

Executive Summary

The pace and direction of development of every country is different; nevertheless, development implies making progress and improvements. The development of a country covers many aspects, including economy, politics, society, culture, sustainability and international affairs. This requires the active participation of people to enhance the nation's strength to cope with new challenges.

Youth are the driving force for productivity and creativity; the future of a country relies on them. Young people should understand and participate in the development of the country. By developing their awareness of the connection between their country and the world, it will help them to achieve their life goals, and to play a unique role in the national development.

Since reform and opening up, our country has made great strides in many fields of industry. It does, however, also face considerable challenges. As a part of the country, Hong Kong has benefitted from the country's development while also playing its part in the process. Under the "One Country, Two Systems" principle, Hong Kong has become closer aligned with the country's development. The Central Government, in different important documents, has clearly positioned Hong Kong's future development, including its integration into the overall development of the country.

The country continues to advance, and Hong Kong society needs to progress as well. It is believed that the active participation of Hong Kong's younger generation would be of significant benefit to the country, the territory, and to individuals. Given the difference in social environments and experiences of different generations, young people will have different attitudes and considerations towards participating in national development.

In his speech delivered in Hong Kong when the current SAR Government was established, President Xi mentioned the need to guide young people to be keenly aware of the trends in both China and the world. He also hoped that all of Hong Kong's young people could devote themselves to building

Hong Kong into a better home¹. The Youth Development Blueprint, launched by the current SAR Government, examined the challenges of young people. These included knowing more about the history of our country to strengthen their sense of national awareness, and the desire to have their voices heard and respected.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. As a nation will prosper only when its young people thrive, Hong Kong's young generation have important responsibilities in the country's development. It is timely and important to understand how they perceive their relationship to the country's development, their willingness to participate in the process, and their thoughts on the current measures that facilitate youth participation. This topic deserves the attention of all those who care about youth development, Hong Kong's future, and the prospects of the country.

Against this background, this research examines what young people think about national development and the values or attitudes that they hold. It also identifies key factors that influence and help encourage the youth's participation in it, with the aim of providing feasible recommendations that could engage youth in national development.

In conducting this study, data was collected between March and early May 2024 through an onsite survey of 520 young people (aged 15 to 34); parallel-case interviews with 18 individuals who claimed to have participated in national development in different forms; and one-to-one interviews with 5 academics and experts.

¹ Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office Of The State Council. (2022). Website. The speech delivered by President Xi Jinping at the meeting celebrating the 25th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to the motherland and the inaugural ceremony of the sixth-term government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. 2022-07-01.

Main Findings

1. Hong Kong has always had its footprint, in different forms, in national development. With the Central Government's implementation of the "One Country, Two Systems" principle in the territory, Hong Kong has become closer aligned with the country's development. The growth of the current younger generation comes at the time of great progress in the country's development in many different areas of achievement. This study showed that 69% of the youth polled said that the country's development is linked to them.
2. 38% of respondents expressed a desire to be involved in the country's progress. Most of them believed that participation had meaning for them. The most commonly mentioned aspects being broadening their horizons, enhancing their skill sets, and contributing to nation building.
3. The respondents highlighted some of the advantages that Hong Kong youth generally have focused on when it comes to taking part in the country's development. While most referred to having an international perspective, other advantages included flexibility in handling matters, and proficiency in bi-literacy and trilingualism. More than 45% said they wanted to learn more about national development.
4. More than 40% of respondents considered themselves as "bystanders" in the process of the nation's development, with only slightly more than 10% perceived themselves as "participants". More than one quarter said the biggest obstacle for their participation is having no clear idea about how they could participate. Some young people in the parallel-case interviews said that the concept of national development is very abstract, leaving them, as ordinary youth, with difficulties as to how they could get involved.
5. 20% to 25% of respondents said they would like to contribute to improvements for the country in Technology and Innovation, Arts and Culture, Economy and Finance, and Talent Cultivation sectors if they were given the opportunity to do so. Some case-interviewees said that they had good experiences from participating in national development.

6. 23% of respondents indicated that they had participated, or are currently participating, in the country's development; most stated that their main involvement being through exchange programmes, study tours, or performances. Some experts said that there is a need to improve the quality of these programmes to deepen and enrich the outcomes of participation.

Recommendations

Based upon the findings and discussions above, this study notes that the development of the country is closely related to the development of Hong Kong society and its young people. While young people intend to participate in the country's development, many of them feel like bystanders and encounter obstacles.

This study's recommendations are intended to promote the effective engagement of young people, thereby improving their own self-development, as the country itself continues to progress.

1. **Develop a promotional strategy targeting the needs of the Hong Kong youth to participate in the country's development. This could be achieved by making the concept more concrete, creating genuine opportunities, and focusing more on the meaning that young people need to encourage their active involvement.**
 - 1.1 **Identify ten key areas in which young people in Hong Kong could participate and contribute to national development**

This research highlights that quite a few of young people find the concept of national development too grand and abstract; there is too much of a distance between the country and themselves; information about national development on the internet is scattered. Obstacles to

participation include not knowing how to participate and lacking sufficient understanding of the country. It is necessary to put forward a comprehensive promotional strategy that would be easy for Hong Kong youth to understand and be motivated enough to take action.

This research suggests selecting 10 key areas of significant national development that are closely related to or of interest to young people for promotional focus, such as Technology and Innovation; Arts and Culture; Economy and Finance; Talent Cultivation; Volunteer Services; Healthcare; Sports; Sustainability; International Mega Events, and International Affairs. Specific goals should be outlined in each area. Clearly outlining the areas not only helps young people understand and grasp the opportunities, but also makes it easier to connect them with their personal development and find common conversation starters among peers. This could have a more long-lasting effect as it makes participation more practical, feasible, and relevant to their lives.

The research suggests that the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau should take the lead in the promotional work, making good use of various official channels such as the “HKYouth+” youth mobile application, to establish a special column about participating in national development. This could help highlight the importance of national development issues while allowing young people to conveniently and clearly receive and understand relevant information via a single channel.

1.2 Introduce a social project fund scheme for youth participation in national development

To increase the practicality of participation, the research suggests that the Government should introduce a social project fund scheme for youth participation in national development. This programme would involve resource

matching between the HKSAR Government and local enterprises for which Hong Kong youth could apply. The youth could go to Mainland cities to contribute to community improvement initiatives. This provides direct incentives and encourages active participation, allowing the youth to explore the development needs and opportunities of Mainland cities. This could enhance the capabilities and perspectives of the participating youth through the application of novel ideas, knowledge exchange, and the cultivation of skills.

Enterprises' support of resources (such as funding, networks, professional consultations, etc.) could facilitate the younger generation's participation in national development, while fulfilling the spirit of Corporate Social Responsibility.

This research suggests that the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Development Office could take the lead with this initiative. The Office could better facilitate the smooth implementation of the related work by closely collaborating with the governments of major cities in the Greater Bay Area,

- 2. The Government should consider increasing the funding for exchange projects in the Mainland with high-quality elements to meet society's expectation of quality exchange initiatives.**

In 2013 the HKSAR Government launched the Funding Scheme for Youth Exchange in the Mainland to provide funding for eligible non-governmental organisations to organise youth exchange projects in the Mainland. The assessment criteria include if the project is substantial, in-depth, creative and others. The Scheme is sponsoring 480 projects for approximately 30,800 places in 2024-25 (first round). This is up significantly from the 319 projects, and nearly 4,000 places, in 2018-19. In 2024-25, the maximum

subsidy per person per day for locations in Guangdong Province is HK\$415; locations in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Hunan Province, Jiangxi Province and Fujian Province is HK\$550. The budget for the programme in 2024-25 is HK\$80 million.

After the Scheme has been launched for over 10 years, there is now a growing demand from organisations for applications, reflecting an increasing need for young people to participate in such activities. As expectations for quality exchanges increase, the Government should provide greater levels of resources for projects that could bring extensive, profound and practical opportunities to develop the country.

The research suggests that the Government should consider increasing the funding for those Mainland exchange projects which demonstrate high quality and meet criteria such as social innovation, hands-on training, in-depth thematic studies, and skills development; the additional funding supporting the extra expenses associated with these features. The Government could determine the specific amount based on the unique characteristics and actual expenditure of each individual project.

- 3. Enhance the effectiveness of Mainland study tours under the subject Citizenship and Social Development with the elements of Exploration, Hope, Empowerment and Contribution to encourage and assist students to have more comprehensive thinking and experiences during the tour, and to nurture longer term younger generations to be better citizens.**

Various measures have been introduced to help increase young people's understanding of the country, including the implementation of the subject Citizenship and Social Development, starting from Secondary Four in the 2021/22

academic year. One of the aims of the subject is to develop positive values and attitudes towards life, so that the students can become more informed and responsible citizens of society, the country and the world. The curriculum content covers three main themes: Hong Kong under “One Country, Two Systems”, Our Country since Reform and Opening up, and Interconnectedness and Interdependence of the Contemporary World. Mainland study tours are part of the curriculum framework, with the theme Chinese Culture and Modern Life. However, according to media reports there is considerable concern from the public about the effectiveness of the study tours.

This research notes that one case-interviewee is looking forward to the study tours being included in the subject of Citizenship and Social Development. Another case-interviewee believes that the effectiveness of any type of study tour might be compromised if the participants lack preparation in setting goals for the tour.

The research suggests developing a ‘thinking-framework’ to brief students on the expectations of the study tours in order to assist them to reflect on how to become responsible citizens. With reference to the Youth Development Blueprint, the elements of this framework could incorporate Exploration, Hope, Empowerment and Contribution.

Within the element of "Exploration," students could approach the theme from various perspectives to enrich their understanding. In respect of "Hope," students could think about what improvements or changes in the country's future they hope for concerning the specific area of focus. Under “Empowerment”, students could observe and identify the skills, knowledge, or qualities they have, have acquired or need to develop further. In “Contribution”, they could share their thoughts on the actions they believe they can take for improvement. This framework could increase

students' awareness of the latest national developments while encouraging them to play a more proactive role, while cultivating them into becoming better citizens.

- 4. Explore and provide more possibilities for Hong Kong youth for internship and to work in international organisations so that they could have more opportunities to witness the country's development at the international level.**

With reference to information services provided by relevant Mainland ministry and universities, this research recommends establishing a comprehensive website to offer Hong Kong youth international organisations employment and internship information. This all-encompassing platform would enable aspiring individuals to prepare early for their future career paths.

Based on the UNV-Hong Kong Universities Volunteer Internship Programme, this research also suggests making more co-operation agreements with designated internationally-focused organisations and to select a few outstanding Hong Kong youth annually for internships within these organisations.