

# Hong Kong should set a poverty-eradication goal



**Hilton Cheong-Leen**

*The author is a former LegCo member, the first Chinese chairman of the Urban Council and life president of the Hong Kong Civic Association.*

**F**inancial Secretary Paul Chan Mo-po made his maiden budget address at the Legislative Council on Feb 22; the 2017-18 Budget was quite similar to its predecessors but the new financial secretary envisioned a more forward-looking approach on economic development, a better quality of life for Hong Kong people and more education opportunities to help young people gain higher-paying jobs that matched their personal interests.

When he was development secretary, Chan and Secretary for Transport and Housing Anthony Cheung Bing-leung closely cooperated to prepare a 10-year roll forward Long Term Housing Strategy that would supply about 500,000 units. This included 200,000 public housing rental units and 90,000 subsidized sale flats, with the balance private units. Public housing topped Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying's agenda of livelihood issues which he wanted to resolve for Hong Kong people.

The financial secretary's earmarking of HK\$30 billion of the HK\$92 billion budget surplus to strengthen elderly services and rehabilitation services, and for people with disabilities, was very much needed. Thousands of private residential elderly care centers provide below-par service; their standard can only be improved with financial assistance from government.

Reserving HK\$20 billion to provide better community and sports facilities could not have been timelier. The launching of 26 projects in the coming five years to develop new or improve existing sports or recreation facilities has been long overdue.

An allocation from the budget surplus of HK\$10 billion to expedite information technology development in Hong Kong, particularly in the financial services sector, is also welcome.

The HK\$1 billion allocated from the budget surplus for youth development includes HK\$700 million for the Education Bureau to develop vocational and professional education and training (VPET) where there is a huge

demand for expansion.

Since last year, the Education Bureau and the Vocational Training Council (VTC) have cooperated in an effort to convince parents and students that VPET education was a very worthwhile alternative to university-type education in view of attractive job prospects for its graduates. It is said that VTC graduates have an easier time securing jobs that match their training than university graduates.

Chief Executive election candidate Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor promised in her manifesto that if elected she would "immediately increase recurrent expenditure on education by HK\$5 billion a year". If Lam is elected, I hope she would allocate some of that for further VPET expansion where the need is great.

Besides public housing, Leung was concerned about poverty alleviation when he became CE in 2012. It was in fact a priority in his election manifesto. Consequently, in December 2012 the government reinstated the Commission on Poverty which was chaired by then chief secretary for administration Lam, who has been replaced by Matthew Cheung Kin-chung.

In Hong Kong the concept of "relative poverty" is adopted which is set at 50 percent of the median monthly household income before policy intervention — ie before taxation and welfare transfers. According to the poverty line analysis, after recurrent cash intervention (ie after taking into account recurrent cash benefits such as Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), Disability Allowance, School Textbook Assistance, etc) Hong Kong's poor population stood at 970,000 in 2015.

Hong Kong faces a challenging situation regarding the non-CSSA working poor families, estimated at 130,000 households (about 450,000 people), together with the many young people who are worried they will end up in the inter-generational poverty trap.

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tinue to improve the system as well as use the Community Care Fund (CCF) to bridge the gap in the system. Her pragmatic and flexible problem-solving approach should be applauded.

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From the so far unallocated balance of HK\$31 billion in this year's budget surplus, the financial secretary could reserve HK\$5 billion for the CCF to accelerate poverty reduction in Hong Kong.

About 40 million people on the mainland still live below the poverty line and the central government has set 2020 as the target year to eradicate poverty so the country could achieve the goal of being a moderately prosperous country.

President Xi Jinping has urged more intensified and precise poverty relief efforts to realize the goal of pulling the entire country out of poverty before 2021. The least we can do is set a comparable target considering how much wealthier Hong Kong people are than their mainland compatriots on average.

## 香港應訂立 減貧窮目標

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### 張有興

作者曾任立法局（現稱立法會）議員，是市政局首位華人主席，現為香港公民協會永遠會長。

若林鄭月娥於 7 月 1 日就任香港特區行政長官，希望她在 5 年任期內能以減貧為首要工作，香港畢竟是世界上其中一個發展得最好和最富有的城市。

財政司陳茂波於 2 月 22 日在立法會發表的 2017-18 年財政預算案，是他的處女之作，但與前任的差別不算太大。不過這位新財政司司長提出較有遠見的方法，著墨於經濟發展、改善港人的生活質素、提供更多教育機會以協助年輕人獲得符合個人興趣而薪酬較高的工作。

陳茂波任發展局局長的時候，與運輸及房屋局局長張炳良緊密合作，制定了 10 年長遠房屋策略，目標是供應 500,000 個居住單位。這包括了 200,000 個公共租住單位和 90,000 個資助出售單位。公共房屋是行政長官梁振英民生政策的重中之重，是他想為香港人解決的問題。

財政司從香港的 920 億元財政盈餘撥出 3 百億元來加強安老服務和復康服務，傷殘人士亦受惠，正切合所需。數以千計的私營老人院服務欠佳，有賴政府資助以提升水準。

預留 200 億以提供更好的社區和體育設施則來得再及時也沒有。未來 5 年將推出 26 項計劃以興建康體場地或改善現有設施，這其實早已應該進行。

從財政盈餘撥出 100 億元以促進香港的資訊科技發展，特別是金融服務相關者，亦是好事。

此外，亦從財政盈餘中撥出 1 億元發展青年事務，包括撥給教育局 7,000 萬來發展有極大需求的職業專才教育。

自去年起，教育局和職業訓練局開始合作，向家長和學生宣傳，職業專才教育 (VPET) 是大學教育之外的另一可取選擇，畢業生的就業前途一點也不遜色。據稱，職訓局畢業生獲聘而學有所用比大學畢業生還容易。

行政長官選舉候選人林鄭月娥在競選政綱承諾，一旦當選“會即時增加每年 50 億元的教育經常開支”。若林當選，我希望她會從中撥款大力發展需求極大的職業專才教育。

梁振英 2012 年出任行政長官時，除了公共房屋外，亦關心扶貧的問題。事實上這也是他競選政綱的一項重點。故此在同年 12 月，政府重設扶貧委員會，由當時任政務司司長的林鄭月娥任主席，現時則由張建宗替代。

香港採用的“相對貧窮”概念，設定在政策介入前家庭月入中位數的一半，即以納稅和接受福利前計算。據貧窮線的分析，以恆常現金介入（即綜合社會保障、傷殘津貼、學校書簿津貼等在內）後計算，香港 2015 年的貧窮人口有 970,000 人。

香港正面對一個有挑戰性的情況，非綜援的低收入在職家庭估計有 130,000 戶（約 450,000 人），還有為數不少的年輕人擔心會陷入世襲貧窮的羅網。

林鄭月娥在她的競選政綱裡承諾，一旦當選，她會不斷改善整個制度及運用關愛基金以彌補制度內的缺口。她這種務實而靈活的對症下藥方向值得稱讚。

若林鄭月娥於 7 月 1 日就任香港特區行政長官，希望她在 5 年任期內能以減貧為首要工作，香港畢竟是世界上其中一個發展得最好和最富有的城市。

今年度的財政盈餘尚有 310 億元未有動用，財政司可預留 5 億予關愛基金，以加快減少香港的貧窮人口。

大陸仍約有 4 千萬人生活在貧窮線以下，中央政府已定下在 2020 年減貧的目標，國家亦可達小康之境。

習近平主席已要求加大力度，更準確展開扶貧工作，以實現國家在 2021 年前把整個國家從貧窮出脫身。香港人平均比大陸同胞富足，有鑑於此，我們至少可以訂定相類的目標。