



# *venn2021: Flourishing People, Planet, and Philanthropy*

9-11 November 2021  
Singapore and Online

## EVENT REPORT

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## I. Opening Forum: Philanthropy's Role in a Post-Pandemic Society

9 November 2021, 18:15-21:20

Revelry Hall, The Barracks Hotel Sentosa

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### SUMMARY

After a nearly 2-year hiatus due to COVID-19, APC members gathered in-person at The Barracks Hotel Sentosa to kick-off venn2021. APC's Acting CEO and Chairman, Laurence Lien introduced the **Flourishing People, Planet, and Philanthropy** theme and unpacked how philanthropy can play a role to build back better in Singapore and across the region.

Guest of Honour, Singapore Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong, sat down with Laurence in a fireside chat to explore philanthropy's role in a global, post-pandemic society.

The discussion touched on the importance flattening four curves—**infection, inequality, demographic, and emissions**—in order to build a fairer, greener, and more inclusive society. The role of philanthropists in rebuilding post-pandemic is not just to provide funding, but also in helping to create more opportunities. Innovative solutions that are inclusive and value tripartite relationships (between government, labour unions, and business leaders) form the foundation of good outcomes in Singapore.

The discussion also noted how convergence and alignment between stakeholders can be reached by keeping an open mind, relying on data, and having confidence that things will change with time. "[Alliances for Action](#)", an industry-led coalition, is such an example of a working partnership to prototype ideas and address common challenges in Singapore.

Finally, the fireside chat discussed the rapid growth of family offices in Singapore, how the country can become a hub for philanthropy, and play a role as a connector between Asia and the world.

During the Q&A session, APC members raised questions on existing regulations that inhibit cross-border giving. While the Singapore Commissioner of Charities (COC) may grant exceptions, the lack of regulatory certainty can dissuade foreign funds from coming to Singapore. Members also raised the challenges of applying Anti-Money Laundering / Combating Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) criteria meant for financial investors to philanthropic giving, and suggested the creation of a new set of AML/CFT requirements specifically for philanthropic entities.

Laurence presented Minister Wong with a copy of APC's Philanthropy Guides, which would be launched and shared with members the next day.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Government, private sector, and civil society in Singapore must work together to build a 'fairer, greener, and more inclusive society'.
- Innovative solutions that are inclusive of everyone *and* value tripartite relationships form the foundation of good outcomes in Singapore.
- Philanthropy can best contribute not just through funding, but by the strategic creation of opportunities.
- Some APC members feel restricted with their giving, especially cross-border, regional giving, and used this opportunity to raise their concerns and suggestions with the Minister.

## 2. Welcome and Opening Remarks: Flourishing People, Planet, and Philanthropy

10 November 2021, 9:00 – 9:25

Speakers: Laurence Lien, Stacey Choe

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### SUMMARY

Laurence referenced [Adam Grant's 2021 article](#) on how people have been 'languishing' over the pandemic, and highlighted how venn2021 was a space for APC members to move beyond languishing and towards creating a 'flourishing' future. Laurence also noted how the themes of pivoting, transitioning, and growing have underpinned APC's work for the year.

Stacey Choe introduced new APC members Francesco Caruso and Danny Yong, as well as new APC staff Bradley Wo, Sarah Tam, and Theresa Cua. She followed by inviting members to examine maps of members' philanthropic activities grouped by the SDGs and geographies. The maps had first been presented at venn2019 and helped to capture overlapping member activities and potential collaboration opportunities. Now updated in 2021, the maps revealed growing interest since 2019 in the fields of health and education amongst members.

The maps are also available to view on the [APC Members Portal](#).

## 3. APC Country Updates

10 November 2021, 9:25 – 9:45

Speakers: Priyaka Nagpal Dhingra, Zelda Loudoe, Margie Ong, Suyin Liu, Mimi Vu, Van Ly

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### SUMMARY

APC's country representatives from India, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam gave brief updates on the COVID-19 status in their respective countries, as well as the state of membership growth, philanthropic ecosystem, and projects.

- **India:** Priyaka noted the steady recovery that India has made since its fatal second-wave of COVID-19 this year and the persisting challenges. She also highlighted APC's upcoming partnership with Accelerate Indian Philanthropy to address social problems in this region, especially with India's growing wealth.
- **Indonesia:** Zelda updated members on the key APC projects in Indonesia: INSPIRASI, Indonesia Education-Mapping, Peace Generation (ASEAN Peace Initiatives), as well as the close of the Thousand Days Fund.
- **Malaysia:** Margie noted that the community remains hopeful in the face of the pandemic, while the philanthropic sector is aiming to strengthen non-profits and focus on key areas such as education and refugee rights.
- **Philippines:** Suyin shared that members are expanding their work on early childhood development programmes and hopes that new APC members will soon join and support.
- **Vietnam:** Mimi and Van discussed the focus on nurturing the emerging philanthropic ecosystem, despite the slight derailment caused by the heavy storm season, the disastrous effects of COVID and fast-changing legislation with regards to donations.

#### 4. Learning from the Field I: Pathways to Scape

10 November 2021, 10:15-11:15

Speakers: Pierre Lorinet, Andrew Hunter, Pang Sze Khai

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##### SUMMARY

Members Pierre Lorinet and Pang Sze Khai, along with guest speaker Andrew Hunter from the Minderoo Foundation of APC member Andrew Forrest, shared their pathways to scale. Pierre explained how the Lorinet Foundation has been working on an outcome-based [Social Impact Guarantee \(SIG\)](#) for youth employment and vocational training. It is a three-way partnership with Social Service Agency YMCA of Singapore and the TL Whang Foundation. SIGs are a form of pay-for-success financing, which can overcome the funding and risk rigidity of government or traditional philanthropy by involving a guarantor to pay the initial funder back if outcomes are not achieved. He announced that the pilot case – a collaboration with Singapore's YMCA Vocational and Soft Skills Programme (VaSSP) – will help to assess if the SIG is an adaptable model for future scale-up projects.

Next, Andrew discussed Minderoo's creation of the [Thrive by Five](#) parenting platform to scale a new global **paradigm shift** in Early Childhood Development (ECD). The app, [Bright Tomorrows](#), helps parents develop their child's life skills while following their daily routine, and can be customised to the parents' values, interests and the age of the child. Andrew noted that the scale that Minderoo aspires to requires the platform to be accessible and be constantly developing content. Additionally, cooperation must be secured at the governmental and grassroots level in each of the target 30 countries.

Lastly, Khai introduced Octava Foundation's [Social Innovation Challenge](#), a competition that will grant a handful of creative EdTech solutions \$50,000 in funding. In parallel, Octava Foundation prepared a [white paper on EdTech in Southeast Asia](#) to understand the EdTech landscape and to inform their own scoping decisions around the challenge. This white paper will further develop the ecosystem to support scaling education technology by informing funders and projects outside of the challenge.

##### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Lorinet Foundation invested in Singapore's first Social Impact Guarantee (SIG) as an innovative financial model to drive more ambitious outcomes in youth employment.
- The Minderoo Foundation launched a mobile parenting app that seeks global scalability across 30 countries while retaining customisable, contextual features.
- Octava Foundation launched a competition (Social Innovation Challenge) for EdTech solutions and released a white paper to allow others to learn from their own scoping research.
- Both the Minderoo Foundation and Octava Foundation's pathways to scale rest on investing significant resources and time into the development of evidence-based research.

## 5. Launch: APC Philanthropy Guide Series

10 November 2021, 11:30 – 12:30

Speakers: Laurence Lien, Bradley Wo

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### SUMMARY

Laurence and Bradley introduced APC's Philanthropy Guides, which are unique because they are Asia-focused, philanthropist-centred, and contain information from member case studies.

Each member received a set consisting of the seven guides: **Starting, Strategising, Structuring, Family, Executing, Evaluating** and **Collaborating**. Described by Laurence as "a labour of love", the series was a two-year project featuring different approaches, best-in-class models, expert perspectives, and 27 case studies of fellow members within each booklet. Members discussed in small groups about their experiences and questions about Family or Evaluating.

Bradley proposed future workshops in 2022 to thoroughly discuss the guides and members expressed strong interest to further explore each of the guides in full. [The guides are available on the APC website.](#)

An external version will also be made available in 2022 for non-members and wider circulation.

## 6. Lightning Round I: Member Sharing

10 November 2021, 13:15-13:30

Speakers: Anthonia Hui, Mitzi Perdue, Peter Golovsky, Chris Marsh

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### SUMMARY

APC member Anthonia introduced the members to anti-human trafficking advocate and American philanthropist Mitzi Perdue, the Board and Asia Chair of the anti-human trafficking non-profit [Win This Fight](#) Peter Golovsky, and Director of UBS Financial Services in California Chris Marsh. Anthonia began the session with an emotional story of a friend's daughter who was the victim of an attempted kidnapping for sex-trafficking in London. It inspired her to delve deeper into efforts to combat human trafficking. Anthonia also called for higher levels of collaboration between private philanthropy and government officials to address this issue.

Mitzi urged all philanthropists to leverage their collective power to fight "a problem that is worthy of APC". Peter identified the five key strategies that underpin Win This Fight's anti-trafficking initiatives: intervention, prevention, victim services, survivor support and public policy advocacy. Peter and Chris also shared about the UBS initiative Justice, Hope and Liberty ([JHL](#)) to end the sexual exploitation of minors in Bangladesh and the "San Diego Trafficking Prevention Collective" ([SDTPC](#)) which provides educational programmes for students and non-profits on preventative measures to human trafficking.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- With issues as vast and serious as human trafficking, no single government body, organisation or individual can solve it. But organisations that can leverage the collective funding and influence of philanthropists and changemakers worldwide can impact change at a significant scale.
- Trafficking is both a global issue and a hyper-localised one. Without a multi-generational framework and a global united approach, the necessary outcomes will not be achieved.

## 7. Flourishing Philanthropy – Why are Collaborations Key for Philanthropy to Flourish?

10 November 2021, 13:30-14:10

Speakers: Rohini Nilekani, Laurence Lien

### SUMMARY

Rohini Nilekani is an author for children's books, a philanthropist and founder of the Arghyam Foundation. Rohini views her work through a **societal-market lens**, and explained that her philanthropy is founded on her conviction that *society comes first*. To achieve the needed scale for her philanthropy, she co-founded the [EkStep Foundation](#) to provide learning opportunities for 200 million children in India.

Rohini outlined **five key pillars to successful scaling**:

1. An inspired team who are driven by the urgency to have impact at scale;
2. A broad vision with a societal goal;
3. A specific target number the project will achieve;
4. A project design that considers the diverse needs of a country;
5. A technologically-enabled (not technologically-led) project plan.

She noted that while pilot projects tend to succeed, the challenge with replicating at scale is contextual variations. Therefore, she emphasised **avoiding “cookie-cutter” replication**. Rohini also drew a distinction between *scaling things that work* and *things that work at scale*. Success is more likely to be found in the latter and by distributing the ability to solve, not simply by “pushing solutions down a pipe.”

On the topic of collaboration, Rohini shared her involvement with the initiative [Societal Platform](#) that aggregates collective knowledge and resources on a variety of topics and social sector issues for philanthropists. While she recognises the importance of cross-border collaboration, Rohini is still very much focused on the ecosystem in India and believes that the younger generation of philanthropists are tackling new and exciting issues that traditional philanthropy ignored in the past.

### KEY QUOTES

*“Society is the building block of everything, if we improve the ethical fibre of leadership, then we can hold the other two sectors more accountable to the larger good.”* – Rohini Nilekani

*“Wealthy people cannot afford to stay away from the social responsibility of their wealth.”* – Rohini Nilekani

*“To do anything collaboratively, some of the participants need to co-create their design. That will create lasting collaboration.”* – Rohini Nilekani

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Designing for scale must begin with a team that is inspired by the urgency to have impact at scale and an overarching quantitative goal.
- Providing projects with a digital backbone can ensure long-term success by allowing the beneficiaries and changemakers to leverage technology (when relevant).
- Cross-border trust and learning between philanthropists and organisations must be facilitated in order to create a more resilient and efficient response for future calamities.
- Projects must evaluate the context in which they are applying the scalable framework in order to achieve success.

## 8. Learning from the Field II: Pivoting

10 November 2021, 14:10-15:10

Speakers: Fernando Zobel de Ayala, Annette Akman, Simon Flint, Stacey Choe

### SUMMARY

Fernando kicked off the discussion by taking members through the evolution of Ayala Corporation through its history, and how it pivoted their business practices during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines. He spoke about Ayala Corporation's **commitment to their employees** through relief packages, then their supply chain, and finally their commitment to uplift the wider community through [Project Ugnayan](#), where they partnered with the Catholic Church to provide 2.8 million families with food and medicine. He also mentioned Ayala's efforts to train locals to become tour guides in Northern Palawan in order to give them the skills to ensure a stable source of income as a more sustainable model of philanthropy.

Annette introduced the Hinrich Foundation and how they managed their [partnership](#) with RMIT University to offer scholarships for professionals to pursue a Master of Global Trade, which involved a strong willingness to focus on what the industry and students needed. This is part of the foundation's wider mission to encourage mutually beneficial and sustainable trade by training the next generation of industry leaders. She noted that foundation's willingness to pivot rested on its **ability to self-reflect** and to ask the difficult question: "Are we creating actual impact or is this just our perceived impact?" To answer this, they conducted an extensive nine-month audit, which resulted in more effective and impact-driven activities. Annette also mentioned that the Hinrich Foundation relocated from Hong Kong to Singapore due to growing security concerns for their partners in Hong Kong due to their work on US-China trade relations.

Simon ended the panel with a presentation on the lessons learnt from the Thousand Days Fund in Indonesia. The failure of the Thousand Days Fund from their perspective was due to the lack of alignment on expectations, and the multiple layers involved with the partners. Since then, they have redirected some of the remaining funds to support a more grassroots [1000 Days Fund](#) programme based on height charts that is smaller, more dynamic and has the right people at the helm. He walked members through an '**Eightfold Path to Philanthropic Enlightenment**' which would enable them to not make the same planning mistakes.

### KEY QUOTES

"Too often we wanted to apply our solutions to communities instead of listening to what they want." – Annette Akman

"The crucial lesson is to beware of path dependency." – Simon Flint

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In times of crisis, institutions must pivot and expand their traditional definition of who they are responsible for and accountable to. Failure occurs when organisations refuse to listen to the specific, local needs of those they are trying to help.
- Pivoting can also come in the form of re-evaluating your partnerships. Without the correct people, a project will struggle to be successful.
- A quick summary of the eightfold path: be sure you have the right goals, scale, partners, competition, people, evidence, effort and connections on the ground.
- Integrated projects that combine philanthropic funding and local business development can minimise the effect of closing a project and exiting a community.

## 9. Flourishing Planet: The Future of Climate Action

10 November 2021, 15:10-15:50

Speakers: Prof Saleemul Huq, Natalie Kennedy

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### SUMMARY

Calling in from COP26 in Glasgow, Professor Huq, Director at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development, noted that this COP was especially important as it followed the release of the [6th assessment report by IPCC](#). This report acknowledged for the first time in its history that human activities have induced currently experienced climate change impacts and stressed that action to deal with climate change was now inevitable and important.

He noted that while countries, philanthropists and other stakeholders were working on addressing climate change, the net amount of work was still inadequate, and that most of the work was more focused on mitigation instead of adaptation. Referencing the findings in the IPCC report, he stressed that adaptation solutions are important as climate-vulnerable countries are already facing real disaster.

He urged members to consider how climate change related to programmes they were currently involved in (either through excess emissions that the programme could reduce or climate change induced vulnerabilities that must be factored in), and how climate change could be incorporated into their work through standalone projects or existing programmes.

In response to a question on how to meet the Paris agreement terms of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, he identified three key actions:

1. Leaders need to understand climate change and act on it through policy and programmes.
2. Investors need to accelerate the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy.
3. Young people need to continue challenging older generations to facilitate and drive climate-change focused work.

### KEY QUOTES

*“The concept of endless growth on a finite place just does not make sense.”* – Professor Saleemul Huq

*“We cannot just give up, even if success is partial.”* – Professor Saleemul Huq

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- APC members who want to engage with climate action can consider new programmes building climate resilience or integrate climate change into existing programmes and frameworks.
- The pivot from climate mitigation strategies to climate adaptation strategies is incredibly important for the most vulnerable communities, many of which are in Asia. Financing solutions for loss and damage induced by climate change and climate justice are key areas for philanthropy and government action.

## 10. Lightning Round II: Member Sharing

10 November 2021, 16:00-16:30

Speakers: Lionel Li, Vichien Phongsathorn, Stacey Choe

### SUMMARY

Lionel presented a short film from the “Inspiring Lives” series funded by Li Foundation, and showcased a video, which explained a competition that will seek out videos that feature “ordinary people with inspiring stories” that highlight the “spirit of Asia”. The short film documented the touching story of the inaugural China Philanthropy Leaders fellow, a programme initiated in June 2021 in partnership with APC. Lionel ended by asking APC members to support in finding more of such stories and sharing with members, so that we can all view these at next year’s venn2022.

Chairman of the Khon Thai Foundation Vichien Phongsathorn explained that through multiple sector collaborations, his organisation has generated an expansive network of change agents, philanthropists, volunteers and social innovators in Thailand that can help to achieve more outcomes on a wider scale. One collaboration example is the Thailand-based [Good Society Expo](#): a platform that enables the public to work with non-profits on key social issues. Members were also invited to participate in the Good Society Summit 2021, an event to share resources and create synergies for social impact and scale. Following the Summit, a website – the Good Society Network – will be created to facilitate further connections. Stacey wrapped up the sharing by informing members that Khun Vichien can be their touchpoint for all things related to the Thai philanthropic ecosystem as he is an incredible capacity builder and supporter in the country.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Lionel is inviting APC members to join him in getting young people to create videos along the theme of Inspiring Asia.
- Collaboration is key to scaling-up efforts to address social issues, particularly when it is built on a wide network that includes the public.

## 11. Future of Asian Philanthropy

10 November 2021, 16:30-17:15

Speakers: Laurence Lien, Bradley Wo

### SUMMARY

Laurence and Bradley introduced members to a new APC research project on the “Future of Asian Philanthropy”. This project will identify four futures of Asia and involves scenario planning and strategy planning relating to philanthropy’s role in each of these futures. The Future of Asian Philanthropy project will culminate in publications targeted for 2022 and is intended to craft a visionary role for philanthropy in Asia and inform strategy planning and decision-making for the wider sector.

Bradley described the four futures for Asia in 2050 and a hypothetical series of events that might result in each 2050 scenario. These futures include:

- **Asia, Inc.:** Asia muddles along from its current state with businesses consolidating power and driving development. Band-aid solutions allow for continued lavish lifestyles, and a survival of the fittest mindset views wealth accumulation as natural and desired.

- **Spider Web:** Society is dominated by the government which oversees all societal activity. The government oversees almost all national activities, resulting in pragmatic authoritarianism, and propaganda and surveillance are widespread.
- **Land Mine:** The public and the state are in a gridlock fight for power and society oscillates between political upheaval and crackdown. This leads to increasing tribalism in the country, with little cooperation between societal groups, and secret allies overseas who provide aid covertly.
- **Social Renaissance:** Society has become more cohesive and actively strives to enhance equality and well-being. Key features include 'real leaders' with enhanced participatory government and community ownership, and ethical economies focused on shared prosperity and well-being.

Members discussed how philanthropy might function within each future and how philanthropy might nudge society towards a more ideal outcome in 2050. Conversations included philanthropy's role in regulating and engaging with corporations, empowering stronger sector leaders and community leaders who can work with governments, and pushing for a values-based mindset.

## 12. APC Update: Highlights from 2021 and Looking Ahead

10 November 2021, 17:15-17:30

Speakers: Laurence Lien

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### SUMMARY

Laurence shared the APC updates from the past year, noting that activities were "remarkable, despite a very challenging year" with **25 successful events**, both online and in-person. APC is also working on three ecosystem-building initiatives: **Transnational Giving Asia**, **Future of Asian Philanthropy** and **Community Foundation of Asia**.

While membership growth was dampened due to the pandemic and difficulty engaging with potential members outside of Singapore, membership renewal was however especially high at 95%. Members also frequently collaborated with one another through APC-led co-funding partnerships and other catalysed activities. These instances of collaboration, regardless of size, are noteworthy as they exemplify the value of a trustworthy network of like-minded individuals.

Looking ahead, APC will be partnering with **Accelerate Indian Philanthropy (AIP)** to develop the Indian market and prioritising membership growth in **Hong Kong, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand**. With luck and continued improvements, overseas trips such as Europe Learning Journey will resume in 2022.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Current membership numbers include – 48 members from 13 markets and 3 new members in 2021. There was a 95% annual renewal rate for membership.
- APC held 25 events for 2021, and at least 80% of nominated and current members had attended a minimum of one event.
- APC facilitated 55 connections for members from January to October 2021 with more than SGD \$4 million funds catalysed for philanthropy. There were also 15 APC member projects in 2021.

### 13. APC Partnership with Accelerate Indian Philanthropy

10 November 2021, 17:30-18:00

Speakers: Ashish Dhawan, Laurence Lien

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#### SUMMARY

Ashish Dhawan is an Indian philanthropist who founded one of India's first leading private equity funds, before fully transitioning into the philanthropic sector and recently co-founding Accelerate Indian Philanthropy ([AIP](#)). His philanthropy journey started 10 years ago, when his passion for education inspired him to work on K-12 education reform in India through his [Central Square Foundation](#). The foundation's approach focuses on leveraging philanthropy resources, building the evidence base with non-profits, and partnering with government. He touched on how the foundation overcame initial challenges when working with government, such as avoiding controversial rights-based work that would alienate the foundation from potential government partners.

Ashish is also investing in ecosystem/intermediary organisations to build capacity within the sector. With AIP, the goal is to transform the strategic giving landscape in India. The AIP approach to philanthropy involves four components:

1. Shaping the agenda (building salience around the issue and creating understanding of needs);
2. Providing technical advisory and implementation support;
3. Innovation (using technology, testing and scaling different solutions, etc);
4. Leading the coalition by bringing partners together and building capacity for the sector.

The APC-AIP partnership will allow for shared resources and learning between networks. Laurence agreed with Ashish's vision for the partnership and noted APC's commitment to help build up India's philanthropy sector through AIP. Through the partnership, APC members can get access to Indian best-in-class models on the ground, work with other Indian philanthropists and have direct exchange and learning with them.

#### KEY QUOTES

*"Give more, give sooner and give better."* – Ashish Dhawan

*"Government is such a crucial player that it is critical to work alongside them."* – Ashish Dhawan

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Learnings from Central Square Foundation's experience working with government involve sacrificing right-based work, directing a majority of the credit to the government, and to use data to nudge improvements rather than criticise particular ministries.
- APC and AIP's collaboration will involve enhanced cross-border learning of global best practices and joint events and programmes for greater touchpoints between philanthropists.

## 14. Day I Closing Remarks

10 November 2021, 18:00 – 18:05

Speakers: Kathleen Chew

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### SUMMARY

Kathleen remarked that even as an online Zoom participant, she found the programming and sessions engaging and fruitful. Some of her highlights included:

- The “Where’s Waldo” of APC member faces icebreaker as not only a fun activity but also a reminder of the purpose of venn – to convene and to learn from one another.
- Powerful sharing from members and speakers, such as Simon Flint’s frankness and honesty about collaboration, Anthonia’s personal story and emphasising the “why” of her philanthropy, Professor Huq’s positive and hopeful voice from COP26, and Ashish’s inspirational story of his bold transition to philanthropy at the height of his corporate career
- Scaling is of utmost importance. Members must start locally, contextualise the project properly, and most of all collaborate with each other.

## 15. Virtual Site Visit: BRAC

11 November 2021, 10:05 - 11:15

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### SUMMARY

On the final day of venn2021, members “visited” the world’s largest NGO virtually. [BRAC](#), founded by Sir Fazle Abed, has touched over 13 million lives through multifaceted solutions involving health, livelihood, education, empowerment, financial inclusion and disaster resilience. They tackle large, systemic problems (e.g. education opportunities for school drop-outs, sanitation and hygiene issues, fair-price market opportunities for marginal farmers) by digging into the root cause and scaling sustainable solutions. This process involves starting with an innovative idea, piloting it, and then utilising feedback and knowledge to refine and perfect the model before scaling up. 80% of BRAC’s annual expenditure in Bangladesh is financed by the surplus from their microfinance and social enterprises.

### Ultra-Poor Graduation programme and BRAC virtual site visit

While poverty has been decreasing in Bangladesh, COVID-19 has forced 14.8% of Bangladesh’s total population to fall back into poverty. BRAC’s Ultra-Poor Graduation programme addresses extreme poverty in urban areas, climate-vulnerable areas, and hard-to-reach areas through four pillars: livelihoods promotion, social protection, financial inclusion, and social empowerment. Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) have revealed a 37% increase in annual income and a 9x increase in savings even four years after programme completion. In Bangladesh, the programme has helped 2.1 million households (all women); globally, it has been implemented in 50 countries and helped 14 million people.

Members joined a live, virtual site visit to Kurigram, Bangladesh. There, current participants of the Ultra-Poor Graduation (UPG) programme shared heartbreaking stories of their living conditions as the poorest of the poor in the village, and how the UPG helped to improve their lives and livelihoods. Members responded with great interest, asking what parts of the programme the women most enjoyed and what their hopes were for their children. During the last segment of the visit, members met with one of the programme's graduates. She shared about how through the programme she had begun raising heifers, which had given her the resources to build a better house for her family and greater confidence.

## KEY QUOTES

*"Poor people are poor because they are powerless. You must organise people for power"* - Sir Fazle Abed

*"Poverty and inequity are human made, so they can be unmade. Birth does not need to be destiny"* - Moutushi Kabir

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The complexity of poverty requires multifaceted solutions in order for sustainable change.
- The Ultra-Poor Graduation programme is focused on adaptive approaches that can respond through multiple interventions. Participants are often socially disconnected due to their circumstances, and the programme also seeks to reintegrate them back into society.

## 16. Panel Discussion and Q&A with APC Members

11 November 2021, 11:15 - 12:00

Speakers: Asif Saleh, Shameran Abed, Stacey Choe

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## SUMMARY

BRAC's Executive Directors, Asif (BRAC Bangladesh) and Shameran (BRAC International), discussed BRAC's multifaceted approach using both soft (agency building, confidence building) and hard solutions and involving the community in the process. In fact, BRAC projects often prioritise the soft solutions to build participant confidence and mentality as this is key to long-term progress.

Members asked about past programme failures, the significance of their organisational structure, experiences working with government, and future plans. For example, BRAC's engagement with Asian governments is often around strategic planning and advising to better allocate resources based on BRAC's evidence and experience. Looking ahead, BRAC plans to shift its international activities away from single intervention projects and more towards multi-sectoral projects to increase overall impact.

The panel discussion ended with Shameran inviting members to visit BRAC in-person to better understand their work, and Asif Saleh noting his pride in the organisation for focusing on the most conflict-ridden areas. Many APC members requested to reconnect with BRAC and explore possible collaborations.

## KEY QUOTES

*“Certain problems and challenges really are universal.” - Asif Saleh*

*“The challenges going forward are great, but we are more connected than ever, so together we can come up with solutions that can change the world.” - Asif Saleh*

*“Failure is good and you only learn from failures.” - Shameran Abed*

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- BRAC seeks to adapt and evolve alongside ever-changing challenges to provide the best solutions for the most vulnerable members of society.
- BRAC generates a [failure report](#) every year to review programmes and reconfigure strategies.
- Soft solutions that build participant confidence and mentality are key to sustainable progress.