

**Publication: Gov Insider Online**

**Date: 26 July 2022**

**Headline: Nurturing future sustainability leaders in Singapore through climate education**

**Nurturing future sustainability leaders in Singapore through climate education**



In the past, coding was a niche skill taught only in tertiary institutions. Now, it's a skill that every teenager is picking up. Singapore, for instance, has incorporated coding into its formal schooling curriculum for children as young as 10.

This transformation in digital knowledge can also be seen in the sustainability sector. More people and institutions are recognising the importance of nurturing sustainability leaders. As the climate change crisis looms large, having individuals take the lead in building a sustainable future is a matter of survival.

Yee May Leong, Equinix's Managing Director in South Asia, shares her views on how education is key to nurturing sustainability leaders, and how Equinix is supporting climate education at the tertiary level in Singapore.

### **Sustainability leaders and a greener future**

Countries around the world signed the Paris Climate Accords in 2015, pledging to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. There is already a global commitment to taking action to tackle the climate crisis.

Singapore is embarking on its own climate initiative, known as the Green Plan, which aims to build a more sustainable nation by 2030. Some of the plan's goals include reducing waste sent to landfills by 30 per cent and slashing net carbon emissions from schools by 60 per cent.

It will not be easy to reach these goals. "If we want to meet the targets for 2030, we need to churn out more sustainability experts," Leong says.

### **Climate education**

Building a conducive educational environment is key to supporting aspiring sustainability leaders in their journey, Leong says. Sufficient educational opportunities, funding and recognition should be given to those who wish to pursue a future in the sustainability sector.

**Publication: Gov Insider Online**

**Date: 26 July 2022**

**Headline: Nurturing future sustainability leaders in Singapore through climate education**

Climate education helps to build expertise about sustainability issues. It includes teaching people the impacts of climate change while equipping them with the skills required to develop means of solving the climate crisis, allowing more people to contribute to the sustainability efforts through advocacy or by working in the green economy in such capacities as providing clean energy consulting.

Compared to countries such as those in Europe, Singapore suffers from a relative lack of sustainability professionals. Certain professions, such as medicine and law are typically held in high regard in traditional Asian societies such as Singapore's, Leong says, drawing fewer people to jobs in sustainability.

Tertiary education institutions in the country are gearing up to fill in this talent gap. The National University of Singapore (NUS), for instance, recently launched a master's programme in sustainable and green finance.

At the undergraduate level, since 2019, all students at Singapore Management University (SMU) have had the opportunity to take a second major in sustainability that comprises interdisciplinary courses in various business specialisations, such as finance, operations and marketing entrepreneurship, and non-business fields, such as climate change and sustainability law and policy. The university's core curriculum also exposes students to important issues with environmental, social, and economic sustainability dimensions, says Winston Chow, an Associate Professor of Science, Technology and Society at SMU.

"As an educator, I've been seeing a lot of interest from students to take sustainability courses, or to ask how important it will be for their post-graduation plans," he said, adding that knowledge on complex issues relating to sustainability and climate change would give students an advantage in their careers.

Recognising the need for climate education, Equinix has invested in scholarships to encourage more students to pursue disciplines that can help tackle climate change, such as sustainable business management. For example, the Equinix Sustainability Scholarship at SMU provides funding and internship opportunities for students who major in sustainability. Equinix is supporting NUS by establishing two scholarships for students enrolled in its Master of Science in Biodiversity Conservation and Nature-Based Climate Solutions programme.

By investing in human capital, Equinix aims to develop role models that can lead the way in promoting a more sustainable way of life, Leong says.

### **Sustainability skillsets**

Future sustainability leaders should embody certain values to drive positive change in society, Leong says. First, leaders need to be aware of how their actions affect the environment before they can cultivate the habit of embracing sustainability as a way of life.

Second, they need to be forward-thinking and anticipate future consequences. For example, organisations need to consider factors such as affordability before switching to cleaner energy sources. "It's not just about fixing the problem – it's about ensuring that it does not result in a negative effect somewhere else," Leong explains.

Third, sustainability leaders need to wholeheartedly embrace change. Sustainability entails a change in lifestyles, such as drinking from cups instead of through straws, or eating nasi lemak from banana leaves rather than polystyrene boxes. Every effort can make a difference, Leong says. Leaders need to be role models for change and inspire others to adopt more sustainable lifestyles.

**Publication: Gov Insider Online**

**Date: 26 July 2022**

**Headline: Nurturing future sustainability leaders in Singapore through climate education**

To drive change, leaders must possess confidence, courage and grit, Leong says. This means not being cowed by the prospect of marginalisation when advocating for changes that might run counter to prevailing norms, and persevering until they achieve their intended results, she adds.

Fourth, leaders must have compassion. To promote social sustainability, people need to accept diverse social norms, avoid being swayed by biases, and give everyone equal opportunities, Leong says.

Leaders have to be “forward-thinking in terms of anticipating, understanding the impact, and being a visionary in terms of seeking out alternative solutions”, Leong says.

### **Sustainability starts from within**

Organisations can also nurture a culture of sustainability among their staff. For example, Equinix is developing a personal “green tracker” for its staff. The tracker is based on a points system in which users gain points by consistently performing sustainable actions, such as using reusable utensils.

Equinix also encourages staff to volunteer for social causes and to give back to the community during its annual impact month. They can participate in Covid-19 relief campaigns, for instance. “This is the future-first sustainability mindset we need to have – it’s not just to take, but to give,” Leong explains.

Organisations can also empower their customers to act more sustainably. Equinix publishes green power reports for a number of companies, providing them with data on their electricity consumption, renewable energy usage and carbon footprints. These customised reports allow them to better track their progress and meet their sustainability goals.

“It’s not just about us. It’s about how [our sustainability efforts] impact our customers and our supply chains,” Leong says.

If Singapore hopes to realise its green vision, it will need sustainability change-makers from both the public and private sectors to help drive the transition. Education is key to equipping these leaders with the values, perspectives and knowledge to help governments and businesses to build a more sustainable future.