

# **The First Talanoa Climate Dialogue in Hong Kong: Building Trust and Ambition**

**14 September 2018**

The first Hong Kong Talanoa climate dialogue for climate action took place in Hong Kong on 14 September 2018.

A group of some 30 people from a variety of stakeholder organizations met for a day. Using the Talanoa guidelines and principles, we discussed Hong Kong's ambition level on climate change action and we told stories of the past, the present and the future from near and far. We centered our discussions on the three questions proposed by the UNFCCC for the Talanoa Dialogue: Where are we now? Where do we want to get to? How do we get there?

Our aim was to explore how to encourage greater awareness and achieve higher ambition levels for climate action in Hong Kong.

Our meeting took place in the few days between the departure of one typhoon from Hong Kong and the arrival of another. The second of these, Typhoon Mangkhut, turned out to be the most intense typhoon since records began 72 years ago. According to the scientists at the Hong Kong Observatory, occurrences of super typhoons are likely to continue.

We expressed a common sense of urgency and commitment to accelerate action to make sure Hong Kong remains a healthy, safe and sustainable city for ourselves and for future generations of citizens.

We believe pessimism can be turned to hope through action. The common challenge of climate change and the process of the Talanoa dialogue can transform the concept of activism from one of confrontation and accusation to one of cooperation, trust building and collaborative action. By the same token, inertia can be transformed into activism.

In this record of our meeting, we have tried to capture the broad spirit and the ideas expressed most prominently during the dialogue. It is fair to note that each point raised in a dialogue and recorded in a report of this nature does not seek to represent the precise position of each person present.

## **Where are we now?**

Our city is surrounded by the sea and backed by steep hills. The great majority of Hong Kong people live in the precious space between the mountains and the coast. Our climate is

subtropical and subject to periods of extreme heat and high humidity. Each year we find ourselves in the path of many typhoons arising in the Pacific Ocean.

Adaptation to climate-related weather extremes is therefore a vital part of Hong Kong's climate action, alongside efforts at mitigation.

Our Talanoa dialogue reinforced a common sense of urgency about climate ambition. We expressed the importance of encouraging and inspiring accelerated, holistic climate action in all sectors of our society. Hope was raised that we are approaching a tipping point in terms of awareness and appetite for climate change action.

We must ensure we learn from climate-related disasters, and link these to greater efforts to make our city safe and resilient. Alongside these efforts, it is our responsibility to make a fair contribution to the global effort to mitigate climate change by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and providing help to less developed parts of the world.

Hong Kong is constrained in terms of space to mobilise renewable energy at scale, but holds great potential for advances in smart technology and financial services promoting energy efficiency, distributed energy and super grids.

Expressions of concern about climate change, acceptance of the science, good intentions and broad aspirational goals represent a solid starting point across Hong Kong. There is a pressing need, however, for much of this to be turned into concrete action plans for us all to embrace.

Hong Kong is not a direct signatory to the Paris agreement. As a Special Administrative Region, however, the territory forms part of China's overall Nationally Determined Contributions. As a major financial centre with a gross domestic product ranking the size of its economy within the top 50 in the world, the city can make an important contribution to meeting the goals.

While there are people in many sectors of our society committed to the issue of climate change, we are still worried that more must be done to close the gap in popular awareness about the physical and economic risks posed by global warming. We cannot continue up the hill to safety at just a snail's pace. To achieve our goals of a low-carbon, climate-ready city, we can build greater trust, understanding and energy regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation.

## **Where do we want to get to?**

Our Talanoa dialogue created a collective vision of a thriving, sustainable city of the future. We set our minds to the year 2050 and imagined what we will see as we look across our

harbour; as we plan time off at the weekend; and as the children of 2050 look up to us with their hope-filled eyes and tell us what excites them on this day.

Green urban public space will be expanded, cherished and accessible to all. Our leisure activities will respect and reinforce our desire to nurture a healthy indoor and outdoor environment. When we look up, we will see more of the stars in the night sky.

At heart, the city of Hong Kong will flourish through the transition to a zero carbon economy built around renewable energy supply, and through wiser use of that energy.

Healthy, energy-efficient housing will be sufficient to provide decent accommodation for all. Offices and other buildings will have achieved carbon-neutrality through state-of-the-art design approaches, construction techniques and management practices.

Transport systems will be zero-emission and healthy. Walking, cycling and driving will share street space and will be configured in ways which are safe and which encourage active mobility.

Advancing information technology will become an important tool for climate change mitigation. More accurate and open data which will be applied to smart grids, smart transport and smart buildings.

We will continue to be a city dependent on imports for a large proportion of the goods we purchase, but we will care more about all that we consume. The circular economy and sharing economy will be a central part in how we live our lives to ensure resources are available for the future. Citizens will consciously embrace a low-carbon lifestyle which will be sufficient to provide a decent standard of living for all; while simpler living for many will improve both physical and mental wellbeing.

As a city emphasising the quality of life in environmental terms, we will be able to apply the same ethos to create a more equitable, just and inclusive society which nurtures the young, protects the old and encourages community participation on the full range of environmental and social issues.

We will enjoy healthier, low carbon and affordable food, more often grown locally and organically. We will be confident of sustainable water supplies for household, business, agricultural and community needs.

Green finance will bring benefits for Hong Kong, but also for the city as a global player, through our role in accelerating the financial opportunities brought by the worldwide transition to a low-carbon future.

Hong Kong will stand as an example and inspiration to other cities around the world, just as we will draw inspiration from great initiatives in other cities around us.

## How do we get there?

Recognising the urgency of the task ahead for highly-developed cities like Hong Kong, we will explore new ways to work together. We must ensure different business sectors, different government departments, civil society and academia are walking the same path together. We must clear away obstacles resulting from business-as-usual outlook and replace this with a can-do spirit of climate entrepreneurship. We can and must break out of divisive silos and replace these with cooperative platforms. These new alliances will be built on open minds and generous hearts.

Public understanding about the impact of climate change can be reinforced with engagement from civil society, business and government. Awareness building includes greater understanding of the benefits for individual wellbeing resulting from timely action on climate change. We must ensure that citizen's pressing concerns in areas such as jobs, health and welfare are addressed within the climate conversation.

A vital component of raising public involvement and awareness on climate action is the opportunity for the community to participate in and benefit from climate initiatives. We can open the space to voice ideas and to become stakeholders in green initiatives such as district renewable energy generation, energy efficiency and low-carbon transport systems. We must recognise and utilise the fresh ideas and drive provided by younger people. We must set a collective vision for our city which inspires and engages everyone.

Hong Kong is a major financial centre. Supported by our government, our finance sector must build institutions, capacities and practices which maximize our ability to finance low-carbon energy systems, infrastructure, technology and research.

The government can leverage funding and devise a range of incentives to create an enabling environment for climate action by business, academic groups and community groups.

The creation of pilot districts and living laboratories can generate ideas and demonstrate practical examples of low-carbon planning, design and innovation which deliver environmental, market and social benefits. Living laboratories can utilise design thinking to create a range of technologies, policy ideas and social processes for the climate change agenda.

Hong Kong already has a number of environmental initiatives in place such as Energizing Kowloon East and Lai Chi Wo revitalization. Despite the fact that some of Hong Kong's pilot projects are isolated and small in scale, these can catalyse the movement towards scaled, widespread uptake of low carbon practices. We can draw lessons from prototypes and where they demonstrate success these can be rolled out territory wide with a blend of

incentives and solid planning guidelines. Key stakeholders – including local businesses, residents and the government – can determine the goals and key performance indicators for pilot districts.

Another proposal for research and development is the potential for hydrogen as a clean energy source.

Business has a massive role to play in moving to the low carbon economy. Market incentives for environmental action and related job creation can provide the carrot. Transparent and fair regulations can provide the stick.

A well-designed carbon pricing system can provide the right market signals to accelerate and consolidate climate action. Hong Kong could join successful existing schemes or instigate a fair and effective scheme suitable to our local economic circumstances. We must fully account for the environmental, social and health costs of emissions which have for too long been externalized.

We can develop the metrics necessary to ensure that our mitigation activities are on track in terms of Hong Kong's contribution to keeping temperature rises well below 2°C pre-industrial levels and closer to 1.5°C below.

Accurate, transparent data on Hong Kong's climate change impact can help us measure progress, motivate further action and improve the relevance of that action.

Hong Kong can play a strong role in national and international efforts to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement including active and exemplary participation in city-level climate action networks and alliances. We can play a part in climate planning for areas beyond Hong Kong in which we share resources, infrastructure and climate impacts, such as the Greater Bay Area of South China.

In keeping with the spirit, the intention and the mechanisms of the Paris Agreement, Hong Kong must continue to set more ambitious emissions targets as we move further into the current century. Along with all cities, we can and we must move ahead towards the target of carbon neutrality by the second half of the century. We have a high level of experience in energy management within the city, and this can be leveraged to achieve mitigation targets.

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We ended our Talanoa Dialogue with a commitment to continue this story; exploring the many ideas and passions we surfaced in our discussions. This may occur through new connections, alliances and collaborations as well as through increased work within the many existing networks to which we already contribute. We will take the lessons from this first Talanoa Dialogue forward in future meetings and discussions, contributing to the momentum for change which already exists in many areas. We will also draw lessons from the style of the meeting, and will explore how the Talanoa process can be used in other

settings to help bring people together for action not just on climate but also to other dimensions of sustainable development. We will remain connected to city-level and sector-level actions locally and globally. These represent the many interwoven initiatives heading towards the clear and present goal of the Paris Climate Agreement: “The need for an effective and progressive response to the threat of climate change.”

## **Talanoa Participants:**

Jens-Peter Brauner, Siemens Mobility Ltd. Hong Kong

Wendell Chan, Friends of the Earth (HK)

Stephen Chan Chong Kai

Annie Chen, RS Group

Freeman Cheung Chun Ming, AECOM

Chong Chan Yau, Carbon Care InnoLab

Dr. Maria Francesch-Huidobro, Carbon Care InnoLab

Peter Hefele, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

Jonathan Godfrey Ho, Business Environment Council Limited

Victor Kwong, Hong Kong & China Gas Co. Ltd.

Ir. Albert Lai, Carbon Care Asia

Vivian Lee

Walton Li Yat Sun

Barbara MacKay, North Star Facilitators

Ringo Mak, 350HK

Chloe Mok, Carbon Care Asia Ltd.

John Sayer, Carbon Care InnoLab

Shailesh Sreedharan, World Resources Institute

Christina Tang, Blue Sky Energy Technology

Dr. Thomas Tang

Alexandra Tracy, Hoi Ping Ventures

Wilson Tsui, Hong Kong Institute of Qualified Environmental Professionals Ltd.

Alissa Tung, Carbon Care InnoLab

Yvonne Yam

Bonnie Yip, The Environmental Management Association of Hong Kong

Dr. Rita Yu, Siemens Ltd.

Lilian Wang