


9 WAY FORWARD

ADOPTING AN INTEGRATED AND HOLISTIC APPROACH TO TACKLE POVERTY

- 9.1 In the past two and a half years, the Commission has taken a critical look at the existing policies and measures in helping the poor, examined what have worked in the past and what should be further strengthened, identified gaps and duplications, and suggested ways to improve coordination and enhance effectiveness. Besides making some immediate improvements, the Commission has made a number of policy recommendations on the direction for future work to prevent and alleviate poverty.
- 9.2 The Commission notes that the Government as well as the Third Sector and the private sector have invested a lot of resources and efforts in helping the needy. These are often delivered by different agencies using programme-based initiatives which are sometimes not visible and accessible to those in need. The Commission considers a programme-based approach may not be effective in tackling poverty issues which are complex and multi-dimensional.
- 9.3 The Commission believes that the longer-term objective is to enhance, strengthen, or further develop ways to integrate programmes not just within Government, but also the efforts of the Third Sector and the private sector, at the central level as well as at the district and community level. The Commission considers that adopting an integrated and holistic approach should be a core strategy for future efforts – through understanding the varied needs of the disadvantaged groups, structuring our support accordingly, encouraging greater coordination, consolidation and integration between agencies to facilitate access to services, and evaluating the impact of public policies from a macro perspective.

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- 9.4 In terms of support to the poor with working abilities, the Commission supports promoting employment as the key to alleviating poverty and achieving self-reliance. The Commission believes that the Government should move from a passive approach relying mainly on public assistance to a more pro-employment approach taking into account the needs of those with abilities to work, and achieve the target of “one-stop shop” in the provision of employment assistance, so that the able-bodied persons especially those who are “difficult-to-employ” can access training, life-long learning, employment and financial assistance easily.
- 9.5 In this regard, the Commission is pleased to note that the Government plans to establish a new Labour and Welfare Bureau which should integrate the various services currently provided by the Employees Retraining Board, the Labour Department and the Social Welfare Department in assisting able-bodied persons to enhance synergy. This is in line with the recommendations made by the Commission to the Administration to promote more integrated and effective employment support.
- 9.6 In terms of structure of support, the Commission considers that the CSSA system has its limitations to promote work and self-reliance. In the long run, the Government should consider how to provide suitable support to the able-bodied unemployed and the working poor so that the system would not dampen the willingness of those who have the ability to work to seek employment and achieve self-reliance.
- 9.7 The Commission notes that there are suggestions to consider limiting the time able-bodied unemployed persons could continue to receive CSSA payment. Given the “one-household rule” under the CSSA Scheme, there is a need to consider carefully how to manage the impact of such measure including providing subsistence support to those households reaching the time limit, especially the elderly and the children members. Such “push-measures” cannot be launched in isolation, and needs to be accompanied by more integrated employment support and other complementary measures.
- 9.8 Some members have suggested looking into the so-called ‘Many Helping Hands’ approach in assisting the poor. Under this approach, income support scheme of the CSSA should be repositioned as a residual programme supplementing the services/benefits of other policy areas of employment, education, health and housing in meeting the needs of the poor, while not affecting the commitment of the Government in providing a basic safety net.

- 9.9 In terms of support to children and their families, the Commission notes that there are a vast number of agencies delivering services and programmes for children and youth. Some of them may not have taken into account the needs of their families; many are programme-based instead of focusing on the needs of children and youth at the different stages of their development. The Commission considers that the work of the Family Commission, if set up, should take into account the needs of children and families from a disadvantaged background.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT

- 9.10 The establishment of the Commission provided a valuable platform for representatives from a diverse background to examine from a macro perspective the core issues relating to tackling poverty in Hong Kong, and to engage different stakeholders and the community in the debate from a broader perspective. Despite differences in views, the Commission has managed to narrow differences and work in partnerships with stakeholders in reaching a consensus on how to understand poverty, and on the key directions for future work.
- 9.11 The Commission recognises that tackling poverty requires sustained efforts to identify the needs of the poor systematically, to provide them with timely and appropriate intervention according to their needs, to evaluate the impact of the intervention measures and continue to improve them based on proven results. There is a need for the relevant bureaux/ departments to take ownership and to make focused and coordinated effort to take forward the policy recommendations. While the Commission has launched some trial initiatives, the Commission is mindful that it should not become an additional implementation agency and bypass the established government machinery.
- 9.12 The Commission nevertheless considers that there is a need to have a designated policy bureau within the Government to oversee and monitor the implementation of the Commission's recommendations of the Commission by different parties. This would facilitate the Government and the community to have a better understanding on the overall progress of poverty alleviation work.
- 9.13 Some have suggested that the Commission should become a permanent and overarching review and monitoring body, in particular on issues which cut across different policy areas. The Commission notes that the Government has mechanisms in facilitating inter-bureau and inter-departmental coordination on cross-cutting issues, and that there is a network of

advisory bodies overseeing different policy areas. The Commission considers that the key is to improve the institutional structure of the Government in order to support more integrated and holistic policy formulation and implementation. The new Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Family Commission which is being considered are moves in the right direction. The Commission believes that the Government should keep in view the changing needs of the community in deciding the most suitable institutional arrangement to continue to support poverty alleviation and prevention work.

LOOKING AHEAD

9.14 The challenges presented to our city are stark. Nevertheless, the Commission believes that Hong Kong possesses a number of strengths which would continue to help us face up to these problems in the future -

- Hong Kong is an economically vibrant city which offers ample opportunities for people to improve their livelihood over time.
- The system emphasises meritocracy and is relatively open; people can, through their own efforts, capitalise on the available opportunities.
- There is a wealth of resources in the community, including those in the public, private and third sectors, which can be deployed to tackle poverty.
- While there is concern that income disparity divides the society, the concern is focused more on improving the well-being of the poor, as well as social mobility and equal opportunities in the system. Most would share the view that wealth accumulation remains an essential driver for continued growth of the city.

9.15 With more focused efforts and with all sectors working in partnership, the Commission believes we could together build a just, caring and harmonious society.