

Women's choices – the long and short of it

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Abstract

It is no longer a little known fact that women contributed to the independence of Singapore in a big way as many voted the current ruling party into power on the promise of remedying a domestic issue – outlawing polygamy through civil law. Then it was women who again shaped the economy as they toiled in the factories, giving our manufacturing industry its boost. The then Prime Minister valued the productive potential of women and effected equal access to education for boys and girls. That gave women the swiftest path to independent living and economic success. However, in this discussion, we revisit the issue of **women's choices**. Choice suggests alternatives, assertion, and independence. This paper takes a hard look at the choices that all types of women in Singapore can make presently and in the future. The paper begins with a historical mapping of women's independence in the early years of Singapore's history, with an emphasis on evaluating the motivations for the various choices offered to women. The second part of the paper examines the limitations of these choices and how these have impacted women over the years. The third section discusses the new women – foreigners – and the marginalized communities of women – the disabled, the older person, the lower-income, the single, the divorcee, and the working mother – to highlight their challenges. The fourth section examines the remedial interventions made to enable women's access to processes for self-empowerment and identify the shortfalls. The last part is the conclusion where certain recommendations will be put forward.

What an apt title – “Women's choices, Women's lives” – that was used by AWARE 25 years ago when they launched the first women-centred forum. Do choices dictate women's lives or do women's lives direct the choices they make? Can one notion exist without the other? These explorations become more profound as we re-examine the way women lead their lives today and wonder if they can make choices that define their lives or that the lack of choices is directing how they live. To move further with this probe one also has to assume that women are aware of choices or the lack thereof. Otherwise they then could be just following a pre-set pathway, being

unaware of options, if available. In addition what are the lived realities for women in Singapore, the Singapore woman, the older woman, the younger one, and the girl-child?

The title – “Women’s choices, Women’s lives” – belies the complexity of how women live, how society deals with women, how the political structure in a society works/does not work for women or how religion for that matter, influences women’s roles. Twenty-five years on the title is neat and apt and worth re-discovering by uncovering how women have moved on since the early years in Singapore’s history. I would like to say at the outset that this essay will in no way cover all aspects of a woman’s life in our society. I will highlight certain areas where a tension between choices on lives and/or lives on choices is more strongly felt. The areas that I will include in this discussion are women’s reproductive, social reproductive and productive roles, women’s body image, leadership and foreign women. The discussions need to continue in many different circles by many women and men so that we can make sense of how we wish our lives to be and so direct them to have an undisputed aim in life – to be happy and to be joyous.

Choices

The concept of choices is a difficult notion to pin down. It is always easier to spot the lack of choices rather than the opportunities for making considered decisions. Moreover the word “choices” carries an inherent meaning of being aware of different options and that individuals can assert on their decisions. ‘Choice’ also assumes availability of opportunities and more importantly the access to opportunities. It is more important to have access to opportunities. For example there is available clean water through the mobile tanks that did their village runs in the 1960s in Singapore. But this availability also meant queuing up at the water point and trekking back a couple of miles carrying the water, foregoing regular attendance at school. Hence access is more important than the opportunity itself.¹

When there are many options, decisions take longer to make. The mind begins to play one choice against the other. The choices that are normally settled for are those whose demerits can be tolerated. It remains valuable to make decisions not out of compulsion or limited choice but in the pool of variety.

However, assertions of choices are tempered by how society imposes on the individual. Sometimes these moderations come because of the family, an ideology, a government policy or even a global context such as a free market system. Most importantly the choice will be motivated and maintained by value systems that the individual embraces. For example, what are the values associated with knowing one’s rights, being able to stand up against social injustice, wanting better lives for others? What are the values of the citizenry?

Some examples of value-based choices are in our history. Shirin Fozdar started the women’s movement in Singapore as she and a few others were outraged at how concubines and their children were left out of inheritance packages and the degradation that these women experienced; the women who founded AWARE were upset at how eugenics was taking centre-stage in procreation policies in Singapore.

A strong sense of citizenry – a communitarianism, a caring for each other’s rightful space as equals – has led to the formation of both the earlier Singapore Council of Women and AWARE. Singapore history also had women MPs with the People’s Action Party, namely

Madam Chan Choy Siong², who ensured that the Women's Charter was passed in Parliament. They were women operating in a neutral space with common goals of wanting to improve the women's condition. That trigger of citizenry continues to defend and probe on choices that women have and their lived realities. That citizenry has taken on new forms of expression – in social media or as myriad workgroups focusing thematically on environment and gender, food security issues, migrant worker discussions, ageing or in the form of volunteers who are willing to work for a betterment of women's lives and so join an organisation towards that purpose.

Our early history – their lives

The women in Singapore³'s early history were from diverse backgrounds. By ethnicity we had the indigenous Malay women. Then there were the English wives and daughters of the colonial masters, the immigrant Chinese, Indian women and the Eurasian women.

Records show Malay women within the sultanate structures of Malaysia and Indonesia living in a stratified class system and in some instances women ruled as matriarchs over estates and households. The Chinese and Indian women (Arora; 2007; Chin and Singam, 2004) were immigrants who came to Singapore and the Malayan Peninsula primarily to become wives to the male migrants. Some worked as washerwomen for the richer families, operated food stalls, and serviced sundry shops. Others also worked as prostitutes. In 1957 Chinese women had the highest economic activity rate – 21.8 per cent as compared with 6.3 per cent for the Malay women and 7.1 per cent for the Indian women.⁴(Wong; Commentary)

The women lived and worked within their realities as wives, mothers, bound by traditional roles and remained largely as the invisible 'housewives'. Some endured humiliation and degradation as husbands established their mistresses as concubines. Some others endured psychological and even physical violence sometimes just because they kept giving birth to girl-children.

Yet there were 'deviant' behaviours that nevertheless became new traditions. Despite the environment that prescribed women to singular traditional roles, groups rebelled to live independently. Three groups of women stand out from our early history. They are the samsui women, the mui tsais and the married working women.

I will discuss the samsui women in this context. They made deliberate choices - they formed a sorority, a mutual dependency club to support each other, share costs and household chores while they also worked as labourers. Their story is still an unwritten one, in my view, as we do not really know why they chose to remain single, whether there were dalliances between the sexes, amongst themselves etc and most importantly, that their lifestyle was a replica of the male migrant workers who lived in community self-help groups as they toiled in the sun by day. If these linkages can ever be proven we have a community of women whose choice was clearly made from wanting to be equal to men, rather than be dependent on them. Whatever the motivation their choice is clear - self-sustainability.

Educating the girls became a hallmark call made by other better educated women. Some were missionaries and others worked with missionaries – be they Catholic, Methodist and Anglican – to offer education opportunities to girls. Women took to forming groups to take care of the orphans, children with special needs. The Asian Welfare Women's Association was

born as a result of that in 1970. Girl children who were abandoned as they were valued less or thought to be carriers of ill-fortune, found homes at the Convent of Holy Infant Jesus and cross-culturally with Malay and Indian families.

Women led the volunteer movement, motivated to care for less fortunate women and to provide opportunities. But there was also a movement that wanted change from the top - a social movement of women feeling outraged at the unequal opportunities being offered to some women, women angered by unnecessary humiliation of other women, women who acted on a value system too, that propelled them to gather other like-minded folks and to ask for fairness for all.

Their actions of choice resulted in the formation of the Singapore Council of Women (SCW), Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) and women's groups within the self-help groups of the Clan Associations. The SCW changed women's lives as polygamy was outlawed in the civil courts and the Women's Charter was born as the People Action party (PAP) kept their word after women voted them into power.

This early history of the women in Singapore is one of choice where a movement was started deliberately to take care of many other women who had fewer opportunities. It is also an act of women asserting on their rights in a neutral space of ideas that bound them together. The early years are also a story of communitarianism as seen through the deliberate lifestyle of pockets of women such as the samsui women. But it is also a reflection of how women saw their primary role to be in the home.

Women's reproductive roles – whose choice?

It was State-control over women's reproductive roles that first got women's notice and later spurred women into action. In 1949 the Family Planning Association was set up to control population for the Malayan Peninsula which was a developing country, rife with tropical diseases and further problematised with poor sanitation. Yet ironically there was little action to stop polygamy. The women wanted State intervention over multiple wives, be their second or third level mistresses. So women were complicit in their demand for State intervention at a time when empowerment and options were scarce commodities. So in 1961 polygamy was outlawed.

Between 1969 and 1970 two controversial legislations were passed – on abortion and sterilisation. Between 1971 and 1973 alone 18, 646 women were sterilised (Chin and Singam; 2004) under the voluntary sterilisation programme. Today we have about 13,000 abortions annually⁵. The sterilisation policy has taken a backseat. A scheme – HOPE⁶ – has a subtle sterilisation policy embedded in it where certain offsets on housing mortgages and incentives for children's education are given in exchange for the family, through the woman, agreeing to ensuring a smaller family size through sterilisation.

Till today many have a mental imprint of the visuals in the posters for the 'Stop At Two', the 1966 National Family Planning Campaign. Advertising and communication experts cite it as the most successful campaign ever in Singapore and the slogans still resonate in 2011 - "Stop-At-Two"; "Girl or Boy – Two is Enough."

Both the abortion and sterilisation policies are part of a government policy to ensure that the lower-income manage themselves with smaller family size and that no unwanted children,

out of wedlock are born to become welfare-dependent children at orphanages. Women's lives, depending on your age and social status, are very much guided by government policies and access of opportunities to comply. In addition a norm is being set very clearly – children must come only in the family structure of a dad and a mum and preferably to those who are better educated and come from a higher income. Cultural attitudes of children to children do not feature in the pragmatic approach of the government.

In 1983 the great Marriage Debate exploded on the scene whereby government policy was aimed at telling women who should procreate. This is a proactive step by the government to work on women at the upper end and encourage them to have more children, under the notion that they will bring up brighter children. In addition the government also set up the Social Development Unit, in 1984, to entice women to marry and so start families. Add to that cauldron the Romancing Singapore campaign of 2002, to get singles hitched through romantic packages. Needless to say the Romancing Singapore Campaign was a still-born while the match-making unit lost its fervour as men and women soon, probably preferring not to have their data in government databases, shifted to the plethora of matchmakers in the private sector.

The family division of the Ministry of Community Development Youth and Sports continues to run campaigns on the joys in having a family. The difference now is that these are managed in soft-hues and in more subtle forms to accommodate the changing environment of its target audience.

The impact of all these campaigns, constant messaging by the politicians is psychological. There is a flawing that takes place subtly, when a woman does not marry or have children if she is married. Men are beginning to feel that pressure too but less so than women as that is their traditional role in the first place. The government continues to dabble in the reproductive role of women with incentives and disincentives and it is done according to the house-type, qualifications and income of individual parents. Women feel the co modifying of their capacity to bear children and make jokes such as “I'm doing my national service” which belies deeper issues that we need to understudy.

The current anxiety over the falling total fertility rate (TFR) is another case of government over-focusing on the role of women as mothers and still leaving it to the employers and fathers to negotiate over parental leave. Women are still seen as caregivers of the infant, the sick child, disabled sibling, elderly parents. Her live is predetermined by government policy that does not recognise an equal role that men can play in the early months of the child. On Thursday Minister Lim Boon Heng⁷ again reiterated at the 2011 budget discussions that there was no need to introduce parental leave, leaving it to the couple, the employer and trade unions to work it out. The political unwillingness to rectify this, cuts deeper into the core of not wanting to upset the balance of what is seen to be women's roles and that men are indeed heads of the household.

For women who wish to live differently – single women who wish to adopt children, unwed mothers, lesbian mothers etc – they are seen as people with deviant behaviours whose choices are frowned upon, even if currently in the instance of single women adopting children there is some relaxation.

The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is unequivocal in its principle of substantive equality. In its Concluding Comments

arising from the report in 2007, the CEDAW Committee has asked the government to create and extend its procreation policies equally to men and women so that they do not limit women's choices.⁸

Currently the home-based roles of caregiving are still an unequal platform. Women are expected to care for the family and this works to her disadvantage if she is keen to continue her productive role in the workforce.

Productive roles / leadership roles – women's lives

Women were important to the country's economy. They are educated and have proven leadership qualities along with the ability to multi-task, as discussed at many forums and articles. In the 1970s – the manufacturing phase of Singapore – women, both local and foreign women - filled the factories, poring over machines to increase the productivity. The call remains the same – which women must remain in the workforce, tapping into their productivity. But for an educated workforce only 55 per cent of women are in the workforce as compared to 76 per cent of men.⁹ In addition most of the women in the workforce are in the Service industry and occupy rank and file positions (82 per cent)¹⁰. This means then that 43 per cent of women in fulltime employment are earning less than \$2,000 per month.¹¹ For the same category there is only 38 per cent men. To compound this issue most of the women in the workforce are well –educated - according to the labour force report 2010 there are 242.5 thousand women with a degree in the labour force, or 44.52% (among total number of graduates who are economically active).

In addition amongst job seekers – of the 3,845 job seekers who were placed in 2010 there were more men than women.¹² Women are working in lower positions, earning less and in some instances, putting in longer hours. It is not surprising then that Singapore is ranked 84th in the world in terms for the Global Gender Gap Index in 2009¹³, slipping from its 65th position in 2008.

Besides the gender wage gap there are also more than 190,000 workers who are either on contract work or in casual labour. Workers at this level earn about \$850 as take-home pay. It is not known how many women are represented as workers here and how many have dependents that they need to care for too.

Thus women seem to be missing in this process. They are earning less, generally, and not all of them are in the workforce and so there are issues of their income security which will impact them as they grow older.

Singapore's standing on women's development and empowerment are as follows:-

Indicators	Year	Ranking
Human Development Index (HDI)	2010	27 out of 169 countries with a HDI value of 0.846. ¹⁴
Gender Inequality Index (GII)	2008	10 out of 169 countries with a GII value of 0.255 ¹⁵ .
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	2007	16 out of 93 countries with a GEM value of 0.76 ¹⁶

While women are upgrading their skills, acquiring degrees and moving up in their career paths there are questions on the choices they are making if they are under-represented in the workforce and even in the top brass. Are women stepping back because they need to divide their time for their social reproductive roles of caregiving? Or are women being stopped by male attitudes and prejudice?

It is no fun, this woman's lot, if she is continuously struggling to maintain the worklife balance. The question is – can there ever be a balance? There are three spheres – husband's work, wife's work and the common home front – being balanced by two people. Equality is a pipe dream by any margin in this balancing act if the support for the couple isn't tangible and deep enough.

It is my view that ironically women's choices are more limited in asserting on the kind of lives they would like to lead with the progress that they have made, in terms of education and career prospects. This is because they have more options now and choices will be difficult to make and they need adequately satisfying roles for them too in the workforce, posing an equal challenge to potential male workers.

Some have called this the backlash of feminism. What is disturbing about this argument is that one ignores the issue of male domination, sexism and inequality of opportunities as the cause of the ills that contemporary women face.

For a talented women workforce there are still too few women at the top and still only one Minister (without portfolio) who is a woman!

Body image – too many choices

Women today are spoilt for choices on what they wish to do to their bodies.

From fitness clubs that offer a buffet of exotic-sounding exercise routines to an avalanche of beauty products that come in small sachets for try-outs and six-in-one-price spa and beauty packages. Women can take the hard slog to Body Beautiful as well as the short-cut to the same outcome, more or less.

Women can choose fitness clubs, beauty parlours, and the web for e-shopping of products and have medically and surgically trained healthcare workers to sculpt their bodies, re-design features and peel away old skin. Technologies keep bringing new innovations to the women.

Women are indeed spoilt for choices and many are choosing different lifestyle options to direct their lives.

The only safeguard that is needed is that information is clear, authentic and there are prosecutorial measures against industry players when they violate the rules of the beauty game.

But the advertising industry still leaves much to be desired in how it brands women. The message is the same old and predictable – seductress, sex symbol, workaholic, 'bitch' and 'bimbo'. Some do it more creatively than others but the message is still the same old stuff. The private sector too has ramped up its use of women as sexual beings to a National level – having them at the F1 races as this new package of the Singapore Grid girls, to cite one example. We

just hope that these women were able to exact a good pay for the work they did as, hopefully, well-informed and empowered individuals.

A case however has to be made for younger girls who wish to go for the Body Beautiful and seem to think that they have made informed choices. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and local laws are the protection against the media hype that takes advantage of the insecurities of adolescent girls and boys.

Foreign women – what choice?

Singapore is dependent on foreign workers who comprise a third of the workforce¹⁷. Amongst them are 190,000 foreign domestic workers (FDW) working in every sixth household in Singapore. The FDW is a woman who has made some choices to come to a new land to raise her family back in her own country. She is more often than not, a trained worker who is trying her best to do the work.

There were once too many recorded stories of how badly some of them were treated when legal structures were scarce and prejudices ran deep. Today we are more educated on the issue, there're more guidelines and the punitive measures taken against violators are visible deterrents. However it needs to be pointed out that often the perpetrator who inflicts psychological or physical abuse on the FDW is a woman. Much psychoanalysis has been put forward – the frustrated woman employer who is a worker elsewhere who comes home to take it out on an easy punch bag in the form of the FDW; the high expectations of the employer versus the inexperience of the worker; the lack of good role models amongst employers etc to pick up good habits of dealing with employees.

But inevitably it is perturbing that often the person who limits the choices for the FDW is another woman – her female employer. It is a paradox as it is an indictment on us as women too - how we treat another fellow woman who is working in a subordinate position in our private space. The second thing to note here is that we, ourselves, run the risk of lowering the value of domestic work and child care when we bargain over the wages and treat her with disdain for the work that she does for us.

Ironically her availability as an FDW – due to lack of adequate provisions by the government – has given many a working woman the option to stay on in the workplace.

The government has improved the laws, for example, amending the Penal Code in 1998 to enhance the penalties to one-and-half times as a deterrent to protect foreign domestic workers (FDWs) against abuse. Clearer standard contract guidelines have also been issued as schedules to the Foreign Worker Employment Act, which means that they are still not a legal contract. It has also become mandatory to provide medical insurance coverage for foreign workers.

But FDWs remain vulnerable to poor work conditions such as inconsistent wage payments, varying wages for the same job done, unsafe and unsanitary work conditions, unsafe transport systems for construction workers, and limited access to recreational spaces. There is also a very disturbing cultural mindset amongst employers that they have a right to overlook the privacy of the workers, keeping their passports, listening in to their phone conversations etc.

There are also other foreign women in the service industry. In the karaoke lounges, in licensed and unlicensed brothels. They are without much protection too as they are expected to rake in the money to pay for their upkeep, for the agent and for their own support of families back home. Newspaper stories have highlighted their plight as trafficked into the trade or that they came in willingly but were caught as they worked illegally.

The third group are the foreign wives who are married to Singapore men from the lower-income groups who do not get their citizenship status that easily. In some cases their children are citizens but they, as mothers, have no legal status, remaining in limbo which affects them if they wish to augment the family income by working. In cases where the marriage has broken down the foreign wives go through much trauma, facing possible deportation without their children.

How are we – Singapore women – looking upon this whole group of foreign women at the lower end? Some women have taken up this cause, motivated by their values to address the unfairness and so started civil societies to that effect. Ms Bridget Lew from H.O.M.E and the AWARE women with TWC2 come to mind. The advocacy to recognise them as workers in need of protection and dignity continues.

But for AWARE and other civil society groups the lobbying for these women's access to protection is a call that they have to make as women's groups.

In the private space there is more that needs to be done as one better-off woman is limiting the choices of another even on a clear worker's rights issue - giving a day-off.

Violence against women – still a lived reality for women

It was a silent scream before - suppressed and sometimes muffled as you did not want the neighbours to hear your pain through the wooden walls. Moreover it was seen as a private, family affair. But all that changed when AWARE made the choice and took up the fight to offer protection to women. In 1995 the Domestic Violence Bill was moved by Dr Kanwaljit Soin, then an NMP and a founder member of AWARE. The Bill was later called the Family Violence Bill and introduced by the then Ministry of Community and Social Development.

Because of this Bill women have more choices – they need not suffer in silence anymore and such acts are seen as a human right violation which has universal traction. Annually about 3,000 women apply for the personal protection orders (PPO). Today others – men, children, and the elderly – all gain from the provisions under this Act. And marital rape is also now recognised between spouses in a marriage.

While there are now more choices for women to seek legal and remedial actions, there are new trends that have emerged that need further action.

Young girls are both initiating the process to becoming sexually active whilst others are also sexually groomed by usually older men, for such initiations. This is a trend that needs more scrutiny and study as it will be a mistake to see it as a choice when the girls are severely under-aged and not just hovering around the 15 to 16 years of age.

An AWARE study has shown incidents of sexual harassment. The most severe ones that we read in the papers are the number of mobile phone up-skirt pictures that are being taken. That women in Singapore have to watch what they wear because of this form of harassment that

is then easily uploaded onto the web. Some men have yet to realise that women have gone past that era but they still end up being violated, virtually.

There is a sense that women and girls are liberated and empowered but incidents of date rapes and drunk rapes still reveal that men and boys are the ones who need more education on what 'no' means and not risk interpreting it in any other way. Women too need to be aware that their choices have their own consequences and bear the responsibility where fair and appropriate.

While we have moved on in this area, there are new forms that are emerging which reveal clear decisions made by girls or women to become sexually active, despite the potential risks to self.

Violence Against Women remains on the global radar as male attitudes have not changed that drastically for such acts to stop.

New threats – can a choice be blind?

The impact of various interpretations of religious texts is impacting on the women's movement. In some of our neighbouring countries it is deemed appropriate to flog women in public for violations as decided by the clerics. AWARE faced its own challenge in 2009 year in the form of a takeover of the executive primarily because AWARE embraces diversity and sees no reason by its rationale and Constitution, to discriminate against the LBGT (Lesbian, Gay, Transgender) community.

Women will be severely limited in acting on their aspirations if these groups take hold of the women's movement and start imposing the interpretations on how women need to live. Women have to make the choice to remain well-informed on their own religion and build up networks for diverse discussions.

It does not help in the case of Singapore that gender does not still feature in our Constitution and under CEDAW; the government has imposed a reservation because of the provisions for Muslim women, under Syria law.

Rising fundamentalist attitudes through religion – Christianity, Hinduism, Islam – is a phenomenon worth paying attention to as it will erode the citizenry space that our foremothers have claimed for us.

Conclusion

Gender equality is what women strive for. They need to gain that space by making daily decisions on how they wish to conduct themselves, assert on their rights and know that they can.

But this no longer just covers small spaces of home, work and country even. Because of globalisation and a world that is inter-connected through trade and the Internet, women can no longer see feminism in isolation from the context of the world and the political inter-play of ideologies.

In becoming more aware feminism actually comes back to the forefront as a critical theory that needs socio-political contextualising. For example, as a result of neo-liberal economics communities have been disempowered as the free trade agreements and investments in some instances, have over-ridden cultural practices and livelihoods. For women to act on re-claiming such livelihoods it becomes a question of being politicised and becoming a stronger women's rights advocate using feminism as the lens to ask for women's rights and access to livelihoods.

In the next 25 years or more, it is my hope that Singapore women will make large imprints globally in the development policies and those AWARE and other women's groups will see the merit in discussing women's issues from a rights-based perspective, thus making CEDAW a lived reality for all women in Singapore.

It is also important to make the choice of turning women's spaces into citizen arenas to discuss ideas, concepts and challenge the status quo, on all issues. If we do that then women have really mainstreamed themselves and forced the agenda on the community.

Recommendations

▪ **The Government:**

- i. To move away from the traditionalist model of the family as the basis of policy-making towards adopting more gender-equitable family structures that are aligned with current realities
- ii. To give equal emphasis to male and female roles in biological and social reproduction, so as to enable all policies to be gender-equitable, as recommended by the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified by Singapore in 1995.
- iii. To ensure that sustainable programmes are in place for lower-income workers and to incentivise employers to offer jobs to women.
- iv. To conduct an in-depth longitudinal study, disaggregated by sex and age, on where women and men are in the workforce.
- v. To have the Public Service Division conduct gender sensitization training for parliamentarians, employers and civil service officers so that they will know that the issue of Singapore's falling fertility rate is not to be privatized as just women's problem.
- vi. To review its Marriage and Parenthood Package to include incentives for employers to have greater flexibility of work hours and parental leave for both male and female employees.
- vii. To introduce women-centric measures to get women back into the workforce.
- viii. To introduce greater punitive measures against agents who violate the rights of foreign workers, foreign wives.
- ix. To ramp up the punitive measures against advertisers who run afoul of advertising guidelines, especially with regards to those in the "beauty" business.
- x. To increase resources for a specialist team for sexual offences

- xi. To have more women in leadership positions in policy making, decision making and political participation
- xii. To ensure that equal pay for equal work is a reality.
- xiii. To introduce an anti-discrimination policy and law in due course, with effective mechanisms for enforcement.
- **Corporations:**
 - i. To promote the introduction of flexible working arrangements and make it part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR).
 - ii. To send their male section leaders for gender sensitization courses
 - iii. To be transparent about their employment policies and practices
 - iv. To stop using sexist advertisements
 - v. To stop working with partners who are offensive to women
 - vi. To be good employers of men and women, local or foreign
- **Civil society (AWARE, other women’s organisations and other civil society organisations):**
 - i. To advocate more strongly to change the traditionalist interpretations of women’s roles imposed by the state and the private sector
 - ii. To run campaigns to counter the onslaught of pressures from the “beauty” industry
 - iii. To develop systematic gender-sensitization training for men and women.
 - iv. To increase awareness of international treaties on women’s rights and to lobby from the local to the international on matters that pertain to women’s rights.
 - v. To re-frame the women’s agenda from being obligatory service providers and care givers in the home to a rights-based perspective of being equal citizens in a caring society.
 - vi. To nurture women leaders from among all walks of life.
 - vii. To build alliances among women’s groups on common fronts.
 - viii. To build and expand the community of concern so that common concerns arising from gender inequalities are addressed by all, instead of being “privatized” as each individual woman’s problem for her to solve by herself.
- **Men**
 - i. To be the equal partners of women in all spheres of life, so as to achieve a gender-equitable work-life balance.
 - ii. To share equal responsibility for the care of their children and elders.
 - iii. To work together with women for gender equality, including participation in campaigns for gender equality alongside women
- **Women**
 - i. To take the lead in the call for gender equality and to take personal initiatives, whenever possible, to advance gender equality.
 - ii. To reach out to all other women from a clear message no woman should be treated less than any other man or woman.
 - iii. To equip oneself with skills and capacities to support other women in empowering themselves.

- iv. To help bring about a change in values and attitudes of the men and women around them so that they fully realize and practise gender equality in their daily lives.

¹ Under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Bill of Rights for Women, equal access to opportunities is paramount.

² Madam Chan Choy Siong declared in 1961 that “Women in our society are like pieces of meat put on the table for men to slice. The PAP government has made a promise. We cannot allow this inequality to exist in this country. We will liberate women from the hands of the oppressor”² (Legislative Assembly Debates, State of Singapore, Vol 15:443 in Wee, Commentary Vol. 7)

³ Then called Singapura and was part of the Malayan Peninsula and once part of the Indonesian archipelago

⁴ Aline Wong; Research Issues on Women and Development in Singapore in the 1980s; 1988

⁵ AFP, May 1; “Singapore sees abortions rise amid recession”

⁶ <http://www.mcys.gov.sg/web/HOPE.html>... The Home Ownership Plus Education (HOPE) Scheme provides comprehensive benefits to young, low-income families who choose to keep their family small. Families receiving assistance under the scheme are committed to keeping their families small and investing their limited resources in education and skills upgrading to achieve self-reliance.

⁷ The Straits Times, March 2 “No government intervention on parental care “.

⁸ CEDAW; Concluding Comments; 10 August 2007

⁹ 2010 Singapore Social Statistics in Brief

¹⁰ <http://www.mom.gov.sg/statistics-publications/national-labour-market-information/publications/Pages/statistical-tables-2009.aspx#em>

Ministry of Manpower, Report on Labour Force in Singapore, 2009; Table 31; CEDAW Shadow Report 2007 by AWARE

¹¹ As above, Table 63

¹² Monthly Digest of Statistics; Section 3.1

¹³ <https://members.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap/rankings2009.pdf>...The indicators for measurement include adherence to equal pay for equal work, maternity and paternity leave provisions, non-discrimination.

¹⁴ The **Human Development Index (HDI)** is a summary measure of human development. It measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: A long and healthy life, Access to knowledge and a Decent standard of living.

It ranges from 0 (no inequality) to 1 (complete equality).

¹⁵ The **Gender Inequality Index (GII)** reflects women’s disadvantage in three dimensions—reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market—for as many countries as data of reasonable quality allow. The index shows the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in these dimensions. It ranges from 0 (no inequality) to 1 (complete inequality).

¹⁶ The **Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)** focuses on women's opportunities rather than their capabilities. The GEM captures gender inequality in three key areas: Political participation and decision-making power as measured by women's and men's percentage shares of parliamentary seats, Economic participation and decision-making power as measured by two indicators – women's and men's percentage shares of positions as legislators, senior officials and managers and women's and men's percentage shares of professional and technical positions and Power over economic resources as measured by women's and men's estimated earned income.

It ranges from 0 (no inequality) to 1 (complete equality).

¹⁷ Many are in low-waged occupations such as the construction, cleaning, maritime services, manufacturing, manufacturing and lower-end workers in healthcare. As of Dec 2009, there are 856,000 foreigners in low- or semi-skilled manual jobs, including 196,000 women employed as live-in domestic workers.¹⁷