

FAMILY COUNCIL

Progress Report of the Women's Commission

This paper sets out the progress of work of the Women's Commission (WoC) in recent years and its work plan in 2011.

BACKGROUND

2. WoC was established in January 2001 as a high-level central mechanism to advise the Government on policies and initiatives which are of concern to women, and develop a long-term vision and strategy for the development and advancement of women in Hong Kong. Its membership and terms of reference are at **Annex**.

3. 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 empowerment of women through capacity building, provision of an enabling environment and public education. Its major accomplishments in the past years in advancing the status of women in Hong Kong are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND PLANS AHEAD

Empowering Women

Quality Parenting Education

4. Parenting is an issue of great concern to women. Women nowadays find parenting enormously stressful and hope to be able to receive support in this regard. WoC has thus embarked on two major initiatives, namely a study on core life values and quality parenting pilot projects, in order to promote quality parenting education in the community.

5. Noting that parenting education available in Hong Kong usually focused on parenting skills and resolving parenting problems only, WoC saw the need to study the development of children's value system which would help them develop the ability to withstand adversity. In late 2005, WoC commissioned a study on the core life values with a view to forging a consensus on a set of core values that should be inculcated in children. Views of stakeholders including education practitioners, experts in the parenting field, parents and children were collected.

6. Moreover, to set up a network of mutual help and information sharing among parents and relevant parties including schools and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), a quality parenting pilot project was launched by WoC. Through the project, WoC also aimed to encourage men to share responsibility in parenting so as to eliminate gender stereotyping of family roles and bring family functions into fuller play. WoC decided that the pilot project should be districted-based so that the above message could be effectively disseminated in the community. As a result, WoC collaborated with the Kwun Tong District Council (DC), North DC and NGOs in the respective districts to roll out the Pilot Project in these districts between 2006 and 2008. A wide range of activities, including lectures, seminars, workshops, day-camps, carnivals, sharing sessions, etc. were organised to enhance the parenting skills of the participants and had received very positive feedback.

7. In 2010, WoC produced a concluding paper to summarise its experience in promoting quality parenting education in the community and put forward recommendations on further promotion efforts. The paper has been passed to the Family Council for reference.

Capacity Building Mileage Programme

8. Launched in 2004, the Capacity Building Mileage Programme (CBMP) is a key initiative of WoC in empowering women. CBMP provides flexible learning opportunities tailored to the needs and interests of women. It is delivered through radio broadcasting and courses offered face-to-face and on the internet, supplemented by optional learning activities. The courses include building harmonious families, parenting, family health, women leadership, management of personal finance and other practical issues in daily life.

9. Since its launch, CBMP has encouraged women of different backgrounds and educational levels to pursue life-long learning and

self-development. CBMP has recorded a cumulative enrolment of over 44 000 since 2004. In addition, according to a survey conducted in 2008, about 720 000 people had listened to the radio programme in the preceding year of the survey. Feedback from students was that they had benefited from the programme in terms of increased interests in learning, enhanced confidence and knowledge in problem solving in daily life, and sharpened communication skills which helped improve their interpersonal relationships in the family and employment contexts.

10. With proven success in encouraging women's life-long learning, the Government allocated \$20 million in 2009-10 to expand the Programme and provide fee remissions to women with financial difficulty for the next three years. As a result, the bursary scheme of CBMP has been expanded such that in addition to recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, women from low-income families can also benefit from the scheme. In 2011, WoC will discuss the long-term funding arrangement for CBMP with the Government.

Women's Participation in Advisory and Statutory Bodies

11. WoC has been working closely with the Home Affairs Bureau in promoting women's participation in advisory and statutory bodies (ASBs). On the advice of WoC, the Government increased the gender benchmark target for participation in ASBs from 25% to 30% with effect from June 2010. In July 2010, WoC issued a letter to women's associations and professional organisations inviting their female members to provide their curriculum vitae to the Central Personality Index maintained by the Government with a view to enhancing women's participation in ASBs. In the coming years, WoC will continue to encourage more women to participate in ASBs, and work with the Government to further raising the gender benchmark target at a suitable juncture, with the ultimate objective of achieving equal participation of men and women in ASBs.

Women's Health

12. Women's health has always been a subject of concern to WoC. Over the years, WoC has, through meetings with the Food and Health Bureau and Department of Health (DH), assisted in reviewing the public health services and health promotion programme provided for women. Meetings were also held with women's groups and NGOs to understand their concerns in relation to women's health. WoC is currently working with DH to enhance the promotion of women-related

health services provided by the Government.

Women's Safety

13. Women's safety remains a priority area of work of WoC. Following the publication of "Women's Safety in Hong Kong: Eliminating Domestic Violence" which sets out a multi-dimensional strategy to eliminate domestic violence and puts forward 21 recommendations, WoC has been closely monitoring the development of policies and measures in relation to women's safety in Hong Kong. In August 2009, WoC published a supplement to the report to take stock of developments and aspects that require continuous efforts. Making reference to the supplement report, WoC will, in 2011, continue to work with the Government in tackling domestic violence, including exploring ways to enhance the integrated services provided to victims as appropriate. Exchange session with stakeholders including NGOs and women's groups will also be held for WoC to listen to their views on women safety.

Provision of an Enabling Environment

Gender Mainstreaming

14. Gender mainstreaming is a key strategy in promoting women's interests and gender equality by taking into account the needs and perspectives of both genders in the decision-making process. WoC has been advising and assisting the Government on the implementation of gender mainstreaming in different policy and programme areas, including developing a Gender Mainstreaming Checklist (the Checklist) to assist Government officers in applying gender mainstreaming in a systematic manner. To date, the Checklist has been applied to nearly 40 specific policies and programmes areas.

15. Taking into account the experience gained in applying the Checklist and in implementing the gender mainstreaming concept by the Government over the years, WoC revised the Checklist in 2009-10 in consultation with stakeholders, including women's groups, gender focal points (GFPs) and academics specialized in gender issues. The revised Checklist provides better assistance to Government officers in applying gender mainstreaming in different policy and programme areas.

16. To promote gender mainstreaming in the community, WoC established a network of GFP in DCs in late 2008. Each of the 18 DCs

has now designated a Member as the GFP to facilitate communication and collaboration between the DCs and WoC. Since the establishment of the GFP network in the DCs, WoC has visited 15 DCs to introduce the work of WoC and explore collaboration opportunities. WoC is pleased to note that Yau Tsim Mong DC and Yuen Long DC have each established a dedicated working group on women's affairs. Tsuen Wan DC, Sai Kung DC, Shatin DC, Yau Tsim Mong DC and Southern DC have, over the years, allocated resources to organise gender-related activities, such as workshops on gender mainstreaming and programmes on women leadership training. WoC has also written to all ASBs to introduce the concept of gender mainstreaming and encourage them to adopt the concept in the course of their work as appropriate.

Family Friendly Employment Policies and Practices

17. WoC believes that it is vital for women and men to share out family responsibilities such that both can achieve a better balance between work, family and life, and that women would be enabled to improve their economic and general well-being. To promote the implementation of family friendly employment policies and practices, WoC has produced a series of leaflets and delivered talks at two conferences, reaching an audience of many hundreds of business sector and human resources professionals. Moving forward, the Labour Department will continue to take forward initiatives on the promotion of family friendly employment policies and practices and WoC will continue to provide advice from the women's perspective as appropriate.

Research and surveys on women issues

18. WoC has continued to conduct researches and surveys in order to gain a better understanding of women's needs and issues of concern, and to shed light on policies relating to women's development. In 2010, WoC commissioned a large-scale survey in order to understand the current status of women and different perceptions between women and men towards women's status in the aspects of family contribution, economic participation and community engagement in Hong Kong. Results of the surveys were widely publicized through press conferences and radio broadcast. In 2011, WoC will start to prepare for a study on the use of time by women to track the changes since the last study conducted in 2001.

Review of Legislations, Policies and Programmes

19. WoC has from time to time met with different Government bureaux and departments to review women-related policies and services and to provide advice from the women's perspective. In 2010, WoC reviewed HKSAR's Third Report on the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, reform on healthcare services, and legislation on minimum wage, etc.. Based on WoC's advice, follow-up actions were taken by relevant bureaux and departments as appropriate. In 2011, WoC plans to review support services for new arrival women, the Mandatory Provident Fund, gender education, and women's participation in ASBs, etc..

Public Education

20. To facilitate changes in misconception about the roles, values, images and capabilities of the two genders, WoC has devoted much effort to public education and publicity with the aim of reducing gender prejudice and stereotyping, as well as raising public awareness of women-related issues. Such programmes include forums and seminars, television series on capacity building and empowerment of women, radio programmes, announcements of public interest on television and radio and posters, as well as various types of competitions, and celebration events for the International Women's Day on 8 March every year. In 2011, WoC will produce a TV drama series and 5-minuter TV series to mark the 10th anniversary of WoC and to enable the public to have a better understanding of the situation of women in Hong Kong.

21. WoC also organised large-scale conferences from time to time to enable stakeholders from different sectors to share and exchange views on issues related to the advancement of women's interests and well-being. In 2006, WoC organised a conference entitled "Together We Build a Harmonious Community", attracting over 400 delegates from Hong Kong and the Mainland to discuss and explore the future directions and strategies in promoting gender equality and advancing the status of women in Hong Kong. In 2009, WoC organised another large-scale conference entitled "Beyond Limits – Women in the 21st Century", to review Hong Kong's implementation of the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and provide a platform for participants to discuss issues related to the development of women in Hong Kong. The conference was attended by over 500 guests from relevant non-governmental organisations, professional bodies, government departments and schools.

Collaboration

22. WoC recognises and appreciates the important contribution made by the non-governmental sector and women's groups in advancing the interests of women in Hong Kong. All along, WoC has maintained close communication with women's groups and NGOs through various activities, meetings and sharing sessions. WoC regularly meets with local women's groups and service agencies, attends and supports their activities, as well as pays visits to different districts.

23. In September 2010, WoC organised the "Beijing+15 Forum: Progress and Prospects of Women's Development - the International and Hong Kong Experience". The Forum provided a platform for participants to review Hong Kong's progress in implementing the "Beijing Platform for Action" as well as the international experience on this front. The Forum was well attended by GFPs and representatives from women's groups and relevant NGOs. In 2011, WoC will continue to cooperate with stakeholders in the districts in organising relevant activities including women leadership training programmes.

Women's Development Goals

24. Building on the experience and understanding of women's issues gathered since its establishment, WoC will formulate women's development goals in 2011 in consultation with relevant stakeholders. To achieve this important task, WoC has set up a dedicated Task Force to take forward the matter. Since its establishment last year, the Task Force has conducted several rounds of meetings with women's groups and NGOs concerned. WoC targets to publish a report to set out recommendations on women's development for consideration by the Government in late 2011.

CONCLUSION

25. Among the initiatives of WoC mentioned above, quality parenting education, family friendly employment policies and practices, as well as elimination of domestic violence are particularly relevant to the interests and well-being of families. In the future, WoC will continue its work to promote the well-being of women, including facilitating women in the building of harmonious families.

ADVICE SOUGHT

26. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Women's Commission Secretariat
Labour and Welfare Bureau
February 2011**

**Membership list of the Women's Commission
(with effect from 15 January 2011)**

Non-official Members

Ms. KAO Ching-chi, Sophia (Chairperson)

Ms AU Pei-yee, Teresa

Ms AU YEUNG Po-chun

Dr CHEUNG Suk-yee, Polly

Mrs Judith ELLIS

Ms FONG Man-ying

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Dr KOONG May-kay, Maggie

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Mr LAW Kin-chung, Christopher

Ms LEE Lai-ching, Ally

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Ms Ayesha Abbas MacPherson

Ms WONG Hang-yee, Sandy

Ms WONG Pui-yee, Catherine

Mr WONG Yao-wing, Robert

Ms YUE Mui-ying, Constance

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.