

**Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs**

**Policy Initiatives of  
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB)  
in Promoting Well-being and Interests of Women**

**Purpose**

The 2004 Policy Agenda just issued lists the Government's new and on-going initiatives over the next three and a half years. This note elaborates, where applicable, on the initiatives affecting the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau in the 2004 Policy Agenda. Where necessary, it also gives an account on the position reached on initiatives relating to the promotion of the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong covered in the 2003 Policy Agenda.

**2004 Policy Agenda**

*Caring and Just Society*

*Mission and Vision*

2. The Health, Welfare and Food Bureau is committed and accountable to building a caring and healthy society. In our future, we see a community celebrating their rich diversity and recognising the different strengths of each individual. Family solidarity and a network of mutual care, trust, support and reciprocity embraces all individuals and nurtures their healthy development. Policies and systems of health care, social, food safety and environmental hygiene and a safety net are in place to enable and enhance everyone's participation in economic and social life with dignity and self-reliance.

*Goals*

3. To fulfil our mission and vision, we aim to achieve the following goals-

- Protect and promote the health of the community
- Assure the safety and quality of our food and provide quality environmental hygiene services
- Recreate a health care system which provides lifelong holistic care, while being affordable and financially sustainable
- Provide care and assistance for the physical and psychosocial well-being of the elderly
- Assist the disadvantaged, the poor and the unemployed with an emphasis on enhancing, not impeding, their will to self-reliance
- Promote the well-being and interests of people with disabilities
- Enable women to fully realise their due status, rights and opportunities in all aspects of life

4. Our mission is to enhance the well-being of every member of the community to build a healthy and caring society. The changing local landscape and the lessons learnt from recent challenges have led us to undertake strategic reflections to re-affirm our directions. With an ageing population, rapid globalisation and economic restructuring, and the persistent threat of new and emerging infectious diseases to public health, sustainable social development must be a key goal of our health and welfare policy. We recognise that our policy must take on a broader perspective, by taking a balanced approach to development that will simultaneously address the human, social, natural and physical dimensions and inclusive of broader partnership base. Individuals, families and communities, as well as professional and business sectors, must all be engaged in exercising our social responsibilities for strengthening the health and social fabric of our society. We must take a social investment approach in building a more inclusive and participatory society through investing in capacity building of personal and community

capabilities.

5. We recognise the need to work within the confines of resources generated by a low tax based regime. In pursuing our mission, our policies need to be fair within generations, equitable between generations and sustainable across generations. Our objective is to expand capacity, extend partnerships and build consensus. In this connection, we would invest in our human capital and develop our infrastructure to help individuals to strengthen their personal assets both in terms of their health and life skills.

6. Health is a personal resource that also affects our collective community well-being. The protection and maintenance of health is therefore a personal responsibility. Individuals should take more responsibility for their own health, through more active involvement in decisions and investments in their health. This includes ensuring that one observes a healthy lifestyle, educates oneself on food safety and nutritional value as a consumer, develops habits in keeping the environment clean, takes preventive measures and seeks appropriate care when required, and contributes towards making the systems sustainable.

7. We are aware that Government efforts alone have never been adequate in bringing about social and health changes and ensuring well-being for all. We aim to create an environment in which all people are provided equal opportunities to develop their potential to the full thereby enabling them to take responsibilities for themselves and to participate and contribute to our economic and social life. Our approach is about creating the conditions for people/communities to maximise their potentials/capabilities, with the government acting as an enabler, a supporter and a facilitator.

8. On the health front, the Government will ensure quality, equitable, efficient, cost-effective and accessible health care systems and to organise the infrastructure for coordinated health care delivery through an interface of public and private systems (e.g. in areas of common treatment protocol, information sharing, product differentiation and new health care products). We need to target subsidies to ensure that we will offer protection to the community from significant financial risks that may arise from catastrophic or prolonged illnesses and avail affordable

quality care to the disadvantaged in our community. As the World Health Organisation puts it, for every Government, it means establishing the best and fairest health system possible.

9. Health and food safety are inextricably linked. On the safe food and clean environment fronts, public health protection should always take precedence. We will ensure a comprehensive and integrated approach in food chain management (i.e. the feed to table policy) by putting in place the necessary infrastructure; a coherent, effective and dynamic food policy on the basis of scientific evidence and risk analysis (e.g. drawing up standards and ensuring compliance through enforcement); and enhancing private-public partnership and participation by stakeholders during the process. While legal and regulatory frameworks are necessary instruments of last resort to ensure and raise standards and provide necessary safeguards, effective protection for public health can only be achieved through the concerted actions from all parties, collaboration across sectors and shared responsibilities between the sectors and the general public.

10. On the social welfare front, we aim to take the approach of helping people to help themselves, focus on maximising their potentials, extend our tripartite relationships with the third sector as well as with the corporate sector in furthering the exercise of corporate social responsibilities.

11. Society is made up of individuals, families, communities and social institutions. Changing times will naturally test the capacities of these groups to cope and take control. The ability of individuals to maximise their own potentials, take possession of their own lives and work to strengthen their life skills and build up their capacity will be vital to coping with changing circumstances and life demands. The ability of the family to provide nurture and care, and be the haven for individuals at times of need is important and needs to be supported. The existence of informal mutual help and collaboration networks in the community forms the basis of a vibrant and inclusive society.

12. Government acts as the facilitator in the process of capacity building for all levels. In this connection, we must shift from the

“service provision” approach to a “social investment” concept and approach. Under the “social investment” approach, we would strengthen the capacities and capabilities of individuals, families and communities, and foster self-help, mutual help, networking and support, and encourage giving in terms of donations and volunteerism, as well as promote active and healthy ageing and rethinking how our community can better support our elderly people. Our social programmes will need to be re-oriented from the current model of encouraging passive recipients of resources and services to those that involve people in active learning and problem solving, which would help instill in them self-esteem, self respect and a sense of control. Such paradigm shifts would encourage self-reliance and self-betterment so that they can become productive, participative and contributive members of a more inclusive society, and build up our human capital and social capital and strengthen intergenerational solidarity and cohesion at the societal level.

13. In promoting women’s well-being and interests, we are committed to create an enabling environment for women to develop their full potential and enhance their capacity to face life’s challenges and participate more fully in all aspects of community life. We need to ensure that women’s needs and concerns would not be overlooked but factored into the Government policy formulation and implementation processes as part of our daily work. We also need to tackle the preconceived notions of the roles and abilities of women which tend to restrict the opportunities and options for women and their development. On the advice of the Women’s Commission, we have adopted a three-pronged strategy of gender mainstreaming, empowerment of women and public education to further promote the development and advancement of women in Hong Kong.

### **Initiatives**

14. A Capacity Building Mileage Programme (CBMP) will be launched in 2004 to encourage and facilitate women to pursue continuous learning.

15. Capacity building is an important empowerment process, and an essential aspect of capacity building lies in the provision of relevant and

accessible learning programmes. The CBMP is a large-scale, flexible learning programme tailored to the needs and interests of women. The CBMP concept has been incubated by the Women's Commission and developed in partnership with the Open University of Hong Kong.

16. The Programme seeks to encourage active learning and facilitate the enhancement of all round abilities and life skills of women as individuals so that they could be better equipped to face life's challenges and develop their potentials more fully. The Programme promotes positive values and mindset. It aims at enhancing women's inner strength, self-reliance and self-confidence.

17. The course content would be very relevant to the daily life and interests of women, such as managing interpersonal relationships, finance management, health and practical issues in daily lives. The Programme would be delivered mainly through radio broadcasting and supplemented by optional learning activities and some face-to-face courses. In this respect, women's groups and NGOs in the community have been invited to participate in delivering some of the CBMP courses and related activities.

18. The Programme would allow participants to take up courses at any time ("multiple entry points") and accumulate "points", which enable them to proceed to more advanced courses (hence "mileage"); or exit the programme at any time ("multiple exit points"). Participants could accumulate points from their studies and advance to the next level of learning when sufficient "points" are accumulated. The Programme would offer a new, convenient and accessible mode of learning for women, and indeed men also, from various backgrounds and education levels.

## **Progress Report on Implementation of 2003 Policy Initiatives**

### ***Caring and Just Society***

19. We indicated in the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau Policy Agenda 2003 "Caring and Healthy Society" that we are committed to promoting the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong. With

advice from the Women's commission, good progress has been made in taking forward the three-pronged strategy of gender mainstreaming, empowerment of women and public education.

### *Gender Mainstreaming*

20. The Administration supports the principle of incorporating women's needs and perspectives in Government policy making, implementation and legislation; an analytical tool in the form of a checklist (i.e. the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist) has been developed.

21. The Checklist was pilot tested in five policy areas<sup>1</sup> in 2002, and based on feedback from the pilot test participants as well as other parties, we refined and finalised the Checklist in 2003. A set of accompanying guidance notes has been produced to familiarise officers with the concepts of gender mainstreaming and provide them with the necessary background information for performing gender sensitive analysis.

22. In 2003, the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist was introduced into several more policy areas<sup>2</sup>. Plans are in hand to roll out the Checklist to other areas incrementally.

23. To enhance civil servants' understanding and awareness of gender related issues, we have continued to provide training for civil servants. Over 600 civil servants of different grades have now participated in the training programme. Participants generally found the training workshops useful, the contents interesting and relevant to their work.

24. We have also taken action to set up a Gender Focal Point Network within the Administration. Some 60 bureaux and departments have already designated a directorate officer as "Gender Focal Point" within their organisations. The Gender Focal Points will act as resource

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<sup>1</sup> The five policy areas are : health care reform, family life education, enhanced home and community care for the elderly, Secondary School Places Allocation and District Council Review.

<sup>2</sup> The policy areas are : review on the role and functions of public sector advisory and statutory bodies as well as women's participation in advisory and statutory bodies; information technology education and training for the community; and design of facilities in public buildings.

persons for their organisations, and liaison persons with the Women's Commission. They would in due course assist in raising awareness and understanding of gender related issues as well as promoting gender mainstreaming initiatives in their respective organisations.

### *Empowerment of Women*

25. To recognise and promote good practices adopted by non-Government organisations (NGOs) in empowering women, a booklet on selected good practices was compiled and published in March 2003 to facilitate possible replication and adaptation of these programmes and activities by others. These practices covered different areas of concern to women, including education and training, economic well-being, self help and mutual help, social participation and decision-making, safety at home and in the public, as well as health.

26. To further encourage and promote such good empowerment practices, the Women's Commission organised a sharing session with NGOs in June 2003, at which representatives of NGOs, together with their beneficiaries, shared their experience and learning points of good empowerment practices. Around 200 persons of various NGOs, service agencies, community groups and government departments attended this forum and found it a very useful experience.

27. In respect of enhancing women participation in decision making, the Administration has accepted the Women's Commission's advice to take gender composition into account when making appointments to Government advisory and statutory bodies (ASBs). A more proactive approach is being taken to reach out and cultivate potential female candidates for appointments to ASBs, and special efforts are being made to increase the number of women appointed to these bodies. We shall work closely with the Women's Commission and Government bureaux and departments in this effort.

### *Public Education*

28. To create an enabling environment for women to fully realise their potential, it is important to tackle society's preconceived notions,



roles and stereotyping of women, which tend to restrict the opportunities and options for women and their development. With the advice of the Women's Commission, the Administration has carried out a series of public education activities and organised different seminars to promote greater gender sensitivity. This includes production of a new series of Announcements in the Public Interest on TV, radio and buses, two TV drama series on gender-related issues, media advertorials and an essay competition. An open forum was also organised in early December 2003 for interested parties to discuss gender biased messages in the media.

#### *Work Conducted in Other Areas*

29. To enhance communication with the non-governmental sector, as well as to create synergy in the work of the Women's Commission and other bodies, the Administration and the Women's Commission are working to establish partnership with non-governmental organisations through its various activities. A framework of collaboration with non-governmental organisations and other interested parties has been developed with active participation of the latter in several workshops.

30. To ascertain the present state of women in Hong Kong and their needs, we have conducted a number of surveys and studies with the advice of the Women's Commission. The first large scale thematic household survey in Hong Kong on the time use pattern of women and men in Hong Kong and factors affecting women's participation in society was completed and the findings were released in 2003. A survey on the effectiveness of the public education and publicity campaign launched with the Women's Commission's advice was also conducted. Findings of these surveys and studies have provided useful quantitative data and enhanced understanding of the situation of women in Hong Kong. They could also serve as useful benchmarks for future reference.

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