

'Social Enterprise in Singapore' by Dr Gillian Koh
Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy
PP5262: Frontiers of Social Innovation
Manasseh Meyer, Seminar Room 2-2
18 February 2009

At the invitation of Ms Durreen Shanaz, Adjunct Associate Professor and Head, Social Innovation Programme, IPS Senior Research Fellow Dr Gillian Koh delivered a lecture on the social enterprise sector in Singapore to her students on the 'Frontiers of Social Innovation' course at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

She defined 'social enterprises' in the presentation as revenue-generating organisations that seek to meet unmet social needs using a business model. She talked about examples of the four more common, though not mutually exclusive models of social enterprises in Singapore - The Work Integration Model (e.g. Barista Express, High Point Removal Services, Ikhlas Catering), the Plough-back-profit Model (e.g. O School and Ikhlas Catering), the Subsidised Services Model (e.g. Bridge Learning and Hua Mei Clinic), and the Social Needs Model (e.g. Asian Films Archive). Other social enterprise models that were less common in Singapore include the Empowerment Model and the Intermediation Model.

Citing the Report of the Social Enterprise Committee (2007) and a report by the Lien Foundation Centre for Social Innovation titled, 'State of Social Enterprise in Singapore (2007)', she said it was recognised that social enterprises faced problems in the three broad areas – the lack of business management capabilities, challenging business models and financials, and the lack of a broader eco-system to support their growth.¹ She highlighted how social enterprises struggled with expectations that they should be profitable although financial sustainability might be a more realistic target especially if they were successfully achieving social impact. Unfortunately, there was no established, generic nor cheap system by which to evaluate this, while this was most certainly needed for Singapore. Social enterprises also faced the challenge of business innovation especially if they placed themselves in business sectors that were already highly saturated in a developed urban setting like Singapore. There also had to be better systems by which management and business talents could be attracted to work or volunteer in the sector to improve their organisational capacity. Finally, she noted how the Singapore market of consumers expected a discount when patronising social enterprises - this was another struggle they faced.

The discussion that followed focused on what government policy in Singapore and elsewhere could do to promote their respective social enterprise sectors; whether such actions were integral or not to the flourishing of this sector if not elsewhere, then, in Singapore.

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ⁱ “State of Social Enterprise in Singapore, Management Report”, Lien Foundation Centre for Social Innovation, in *Report of the Social Enterprise Committee*, (November 2007), Annex 1.3, pp.76-86.