Singapore Management University

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Social Space

Lien Centre for Social Innovation

2010

Lien Centre For Social Innovation: Highlights of the Start-Up Years

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Citation

LIEN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION:
Highlights of the Start-Up Years

Participants at a World Cafe on Corporate Social Responsibility, organised by the Lien Centre for Social Innovation in January 2009, and facilitated by Facilitators Network Singapore. - *Photo Credit: LCSI*

This year, the Lien Centre for Social Innovation celebrates its fifth anniversary as an institution that's dedicated to being a thought leader and catalyst for positive social change in Singapore and Asia. As we continue to refine and broaden our efforts to fulfil the Centre's mandate, this article highlights some of the key activities and accomplishments in our start-up years, grouped in terms of our key areas of focus:

- Research
- Catalysing Social Innovation Initiatives
- Platforms
- Capacity Building

RESEARCH

The Centre has undertaken a series of major assessments of key areas in the social sector in Singapore and Asia. The following reports have been published:

• The State of Social Enterprise in Singapore. Released in August 2007, and prepared for the Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports (MCYS) in Singapore, the study looked at the growing interest in social enterprises

in Singapore and proposed 26 recommendations in three areas: (a) encouraging and facilitating socially responsible enterprises; (b) building a pro-social enterprise environment (c) creating a culture of social entrepreneurship. The study contributed to the deliberations of the national Social Enterprise Committee and eventually became part of its report to the Minister for MCYS.

• Information Technology (IT) Enablement of the Nonprofit Sector. This white paper released in July 2009, looked at why IT needs are not well addressed in small and medium-sized nonprofit organisations and recommended ways in which it could be improved. Follow-up discussions on the findings have been held with the Charities Unit of MCYS and the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore.

Two major reports on research undertaken at the start of 2009 are due to be published by the end of 2010:

• CSR in Asia. This extensive report aims to understand the drivers and constraints of CSR in Asia by looking at the top five publicly-listed

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companies on the respective stock exchange in 10 Asian countries. The research examines the activities of these companies using the ISO 26000 categories of CSR core areas: organisational governance, human rights, labour practices, the environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues, and community involvement and development. The report seeks to provide CSR practitioners and researchers with insights into the pattern of CSR practice and factors for success in Asian companies. The research will be complemented by two smaller studies, one on CSR in Singapore, and the other on ethnic Chinese philanthropy in South East Asia.

• Unmet Social Needs. This is another extensive research project that explores Singapore's social policy systems and how they are currently addressing our growing societal challenges. The report will highlight six vulnerable communities: the disabled, mentally ill, single-person-headed households, borderline cases, foreign workers, and new migrant communities. The research is based on focus group discussions with key players and secondary research.

CATALYSING SOCIAL INNOVATION INITIATIVES

The Centre seeks to foster and catalyse social innovation across Asia through these initiatives:

• Lien i3 Challenge. The Lien i3 Challenge was a global competition that awarded S$1million dollars to exceptionally innovative and impactful projects that benefited communities in Asia. The competition's call for proposals in April 2009 drew a remarkable 648 entries from around the world. After several rounds of vetting and deliberations, a panel of 10 judges selected eight winners in September 2009. The winners were invited to Singapore for the Centre's inaugural social innovation conference, during which the awards were given out. (See Page 131 for details and progress reports of the winning projects.)

• Venture Philanthropy. In November 2008, the Centre organised a venture philanthropy forum, co-hosted with HP Alumni and the Institute of Policy Studies. Through follow-ups with interested participants, the Centre spearheaded the formation of Singapore's first venture philanthropy organisations:

the Singapore branch of Social Venture Partners and Asia Philanthropic Ventures.

PLATFORMS

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Apart from the research reports, our major publications are:

• Social Space. Since 2008, this annual publication provides an avenue for experts, industry leaders and practitioners to cover a range of topical social areas.

• The World That Changes The World: How philanthropy, entrepreneurship and innovation are transforming the social ecosystem. The first of its kind, this international collaborative project provides a holistic and comprehensive review of the social ecosystem. Of the 21 international authors, six are from Singapore and the Lien Centre. The book is published by John Wiley & Sons and it will be officially launched at the SIX annual conference in September 2010. (See page 104 for an excerpted Chapter from the book. Further information on the book can be found on the inside back cover).

The major forums we have organised to date are:

• Social iCon 2009. This inaugural flagship social innovation conference in Singapore, supported by Ashoka,[1] attracted 270 participants, of which one-third was from overseas. The theme of the conference was on leading social innovators and key enablers of social innovation. With its innovative and unusual approach to presenting the issues and content, the conference created a buzz across Singapore's nascent social innovation scene.

• SIX and The City. In September 2010, the Centre will host the annual summer school of the Social Innovation Exchange (SIX), the first time the school is held outside Europe. SIX is the global association of social innovation organisations, first convened by the Young Foundation.

• Social Conversations. A regular feature for many in the social scene in Singapore is our almost monthly social conversations that have the goal of providing

the broader community with the opportunity to listen to, and engage with, leaders in the social sector. To date, more than 30 social conversations have been held on wide-ranging topics.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The Centre seeks to leverage its position as part of a university with its capabilities and reach, to help build the capability of two key groups of people: nonprofit leaders and students. Key programmes include:

• iLEAP. The iLEAP Professional Course is an intensive 14-week training programme for leaders of nonprofit organisations. Led by over 50 instructors and guest speakers, the course uses a unique translational and experiential approach to learning and sharing the different facets of managing a nonprofit organisation. Each of the 14 weekly sessions is held onsite with a different community partner organisation which also serves as the main case study for topics ranging from strategic planning to new social models. The first batch of 26 participants who completed the inaugural programme in January 2010 came from a wide mix of social sector organisations, academic institutions, and independent organisations.

• iGlocal. From January to May 2010, the Centre collaborated with United World College of South East Asia and the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre on a pilot project to demonstrate an alternative student-centred approach to service-learning in Community Involvement Projects.[2] The project involved secondary school students from four local and two international schools. The Centre is currently working to follow-up on the pilot, to expand awareness and to take iGlocal to other schools.

• SMU Student Engagement. The Centre also works with various Singapore Management University departments and student bodies on a range of projects, awards and student internships with nonprofit organisations. The goal is to plant the seeds of social consciousness and innovation in tomorrow's leaders.

LOOKING FORWARD

As the Centre enters its next five year phase (2011 – 2015), we hope to build the capacity of the social sector in the nonprofit space. In the spirit of our mandate and vision, the Centre will continue to encourage and demonstrate the spirit of innovation in ways that enhance and mobilise the social sector ecosystem in Singapore and Asia.

LIEN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION BOARD MEMBERS	
1 Dec 2005 - 31 May 2008	**1 June 2008 - 30 Nov 2010**
Gerard Ee (Chairman)	Willie Cheng (Chairman)
Willie Cheng	David Chan
Lee Poh Wah	Robert Chew
Laurence Lien	Cecilia Chua
Lim Soo Hoon	Gerard Ee
Pang Eng Fong	Lee Poh Wah
Robert Schlesinger	Laurence Lien
Tan Chi Chiu	Thomas Menkhoff
Tan Wee Liang	Steven Miller
	Zaqy Mohamad
	Tan Chi Chiu
	Yeoh Chee Yan

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[1]   Ashoka's Changemakers is a global online community that connects and encourages people to share ideas, inspire and mentor one another, while finding and supporting the best ideas in social innovation.

[2]   Community Involvement Project (CIP) is a programme of the Ministry of Education. Its objective is to build social cohesion and civic responsibility.