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Social Space

Lien Centre for Social Innovation

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2009

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#### Citation

Lien Centre for Social Innovation. Socially Innovative Youth Projects in Asia. (2009). *Social Space*. 116-117.

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# Socially Innovative YOUTH PROJECTS IN ASIA

The Lien Centre spotlights the creative efforts of four groups of tertiary students in spearheading new social projects in Asia.

On 6 March 2009, Lien Centre organised a Social Conversation for innovation youth projects. Students from the Singapore Management University (SMU), the United World College of Southeast Asia (UWCSEA), the National University

of Singapore (NUS) and Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) gathered at Settler's Café SMU to review the social enterprise projects that they had conducted.

We present here four of the projects:

## Advocating Children Rights and Welfare Through Goat-sharing (SMU)

Organised by SMU students, the Microfinance Goat Project was conducted in the Philippines and was aimed to improve the livelihoods of families living in rural provinces through goat-rearing and the sale of goat meat. Formulated as an initiative to help the community fight against child labour and to advocate children's rights and welfare, the project not only attempted to fulfil the educational needs of children but also aimed to create an awareness of the dangers of children working in plantations and encouraged their parents to take them out of such work.

In the mountain *barangays* (villages) of northern Cebu, there are more children in the workforce compared to those in school and almost every child

SMU students tending the goats in Cebu.



is involved in some form of income-generating activity to supplement his or her family's meagre income.

In Adlaon, Guba and Cambinocot *barangays*, self-help groups called Family Watch Groups (FWG) are working to stop child labour in dangerous farming areas and plantations and are pushing for the rights of children and their education to be recognised in their *barangays*.

Three project teams from SMU – Project Dawn, Venture and Kinabuhi – partnered with the Share-a-Child Movement and the FWGs in each of the *barangays* to facilitate a business model of goat-sharing between families and the community. Share-a-Child is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Cebu that advocates the rights and welfare of children and women in order to empower families by reducing the dependency on child labour and encouraging them to go to school.

The three teams introduced the 'One family, one goat at a time' concept, which is a microcredit goat livelihood and outreach initiative. Basically, families can obtain interest-free loans of up to two years to purchase goats, on the condition that they share that benefit by giving up one kid goat to another needy family whenever their goat bears its young.

In the 3 *barangays*, the number of families receiving goats has grown between 30% to 80% since 2008. Up to date, more than 100 students have been involved in the project. Also, the manure from the goats have enabled families to practise organic farming - families shared that they experienced a multiple-fold increase in their crops harvest by using goat manure as natural fertilisers.

Through these projects, SMU Business Management students had the opportunity to apply what they have learnt in the classroom to deal with real world situations and address pressing societal issues. To date, SMU's Office of Student Life has sent over 90 students to work hand-in-hand with the rural community in Cebu and will continue to encourage submission of more applications for the 2010 summer projects in order to sustain the Goats' Livelihood Programme as well as other community and education programmes.



Participants and Facilitators discuss issues at the IJP project

### Initiative for Peace (UWCSEA)

Facilitated by 22 multi-national student facilitators from UWCSEA, this programme aimed to reduce prejudice and promote understanding and reconciliation amongst youth in the conflict area of Timor Leste. There were 39 Timorese youth, volunteers and seminary students. One of the foci of the programme was communication and rapport building skills. A particularly enlightening activity for the participants was a role-play of the government in planning the country's budget. Groups were asked to allocate and rationalise how much of the country's budget should be spent on various areas. At the end, the actual allocation for both Singapore and Timor Leste were unveiled and there was a discussion of the differences between the two countries and the reasons the Timorese State spends the budget the way they do. Participants also discussed specific issues they would pursue upon returning to Timor Leste within their local community or schools. One of the programme's aims was to encourage participants to return to Timor Leste as passionate, empowered and active youths who can contribute to Timor-Leste's nation-building process. This year, a Timorese group has set up a youth organisation: Timor Leste Youth for Peace.



Franco Lim, Project Director of Save3s getting his hands dirty with reforestation work.



Source: NUS

### Small Actions, Big Hearts (NUS)

NUS students summarised a project they piloted at the university known as 'NUS Fights Climate Change'. Targeted at all levels, from students to the university president, the project was developed in a bid to raise awareness and action on environmental consciousness as well as influence policy decisions relating to climate issues. One of six projects under the broad NUS Fights Climate Change initiative, Save3s is a paper conservation venture that aims to minimise the excessive and often unnecessary usage of papers in the NUS campus.



The Sole Makers (From left to right: John, Jing Ying and Justine)

### SoulEd Over for Charity Nanyang Polytechnic (NP)

Launched under the School of Humanities, NP's new Diploma in Business & Social Enterprise course certainly has something to be proud of. Offered for the first time in April 2008, it has seen three students coming up with the innovative idea of donating a pair of shoes for every pair sold under their 'SouLE' brand.

'SouLE' is a combination of the words Soul and Sole, and perfectly exemplifies their vision – which is to provide a sole for every soul. One of the trio, Justine Lee, was compelled to make a difference after he discovered that people from poverty-stricken

countries could not afford shoes and had to suffer life-threatening infections attributed to ill-fitting footwear. Last year, in June, he set up Project Selfless Shoe with two of his schoolmates.

The trio, known as Sole Makers under their Project Selfless Shoe, pledged to donate a pair of shoes to the needy for every pair that is sold under their 'SouLE' brand. Their concept was simple – whenever a student buys a pair of the enterprise's newly designed and reasonably priced shoes from their website ([www.selfless-shoe.blogspot.com](http://www.selfless-shoe.blogspot.com)), Sole Makers will donate another pair of shoes to someone who is in need. To date, all donations have been given to local recipients but the group has been talking to several Asian shoe suppliers and is considering expansion.

In August 2008, Sole Makers accomplished a worthwhile feat when they clinched second place in the Mayor's Imagine Social Entrepreneurship Challenge (MISE) – an initiative jointly organised by Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC) and NUS students in Free Enterprise and Social Innovation Park.

The MISE initiative led to a grant of S\$25,000 from the Mayor's Imagine Fund for their project. Heartened by the efforts of the trio, Joyce Tang – a lecturer from NP's School of Humanities – stepped in as the project's advisor and is now guiding them with their business plans.

Currently, the project is trading well into its second year and is attracting the attention of fellow students. The group has also started a twitter site (<http://twitter.com/Soledier>) in light of the project's popularity. Hoping to inspire new designs for their collection, Sole Makers welcome any kind of contribution – be it in terms of shoe design ideas or shoe sales – from the public to propel their good cause to greater heights.