

**Summary of the views expressed at
the Third Meeting of
the Committee on Social Development and Quality of Life
of the Commission on Strategic Development
held on 24 April 2006
(Translation)**

The Chairman pointed out to Members that each of the four Committees of the Commission on Strategic Development had its own terms of reference. The Executive Committee was, however, tasked at the same time to coordinate the work of the other Committees. The Executive Committee, chaired by the Chief Executive, discussed at its meeting on 6 April the work progress of the Committees. The views concerning the work of this Committee were as follows-

Population Policy

- (i) The Council for Sustainable Development would shortly commence a “public engagement process” on population policy. The Government should ensure that discussion of the Council and this Committee would not overlap with each other;
- (ii) The eligibility and portability of public benefits should be covered in the discussion of population policy;
- (iii) Attention should be paid to the impact of the Mainland new arrivals on the population quality of Hong Kong;

Environmental Issues

- (iv) Environmental pollution, especially air pollution, was a major issue to be examined when exploring ways to improve Hong Kong’s quality of life; and

Illegal Workers

- (v) Attention should be paid to the problem of illegal workers, particularly after the implementation of the “Individual Visit Scheme”.

2. In response to the views of the Executive Committee on population policy, the Chairman said that a representative of the Council for Sustainable Development had been invited to brief Members on the work related to its “public engagement process” on population policy later in the meeting. The Council would report the outcome of the process to this Committee as appropriate. As regards issues of quality of population, and eligibility and portability of public benefits, they would be discussed respectively in this and the following meeting. The Chairman stated that the Committee might consider discussing issues concerning environmental pollution and illegal workers in future meetings as appropriate.

Matters arising

3. The Chairman reported that a workshop on population policy was organized on 28 March for Members to exchange views on promoting parenthood and quality of population. Four population experts had been invited to share their views. The Secretariat had distributed the relevant documents and the summary of views expressed at the workshop to Members for reference.

Population Policy

An Overview of Key Population Policy Issues (Part I): Demographic Trend of Hong Kong and Major Issues on Promoting Parenthood and Quality of Population (Paper Ref: CSD/SC/3/2006)

Council for Sustainable Development - Public Engagement Process on Priority Area of Population Policy (Paper Ref: CSD/SC/4/2006)

4. The Chairman said that in view of the complexity of the population issues concerned, the Committee would focus on issues related to promotion of parenthood and quality of population at this meeting. Other population related issues such as ageing population and eligibility and portability of public benefits would be discussed in the next meeting. The Secretariat would organize a workshop on the above issues on 30 May. Members would be informed of the detailed arrangements in due course.

5. As the two papers were relevant to population policy, the Chairman invited Members to express their views on both papers together.

Ageing Population

6. Most Members considered that the issue of population ageing should be taken seriously. It was raised that the definition of “elderly person” should be reviewed and it was suggested that the Government should actively promote lifelong learning and continuing education to enhance the productivity of the

elderly. Some other Members suggested that the feasibility of extending the retirement age should be studied. Some Members opined that population ageing might not necessarily have an adverse impact on the society and the economy. The elderly could still make contributions to the society. Our society should encourage the elderly to seek personal development and self-improvement, provide better health and financial protection (e.g. medical services and retirement schemes) and encourage them to take a proactive role in the society (e.g. taking part in volunteer services).

7. Some Members pointed out that Hong Kong could slow down the ageing of its population by importing migrants from the Mainland as Hong Kong was also one of the Mainland cities.

Promoting Parenthood

8. The majority of Members considered that it was a personal choice on whether or not to have children. The Government should not dictate people in making their choice. Having said that, as a measure to slow down population ageing, the governments of many developed economies were actively promoting parenthood. A Member suggested that the Government should review its existing policies to remove hindrances to childbearing and provide a family-friendly environment to ensure those who wanted to have children would not be discouraged because of financial considerations, the need to work, education or childcare needs. In addition, the Government should encourage the business sector to provide a “family-friendly” working environment by advocating schemes like “a five-working-day week”, “two persons for one job”, “part-time jobs” and “flexitime” to facilitate females to manage both their work and the need to take care of their children. However, some Members cautioned that the implementation of “family-friendly” working arrangements should not adversely affect Hong Kong’s competitiveness.

9. A Member opined that government measures might not necessarily be effective in raising Hong Kong’s fertility rate. The Government should however convey a clear message to the public that parenthood was encouraged. The Government should consider providing financial or other incentives according to actual circumstances. A Member suggested strengthening support in the area of childcare services such as providing financial assistance (including pre-primary education allowance) and creche services as well as advisory services on child rearing and guidance to parents.

10. A Member was of the view that the prevailing socio-cultural mindset of a community would have a significant influence on a person’s decision on whether or not to have children. The Government should step up publicity and public education to reinforce family values, advocate parenthood and emphasize the important role of family in society. Sharing of family chores should be

promoted to encourage men to help out with house chores so as to create a favourable social environment that encourage childbearing. A Member proposed that the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong should be tasked to help promote family values and childbearing, and gradually transform the prevailing social culture through public education. It was also suggested that a “Family Affairs Committee” should be set up to carry out such work.

11. Members generally agreed that the reasons for the decline in fertility rate were complicated and declining fertility rates were common in developed economies. However, in view of the extremely low fertility rate in Hong Kong, the lowest in the world, members considered that the causes of such a phenomenon warranted an in-depth study.

12. The reasons for the low fertility rate suggested by Members were as follows:

- (a) The weakening of traditional family values as well as a lack of commitment or confidence of the new generation in marriage, childbearing and family;
- (b) An increasing sense of job insecurity that led to a lack of confidence in the future, which affected the family plans of couples, including their plans to have children;
- (c) Increased work pressure. The need to work long hours and frequent work outside Hong Kong would make couples find it difficult to manage both work and family;
- (d) Economic difficulties and financial pressure;
- (e) Lack of confidence in Hong Kong’s education system. Parents were dissatisfied with the education reforms, and lacked confidence in rearing and coaching their children; and
- (f) A growing number of working women became financially independent, which led to late marriage and late childbearing.

13. Regarding the relationship between financial considerations and childbearing, a Member considered that the opportunity cost of middle class couples in childbearing was relatively high. Many Members shared this view, and they pointed out that a low fertility rate among the middle class was a worldwide trend. On the other hand, some Members commented that the education system and quality of education in Hong Kong might discourage many couples from having children.

14. A few Members said that from a macro perspective of limited resources on earth, a smaller population would mean a smaller demand on resources and less damage to the natural environment. As such, there was no need for the Government to promote parenthood. From the policy perspective, the Government should strengthen the provision of education and training available to the local population, with a view to enhancing their productivity for the sustainable development of the local economy.

Promoting Quality of Population

15. In promoting population quality, the majority of the Members suggested to focus on nurturing local talent and education. It was proposed that the supply of university places should be increased to allow more local students to enhance their personal knowledge and potential. Furthermore, Members suggested to strengthen the bridging of local associate degree programmes and adult education courses with university programmes. Another Member proposed to attract overseas students to enrol in Hong Kong's diploma or senior secondary courses through student exchange programmes on a trial basis. In order to attract more Mainland or overseas students to study in Hong Kong, a Member suggested that it was necessary to increase the number of boarding schools in Hong Kong. A Member considered that the phrase "promoting quality of population" might lead to a misunderstanding that eugenics was encouraged. They proposed that it be rephrased as "attracting talent".

16. On attracting talent, a Member suggested that we should target the children studying overseas whose parents were Hong Kong residents, overseas Chinese in South-East Asia and the Hong Kong families working in the Mainland. As these people had a better understanding and a stronger sense of belonging to Hong Kong, it was more likely that they would consider returning to work and live in Hong Kong.

17. Many Members opined that Hong Kong should adopt an open-door policy and a flexible entry system to facilitate the mobility of talent to cluster at Hong Kong. The Mainland, Southeast Asia and South Asia should be our prime sources of talent. A Member, nevertheless, pointed out that Hong Kong was different from international cities such as New York, Tokyo and London, where free flow of people in different cities of the country was allowed. The flow of people between Hong Kong and the Mainland was, however, subject to control. Having said that, most Members considered that there was still room for Hong Kong to import talent from the Mainland. The key was to formulate appropriate policies in line with the long-term direction towards free flow of people, goods and capital.

18. As regards the issue of attracting talent, Members put forth the following specific proposals:

- (a) To enhance the quality of life, particularly the air quality. Also, it would be necessary to promote cultural and creative activities and improve the quality of the environment, so as to make Hong Kong more attractive to the Mainland and overseas talent;
- (b) To maintain an open economy and ensure fair competition;
- (c) To simplify the immigration procedures to facilitate a free flow of talent;
- (d) To step up publicity for Hong Kong in the Mainland and abroad to enhance the understanding of the Mainland talent and Hong Kong people abroad about Hong Kong;
- (e) To facilitate the development of Hong Kong, the Government should consider working with the business sector in attracting Mainland talent in specific sectors;
- (f) To create a favourable business environment to attract non-local talent to work and stay in Hong Kong; and
- (g) To review and examine the One-way Permit System with the Mainland authorities.

19. Apart from attracting talent, a Member highlighted the need to retain talent in Hong Kong by creating a cordial environment for non-local people. It was suggested that foreigners in Hong Kong should be encouraged to participate in community affairs, and assistance should be rendered to new arrivals from the Mainland to adapt to local cultural and social values. By fostering among them a sense of belonging to Hong Kong and an inclination to serve the community, it would help the non-local people to better integrate into the local community. Members agreed that new arrivals from the Mainland were important human resources to Hong Kong. Their working and living experience in the Mainland could help local businessmen develop their business there.

20. Many Members pointed out that the “Invitation and Response” document for the “public engagement process” on population policy prepared by the Council for Sustainable Development was quite comprehensive. Its approach to explore the population policy issue from the economic, social and environmental perspectives should be supported. They added that the Government should consider building a sustainable society by improving the urban environment, quality of life and work styles, and promoting a fair competition policy to encourage childbearing and attract talent to Hong Kong.

21. The Chief Secretary for Administration made the following comments:

- (a) Population policy should be considered from a comprehensive and holistic perspective. Whether Hong Kong should position itself as a city on its own or as part of China in formulating its population policy was worth exploring.
- (b) It was a personal choice on whether or not to have children. The Government should help remove hindrances to childbearing. Further studies would be required to provide an objective and rational basis for the formulation of population policy;
- (c) International experience showed that governments might not be able to change the views of people on childbearing. To maintain our global competitiveness, it was necessary for Hong Kong to import talent;
- (d) On the issue of attracting overseas students, the Education and Manpower Bureau was stepping up supporting measures such as increasing number of dormitory places, etc. Members' views would be referred to the Bureau for consideration; and
- (f) As regards the flow of people, , it was still necessary to control the inflow of Mainlanders under the policy of "One Country, Two Systems". Necessary adjustment could be made according to the actual circumstances after discussion with the Mainland authorities.

22. The Chief Secretary for Administration noted that some Members had expressed views on the issue of population ageing. The issue would be discussed in detail in the next meeting. He also encouraged Members to attend the workshop to be held in late May to exchange views on relevant issues.

23. The Chairman thanked Members for their support to the "public engagement process" on population policy to be undertaken by the Council for Sustainable Development soon. The Secretariat would refer Members' views to the Council for consideration.

24. The attendance list of the participants is at Annex.

Secretariat to the Commission on Strategic Development
May 2006

策略發展委員會
社會發展及生活質素委員會第三次會議
2006 年 4 月 24 日

Third Meeting of
the Committee on Social Development and Quality of Life
of the Commission on Strategic Development
24 April 2006

出席人士

Attendance List

主席 :

Chairman :

The Chief Secretary for Administration

政務司司長

官方委員 :

Official Members :

Head, Central Policy Unit

中央政策組首席顧問

Director, Chief Executive's Office

行政長官辦公室主任

非官方委員 :

Non-Official Members :

Dr CHAN Kin-keung, Eugene

陳建強醫生

Mr CHAN Siu-hung

陳紹雄先生

Ms CHAN Yu

陳瑜女士

Dr CHAN WONG Lai-kuen, Anissa, M.H.

陳黃麗娟博士, M.H.

Mr CHENG Wai-sun, Edward, J.P.

鄭維新先生, J.P.

Prof CHIU Wing-kai, Stephen

趙永佳教授

Mr DING Wai-chuen, Raphael

丁偉銓先生

Mr HEUNG Cheuk-kei, Daniel, S.B.S., J.P.

香灼璣先生, S.B.S., J.P.

Dr HUI Ka-wah, Ronnie

許家驊醫生

Ms KAO Ching-chi, Sophia, J.P.

高靜芝女士, J.P.

Miss KI Man-fung, Leonie, J.P.

紀文鳳女士, J.P.

Mr LAI Kwong-tak, Albert

黎廣德先生

Prof LAM Shun-chiu, Dennis, J.P.

林順潮教授, J.P.

The Hon LAU Kong-wah, J.P.

劉江華議員, J.P.

Dr LAW Chi-kwong, S.B.S., J.P.

羅致光博士, S.B.S., J.P.

Ms LAW Suk-kwan, Lilian
Mrs LAW SHING Mo-han, Yvonne
Mr LEE Chung-tak, Joseph, B.B.S., J.P.
The Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Dr LO Wing-lok, J.P.
Ms MAR Yuet-har, B.B.S., M.H.
Dr NG Cho-nam, B.B.S.
Mr SHIH Wing-ching, J.P.
Mr SO Kam-leung, Gregory, J.P.
Mr SZE, Kyran
Mr TAI Hay-lap, B.B.S., J.P.
Ms TAM Siu-ying, Iris, J.P.
Mr TIK Chi-yuen, J.P.
Mr WONG Kwok-keung, Peter, J.P.
Mr WONG Sau-ching, M.H.
Mr WONG Ying-wai, Wilfred, J.P.
Mr YUNG Wing-ki, Samuel, M.H.

羅淑君女士
羅盛慕嫻女士
李宗德先生, B.B.S., J.P.
梁耀忠議員
勞永樂醫生, J.P.
馬月霞女士, B.B.S., M.H.
吳祖南博士, B.B.S.
施永青先生, J.P.
蘇錦樑先生, J.P.
施家殷先生
戴希立先生, B.B.S., J.P.
譚小瑩女士, J.P.
狄志遠先生, J.P.
王國強先生, J.P.
黃守正先生, M.H.
王英偉先生, J.P.
容永祺先生, M.H.

列席

In Attendance

Assistant Director of Administration (Sustainable
Development)2, Administration Wing
Chief Secretary for Administration's Office
- Mrs Vicki KWOK

政務司司長辦公室行政署
助理行政署長（持續發
展）2,
- 郭黃穎琦女士

因事未能出席

Apologies

非官方委員 :
Non-Official Member :

Prof CHANG Hsin-kang, G.B.S., J.P.
Mr LAW Kin-chung, Christopher
Ms LOH Kung-wai, Christine
Prof NG Ching-fai, G.B.S.
Prof POON Chung-kwong, G.B.S., J.P.
Mr PUI kwan-kay, M.H.
Mr WONG Kwok-kin

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黃國健先生

