

**Legislative Council Subcommittee
to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty**

**Enabling Community Participation
in Formulating Poverty Alleviation Strategies**

Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the existing mechanism of the Government in enabling community participation in formulating poverty alleviation strategies, which is also relevant to recommendation (a) in the “Report on Working Poverty” (the Report) of the Legislative Council Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty.

Overview

2. The Government shares the importance of engaging the community in the formulation of public policy, including poverty alleviation strategies. There are consultative mechanisms both at the central and district levels for this purpose.

Central Level Mechanism

3. There is an extensive consultative network of advisory bodies established under different government bureaux and departments to oversee a wide range of issues relevant to poverty prevention and alleviation, addressing the needs of children/youth, the unemployed/workforce, the elderly and other disadvantaged groups.

4. In early 2005, the Government established the Commission on Poverty (CoP) to assist the Government in examining existing policies and to make policy recommendations for alleviating poverty and promoting self-reliance. The newly established Committee on Economic Development and Economic Cooperation with the Mainland, and the Committee on Social Development and Quality of Life under the Committee on Strategic Development also focus on economic and social policy initiatives.

District Level Mechanism

5. The Government accords great importance to the District Administration Scheme in promoting public understanding of Government policies, and in encouraging public participation in community activities. Bureaux and departments are required to consult District Councils on local matters that affect the livelihood, living environment or well-being of residents in the districts to ensure that the Government is responsive to district needs and problems. There are various standing district feedback channels which include District Councils, various committees and task groups set up for different purposes and with which the Administration maintains close liaison.

6. In his Policy Address in October 2005, the Chief Executive reaffirmed the Government's commitment to reinforcing district work, including enhancing the co-ordination function of District Management Committees, expanding the role of District Councils, and making available more channels for the public to participate in the management of district affairs.

District-based Approach in Alleviating and Preventing Poverty

7. The CoP supports the adoption of a district-based approach to identify the specific needs and key challenges faced by different communities, and to design corresponding solutions. Some districts, including the three pilot districts on poverty alleviation, namely Yuen Long, Sham Shui Po and Kwun Tong, have respectively set up dedicated local forums involving local officials, district councilors and local organizations to identify the priorities of district needs, to mobilize community resources, and to explore bottom-up solutions in addressing the key challenges in the districts. District action plans are being implemented to tackle local challenges. A total of \$150 million has been committed in the next five years to reinforce work in preventing and alleviating poverty at the district level. \$30 million was allocated to the "Enhancing Self-Reliance Through Partnership Programme" under the Home Affairs Department in 2006/07 to promote sustainable poverty prevention and alleviation efforts at the district level. The main purpose of the programme is to help enhance self-reliance, with particular focus in promoting social enterprise and opportunities for the disadvantaged to upgrade themselves and to integrate themselves effectively into the community.

Strengthening District Networks on Employment Issues

8. The Government agrees that there is room for further enhancing district networks on employment issues. Currently, there are forums at the district level (sub-committees / working groups under the District Councils, such as Labour and Economic Committee) which discuss issues relating to local employment. Job centres also actively reach out to local employers. As an enhancement measure, Labour Department and Social Welfare Department offices at the district level would strengthen their coordination and collaboration. The new job centres in North District and Yuen Long, which will be opened in the latter half of September 2006, are expected to strengthen the local district networks in promoting employment in these relatively remote areas. The Home Affairs Department also assists in the coordination of the work of bureaux and departments at the district level in promoting employment and helping the disadvantaged.

District-based Support for the Disadvantaged

9. The CoP is now conducting a study on “District-based Support for the Disadvantaged” which aims at examining the best practices and supportive framework in formulating and implementing district poverty alleviation strategies, taking into account the experience of the districts, the implementation of the “Enhancing Self-Reliance Through Partnership Programme”, and views from district personalities. The CoP will draw reference from the outcome of the study and make recommendations on the long-term strategy in implementing the district-based approach in alleviating poverty.

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