

INSIGHT

Chance to catch up

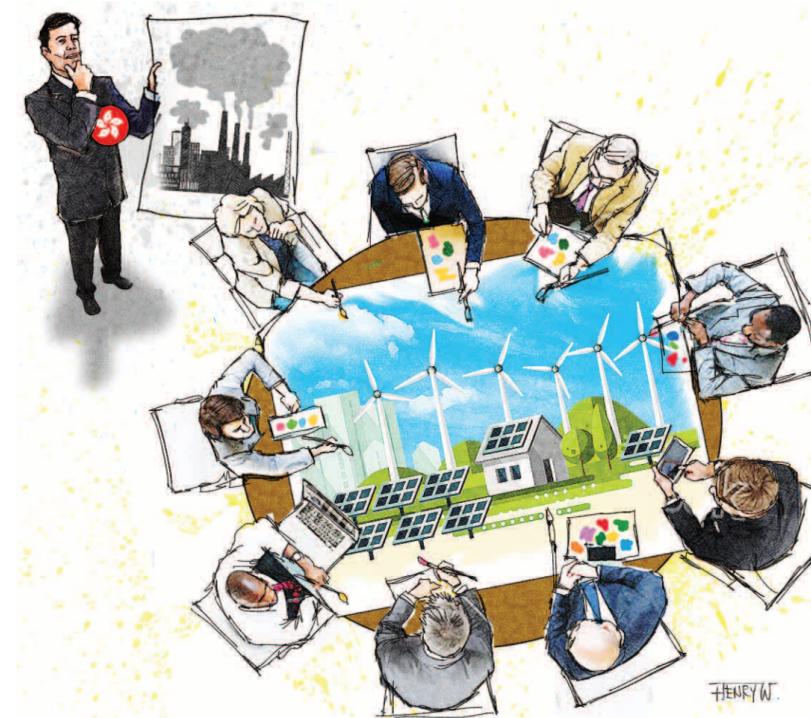
Gavin Edwards says the Paris climate talks offer HK an opportunity to learn from pioneering cities

Hong Kong's Environment Secretary Wong Kam-sing will travel to Paris at the end of this month for the UN climate negotiations, where world governments will come together to agree a bold new set of targets and actions on climate change. The key outcome will hopefully be a new international agreement on the climate, applicable to all countries, with the aim of keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius. In preparation for the meeting, more than 150 countries have already indicated a number of pledges they may be willing to make—their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions—that can form part of the agreement. For example, the European Union pledges to cut its emissions by 40 per cent (from 1990 levels) by 2030, Costa Rica is aiming to be carbon neutral by 2021, and China aims to lower its carbon intensity by 60 to 65 per cent by 2030 (from 2005) and ensure its emissions peak by 2030.

As we approach the final weeks in the lead-up to the Paris agreement, a couple of challenges are emerging—one global, one local. The global challenge is that the intended contributions by all countries have been modelled by climate scientists and policy experts at Climate Action Tracker (an independent group of four leading research organisations), and they forecast that the world will see a 2.7 degree rise by late in the century if the Paris agreement succeeds and is implemented.

This falls well short of the 2 degree target governments are aiming for, and is a long way shy of the generally accepted safe temperature rise which our planet can tolerate: 1.5 degrees. And this is not just some academic numbers game. At 2.7 degrees warmer, we could experience significant food shortages globally as crops fail in sub-Saharan Africa, and our own major source of food—the Pearl River Delta—experiences increasing flooding. Even a 2 degree rise—the stated aim of the Paris agreement—spells the end of the world's

Even a 2 degree rise [in global temperatures] spells the end of coral reefs



coral reefs and a whole host of other impacts driven by increasingly extreme weather patterns.

Second, the local challenge: Hong Kong's contribution to averting catastrophic climate change. Wong gathered key government, corporate and NGO representatives together on November 6 to launch the Hong Kong Climate Change Report, outlining government efforts. However, instead of articulating a plan of action for the decades ahead, he summarised existing policies and efforts, and is taking a wait-and-see approach to the Paris climate negotiation so the government can then consider its next steps. This is odd, given that China (which reports and commits globally on its greenhouse gas emissions, including those of Hong Kong) has outlined its plan well beyond 2020. On a recent trip to the US, President Xi Jinping articulated a range of measures, including greenhouse-gas emissions targets, investments in renewable energy, a national emission trading scheme to regulate large carbon dioxide emitters, and clear targets for green buildings.

Here in Hong Kong, the current

plan is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 19 to 33 per cent by 2020 (from 2005), but that's all. With current efforts, we'll only achieve the low end of this target, and only if the long-promised initiative to reduce the burning of coal for electricity generation is implemented. Contrast this with cities around the world which will come together at a special event during the Paris negotiations, share their ambitious plans, and learn from each other.

Greater Taipei will cut its emissions by 20 per cent by 2026 (from 2006), Yokohama will cut by 80 per cent by 2050 (from 2005), London by 60 per cent by 2025 (from 1990) and New York by 40 per cent by 2030 (from 1990). However, Hong Kong's greenhouse gas emissions have been steadily rising over the past decade, by 23 per cent from 2002 to 2012.

The development of renewable energy in the city has barely begun. And CLP Power is proposing new gas-fired power generation instead of using renewable energy. The social cost of fossil fuel has never been mentioned, even in the latest document of the electricity market

regulatory regime review. If our electricity market is not going to change, there is no chance for us to stop climate change. Under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, car-

It's time for Hong Kong to step up its efforts by leaving Paris with new ideas and pledges

bon dioxide is not even considered a pollutant, even though it is widely agreed that ever-escalating carbon dioxide emissions are one of the largest threats to our planet and our city. Our electricity market is not ready to tackle climate change.

So, if the past decade was something of a lost decade for Hong Kong in terms of making a meaningful and commensurate contribution to tackling climate change, what should we do in the next decade, to catch up?

First, the Environment Bureau has a huge opportunity to address the lack of renewable energy development by adopting a comprehensive feed-in tariff policy to reward anyone who installs solar panels on rooftops or wind turbines in coastal waters.

As the government wraps up its review of the Scheme of Control Agreement which governs our electricity production, it must include a renewable energy support policy, even if we are one of the last cities in Asia to adopt such a policy.

Second, it's time for our private sector to put funding into renewable energy and energy efficiency development. Globally, there are more new investments in renewable energies such as wind and solar than there are in coal, gas and nuclear combined. They are effectively winning against these dirty energy sources, because governments around the world realise the importance of supporting safe, low-carbon energy. Some US\$270 billion is being invested in low-carbon development.

So, instead of supporting CLP's pitch to build another gas plant, the government should encourage future investment in renewables, and greater investment in energy efficiency. For example, a simple scheme to encourage all grocery and convenience shops to put doors on their display fridges will cut their fridge energy consumption by 50 per cent, according to recent WWF research.

Lastly, we need a plan for Hong Kong that goes beyond 2020. Our environment secretary arrives in Paris empty-handed without a longer-term plan while other cities profile theirs. However, it does not have to be a wasted journey—he will have an incredible opportunity to learn about the pioneering efforts of other cities, and to bring back ideas to adapt to Hong Kong. This can start with a plan to substantially cut our city's emissions by 2030, and a plan to adopt a new scheme of control to encourage renewable energy development.

The difference between a world that is 2.7 degrees warmer and one that is only 1.5 degrees warmer is the difference between a liveable planet and a planet that is thrown into chaos. It's time for Hong Kong to step up its efforts by leaving Paris with new ideas and bolder pledges to do much more. And when Hong Kong attends the next big climate conference in a few years' time, I very much hope that these efforts will earn us international recognition as Asia's sustainable city.

Gavin Edwards is conservation director at WWF-Hong Kong

Unfulfilled promises take shine off Modi

Priya Virmani says recent election results show India's young voters are losing faith in the prime minister's ability to deliver on his pledges to make life better for ordinary folk

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has just concluded his visit to the UK, where he received a rock star's welcome. However, back in India, put your ear to the ground and you will hear a different story—one of misgivings.

Modi's party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, has just lost elections in the key state of Bihar. This is Modi's first major electoral setback since he rode into the prime ministerial office in May 2014, and the defeat has come as a complete surprise to his party. The Bihar elections were lost because of promises made but not kept—like those on the provision of livelihoods and the availability of electricity.

On the international stage, Modi has been marketing the grand narratives of "Make in India", "Digital India" and "Smart Cities". These concepts are grand in scope but low on delivery. For example, the promise to provide electricity to 18,000 additional Indian villages will remain unfulfilled until the lack of policy support is addressed.

Hitting deadlines and improving waiting times for government functions and decision-making—including on civic documents like passports and driving licences, and the outcome of government tenders—are more unfulfilled promises, while India's agrarian crisis and the number of farmer suicides have not abated.

Cleaning up obscene government excesses has also remained just talk. Stories of bribe-taking and conspicuous corruption abound. Entrepreneurs say bribes are still sought openly, but now government officials often demand that phones be kept in view during negotiations, to ensure they are not being recorded.

Following Modi's mantra of "minimum government and maximum governance", last week, the government relaxed foreign direct investment restrictions in more than 15 sectors, to encourage foreign investors to "Make in India".

But Modi's global showmanship has yet to translate into meaningful change at the grass-roots level—the life of the common person remains largely the same.

One of Modi's flagship programmes has been the *Suachh Bharat* (Clean India) campaign. A tax of 0.5

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per cent has been levied on all services to fund this initiative. Yet, people are becoming increasingly resentful of such taxes. On the one hand, there are no visible improvements. It is common to see men urinating in public against walls with *Suachh Bharat* written on them. On the other hand, one billion rupees (HK\$120 million) has been spent just on advertisements for the campaign—a campaign that has been purely cosmetic, with no meaningful initiatives such as community involvement, auditing of civic cleaning or the upgrading of cleaning processes.

Some 660 million Indians—55 per cent of the population—don't have access to a toilet. The Clean India programme claims to be addressing this by building more toilets in rural India.

But this endeavour is also plagued with serious failings. The amount assigned for construction of each toilet is actually only a third of what is needed. Functionality, access, maintenance and waste management are all being overlooked. Villagers remain uneducated about sanitary hygiene and are still defecating in the open.

Modi loves telling his story—of how a tea seller at a railway station became prime minister of the world's largest democracy. But India remains a country of rampant corruption, entrenched nepotism and gender inequalities.

The real threat from Modi is not that he is altering the secular fabric of India. This secular fabric, that India is so proud of, is actually a travesty. Modi is simply doing by day what his predecessors did by night.

The real danger is that "aspirational India" (mainly the youth, who comprise 65 per cent of the population) is becoming frustrated. They are not seeing the changes Modi promised and that they were confident he would deliver. That confidence is waning. The cracks are becoming clear.

Dr Priya Virmani is a political and economic analyst



Modi's Clean India campaign has been cosmetic; people have seen no improvements. Photo: AP

Government should channel the energies of HK's restless youth

Tik Chi-yuen says our young people need to be nurtured and the government should set up a Youth Department and dedicated innovation committee to guide them and help society progress

When people are marginalised, or treated as unimportant, they will usually either become hostile to such action or become antisocial. Some of our local youths, including gifted student leaders, have done exactly that to express their dissatisfaction, manifesting itself most prominently in last year's Umbrella Movement.

Young people are sources of creativity and innovation, though it's true they can also be impatient and narrow-minded. When capable young people are given influential positions, their dynamism and potential can be fully realised to help society progress.

The government is certainly aware of this; witness its appointment of 33-year-old Ronald Chan Ngok-pang, the youngest undersecretary since the handover, to the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau.

The appointment reflects an open-minded approach to power-sharing but needs to be followed up with similar action.

How could more talented youth be engaged to better understand governance and offer constructive proposals? Could the voice of the young generation be officially recorded and used for reference in policy formulation?

It is obvious that the government has to enhance the foundations to nurture more political talent, so that more people are capable of acting rationally, taking on responsibility and working towards a sustainable Hong Kong.

We therefore recommend that the government consider setting up a powerful Youth Department, under the direction of the chief secretary, to effectively coordinate all youth-related policies and focus on training young political elite. It could develop a database of online youth groups with a view to seeking their input, in order to get to know them, their thoughts and ideas.

At the grass-roots level, a Youth Department could speed up the building of youth hostels, to deal with the urgent demand for single-person housing for the younger generation. It could also centralise all work from various departments into one transparent hierarchy. Moreover, officials could simplify administrative procedures.

At the community level, a Youth Department could invite students to become advisory members of district community centres. It could encourage them to speak up and help with social facilities and services,

simultaneously strengthening their sense of belonging and ownership in their districts.

At the central level, the department ought to invite at least 5 per cent of young people aged between 18 and 35 to join not just the Commission of Youth, but all government advisory committees. The committees could arrange flexible meeting times and venues, to cater to young members.

As for the establishment of an Innovation and Technology Bureau, we would like to see a committee of youth innovation and technology set up, composed of IT professionals and young entrepreneurs. It could provide help and training to young starters, including, for example, with financial, scientific and IT equipment and consultancy services.

Since IT equipment and facilities are somewhat costly, in order to encourage more young entrepreneurs to explore pioneering designs and ideas, a HK\$300 million fund should be created.

The committee could then guide young innovators to fulfil their goals, by providing them with the necessary expertise.

Youths are known for their impatience and fire, for sure. Nevertheless, if they have mentors who can enlarge their future opportunities, they could be a very important driving force of passion and energy to move this cosmopolitan city forward.

Tik Chi-yuen is convenor of the Third Side

China on the right road

Kamilia Lahrichi praises Beijing's efforts to introduce road safety laws, but says better planning is still needed to cut the high death toll

Following the end of the second global conference on road safety in Brazil this week, China deserves praise for progress in cutting its death toll since 2001. However, it still has a way to go.

Although Beijing has passed most of the critical legislation—covering drink-driving, motorcycle helmets and seat belts—to foster a culture of safety, the world's biggest auto market still counts over 250,000 road deaths a year (nearly 25 per cent of all such fatalities worldwide), according to the "Global Status Report on Road Safety 2015" released by the World Health Organisation this month.

The reality is that road injuries are not an incurable ill; government inaction, however, may be. Car accidents remain the major cause of death for Chinese under 45, according to the WHO. In other words, those aged under 45 are more likely to die in a car accident than from suicide, HIV or malaria.

This global public health issue can only be solved domestically. There needs to be better coordination between different sectors of government, such as the health and transport ministries.

First, the Chinese government has a critical role to play in communicating properly the risks of not enforcing the seat belt, speeding, helmet and drink-driving laws. Similarly, it has to shed light on the potential of road safety in terms of health and development. In fact, economic losses related to road accidents

amount to 3-5 per cent of GDP in low- and middle-income nations like China—a critical loss.

To do so, Beijing has to provide relevant and accurate data on road crashes. The WHO's figures for China's annual death toll in road traffic accidents are more than four times those that the Chinese government published. Police in China often underreport road death figures.

The point is to take into account all casualties—drivers and passengers but also pedestrians.

It may not be possible for any government to completely eliminate road accidents, but they can all enhance their response to crashes by making available an emergency phone number and training people to attend to road victims as quickly as possible.

Another simple measure to cut accidents is to install speed bumps near schools. Many lives could be saved in China with better transport planning. Road casualties in Chinese cities are usually drivers, but passengers and cyclists are also victims. Riders of two-wheeled vehicles and pedestrians are the main victims in rural areas.

China's future is ultimately not about manufacturing and using more cars. Rather, it should be about walking and cycling more, and safely.

Kamilia Lahrichi is a foreign correspondent and recipient of the 2014 United Nations Foundation's "Global Issues" Journalism Fellowship. www.kamilialahrichi.com