

HONG KONG:  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

First and Last Name

Name of the Class

Professor

University

City, State/Province

July 16, 2022

There is an increasing awareness of the impacts of human activity on the natural world. In recent times, national level and global level actions are being taken by individuals and countries to ensure that human progress and development also entails the important concept of sustainability. Often, the issue of sustainable development is closely linked to the environmental issues of climate change or pollution. However, sustainable development also includes various important factors that work towards social and economic goals. The UN has outlined a series of sustainable development goals that it hopes the world can meet by the year 2030 (UN, no date b). This next decade is increasingly crucial in creating solutions that will address challenges including poverty and climate change (UN, no date a). Specifically, the UN calls on the world to act on a the global, local, and individual levels as there is a growing awareness of the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in creating lasting and sustainable change throughout the world (Elliott, 2013, p. 2).

### Sustainable Development

Specifically, for this paper's purposes, the term sustainable development will be used to mean the "socio-economic development in line with ecological constraints" (Klarin, 2018, p. 68). This definition correlates with the triple bottom line concept and this concept is the core concept within sustainable development. The triple bottom line concept essentially means that the issues of environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability are in balance with each other (Klarin, 2018, p. 68). If there is a balance between these three pillars, then sustainable development is feasible. However, it should be noted that achieving this type of balance is very difficult and involves carefully ensuring that other pillars are not displaced at the expense of another (Klarin, 2018, p. 68).

When the term sustainable development is used in the Hong Kong context, it is important to note the Hong Kong government's own use of the concept. In particular, the government's website does use the Brundtland Report's definition of sustainable development: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Environment Bureau, no date). Additionally, the Government of Hong Kong also notes the importance of balancing economic, social, and environmental needs (Environment Bureau, no date). What is more, a list of public engagements from 2004-2020 also details the government's actions, policies, and projects towards meeting sustainable development goals.

#### Hong Kong's Current Situation

In terms of environmental sustainability, one leading challenge for Hong Kong is how to address the issues of waste management, air quality pollution, and issues stemming from land reclamation (Caudevilla, 2019, p. 4). Additionally, it should be noted that the population of Hong Kong is more than 7 million people in a geographical area of only 1,100 square kilometres (Caudevilla, 2019, p. 3; Environmental Protection Department, no date). The issue of environmental pollution due to poor waste management and air pollution are not only impact the environment, but also has important implications for the health of Hong Kong's residents. The health outcomes for its citizens are also an important pillar in developing and maintaining sustainable development goals. The problem of waste management increasingly became a problem for Hong Kong as the economy rapidly grew in recent years (Caudevilla, 2019, p. 6). With the growing population came more waste including solid, chemical, construction, and clinical waste that the Government of Hong Kong is increasingly having a difficult time in managing (Caudevilla, 2019, p. 6).

One of the specific goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is to address the need for sustainable cities and communities in the world (UN, no date b). Specifically, it is noted that the growth of the world's population not only increasingly urbanizes the world, but also increases the overburdening of infrastructure and services related to waste collection and negatively affects air quality (UN, no date b). The Government of Hong Kong, in a 1999 policy address, noted the need to focus on finding solutions that reduce pollution and waste, as well as enhance the quality of life for its citizens and maintain economic prosperity (Environment Bureau, no date). This shows that the Government of Hong Kong is aware of the intricate balance between the three pillars of sustainable development. However, awareness of these important concepts does not necessarily mean that policy or projects can effectively provide the proper solutions to these difficult challenges.

The Government of Hong Kong is aware of the growing challenge of waste management and made predictions that landfill space would reach capacity by 2019 (Environmental Protection Department, no date). Additionally, the Government of Hong Kong has taken measure to address the high levels of air pollution with a reported 17% to 62% reduction of certain pollutants due to its new emission standards it implemented (Environmental Protection Department, no date). However, the goals of sustainable development are complexly intertwined, creating the need to persistently modify goals to fit developing needs within the population.

#### Case Study: Municipal Solid Waste Charging in Hong Kong – Is the Project Sustainable?

The specific Hong Kong sustainable development project that this essay will focus on centres on the challenge of municipal solid waste. As of 2014, Hong Kong reported an 80% increase in municipal solid waste over a 30-year period which far exceed what was expected considering a population growth of 36% (Council for Sustainable Development, 2014, p. 3). Due

to this accelerated creation of waste, the government created a project that aimed to decrease the amount of waste produced by its population through charging households per bag for waste removal. They hoped that this measure would curb the increase in waste and help foster more care in the population for how much waste is produced. Additionally, the government believed this to be a sustainable way to ensure that environmental concerns were addressed and that the practical considerations of landfills rapidly reaching capacity were addressed.

### Objectives

The policy for waste management put together a series of objectives that the Government of Hong Kong hoped would solve this complex problem through economic, social, and environmental measures. The project's ultimate goal was to charge for waste disposal with pre-paid garbage bags. The volume of waste disposed of by each household would therefore be traceable, would be based on quantity, and ensure equity in the financial costs of the charging scheme (Council for Sustainable Development, 2014, p. 4). Additionally, the project made provisions for commercial waste.

### Strategies and Actions

To implement these new policies, the Government of Hong Kong also realizes the importance of supporting its overall goals with supporting measures. In particular, a public awareness program was created to increase the public's knowledge of the importance of waste reduction and recycling (Council for Sustainable Development, 2014, p. 5). The need for an increase in the number of recycling facilities was foreseen, and measures were also taken to increase law enforcement personnel to ensure that households or individuals were not bypassing the new waste charging scheme (Council for Sustainable Development, 2014, p. 5). It should be

noted that there was also a transitional period that allowed citizens to provide input about the new policies before they were implemented in full.

### Evaluation & Results

The pilot scheme for municipal solid waste charging was conducted in 2014, and the results show that although a few residential estates demonstrated decreases in waste production, most waste levels remained steady for all the households involved (Council for Sustainable Development, 2014, p. 14). Additionally, it was found that there would inevitably be problems stemming from fairness and economic equity in this charging scheme. In the overall goal of creating change for positive environmental effects, charging households per bag of waste would create social and economic effects for individuals. Environmentally, the strategy seems likely to create reductions in waste, but it should be noted that the pilot scheme saw little reduction in overall waste. As such, the economic effects resulting from such a charging scheme could cause strain for lower-income households due to the price per bag of waste or the proposed drop-off schedule necessary for waste disposal. This would also impact any citizens that were unable to drop off their waste at designated disposal sites, creating the need for additional expense to coordinate efforts for waste disposal.

### Conclusion

The municipal solid waste case study in Hong Kong shows a thoughtful evaluation by the government to balance the three pillars of sustainability. However, additional measures will be necessary to ensure that there is substantial environmental impact resulting from these measures. A strong recycling program and public education program could help promote more lifestyle change. Additionally, issues with the transport, monitoring, and cost of waste disposal should be studied further to ensure that social and economic disparities are not exacerbated.

## References

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