

Commission on Poverty (CoP)

Progress Report

(February – August 2005)

PURPOSE

This paper provides an overview of the progress made during the last few months by the Commission on Poverty and the Administration in strengthening efforts in poverty alleviation and prevention. It also sets out the next steps of work.

BACKGROUND

2. Despite the general affluence of the Hong Kong community, there are certain social groups in the community who are more disadvantaged and require care and support over and above those generally available.

3. It has been the Government's long established policy to assist the disadvantaged through, e.g. welfare and social protection and support, housing, education, training, vocational and employment assistance. The establishment in early 2005 of the Commission on Poverty (CoP), with membership drawn from relevant bureaux, the academic, political, business and NGO sectors, marks the focus on policy integration through inter-disciplinary and cross-sector partnership. Work by the CoP and other bureaux should thus be seen holistically, as efforts by the HKSARG to empower and promote the interest and self-reliance of the disadvantaged through various means.

WORK OF THE COMMISSION

4. During the first six months of its establishment, the CoP has held four meetings and conducted three formal district visits. The following paragraphs (paragraphs 5 – 19) highlight the progress made by the Commission in five areas, viz. understanding poverty, implementing the district-based approach in alleviating and preventing poverty, tackling intergenerational poverty, from welfare to self-reliance, and communication and publicity. The actions taken include a combination of policy work, district initiatives, and pilot projects in mobilizing social capital. A gist is set out at **Annex A** for ease of reference.

(I) Understanding poverty

5. Poverty is a complex issue. The following are the broad *approaches* adopted by the Commission in understanding and tackling poverty -

- (a) Multi-dimensional approach to understanding poverty - there is a general consensus among Commission members that poverty should not be defined rigidly as one fixed figure or line. As in the case of other developed economies, Hong Kong should adopt a multi-dimensional perspective and pragmatically focus on the needs of the disadvantaged groups;
- (b) Poverty prevention - Commission members agreed that poverty prevention is no less important than poverty alleviation. Policies and measures should be sustainable and promote self-reliance.
- (c) Joint community effort - poverty alleviation and prevention require joint action by the Government, business, the community and the individuals themselves. While the Government has responsibilities to put in place policies and systems which ensure fair access to opportunities, social/neighborhood support networks, business/job opportunities and assumption of responsibility by the individuals themselves are also essential to the promotion of self-reliance and poverty prevention.

6. To facilitate understanding and monitoring of the poverty situation in Hong Kong, the following *actions* have been undertaken -

- (a) a set of indicators reflecting the poverty situation of three key social groups and the community is being developed. The indicators would be used in the future to (a) track and monitor poverty situation in Hong Kong over time; (b) facilitate broad strategy planning¹;
- (b) the general indicators above are supplemented by district-specific information and statistics in implementing the district-based approach (see II below);
- (c) a study on earnings mobility in Hong Kong will be undertaken to reflect on the opportunities for the poor to advance in the social ladder.

7. *Next steps*: the poverty indicators would be available in end 2005. Preliminary results of the study on earnings mobility are expected to be available in mid-2006.

¹ The preliminary set of the indicators is set out in CoP Paper 10/2005.

(II) District-based approach to alleviating and preventing poverty

8. Commission members agreed on the adoption of a district-based *approach* since -

- (a) a district-based approach can facilitate concrete understanding of the unique/specific needs and key challenges faced by different communities;
- (b) with their local knowledge, a local forum with the involvement of relevant parties would be in the best position to identify the priorities of the district concerned in alleviating poverty, and in designing corresponding solutions; and
- (c) a district-based approach facilitates flexible adaptation of services provision to meet the changing demographics and needs and help nip problems in the bud.

9. The Commission visited Tin Shui Wai on 7 March, Kwun Tong on 29 April, and Sham Shui Po on 5 May and met with community organisations and local personalities. The following are the key *actions* being undertaken in the three pilot districts -

- (a) a new district forum has been set up in each of the three districts chaired by the respective District Officers to coordinate efforts in poverty prevention and alleviation; and
- (b) an action plan has been drawn up in each of the three districts following the CoP visits and is being implemented².

10. The Administration is committed to reinforcing the district-based approach to preventing and alleviating poverty by providing districts with additional resources and support where justified. The Financial Secretary has decided and announced on 29 May 2005 that the net revenue from the personalized vehicle registration marks (PVRMs) Scheme would be dedicated to the work on alleviation and prevention of poverty. Subject to the passage of the legislation, part of the resources would be used to reinforce the district-based approach.

11. **Next steps:** The Secretariat would continue to maintain close liaison with the districts with a view to providing assistance where necessary in implementing the action plans, and keep the Commission posted and consulted on its involvement. District indicators are being developed to track progress in implementing the action plans. Subject to the passage of the relevant legislation, the Commission would be consulted on how to deploy the resources from the PVRM Scheme for reinforcing the district-based approach.

² The action plans are set out in CoP Paper 9/2005 "Follow-up to Tin Shui Wai Visit" and CoP Paper 16/2005 "Follow-up to District Visits and Way Forward".

(III) Tackling intergenerational poverty

12. The Commission has agreed at its April meeting to focus its work in the first six to nine months on children and youth, and working people. A Task Force on Children and Youth has been set up under the chairmanship of Dr. Philemon CHOI. The Task Force has since met twice.

13. The following are the key deliberations so far -

- (a) the Task Force has agreed to build on existing Government policies, strategies and measures with a view to promoting their integration and identifying service gaps, if any;
- (b) the Task Force would examine the interface of the screening mechanisms and intervention measures in place during the life cycle of a child, and to explore ways to enhance coordination, effectiveness and sustainability of the measures³; and
- (c) the Task Force would mobilize community resources in building social capital and a more inclusive society and towards these ends, would consider launching pilot projects which (i) could nurture community support for such efforts; (ii) represent a new mode of delivery of service so as to avoid duplicating existing efforts; and (iii) are sustainable.

14. *Next steps:* The Task Force would continue its policy work. A “Mentorship Fun” Project and an “Adopt-A-School” Programme would be launched later in the year⁴. Jointly with EMB, the Secretariat is also working on the opening up of some school premises for community use in the areas deficient in community facilities. Supplementing the public library network is also the further promotion to the NGO sector at the district-level of the bulk loan scheme operated by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

(IV) “From Welfare to Self-Reliance”

15. Noting the past trend and projection of the able-bodied and other social security recipients⁵, the Commission agreed at its June meeting that the direction for further work is to help the able-bodied unemployed to move from welfare to self-reliance.

³ Please refer to CoP TFCY Paper 1/2005 which provides an overview of the existing screening mechanisms.

⁴ Details of the pilot projects are available at CoP TFCY Paper 2/2005.

⁵ Please refer to CoP Papers 19/2005, 20/2005 and 21/2005 for details.

16. **Next steps:** The following will be undertaken to take forward the Commission's deliberation in June -

- (a) explore community-based employment opportunities by facilitating and capitalizing on neighbourhood networks;
- (b) conduct a district study on the existing employment assistance and services for the able-bodied to ensure that services and support are delivered in an integrated and effective manner, taking into account the interface among relevant policies as well as the perspectives of delivery agencies and target beneficiaries; and
- (c) ensure that assistance and training takes into account the development trends in specific industries so that the unemployed could be meaningfully engaged in jobs for which they have been trained.

17. With regard to 16(a), the Commission would consider how to facilitate the further development of social enterprises in Hong Kong at its September meeting. The Secretariat is also exploring with the districts on pilot projects to strengthen district networks and facilitate employment creation. Concerning 16(b), a study on the existing employment assistance and services for the able-bodied is being conducted involving relevant government departments, NGOs and the unemployed at the district level. A pilot project will be proposed to help unemployed youth to become self-reliant through tailor-made motivation programmes and active job placement. With regard to 16(c), as a first step, the Commission would follow up a Member's suggestion and explore how we may assist the low-skilled workers to capture the employment opportunities in the hotel and tourism industries.

(V) Communication and publicity

18. Members consider that besides the policy work and district initiatives, the Commission should also publicize its work and the message of self-reliance and mutual help. With the help of some Members, the Secretariat has collected a series of successful cases of self-reliance and mutual help for publicity purpose. Press interviews are being conducted on selected cases. In addition, press interviews on district activities and on CoP's work have also been conducted. Compilation of this progress report should also help the public understand more of the work of the Commission.

19. **Next step:** The Secretariat would consider further communication and publicity activities where appropriate. Suggestions are also welcome.

WORK OF OTHER BUREAUX

20. Through promotion of an inter-bureau, inter-disciplinary and cross-sector partnership, the CoP seeks to complement and not duplicate the work of the existing bureaux including its advisory bodies/committees.

21. **Annex B** highlights new policies and initiatives of relevant bureaux/departments announced in the last six months, as well as those being planned, which contribute to Government's efforts in poverty alleviation and prevention.

ADVICE SOUGHT

22. Members are invited to -

- (a) note the progress of the Commission made so far in five areas (paragraphs 4 – 19); and
- (b) note the work of other relevant bureaux and departments (paragraphs 20 – 21).

Commission Secretariat
September 2005

Commission on Poverty
Highlights of Major Areas of Work (*as at August 2005*)

<i>(I) Understanding poverty</i>
➤ CoP agreed that (a) poverty is a multi-dimensional concept; (b) poverty prevention is important; and (c) poverty prevention and alleviation require joint community effort.
➤ A set of poverty indicators is being developed to reflect the poverty situation in Hong Kong, and would be available by end 2005. A set of district-based indicators is also being developed.
➤ CoP agreed that social advancement through generations would be a useful longitudinal gauge of the effectiveness of poverty alleviation and prevention. A study on earnings mobility in Hong Kong is being planned and the preliminary results are expected to be available in mid-2006.
<i>(II) District-based approach in alleviating and preventing poverty</i>
➤ Following CoP's visits, the three priority districts have established dedicated fora and formulated action plans in tackling local challenges. The Secretariat would maintain close liaison with the districts with a view to provide assistance where necessary in implementing the action plans.
➤ District indicators are being developed to track progress in implementing the action plans.
➤ The Administration is committed to reinforce the district-based approach in preventing and alleviating poverty by providing districts with additional resources and support where justified.
<i>(III) Intergenerational poverty</i>
➤ Task Force on Children and Youth established to take forward the work on prevention of inter-generational poverty. The Task Force would (a) build on existing Government policies, strategies and measures which reduce the risk of intergenerational poverty; (b) examine the interface of the screening mechanisms and intervention measures during the life cycle of a child; and (c) mobilize community resources in building social capital among the younger generation and consider launching pilot projects.
➤ Building up social capital in the education sector and among the younger generation: Mentorship Fun Project to be officially launched in October 2005.
➤ "Adopt-a-school" Project – using schools as a platform for cross-sector partnership in poverty alleviation and prevention.
➤ The Secretariat and EMB are working together to facilitate the opening up of some school for community use in areas deficient in community facilities.

➤ Further promotion to the NGO sector at the district-level of the bulk loan scheme operated by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.
<i>(IV) “From Welfare to Self-Reliance”</i>
➤ Members agreed to review the effectiveness of existing policies and measures in helping the unemployed, including training, delivery of employment assistance at the district level, creation of community-based employment opportunities etc.
➤ The Commission would consider how to facilitate the further development of social enterprises in Hong Kong ¹ .
➤ The Secretariat is exploring with the districts on pilot projects to strengthen district networks and to facilitate employment creation.
➤ The Commission would follow up the suggestion and explore how to assist low-skilled workers to capture the employment opportunities in the hotel and tourism industries.
➤ A study on the existing employment assistance and services for the able-bodied is being conducted involving relevant government departments, NGOs and the unemployed at the district level.
➤ A pilot project will be proposed to help unemployed youths to become self-reliant through tailor-made motivation programmes and active job placement ² .
<i>(V) Communication and publicity</i>
➤ Publicizing successful cases of self-reliance and mutual help.
➤ Press interviews on district activities and on CoP’s work have been conducted.
➤ Compiling progress reports to help the public understand the work of the Commission.

Commission Secretariat
September 2005

¹ Subject to outcome of discussion on CoP Paper 22/2005.

² Subject to outcome of discussion on CoP Paper 23/2005.

**Poverty alleviation and prevention measures
implemented or being planned by relevant bureaux**

The following sets out new policies and initiatives of relevant bureaux/departments announced in the last six months, and those being planned, which strengthen the work of poverty alleviation and prevention to the disadvantaged and complements the work of the Commission.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

(i) Comprehensive Child Development Service

2. The Comprehensive Child Development Service (0-5 years) (CCDS), an initiative set out in the Policy Address in January 2005, is a universal programme aiming at augmenting the existing service in the Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs), through better alignment of the delivery of health, education and social services, to ensure early identification of the varied needs of children and their families so that appropriate services can be made available to them in a timely manner. While CCDS is not by nature a poverty alleviation initiative, it helps identify needy children and families, including poor families, and provide them with assistance at an early stage. The first pilot CCDS has been launched in Sham Shui Po in July 2005. We will continue to work closely with NGOs and the community to prepare for the launch of the pilot CCDS in the other selected communities (i.e., Tin Shui Wai, Tuen Mun and Tsueng Kwan O) in early 2006. Subject to the experience gained in the pilot run, we will extend CCDS to the other parts of Hong Kong by phases in due course.

(ii) Additional resources to District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) to support district-based work

3. To address the developmental needs of those children and youth who are in disadvantaged circumstances in the districts, an annual recurrent new provision of \$15 million has been earmarked effective from 2005-06. The \$15 million has been allocated to the thirteen administrative districts of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) having regard to various social indicators on disadvantaged children and youth by district.

4. The new resources is intended to meet i) learning and education needs; ii) job skills training and employment needs; and iii) social needs of children and youth aged 0 to 24 in deprived circumstances. The DSWOs may use the allocated resources to meet the needs of the target groups through implementation of developmental projects or through direct cash assistance. DSWOs would identify or partner with welfare organizations including SWD departmental units, subvented non-governmental organizations and other welfare organizations to implement the new initiatives.

(iii) Implementation of P.A.T.H.S.

5. A new programme called the 'Positive Adolescent Training Through Holistic Social Programmes ("P.A.T.H.S.") to Adulthood : A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme' was launched in early April 2005 for junior secondary students to enhance their psycho-social development, such as competency, character and so on. SWD assists in the implementation. There will be two tiers of programme, one for all junior secondary students and the other for those identified to be in greater need. For the 2005-06 school year, it will be an experimental phase and 52 schools have joined. The project will be fully implemented in the 2006-07 school year.

(iv) Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged

6. The \$200 million Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged, which promotes the development of a tripartite social partnership comprising the Government, the business community and the welfare sector in helping the disadvantaged, was launched in March 2005. Funds would be disbursed in the form of a matching grant for application by welfare Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who are able to secure corporate sponsorship in organizing projects for the direct benefit of the underprivileged groups. In the first round of applications, 43 applications have been received and 29 approved. The second round will be launched in October 2005.

(v) Community Investment and Inclusion Fund

7. The Government has been responding to the changing social realities through the \$300 million Community Investment and Inclusion Fund to encourage innovative solutions through cross-sectoral partnerships to build community capacity for mutual help. As of August 2005, 85 projects have been selected, with early results of enhanced social and economic outcomes being achieved and contributed to breaking the cycles of inter-generational deprivation. Outcomes achieved include: (i) Increased resilience – with over 20,000 (vulnerable) ex-service recipients transformed into contributive helpers, self-managing 210 mutual help networks and 17 potential work co-operatives; (ii) Increased vitality - new arrivals, disengaged youth, middle-aged unemployed, ethnic minorities, elders and the homeless re-engaged with the mainstream society and connected to over 380 new jobs and over 3,500 work opportunities; and (iii) new cross-sectoral partnerships that involved 880 collaborators from schools, businesses, professional bodies, NGOs, resident and women's groups and government departments.

(vi) Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme

8. Regarding the CSSA Scheme, HWFB has -

- reviewed the self-reliance measures for single parents on CSSA and formulated proposals;

- evaluated the intensive employment assistance projects for able-bodied recipients;
- implemented a \$100 monthly supplement for severely disabled CSSA recipients living in the community;
- extended the Portable CSSA Scheme for elderly to Fujian Province and relaxed the eligibility requirement for participation.

Education and Manpower Bureau

(i) School-based After School Learning and Support Programmes

9. To tie in with the Government's policy on poverty alleviation, EMB has provided additional funding to schools for organising school-based after-school learning and support programmes for needy students with effect from the 2005/06 school year. The programmes are school-based in nature and the focus is placed on providing more assistance and opportunities to the younger generation of needy families to improve their learning effectiveness, broaden their learning experiences outside classroom, and raise their understanding of the community and sense of belonging. The target group is P1 to S7 students from CSSA families or in receipt of full-grant assistance under student financial assistance schemes. Funding in the amount of \$75 million has been allocated to about 300 schools in the 2005/06 school year for organizing support programmes for some 55 700 target students.

(ii) Small class teaching

10. Starting from the 2005/06 school year, EMB implements small class teaching (SCT) in schools with a high concentration of disadvantaged students, as a means to help those children, and, in so doing, to support the Government's pledge to alleviate inter-generational poverty. This Scheme takes into account overseas research studies which indicate that SCT has more significant effects on students with weak family support and in their early years of schooling. Schools having 40% of their P.1-P.3 students receiving CSSA or full grant assistance under student financial assistance scheme are eligible to participate. The selected schools are provided with a cash grant of \$290,000 per annum for each additional class to enable them to split their P.1 – P.3 students into small classes of 20 – 25 for the Chinese, English and Mathematics lessons. Apart from cash grant, the schools will be provided with professional support to help the teachers develop effective pedagogical strategies to maximize the benefits of SCT. A total of 75 primary schools meet the 40% threshold and 29 of them have joined the scheme.

(iii) Enhancement of uniformed/youth groups activities

11. As an enhancement measure for Uniformed Groups (UGs) Activities, EMB is separately considering the provision of additional subsidies to UGs that will set up new leagues with free uniforms for needy participants. Sponsorship will also be provided for those with financial difficulties to receive leadership training. The details are being worked out for implementation expected of later in the 2005/06 school year.

(iv) Strengthening training and retraining services

12. The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) offers annually over 110 000 retraining places (about half being offered in placement-tied courses) in some 130 centres throughout the territory. Training places will be adjusted among districts by respective training bodies taking into account the number of retrainees as well as market needs.

13. From January to June 2005, the ERB has set up two new retraining centres in Yuen Long district (covering Tin Shui Wai), on top of the existing seven centres, to cater for the increasing demand for retraining in that area. In terms of training capacity, the number of training places has increased significantly to 2 851 for the period from January to June this year, up from 1,387 for the corresponding period in 2004.

14. The ERB has stepped up its promotional efforts by launching district-based road shows on retraining services in various regions. The first road show was held on 10 June 2005 in Tin Shui Wai. The ERB also sponsors its training bodies in launching district-based promotion in areas of great demand. The training bodies at Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai have been selected as the pioneering centres to stage a series of promotional activities during the period from June to September.

15. Separately, the Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth has provided sponsorship of more than \$20 million to support 13 pilot projects for the non-engaged youth, benefiting some 4 600 young people. The Task Force is considering sponsorship of more projects to help the non-engaged youth.

Economic Development and Labour Bureau

(i) Enhanced employment assistance to districts in 2005

16. To strengthen employment assistance to districts, the Labour Department (LD) has equipped the 10 job centres in various districts with additional fax machines and newspapers with vacancy information to encourage job seekers to make applications to employers direct.

17. In addition to the 39 vacancy search terminals (VST) installed at all Social Security Field Units of the Social Welfare Department, LD has since January 2005 further installed 15 VSTs at the Public Enquiry Service Centres / Community Centre of various districts to facilitate job seekers to gain access to a wide range of job vacancies. More VSTs will be installed at the remaining Public Enquiry Service Centres shortly.

18. To promote self-reliance among job seekers, LD has since January 2005 set up resource corners in all the 10 job centres, which are equipped with reference books covering skills on job searching, resume writing and selection interview, as well as updated employment or training materials. All job seekers, in particular ethnic minorities and new arrivals, are encouraged to use the resource corners to obtain comprehensive employment information and attend employment briefings conducted regularly in job centres.

19. At the same time, LD has enhanced its employment briefings with updated labour market information, job search skills, retraining materials and self-reliant messages to encourage the unemployed to be more positive and self-reliant, so as to help them better prepared for re-entering into the labour market.

20. To address the employment needs of the ethnic minorities, the Kowloon West Job Centre regularly provides information on LD's recruitment activities such as employment briefings, job fairs, bulk interviews, recruitment forums etc to the concerned non-governmental organisations for dissemination to ethnic minorities of various districts.

21. Meanwhile, Tuen Mun and Tai Po Job Centres are being expanded to organise district based job fairs. This will capture more local employment opportunities and facilitate job seekers living in the northern part of New Territories to attend job interviews without the need to travel to urban areas.

22. To reach out to job seekers in the more remote parts of the New Territories, LD has since January 2005 organised nine large-scale job fairs, some of which were held in districts like Tsing Yi, Sheung Shui, Kwai Chung and Tuen Mun. More large-scale job fairs are under planning, such as one at the Hollywood Plaza, Diamond Hill in October and another in Tin Shui Wai towards the end of year.

23. To cater for the employment needs of youths living in remote areas, LD staged a series of four job fairs in March and April 2005 in Kwai Chung, Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai in cooperation with nine NGOs with local service centres in the North-western New Territories.

24. To sustain this momentum, NGOs joining the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme have continued to organise job fairs for youths in various districts in the past few months. LD has participated and provided assistance in seven of these job fairs. In September 2005, LD will participate in another job fair to be organised by an NGO.

(ii) Work Trial Scheme

25. LD has launched the Work Trial Scheme on 28 June 2005. The objective of the Scheme is to enhance, through work trial opportunities, the employability of job seekers who have special difficulties in finding jobs, such as job seekers who have registered at LD for a prolonged period but remain unemployed and those who have failed repeatedly in job interviews.

26. During the one-month work trial period, participants will be arranged to work in real jobs offered by participating organizations, which will also provide on-the-job training and appoint a mentor to the participants. There will be no employment relationship between the participant and the participating organisation. To safeguard the interests of the participants, LD will take out insurance for them. LD will also encourage participating organisations to offer employment to participants after completion of the work trial.

27. On satisfactory completion of the one-month work trial, the participant will be paid an allowance of \$4,500 from LD. As a token of commitment, participating organisations will also be required to contribute \$500 for each participant engaged, making the amount of allowance to \$5,000 for each participant.

Home Affairs BureauDistrict-based approach in alleviating and preventing poverty

28. District Officers have stepped up their activities on poverty alleviation work. For the three more deprived districts, District Officers have set up new district forums to coordinate efforts in poverty prevention and alleviation. Additional resources will be squeezed within the department wherever necessary to support the poverty prevention and alleviation work in these districts.

Commission Secretariat
(with input from relevant bureaux)
 September 2005