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## From green solutions to empowering livelihoods: How S'pore firms are getting future-ready with purpose

Ghim Li Group and SP Group demonstrate how having a corporate purpose can help transform lives and communities, acting as a catalyst for sustainable growth and resilience



Guided by its corporate purpose, SP Group builds staff pride through corporate volunteerism, bringing smiles to the faces of seniors, youth and children. PHOTO: SP GROUP

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Understanding its potential to influence and empower the communities in which it operates has driven this Singapore apparel manufacturer to teach farmers' wives to sew.

Home-grown firm Ghim Li Group, which produces clothing for major USA retailers and department stores, has a presence in several countries, including Fiji, where it initiated a training programme as part of a broader goal to help workers move out of the poverty cycle and improve

the quality of life for their families.

Ms Felicia Gan, CEO of Ghim Li Group, says: “Our corporate purpose is about creating value, not just through our products but also through responsible and sustainable business practices, innovation, and a deep commitment to the communities we are a part of.”



Ghim Li Group started a social initiative in Fiji in 1995, working with farmers' wives to enhance their skills by teaching them sewing. PHOTO: GHIM LI GROUP

This is also why the firm is part of the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre’s (NVPC) Company of Good community, which seeks to partner, support and recognise businesses in Singapore as they make progress in their journey to do right, do good *and* do well – beginning with corporate purpose.

Singapore’s national grid operator, SP Group, is also dedicated to being a business for good and generating value for society. “Creating sustained impact in the community to uplift and improve lives is integral to our corporate strategy of empowering the future of energy. Being purpose-driven enables us to take a holistic and integrated approach to our business and community-building initiatives,” says Mr Stanley Huang, group CEO of SP Group.

For NVPC, corporate purpose can be carried out in five impact areas: People, Society, Governance, Environment and Economic.

Businesses in Singapore can be recognised at a national level under NVPC’s Company of Good Recognition System, for their commitment to adopting corporate purpose and creating impact in these five areas.



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Enhanced from previous Champions of Good editions, the new Recognition System is designed to be inclusive towards companies at varying stages of their purpose journey, acknowledging their growing impact in contributing to a better shared future for Singapore.

### Harnessing the power of people

On the people front, Ghim Li Group and SP Group go beyond merely providing jobs. They are committed to prioritising their employees, focusing on developing talent, and ensuring that each individual is connected to a meaningful purpose in his or her work.

This is certainly one of the reasons why Ghim Li Group has managed to grow from a collection of six sewing machines in 1977 to an Asia-wide manufacturer of textiles and apparel that supplies some of the biggest US retailers today.

With operations in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, Brunei, Fiji and Guatemala, the company has always taken the initiative to make a lasting change by upskilling its people. “It was all about continuous education and exposure,” says Ms Gan, talking about the Fijian training programme, which started in 1995. “To date, we still have some of these Fijian associates working with us.”

In addition, the company actively promotes volunteerism through inclusivity, allowing employees to take the lead in these activities so that they feel genuinely engaged. Ghim Li Group also does its part to nurture the next generation by providing student internships and collaborating with universities to foster local talent in design.





Responding to its employees' affinity for environmental matters, Ghim Li frequently organises tree-planting activities to engage its staff. PHOTO: GHIM LI GROUP

Putting people at its core is also central to how the SP Group runs. “At the heart of our purpose-driven business are our 3,700 employees,” says Mr Huang. “They uphold our values and priorities in safety, reliability and sustainability, while being multipliers of good in the community.”

Staff enjoy a comprehensive workplace health and wellness programme, as well as continuous training and development to deepen their core competencies. They also get many opportunities to engage in volunteerism through the SP Group’s comprehensive network of funding and programmes that benefit the vulnerable in the community – from children to youths and seniors.

“In 2022, our corporate social responsibility contributions totalled around \$5 million in donations, sponsorships and volunteer manpower,” says Mr Huang.





Staff engage with members of the Youth Guidance Outreach Services at the world's largest underground district cooling network at Marina Bay, a key sustainable energy solution engineered by SP Group. PHOTO: SP GROUP

## Integrating sustainability across its operations

Enhancing sustainability is also crucial for purpose-driven companies. Putting green practices into place is not just a way of reacting to growing consumer awareness and demand, it also benefits businesses by driving innovation, increasing cost savings and reducing waste.

As a manufacturer of apparel, Ghim Li Group is more than aware of the impact that the fashion industry has on the environment, which is why sustainability is embedded into its core purpose.

Its approach is centred on developing eco-friendly products while continuously educating and encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable products and incorporate environmental responsibility into their personal lives. Constant innovation is a must, something it drives by engaging in joint research and development projects with academic institutions and start-ups.

“We have a dedicated green team of more than 30 members and growing,” says Ms Gan, of a journey that started in 2016 when they became one of the pilot vendors of a major USA retailer’s green initiative that encourages companies to cut emissions in the US. “We attained gold status in 2018, and that is being consistently maintained today.”



As part of its sustainability efforts, Ghim Li Group has installed a reverse osmosis plant at its fabric mill to recycle 30 per cent of its wastewater discharge. PHOTO: GHIM LI GROUP

As a leading utilities group in Asia Pacific, SP Group is forging the way ahead by providing low-carbon, smart energy solutions for both business districts and residential townships. “We aim to strengthen the resilience, reliability and sustainability of our energy networks, building on network capabilities,” says Mr Huang, of the company’s determination to incorporate more renewable energy sources into the grid.

This is seen in SP Group’s efforts as it works to install rooftop solar panels at 37 electricity stations by 2025, while operating the largest and fastest electric vehicle network in Singapore and maintaining its position as Southeast Asia’s largest underground district cooling operator, a viable and proven solution that saves energy and reduces carbon emissions.

The company has also developed a suite of green digital solutions for building owners that integrate different systems and diverse data sources to create a seamless, sustainable utility management experience that works to reduce wastage and lower electricity consumption.

“A multitude of opportunities lie in the evolving energy landscape,” added Mr Huang. “Being purpose-driven helps to rally and unite different stakeholders in decision-making, enabling businesses to make meaningful and sustainable contributions to the society, while enhancing the overall resilience and sustainability of the company.”

By integrating purpose into their strategies, companies such as Ghim Li Group and SP Group not only drive innovation but also significantly bolster environmental stewardship and community welfare. This approach fosters a virtuous cycle, enhancing the future for businesses, society, and the planet – proving that doing good is good for everyone.

Find out how your organisation can be recognised at the national level as a Company of Good.

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