

Commission on Poverty (CoP)

Meeting held on 18 February 2005

Gist of Discussions

The Commission on Poverty held its first meeting on 18 February 2005.

The meeting endorsed its Terms of Reference -

- to study and identify the needs of the poor;
- to make policy recommendations to prevent and alleviate poverty, and promote self-reliance; and
- to encourage community engagement; delineate responsibility between the government, social welfare sector and community organisations; foster public-private partnerships and mobilise social capital in alleviating poverty.

Members were given an overview of existing government policies and measures in alleviating poverty, in particular in the areas of social security; social welfare; health and other support services to the needy; education and other support services to students; training and retraining; employment services as well as the Government's role in district administration and community building. Members then shared their expectations on the work of the Commission and expressed their views on policy areas where services needed to be enhanced or required better co-ordination.

Intergenerational poverty, the working poor, the elderly not receiving CSSA and employment assistance for the able-bodied were some of the key issues identified at the meeting as meriting further attention. The meeting considered it desirable to identify quantifiable indicators to

facilitate public understanding of the progress in poverty alleviation. Members were briefed on the researches conducted by the Central Policy Unit (CPU) relevant to poverty alleviation. The CPU would support the Commission by commissioning and conducting further researches according to the priority areas identified by the Commission.

Members agreed to adopt a district-based approach in studying and identifying as well as addressing the needs of the poor. The Commission would conduct district visits to better understand the special needs and challenges of different areas in Hong Kong. As a first step, members of the Commission would visit Tin Shui Wai in March. The views of individual Members would be gauged as inputs to facilitate the preparation of a draft work programme for further discussion at the next Commission meeting in April.

The meeting also discussed the different methods in measuring poverty. While views differed on whether there was a need to draw a line different from the current CSSA level, there was a general consensus that poverty should not be defined rigidly as one fixed figure or line. Rather, it would be more important to identify and address the different needs of different groups. Meanwhile, the Government Economist would compile a set of the relevant indicators which would help reflect the poverty situation in Hong Kong for members' consideration at the next meeting.

To promote transparency of the work of the Commission, it was agreed that the agenda would be made public before meetings through the dedicated website of the Commission (www.cop.gov.hk). Official documents would be bilingual. All non-classified discussion papers and a gist of members' discussions would also be uploaded to the website after each meeting.