

FAMILY COUNCIL

Progress Report of the Women's Commission

This paper sets out the background of the establishment of the Women's Commission (WoC), its major accomplishments in advancing the status of women in Hong Kong and its work plan in 2008.

BACKGROUND

2. Since the application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of the United Nations (UN) to Hong Kong in 1996, the Government has committed to discharging its CEDAW obligations to promote the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong. In 1999, the relevant UN Committee examined the initial report submitted by the Government under CEDAW and suggested that HKSARG should establish a governmental mechanism for the advancement of women in Hong Kong and charged with the proactive development of policy and long-term strategies on gender equality.

3. In parallel, since the 1980's, women organisations and interested parties in Hong Kong had also been advocating vigorously for the establishment of a Women's Commission as a high-level central mechanism for advancing the status of women in view of the gender inequalities and gaps prevailing then in society.

4. Accordingly, WoC was established by the Government in January 2001 as this high-level central mechanism. Appointed by the Chief Executive, it is tasked to take a strategic overview over women issues, develop a long-term vision and strategy for the development and advancement of women, and advise the Government on policies and initiatives which are of concern to women. Its current membership and terms of reference are at Annex.

5. The mission of WoC is "To enable women in Hong Kong to fully realize their due status, rights and opportunities in all aspects of life".

To achieve this, it has adopted a three-pronged strategy, namely the provision of an enabling environment, empowerment of women through capacity building and public education. Its major accomplishments in the past years in advancing the status of women in Hong Kong are summarised in the ensuing paragraphs.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Provision of an Enabling Environment

Gender Mainstreaming

6. Gender mainstreaming is a key strategy to achieve gender equality. It seeks to systematically remove all obstacles and inequalities in the environment, policies, legislation, systems and programmes so that both genders can fully participate in the society. WoC is the Government's key advisor in implementing gender mainstreaming and applying the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist (the Checklist). The Checklist is an analytical tool developed by the WoC to assist government officials in incorporating, in a more systematic way, the gender perspectives in the policy formulation and programme development processes, so that women and men will have equitable access to, and benefit from, society's resources and opportunities. The Checklist has been applied to 28 policy or programme areas. Apart from adopting the Checklist, more and more colleagues have now also applied the gender mainstreaming concept in the course of their daily work, taking into account the needs and perspectives of both genders. WoC will continue to assist the Government in introducing the use of the Checklist and applying the gender mainstreaming concept to more policy areas on an incremental basis. The aim is to institutionalise gender mainstreaming in the policy making process in the long run.

7. WoC also assists the Government in setting up a network of "Gender Focal Points" from all bureaux and departments who serve as the contact or resource persons for their respective organisations. Furthermore, WoC assists the Government in providing training to civil servants on a regular basis to enhance awareness of gender-related issues. Hitherto, over 3,000 civil servants of various grades and ranks have received such training.

Review of Services for Women

8. Another major task of the WoC is to keep under review, in the light of women's needs, services delivered within and outside the Government. Over the past years, it has reviewed key services for women, including health services, public housing, information technology training, employment services and job-related training, adult and continuous education, welfare services and family services, services for victims of domestic and sexual violence and violence prevention programme, services for disabled and minority women, and leisure services, etc and has provided advice to the Government on improvements to cater for women's specific circumstances and needs.

Family Friendly Employment Policies and Practices in Hong Kong

9. To enable women to improve their economic and general well-being as well as to promote gender equality, WoC believes that it is crucial to provide an enabling environment in which women and men can share out family responsibilities and participate fully in all other aspects of life. In 2006, WoC conducted a research jointly with the Equal Opportunities Commission to review and investigate the needs, awareness, and prevalence of family friendly employment policies and practices (FEPPs) in Hong Kong, and examine the expectations and benefits of FEPPs in our society.

10. In the light of the research findings, WoC has worked in partnership with the Labour Department and other stakeholders to further promote FEPPs, such as co-organising a seminar on FEPPs in June 2007. It has also produced and widely distributed a promotional leaflet to different sectors. In addition, WoC has actively undertaken speaking engagements to promote FEPPs to different employers groups.

Researches and surveys on women issues

11. WoC also conducts from time to time researches and surveys to gain a better understanding of women's needs and issues of concern, and to shed light on policies relating to women's development. For instance, WoC conducted in 2002 a survey on the extent of women's satisfaction and another one investigating women's employment in different sectors, as well as a large-scale thematic household survey on the time use and factors affecting women's participation in the society. The more recent ones include the study on FEPPs mentioned above.

Empowerment of Women

Capacity Building Mileage Programme (CBMP)

12. A women's empowerment strategy emphasises the importance of increasing women's skills and their capacities to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. The CBMP is a key initiative of the WoC in empowering women. It is a flexible learning programme implemented jointly with the Open University of Hong Kong, Commercial Radio and nearly 80 partnering women's groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), seeking to encourage life-long learning and a positive attitude and mindset of women. The CBMP, tailored to the needs and interests of women, is mainly delivered through radio broadcasting, supplemented by optional learning activities and face-to-face courses delivered by the NGOs. The courses include subjects such as managing interpersonal relationships, finance management, health and other practical issues in daily life.

13. Since its launch in March 2004, the CBMP has received strong support from the community and encouraged women of different backgrounds and educational levels to pursue life-long learning and self-development. Up to November 2007, the cumulative number of enrolments exceeded 20 000, not to mention the large network of audience reached through the radio programmes. Feedback from students is that they have benefited from the programme tremendously in terms of increased interests in learning and enhanced confidence and knowledge in resolving problems in daily life.

Women's Participation in Government Advisory and Statutory Bodies (ASBs) and at the Community Level

14. Women's participation in public decision-making is an important aspect in the advancement of women's status. On the suggestion of the WoC, the Government promulgated in January 2004 a working target of at least 25% for each gender (the 25% gender benchmark) for the purpose of appointments to ASBs. The 25% gender benchmark target was achieved in December 2005. As at December 2007, 26.6% of the appointed non-officials on ASBs were women.

15. WoC is conscious that this is an average figure and appointment of women in some of the ASBs may fall below this average. That notwithstanding, WoC considers it crucial for the Government to keep up the momentum and raise the gender benchmark further to 30%.

WoC will continue to work with the Government to make efforts to reach out, identify and cultivate potential female candidates, and to take measures to encourage and build up the capacity of more females to participate in public affairs at the community level.

Nurturing Caring Families

16. In response to the needs and concerns expressed by many women groups, WoC has put nurturing caring families as one of its work foci in the past few years, with an emphasis on quality parenting. In 2006 and 2007, it has taken forward a pilot project in Kwun Tong District and North District to promote quality parenting and to instil the core life values in the younger generation. The response has been encouraging. WoC will continue its efforts and appeal for the support of the District Councils to spearhead the above initiatives in other districts.

Women's Safety

17. Women's safety has always been a priority area of the work of the WoC. Over the years, the WoC has reviewed the policies, services and legislation relating to domestic violence. Following detailed discussion with over 50 organisations, WoC published in January 2006 a report on the strategy and action plans entitled "Women's Safety in Hong Kong: Eliminating Domestic Violence" (Safety Report), putting forward a total of 21 recommendations for policy, service and legal changes. The recommendations have obtained the support of the Government, women groups, concerned stakeholders and others in the wider community. In 2007, WoC has reviewed the progress made by the Government and it plans to publish a Supplement Report in 2008 to take stock of the progress of the various recommendations.

Women's Health

18. Women's health is another important aspect of empowerment of women as improving women's general state of health would enable them to participate more fully in society. WoC has reviewed the public health services and health promotion programmes provided for women by the Department of Health (DH). Among other things, WoC considers that the cervical cancer screening programme should be promoted to all women at large, in particular high-risk women. On the advice of WoC, the DH, in collaboration with other health care professionals, launched in 2004 a territory-wide cervical screening programme to provide affordable cervical smear test for participating women for better prevention of the disease.

WoC also maintains communication with the Government and the NGO sector for the promotion of further development of women's health clinics in the territory.

Public Education

19. Despite the changes in traditional thinking, the society may still harbour considerable prejudices and misunderstanding about the roles, values, images and capabilities of the two genders that hinder women from developing their full potential. Over the past few years, WoC and the Government have worked together to organise various public education programmes to reduce gender prejudice and stereotype and raise public awareness of women-related issues. These include organising open forums and seminars, producing three TV drama series "Women with Dreams" on capacity building and empowerment of women, commissioning radio programmes to promote awareness of gender issues, producing announcements of public interest on television and radio and posters, as well as organising essay competitions, an Orientation Camp Game Design Contest, and celebration events for the International Women's Day on 8 March every year.

20. In 2007, in connection with the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the HKSAR, WoC organised a series of activities, collectively named "Colourful Lives of Women" (華彩半邊天), to recognise the contribution of all sectors, in particular the women's groups, in empowering women. A series of short TV programmes was produced to introduce the achievements and contributions of local women's groups and NGOs in helping women build up self-confidence and independence. From 30 November to 3 December 2007, WoC also organised a large-scale exhibition on "Women of Hong Kong – A Century of Contribution and Development" to showcase the development of women in the areas of work, family, education and social participation in the past century and to pay tribute to women's contribution to the society.

21. WoC also attaches importance to the promotion of gender awareness in school education. It has maintained regular dialogues with the Education Bureau and provided advice on the development of the curriculum from the gender perspective, in order to promote gender awareness and reduce gender stereotyping of students in their early stages of life and to make a sustainable impact.

Collaboration

With Non-governmental Organisations

22. To enhance communication with the non-governmental sector, and to create synergy with other bodies, WoC seeks to establish partnership with District Councils, women's groups and NGOs through regular meetings and organisation of various discussion fora and seminars to facilitate exchanges. For example, in June 2006, WoC organised a conference on "Together We Build a Harmonious Community", providing a platform for all stakeholders to discuss and explore the future direction and strategies in further promoting gender equality and advancing the status of women in Hong Kong.

With the Mainland and international bodies

23. In April 2005, WoC initiated and co-organised with the Government and the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) the "Joint Events in Celebration of the Beijing + 10" in Beijing. Over 200 delegates from the Mainland and Hong Kong participated in the event to review the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action¹ and exchange views on various women issues. WoC also joined the HKSAR delegation to attend "The Tenth Anniversary Commemoration of the Fourth World Conference on Women" organised by the Mainland between 29 August and 1 September 2005 in Beijing. In 2007-08, WoC collaborated with the ACWF on two projects, including contribution of a chapter to an ACWF publication of women's development in the 20th century, and collection of exhibits on women's development and contribution in Hong Kong in the past century for the China Women and Children Museum to be opened in Beijing in 2008.

24. WoC has also participated in a number of regional and international conferences, such as the annual session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Women Leaders' Network meetings in the past few years and the 6th East Asian Women's Forum in 2006, which provide good opportunities for dialogue with overseas experts and brings outside perspectives to the Commission's work. Members are also able to keep abreast of the key women issues in the regional and international arena and

¹ The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) was adopted by the participating governments at the Fourth World Conference on Women of the United Nations held in Beijing in September 1995. It sets out various strategic objectives under 12 critical areas of concern to empower women through promoting their advancement and removing all the obstacles to their active participation in all spheres of public and private life.

to draw reference from overseas experience.

2008 WORK PLAN

25. In accordance to its established three-pronged strategy, the WoC has devised a five-year Work Plan in 2007. In 2008 specifically, the WoC will –

- (a) further promote gender mainstreaming and establish gender focal points in District Councils;
- (b) commission a large-scale survey on women's self-perception;
- (c) continue to promote FEPPs to employers, in particular the small and medium sized enterprises;
- (d) collaborate with Labour Department and other stakeholders to collect examples of good practices on FEPPs and publish a booklet to further promote FEPPs;
- (e) attend the annual session of CSW and organise a parallel event on women empowerment, and visit the Mainland and Macao for mutual exchange;
- (f) continue operation and promotion of CBMP;
- (g) continue promotion of quality parenting;
- (h) follow up the initiatives on women's safety;
- (i) consider strategies to promote interests of women in serving on ASBs and follow up with Government on increasing the working target for women's participation in ASBs from the current 25% to 30%;
- (j) conduct regular district visits and meet with professional and women's groups to enhance communication and strengthen partnership;
- (k) mobilise district resources to provide leadership training for leaders of local women's groups;
- (l) launch public education programme, and implement initiatives to enhance gender awareness of different target groups;
- (m) organise event for celebration of International Women's Day;

and

- (n) conduct roving exhibition and produce a publication to showcase women's contribution and development in Hong Kong.

ADVICE SOUGHT

- 26. Members are invited to note the content of this progress report.

Women's Commission Secretariat
Labour and Welfare Bureau
March 2008

**Membership list of the Women's Commission
(with effect from 15 January 2008)**

Non-official Members

Ms KAO Ching-chi, Sophia, J.P. (Chairperson)

Dr CHAN Lai-foon, Miranda

Ms CHAU Chuen-heung, MH, J.P.

Ms CHENG Ming-fung, Jacqueline

Ms FONG Man-ying

Ms Ruth GEE

Dr Sharmila GURUNG

Dr HUI Ka-wah, Ronnie, J.P.

Ms KO Po-ling, M.H., J.P.

Mrs LAU KUN Lai-kuen, Stella, J.P.

Ms LAU Ka-shi

Ms LAU Lai-hing, Joanna

Mr LAW Kin-chung, Christopher

Mr LEE Luen-fai

Ms Ayesha MACPHERSON

Prof TAM Siu-mi, Maria

Prof TANG Wai-king, Grace, J.P.

Dr YEUNG Ka-ching

Ex-Officio Members

Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Vice-Chairperson)

Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs or representative

Director of Social Welfare or representative

Terms of Reference of the Women's Commission

The Women's Commission is tasked to promote the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong. As such, it –

- (a) advises the Government on the development of a long term vision and strategies related to the development and advancement of women;
- (b) advises the Government on the integration of policies and initiatives which are of concern to women, which fall under the purview of different Policy Bureaux;
- (c) keeps under review, in the light of women's needs, services delivered within and outside the Government and to identify priority areas for action, and monitor the development of new or improved services;
- (d) initiates and undertakes independent surveys and research studies on women's issues and organises educational and promotional activities; and
- (e) develops and maintains contact with local and international women's groups and service agencies with a view to sharing experiences and improving communication and understanding.