

**SPEECH BY EMERITUS SENIOR MINISTER GOH CHOK TONG AT
THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL'S SYMPOSIUM ON
27 OCTOBER 2015 (TUESDAY) AT THE CI YUAN COMMUNITY CLUB
PERFORMING THEATRE AT 2.40 PM**

SERVICE AT THE COMMUNITY DOORSTEP

Today's symposium will review the role CDCs have played since its establishment in 1997 and explore its future goals. I feel that this is a task better suited to a younger office-holder with responsibility for Singapore's future. I shall, therefore, focus on only one aspect for you to deliberate: the need to coordinate and deliver government social services at the community doorstep.

2. Some 30 years ago, when I went to the PAP HQ at Thomson Road, I saw many people climbing up the hill to go to the Ministry of Community Development in the adjacent tower block. I asked a couple of them for the reasons of their visit. They told me that they were there to seek public assistance. That set me thinking.

3. They had to huff and puff up the hill, and incur transportation costs as well to receive their cheques. I thought the government should deliver public assistance in a more convenient way to the needy.

4. Governments everywhere tend to be provider- rather than people-centric. Governments are not private sector companies having to sell their goods and services. They are not retail shops where the customer is king. Governments, therefore, are generally less sensitive to their citizens' needs as consumers. Some governments are not even efficient in delivering services. Even for many developed countries, service with a smile is the exception rather than the norm.

5. Fortunately in Singapore, the government at least strives to be efficient and courteous in delivering services. I am glad that it has also become more people-centric, ie customer friendly. That was one of the reasons for establishing the Community Development Councils in 1997. It was to bring social development services closer to the people. Another reason was to involve citizens in doing so. These are the District Councillors, volunteers who act as the interface between the government and the people.

6. The CDCs have brought assistance to the needy closer to their doorstep with delegated responsibility from MSF (Ministry of Social and Family Development). They have done a good job by going beyond merely assessing and handing out public assistance. They have forged corporate and community partnerships to improve the physical and mental well-being of vulnerable residents.

7. MSF saw the benefits of helping the needy closer to their homes. They have now taken back the social service function and set up more points of delivery. Instead of having these services delivered only in the offices of the 5 CDCs, they have 24 accessible SSOs (Social Services Offices) closer to the community.

8. Other Ministries have taken a leaf from the success of CDCs and SSOs. I like very much the appointment of community relations managers by NEA (National Environment Agency) and LTA (Land Transport Authority). Problems and feedback raised by the people and grassroots advisers are now quickly attended to.

9. The town councils and the Neighbourhood Police Posts are other outstanding examples of bringing government services to the people. The Police have now gone one step further. They have introduced the new concept of Cops on Wheels.

10. With such people-oriented moves, the government has become closer to the people and vice versa.

11. The silo thinking and turf protection of Ministries are also disappearing. I remember clearly a ridiculous example of silo thinking and responsibility when I was a new MP. In a walkabout in Marine Parade, I saw that the grass was cut on only one side of the drain running along a major road. When asked, the HDB officer explained that the strip of land on the other side between the drain and the road belonged to PWD and that PWD had its own contractor and cycle for maintenance.

12. As for the leaves and debris in the drain, he said it was PUB's responsibility to clear them.

13. The people could not care less whose responsibility it was. As far as they were concerned, it was the government's. I told HDB to sort it out with PWD and PUB, which they did. These problems have continued

to dog us from time to time, which is why PM set up the Municipal Services Office to ensure that citizens' concerns are addressed quickly and in one place.

14. The government must keep on improving its provision of services. It must always focus on the conveniences of the people in receiving services rather than on its own convenience in delivering them. So too must the CDCs look forward, which is what this symposium is about.

15. What is the new landscape at the constituency level?

16. I see a plethora of social and community service providers. We have the PA, community centres, CCCs and RCs. We have the PAP branch and its meet-the-people sessions. We have the family services centres and senior care centres. The latest addition is the Pioneer Generation Office.

17. Outside the constituency but providing key social services are SSOs, AIC (Agency for Integrated Care), WDA (Workforce Development Authority), e2i, hospitals, nursing homes, and many VWOs (Voluntary Welfare Organisations). All these organisations play an important role in providing services in the community. Are there overlaps in services provided by them? Are there gaps? Are they provider-centric or people-centric? Can CDCs play a role in coordinating some of these services that are provided, and ensure that the needs of the people are more conveniently and better met?

18. On the people's or consumers' side, I can see some structural demand changes. First amongst them is the increasing need for home medical care. With a rapidly ageing population, better affordable hospital care and MediShield Life, I foresee hospitals attracting more and more elderly patients like a huge magnet. I see the need to put in place a system for nudging patients back to their homes. Most old people prefer that anyway. How can CDCs play a role in supporting volunteers, caregivers and the community in looking after elderly hospital patients at home?

19. What kind of new services will have to be provided? For those who fall between the cracks, how do we identify them? I think CDCs should start asking questions about the role they can play in this social service space at the community level. They should work with MSF and SSOs here.

20. Yet another area is delivering information and explaining policies to the people. An example of the need for this is the Pioneer Generation Package. It did not receive warm reception initially despite its generosity because most pioneers did not understand it. So the Pioneers Generation Office was set up to bring information to the doorstep of the pioneers. Can CDCs work with the relevant government agencies to explain complex policies like Medishield Life at the community level, if not at the doorstep?

21. CDCs have proven their worth. But going forward, the key question is how they can help the government to deliver its social development services more effectively in the community. How can they empower the community and work with it to co-create solutions to address present and future ground needs? By serving residents better, the CDCs strengthen the bond between the government and the people. By staying in tune with the times, they will remain relevant.

22. On this note, I wish you a fruitful CDC Symposium.

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