

# Detailed notes for “Conversation on Green Plan 2030: Say YES to Waste Less”

Session Details: Monday, 15 August 2022, 2.30 pm – 4.30 pm via Zoom

## INTRODUCTION

1. The host, Ms Chew, welcomed participants to the Conversation on Green Plan 2030: Say YES to Waste Less and introduced the speakers: Ms Kwok Xiao Wei, Executive Manager, Public Engagement Group, National Environment Agency (NEA), Ms Yien Li Yap, Country Lead, OLIO, Ms Farah Sanwari, Co-founder, FiTree, Mr Heng Li Seng, CEO and founder, Green Nudge, and Mr Mohamed Azlan, Course Manager Maritime & Business Practice, ITE CC School of Business and Services.

## CONTEXT SETTING

2. Ms Kwok said that Singapore's Zero Waste Master Plan mapped out Singapore's key strategies to build a sustainable, resource-efficient and climate-resilient nation. She said that the master plan detailed three goals: (i) Extend Semakau Landfill's lifespan beyond 2035; (ii) Reduce waste sent to the landfill per capita per day by 30% by 2030; (iii) Achieve a 70% overall recycling rate by 2030. In addition, she shared that the master plan would include a circular economy approach to waste and resource management while shifting towards more sustainable production and consumption.
3. She said that NEA launched the “Say YES to Waste Less” (SYTWL) movement in 2019 to build public awareness of the impact of excessive consumption on Singapore's environment and future generations, along with the need for reduction. She shared that the campaign included actionable messages, including buying and ordering only the amount of food you can finish and bringing along a reusable bag, bottle and container whenever heading out. Overall, SYTWL's touchpoints with the public included raising awareness on actionable items, driving action and promoting advocacy in Singaporeans.

4. Ms Kwok said that they raised awareness digitally through: (i) advertisements on online platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Youtube; (ii) digital banners, (iii) content publisher collaborations and (iv) live selling. In addition, SYTWL raised awareness through other channels such as (i) out-of-home display panels, (ii) Wall hooks for engagement, (iii) Outreach programmes, (iv) Little Red Dot advertorials.
5. She also said that they drove action for SYTWL through (i) amplified messages through internal communications or partners, (ii) disseminated EDM, (iii) physical informative collaterals, (iv) GROs and CDC Partners -organised online campaigns and engagement events and (v) student participation in campaign activities.
6. Ms Kwok said that SYTWL promoted advocacy for their programme through events, challenges and promotions, as well as initiatives developed with NGOs or Social Enterprises.
7. Ms Kwok then said that the SYTWL campaign required the support of the Government, businesses, the public and NGOs for the campaign aims to be achieved. She urged the participants to make small changes to how they lived, worked and played to positively impact Singapore's progress towards becoming a zero waste nation.

## **POLL [Participants split into six breakout groups for a deep-dive discussion on each of the pillars]**

### **In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge stopping Singaporeans from achieving zero waste?**

8. Facilitators of each breakout room invited participants to answer a poll question: Which of the "Sustainable Living" topics do you think is most important to address? The topics voted across the breakout rooms were:
  1. Inconvenience / too lazy to carry reusables
  2. Promotions and sales entice me to buy more
  3. Nobody around me cares about waste
  4. Lack of incentive to use reusables (e.g. discounts)
  5. Others
    - i. Please see [Annex A](#) for poll results.
9. Facilitators then asked participants to explain their choice.

## **Which did you choose and why?**

### **Inconvenience / too lazy to carry reusables**

10. A participant said it was inconvenient to carry around reusable containers, which could be heavy. It was more convenient to use a single-use disposable container.
11. Participants shared that reusable bags were inconvenient as they had to be cleaned. In addition, they said that one bag would not be enough for more extensive grocery trips, and it was easy to forget to bring reusable bags when they were in a rush.
12. A participant said many were unaware of the importance of recycling and saw it as a hassle.
13. A participant said the lack of recycling bins near where they live made recycling inconvenient for Singaporeans.

### **Promotions and sales entice me to buy more**

14. A participant said Singaporeans would buy more things than they needed during sales and promotions.

### **Nobody around me cares about waste**

15. A participant said most youths did not think or care too much about waste reduction.

### **Lack of incentive to use reusables (e.g. discounts)**

16. A participant said Singaporeans were already using reusables, such as reusing plastic bags from supermarkets as garbage bags. However, there were not enough incentives to promote higher usage.

### **Other**

17. A participant said most people would stop thinking about what they threw out once it was out of their sight, so they did not think as much about waste management.
18. A participant said that Singaporeans would take plastic bags just because they were offered for free.

## **BREAKOUT DISCUSSION**

### **What are some actions you are taking to move towards a zero-waste lifestyle?**

19. Participants said they incorporated reusable items in their daily activities, such as recyclable bags, water bottles, takeaway containers and utensils, to reduce the use of single-use plastic.
20. Participants shared that they ordered food in amounts they could finish or shared their food with others in order to minimise food waste. At home, they would give extra food they prepared away. They also shared that actions to support sustainable food production companies consciously would help.
21. A participant said they bought second-hand items from Carousell, an online platform that facilitates peer to peer sales of items.

### **What prevents you from consuming/generating less waste?**

22. Participants said that ingrained bad habits, laziness and inconvenience discouraged them from consuming or generating less waste. They also said that some Singaporeans do not have a sustainability mindset and did not think that it was their responsibility to generate less waste.
23. A participant shared that they were not taught sustainable habits from young which has impacted how they manage waste today.
24. Participants said consumers often associated sustainable products with negative traits, such as having lower quality and being less aesthetically pleasing. They shared that some biodegradable bags were less durable than plastic bags, so they stuck with using single-use bags instead. They also said that some reusable items are more expensive than single-use items.
25. A participant said social barriers such as population growth paired with unsustainable consumption and production patterns among the wealthy could make waste management less achievable.

### **What more can be done, as a community and with partners, to achieve a zero-waste lifestyle?**

26. Participants suggested that one could build up sustainable habits by starting small, such as using reusable products instead of single-use ones. They also said that while they could not force others to care about sustainability, one could do their part by sharing advice and knowledge on sustainable habits with others in their social circles.
27. Participants suggested that businesses and organisations could incorporate incentives in using their products or services that contributed to sustainable living or disincentives for habits that generated more waste.
28. Participants suggested that educational programmes, such as community workshops and recycling drives, could encourage others to adopt more sustainable habits.

## **LARGE GROUP SHARE BACK**

29. A facilitator shared that the participants identified their greatest challenges as inconvenience, laziness, and lack of interest in managing excessive waste. These could be due to the lack of awareness of the SYTWL campaign. The group shared that they were already using reusable bags and cups. They suggested taking public transport more, incorporating benefits into its usage, and running workshops at sustainability-focused community centres.
30. A facilitator agreed that their group's main challenge was the inconvenience of adopting green habits, such as the unwillingness to carry reusable items such as Tupperware, which adds to the weight of their bags. The group also agreed that there was general apathy towards sustainable efforts and that most Singaporeans did not find the 3 Rs necessary. The group suggested using less single-use packaging and tissues, preparing meals in advance and opting for foldable food containers for a more lightweight reusable container option.
31. A facilitator said participants agreed that Singaporeans saw waste reduction as a hassle without acknowledging the impact they caused. The group shared that it was also inconvenient to find recycling bins within their vicinity. They suggested that to manage food waste, Singaporeans can order less or share food with their peers, and shoppers can choose products with less packaging or use fewer plastic bags.
32. A facilitator said that other than inconvenience and laziness, advertisements and promotions incentivised them to make unnecessary purchases. The group suggested planning grocery store visits to ensure they brought enough reusable bags. The group also suggested that schools hold workshops to educate students on the benefits of

reusable items to counter the convenience of disposable utensils and the negative impacts of wasteful consumption. The group also suggested providing more incentives for reusable items, an initiative Starbucks had implemented.

33. A facilitator said his group agreed on how often they forgot to bring out reusable bags for the next day after using them. They also said that reusable bags were not as trendy to carry around. They suggested that shops could charge customers for plastic bags, which was an initiative that some shops have already implemented.
34. A facilitator said his group agreed with the challenges of laziness and apathy towards waste reduction. The group shared that Singaporeans' *kiasu* trait led them to take more single-use plastic, such as free plastic bags provided, even if they did not need them. The group also agreed that the waste reduction messaging was not well-known in Singapore yet and that the Government did not share any development progress from the existing waste reduction efforts. The group suggested reducing paper wastage by using emails, digital data or social media for personal info instead.

## PANEL DIALOGUE

35. Ms Chew opened the panel dialogue by introducing the panellists: Ms Kwok Xiao Wei, Ms Yap Yien Li, Ms Farah Sanwari and Mr Heng Li Seng. Then, she invited participants to pose questions through Pigeonhole.

### **What sustainable behaviours can be observed in Singapore when it comes to the sharing economy, and how can individuals take steps to adopt those behaviours?**

36. Ms Yap said that the sharing economy, a subset of the circular economy, was built on sharing, swapping, trading or renting products or services. She said that while the National Library was an excellent example of a sharing economy, it was under-utilised by Singaporeans. She added that informal community libraries were also present in different neighbourhoods. She also said that Singaporeans already contributed to the sharing economy by using apps such as Grab or clothes rental and swapping companies. She said that Singaporeans could move towards a sharing economy if they looked for alternative sources for items they need and considered if they truly needed them. She said second-hand products could be considered if they were in decent shape, especially since used items were cheaper. She also recommended researching community resources in their vicinity.

### **How can one draw collective effort in reducing waste?**

37. Ms Sanwari said that first, there was a need for a theory of change so they could identify the ultimate impact Singapore was trying to achieve. This gives clarity to the efforts needed. Next, they should consider the motivation of different communities. For example, a community could be better motivated by cash savings rather than going green, and collective efforts can be based on that motivation. Lastly, there was a need to build partnerships and collaborations with pre-existing organisations to have people work together to resolve an issue.

### **As someone who is sharing about inculcating sustainable habits, what is one interesting thing or a challenge that you have encountered in your sustainable journey?**

38. Mr Heng said that even though he was five years into his sustainability efforts, his family members still did not have sustainable habits and their less-sustainable habits offset his own. He said it was hard to convince people around him to become more sustainable, but continued to do his part as his family members' habits changed over time. He pointed out that people around him had their own learning speed and invited those who were not convinced to switch to a sustainable lifestyle to understand more.

### **What are some possible green jobs youths can look forward to after they graduate, and what are some skills they need to get there?**

39. Ms Kwok said green jobs were created to capture green growth and support green activities, such as providing environmentally friendly goods or services. She cited sustainability managers and plant operations managers as examples of green jobs. She said that some of the skills required for green jobs were data analytics, chemical recycling and environmental engineering. She encouraged participants to learn new skill sets and knowledge after completing their studies.

### **It's hard to get my friends to start going green, like using takeaway containers. Any advice to get them to start?**

40. Ms Kwok said one could set an example with their actions first. She suggested bringing reusable containers when buying bread from bakeries. She also suggested bringing big silicone food-grade plastic bags or net bags for grocery shopping. She said price tags

could still be stuck onto their containers or bags for scanning and checking out. She also suggested personalising reusable bags to make them more attractive.

41. Ms Sanwari said it was less about convincing but more about making someone familiar and comfortable with using reusables. She shared an example of sharing reusables with friends to expose them to a sustainable lifestyle.
42. Ms Yap agreed with Ms Kwok and Ms Sanwari. She said that it was essential to set an example through one's actions, which could influence one's social circles to be sustainable together. She shared an example of bringing a reusable food container to the office for take-outs and her colleagues followed suit soon after. She said it was important to make green habits not seem like a big deal to help others adopt them.
43. Mr Heng said that continuing green habits over time was the best way to make others more receptive to them. He shared research which found that men did not take to green habits because it was seen as a feminine habit. He then shared that another study found that eco-conscious men were perceived as more attractive as mates, which could be another reason for people to pick up green habits.

#### **What motivated you to work in the sustainability sector?**

44. Mr Heng said he saw how quickly waste bins in the office filled up and overflowed during his previous job. He sympathised with the elderly cleaning lady and reflected on how to be more environmentally friendly and he naturally progressed towards a job in the sustainability sector. He said that any jobs that positively impact the environment or led individuals to consider being greener could be deemed green jobs.
45. Ms Sanwari shared that her project in NUS required her team to design a television which would only last for two years. She shared the concept of planned obsolescence, where products were designed with a short lifespan to encourage more purchases. She said that this concept was highly problematic, leading to her working in the Sustainable Living Lab. There, she promoted innovation with open-source tech and other solutions geared toward helping Singaporeans live sustainably.
46. Ms Yap shared that she was initially interested in sustainability as a hobby and worked with NGOs around Southeast Asia after her graduation. The shift for her was when she saw a lot of plastic, energy, water and food waste produced in the kitchen. She said that she started noticing the problems with food sustainability and delved into them.

## **How can companies be more sustainable?**

47. Ms Kwok said NEA had regulations in place to ensure sustainable practices. For example, a bottled water company with more than \$10 million in annual turnover had to submit their production and recycling plans as part of the mandatory packaging reporting regulation. She said that the Government could implement these regulations to make sustainability more mandatory for companies.
48. Ms Yap said OLIO, a food-sharing mobile app which connects companies or individuals with surplus food to those who want to consume it. encouraged companies like supermarkets and restaurants to adopt sustainable initiatives. She said that the sustainability team should be placed under the operations and finance department rather than marketing so that companies would be able to build public sustainability goals and actions into their daily operations rather than one-off events.
49. Ms Sanwari said public accountability would keep companies sustainable as well. She said that Singaporeans could research companies and find out if they were only carrying out sustainable activities for marketing or as a commitment. She also said that the public could take proactive measures to move society towards sustainability.
50. Mr Heng said that during job interviews, interviewees can ask about the company's sustainability efforts. He said that asking these questions in interviews would help companies realise that many Singaporeans care about sustainability and shift companies towards more action.

## **What can we say to someone who doesn't believe that wasting materials, et cetera, doesn't make a significant impact?**

51. Mr Heng said sometimes, all he could do was be polite and let it go, even though he felt that it was the wrong mindset and that he would continue doing his part.
52. Ms Kwok said she would encourage people who did not believe that individual actions matter to visit incineration plants or Semakau Landfill to understand the amount of waste Singapore could generate in a day and how little space they had left. She hoped the learning journey would impact them enough to drive them to action but also agreed with Mr Heng that sometimes we could not do much.
53. Ms Farah said she would be polite but would also consider if the person with this stance was influential in gauging those words' repercussions.

54. Ms Yap said she would show pictures of the impacts of wasteful habits for clearer messaging. She also advised against speaking harshly against influential people to avoid trouble.

**What is one piece of advice you would give to youngsters our age on the SYTWL topic?**

55. Ms Yap called for youths to stay curious to find out more about the SYTWL campaign.
56. Ms Kwok suggested making the environment a priority for themselves to remain mindful of their habits.
57. Ms Sanwari advised Singaporeans to be critical about environmental events and be kind to themselves when they could not put in the effort that translated to results quickly.
58. Mr Heng said Singaporeans had access to various infrastructures for wasting less but had poor mindsets. He also agreed with Ms Sanwari and added that it was important to remember that mistakes were allowed when leading a sustainable lifestyle, as long as one keeps going.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

59. Ms Chew invited Mr Azlan to give his closing remarks.
60. Mr Azlan thanked NYC on behalf of the ITE and thanked the panellists for the insights into the waste challenges Singapore faced. He also appreciated the panellists' sharing of zero-waste lifestyle tips for the participants.
61. As a call to action, Mr Azlan invited participants to challenge themselves and mobilise the ideas shared throughout the conversation.
62. Ms Chew closed the session by directing participants to NYC's placemaking platforms and grant resources.
- Youth Action Challenge – Ideate solutions that tackle issues you're concerned about through workshops and guidance from experienced industry professionals.
  - Youth Corps Leaders Programme - NEA Youth for Environmental Sustainability Edition – Initiate and lead environmental leads in the community.

# ANNEX A -

## POLL RESULTS

In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge stopping Singaporeans from achieving zero waste?

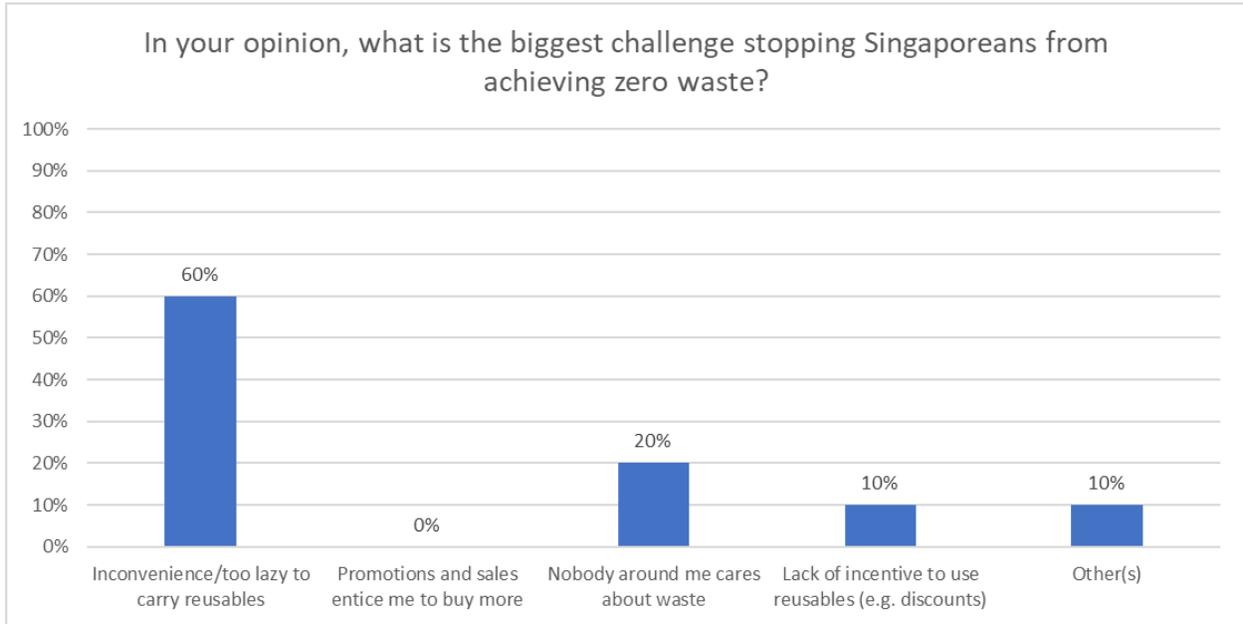


Figure 1 - Poll results from Group 1

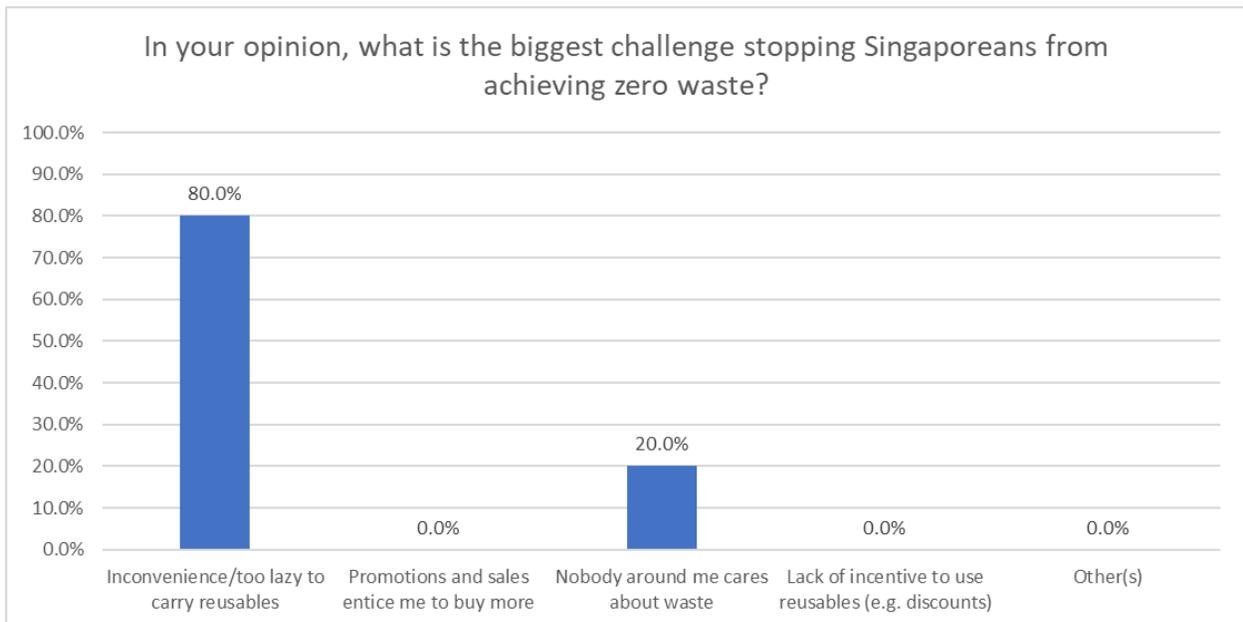


Figure 2 - Poll results from Group 2

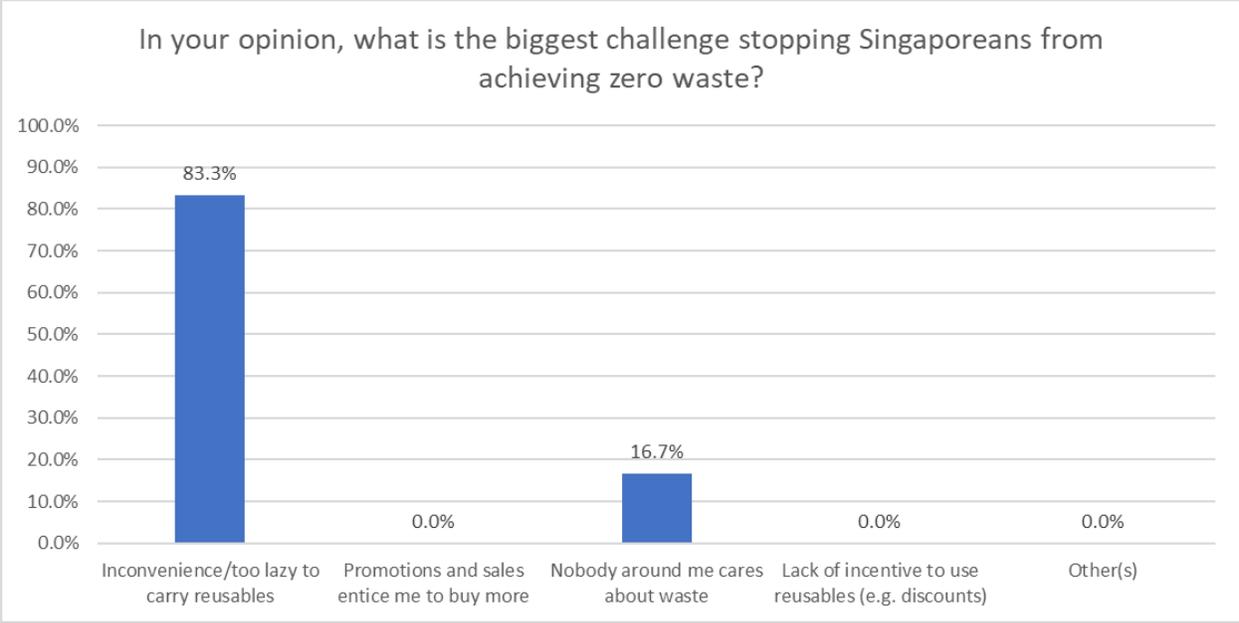


Figure 3 - Poll results from Group 3

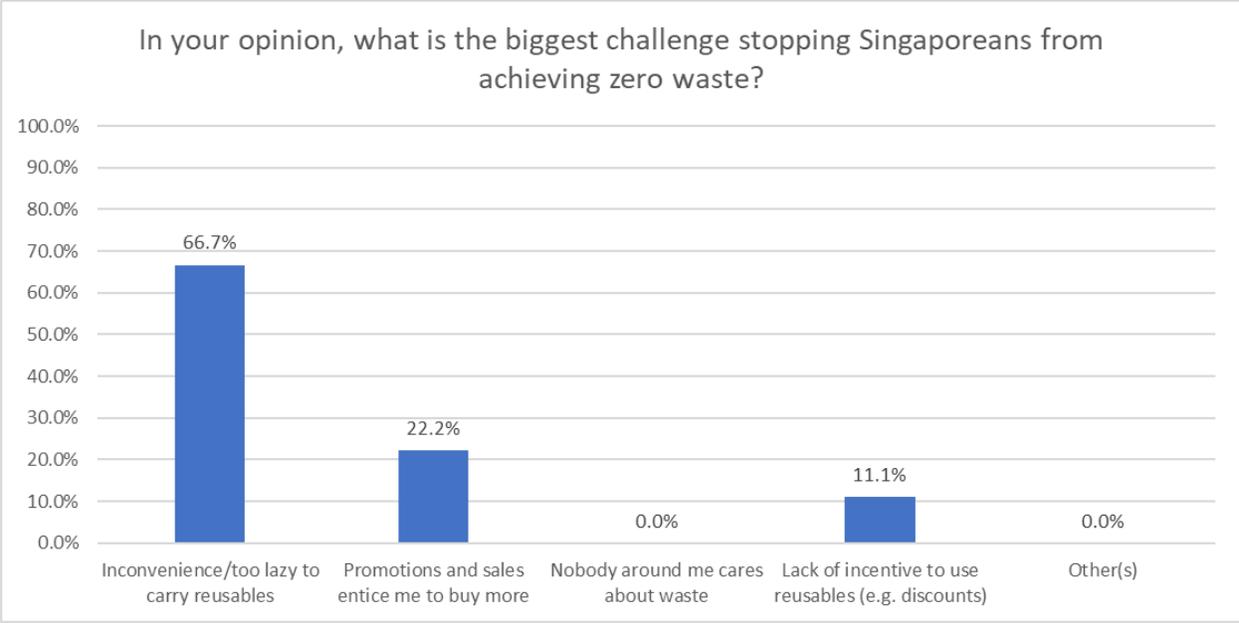


Figure 4 - Poll results from Group 4

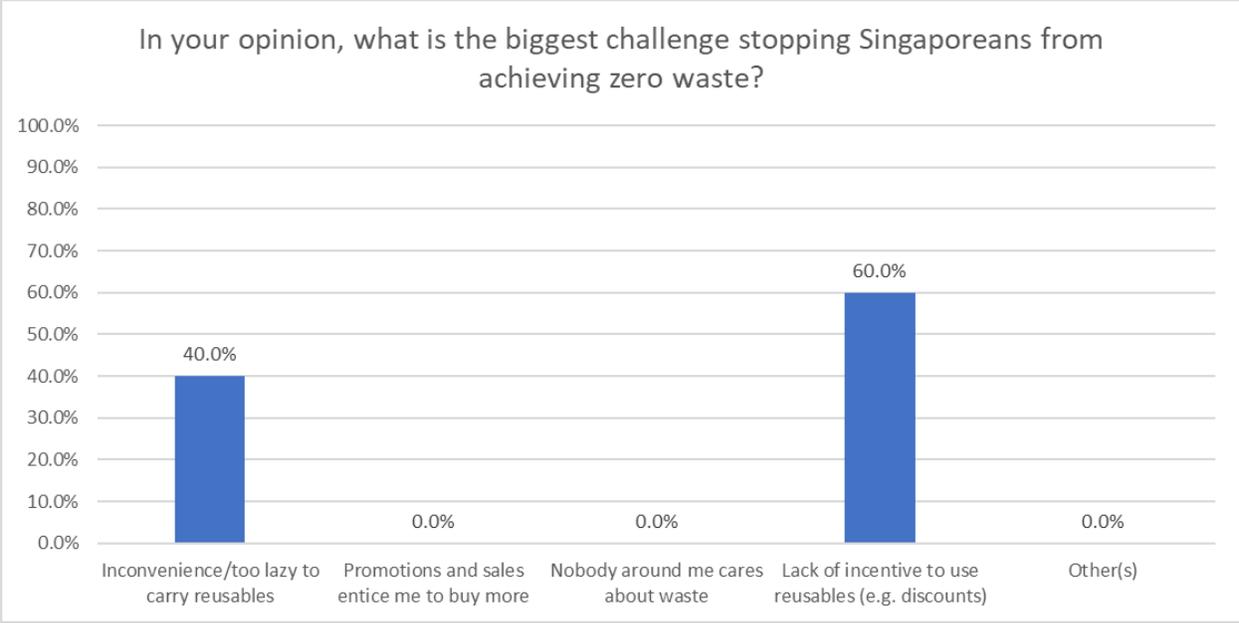


Figure 5 - Poll results from Group 5

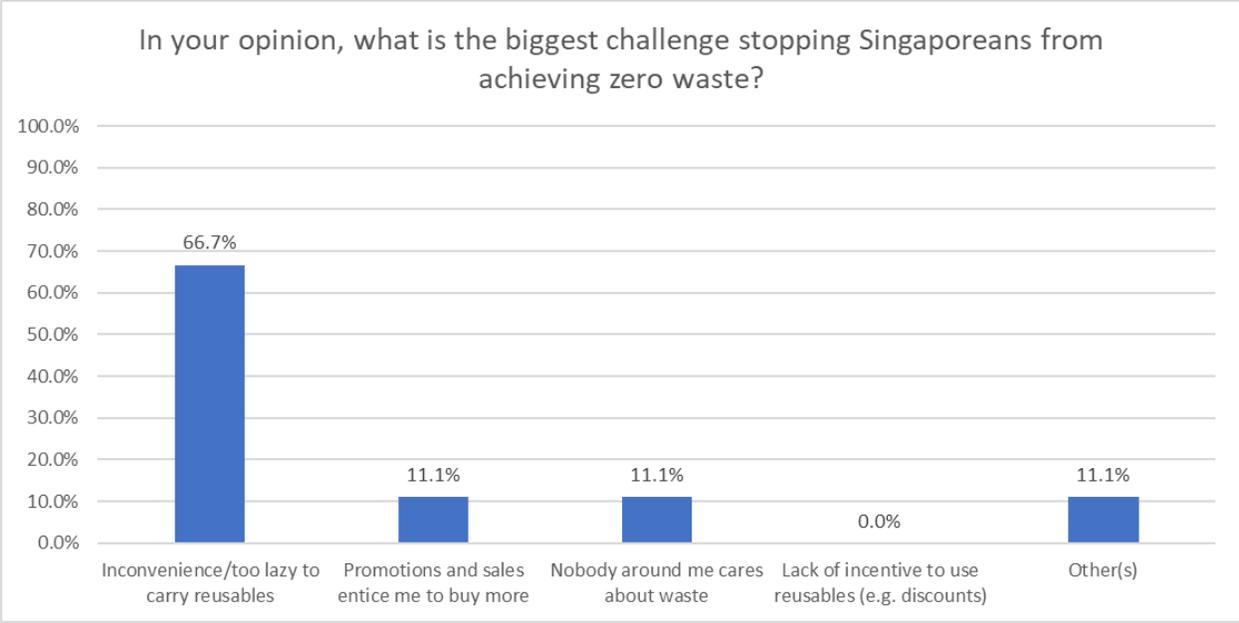


Figure 6 - Poll results from Group 6