

Asean students keen to solve social issues

70 teens from region gather at forum to focus on the elderly, the disabled and the environment

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Magno Alvin James is a teenager with big dreams.

The 18-year-old high school student from the Philippines wants to change how his country manages waste and deals with garbage disposal. "People in Manila think that garbage in the streets and dirty water are a norm. This mindset needs to change," said Alvin.

Meanwhile, Clarannisa Saskia, 16, from Bandung, Indonesia, grew up next to a river which gradually filled up with rubbish and sewage, prompting her to become a champion for conservation. "We must take action to protect the environment," she said.

Alvin and Saskia are just two of the 70 students taking part this week in the inaugural Step Sociovation Forum, organised by the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) and funded by Temasek Foundation International.

Step is a Temasek Foundation International programme to help youth in Asia build bridges of friendship, goodwill and understanding.

The name Sociovation is a conglomerate of the two words, "social" and "innovation", which are what the forum is all about.

The forum is centred on the idea of design thinking, teaching young people to identify problems in society and come up with creative solutions to the problems.

The five-day forum, which started on Monday, involves students from the 10 Asean countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Led by a group of 12 volunteers studying at SUSS, the forum focuses on three areas: the elderly, the disabled and the environment, with the environment proving the most popular topic.



Together with the SG Food Rescue organisation, these Asean students collected close to 300kg of vegetables from food sellers and stallholders in Little India. The students are taking part in the inaugural Step Sociovation Forum, which is organised by the Singapore University of Social Sciences and funded by Temasek Foundation International, this week. PHOTOS: SUSS

Student facilitator Grace Yeo, 21, said it is important to raise awareness of environmental sustainability in South-east Asia, especially tackling the problem of food wastage in Singapore. "Maintaining the environment is a global issue, not just pertinent to Singapore. It affects everyone," she said.

Activities in the environmental sector aim to promote a healthy relationship environment through the Singaporean idea of the "kampong spirit".

As part of the activities in the first two days, the participants harvested organic vegetables and used these to cook an eco-friendly meal. They also learnt about the importance of waste management at an eco-farm in Yishun.

They will also learn about how households in Singapore can reduce usage of non-recyclables as well as about the impact of electronic waste and fast fashion,



Students from Thailand and Brunei rinsing weeds yesterday at eco-farm Ground-Up Initiative in Yishun. The weeds were to be used for composting.

which are major environmental concerns that Singapore faces.

This focus is in line with 2019 being designated as a Year Towards

Zero Waste by the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources.

The students will be expected to present a prototype solution to the

identified problem on the last day of the forum.

Chan Ming Zhang, 18, a second-year Ngee Ann Polytechnic engineering student, said: "It is inspiring to see the passion of the youth from Asean countries. We as Singaporeans can learn from their experiences and spark change in our society."

The foreign participants also took the opportunity to learn from their Singaporean hosts.

Ardchon Chatiyar, 16, from Thailand said: "Although we are all from different countries, have different cultures and speak different languages, we all share a common love for the environment".

Alvin shared similar sentiments, saying: "I can learn new things from people of countries other than my own. I can share these ideas with my peers when I return to the Philippines."

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