

WOMEN'S COMMISSION

Enhancing Population Potential for a Sustainable Future

PURPOSE

This paper provides Members with an overview of the captioned Invitation and Response (IR) document and some pointers for discussion at the meeting.

BACKGROUND

2. The Council of Sustainable Development (the Council) issued an IR document on “Enhancing Population Potential for a Sustainable Future” in June 2006 to engage the public to discuss on the sustainable population policy. A copy of the IR document is attached at [Annex A](#) for Members’ reference.

3. The IR document pointed out that Hong Kong has witnessed significant economic development and population growth in the past decades but the growth trend will undergo changes in the years ahead as a result of –

- ✧ declining fertility rate
- ✧ ageing of the population
- ✧ longer life expectancy
- ✧ population movements
- ✧ changing dependency ratio

Without a sustainable population policy, Hong Kong may face the following possible situation –

- ✧ a shrinking labour force
- ✧ over dependency on the working population
- ✧ a loss of valuable human capital in the population
- ✧ a possible loss of talent
- ✧ a compromised quality of life for our population
- ✧ a decline in the dynamism and vibrancy of our city

4. The IR document sets out some possible options for consideration from the economic, social and environmental perspectives as follows –

(a) Economic Perspective

- ✧ Enhancing the capacity of the labour force by providing appropriate education and training, as well as advocating the extension of the population's working life or gradually raising their retirement age.
- ✧ Unleashing hidden human capital by promoting and encouraging participation of women and the elderly in the workforce.
- ✧ Attracting talent from the Mainland and abroad, and retaining local talent amidst the immense global competition.

(b) Social Perspective

- ✧ Addressing the social needs of different sectors of the community, including working women, the elderly, and people with disabilities or chronic diseases, to ensure that their energy and experience are properly channeled to the benefit of our society.
- ✧ Enhancing the quality of life by promoting healthier lifestyles and a better balance between work, family and leisure.
- ✧ Advocating a flexible life horizon to promote individual choices on life pattern.
- ✧ Promoting cultural diversity and ethnic inclusiveness, as well as addressing the social and family needs of immigrants and minorities, so that they feel welcomed and accepted.

(c) Environmental Perspective

- ✧ Conserving and preserving natural resources.
- ✧ Creating a living environment that is attractive to locals and incomers.
- ✧ Building an accessible environment for all.

5. The Council invites the community to participate in the discussion and put forward their views on the issues as set out in the IR document. The Chairperson of Women's Commission (WoC) has earlier attended one of the regional forums organised by the Council in July 2006. The speech delivered by the Chairperson is attached at Annex B (in Chinese only) for Members' reference. The Council's engagement process will be completed by end October 2006.

6. The population policy will no doubt have significant impact on the interests of women. The Secretariat of the Council is therefore invited to attend the WoC meeting to brief Members on this subject so as to facilitate a focused discussion on a number of key issues raised in the IR document. Views expressed by Members at the meeting will be collated and put into a written submission to the Council. The draft submission will be circulated for Members' comments in due course.

ADVICE SOUGHT

7. For this discussion session, Members are invited to give views on the issues raised in the IR document, with particular focus on the following issues –

- (a) The overall male labour force participation rate is much higher than women, despite the education attainment of both sexes has continued to rise. A portion of the female population may find it difficult to participate in the labour force while accommodating their personal goals and family needs. ***How could we unleash this hidden human capital by promoting and encouraging participation of women in the workforce?***
- (b) The traditional expectation that women are responsible for the care of their families remains. Women are often faced with making the difficult choice between career and family. ***How could we help women attain equilibrium among career development, family commitments and parenthood aspirations?***
- (c) The fertility rate per women has declined substantially from 3 in 1980 to 0.966 in 2005. Noting that parenthood is a personal choice, ***how could we create a favourable environment for child bearing and nurturing to effectively promote parenthood?***

**WoC Secretariat
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