

**Summary of the views expressed at
the Fifth Meeting of
the Committee on Social Development and Quality of Life
of the Commission on Strategic Development
held on 20 September 2006**

The Chairman welcomed new Members, Messrs CHEUNG Kwok-che and PUN Tin-chi to the meeting.

Matters Arising from the Last Meeting

2. The Chairman reported that the summary of views of the fourth meeting of this Committee had been issued to Members and uploaded to CSD's webpage in August.

**Support for the Family
(Paper Ref: CSD/SC/6/2006)**

General

3. Members agreed that family was the basic unit of a society and a harmonious family relationship was one of the keys to building up social harmony. It was therefore important for the government and the community to give priority to supporting the family.

4. Members agreed that family problems could not be resolved by government alone. However, the government had an important role in providing a conducive, supportive, and friendly social environment for the family. The importance of neighborhood and the business sector in providing support for the family should not be overlooked. On the other hand, Members agreed that public support for the family should not become too intrusive to family affairs.

Major Issues Encountered by the Hong Kong Family

Weakening family functions

5. Members generally acknowledged that the changing socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the local families had posed major challenges to our family system. Some Members considered that the preference for materialistic rewards, privacy and choice of individualistic lifestyle had diluted the traditional virtues of the Chinese family values such as caring for and mutual support among family members.

Family and work imbalance

6. A number of Members considered that the increasing number of working parents, growing trend of long working hours and working across the boundary had adversely affected the quality of family life.

Domestic violence

7. Members noted the upsurge of domestic violence cases. They agreed that domestic violence was a multi-faceted problem associated with a number of factors and complex dynamics. Apart from spouse battering and child abuse, a Member pointed out that physical maltreatment of the elderly in Hong Kong was also serious, but had not been properly recognised. Members agreed that it was necessary to strengthen the support to the family under stress at an early stage to prevent worsening of family problems. This would be far more effective than providing remedial services after domestic violence had happened.

Integration of ethnic minority into the society

8. A Member pointed out that there was an increasing number of ethnic minority families in Hong Kong. In view of their different cultural and language background, most of the students from ethnic minority families had experienced different extent of difficulties in adapting to the local school curriculum. It had not only affected the students' academic

results, but also undermined their self-esteem and adversely affected their integration into Hong Kong mainstream society.

Others

9. A Member viewed that financial problem was a major cause of family problems. He therefore considered that solving poverty and income inequality problems should go hand in hand with tackling family problems.

10. A number of Members highlighted that the existing resources for providing family services were insufficient. As a result, in order to meet administrative performance requirements, frontline staff had to close their cases quickly, sometimes prematurely, instead of tackling them in an in-depth manner. This partly explained why some severe family violence cases had happened after the cases concerned were closed. A few Members added that this was also a major source of the frustration of frontline social work staff.

Priority Issues and Actions to be Taken

11. Members were appreciative of the efforts made by the Government in providing family-related services and the recent initiatives related to remedial services to support families under stress. However, some Members considered that more efforts should be made by the Government in providing preventive services to support the family. The Government should review its resource allocation and coordination of work related to this aspect of work. Specifically, Members raised the following priority issues and actions to be taken.

(a) Social Education on Family

12. Members considered it necessary to strengthen the promotion on the importance of family and family values such as caring for family members, individual responsibility for family harmony, etc. through publicity and family education. Some Members even emphasized that this was fundamental to promoting harmonious family in the society. They

considered that more resources should be devoted to this area of work as a long-term social education programme. Some Members suggested that family education could also be included in the extra-curricular activities of schools, or entertainment programmes produced by the mass media.

(b) Promoting family-friendly environment

13. A Member suggested to establish a Family Commission / Committee to coordinate relevant government policies and measures as well as to assess and advise policy bureaux on the impact of government policies on the family. Some Members also proposed that concessionary package on transportation fees should be provided to families. Other Members suggested to improve physical accesses for wheelchair users and perambulators for babies in public places.

14. Some Members pointed out that support from neighborhood had significant positive impact on the maintenance of family relations. As such, preservation of neighborhood network should be taken into account at the early stage of town planning and urban renewal projects. In addition, District Councils, district groups, religious organizations, etc. should be encouraged to strengthen their support to the family at neighborhood level.

(c) Promoting family-friendly workplace environment

15. Many Members considered that long working hours and over-emphasis on materialistic lifestyle had contributed to work-family imbalance. A number of Members also highlighted the importance of co-operation among the government, business community and non-governmental organisations in promoting a family-friendly workplace environment. Some Members suggested that companies should be encouraged to provide nursery services to meet the needs of working parents, introduce flexible working hours and avoid excessive overtime work. Another Member supported setting up crèches and childcare centres in major employment centres to help the working mothers to take care of their young children. A Member urged that the business sector should cultivate a norm to promote family-friendly practices and encourage other companies to follow suit. Family-friendly workplace practices

might in the short term increase business operational cost. However, in the long-run, they would help retain good employees and attract more talents to the firms. Many Members opined that such practices would considerably help working parents to achieve a better family-work balance and upgrade the quality of their family life.

16. It had also been raised that community-based enterprises such as on recycling business could be set up through tri-partite partnership at local level. The enterprises would provide job opportunities for some parents to engage in work within their local community. A Member also raised that standard working hours for workers should be stipulated as a measure to promote family-friendly workplace environment.

(d) Supporting family under stress

17. A number of Members highlighted the importance of early identification of families at risk, thus allowing the provision of adequate and timely assistance to avoid family tragedies. Members also reflected that there was a lack of sufficient resources to support frontline staff and professionals to handle relevant cases. They urged the government to improve the situation.

(e) Financial incentives

18. Some Members suggested providing tax incentives, e.g. to increase tax allowances for new-born babies, full-time carers of family members, persons residing with dependent parents, and companies introducing family-friendly measures to demonstrate the government's determination in cultivating a family-friendly environment and encouraging people to devote more time and effort to the family.

(f) Parental education and counseling services

19. Some Members pointed out that some married couples or parents might have little knowledge on how to maintain a harmonious relationship or to coach their children. It was suggested that more pre-marriage, marriage and relationship counseling services and training courses should

be made available. In addition, some Members viewed that non-governmental organisations could help establish a supporting network in the community to enable sharing of experience and mutual support among couples and parents.

(g) Supporting family with elderlies

20. A few Members pointed out families with elderly parents and dependent elderly members were given little support from the community. Many of the dependent elderly family members or parents had been forced by circumstances to be accommodated in residential institutions. This was a costly option for the society and was inconsistent with the objective of promoting Chinese family virtues. Consideration should be given to providing more day care support services to the elderlies so that other family members could take care of their elderly members after work.

(h) Researches and studies

21. To provide a better understanding of the key family issues, Members suggested that further surveys and studies, as appropriate, should be conducted in the following areas –

- (a) survey on problems encountered by Hong Kong families with a view to providing an informed basis for the government and relevant organisations to provide necessary and adequate support to families in need;
- (b) identification of “high risk” families under stress, including their characteristics, locational concentration pattern, etc. so as to provide an objective basis to prioritize resources to support the families concerned at an early stage;
- (c) assessment of effective ways of learning Chinese/ English as a second language with a view to improving the curriculum design of ethnic minority students (Note: A Member informed the meeting that the University of Hong

Kong was conducting a study on this similar subject); and

- (d) impact of the pregnant women from the Mainland giving birth in Hong Kong.

22. The Chairman stated that the Secretariat would prepare a summary of views expressed at the meeting, and distribute to Members as well as relevant bureaux and departments for reference. Members were invited to submit to the Secretariat their further comments by post or by email, which would be circulated to other Members to facilitate exchange of opinions. The next Committee meeting would be held on 30 November 2006, and would discuss issues on “income inequality and social mobility”.

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

Secretariat to the Commission on Strategic Development
October 2006

策略發展委員會
社會發展及生活質素委員會第五次會議
2006年9月20日

Fifth Meeting of
the Committee on Social Development and Quality of Life
of the Commission on Strategic Development
20 September 2006

出席人士

Attendance List

主席 :

Chairman :

Acting Chief Secretary for Administration

署理政務司司長

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

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.

Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che

張國柱先生

Mr DING Wai-chuen, Raphael

丁偉銓先生

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.

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

林順潮教授, J.P.

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

羅致光博士, S.B.S., J.P.

Mr LAW Kin-chung, Christopher

羅健中先生

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 LOH Kung-wai, Christine
Ms MAR Yuet-har, B.B.S., M.H.
Prof NG Ching-fai, G.B.S.
Dr NG Cho-nam, B.B.S.
Prof POON Chung-kwong, G.B.S., J.P.
Mr PUI kwan-kay, M.H.
Mr PUN Tin-chi
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 Kwok-kin, B.B.S.
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.
陸恭蕙女士
馬月霞女士, B.B.S., M.H.
吳清輝教授, G.B.S.
吳祖南博士, B.B.S.
潘宗光教授, G.B.S., J.P.
貝鈞奇先生, M.H.
潘天賜先生
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.
黃國健先生, B.B.S.
容永祺先生, M.H.

因事未能出席

Apologies

非官方委員 :
Non-Official Member :

Ms CHAN Yu
Prof CHANG Hsin-kang, G.B.S., J.P.
Prof CHIU Wing-kai, Stephen
Mr HEUNG Cheuk-kei, Daniel, S.B.S., J.P.
Mr LAI Kwong-tak, Albert
The Hon LAU Kong-wah, J.P.
Mr WONG Sau-ching, M.H.
Mr WONG Ying-wai, Wilfred, J.P.

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