

For information

**Legislative Council Subcommittee
to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty**

**Commission on Poverty
Mechanisms in Gauging Public Views**

PURPOSE

This paper provides an overview of how the Commission on Poverty (the Commission) presently engages the community and gauges views regarding poverty prevention and alleviation policies and measures.

BACKGROUND

2. At the Subcommittee meeting on 28 April 2005, the Administration undertook to provide a paper on how the Commission draws inputs from the community in formulating and taking forward its work on poverty prevention and alleviation, including the consultative mechanisms which the Commission would make use of in the process.

**THE COMMISSION COMPLEMENTING OTHER
BUREAUX/DEPARTMENTS**

3. Poverty prevention and alleviation involves social policies and intervention measures of wide ramifications. Community support is critical to the credibility and efficacy of such policies and measures. It is therefore only natural that the Administration takes the need to seek community inputs seriously. It must be pointed out at the forefront that work on poverty prevention and alleviation does not start with the establishment of the Commission; rather, it has been a well established and integral part of Hong Kong's public policies. What the establishment of the Commission signifies is the Administration's political commitment to tackling poverty as well as a recognition that inter-policy coordination and an inter-disciplinary approach merit

dedicated attention. In other words, what the Commission implies is not sub-planting the roles of other bureaux and departments but rather to supplement them by providing a horizontal platform for better integration of Government-wide efforts, improved interface among relevant public policies and, not least, for galvanising cross-sector community participation in the cause of poverty prevention and alleviation. Thus, how the Commission solicits community inputs should build on current mechanisms already put in place by other bureaux and departments. It follows that how the Administration seeks community participation in the formulation and implementation of poverty prevention and alleviation measures should be appraised holistically.

4. Given the above as well as the diverse nature of poverty issues, the Commission prefers to adopt a multi-pronged approach in seeking community views. We believe that this approach provides flexibility and enables the Commission to benefit from specific advice of target groups knowledgeable and experienced in the issues under deliberation. In seeking to complement rather than duplicate existing efforts, the Commission's communication and consultation work would also help expand the portion of the community, at both the central and district levels, engaged in the discourse on poverty prevention and alleviation. The paragraphs to follow will briefly set out the multi-pronged approach currently adopted.

MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH

Central Level

(a) Membership of the Commission

5. Given the Commission's focus on policy interfaces, its membership has been deliberately designed so that the interaction among members would generate the macro, balanced and holistic perspective appropriate to the Commission's role and focus. The Commission membership draws on expertise from wide walks of life, comprising the Government, the media circle, district organisations, business sectors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) of different nature as well as academics in different disciplines. All of them are knowledgeable about public policies formulation and implementation, with some possessing

greater experience and expertise in district work and work directly related to poverty alleviation.

(b) Channel for round-the-clock, direct communication with the Commission

6. To promote transparency and to update the community on the progress of the Commission's work, the Commission has launched a dedicated website (www.cop.gov.hk). Agendas of the Commission would be made public before meetings. All non-classified discussion papers and a gist of discussions would also be uploaded to the website after each meeting. Members of the public are welcome to submit their views direct to the Commission.

(c) Existing consultative network of Government bureaux/departments

7. Currently, there is an extensive network of advisory bodies established under different government bureaux and departments to oversee a wide range of issues relevant to poverty prevention and alleviation, including the needs of children/youth, the elderly and other disadvantaged groups, and on cross-cutting policy issues including training and employment. Examples include the Commission on Youth, the Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth. These advisory bodies consist of representatives from different sectors, as well as experts and professionals in specific fields of interest. A list of the more directly relevant advisory bodies is set out at Annex.

8. The Commission is wary of the need to avoid duplication or erosion of the existing consultative machinery, as so doing would not be conducive to enhancing a sense of ownership towards the cause of poverty prevention and alleviation from other bureaux/departments/organisations/personalities currently engaged in such consultative machinery. It would also imply the necessity of a more elaborate Commission Secretariat setup that we do not prefer. In our view, the Secretariat should be kept lean and small so that more public resources could be made available for services/programmes directly benefiting the needy.

(d) Meetings with relevant NGOs and bodies

9. Besides making use of the existing advisory networks, the Commission would also engage relevant NGOs, academics and professional bodies to seek their views depending on the nature of the issues involved.

District Level

Standing District Feedback Channels

10. Such central set-up is supplemented, on a standing basis, by district networks which include District Councils and various task groups set up for different purposes and with which the Administration maintains close liaison. The established practice is that where salient issues relevant to particular policies are discussed, district officials will channel these to their departments and bureaux for follow up and incorporation into policy analysis/formulation. Discussion on poverty prevention and alleviation is no exception.

District-based approach of the Commission in alleviating poverty

11. Apart from various mechanisms to gauge public views on policy issues at the central level, the Commission has also adopted a district-based approach to facilitate concrete understanding of the unique/specific needs and key challenges faced by different communities, and to encourage formation of local forums involving local officials, District Councils and other relevant parties who would be in the best position to identify the priorities of the districts and bottom-up solutions in addressing the key challenges in the districts.

12. The Commission has conducted visits to Tin Shui Wai, Kwun Tong and Sham Shui Po in the past few months in order to gain first-hand knowledge of the challenges faced by the districts, and to consider how best to implement the district-based approach in alleviating poverty. During the visits to the three key districts, the Commission had meetings with the District Councils members and local personalities, as well as sharing with representatives from the target groups, namely the elderly, children from CSSA/single-parent families, the unemployed and the working poor not receiving CSSA. Besides, the Secretariat to the

Commission has also carried out a series of fact-finding visits to other districts and to exchange ideas with local NGOs on their work.

13. The Commission is pleased that in response to the initiative of the Commission, dedicated forums have been set up in the three key districts and a range of follow-up actions are underway. Recognising the key role to enhance existing district networks and build social capital, some districts would organise further local forums/roundtables would be organised at the district level.

14. The Commission would continue to take an active step in keeping in view developments in the districts, and to provide assistance to the districts where appropriate. The Commission would review the experience in implementing the district-based approach in alleviating poverty to see if some good practices for future application/reference could be drawn.

WAY FORWARD

15. For a generally affluent economy like Hong Kong, which is currently undergoing economic restructuring, poverty is a complicated issue involving many different dimensions. To cater for the breadth, diversity and complexity of poverty-related considerations, the Commission has adopted a multi-pronged approach to gauge public views at both central and district levels, making use of the existing comprehensive consultative networks, including both general and functionally targeted forums. In so doing, the Commission could not only benefit from views that it directly gauges but could also tap into the richness of inputs on various relevant issues solicited community-wide, by different parts of the Administration, at both the central and district levels. This, we believe, is more conducive to generating an Administration-wide and community-wide participation in poverty prevention and alleviation.

Existing Advisory Bodies and Committees Most Relevant with the Commission on Poverty

Interface of areas of interests with the Commission on Poverty

Prevention of Intergenerational Poverty

- *Committee on Promoting Holistic Development of Preschool Children under the Department of Health*
 - To facilitate joint efforts from health, social service and education sectors in promoting the optimal development of preschool children in Hong Kong.

- *Task Force on Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) under the Health, Wealth and Food Bureau (HWFB)*
 - To oversee and facilitate the implementation of the pilot CCDS.

- *Committee on Services for Youth at Risk under HWFB*
 - To promote multi-disciplinary, cross sector and cross-bureau/department collaboration to recommend effective means to address the changing needs of young people, especially the youth at risk.

- *Commission on Youth under the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB)*
 - To advise on matters pertaining to youth; and to exchange ideas and information with other Government advisory bodies on youth matters with a view to ensuring that interests of young people are taken into account in the design of relevant service programmes.

- *Education Commission under the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB)*
 - To advise on the overall objectives of and policies on education.

- *Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth under EMB*
 - To coordinate and oversee various training and employment programmes targeted at non-engaged youth (NEY) with a view

to enhancing the effectiveness of these programmes and fostering new ideas and strategies in assisting young people in their continuing development and employment.

Promotion of self-reliance and community building

- *Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) Committee under HWFB*
 - To advise on the most appropriate and effective means to facilitate the development of social capital in Hong Kong.

Welfare

- *Social Welfare Advisory Committee under HWFB*
 - To keep social welfare services under continuous review; and to advise on all matters of social welfare policy

Employment

- *Labour Advisory Board under the Economic Development and Labour Bureau (EDLB)*
 - To advise on labour and other related matters.

Women

- *Women's Commission under HWFB*
 - To advise on the development of a long-term vision and strategies related to the development and advancement of women; and to initiate campaigns and activities on enhancement of all round abilities and life skills of women to better equip themselves to face life's challenges.

Elderly

- *Elderly Commission under HWFB*
 - To advise on the formulation of a comprehensive policy for the elderly including matters relating to the care, housing, financial security, health and medical, psychological, employment and recreational needs of the elderly; to co-ordinate the planning and development of various programmes and services for the elderly, and to recommend priorities for implementation having regard to manpower, financial and other resources available.

** Please refer to < <http://www.info.gov.hk/cml/eng/cbc/index2.htm>> for further details of the terms of reference and membership of the above advisory bodies and committees.*

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