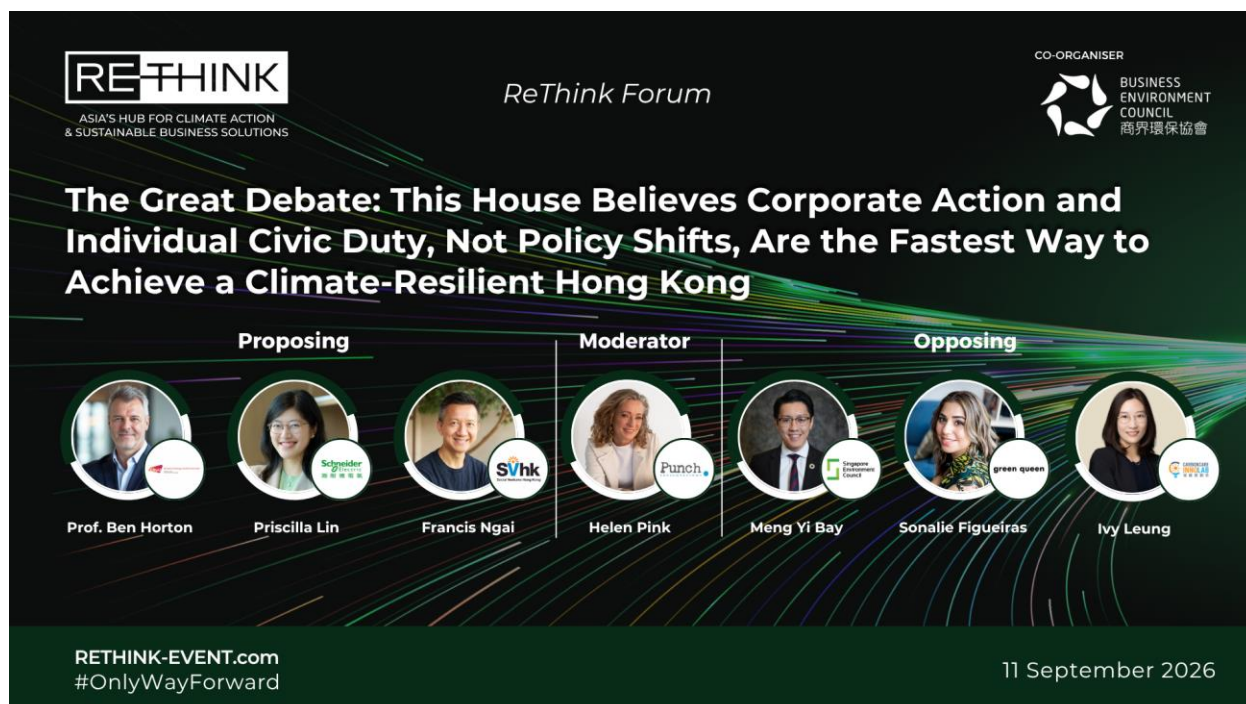




The Great Debate: This House Believes Corporate Action and Individual Civic Duty, Not Policy Shifts, Are the Fastest Way to Achieve a Climate-Resilient Hong Kong

ReThink HK Forum

11 Sep (Fri) Day 2 : 16:30 – 17:35

This debate explored a central question: **What is the fastest path to making Hong Kong climate resilient: top-down government policy or bottom-up corporate and community action?**

Executive Summary

The debate concluded that **corporate and civic action is the fastest lever for climate resilience**, winning the audience vote. However, the discussion made clear that both

approaches are necessary: policy provides the framework and scale, while individuals and businesses can act immediately rather than waiting for regulation.

Key Arguments from the Proposing Team (Corporate & Community Action)

1. Governments have consistently failed to act fast enough

- Climate scientists have warned governments about climate change for decades.
- Despite repeated warnings through IPCC reports, COP summits and the Paris Agreement, global emissions and atmospheric CO₂ concentrations have continued to rise.
- The team argued that waiting for government action has proven ineffective and risks further delay.

2. Individuals and businesses can act now

- Companies and consumers control significant emissions through purchasing decisions, supply chains and consumption habits.
- Examples were shared of businesses investing in climate resilience because it makes commercial sense:
 - o Reduced insurance premiums through climate risk reduction.
 - o Energy efficiency investments delivering immediate and sustained cost savings.
 - o Supply chain decarbonisation improving competitiveness and reducing risk.
- The proposition argued that decisions about procurement, investment, food choices and suppliers can begin immediately.

3. Civic movements drive change

- Historical social movements, from civil rights to gender equality, were cited as examples of people-led change.
- Community initiatives often create solutions and prototypes that governments later adopt and scale.
- The argument concluded that public demand and corporate leadership often precede policy change.

Key Arguments from the Opposing Team (Policy)

1. Markets are not naturally aligned with climate goals

- Corporations are expected to maximise profits and consumers face affordability pressures.
- Climate costs are largely externalised, meaning sustainable choices often appear more expensive.
- Policy is needed to realign incentives so that sustainable choices become the most economically attractive.

2. Policy creates coordination and scale

- Climate action involves many stakeholders whose efforts may otherwise be fragmented.
- Without common standards, there are risks of inconsistent action and free-riding.
- Examples included electric vehicles, renewable energy adoption and waste management, where systemic coordination is required.

3. Policy protects vulnerable communities

- Governments can address issues affecting populations who may lack the resources to adapt themselves.
- Examples included support for residents of subdivided housing experiencing extreme heat and initiatives such as community living rooms.
- The opposition argued climate resilience must be inclusive and therefore requires government intervention.

Audience Discussion

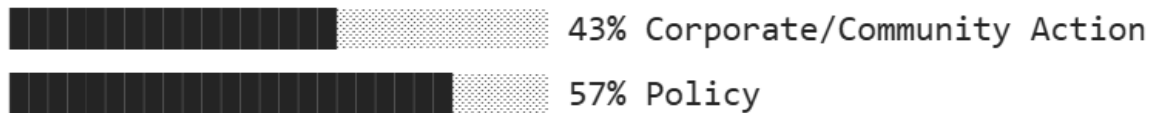
Several audience members challenged both sides:

- Questions were raised about whether public demand ultimately drives government priorities.
- Others noted that only a small proportion of companies have adopted science-based climate targets voluntarily.

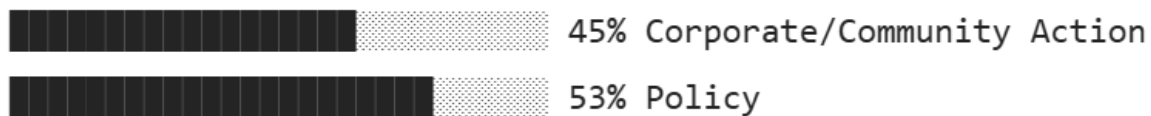
- Debate participants also discussed the slow implementation of Hong Kong's waste charging scheme as evidence of the limitations of policy without public buy-in.

Debate Outcome

PRE-DEBATE



POST-DEBATE



The proposition gained the most support during the debate and was therefore declared the winner.

Final Takeaway

The strongest conclusion from the discussion was not that policy or civic action alone can solve climate change, but that:

Policy provides the foundation and scale, while businesses and individuals provide the speed and momentum.

The debate emphasised that climate resilience cannot wait for future legislation. Organisations and individuals already have the ability to influence emissions, consumption, investment decisions and community action today, while continuing to advocate for stronger policy frameworks that enable larger systemic change.

Key Learnings

1. Climate action cannot wait for policy alone

- While policy is essential for creating standards, incentives and accountability, climate risks are already impacting Hong Kong today. Businesses and

individuals have opportunities to take immediate action rather than waiting for regulation to evolve.

2. Policy enables scale, but people and businesses create momentum

- The debate highlighted that policy is most effective when supported by public and corporate buy-in. Lasting change requires both top-down direction and bottom-up action working together.

3. Climate resilience is increasingly a business issue, not just an environmental one

- Speakers cited examples where climate action reduced costs, improved competitiveness, strengthened supply chain resilience and lowered risk exposure. The business case for climate action is becoming stronger as climate impacts intensify.

4. Individual and corporate decisions influence emissions far beyond government control

- Consumption choices, procurement decisions, investment strategies and supply chain management represent significant emissions sources that can be addressed directly by organisations and consumers.

5. Incentives matter

- The opposing team argued that expecting businesses and consumers to consistently choose more sustainable options without economic incentives is unrealistic. Policy remains a critical mechanism for aligning financial and environmental interests.

6. Collective action often precedes policy change

- Many successful social and environmental initiatives begin with civic movements, pilot programmes and business innovation before being adopted and scaled through government policy.

7. Climate resilience must be inclusive

- Effective adaptation strategies need to consider vulnerable populations who are disproportionately affected by climate impacts and may have limited ability to respond independently.

8. Education and awareness remain critical enablers

- Several speakers stressed that informed individuals are better equipped to make sustainable decisions, influence their organisations and advocate for broader systemic change.

Overall Learning

The debate reinforced that Hong Kong's fastest path to climate resilience is not a choice between policy and action. Policy provides the framework and scale, while businesses, communities and individuals provide the urgency, innovation and implementation needed today.