

SOCIAL SCOPE

SEAP ICSW SOUTHEAST ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL

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Editorial Note- This conversation is about need for intergenerational living. Good to see that Malaysia has begun his and it is hoped that social welfare organizations in SEAP region will start this dialogue. Time to start.

Why generations need each other more than ever

From climate anxiety to AI deepfakes, the challenges of today require every generation at the table

I recently attended a discussion organised by Aliran that explored how different generations think about the future – particularly in relation to social change and the potential social costs that come with it.

The conversation revealed how generational experiences shape attitudes towards technology, work, knowledge and the uncertainties of contemporary life.

Anxiety of an uncertain future

One recurring theme was the growing sense of insecurity about what lies ahead.

Younger participants expressed deep concern about environmental sustainability and the need to reduce carbon footprints.

Others highlighted persistent structural barriers affecting women's rights and gender equality.

These concerns raise broader questions about authority and responsibility: who shapes the social agenda, and how can societies develop structures that allow different generations to engage in meaningful dialogue?

The discussion also touched on the complex relationship between technology and knowledge. During the Covid pandemic, people increasingly turned to online platforms for information about vaccines, public health measures and scientific developments.

Yet the same digital environment that enables access to information can also create echo chambers, where individuals selectively consume content that reinforces their existing beliefs. This dynamic has contributed to the spread of misinformation, including certain anti-vaccine narratives.

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, the challenge of verification becomes even more complicated. AI can now generate convincing images, voices and digital personas that mimic real human beings.

Much has changed

Participants acknowledged that the pandemic accelerated a dramatic shift in the way we learn and interact with the world. Covid pushed many people – including older generations who were previously less comfortable with digital tools – to embrace technology more fully.

Platforms such as Zoom and other webinar technologies opened new possibilities for learning and engagement. Today, we can attend lectures, seminars and discussions with scholars, activists and practitioners from anywhere in the world without leaving home.

In many ways, the pandemic brought about what some have called the “death of distance”. Geography is no longer the barrier it once was. Technology now allows us to connect with individuals, institutions and knowledge networks across continents in real time – expanding opportunities for intellectual exchange and collaborative learning.

These changes require a shift in mindset. In a rapidly changing world shaped by digital innovation, individuals and institutions must cultivate a growth mindset and commit to continuous, lifelong learning. The skills needed

today may become obsolete tomorrow, and adaptability has become an essential capability.

Learning is no longer confined to formal education. It now occurs through online courses, webinars, digital communities and informal knowledge networks.

Stereotypes and shared ground

The conversation also explored generational stereotypes and identity. Generation Y or Millennials have sometimes been labelled as less hardworking or overly dependent on technology, while Generation Z are often portrayed as hyper-connected and immersed in digital culture.

Yet such stereotypes oversimplify reality. Younger generations have also experienced unprecedented disruption – particularly during the pandemic, which forced them to adapt quickly to remote learning, hybrid workplaces and rapidly changing social conditions.

Covid restrictions also produced lasting shifts in everyday life. Working from home became normalised in many sectors, altering expectations about workplace flexibility and productivity. Food habits changed as more people rediscovered home-cooked meals. Technology began to mediate not only professional interactions but also social relationships and family life.

Participants also reflected on the future of information consumption and public discourse. With the rise of AI and algorithm-driven content, fewer people may engage in deep reading of traditional media, including portals such as Aliran's. This raises important questions about how societies can sustain thoughtful, critical public conversation in an era of rapid digital consumption.

Another issue discussed was the widening gap between older and younger generations. Differences in technological familiarity, communication styles and social values can create misunderstandings.

There is also the problem of ageism, where older individuals may feel marginalised in an increasingly digital world.

Yet the discussion emphasised that generational differences should not become barriers – but opportunities for mutual learning. Older generations bring experience, historical memory and perspective, while younger generations contribute technological fluency, fresh ideas and innovative ways of engaging with the world.

The central challenge, ultimately, is learning how different generations can walk together into the future. This requires not only the transfer of knowledge and ownership but also the building of relationships grounded in empathy and shared values.

In a world shaped by rapid technological change, environmental uncertainty and social transformation, the cultivation of ethical awareness and mutual respect matters more than ever.

The future will not be shaped by one generation alone. It will depend on our collective ability to learn from one another, adapt to change and sustain the values that allow societies to flourish.

Dr Asma Abdullah (from Malaysia) is a specialist in cross-cultural communication and leadership development with over 30 years of experience in education, corporate training and consultancy.

Stopping separation: keeping families together

In 2009, with our support, the UN adopted new guidelines for alternative care. These emphasised that children should only enter care if absolutely necessary and must always have the opportunity to return to their original families if it is in their best interest.

Issued By Mohammed Hassan Khan – ICSW – SEAP Vice President and volunteer editor of this newsletter. Kindly Share with friends.