

WOMEN'S COMMISSION

Work of the Women's Commission: Progress and Future Work Focus

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to inform members of the Equal Opportunities Commission of the progress of work of the Women's Commission and plans for the coming year.

BACKGROUND

2. The Women's Commission was set up on 15 January 2001 as a central mechanism tasked with identifying all women's needs and addressing matters of concern to women in a holistic and systematic manner. It takes a strategic overview over women's issues. A copy of its terms of reference is at Annex. It will develop a long-term vision and strategy for the development and advancement of women. It advises the Government on policies and initiatives which are of concern to women and seeks to ensure that women's perspectives are factored in during the formulation of policies and legislation as appropriate.

3. The Commission has set itself the mission "to enable women to fully realise their due status, rights and opportunities in all aspects of life". The Commission has identified three priority areas of action, namely, gender mainstreaming, empowerment of women and public education. Respective dedicated Task Forces have been established to take forward work related to these three areas.

Gender Mainstreaming

4. Gender mainstreaming aims to integrate women's perspectives in legislation, public policies and programmes. Action has been taken in the following areas:-

- (a) development of a gender mainstreaming strategy and tool;
- (b) capacity building for civil servants, i.e. provision of tailor-made gender-related training programmes;
- (c) research on overseas experience in gender mainstreaming; and
- (d) conduct of a mailed questionnaire survey on the extent and level of positions taken up by women in the private sector in Hong Kong.

5. On the development of a gender mainstreaming strategy and tool, a Gender Mainstreaming Checklist has been developed to facilitate government officials to incorporate gender perspectives into programme, policy and legislation formulation and implementation. The Checklist is being pilot tested in five policy areas commencing in March 2002. A review will be carried out in August 2002 to evaluate the usefulness of the checklist.

Empowerment of Women

6. Empowerment comprises processes at the individual and collective levels. At the individual level, empowerment involves capacity building for women; developing a sense of self-worth, believing in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to make choices for one's own life; gaining the ability to generate and exercise choices; and developing capability to organise and influence the direction of social changes. At the collective level, empowerment requires the creation of enabling environments which facilitate women's advancement and full participation in economic, social and political decision making. By empowerment of women, the Women's Commission seeks to increase women's self-reliance and internal strength, as well as to release their "common sense power", so that they would be better equipped to rise to life's challenges. The Commission also seeks to engage women as agents of change, and to eliminate barriers to women's full participation in the community with a view to bringing about realisation of the full potentials of women.

7. The Empowerment Task Force of the Commission has:-
- (a) reviewed women's participation in Government advisory boards and statutory bodies;
 - (b) conducted an initial review of the current services for women provided by departments (including Social Welfare Department, Home Affairs Department, Education Department and the Employees Retraining Board) and advised on improvements to existing services for women; and
 - (c) supported and advised on the establishment of Community Investment and Involvement Fund (CIIF);
8. For the coming year, the Empowerment Task Force would take action on the following:-
- (a) compiling good empowerment practices;
 - (b) encouraging and facilitating capacity building initiatives;
 - (c) compiling a directory of services for women;
 - (d) enhancing women's participation in decision making; and
 - (e) exploring new models of services, e.g. providing establishment of more mutual help services among women adopting the membership model, and provision of community level women health care centres, etc.
9. For (a) and (c) above, the Empowerment Task Force would invite contributions from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and service agencies. As for increasing women's role in decision-making, the Task Force is exploring with Home Affairs Bureau measures to enhance women's participation in Government's advisory and statutory bodies.

Public Education

10. The objectives of publicity and public education efforts are to enhance public knowledge of the Women's Commission's work, address commonly held misconceptions about the roles, values and images of women and raise public awareness of women-related issues. The Public Education Task Force has launched a large-scale media and publicity campaign, which includes:-

- broadcasting Announcement of Public Interest on TV and radio;
- printing and distributing publicity posters;
- showing a docu-drama series on TV based on real life stories of women;
- conducting a series of community activities, including a translation competition on the term "Empowerment";
- giving TV and radio interviews; and
- placing advertisement on "Community Star" newspapers and bus bodies.

Women's Commission Conference 2002

11. To stimulate public discussion of gender-related issues and to bring home overseas perspectives and experience, the Women's Commission is organising a conference entitled "Women for a Better Tomorrow" on 10 – 11 May 2002. Overseas speakers, including experts from the Asia-Pacific region, and senior representatives of the All-China Women's Federation have been invited to address the Conference. Around 400 participants from local women groups and services agencies are expected to attend, especially those coming from grassroot backgrounds.

12. During the Conference, breakout sessions and informal networking sessions on gender mainstreaming, empowerment and public education will also be carried out, where NGOs and individuals will participate

to share ideas and experiences in these areas. The opportunity will also be taken for NGOs to showcase their work on women's issues in a "Marketplace". Furthermore, many women groups and organisations will host community activities with a focus on women in the month of May.

Surveys and Research

13. To better understand women's issues in Hong Kong, the Commission has commissioned surveys and studies in the following areas:-

- (a) time use pattern of women (especially homemakers) and men and factors hindering women's participation in the community;
- (b) extent of satisfaction of women in Hong Kong in respect of their current state of affairs;
- (c) distribution of women employees at different levels and in different disciplines of private business establishments in Hong Kong; and
- (d) community perception of various gender issues.

14. Furthermore, the Women Commission had given advice on the Census and Statistics Department's (C&SD) report on "Women and Men in Hong Kong: Key Statistics" which was published in August 2001.

Partnership with the Community

15. As part of the effort to solicit ideas and to exchange views with the community on issues of concern to women, the Women's Commission liaises with interested groups through:-

- (a) regular visits to local women's groups and service organisations;
- (b) holding an Open Forum on 21 July 2001 to discuss the future direction of the Commission's work; and

- (c) meeting with women's groups and service agencies in October 2001 to discuss issues related to the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund.

16. The Women's Commission will continue to build partnership with women's groups, NGOs, government organisations, academia and community groups to work together on issues of concern to women in Hong Kong. Such efforts will not only promote advancement of women, but also help build a sense of co-operation and enhance social cohesion which would benefit society as a whole.

Women's Commission Secretariat
20 March 2002

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 will –

- (a) advise the Government on the development of a long term vision and strategies related to the development and advancement of women;
- (b) advise 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) keep 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) initiate and undertake independent surveys and research studies on women's issues and organise educational and promotional activities; and
- (e) develop and maintain contact with local and international women's groups and service agencies with a view to sharing experiences and improving communication and understanding.
