

*By John Mugisha;*

- *African officials will get priority for Singapore-conducted training that will cover emerging issues such as climate change, sustainability and digitalisation.*

This is part of a new three-year Singapore-Africa Partnership Package unveiled by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on Monday, June 27 in Kigali.

Mr Lee was speaking in Kigali during a joint press conference with Rwandan President Paul Kagame. Both leaders had attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).



African nations make up 19 of the 54-nation group of mostly former British colonies. On Saturday, the last day of the summit, the Commonwealth admitted west African states Gabon and Togo.

Mr Lee said on Monday that he is glad that the summit gave him the opportunity to meet his African counterparts face-to-face, and to exchange views and perspectives with each other.

He acknowledged that the Commonwealth does not have a lot of resources available for official group cooperation, but pointed out that member states still work informally together.

“With that branding, we are both Commonwealth countries, there is a certain, I would not go on to say shared values, but certain commonality in a broad approach and mindset, which means if I work together with you, I think it is likely to go somewhere. That is very valuable,” he said.

While Mr Lee is on his first official visit to Africa, he recounted how Singapore’s founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew first visited the continent more than 50 years ago.

“Even now, some of the African leaders I met at CHOGM still recall his visit to their countries. And I am grateful for this reservoir of goodwill in Africa towards Singapore,” he said.

Mr Lee said Singapore is encouraging its people and businesses to venture into new

markets in Africa.

“We are also happy to share our experience in economic development, human resource development and capacity building with others,” he said.

This is why the Singapore Cooperation Programme (SCP) was launched in 1992, Mr Lee said. The programme offers training courses on topics like public health, trade and economy, as well as leadership and governance.

“On this 30th anniversary of the SCP, I am happy to announce a three-year Singapore-Africa Partnership Package,” Mr Lee said.

“We will customise courses in priority areas for Africa. These will cover emerging issues such as on climate change and sustainability, and digitalisation and smart cities.”

African officials will also get “priority placement” in SCP courses, while senior African officials will be offered postgraduate scholarships in Singapore universities, he continued.

“Rwandan officials have actively participated in SCP courses over the years,” he added, noting that more than 12,000 African officials, including many from Rwanda, have attended the “well-received” SCP courses to date.

“And we look forward to Rwanda’s and Africa’s continued participation in the SCP.”

Mr Kagame in his speech thanked Singapore for being a “valuable partner” over the years, saying that the countries will be doing even more together in the years ahead.

“Singapore’s development model and its commitment to social cohesion and national unity are very impressive,” he added.

Singapore is Rwanda’s largest trading partner, with about US\$150 million (S\$208 million) worth of foreign direct investments made by Singapore companies in Rwanda.

In August 2021, the two countries also signed a memorandum of understanding on digital economy cooperation.