Source: *TODAY*, p20
Date: 26 October 2016

Social enterprises thrive when given more collaborative space: Tharman

SINGAPORE – Social enterprises should be given support to grow, and one way to do that is having a shared platform for them to tap resources, and maximising "collaborative space", Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam said.

Speaking at the Singapore Social Enterprise Conference yesterday, he said that what he found "most interesting" is the collaborative space among social enterprises, non-profit outfits, businesses and governments. "(This space) can be extremely impactful, and we're only beginning to see it."

He gave the example of Edible Garden City, which builds gardens in under-utilised spaces to grow food produce, and employs people with autism. Mr Tharman noted that the social enterprise works with the Autism Research Centre, and some government agencies such as the Singapore Land Authority.

"They decided that part of their objective is to support persons with autism through urban-farming training programmes ... not just to help persons with autism have a job, but something more intrinsic, in the ways in which persons with autism can contribute and benefit from it themselves," he said. He added that social enterprises are filling needs in other countries "where things are not working well", and collaborating more closely with governments to do so.

A check with the Singapore Centre for Social Enterprise, which organised yesterday's conference, showed that social enterprises collaborating with those in the private sector, for example, include Make the Change — which enables executives from a multinational company to mentor students from low-income families.

Mr Tharman said that shared platforms should be provided to help social enterprises grow and achieve their social objectives, citing the Sustainable Living Lab as an example. It is a platform that offers resources such as sustainable materials, 3D printers, and other machines to help inventors, students and social entrepreneurs create products.

Separately yesterday, the Singapore Centre for Social Enterprise released a set of results from a public perception survey of 1,888 respondents, which found that more people were buying products or services from social enterprises — 35 per cent this year compared with 22 per cent in 2010, when the first survey was done.

It also found that more people were aware of social enterprises — from 13 per cent in 2010 to 65 per cent this year. **TAN WEIZHEN**