

AGAINST CHILD ABUSE
Responding to
Long-term Social Welfare Planning in Hong Kong
Consultation paper
Social Welfare Advisor Committee
April 2010

1. Thorough and extensive consultation on the Long-term Social Welfare Plan

The decision to do away with the Five Year Plan and the decision to adopt consultations sessions instead were not decisions made as a result of wide consultation in the social welfare sector and thus we propose for genuine consultation by the involvement of all stake holders, cross discipline and at different levels, management and frontline and by the involvement of service users, adults and children.

2. The Government's Role on the Long-term Plan

It is important that the Review is done by the Hong Kong Government and not merely a consultation conducted by the Social Welfare Advisory Committee which though being an important mechanism for social welfare has only an advisory and not mandatory role. SWAC may have limitation in ensuring a well consulted long-term social welfare plan and its proper implementation supported by adequate resource allocation.

3. Refer to para 2.1 Chapter 2 under An overview of social welfare in Hong Kong

It was said that the social welfare system of Hong Kong is highly developed and institutionalized. On one hand we are proud of the Hong Kong system for being efficient, on the other hand we are concerned if our system is evidence based and whether effective models of prevention and remedial action has been developed and widely used and if our multidisciplinary professionals have acquired a proactive and child rights perspective. **The entire social welfare system and policy required a thorough review to reflect child impact assessment properly actualized and the principle of best interest of the child notion and the essence of the UNCRC and the other Covenants that have been extended to Hong Kong through the years followed through.**

We have the understanding that models proved effective by research have not been widely practiced because of lack of policy, manpower and resources to stipulate such sustained. Measures proven worthwhile should receive government funding and be made universal as mainstream services.

Hong Kong has turned to focus on an integration system and has not devoted adequate attention, resources and manpower to ensure high quality specialized services such as services for cross border families, ethnic minorities, single parents etc. etc.

4. Refer to para 2.4 to 2.7 Demographic changes, Chapter 2

Not sufficient coverage had been made on the projection of cross border families between Hong Kong and the Mainland. No coverage on increase in new born babies by both parents from Mainland and one parent from Mainland. Such families encountered different challenges which require special policy and attention. Accurate projections are essential to trace trends, characteristics, identify needs and limitations and to plot directions and strategically plan to have demands meet and to involve all stakeholders in the planning, training and implementation process.

Demographic changes also relate to town planning, housing and resource allocation. There are often criticisms of government's town planning or the lack of new town planning. This voice is particularly strong when tragic cases from Tin shui wai, Tung Chung etc. hit the news. There is often criticism that these remote areas repeat the ills of new towns in the past decades such as Tuen Mun that new families lacked social support, encountered difficulties in finding jobs with fair pay and having to pay for traveling to work outside the new town etc. etc. etc. Furthermore the government was often criticized as to the allocation of new arrivals or the lower income groups to remote district(s) in Hong Kong and thus contributing to repetitive tragedies in some areas.

It would be important for the government to be proactive and outline effective town planning demands and directions in the long term social welfare plan.

5. Refer to para 2.8 – 2.9 on Economic Development, Chapter 2

Considerable efforts have to be made addressing the widening gap between the

rich and the poor. Projections and Strategies to cope and to help the poor, children under poverty in particular must be well listed.

Special policy and efforts to ensure the school drop outs, non achievers or those semi skilled workers to be able to acquire special skills and knowledge to earn their own living with dignity must receive special coverage.

Hong Kong will have a large group of retirees and how would the society work with them for further economic development is a question that needs to be addressed.

There are always criticisms of those who received Comprehensive Social Security and often times they are considered lazy and irresponsible. Nevertheless the policy and services to support them not only in terms of financial assistance but counseling, skills building and community networking requires special policy and resources.

As many as over 200,000 domestic helpers reside and worked in Hong Kong and many of them have children under their care and supervision. These helpers enabled their employers to work and they contribute to the economic development of Hong Kong. However education and support to ensure children and families well attended and the helpers psychological well being are important but often time lacking.

6. Refer to para 2.10 onward Social Changes, Chapter 2

The need of Family Support, child care and attending to special needs deserve special coverage. Contributing factors to family problems such as domestic violence including child, spouse and elderly abuse requires on going study and strategic design of effective programs.

7. Refer to para 2.13, Chapter 2

Special focus on positive life values, core values of freedom, equality, democracy, dignity, integrity, respect and responsibility must be promoted and sound policy, education and services made available to ensure such values being promoted and practiced.

There are worrying findings on the poor and problematic mental health of children and young people. It was captured that the very young sometimes as young as 3-4 year olds are emotionally depressed or aggressive and needs special assessment and treatment.

The homicide and suicide tragic cases and the cases of parental suicide taking children with them all caused grave concern and must receive special prevention and action.

To ensure a citizen growing healthy and happy, family education must start early and the Comprehensive Child Development Service for 0-5 must be emphasized and supported by resources and well trained and committed personnel to ensure families with new born being visited, guided and supported. Such home visitation could be supported by proper mobilization and training of volunteers as mentors.

The Against Child Abuse (a specialized NGO) has piloted Healthy Start Home Visitation Program since 1979 with the funds of Community Chest and Hong Kong Jockey Club Charitable Trust and Good Parenting Program for Crosss Border families with the funds from a Swiss Anonymous Foundation. Home Visitation for single and young mothers in the name of Bless My Home Forever Project and Home Visitation for the children in poverty and hardship in the name of DayLily Project also funded by the Community Chest have only just been launched.

Cross Border Child/ Family Government/NGO Platform should be set up

In view of the large number of children and families involved, a cross border child and family platform should be set up to be responsible in the planning and understanding and implementation of action plans for this group. Liaison with the Mainland is essential to ensure different system, culture and services comprised in the best interest of children.

Refer to 2.18 under Sustainability of our Welfare System, Chapter 2

The sustainability should also be looked at on how the professionals in the manpower ratio and planning; training and supervision. While professionals having to shoulder a variety of duties and large caseload/workload, without improvement in this system and without proper staff development and morale

boosting programs, the sustainability of our welfare system is at risk.

The active involvement of the business sector is a good direction but donors and funding bodies often times look for statistics and were hesitant to devote resources to support staff cost and central administration. The government should try hard convincing the investment in these important areas.

Good practices and devoted personnel must be treasured and not shattered. The retirement age in Hong Kong should be reviewed.

8. Question 5, para 4.1, Chapter 4 Guiding Principles for Social Welfare Planning

Important principles should well be included:

To acquire a Child Perspective and to require Child Impact Assessment to be properly made by related departments and organizations and such assessment results to be reflected and monitored.

To acquire a rights approach and to review child related legal framework to ensure child and family protection.

How do we ensure the Commissions: youth, women, elderly and Family Council making their roles, actions and financial reports known to the public. It would be important to have what they achieved and what not being made widely known and their specific roles and functions be highlighted in the important social welfare long term plan.

Cross Sector Consultation and Collaboration on the Long-term Plan

Though this is a Plan for Social Welfare, it should not stop at social welfare sector alone. The need for collaboration in the understanding, strategic mapping and implementation of the long term social welfare plan must be backed up by the blessing and participation of all departments and cross disciplines. This Plan should be the bases for operation, resource and manpower allocation and multidisciplinary training.

9. Question 6, 14 on Page 27, Refer to Chapter 5 Strategic Directions for

Planning and Provision of Welfare Services para 5.3 Social Investment

The Chapter has stressed social investment but not sufficient address Rights, Justice and Social Responsibility of the Government and of the Citizens. The welfare services and system has a role to ensure justice and human rights respected. Those who may have lost capacity or ability to generate income or help oneself, must receive the support and respect they deserve.

A Strategic Action Plan Balancing Prevention at all levels: primary, secondary and tertiary must be included and resources must be devoted to cover all levels and all stakeholders.

Refer to para 5.5 (b) Multi partite partnership and collaboration

Hong Kong has been reinforcing a tripartite partnership of GOs, NGOs and the commercial sector. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service has been annually organizing the Caring Company recognition program. Nevertheless more proactive policy and encouragement of the commercial sector to ensure child and family safe policy and environment must receive more proactive efforts from the policy and resources angle.

Work base child as a feasible option to ensure employees with young children being supported is something not adequately promoted nor sustained. Early counseling and social service for necessary employees must be encouraged and such services made accessible to the commercial sector. Joint efforts should be encouraged and supported by skills, funding and in action.

Refer to para 5.14 (e) Innovation to drive service delivery

While everyone applaud innovations, innovations must receive funding and support to be sustained. There are much concerns as to the innovative projects being implemented for a few years and not being able to continue and such innovation and practice wisdoms are wasted.

Refer to para 5.16 (f) Family and district-based approach

While no one would deny the significance of the role of a sound family, more emphasis must be placed on the child and vulnerable members in the family,

otherwise like in our ancient feudal days, individuals had to sacrifice their interest and well being for the total good of the family contributing to many sad and tragic stories which we do not want history to repeat itself.

There is a stronger voice in Hong Kong for the establishment of a Child Commission and the appointment of a Child Commissioner. This should be written into this welfare plan and to ensure a strong child perspective in policy and practices.

Refer to para 5.18 -5.20

While evidence based planning and assessment deserves support, this policy must be supported by resources and technical skills and know how. Furthermore it would be important to acquire an open mind to make such findings on specific issues, matters, models etc. known in the community. In our experience some research findings had been shelved and not made properly known in the community. Furthermore recommendations and observations found in such studies, research etc. should have a monitoring mechanism to ensure being followed through.

Refer to para 5.21 under Planning process for provision of welfare services

We urge in addition to wide consultation on the direction and planning, operational plans should be worked out by responsible, well selected stakeholders and such plans should be consulted widely. The past practice in Hong Kong had been to consult on outlines and macro directions and principles only, operational plans are simply worked out by relevant departments and launched as they see fit. Careful and open monitoring had not been made a practice. We hope to see this principle lay down in the long term plan.

We refer to the pilot scheme on the child fatality review mechanism and strongly urge to make such an on going mechanism with serious child injured cases to be reviewed and lessons learnt in working out strategic plans of action to improve the system and relevant services.

Prepared by: Priscilla Lui, Mrs, Director of Against Child Abuse

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