Oxfam Hong Kong Responds to the First Five-Year Plan and the 2026 Policy Address

16 September 2026

Chief Executive John Lee today (16 September) delivered Hong Kong's First Five-Year Plan (*hereinafter* "Five-Year Plan") together with his final Policy Address of the current term. The Five-Year Plan highlights the institutionalisation of the tripartite collaboration among the Government, the business sector, and the community in supporting the disadvantaged and underscores the role of technological innovation and data analysis as key tools for improving livelihoods. This aligns closely with Oxfam Hong Kong's (OHK) earlier advocacy. OHK welcomes the measures proposed that carry significant implications for expanding educational opportunities, enhancing employment and improving elderly health. We further hope that large-scale development projects will incorporate broader public participation and ensure that the benefits of innovation are shared across the community.

"The Papers demonstrate the Government's continued commitment to supporting specific vulnerable groups. We hope that poverty alleviation efforts will gradually move from 'precise identification' to 'strategic investment'. This is not only about poverty relief but also about prevention. With clear insight into the needs of disadvantaged groups, and by harnessing technology and data, the Government can deliver targeted support in education, jobs, community economy and elderly health. These measures are crucial to strengthening protection, mobility and resilience," said Henry Tang, Director General of Oxfam Hong Kong.

To this end, we set out our detailed responses and recommendations below:

1. Broadening the Identification of Vulnerable Groups and Defining Poverty

OHK welcomes the Government's inclusion of persons with disabilities and their carers in the Five-Year Plan's targeted support groups, covering families where older people care for other elderly or disabled members. The Policy Address also proposes increased living allowances for carers of elderly and disabled persons in low-income households, the introduction of community canteens and regularisation of the pilot scheme for training foreign domestic helpers in elderly care, as well as the establishment of an Elder Harmony Network to strengthen services for ethnic minority elders.

To better demonstrate the Government's commitment in targeted support, and to show the tangible outcomes and impact of these policies, OHK urges that, in the next phase of targeted poverty alleviation, more groups can be incorporated into the analytical framework of the Commission on Poverty according to different demographic characteristics. Using the broader macro "income indicator" as the basis for assessing poverty risks and conducting in-depth analysis of the specific needs of each group, resources and policies can be better directed to support stakeholders in designing and delivering more tailored poverty alleviation initiatives. At the same time, establishing an impact assessment framework will ensure that policy results are clearly demonstrated.

2. **Strengthening Grassroots Job Resilience and Promoting Flexible Community Employment**

OHK notes the Government's investment in the development of the Northern Metropolis, recognising that largescale infrastructure projects not only advance regional development but also create substantial employment opportunities. This is particularly significant for the construction sector, where unemployment remains high at 5.9%[1]. According to Census and Statistics Department figures from March 2026, the labour market capacity (employment plus vacancies) in construction sites (manual workers only) recorded the largest annual decline, at around 9.4%[2], representing a reduction of more than 10,000 positions. This highlights the need for policies that combine retraining with job creation. While the Government is considering cost-saving measures in public works, it should also plan labour policies carefully, prioritising investment in local workers' employment opportunities. Doing so would foster stable career prospects, enhance citizens' spending power, and generate positive momentum in the local economy.

OHK recommends that the Government draw reference from the forthcoming updated Manpower Projection Report and to review the effectiveness of using the levy collected from employers of foreign workers to support the retraining local grassroots workers. Based on market demand, new entry level positions should be created in emerging

[1] Table 210-06405 : Unemployed persons with a previous job and unemployment rate by detailed previous industry: https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/web_table.html?id=210-06405
[2] Calculated by OHK using the data from Statistics on persons engaged and vacancies for March 2026: https://gia.info.gov.hk/general/202606/22/P2026062200360_547787_1_1782110754557.pdf

sectors, accompanied by tailored training programmes. For example, to meet the growing need for community care and health services arising from population ageing, the role of health care assistants could be expanded; to support green development, grassroots jobs could be established within community recycling networks; and to advance innovation and technology, training could be provided in smart property management. OHK welcomes the upgrading of the Employees Retraining Board into Upskill Hong Kong, and urges that resources be appropriately directed to local grassroots workers, particularly vulnerable groups who have lost employment due to economic transformation, ensuring that support reaches those most in need.

In addition, OHK has consistently advocated for better use of community resources, including relaxing restrictions and revitalising vacated market spaces as “community economy pilot zones”, allowing low-risk industries to operate and promoting local consumption through digital mapping. Community living rooms and transitional housing could also serve as platforms to support women’s employment or be designated as spaces for small-scale bazaars. We are encouraged that some of these proposals have been adopted: the Five-Year Plan pledges to empower women, while the Policy Address explores repurposing market spaces for community facilities. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department also plans to pilot a more flexible tenancy model, and to prioritise stall upgrades under the Market Modernisation Programme to improve customer experience. OHK believes these measures can stimulate grassroots employment and strengthen the link with community economy, creating a virtuous cycle of consumption, employment and community capital.

3. Announcing a Living Wage to Safeguard Grassroots Workers’ Quality of Life

OHK appreciates the Government’s move to institutionalise the tripartite collaboration among the Government, the business sector and the community in supporting the disadvantaged. We also note that its commitment to working with the Hong Kong Stock Exchange to provide further guidance for listed companies in preparing *Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Reports*. This will encourage listed companies to take a more active role in social responsibility and foster closer, more effective collaboration between the business sector and social service organisations.

With grassroots wages under sustained pressure, the Government must further promote this tripartite poverty alleviation collaboration in creating decent and dignified employment environments. In 2018, Oxfam published the Hong Kong Living Wage Research, and has since adjusted the living wage level annually in line with inflation and consumption patterns. For 2026, the living wage is set at HK$64 per hour. OHK recommends that the Government announce the living wage level alongside its annual review of the statutory minimum wage, providing a benchmark for employers with the capacity to adopt it voluntarily.

Furthermore, we have long advocated for the inclusion of the "living wage" under the "social" dimension of the ESG Reporting Guide. This would encourage capable employers to provide pay at the living wage level to all staff, including outsourced and frontline workers, thereby strengthening protection for grassroots employees and promoting corporate social responsibility.

4. Leveraging Data and Technology to Support Primary Health and Community Care

The Five-Year Plan and the Policy Address both propose increasing the number of community care and residential care service vouchers for the elderly, as well as expanding day care facilities and integrating health centres for seniors to reduce waiting times. OHK welcomes these measures, noting that the integration of elderly centres with health centres will strengthen service coordination. Given the importance of accessibility and awareness of medical resources among older people in the community, we believe the Government should enhance communication and outreach to ensure that health care and community care service vouchers can be effectively linked with existing public and private services, thereby maximising their impact. At the same time, the Government should make better use of data to continuously review the demand, applications and usage of community care service vouchers across districts, and adjust provision accordingly.

OHK has long advocated strengthening technological literacy among the elderly and their carers, promoting the use of remote monitoring systems, smart sensors and emergency alert devices, and introducing AI-based primary healthcare monitoring systems to help seniors manage chronic conditions at home and access timely support when needed. We are encouraged that some of these proposals have been adopted: the Housing Authority will launch a pilot scheme in public housing estates with a high proportion of elderly residents, introducing appropriate home-based gerontechnology for single-elderly and all-elderly households, with gradual expansion to other estates.

5. **Reducing the Education Burden on Low-Income Families to Promote Upward Mobility**

The Five-Year Plan highlights the integration of AI and innovative technology into teaching. In June, the Government also released the *Blueprint on Digital Education Development in Primary and Secondary Schools*, emphasising the promotion of digital learning. OHK believes the Government should introduce additional subsidies to support students' learning, particularly for those from low-income families, as access to educational resources is fundamental to building knowledge and improving learning outcomes.

The reduction of HK$2,500 in student subsidies last year forced many low-income families to cut back on their children's participation in tutorial classes or extracurricular activities, directly weakening opportunities for upward mobility. While the Government has cited "targeted resource allocation" as the reason for not reinstating the subsidy, the reality is a complete withdrawal. Beyond covering basic textbook expenses through the textbook allowance, providing learning subsidies would help ease the financial burden on these families and provide students with greater access to quality educational resources.

Conclusion

OHK considers this year's Policy Address to be positive in its continued support for specific groups. However, to truly break the impasse of intergenerational poverty, in-work poverty and old-age poverty, the Government must move beyond "precise identification" towards "strategic investment". By broadening the definition of vulnerable groups, promoting flexible community employment, announcing and promoting the living wage by the Government, leveraging technology to support elderly health, and reducing the education burden on low-income families, public resources can be allocated more strategically to strengthen social protection and create opportunities for upward mobility. We hope the Government will work hand in hand with all sectors of society to advance more comprehensive and forward-looking poverty alleviation policies, enabling Hong Kong to move towards a fairer, more inclusive and sustainable future.

The End

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