

苗圃問答

Questions and Answers about SOWERS ACTION



1. 現時中國大陸的基礎教育情況是怎樣的呢？

中國自 1986 年開始實行義務教育法，所有適齡兒童都須接受小一至中三的教育，家長有責任送子女入學，學費全免，只需繳交書雜費，在校寄宿生還需繳付寄宿費。

但因應地區不同，書雜費由幾十元到幾百元不等。一般來說，在城市，失學率是很低的，但在一些貧困山區來說，收入僅足溫飽，子女讀書困難，失學情況是很普遍的。中國政府自 2006 年起逐步擴大農村地區免雜費、免書費和補貼寄宿生的生活費（簡稱「兩免一補」）。貧困地區兒童失學問題有望逐漸緩和。然而貧困地區危房校舍和師資，仍是大難題。

What is the situation of fundamental education in Mainland China today?

The People's Republic of China started to implement the free-education policy in 1986, requiring all children attaining school age to receive 6 years of primary plus 3 years of secondary education. Parents were obliged to send their children to school as schooling is completely free of charge, all they needed to pay were just book and miscellaneous fees; boarding students were also required to pay boarding fees.

Depending on the region, book and miscellaneous fees ranged from tens to hundreds of Yuan. In general, the drop-out rate in cities was extremely low. But in impoverished localities in the mountains where household incomes were barely sufficient for survival, it was very common for children to drop out from school as the families already had a hard time making ends meet. In 2006, the Chinese government started to gradually expand the fee-waiver policy in China's rural regions, exempting students of such localities from having to pay book and miscellaneous fees. In addition, boarding students were provided with a living subsidy (referred to in short as "Two waivers-One subsidy"). Therefore, it is hoped that the new policy could slowly solve school children drop-out problems haunting China's impoverished regions. Furthermore, problems posed by dangerous school buildings and poor teacher quality continue to plague these regions.

2. 你們有考慮過辦教育是政府的責任嗎？

中國由於人口多，發展教育面對很大困難。也許我們可以這樣看，香港已經是一個非常繁榮的社會吧？想像一下明天早上，所有慈善團體舉辦的學校，醫院，社區中心等都沒有了，香港的社會服務足夠嗎？連香港這樣高度發展的社會都需要慈善團體的支援，更遑論中國這個發展中國家了。

Have you ever considered that it is the government's duty to make education available to its people?

Having a huge population, China faces tremendous difficulties in education development. Perhaps we can look at the issue this way: Hong Kong, an extremely affluent society as it is, can you imagine what will happen if all charity organizations presently running schools, hospitals and community centers in Hong Kong are gone tomorrow? Will Hong Kong's social services continue to be adequate if that happens? When the support of charity organizations remains crucial to a highly developed society like Hong Kong, the importance of such organizations for a developing country like China is obvious.

3. 眾所周知要徹底改善中國教育的難處，為甚麼你們仍會搞『苗圃行動』？

面對著一大堆困難、不滿意等，很多人會選擇妥協，甚至逃避，或者漠視，讓這一代人應該解決的難題，推到下一代去。但人莫不需要理想去激揚生命。知難行更難，對於中國教育，雖然我們不能在一、二十年完成，我們仍堅信必有心人，一燈燃亮萬燈，將這個信念延續下去。這樣『苗圃行動』就代表一種生命，一種敢於面對困難的生命。

Everybody knows of the difficulties involved in thoroughly improving education in China. Why do you persist in running "Sowers Action"?

Many people choose to compromise, run away or turn a blind eye when they are faced with seemingly un-surmountable difficulties and dissatisfactions. As such, problems needing to be tackled by one generation are shoved onto the shoulders of the next. But don't we humans need to have ideals to live an inspiring life. We know that the road of education improvement in China is neither smooth nor can it be completed in one or two decades. Yet we strongly believe that the day on which we made our first stride, our journey on this road would be carried on generation after generation by like-minded individuals until the final destination is reached. In this manner, "Sowers Action" represents a kind of being, one that dares to face up to difficulties.



4. 苗圃行動通過甚麼方法去完成促進中國教育的目標呢？

我們盡力籌集善款，用於三方面：

- 一、讓所有適齡兒童都能入學，在完成九年義務教育的基礎上，進一步提升人口素質。
- 二、改善辦學條件，包括設施和建校。
- 三、改善教師質素。

同時我們希望以我們的實際行動和成果，感召更多有心、有能力的人參與這項有意義的工作。

By what means is Sowers Action to achieve its goal in promoting education development in China?

We do our best to raise funds which are to be used in 3 ways:

1. Enable all children attaining school age to attend school; further upgrade the people's quality on the basis of their completion of 9 years' free education.
2. Improve schooling conditions, including education facilities and school buildings.
3. Improve the quality of teachers.

5. 我們都擔心挪用捐款、貪污等問題，你們怎樣處理善款呢？

- a) 我們強調『實地考察、直接資助、長期跟進』。為確保善款用到切實有需要的地方，沒有工作組到過瞭解過當地的實際情況，我們是不會考慮資助的。
- b) 項目資助透過協議書形式進行，清楚列明捐款數額，用途，驗收規格等，確保工程按協議內容完成。協議由教育局或縣政府、地方團委、中國青基會及本會等機構的授權代表簽署，由眾多單位同時監察執行。
- c) 一般情況是本會只資助部份工程款項，餘款由當地籌集，增加本地鄉民的參與及監察的積極性。本會百份之五十的捐款需在工程驗收滿意後支付（部份地震災後重建項目撥款略有不同）。
- d) 歡迎捐款者及公眾人士參加本會的國內服務工作組，直接參與完成整個資助過程。

We are worried about embezzlement and corruption. What do you do with the charity donations?

- a) We stress on "On-site assessment, Direct-subsidy and Long-term follow up." To ensure that all charity donations are used in the most needy places, Sowers Action does not consider providing assistance to any locality unless our working groups understand the actual situation there upon conducting On-site assessments
- b) Projects of assistance are carried out by written agreements in which the amount of assistance, purpose, inspection and acceptance specifications are explicitly set out to ensure completion with full compliance. The written agreements, signed by authorized representatives from the Education Bureau or County government, local Party Secretariat, China Youth Development Foundation and Sowers Action, are implemented under the simultaneous supervision of multiple institutions.
- c) To arouse the enthusiasm of local villagers to participate in and supervise over project implementation, Sowers Action's assistance generally covers only part of the project's cost while the locality itself is responsible for raising any remaining balance. 50% of Sowers Action's assistance will be paid only when all works have achieved satisfactory acceptance. (The handling of assistance for post-quake reconstruction is slightly different)
- d) Sowers Action welcomes donors as well as the general public to join its China service working group and to directly participate in and follow through the entire assistance process to its completion. barely sufficient for survival, it was very common for children to drop out from school as the families already had a hard time making ends meet. In 2006, the Chinese government started to gradually expand the fee-waiver policy in China's rural regions, exempting students of such localities from having to pay book and miscellaneous fees. In addition, boarding students were provided with a living subsidy (referred to in short as "Two waivers-One subsidy"). Therefore, it is hoped that the new policy could slowly solve school children drop-out problems haunting China's impoverished regions. Furthermore, problems posed by dangerous school buildings and poor teacher quality continue to plague these regions.

6. 助學捐款會不會大部份用作苗圃的行政經費呢？這方面的支出是不是很龐大？賬目清楚嗎？

- 本會收到的一般捐款，如沒有指明用途，皆作為助學捐款。助學捐款只能用於內地資助，不能扣除任何數目作為本會的行政經費。至於本會的行政經費，來源包括會員會費，指定行政費捐款，利息收入及行政費籌募活動等。
- 由於本會以義工主導，盡力減少行政費用。大部份的活動都以自籌經費，平衡預算的辦法完成。工作組到內地服務的旅費亦需由參加的組員自付；但因會務需要而參加工作組的職員、地區幹事、義務董事、及因有特殊任務由本會董事局邀請參加的人士，可申請交通及住宿費津貼，每個工作組可申請的金額及人數皆有上限。
- 本會的賬目是完全公開的，會員及捐款者可隨時查閱。每年由德勤·關黃陳方會計師行 (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu) 審核。

Can funds raised for education assistance be used to cover Sowers Action's administrative expenses? The expenses incurred in running Sowers Action must be huge, can Sowers Action maintain clear financial accounts?

- Donations in any form, without specifying the purpose, will automatically be regarded as donations for education assistance. All funds raised for education assistance can only be used for education assistance in Mainland China, they cannot be used in any manner to cover Sowers Action's administrative expenses. As regards Sowers Action's administrative expenses, they are paid for by income generated from membership dues, donations specified for administrative use, interest income and events organized specifically for raising funds to cover Sowers Action's administrative expenses.
- Sowers Action always makes an effort to minimize its administrative expenses since it is a volunteer-led organization. Events organized by Sowers Action often raise their own funds to cover all administrative expenses incurable and maintain a balanced budget to ensure success. Individuals joining Sowers Action's China working group are liable to pay for all expenses incurred by and during the trip. However, Sowers Action's staff, Regional Officers, Honorary Directors having to join the working group as a result of the need to attend to Sowers Action's affairs and guests invited by Sowers Action's Board of Directors for special missions may apply for transport and boarding allowances. There is a ceiling for the number of participants in and amount of allowance available for application to each working group.
- Sowers Action's financial accounts are completely open and members and donors may come to inspect them at any time. Each year, these accounts are audited by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu.



7. 要資助中國教育，不是把善款匯到內地就行嗎？為甚麼你們要這樣千里迢迢，攀山涉水的親自去做服務呢？

為了表達對中國偏遠貧窮地區教育的關心，我們都認為單是捐款是不足夠的。

發展教育不是三數年間的事，需要有一個長遠不間斷的發展計劃，方能從根本改善這個問題，但是捐錢而不參與，很多時候給人一種誤導，以為一次捐款等同問題已經解決了，其實問題還是延續下去。

我們帶去的除了是一些善款外，我們還為他們帶來一點關心和支援，要知道在貧瘠山區當教師是不容易的，有時精神支持比物質支持還來得重要。

To provide assistance for education development in Mainland China, can't you simply wire the money to China? Why do you need to travel thousands of miles up the mountains and down the swamps just to render the services in person?

To show our concern for education in remote and poverty-stricken areas in Mainland China, we believe that money alone is not enough.

Education development is not something that can be done in 3-5 years' time, it requires a continuous development plan for the long-term, or there is no way to cure the problem at its root. Just giving money without physical participation can often mislead people into believing that the problem can be solved with a one-time payment. But, of course, the problem lingers on.

Therefore, besides monetary assistance, we also bring to the children care and support. You must understand that it is not an easy task to be working as teachers in those impoverished regions in the mountains; spiritual support is hence many a times more valuable than material assistance.



8. 苗圃行動會宣揚香港人的思想或意識形態嗎？

苗圃行動是一個『助學』團體，並非教育、政治或宗教團體，不會宣揚任何一種意識形態，亦不會干涉受資助學校的教學內容。

鄉村有鄉村的文​​化，如果以香港和內地的一些農村比較，這個差距就更明顯。

所以我們並不以香港的文化為主而影響到他們本土的生活和思想。例如在考慮實物資助時，我們會想到送去的物品是否和當地需要配合。例如送一批迷彩螢光的冬衣給學生，恐怕就不太配合農村生活了。

無論在考察或資助時，『禮貌』都很重要。雖然有一種資助者和受助者的關係，但我們仍是喜歡以一種較平等的態度共處。更何況我們僅是代表捐款者運用捐款的受託人。

Will Sowers Action propagate the thoughts or ideology of the Hong Kong people?

Sowers Action is an "education assistance" organization, it has nothing to do with education, politics or religion; therefore it does not propagate any ideology or interfere with the curricula of schools receiving our assistance.

Each village has its own culture, the difference is obvious when the culture of HK is compared to that of certain villages in Mainland China.

We don't seek to influence local life and thinking with Hong Kong culture as it has no priority in the way we provide assistance. For this reason, when we need to send in material assistance, we always consider whether certain objects may go well with the local need. For example, sending stylish but easily-torn garments as winter clothes to children living in impoverished regions in the mountains is simply impractical.

Whether we are conducting investigations in or providing assistance to a locality, our watch word is "to be courteous." Even though there exists a donor-receiver relationship between us and the local peoples, we like to treat everybody as equal. After all, we are merely trustees having the task of representing our donors to disburse their donations there.

9. 內地有像苗圃一樣的助學機構嗎？你們有和他們合作嗎？

有。內地的中國青少年發展基金會屬下的『希望工程』目標與苗圃行動都是一樣，希望每一個適齡兒童都能入學完成基礎教育。苗圃行動是香港的慈善團體，希望工程是內地的組織，大家目標相同，但在日常會務，籌款或落實資助過程都有不同的處理辦法。

希望工程和教育局很多時為本會提供資料，協助本會的工作組安排探訪和實地考察，並派代表在資助協議書上簽名，以負起部份跟進監察的工作，同時亦可避免有資源重疊的情況。

1997 年本會和中國青少年發展基金會合辦『行路上北京』籌款活動，共籌得港幣 2,000 萬，用於廣東、湖南、湖北、河南及河北沿途五省。

2004-05 年本會和中國青少年發展基金會再次合作，舉辦『助學長征』步行籌款活動，共籌得港幣 3,000 萬，用於江西、廣東、湖南、廣西、貴州、雲南、四川、甘肅、寧夏、陝西等十省區共 101 個縣市。

2007 年本會和雲南省青少年發展基金會、西藏青少年發展基金會合作，舉辦『茶馬古道』步行籌款活動，共籌得港幣 1,500 萬，用於雲南和西藏建校及職業教育。

Are there education assistance organizations in Mainland China resembling Sowers Action? Have you ever collaborated with them?

Yes, "Project Hope," an affiliate of China's Youth Development Foundation, has the same goal as Sowers Action: may all children attaining school age be able to attend school and complete fundamental education. Sowers Action is a charity organization registered in Hong Kong while Project Hope is an entity registered in Mainland China. Even though we have the same goal, we handle the process of fund-raising or assistance implementation differently.

Project Hope and Education Bureaus in Mainland China often provide information to Sowers Action and assist Sowers Action's working group to organize visits and on-the-spot investigations. They also dispatch representatives to sign Sowers Action's assistance agreements and take responsibility for part of the follow-up and supervision tasks, while at the same time avoid the overlap of resources.

In 1997, Sowers Action and China Youth Development Foundation jointly hosted the "Walk to Beijing" fund-raising event and received a total of HK\$20,000,000 in donations. The money was used in the five provinces found along the route: Guangdong, Hunan, Hubei, Henan and Hebei

In 2004-05, Sowers Action and China Youth Development Foundation collaborated again to host the "Long March for Education" fund-raising event and received a total of HK\$30,000,000 in donations. The money was used in a total of 101 counties/cities in the 10 provinces found along the route: Jiangxi, Guangdong, Hunan, Guansi, Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, Gansu, Ningxia and Shaanxi.

In 2007, Sowers Action collaborated with Yunan Youth Development Foundation and Xizang Youth Development Foundation to host the "Ancient Tea-Horse Route" fund-raising event and received a total of HK\$15,000,000 in donations. The money was used in Yunnan and Xizang for the construction of schools and in vocational training.

10. 你常提到的工作組，他們有甚麼具體任務？

工作組探訪時，一般會與鄉鎮領導如黨委書記等見面，以瞭解全鄉的情況，例如經濟、人口、個人年均收入或此鄉的特殊困難和問題，但有關教育的，我們還會詢問縣的教育局長，鄉的教育辦公室主任和學校校長，老師等，接著我們會填寫一份內部的學校探訪報告和考慮推薦或不推薦一些資助項目。

工作組另一個任務是根據資助協議書驗收工程，取回支出款項收據及拍攝物資使用情況的相片。

工作組也會考察在建工程、重訪學校、家訪學生等。

You often mention about the working group, what exactly are their responsibilities?

During visits, working group members often meet with village leaders such as the Party Secretary to understand the village's economic situation, population, annual income per capita or whether the village is faced with any problems or difficulties. We also consult with the director of the county's Education Bureau, head of the village's Education Office and principal and teachers of the school on matters of education. Thereafter, we will fill out a school-visit report (for internal use) and consider whether to recommend or not to recommend certain projects for assistance.

Another responsibility of the working group is to carry out project acceptance in accordance with the assistance agreements, retrieve the receipts for all payments made and take photos of how objects send in as material assistance are being used.

The working group may also inspect construction projects in progress, revisit schools and conduct home visits with students.

11. 聽說很多時候，由於種種原因例如材料漲價等，在內地搞建設是難以完工的，這就變了無底洞，這問題你們怎麼處理呢？

在未審批重建學校工程以前，一般需要有關單位填妥本會問卷及提供圖則、用料預算等，本會才會加以考慮。審批時我們只批出一個資助上限，並要求對方就所有工程工作一保證（包底）才考慮資助。

在特殊情況，如果理由充份合理，董事局也會考慮追加資助金額。

It is commonly said that owing to various reasons, such as a hike in price of materials, construction projects in Mainland China are often left with no completion date and turn into a bottomless money-sucking pit. How does Sowers Action tackle this problem?

Before examining and granting approval to any school reconstruction projects, Sowers Action often requires the relevant units to complete and return a questionnaire together with blueprints and drawings specifying the materials to be used, and also the budget of construction cost; or, no consideration will be given to such projects. In the course of project examination and approval, besides specifying only the maximum amount of assistance possible, we will demand our counterparts to guarantee the completion of all works and be wholly responsible for any shortfall; or, no consideration will be given to such a project.

Under special circumstances, presented with legitimate reasons, Sowers Action's Board of Directors may at a later date consider to increase the assistance amount.

12. 剛才解釋了苗圃行動的推行方法，但是背後的信念是甚麼呢？

不會。所有資助項目都必須經過本會董事局批核。因為我們除了考慮到資助的需要外，還要考慮我們資助和跟進的能力。

Will assistance be granted during the course of a visit?

No, all projects of assistance must first be examined and approved by Sowers Action's Board of Directors. This is because besides having to consider the degree of necessity for a project to receive assistance, we must also take into consideration our ability to provide assistance to and follow up on such a project.

13. 剛才解釋了苗圃行動的推行方法，但是背後的信念是甚麼呢？

我們認為要從根本解決一個地方的貧困問題，需從教育做起，讓當地人民能夠自力更生。

所以我們的目標是以『助人自助』的發展策略為主。

我們的口號是：『治貧先治本，基礎在教育』。然而，要有效執行這種發展計劃，須以尊重地方文化為主。

另外，如果單就感性的層面看，幫助一個貧苦學生令他可以接受教育，是做一件好事，但如果看遠一點，這其實關切到整個民族的前途。試想想中國如不能改善人口素質情況，她怎樣於 21 世紀持續發展？所以我們相信中國的進步在於將人口包袱轉化為智力資源。

You have just explained to me about how Sowers Action carries out education assistance, so what is your belief behind all this?

Our belief is, education is the remedy to poverty. To be able to tackle the problem of poverty at its root, people living in impoverished regions must be able to become self-reliant.

As such, Sowers Action's goal is based on a development strategy that stresses on "helping people to help themselves."

Sowers Action's slogan is: "education is fundamental to the elimination of poverty." However, the effective implementation of such a development strategy requires the respect for all local cultures.

Also, judging the issue from an angle of compassion, it is good to be able to help an impoverished student to receive proper schooling. Judging the issue on a long-term basis, it concerns the future of all Chinese peoples! If China fails to improve its literacy rate, how can she continue to develop in the 21st century? As a result, we trust that China's progress resides in turning the burden of its huge population into intellectual resource.

