



2 Early Days

Building the path Setting the direction

The Women's Commission's role within the Government is to be a high-level central mechanism to develop women's strategies in a holistic and systematic manner; advise the Administration on policies, legislation and services affecting women; and assist in implementing CEDAW and other international conventions relating to women, etc. It is also distinguished by being a government body that tackles issues which lie at the heart of discrimination but not unlawful, for example, sexism and stereotypes. It identifies and addresses the needs of women, and promotes women's development and empowerment.

Members of the Commission, comprised 18 non-official members and four ex-officio members, were selected for a three-year term and came from a variety of backgrounds and interests. They included women - and men - who had worked on women's health, development, violence against women and many other issues. Three days after Members were formally appointed, a meeting was held to discuss how the Commission should operate. We felt it was important to talk about the philosophy and broad direction of the Commission before setting out to develop a long-term direction and strategies for initiatives. The early days of the Commission were therefore spent identifying Hong Kong women's needs and concerns.

This involved widespread consultation with government, academia, women's groups, and the community in general. One example is the many visits to non-governmental organisations and service agencies. A typical Saturday might involve visits to at least two community organisations to hear their views and understand the services they provided for women. We consulted Mainland China and overseas experts, visited international organisations and collated the experiences and work of other central mechanisms for women.



There were also briefings by, and discussions with, government departments, including the Home Affairs Bureau, Social Welfare Department, Census and Statistics Department, Law Reform Commission, Planning Department, Department of Health and the then Education Department, on their perspectives and involvement in different women's issues. Despite the progress of the past decade, we were aware that women still faced many difficulties: economic pressure in middle age, those with dual roles burdened with family responsibilities, the threat of violence, and the need for capacity building and opportunities to realise their potential, etc.

Informal meetings, workshops and "soul-searching" sessions among Members then followed. There was a great deal of heartfelt talk and wisdom sharing. From these the Commission's vision, mission, values and priority areas of action arose. The mission we set for the Commission was: "to enable women to fully realise their due status, rights and opportunities in all aspects of life," with Members identifying three priority areas of action, namely Gender Mainstreaming, Empowerment of Women and Public Education, and agreeing that the Commission should focus on strategies rather than on organising or delivering services itself. It was felt this three-pronged approach would enable advancement of the status of women in Hong Kong in the short and long-term, tackle issues from a policy perspective and address community misconceptions.

In July 2001, we held an Open Forum on "The Future Direction of the Women's Commission" at the Hong Kong Science Museum Lecture Hall to discuss the Commission's intended future direction and its three priority action areas with local women's groups and other interested parties. The response was enthusiastic, with over 200 people from 80 women's organisations, service agencies, higher education institutions, community groups and representatives from government departments attending and generally endorsing our mission and work.

See also, "Structure," "Members' Reflections" and "Terms of Reference and Membership" in "Annex."