

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**Policy Initiatives of Labour and Welfare Bureau
in Promoting Well-being and Interests of Women**

Purpose

The Chief Executive delivered his 2008-09 Policy Address on 15 October 2008. This note sets out the initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau in promoting the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong.

2008-09 Policy Address and Policy Agenda

2. In 2008-09, the Administration will continue to work together with the Women's Commission (WoC) to promote the well-being and interests of women through its three-pronged strategy – viz. the provision of an enabling environment, empowerment of women and public education.

Provision of an Enabling Environment

Gender Mainstreaming

3. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy advocated by the United Nations in promoting women's interests and gender equality by incorporating the needs and perspectives of both genders as an integral dimension in the decision-making process. It seeks to enable both genders to have equal access to and benefit from society's resources and opportunities, such that women and men can both fully develop their potential and contribute to society.

4. Since 2002, the Administration has, on WoC's advice and with its assistance, implemented gender mainstreaming in various policy and programme areas. WoC has also developed a Gender Mainstreaming Checklist which comprises a series of simple questions to assist Government officers in applying gender mainstreaming in a more systematic way. To date, the Checklist has been applied to the 28 specific programmes as set out in Annex.

5. In addition, staff of many bureaux and departments have also applied the gender mainstreaming concept in the course of their daily work, taking into account the needs and perspectives of both genders. Some examples of the programmes that have applied the Checklist or the gender mainstreaming concept include:

- (a) **Government Publicity Programme** – the Information Services Department has applied the Checklist to its publicity programme. It has laid down a standard practice that bidders for the Government's outsourcing exercises on the production of publicity items under major publicity campaigns and minor programmes are required to ensure that all work submitted to the Government do not contain any gender bias or inequality and gender stereotyping.
- (b) **Publicity and Public Education Programmes of the Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority (TELA)** – TELA has applied the Checklist to its publicity and public education programmes pertaining to raising public awareness of the importance of protecting youth from being exposed to obscene and indecent articles. It has ensured that the publicity materials and messages do not contain any gender bias or gender inequality. Furthermore, various channels have been used so that the publicity programmes can be more effectively accessed by women.
- (c) **Services provided to Victims of Domestic Violence and Review of the Domestic Violence Ordinance** – the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) have applied the Checklist in their review of the services provided to victims of domestic violence and the Domestic Violence Ordinance. As a result, improvements have been made, among others, to enhance the shelter service for victims of domestic violence such that boys over the age of 12 can be admitted to the shelter homes together with their mothers where necessary. SWD and the Police have also strengthened training for frontline social workers, police officers and other relevant professionals responsible for handling domestic violence cases to enhance their gender awareness and sensitivity.
- (d) **Provision of Public Facilities and Design of Facilities in Buildings** – the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), having considered that women usually require longer time than men in using toilets, has increased the WC compartment ratio (female to male) from 1.5:1 to 2:1 since April 2004 in planning FEHD public toilet facilities. Furthermore, the Buildings Department issued a practice note in May 2005 seeking to increase the provision of sanitary fittings for females in shopping arcades, cinemas and places of public entertainment. These measures help alleviate the long queuing time for women for using such facilities.
- (e) **Publicity Programme on Electricity and Gas Safety** – the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) has applied the Checklist in devising its publicity programme on electricity and gas safety. For example, in conducting surveys on household electrical and gas safety, EMSD has collected sex-disaggregated data

such that they can monitor the safety knowledge of both genders and devise their publicity strategy accordingly. Noting that many end-users are females, it has made use of different channels, such as posting and distributing publicity materials at busy public locations and public transportation systems, and TV programmes targeted at female audience etc, to reach out to females more effectively.

- (f) **Procurement of uniforms and accoutrements for frontline officers** – the Police Force has applied the gender mainstreaming concept in the procurement of uniform and accoutrements for officers. Both female and male police officers have been consulted. Having regard to the differences in the body shape of male and female and the feedbacks received, the Force have made suitable improvements to the materials and design of uniform and accoutrements, e.g. improving design of bullet-proof vest and procuring pistols with handles of different sizes to suit the needs of different officers. These would not only help enhance the safety of frontline police officers, but would also help improve the overall operational effectiveness of the Police Force.

Indeed, in addition to the Police Force, the Customs and Excise Department, the Immigration Department and the Fire Services Department have likewise adopted the gender mainstreaming concept in the procurement of uniform and accoutrements for their officers. Similar positive impact has been observed.

- (g) **Central Fund for Personal Computer** – the Social Welfare Department has applied the Checklist on the operation of the Fund. It continues to ensure that all applicants with disabilities, both female and male, are treated equally in the vetting process. It has also promoted the Fund through local press and invitation to non-governmental organisations, thus more effectively reaching out to the target groups including women with disabilities. With these efforts, the ratio of female successful applicants has increased considerably from 26.3% in 2003 to 50.0% in 2008.
- (h) **Leisure and Cultural Facilities** – the Leisure and Cultural Services Department has improved the leisure and cultural facilities under its management to meet the needs of customers of both genders. For example, family changing rooms are now provided at 28 public swimming pools. One more will be provided in the coming year and feasibility study is being conducted for the provision of family changing rooms in 4 other swimming pools. In addition, breast-feeding rooms have been provided in 13 leisure and cultural venues. Breast-feeding rooms will also be provided in 12 newly built leisure and cultural venues, as well as in 16 existing venues being renovated within the coming 3 years.

- (i) **Vocational training for adult offenders** – the Correctional Services Department (CSD) has since June 2006 introduced full-time technical and commercial vocational training courses for local adult offenders. As a pilot, the training was first provided to male adult offenders and it has been extended to female adult offenders since February 2008. In developing the training programme, CSD takes into consideration the different needs of different genders. Surveys are conducted to gauge the vocational needs and preference for vocational training of both female and male offenders; job market data of respective gender is used as the basis for design of training courses; and the effectiveness of the training courses provided for female and male offenders are separately evaluated.
- (j) **First Aid Services** – the Auxiliary Medical Services (AMS) have since 2005 used curtains when treating injured persons to enhance patients' privacy. Furthermore, every first-aid team would have at least one female member such that patients would, as far as practicable, be examined and treated by AMS members of the same gender during normal first-aid administration.
- (k) **Operational Duties of Immigration Department** – the Immigration Department has adopted the gender mainstreaming concept in deploying staff for escort and search duties. They will ensure that persons involved in the relevant cases are handled only by officers of the same gender. For field operations, where persons of both genders might be involved, operation teams with both male and female officers are deployed to carry out their duties.
- (l) **Tamar Development Project** – the Tamar Development Project comprises the Central Government Complex, the Legislative Council Complex and an open space. The project will have regard to the gender mainstreaming concept and strive to cater for the different needs of female and male users as far as practicable. For example, breast-feeding facilities will be provided; improvement to the design of layout will be considered having regard to needs of users of different genders; and suitable construction materials (e.g. non-reflecting flooring materials) will be considered to cater for the concern of female users.

6. In 2008-09, the Administration will continue to progressively adopt gender mainstreaming in more policy and programme areas, including the health services for women, provision of market facilities, provision of leisure and cultural facilities, and provision of sports facilities.

7. In addition, to facilitate promotion of gender mainstreaming in the Government, we have since 2003 established a network of gender focal points

(GFPs) in all bureaux and departments. The GFPs serve as the resource person for their respective bureau and department and as the liaison points in implementing gender mainstreaming. They also assist in raising awareness and understanding of gender related issues of the officers in their respective organisations. We regularly meet with the GFPs and the last meeting was held in August 2008 at which GFPs have offered useful advice on the strategy to further promote gender mainstreaming within the Government. On their advice, we have developed a web-portal on gender mainstreaming as a resource and experience-sharing platform to help intensify understanding of the concept for all civil servants. We will also continue with the on-going efforts to provide training to civil servants to raise their awareness of gender-related issues and the concept of gender mainstreaming. To date, over 3 600 civil servants of various grades and ranks have attended various classroom gender-related training. We have also collaborated with other bureaux and departments to arrange tailor-made programmes or train-the-trainers sessions for their staffs. Efforts on this front will continue.

8. To promote gender mainstreaming in the community, WoC has proposed to establish a GFP Network in District Councils (DCs) to facilitate communication and collaboration between DCs and WoC. All 18 DCs are very supportive of the initiative and every one of them has now designated a Member as the GFP. WoC will soon have the first meeting with the DC-GFPs and we will support WoC in working closely with them in promoting the incorporation of gender perspectives in district projects and activities. We will also continue our efforts in sharing the Administration's experience in implementing gender mainstreaming with DCs and other stakeholders in the community.

Family-friendly Employment Policies and Practices

9. To enable women to improve their economic and general well-being as well as to advance women's development, it is important to provide an enabling environment in which women and men can share out family responsibilities and participate fully in all other aspects of life. Over the past three years, we have supported WoC in promoting the adoption of family-friendly employment policies and practices (FEPP) in Hong Kong, including a research study jointly conducted with the Equal Opportunities Commission on the needs, awareness, and prevalence of FEPPs in Hong Kong, publication of a promotional leaflet on FEPP for distribution to different sectors and organisation of a seminar on FEPP in collaboration with the Labour Department and other stakeholders. In 2008-09, we will assist WoC in collecting examples of good practices of FEPP to facilitate experience sharing and further promotion across different sectors of the community.

Empowerment of Women

The Capacity Building Mileage Programme

10. Launched in March 2004, the Capacity Building Mileage Programme (CBMP) is a key initiative of WoC in empowering women. CBMP is implemented jointly by the Open University of Hong Kong (OUHK), the Commercial Radio and nearly 80 partnering women's groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

11. CBMP is a flexible learning programme tailored to the needs and interests of women. It is mainly delivered through radio broadcasting and supplemented by optional learning activities and face-to-face courses delivered by NGOs. The courses include subjects such as managing interpersonal relationships, finance management, health and other practical issues in daily life. Since its launch, it has encouraged women of different backgrounds and educational levels to pursue life-long learning and self-development. Up to July 2008, the cumulative number of enrolments exceeded 25 000, not to mention the large network of audience reached through the radio programmes. Feedback from students is that they have benefited from the programme in terms of increased interests in learning, enhanced confidence and knowledge in resolving problems in daily life, and sharpened communication skills which help improve their interpersonal relationships in the family and employment contexts.

12. CBMP was first operated on a pilot basis for three years with funding support from the Lotteries Fund. With the proven success of the CBMP in encouraging women's life-long learning, starting from March 2007, the Administration has provided funding to support the continued operation of CBMP, such that the CBMP course fee has been set at a relatively low level to provide affordable learning opportunities for women. In order to enable women with financial needs to also benefit from the CBMP, OUHK has, with private donation, set up in 2004 a CBMP student financial assistance scheme to assist eligible students with financial needs. In 2008, OUHK has received a donation of \$1 million from a donor for setting up a new fund to support CBMP participants in need, and also donation of \$250,000 from two other donors for expanding the existing financial assistance scheme. This would no doubt benefit more women in need, and also represent a vote of endorsement by the community on the effectiveness of the CBMP.

Women's Safety

13. The Administration is committed to combating domestic violence and spares no effort in strengthening support for victims of domestic violence and families in need. In January 2006, WoC issued a report on "Women's Safety in Hong Kong: Eliminating Domestic Violence", setting out a multi-dimensional strategy to eliminate domestic violence and putting forward 21 recommendations. The Administration has responded positively to the recommendations, including

amending the Domestic Violence Ordinance to enhance the protection for victims of domestic violence, adopting an early intervention strategy, strengthening the direct services and support for victims and their families, improving the handling of domestic violence cases by the Police, developing batterer intervention programme for abusers, and stepping up publicity efforts. Different sectors in society have also played their parts and worked together to build community network and neighbourhood support.

14. We are now assisting WoC in preparing a report to take stock of the developments made and aspects that require continuous efforts. The Administration will continue to support WoC in implementing the multi-dimensional strategy in tackling domestic violence in partnership with all stakeholders.

Nurturing Caring Families

15. The Administration has supported WoC in taking forward its initiatives to promote nurturing of caring families. Building on the results of its study on “Core Life Values for Parenting Education” released in September 2006, WoC has initiated two pilot projects on quality parenting in collaboration with the Kwun Tong District Council and North District Council. The pilot projects aim to promote quality parenting education and core life values for instilling in the younger generation. They also aim to establish a support network for parents to share experience and offer mutual help on parenting issues. The two District Councils have provided funding to a total of 22 projects under the pilot.

16. In 2008, we have been assisting WoC in further promoting quality parenting to other districts. We are following up with Tuen Mun and Island District Councils which have indicated interest in implementing the project. WoC is also planning to hold a seminar in November 2008 to share experience gained in the pilot.

Public Education

17. Over the past years, the Administration has worked closely with WoC to organise various public education programmes seeking to reduce gender prejudice and stereotype in society and raise public awareness of gender-related issues. These include organising open forums and seminars, producing three TV drama series “Women with Dreams” on capacity building and empowerment of women, commissioning radio programmes to promote awareness of gender issues, producing announcements of public interest on television and radio and posters, as well as organising essay competitions, and celebration events for the International Women’s Day on 8 March every year.

18. In November 2007, we assisted WoC in organising a large-scale exhibition on “Women of Hong Kong – A Century of Contribution and Development” to showcase the development of women in the areas of work,

family, education and social participation in the past century and to pay tribute to women's contribution to the society. The exhibition material is duplicated and would be put on show at Shatin Town Hall, Hong Kong Central Library, Tsuen Wan Town Hall, Museum of History, seven Government offices and 12 public libraries from July 2008 to March 2009.

19. We also attach importance to the promotion of gender awareness in school education to reduce gender stereotyping of students in their early stages of life and to make a sustainable impact. We are supporting WoC in organising a debate competition on gender issues for secondary and tertiary students to generate interest, awareness and more thorough understanding of various gender issues among the students. The debate competition will take place in October and November 2008.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
October 2008

**Policy and Programme Areas that have applied
the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist**

Policy/Programme Areas	Bureau/Department
<u>2002-03</u>	
1. Health Care Reform	Food and Health Bureau ¹
2. Enhanced Home and Community Care Services for the Elders	Labour and Welfare Bureau ² and Social Welfare Department
3. Family Education Services	Social Welfare Department
4. Secondary School Places Allocation	Education Bureau ³
5. District Council Reviews	Home Affairs Bureau and Home Affairs Department
<u>2003-04</u>	
6. IT Education in the Community	Commerce and Economic Development Bureau ⁴ , Office of Government Chief Information Officer, Home Affairs Department and Social Welfare Department
7. Review of the Appointment Policy of Advisory and Statutory Bodies	Home Affairs Bureau
8. Design of Facilities in Public Buildings	Architectural Services Department
<u>2004-05</u>	
9. Review of Building (Standards of Sanitary Fitments, Plumbing, Drainage Works and Latrines) Regulations – Review on Provision of Sanitary Fitments for Female	Development Bureau ⁵ and Buildings Department
10. Provision of Public Toilets	Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

¹ Formerly Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

² Formerly Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

³ Formerly Education Department and Education and Manpower Bureau

⁴ Formerly Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau

⁵ Formerly Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau

Policy/Programme Areas	Bureau/Department
11. Major Publicity Campaigns and Minor Publicity Programmes	Information Services Department
12. Review of Composition of Advisory Committees by Office of the Telecommunications Authority	Office of the Telecommunications Authority
13. Consumer Education Programmes	As above
14. Publicity Programme on Electricity and Gas Safety	Electrical and Mechanical Services Department
<u>2005-06</u>	
15. 2006 Population Bi-census	Census and Statistics Department
16. Comprehensive Child Development Service for Children	Labour and Welfare Bureau ⁶ , Education Bureau ⁷ , Department of Health, Social Welfare Department and Hospital Authority
17. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Community Support Project	Labour and Welfare Bureau ⁸ and Social Welfare Department
18. Provision of Infirmity Care Services in Non-hospital Setting	As above
19. Combating Domestic Violence and Review of Domestic Violence Ordinance	As above
<u>2006-07</u>	
20. District Administration: Enhancing the Role of District Councils and District Officers	Home Affairs Department
21. Community Rehabilitation Day Services	Social Welfare Department
22. Review of Services for Victims of Sexual Violence	As above

⁶ Formerly Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

⁷ Formerly Education and Manpower Bureau

⁸ Formerly Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Policy/Programme Areas	Bureau/Department
23. Operation of the Multi-purpose Crisis and Support Centre	As above
24. Publicity and Education Programme about the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinances	Television and Entertainment Licensing Authority
<u>2007-08</u>	
25. Qualification Framework	Education Bureau
26. Manpower Development Scheme	Labour and Welfare Bureau and Employees Retraining Board
27. HIV Prevention Programme	Department of Health
28. Promotion of Breast-feeding and Provision of More Baby-care Facilities in Government Buildings and Public Areas	Food and Health Bureau