

Social challenges and climate action series:

## **Civil Society partnership accelerates the transition of renewable energy**

By Kevin Li

August 2022



*Since the CarbonCare InnoLab's Paris Watch Programme was launched, six community dialogues have been held so far. The first six dialogues were focused on the residents of subdivided housing, the welfare and the community health care sectors, outdoor workers, the persons with disabilities and mental illness,*

*and women's groups. This time, we turn our focus to climate change mitigation. Renewable energy is an important part of mitigation efforts. Together with the participants, we reviewed the current situation, policies, difficulties encountered and promotion plans of renewable energy development in Hong Kong. All the participants believed that this community dialogue has promoted the space for mutual communication and cooperation among peers, and laid the foundation for the civil society to promote the renewable energy transition in the future.*

An important part of the CarbonCare InnoLab's Paris Watch programme is to, through community dialogues, promote a deeper understanding of all walks of life and enhance their ability to deal with climate crisis. These dialogues put the principle of "just transition" at the core, and advocate that the interests of citizens who may be affected by unemployment, economic restructuring and rising prices must be taken into account during the transition. The principle of "just transition" also emphasizes the participatory and inclusive climate adaptation process. The participation and voices of various stakeholders, who are facing the impacts of climate change, must be guaranteed and respected.

Adhering to the principle of "just transition" throughout the first seventh community dialogues, CarbonCare InnoLab held the eighth community dialogue on 13 July 2022, with a total of 11 people from 10 organizations, including academics, policy think tanks, enterprises and environmental groups.<sup>1</sup> All the participants agreed that the current development of renewable energy in Hong Kong is slow and lagging behind. It is hoped that they can brainstorm and think about how to gather civil society forces to accelerate the energy transition.

## **The government's 2050 carbon neutrality target lacks a robust pathway**

In October 2021, the Hong Kong SAR Government launched the "Hong Kong Climate Action Plan 2050", which pledged to increase the proportion of renewable energy in the power generation fuel mix to 7.5% to 10% by 2035, and 15% by 2050. However, the "[Paris Watch Hong Kong Climate Action Report 2021](#)" published last year by CarbonCare InnoLab pointed out that the above targets are too conservative. It is difficult to gain the momentum to achieve the renewable energy targets and carbon neutrality in 2050.

The participants who has been paying attention to the development of renewable energy in Hong Kong analysed the policy failure at the meeting. The

---

<sup>1</sup> For the full list of participants, please refer to the Annex at the end of the article.

potential of renewable energy in Hong Kong, including solar energy and wind power, and the financial system that has been established for many years can facilitate the investment and financing of related infrastructure and substantially increase the proportion of renewable energy. However, the problem is that the government does not have the determination to develop vigorously. The two main power companies in Hong Kong monopolize the power grid, making it difficult for other investors to enter and activate the market, and the development of the solar energy industry is not well-regulated. Take the increasingly popular solar photovoltaic installations as an example. Since the introduction of the feed-in tariff policy in 2018, the installed capacity has increased from only 1 MW to 267 MW by the end of 2021. Such development has led to a mix of positive and negative issues in the industry. As solar photovoltaic installation projects are outsourced to those with the lowest market price, the industry lacks professional standards, the quality of projects varies, and workers' compensation, benefits, and training are also lacking due guarantee.

### **Strengthening renewable energy strategies and expertise will help the industry develop**

Participants also cited renewable energy policies and practices in other neighbouring countries and regions, including Singapore, Japan, mainland China and Taiwan, and pointed out that there are many possibilities in terms of policy and technological innovation, investment financing and industry standards. There is still much room for improvement. Although it is not easy to break through the constraints of existing policies and markets, the participants have studied the development of renewable energy around the world and shared many useful opinions and suggestions:

1. In terms of policy, the “Hong Kong Climate Action Plan 2050” should be publicly reviewed every five years, including setting annual renewable energy targets and ensuring a clear and specific carbon reduction pathway. With the 2030 carbon peaking and 2060 carbon neutrality targets in mainland China, Hong Kong needs to tackle the inconsistency and strengthen energy cooperation with mainland in order to achieve the city's carbon neutrality by 2050. Moreover, we should not stop at building energy efficiency, rooftop solar and offshore wind, but should also continue to explore the possibilities of floating solar panels in reservoirs and other renewable energy installations.
2. At the institutional level, building renewable energy infrastructure also requires necessary environmental impact assessments, including

- assessments of land and offshore water planning strategies, to mitigate or eliminate possible ecosystem impacts, and to enhance climate adaptation and resilience. While solar photovoltaic panels generally have a lifespan, manufacturers are also obliged to properly recycle and dispose of them to comply with the principles of circular economy due to the toxic heavy metals contained in the panels.
3. At the industry level, as mentioned above, we must enhance the professionalism of the industry, such as establishing a renewable energy council to strengthen personnel training and qualification certification, formulate work guidelines. Universities can also set up related degree programs. Women and disadvantaged groups are also suitable for the renewable energy industry, so the above training should also be extended to them. In addition, employees can also set up trade unions to protect workers' rights.
  4. Technically speaking, since the supply of renewable energy is usually constrained by meteorological conditions and therefore varies from time to time, it is necessary to make adjustments when connecting to the power grid to avoid unstable power supply or curtailment of a large amount of renewable energy. In addition to connecting to the power grid, we should also consider other sources of power, especially the development of energy storage. Green hydrogen fuel is one of the most high-profile examples.

In the long run, the participants believed that the possibility of opening up the monopolised electricity market in Hong Kong should be continuously explored, allowing other private investors and the public to participate in renewable energy infrastructure and power supply. We should take into account making the power grid system more flexible, when enhancing the diversity of energy supply. Settling power grid issues will be conducive to the sustainable development of renewable energy.

#### **Project Team** (in no specific order)

Dialogue Designer and Chief Facilitator: Thierry Leung (Senior Social Worker, Programme Manager)

Deputy Facilitator: Blaire Ho (Programme Officer), Alissa Tung (Programme Director), Angela Tam (Intern), Crystal Cheung (Intern)

Facilitation Advisor: Lilian Wang

Project Advisor: Chong Chan Yau (Co-founder and CEO)

## Author's Profile

Mr. Kevin Li is the Researcher for CarbonCare InnoLab.

## Annex

CarbonCare InnoLab invited different groups and experts in Hong Kong to participate in the eighth community dialogue (in no specific order):

- Department of Building Environment and Energy Engineering, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
- Department of Geography, Asian Energy Research Center, Faculty of Social Sciences, Hong Kong Baptist University
- Civic Exchange
- Solmunity
- Greenpeace
- WWF Hong Kong
- RH Consultant Knowledge Sharing Platform
- The Hong Kong and China Gas Company Limited
- York Joint Design & Construction Co., Ltd.

## Links

1. [Social challenges and climate action #1: Empowering residents of subdivided houses in Hong Kong](#)
2. [Social challenges and climate action #2: Extreme weather hit hard welfare and health care workers and the vulnerable people](#)
3. [Social challenges and climate action #3: Legislation is the only way to relieve outdoor workers' suffering from extreme weather](#)
4. [Social challenges and climate action #4: Our society must include persons with disabilities in tackling climate change](#)
5. [Social challenges and climate action #5: Combining research and community action to support people with mental illness in tackling climate change](#)
6. [Social challenges and climate action #6: Climate action and transition to a low-carbon society must incorporate women's perspectives](#)