

香港兒童權利委員會
THE HONG KONG COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

**Response to the Consultation Paper of
The Long-term Social Welfare Planning in Hong Kong**

1. About the Environmental Scan of Hong Kong's situation

The environmental scan lacks in sketching the changing environment for children in Hong Kong. Although there were some descriptions in paragraphs 2.10 – 2.15, they were more related to families in general and youth. Indeed, the support system around children nowadays has been broken down gradually with the general long working hours of parents, more and more single child in families, less siblings, as well as distant relationship with relatives and neighbours. Children are also facing a highly competitive society, and they have spent more than sufficient time on tuition classes, extra-curricular activities and many other names of things that they could physically and psychologically afford. Children have much less sleep than before and they are less engaged in free play and spent less time in playgrounds, country side; but they have engaged more in indoor activities and programmed gadgets and events. All these need to be mentioned in the environmental scan for long-term social welfare planning, as well-planned welfare services to address these emerging problems might help prevent problems that can emerge later in youth, such as the problems of drug abuse, compensated dating and hidden youth as mentioned in paragraph 2.14.

2. About the Guiding Principles for Social Welfare Planning

In the third guiding principle **Shared Responsibility**, it mentioned the **user pays principle** is important. While it might be an initiative that is worth explored further under the low-tax system in Hong Kong, it has to be clear that it can only apply to those who can afford to pay and not those already struggling in their life. Otherwise, this new policy will only add additional pressure to individuals and/or families in need.

In the fifth guiding principle **Prevention is better than cure**, we simply could not see how this can be turned into a reality by the proposed strategic directions in Chapter 5, which is only describing the already built in services. It will be further elaborated below.

In the sixth guiding principle **Flexibility**, while we agreed flexibility is important to address the changing community's needs, we do need to have clear long-term goals, policy mapping and evaluation mechanism. Otherwise, our welfare system is leading to nowhere. We need to have a

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transparent and efficient evaluation mechanism to assess if our policies are effective in achieving the set long-term goals. If not, why? Otherwise, it is absurd to have the “long-term social welfare planning” in the first place.

3. About Sustainability and Partnership

In paragraph 2.23, it said *“With their own sources of funding, non-subvented NGOs actively support and contribute much to the welfare development of Hong Kong in a self-sustaining mode. Their experience and success also provide us with useful insights on the issue of sustainability of our welfare system in the long run.”* However, we do not see how the government has recognized the efforts of non-subvented NGOs in its contribution in society. These NGOs have been bridging up the service gap by providing services on rights-based programs, promoting social harmony, empowering different service target groups for resilience, however, all these services and programs are not eligible for funding application from the Social Welfare Department, Community Chest and Lotteries Fund, and many other applications. They are struggling to survive in very difficult circumstances. Indeed, some small NGOs could not go over the financial crisis last year and tragically pulled down. We need the Government to recognize non-subvented NGOs’ contribution in Hong Kong with clear positions in the Long-term Social Welfare Planning in Hong Kong; establish clear platform to interact with them; and by providing and/or channeling resources and information to them like the subvented NGOs.

Many NGOs in Hong Kong are also very traumatized by the rigid requirement of funding bodies by highlighting “experimental”, “pilot”, “creative” as the application requirement for their projects. Funding is normally discontinued after three years for a pilot project, some are even shorter. Every successful project needs time to develop, reach the community before it is matured. The rigid requirement will spin the vicious cycle of NGOs failing to retain good staff in the welfare sector after the project/contract ends; NGOs are putting focus on “creativity” rather than the substance of the service; and might even give false hope in the community if the services are being discontinued within a couple of years. Government has a key role in addressing this issue seriously with the funding bodies in Hong Kong.

4. About the Proposed Strategic Directions

The Consultation of Long-term Social Welfare Planning was announced amid a spate of tragic incidents in Hong Kong: children died and seriously injured along with their distraught parents who

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jumped from heights; infant starved to death; youth with mental problem jumped in front of peers in school... All these incidents deserved our serious attention if the existing welfare system has provided a safety net for people in need in our society. The proposed strategic directions in Chapter 5 are very much repeating the already built in services and programs. These tragic incidents would not have happened if the existing system is good enough. **Prevention is better than Cure**, we need to see this being realized in government's clear policy and budget allocation. The number of children suffering from mental health problems has surged by more than a half in the past eight years, yet they have to queue up for an average of 1-3 years for the psychiatry services in public hospitals, and the services provided by the private sector and NGOs are either too expensive or unclear to them. How can we prevent them from snowballing into more serious cases in future? Prevention starts from children when we can still mend the problems. Yet, the government budget has put focuses on serious adult cases. This is just one of the many examples.

Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights
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