

Review and Outlook



Chair of the Board
Choi Siu Ming

Chief Executive Officer
Brianna Hui

Chairperson Message



As the 3-year long pandemic subsides, public sentiments and outlooks are starting to resume normal. On the other hand, social order and the economy, despite signs of improvement, has not fully recovered. Further, as China – US relations continue to deteriorate, it has led to low economic growth and high inflation, thereby putting enormous pressure on corporate profitability and livelihood of our citizens. As a result, the number of volunteers and fund raising participants have seen a significant decrease, and the project donation amount raised during the year, HK\$ 13 million, approximates only one-third of those raised in normal years. In May, a trip to Nepal was organized with only 19 participants. Due to increased regulations for stability maintenance in various regions, it has been challenging for external groups to operate, and many resources need to be allocated for government procedures and reporting.

In this post pandemic era, complacencies are common place, and the can-do attitude of the past has all but disappeared. And as video-conferencing now replace most face-to-face meeting, the absence of human interactions makes it difficult to build morale and cohesion in our volunteer team.

Some suggest that charitable organization has no place in our society. However, as income and other inequalities increasing rapidly, the role of charitable organization – to mediate and mitigate such inequalities – as we see it, has become all the more important. Without such organizations, what will our society come of tomorrow?

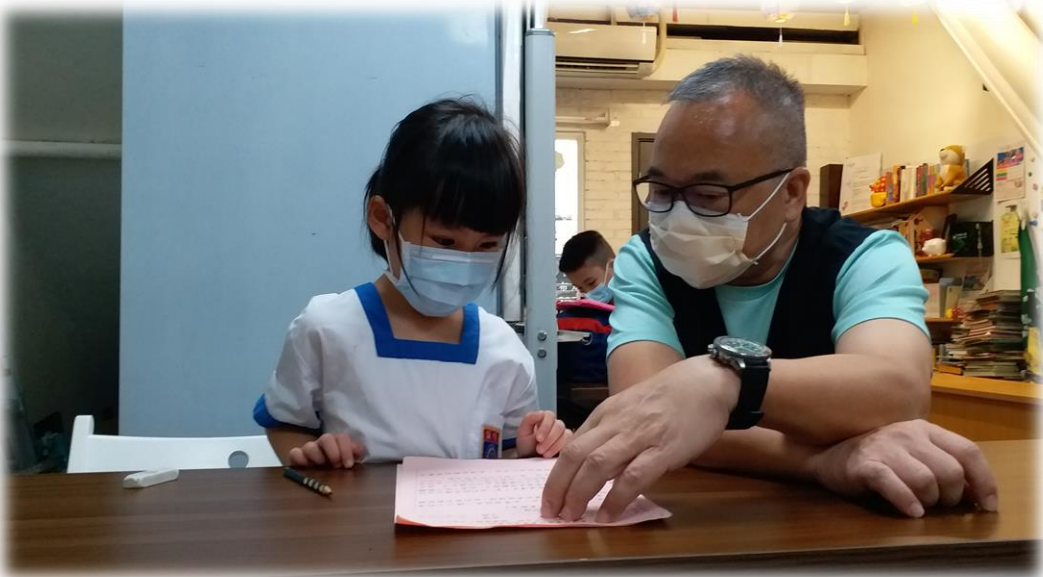
In June, we saw over 800 volunteers participated, despite extreme heat, to complete the giant puzzle that bore the name of our organization, “Sowers Acton”. I take the opportunity to express our gratitude to all those participated. In the same month, we held our first ever flag-selling fund raising activity. However, the location (Hong Kong Island which is rather far from our beneficiary area) and date (close to exam period) we were assigned to were less than ideal and has severely affected our ability to fundraise. However, we will learn from this and continue to work harder next year.

Progress on projects in Myanmar, Northern Thailand and Nepal were marginal this past year. The main adverse factors are foreign exchange controls limiting our ability to wire in subsidy funding and political where our ability to work with local partners remain uncertain. At the moment, we are collaborating with our local partners on a very “low key” basis. In contrast, our achievements in Nepal were more satisfactory, especially in the Chinese language classes. 3 of our students finished a 1-year course and as a result, gained new employment which helped to raise their monthly income from 15,000 to 40,000+ rupee.

Our agricultural projects have also provided relief for the recipient families. However, this is a country prone to natural disasters. Every year, monsoons cause torrential rain and mudslides, and families are destroyed. It will take major national policies to improve the fundamentals, but for now, Sowers will assist in any way we can to provide relief. For the Nepalese residents, a bag of rice, a winter coat we provided are greatly treasured. As we delivered these relief supplies, we were greeted enthusiastically and emotionally, local residents shaking our hands, weeping, and expressing their gratitude in foreign words that we do not quite comprehend. And all this while, we can think of no one but you who donated selflessly to the cause.

Sowers Action Shum Shui Po center is also busy at work. While needs for family subsidy decrease as society regains normalcy post pandemic, we switch our focus to strengthen education programs: one-on-one tutoring, theme classes, special education, out-reach programs to expand students’ horizon and confidence. With that, we aim ultimately to minimize cross-generation poverty through education. Although we have already reached out to many, much work remains. Charity is a shared responsibility and achieving social equality will no doubt contribute to a harmonious society.





I once met a widow who lost her husband less than a year after coming to Hong Kong from China. She and her daughter need to survive on a monthly subsidy of 4,000, after paying rent there is little left and they to rely on lunch box hand-outs for their meals. And when they had to relocate from Cheung Sha Wan to Mongkok, she needed to move her belongings walking the distance as she did not have the means to pay for bus fare. At the end, Sowers helped her relocate and found a used refrigerator for her use. Many voiced their opinion, some said that she should return to China and continue farming, some sympathized with her needs to stay in Hong Kong to care for her daughter. In the middle of it all, Sowers Action tries to play a critical role in filling in the void where public policies did not address.



I come back to the question “what will our society come of tomorrow?” Sowers can be said a microcosm of the public welfare sector, while we are known for our work amongst the sub-divided flat residents in Shum Shui Po, we are also known for providing care for the less fortunate outside of Hong Kong. The non-profit sector nowadays is now run more and more by economic and market dynamics, where competition, profitability and exclusivity are becoming more important. Under our limited operational budget, how can we afford to pay the high salary of some expert who can help apply successfully to foundation funding? Alternatively, to receive funding, we need to play by or rely on the 3 power principles, power of money, power of the government, and power of the social media.

The contracting economy and declining income has severely impacted donations to non-profit organizations and most can no longer operate independently to serve out its mission to improve social causes. And worse, many small to medium sized organizations have gone out of existence, and the remaining few are spread razor-thin and inadequate to serve the many needs of our society, with the void especially severe in the low-income population, and we are hearing much grievances from the neglected. In closing, we at Sowers Action are no doubt feeling the financial impact of the economic contraction. A drought is looming but we are hopeful that we will be able to discover relief, new funding sources, before the drought arrives.