



## 8 OTHER DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

### WORK PROGRAMME OF THE COMMISSION

- 8.1 In discussing its work programme, the Commission was aware that a vast range of policies and programmes are in place to assist different needy groups in the community. The Commission agreed that it would be more effective to focus its efforts on areas which are of the greatest community concerns, which cut across different policy areas and require high-level examination, or which deserve a rethink of the approaches that we have been undertaking.
- 8.2 In the past two and a half years, the Commission has conducted an examination of the policies and measures relevant to alleviating and preventing poverty of the following groups -
- children and youth;
  - the unemployed and working poor; and
  - the elderly.

In addition, the Commission has also focussed on the following key areas of work which are cross-cutting in nature -

- enhancing understanding on poverty issues;
- strengthening the district-based approach; and
- exploring ways to build partnerships in the community.



8.3 For other disadvantaged groups, the Commission has agreed to keep in view their needs<sup>1</sup>, and to explore how to assist them in its work. These groups include -

- women and single parent families;
- persons with disabilities;
- ethnic minorities; and
- new arrivals from the Mainland.

This chapter sets out some of the work of the Commission relating to these disadvantaged groups.

## WOMEN

8.4 Women play an important role in the family, often as carers for children and other family members. Women often have to face pressure from both work and family, as over 40% of married women participate in the labour force in Hong Kong. There is also an increasing number of single parent households. Most of these households are headed by females, who face pressure from both family and work.

8.5 The Commission has taken into account the particular needs of women in its work. Efforts to promote employment (Chapter 3) and to strengthen support to children and family (Chapter 4) should benefit women as well as men. Specifically, the Commission supports efforts to enhance capacity, employability and economic participation of women from a disadvantaged background (e.g. low income, low education, socially excluded).

### Enhancing capacity

8.6 Enhancing the capacity of women from a disadvantaged background and equipping them with a positive mindset are important in helping them to cope with different life challenges. Empowering women who are carers for children would also have a positive impact on the next generation.

8.7 The Commission notes that the Women's Commission (WoC) has launched the Capacity Building Mileage Programme to encourage women of different backgrounds and education levels to pursue life-long learning and self-development. The Commission also notes that its mode of operation (through radio broadcasting and optional face-to-face learning activities) provides a flexible way for women, particularly those who are carers and who have to spend a lot of time at home, to enhance their capacity. The Commission supports the WoC's continued efforts, in particular its initiatives for women from a disadvantaged background. The WoC also plans to strengthen parent education in the Programme in response to the Commission's initiative (Chapter 4, paragraphs 4.25 – 4.26).

## Enhancing employability and economic participation

- 8.8 In relation to poverty alleviation, the Commission's focus is on how to assist the "difficult-to-employ", viz. low-skilled, low-education and middle-aged workers to enhance their employability and adjust to the changing demands of the labour market (Chapter 3, paragraphs 3.6 – 3.12). For female workers, there is a need for targeted employment training and assistance which take into account their special needs.
- 8.9 The Commission notes that since the establishment of employees retraining programme in 1992, over 1 million training places of various courses have been taken up. A total of about 500 000 retrainees have benefited from retraining, about 75% of whom are women. The Commission has also explored the job opportunities in the home help and personal care market which are suitable for women, and noted the proactive efforts of the Employees Retraining Board in developing these markets e.g. local domestic helpers, post-natal mentors, healthcare massage/foot reflexology, elderly home care etc.<sup>2</sup>
- 8.10 The Commission also notes that social enterprises (SEs), including co-operatives, offer opportunities for women to participate in economic activities. The Commission supports continued effort in this direction (Chapter 3, paragraphs 3.16 – 3.18).
- 8.11 The Commission notes that gender prejudice and discrimination are sometimes cited as factors causing women to be more prone to poverty<sup>3</sup>. In this regard, the Commission notes the on-going effort of the WoC to promote gender equality and gender mainstreaming in policy making and to tackle gender prejudices and stereotyping that impede women's development.

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- 8.12 Persons with disabilities (PWDs) need the support of the community to integrate into society and to develop their capabilities. For PWDs with a certain degree of ability to work in the open market, the Commission notes the success of the Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project in helping some PWDs to become self-reliant through providing support to SEs employing the PWDs.

### “ENHANCING EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH SMALL ENTERPRISE PROJECT”

A one-off provision of \$50 million was announced in the 2001-02 Budget in support of the project to enhance employability of PWDs. A non-recurrent grant to provide seed capital and the initial operating expenditure is provided, but the businesses should be self-sustaining in the long run. As at March 2007, 512 posts were created (for 371 PWDs and 141 persons without disability) by the 42 social enterprises in the Project. It is noteworthy that some of the projects have successfully competed for business in the open market.

- 8.13 The Commission has drawn reference from the experience of the Project, and supports extending the model to facilitate work integration of the able-bodied unemployed who are “difficult-to-employ”, mainly low-skilled, low education and middle-aged workers.
- 8.14 In order to further promote the development of SEs in Hong Kong, the Commission supports the relaxation of the requirement that applicants under the Project have to employ at least 60% PWDs to 50%. This relaxation should enable SEs to widen their range of business activities and allow more unemployed persons and PWDs to benefit.
- 8.15 In order to provide more opportunities to SEs employing PWDs, the Hospital Authority has agreed to increase the weighting for the employment of PWDs from 5% to 10% of the total score when assessing contracts. The Commission supports the Government in continuing to explore if further increases of this weighting for SEs is feasible.

## ETHNIC MINORITIES

- 8.16 Ethnic minorities, particularly those who are non-Chinese speaking (for example, South Asians and Southeast Asians who make up about 4% of Hong Kong population in 2006), face more difficulties in integrating into the society and to fully develop their capabilities due to language and socio-cultural barriers. The Commission considers that it is important to provide opportunities and targeted support to ethnic minority groups in education and training, so that they can enhance their capacities and move out of poverty<sup>4</sup>.

### Enhancing education support for ethnic minority children

- 8.17 The Education and Manpower Bureau has been implementing progressively a number of enhanced educational support measures for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students, notably those from ethnic minority groups, to better prepare them for integration into the mainstream community, including -
- providing intensive on-site support to designated schools to help them further enhance the learning and teaching of the Chinese Language subject, and making time-limited cash grants to schools to enhance support for these groups of students;
  - developing a supplementary guide on the teaching of Chinese under the umbrella of the central Chinese Language curriculum;
  - providing training programmes for Chinese language teachers in the designated schools;
  - running a Chinese Learning Support Centre which offers remedial programmes for NCS students who are less proficient in Chinese (in particular the late starters) after school or during holidays;

- extending summer bridging programmes to cover not only Primary 1 entrants but also students progressing to Primary 2, Primary 3 and Primary 4;
- identifying suitable vacant school premises in Yuen Long to support the running of programmes for NCS ethnic minority children;
- making arrangements for interested NCS students to participate in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (Chinese) examination in Hong Kong to provide them with an additional avenue to attain an alternative qualification in Chinese; and
- producing an NCS parent information package and leaflet introducing the local education system and the education support services for NCS students in the major ethnic minority languages.

### **Strengthening training for ethnic minorities**

8.18 The different training institutes in Hong Kong have also taken into account the language needs of ethnic minorities and considered a number of measures to help them enhance their employability –

- the Vocational Training Council (VTC) has put in place dedicated programmes for ethnic minority youths and adults;
- the VTC and the Construction Industry Training Authority (CITA) would consider recruiting speakers of the main minority languages (e.g. Urdu and Nepali) as interpreters in vocational training courses, and to translate course materials into these minority languages; and
- the ERB has explored the provision of suitable retraining programmes for members of ethnic minorities, and plans to offer two courses on Security and Property Management, and Domestic Help in English in mid-2007.
- the development of a Workplace Chinese programme to enhance the employability of those ethnic minority individuals who are not proficient in Chinese but who are past the stage of learning Chinese at school.

8.19 The Commission believes that better mutual understanding and acceptance will help speed up the integration process of ethnic minorities into the local community. In this regard, the Government has been working on promoting racial harmony and arousing public awareness of the importance to foster a culture of mutual tolerance and respect through public education and publicity. The recently introduced Race Discrimination Bill, if enacted, will also help safeguard the rights of the ethnic minorities and promote racial equality. The Government should continue to study the needs of the ethnic minorities and render appropriate assistance to promote integration and avoid their falling into poverty due to social exclusion.

## NEW ARRIVALS

- 8.20 New arrivals (NA) from the Mainland of China under the One Way Permit (OWP) Scheme made up more than 90% of Hong Kong's population growth since 1997. An analysis of the profile of new arrivals shows that the majority of them were children with the right of abode in Hong Kong and Mainland spouses of Hong Kong residents. It is noted that there were no significant difference in the university attendance rate between local-born persons and Mainlanders who came to Hong Kong before the age of nine<sup>5</sup>. Providing education and support for the new arrival children and their families is important to ensure they can capture the available opportunities in society.
- 8.21 In this regard, the Commission notes that the Comprehensive Child Development Service (Chapter 4, paragraphs 4.22 – 4.24) has helped identified new arrival children and families who need more intensified support. The support measures to children and their families during the different stages of a child's development (Chapter 4) should also assist needy families including new arrival families.
- 8.22 Adult new arrivals did not generally have a high education attainment level and possessed little working experience<sup>5</sup>. While they provide a steady supply to the labour force, given their skills and experience, they are more prone to take up low-income jobs. They require more support to help them access the available services including education and training opportunities to enhance their capacities. Besides government support, strengthening social capital and community networks (Chapter 7) would help facilitate their integration into the community.
- 8.23 The Commission considers that new arrivals present challenges as well as opportunities to our society, taking into account the low birth rate and the ageing population. The Government would need to keep in view this important trend and to enhance the population potential through education and capacity enhancement so that the new arrivals can contribute to the development of the society.

## DIRECTION FOR FUTURE WORK

- 8.24 This above highlights some of the work of the Commission relevant to these disadvantaged groups. The focus is to take into account their specific needs and background, to provide them with suitable support, to enhance their capacities and employability, and to promote social inclusion and integration. The Commission is aware that there are existing Government agencies and advisory bodies overseeing the policies and measures assisting the above disadvantaged groups. The Commission hopes that the different agencies and advisory bodies will take into account the poverty situation of the disadvantaged groups, and to continue our efforts in helping them to make the best use of their capabilities and avoid poverty.