

**Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty
Study on Women in Poverty**

The reasons for closing the centres for single parents and new arrivals, and plans for providing services for these categories of people

1. The Government attaches importance to the welfare needs of the socially disadvantaged including the single parents and new arrivals, and seeks continuous service improvement and more effective and efficient use of resources through service re-engineering.
2. Following a review of family welfare services in 2000-2001 and the positive findings in the pilot projects of Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) implemented from April 2002 to March 2004, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) re-engineered the family service resources to form a total of 61 IFSCs run by the SWD and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) by phases in 2004-05. IFSCs are in a better position to provide more holistic and user-friendly services to families in need, including single parents and new arrivals.
3. As compared with the five time-limited Single Parent Centres (SPCs) located in five districts and four time-limited Post Migration Centres (PMCs) in four districts serving a much larger geographical boundary, the 61 IFSCs which are distributed all over the territory are more accessible. The new IFSC service model puts a premium on early prevention and intervention. It also offers additional services previously not available at SPCs and PMCs, including intensive counselling, assessment for compassionate rehousing, arrangement for clinical psychological services, etc.. With greater accessibility and the provision of a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services, IFSCs can better meet the varied needs of single parents and new arrivals.
4. As at the end of December 2005, of a total number of 40 429 active cases receiving counseling and supportive casework services in IFSCs, 5 210 are single parent cases while 882 are new arrival cases. During the period from April to December 2005, IFSCs have organized 223 groups specifically for 2 900 single parents and 188 groups specifically for 1 815 new arrivals. To quote just a few examples, the mutual help group “風雨同路” of Caritas-Tin Shui Wan IFSC has established support network among single parents to ease their psychological stress and enhance their parenting skills while the women empowerment programme “生命彩虹” of SWD-Cheung Sha Wan IFSC has increased the employability of new

arrivals through experience sharing and language skill training. Apart from these dedicated groups, single parents and new arrivals can also participate in other support groups and programmes such that they may feel less isolated through interaction with other families.

5. We reported to the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services the progress of the implementation of the IFSC model and closure of time-limited SPCs on 9 May 2005 vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1426/04-05(03).

The areas of work of the Women's Commission and the progress made in reducing poverty in women

6. The Women's Commission (WoC) strives to enable women to fully realize their due status, rights, and opportunities in all aspects of life. It sees empowerment of women, amongst others, as an important strategy to achieve the mission. It believes that empowerment of women involve two levels of change – change at the personal level through capacity building and change in the external environment. WoC has been playing a catalytic role in building women's capacity. It inspires new ideas for change and mobilize social resources to achieve the best results. At the same time, it also urges for the provision of an enabling environment for women through the elimination of obstacles in the environment, systems and policies.

7. While the issue of women and poverty requires actions across various bureaux and departments, commissions and non-governmental organizations, WoC has taken the following initiatives to promote economic empowerment of women, including women in poverty –

(a) On an enabling environment, WoC has 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. It has also shared its Gender Mainstreaming Checklist with the Commission on Poverty.

(b) WoC also keeps under review services in the light of women's needs. Over the past years, it has reviewed key services for women in need, such as employment services and job-related training, adults and continuous education, welfare services and family services, and has urged the Administration to consider women's specific circumstances and needs when delivering these services.

- (c) In response to women organizations' concerns, WoC sees running cooperatives as a new direction of economic empowerment for women, and has asked the Administration to further facilitate the development of cooperatives.
- (d) On capacity building, WoC together with the Open University of Hong Kong, a radio company and non-Governmental organizations, have launched the Capacity Building Mileage Programme since March 2004 to encourage women of different background and education levels, in particular grassroot women, to encourage them to pursue life-long learning and self-development. Responses from women have been enthusiastic. As at November 2005, 21 radio courses and six face-to-face courses have been conducted. The total number of enrolments is over 7,800. There is also a large network of audience reached through the radio programmes, in addition to the face-to-face programmes.
- (e) WoC also helps promote the \$300 million Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) to women's organizations, which seeks to, amongst others, empower women in poverty through cross-sectoral partnerships and cross-strata mutual-help networks so as to increase their confidence and ability to seek employment and resilience to face life adversities. In June 2005, WoC and the CIIF Committee jointly organized a CIIF workshop with over 95 representatives of women's groups participated. As of March 2006, a total of 34 projects, out of the 102 projects approved by the CIIF to date, are either implemented by women's organisations or targeted at women as core participants, involving funding of over \$28 million.
- (f) WoC has also organized conferences and workshops on issues of concerns to women, including women and economy, to facilitate exchanges of views and experiences. Besides, WoC also published a booklet on best practices on women empowerment for sharing with the wider community.

8. In addition to the above initiatives, WoC has also asked the Administration to take stock of the studies and researches related to women and poverty to facilitate further consideration. We would report the results to WoC shortly, and explore further area of work with the relevant bodies.

The progress made in the implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist and the effectiveness of the Checklist

9. Gender mainstreaming means incorporating women's as well as men's needs, concerns and experiences in the policy making process. With the help of the Women's Commission, an analytical tool in the form of a "Gender Mainstreaming Checklist" has been developed, and we are gradually introducing the use of the Checklist in different policy or programme areas. So far, the Checklist has been applied to 19 policy or programme areas, including five in 2005-06.

10. All bureaux and departments have already designated a senior officer (a directorate officer in most cases) as the "Gender Focal Point" within their respective organisations. These Gender Focal Points help raise awareness and understanding of gender-related issues, promote gender mainstreaming and the use of the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist, and liaise and coordinate within their organisations, with the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) and the Women's Commission. In addition, gender-related training is provided to civil servants to equip them with the knowledge and skills to apply gender mainstreaming to their work.

11. In addition, in 2005-06, a core group of selected Gender Focal Points has been set up to devise plans or strategies to facilitate the bureaux/departments for proactive application of the Checklist. We have also implemented an evaluation mechanism, which includes focus group discussions with the Gender Focal Points to gather feedback and suggestions. Besides, we have organized a briefing for Principal Officials and Heads of Departments as well as a seminar for Members of the Legislative Council to promote gender mainstreaming.

12. In 2006-07, we will continue to roll out the Checklist to more policy or programme areas on an incremental basis. We will also follow up on the suggestions made by the core group and complete the evaluation exercise by mid 2006. As part of the review exercise, the Women's Commission has also published a booklet on completed gender mainstreaming cases to set out the impact of gender mainstreaming on policies and programmes and to further promote the Checklist within the Administration.

The extent of women participation in the decision-making structure and the appointment of women from the grassroots to government advisory and statutory bodies

13. Hong Kong has made considerable progress in women's participation in decision-making, as follows -

- (a) At present, four (14%) out of 29 members of the Executive Council are women.
- (b) In the 2004 Legislative Council election, there were about 1.57 million registered female voters on the General Electoral Roll, representing 49% of all the registered voters. The turnout rate of female voters was 55.4%. 26 out of the 159 candidates were women.
- (c) In the Legislative Council, there are 11 female legislators (18%) out of a total of 60 members.
- (d) 90 women are serving on the District Councils established in early 2003, representing a 25% increase in the number of women who served on the District Boards in 1999-2002.
- (e) The percentage of women in the total number of civil servants is increasing. Six (35%) out of the 17 Permanent Secretaries are women. As at September 2005, women made up 34% of the total number of civil servants and 27% of the total number of directorate officers.

14. Appointments to Government advisory and statutory bodies (ASBs) are made on the basis of merits, taking into consideration an individual's ability, expertise, experience, integrity and commitment to public service, regardless of gender. That said, the Government considers a balanced gender composition would enable the perspectives and concerns of both men and women to be fully reflected. On the advice of the Women's Commission, the Government has set a gender benchmark of 25% as an initial working target for appointments to ASBs. A proactive approach is being taken to reach out, identify and cultivate potential female candidates, and women's participation in ASBs has been improving. As at December 2005, women took up 25% of the appointed non-official posts of ASBs. The Administration would continue to work closely with the Women's Commission and women's organizations to enhance women's participation in ASBs.

Response/progress made since the last report on CEDAW by the HKSAR Government

15. The Government considers that providing adequate education, training and employment opportunities to the poor, including women, is the best way to alleviate poverty. At the same time, we also provide a safety net for those in need.

16. To upgrade women's skills and raise their employability, continuing education and retraining opportunities are provided to women. Employment services are also available to women who wish to obtain jobs. Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) is also provided to women who are financially vulnerable to meet their basic and essential needs.

17. Besides, the Government provides a wide range of subsidized services for the needy, including women in poverty, such as public housing, medical services, education and social welfare support.

18. Examples of our welfare support to the needy women include Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) to provide family support services to the needy including women and single parents, the provision of other family services, child care services and after school care services to encourage parents of low-income families to seek jobs to attain self-reliance with the provision of financial assistance to those in need etc. To strengthen support to the needy families, including women in poverty, we have increased the provision for providing fee-waiving places from \$10 million a year to \$15 million from 1 April 2005, thereby increasing the number of full fee-waiving places by 50% from 830 to 1 245.

Whether the Government has any plans to revise the Co-operative Societies Ordinance to facilitate the establishment and operation of such societies

19. We have met the co-operatives and potential co-operatives. We understand that their main difficulties lie with the business viability, lack of start-up capital, insufficient experience and professional knowledge in starting and running a business and so on.

20. The Financial Secretary has announced in his Budget Speech 2006-07 that the Government will assist further in the development of social enterprises which include co-operatives. The relevant initiatives include –

- (a) setting aside \$30 million to strengthen district-based poverty alleviation work, including providing start-up support to social enterprises;
- (b) exploring how to further facilitate social enterprise in bidding for government contracts within the existing government procurement policy;
- (c) earmarking \$9.8 million for support social enterprise initiatives, including nurturing social entrepreneurs and strengthening their training; and
- (d) extending the support services now generally available to Small and Medium Enterprises to social enterprises alike.

21. We believe that the above initiatives will facilitate the establishment and operation of co-operatives by addressing their key concerns. It may not be necessary to amend the Co-operative Societies Ordinance (Cap. 33).

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
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