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### Up close and personal with Mr Sundar Selvam: Hitting zero targets

Sundar Selvam

*Singapore Management University*, [ssundar@smu.edu.sg](mailto:ssundar@smu.edu.sg)

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## Up close and personal with Mr Sundar Selvam: Hitting zero targets

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<https://alumni.smu.edu.sg/smu-circle-august-2021/sundaravadivelan-selvam>



He might not be one you would have come across on campus. And not one you might read much about in SMU news or in the limelight for its achievements, preferring to remain in the background. But look around the SMU campus and you will see the fruits of his work and that of his team.

Meet Sundar, SMU's Vice-President for Campus Infrastructure and Services. Since January 2015, he has been at the forefront of driving SMU's own sustainability journey which has resulted in several "firsts".

**Bervyn: Tell us more about yourself, your career journey, and how you have come to do what it is you do now at SMU.**

**Sundar:** Since graduating with a civil engineering degree, it has been a wonderful journey of more than 30 years in the construction industry both in Singapore and India.

With the years of experience, I have been able to build expertise in project management, procurement, design processes, human resource management and other key areas in property development. I was able to deliver a variety of building, infrastructure, and petrochemical projects including ITE College West, Singapore, which is the first Private-Public Partnership (PPP) project. before joining SMU in January 2015.

I started at SMU as the Director of the former Office of Campus Development (OCD) to drive the construction of the School of Law (SOL), which was successfully commissioned on time on 1st January 2017. I attribute this success to the efforts of a very passionate and dedicated project team.

In April 2017, SMU management took a strategic step to restructure and merged the synergies of three separate departments – the Office of Campus Development (OCD), Office of Facilities Management (OFM) and Leasing Business Unit (LBU). This consolidation resulted in the formation of what is now the Office of Campus Infrastructure and Services (OCIS), and I was tasked with leading this team as Vice-President.

Since its formation, we have implemented a number of key projects, such as the SMU Connexion. Opened in January 2020, it is a vibrant and dynamic learning facility that reflects SMU's spirit of innovation and collaboration. Soon, "AS3" as it is now called is a multipurpose building currently under construction. This building will house the School of Social Sciences (SOSS), the School of Computing and Information Systems (SCIS) (Research), the Office of Core Curriculum/ Wee Lim Wee Centre (OCC/WKWC), Centre for Research on Successful Ageing (ROSA) & Lien Centre for Social Innovation (LCSI) and will be another great addition to the campus when it is completed in 2022.

**Bervyn: What are key areas of responsibility of the OCIS team?**

**Sundar:** I oversee the functions of various teams of OCIS, namely Campus Development (CD), Space Management (SM), Facilities Management and Services (FMS) and Leasing Business (LB) which work together harmoniously to enhance the quality of support services for the SMU Community.

The teams provide management of new development and major refurbishment projects, use of existing spaces on campus, maintenance of all campus facilities, operation, maintenance of mechanical and electrical (M&E) systems, management of commercial tenants on campus, booking of conference rooms for external parties, car-parking facilities, and accommodations for students and faculty.

SMU is known for its unparalleled interactive pedagogy and learning environment that is responsive to its diverse student body and community. To maintain this advantage, the OCIS team is committed to keeping existing spaces in optimal condition, developing contemporary and functionally efficient facilities infused with environmental elements. From conceptualization to planning and design of such projects, sustainability and wellness-related considerations for the user take centre stage.

**Bervyn: Sustainability is one of SMU strategic priorities and quite clearly, we want to walk the talk. Can you tell us more about SMU's plans to be a sustainable campus? What have been the key achievements and what are some of our objectives ahead?**

**Sundar:** Since its establishment in 2000 and the opening of the City Campus in 2005, SMU has been committed to the sustainable development of a clean, green, and healthy environment for SMU students, faculty and staff as well as neighbouring communities, businesses, residents and visitors.

SMU has been consistent in its efforts to raise the sustainability bar even higher by 2020 and achieving its environmental sustainability targets for 2020.

**2020 Performance** **Sustainability Targets Achieved**

**Smart, Sustainable, Iconic City Campus**



**BEST IN CLASS Energy Efficient Campus**

- Net Zero Energy building (SMUC)
- Super Low Energy Building (AS3)
- 100% Green Mark Platinum Campus (Including PSR)



**GREEN & CLEAN ENERGY Powered Campus**

- Solar farm in Campus – Largest in city centre (6,600SqM)
- Electric Vehicle (EV) charging @ LKCSB carpark
- 100% Green Energy used for SMU Campus from April 2020



**SUSTAINABILITY TARGETS 2020 (Achieved)**

- Energy intensity reduction by 40% (Baseline 2006)
- Water index reduction by 30% (Baseline 2011)
- Waste reduction by 10% (Baseline 2017)
- Indoor potted plants increased by 50%



**ENVIRONMENT CONSCIOUS F&B and RETAIL**

- Reduction in F&B, business operations, paper & printing and discarded assets by 10%
- Online ordering and contactless payment for F&B tenants in SMU (achieved 75%)
- Reduction in use plastic and non-biodegradable consumables



**REUSE, REDUCE & RECYCLE Efforts**

- 300+ fixtures and fittings from PSR refurbishment reclaimed and donated to 15 charities
- 387,000 plastic bottles saved by water dispensers in SOL, SMUC and Admin Building
- Paper recycling increased by 38% (Baseline year 2017)

Leveraging the progress made over the years in environmental sustainability efforts, SMU is now exploring the next significant frontier of attaining carbon neutrality in the future. The idea of this bold endeavour stands as a testimony to SMU's conscious efforts and commitment towards sustainability since its inception.

SMU embraces innovation and industry partnerships that play a key role in impacting sustainability wide and deep. We have ramped up our engagement with the agencies and forming strategic partnerships in recent years for developing exemplary infrastructure which, apart from meeting the University's growth needs, also serves as an inspiring case study for the industry, peers, professionals and students.



The multi-award-winning SMU Connexion opened for use in January 2020. The new building is a vibrant and dynamic learning facility that reflects SMU's spirit of innovation and collaboration. The five-storey building is designed to facilitate experiential learning and to host numerous flexible learning and recreational functions. The building's various passive and active design features make it highly environmentally responsive. It makes use of Mass Engineer Timber (MET) Construction, a prefabricated facade, Mechanical Electrical Plumbing (MEP) Modular Installations, SMU's in-house engineered product - enhanced Passive Displacement Cooling (ePDC), and an array of high-performance photovoltaic cells on the rooftop with energy-smart control systems. These are among the advanced features which helped the University earn a string of awards and recognition, including BCA Green Mark Platinum (Zero Energy), WELLS Pre-Certification, BCA Design and Engineering Safety Excellence Award, and Association of Consulting Engineers Singapore (ACES) - Design Excellence Award – Merit.



The photo above is an artist's impression of SMU's multiuser 'AS3' project, which is scheduled for completion in 2022.

Construction is underway of the building, comprising five-storeys and two basements. The building responds to the University's growing needs for academic and research spaces on campus. Like SMU Connexion, AS3 makes use of Mass Engineer Timber (MET) Construction, a prefabricated façade and Mechanical Electrical Plumbing (MEP) Modular Installations. It is being built to meet BCA Green Mark Platinum (Super Low Energy Building) standards.

Looking ahead, sustainable development is recognized as one of the biggest societal challenges of the twenty-first century. Institutions of Higher Learnings (IHLs) are expected to have the vision, the knowledge, and the power to lead this transition and induce the changes towards this new paradigm. As such, the sustainability values of SMU are gearing up to push and have greater visibility as an important anchor in its mission and practice. Towards this end, SMU is developing a sustainability strategy to support its Vision 2025 and its associated priorities and objectives, which will aim to deliver meaningful environmental and societal impact by harnessing our unique strengths & ecosystem.

### ***Bervyn:* What are some of the key challenges and opportunities on this sustainability journey?**

***Sundar:*** Sustainability is a definitive new scientific field that focuses on the challenges facing the world and how those challenges should be addressed. SMU aspires to be one of the promising leaders in this movement, contributing to a paradigm shift that involves combining all relevant dimensions of sustainable development, including the responsibility to take action.

To achieve this, there are some key parameters that we need to pay attention to. These include (a) consolidating the identity characteristics of SMU, its organization and its relationship with stakeholders; (b) promoting institutional cohesion at all levels; (c) ensuring the future sustainability of the institution in economic terms; (d) the potential of its human resources and infrastructure; (e) deepening the relationship with our alumni and extending social action to students with economic deficits; (f) building strategic partnerships at national, regional and international levels and deepening our external and internal communication practices.

In our action plan, in addition to fulfilling the required actions on health, safety and sustainable policies and measures for new infrastructure, we must simultaneously define objectives aimed at developing a built-in and built strategy for teaching, strengthening research in sustainability and upgrading knowledge.

**Bervyn: How can the alumni community partner with the University on this journey?**

**Sundar:** We are immensely proud of SMU Alumni who are active across the world in business, government, NGOs, and academia. Their shared history and interest in sustainability create a bond that lasts long beyond their university years. The active involvement of our alumni creates a platform for collaborative initiatives that allow our students to draw on an amazing pool of knowledge and passion for sustainability and projects around the globe led or initiated by our alumni. In fact, some of our alumni have taken to sustainable entrepreneurship and/or work in the field of sustainability, and are now leaders of change.

Some tangible ideas for our collective consideration could be a platform that brings our alumni and students together to discuss and raise awareness about sustainability. This could take the form of forums or debates, or inviting alumni to speak about the issue at events on campus. Such events would highlight the work our alumni are doing and the impact they are having through their business, career or lifestyle. We could showcase SMU alumni and their fascinating journeys through various platforms to inspire the community.

**Bervyn: Finally, if there is one behavioural change that individuals could make as one's contribution to the sustainable campus, what would that be?**

**Sundar:** Research reveals the importance of community empowerment and support, for both centralised and individual initiatives. To an extent, the embedding of a sustainability culture in an institution can be assessed by the degree of the stakeholders' perceptions of the relevance of sustainability initiatives. I strongly believe that the successful adoption of sustainability in SMU would require systematic transformation, most importantly in stakeholders' practices and behaviours.

In this regard, as a community we need to learn how to do these things together. As the African proverb goes, "it takes a village to raise a child". While this statement might be more commonly used in a different context, it's implications hold true in the present context. To truly support sustainability, we must be willing to explore the connections between our activities as humans and the changes in our environment. We need to become knowledgeable citizens for the 21st century and cultivate new habits, to do things differently as we find ways to transition from an extractive economy and consumer society, into a renewable economy and a society focused on resilience, buffering the instabilities coming our way.