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Singapore experienced its hottest day on record at 36.7°C in May, and around the world, record temperatures and extreme weather across China, Europe and the United States are raising concerns about the world's ability to withstand a new era of climate change.

Having first-hand experience of the ominous threat of climate change, young people entering the workforce today no longer just seek a good pay cheque and career prospects, but desire to make a difference in the world through participating in the green economy.

A recent Accenture study found 77 per cent of Asians aged 15 to 39 aspire to work in the green economy within 10 years.

Among them include many younger Singaporeans who are determined to play a key role in battling the climate threat as Singapore forges ahead with its Green Plan 2030 with a call to reach climate neutrality by or around mid-century.

What we want to guard against, however, is too narrow a definition of the green economy as there are so many ways to contribute to the battle against climate change.

GROWING GREEN ECONOMY OPPORTUNITIES

In recent years, the little red dot has witnessed a rapid increase in the number of green economy job opportunities, driven by the global megatrend towards clean and renewable energy adoption, supportive government initiatives, and strong corporate research partnerships.

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Some notable initiatives include the Research, Innovation and Enterprise 2025 plan which has allocated S\$220 million in funding to national research initiatives focusing on sustainability. It is also expected to spur private sector research and development and job creation.

Another exciting green project under development is the Renewable Energy Integration Demonstrator, the largest energy microgrid platform in the tropics today, offering young talents the opportunity to develop and pilot innovative energy solutions locally.

These new technologies include carbon capture, utilisation and storage.

GREENING OF TRADITIONAL SECTORS

With many new and exciting projects under development, a misperception is that green jobs lie solely within the newer agri-tech, renewable energy and climate solutions industry sectors such as carbon capture which are commonly referred to as the "green economy".

Many young people might overlook the industries they perceive as traditional and not making a positive impact on the environment.

This is not true. The United Nations Environment Programme and International Labour Organisation point out that green jobs are not limited to positions in agriculture and renewable energies.

In fact, Accenture predicts that 76 per cent of the new green jobs will be created in traditional industries such as manufacturing as they pivot towards greener practices. And these opportunities are equally exciting as that of emerging sectors.

According to the LinkedIn Green Economy Report 2022, manufacturing is among the top sectors contributing to green talent hires in Singapore.

Jobs created by the Industrial 4.0 transformation — which focuses on interconnectivity, automation, machine learning and real-time data — are spread across design, engineering, manufacturing and operations, providing diverse opportunities for workers of all skill levels.

For instance, adoption of emerging technologies such as Additive Layer Manufacturing, 3D/4D printing, artificial intelligence, machine learning and cloud computing are empowering manufacturing companies to reimagine and re-design their operations to achieve their sustainability goals.

As traditional industries undergo digital, technological and sustainable transformation, employees are benefiting from the upskilling/reskilling programmes organised by companies.

For example, Rolls-Royce's Fan Blade Singapore facility has collaborated with Singapore Polytechnic to curate a two-day course on "Advanced Manufacturing in the Digital Era" to upskill colleagues and ensure they remain abreast of new developments in the industry.

Meeting the challenge of net zero also requires companies to look comprehensively across their operations and innovate throughout the value chain.

To become a carbon neutral business, companies from more mature industry sectors are now offering a wider variety of green jobs beyond science and engineering, through which people from different disciplines and with diverse skill sets can contribute meaningfully towards a low carbon future.

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These “green” roles range from energy, water and material balancer planners, supply network officers, campus energy optimisation managers, environmental accountants, business impact analysts, product developer and robotics technicians, to name a few.

GETTING READY FOR “GREEN” OPPORTUNITIES

To prepare for the opportunities of the future, it is important that youth are exposed to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (Stem) education at a young age to cultivate their interest and passion in the field.

For instance, students who are keen to learn more about Stem can seek out free courses, such as those on artificial intelligence run by AI Singapore. They can also look out for various Stem workshops run by social enterprises in collaboration with corporations.

Young people can also take up training opportunities and scholarships provided by both the private and public sectors.

For those considering a professional career in the green economy, a degree or certification in a field such as environment science and sustainability studies would certainly help.

Institutes of Higher Learning are ramping up offerings in sustainability to better prepare Singaporeans for future jobs in the green economy, such as the Singapore Green Finance Centre established by Imperial College and the Singapore Management University and focused on green finance research and talent development.

Numerous skill development and outreach programmes are also concurrently being offered by government ministries, trade unions and large corporate employers for workers to skill and upskill themselves.

WHAT EVERY GREEN PROFESSIONAL NEEDS

Beyond just picking up the relevant knowledge and skills, there are certain character traits that may be beneficial to someone considering a career in the green economy.

A genuine desire to spark change and inspire a better world will serve as a driving force as one navigates the diverse landscape of job opportunities available. However, passion and enthusiasm alone are unlikely to be enough.

Breakthrough technologies and corporate transformation can and probably will take years or even decades to achieve. It is therefore vital that passion and enthusiasm are powered by perseverance, determination, and grit in order to stay the course and succeed.

In addition, given the nascency of new technologies, those who will thrive in the green economy will be those who keep an open mind and welcome change; traditional office jobs with fixed working hours and clear responsibilities are likely to end up not being the norm.

Instead, employees might be required to think creatively, consider alternative ways to solve new problems and take on additional work streams which they may not have considered feasible.

This is especially true in more traditional industries where major gearshifts may disrupt entrenched norms as they strive to decarbonise.

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In the quest for viable solutions to climate change, we also need a workforce that fully embraces diversity; a workforce that will collaborate, innovate and produce creative solutions to some of the world's most pressing issues.

With these traits, young people today, including many in Singapore, will play a vital role in building a cleaner and more sustainable future for the country, and indeed, the world.

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