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Country and Marine Parks Board

Preparation work for the revalidation of Hong Kong Global Geopark

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to summarise the preparation work of Hong Kong Geopark as a member of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) to meet the objectives of the GGN and to prepare for revalidation as a member of the network.

BACKGROUND

2. In September 2011, Hong Kong National Geopark was accepted as a member of the GGN, which is supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and renamed "Hong Kong Global Geopark of China".

3. A Geopark has been defined by UNESCO as an area with geosites of international significance supported with a science popularisation programme targeting the broad public with no knowledge of geology. It must also be equipped with a sustainable development strategy that benefits the local community. Since UNESCO advocated the geopark concept in 2004, 90 global geoparks have been established in 27 countries, with 27 global geoparks in China alone. To become a global geopark, a candidate geopark must first apply to its national government, and submit its global geopark application document to UNESCO through the relevant state agencies. The geopark is assessed by the GGN, and candidate geoparks that fulfill the UNESCO requirements are awarded global geopark status and continue to be assessed every four years. In 2015, Hong Kong Global Geopark will have to be revalidated.

PREPARATION FOR REVALIDATION

4. In planning our preparation work for the revalidation, we have considered the GGN's recommendations to Hong Kong Geopark and other revalidated candidates, along with the views of our advisors. To ensure Hong Kong Geopark's continued eligibility as a global geopark, we intend to undertake preparation work in the following eight areas:

(i) Management and Conservation
(ii) Geopark Branding Visibility
(iii) Local Engagement
(iv) Accessible Geopark Information
(v) Visitor Centres

(vi) Science Popularisation
(vii) Geopark Guides
(viii) Exchange and Sharing

(i) Management and Conservation

5. In parallel with the management structure of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), a Geopark Division was set up in April 2010 to develop strategies and take the lead on geopark-related initiatives. It is responsible for developing strategies and carrying them out in conservation planning, science popularization, production of publications, and the development and improvement of visitor services and facilities. It is also responsible for tasks new to the protected areas in Hong Kong, such as networking with other geoparks, partnering with local communities, conducting scientific research, and knowledge building.

6. The AFCD has a long history of working with plants and animals, but there was limited knowledge of geology among many of its staff. Arrangements were therefore made to ensure that all staff involved received basic training on geology and geoparks, which is fundamental to the good management of the geopark. So far, most staff at the supervisory level have received basic geology training. On-the-job training will be continuously provided to make sure that all new staff receive the required training, while up-to-date or more in-depth knowledge such as volcanology and paleontology are provided to all staff.

7. A site-management plan, which will be reviewed periodically, has been formulated, with regular patrols and enforcement, and litter collection and grass-cutting along footpaths to ensure the geo-areas and trails are always well maintained. The geopark area covers both land and sea. To ensure proper management of the entire geopark, regular land patrols are carried out on foot or by motorbike, while remote coastal areas and islands are patrolled using marine park vessels.

(ii) Geopark Branding Visibility

8. An emerging key requirement of the GGN is that all geoparks contribute to the betterment of the geopark image. This was a common recommendation to revalidated candidates in 2012. All facilities must exhibit clear global geoparks identity distinctive from other UNESCO or similar initiatives. This allows visitors to have a clear understanding that Hong Kong Geopark is a member of both the China Geoparks Network and the Global Geoparks Network. Geopark logos are also displayed on our website, leaflets, and all other publications to effectively promote geopark branding. Multi-language publications and a new initiative entitled 'Geo-lexicon' will also be used to convey geopark messages to non-Chinese visitors.

9. Global E-Classroom is one of our innovative programmes to promote the geopark brand using the internet to enable presenters to give real-time presentations to teachers, students and geopark staff in different countries and regions, usually at geopark venues or geosites. Such exchanges not only arouse students' interest in learning more about earth science, they also enable them to learn about different cultures and lifestyles, which help promote the global geopark image. The Global E-classroom platform also provides a means of cooperation and exchange among

experts and practitioners, and therefore, promotes the geopark movement. A total of 10 e-classroom sessions have been planned for 2013 and 2014.

10. The "Prehistoric Story Room", located at the lobby of the Bank of China Tower, is an extension of Hong Kong Geopark into the city centre. To make the exhibition appealing, the room has bright colours and a stylish design, and a narrative style is used to tell the story of the history of life on the earth to make it appealing and easily understandable to the general public. Multimedia interactive games are also included to help visitors understand the exhibits in a fun way. The Prehistoric Story Room has been very popular since it opened in October 2011, receiving more than 70,000 visitors a year. Its prime location, trendy presentation style and innovative mode of operation involving the government, an NGO and the private sector have greatly enhanced the Hong Kong Geopark brand.

(iii) Local Engagement

11. Local engagement is an important tool of the GGN for bringing real improvements to local communities through partnership projects. The development of the Volcano Discovery Centre in Sai Kung Waterfront Park is a fine example of this. The function of the centre, at a gateway location, is to promote Hong Kong Geopark and science popularization, and to provide tourist information and services. The project has been supported by the Sai Kung District Council, which was involved as early as the site-search stage. In addition to participating in the planning stage, people from the local community will take part in the management of the centre and local products will be promoted there.

12. In the Northeast New Territories, another signature collaborative project to improve accessibility to geo-areas is underway. Right from the planning stage, we have been collaborating with the District Office to involve local communities in the project. The project aims to improve the trails and visitors' facilities in the Sha Tau Kok area, adjoining the Double Haven Geo-Area of the Hong Kong Geopark. In addition to the works components, the project comprises community involvement activities, such as publicity activities aimed at raising eco-awareness, educational campaigns on the geopark, educational and training sessions for locals, and eco-tours led by trained locals.

13. Partnerships with the private sector are an important concept in the GGN. In Hong Kong, this is demonstrated by our partnership with two hotels committed to geoconservation and promotion of the geopark concept. All hotel staff have received basic geopark training. The lobbies and selected rooms are decorated with the geopark theme. Geopark videos are broadcast in the hotel lobbies and are available on a dedicated in-room TV channel. Specially designed geopark menus are also available to publicise Hong Kong Geopark and its guided tours.

14. The geo-heritage centres are all run in partnership with NGOs. While our geopark provides capacity building for the NGOs during the initial stage, they will soon be able to operate the centres independently in line with the GGN concept. This operation model has been found to be cost-effective and sustainable.

(iv) Accessible Geopark Information

15. Our aim is to ensure geopark information is easily accessible through, but not limited to, contemporary platforms, such as our website and smartphone applications. For the majority of the public, our website is the first means of obtaining information about Hong Kong Global Geopark. It also represents the image of Hong Kong Geopark to overseas visitors. Therefore, we have put a lot of effort into developing an attractive, informative and educational website. The website has been well-received and last year was voted an "Excellent Website" for the second straight year.

16. In late 2012, we launched a newly revamped Hong Kong Geopark website, providing more comprehensive, interesting and easily understandable information about the geopark. The new website is also a more informative and user friendly platform for visitors to find tourist information and for teachers to find educational activities.

17. YouTube and other video platforms also provide effective ways to reach a wider public, especially youngsters. However, good quality video clips can be taken only in good weather conditions. Therefore, we have developed our own expertise in taking and editing video clips, so that we can take good video flexibly, whenever weather conditions are suitable. We have so far produced a total of 34 video clips on different themes, such as our 10 geo-area promotional video clips, which are available on the Hong Kong Geopark YouTube channel.

(v) Visitor Centres

18. As a requirement of the GGN, scientific research is necessary, not just to better understand the geological features, but also to acquire new findings to develop educational materials and support educational activities. Our visitor centres are another major element of Hong Kong Geopark that allow us to directly convey the geoconservation message and promote the geopark to the public. With the help of scientists and specialists at home and abroad, we develop our visitor centres with on-going scientific research on volcanology and sedimentary rocks, the two major geological elements of Hong Kong Geopark. We also invite overseas experts to provide training to our staff in order to enrich our knowledge base. It is only with a thorough understanding of the relevant geological knowledge that we are able to explain scientific findings in easy-to-understand terms and popular formats, thus enhancing the displays of our visitor centres.

19. As an on-going exercise, we have renewed and enhanced the exhibits in our display at the Lions Nature Education Centre (LNEC). The latest enhancement was completed in April 2013, with a new corner created showing the different geological ages as they relate to paleontology and how their respective fossils relate to typical living organisms. Other enhancement plans are also underway to further enrich the centre so that visitors find the displays and exhibits attractive, interesting, easy-to-understand and inspiring.

20. In view of the increasing number of visitors to the Sai Kung Region, a Volcano Discovery Centre has been planned to serve as a focal point, providing visitor services to tourists and popularizing the area's volcanic history with innovative

exhibits and specimens from our partner geoparks. The display and exhibits in the centre were designed based on a survey conducted in July 2012. In addition to displaying the information we wanted to show to the public, it will also have exhibits on things the public indicated they would like to learn about. This "visitor-based approach" is a new approach to designing our visitor centres.

(vi) Science Popularization

21. In this new era of advanced communications, the geopark message must be appealing, with geoscientific knowledge integrated with ecology and history to compete with myriad types of entertainment and advertisements. Information must be presented in a way that is both easy-to-understand and fun, in order to successfully appeal to students, tourists and the rest of the general public. We have been invited by many Mainland and overseas geoparks to share our experience in science-popularization methods.

22. Our geopark has produced a number of publications. In view of the increasing popularity of comics among teenagers, we made the first attempt to explain geology in comic format. The comic book makes geology more fun and understandable through cartoons, and has been well received by young people. Two sizes of Geofolks for different uses have been produced: a big doll and small key ring. Another initiative, Geofolks papercraft, is a new attempt to attract the interest of young people; it can serve as an indoor decoration and provides an appealing handicraft activity suitable for both adults and young people. The Geofolks papercraft were produced with ideas and assistance from Japan's Itoigawa Geopark, one of our sister geoparks.

23. Our latest photo album has adopted a brand new design concept, showcasing Hong Kong Global Geopark with 3D pop-ups and other interactive gimmicks to take advantage of the power of the printed page, which cannot be replaced by virtual means, such as electronic books. It presents a holistic visual overview of the geopark, from the breathtaking natural and cultural landscapes to the importance of management, education activities and local engagement.

24. An enhanced edition of "Handbook for Geopark Guides" has been published with voice-over in Cantonese, English, Putonghua, Japanese and Korean. The new Handbook, published in March 2013, helps geopark guides learn the correct wording and pronunciation of different terms, so that they can provide quality interpretation to non-Chinese visitors from different countries.

25. All information boards and interpretation panels in the geopark are periodically reviewed and updated, in order to incorporate the latest research findings, and more importantly, to adjust and enhance the information according to visitors' needs. In response to the findings of a visitor survey, all interpretation panels were updated for the second time in 2011 to further simplify the text and enhance the headings. In many cases, some technical terms cannot be avoided in the panels. Therefore, the interpretation panels will be updated for the third time this year, with the addition of a Geo-lexicon corner, which explains the technical terms in the panel text using simple phrases to make them understandable.

26. Electronic books, or e-books, have become very popular in the past two years

among all ages worldwide. To keep up with this trend in order to reach a broader audience, not only in Hong Kong but also across the border, we will begin publishing e-books this year. One e-book will promote all 27 global geoparks of China, with photos and video clips. Another e-book will introduce specific geological topics — fossils and paleontology — which are popular topics with people of all ages, in a story-telling style.

27. School education is the third major focus of Hong Kong Geopark in promoting science popularization. Instead of organizing one-off individual education activities, the Geopark Schools programme is organized to encourage participating teachers and their students to develop a long-term interest in earth science, integrated with ecology and culture, and to explore the links between science and art. These integrated activities are effective in arousing students' interest in geology and helping them understand geological concepts in an enjoyable, hands-on way. In 2012-13, ten schools participated in the pioneer scheme, and we are expecting 20 schools to participate in the coming school year.

(vii) Geotourism: Geopark Guides

28. For many visitors on a guided tour, their guide represents the image of Hong Kong Geopark. Therefore, to ensure the quality of geopark tours and geopark guides, the Recommended Geopark Guide / Accredited Geopark Guide (R2G/A2G) scheme was set up. It is the first such initiative among all global geoparks. All geopark guides are required to have regular experience as a geotour guide, undergo continuing education, and pass periodic assessments. The geotours led by these guides are very popular with tourists, with over 100 such tours having been organised so far.

29. Since it was set-up in 2010, the R2G system has been constantly reviewed to meet visitors' needs. The recognized R2G preparation courses have been revised to cover essential geopark-related concepts: basic paleontology, which is highly relevant to the Northeast New Territories Sedimentary Rock Region, where important fossils have been discovered; and the management and operation of geoparks to ensure that the guided tours are in line with the geopark concept. A geopark guide is not required to 'teach' geology to visitors, but must be able to convey scientifically correct information in an interesting and easy-to-understand way.

30. The Accredited Geopark Guide (A2G) system is another unprecedented initiative among the travel industry (the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong), the government (the AFCD) and a non-governmental organization (the Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong). A2Gs are officially accredited by the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong, and they are required to give higher quality interpretations by providing their own explanations and stories, according to the level and needs of each tour group. On-going training is provided to geopark guides to ensure that the quality of the tours and geopark guides is maintained.

(viii) Exchanges and Sharing

31. One of the key recommendations to some revalidated candidates in 2012 was that they be more active in their participation in GGN activities and contribute positively to the GGN network. Having a specific role in bridging the gap between the

East and West with a view to making contribution to the GGN, Hong Kong Geopark actively exchanges ideas, information and experience with other member geoparks and experts by organizing international events and individual cooperation projects which are highly supported by the Ministry of Land and Resources (MLR) and the UNESCO. Currently, we are actively involved in the regular training programmes organized by MLR to upskill mainland geopark guides and geopark managers.

32. At the 5th International Conference on Geoparks held in Unzen Volcanic Area Geopark in May 2012, we took part in three different sharing sessions: in a public forum on geotourism, we explained our tourism strategy; and in other sessions, we shared our "Global E-classroom" experience and our sister partnership with Itoigawa Global Geopark of Japan. This important geopark conference was a valuable opportunity for us to learn from, and network with, other geoparks, and to contribute through sharing our experience.

33. Various cooperation initiatives, which have resulted in mutual benefits, have been undertaken with our sister geoparks. Exchange of specimens, experience and expertise as well as direct promotion of each other have created the synergy needed for a better management and operations our geoparks. These initiatives have also benefited the wider community on an international scale. A visit to Hong Kong Geopark by Itoigawa students is a fine example of this. It will be held for the third time in August 2013, and students from Hong Kong Geopark schools are planning to visit geoparks in Japan and the UK.

34. In addition to celebrating the first anniversary of Hong Kong Global Geopark of China, the Roundtable Conference held in October 2012 provided an opportunity for all our six sister geoparks and global geoparks in China to gather and share our latest initiatives and plans. The participants reflected that the conference arrangement provided them with a valuable opportunity to make connections with their counterparts of other countries and get practical examples of how to meet the GGN requirements in the areas of management, science popularization and local engagement.

35. A "Workshop for Geopark Managers" was held in March 2013. The workshop marked our first initiative in bringing together geopark managers from the region, with the aim of enhancing geopark management and strengthening the geopark network. A wide range of activities were organised, including seminars, discussions, an e-classroom, role-playing and visits to local geopark facilities. The responses from the participants were very positive and they requested more such opportunities in the future.

36. In the light of the positive feedback from the participants of previous workshop and conference, a "Mentor Programme for Asian Geoparks" has been developed and will be implemented for three years. The target participants are the young geopark managers from Asian countries, including Mainland China, whom will be arranged to participate in a series of activities including attachment to understand the actual management work of Hong Kong Geopark, conservation and management of protected areas, as well as field trips to geosites, workshops and lectures. This programme to enhance the experience and capacity of young geopark managers will foster the role of Hong Kong Global Geopark as an important intellectual platform for

knowledge exchange in the region.

37. To tie in with the overseas promotion of green tourism by the Hong Kong Tourism Board, a Conference on Geotourism will be organized in Hong Kong in collaboration with the tourism authorities in Hong Kong. Overseas travel agents will be invited to the conference to keep them abreast with the geotourism opportunities in Hong Kong.

ADVICE SOUGHT

38. Members are invited to note and provide comments on the work in preparation for the revalidation of Hong Kong Global Geopark as set out above.

Country and Marine Parks Authority
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