



Cash-strapped charities are looking for innovative ways to help others, writes **Katie Lau**

Pockets of resistance

Linda To Kit-lai and Angie Tse Tak-oi's cheery faces belie the daunting challenges ahead for their organisation, Her Fund. It doesn't receive government subsidies and the NGO champions what many view as less immediately pressing causes: women's rights and gender equality.

That makes Her Fund doubly vulnerable in these financially hard times, but To and Tse are determined to overcome the hurdles. "It's always been hard for us because our issues aren't considered urgent in Hong Kong," says Tse, the group's fund-raising officer.

"People here donate only when there's visible suffering [such as natural disasters], but we need to bring social injustice and human rights into the open because not many people are aware of it."

Founded in 2004, Her Fund channels the money it raises as grants to a range of women's groups, half of them grass roots organisations that haven't secured charity status. The Women's Poverty Concern Group, for instance, is an alliance of working-class residents in Tuen Mun that helps single mothers build self-confidence and teaches them to fight for social benefits.

"These are little-known organisations that can't afford to do publicity or fund-raising, but what they do is vital to the welfare of women in Hong Kong," says To, Her Fund's executive director.

Being a relatively new outfit, the fund relies on creative ways to raise its profile and attract donations.

"You need to be a big-name [group] to use conventional fund-raising methods like selling flag and running street collections," Tse says. Last year Her Fund organised a Guinness Record-making event, drawing 986 people to set a record for the most people in a kick-boxing class. Such tactics have helped collect increasing donations – from HK\$60,000 in its first year to HK\$260,000 last year – mostly from professional women.

With budgets being cut everywhere in the global downturn, NGOs such as Her Fund know they must be even more innovative to keep contributions flowing in.

Last month the group began an 88-day fund-raising drive through an online auction (hk.user.auctions.yahoo.com/hk/booth/herfund) that Tse hopes will bring in more than HK\$200,000.

Items on offer are donated by supporters and women's groups abroad, ranging from designer handbags to a volleyball signed by the Chinese national women's team. Among the latest items are a book signed by Legislative Councillor Emily Lau Wai-hing and a stamp marking the 90th birthday of former South African president Nelson Mandela.

Adopting a concept popular in

the west, the team is also encouraging supporters to host fund-raisers built around their daily lives. "You can do whatever you want. You can throw a party, cook a meal, read a poem, anything," says Tse. "The point is you can make charity a part of your life and it should be fun."

Even established charities have learned there's more to fund-raising than flag days and street appeals.

"The 'F' in fund-raising is also about making friends and having fun, and that's how you can keep the donors," says Christina Fang Meng-sang, chief executive of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

Last year, the council launched Wisegiving, a website that enables users to find out about the background and finances of participating charities, helping them make informed decisions about contributions.

More than 130 charities signed up in the hope of attracting more funding with greater transparency and accountability – factors found to be increasingly important to donors in a recent poll by the University of Hong Kong's public opinion programme. Such issues are especially relevant because contributions are decreasing.

Mission to New Arrivals, a low-profile Christian group initially established in 1997 to help new immigrants, has extended its brief to tackle structural poverty, which it views as the most critical issue exposed in the current economic woes. Although most of its funds come from faith-based organisations which are less sensitive to economic swings, Mission is feeling the pinch too.

"The crisis has made us aware of getting funds elsewhere," says general secretary, Reverend Leung Yau-tung.

The Community Chest has suffered a 40 per cent drop in donations this year and other charities, including World Vision and Christian Action, have recorded



Photo: Sam Tsang

30 per cent reductions. "It's very hard to attract new contributions now, so charities need to pull out all stops and treat their donors well," Fang says.

"People used to be impulsive when making donations, but now many think twice. So we have to make donating convenient and making them feel part of the organisation."

Oxfam has long been mindful of the need to cultivate long-term relationships; it launched monthly donation schemes 10 years ago, keeping supporters updated with newsletters and inviting them on visits to observe its work in poverty-stricken areas.

Contributions from individuals have since overtaken the collection from its annual Trailwalker fund-raiser, accounting for more than 70 per cent of its revenue.

"When the economy is gloomy, you have to show donors that their money is well spent and their contribution does make a difference, so they will continue to give their support," says Ho Wai-chi, director of Oxfam Hong Kong.

This approach helped keep the group afloat through the Sars downturn and even brought in more contributions, but Ho knows the

period ahead will be far tougher. "It's not a regional crisis like before," he says.

"We'll just have to work extra hard at donor loyalty and creative campaigns and hope for the best." Treats, a charity that helps children break down stereotypes and social barriers through play and learning activities, has responded to a sharp drop in revenues by looking for "in-kind" contributions.

Among the goods and services received are toys, amusement park tickets, free banner ads on related websites, and public relations expertise. "It can be anything. We can't wait for things to fall in our laps," says director Kris Tong Sung-man. "We'll be actively seeking sponsors and volunteers. People who have been too busy in the past may have more time to volunteer their help as their workload is reduced in the financial crisis."

With no resources for fund-raising, Tong has turned to the internet for a low-cost way to boost Treats' profile. Besides establishing a presence on YouTube and Wisegiving, the group also joined ammando.com, an international networking website for charities, to seek donors from abroad.

"We can't afford a televised campaign like big charities," she says. "We need to be proactive instead of complaining because it's in times like this that we can show donors we're worthy of support."

The Chen Yat-sen Family Foundation is among those philanthropic institutions in Hong Kong focusing on smaller, innovative programmes addressing issues such as integration for ethnic minority children. "I'm open to experiments because society is constantly changing and these projects are likely to be neglected by mainstream charities like the



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Ho Wai-chi, Oxfam Hong Kong director

Jockey Club and the Community Chest. Small NGOs need our support," says foundation chairman James Chen Yue-jia.

But to make sure every cent is well spent, the foundation requires groups to undergo a thorough assessment. Contracts are signed and an independent organisation invited to conduct progress reports every half year.

"We make sure they meet mutually agreed goals. But, as long as they make a good effort, we don't mind if they fail [in other aspects]," Chen says.

He says the government's introduction of lump-sum grants has benefited NGOs. "It used to be a one-way

process when the government decided what the needs were and subsidised the charities.

"Now I see NGOs beginning to find out what communities need and come up with projects that are close to their heart. It's a good thing."

At Ho-sum, a website that connects volunteers with charities, executive director Clare Chan Hung-ka realises she has to go the extra mile to persuade corporate donors to part with their cash.

Now that it no longer qualifies for support as a start-up NGO, companies are Ho-sum's most important funding source.

"We do something like an impact analysis to show [corporate] donors what an effect they can make with every HK\$60 they contribute," says Chan. "When they have so many choices, branding is very important if your charity is to stand out. I hate to say I'm selling it like a business, but it's true. Donors are very practical and want to see where their money goes."

Chan says the financial crisis is an incentive for her two-person outfit to explain the value of the website: during hard times, the support of volunteers is even more critical to NGOs' operations.

People

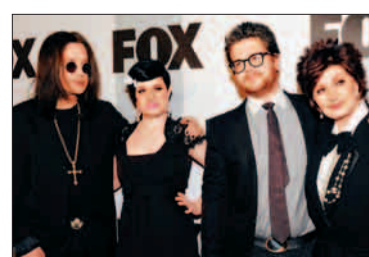
Photos: AP

Osbornes to star in new TV show

Reach for the bleeper – the Osbornes are headed back to television.

Black Sabbath frontman Ozzy Osbourne and his family (right), who shocked and delighted audiences for four years on their Emmy-award winning MTV reality show *The Osbornes*, are up to no good again in a variety-style show featuring skits, impersonations, audience games – and a liberal sprinkling of four-letter words.

Osbornes Reloaded features Sharon, Ozzy and children Jack and Kelly in candid-camera style skits, occasional pie-throwing, the odd performance by Ozzy, and will include celebrity guest appearances. And so far not even the family



can quite agree on what type of programme it will be.

"The word 'variety' frightens us. No disrespect to other variety shows of the past. It's just not what we do," Kelly Osbourne said.

The show is due to air on Fox later this Spring, but an exact date has not been set. *Reuters*

Mambo king Aguilar dead at 81

Pedro "Cuban Pete" Aguilar, one of the leading mambo dancers of the 1950s, has died at the age of 81.

The mambo star passed away on Tuesday at the Sinai Plaza Rehabilitation & Nursing Centre in Miami, said Barbara Craddock, his long-time dance partner.

Craddock described the cause of death as heart failure, but said it could be related to diabetes. Aguilar (right) performed for presidents and foreign leaders, and was hailed as one of the greatest mambo dancers by *Life* magazine and mambo percussionist Tito Puente, his website said.

Aguilar was born in Puerto Rico in 1927 and grew up in New York City. He picked up the nickname "Cuban Pete" in 1949, after the song by the same name recorded by Desi Arnaz.

Craddock said Aguilar had an ability to get inside the music when he danced. "His feet and hands became another instrument with the orchestra. It was a privilege to be his partner." *Agencies*



Rock brought back to book

Comedian Chris Rock is making a comeback as an author.

Grand Central Publishing says Rock's new book, not yet titled, will be full of "comedic observations". It's tentatively scheduled for release next year. His *Rock This!* was published in 1997.

Deb Futter, editor-in-chief of hardcovers at Grand Central, said: "We are so excited to be publishing Chris Rock ... he hasn't published a book in many years so this one will be highly anticipated."

Rock, 43, was a featured voice in the *Bee Movie* and *Madagascar* films, and he created the *Everybody Hates Chris* TV series. *AP*

Garner and Affleck's 'fiery' Rose

Jennifer Garner and Ben Affleck have announced their new baby daughter's name – Seraphina Rose Elizabeth Affleck. The baby was born last week in Los Angeles. Affleck and Garner (right) have another daughter, Violet, 3.

People.com said no explanation was offered for the name, including whether she was named for anyone. One website specialising in the origin of names refers to Seraphina as "derived from the Biblical word seraphim", which was Hebrew in origin and meant "fiery ones".

The seraphim were angels, described in the Bible as having six wings each. This was also the name of a 13th-century Italian saint who made clothes for the poor. *Agencies*

