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# Grassroots Philanthropy in Singapore in the New Millennium

Philanthropy in Asia: Working Paper No. 7



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# ACSEP

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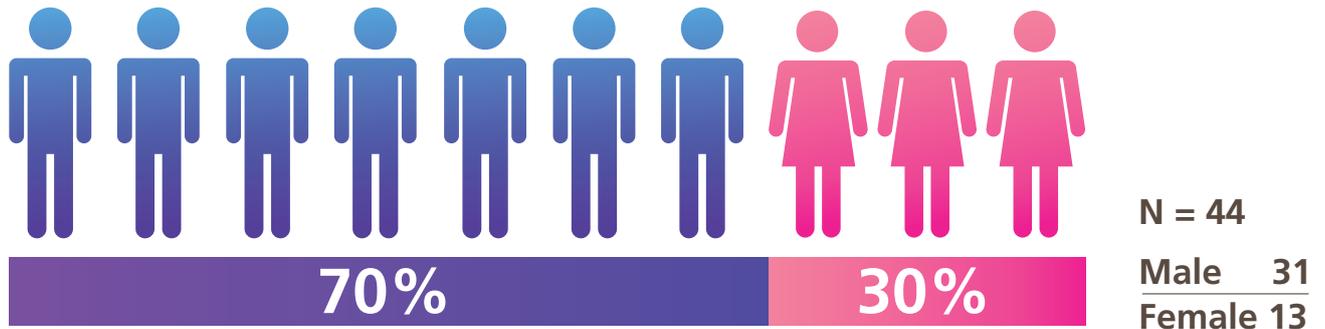
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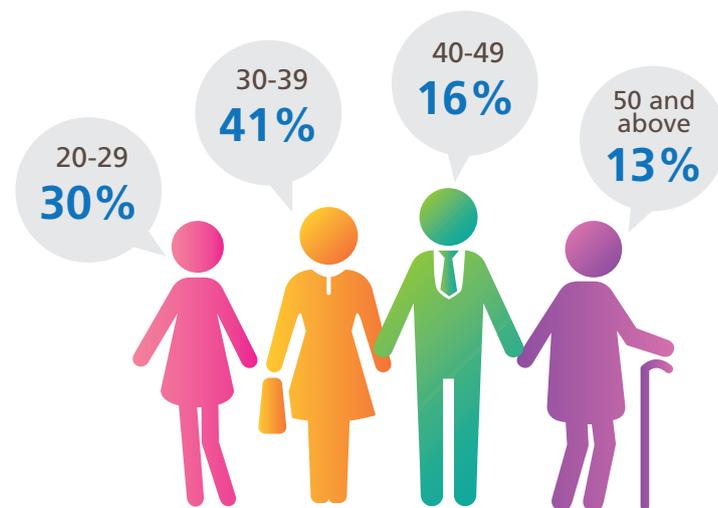
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# Sampled Grassroots Philanthropists in Singapore

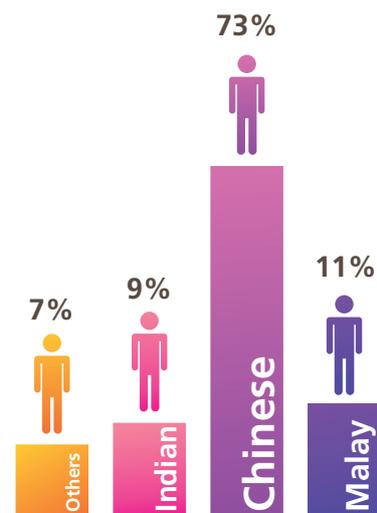
## Gender



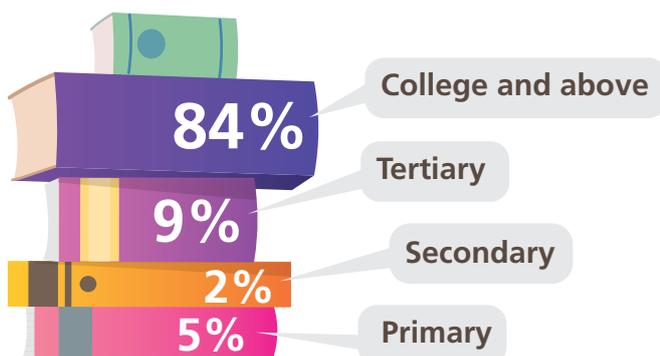
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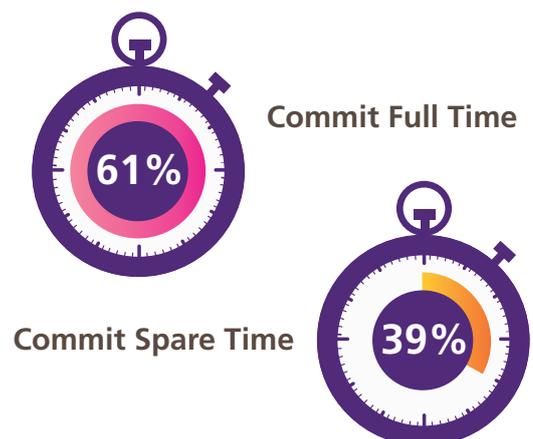
## Ethnicity



## Education



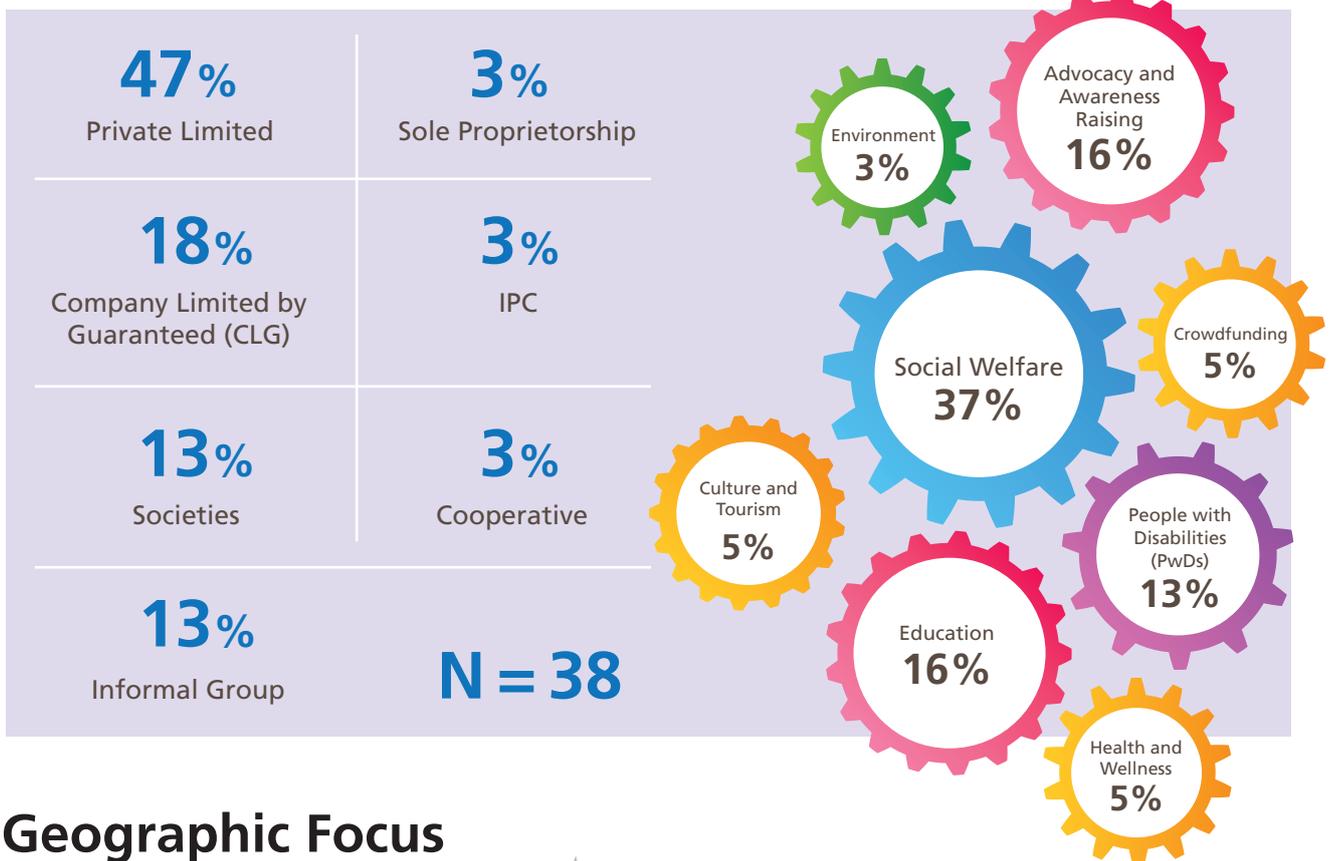
## Time Commitment



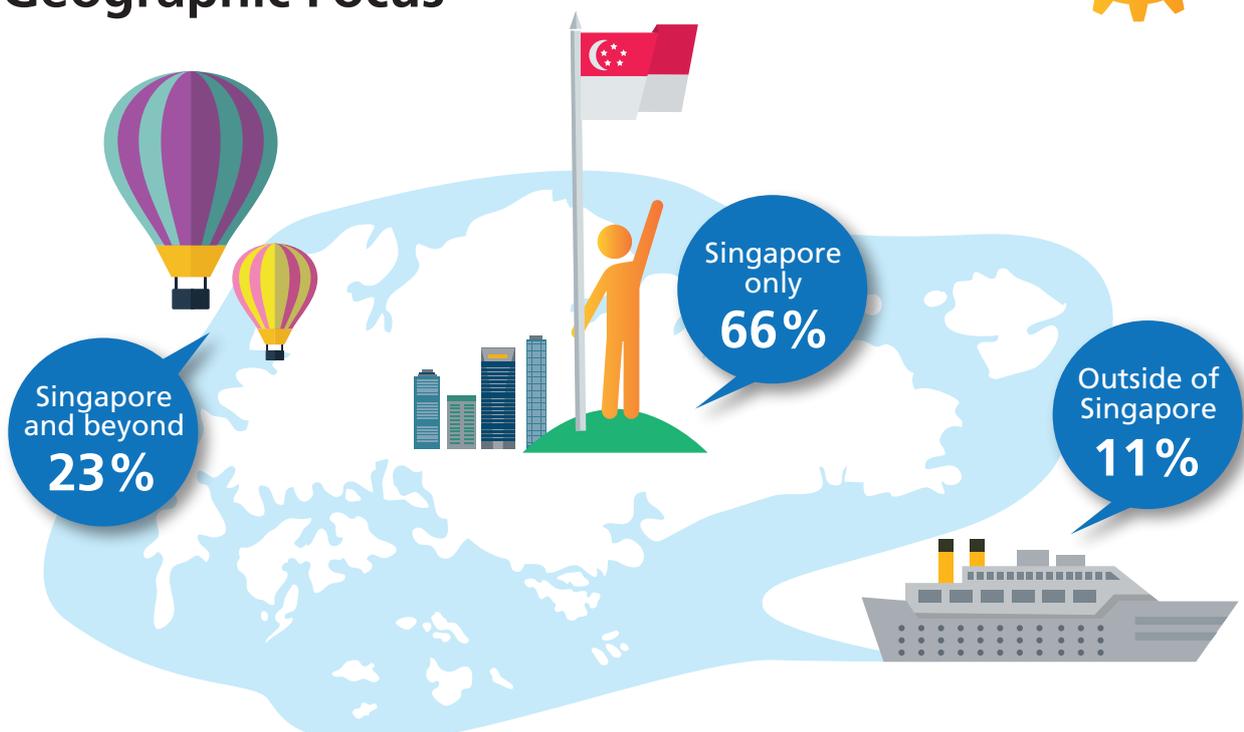
# Different Forms of Institutionalised Grassroots Philanthropy

## Type of Organisations

## Sector Focus



## Geographic Focus



# Grassroots Philanthropy – Features and Motivations

## \* FEATURES



Proactively identifying cracks and gaps in the system and coming up with solutions



Embracing giving as a lifestyle



Risk-taking

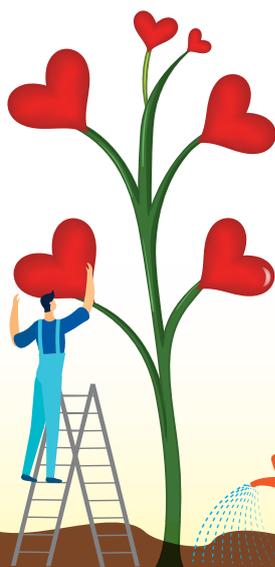


Being entrepreneurial – persistent, resilient and adaptive to changes



Embracing organisational learning

## \* MOTIVATIONS AND MEANING OF GRASSROOTS GIVING



- Achieve social impact to make the current system better
- Emotional connections to the world and the relationships forged with beneficiaries
- Paying it forward – from immediate family, education, religion and global exposure
- A response to the heightened awareness of the privilege of being a Singaporean or Singapore resident

## \* TRENDS IN GRASSROOTS GIVING

- More actions need to be taken to engender social impact besides traditional cheque writing.
- Educational programmes have deepened the roots in grassroots engagement.
- Choosing the route toward institutionalisation to sustain grassroots engagement and align grassroots work with personal values.
- Advances in technology and new media can help grassroots philanthropists adopt a business approach to sustain social good and scale the social impact their initiatives deliver.

# Executive Summary

This is an exploratory study of contemporary grassroots philanthropy in Singapore. The purpose is to obtain insights into what motivates contemporary grassroots philanthropy and to understand the characteristics of those who have pushed their grassroots work forward through establishing an organisation.

The grassroots philanthropists in our exploratory study exhibit one or more of the following characteristics in self-articulating their giving journey:

- Proactively identifying cracks and gaps in the current system and coming up with solutions.
- Embracing giving as a kind of lifestyle rather than a personal obligation.
- Embracing risk-taking in grassroots philanthropy that tends to diverge from the conventional life trajectory.
- Being entrepreneurial – persistent, resilient and adaptive to changes – in different steps to institutionalise their grassroots engagements.
- Embracing organisational learning that helps grassroots philanthropists better articulate the type of value-based institutionalisation that aligns with their intention and impact.

As articulated by most grassroots philanthropists in our study, their motivations for giving revolve around four themes:

- The younger generation especially emphasises social impact to make the current system better.

- Their philanthropy provides emotional connections to the world around them based on the relationships forged with beneficiaries.
- Grassroots givers are paying it forward, having learnt through different socialisation processes including their immediate family, education, religion and global exposure.
- Their philanthropy is a response to their heightened awareness of the privilege of being a Singaporean or Singapore resident, which leads to their organising to institutionalise their philanthropic acts.

Our preliminary findings point to the following trends among our select group of grassroots philanthropists:

- There is growing concern, especially among the younger generation, that in addition to traditional cheque writing, more actions need to be taken to engender social impact.
- Educational programmes have provided people with the opportunities to deepen their roots in grassroots engagement and explore social issues within and beyond Singapore.
- People engaged in grassroots work tend to choose the route toward institutionalisation to sustain their grassroots engagement and align grassroots work with personal values.
- Advances in technology and new media help grassroots philanthropists, especially the younger ones, adopt a business approach to sustain social good and scale the social impact their initiatives deliver.

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<b>GLOSSARY</b>	
ACRA	Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority
CCA	Co-Curricular Activity
CIP	Community Involvement Programme
CLG	Public Company Limited by Guarantee
IPC	Institution of a Public Character
NVPC	National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre
Pte Ltd	Private Company Limited by Shares

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background of Study

Contemporary Singapore is known for her drive to be a smart nation and the global hub for innovation by attracting technical startups, businesses and investors around the world to tackle challenging macro problems (Choudhury, 2017; Forbes, 2018). Behind the emblems of innovation and entrepreneurship, Singapore's economic strategy has been closely linked to building a caring society and a giving nation (Chia, 2018). Under the strong national directive of encouraging every citizen to give, individuals have donated S\$30 million in 2018 to Giving.sg, the online charity portal administered by the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) (Lam, 2019). This is a 15-percent increase from 2017 and the highest donation since 2015. Accordingly, volunteerism has grown significantly over the years (Tan, 2018). In light of the increase in giving, various ground-up initiatives have also emerged which defy categorisation into the traditional or more familiar terms such as volunteerism because they combine various elements including traditional philanthropy, voluntary commitment, and the new business culture.

In this paper we use the term, *grassroots philanthropy*, to capture this new direction in Singaporean society. This exploratory study depicts the preliminary contours of the contemporary landscape of grassroots giving in Singapore. We cover in our study the grounds of those who have pushed their grassroots work forward by institutionalising their giving.

While this study may not be fully representative of the entire civic engagement and the grassroots philanthropic movement in Singapore, the narratives of contemporary grassroots givers provide some anecdotal references to the values they are embracing. These stories and vignettes could potentially shed light on what

drives contemporary grassroots philanthropy in Singapore.

## 1.2 Exploring Grassroots Philanthropy

Although people nowadays often associate philanthropy with the giving of money in the form of grantmaking by large foundations or wealthy individuals, philanthropy in its basic sense involves voluntary giving of time, skills and money to produce public benefits (Bernholz, Cordelli, & Reich, 2016). In this paper, we aim to bring back the original meaning of the term, *philanthropy*. We contend that in its original context, philanthropy means an intention to bring benefits to the public in which the intention is not imposed but rather voluntary and bottom-up. Philanthropy also means sustained effort to push for social good rather than sporadic giving.

This paper uses the broader definition of philanthropy to discuss those ground-up giving initiatives by ordinary citizens who have institutionalised their giving into some formal or informal forms of organisations to sustain their grassroots engagements. We draw this definition from Ruesga's (2011) classification of grassroots philanthropy:

Grassroots philanthropy can mean the giving of time, money, and other forms of support by ordinary citizens to one another and to the collective activities of their own communities, defined either by geography, identity, or interest.

This paper refers to the ordinary citizen givers in our sample as grassroots givers and grassroots philanthropists interchangeably who we have defined as someone who have played a part in the contribution of time, money and skills to advance public good in Singapore and beyond.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a preliminary investigation of the motivations and perceptions of giving associated with contemporary grassroots philanthropy in Singapore. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What motivates grassroots philanthropy in Singapore?
- How do grassroots givers perceive their giving?
- How does the context of Singapore shape their perception of giving?
- In what forms do they institutionalise their grassroots work?
- What are some new trends in giving in the contemporary era?

Given the limited research exploring grassroots giving since the new millennium, this study

addresses the gap by offering a viewpoint grounded in in-depth interviews with some of the better known grassroots philanthropists. This study is not intended to be comprehensive nor conclusive, but aims to encourage more studies on active citizens doing grassroots works in Singapore to further investigate what drives their giving. The intended audiences for this study are scholars researching philanthropy and civic engagement, sector developers of service provision and social enterprises, and people who are interested in learning more about giving and wanting to start their giving journey.

In the sections that follow, we first discuss some of the conceptualisations of grassroots philanthropy and how grassroots philanthropy is closely linked to the individual's moral biography. The third section introduces the method and data we used for this study. We discuss our findings in the fourth and the fifth section by analysing the interview data. The last section presents our conclusions. Here, we offer some insights on the current landscape of giving in Singapore.

## 2. Overview of Grassroots Philanthropy

### 2.1 Defining Grassroots Philanthropy

The term, *grassroots philanthropy*, evokes two very powerful ideas that may seem to contradict each other. Grassroots is associated with bottom-up initiatives as opposed to elite-based or government-imposed directives. Philanthropy nowadays is often equated with grantmaking or charitable giving that is associated with large foundations, wealthy individuals and big corporations. As the contemporary understanding of these two terms tend to bring some doubts and controversies, Ruesga (2011) identifies three strands of grassroots philanthropy by distinguishing philanthropy *to* the grassroots, philanthropy *with* the grassroots, and philanthropy *from* the grassroots.

In this study, we adopt the philanthropy *from* the grassroots approach which Ruesga (2011) defines as the contribution of time, money and talent by ordinary citizens as opposed to top-down or elite-driven giving. This approach to grassroots philanthropy prioritises the engagement with grassroots communities as essential to building positive social capacity on the ground (Marshall, 2012; Niyizonkiza & Yamamoto, 2013; Félix & DuPree, 2014).

We draw further definitions from Zhou and Han (2018, p. 2) who define grassroots philanthropy as “public interest or charitable work organised by individuals who self-identify as grassroots, as opposed to programmes offered by mainstream charitable organisations or public semi-public institutions.” Grassroots discourse on grassroots philanthropic organisations (GPOs) in Chinese cyberspace tends to focus on the individual aspects of philanthropy rather than the institutionalised and professionalised aspects of their organisations or practices (Zhou & Han, 2018). GPOs tend to view philanthropy as “small good deeds, a personal spiritual journey, and something that brings happiness” rather than stressing the efficiency, accountability and professionalism of their philanthropy (Zhou & Han, 2018). In this study, we also examine whether this thesis holds in the case of Singapore.

In accordance with this conceptualisation, grassroots philanthropist could give in various forms: voluntary engagement through giving one’s time and skills, charitable giving, and establishing philanthropic resources through the creation of some forms of institutions for the purpose of permanent giving (Adloff, 2009).

Given our definition of grassroots philanthropists, the following groups of people were intentionally left out from our scope of study: people who give consistently without institutionalising their giving; individuals who give large gifts on a once-off basis; and individuals who invest deeply in caring for others over a long period of time without some forms of institutionalisation.

Furthermore, grassroots philanthropists connote ordinary people. We did not include the high-net-worth individuals, celebrity philanthropists, and elite or billionaire philanthropists in our sample (Hood, 2016; Deng & Jeffreys, 2019). However, for the purpose of our study, a grassroots philanthropist *can* come from a higher socio-economic background although she or he ought not to already be in a position of influence when interviewed. Finally, grassroots philanthropy – in its informal, bottom-up expression – ought to be initiated by intrinsically motivated individuals and not driven by top-down organisational policy. Thus, corporate and venture philanthropy were also excluded.

### 2.2 The Motivations and the Moral Biography of Grassroots Philanthropy

Scholars have documented the historical developments of philanthropy in Singapore as well as notable trends (Prakash & Tan, 2015; Lee, 2019; Ooi, 2019). However, little information is available on the motivations of grassroots philanthropists and their organisations in the current era. Our research adds to the existing body of work on Singapore’s giving landscape that has shed light on historical and contemporary trends in giving.

The prior work covers a particular demography of givers (Ooi, 2016, 2018) and the methods of giving (Lam, Prakash, & Tan, 2014; Ang, Lam, & Zhang, 2016;) as well as offers a macro view of the giving landscape (Prakash & Tan, 2015; Koh, Lam, & Zhang, 2017). Providing another angle to study the roots of philanthropy, this exploratory study adopts a qualitative approach to probe the individual narratives of giving, their aspirations associated with giving, and people's self-reconstruction of their giving journey.

This study further explores the meanings of giving to provide a more in-depth understanding of the motivations behind philanthropic behaviours in Singapore (Webb & Khoo, 2010; Lam, Jacob, & Seah, 2011; Neumayr & Handy, 2017). The motivations to give include economic resources, religious beliefs, intergenerational learning, and a sense of responsibility towards social integration (Lam, Jacob, & Seah, 2011). In addition, giving is also motivated by people's search for meanings in life (Stannard-Stockton, 2008; Trobe, 2013).

Philanthropy is not only about giving in the literal sense, but is "a more profound array of biographical and societal relationships". Therefore, philanthropy could be understood as "a moral biography of care" (Schervish, 2014, p. 389). In the words of a self-identified grassroots philanthropist, "philanthropy is an emotional subject" and how one talks about

her or his philanthropic efforts "should reflect our emotional depths" (Somerville & Setterberg, 2008, p. 24). At the societal level, grassroots philanthropy could be further defined as "the moral citizenship of care" (Schervish, 2014, p. 389).

The Singapore Government has implemented various intervention measures to cultivate civic engagement among the citizens to promote active contribution to charitable causes and community volunteerism (Zhang, 2013). While the government has provided essential welfare services to its citizens, Singaporeans are encouraged to play a role in charity and philanthropic organisations to ease the welfare burden of the state (Cheung, 1992). For many young citizens, participating in co-curricular activities (CCAs) is compulsory as part of their non-academic curriculum (Zhang, 2013). These CCAs include volunteering in local and overseas communities, participating in philanthropic and charity organisations, and starting their own grassroots initiatives.

Taking into consideration these individual and place-based factors, we have attempted to show in our study that the practice of philanthropy is linked to personal biography and the larger society. These experiences have profoundly shaped the giving journey of grassroots givers in our sample and is one of the drivers to institutionalise their grassroots giving.

## 3. Data and Methods

### 3.1 Sample Selection of Contemporary Grassroots Philanthropists

The objective of this study is to identify about 40 grassroots philanthropists who had pioneered or initiated organisations and movements in the new millennium to explore their motivations and perceptions of giving. Our data collection and analysis involved the following steps:

1. Performing a review of prior research to identify relevant keywords in existing literature.
2. Conducting media searches to identify grassroots givers in the new millennium based on the keywords identified in existing literature.
3. Carrying out semi-structured qualitative interviews with identified grassroots givers to gather in-depth insights into why, how, what, and to whom they give in Singapore in the new millennium.
4. Identifying from interview data the motivations driving grassroots philanthropy in Singapore in the new millennium and their key features, and defining the trends that are particular to the current era.

Media articles were selected from local media sources (*The Straits Times* and *Today*), searched via the National Library catalogue and Google News. To ensure we have a diverse sample of interviewees and to negate biases in media profiling, respondents were also considered if they were not featured in local news sources, but met the criteria for consideration as a grassroots philanthropist. These potential interviewees came through the recommendations of key contacts in the field of philanthropy and social entrepreneurship. Upon identifying the individuals who meet our criteria, we proceeded to contact them to request and conduct in-depth interviews based on their availability.

### 3.2 Research Method and Data

Qualitative interviews were chosen as the method of data collection because they would provide for in-depth investigation with interviewees into the meaning of giving. We adopted a semi-structured interview format to offer interviewees the freedom to share their motivations or methods of giving as they wished without being restricted by the order in which we asked interview questions.

We obtained permission to audio-record the interviews before proceeding. Each interview generally took around one to two hours. The recording was then transcribed and the transcripts analysed using the qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA. As this study was intended to identify trends and define the culture among contemporary grassroots givers, we anonymised the interview data by not referring to any specific person directly. Although quotes have been extracted from interview data and included in our report to illustrate the features, motivations and trends associated with grassroots giving, the anonymity accords our interviewees a layer of privacy protection in exchange for sharing the intimate experiences in their giving journey.

### 3.3 Profile of Respondents and Organisations

Based on our media searches and through network recommendations, we initially identified 76 individuals who fit our profile of grassroots philanthropist. We managed to contact 53 individuals and eventually conducted in-depth interviews with 44 people representing 38 organisations as some organisations have more than one founder. We contacted the selected interviewees between December 2017 and January 2018 to schedule in-person interviews with those based in Singapore and Skype interviews with those based outside of Singapore. We conducted the semi-structured interviews in February 2018.

Table 3.1 shows the summary descriptive data on our sampled grassroots givers. Below, we provide a more detailed description of our sampled grassroots givers.

- **Gender:** We profiled both men and women with the latter representing about one-third (30 percent) of the data.
- **Age:** 71 percent of our interviewees were under the age of 40 at the time of the interview. Our sample of interviewees is skewed toward younger people.
  - **Generation:** In terms of generations, 24 persons (54 percent) were aged 35 and under. 14 persons (32 percent) were considered midlifer between the ages of 36 and 49 while 6 persons (14 percent) were aged 50 and above.
- **Ethnicity:** This study included persons from all the four official racial groups in Singapore.
- **Education:** 84 percent of our sample have a college degree.
- **Time Commitment:** 39 percent of our sample hold full-time occupations in addition to their grassroots engagement at the time of their interviews while the rest work full-time on their giving projects.
- **Religion:** We considered persons of all major religions in Singapore.

Table 3.2 shows the summary descriptive data on the organisations represented in our sample. Below, we provide a more detailed description of the various forms of our sampled grassroots organisations.

- **Legal Structure:** 26 out of 38 organisations (68 percent) were registered with the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA) as a company, taking the forms of Private Company Limited by Shares (Pte Ltd), Sole Proprietorship, and Public Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG). Other organisational forms traditionally associated with charity and philanthropy, such as registered societies, cooperatives and an Institution of a Public Character (IPC), were also represented in our sample. 5 organisations operated as informal groups.
- **Time of Institutionalisation:** 95 percent of the grassroots philanthropists officially registered their grassroots engagement in a legal form after 2000.
- **Sector Focus:** 37 percent of our sample were involved in social welfare and direct service delivery, but other social causes were also represented in the work of our sampled organisations.
- **Geographic Focus:** 25 organisations (66 percent) focused their work on Singapore, 9 organisations (23 percent) focused on Singapore and beyond, while 4 organisations (11 percent) focused on work outside of Singapore.

**Table 3.1: Summary of Sampled Grassroots Philanthropists**

Variable	#	%	Total
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	31	70	
Female	13	30	
			44
<b>Age</b>			
20-29	13	30	
30-39	18	41	
40-49	7	16	
50 and above	6	13	
			44
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Chinese	32	73	
Malay	5	11	
Indian	4	9	
Others	3	7	
			44
<b>Education</b>			
Primary	2	5	
Secondary	1	2	
Tertiary	4	9	
College and above	37	84	
			44
<b>Time Commitment</b>			
Commit Spare Time	17	39	
Commit Full Time	27	61	
			44
<b>Religious Orientation</b>			
Buddhist	5	11	
Catholic	1	2	
Christian	17	39	
Hindu	2	5	
Muslim	6	14	
Others	2	4	
Secular Spirituality/Free Thinker	11	25	
			44

**Table 3.2: Summary of Sampled Grassroots Organisations**

Variable	#	%	Total
<b>Type of Organisations</b>			
Private Limited (Pte Ltd)	18	47	
Sole Proprietorship	1	3	
Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG)	7	18	
Institution of a Public Character (IPC)	1	3	
Societies*	5	13	
Cooperative	1	3	
Informal Group	5	13	
			38
<b>Time Institutionalised</b>			
Before 2000	2	5	
2000-2009	15	40	
2010 onward	21	55	
			38
<b>Sector Focus</b>			
Advocacy & Awareness Raising	6	16	
Culture & Tourism	2	5	
Crowdfunding	2	5	
People with Disabilities (PwDs)	5	13	
Education	6	16	
Environment	1	3	
Health & Wellness	2	5	
Social Welfare	14	37	
			38
<b>Geographic Focus</b>			
Singapore only	25	66	
Singapore and beyond	9	23	
Outside of Singapore	4	11	
			38

\*One society is also registered as a charity.

## 4. Features of Grassroots Philanthropists and Their Motivations

This section presents an overview of contemporary grassroots philanthropists making up our study sample. First, we highlight some of their prominent features that emerged from the interview data. We then discuss the motivations behind their giving and what giving means for them. Lastly, we take a look at how the privilege of being Singaporeans shape giving.

### 4.1 Features of Contemporary Grassroots Philanthropists in Singapore

The community of Singaporean grassroots philanthropists is a myriad and diverse group, but we have attempted to identify – through the data collected for this study – some of the features common among local contemporary grassroots givers. Delineating these features offer us a composite picture of contemporary grassroots philanthropists in Singapore and increase our understanding of what drives their giving and the shapes this giving is taking.

The data we collected tell us grassroots philanthropists are keen to identify cracks and gaps in the current system and come up with solutions. They tend to view giving as a kind of lifestyle rather than an obligation. Partaking a path in giving involves risk-taking. Grassroots givers in our study have been through various organisational learning processes. Organisational learning helps them better articulate the type of value-based institutionalisation that would extend their intention and impact. Grassroots givers have to be entrepreneurial by being persistent, resilient and adaptive to changes in different steps of institutionalising their grassroots projects. The majority of grassroots givers have chosen to institutionalise their giving in a legal structure to continue their initial intention and to engage more citizens in their grassroots work.

To summarise, grassroots philanthropists in our study demonstrate the following features:

- Proactive in identifying cracks in the system
- Perceive giving as a lifestyle choice
- Willingness to take risks and follow an unconventional life trajectory
- Possess an entrepreneurial spirit
- Practise organisational learning to institutionalise value-based giving

Although our sample of philanthropists may not fully represent the entire spectrum of grassroots givers in Singapore, their narratives nevertheless offer insights and anecdotes on what people think about giving to the grassroots. The following section further elaborates some of the defining features of grassroots givers in our study.

#### 4.1.1 Proactive in Identifying Cracks in the System

Contemporary grassroots givers are proactive people who are able to identify cracks in the system and take initiatives to come up with solutions to close gaps in the public, private and people sectors.

Instead of going after ‘trendy’ causes, the majority of grassroots givers in our study set out to identify the real needs of stakeholders. They are keen to contribute to neglected areas that are sometimes less glamorous. Contemporary grassroots givers were thoughtful in articulating the problem areas in their chosen cause. A founder of an organisation focussing on sustainable sanitation worldwide said he tends to choose issues that have been widely neglected and may not be glamorous.

The ones that nobody wants to do, the ones that are neglected, the ones that don't get funding, people don't want to put money in because it's not glamorous, or it's

controversial or is difficult, tedious, and is not glamorous and you can't claim credit. Those types are things I want to do because nobody would want to do [them]. (G22)

The founder of a volunteering group that has operated for a long time said grassroots givers have to be keen in order to find the gaps and tap on resources to help the stakeholders.

Sometimes, these kinds of things, you need to keep looking at society and slowly understand these people. And you must aim at these cracks, help pull them out and tap on government resources. (G1)

Once they identify the groups that have fallen through different system cracks, they make it a point to serve these marginalised people, i.e., "people who fell through the cracks in the systems, single moms, elderly, and a wide range of people." (G18)

In addition to people running service delivery organisations, our sample of grassroots givers include founders of crowdfunding sites who said that one of the goals of establishing their social ventures is to develop a mechanism to raise funds for those not getting help through existing systems.

We legitimise crowdfunding as a mechanism for those who fell through the cracks to still be helped, without these institutions and agents of these institutions to violate their fiduciary duties. (G7)

The grassroots givers in our study are proactive in identifying gaps in the system and are not afraid to take up the challenge to come up with viable solutions to bridge those gaps.

#### 4.1.2 Perceive Giving as a Lifestyle Choice

The majority of grassroots givers in our study view giving as a lifestyle choice they have adopted rather than a personal obligation or a short-term project. In the words of the 46-year-old founder of a volunteer organisation, giving one's own time is a lifestyle choice.

Basically, for me, volunteerism is not a project. I've always preached and a mantra I have actually held close to my heart is, *it's a lifestyle choice*. So just like how people like to live healthily, or their lifestyle about how they like branded stuff, for me, *volunteerism is part of my life. It's not a project*. (G10) [italics added by authors]

This narrative of giving as a lifestyle option runs across various generations of grassroots givers in our study. For many people under 30 years of age, they also consider giving as a lifestyle choice. A young social entrepreneur working toward improving health communication with children said if one is truly a giving person, then giving is deep-rooted and "consistent throughout" in public or private (G28). Giving allows the grassroots giver to find meaning beyond the joy of giving. For a lot of Millennials, giving also means figuring out "what am I going to make out of this life." (G41)

Among those in our study sample who have embraced giving as a lifestyle choice, they attributed their decision to engage in grassroots work to being truthful and "do the right thing" (G17), "an inside calling" (G9), and "caring for oneself" (G34). Grassroots philanthropists in our study point to this innate affinity as the driver of their long-term engagement with giving.

#### 4.1.3 Willingness to Take Risks and Follow an Unconventional Life Trajectory

An interesting finding in our analysis of grassroots philanthropists is their willingness to take risks and follow an unconventional life trajectory by choosing the path of grassroots giving. Those between 20 and 40 years of age in our study have expressed awareness of the typical Singaporean trajectory in life that encourages a particular mode of success. Often, this is not aligned with an inclination towards engaging in social issues.

Respondent G15, a social entrepreneur addressing the social integration challenges faced by People with Disabilities (PwDs), described his earlier conventional life path as "study kindergarten or even nursery then kindergarten, then primary

school, secondary school, tertiary, and then I go out and work. That's how most Singaporeans will [see] their life being." Alternative paths to success have not been offered or encouraged through the Singaporean educational system.

Many respondents said they could have led a comfortable life by pursuing a more conventional career, but that does not bring them happiness. On the other hand, starting a business to help others actually brings joy to them.

I guess, for me is, I've been in the position whereby I've been chasing money and at one point in time, I even had the opportunity to choose to stay home, and the luxury lifestyle and stuff like that ... but at the end of the day when you're back to that house alone and does it really make you happy? So, I start to ask myself, what is that void? (G26)

Much of the unconventional journey of grassroots philanthropists in our study entails taking risks and steering away from a comfortable path. The journey though fraught with challenges could potentially bring great rewards. Respondent G28 said starting a social enterprise is like taking a leap of faith because many people view it as "career suicide."

Grassroots givers in our study are well aware of how they could achieve success by following the conventional career path, yet they are willing to deviate from that track and instead take risks to pursue what feels 'right' for them.

#### 4.1.4 Possess an Entrepreneurial Spirit

Many grassroots givers in our study self-identify as social entrepreneurs. Their entrepreneurial spirit is evident in the emphasis they placed on "solving a problem" (G28), which they said is at the core of their social enterprises. They will not hesitate to champion good ideas, but stressed the need "to have a clear value proposition" (G31) in order to positively impact their stakeholders. Respondent G36, a social entrepreneur working in the area of youth employment, said social entrepreneurship is not just about giving; rather "it's setting yourself a challenge [and] there is a lot you can do in your life."

These grassroots givers demonstrate a constant drive to make things better and tend to want to take care of things themselves instead of waiting for the government or others to take action. Respondent G21, who runs an organisation to improve reading skills among low-income children, talked about how he started his grassroots work.

I think I'm very impatient. When I see a thing, I will want to go and do something about it. I cannot wait. Which is why I cannot wait for bureaucracy. (G21)

Grassroots philanthropists in our study are not afraid to experiment and have demonstrated resilience and adaptability when confronted by challenging situations and difficulties in setting up their organisations or generating support for their causes. They are persistent with many insisting their value-based giving is a "long-term commitment" (G34).

#### 4.1.5 Practise Organisational Learning to Institutionalise Value-based Giving

In keeping with their entrepreneurial spirit, grassroots philanthropists in our study are passionate about learning new ideas as well as learning from their failures. They see their failures and shortcoming as motivation to keep learning and growing. In the words of a young activist (G23) working with people affected by housing resettlement, learning is "a personal value" and "we must never stop learning."

These grassroots givers described their experience of finding problem areas and navigating to find solutions with the potential to deliver social impact as practising organisational learning in their journey towards institutionalising their value-based giving. For these grassroots philanthropists, organisational learning is about trying out new things and looking at the implementation of different programmes as trial and error to discover the best way that suits the purpose of the grassroots organisation.

[It] has always been an experiment for us, finding out what's the best way. I think for us, we are very open to trying stuff. That's why I don't think anything we've done is a waste

of time and anything, but it's also finding out what is the best way. (G41)

The organisational learning process allows grassroots givers to gain more insights about themselves as well as their value-based giving. Respondent G4, who started an organisation to fight and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness, shared, "I tell you, I have failed miserably at times, but it's okay, we need to fall before we can rise. I have learnt through my failures and I have learnt about myself." (G4)

Grassroots givers in our study are open to different learning opportunities including with other organisations to learn how to run their own organisation. They are also open to sharing their experiences with others.

## 4.2 Motivations and Meaning of Giving

While people's motivations for giving vary, three themes emerged from our study of grassroots philanthropists who we asked to articulate their own giving. The first is the emphasis on social impact to make the current system better. This is particularly evident in the narratives of the younger generation of grassroots givers. Second, the emotional connections and relationships forged help to sustain the work of grassroots givers and make them want to do more. Third, grassroots philanthropy is typically spawned by people wanting to pay it forward as a result of different socialisation processes through immediate family, education, religion and overseas experiences.

### 4.2.1 Social Impact

Many grassroots givers, especially the younger generation, view their grassroots engagement as having a social impact on the existing system to bring about change. A social entrepreneur working to equip disadvantaged women with skills to make them employable has observed that "money is flowing into social impact and I think that is a great change that I can see." (G8) In fact, the concern about social impact is tied to the fact that more donors, in the younger generation, want to be more involved in the process rather than merely

writing a cheque. The founder of a social enterprise using adventure as a platform to raise funds and awareness for different social causes shared her sentiment on this issue.

I think donors increasingly want to be involved in the process. Meaning that they don't want to just write a cheque anymore. They want to be hands-on, they want to go to the ground, they want to meet the beneficiaries ... that comes from a sense of wanting more accountability or perhaps also the younger generation's eagerness to give and be involved. (G40)

In addition, grassroots givers in our study see their giving as contributing to a collective impact rather than being merely altruistic. The feeling of being a part of a collective effort where everyone is contributing to make society a better place drives many young grassroots givers to continue their work. A founder of a social enterprise supporting people with disabilities saw his grassroots engagement as "a collective effort to change something." (G11)

What really drives me is, first of all, having that visualisation of what society can really become if we really achieve our goal. And, secondly, as I mentioned, I am not alone in this. For the amount of effort that I put in, there's someone else doing an equal amount of work. So, I can't let the other person down by not doing my part. (G11)

For respondents in the youth category (20-35 years old), using creative means to transform existing systems constitutes a major influence driving their grassroots engagement. A founder of a social enterprise that leverages the arts to change people's perspectives of social issues said being disruptive is a model that is particularly appealing to Millennials.

Millennials all like to disrupt. It did make sense to me it really did click we could really make constructive and productive changes. A new generation of leaders that are going to take over Singapore and a new generation that started with social media. Disrupt for me

is a very interesting model. We can always go take business models, charities we can see their finances. But with [our organisation], we were run by youths for youths. We have that ability to have fun and see what works and what didn't work and at the same time make very significant changes to what we believe in. (G13)

Those grassroots givers who embraced the label of social enterprise for their value-based giving see the potential to generate larger social impact beyond Singapore by adopting the business model. Respondent G38 who co-founded a social enterprise in the Philippines contended that as a social enterprise, "you want to impact as many people as possible."

Consequently, grassroots givers see their institutionalised giving as creating a model that could be replicated to impact systems beyond Singapore. "[The] best way is I think there's a model that can actually be replicated in different places, different geographies, different cultures or different struggles of society" (G35).

While the actual impact is still hard to assess, the majority of grassroots givers in our study believe their institutionalised giving contributes to social transformation.

#### 4.2.2 Emotional and Relational Connections

Grassroots givers in our study see giving as forging emotional connections that build relationships with others. They associate their giving with a range of emotions including sympathy, empathy, empowerment, happiness, joy, fun, heartwarming, love, compassion, courageousness and kindness, to name a few. These emotions that grassroots givers reported experiencing have propelled them to forge even more connections in order to institutionalise their values in an organised form.

Giving allows grassroots givers to build a relationship with the world to help people they have never met before, and this world of giving is boundless. In the words of a successful business person turned social entrepreneur:

When I do business I only think about the local situation, now can think about the whole world. Even we can help people we have never met before, we can partner with people that we'll never meet in the rest of my life. And it's like borderless, you know. (G22)

Grassroots philanthropists see the current state of their giving as "a reflection of the relationships or friendships formed" (G34) and "forming friendships" (G39). The emotional aspects of personal relationships forged with their stakeholders and beneficiaries contribute to sustaining the person and serve as the engine behind their grassroots work, said an entrepreneur (G3) working to help different stakeholders craft stories for the media to achieve greater impact.

Even the small, mundane interactions between grassroots givers and the families and people they care about forge emotional connections and further strengthen relationships: "It was really in the every single day small interactions with people that really inspired me the most." (G40)

#### 4.2.3 Pay it Forward

The majority of grassroots givers in our study chose to give in an organised, formalised way because of past benefits they received from their social networks. Engaging in grassroots giving is their way to pay it forward. Without a doubt, acts of giving and volunteering are tied to social capital and demonstrate "a degree of compassion and commitment to others" (Brown & Ferris, 2007). In addition, social capital facilitates collective action to form "norms of trust" and "networks of community" (Brown & Ferris, 2007). As a part of the larger collective, grassroots givers see their institutionalised giving as an act to "pay it forward" (G15, G30, G36) and "to pass on knowledge as a giver." (G24)

Yeah, I always believe, *pay it forward*, because I wouldn't say I'm the recipient, but I think I've got everything given to me and in that sense. So I think okay, let's help, there's something I can do. (G30) [italics added by authors]

Grassroots givers see the need to benefit others and pay it forward as a result of various influences including their family, education, religious orientation, and global experiences.

### *Family Influences*

Grassroots philanthropists in our study tell us that giving parents greatly influence their generosity. Some were influenced by the generosity of their parents towards their neighbours and community. In other instances, their parents were able to succeed, thanks to the generosity of others. Seven grassroots givers in our study stressed the importance of having role models in giving; many look to their parents for inspiration.

I want to say that my bigger influence was my mother. She was a very giving person. I mean she's a disciplinarian, she has a rather harsh demeanour, but she's very generous with others. Even though we're poor, little she has she will share. So she's one of my role models. (G4)

When I was growing up, my mum would tell me that it's not about academic excellence; it's no substitute for the poverty of character. She always told us that it's not just about doing well in school, in life, but it's also about doing things that would benefit other people. (G12)

Socialisation by parents inspires many grassroots givers in our study to begin their grassroots engagement in order to pass on the legacy.

Among grassroots givers, midlifers and those belonging to the senior generation who have experienced kampong life described their giving as carrying on the kampong spirit (G4, G29) – a sense of maintaining social cohesion in a community through mutual help.

It's just like the kampong way of life. Follow our grandfather's footsteps. We have similar people who all just need some help. (G29)

They also recalled the time when Singapore had to lift itself out of poverty as an inspiration for their giving.

Intergenerational transmission of values is another source of inspiration. The parents of respondent G32 brought him on mission trips, on a yearly basis, to places that are "a lot more rural with difficult and poor living conditions." This instilled in him the sense that "giving back is important" and reminded him that one "has a privilege to give."

### *Education System*

Educational programmes in Singapore play a part in raising awareness about social inequality within and beyond Singapore. Respondent G31, who runs a social enterprise that builds water filters for rural communities, had his first exposure to the needs of the developing world via an overseas community involvement project. His memory of the water being "greenish" and "very murky" catalysed his commitment to the cause. In addition, his training as an engineer motivated him to innovate and engineer a solution that is simple – unlike existing solutions that are "too technical" or "too difficult for non-technical personnel to operate." An awareness of one's privilege, brought about through education and exposure, motivates one to "give back." (G31)

Through educational programmes such as the Community Involvement Programme (CIP) (initiated in 1997 and implemented in 1998), Singaporeans now have a sustainable giving mindset. 15 out of 44 (34 percent) grassroots givers in our study talked about their experiences participating in CIP. Respondent G2 helped run the CIP programme in his school and believes that the programme is beneficial to expose students to the "joy of giving" and to "change their mindset."

In addition, many respondents of the younger generation were brought into the social impact arena via multiple opportunities made available in the education space, such as grants advertised in the media, competitions, or even projects or departments spearheaded by faculty in higher education. These opportunities for interaction provide a context for civic engagement that inspires action for the collective good.

### ***Religious and Spiritual Orientation***

Some of the grassroots givers in our study are also motivated by their religious orientation. Participating in religion offers them a purpose or a platform for giving. For Respondent G41, her perception of being a “blessing” is what motivates her to give. Four grassroots givers began giving through their religious communities and continue to serve. Some of them branched out from their religious circles because they recognised there are needs beyond their religious community. In addition, some spoke about being directed or “called” to particular causes and finding others who share the same values. Religious communities offer a context for giving and a frame to explain why one chooses to give, enabling continued giving through encouragement and sharing of resources and insights. Some grassroots givers also relate their giving to the virtues associated with their religion, such as the giving life of Jesus to demonstrate “servant leadership” (G9), the Christian values of “humility and a kind heart” (G28), the personal faith in “forgiveness” (G12), the belief in “karma” (G33), and “do good” in Buddhist teachings (G35).

However, not all of the grassroots philanthropists cited religious experiences as a motivation for their giving. Some saw the influences of religion more in spiritual terms and shared that “spirituality for me connect you to bigger things in life” (G5) and essentially “all religions are good” (G10). In other instances, grassroots givers reframed religion as the means to hold oneself accountable. They also regard religion as having good intentions, i.e., “to be kind and respect other human beings or respect other beings so yeah I wouldn’t consider myself to be super religious, but I think it is important for everyone to be kind to others.” (G16)

### ***Exposure to Experiences Beyond Singapore***

Through connection to networks, via overseas exposure and the internet, one is able to push “boundaries of thought and identity beyond the personal sphere” (Brown & Ferris, 2007) and beyond the Singaporean mindset of survival. About 45 percent of grassroots givers in our study said their experiences overseas or global exposure through media or social networks influence their

giving. These overseas experiences include work, trip, study programmes, volunteering, or migration experience.

Respondent G38 who started a social enterprise based in the Philippines observed that Singaporeans tend to have a mentality of needing to “do more to protect what [they] have built.” Through a connection to a global community and overseas experience, he was able to broaden his worldview and established his social venture outside Singapore. His changed mentality enabled him to push for change beyond Singapore and to assume the role of a change leader.

Media play a key role in sensitising philanthropic action in the current era through a personal connection to individuals who may not be in close proximity. Respondent G18 recalled watching a documentary about Africa and a Facebook video of a religious leader encouraging others to live out their Islamic faith by giving to others. Both these media clips were a push for her to give. Thus, social networks and consequent affinity with persons abroad, or stories that individuals are remotely connected with through the internet, promote empathy and a desire to give. Respondent G24 recounted that the TV programmes about animal-assisted therapy that he watched during a trip sent him the signal to begin giving in this area.

## **4.3 A Sense of Obligation Born Out of the Privileges of Being a Singaporean**

Grassroots givers in Singapore are cognisant of the privileges they enjoy as Singaporeans that accrue from the nation’s relative wealth, a stable social environment, and favourable economic conditions. Some 60 percent of the grassroots givers in our study referenced the privileges of being Singaporeans when discussing their motivations for giving. This conscious recognition of their privileged position – reinforced by social norms – engenders a sense of responsibility and obligation, propelling grassroots givers to give even though they may not be wealthy. These same elements influence how they institutionalise their giving, and ultimately shape their giving journey.

Even by virtue that I was born in Singapore ... means that I have access to most basic rights that I think many other countries see [this] as a privilege ... I see myself as a very privileged individual. (G31)

In acknowledging the privilege of being Singaporeans, grassroots givers often feel it is their responsibility to give and to do good.

I think the other thing is about the notion of responsibility that comes with privilege, so you have a certain amount of privilege, and if you are aware of it then I think the question is what you do with it. I feel that if you are privileged, you have the responsibility to use it to do some good. And this is then my way of doing some good. (G23)

Many grassroots givers in our study perceive giving as a privilege. For respondent G7, a founder of a crowdfunding site for people in need, giving is “[a] personal way of acknowledging the privileges and benefits that I have by virtue of upbringing, resources that I have. To address whatever social issues which are of importance to me.”

With the nation having found success in many areas, the Singaporean grassroots philanthropists perceive themselves to be a part of the global citizen collective with the capacity and capability to contribute and extend success to other areas of society at home and abroad. In the words of Respondent G28, “Being Singaporean, it is in my heritage to succeed.” Furthermore, their allegiance to Singapore and their desire to ensure the community’s well-being led these grassroots

givers to expect more from the government. This is manifested in their willingness to question existing social initiatives and their demand that the government does more. An example is respondent G1’s feedback that the government’s approach to meeting social needs sometimes lacked the human touch. The perception of one’s position as a part of successful Singapore gives grassroots givers the confidence to strike out and make a difference in the world.

Grassroots givers in Singapore are proud of their heritage and exhibit a keen sensitivity to the diversity that distinguishes their nation. They described their giving as aligned with their commitment to living the national values. Through the interviews, we observed that Singaporean grassroots philanthropists demonstrate a keen awareness of the nation’s cultural diversity and the diversity of people’s experiences (G19). Respondent G35 talked about growing up being aware of “the difficulties of living in the society where they have a whole diverse range of people in various walks of life, and different income levels, and different poverty levels,” which helped him understand why giving is important.

With Singapore being a multi-racial country, grassroots philanthropists reported giving to all racial groups without bias towards any particular group. Many grassroots givers demonstrate a desire to embrace local languages, ethnic cultures, and the people in Singapore. Respondent G1 talked about the importance of heeding one’s origin to ensure a foothold in one’s giving journey. “In order for you to be stronger, you need to have a stronger root.”

## 5. Forms of Institutionalisation and New Trends

Respondents in our study chose to institutionalise their giving in the form of a variety of legal entities that reflect their value-based giving. By institutionalisation, we mean the formal registration of the organisation in a legal form and embedding some codes of conduct to maintain the organisational activities. The majority (47 percent) of the grassroots organisations in our study are incorporated as for-profit private limited companies. The second most popular (18 percent) incorporated legal entity is a company limited by guarantee (CLG). The other legal entities represented in our study include societies (13 percent), cooperative (three percent), sole proprietorship (three percent), and IPC status (three percent) (see Table 3.2 for more detailed information). Thirteen percent of the organisations remain as informal groups. Grassroots philanthropists tend to choose the entity form that reflects their values and the intention of their giving.

### 5.1 Public Limited Company and Private Limited Company

Further analysis of the choice of legal structure by generations yields interesting insights into these grassroots givers' decision pertaining to legal forms. An overrepresentation of grassroots givers in our study chose to incorporate their work as a company. Among those in the youth category (aged 20-35), 17 out of 22 chose the legal form of private company limited by shares (Pte. Ltd.), one selected sole proprietorship, three went with public company limited by guarantee (CLG), and one still operated as an informal community group. The research by *raiSE* (2017) also observed similar findings. The trend toward institutionalising grassroots work in a legal structure could be understood as the rise of managerialism and professionalisation in the social sector (Hwang & Powell, 2009; Maier, Meyer, & Steinbereithner, 2016). This trend also shows that younger generations have increasingly embraced the business model as a vehicle for social good.

There are many reasons why grassroots givers chose the legal form of a company. Three rationalisations stood out from the narratives of grassroots givers in our study: 1) the way that profits are redistributed; 2) the intention of combining social mission with a business model, and 3) the potential to generate greater social impact. Respondent G7, who runs a crowdfunding site for people at the bottom of the pyramid, chose the legal form of a company limited by guarantee (CLG) because this doesn't have shareholders and "excess profits get reinvested in the organisation."

The social as well as the business aspects of grassroots work have become the basis for many grassroots givers to register their entities as a company (Pte. Ltd. or CLG). Some of the grassroots givers embraced the label of social enterprise to reflect their intention to use a business model to solve social problems on the ground.

It turned out to be a social enterprise because I think we were rated based on some of these intentions we had from the start, which was to find a way to end rural thirst right? ... I think that was how the social enterprise aspect came about, *it is to be social yet entrepreneurial, to find ways to solve problems and meet needs on the ground.* (G31)  
[italics added by authors]

In choosing the legal structure of their company, grassroots givers tend to view their institutionalised giving as a startup and are prepared to cope with the initial challenge for starting a company. "I approach it like a startup, we don't expect a startup to be making money by day one, and to know what its business model is" (G7). Registering as a company also allows grassroots givers the flexibility to experiment with a different organisational trajectory to explore ways they could scale up the impact.

## 5.2 Societies, Charity, Cooperative

Other grassroots givers in our study chose to register their organisations as a society or a charity. Five out of 38 organisations in our study are registered as a society to reflect an association of 10 or more persons with similar interests (Registry of Societies).

One obtained charity organisation status with the Commissioner of Charities for operating a soup kitchen. The reason for registering their organisation as a charity is based on the rational evaluation of the feasibility of sustaining the organisation in the long run. Respondent G4 runs an organisation helping people with mental illness. Although she could have set up the organisation as a business or as a social enterprise, with their stakeholders in challenging conditions, she could not expect them to help run the social enterprise. Given this basic assessment, she decided to register the organisation as a charity so they could receive funding.

I'm not a business person, so I don't have a business background. To set up a business enterprise or social enterprise, to me, I think that is more challenging. You need people who are really committed. Our clients, by and large, a lot of clients are [affected] by mental illness. So I do not have high expectations that as clients they can actually help to run a social enterprise and front our programmes. That's why for now we are still a charity. Because without the funding, it's not easy to help them (G4).

In another case, respondent G2 who started an inclusive running club with people with disabilities (PwDs) chose to register the organisation as a cooperative rather than a social enterprise. This allows the organisation to be owned by all members and to ensure "all the revenue that is earned goes back to the cooperative."

The majority of grassroots givers in our study were quite articulate about choosing the legal structure that best suits the stakeholders they serve and the desired outcome that they would like to achieve.

## 5.3 Assessments before Settling on a Legal Structure

Among the grassroots organisations that still operate as informal groups, their representatives did not rule out the possibility of formalising their grassroots work in the long run. They shared that they needed to assess the field first before settling on a legal form.

[We] are not a registered organisation at this point of time, but I think we just felt that the identity had to be established properly. (G23)

Respondent G10, who started a ground initiative to help underprivileged families, talked about operating as an organisation – even though they are not registered as one – to keep their work accountable and to offer transparency whenever money is involved.

Grassroots givers tend to be cautious and refrain from rushing into formalising an organisational form for their work. To determine if their group is worth institutionalising or perhaps better off collaborating with other existing organisations, one youth grassroots giver (G23) shared that he would like to understand the needs of the field better and find out "what are the overlaps, whether there are good needs assessment."

Grassroots givers often base their decision to formalise/institutionalise their philanthropic work on the size of their respective interest group. Many grassroots givers begin to assess whether or not to register their group once it reaches a certain size, and tie their decision on a legal structure to the sustainability of the group and the value the formalised organisation could potentially bring in the long run. Respondent G2 shared the reason he decided to consider registration: "[The] group began to grow, and it grew bigger and bigger and bigger, to the extent that you no longer can run it like an interest group." Eventually, he decided to register the group as a cooperative to keep the club sustainable.

## 5.4 Technology-Mediated Giving

Contemporary grassroots philanthropy is increasingly mediated by technology. Grassroots giving covered in our study were initiated and are managed using technology platforms such as Facebook, websites, mobile apps, WhatsApp, Twitter and other social media. All organisations in our study have either a Facebook page or an official website. The founders of many grassroots organisations began their initiatives by posting on their personal Facebook page.

Of the 44 grassroots philanthropists in our study, 19 shared that they initiated their work on Facebook either via a post calling for action on their personal page or through the creation of a dedicated page to garner support for their particular social cause. In addition to leveraging social media platforms, these grassroots givers also created products using advanced technologies, mobile apps, e-commerce sites, and online fundraising platforms to advance their engagement with a particular social cause.

The grassroots givers in our study are positive about the potential of technology to help scale up their grassroots engagements. Respondent G38, a social enterprise founder working on providing language and vocational training to rural youths, shared, “We can do that more than before because

of technology and because of how the world has shaped us. This gives me at least some optimism about the future.”

Certainly, technology-mediated giving is becoming ubiquitous with technology shaping up to be a necessary tool in demonstrating the transparency and accountability of organisations engaged in grassroots giving. Professionalisation and accountability are requisites as Singaporeans tend to be very careful in how they give as well as “kiasu” (afraid to lose) because they do not want to be cheated (G40). The perception of many grassroots philanthropists in our study is that Singaporeans generally are willing to give if they see a good cause, but philanthropic organisations will need to step up the transparency of their efforts to let people know that “the need is real and people see it” (G19) and to be “more involved in the process” (G40).

With people wanting to take control of their giving, online giving platforms that demonstrate transparency and accountability are more likely to earn donor trust and raise contributions. Online giving is also being aided by the growth of the FinTech sector in Singapore, which is helping to increase the ease of giving. The trend towards leveraging technology to champion social causes is apparent in the narratives of all study respondents.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the self-articulated discourses of Singaporean grassroots givers, their philanthropy is highly entrepreneurial. They are not averse to institutionalising their value-based giving in an organisational form, given the emphasis they place on efficiency, accountability and professionalism. In addition, grassroots philanthropists in Singapore view their giving as a lifestyle choice that brings them personal happiness. While many perceive their giving as small good deeds as observed by Zhou and Han (2018) in Chinese grassroots philanthropic discourse, many grassroots philanthropists in Singapore institutionalised their giving in order to achieve more accountability.

Although grassroots givers in Singapore use emotional terms to describe the motivations behind their giving and view their giving as a personal spiritual journey that could bring greater good to society, there is no denying their efforts are helping to bridge gaps in current systems in Singapore and beyond. There is a growing concern that traditional

donation may not adequately address needs, which is why grassroots givers in our study, particularly the younger generation, insist that they do work that will deliver social impact.

In conclusion, while grassroots philanthropy in the new millennium is largely initiated by individuals to champion various social causes on the ground, it nevertheless serves as an important node in the larger network of interconnected individuals – philanthropists, volunteers, sponsors and beneficiaries – and is helping to achieve greater social impact. Grassroots philanthropists are key players in this millennium, acting as avenues for reciprocal philanthropic action. These networks are made possible by advances in technology and are products of social formations including nation, family, education, religion and society. Contemporary grassroots philanthropy is helping to address unmet needs and contributing to the development in Singapore and beyond.

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