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SINGAPORE - Singaporeans are seen as a dependent lot by some academics who want them to cut their apron strings from the Government and take charge of issues of concern to them.

This dependency attitude, however, can be traced to the Government's success in doing so much for the people that it has bred the mindset that the Government "takes care of me from cradle to grave", they said.

But today's world is so complex that the Government can no longer do it alone, said Singapore Management University (SMU) psychology professor David Chan on Friday at a conference on Singapore's future.

The man in the street needs to step up and stop relying on the Government to do everything, he added.

Also, if more people step forward to help tackle the nation's challenges, Singapore will be better able to withstand any shock or disaster that come its way, noted SMU president Arnoud De Meyer.

The two men were speaking at a panel discussion on national resilience at the conference, which is organised by the SMU Behavioural Sciences Institute.

The conference also looked at how health and education trends could affect social cohesion, as well as how social media and volunteerism might change society.

Prof Chan, who heads the institute, also said involving more citizens in national problem-solving is one way society can become more resilient and better prepared for crises and shocks.

But some Singaporeans, he noted, feel national issues are not their problem and are content to leave the Government to resolve these.

"The danger of complacency is that if we who are not in Government do not stand up, the day will come when the Government fails... and I worry that our people will not step up then," said Prof Chan.

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Senior Minister of State Heng Chee How, who was among the 300 academics, students and policymakers at the conference, agreed that individuals could take greater ownership of issues of concern to them.

Speaking during the question and answer session, he urged people to find ways to change things on their own instead of shifting the responsibility to the authorities.

Singapore could also become more resilient if society respected diversity more, said Prof De Meyer.

"The more we can use these different approaches and ideas to build solutions to complex problems, the better off we are," he added.

But Prof Chan felt Singaporeans are not at that stage yet, saying they are not quite "one united people" right now because different groups have different core values.

Some groups, for instance, do not accept that the maintenance of social harmony should be a common social norm if they think their fundamental values are being encroached on, he said.

Over time, some of these core values can translate into deep-seated differences, he added.

But Ambassadors-at-Large Tommy Koh and Chan Heng Chee said it was too extreme to conclude Singaporeans were not one united people.

Unity did not mean everyone should share the same opinion, they argued.

"Singapore is one nation, one people, but with different points of view. We're a very plural society, but that does not subtract from the fact that we are one people," Prof Koh said.

Agreeing, Prof Chan Heng Chee said it was dangerous to think that being one people meant thinking of solutions in only one way.

"There are different roads to the same destination and we must embrace diversity," she added.