

Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty

Views and suggestions of deputations made at the meeting on 23 February 2005

Subject	Views and suggestions (Name of deputations)	Remarks
I. Definition of poverty	<u>Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union</u> According to the United Nations, poverty was defined as lacking resources to maintain the basic living. It was more than a lack of money.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(02).
	<u>Hong Kong Social Workers' Association</u> It was unavoidable to study the definition of poverty from different perspectives, if the Government was to alleviate poverty.	Paragraph 2 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 959/04-05(03).
	<u>The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong</u> It was more appropriate to adopt the relative poverty concept for defining poverty in Hong Kong, and the benchmark would base on those whose household income was below one-half of the average household income.	Page 1 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 889/04-05(01).
	<u>Federation of Hong Kong Industries</u> It was important to differentiate absolute poverty from relative poverty.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(03).

	<u>Dr WONG Hung</u> Poverty was commonly defined on the basis of absolute poverty or relative poverty or both. The income eligibility for CSSA allowance was commonly regarded as a poverty line in Hong Kong.	Pages 1 to 25 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/ 04-05(04).
	<u>Dr LUI Hong-kwong</u> There was no universally accepted definitions of poverty. Broadly speaking, poverty could be defined in absolute and relative terms. In Hong Kong, the most widely used definition of poverty was based on the relative poverty concept.	LC Paper No. CB(2)869/04-05(04).
II. Situation of poverty in Hong Kong	<u>Society for Community Organization</u> The Gini Coefficient of Hong Kong was record high which showed that the gap between the rich and the poor was widening.	Paragraph 1 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(01).
	<u>Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union</u> The number of people on poverty in Hong Kong exceeded 1.2 million, most of them were low-skilled workers of low educational level. Over one-half of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients were elderly.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(02).
	<u>The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong</u> The gap between the rich and the poor was widening. It was estimated that about 1.12 million people whose household income was less than one-half of the average household income, i.e. 16% of the total population in Hong Kong.	Page 1 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 889/04-05(01).

	<u>Oxfam, Hong Kong Social Security Society and Alliance concerning CSSA</u> The gap between the rich and the poor was widening. Over 1.2 million of Hong Kong people were living in poverty. According to the figures released by the Census and Statistics Department in the second quarter in 2004, there were 250 000 unemployed, and 750 000 people were receiving a monthly income of less than \$6,000. The problem of poverty was not only that of the CSSA recipients.	Page 1 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 869/04-05(02).
	<u>Dr WONG Hung</u> There were various studies and researches on the situation of poverty in Hong Kong since 1990s. Although these studies adopted different definitions of poverty, the findings suggested that the problem of poverty in Hong Kong was serious, and that over 600 000 people were living in poverty. It was necessary to establish a poverty line or several poverty lines, which would be determined on the basis of research findings and also political considerations. As there were different opinions on the items to be included in the definition of basic needs, the Government should gauge public views through open forums in determining the poverty indicators.	Pages 26-29 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(04).
	<u>Dr LUI Hong-kwong</u> It was unrealistic to devise a simple poverty line for all households in Hong Kong. If the Government was to analyse the poverty situation, the US Census Bureau approach (which adopted a number of poverty thresholds for households of different compositions) should be adopted.	LC Paper No. CB(2)869/04-05(04).

III. Reducing inter-generational poverty	<u>Hong Kong Council of Social Service</u> Government should provide learning opportunities for children from low-income families.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 869/04-05(01).
	<u>Society for Community Organization</u> Government should strive for reducing inter-generational poverty.	Paragraph 4 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(01).
	<u>The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong</u> The Association supported the measures to reduce inter-generational poverty as stated in the 2005 Policy Address. As the needs of children and young people were not the same, specific assistance should be provided to different age groups.	Page 2 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 889/04-05(01).
	<u>Caritas – Hong Kong</u> The poverty cycle should be broken by helping the children from deprived families to acquire education. Assistance to children from poverty families should be provided on a district basis.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 1068/04-05(01).
IV. Assistance to the needy (e.g. elderly and disabled)	<u>Hong Kong Council of Social Service</u> Government should draw up concrete measures to assist the elderly, single parents and people with disabilities.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 869/04-05(01)

	<u>Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union</u> Government should – (a) review whether public housing rental and public utilities charges were within the affordability of users; (b) review the CSSA levels on basis of basic needs; and (c) introduce an old age retirement scheme.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(02)
	<u>Caritas – Hong Kong</u> Specific assistance should be provided for young people with low education (by providing special allowance to employers who provided mentoring placements to youth), and people with disabilities (by formulating policy on a quota system for employment of disabilities).	LC Paper No. CB(2) 1068/04-05(01).
	<u>Federation of Hong Kong Industries</u> While the Federation supported that Government should provide assistance to those in absolute poverty, it considered that disparity between the rich and the poor was considered a driving force for the poor to move up the social ladder.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(03).
V. Assistance to the unemployed	<u>Society for Community Organization</u> Government should assist unemployed or low-skilled workers to find better jobs by implementing measures to eliminate discrimination against age and people with criminal or mental illness records.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(01).

	<u>Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union</u> Government should assign a case social worker to better help the unemployed.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(02).
	<u>Federation of Hong Kong Industries</u> Unemployment was one of the causes of poverty. Government should consider other forms of assistance, rather than giving out CSSA, to the unemployed.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(03).
VI. Working poverty and labour protection	<u>Hong Kong Council of Social Service</u> Government should provide assistance to low-income earners through creation of employment opportunities, and provision of education and training.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 869/04-05(01).
	<u>Society for Community Organization</u> As a result of economic restructuring, low-skilled workers faced great difficulties in seeking employment. There was insufficient labour protection for low-income earners.	Paragraph 3 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(01).
	<u>Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union</u> Government should improve the business environment to encourage industries to move back to Hong Kong so as to provide more employment opportunities. Government should introduce a minimum wage system to enable the low-income earners to receive a wage level that could support their living.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(02)

	<u>Federation of Hong Kong Industries</u> The problem of poverty could be tackled by creating more employment through economic growth, and Government should encourage the industries to move back to Hong Kong. As most new arrivals were low-skilled workers, Government should discuss with the Mainland authorities the daily quota of the One-way Permits. Government could launch an enterprise mentorship programme by making reference to the experience of the Small and Medium Enterprise Mentorship Programme. It considered it inappropriate to study the issue of minimum wage in the context of measures to alleviate poverty.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(03).
	<u>Dr LUI Hong-kwong</u> The main reason of poverty was unemployment or low-income employment. The problem was caused by an accelerated increase of low-skilled labour force.	
VII. Operation of the Commission on Poverty (CoP)	<u>Hong Kong Council of Social Service</u> CoP should conduct studies on the basic needs of low-income families and vulnerable groups, and formulate indicators and targets for implementing anti-poverty strategies.	Paragraphs 2 to 6 in LC Paper No. CB(2) 869/04-05(01)

	<u>Society for Community Organization</u> CoP should consider establishing a poverty line in order to identify its target groups and formulate anti-poverty strategies. CoP should encourage participation of business sector and public bodies in helping the disadvantaged.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(01).
	<u>Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union</u> CoP should not only play an advisory role, but should have power to formulate and implement anti-poverty strategies. To enhance the work of CoP, it should conduct open meetings. It should conduct open hearings to gauge public views.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(02)
	<u>Hong Kong Social Workers' Association</u> CoP to collect, on a regular basis, data relating to poverty in Hong Kong in view of the changing economic situations and different causes for poverty, to enable practical strategies to be formulated.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 959/04-05(03).
	<u>The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong</u> CoP should form working groups to study the needs of poor families and to mobilise/co-ordinate resources in districts to implement measures to alleviate poverty. It should enable participation of different sectors in combating poverty. CoP should also make reference to the Head Start Project of the United States.	Page 3 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 889/04-05(01).

	<u>Oxfam, Hong Kong Social Security Society and Alliance concerning CSSA</u> Government should establish a poverty line in order to collect reliable information and devise an objective standard for implementing measures to alleviate poverty. CoP should formulate short-term and long-term anti-poverty strategies and devise a mechanism to evaluate its effectiveness, and provide public forums for different sectors of the community to discuss and participate in alleviating poverty. CoP should consider setting up a social and economic forum modelled on the experience of Ireland. The work priorities of CoP should be – (a) to foster the development of partnership between Government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs); (b) to provide sufficient resources for gauging public views and implementing measures to alleviate poverty; © to conduct independent research on a regular basis and devise clear indicators for determining its target; and (d) to formulate clear benchmarks for reviewing the effectiveness of measures introduced.	LC Paper Nos CB(2) 869/04-05(02) (page 2) and CB(2) 869/04-05(03).
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	<u>Caritas – Hong Kong</u> CoP should define its target groups and identify the support measures as early as possible. CoP should form focus groups and conduct open forums to enhance direct communication with its target groups. CoP should give priority to assist young people (by providing apprenticeship training), disabled persons (by setting a quota for employment of disabled persons by companies), ethnic minorities and new arrivals (by providing language courses and employment services). CoP should study the problem of the families suffering from poverty in order to provide appropriate services to children from these families. Sufficient resources should also be provided to schools to strengthen support services.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 1068/04-05(01).
	<u>Dr WONG Hung</u> Establishing poverty lines would enable Government to assess the effectiveness of measures introduced. CoP could use the income eligibility for CSSA allowance (which was commonly regarded as a poverty line in Hong Kong) as the basis for conducting studies on the basic needs of the poor families.	

	<u>Dr LUI Hon-kwong</u> CoP could adopt the CSSA level as a benchmark for identifying poverty families in Hong Kong and focus its efforts in formulating measures to alleviate poverty. CoP should seriously consider ways to enhance the quality and skill of the labour force to meet the market demands. It should also change parents' thinking that their children must go to grammar schools and universities.	
VIII. Overseas experience	<u>Oxfam, Hong Kong Social Security Society and Alliance concerning CSSA</u> The Administration should make reference to the experience of Ireland and establish a social and economic forum which had proven to be successful. In Ireland, an anti-poverty committee was set up under each bureau/department to implement specific measures under its policy purview, and the committees under the different bureaux reported to the co-ordinating committee, which was chaired by the Prime Minister.	LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 869/04-05(02) and 959/04-05(02).
	<u>Dr WONG Hung</u> The Government could make reference to the experience of overseas countries in drawing up the poverty line. For example, the Mainland adopted the minimum living standard security line as the benchmark for absolute poverty. In the United Kingdom, the poverty line was determined as those whose household income was below one-half of the average household income, and these households were further divided into five groups.	Pages 10 and 18 of LC Paper No. CB(2) 915/04-05(04).

IX. Work of the Subcommittee	<u>Hong Kong Council of Social Service</u> The Subcommittee should consider forming working group(s) to conduct in-depth discussion and public hearings on specific topics, and then provide recommendations to the Administration.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 869/04-05(01).
	<u>Hong Kong Social Workers' Association</u> The Subcommittee should be proactive in making recommendations and mobilising efforts in all sectors of the community to alleviate poverty.	LC Paper No. CB(2) 959/04-05(03).
	<u>The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong</u> Apart from monitoring the work of CoP, the Subcommittee should also encourage academic institutions to conduct longitudinal studies on the problem of poverty.	