

Council for Sustainable Development

Report on the
Public Engagement Process on Population Policy

(June 2007)



可持續發展委員會
Council for
Sustainable Development

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Introduction

There are many internationally-recognized sustainable development (SD) principles and goals, such as those set out in the United Nations Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, that are relevant to Hong Kong, as they are to other societies around the world. SD must focus on the conservation of natural resources and eco-systems. To be socially sustainable, there must be equitable access to services for all citizens. These require profound changes at all levels of society, whether in governance, life styles, or civic commitment. The need for concerted action compels an open and participatory process aimed at engaging the wider community in the derivation of an SD strategy. Since its establishment in 2003, the Council for SD has designed and implemented a stakeholder engagement process to encourage wide-ranging dialogues on key issues that will have an impact on the sustainability of our city, with a view to helping formulate the SD strategy for Hong Kong.

2. The “pilot” engagement process, which took place between November 2003 and May 2005, focused on three areas: Solid Waste Management, Renewable Energy and Urban Living Space, and culminated with a Council report on the outcome of the engagement process and recommendations for the Government to consider. Built upon the outcome of this engagement process, the Government’s first SD Strategy for Hong Kong on these three pilot areas was promulgated in May 2005.

3. In July 2005, the Council organized a Stakeholder Forum to invite views on the priority areas for discussion under the new round of engagement. The Council considered the forum outcome and decided to take forward two priority areas – Population Policy and Better Air Quality. As regards the former which is the subject of the current Council Report, the Council launched the Invitation and Response (IR) document “Enhancing Population Potential for a Sustainable Future” in June 2006 and organised a series of engagement events to involve the community in an interactive discussion on related issues.

4. In 2006, the Council compiled a study report on the second priority area, Better Air quality, to consolidate relevant information. The

Support Group on this subject is now drafting a new IR document for the upcoming working on the engagement process on Better Air Quality.

Organisation of the Report

5. This document reports on the outcome of the engagement process on Population Policy spearheaded by the Council for SD from June to October 2006.

6. Chapter 1 outlines the engagement process and the events organised. The Council has considered the public views on a sustainable Population Policy and distilled these views into a number of Principles in Chapter 2. The same chapter also summarises the stakeholders' concerns and sets out the relevant "Targets" to facilitate the work of all parties towards achieving the "Principles".

7. Based on the engagement outcome, the Council has laid down in Chapter 3 its recommendations for the Government on a sustainable Population Policy for Hong Kong. The final chapter, Chapter 4, looks to the future, and proposes needed action by the Government and the community.

Chapter 1 – Public Engagement Process

Modeled on the Council’s first engagement process, the current one on Population Policy follows five stages –

- I. Identification of Priority Areas
- II. Preparation of a document to invite responses
- III. Direct involvement of the wider community
- IV. Reporting
- V. Government Action

2. Following from identification of priority areas at the Stakeholder Forum in July 2005, the Council prepared an IR document “Enhancing Population Potential for a Sustainable Future” and launched it in June 2006 to kick off stage III of the process. The current Report, which is a product under stage IV of the process, gives an account of the engagement findings and puts forward the Council’s recommendations on the way forward.

3. During the four-month engagement process from June to October 2006, the Council organised three regional forums¹, five regional workshops², and 15 events co-organised with partner organisations³ to involve stakeholders from different sectors of the community. Together we brainstormed and considered possible ways to enhance our population potential for a sustainable future. More information on these engagement events and the reports summarising the participants’ views are available on the SD Strategy website (www.susdev.org.hk).

¹ The Council organised the Regional Forum (Hong Kong) on 29 June, the Regional Forum (Kowloon) on 22 July and the Regional Forum (New Territories) on 12 August.

² The regional workshops took place in Hong Kong Island (30 August), Kowloon East (3 October), Kowloon West (4 September), New Territories East (16 August) and New Territories West (13 September).

³ The Council’s partner organisations in this engagement process included the Hong Kong Institute of Architects, Professional Green Building Council, Hong Kong Family Planning Association, Roundtable, Hong Kong Council of Social Service, Hong Kong People’s Council for Sustainable Development, Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups and Business Environment Council. The partner organisations assisted in organising the 15 events with the Council during August to October 2006.

4. Other promotional and engagement channels included TV/radio Announcements of Public Interest, bulletins and the SD Strategy website with online discussion forum and questionnaire. Roving exhibitions for this engagement process were held at 10 public locations⁴ from July to October 2006.

5. The Council hosted a Strategy Summit in December 2006 as a finale to wrap up the engagement process. At the Summit, stakeholders consolidated public views gathered during the previous months, identified the key concerns that had emerged from these views, and discussed the possible way forward in addressing these issues.

6. During this engagement process, the Council –

- (a) distributed over 17,000 copies of the Council's IR document and more than 27,000 summary leaflets;
- (b) received over 3,000 responses to the IR document, which included written comments, leaflet responses, messages on online discussion forum, etc.;
- (c) recorded over 1,700 attendances at the various engagement events; and
- (d) recorded a throughput of some 20,000 visitors at the roving exhibition.

7. As with previous Council's activities, stakeholders who participated in this engagement process came from a broad spectrum of the community. With the assistance of partner organisations, the Council was able to reach out to an even wider range of stakeholder groups. Participants at the various engagement events and respondents to our IR document came from the academic, business, professional, social, environmental and NGO sectors. Building on the experience of the first engagement process, the Council also deepened the engagement of district communities and youth groups.

⁴ The roving exhibition made the rounds of Festival Walk, Queensway Government Offices, MTR Hong Kong Station, Olympian City II, East Point City, Tuen Mun Town Plaza, Tsz Wan Shan Shopping Centre, Kingswood Ginza II, Sunshine City Plaza and Cityplaza.

Chapter 2 – Outcome

With the help of an independent agency to analyse and report on public views gathered during the engagement process, the Council noted that the major concerns of the stakeholders centred around four main themes, namely, quality of life, declining fertility rate, manpower, and ageing population.

2. In the ensuing sections, we have summarised key stakeholder views on these four main themes to provide a general account of their concerns regarding the wide range of issues under Population Policy. In addition, we have summarised, where appropriate, the views of and on-going measures undertaken by Government as an equally important stakeholder in this process.

3. The “Principles” under each of the four themes are intended to capture the essence of the community views on Population Policy issues and reflect the general “key concerns” agreed by stakeholders at the Strategy Summit. To provide a better indication of how these “Principles” might translate into action, we have also outlined the related “Targets” to facilitate the work of all relevant parties towards achieving these “Principles”.

Quality of Life

4. Many stakeholders expressed concern about the quality of life in Hong Kong. However, people’s views were divided as to whether they felt satisfied with it. While many stakeholders enjoyed the convenience and cosmopolitan lifestyle in Hong Kong, others were concerned about living costs, environmental issues and work pressure. The views gathered can be broadly categorized into those related to the living and working environment.

(1) Living Environment

5. During the engagement process, there was a considerable amount of discussions on urban planning and environmental issues. In general, stakeholders aspired to an enhanced quality of life, with more open space and more spacious living environments. They also urged the

Government to improve urban planning and work with all parties concerned to improve air quality. Stakeholders generally aspired to more pleasant and enhanced living environments and facilities, with emphasis on family friendliness. This would also help attract and retain talent in Hong Kong.

6. The Government accords a high priority to building an enjoyable living environment for the population in Hong Kong, which involves a wide range of policies from air quality to recreation, culture and heritage, urban design and planning. The Government will continue with its efforts in conjunction with other sectors of the community.

Principle 1: The Government and the community should join hands to improve air quality, increase the provision of open space and recreational outlets, implement more greening measures, enhance investment in culture and the arts, conserve tangible and intangible heritage and promote sustainable urban design, with a view to creating a better living environment.

Target 1: To provide an enjoyable living environment for our population and, at the same time, help attract and retain talent.

(2) Working Environment

7. A large number of stakeholders expressed concern about the work pressure and long working hours prevalent in Hong Kong. They strongly supported a “flexible life horizon”, whereby a better balance could be achieved between study, work and leisure throughout their lives, with greater flexibility to cater for their individual choices of lifestyle. Hong Kong people in general have too little time for their personal and family life. There was overwhelming support for family-friendly practices and better work-life balance in Hong Kong. The majority considered that these would not impair the competitiveness of Hong Kong. Many of them aspired to more socially responsible employers which promote family-friendly work environments for their employees.

8. The Government has implemented the five-day week scheme in phases since July 2006. This has helped to reduce the work pressure of government staff and improve the quality of family life. In addition, the

Government has been encouraging employers in the private sector to adopt workplace family-friendly practices. It will continue with its promotional work on this front, to enable employers to understand and be considerate about the needs of their employees.

Principle 2: To enhance our quality of life, the Government should actively work with the business community and NGOs to study ways to promote various family-friendly measures, such as flexi-time arrangements, job sharing and home-based work.

Target 2: To facilitate the employers' and the community's understanding of the importance of work-life balance for employees, and encourage employers to implement measures promoting a family-friendly work environment.

Declining Fertility Rate

9. Many stakeholders shared their views on the declining fertility rate and its impact on the long-term development of Hong Kong. While some stakeholders noted that this would mean a shrinking workforce, others considered that a smaller population was not undesirable. They believed that having children was essentially a personal choice.

10. In making childbearing decisions, people would consider factors such as the implied financial “burden”, work pressure and the availability of education and childcare support. Working women in particular were deemed to be facing tremendous pressure in balancing the competitive demands from work, family and childbearing / rearing responsibilities.

11. Stakeholders were in favour of a more active promotion of family values and parenthood, as well as more civic education on family care and support. They hoped that the Government and major business groups could take the lead in implementing family-friendly measures, by providing for incentives and environments conducive to parenthood.

12. On education, stakeholders looked for a stable education system which would offer diverse development opportunities. In this regard, the

Government has by now launched all proposals laid down in the 2000 Education Reform blueprint, putting in place a diversified and sustainable education system which provides more choices and opportunities, emphasizes quality and encourages life-long learning. The Government further announced in its 2006-07 Policy Address a major financial commitment to providing pre-primary education fee assistance to parents and enhancing the quality of pre-primary education.

13. The Government also recognizes that mutual care and aid among neighbours are a strong source of support for families. It will continue to encourage community building and support within neighbourhoods. The Government attaches much importance to family education and the promotion of family values to foster family harmony and solidarity.

Principle 3: To promote parenthood, the Government should implement measures conducive to childbearing and child rearing. However, it should not interfere with the childbearing decision of individual couples.

Target 3: To promote community-based childcare support and enhance developmental support for children.

Principle 4: The Government should seek to reinforce the importance of healthy family function and promote family support, in order to enhance social harmony and build a more sustainable social network of care and support for the population.

Target 4: To promote family values and support in the community.

Manpower

14. Stakeholders recognized a skill mismatch problem in the local employment market, and noted the shortage of a highly skilled workforce in Hong Kong. They considered that nurturing the local population and admitting quality people were both important.

15. It was noted that the education and training of our local workforce were being taken care of by existing continuing education and retraining programmes to meet current work requirements. Stakeholders also pointed out the increasing trend of Hong Kong people, especially managerial and professional staff, working on the Mainland. They also saw the need to continue reviewing talent admission schemes in order to ensure attraction and retention of suitable talent from the Mainland and abroad.

16. The Government is committed to providing quality education and training to our population to meet the needs of the economy. It also administers suitable talent admission schemes to help maintain Hong Kong's competitiveness in the international market, bearing in mind that the need and demand for quality talent are prevalent among developed countries and cities worldwide.

Principle 5: To maximize the potential of our local workforce and to better prepare them to face challenges in the global market, the Government should enhance its efforts in the training, retraining and continuing education of our local workforce to meet the manpower needs of the day.

Target 5: To provide enhanced employee training, retraining and continuing education programmes that are wider in scope and coverage, to enable more members of the population to benefit from these programmes and upgrade themselves.

Principle 6: The Government should continue to implement suitable schemes and keep them under review, with a view to admitting suitable talent to Hong Kong to enhance our society's competitiveness and vibrancy.

Target 6: To ensure that suitable talent admission schemes are in place to meet the prevalent needs of Hong Kong.

Ageing Population

17. Stakeholders were aware of the anticipated ageing trend and increase in age-dependency ratio in Hong Kong. There were views that

ageing in itself was not a problem, and the community as a whole should consider ways to face and embrace this new phenomenon.

18. Many respondents recommended the promotion of active ageing. Society should take care of the financial, housing and healthcare needs of the elderly, and address the social needs of the singleton elderly households.

19. Stakeholders were of the view that there should not be any pre-set retirement age, as flexibility should be allowed to accommodate individual circumstances and choices, in line with the notion of “flexible life horizon”. They looked forward to a lively and dynamic post-retirement life; and preferred spending more time with family, exploring new interests and doing voluntary work after retirement. If they were to continue to stay in the labour market, they would prefer doing freelance work. Stakeholders also considered that there was a need to encourage proper and timely retirement planning.

20. The Government and the Elderly Commission are working together to improve the quality of life of our elderly population and to providing them with a sense of security and belonging, as well as a feeling of well-being and worthiness. They will continue with their efforts in promoting healthy and active ageing.

Principle 7: The Government should implement measures to promote healthy and active ageing, and to accommodate individual choices in post-retirement life.

Target 7: To facilitate more diverse choice in post-retirement life, including volunteer work, exploration of new hobbies, spending more time with family, continuing education, and part-time or freelance work.

Principle 8: The Government should work with all relevant sectors to help meet the accessibility needs of an ageing population in a built environment.

Target 8: To improve accessibility of buildings and facilities for the elderly in the community.

Chapter 3 – Recommendations

The Council was glad to see an active participation by stakeholders, including the Government, in the discussion of the wide range of Population Policy related issues. Having reviewed the feedback from the stakeholders, the Council now puts forward the following recommendations for the Government's consideration in formulating a long-term strategy for Hong Kong's Population Policy.

Quality of Life

1. To work on a comprehensive programme with a view to improving the air quality of Hong Kong.
2. To provide more open space and recreational outlets in all districts, and to implement more greening measures, for the enjoyment of our population.
3. To enhance investment in development of culture and the arts, particularly in making culture and the arts more accessible to the public, encouraging public participation in and promoting appreciation of the arts, as well as to improve measures on heritage conservation, with a view to strengthening the population's cultural identity and social cohesion.
4. To continue implementation of the guidelines on sustainable urban design and explore sustainable building features with a view to enhancing our living environment.
5. To organise promotional activities targeting employers and the public at large, with a view to deepening the work-life balance culture and promoting family-friendly employment measures conducive to family care.

Declining Fertility Rate

6. To promote mutual childcare support among needy families through community networks.
7. To provide financial incentives with a view to promoting parenthood.
8. To enhance public understanding of the various education reform measures being implemented.
9. To consider whether a Family Commission should be set up for more effective co-ordination of policies and initiatives relating to family support.
10. To enhance the promotion of mutual support among different generations.
11. To review the public housing policy, including the public housing allocation system, to support and promote the care of extended family members.

Manpower

12. To enhance current retraining programmes for our workforce and expand the target groups of these programmes with respect to age and educational attainment.
13. To continue to implement the qualifications framework that clearly defines the standards for different qualifications, ensures their quality and provides articulation ladders among different levels of qualifications.
14. To relax the eligibility criteria and scope of the Continuing Education Fund.
15. To review the relevant talent admission schemes from time to time, and to further step up their promotion.

16. To review and, where necessary, enhance the Quality Migrant Admission Scheme in light of the experience gained since its launch in 2006.

Ageing Population

17. To further promote the Senior Citizen Card Scheme among public and private sectors, with a view to introducing additional benefits to facilitate healthy and active ageing of the elderly.
18. To work with community organisations to continue to promote community health, with an emphasis on healthy ageing.
19. To plan for hospital and healthcare services necessary for an ageing population.
20. To promote active ageing and elder learning.
21. To encourage more elderly to participate in volunteer work.
22. To promote to employers the notion of active ageing such as engaging the retired elderly in volunteer, part-time and freelance work.
23. To examine the adequacy, sustainability and choice of retirement protection schemes.
24. To facilitate barrier-free access and universal design of buildings and facilities for an ageing population.

Chapter 4 – Building on the Engagement Process

This Council Report represents Stage IV [#] of the engagement process on Population Policy. In the past few months, the Council has engaged community stakeholders in a series of interactive and face-to-face discussions, and is now putting forward its recommendations on a sustainable Population Policy for the Government's consideration.

2. The next step is for the Government to consider the Council recommendations and prepare its Population Policy in view of the challenges ahead.

3. We all should appreciate that the Population Policy (and indeed many other sustainability issues) impacts upon the livelihood, lifestyle, behaviour as well as choices of all members of the community. In order to leave a mark on the long-term development of our city and put a sustainable Population Policy into action, we need the concerted efforts of all individual members and sectors of society, and recognize that the Government is only one of the many stakeholders in this change process.

4. We need to look to ourselves to see what we can undertake as individuals to improve the quality of our own lives, as well as that of fellow members of the community. Our enhanced well-being will also contribute positively to the economic, social and environmental aspects of Hong Kong.

5. The Council for SD will continue to review the engagement process and consider whether and how the process may be further enhanced in its current exercise on the priority area of Better Air Quality. The Council looks forward to your continued participation in the engagement process.

[#] Please refer to Chapter 1 for the five stages of the engagement process.

**Terms of Reference and Membership
of the Council for Sustainable Development**

Terms of Reference -

- a. To advise the Government on the priority areas it should address in promoting sustainable development;
- b. To advise on the preparation of a sustainable development strategy for Hong Kong that will integrate economic, social and environmental perspectives;
- c. To facilitate community participation in the promotion of sustainable development in Hong Kong through various means, including the award of grants from the Sustainable Development Fund; and
- d. To promote public awareness and understanding of the principles of sustainable development.

Membership -

Chairman: Chief Secretary for Administration

Vice-chairman: Dr. Edgar Cheng, G.B.S., J.P.

Members:

- Dr. Lily Chiang
- The Honourable Choy So-yuk, J.P.
- Mr. Barrie Cook
- Ms. Christine Fang, J.P.
- Mr. Hans Michael Jebsen, B.B.S.
- Mr. Thomas Kwok, J.P.
- Mr. Michael Lai, M.H., J.P.
- Professor Lam Kin-che, S.B.S., J.P.
- Ir. Otto Poon, B.B.S.
- Mr. Tai Hay-lap, B.B.S., J.P.
- Professor Tsui Lap-chee, J.P.
- Secretary for Economic Development and Labour
- Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works
- Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
- Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands

**Terms of Reference and Membership
of the Strategy Sub-committee**

Terms of Reference -

- a. To assist the Council for Sustainable Development with the formulation of a Sustainable Development Strategy for Hong Kong;
- b. To engage stakeholders and the community and implement a consultation programme as agreed by the Council for Sustainable Development with a view to ensuring that the Sustainable Development Strategy is inclusive and widely accepted by the community; and
- c. To report regularly to the Council for Sustainable Development on progress with the formulation of the Sustainable Development Strategy.

Membership -

Chairman: Ir. Otto Poon, B.B.S.

Members : Dr. Lily Chaing
The Honourable Choy So-yuk, J.P.
Mr. Hans Michael Jebsen, B.B.S.
Professor Lam Kin-che, S.B.S., J.P.
Ms. Carmen Chan, J.P.*
Dr. Chan Wai-kwan, J.P. *
Dr. Anissa Chan, M.H.*
Mr. Chua Hoi-wai *
Ms. Anne Copeland-Chiu *
Dr. Susan Fan *
Mr. Albert Lai *
Dr. Alexis Lau *
Mr. Chandran Nair *
Dr. Ng Cho-nam, B.B.S. *
Dr. Andrew Thomson *
Mr. Ali Tuet *
Ms. Luciana Wong *
Professor Wong Siu-lun, B.B.S., J.P.*

* Co-opted Members

**Terms of Reference and Membership
of the Support Group on Population Policy**

Terms of Reference -

- a. To identify key issues relevant to Hong Kong's long-term sustainability in the priority area, with appropriate reference to international experience and best practice.
- b. To collect relevant background information (with reference to local and international experience) and compile an Invitation and Response document.
- c. To design and implement the public involvement stage of the engagement process for public discussion of the Invitation and Response document and related issues.
- d. To present the Invitation and Response document to the public and to encourage and facilitate interactive discussion by stakeholders with a view to building consensus among major groups.
- e. To receive and collate responses from stakeholders, with a view to making proposals to the Strategy Sub-committee and Council for Sustainable Development.

Membership -

Convenor: Professor Wong Siu-lun, B.B.S., J.P.

Members: Dr. Chan Wai-kwan, J.P.
Mr. Chua Hoi-wai
Dr. Sue Lo
Miss Alice Mak Mei-kuen
Dr. Peter K.S. Pun, S.B.S.
Mr. Wong Wang-tai
Dr. Paul Yip
Representative from Central Policy Unit
Representative from Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Representative from Security Bureau
Representative from Home Affairs Bureau