

# experience SINGAPORE



## FLYING THE FLAG FOR EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT

focus

Celebrating Singapore women and developing their future potential

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# ED'S NOTE



Dear readers,

It has been a year since Singapore launched *Conversations on Singapore Women's Development*, a national effort to understand issues facing women in Singapore and to lead the way towards levelling the playing field for women here. While Singapore women have made tremendous progress over the years, more can be done collectively as a society to empower, protect and uplift our women. Addressing the issue would also help strengthen the ethos of fairness and justice in society.

In this issue's Focus story "The Road to Equality" (pages 3 to 5), we explore Singapore's journey towards equality between men and women. The first significant milestone was achieved 60 years ago, with the passing of the Women's Charter in 1961. The Women's Charter enshrined legal protections for women, which led to a slew of developments that cemented the place of women in Singapore society, culminating in the swearing in of the Republic's first female President in 2017. As the article highlights, the issue of gender equality is not just for women to consider; men, too, have an invaluable role in the fight for equality.

It is encouraging to see that Singapore's efforts have borne fruit: "A Wave of Change" and "Her Time in the Sun" (pages 8 and 9 respectively) showcase Singapore women who are making strides in traditionally male-dominated industries like the sciences and sports. But challenges remain, as our interviewees candidly shared with us. We hope these stories will give you a deeper appreciation of the lived experiences of Singapore women.

Sharing such experiences is a key part of the journey towards achieving equality for women. In "Sharing our Lessons" (pages 6 and 7), we explore how the Singapore Cooperation Programme allows countries with different experiences and cultural norms to share their views openly and in a non-judgmental space. The environment provided through such platforms also promotes constructive dialogue rooted in understanding and learning. These cross-boundary partnerships are also common in the people and private sectors, and allow Singapore to learn from the world as well, as "A Sisterhood Beyond Boundaries" (pages 10 and 11) demonstrates.

We are pleased that despite the pandemic, these interactions and exchanges of ideas are continuing, thanks to the widespread use of digital tools and online platforms. We hope that you will join us in these important conversations as we find ways to deliver progress to our people.

*Cheryl Shum*

**Acting Director  
Strategic Communications Directorate  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore**

## KEEP IN TOUCH!

Share with us your memories, photos and experiences in Singapore under the Singapore Cooperation Programme.  
Email us at [mfa@mfa.gov.sg](mailto:mfa@mfa.gov.sg)



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Meaningful cooperation and partnerships can help make gender equality a global reality

## experience SINGAPORE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE SINGAPORE COOPERATION PROGRAMME



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
SINGAPORE

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A VIRTUAL PANEL DISCUSSION DURING THE WOMEN IN CYBER EVENT AT THE SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL CYBER WEEK 2020.



focus

# THE ROAD TO EQUALITY

A look back at the progress made by the women of Singapore, and how their potential can be further realised in the days ahead.

**Singapore women** have made tremendous progress over three generations. The Republic swore in its first-ever female President in 2017, and women are prominent leaders in government and business. Yet, creating an equitable society for both men and women in Singapore is an ongoing process. As Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong noted earlier this year, “We’ve made progress over the years at home, in workplaces and in society, but we still need to change mindsets further.”

To spur this “change in mindset” and raise awareness of both this progress and the potential for improvement, the Singapore Government declared 2021 as the Year of Celebrating SG Women. As part of this movement, the country’s Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) organised celebrations and activities that highlighted and celebrated women’s place in society. These included local initiatives like *Conversations on Singapore Women’s Development*, a series of 160 dialogues that attracted nearly 6,000 participants. They also include global celebrations that marked International Women’s Day in March.

Added Mr Lee, “Beyond celebrating the contributions of women, past and present, in building Singapore, this movement also recognises the myriad roles women occupy in

our community. Whether prominent leaders or everyday workers — and everything in between — women are first and foremost our mothers, wives, sisters and daughters.” But it’s not just in 2021 that the welfare of women has come under the spotlight. Over the years, countless initiatives and organisations have sought to improve the lot of women, in hopes of building a fairer and more equitable society.

## MAKING STRIDES IN THE WORKPLACE

Women in Singapore are making significant progress in the workplace. In 2010, the share of resident married couples in Singapore with a working wife stood at 52.9 per cent. This number rose to 60 per cent by last year, showing the increase in contributions by women to the economy. But this progress has been unequal; female participation in some segments of the economy lags behind that of their male counterparts. Here’s how Singapore is tackling the issue in different industries:

- CYBER GUARDIANS:** Cyber security remains a key enabler for the digital economy but it is a sector where female talent remains under-represented. According to the (ISC)<sup>2</sup> Cybersecurity Workforce Study in 2020, it was estimated that just 30 per cent of cyber security professionals in the Asia-Pacific region were women. The Cyber Security Agency of Singapore has worked with industry partners to develop the *SG Cyber Women* (#SGCyberWomen) initiative to encourage more females, including those still in secondary school, to join the cyber security profession.



A CAMPAIGN TO GROW FEMALE TALENT IN CYBERSECURITY IN SINGAPORE.



THE LAUNCH OF POWERS AT NTU BY SINGAPORE PRESIDENT HALIMAH YACOB.

- SISTERS IN SCIENCE:** Despite more women pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), the number of women who go on to work in these fields remains low. For instance, only 30 per cent of local researchers and engineers are women, according to the A\*Star Manpower Survey in 2018.

The Promotion of Women in Engineering, Research and Science (POWERS) programme, which was launched by President Halimah Yacob at the biennial *Women in Engineering, Sciences & Technology* symposium in March, aims to tackle this “leak” of STEM talents by connecting women with role models and mentors. Spearheaded by two professors at the Nanyang Technological University, the programme will also support research that addresses barriers and gaps in the local context,



Flip to page 8 to read about how a female scientist climbed the ranks in Singapore.

and provide educational opportunities through public talks and activities to share discoveries.

Noting the importance of such initiatives, President Halimah said, “A gender-balanced research team is more likely to consider certain variables that are influenced by a difference in socio-economic circumstances or biological sex. For instance, women have historically been excluded from medical research. Much of what we know of health and medicine has been informed by studies on men. However, scientific research has shown us that diseases can affect men and women differently and may require different treatments.”

- LEADERS IN LAW:** One area where Singapore has done well to narrow the gender gap is the legal profession. In the early 1970s, just 15 per cent of lawyers in Singapore were women. By 2015, the share of women in practice had risen to 43 per cent. More women have also become partners, senior counsels, judicial officers, judges and law academics than ever before.

Part of this success comes from the efforts of bodies like the Singapore Association of Women Lawyers, a non-profit organisation whose aims are more targeted at social inequalities rather than solely gender inequalities. Still, such organisations provide valuable support networks in the profession, says Justice Judith Prakash, the first woman to be appointed a permanent judge of the Singapore Court of Appeal. She recalled: “While I found it very satisfying to work with women like Farideh Namazie and Anamah Tan (two trailblazing lawyers) to provide legal knowledge to people who had little access to lawyers, my interactions with them and others, equally significantly, provided me with a support group when I needed advice and a sounding board.”

Justice Judith Prakash

THE FIRST WOMAN TO BE APPOINTED A PERMANENT JUDGE OF SINGAPORE'S HIGHEST COURT



## THE ROAD THUS FAR

Milestones in Singapore's journey to equality between men and women



**1952**  
Mdm Tang Pui Wah becomes the first local female athlete to compete in the Olympics.



**1978**  
The first Family Service Centre opens to support vulnerable women and families in need.



**1996**  
The National Family Violence Networking System, which involved various community partners, is set up to address the problem of family violence.



**1961**  
Introduction of the Women's Charter – legislation that upholds the rights of women in Singapore.



**1985**  
The Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), a non-profit women's organisation and a key pillar in the journey to gender equality, is registered.



## PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The colourful Year of Celebrating SG Women logo is inspired by Singapore's national flower, the Vanda Miss Joaquim. The logo's three silhouettes embedded in the orchid symbol represent the progress of women from the past to the present and into the future, while the spectrum of shades symbolises the diversity of women across generations and backgrounds. Such views were echoed during the Government's conversations on Singapore women's development.

## THE ROLE OF MEN

Progress in the workplace would mean little if unaccompanied by similar changes at home. As Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Mr Edwin Tong noted, "We cannot ignore what happens at home, for this too, tremendously impacts women's well-being and their careers." Despite their success in professional realms, household and caring responsibilities still tend to sit more on the shoulders of Singaporean women, according to findings from an Ipsos study on the behaviours and attitudes towards household and domestic caring responsibilities in Singapore. During these conversations, participants mooted to shift societal mindsets away from traditional gender roles where women are often the main caregiver and men the main breadwinner.

Bringing these shifts will require a whole-of-society effort, as many of our notions about gender roles are deeply entrenched and difficult to sway. But one way of getting there is encouraging men to lead the clarion call for change. That is why the Year of Celebrating SG Women does not only focus on women. And the movement does not just celebrate women — it also pays tribute to the countless men who debunk stereotypes, change mindsets and play an active role in supporting and uplifting women. Said Mr Tong, "Men must play an active part in advocating for shared responsibility in caregiving. To dismantle patriarchal values and traditional mindsets on gender roles, men must step up both as equal partners, vocal allies and vocal advocates."



To dismantle patriarchal values and traditional mindsets on gender roles, men must step up both as equal partners, vocal allies and vocal advocates.

Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Mr Edwin Tong

● SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG AT THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE CONVERSATIONS ON SINGAPORE WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION, SINGAPORE

### 2001

The first Marriage and Parenthood Package is launched to support women's pursuit to balance caregiving and work-life harmony. Subsequent Packages in 2004, 2008 and beyond provided additional support such as increased leave provisions for mothers and fathers, subsidies for maternity-related medical costs and subsidies for childcare and infantcare.

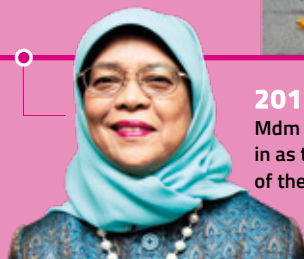
### 2020

The 14<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Singapore opens with a record 27 female elected Members of Parliament.



### 2017

Mdm Halimah Yacob is sworn in as the first female President of the Republic of Singapore.



### 2021

Ms Helen Wong becomes the first woman to head a Singapore bank when she is appointed group CEO of OCBC.

PHOTO COURTESY OF OCBC



PHOTOS: NANJANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY, SUPREME COURT OF SINGAPORE, SPORTS SG AND GETTY IMAGES



**SCPTA - Singapore's Experience:  
Protection, Rights and Obligations under the Women's Charter  
3 to 7 September 2018**



reflections

# SHARING OUR LESSONS

How two initiatives running in collaboration with the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) shine a spotlight on Singapore's experiences in navigating gender issues and the journey towards achieving equality for women.



THE PROGRAMME'S 24 PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED JUDGES AS WELL AS GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS INVOLVED IN THE DISPENSATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF FAMILY JUSTICE AND PROTECTION.

## EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW

Justice is blind — or so they say. But historically, the rights of women have often been marginalised. To address this issue, Singapore enacted the Women's Charter in 1961. Over the last 60 years, this has helped ensure greater legal equality for Singapore women.

SCP participants received a holistic overview of the workings of the Charter and the protections it affords Singapore women in a five-day programme developed by the Singapore Judicial College (SJC) and conducted under the SCP Training Award. Speakers from the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO)

and the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) also shared their insights. Beyond a legal overview, the participants also gleaned an understanding of how the Charter is effected on the ground through learning journeys to the Family Justice Courts and SCWO.

Conducted in 2018, the programme attracted 24 participants from 18 jurisdictions, including judges and government officials who were involved in the dispensation and administration of family justice and protection. They were active participants, shared Mr Paul Quan, Executive Director of SJC. "I distinctly recall that this was a particularly vocal class. There

was a very keen interest to learn and they made use of every opportunity to share their experiences."

Attitudes towards women vary greatly around the world, but Mr Quan said that participants were respectful of these differences and were keen to find common ground. He said, "We saw an open exchange where differences in views were respected

and understood.” This attitude of openness and camaraderie promotes learning and change, he noted. “We create interactive discussion spaces which allow people to find a common ground constructively, agreeing to disagree, by giving them a peek at the other side of the fence.” In his view, the true value of the programmes lies in enabling participants to tap on the collective wisdom of the class through experiential learning methodologies.

Participants who completed the programme gained a greater appreciation of how gender issues are inextricably linked to broader development issues. As one participant put it, “The gender issue is a taboo topic in many parts of the world. This course brought it to the table and dissected it, showing us the tremendous achievements of, and opportunities in Singapore.”

This was the first time that SJC had run an international programme in this area on this scale since its founding in 2015. Looking back, Mr Quan is glad that his team pulled it off. “We are very proud to have done it, not least because we recognise the importance of sharing our experience of how Singapore as a society is engaged with gender equality on multiple collective fronts,” he said. With this experience, SJC looks forward to designing and hosting similar programmes.



## RAISING JUDICIAL STANDARDS

**The Singapore Judicial College caters to the learning and development needs of Singapore judges through its judgecraft and bench skills programmes. It also shares its experiences with global partners in areas of expertise associated with the Singapore judiciary, such as case management and court technology.**

### MEET THE TRAINER

***Gender Equality between Men and Women: Towards a More Inclusive Singapore Society*** is curated by Ms Tina Ng, a Senior Principal Consultant with more than 30 years of experience in human resource development. She tells *Experience Singapore* about the satisfaction she derives from running such programmes for global partners:

#### **Why do you enjoy curating programmes like these?**

It is a great privilege to be able to connect with so many participants from around the world, and to learn about their vision, hopes and aspirations. It is also heartening to hear how each one of them wants to contribute and make a difference in their own societies. I have made many friends over the years through these workshops. It gives me great joy to continue to learn about the progress and developments, and the participants’ contributions to their own agencies and countries. This is as much a learning experience for me, as it might be for them.

#### **How long have you been engaged in such work?**

I have been in Learning and Development for more than 30 years and have conducted, designed and developed programmes for both local and international participants. For the last 10 years, my work has involved collaborations with different countries. I have had the privilege to visit and interact with government officials from these countries.



### UPCOMING SCP PROGRAMME: TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

- **What?** *Gender Equality between Men and Women: Towards a More Inclusive Singapore Society*
- **When?** 29 November to 3 December 2021
- **Who?** Mid- to senior-level government officials, especially those involved in leading and coordinating gender-related policies

Equality is a key tenet of the Singapore vision, as explained by **Gender Equality between Men and Women: Towards a More Inclusive Singapore Society**, an upcoming programme by the Civil Service College. The programme is conducted under the auspices of the SCP Training Award and will be held virtually from 29 November to 3 December 2021. It targets government officials involved in leading and coordinating gender-related policies. Officials of both genders are encouraged to participate in the programme so that the class benefits from diverse perspectives.

The programme will begin with an assessment of the progress made around the world towards achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 (Gender Equality). It will then focus on Singapore’s experience in this regard, shedding light on how Singapore’s unique multi-racial and multi-religious society presented both challenges and opportunities when tackling gender-related concerns. Women from different generations and backgrounds will also share their stories about life as a female in Singapore.

“By hearing about Singapore’s experience, we hope that participants will be able to find commonalities with their home countries,” shared Ms Tina Ng, the programme’s curator (*see left for more*). “The programme will provide a safe space for participants to share their views and engage in open discussions about efforts to advance equality between men and women.” Through the programme, it is hoped that participants can also exchange perspectives, discuss best practices and be able to generate ideas that could be applicable in their home countries.

**Sign up for *Gender Equality between Men and Women: Towards a More Inclusive Singapore Society* at <https://go.gov.sg/genderequality21> by 3 November 2021.**



in singapore

## TREASURES OF THE SEA

DR NEO'S INTEREST IN MARINE BIOLOGY GREW WHILE WORKING ON HER FIRST UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROJECT INVESTIGATING THE REPRODUCTIVE ECOLOGY OF GIANT CLAMS. THIS LED TO A LIFELONG FASCINATION AND AMBITION TO SAVE THIS ENDANGERED SPECIES. SHE SPEARHEADED TWO RESTOCKING PROGRAMMES IN SINGAPORE THAT BRED AND RAISED BABY CLAMS THAT WERE EVENTUALLY RETURNED TO THE SEA.

## THE VALUE OF SHARED EXPERIENCES

Biases that continue to exist in STEM may take time to shed, but there are ways to overcome them. Citing her own experience, Dr Neo shared how over the years, she has found that "seeking external help — like professional coaching — was most helpful towards reorientating my mindset towards building my career and overcoming personal biases." She learnt and practised drawing boundaries within an unfriendly working culture and with unfriendly colleagues. More importantly, "I recalled feeling a sense of liberation after removing the negatives in my career," said Dr Neo.

## BUILDING A NETWORK

On reflection, Dr Neo thought that building a network of peers that support diversity (in gender, ethnicity, parenthood, etc.) would have made more of a positive impact on her growth in academia. She mentioned how at Mothers in Science, an international non-profit organisation, they are working to raise awareness of the career obstacles faced by mothers in STEM like herself, and advocate workplace equity and inclusion.

"Our organisation has been actively sharing career journeys with mothers in STEM, and creating platforms for mentorship and joining the global movement to call for action to support mothers in science," she explained. "As a founding member of Mothers in Science, this has been an eye-opening experience for me. Being a part of this growing conversation globally empowers me to speak up about these issues in Singapore."

# A WAVE OF CHANGE

Recipient of the Pew Fellowship in Marine Conservation Dr Neo Mei Lin is both a leader in the field of marine biology and at the forefront of leading change in STEM.

**Dr Neo Mei Lin's interest** in nature was sparked when she was a young girl, thanks to her parents, who regularly brought her to nature sites around Singapore. "So when I was at university, taking up courses in environmental sciences was an obvious choice," she said. Back then, many of her lecturers were men. This continued in her early research days, where her colleagues and mentors were also male.

Explained Dr Neo, "Quite frankly, it didn't bother me as much when I was still a research student, as I was more focused on the quality and quantity of scientific research than the gender of its source. However, that changed as I began building a career, both locally and internationally. It was worrying for me as it made me question whether I could succeed as a STEM academic, given the few females I saw holding key academic positions."

But those doubts have evaporated in the years since, given the slew of accolades she has received for her research in marine biology: the World Future Foundation Ph.D. Prize in 2014; the L'Oréal For Women in Science National Fellowship in 2015; the National University of Singapore's

Outstanding Young Alumni Award in 2017; and the Pew Fellowship in Marine Conservation in 2021.

Despite these accolades, there is still a common perception that science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) remains a male-dominated field. She quipped, "If you were to ask someone on the street what a scientist looked like, you'd probably commonly get 'a man with frizzy hair in a white lab coat' (like Albert Einstein) as a response!"

## GENDER IN STEM

Despite the growing balance between the number of male and female researchers in Dr Neo's pet field of research, marine biology, the number of females taking up graduate courses to pursue marine science remains low, and even fewer females reach top academic positions. "I truly hope to encourage more women to take up STEM careers by sharing my experiences in overcoming some of the challenges," said Dr Neo.

Inspiration alone is not enough, however. "We must address the biased perceptions and attitudes that are, unfortunately, still prevalent," she said.



# HER TIME IN THE SUN

Singapore's sprint queen  
Shanti Pereira on life  
as a female athlete.

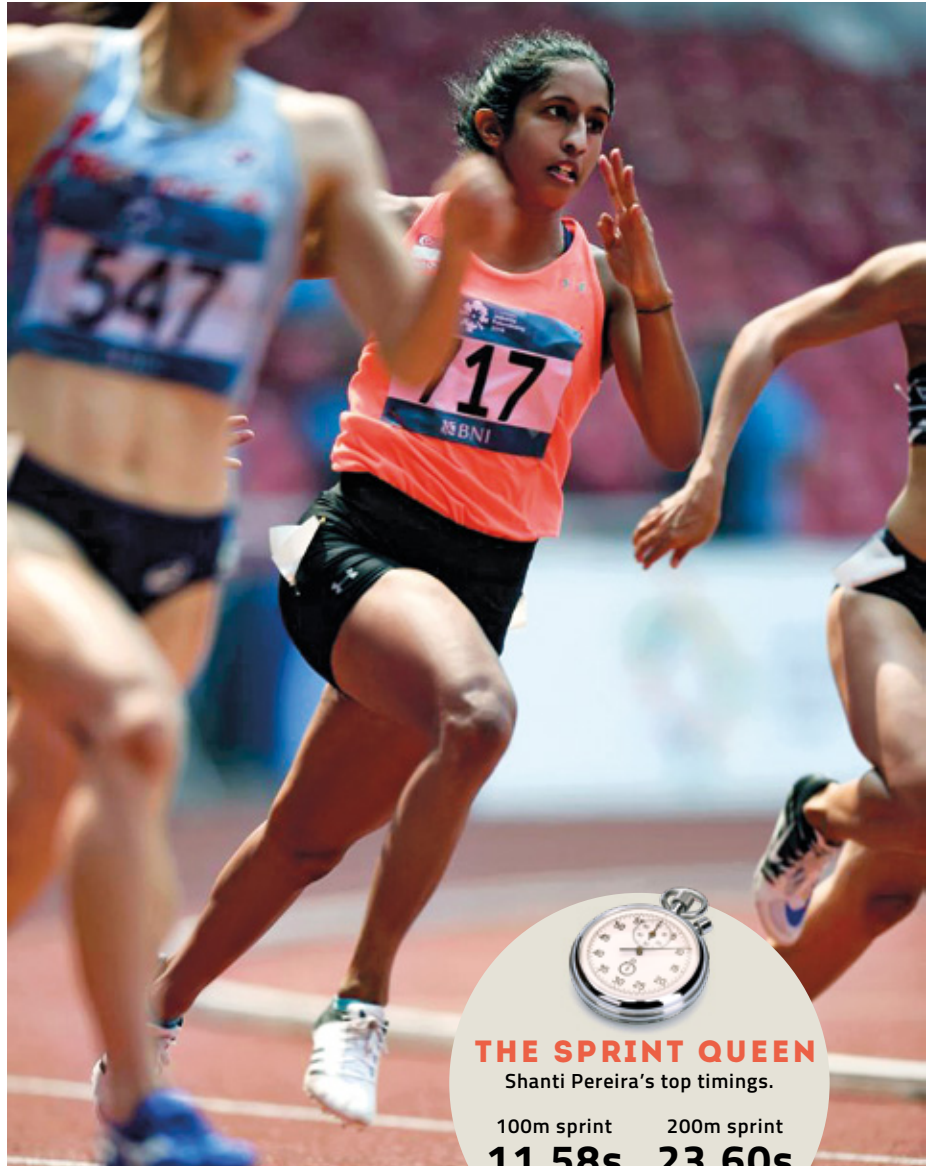
**Fifteen years may not** seem like a long time but for Ms Shanti Pereira, that period has been nothing short of life-altering. In 2006, the then-nine-year-old keenly watched her elder sister run a race in school. That experience mesmerised her and inspired Ms Pereira to lace up her running shoes and hit the track as well. Fast forward 15 years and Ms Pereira, now 24, has just returned from a trip to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

This was her Olympic debut and although she did not win any medals, she told *Experience Singapore* that the experience was one she would not be forgetting any time soon. "Representing Singapore at the Games was one of the highlights of my career," she shared. Other highlights included winning a gold medal at the 2015 Southeast Asian Games in Singapore and clocking a 100m run in less than 12 seconds in 2013.

These wins were the result of a vigorous training schedule, comprising an average of 10 training sessions a week. During these trainings, she combines high-intensity speed and strength sessions, as well as endurance and recovery workouts. With all this training, it is no wonder that she is often dubbed "the fastest woman in Singapore". This tag comes with pressure, explained Ms Pereira. "Sometimes, I may not run my fastest and people automatically wonder why I'm not performing 'well'. This used to affect me a lot but over time, I've accepted that it's part and parcel of an athlete's life. Not every year is going to be great." Her solution? Focusing on the things that she can control: her training and diet.

## WOMEN IN SPORTS

On the role of women in sports, Ms Pereira shared how women are slowly but surely establishing themselves in many male-dominated fields, not just sports. "We're doing this through our displays of strength, confidence and fighting spirit," she said. "The fact that our presence in sports is more or less normalised means that I have not faced that many challenges as a female. Other than having to train or compete while menstruating, I suppose, there haven't been that many challenges for me!"



## THE SPRINT QUEEN

Shanti Pereira's top timings.

100m sprint	200m sprint
<b>11.58s</b>	<b>23.60s</b>
(2019)	(2015)

## FEMALE ROLE MODELS

As for female role models that she looks up to, Ms Pereira highlighted Allyson Felix of the United States and Dina Asher-Smith of the United Kingdom. "The former for being the most decorated athlete of all time, all while being a mum and fighting for women's rights. The latter for expressing her true self even on the biggest stage. She does what she wants and doesn't care what people think of her. That, to me, is so important and inspiring for many young women around the world," said Ms Pereira.

## SETTING HER SIGHTS

The 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games may be over, but Ms Pereira already has her sights set on other major competitions in the coming years. "I'm taking a short break before starting my training again to prepare for next year's competitions," she revealed. "The Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, and Paris Olympic Games are definitely in my sights."



joining hands

DELEGATES AT THE ACWO MEETING IN MYANMAR IN 2019, WHEN SINGAPORE ASSUMED THE PRESIDENCY OF THE ORGANISATION.

# A SISTERHOOD BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Meaningful cooperation and partnerships can help make gender equality a global reality.

**As an advocate** for women in Singapore, the Singapore Council of Women's Organisations (SCWO) coordinates more than 60 women's groups in the republic and unites them towards common goals. But its efforts go beyond just Singapore's shores, thanks to meaningful collaborations with similar organisations in other countries. "These partnerships build mutual understanding and respect, and allow us to learn best practices from one another," explained Dr June Goh, Immediate Past President of SCWO. "Advancing the female agenda requires a combined effort and through these collaborations, we can find opportunities to grow together."

An example of such best practices was highlighted at the Global Network of Women's Shelters Conference held in Taiwan in 2018. A Singapore-based shelter, the Star Shelter, used an innovative virtual presentation to help participants empathise with survivors of sexual abuse seeking shelter. The presentation was well-received and opened doors for further collaboration and understanding.

Beyond perennial issues like sexual violence, global partnerships also help address emerging concerns, such as the worldwide rise in domestic abuse during lockdowns that happened as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. SCWO shared its members' experiences in addressing such issues in a report submitted to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. "This submission was a good opportunity for us to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women as well as to feature the work done by various women's organisations and civil societies in Singapore," Dr Goh added.



VARIOUS ACWO MEETINGS OVER THE YEARS.

## POOLING RESOURCES

Strong partnerships with regional counterparts also help women's organisations scale up their efforts to maximise impact. Just take the *Inspiring Girls Initiative* for example. The initiative pairs female mentors with young girls to inspire them and help them explore their full potential. Started in the United Kingdom in 2013, it is now run in 26 countries across four continents. It debuted in



THE SCWO IS REPRESENTED ON VARIOUS GOVERNMENT AND INTER-MINISTRY COMMITTEES, AS WELL AS REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES WHERE IT CONTRIBUTES VIEWS IN THE AREAS OF FAMILY, WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY.

PHOTOS: ACWO, MSF

## DID YOU KNOW?

THE ASEAN CONFEDERATION OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS (ACWO) MARKS ITS 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY THIS YEAR. IT WAS FORMALLY ESTABLISHED AT A MEETING IN JAKARTA, INDONESIA, IN NOVEMBER 1981.



PRESIDENTS OF WOMEN'S COUNCIL OF THE ASEAN COUNTRIES.



ACWO AND ITS MEMBERS PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN ADVOCATING FOR WOMEN FROM ALL SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY.

Singapore in 2018, marking the first time the programme was run in Asia. At its inaugural session, 40 girls were paired with nine female role models, who shared about their education, professional and personal lives. "SCWO hopes to be able to scale it to other countries in Southeast Asia," said Dr Goh.

To do this successfully, SCWO relies on the wide network of partners it has amassed over the years, through regular participation in events run by bodies like the ASEAN Confederation of Women's Organisations (ACWO). SCWO took over the 19<sup>th</sup> presidency of the ACWO from Myanmar in 2019 and hosted the organisation's first virtual meeting in August 2020. Reflecting on the meeting, Dr Goh said, "I was heartened to see everyone safe, in good spirits and

eager to meet and share ideas." SCWO then conducted the inaugural ACWO Masterclass in the following month. The two-day affair was attended by more than 100 regional participants, and covered topics related to female ageing and entrepreneurship. These topics stemmed from SCWO's participation in the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, which addressed similar concerns.

Dr Goh personally found the masterclass an enriching experience, with the national coordinating bodies for women from ASEAN countries, members of various women's organisations, and representatives from the public and private sectors coming together to discuss and raise awareness on women's issues. "They also sought to empower, and advocate for women in ASEAN. The

participants were engaged and full of enthusiasm, and discussions were robust. Valuable connections were made as well," she added.

For Dr Goh, these experiences are an invaluable reminder of the importance of individual efforts in the quest for gender equality. "I cannot emphasise enough how each and every one in ACWO carries an important responsibility and role in the advancement of women," she remarked, highlighting that as the national coordinating body for women in each of our countries, ACWO and its members play a pivotal role in advocating for women from all segments of society. "Together, we can encourage and learn from each other, and continue to be relevant to the women in ASEAN whom we serve and leave no one behind."

## TAKING STOCK OF PROGRESS

This year, Singapore will submit the **6<sup>th</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** Periodic Report to the United Nations. The report is compiled by the Inter-Ministry Committee on CEDAW, that also monitors the progress and implementation of policies and programmes impacting women, and engages civil society groups on women's development issues. The report showcases the progress made in women's development over the past five years.

"These include recently-announced initiatives to better protect women from family violence, such as improving immediate support for victims, enhancing protection for them, preventing abuse from recurring,

and raising awareness of early warning signs," shared **Dr Lee Tung Jean, First Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Social and Family Development**, who leads the inter-ministry committee.

While many of these initiatives have been contextualised to consider local cultural norms, they have also benefitted from global partnerships. "Learning from the experiences of other states has been very useful for Singapore in understanding best practices for women's development," Dr Lee elaborated. "While a 'one-size-fits-all' approach may not apply due to each state's unique history and circumstances, global cooperation enables countries to have a better appreciation of one another's unique

domestic situation, as well as the diversity among states." Singapore also participates actively in other women-focused international platforms, such as the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the APEC Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy.



## **BREAKING BARRIERS THROUGH EDUCATION**

Women accounted for 41 per cent of the cohort in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) courses in Singapore, up from 38 per cent in 2017.

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SINGAPORE



joining hands

The ASEAN Confederation of Women's Organisations (ACWO) General Assembly and Conference is a biennial event that brings together members from the 10 ASEAN countries to share best practices and learn about the successes and challenges faced by each country while working on improving the status of women.