

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL BRIEF

PANEL ON ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS & PANEL ON PLANNING LANDS AND WORKS

Study on Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SUSDEV 21) Progress of Study and Second Stage Public Consultation

PURPOSE

This paper informs Members of the preliminary findings of the Study on Sustainable Development for the 21st Century (SUSDEV 21).

BACKGROUND

2. Study on SUSDEV 21 was launched by the Planning Department on 1 September 1997 through the appointment of consultants, ERM- Hong Kong Limited, subsequent to CSC's endorsement of the consultancy study and the draft study brief of SUSDEV 21 in October 1995 and June 1996 respectively. The Study is expected to be completed by April 2000. We submitted a briefing on the progress made and consultation strategy to Members of the then Provisional Legislative Council in April 1998.

3. The first stage public consultation was held between April and June 1998 mainly to promote public understanding and awareness of sustainable development as well as to collect public views for formulation of a definition of sustainable development for Hong Kong. The subject has subsequently been widely discussed in many sectors.

4. Taking into account the views gathered from the first stage public consultation, the Study has come up with preliminary findings, including a definition of sustainable development for Hong Kong, recommended institutional changes to facilitate more effective implementation of sustainable development, a set of indicators to evaluate sustainability, and a computer tool for facilitating sustainability assessment.

5. Before finalizing the findings and prepare recommendations of the Study, we are putting forward the preliminary findings for comments by the

public and stakeholder groups in a second stage public consultation launched on 25 October 1999. The consultation period will end on 31 January 2000.

DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR HONG KONG

6. We have thoroughly considered several options in the light of views gathered during the first stage public consultation, and recommended the following definition:

“Sustainable development in Hong Kong balances social, economic and environmental needs, both for present and future generations, simultaneously achieving a vibrant economy, social progress and better environmental quality, locally, nationally and internationally, through the efforts of the community and the Government.”

SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS

7. Development can only be said to be sustainable if the economic activity it shapes is:

- a) adequate to meet the social needs of today’s population,
- b) becoming more efficient in its use of resources and management of wastes fast enough to offset impacts of rising population or increasing public demand,
- c) leaving sufficient stock of natural resources to meet the needs of other people and later generations.

To make assessment of whether or not a development proposal is “sustainable” one needs to have indicators that can show how conditions have changed or will change over time. The Consultants have made recommendations for a range of indicators based on measurable criteria, suitability for predictive analysis, and applicability to economic, social and environmental issues of the greatest concern to the community. A total of 39 indicators have been selected and included in the Consultation Document at Annex A. It is anticipated that the indicators will be reviewed regularly in order to provide an updated system for evaluating sustainability.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT

8. Effective institutional arrangements are essential to integrate separate policy areas. Obligatory assessment at the early stage of policy formulation of the potential impacts of new proposals on the social, environmental and economic condition of Hong Kong is intended to provide

that integration. In the Policy Address the Chief Executive also announced that a Council for Sustainable Development will be set up to provide non-Government participation in the process and to promote public awareness. A Sustainable Development Unit will be established as well to monitor the SIA process and provide analysis and support to CSC and to the new Council. The Unit will maintain the CASET system, described below, which will be made available to Bureaux to assist them with their SIAs.

9. We will draw up a strategy to implement sustainable development based on the above institutional arrangement, and in the light of the feedback obtained from the second stage public consultation. The strategy will include the role of the “Council for Sustainable Development”, and the responsibilities of the “Sustainable Development Unit” and where it will reside.

COMPUTER AIDED SUSTAINABILITY EVALUATION TOOL (CASET)

10. CASET is the computer-based tool devised under the SUSDEV 21 Study to assist the Government in evaluating implications of major policy initiatives. It is designed to provide a consistent, comprehensive and consensus-based means of examining the wide range of economic, social and environmental issues in the early stage of policy formulation. The system will alert decision-makers to the implications of a policy proposal on various predetermined social, economic as well as environmental indicators, it will not replace the process by which the policy makers have to make a final decision.

11. In brief, the CASET will provide output in form of Sustainability Evaluation Reports (SER) describing expected impacts on sustainability in terms of changes in the indicators triggered for the policy under test. The SER will also show a range of Target Values for each indicator. These have been gathered from different key stakeholder groups such as Chambers of Commerce and Green Groups, to enable assessment of likely public impacts. The CASET will also incorporate baseline values for indicators and relevant information to help its users in estimation of the impacts.

SECOND STAGE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

12. The second stage public consultation is being held from 25 October 1999 to 31 January 2000. The main objectives of the second stage public consultation are to widely inform the general public about Government’s implementation of sustainable development and to collect feedback on the key findings of the Study. Details are provided in the Consultation Document at

Annex A. A copy of the Information Pamphlet which contains simple messages on sustainable development for the second stage public consultation is also attached at **Annex B.**

CONCLUSION

13. Members are invited to note and comment on the preliminary findings of the Study.

ANNEX

A Consultation Document
B Information Pamphlet

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