



The Social Mission Conference 2010

THE POOR



George Lim

**Deputy Chairman,
Caritas Singapore**



On the surface,
Singapore looks like a
rich country with no
poor





But like every other country, we do have poor people among us; people who have not been able to cope with the rapid economic pace, or who have suffered the effects.





SOME FINDINGS ARISING FROM OUR COMMUNITY STRATEGY STUDY

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- **Gap between rich & poor widening:**
GINI Coefficient: 0.49 in 2000;
0.52 in 2005
- **Families are at risk**
3.8 divorces per 1,000 residents (1980)
8.2 divorces per 1,000 residents (2007)
- **Elderly at risk (Ageing Population)**
> 65 years old: 8.5% in 2007;
20% in 2030





SOME FINDINGS ARISING FROM OUR COMMUNITY STRATEGY STUDY

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Vulnerable Groups:

- Migrant workers
- Abused domestic helpers
- Prisoners / Ex-prisoners
- Disabled
- Persons with AIDS/HIV
- Mentally Challenged





Ng Bee Leng

Social Worker



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What is Poverty?

**Poverty is the Denial
of Opportunities
and Choices,
including material
well-being**



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Who are the Poor in Singapore?

**A Letter from
Alex**

**Voices of
Emily**

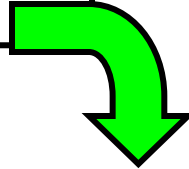


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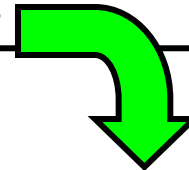
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Poverty Trap

Growing Income Gap leads
to Unlevel Playing Field



Meritocracy perpetuates Poverty through
Unequal Opportunities and Choices



Entrenched or Trans-generational
Poverty



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Option for the Poor

– Respect and Dignity not Pity

– Empowerment and
Self-help not just
Charity



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**Call to Action in
Our Everyday
Life**



Dr Mathew Mathews

**Lead Researcher,
“Study of the Poor”**



SYSTEMIC CHANGE



Bring about a change in the life of the poor

- Education
- Employment
- Self-help projects
- Micro-credit Financing



Engaged in the apostolate of Charity



Christ in the centre of our activities

Serving Christ in the poor

Vincentian Spirituality



Attitudes to Working With the Disadvantaged



Many of the NGOs seem to use the type of patronising and condescending charity rhetoric that went out of fashion in Australia more than 30 years ago. For example, references are made to assisting “the needy in society”, or improving “the lives of the less fortunate” (NCSS 2006). This language implies that the disadvantaged should be grateful for this assisting, and appears designed to reinforce existing hierarchies in society (Mendes, 2007:4)



“steer clear of the welfare mentality” “the disadvantaged do not expect and cannot demand that they be looked after by the state as a matter of right” assistance is temporary in nature. It is lending a hand to help Singaporeans in need to stand on their own two feet again, not to weaken their spirit to help themselves”

SM Goh Chok Tong



Common notions about the poor



People are poor because

- they are lazy, not willing to do hard work
- they have an attitude problem
- they don't have the drive
- they got themselves into a mess
- they have little capability
- they are depending on rich people to help them



- “I don’t understand how these women keep having children when they have so many already – can’t they learn how to do family planning”
- “why they want to stay on in the marriage when he is not providing and worse getting drunk all the time and beating her”
- “I am sorry, but they are just like that, we offer them jobs but they are not willing to do it – they say its too far, doesn’t pay well...if I was in their financial state I will definitely take it up myself”



A Mindset for Helping



- Be respecting of their ways of doing things and seek to understand OR judge and deplore
- Focus on strengths or weakness
- Passionate about the opportunity to collaborate together OR do it as a chore
- Hopeful for change or resigned



Br Emmanuel, SG

**Chairman,
Catholic Welfare Services**



THE POOR



- My own experience
- Vow of poverty
- Role as Chairman, CWS



WHO ARE THE POOR IN SINGAPORE TODAY?



- Low income
- Disadvantaged children
- Those from broken families
- “Professional poor”
- Those without jobs or homes, etc.



WHAT ARE THE PRESSING NEEDS?

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- Help from professionals
- System that will change the mind-sets of the poor and the Givers
- Compassion & Love
- Dignity



WHAT ARE THE ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY IN SINGAPORE?

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- Are we addressing them?
- High standard of living?
- Are we a charitable people?
- Do we really help the poor get out of the poverty cycle?
- Personal sharing



CWS PROJECT TO IMPROVE THE LOT OF THE POOR



*I have been toying and more than toying but seriously thinking that we at the Catholic Welfare Services should have a system where the poor knocking at the doors of the churches, of religious congregations, of individuals who feel they are not able to help them could recommend to the poor to go the CWS where a **team of dedicated people** will look into each individual person needing help and **study in depth ways** and means to improve their standard of life. Not just a one stop help but a **followed up assistance** until these poor people **readjust themselves to society.***



CONCLUDING PRAYER

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God the Father in the Name of your Son Jesus we ask you to give us the wisdom, the lights, the discernment, the compassion and the love that your Son had for the poor. Jesus said “Whatever you do to the least of these my brethren, you do it unto me”. Help us not to give stingingly to the poor, but largely with the heart of Christ, that the poor, and Christ through them will know how much we love him.

Mother Mary be with us in our effort to reach out to all those in need without any exception.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.



George Lim

**Deputy Chairman,
Caritas Singapore**



Our Mission

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“The mission...is to work for a world in which ***poverty and injustice will be over*** and in which the ***dignity of every human being*** will be respected. This is about more than economics. It is about helping a world to emerge in which who we are and what it means to be human will be visible. If the ***humanity*** of any of our brothers and sisters on this planet is hidden or destroyed, then humanity itself is wounded.”

Fr Timothy Radcliffe, O.P
(*“Just One Year, A Global Treasury of Prayer and Worship”*)
- referring to the work of Christian Aid and CAFOD

