|  |
| --- |
| Executive Summary |

Over the course of many years, global patterns of economic growth and production have led to the overconsumption of natural resources and caused significant environmental damage. As such the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development have led people to become increasingly aware of climate crises and environmental issues. This, in turn, has prompted a re-evaluation of the economic development models that have contributed to environmental degradation with sustainable consumption and production models becoming globally recognised. In 2015, the United Nations incorporated it as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and called for proactive action from nations.

Sustainable consumption and production is about “minimising the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants”, while simultaneously meeting developmental needs and to “bring a better quality of life”[[1]](#footnote-2). Over the past few decades, Hong Kong has experienced rapid economic development, transforming it into an internationally affluent city. However, this has also resulted in excessive resource consumption[[2]](#footnote-3) and waste disposal[[3]](#footnote-4). As Hong Kong enters a post-pandemic recovery phase and society returns to normal, achieving a green transformation has become all the more urgent. To achieve carbon-neutral goals, it is crucial to develop low-carbon energy systems and develop green industries, while also leveraging consumer behaviour to drive changes that address lifestyle habits related to clothing, food, housing, and transportation.

Although environmentally-friendly consumption practises have gradually gained public attention, a local survey found that over 40% of Hong Kong respondents considered themselves not very or not at all aware of the concept of sustainable consumption. The study also revealed a gap between Hong Kong people’s awareness and attitudes towards sustainable consumption and their actual behaviours, indicating room for improvement in societal consciousness and practises.

To encourage a sustainable consumption lifestyle[[4]](#footnote-5), it needs greater participation and commitment from government, enterprises and consumers. It is worth all stakeholders in society to consider how to change their consumption habits - that are rooted in convenience and easy disposal - into one with greener consumption patterns and lifestyles, and that promotes the transformation of enterprises and economic production models. Although sustainable consumption is an emerging area of research, it has received relatively little attention in Hong Kong.

In light of the above, this study aims to explore the attitudes, awareness, and practises of sustainable consumption among young people, and consider strategies from other countries. By doing so, this study seeks to identify factors and incentives that can effectively promote sustainable consumption among the general population.

This study uses data collected between May to July 2023 via three methods: an online survey of 903 young people aged 15 to 34, a seven-day lifestyle experiment and in-depth interviews with 8 youths who align with the concept of environmental protection and sustainability but do not frequently practise it in their daily lives

|  |
| --- |
| Main Discussion |

1. The impact of consumer behaviour and individual lifestyles on climate change is a growing concern. This emphasises the need to accelerate the adoption of green and low-carbon lifestyles as a crucial aspect of addressing climate change.

2. The majority of surveyed young people acknowledge the value of environmental conservation and recognise the importance of low-carbon and sustainable living. However, they are generally reluctant to bear the additional costs for environmental protection. There is still room to enhance their understanding of climate change and sustainable consumption.

3. Reducing food waste, checking energy labels, bringing their own containers, and recycling are the more common sustainable consumption behaviours among the surveyed young people. However, they are less inclined to reduce meat consumption and avoid single-use purchases.

4. The young people interviewed demonstrated a limited consideration of product eco-friendliness during their consumption activities, and their awareness of their carbon footprint in daily life was found to be low. Inconsistencies in attitudes and behaviours among young people towards sustainable consumption were evident. Factors hindering their adoption of sustainable consumption practises include: high costs, inconvenience, peer and social pressure, and a lack of sufficient information.

5. A significant number of interviewed youths perceive the Government’s determination to address climate change as insufficient. They express dissatisfaction with the Government’s performance and effectiveness in carbon reduction and believe that government should bear the responsibility for promoting sustainable consumption in society.

|  |
| --- |
| Recommendations |

Based upon the findings and discussion above, this study proposes the following recommendations to aid the transition to sustainable and carbon neutral lifestyles.

1. Develop comprehensive sustainable consumption strategies and utilise diverse policy tools to drive behavioural change.

The Government has established the “Council for Carbon Neutrality and Sustainable Development” to provide guidance on decarbonisation strategies, the "Office of Climate Change and Carbon Neutrality" and a "Climate Change Commissioner" to oversee and coordinate government climate actions. However, these current government initiatives lack a specific focus on promoting sustainable consumption.

This study recommends the Government formulates clear and well-defined sustainable consumption strategies. In addition to regulatory measures and levies, the Government could explore using "green nudges" as soft approaches. By engaging relevant experts as consultants, and adopting a behavioural-science approach, various psychological techniques can be employed to encourage and facilitate the public's adoption of green lifestyles. These strategies should be supported by community initiatives and policies, enabling individuals to practise low-carbon living.

2. Establish a sustainable consumption points system to incentivise and promote green and low-carbon lifestyles.

Increasing the use of economic incentives can effectively drive consumers' behavioural changes; the Government’s "GREEN$ Electronic Participation Scheme" being an on-going example. This study suggests expanding the program to include a broader range of green behaviours, drawing inspiration from the "Tan Puhui Carbon Offset" mechanism in Mainland China or the “Green Points" scheme implemented in Taiwan. Leveraging technology, citizens’ carbon-reduction efforts can be recorded, measured, and quantified, with corresponding rewards or rebates.

By actively participating in activities such as recycling, energy conservation, adopting a "low-carbon diet," or purchasing green products, individuals can accumulate carbon points in exchange for tangible benefits. This recommendation aims to motivate individuals to engage in sustainable consumption and long-term low-carbon lifestyle habits.

3. Reshape public education and communication strategy to effectively disseminate the message of low-carbon living.

To enhance public awareness of sustainable consumption, it is crucial to strengthen public education and communication. While the current Government's focus on promotion has yielded initial success - primarily in areas such as recycling, plastic and waste reduction - there is a need to expand the scope of publicity to include sustainable behaviours that are not yet widely practised. This could include promoting vegetarianism, encouraging zero-waste shopping practises, and highlighting the potential of purchasing products approaching or past their best-before dates.

In addition, this study recommends that the Environmental Bureau update the image of its public relations representative, known as “Big Waster” (Cantonese). Since 2013, "Big Waster" has become synonymous with the food waste reduction campaign and is widely recognised as the Government's mascot. By revitalising the image of the "Big Waster" and incorporating additional personality and values, the focus can be shifted to promote other sustainable consumption behaviours, thereby dispelling the perception that it solely represents "food waste."

4. Develop a thorough carbon labelling system to popularise carbon information for products and food, while encouraging producer responsibility.

The implementation of a carbon labelling system aims to provide consumers with easily accessible information about the carbon footprint of products, enabling them to make informed choices that align with their low-carbon and green preferences. While some countries have already established carbon labelling systems, in Hong Kong there are currently only pilot schemes initiated by local enterprises and non-profit organisations, such as the "Hong Kong Product Carbon Footprint Label Certification" by the Chinese Manufacturers' Association of Hong Kong and the pilot menu "Carbon Labelling Programme" by Future Green in collaboration with Henderson Land Group.

To strengthen carbon labelling and incentivise widespread participation by enterprises, this study recommends the Government should actively engage in the development of a standardised carbon labelling system. This will not only provide consumers with the knowledge of carbon emissions associated with products and food but also encourage enterprises to take responsibility for reducing their carbon emissions, contributing to a more sustainable future.

5. Provide formal climate and environmental education in the school curriculum.

Currently, environmental education in schools is dispersed across different subjects and is focused on knowledge-based learning that lacks practical discussion relevant to the local context. It is imperative to prioritise environmental education in the future.

This study recommends strengthening the implementation of systematic environmental and climate education by fully integrating it into Primary and Secondary school curricula. Clear learning objectives should be established, drawing reference from international standards, with a focus on cultivating students' awareness of "global thinking and local action." The Education Bureau should provide comprehensive support and resources to enhance the effectiveness of education, encouraging more hands-on activities and experiential learning. Immersing students in the environment from an early age would promote a genuine concern for the environment.

6. Promote youth leadership and engagement in climate action.

Climate issues are intrinsically linked to youth development, and the successful achievement of long-term carbon neutrality relies heavily on engaging youth. The Government should actively mobilise and establish channels for young people to play an active role in climate action.

Governments worldwide have recognised the importance of youth participation and have provided platforms to nurture their ability, empowering them to become climate activists and contribute to shaping their cities' climate agendas. Locally, collaboration has started between community organisations, social enterprises, and the business sector. In line with these initiatives, it is recommended that the Government could explore partnerships with these stakeholders to establish a regular "Hong Kong Youth Climate Summit”. This platform would help to facilitate exchanges and connections between young people, government officials, and global leaders, to inspire and promote youth-led climate action.

1. A working definition of sustainable consumption was first proposed in 1994 at the Oslo Symposium, and more recent and common definitions include Paving the Way for Sustainable Consumption and Production: The Marrakech Process Progress Report, published by the United Nations Environment Programme in 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. HK01 (May 31, 2018). "Policy Analysis: Why is Hong Kong's per capita water consumption high? Finding answers from water bills." URL: [https://www.hk01.com/社會新聞/194008/政策分析-港人食水消耗量為何偏高-從水費單裏找答](https://www.hk01.com/%2525E7%2525A4%2525BE%2525E6%25259C%252583%2525E6%252596%2525B0%2525E8%252581%25259E/194008/%2525E6%252594%2525BF%2525E7%2525AD%252596%2525E5%252588%252586%2525E6%25259E%252590-%2525E6%2525B8%2525AF%2525E4%2525BA%2525BA%2525E9%2525A3%25259F%2525E6%2525B0%2525B4%2525E6%2525B6%252588%2525E8%252580%252597%2525E9%252587%25258F%2525E7%252582%2525BA%2525E4%2525BD%252595%2525E5%252581%25258F%2525E9%2525AB%252598-%2525E5%2525BE%25259E%2525E6%2525B0%2525B4%2525E8%2525B2%2525BB%2525E5%252596%2525AE%2525E8%2525A3%25258F%2525E6%252589%2525BE%2525E7%2525AD%252594) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Information Services Department. (2022). "Solid waste at landfills up 5.4%." URL: <https://www.news.gov.hk/chi/2022/12/20221229/20221229_143326_104.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Consumer Council. (2021). "Embracing Sustainable Consumption for a Happy Life – A Tracking Study on Consumer Behaviour”. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)