


## 7 BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS

### PROMOTING SELF-RELIANCE THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

- 7.1 One of the tasks of the Commission is to explore how to encourage community engagement; delineate responsibility between the government, the social welfare sector and community organisations<sup>1</sup>; foster public-private partnerships and mobilise social capital<sup>2</sup> in alleviating poverty<sup>3</sup>.
- 7.2 This is an important aspect of the Commission's work – it requires more than the provision of assistance to the needy to help them move out of poverty and achieve self-reliance. Besides knowledge and skills, attitudes, personality and motivation are also the critical success factors in shaping careers and future. Social networks are most needed by those caught in the cycles of poverty to activate their motivation and search for opportunities. Partnerships help strengthen social networks and offer opportunities.
- 7.3 Support from the Third Sector and the private sector is essential in building partnerships to tackle poverty – poverty issues are becoming increasingly complicated and can no longer be satisfactorily resolved by the efforts of any one sector alone. There is increasing recognition of the limitations to rely on public assistance, provision of welfare and corporate giving in enhancing capacities of the poor and promoting self-reliance. Joint efforts are required to search for more sustainable partnerships and innovative solutions.

## ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS

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- 7.4 There has been a long history of tripartite partnerships between the community, the business sector and the Government in Hong Kong<sup>4</sup>. Such partnerships appear in many forms. Besides supporting specific social causes including poverty, the process also contributes to the building of social capital and development of civil society<sup>5</sup>.
- 7.5 Many such partnerships are driven by the volunteerism of the private sector and Third Sector without the participation of the Government. Indeed, a diverse, independent and thriving civil society is key to driving innovations, social change and progress in our society. That said, the Commission considers that given the diversity of the private sector and the Third Sector, the Government can play an important and sometimes leading role in promoting worthwhile approaches and partnership models. The Government can also be a facilitator in building platforms to help pool community resources together, and provide incentives to encourage worthwhile partnerships.
- 7.6 The Commission notes the Government has placed increasing emphasis on fostering partnerships and building social capital in the community in recent years. The Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) was established in 2002 to provide seed money to support collaborative efforts of community organisations and the private sector. The CIIF provides a useful platform for identifying successful formulas in building up social capital in the districts, and to promote good practice models.
- 7.7 In addition, the Government established the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged in 2005 to further incentivise the welfare sector to expand their network in seeking and securing corporate sponsorship, and to encourage the business sector to assume more social responsibility in helping to create a cohesive, harmonious and caring society.
- 7.8 The Commission took note of the key initiatives in fostering partnerships by the Government in helping the less advantaged in the community, and explored additional models and mechanisms which help pool resources from different sectors to tackle poverty in a sustainable manner.

## THE UNEMPLOYED AND WORKING POOR

- 7.9 Private sector participation is crucial in enhancing the employability and creating job opportunities for the poor with working abilities. In this regard, the relevant government agencies and the NGOs which deliver employment assistance to the less advantaged have been working in close partnerships with the private sector in various forms. Increasing emphasis is also placed in creating district networks in partnership with local chambers and businesses in developing community job opportunities.
- 7.10 The Commission notes that there are obstacles in promoting certain forms of partnerships, e.g. placement opportunities for the unemployed in a real work environment, especially those who are “difficult-to-employ” (middle-aged, low-skilled and low-education), and non-engaged

youths who may lack motivation and life objectives. While some private sector is willing to assist the disadvantaged to adjust to work, they sometimes lack the expertise and resources to provide guidance and support, the essential elements which help the disadvantaged build self-confidence and motivation to work.

- 7.11 Drawing reference from local and overseas experience, the Commission further supports the development of social enterprises as an innovative approach to pool together the resources from the private and Third Sector in creating community employment opportunities. The Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme was launched in 2006 to provide support to sustainable district partnerships to assist the disadvantaged, including social enterprises.
- 7.12 The Commission considers that social enterprises offer a good model for the Third Sector and the private sector to form sustainable partnerships to facilitate work integration of the disadvantaged into mainstream job market. The Commission recognises that such partnerships require careful matching of needs and resources, as well as shared common purposes. The Commission suggests that the Government should consider building a platform for fostering tripartite partnerships in support of social enterprise development<sup>6</sup>.

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- 7.13 One of the key determinants in the healthy and balanced development of children is the availability of positive role models in a child's life (Chapter 4, paragraph 4.15). Besides family members and peers, developing a mentorship network and building social capital using schools as a platform is also important.
- 7.14 In this direction, the Commission has explored a number of pilot initiatives to explore new models to promote social capital building among children. A Mentorship Fun Project was launched to encourage the building up of social capital in the education sector by building an electronic platform, the Voluntary Service Exchange, to match those who have interest to offer voluntary services and those who may need such support. A travelling allowance is also provided to the volunteer mentors. Since July 2005, more than 3 600 students have joined the project as mentors and they have performed over 60 000 hours of voluntary services.
- 7.15 Recognising the private sector as an important source of support and exposure to students, the Commission has also tried out a pilot partnership model by encouraging companies to "adopt" schools, especially those with a significant proportion of students from disadvantaged families, and to develop a growing, longer-term and progressively deeper relationship with the adopted schools. Six companies and four schools have joined the pilot. The experience of the pilots would be shared with the Education and Manpower Bureau in considering how to further promote social capital building by using schools as a platform.

- 7.16 The Commission considers that it is worthwhile to explore how to further encourage quality mentoring efforts for children and youth. The Commission notes that while children from a disadvantaged background may benefit significantly from such efforts, there is a need to avoid labeling them with a greater need for mentoring support so as not to undermine the role of their own family members. The Commission has also examined resources relevant to promoting better quality mentoring<sup>7</sup>. While mentoring efforts depend to a large extent on the volunteerism on the part of the volunteers, advice and support to the mentors and monitoring of the impact on the mentees help enhance the effectiveness of mentorship programmes.
- 7.17 In order to provide more intensive support to children from a disadvantaged background, the Commission supports establishing a new Child Development Fund (CDF) in Hong Kong. Besides encouraging children to develop their own personal development plans and build up their assets through targeted savings, the Commission considers that complementary mentorship support should be an essential feature of the CDF. The Commission believes that the CDF provides a new model to draw on the resources from the family, the private sector, the community and the Government effectively in support of the longer-term development of children from a disadvantaged background.

### OTHER DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

- 7.18 The strength of community networks, the amount of social capital and the degree of participation of the disadvantaged group in the community are closely linked to their well-being as a member of the society and their ability to access to essential assistance and services, and core to any effort to alleviate and prevent poverty.
- 7.19 The Commission supports continued effort to foster partnerships among different sectors to address the needs of different disadvantaged groups, including the elderly, women and single parent families, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and new arrivals from the Mainland. The Commission believes that the longer-term objective is to explore more effective mechanisms to pool the efforts and resources of different sectors to assist the disadvantaged, and to maximise their participation in the community.