

Family Perspectives in the Policy-making Process

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the Government's commitment to feature family perspectives as an important consideration in the policy-making process. Members are invited to give views on the guiding questions set out at paragraph 4 below to help policy-makers better consider family perspectives in the policy-making process.

Making family perspective a major consideration in policy-making process

2. The Chief Executive has pledged in his 2008/09 Policy Address that the Government is committed to look into ways to include the family as a factor to consider in its policy-making process. Considerations of family perspectives help the Government balance competing needs of families more effectively in making policies, thus enabling major policy proposals to gain support from the community more readily.

How to implement family perspectives in policy-making process

3. It is most important that policy-makers have good family awareness and sensitivity; can identify the different needs of families and family members; and balance such considerations against other policy objectives and considerations.

4. We have drawn reference to examples of the United States and New Zealand (at *Annex A*), and worked out a list of guiding questions below, which are built on the family core values identified by the Family Council, to assist the policy-makers in considering the family perspectives during the process of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies :

List of questions on consideration of family perspectives

Policy-makers will be invited to consider whether and how the proposed policy/policies will give proper regard to -

Love and Care:

- reinforce the families and relationship amongst the family members (e.g. foster marital relationships; enhance parental competence and knowledge and commitment necessary for raising children; enhance inter-generational relationship)
- foster mutual care of family members towards one another, including those with special needs
- protect family members from abuse, violence or neglect

Respect and Responsibilities:

- respect the rights of family members
- enforce family members' obligations to provide support (be it financial or other forms of support) to one another
- recognize the reciprocal influence of family needs on individual needs and vice versa

Communication and Harmony:

- facilitate communication amongst family members
- enable family members to better balance work, family and community commitments
- strengthen the connection to the wider kin and community / neighborhood networks

5. A *hypothetical example* is provided at *Annex B* as an illustration of application of family considerations in the policy-making process.

6. Relevant Government departments will also be encouraged to make use of relevant family data in the policy formulation and programme implementation processes. Reference will also be made to the publications and thematic reports published by the Census and Statistics Department.

Advice Sought

7. Members are invited to note the Government's decision on including family as a factor to consider in the policy-making process, and to comment on the questions set out at paragraph 4 above.

Family Council secretariat
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OVERSEAS EXAMPLES ON THE ADOPTION OF FAMILY PERSPECTIVES

United States' Experience: A Checklist for Assessing the Impact of Policies on Families

The first step in developing family-friendly policies is to ask the right questions:

- What can government and community institutions do to enhance the family's capacity to help itself and others ?
- What effect does (or will) this policy (or program) have for families ? Will it help or hurt, strengthen or weaken family life ?

The questions sound simple, but they can be difficult to answer.

Each of the 6 principles is accompanied by a series of family impact questions. The 6 principles are –

- Policies and programmes should aim to support and supplement family functioning and provide substitute services such as foster care only as a last resort.
- Policies and programmes should encourage and reinforce marital, parental and family commitment and stability especially when children are involved.
- Policies and programmes must recognise the interdependence of family relationships, the strength and persistence of family ties and obligations, and the wealth of resources that families can mobilise to help their members.

- Policies and programmes must treat families as partners when providing services to individuals and as an essential resource in policy development, programme planning and evaluation.
- Policies and programmes must acknowledge and value the diversity of family life.
- Families in greatest economic and social need, as well as those determined to be most vulnerable to breakdown, need to be included in government policies and programmes.

Principle 1. Family support and responsibilities

Policies and programs should aim to support and supplement family functioning and provide substitute services only as a last resort.

Does the proposal or program:

- support and supplement parents' and other family members' ability to carry out their responsibilities?
- provide incentives for other persons to take over family functioning when doing so may not be necessary?
- set unrealistic expectations for families to assume financial and/or care-giving responsibilities for dependent, seriously ill, or disabled family members?
- enforce absent parents' obligations to provide financial support for their children?

Principle 2. Family membership and stability

Whenever possible, policies and programs should encourage and reinforce marital, parental, and family commitment and stability, especially when children are involved. Intervention in family membership and living arrangements is usually justified only to protect family members from serious harm or at the request of the family itself.

Does the policy or program:

- provide incentives or disincentives to marry, separate, or divorce?
- provide incentives or disincentives to give birth to, foster, or adopt children?
- strengthen marital commitment or parental obligations?
- use appropriate criteria to justify removal of a child or adult from the family?
- allocate resources to help keep the marriage or family together when this is the appropriate goal?
- recognize that major changes in family relationships such as divorce or adoption are processes that extend over time and require continuing support and attention?

Principle 3. Family involvement and interdependence

Policies and programs must recognize the interdependence of family relationships, the strength and persistence of family ties and obligations, and the wealth of resources that families can mobilize to help their members.

To what extent does the policy or program:

- recognize the reciprocal influence of family needs on individual needs, and the influence of individual needs on family needs?
- recognize the complexity and responsibilities involved in caring for family members with special needs (e.g. physically or mentally disabled, or chronically ill)?
- involve immediate and extended family members in working toward a solution?
- acknowledge the power and persistence of family ties, even when they are problematic or destructive?
- build on informal social support networks (such as community/neighborhood organizations, religious communities) that are essential to families' lives?
- respect family decisions about the division of labor?
- address issues of power inequity in families?
- ensure perspectives of all family members are represented?

- assess and balance the competing needs, rights, and interests of various family members?
- protect the rights and safety of families while respecting parents' rights and family integrity?

Principle 4. Family partnership and empowerment

Policies and programs must encourage individuals and their close family members to collaborate as partners with program professionals in delivery of services to an individual. In addition, parent and family representatives are an essential resource in policy and program development, implementation, and evaluation.

In what specific ways does the policy or program:

- provide full information and a range of choices to families?
- respect family autonomy and allow families to make their own decisions? On what principles are family autonomy breached and program staff allowed to intervene and make decisions?
- encourage professionals to work in collaboration with the families of their clients, patients, or students?
- take into account the family's need to coordinate the multiple services required? Does it integrate well with other programs and services that the families use?
- make services easily accessible to families in terms of location, operating hours, and easy-to-use application and intake forms?
- prevent participating families from being devalued, stigmatized, or subjected to humiliating circumstances?
- involve parents and family representatives in policy and program development, implementation, and evaluation?

Principle 5. Family diversity

Families come in many forms and configurations, and policies and programs must take into account their varying effects on different types of families. Policies and programs must acknowledge and value the diversity of family life and not discriminate against or penalize families solely for reasons of structure, roles, cultural values, or life stage.

How does the policy or program:

- affect various types of families?
- acknowledge intergenerational relationships and responsibilities among family members?
- provide good justification for targeting only certain family types, for example, only employed parents or single parents? Does it discriminate against or penalize other types of families for insufficient reason?
- identify and respect the different values, attitudes, and behavior of families from various racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, and geographic backgrounds that are relevant to program effectiveness?

Principle 6. Support of vulnerable families

Families in greatest economic and social need, as well as those determined to be most vulnerable to breakdown, should be included in government policies and programs.

Does the policy or program:

- identify and publicly support services for families in the most extreme economic or social need?
- give support to families who are most vulnerable to breakdown and have the fewest resources?
- target efforts and resources toward preventing family problems before they become serious crises or chronic situations?

New Zealand's Experience : A Checklist for Assessing the Impact of Policies on Families

1. Family Recognition and Support

- How are recognition and support for families demonstrated by the policy?
- Does the policy help family members to carry out their responsibilities without undermining their autonomy?
- What efforts are made to support families who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or at risk?
- What attention, if any, is given to the broad societal context and its impact on families?
- Does the policy recognise the connectedness of families to wider kin and community networks?
- How does the policy address and balance individual and family needs?

2. Family Diversity

- How does the policy affect different types of families? Does it provide good justification for targeting only certain family types?
- Is identifying and respecting the cultural, ethnic, religious, sexual diversity of families relevant to the policy's effectiveness?
- To what extent do the underlying assumptions about families on which this policy is based appropriately reflect an understanding of the diversity of family types and family needs?
- Does the policy acknowledge family relationships and responsibilities across households and generations?
- Does the policy enhance capacities in ways that are consistent with Māori cultural identity and self-determination?

3. Family Living Standards

- Does the policy affect families' ability to maintain an adequate standard of living?
- Does the policy affect families' ability to advance economically and build family assets?

4. Family Formation/Dissolution

- Does the policy provide any incentives or disincentives for family decisions to marry, divorce, separate, bear/adopt children etc?
- What is done to support the resiliency of families in self-managing through transition, adversity and change?

5. Family Functioning

- To what extent does the policy address the safety of families and family members, preventing abuse, violence or neglect?
- How does the policy uphold or enforce parental obligations?
- How does the policy enhance parental competence and promote the knowledge, skills and commitment necessary for raising children?
- How does the policy support the mutual care of family members, including children, older people, members with disabilities and those who are sick or vulnerable?
- Does the policy affect the ability of families to transmit culture, knowledge and values across generations?
- Does the policy affect families' ability to balance paid work, family and community commitments?
- What efforts are made to ensure that the rights of individual family members are respected within families?
- What are the implications of power relations within families for the policy?

6. Family Participation

- How does the policy consider the importance of partnerships between government agencies, communities and families in meeting the needs of families?
- In what ways does the policy ensure that families have access to effective services?
- In what ways does the policy remove the barriers to families' participation in social and economic life?
- What opportunities are provided for families to participate in the development, implementation, delivery and evaluation of policies and services?
- How does the policy empower communities to respond to family needs?

If by completing this checklist the policy analyst identifies any potential direct or indirect negative impacts they should consider using a more rigorous method for assessing the scope and duration of the potential impacts, and whether or not they could be avoided. Such methods might include economic analysis, gender analysis and impact assessment.

**ILLUSTRATION OF APPLICATION OF FAMILY
PERSPECTIVES IN THE POLICY-MAKING PROCESS**

Hypothetical Example:

Proposed Policy on the “Authorization of soccer, horse race and Mark Six betting in Hong Kong”

Issue

To tackle the problem of illegal gambling which has led to a continued decline in turnover on authorized soccer, horse race and mark six betting.

Considerations of family perspectives

We note that concerns were raised by some anti-gambling groups that the proposal might aggravate social and family problems. We are of the view that the corresponding regulatory controls imposed on the licensed operators (e.g. the strict prohibition to take bets from the under-aged) and the preventive and remedial measures to tackle excessive gambling problems should help address such concerns.

On balance, the proposal has a relatively positive impact on families compared to a “Do-nothing” alternative. The proposal could help combat illegal gambling and alleviate associated criminal activities, and maintain the betting duty revenue at a steady level.

We note that excessive and/or illegal gambling definitely has a negative impact on family relationship and harmony amongst family members.

Authorization of the above-said forms of betting will help channel illegal betting to proper and regulated outlets, and therefore help alleviate or minimize the harms and social evils associated with illegal betting through the “under-ground” bookmakers.

Public education and prevention of excessive gambling through treatment and counselling services will be strengthened alongside the authorization/regulation proposal to help problem and pathological gamblers. Considerations will be given to the family needs and individual needs and the support packages will be designed to address the problems encountered by individuals and families in a more comprehensive and balanced manner (e.g. group and family therapy which encourages a frank and open discussion of problems faced by the gamblers with their families and friends, on top of individual counselling).

The support packages mentioned above would encourage problem and pathological gamblers and their families to prioritize their various engagements and, if possible, link them to a support network not only within the families but with other gamblers' families who face similar problems. By helping problem and pathological gamblers to refrain from further indulging in excessive gambling, they could better perform their roles and resume their normal life as soon as practicable.

Moreover, through the early and easier identification of problem and pathological gamblers, there is a higher likelihood that their family members may be protected from abuse, violence or neglect at the earliest possible instance.

We have considered totally banning gambling practices and outlets in Hong Kong. Nonetheless, this is not practicable in terms of enforcement and also revenue considerations.

To conclude, we believe that even if the Government bans gambling, there is a high possibility for proliferation of the illegal market. This would lead to even more crimes and higher social costs in the end which could be even more detrimental to families in Hong Kong.