

Sustainable and affordable housing for all

 Wednesday, 4 October 2023

 2:30pm-7:00pm

About the Hong Kong Housing Forum

The Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong Housing Forum is part of a biennial global series of events designed to bring together stakeholders engaged in finding inclusive and innovative solutions for shelter issues and in promoting affordable housing as a driver of economic growth.

Event Objectives

After hosting the Asia-Pacific Housing Forum in Hong Kong in 2015 and 2017, we have held Hong Kong Housing Forum events in 2019, 2021, and now in 2023 with the objective to position Habitat Hong Kong as a catalyst for systems change through convening housing sector expertise. Through the Hong Kong Housing Forum we aim to:



Enable actionable partnerships and collaboration between people, public and private sectors, for the delivery of adequate housing at scale



Promote innovative and inclusive housing solutions, as a response to the housing deficit



Strengthen housing ecosystems for delivery of climate-resilient, low-cost housing, using appropriate construction technologies



Enhance access of the most vulnerable populations to safe, healthy and affordable housing

Event Summary

Over 60 guests attended the Asia-Pacific Housing Forum Hong Kong Pre-Event on 4 October 2023. This in-person event with the theme, 'Sustainable and affordable housing for all', highlighted the need for inclusive communities that cater to and address the increasing challenges faced by people living in subdivided units and other forms of inadequate housing. Integrated efforts from key actors are required to explore housing solutions that lead to the eradication of subdivided units in Hong Kong.

Introduction

Jo Hayes, CEO, Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong, opened the event and shared Habitat Hong Kong's vision and strategic goals for the next three years. Jo shared how the Hong Kong Housing Forum is an integral component of a global series and a movement to bring housing sector experts together to find solutions that put people at the centre and address what, in the housing systems, is preventing people from accessing decent and affordable homes. Jo introduced the keynote speaker, Secretary for Housing, Government of the HKSAR Ms Ho Wing-yin Winnie JP, highlighting Ms. Ho's innovative approach to housing solutions and celebrated how recently launched projects demonstrate the government's commitment to putting people at the centre of the future design of housing.



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Keynote speech by the Secretary for Housing

Ms Ho Wing-yin Winnie JP, Secretary for Housing for the HKSAR Government, delivered a keynote speech, to share some of the housing initiatives the government is working on to reduce the housing deficit.

1. Address the shortfall of public rental housing and the issue of people living in subdivided units with inadequate living conditions.

- Plan to produce a third of the needed housing units in the next five years, with the remaining two-thirds to be developed and delivered in the following five years.
- Utilize short-term land resources and shorten construction time through modular integrated construction and adaptive reuse of vacant buildings.
- In the first five years, the government plans to construct 20,000 transitional housing units and 30,000 light public housing units.

2. Public engagement and partnership with NGOs are emphasized to achieve the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and improve living conditions.

- Identified sufficient land for 21,000 transitional housing units, with 7,800 already in service and 13,200 under construction or tendered as of 30 June.
- Transitional housing projects have so far helped over 6,000 families, including those living in inadequate housing conditions and those waiting for public rental housing.
- Collaboration between the government, private sector, and NGOs is crucial for the success of transitional housing projects.

3. Modular integrated construction has been widely adopted in the construction industry, with over 70 projects implemented.

- Build 30,000 public housing units by 2026-2027, with 50% of them located in urban areas.
- Savings for families, from them moving from subdivided units to public housing units is estimated to be HK\$6.3 billion over a 5-year period, in reduced rent.
- Around 820,000 public rental housing units and a total of around 1.1 million housing units, including ownership schemes as of the beginning of 2023.



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Panel 1 - Climate change and affordable housing

This panel elevated the conversation around climate change adaptation and resilience and discussed how this affects vulnerable families living in subdivided units and other forms of low-income housing.

Speaker highlights and key takeaways



Prof. Christine Loh

Chief Development Strategist at Institute for the Environment, HKUST, Scholar in Residence at Asia Society Hong Kong, and Visiting Scholar at the Anderson School of Management, UCLA

Christine Loh, Chief Development Strategist at the Institute for the Environment at HKUST, presented the escalating extreme weather conditions in Hong Kong, including typhoons, hot days, extreme heat, black rainfall, and the threat of storm surges associated with tropical cyclones. She highlighted the impact of these weather events on Hong Kong, citing examples such as Typhoon Mangkhut in 2018 and the black rain in September 2023, which caused unprecedented damage through landslides and flooding. Christine emphasised the effects of heat on an ageing population and the importance of considering extreme climate risks for both the public and private sectors. She emphasised the need for adaptation and government and community involvement in disaster and resilience planning.



Eric Ho

Co-founder and Director, Architecture Commons, and Founder, Neighbourhood Innovation Lab

Eric Ho, the founder and director of Architecture Commons and Neighbourhood Innovation Lab, discussed initiatives carried out by the housing authority, such as microclimate studies and well-being design projects in 2015. Referencing the Wellbeing Design project he is leading, where Habitat Hong Kong is a professional partner, he emphasised the importance of an iterative design process, innovation, and community consultation to create human-centric neighbourhoods.



Dr. Chao Ren

Associate Professor in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Hong Kong

Dr. Chao REN from the University of Hong Kong, shared concerning projections on the increasing number of hot days and hot nights in the coming years. She discussed the correlation between extreme heat scenarios and increased mortality risk, with a projected average mean temperature of 41°C by the end of the century in Hong Kong.



Kin-Kwok Lai

Registered Social Worker and Senior Lecturer of Felizberta Lo Padilla Tong School of Social Sciences, Caritas Institute of Higher Education in Hong Kong

Mr. Kin-Kwok LAI, a registered social worker and senior Lecturer at Caritas Institute of Higher Education, addressed the impact of climate change on vulnerable families and people living in substandard conditions. He discussed the challenges faced by residents, including increased indoor temperatures, insect and rodent infestations, and the impact on social and family relationships. Kwok highlighted the limited access to government subsidies, support, and maintenance for those living in substandard conditions. The presentation also touched on the need for support services and transitional housing, both in the public and private sectors. The need for rent subsidies, tenancy control of subdivided units, and cash allowance trial schemes were expressed by the community. Concerns were raised about the positioning and accessibility of transitional housing, as well as the need for standardized tenancy agreements and improved maintenance on homes.

Moderator



Mary McHale

Director of Strategic Named Accounts for Asia-Pacific, Equinix

Overall, the panel discussion shed light on the escalating extreme weather conditions in Hong Kong, the impact on the most vulnerable populations, and the need for adaptation, government involvement, and community support to address the challenges posed by climate change.

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Panel 2 - Reducing the housing deficit through policy and systems change

This panel explored how the shortage of affordable housing could be addressed through policy and systems change and discussed how P4* partnerships could strengthen the housing ecosystem.

*Public, Private, People Partnerships

Speaker highlights and key takeaways



Ar Donald Choi Wun Hing JP

Executive Director and CEO, Chinachem Group

Donald Choi, Executive Director and CEO of Chinachem Group, shared his views as both a developer and an architect. Chinachem Group believes that everyone deserves quality, practical, environmentally friendly and healthy homes. In the last few years they have contributed units to the Community Housing Movement and worked with Habitat for Humanity and HKU to convert part of an old residential building in Jordan into demonstration housing and a pop-up community space. Donald highlighted the need to address the ageing population issue in Hong Kong and that the private sector needs to work with the Government to provide additional supplies of decent and affordable housing.



Ryan Ip, CFA, MRICS

Vice President and Co-Head of Research, Our Hong Kong Foundation

Ryan Ip, Vice President and Co-Head of Research at Our Hong Kong Foundation, shared The Northern Metropolis and Kau Yi Chau initiatives could improve the home-job balance of the city and help decant the old and dense urban area, which improves the quality of living. Ryan also highlighted Re-launching the Tenant Purchase Scheme (TPS), which allows tenants of Public Rental Housing (PRH) to purchase their rented units at an affordable price, could generate multiple benefits for low-income households, the government and society at large. He believed Public-private partnership plays an important role in enriching the overall housing ecosystem, as the private sector can help share the government's financial burden, and is often also more efficient and creative. With the right kind of policy support, private affordable housing projects can also be an attractive investment option for long-term investors.



Steve Lewis

Partner & Head of Infrastructure, Major Programmes and Construction Advisory, EY Hong Kong

Steve Lewis, Partner & Head of Infrastructure, Major Programmes and Construction Advisory of EY Hong Kong and a Chartered Surveyor, talked about other affordable housing solutions being considered by the government, such as Modular Integrated Construction, which is a major part of the resolution to the short and longer term housing waiting list. Besides, he mentioned that the GBA has a mature manufacturing market capable of meeting the demand. The Government is actively driving closer collaboration between developers and main contractors in HK and the GBA manufacturers to ensure the efficiencies are not lost.



Dr Grace Seo

Department of Applied Social Sciences, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Dr Grace Seo, Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied Social Sciences and the Director of the Centre for Social Policy and Social Entrepreneurship at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Grace shared that Inclusionary zoning is implementable in Hong Kong but the effect could be minimal due to Hong Kong's already high development density and potential conflict over facility management. Building endless public rental housing is not the ultimate solution to the current housing affordability problem. Hong Kong needs more rungs for low-income people to move up the housing ladder. She suggested housing options should be more diversified for low-income people, converting short-term lease transitional housing (i.e., temporary housing) to long-term lease affordable housing (i.e., permanent housing) could enhance low-income people's housing stability; also nurturing the voluntary sector for affordable housing provision could be helpful.

Moderator



Katherine Rumble

Director, Partnerships & Development, Habitat for Humanity Hong Kong

Overall, the panel discussion demonstrated the diverse views and expertise of the speakers and highlighted that there is a need to explore multiple potential solutions to the housing deficit in the short, medium and long term.

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Closing remarks

Closing remarks were delivered by Jo Hayes, where she thanked event platinum sponsors Chinachem Group, the Real Estate Developers Association and venue host, Ernst & Young. She talked about the Habitat goal to serve 4,000 people in Hong Kong over the next three years and the need for monthly donors to help plan and sustain impactful programmes and systems change projects. She invited the audience to speak to our Board Directors in the room about the impact Habitat is having in the community and how they can get involved.



To find out more about the Asia Pacific Housing Forum and Habitat's work in Hong Kong, please visit our website www.habitat.org.hk

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