**Chapter 3: HOW DO WE DECIDE WHAT IS GOOD FOR SOCIETY?**

**Challenges in deciding what is good for society.**

1. **Different needs and interests.**

* People have different needs and interests; this makes deciding what is good for society difficult.
* It is challenging to decide how much support to be given to different groups of people as society is very diverse with different needs and interests.

Example

* The government wants to improve transportation by building more MRT lines such as the Thomson-East Coastline.
* However, this may mean the destruction of the environment to build tunnels – leading to unhappiness among environmentalists.
* People’s homes and businesses may have to be demolished to construct the tunnels leading to unhappiness.
* The destruction of the environment may cause certain groups of people who care for the environment very unhappy.

Explanation

* **They may feel their interests are not being taken into consideration when the government is making decisions.**
* **This makes it very challenging to meet everyone’s needs and interests.**
* **Not everyone’s needs and interests can be met due to limited resources, and this can lead to tensions in society.**
* **There is a need to establish a common understanding so that decisions made can benefit society.**

1. **Different priorities.**

* People have different priorities depending on which stage in their life they are at.

Example

* Families with young children may want the government to allocate more resources to early childcare services.
* The elderly may want the government to subsidise healthcare more since they require more medical attention.
* Challenging to decide which needs and interests are to be addressed, as there are differing priorities among people and limited resources.

Explanation

* **Limited resources, such as land, are a challenge for Singapore as the government must make good decisions on allocating its limited resources so that the citizen’s needs are met.**
* **Poor prioritising of resources may lead to some citizens’ needs not being met and this may lead to unhappiness and tensions and loss of faith in the government.**
* **There is a need to establish a common understanding so that decisions made can benefit society.**

1. **Unequal sharing of costs.**

* Some decisions by the government may lead to different impacts on different people.
* Some groups take on more of the costs than others.

Example.

* To house the large number of foreign construction workers, the government builds dormitories.
* Most agree that having foreign construction workers is necessary for Singapore’s economy to be sustained however residents do not wish the dormitories built near their homes.
* This leads to the ‘Not in my backyard’ (NIMBY) syndrome -> Residents are worried about their safety and the value of their homes will be affected if dormitories are built near them.

Explanation

* As Singapore is land-scarce, it is challenging to meet the needs of different groups of people.
* Some groups will inevitably have to bear higher costs than others and this might lead to tensions.
* There is a need to convince citizens on the benefits and challenges of the decisions so that citizens can be more accepting of the government’s decisions.

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| **Good to know**  **What is a ‘trade-off’?**   * A trade off means deciding between two or more things that cannot be obtained at the same time due to limited resources because having more of one thing will result in having less of another. * Before deciding, the government will discuss and understand all the trade-offs involved and the compromises that it must make to make the decision so that the needs and interest of most people can be met. * By having a complete picture, the government can weigh and decide what is most beneficial from all these considerations; despite having conflicting demands.   Example – Integrated Resorts in Singapore.   * Government wanted to build casinos to boost tourism and the economy. * Citizens were worried it could lead to a rise in gambling addicts and have a negative effect on families. * To ease their worries - the government implemented safeguards such as Gambling support hotlines to help those in danger of becoming addicted. |

**Principles of good governance.**

1. **Good leadership**

* Good leaders are necessary to make good decisions for the benefit of the country.
* Leaders need to be hardworking, honest and have integrity and be able to make the right decisions instead of popular decisions.
* Leaders must not be swayed by monetary benefits and instead work towards meeting the needs of the citizens.

Example

* For example, Lim Kim San, the first chairman of HDB and Minister of National Development worked for 4 years without salary to oversee the construction of 26,000 HDB flats from 1960.
* His efforts helped to provide affordable housing for Singaporeans during a period when there was a lack of quality houses.

Explanation

* Good leadership helps to win the confidence and trust of the people and build faith with the government. It can lead to a harmonious and successful society.

1. **Anticipate change and stay relevant**

* Good leaders will be able to foresee future challenges and plan ahead for it.
* They need to be able to predict what are the future changes that will affect the country and make decisions now to prepare for it.
* They need to be innovative and modern in their thinking so that they can help the country stay relevant.

Example

* The government has identified that due to climate changes, sea levels may rise in the future.
* Hence the Singapore government set aside 5 billion dollars for the Coastal and Flood Protection fund to help the country meet the significant risks of rising sea level over the next 50 to 100 years.

Explanation

* Anticipating change and staying relevant will prepare the country better for the future as its able to identify potential problems, tap on new opportunities and make decisions that benefit Singapore’s progress.
* This leads to good governance, and it wins the trust and faith of the people leading to a harmonious society.

1. **A stake for everyone, opportunities for all.**

* It is important for citizens to have a say in the decision making of the country.
* The government has created more opportunities for citizens to share their views with the government and with each other.

Example

* The Singapore Together movement was a government initiative launched in 2019 which encouraged citizens to partner with the government and with each other to share their feelings and work together on areas they cared about.
* Based on the responses collected, themes that matter to citizens include a racially harmonious society, cultivating national identity and contributing to national defence.
* During the Covid pandemic, almost 17,000 Singaporeans shared their views on how Singapore could navigate the challenges of the pandemic and emerge stronger.
* Some of the ideas that emerged from these conversations were adopted by the government.

Explanation

* By providing a stake for everyone in the country, people will feel a greater sense of responsibility towards the progress of the country.
* By allowing people to voice their views and acknowledging their concerns, it helps to **develop a sense of belonging** to the people in the country. They will be more willing to be involved in working towards the good of society.

1. **Meritocracy**

* Meritocracy refers to a system that rewards hard work and effort.
* People are rewarded according to the effort they put in regardless of race, religion and family background. This encourages them work harder.

Example

* Students are offered Edusave scholarships/Good Progress awards based on their learning attitudes, performance, conduct, leadership and character.

Explanation

* This encourages everyone to do their best as everyone has an equal chance to succeed.
* This in turn benefits the country as citizens develop trust and faith in the government.
* The fair approach adopted by the government leads to people developing trust in the system which leads to a harmonious society.