


## 6 DISTRICT-BASED APPROACH

### DISTRICT-BASED APPROACH TO ALLEVIATE AND PREVENT POVERTY

- 6.1 At its first meeting on 18 February 2005, the Commission agreed to adopt a district-based approach to alleviate and prevent poverty, in recognition that -
- (a) centrally-driven policies alone may not be sufficient to tackle poverty, since different districts have different characteristics and some are less well-off than the others;
  - (b) using a district-based approach can facilitate a more concrete and contextualised understanding of the unique challenges faced by different communities, and facilitate adopting more targeted measures to address poverty issues;
  - (c) there are rich district resources (local personalities who understand the local situation, social networks etc.) which can be mobilised and tapped to assist the disadvantaged;
  - (d) using a district-based approach can allow a more flexible adaptation of services at the district level to meet the changing demographics and needs, and help prevent problems from emerging, instead of formulating strategies to tackle them afterwards.

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- 6.2 Adopting a district-based approach however is not a substitute for assistance guided by centrally-driven policies. Rather, it is a necessary complement to assistance and support from outside the community.

### WHAT IS THE DISTRICT-BASED APPROACH?

In gist, the district-based approach is about **more opportunities** and **stronger capacities** for the less well-off districts -

- to take into account local needs and characteristics in designing and implementing central poverty alleviation policies, and provide more opportunities for the less well-off districts; and
- to enhance local capacities to make the best use of the community resources to help the disadvantaged.

### WORK OF THE COMMISSION

A Task Force on District-based Approach was set up under the Commission to –

- (a) enhance understanding of the key challenges faced by the less well-off districts, and monitor the implementation of the district-based approach in the three pilot districts;
- (b) consider appropriate central policies and measures to provide more opportunities to the less well-off districts; and
- (c) examine the good practices at the district level and recommend ways to enhance local capacities to tackle future challenges.

## ENHANCING UNDERSTANDING OF DISTRICT NEEDS

6.3 Enhancing understanding of the needs of different districts is a necessary step to analyse how we strengthen the capacities of the less well-off districts to address local challenges. The Commission achieved this both by drawing reference to the primary data of the districts, as well as through implementing initiatives following the district-based approach in three pilot districts.

### Indicators of poverty

6.4 During compilation of the poverty indicators, the Commission notes that besides analysing the situation of the different age groups, it is important to include a district perspective in the poverty indicators in order to reflect the general well-being of different districts. A number of indicators have been selected for the purpose (See Chapter 2 for the indicators and analysis, paragraph 2.11).

6.5 The poverty indicators are intended to keep track of the poverty situation at the macro level, and provide prima facie indication of the districts which deserve more attention. For example, the 2006 indicators show that among the less well-off districts, improvements in Kwun Tong have been most distinct while the performance was less encouraging for Islands and Yau Tsim Mong.

6.6 The Commission notes that for the purpose of formulating policy initiatives or for tackling more localised poverty issues at the neighbourhood level, there is a need to draw reference to more detailed local data (e.g. Social Indicators on District Welfare Needs<sup>1</sup>), district characteristics, relevant researches and studies, as well as collating views from local stakeholders. Government bureaux and departments should take into account the different characteristics and needs of districts in formulating and implementing policies at the district level.

### Implementing district-based approach in pilot districts<sup>2</sup>

6.7 In order to have a more in-depth understanding of the needs of the less well-off districts, the Commission agreed to select three pilot districts for experimenting the district-based approach, namely Yuen Long (including Tin Shui Wai), Kwun Tong and Sham Shui Po, which are less well-off taking into account a number of district indicators.

- 6.8 In response to the initiative of the Commission, the three pilot districts have established new poverty alleviation fora chaired by District Officers (DOs) since mid-2005. Local stakeholders were engaged to identify the key challenges faced by the districts, drawing reference from available information and data, local characteristics and views from the stakeholders. District priorities and strategies were identified in response to the key challenges, and action plans were formulated accordingly.
- 6.9 The Commission has also conducted a number of visits to the pilot districts and met with the local stakeholders in order to gain a first-hand understanding of the district needs. Taking into account the experience of the pilot districts, a number of initiatives have been launched to reinforce the district-based approach from the central level and provide more opportunities to the less well-off districts (paragraphs 6.10 to 6.19 below).

### PROVIDING MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO LESS WELL-OFF DISTRICTS

- 6.10 On top of the efforts of the three pilot districts and the existing services available, the Commission notes that there is room to reinforce the district-based approach and to provide more opportunities to the less well-off districts from the central level.
- 6.11 During the dialogues with the local stakeholders, the following were the major concerns expressed at the district level which could not be addressed by the efforts of the districts alone -
- (a) specific needs of communities e.g. Tin Shui Wai (TSW) which is more economically deprived; and
  - (b) needs for additional resources for districts to launch initiatives to assist the disadvantaged.

#### **Additional measures to address specific needs of districts**

- 6.12 TSW is often highlighted as one of the communities which requires additional central policy support and remedial measures to rectify the inadequacies in its development. There are a lack of local employment opportunities, a high concentration of families with a less privileged background, a high percentage of youth, and a relative lack of local community facilities and established social networks. The relatively high transport costs for commuting between TSW and urban districts is seen as a disincentive for low-income employees to work across districts.

- 6.13 In response to the community concerns and the Government's pledge to tackle poverty at the district level, the following additional measures have been launched -
- (a) pilot transport support schemes to provide additional work incentives to the needy living in the more remote districts (Chapter 3, paragraphs 3.25 – 3.31);
  - (b) establishing new job centres in Yuen Long and North districts in September 2006 to provide job-seekers living in remote areas with a full range of employment services<sup>3</sup>;
  - (c) strengthening retraining service in TSW in terms of the number of training centres operating retraining courses and the number of training places offered to TSW residents<sup>3</sup>;
  - (d) stepping up provision of community facilities in TSW (and Tung Chung) (Chapter 4, paragraph 4.36).
- 6.14 The Commission notes that addressing the specific needs of more deprived communities like TSW requires sustained efforts and measures to address the relative lack of employment opportunities (Chapter 3, paragraphs 3.29 to 3.31).

#### **Additional resources for district-based initiatives**

- 6.15 Despite the availability of a wide array of Government services and programmes to help the disadvantaged, official measures designed according to general eligibility criteria often cannot address needs of individuals and their families with unique circumstances, or “hidden cases” which are not covered by existing services due to various reasons. Hence, district-based initiatives delivered by local NGOs and community organisations are necessary supplements to formal services provision.
- 6.16 In terms of resources available at the district level, the Commission notes that a number of government funding sources are available which enable districts to come up with bottom-up solutions to address local needs (Appendix viii). An increasing number of these funding sources have a special focus on the needs of the disadvantaged, while some others promote cross-sectoral partnership and social capital which in turn enhance the capacities of the disadvantaged in the process.

- 6.17 During the dialogues with the local stakeholders, the Commission notes that the concern is not simply a lack of funding sources for district-based initiatives, but how these funding sources can be deployed effectively to mobilise the community to address the needs of those not assisted by the existing services. Noting the funding sources serve different objectives and purposes, the Commission considers that it would be useful to enhance information dissemination of the various funding sources, and to streamline the application procedures. In the longer run, there is merit to keep in view the need to streamline and rationalise the various funding sources for district-based poverty alleviation initiatives.
- 6.18 At the same time, the Commission notes that none of the existing funding sources are employment-focused. Taking into account the emphasis on employment to prevent and alleviate poverty, the Commission supports setting aside new resources to encourage district-based projects to create sustainable local employment opportunities<sup>4</sup>.
- 6.19 In the 2006-07 Budget, \$150 million has been earmarked over the next five years to strengthen district-based poverty alleviation work and assist socially disadvantaged groups to gain self-reliance, including support for social enterprises at the district level. In response, the Home Affairs Department has launched the Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme.

#### **ENHANCING SELF-RELIANCE THROUGH DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME**

The Programme was launched by the Home Affairs Department in mid-2006 in response to an initiative of the Commission on Poverty to reinforce its work in preventing and alleviating poverty through a district-based approach. It has also taken into account the renewed emphasis on district partnership in the Review on the Role, Functions and Composition of District Councils.

The Programme seeks to promote sustainable poverty prevention and alleviation efforts at the district level that help enhance self-reliance, targeting socially disadvantaged groups. Instead of providing welfare or short-term relief, the Programme aims at increasing the skills and capacities of the employable and providing opportunities for the disadvantaged to upgrade themselves and to be effectively integrated into community. As at early 2007, the Programme has provided start-up funding to 41 social enterprise projects, which are expected to provide about 750 jobs. Most of them operate in the less well-off districts<sup>5</sup>.

## JOINING UP LOCALLY

- 6.20 In order to deliver assistance to the disadvantaged effectively, the Commission considers that central policies should allow a degree of flexibility for districts to adjust during the implementation process according to their characteristics and needs. At the district level, there is a need to “join up” policy and delivery in order to respond to local needs, remove local barriers and achieve greater impact.
- 6.21 In this regard, the Task Force has drawn reference from the District Welfare Planning Protocol<sup>6</sup>, which provides a planning framework for District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) to follow in the planning and delivery of welfare services at the district level. The framework allows DSWOs to take into account local characteristics and to identify local service needs and gaps during the planning and delivery process. It also enhances district coordination through the District Coordinating Committees to forge cross-sector collaboration, and strengthens the local outreaching network to deliver assistance to the needy.
- 6.22 In terms of coordinating poverty alleviation work at the district level, while the role of DSWOs remains important, District Officers (DOs) have played an instrumental role in the experience of the three pilot districts (paragraphs 6.7 – 6.8)<sup>7</sup> -
- (a) the dedicated fora chaired by DOs , comprising of Government officials, NGOs and district leaders, facilitate drawing up overall poverty alleviation directions and strategies, and guide local stakeholders to focus resources and efforts on common district priorities;
  - (b) efforts of DOs enhance inter-departmental cooperation and cross-sector collaboration to address district needs and remove local barriers; and
  - (c) there is room to make better use of local resources and community networks to assist the needy, especially those “hidden” cases which are not covered by existing measures for various reasons.
- 6.23 In this regard, the Commission supports the Administration’s direction to strengthen the role of DOs as an overall coordinator and leading representative of the Government at the district level, and act as an important link with local stakeholders to deal with issues concerning people’s livelihood, strengthen community building, and promote community and charity work at the district level. DOs should be given a clearer mandate to coordinate inter-departmental efforts at district level of key concern areas relating to poverty alleviation and prevention, in order to better respond to local needs, remove local barriers and achieve greater impact. At the same time, the Government should provide DOs with support and avenue for escalating problems which cannot be dealt with at the district level and which require high-level intervention<sup>8</sup>.



- 6.24 The Commission considers that employment is one of the areas where district coordination can be further enhanced. Employment service should be planned and delivered according to specific needs of unemployed in individual districts. Better interface among service providers, including different government departments to assist the “difficult-to-employ” is very important.
- 6.25 The Commission notes that 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. The Commission notes that as a short-term enhancement measure, LD and SWD offices at the district level would strengthen their coordination and collaboration. The new job centres in the North District and Yuen Long opened in September 2006 also strengthen the local district networks in promoting employment in the remote areas. In the longer run, the Commission recommends that the Government should consider adopting a more integrated model in helping the unemployed to work, including at the district-level<sup>9</sup>.

## STRENGTHENING LOCAL CAPACITIES

- 6.26 In order to examine the good practices at the district level in alleviating and preventing poverty, and to consider ways to strengthen local capacities to tackle future challenges, the Commission has conducted a Study on District-based Support for the Disadvantaged. The Study has taken into account the experience of the three pilot districts, as well as consolidating poverty alleviation work carried out by other districts (Executive Summary at Appendix ix).
- 6.27 The Commission notes that 10 districts have set their objectives, directions and strategies for poverty alleviation work, and there are a variety of mechanisms in coordinating poverty issues at the district level. The major observations of the Commission are as follows -
- (a) there is no single ideal model which should be adopted by all districts to tackle poverty – districts have their own characteristics, strengths/weaknesses and local dynamics. It is not appropriate to apply a “one-size-fits-all” model to direct how districts should plan and coordinate poverty alleviation work;
  - (b) there are however essential steps that should be taken by districts in analysing and identifying local needs, mapping out directions, planning and implementing programmes, and evaluating effectiveness of poverty alleviation and prevention programmes. These are captured in a Checklist at Appendix x.

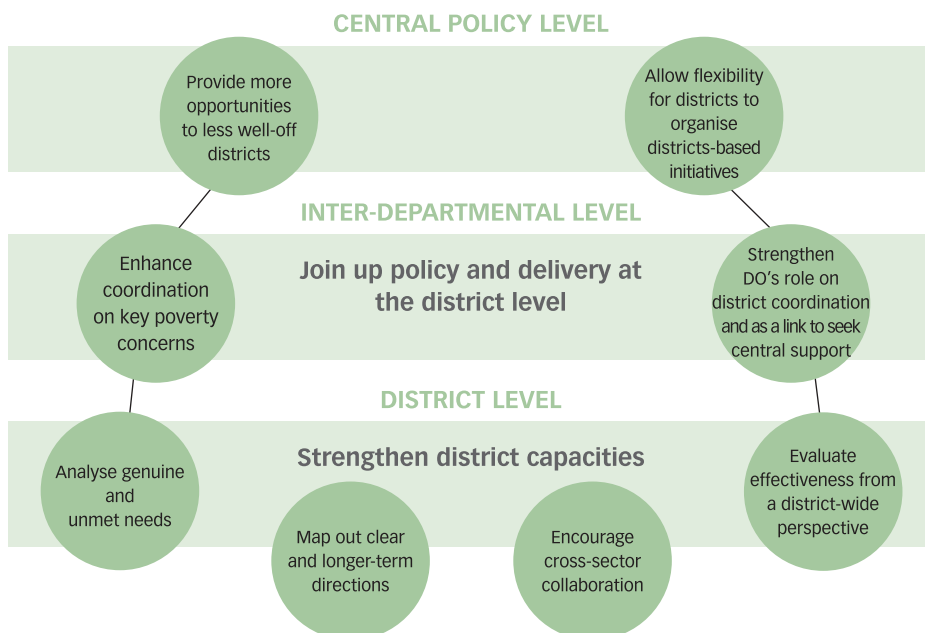


6.28 Through implementing the Checklist, it is hoped that districts can strengthen their capacities and make the best use of the community resources to help the disadvantaged by -

- (a) setting clear and longer-term directions to tackle poverty issues of priority concern in the district, and communicating them to local stakeholders widely so that different stakeholders can align their programmes to the common directions and allocate resources accordingly;
- (b) engaging local stakeholders in developing the directions and strategies, and encouraging cross-sector collaboration;
- (c) identifying the genuine needs of the disadvantaged systematically, through analysing community data and reaching out to the “hidden” ones who are needy but not served by existing services or are outside the local networks; and
- (d) assessing effectiveness of district programmes through developing district-wide performance indicators based on the directions and strategies set.

**DIRECTION FOR FUTURE WORK**

6.29 The district-based approach is a necessary complement to central policies to alleviate and prevent poverty. It requires sustained efforts at three different levels – central policy level, inter-departmental level and the district level.



## STRENGTHENING CENTRAL SUPPORT TO DISTRICTS

- **Enhance understanding of characteristics and needs of districts** (through poverty indicators, other primary data and collating views from the districts), and take them into account in formulating and implementing policies at the district level (*paragraphs 6.4 – 6.6*).
- Provide **more opportunities to less well-off districts**, including physical infrastructure (community facilities), economic and employment opportunities, and enhanced measures (*paragraphs 6.12 – 6.14*).
- Encourage **district-based initiatives** as necessary supplements to formal services provision through providing additional funding sources, better information dissemination of existing funding sources, as well as rationalising and streamlining different funding sources in the longer run (*paragraphs 6.15 – 6.19*).
- Put in place **suitable institutional structure** for districts to escalate problems which cannot be dealt with at the district level to the Government so that policy barriers can be removed in a timely manner (*paragraph 6.23*).

## STRENGTHENING INTER-DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION AT DISTRICT LEVEL

- Strengthen the **role of DOs** to enhance cross-sector collaboration to address district needs; this should be complemented by central policy support (*paragraphs 6.22 – 6.23*).
- Give DOs a **clearer mandate** to coordinate inter-departmental efforts at the district level on key concern areas relating to poverty alleviation and prevention, in order to better respond to local needs, remove local barriers and achieve greater impact (*paragraphs 6.20 -6.25*).

## STRENGTHENING DISTRICT CAPACITIES

- Encourage districts to **strengthen their capacities** through taking the essential steps in analysing and identifying genuine and unmet local needs, mapping out clear and longer-term directions, engaging stakeholders and encouraging cross-sector collaboration, and evaluating effectiveness of poverty alleviation and prevention programmes (*paragraphs 6.26 – 6.28*).
- Encourage the establishment of **district-based platforms** or mechanisms to identify district needs and responses, comprising of Government officials, NGOs and district leaders (*paragraph 6.22*).