

立法會
Legislative Council

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LC Paper No. CB(2) 3049/05-06
(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty

Minutes of meeting
held on Thursday, 27 April 2006 at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, JP (Chairman)
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Margaret NG
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG

Member attending : Hon TAM Heung-man

Members absent : Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Public officers attending : Ms Dora FU
Principal Assistant Secretary (Women)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Freely CHENG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Family)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr LEE Sheung-yuen
Acting Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (3)

Miss Joanna CHOI
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (2)

Miss CHAN Ka-lin
Assistant Commissioner (Social)
Census and Statistics Department

Ms SIU Wai-fun
Senior Statistician (Social)
Census and Statistics Department

Miss Joanne CHU Shui-man
Senior Administrative Officer
Commission on Poverty

Mr Raymond TANG Yee-bong
Chairperson
Equal Opportunities Commission

Dr Ferrick CHU Chung-man
Head, Policy & Research
Equal Opportunities Commission

Attendance :
by invitation

Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Mariana CHAN
Chief Officer
Policy Research and Advocacy

Concerning Group for Women Poverty

Ms HO Foei-lin
Member

Ms YEUNG Suet-lan
Member

Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres

Ms FONG Man-ying
Director

Ms CHONG Tsz-wai, Doris
Education Officer

Society of Community Organisation/Concern Group on the
Rights of New Immigrant Women

Ms SZE Lai-shan
Community Organiser
Society of Community Organisation

Ms YAU Yik-yung
Spokesperson
Concern Group on the Rights of New Immigrant Women

Hong Kong Women Development Association

Ms AU YEUNG Po-chun
Convenor
Committee on Social Policy Research

Hong Kong Federation of Women

Ms LEE Kwai-chun
Organising Member

Ms HO Pui-shun
Project Officer

Hong Kong Women Workers' Association

Ms WU Mei-lin
Co-ordinator

婦女力量

Ms MAN Kwai-sin
Member

Ms LAI Wai-lan, Tracy
Organiser

Mission to New Arrivals Organization Hong Kong

Rev. LI Kin-wah
Secretary General

Ms TANG Shuk-yee
Volunteer

Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse
(Kwan Fook)

Ms LIU Ngan-fung
Chairman

The Association for the Advancement of Feminism

Miss CHOI Wing-sze
Organiser

Clerk in attendance : Mrs Constance LI
Chief Council Secretary (2)5

Staff in attendance : Miss Betty MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)1

Ms Anna CHEUNG
Legislative Assistant (2)5

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I. Confirmation of minutes of meeting
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1820/05-06]

The minutes of meeting on 28 February 2006 were confirmed.

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II Women in poverty
(4:35 pm – 6:25 pm)

(a) Meeting with deputations

2. The Chairman welcomed representatives of the deputations to the meeting. The views of the deputations were summarised below.

Views of deputations

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1868/05-06(01)]

3. Ms Mariana CHAN presented the views of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) as detailed in its submission. Ms CHAN said that HKCSS had jointly conducted a survey with Oxfam on labour force participation rate of women and women in poverty. According to the data collected between 1996 and 2004, it was revealed that while the labour force participation rate of women increased from 48% in 1996 to 52% in 2004, there were differences in the types of occupations, average monthly earnings and working hours between men and women, and the difference was greater in non-supervisory and non-technical jobs.

4. Ms CHAN further said that as a result of economic restructuring, many women were engaged in low-paid employment. Statistics revealed that 17% of women were in poverty in 2004, as compared to 15% in 1996. For women in employment, 7.1% of them were in poverty in 2004 as compared is 4.9% in 1996. It was also noted that many low-income women employees had low educational attainment. Given the increasing number of ageing women and single mothers who were financially dependent, the problem of women in poverty was getting worse.

5. To alleviate the problems faced by women in poverty, Ms CHAN said that HKCSS had made seven suggestions as detailed in its submission for the Government's consideration, which included provision of diversified employment training for women to enhance their employability and universal retirement scheme for all elderly.

Concerning Group for Women Poverty
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1817/05-06(01)]

6. Ms HO Foei-lin presented the views of Concerning Group for Women Poverty as detailed in its submission. Ms HO said that middle-aged and low-skilled women, especially single mothers, had the greatest difficulty in finding suitable employment with a reasonable income. The Government should create appropriate employment opportunities for these women workers, for example, awarding government service contracts to Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients, to enable them to move from welfare to self-reliance.

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7. Ms HO urged the Administration to seriously consider prescribing a minimum wage and maximum working hours to protect women workers from being paid with unreasonably low wages.

Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1817/05-06(02)]

8. Ms FONG Man-ying presented the views of Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres as detailed in its submission. Ms FONG said that the Administration should make reference to the principles laid down in the World Bank Report 2000/01 when formulating strategies to alleviate poverty, viz. to provide opportunities, enhance empowerment and strengthen protection. In the light of these principles, the Administration should foster women's participation in the labour force.

9. Ms FONG further said that women often had to forego their jobs and careers in order to take care of their families. However, they did not have any retirement protection, and were more vulnerable to risks. She commented that the Commission on Poverty (CoP) did not address the problem of women in poverty. The Administration should take into account women's needs and perspectives in the formulation of policies, and ensure equal opportunities for men and women.

Society for Community Organisation/Concern Group on the Rights of New Immigrant Women
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1852/05-06(01)]

10. Ms SZE Lai-shan and Ms YAU Yik-yung presented the views of Society for Community Organisation (SOCO) and Concern Group on the Rights of New Immigrant Women as detailed in their submission. Ms SZE said that new arrival women represented about 10% of the total women population in Hong Kong. However, new arrival women were deprived of housing and financial assistance because of the seven-year residence rule for public housing and CSSA. Some new arrival women were unable to join the labour market because of inadequate childcare and after-school services for their children. In this connection, SOCO urged the Administration to abolish the seven-year residence rule for public housing and CSSA; provide employment training and continuing education for women; extend the service hours of child care and after-school care services, and set a minimum wage.

11. Ms YAU further said that many new arrival women from the Mainland were low-skilled with low educational attainment, and they had to take up non-skilled jobs and worked irregular hours. To enable these women to take up employment, the Administration should extend the service hours for child care centres and provide fee waivers to low-income households. She suggested that WoC should include new arrival women in its work plan.

12. Ms SZE added that the Women's Commission (WoC) and CoP should provide targeted assistance to new arrival women.

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Hong Kong Women Development Association
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1817/05-06(03)]

13. Ms AU YEUNG Po-chun presented the views of Hong Kong Women Development Association as detailed in its submission. Ms AU YEUNG said that the major causes of women in poverty included loss of low-skilled jobs due to economic restructuring, gender prejudice and stereotyping, insufficient social security and support for new arrivals and single parents and insufficient retirement protection for women.

14. Ms AU YEUNG further said that CSSA single-parent family cases represented 13.1% of all CSSA cases, and 81% of the single-parent family cases were headed by women. The Administration should address the problem of women in poverty to avoid perpetuation of the problem. The Association suggested that the Administration should strengthen child care and after-school care services, provide targeted employment training for women, implement a family-friendly policy to foster employment opportunities of women, set a minimum wage and eliminate discrimination against women in employment. Ms AU YEUNG added that the Administration should enhance women's participation in Government's advisory and decision-making bodies to 30%.

Hong Kong Federation of Women
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1852/05-06(02)]

15. Ms LEE Kwai-chun presented the views of Hong Kong Federation of Women as detailed in its submission. Ms LEE said that statistics revealed that more women than men were engaged in low-paid jobs and the number of low-income women was increasing. To address the problem of women in poverty, the Administration should provide targeted employment training for women to enhance their employability, review its employment support for new arrivals and consider providing a universal retirement scheme for all elderly, including home-makers.

香港婦女勞工協會
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1868/05-06(02)]

16. Ms WU Mei-lin presented the views of 香港婦女勞工協會 as detailed in its submission. Ms WU said that one out of seven women employees were living below the poverty line because of the low wages. For home-makers and low-income women, they were not covered by retirement protection. The high cost of living had posed great difficulties on these women and many of them could not make both ends meet despite hard work. She strongly urged the Administration to address the problem of women in poverty.

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17. To prevent women from falling into poverty, Ms WU said that the Association considered that the Administration should prescribe a minimum wage and maximum working hours, provide a universal retirement scheme, and abolish the contracting-out arrangements for government services as the arrangement had increased the exploitation of workers by employers.

婦女力量

18. With reference to her own experience in seeking employment, Ms MAN Kwai-sin said that she had quitted her job six years ago in order to take care of her family. When she decided to rejoin the labour market, she had difficulties in finding a suitable job because of inadequate local market demand, and out-dated skills and working experience. There was also discrimination against middle-aged women workers.

19. Ms Tracy LAI said that the Administration should provide transport subsidy to low-skilled women for attending interviews and taking up employment across districts. Ms LAI further said that as some women might not be able to find employment, the Administration should consider providing seed money for these women to start their own business and engaging the business sector to provide professional advice.

*Mission to New Arrivals Organization Hong Kong
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1868/05-06(03)]*

20. Rev LI Kin-wah presented the views of Mission to New Arrivals Organization Hong Kong as detailed in its submission. Rev LI said that the Organisation provided specific services to single parents and new arrivals from the Mainland who faced more difficulties in finding employment. Moreover, single parents who had to take care of young children could not take up full-time employment. Rev LI urged the Administration to provide more support to these women, such as providing more targeted assistance to women in poverty, extending the concept of social partnership to assist women to start their business in local community, prescribing a minimum wage and maximum working hours and strengthening child care services.

21. Ms TANG Shuk-yee added that she was a single parent on CSSA, and had a son aged nine. Although she wished to find a job to support her family, she was unable to do so because she had to take care of her child. In view of the difficulties faced by single parents, she urged the Administration to withhold the proposal for single parents on CSSA with youngest children below the age of 12 to participate in the Active Employment Assistance Programme under the Support for Self-reliance Programmes. Rev LI added that the Administration might consider asking these single parents to take part in volunteering work instead of taking up paid employment.

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Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse (Kwan Fook)
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1856/05-06(01)]

22. Ms LIU Ngan-fung presented the views of Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse (Kwan Fook) as detailed in its submission. Ms LIU said that CoP should play a more active role in addressing the poverty problem faced by women. The Administration should take into account women's needs and perspectives in formulation of policies, for example, by providing/encouraging tailor-made employment or entrepreneur programmes which would enable women to work on a more flexible basis. The Administration should also publish the findings of the study on "equal pay for the work of equal value" (EPEV), step up public education to eradicate discrimination against women, abolish the seven-year residence rule for public housing and CSSA, and withhold the proposal for single parents on CSSA with youngest children below the age of 12 to take up employment. Ms LIU also urged the Administration to prescribe a minimum wage and maximum working hours and provide a universal retirement scheme.

The Association for the Advancement of Feminism
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1856/05-06(02)]

23. Miss CHOI Wing-size presented the views of the Association for the Advancement of Feminism as detailed in its submission. Miss CHOI said that the submission also reflected that the Government had made little progress in respect of the comments made by Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in its 1999 report. She pointed out that while CEDAW raised the concern that a high-level central body should be established to deal with all women issues, the Government had only set up WoC which was an advisory body. Miss CHOI urged the Administration to make available the findings of EPEV study as soon as possible. She commented that the Administration had not taken any action to regulate the wage levels of low-income women or provide a universal retirement scheme for all elderly.

24. To alleviate the problems faced by women in poverty, Miss CHOI said that it was Government's responsibility to implement gender mainstreaming in all poverty eradication policies and programmes. The Administration should take into account women's needs and perspectives in the formulation of policies, legislation and funding proposals, and ensure equal opportunities for men and women. She urged the Administration to expedite work in this area, and develop an evaluation mechanism on the measures taken. Miss CHOI added that the Association had conducted a study on gender mainstreaming, which was attached to its submission.

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Other submission(s) received (but not attend the meeting)

香港職工會聯盟 - 婦女事務委員會

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1868/05-06(04)]

25. Members noted that 香港職工會聯盟 - 婦女事務委員會 had provided a written submission [LC Paper No. CB(2) 1868/05-06(04)], which was tabled at the meeting, and had not sent representatives to the meeting.

Discussion

26. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that while he shared the views expressed by deputations attending the meeting, women from the Mainland on Two-way Permits were another group of women in poverty whose interests were neglected. The husbands of these women were Hong Kong residents who were usually low-income earners, and these women had to take care of their families during their temporary stay in Hong Kong. However, they were not eligible for CSSA or free medical service as they were non-Hong Kong residents. Mr LEE sought the views of the deputations on the assistance to be provided to this group of women.

27. Ms SZE Lai-shan of SOCO agreed that women on Two-way Permits also faced great difficulties and some of them were divorced or widowed. She urged the Administration to provide free medical care to these Two-way Permit holders, whose spouses were Hong Kong residents.

28. Rev LI Kin-wah of Mission to New Arrivals Organization Hong Kong and Ms LIU Ngan-fung of Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse (Kwan Fook) shared a similar view with Ms SZE Lai-shan. Rev LI and Ms LIU pointed out that in many cases, these women from the Mainland had to stay in Hong Kong to take care of their family, because of the death or illness of their husbands. They urged the Administration to relax the residence rule for public housing and CSSA payments to the Two-way Permit holders who were in genuine financial difficulties.

29. Miss CHAN Yuen-han requested the representative of HKCSS to explain the rationale for using the average median monthly employment earnings by sex and occupations in the year 2002 in Table 5 of its submission, while the 2004 statistics were used in other parts of the submission. Ms Mariana CHAN of HKCSS explained that Table 5 was prepared based on the statistics available at that time. She would provide members with the updated statistics after the meeting.

(Post-meeting note : The updated submission from HKCSS was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1975/05-06 on 11 May 2006.)

30. Dr Fernando CHEUNG noted that the Administration considered it unnecessary to amend the Co-operatives Societies Ordinance for further development of social enterprises because the following initiatives had been adopted –

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- (a) an amount of \$30 million had been set aside to strengthen district-based poverty alleviation work;
- (b) further options to facilitate social enterprise in bidding for government contracts within the existing government procurement policy were being explored;
- (c) an amount of \$9.8 million was earmarked for support social enterprise initiatives; and
- (d) the support services available to small and medium enterprises would be extended to social enterprises.

Dr CHEUNG asked the deputations whether they agreed that such initiatives would facilitate the establishment and operation of co-operatives, create employment opportunities for women in poverty and prevent them from falling into poverty.

31. Ms WU Mei-lin of Hong Kong Women Workers' Association responded that the Administration had provided little assistance to the establishment of co-operatives at district level. She pointed out that the Co-operative Societies Ordinance was enacted in the 1950s under the auspices of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and was outdated. Ms WU urged the Administration to review and waive the requirement under the Co-operative Societies Ordinance that all co-operatives should have 10 members, so as to provide flexibility for the formation of women co-operatives of different sizes. Ms WU also requested the Administration to consider providing seed money to women for starting and operating a business.

32. The Chairman thanked the deputations for attending the meeting.

(b) Meeting with the Administration
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 1706/05-06(01)-(03)]

33. Responding to the deputations' views regarding the work of WoC, Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Women) (PAS(HWF)(W)) said that WoC was not an advisory body but a high-level central mechanism within the Government. Since its establishment in 2001, WoC had strived to enable women to fully realise their due status, rights, and opportunities in all aspects of life. The mission was achieved through the provision of an enabling environment and empowerment of women. On the issue of women and poverty, WoC had obtained the endorsement of the Administration to apply gender mainstreaming to policies, legislation and programmes, in order to incorporate the needs and perspectives of women and men in the decision making process. A Gender Mainstreaming Checklist had been developed and applied to 19 policy areas/programmes. In addition, WoC had urged the Administration to formulate a family-friendly policy.

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34. PAS(HWF)(W) advised that WoC had also played an active role in building women's capacity. In collaboration with the Open University of Hong Kong, a radio company and non-government organisations (NGOs), WoC had launched the Capacity Building Mileage Programme to encourage women of different background and education levels to pursue life-long learning and self-development. The total number of enrolments was over 10 000. PAS(HWF)(W) further advised that on the advice of WoC, the Government had set a gender benchmark of 25% for appointment to Government advisory and statutory bodies. As the working target of 25% was achieved, the Administration was considering WoC's request to further raise the gender benchmark to 30% for appointments to Government advisory and statutory bodies.

35. PAS(HWF)(W) added that WoC would step up public education to promote the positive value and change the mindset of public to remove gender bias and stereotypes that hindered women's development. WoC would conduct fact-finding researches and keep the services under review in the light of women's needs, in particular those who lived in poverty.

36. On the need to amend the Co-operative Societies Ordinance, Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Family) (PAS(HWF)(F)) said that the Administration was willing to review the Ordinance with a view to facilitating the formation of co-operatives of social enterprise nature. PAS(HWF)(F) pointed out that the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, and Dr Fernando CHEUNG (Chairman of Panel on Welfare Services) had paid visits to some co-operatives to better understand their specific concerns. It was found that the major difficulties faced by the co-operatives and potential co-operatives were the lack of start-up capital, insufficient experience and professional knowledge in starting and running a business. These concerns were beyond the legislative framework of the Co-operative Societies Ordinance. The restriction under the Co-operative Societies Ordinance that all co-operatives should have a minimum number of 10 members was only of secondary concern. PAS(HWF)(F) explained that too small a membership was not conducive to the smooth operation of co-operatives, which usually involved a lot of practical tasks requiring division of labour. Overseas experience showed that the membership size of a co-operative ranged from three to 100. PAS(HWF)(F) added that the Administration welcomed views on the appropriate threshold in respect of the membership size of co-operatives. The Administration would continue to provide assistance to the relevant stakeholders and consider whether amendments to the Co-operative Societies Ordinance was necessary.

37. Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs 2 (PAS(HA)2) said that the Administration supported that a balanced gender composition in the work of public sector advisory and statutory bodies would enable the perspectives and concerns of both men and women to be fully reflected. The Administration adopted a progressive approach in increasing women's participation in the work of public sector advisory and statutory bodies. PAS(HA)2 advised that in January 2004, an initial working target of at least 25% for each gender has been set for the purpose of

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appointment to public sector advisory and statutory bodies. As at March 2006, 25.6% of the appointed non-official post holders were women. She added that the Administration would continue to monitor progress in enhancing women's participation in the work of public sector advisory and statutory bodies. The Administration would consider raising the gender benchmark in future.

38. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan asked about the timetable for the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) to release the findings of the study on EPEV. Miss CHAN Yuen-han also asked about the measures put in place by EOC to ensure equal pay for equal work between men and women.

39. Chairperson, EOC advised that the issues of women and poverty were complex subjects which should be viewed from the socio-economic perspectives. EOC observed that pregnancy discrimination and sexual harassment against women in employment had adverse effects on the employment of women. Chairperson, EOC pointed out that most of the complaints against pregnancy discrimination were related to dismissal upon return to work after maternity leave. As for victims of sexual harassment, they would usually choose to change to another job. Consequently, such women employees were deprived of promotional opportunities and accumulation of working experience due to job changes. As regards the pay differences, Chairperson, EOC said that EOC was aware of the pay differences between women and men engaged in the same type of job, especially for non-supervisory and non-technical jobs. EOC was also aware of the financial hardship faced by home-makers in low-income households and the needs of working women to take care of their families after work. In this respect, EOC would carry out researches to further study the extent of the problems and follow up on complaints of discrimination against women in employment. Nevertheless, he considered that in the longer-term, it would be necessary to formulate family-friendly employment policies, and encourage practices in public and private sectors to facilitate sharing of family responsibilities between the two sexes and women's participation in the labour force and community services.

40. Head, Policy & Research of EOC supplemented that the formulation of family-friendly policy would help sharing of family responsibilities by other family members and encourage employers to facilitate women employees to work on a part-time or flexi-time basis or even work at home.

41. Regarding the EPEV study, Chairperson, EOC said that EOC commissioned a feasibility study in 1997 to examine issues related to the implementation of the EPEV principle. The study originally aimed to examine whether there were structural or systematic unequal situations between men and women in employment, and the types of jobs and positions involved. As revealed by the draft report, there were no conclusive findings that unequal situation existed between men and women in employment. Chairperson, EOC assured members that since he had assumed the office of Chairperson of EOC, he accorded priority to the EPEV study and a Taskforce on EPEV had been formed. He hoped that the consultancy study report would be released by 2007 for discussion by the community.

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42. Responding to some deputations' views about CoP's role in addressing the poverty problem faced by women, Senior Administrative Officer, CoP (SAO/CoP) said that the establishment of CoP was not to overlap the existing work of different bureaux. CoP would maintain close liaison with WoC and Health, Welfare and Food Bureau on issues relating to women in poverty. In fact, within the three priority groups set by CoP, namely the working poor, children and youth from disadvantaged background (i.e. intergenerational poverty) and elderly poor, the needs of other needy groups, such as women had, to a certain extent be addressed. For example, CoP would examine the specific parenting needs of parents from disadvantaged groups (including single parents and new arrivals from the Mainland) when studying the problem of intergenerational poverty. On the suggestion of enhancing support to create local employment opportunities for women, SAO/CoP said that CoP had approved an additional funding of \$30 million for district-based poverty alleviation work, including providing support for social enterprises. The development of social enterprises would enhance the employability of the disadvantaged, included women in poverty, to move from welfare to self-reliance. The Home Affairs Department which was responsible for the management of the fund was working on the details for fund allocation. SAO/CoP added that to promote the development of social enterprises, support services now generally available to small and medium enterprises would be extended to social enterprises.

43. Mr Albert HO said that some deputations had pointed out that the Administration should take into account women's needs and perspectives in the formulation of policies. He asked whether WoC had made suggestions to the Administration to conduct gender impact analysis in the decision making process.

44. PAS(HWF)(W) responded that WoC advocated gender mainstreaming and had obtained the endorsement of the Administration to introduce gender mainstreaming in various policy areas. The gender mainstreaming strategy of WoC included the following –

- (a) WoC had designed a Gender Mainstreaming Checklist to assist government officers to evaluate the gender impact of public policy, legislation and programme. The Checklist had so far applied to 19 policy or programme areas;
- (b) at the request of WoC, C&SD had collected sex-disaggregated data and compiled an annual statistical publication "Women and Men in Hong Kong – Key Statistics";
- (c) all bureaux and departments had to designate a senior officer as the Gender Focal Point within the organisations to form a Gender Focal Point Network; and
- (d) training was provided to civil servants to raise their awareness and understanding of gender related issues.

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45. Responding to Mr Albert HO, Assistant Commissioner (Social)/Census and Statistics Department said that during the past 10 years, the increase in the number of women who had higher educational attainment was larger than men in the same age group. She envisaged that the trend would continue in the coming years.

46. Ms LI Fung-ying said that there were different estimations of low-income employees (i.e. those received a monthly income less than \$5,000) in the papers provided by the LegCo Secretariat, C&SD and CoP. According to C&SD and LegCo Secretariat, the number of low-income employees in 2005 was about 340 000 and 350 000 respectively. However, the number of low-income employees in 2005 provided in CoP's paper was about 260 000. Ms LI asked about the reasons for such a difference. SAO/CoP responded that she would seek clarification with C&SD and the LegCo Secretariat on the estimations.

(Post-meeting note : The reply from C&SD to the enquiry raised by Ms LI Fung-ying was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1975/05-06(01) on 11 May 2006.)

47. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that he was surprised that the NGOs, instead of CoP or WoC, discussed the policies for alleviating the problem of women in poverty. Mr LEE asked whether WoC had ever discussed policies for women in poverty.

48. PAS(HWF)(W) said that poverty was a complex issue which could not be dealt with by WoC alone. She further said that WoC was tasked to promote the application of gender mainstreaming to policies, in order to incorporate the needs and perspectives of women in the decision making process. WoC had provided its Gender Mainstreaming Checklist to CoP. At the request of the Chairman, PAS(HWF)(W) agreed to provide the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist after the meeting.

Admin

49. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan was of the view that WoC should have a role to play in addressing the poverty problem faced by women. He considered that WoC should review women policies to see what improvements could be made by Government in specific areas to address women's specific needs when delivering policies and services. PAS(HWF)(W) responded that in the past, WoC has reviewed employment-related services provided by the Government, including employment services, vocational training, retraining for employees, adult and continuous education as well as relevant welfare and support services. WoC would continue to discuss these issues with the bureaux and departments concerned.

50. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that CoP should critically review its effectiveness if it did not have a role to play in addressing the poverty problem faced by women. Moreover, WoC should let the public know the impact of rolling out the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist, instead of just updating the number of policy or programmes areas to which the Checklist had been applied. Dr CHEUNG further said that as the Administration would submit its report on the implementation of

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CEDAW to the United Nations (UN) in August 2006, he strongly urged that the Administration should brief LegCo on the draft report before submission. Dr CHEUNG further asked about the Administration's plan and timetable for reviewing the need to amend the Co-operative Societies Ordinance.

51. PAS(HWF)(W) said that WoC had published a booklet on completed gender mainstreaming cases to set out the impact of gender mainstreaming on policies and programmes. In the course of developing the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist, it was observed that women's participation at Government advisory and statutory bodies was low. A gender benchmark of 25% was set and women's participation rate was increased. PAS(HWF)(W) further said that the Administration would brief the Panel on Home Affairs on the Administration's arrangements for the upcoming UN hearing of the second report of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region about two months before the hearing.

(Post-meeting note : The item was discussed at the meeting of the Panel on Home Affairs held on 9 June 2006.)

52. PAS(HWF)(F) added that the Administration had met the co-operatives and potential co-operatives and discussed the appropriate membership size for formation of co-operatives. PAS(HWF)(F) stressed that the requirement for 10 members to form a co-operative under the Co-operative Societies Ordinance was of secondary concern when compared to the needs for support in the establishment and operation of co-operatives.

53. The Chairman said that the LegCo Secretariat would prepare a draft report on women in poverty incorporating views and suggestions made by members and deputations. Members agreed that the next meeting would be held on 18 May 2006 to discuss the draft report.

54. The Chairman further said that further meetings should be scheduled to discuss with CoP and the Administration the implementation of recommendations in the Subcommittee's report on working poverty. Members would be informed of the meeting dates later.

55. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:32 pm.