

## Towards a Sustainable Singapore: How Youth Can Make a Difference?

### **Project Money Plant**

For the youth in developed countries, there is an increasing weight of responsibility that they ought to shoulder to compensate for the damage that has been caused to the planet; A convenient lifestyle, however lustrous or accidental it may have been, has steadfastly led to climate problems. Specifically, Singapore, situated minutely close to the equator, experiences the wrath of global warming significantly, but this asymmetry is not to be confused as a complaint.

Greener reforms and large-scale environmental efforts towards a sustainable future are solutions in the long-term, and require government intervention. Older generations may either lack time to contribute effectively, or turn a blind-eye due to a lack of awareness. It thus becomes increasingly crucial for the youth to partake in climate-change combative efforts. Hence, we need to envision collective efforts that yield help in the immediate term, and find a way to rally the youth towards active participation. For the youth which has indulged immeasurably in convenient first-world lifestyles, how do we convince them? This essay proposes the creation of a virtual carbon economy: **“Project Money Plant”**.

### **Why we need incentives**

In the Singaporean system, incentives have been the bedrock to nudging the locals in the direction of governmental policies (i.e, the baby bonus scheme and edusave awards, etc). While it is unpragmatic to assume that collective youth efforts (towards environmental conservation) occur organically, having an incentive design structure in place can accelerate youth towards national sustainability goals.

### **Virtual Carbon Economy**

Currently, Singapore has planned the development of a carbon credit trading hub to support decarbonisation sustainability. Under this system, industries need to offset their negative impacts on the environment by implementing eco-friendly changes, or purchase carbon credits to compensate otherwise. This allows environmental organisations to sell monetised carbon credits to these industries to help support their activities.

Drawing inspiration from this idea, the socio-economy of youth needs to be entwined with their active contribution to environmental efforts. For instance, a good handful of our youth already engage in voluntary work. To encourage more mass involvement, we need a reward system to complement their altruistic motivations.

### **Introducing: Project Money Plant.**

*Project Money Plant* is a rewards system where virtual carbon points are distributed to the youth for their efforts to conserve the environment. The dissemination of these points are meant to be subjective, and not necessarily beyond ordinary; It may be awarded to an innovative science

project, or a small eco-friendly business for every product they create. Participants may share their efforts publicly via their social media accounts to claim their carbon points, which in return allow them to redeem discounts for eco-friendly products. In this way, the project aims to transform Singapore's social capital into a virtual carbon-credit socio-economy, as it floats upon the consumerist culture to its advantage and directs it to co-create a sustainable future. To make matters easier, the virtual points can be awarded via Singpass, or an application mimicking the functionality of TraceTogether, to highlight a meticulous count and individuality of the points earned.

Additionally, a leaderboard simulation may spur competitive spirits, attracting more youth to participate. This can be made possible by displaying a verified leaderboard that lists the supposed "top environmentalists" in each grass-roots community, or congratulating the students at their educational institutions; Such tokens of appreciation are more than aplenty to prompt the students towards quicker actions. If this plan succeeds, youth-led environmental initiatives may garner the attention of philanthropic support, and youth-led environmental innovations may attract potential investments. Cultivating bright minds in this manner will not only prove useful for a sustainable future, but nurture Singapore's homegrown talents and bolster its international prestige. Precisely because of the inclusive nature of the reward system, Singaporean youth receive a platform to implement their interests in other areas, and extend it towards sustainable issues the way they see fit. This bottom-up approach incentivises youth and puts them in the best place to act on local environmental issues on their own without needing the government to step in.

For instance, a local band may perform to raise funds for the rejuvenation of their local park, or a crypto-enthusiast may form non-fungible token (NFT) projects in collaboration with an NGO for an environmental initiative. In many ways or other, the youth are awarded intangibly, an indelible opportunity to act on their interests outside the academic sphere, de-stressing them from the generational pressure on grades. They are encouraged to become more confident in initiating ideas, and consequently, the drive moulds them to become more oriented towards national goals.

Despite the tiny landmass of Singapore, Singaporeans produce carbon emissions greater than their counterparts in larger countries, such as Switzerland, Britain and France (Straits Times, 2018). Moreover, a Climate Change Public Perception Survey in 2019 showed that 8 in 10 were prepared to take necessary actions that may help curb climate change. It is obvious — and without the need of any statistics — that most of us are clueless on where to begin, especially because we wait for the authorities to introduce environmental policies. I believe that this problem may be surmounted by creating a system, such as *Project Money Plant*, that actively engages the youth to consciously participate in eco-friendly activities.

Footnotes:

1. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/environment/singapore-launches-its-year-of-climate-action-masagos-urges-people-and>
2. <https://www.strategygroup.gov.sg/media-centre/press-releases/climate-change-public-perception-survey-2019>