

Message from New Managing Director



“The people-centred approach (以人為本) must be put in the right context for it to be properly understood, such context being the need for URA’s decisions and actions to be legal, reasonable and guided by compassion (合法, 合理, 合情).”

Ms Iris TAM Siu-ying, JP

I am most honoured and humbled to be entrusted with the leadership of the Urban Renewal Authority (URA). In carrying out our public mandate, my team and I will continue to be guided by our firm commitment to discharging our duties conscientiously, fairly, and with the utmost integrity.

The people-centred approach (以人為本) has been the cornerstone of the URA since its inception. It humanises the urban renewal process, bringing into sharp focus its prime objective of serving the people. But like many adages that have found their way into our popular vernacular, there have been different interpretations of what it actually entails. Consequently, this can create some misunderstanding and tension at times which are not conducive to the advancement of urban renewal in Hong Kong.

In formulating and applying our policies, and in the implementation of our various projects and schemes, we are always mindful of the human factor in urban renewal. The needs and circumstances of people affected by the URA's projects can be as diverse as they can get. By and large, we believe that most cases can be adequately dealt with by our established policies. Occasionally, some special ones may come along that warrant compassionate consideration and which we feel can be justified. However, it remains a fact that not all needs can be satisfied in the way that an affected person might want, nor do we believe that a request or demand should be deemed to be justified on the basis of a liberal interpretation of the people-centred approach – one that eschews compromises and limits.



Ms Iris Tam visits residents in the old district under the URA's Community Service Partnership Scheme.

The people-centred approach (以人為本) must be put in the right context for it to be properly understood, such context being the need for URA's decisions and actions to be legal, reasonable and guided by compassion. I believe the Chinese adage “合法, 合理, 合情,” says it best. All three elements of “law”, “reason” and “compassion” are indispensable for they complement and temper each other. Any action or decision made that is devoid of any one element simply cannot be considered as fair, sound nor responsible, and hence,

contrary to public interest. In fact, even where all three elements are taken into account in the course of any consideration, there is still the matter of weighting that should be given to each. It is a constant balancing act, and a very fine one indeed, that the URA strives to tackle on a daily basis.

Just as redevelopment has become synonymous with the URA over the years, many people have come to look upon our people-centred approach as being exclusive to this mode of urban renewal. This is a somewhat limiting perspective and one which I believe should be broadened to take into account our other efforts, in particular, rehabilitation.

Prior to its confirmation as a core business of the URA by the new Urban Renewal Strategy in 2011, the URA's rehabilitation efforts have already been enjoying substantial recognition from the public. From a very modest beginning that saw us offering material incentives such as free paint and drain pipes to building owners, our rehabilitation initiatives have evolved into different schemes that provide a whole spectrum of technical and financial assistance to building owners. In devising these schemes, we have kept pace with and fully supported the Government's initiatives in promoting building safety like Operation Building Bright and the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme. In terms of our reach, we are extending beyond our original rehabilitation scheme areas and are progressively taking over the rehabilitation portfolio of the Hong Kong Housing Society in Kowloon and the rest of the territory.

All the above would not have been possible without the adoption of a people-centred approach. The initial introduction of rehabilitation as part of URA's work entailed the reconciliation of two fundamental issues, namely, that rehabilitation is a non-revenue



Ms Iris Tam hosts a media tour to the site of the Kai Tak “flat-for-flat” project.

generating and labour-intensive activity, and that building maintenance is the prime responsibility of building owners. As a responsible public body utilising public money, the URA has to justify its involvement in assisting private property owners to discharge their basic duties. Taking a pragmatic and people-oriented view, we accept that there are myriad reasons for building dilapidation. Laying the blame squarely on the lack of will of building owners is a gross generalisation that does not recognise the challenges many owners face in rehabilitating their multi-owned buildings - the most obvious being that rehabilitation is a collective decision involving strong commitment and financial contributions from owners. By offering a helping hand, the URA is not usurping the duties of building owners, but is instead empowering those who have the necessary resolve but may not have adequate means or guidance to fulfill their obligations. In a wider context, rehabilitation plays a crucial role in arresting urban decay by improving the living conditions of residents concerned and extending the useful life of buildings.

The URA has also been endeavouring to ensure successful applicants to our various schemes would obtain value-for-money for rehabilitation work commissioned through reducing opportunities for dubious practices such as tender-rigging by unscrupulous contractors. We are very grateful to the Police and the Independent Commission Against Corruption for their joint efforts in this respect.

The inroads which have been made in the past years will stand us in good stead to face the challenges ahead. I would like to take this opportunity to register my special appreciation for the former Chairman, Mr. Barry Cheung and my predecessor, Mr. Quinn Law, for their wise counsel and guidance during their tenure. My thanks are also due to former Board members whose invaluable contributions have laid a solid foundation for the URA to build on, and to aspire further in the advancement of urban renewal.

Iris TAM Siu-ying
Managing Director

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