

Proposed Research Outline

Poverty Combating Strategies in Selected Places

1. Background

1.1 At the meeting of the Subcommittee to study the subject of combating poverty (Subcommittee) held on 14 January 2005, Members proposed to study the impact of economic changes/policies on the problem of poverty.

1.2 There have been policy initiatives proposed by governments around the world to reduce/eradicate poverty and enhance social protection for the poor. This is particularly the case recently in Asia, where high unemployment caused by economic restructuring and repercussions of the Asian financial crisis has precipitated a more pro-active approach to combating poverty.

1.3 The research to be conducted by the Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) is on the poverty combating strategies adopted in selected places, including the anti-poverty measures implemented to cope with the impact of economic restructuring on the poor. The study aims to provide the Subcommittee with overseas experiences relevant to the Hong Kong situation.

2. Proposed places to be studied

2.1 The proposed study will cover the poverty combating strategies in the following places:

- (a) Ireland;
- (b) the United Kingdom (UK);
- (c) South Korea; and
- (d) Singapore.

2.2 Ireland is selected because it was the first country in the European Union to set explicit anti-poverty targets. In 1997, Ireland published the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, a ten-year government plan with specific targets and benchmarks for poverty reduction. In addition, Ireland has established specific government bodies responsible for implementing and monitoring policies relating to poverty reduction, particularly the Combat Poverty Agency, which advises on ways to prevent and eliminate poverty and social exclusion.

2.3 In the UK, the national strategy for the reduction of poverty focuses on intervention at key stages in people's lives to prevent transmission of poverty through generations. Based on the premise that employment is an effective method of poverty prevention, "New Deal" programmes have been put in place to help long-term unemployed back to work through provision of support such as training and job preparation.

2.4 South Korea has introduced a series of anti-poverty programmes since 1998 to cushion against the impacts of both economic restructuring and the Asian financial crisis. These programmes include the implementation of employment generation measures, and the enactment of the National Basic Livelihood Security Act in 1999 to guarantee basic livelihood for those people with incomes below the minimum cost of living. In addition, the coverage of various social insurance schemes has been extended. The new measures represent a shift in South Korea's anti-poverty policy, which had until 1998 focused on the provision of limited protection mainly for those unable to work due to age or disabilities.

2.5 Singapore has adopted a "many helping hands" approach to combating poverty. Family has been identified as the first line of support for people in need of assistance and, if necessary, additional support will be provided by the community, voluntary welfare organizations, as well as the government and business sectors. In addition, Singapore has implemented a series of pro-active measures in recent years to reduce poverty, which include the Home Ownership Plus Education Scheme to help young low-income families break out of the poverty cycle by providing them with a comprehensive package of social assistance. A ComCare Fund was set up in January 2005 to finance the provision of social assistance programmes in the local communities. The Fund starts with an endowment of S\$500 million (HK\$2.37 billion) and will be built up to S\$1 billion (HK\$4.74 billion) over time.

3. Research outline

3.1 RLSD proposes the following outline for the study:

Part 1 — Introduction

3.2 This part provides the background information of the research.

Part 2 — Ireland

Part 3 — The United Kingdom

Part 4 — South Korea

Part 5 — Singapore

3.3 Parts 2 to 5 present the socio-economic background against which Ireland, the UK, South Korea and Singapore implement their respective anti-poverty strategies. The ways in which these places define and measure poverty are also covered. There will be a discussion of the nature of their anti-poverty strategies in terms of the responsible government authorities, approach adopted, specific programmes implemented and progress of poverty reduction.

Part 6 — Analysis

3.4 This part compares the major characteristics of the poverty combating strategies adopted in the selected places.

4. Completion date

4.1 RLSD proposes to complete the research report in May 2005.