

1 2015 was historical in many ways. One moment was the signing of the climate change agreement at COP21 in Paris. This reaffirmed the fact that environmental sustainability is a global issue and that business as usual is not enough to make sure that our next generation, and the generations after, will have a liveable planet. Everyone has to take action. Governments too, should embrace a mindset of innovation and imagination in pursuing sustainability. Being one of the first countries to form a ministry dedicated to the environment in 1972, we have tried to tackle our challenges in improving the environment with innovation and imagination. Fast forward to today, Singapore has a clean environment but there are new challenges and we must continue to innovate solutions. To this end, Singapore's next phase of sustainable development is captured in our Sustainable Singapore Blueprint 2015 (SSB). We want to become a model of sustainable development for cities worldwide.

2 On the screen, you will see a picture. If I told you this is a picture of a landfill, would you believe me? Just 20 years ago, no one would have believed it would be possible. But this place of thriving mangrove forests and coral reefs is Singapore's only off-shore landfill, Semakau. It is clean, odour-free, and has a healthy marine ecosystem that supports many fish farms nearby. This was made possible because engineers in Singapore imagined that it could happen and worked relentlessly towards it. Nonetheless, having this offshore landfill is just one part of our solid waste management strategy. It has a limited lifespan and will only last until around 2035. Much more needs to be done to reduce, reuse and recycle waste in Singapore. Although our non-domestic recycling rates are high, there are certain aspects in which Singapore has not done so well, like the amount of electronic waste generated and the low domestic recycling rates. But we are improving on them and holding an even greater ambition – we are working towards becoming a Zero Waste Nation. We are imagining a future where there is no waste, only reusable resources. This story of Singapore's waste management shows that sustainability needs imagination and ambition.

3 However, just having ambition is not enough. Sustainability needs a long-term plan. Let me cite a couple of examples. 40 years ago, the Singapore River was an open sewer. Our then Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew issued a challenge to clean up this river. It took a decade of careful planning to do so – we relocated pollutive industries, dredged the river banks, and put in place new facilities, as well as modern waste collection, drainage and sewerage systems. The 10-year project transformed the Singapore River from a congested, foul-smelling, filthy river into a clean river where fishes and aquatic animals returned.

4 After this was done, we went further and planned to dam up the river mouth to form a reservoir to add to our local water catchment capacity. It took a further two decades of breakthroughs in anti-pollution and filtration technology for this dam, the Marina Barrage, to materialise. Today, the Marina Reservoir, enabled by the Marina Barrage, sits as a centre-piece of a thriving high-value business and residential district. It not only provides drinking water but is also a

popular spot for families to spend their weekends at. As an urban reservoir, it is a testament of what technology, patience and vision can do to open new possibilities.

5 Another example is the development of Singapore as a City in a Garden, which began back in 1963. The late Mr Lee Kuan Yew mooted the idea of greening the city to ensure that Singapore had a good living environment for all, rich and poor alike, amidst industrialisation and urbanisation. It was also an important factor in persuading potential investors of the commitment, discipline and efficiency of the government. With this goal in mind, there was a long term plan to carefully choose and plant trees along the streets, creepers and plants at concrete structures, and creating a network of nature reserves, parks, park connectors and tree-lined roads. All these helped Singapore evolve from a Garden City into a City in the Garden today, with almost 10% of our land area committed to parks and nature reserves, and some 300km of park connectors – because we imagined it. We plan to further increase this in the years to come under the SSB 2015.

6 On top of ambition and long-term plans, sustainability must make sense to the ordinary citizen and be part of everyday life. At the core of the SSB 2015, we want every Singaporean to lead a sustainable lifestyle and care for the environment. To facilitate this, we are embarking on our Smart Nation initiative by test-bedding a variety of Smart technology and convenient eco-friendly features in the Punggol district to enable our residents to live a smarter, greener and more comfortable life. Across the district, we are installing solar panels on rooftops to offset the cost of lighting up common areas and ultimately help residents save money. We are also progressively installing dedicated chutes for recycling. By making such sustainable habits convenient, residents with such infrastructure recycle about 3 times more than those in other areas.

7 In sum, to successfully embed sustainability into national policy, we need imagination and ambition, together with a long-term plan that can become a part of our everyday life.