

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

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## **Panel on Home Affairs**

### **Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 14 May 2010**

#### **Women participation in Village Representative Elections**

##### **Purpose**

This paper gives an account of discussions held by Legislative Council ("LegCo") Members on women participation in Village Representative ("VR") elections.

##### **Background**

2. To ensure that VR elections are open, fair and consistent with the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance (Cap. 383) and the Sex Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 480), the Government enacted the Village Representative Election Ordinance (Cap. 576) ("VREO") in 2003 to provide a statutory basis for VR elections. The first ordinary VR elections were held in 2003 and the term ended on 31 March 2007. The second ordinary VR elections were held in January and February 2007 to return VRs for the new four-year term from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2011.

##### **Participation in VR elections**

3. Under the VREO, both genders are given equal opportunities to become voters and/or candidates in the VR elections in so far as they fulfill the criteria prescribed in the legislation. To be eligible for registration as a voter for an indigenous village or a composite indigenous village<sup>1</sup>, a person needs to be an adult and an indigenous inhabitant of that village, or a spouse or surviving spouse of an

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous villages are those already in existence in 1898. They are listed in Schedule 2 to the VREO. Composite indigenous villages are villages that comprise more than one indigenous village whose indigenous inhabitants jointly elect their indigenous inhabitant representatives. They are listed in Schedule 3 to the VREO.

indigenous inhabitant of that village, and holds an identity document. To be eligible for nomination as a candidate, a person needs to attain the age of 21 and should be an indigenous inhabitant. He or she should also be a Hong Kong permanent resident and ordinarily resides in Hong Kong, and is not disqualified from voting in the election.

4. To be eligible for registration as a voter for an existing village<sup>2</sup>, a person needs to be an adult, a Hong Kong permanent resident and a resident of that village for three years immediately before the date of the application for registration. To be eligible for nomination as a candidate, a person needs to attain the age of 21 and has been a resident of that village for six years before the nomination, and is not disqualified from voting in the election.

5. The participation rates of the two VR elections in 2003 and 2007 and preliminary statistics on the forthcoming VR election in 2011, as provided by the Administration, are summarized in the following table –

| <b>VR Elections</b>      | <b>2003</b>                       | <b>2007</b>                                      | <b>2011</b>   |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| No of existing villages  | 707                               | 707  | 709 <sup>3</sup>  |
| No. of VR seats          | 1,480                             | 1,480  | 1,484 <sup>3</sup>  |
| No. of registered voters | 158,000                           | 170,000<br>(about half of them (47%) were women) | 169,740<br>(as recorded in the 2009 Final Voter Register; about half of them (47%) are women) |
| No. of candidates        | 1,638<br>(of which 29 were women) | 1,630<br>(of which 35 were women)                | -   |
| No. of elected VRs       | 1,291<br>(of which 17 were women) | 1,320<br>(of which 28 were women)                | -   |

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<sup>2</sup> Existing villages are listed in Schedule 1 to the VREO.

<sup>3</sup> Pursuant to the enactment of the Village Representative Election Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2009 in November 2009, two villages (viz. Lai Pek Shen and Yuen Long Kau Hui) have been included in the Schedules to VREO for the purpose of VR elections. Each of these villages is represented by two VRs.

## **Deliberations of LegCo Members**

6. When the Panel was consulted on the Administration's proposed amendments to VREO at its meeting on 14 November 2008, a member pointed out that despite the introduction of VREO to ensure equality between the two sexes in electoral arrangements, women participation in the VR elections remained unsatisfactory. The member suggested that the Administration should study the reasons for the relatively low participation rate of women in VR elections, and step up its efforts to encourage women participation in the forthcoming VR elections. She also enquired about the number of complaints where women voters were being threatened or pressurized during these elections.

7. The Administration advised members of the statistics on women participation in VR elections as tabulated in paragraph 5, highlighting that the number of women candidates had increased by 21% from 29 in 2003 to 35 in 2007, and the number of women VRs elected had risen by 65% from 17 in 2003 to 28 in 2007. Regarding members' enquiry on the complaint cases, the Administration advised that there were six reports of intimidation cases in the past VR elections and none of them was lodged by women voters.

8. On measures to encourage participation in the VR election in 2011, the Administration advised that the Home Affairs Department ("HAD") would conduct a publicity campaign through dedicated websites, media advertisements, mobile broadcasts on vehicles, banner/poster/notice display and distribution of voter registration forms/leaflets during the period from 31 May to 16 July 2010 to encourage eligible persons of both genders to register as voters in the next VR election. HAD/District Offices would also issue appeal letters to all 27 rural committees and women groups in the New Territories to encourage women participation in the VR election. Before the nomination for the election, HAD would issue an appeal letter to Heung Yee Kuk to highlight the importance of equal opportunities for both genders.

9. The Administration further undertook to continue to step up publicity to encourage wider participation of women in VR elections; closely monitor the rate of women participation in the coming voter registration, candidate nomination and voter turn-out, as well as the number of women VRs elected. As an ongoing effort, it would encourage wider participation by women in rural affairs, e.g. through the establishment of women groups to promote volunteer work and mutual help in rural areas.

## **Related issues**

10. Apart from women participation in VR elections, some members had expressed concern about women participation in public affairs at different LegCo forums. At the Panel meeting on 9 February 2007, a member urged the Administration to take more proactive steps to facilitate women's participation in the

work of advisory and statutory bodies ("ASBs") by raising the work target of 25% as a gender benchmark for appointments to ASBs. A Member raised a question on the "Implementing gender mainstreaming and promoting gender equality" at the Council meeting on 28 April 2010. In particular, the Member asked, among others, whether the Administration had any plan to raise the work target of at least 25% for each gender for the purpose of appointing non-official members of ASBs, and in the light of the overall women's participation rate in ASBs of 27.6% as at April 2009, whether the Administration had assessed the reasons for women's participation rate falling short of 30%.

11. In his response to LegCo in April 2010, the Secretary for Home Affairs ("SHA") advised that the Home Affairs Bureau had issued internal guidelines to bureaux and departments that the gender benchmark target for participation in ASBs would be raised from 25% to 30% with effect from June 2010. As at 31 March 2010, among some 400 ASBs, 384 had government-appointed non-official members. Among them, 171 ASBs recorded a women's participation rate of more than 30% and women took up half of the seats in 51 ASBs out of these 171 ASBs. However, 213 ASBs had a women's participation rate of less than 30%. SHA further pointed out that there were reasons arising from the culture and practices of society formed over a long period of time to account for the relatively low women's participation rate. Through efforts in recent years, the rate had gradually increased from 25.2% in December 2005 to 28.1% in March 2010.

### **Latest development**

12. At the Panel meeting on 9 April 2010, some members reiterated their concern about the low women participation rate in VR elections. As HAD would soon commence the publicity programme of the forthcoming VR election, members agreed that the subject be further discussed at the meeting on 14 May 2010.

### **Relevant papers**

13. A list of relevant papers with their hyperlinks at the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
11 May 2010

## Panel on Home Affairs

## Relevant documents on Women Participation in VR Elections

| Committee             | Date of Meeting  | Minutes/Paper/<br>Council question   | LC Paper No./<br>website  |
|-----------------------|--|--|---|
| Panel on Home Affairs | 9.2.2007   | Minutes of meeting   | CB(2)1501/06-07<br><a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha070209.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha070209.pdf</a>                    |
|                       | 13.4.2007  | Information note on Rural Elections  | CB(2)1556/06-07(01)<br><a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ha/papers/hacb2-1556-1-e.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ha/papers/hacb2-1556-1-e.pdf</a>      |
|                       | 14.11.2008   | Background brief on VR Elections   | CB(2)239/08-09(02)<br><a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1114cb2-239-2-e.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1114cb2-239-2-e.pdf</a> |
|                       |  | Minutes of meeting   | CB(2)469/08-09<br><a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20081114.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20081114.pdf</a>                 |
|                       | Supplementary information from the Administration on measures taken to encourage women participation in VR elections | CB(2)1229/09-10(01)<br><a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1114cb2-1229-1-e.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1114cb2-1229-1-e.pdf</a> |   |
| Council meeting       | 28.4.2010  | Oral question raised by Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong on implementing gender mainstreaming and promoting gender equality  | <a href="http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201004/28/P201004280171.htm">http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201004/28/P201004280171.htm</a>   |