

A First Sustainable Development Strategy for Hong Kong



可持續發展
Sustainable Development

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Preface



To most people in Hong Kong, sustainable development is an unfamiliar concept. We have long enjoyed the material rewards of economic growth, and in recent years we have grown more sensitive to the need for better protection of our natural environment. But we are only just beginning to consider how best to balance continued economic development with care for our natural surroundings and to understand how both these considerations affect the quality of life in our city. The debate on Hong Kong's sustainable development has started.

When the former Chief Executive first brought the issue of sustainable development to the forefront of government policy in his 1999 Policy Address, he emphasised that: "Every citizen, every business, every government department and bureau needs to start working in partnership" to achieve sustainable development for Hong Kong.

The Council for Sustainable Development has spent much of the past year working in partnership with various sectors of society to identify issues that will have an impact on our sustainability in three pilot areas: solid waste management, renewable energy and urban living space. Following a five-month process of stakeholder engagement, the Council has reported to me on its findings and recommendations. It is now up to the Government to act.

In the following pages we set out a strategic direction for Hong Kong's sustainable development in the three pilot areas. This document marks the beginning of a new process of identifying long-term policy solutions in areas that will influence our sustainability. I encourage you to read this document, to share it with your family, friends and colleagues, and to give us your views, so that we can all work in partnership towards making Hong Kong a sustainable society.

Hon. Donald Tsang Yam-kuen

Acting Chief Executive

Approaching a First Sustainable Development Strategy for Hong Kong

There is no single prescribed formula for presenting a sustainable development (SD) strategy. Many cities and countries have produced such strategies, and these vary in format and in content, reflecting the concerns and priorities of their respective societies. In presenting Hong Kong's first SD Strategy, our intention is to articulate some of the challenges that we face in ensuring the sustainability of our city, and to set out an appropriate response to these challenges.

2. Although there is no standard blueprint for an SD strategy, guidance is available from United Nations documents and from publications on best practice in this area by relevant international organisations¹. Some of the key elements for an SD strategy that emerge from these sources are –

- The need for an **overall strategic vision**, which describes the long-term aspirations for a society
- **Strategic objectives** for each of the major issues covered that describe the relevant aspects of each issue and define measurable targets
- **Targets** that match specific and measurable objectives to be achieved by a certain time
- **Action plans**, detailing how new policies or programmes could contribute to meeting the specific targets and objectives set out in the strategy, with the aim of achieving the overall vision.

3. Further points that are raised in international guidance are that an SD strategy should reflect local values, should take account of the outcomes of a wide-ranging process of stakeholder engagement and should promote ownership and commitment within the community.

Stakeholder Engagement

4. In December 2003, the Council for Sustainable Development (Council for SD) began work on a five-stage engagement process that was intended to lead to the formulation of a first SD strategy for Hong Kong. The process consisted of the following steps –

- I. Identifying initial "plot areas" relevant to Hong Kong's long-term sustainability:** the Council identified the three areas of: Solid Waste Management, Renewable Energy and Urban Living Space in December 2003.

¹ For example, "Sustainable Development Strategies: A Resource Book" OECD and UNDP, Earthscan: London/Sterling VA (2002)



Students making their wishes for a sustainable Hong Kong

- II. Preparing a document to invite public responses:** in February 2004, the Council for SD established three support groups, comprising stakeholders from various sectors, including government officials, to help prepare a document that would provide information and invite responses to key questions relevant to sustainable development in the pilot areas.
 - III. Directly involving the wider community:** the Council issued the “Invitation and Response” document: *Sustainable Development—Making Choices for Our Future* in July 2004 to launch a campaign of community involvement through public forums, workshops and other channels, culminating in the SD Strategy Summit in December 2004.
 - IV. Reporting on the response from the community and putting forward recommendations:** in February 2005 the Council for SD endorsed a report on the engagement process, including recommendations to the Government on the way forward for a strategic approach to the three pilot areas.
 - V. Government action:** the publication of this document is both the final step in the engagement process and a first attempt by the Government to outline an SD Strategy based on the outcomes of a campaign of stakeholder involvement.
- 5.** We recognise that both the engagement process designed by the Council for SD and this document itself will require further review and improvement as we gain more experience and better insight into how to establish mechanisms for promoting sustainable development in Hong Kong. With the advice of the Council – as well as other stakeholder groups – we aim to facilitate improvements to the strategy-building process at all levels.

The SD Strategy Document

- 6.** In preparing this document, we have taken full consideration of the advice of the Council for SD, as set out in its report on the engagement process: *Making Choices for Our Future*. The Council’s report took account of feedback from over 1,400 people who took part in public engagement events, as well as nearly 2,000 written submissions in various forms – many of which were from organisations that themselves represent large groups of stakeholders.

7. In considering how to respond to the Council's advice, we have tried as far as possible to meet the expectations of the stakeholders whose advice and commitment are captured in the report on the engagement process. Nonetheless, in some areas, it has been necessary to take a more prudent approach to what can realistically be achieved in the pilot areas, particularly in setting out short-term plans of action. As pointed out towards the end of this document, the SD Strategy is not the final word on the issues discussed here, and we will regularly review the implementation of the various initiatives described below to ensure that we are on track for sustainable outcomes.



A series of regional workshops in October and November 2004

8. In drafting this document, we have attempted to set out a logical sequence of objectives, targets and action plans for each of the pilot areas, consistent with the overall vision developed by the Council for SD. The document represents a first step in working towards achieving the overall strategic vision for Hong Kong's sustainability, which the Council has couched in the following terms -

“Our vision is for Hong Kong to be a healthy, economically vibrant and just society that respects the natural environment and values its cultural heritage. By engaging the community in the process of building a strategy for sustainable development, we aim to ensure that Hong Kong will be a city for all to share and enjoy, for this and future generations.”

Challenges for Hong Kong's Sustainable Development

1) Solid Waste Management: A Community Effort for Sustainability

9. Achieving long-term sustainable solutions in the area of solid waste management will require the entire community to help us meet the challenges that we now face. One of the most pressing of these challenges is the likely exhaustion of existing landfill space in Hong Kong within the next 6 to 10 years. Continuing to dispose of large volumes of solid waste in landfills in our countryside is simply not a sustainable practice.

10. As a society that places a high value on acquiring newly fashionable and attractive consumer goods, we have become used to making frequent purchases and disposing casually of old or surplus items and packaging. On average, each person in Hong Kong disposed of about 1.36 kg of municipal solid waste each day in 2004, which is enough to fill more than three Olympic-sized swimming pools with waste daily (See Figure 1). As such, a continuing challenge for all of us is to change our mindset and to focus on how to avoid creating "unnecessary" waste. This can be done through making choices about what we really need, about how we might maximise the use of items, and about how to make available for recycling things that we no longer need.

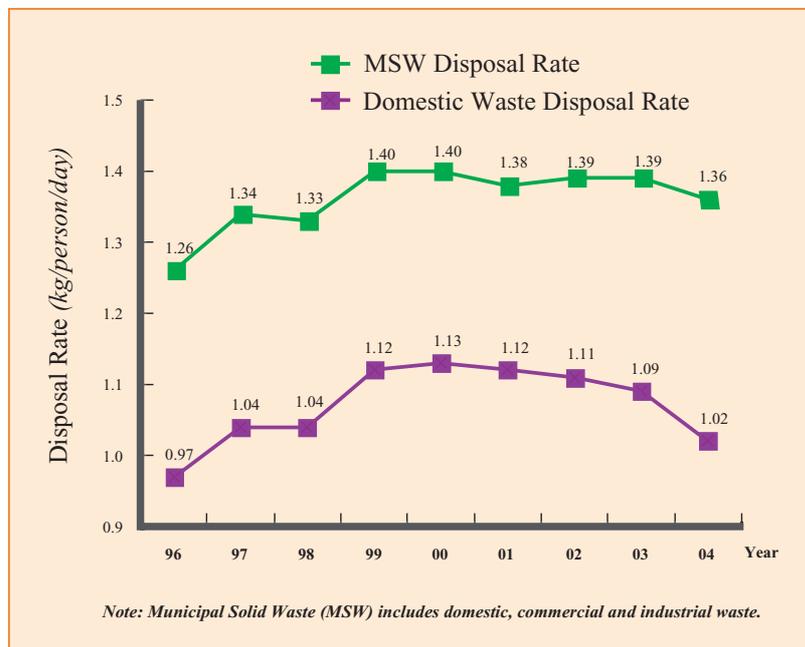


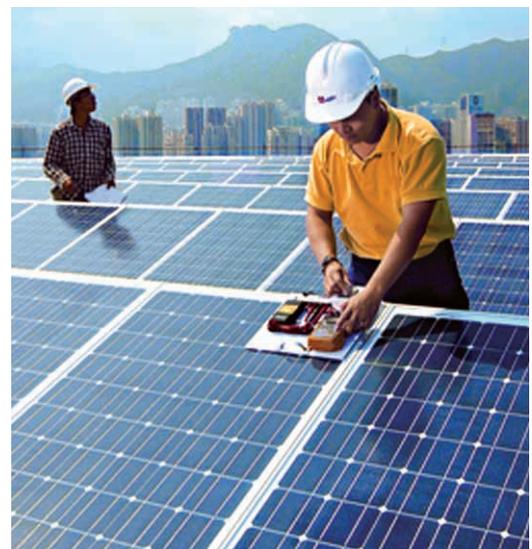
Figure 1 Change in per capita generation of MSW and domestic waste from 1996 to 2004.

11. The Government recognises its responsibility to facilitate waste avoidance, reduction, re-use and recycling of materials, and effective waste treatment. The following section of this document outlines our proposals for action towards sustainable solid waste management. However, whilst the Government can take the initial steps in many areas – and can set a good example through its own practices – it is essential that the wider community also plays its part if we are to be able to achieve the objectives and targets set out in this strategy document.

2) Renewable Energy: Acting Locally on a Global Issue

12. A reliable, safe and efficient electricity supply is vital if we are to meet our social and economic needs. The local power companies have historically been able to provide safe and reasonably priced electricity generated from burning fossil fuels. However, globally, over-reliance on burning such fuels to produce electricity is widely believed to be a factor in climate change. There is a further concern that supplies of oil, gas and coal are being rapidly depleted, and are becoming more difficult to extract, making them more expensive as energy sources.

13. Hong Kong’s direct contribution to climate change through power generation from fossil fuel is insignificant in global terms. Even within the city, emissions from our power stations have a limited impact on local air quality. Nonetheless, we have a responsibility to act to reduce the overall burden on the planet of our consumption of non-renewable energy resources. Socially, economically and environmentally, the world’s reliance on burning fossil fuel for purposes such as power generation will have long-term implications, and we must consider what we can do to help promote sustainable practices that will provide a viable environment for future generations.



Renewable Energy installations

14. Renewable energy (RE), in the form of wind, solar, waste-to-energy, thermal and hydroelectric power, offers proven alternatives to the burning of fossil fuels. The challenge for Hong Kong is to see whether we can find a way to obtain regular and cost-effective electricity from renewable sources for supply to consumers – especially given that current RE technologies, for example, wind turbine installations, tend to be land-intensive, and that we have few sites suitable for locating large scale facilities locally. As there are limits to how much we can do within the boundaries of Hong Kong itself, we have to set ourselves realistic objectives and targets for deriving some of our electricity from RE sources, and consider other practices that will lead to a more sustainable and

efficient use of energy. With this effort, we will be able to make a contribution that will have an effect, however small, on sustainable development both locally and globally.

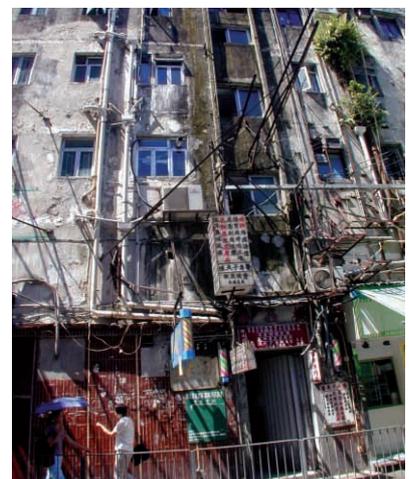
3) Urban Living Space: Creating a Sustainable Built Environment

15. Creating a sustainable urban living environment involves a range of challenges. In seeking to improve the quality of life for people in Hong Kong, we need to consider how best to plan and to build so as to make our built environment attractive. We must also consider how best to maintain and enhance economic opportunities, whilst conserving a healthy and diverse natural environment and facilitating social and cultural development. The vision of the Council for Sustainable Development is for Hong Kong to be a city: “for all to share and enjoy, for this and future generations.” To realise this vision, we will have to balance and integrate social, economic and environmental factors carefully when deciding how best to accommodate our further growth.

16. Hong Kong cannot stand still. In the medium term, our population will very likely continue to grow. We will need to plan for further economic development, and Hong Kong people will have higher expectations in terms of the comfort and attractiveness of their living environment. We are already engaged in a long-term SAR-wide strategic planning exercise in the context of the “Hong Kong 2030: Planning Vision and Strategy” (“HK 2030”) study, which is looking at broad land-use scenarios with a firm emphasis on planning for sustainability. In the context of this sustainable development strategy document, the focus is on the specific challenges we face in creating sustainable living space in a densely populated city that is nonetheless rich in biodiversity and socio-cultural heritage.

17. One of the major challenges we face is how to deal with older, often dilapidated neighbourhoods in such a way as to upgrade the urban living environment with due regard to existing social networks, and yet provide financially viable solutions. We also have to consider how to optimise the economic value of our scarce land resources for commercial and residential development whilst ensuring that we do not create an urban landscape that alienates citizens.

18. A related issue is the question of the overall look of our city, in terms of issues such as building design, building heights – particularly where these affect views of the harbour or the surrounding hills – and the provision of more pedestrian-oriented and green spaces for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike.



An old urban neighbourhood

Strategic Objectives and Targets

1) Solid Waste Management

Strategic Objectives

19. The Government shares the vision developed by the Council for Sustainable Development on sustainable waste management. To achieve this, we need to define clear and socially acceptable objectives that will contribute to conserving our natural environment, providing business and employment opportunities and encouraging a collective, community-based approach. With this in mind, we have identified the following strategic objectives in this area –

1. As a community, to make every effort to avoid generating waste and to reduce the amount of solid waste that needs final disposal, by adopting measures to facilitate the separation of discarded material, the recovery and reuse of material and the recycling of non-reusable material.
2. To apply the “user pays” principle as a means of reducing volumes of waste for disposal.
3. To adopt advanced technologies and practices to treat waste requiring final disposal and to create new economic opportunities.

Targets

20. The objectives set out above represent the strategic aims of a sustainable solid waste management policy. To help us move towards the achievement of these aims, it is important to have a comprehensive plan that sets out targets and action steps to achieve sustainable development in this area. In the near future, we will publish a White Paper to set out the strategy for the management of municipal solid waste. In the meantime, we will review the targets recommended by the Council for Sustainable Development (SD) in its report: *Making Choices for Our Future*, namely –

1. To reduce the amount of municipal solid waste generated in Hong Kong by 1% per annum up to the year 2014, based on 2003 levels.
2. To increase the recovery rate of municipal solid waste to 45% by 2009 and 50% by 2014.
3. To reduce the total municipal solid waste disposed of in landfills to less than 25% by 2014.

2) Renewable Energy

Strategic Objectives

21. In order to promote greater use of energy from renewable sources in Hong Kong, we need to establish an overall direction that will have regard to local social, economic and environmental conditions. We recognise that the issue of how to use RE is a new one to many people in Hong Kong, and that appropriate education and information sharing should be a key component of any strategy for a more sustainable energy policy. Accordingly, taking account of the report from the Council for Sustainable Development, we have drawn up the following strategic objectives in this area –

1. To explain clearly the issue of RE to the wider community, putting this in the context of local and global sustainable development, by organising regular promotional and educational campaigns.
2. To have an energy policy that is sustainable in the longer term, and that will set clear goals for the increased use of RE in Hong Kong and promote energy efficiency and conservation.
3. To increase and sustain conservation of energy in order to reduce the growing trend of energy use.

Targets

22. The strategic objectives in this area paint a broad picture of the route that we propose to take in establishing sustainable development in the field of RE and energy consumption generally. To help us move towards these objectives, and to provide a baseline against which future progress may be measured, we have drawn up the following specific targets –

1. To organise more public education programmes on RE and sustainable energy consumption that links these issues to local and global sustainable development.
2. To aim to have between 1 and 2% of Hong Kong's total electricity supply met by power generated from renewable sources by the year 2012, with this target being subject to regular review in the light of advances in technological solutions and emerging sustainability considerations.
3. To develop plans to promote energy efficiency and conservation as part of a sustainable energy policy.

3) Urban Living Space

Strategic Objectives

23. Unlike the areas of solid waste management and renewable energy, which lend themselves to clear objectives, quantifiable targets and clearly definable courses of action, the subject of urban living space is more difficult to link to specific measurable outcomes. Nonetheless, the Council for Sustainable Development, through the process of public

engagement, has identified in its report to the Government a number of areas of concern that might be usefully addressed in the context of this strategy document, with a view to setting out broad goals for achieving a sustainable urban living environment. With these in mind, we set out the following objectives –

1. To speed up improvements to the environment of older urban areas through a “people-oriented” approach and the flexible deployment of the “4R” strategy – redevelopment, rehabilitation, preservation and revitalisation.
2. To plan and further develop the New Territories, taking account of stakeholder concerns on sustainability issues such as the need to protect the natural environment and cultural characteristics of rural areas, while having regard to Hong Kong’s long-term socio-economic needs.
3. To promote sustainable urban planning and design practices that will ensure that Hong Kong will be an attractive and enjoyable place in which to live and work.

Targets

24. In considering potential targets that would help to achieve the strategic objectives in this area, we have thought about where existing planning guidelines and building practices could be improved in the near future. Given that most of Hong Kong’s commercial and residential development is driven by market forces, it would not be appropriate to set arbitrary numerical targets in relation to our future urban environment. However, we can identify the following as broad targets that would help Hong Kong move towards the strategic objectives –

1. To regenerate older urban districts by taking full account of the need for economic viability whilst emphasising the importance of open space provision and retaining local socio-cultural characteristics and heritage buildings.
2. To clarify the relative social, economic and environmental considerations that would need to be addressed in further developing the New Territories, so that stakeholders can regularly give informed views on the merits of development options.
3. To maintain and to review on a regular basis guidelines governing sustainable urban planning and design, with special regard to issues such as buildings affecting view corridors or restricting air flow and the need to proceed in a manner consistent with the overall sustainable development strategy for Hong Kong.

Plan of Action – Fifteen Key Initiatives

25. Meeting the targets in the three Pilot Areas will require a concerted effort on the part of the Government, business organisations and the general public. For its part, the Government has defined the following specific measures that may be taken to help achieve the strategic targets, as briefly outlined in the following plan of action.

Towards Sustainable Solid Waste Management

1. To embark on educational programmes to reduce waste generation.
2. To introduce community programmes to encourage territory-wide separation of waste at source and introduce measures to facilitate household participation.
3. To step up implementation of the polluter-pays principle through the introduction of fiscal measures such as product responsibility schemes and green tax.
4. To develop a policy to promote the recycling industry.
5. To establish an EcoPark exclusively for the environmental industry.
6. To examine the introduction of charges for municipal solid waste.
7. To consult the public on the introduction of advanced technologies for the bulk treatment of solid waste.

Towards the Sustainable Use of Energy

8. To work with the power companies and other stakeholders to organise more education campaigns on RE.
9. To establish by 2006 a policy on the installation of RE facilities as part of new government buildings and major public sector projects.
10. To work with the power companies on arrangements for simplifying procedures for RE suppliers to gain access to the existing electricity grid, with the aim of having appropriate procedures in place in the post 2008 electricity market, and to encourage them to use RE sources for power generation.
11. To draw up by 2007 a sustainable energy policy that has regard to measures aimed at promoting the use of RE and encouraging energy efficiency and conservation.

Towards Sustainable Urban Living Space

12. To consult stakeholders on guidelines for revitalisation and redevelopment of older urban areas for inclusion in the Urban Renewal Strategy by 2006, and to publicise the document widely.

- 13.** In the context of the "HK 2030" study, to explain clearly the sustainability implications for further development of the New Territories, with a view to having a framework for sustainable detailed planning through stakeholder consultation in place by 2006.
- 14.** To continue to implement and keep under review the current guidelines on sustainable urban design.
- 15.** Having regard to the effectiveness of measures to promote sustainable building design features, to consider further enhancing sustainable building design guidelines, with a view to drawing up recommendations for improvement, including an assessment of the implications of setting mandatory requirements in this area by 2007.

Conclusions and the Way Forward

26. Sustainable development is an idea that encompasses a wide range of human activity and requires us to look to a future that may be difficult to imagine in concrete terms. This document represents a tentative first step in the direction of a strategy for Hong Kong's long-term sustainability. We still have much work to do in building a platform for community-wide understanding of sustainable development and forging a collective will to achieve this. But we have made a start.

27. The objectives, targets and initiatives set out above derive from the advice of the Council for Sustainable Development, as set out in its report to the Government: *Making Choices for Our Future*. We believe that the engagement process through which the Council arrived at its findings and recommendations – and of which this document is the concluding stage – represents a valid method of involving stakeholders in the community in contributing to long-term policy-making. This type of "bottom-up" engagement is itself an essential element of planning for sustainable development, and we will continue to give the Council our support as it looks to improve the process.

28. The Government is not the sole agent responsible for Hong Kong's sustainability. Without efforts from people in the community, whether as members of sectoral bodies or individually, no strategy will be effective in taking us towards sustainable development. The Council will continue to include stakeholders in the discussion of how to set the course for sustainable policies and practices in key areas of our lives. It is important however that stakeholders play their part in helping to realise the goals that emerge from the engagement process.



Youth Forum organized in partnership with the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups

29. This document represents only a small milestone on Hong Kong's path towards sustainability. It should not be seen as the final word on the issues discussed here - on the contrary, this should be "living" document, subject to review, and if necessary, modification in the coming years. With the benefit of future generations in mind, we will need to ensure that the strategic goals presented here evolve as we move towards the vision formulated by the Council, for Hong Kong to be –

"A healthy, economically vibrant and just society that respects the natural environment and values its cultural heritage".

May 2005