

# **Business-NGO Relationships for Environmental Conservation in Hong Kong: Capacity Building for NGOs and the Roles of Government and Business-Related Organisations**

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*Voluntarism and relationships involving partnerships and other alliances are exerting an increasingly powerful influence over developments in environmental policy in Europe, USA and elsewhere but have yet to figure prominently on the environmental agenda in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, there are problems such as the lack of relevant skills and knowledge, of sufficient and independent funding sources for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and of trust and understanding between NGOs and businesses, as well as a relatively weak civil society compared to the high level of power exerted by business firms. Positive action is required by the relevant parties to ensure the long-term development of business-NGO relationships. Also required is more concerned environmental legislation, and corporate social responsibility education on the environment. Key needs are capacity building and funds for NGOs in order for them to establish balanced and meaningful relations with businesses in relation to environmental matters. These are matters addressed in this article on the basis of 31 in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders, including environmental NGOs, businesses, government departments, business-related organisations, and a legislative councilor. The stakeholders' views highlight the current problems and possible roles of the government and business-related organisations in Hong Kong in assisting in the forging and sustaining of business-NGO relationships of significance to environmental conservation.*

## **Introduction**

Many of today's social, economic and environmental challenges are too complex for one sector to tackle alone. The responsibility to take care of the environment should not be solely the role of just one party such as the government (CSRI 2006). Businesses which receive and control the majority of the society's resources and which traditionally are the key polluters, should work together to discharge their social responsibility on the environment. Working with the society at large to improve the quality of life has been included in the corporate social responsibility (CSR) definition of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD 2006). Over the past ten years, processes of environmental reform have been

increasingly shaped by the concept of cooperative environmental management, of which cooperative relationships between businesses and NGOs have been a key element. The development of cooperative environmental management reflects various factors, including the concepts of shared responsibility, stakeholder engagement, and an interest in learning and capacity building (Ten 2002).

NGOs are increasingly changing their strategy towards business from one of forcing change (eg, through protests and boycotts) to facilitating change (through cooperative relationships) and sustaining change (by creating their own standards and accreditations that businesses sign up to) (Murphy & Bendell 2001; Elkington, et al 2003). Gunningham and Sinclair (2002) argue that partnerships offer a middle course between the two extremes of traditional regulation and of self-regulation and voluntarism. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002 provided significant backing for Type II partnerships for sustainable development (ie, non-negotiated partnership commitments between government, intergovernmental agencies and civil society actors), leading to over 300 registered partnerships and other forms of cooperative relationships involving government, businesses and NGOs. Changing perceptions of business towards NGOs are resulting in increasing numbers and kinds of relationships across the developed North (Egels-Zandén & Wahlqvist 2006).

Cooperative relationships provide the potential for a new settlement between business and civil society that can be a win-win situation (Elkington, et al 2003). Business can gain the support of NGOs and other stakeholders in various ways, involving reputation enhancement, brand building, marketing opportunities, employee motivation, and risk reduction (eg, with regard to boycotts and adverse publicity). The NGO movement needs the resources (both financial and human capital) that businesses can provide. NGOs can also gain greater influence over company policy. However, there is a need for more influence, and a need to better understand what makes relationships successful and effective. Cooperative relationships are seen as an important part of stakeholder dialogue and of new social and political structures (Schneidewind & Petersen 1998).

Asian companies are lagging behind their counterparts in Europe and North America in having written policies on supporting third party sustainable development programmes (Welford 2005). Much of the Asian growth has been, and continues to be, fuelled by unprecedented levels of environmental degradation and human health impacts in the region (Welford 2004). In terms of corporation policies and actions, however, there are some encouraging signs in Hong Kong. A few large Hong Kong corporations have voluntarily stepped forward and published their social and environmental policies and practices. A survey of opinion leaders among eight key stakeholder groups in Hong Kong indicated that there is

considerable support among all groups for wider use of voluntary agreements and partnerships, but that progress is hindered by a lack of understanding as to how these can be engineered and how they will operate in practice (Hills 2005).

Drawing on stakeholders' views collected from 31 in-depth face-to-face interviewees, this article investigates current business-NGO relationships for environmental conservation in Hong Kong, including the current facilitation, the problems, and the possible roles of the government and business organisations in further prompting and facilitating the relationships. The root solution of capacity building for NGOs is considered. The research findings should be a useful reference for the environmental NGOs and businesses to enhance their understanding of formal relationships and to look for further possibilities.

The 31 interviews were conducted between October 2005 and May 2006. They included a legislative councilor who represents the voice of civil society on environmental matters, as well as individuals from (a) fourteen environmental NGOs of different scales and specialisations (including ten partnering and four non-partnering ones covering about a half of the total number of recognised environmental NGOs in Hong Kong); (b) ten partnering businesses (five international, one regional, and four local, with headquarters or branches in Hong Kong and concerning energy technology, power, fuels, banking, airlines, rail and bus transport, IT, and beverages); (c) two business-related organisations; and (d) four relevant government departments. All interviewees were in relevant senior grades, ranging from director, assistant director, chairperson, vice-chairperson, committee/board member, manager and senior officer.

In addition, adopting a qualitative approach, a detailed analysis was made of 20 business-NGO relationships, and another six in which the government or business associations have been involved.

## **Business-NGO Relationships**

### *Current Activities in General*

All formal environment-oriented relationships between the interviewed businesses and environmental NGOs in Hong Kong were found to have been formed since 1996, and have been much more active since 2001. According to the interviews, a high number of the relationships have involved NGO reviews of the businesses' environmental management practices. The reviews have comprised, or been related to, the provision of environmental reports, organising of workshops, participation in environmental committees, commenting on the environmental impacts of the businesses' development projects, addressing the supply chain certification of businesses, and the eco-labeling of their products. The

provision of environmental education classes for business employees has also been popular. Businesses have received environmental education classes from NGOs, as well as themselves offering such classes to NGOs.

The provision of financial support to NGOs has been popular. Such financial support has been direct in the form of monetary donations from businesses or collected from their customers, and indirect in the form of rebates. They have been accompanied by product donations (eg, free tickets and advertising space) and technological equipment sponsorships (eg, solar panels and wind turbines), along with the provision of assistance to NGOs in organising and/ or marketing their charity events. Businesses have also contributed the skills and time of employees, and supported the conduct of public policy research.

#### *Who Approaches Whom?*

Businesses and NGOs have approached each other to form cooperative relationships. The initiatives have depended on their project nature and the underlying aims. Until recently, business-NGO relationships have not been the focus of most environmental NGOs in Hong Kong. Interviewed NGOs which have formed relationships with businesses recorded that they have taken the initiative to approach the businesses directly.

In general, NGOs have approached businesses on the basis that corporate sponsorship is needed, or that the involvement of a particular business sector is required to facilitate the NGOs' projects (eg, the involvement of an airline company in preventing the inhuman traffic of endangered animals). Businesses, on the other hand, have been more active in forming relationships with NGOs, particularly when advice has been needed from them in improving their corporate environmental management practices. These relationships have recognised that some NGOs have certain specialised knowledge (eg, in biodiversity) or skills (eg, in delivering education), as well as detailed data in a particular field (eg, species birds in Hong Kong). Other relationships have been based on personal connections, previous company employment, new contacts through events, and the trust built from existing relationships in related areas.

#### *Current Problems*

A significant problem in the formation and sustaining of these relationships has been insufficient government support, partly due to a lack of a formalised process for consultation with NGOs. Two NGOs that monitor development projects voiced the opinion that the present system for development is flawed in that stakeholders are consulted only when an environmental impact assessment (EIA) is required. There is no questioning about the need for the project, and stakeholders can only vote on the choices on offer. Ideally,

stakeholders need to be approached at an earlier stage when the decision about the necessity for a project is being made by business in liaison with the government.

Another constraining criterion for NGOs is a lack of independent funding sources. Some NGOs have felt exhausted after various projects because they make considerable input under great financial pressure. One NGO mentioned that the organisation succeeded in forging a relationship with business, but with no financial return as it wanted to safeguard its freedom. This NGO believes that more inputs are needed from business besides financial support to complement the knowledge and credibility that NGOs bring to the relationships. As some NGOs are hesitant to accept direct funding from businesses, there is a need for an independent funding source in Hong Kong which can support NGOs.

Funding is essential to NGOs and, thus, appropriate collaborations with businesses have been considered to be very important for some NGOs. Some NGOs obtain financial support from businesses so that they can support their administration and operations. Although there are different reasons to explain why short-term relationships seem to be more common than long-term ones, some NGOs have kept their relationships short and of an "on-off" kind only for the time of relevant activity so as to stay independent from the businesses involved. A few do not accept any financial support from the businesses that are happy to work with them, and rely on their existing limited income sources and manpower. By contrast, two big NGOs have consciously targeted businesses as a considerable source of funding, with an emphasis on educational and volunteering activities.

The NGOs' current income sources are varied and diverse. The common ones are business sponsorships, membership fees, donations from the community and some charity organisations, funding from government or private sector foundations which support environmental education and sustainable development, and fees for organising educational activities like school talks, tours and classes for schools and social organisations. Besides these major income sources, other minor ones include the money earned from charity sales, from the running of second-hand shops with goods donated from businesses and the community, from souvenir shops which sell self-published books, postcards and maps, from the organisation of local tours for tourists, and from advertisements for local shops in the NGOs' regular publications. Some local and regional NGOs have also approached international NGOs in Asia that are relevant to their projects.

#### *Support for Business-NGO Relationships*

Since 2004, some government departments have become more interested in supporting or being involved in business-NGO relationships. Officials interviewed considered their involvement to be departmental policy, to be

part of the public participation exercise by the government, and to be a way to getting greater efficiency in providing public services. They saw it as a means of acquiring a better understanding of the practices of businesses and NGOs, of matching up the parties, and of helping them to be successful. It was also viewed as an effective way to let businesses and NGOs know about the government's practices.

As businesses may think NGOs are watchdogs over them, the involvement of the government in helping match businesses and NGOs can reduce the hesitation for both sides to approach each other. The involvement in is line with the fact that the government is a big purchaser of products like construction materials and usually wants its suppliers to use and provide eco-materials wherever.

Two of the business-related organisations interviewed said they have supported business-NGO relationships as a means of promoting environmentally friendly business activity, while also helping the businesses to be successful. Through supporting such relationships, they have gained a better understanding of businesses and NGOs, as well as developing new contacts that might be interested in forming relevant relationships and acquiring experience in how to coordinate resources to assist businesses to achieve their aims.

### **Possible Roles of Government and Business-Related Organisations in Facilitating Business-NGO Relationships: Stakeholders' Perspectives**

#### *General Considerations*

Most interviewed NGOs and some interviewed businesses know very little about specific aspects of the government's work in promoting business-NGO relationships, but they are generally aware of activity in this regard. Although some government departments and business-related organisations have recently started to promote the need for such relationships, most of those interviewed do not think that the government has done enough to facilitate cooperation between businesses and NGOs. They appreciate that the government may not be responsible for taking the lead in promoting business-NGO relationships, but they do realise its support can be very important. Environmental conditions in Hong Kong are deteriorating and, thus, any improvement in them as a result of actions by the government, businesses and the public is to be welcomed.

Many of the interviewees thought that business-related organisations, especially the various manufacturing associations, trade associations and chambers of commerce, have only played a limited role in facilitating business-NGO relationships and could do much more in this regard. Half of the NGOs and most of the companies interviewed thought that the recent environment-related awards made by various associations and the

government have encouraged businesses to form relationships with NGOs on environmental issues. Businesses like the positive media exposure the awards can offer. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) businesses especially feel the awards assist their business development by giving them positive recognition.

It is difficult to judge the impact of such awards in terms of the actual changes in how businesses are run. It is not clear whether the awards are helpful to the environment and what standards and criteria the awards are based on. Some interviewees doubted the credibility of some awards. Two believed that the giving of too many awards may make the awards rather meaningless.

#### *Roles of the Government*

*(a) NGO perspectives.* All of the interviewed NGOs thought that the government should assume a proactive role in developing relevant legislation. The government should strengthen existing environmental regulations with a focus on measures such as the eco-labeling of products and waste separation, recycling and reduction. Cooperative relationships between NGOs and businesses should be encouraged, so that more businesses seek the assistance of NGOs in improving their environmental performance. Also, the NGOs believed that environmental policies set by the government should be more comprehensive. Without a set of detailed policies and practices, including the ratification of international agreements, they found it difficult to argue with businesses over their development plans. Overall, the government needs to strike a balance between the interests of NGOs, customers and businesses. This includes recognising that there will be additional costs of production in fulfilling certain environmental regulations, with implications especially for the operation of SMEs. Prudent consideration is essential for SMEs as they make a substantial contribution to Hong Kong's economy.

Most interviewed NGOs suggested the government should enhance education on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental conservation for businesses (eg, through seminars), and provide more inspiration and support for the implementation of relevant policies and programmes. In increasing the awareness of Hong Kong businesses that business development and profits can go along with environmental conservation, and better environmental management practices can give them long-term benefits or even new business opportunities, the government should keep them informed of the successful strategies implemented by international corporations, as well as of positive cases of cooperation with NGOs. The sharing of good practices among HK businesses should also be promoted.

Apart from the enhancement of regulations and education, capacity

building for NGOs is also central to prompting and sustaining business-NGO relationships on environmental conservation. Inadequate capacity has been the root problem of most NGOs, especially the small scale ones, in initiating cooperation with businesses and maintaining balanced power in long run. A central and independent funding source for the NGOs in supporting their projects with businesses for environmental conservation was suggested by the interviewed NGOs. This funding source should be long-term with considerable scale and offer fair opportunities for all NGOs. The government should ensure the sustainability of the funding by setting it up, managing it, allocating government resources, and attracting money from businesses. Obtaining financial support from this fund instead of directly from businesses could help NGOs keep their independence from businesses and lessen their financial pressure. NGOs would not need to worry that any environmental intervention on their part would end up with the withdrawal of income. With this independence and financial resource, NGOs would be more capable of initiating and maintaining cooperative relationships with businesses. Beside financial support, free venues provided by the government (eg, community halls) for running activities would also help NGOs in reducing expenditure.

Another way to assist environmental NGOs is to strengthen their political status. The government should allow greater and early involvement of NGOs in its policy making process. In Hong Kong, there has been a long practice that a lot of government projects are contracted out to the private sector. It is also common for the contracted companies to subcontract out parts of their projects. Monitoring the environmental performances of the involved companies by the government is not an easy task. Recently, there was a good initiative that a government department named an environmental NGO to advise a transport company on its new railway project. In this regard, some interviewees suggested the government could do more to promote NGO's engagement in its out-sourced projects, with contractors needing to get agreement from several NGOs on their construction work, as influenced by the project scale and nature.

In addition, there are other possible roles that can be played by the government in facilitating business-NGO relationships and improving corporate environmental management, as suggested by the interviewed NGOs. First, the government could create a forum for businesses and NGOs to meet and share their views — for example, by organising seminars on corporate environmental management, and by setting-up an online system which indirectly links them up. Second, the government should act as a role model and use environmentally friendly products. Third, advocacy and education through the mass media (eg, TV programmes) could help put public pressure on businesses. Fourth, the government could require corporations to publish mandatory CSR reports to increase the transparency of their environmental performance. This could increase their awareness of



environmental issue. Fifth, the government could collect ideas from schools and universities in planning relevant policies. The government needs to take more long-term actions to facilitate the cooperation of businesses and NGOs, instead of just staying at the current levels of promotion and feasibility studies.

*(b) Business perspectives.* Most interviewed businesses agreed that the government needs to provide more information to the public and corporations on CSR concerning environmental conservation. Half of them suggested that the government should strengthen regulations to promote environmentally friendly products and services. More importantly, the government should encourage business-NGO cooperation by highlighting the benefits to businesses, and providing them with guidance and examples of effective programme implementation. These suggestions are consistent with the NGOs' views, except that not all of the interviewed businesses would like to have enhanced environmental regulations governing their operations.

*(c) Government perspectives.* All of the interviewed officials of government departments expressed their views on the government's roles based on their experience in supporting or being involved in business-NGO relationships for environmental conservation. They suggested that the government could take the initiative in matching-up NGOs and businesses. This would be helpful for those NGOs which feel hesitant or are not experienced in setting-up relationships with corporations. The government could also approach business-related organisations to assist in this regard in relation to their members. It could set up and coordinate certain business-NGO cooperative programmes, dealing with liaison and promotion, balancing the interests of businesses and NGOs, and reducing their potential for conflict. Instead of being the sole funding provider, the government could approach businesses for financial sponsorships. Raising public awareness is also the role of the government. The government could contribute expertise and hardware. One interviewee also suggested that the government could provide information to the public and corporations through the internet and the government's resources centres. The ideas of educating corporations, bringing NGOs and businesses together, and achieving financial sustainability from businesses, are similar to the NGOs' suggestions.

The interviewed departments have initiated a number of projects aimed at facilitating business-NGO relationships. Some of them have been one-off, lasting for a few months to two years, while others are on-going. The projects could be good reference points for other government departments. They have connected businesses and NGOs, provided hardware contributions like venues and equipment, and also provided financial support and employees' skills and time. Some of them have helped to get

volunteers, financial support and hardware contributions from businesses.

One example is the organisation of environmental classes for employees of the government, businesses, and some NGOs. Knowledge and experience of the three sectors were shared. Other examples have included the eco-labeling of products for businesses, the accreditation of fishing and vegetable farms with good practices, the organisation of educational activities and the preparation of information packages for schools and the general public, the organisation and promotion of projects like tree-planting and mooncake box recycling, and the re-refinery of the used oil of motor boats. These activities have involved working not just with relevant NGOs and businesses, but also with other parties such as district councils and the restaurant federation.

Among the examples, school-based environmental education since late 2005 is particularly encouraging. Relevant government departments, different business sectors, and environmental and social NGOs have worked together in delivering educational activities for primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. Tours, workshops, seminars and school talks are organised for students, parents and teachers. Diverse, specialised and up-to-date knowledge and insights are offered by businesses and NGOs. Such knowledge may not be covered by the normal curriculum in schools. Consequently, it saves resources of the government in providing the educational activities by itself alone. At the same time, businesses are eager to be involved as this allows them to have more opportunity to create a better public understanding of their products, practices and employment arrangements. This project shows that considering the long-term benefits of businesses and the community alike is one of the key elements in securing successful cooperation. It offers a win-win strategy for all the involved parties — the government, businesses, NGOs, schools and students.

One interviewee suggested that the government should not forever be involved in organising projects for facilitating business-NGO relationships. It should withdraw its participation after the atmosphere of business-NGO cooperation is created in the society, such that they can link up with each other by themselves.

#### *Roles of Business-Related Organisations*

(a) *NGO perspectives.* Interviewed NGOs suggested that, similar to the government, business-related organisations should advocate more on CSR and foster positive business attitudes towards sustainable economic development involving environmental conservation alongside business development, rather than just focusing on short-term financial and related matters of concern to their members. Business-related organisations like the manufacturing associations, trade associations and chambers of commerce should be the important players in encouraging better corporate

environmental management practices and in promoting the cooperation of businesses with NGOs. They are able to access those businesses in their sectors which are their members. But currently, as perceived by interviewees, most of them have not utilised their capabilities well in this regard.

The main responsibilities of most business-related organisations are to represent businesses and to strive to facilitate their success. Business-related organisations could valuably assist their members in identifying green management practices and encouraging them to adopt such practices (eg, using environmentally friendly products). They could invite environmental NGOs to look into business operations and to advise on green business practices, with the aim of making it easy and efficient for businesses to adopt such practices.

Business-related organisations could represent their members in approaching NGOs and in improving the communication between businesses and NGOs. Hong Kong lacks and needs a permanent forum for businesses and NGOs to communicate with one another. Different business-related organisations could work together to set up such a forum, so as to bring businesses and NGOs together to address the involvement of businesses in conserving the environment. They could also provide training for NGOs in business management practices, and for businesses in community philanthropy and involvement, so as to build up their respective capacities for engaging with one another.

*(b) Business perspectives.* Echoing the NGO perspectives, nearly all of the interviewed businesses suggested the business-related organisations should enhance the education for them on their CSRs concerning environmental conservation. Besides, business-related organisations could offer significant help in matching up businesses and NGOs by providing common platforms (eg, a website and regular seminars) and references for networking (eg, by providing a list of NGOs which are interested in forming cooperative relationships with businesses for environmental conservation).

Presently active business-related organisations such as the Business Environment Council and Hong Kong Productivity Council could work with academic institutions and other business-related organisations like the chambers of commerce in fostering an awareness of responsibilities and strategies for environmental conservation. Half of the interviewed businesses suggested that business-related organisations should represent their members by being involved in the development of environmental regulations for businesses.

*(c) Government perspectives.* Consistent with the NGO and business perspectives, the interviewed government departments suggested that business-related organisations should play an active role in encouraging their members to work together with NGOs. As business-related

organisations have a close relationship with businesses and understand their needs well, they could take the lead in organising tailor-made CSR and environmental training for their members. Seminars on CSR, environmental conservation, and the government's environmental regulations are needed. They could be provided on a fee-for-service basis according to market demand, in contrast to the limited number of free training courses offered by the government.

### **Conclusion and Ways Forward**

There is good potential for the development of business-NGO relationships for environmental conservation in Hong Kong. According to interviewees' observations and future plans, it is foreseen that more and more NGOs and businesses will soon be approaching one another to form cooperative relationships. The development of such relationships, however, will be in slow if there is a lack of involvement by the government and business-related organisations.

Recently, the government has been more open to business-NGO cooperation, and has started to promote it. The Central Policy Unit of the government highlighted it in a feasibility study in 2005. Some government departments have also become more open to NGOs' opinions. At the same time, businesses are getting more concerned about CSR issues. The public's awareness of environmental conservation and CSR is increasing, and there is a stronger market demand for environmentally friendly products. Such developments will exert pressure on businesses to improve their environmental management practices and to promote better corporate images. This, in turn, will induce businesses to form more cooperative relationships with NGOs in adopting green management practices and developing green products.

Although more and more business-NGO relationships are likely to emerge in the future, it does not necessarily mean that such relationships will have a flourishing future in terms of quality and continuity. The relationships will only be moved to a more mature level if all of the businesses, NGOs, government departments and business-related organisations involved are prepared to take more proactive steps in fostering and maintaining them. First, more government departments and business-related organisations will need to take the kind of facilitative action suggested above. Second, businesses need to treat environmental conservation more seriously and root out their bias against NGOs. Third, NGOs need to be more aware of the needs of businesses and provide them with more constructive advice in renovating their environmental management practices instead of just criticising them. They need also to look for different ways of cooperating with businesses in responding to the abilities and strengths of different business sectors, instead of solely seeking

to get financial support from them. If businesses feel that they cannot derive benefits from investing time and resources in cooperative relationships with NGOs, they may reduce their participation or even withdraw completely in the future. The benefits for them can be in various possible forms, not only as monetary returns. Possible outcomes include improved corporate images and reputations, better acceptance and trust from the community, enhanced understanding on the part of the community of business operations, more inspiration to develop new products and services, a steady supply of raw materials due to environmental conservation, and an assurance of the quality and quantity of labor supply for business operations through the provision of relevant education and training. In the process, business-NGO relationships can focus on some significant environmental issues which require long-term effort and which cannot be worked out without collaboration between businesses and NGOs.

The economic situation of businesses and markets can affect the development of business-NGO relationships. Economic depression reduces the incentive for businesses to support environmental conservation. According to the interviewed businesses, if the economy is gloomy, they will not consider this issue due to less spare money available. So, following this logic, they have to understand how cooperative relationships for environmental conservation can in fact benefit their investments. At the same time, NGOs' incomes may be reduced during economic depression because of fewer corporate donations, this affecting most of their concerned corporate programmes.

In Hong Kong, the private sector always exerts a high level of political power in the society. The power and status of NGOs are considered to be relatively low. Some interviewed NGOs perceived that public policy making tends to be biased in favour of the private sector. There is a huge power disparity between the business and NGO sectors which can significantly hamper the building of mutual trust and respect. Empowering NGOs in an attempt to create a level playing field is important in ensuring a continuous development of business-NGO relationships. If the NGO sector remains weak, it will be difficult for it to have meaningful and fair relationships with businesses. Any cooperation between them may easily end with few short-term projects for advocacy and public relations or merely donations and volunteering, instead of long-term consultative ones concerning corporate environmental management aimed at long-term environmental improvements.

Capacity building for NGOs should be a primary issue in addressing and facilitating the development of business-NGO cooperative relationships. Ways of achieving this, as suggested by interviewees and already referred to above, include the establishment of a central and independent funding source, making provision for NGOs and contracted companies to engage with one another in the earlier stages of projects, and ensuring the

government and business-related organisations assist by creating match-up forums for NGOs and businesses. In addition, more action is needed in empowering NGOs in relation to their human resource management and development. It is common in Hong Kong for the staff of most NGOs to be on a voluntary basis or to receive a relatively low salary in comparison with the labour market. It is therefore difficult for NGOs to keep staff for a long time and, accordingly, difficult for them to maintain long-term projects with businesses. This situation should be relieved after the strengthening of NGOs' financial capacity. Besides, NGOs need to be able to give more practical advice to businesses by equipping themselves with in-depth and diversified expertise, including both volunteers and paid staff. Regular training will help staff upgrade skills and acquire new skills in the planning and management of cooperative relationships, with such skills continuously being refined and built on as more and more relationships are established with businesses for the purposes of environmental conservation.

Businesses and NGOs can make a considerable contribution to environmental conservation in ways that can complement the policies and activities of the government. The existence of meaningful business-NGO relationships is an important means of ensuring the value of their contributions. Consequently, the establishment and maintenance of such relationships are matters to which NGOs, businesses, business-related organisations, and the government alike need to pay close attention in the name of effective environmental conservation and improvement.

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*The thirty-one interviewed environmental NGOs, businesses, governmental departments, and other relevant organisations and individuals in Hong Kong included: Hong Kong's People Council for Sustainable Development, Green Peng Chau Association, Civic Exchange, Kadoorie Farm and Botanical Garden, Footprint, Greenwoods (HK), WWF (HK) (two divisions), TRAFFIC East Asia, Friends of the Earth (HK), HK Bird Watching Society, Green Lantau Association, TaiO Culture Workshop, Greenpeace China, Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation, Mass Transit Railway Corporation, New Energy and*

*Nano-Technology Co Ltd., Exxon-Mobil, Starbucks, Hewlett Packard, HSBC, Cathay Pacific Airways, CLP Group, Education and Manpower Bureau, Sustainable Development Unit, Environmental Protection Department, Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department, Business Environment Council, Hong Kong Productivity Council, and a Legislative Councilor — Dr C H Cheung. The interviews were conducted by Dennis Cheung and Sukhmani Mantel as part of the research project of the Centre of Urban Planning and Environmental Management, the University of Hong Kong, entitled "Partnerships, Voluntary Agreements and the Process of Environmental Reform". The project was supervised by Richard Welford and Peter Hills of the Centre, and funded by the Hong Kong Research Grants Commission (HKRGC) (Grant HKU 7288/04H). Thank to all interviewees, supervisors and the HKRGC for their support for this research.*