

## **Commission on Poverty**

### **Information Note on Government Policies and Measures in Alleviating Poverty**

#### **Purpose**

This paper sets out for Members' reference a general overview of the existing government policies and measures in alleviating poverty, and relevant measures in the pipeline. It aims to facilitate Members to have an exchange on their expectations on the work of and the priority areas to be addressed by the Commission.

#### **Policies and Measures in Alleviating Poverty**

2. The task of the Commission, as stated in the 2005 Policy Address, is to study, from a macro perspective, how to help the poor in terms of financial, employment, education and training needs. It will also explore practical ways to assist those who suffer from poverty due to old age, disability or single-parent family, particularly those in low-income employment.
3. The relevant policies and measures in alleviating poverty are enclosed -

*Enclosure I* sets out the policies and measures of the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB), covering our social security system, support services to the needy, health services as well as new initiatives as put forward in the 2005 Policy Address.

***Enclosure II*** sets out the policies and measures of the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), including free and universal education, student guidance support services, extra-curricular activities, IT and financial assistance, training and re-training services, and a number of new initiatives.

***Enclosure III*** provides an overview on the employment services provided by the Labour Department (LD) of the Economic Development and Labour Bureau (EDLB), including services targeted at the able-bodied, people with disabilities, the Middle-aged, youth; as well as new initiatives in the pipeline.

***Enclosure IV*** outlines the role of the Home Affairs Department (HAD), including district administration and community building work through the 18 District Offices (DOs).

Other relevant policies and measures areas (e.g. housing, transport) are not covered in the information note at this stage.

4. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper as a basis for considering the work programme of the Commission.

Commission Secretariat

February 2005

**Government Policies and Measures in Alleviating Poverty**

**Health, Welfare and Food Bureau**

**Purpose**

This paper informs Members of the policies and measures being taken by the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) to address the needs of the vulnerable groups. It also sets out the new initiatives of HWFB to help the needy as put forward in the 2005 Policy Address.

**Principles**

2. The vision of the Bureau in respect of health and social welfare is to build a 'Caring and Healthy Society'. Our mission is to create an environment of material support to help individuals and families overcome adversities, and provide a safety net to ensure that no one is deprived of basic needs and medical support because of the lack of financial means. We are guided by the following principles:

- We should target resources at helping those most in need in an effective way.
- Assistance should come in many forms and from different sources. Financial aid by the Government is not the only solution.
- We should foster the spirit of partnership and shared responsibility among different sectors of the community. Individuals should also be equipped to overcome adversities, rather than demotivated by falling into the trap of dependency.
- The social security system should be financially sustainable having regard to the use of precious public resources.

## **Resources**

3. In 2004-05, Government expenditure on health and welfare is estimated to reach \$64 billion, accounting for almost 30% of public expenditure, and representing 133% increase over the past ten years. Specifically, in 1994-95, we spent \$10.5 billion on welfare. This increased to \$33.7 billion in 2004-05. **Annex A** provides a graphical illustration of the growth in social welfare expenditure in recent years.

## **Measures To Alleviate Poverty**

### **(A) Social Security System**

#### *The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme*

4. The CSSA Scheme is set up to provide a safety net of last resort for those who cannot support themselves financially. It is non-contributory, cash-based and funded by public revenue.

5. Over the past decade, the CSSA scheme has evolved from a rudimentary welfare assistance programme to become a social protection scheme with comprehensive coverage. Whereas assistance was normally given in kind (such as rations) prior to 1970, nowadays CSSA recipients receive non-accountable, standard cash payments to meet their day-to-day basic needs (food, clothing and footwear, fuel and light, durable goods, etc.), with higher rates going to children, elderly and people with disabilities or ill health. Meanwhile, a wide range of special grants is available to meet recipients' special needs, covering rent, water/sewage charge, schooling expenses, childcare centre fees and burial expenses. Recipients who are old, disabled or medically certified to be in ill health are entitled to other special grants to meet their special needs, such as glasses, dentures, medically recommended diets, removal expenses, medical and surgical appliances. In addition, a monthly single parent supplement is payable to single parents and an annual long term supplement is payable to cases involving the elderly, the disabled and those medically certified to be in ill health. **Annex B** shows the eligibility criteria for CSSA, and some examples of average payments.

6. It is worth noting that:
- CSSA expenditure has increased drastically over the past decade, from \$3,427 million in 1994-95 to \$17,306 million in 2003-04. The average annual growth rate was 19.7% during the period.
  - CSSA expenditure as a percentage of total government recurrent expenditure increased from 3.2% to 8.7% over the same period.
  - As at December 2004, the total number of CSSA cases amounted to 295 694, representing an increase of about 182.1% over that in 1994; the total number of recipients stood at 542 017, representing an increase of 333.5% over that in 1994.
  - The proportion of expenditure on unemployment/low earnings/single parent family cases which involve mainly able-bodied recipients increased from 16.0% in 1994-95 to 41.4%.
  - The CSSA take up rate to Hong Kong's total population has increased from 2% in 1994/95 to 8% in 2004/05.

***Annex C*** shows the growth in CSSA expenditure and recipients in the past decade.

### ***Support for Self-reliance Scheme***

7. On top of cash assistance, our social security system has also been providing services and opportunities for people to equip themselves to be off benefits and lead a more fulfilling life. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) introduced the Support for Self-reliance Scheme in June 1999, and implemented enhanced measures in June 2003 to provide active employment assistance for unemployed able-bodied recipients to seek gainful jobs. By involving recipients in unpaid community work, SWD also tries to help them develop a work habit, build up self-esteem and self-confidence, and prepare for employment. SWD has also commissioned Non-governmental Organizations (NGO) to run intensive employment assistance projects

which aim at helping CSSA recipients move off benefits and rejoin the workforce. Since the introduction of the Support for Self-reliance Scheme in 1999, we have successfully turned 45 162 unemployed recipients into income earners.

### *Review of the CSSA Scheme*

8. The CSSA standard rates are reviewed regularly to take account of price changes with reference to the movement of the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices (SSAIP).

9. In addition, a household expenditure survey for CSSA households is conducted every five years, in addition to the annual adjustment. The aim is to update the SSAIP in light of the relative importance of individual items of goods and services consumed by CSSA households, to ensure that the index can more accurately reflect the expenditure pattern of CSSA households and the impact of price changes on the purchasing power represented by the CSSA standard rates. The latest household expenditure survey for CSSA households was conducted in 1999-2000. The Census and Statistics Department is conducting another household expenditure survey for 2004-05 this year.

10. In view of the fast growth in cases involving able-bodied adults over the past years, our emphasis at the moment is on continuing our efforts to help able-bodied recipients move into work. We are now conducting: (a) an evaluation of the intensive employment assistance projects implemented since October 2003 to help employable CSSA recipients and the 'near-CSSA' unemployed move into work; and (b) a review of existing CSSA arrangements and related services for single parent families on CSSA. The findings of both reviews are expected to be available in mid 2005.

11. We will also review the provision of disregarded earnings, which provides an incentive for recipients to seek and continue work, under the CSSA Scheme. The findings of the review are expected to be available in late 2005.

(B) **Support Services**

12. Apart from the social security scheme, SWD has put in place a wide range of welfare services to help those in need. The objectives of these services are to strengthen the capability of the socially disadvantaged in lifting themselves out of adversities, and to provide them with opportunity to participate in all sorts of economic and social activities. It is hoped that through these services, their inner strength, self-reliance and self-confidence can be enhanced. All those in need including low-income earners and CSSA recipients have access to these services by direct approach, on a referral basis or through the outreaching network of SWD. The following are some key examples of the services provided –

*Low-income Families*

13. We have developed a network of welfare services to cater for family needs through the provision of a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services. For example, there is an extensive network of Family Services Centres/Integrated Family Service Centres operated by SWD or NGOs over the territory to provide family support services to the needy. Services include counselling service, supportive groups and programmes, aiming at assisting individuals and families build up self-confidence and develop proper values, enhance parents' parenting skills and strengthen their skills in problem solving and stress management.

14. To encourage parents of low-income families to seek jobs so as to attain self-reliance, aided day nurseries and crèches are set up to serve families in need of child care support for their children aged under six. Ancillary services such as extended hours service and occasional child care services are available to cater for the special needs of the parents, for example, for parents working long hours or parents having sudden commitment. Mutual help child care centres are also developed to provide occasional care and supervision for children on a mutual help basis.

15. Low-income families with a social need to place their children in full day care can also receive financial assistance through the Fee Assistance Scheme for Child Care Centres. Applicants have to pass the means test and satisfy the social need criteria, such as both parents working, single-parent families or parents who are chronically ill or disabled. The amount of assistance payable is determined by the number of the applicant's family members, the family's total income and the recognized rent. The maximum amount of assistance payable will be based on the fees charged in the aided child care centre. Eligibility criteria for fee assistance are at ***Annex D***.

### ***Children & Youth***

16. Children and youth are the masters of our future. They should be given opportunities and motivations to develop themselves and to move up the social ladder. In this connection, after school services and other recreational and extra-curricular activities are provided to less-privileged children and youth to lead a normal and healthy lifestyle as follows:

17. The target beneficiary of young people services under the schedule of SWD are children and youth aged six to twenty-four. NGOs are subvented to provide core young people services, namely children and youth centre services, outreaching social work services and school social work services for the above target groups. Since 1994-95, the above services have been pooled together and operated in the form of an Integrated Children and Youth Services Centre with a view to providing holistic services for contemporary young people. These include guidance and counselling services, supportive service for young people in disadvantageous circumstances, socialization programmes and programmes for developing their social responsibility and competence. We aim at training up our young people to become responsible and contributing members of the society.

18. The Administration will introduce in phases a pilot "Head-Start Programme" for children aged 0-5 years in four selected communities,

namely Sham Shui Po, Tin Shui Wai, Tuen Mun and Tseung Kwan O, through inter-sectoral collaboration among Department of Health (DH), Hospital Authority, SWD/NGOs and Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) at the district level, and using DH's Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) as a platform. The initiative is aimed at strengthening interface among the services, and to establish a mechanism to identify children and their families who might require further attention, with a view to providing timely and prompt intervention in the form of counseling and psychological support. We will consider extending the programme to other MCHCs by phases after a review of the trial.

19. After School Care Programme (ACSP) provides supportive services for primary pupils aged six to twelve whose parents are unable to provide proper care for them after school hours due to work or other reasons. Services of ACSP include homework guidance, parental guidance, meal service, skill learning and other social activities. With effect from September 2000, the SWD has been allocating subsidy to ASCP centres to help working parents who are unable to take care of their children after school as a result of being engaged in work and/or attending employment-related retraining/attachment programme. Eligible parents would be granted full fee waiving or half-fee reduction places for the service according to their family household income with reference to the Median Monthly Domestic Household Income (MMDHI). Eligibility criteria for subsidy under the ASCP can be found at ***Annex E***.

20. We plan to provide additional resources to increase the number of fee-waiving places for low-income families, especially single parents, who require after school care service run by NGOs in centres for primary pupils aged 6 to 12. At present, SWD provides 830 full fee-waiving places through existing resources. We plan to earmark an additional amount of \$5 million each year to increase the number of fee waiving places by 50%, i.e. providing another 415 full fee waiving places.

21. We will also provide additional resources to enhance services for those children and young persons who are vulnerable and in need of

protection. One example is the increase in the provision of residential care placements including emergency placements, child protection services, psychological support and other crisis-intervention services etc.

22. We would enhance our outreaching services for young night drifters, as well as services for youths-at-risk and those who have committed offences. The Community Support Services Scheme (CSSS) for youths cautioned under the Police Superintendents' Discretion Scheme would also be enhanced to provide opportunities for steering these young people into the right course.

23. Additional resources will also be provided to District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) to support needy children and youth at the district level to meet their developmental needs.

24. Taking account of several successful models being developed through the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) projects (please see also paragraph 42 on CIIF), we would encourage NGOs to organize mentorship schemes for youths to help their development. The NGOs may also apply for funding under the CIIF or other funds as appropriate.

### *Women with Low-income*

25. To address the needs of low-income women, the Women's Commission has initiated a Capacity Building Mileage Programme (CBMP) in collaboration with other organisations. CBMP seeks to encourage active learning and facilitate the enhancement of all round abilities and life skills of women as individuals so that they could be better equipped to face life's challenges and develop their potential more fully. The Programme promotes positive values and mindset.

### *Elderly*

#### Support Services

26. To facilitate active and healthy ageing, we have set up more than 200 elderly centres throughout the territory to provide a full range of services and activities to cater for the psycho-social and developmental needs of elders and their carers. Also, we have set up Support Teams for the Elderly, which are based in the district elderly community centres and are made up of volunteers, to outreach to vulnerable elders and provide care, counseling and support to them.

27. For elders who have functional disabilities and require subsidized long term care (LTC) services, we provide them with a range of subsidized home-based community care services to facilitate them to stay in the community as long as possible. There are about 22,300 elders using our subsidized community care services.

28. The total number of subsidized residential care places for the elderly has increased from 16 000 in 1997-98 to more than 26,900 today (i.e. about 1 subsidized residential care place for every 30 elders aged 65 or above in Hong Kong). Elders staying in the subsidized residential care places only has to pay a monthly fee which is around 20% of the actual unit cost, whereas the remaining 80% is paid by the Government. Those who have financial difficulties can apply for the CSSA to cover the home fees. In addition, there are another 22 000 elders living in non-subsidised residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) by means of CSSA. Therefore, altogether the Government is helping about 49 000 elders (i.e. 1 in every 21 elders) to pay for RCHE services.

29. We have been enhancing the residential care services through various means, namely a mixed mode in the provision of residential care places, re-engineering of services to provide a higher level of and continuum of care, and market facilitation. To meet the growing care needs of elders, we will put in about \$180 million to gradually convert existing residential places into about 3 000 LTC places starting from 2005. We will also seek to provide infirmary care services for medically-stable infirm elders in a non-hospital setting.

### Financial Support for the Elderly

30. Currently, elders in Hong Kong who have financial difficulty can apply for CSSA. Under this scheme, recipients who are aged 60 or above are classified as elderly recipients. In addition, the Old Age Allowance (OAA) is also designed to meet the needs of the elderly arising from old age. For elders aged 65-69, they receive a monthly payment of \$625 subject to making an income and asset declaration, while those aged 70 or above receive \$705 a month regardless of means.

31. With increasing ageing population and more cross-boundary movement, we appreciate that more elders on social security have expressed the wish to retire in the Mainland, and continue to receive their welfare payments. We have proposed to relax the current eligibility requirements under the Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (PCSSA) Scheme by allowing elders who have received CSSA for not less than one year (currently not less than three years) to join the scheme, and to extend the coverage of the scheme beyond Guangdong to Fujian as well.

32. To provide elders receiving OAA with more flexibility to spend time outside Hong Kong, we have also proposed to relax the permissible limit of absence of OAA from 180 days to 240 days a year.

### ***People with Disabilities***

33. In order to encourage more people with disabilities to achieve self-reliance, we are committed to promoting employment for them and to ensuring that they enjoy equal opportunity of participating in productive and gainful employment in the open market. For those who do not have the ability or are not ready to take up open employment, we provide sheltered employment.

34. We provide a range of employment programmes and services covering both sheltered workshops and supported employment which serve to enhance the working capacity of people with disabilities. In 2001, SWD

launched “On the Job Training Programme” for people with disabilities to enhance their employment through a proactive training, market-driven and placement-tied approach, and to encourage employers to create or offer job opportunities for them.

35. Through the “Enhancing Employment of people with disabilities through Small Enterprise Project”, we assist NGOs to create and run small businesses employing people with disabilities so that they can enjoy the genuine employment in a carefully planned and sympathetic working environment. Marketing Consultancy Office (Rehabilitation), a regular establishment in SWD, enhances employment opportunities for people with disabilities through innovative, effective and efficient business development and marketing strategies.

36. To help disabled persons to live in the community, we have proposed to provide those CSSA recipients suffering from 100% disability or requiring constant attendance and living in the community with enhanced financial assistance of an additional monthly supplement of \$100 to support them to live in the community. We estimate about 50,000 CSSA recipients in these categories may benefit from this enhancement, with an additional outlay of \$62 million from the CSSA Scheme.

(C) **Health Services for those in need**

37. It is our long-held policy that no one should be denied adequate medical care because of lack of means. We understand that the provision of adequate health services is essential for a person’s well being. Measures are in place to take care of the different needs of the vulnerable groups.

***Waiving Mechanism of Public Hospitals and Clinics***

38. To assist the vulnerable groups in the community, i.e., the low income group, chronically ill patients and elderly patients who have little income or assets, but who are not CSSA recipients, the Government has implemented an enhanced medical fee waiver mechanism to provide

effective protection from undue financial burden to them. To uphold our aforementioned fundamental policy, recipients of CSSA will be waived from payment of their expenses for services rendered by DH and HA.

39. Non-CSSA recipient patients who have special difficulties may seek assistance from the Medical Social Workers of public hospitals and clinics or the Social Workers of Family Services Centres of SWD who will assess their situation on a case-by-case basis. The waiving mechanism and guidelines will be regularly reviewed to ensure that it serves the needy effectively.

40. Under the enhanced mechanism, eligible patients would be granted a fee waiver according to their household income (with reference to MMDHI) and household assets. As for those who do not meet such criteria, they can still provide other non-financial factors for the consideration of Medical Social Workers or Social Workers. Based on a patient's actual needs and conditions, they will exercise discretion to grant waivers and to decide the exact period of the fee waiver.

41. In rolling out new services, DH is also very conscious about the affordability of such services to the vulnerable groups. Taking into account the fee waiver system mentioned above, appropriate fee exemption is introduced in conjunction with new services to ensure those in financial difficulty are not deprived of such services.

#### **(D) Building of Social Capital and Tripartite Partnership**

42. With a view to addressing social needs in a more effective way, it is crucial to promote community participation and to improve people's quality of life by building social capital. The CIIF was set up with an initial allocation of \$300 million following the Chief Executive's 2001 Policy Address. The Fund has a clear purpose distinct from providing ongoing support for long-term services, and places emphasis on building individual and community capacity so that they can more effectively help each other to address social needs. It encourages a shift away from a conventional

service provision mode to taking a social investment approach. In the coming years, the Fund will focus on building up the critical mass of projects within each district, and enhance strategies with specific target groups, such as deprived children and youth to help breaking the cycles of deprivations through community joint actions. Successful project models would also be extended to other districts, and we would work with DSWOs, especially in those districts requiring special attention, to encourage and assist the development of worthwhile projects targeting the special needs of the district.

43. The Financial Secretary announced in his 2004-05 Budget that an additional \$200 million was earmarked on a one-off basis for promoting the development of a tripartite social partnership comprising the Government, the business community and the welfare sector in helping the disadvantaged. In his Policy Address, the Chief Executive hopes that the Fund could help strengthen social cohesion through enhanced cooperation of the three parties. The Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged was formally established in December 2004 with the above objective. Applications to the Fund would be invited in March 2005.

## **Conclusion**

44. The Government is committed to continue to invest substantially in helping the needy in our community. In this connection, Members may wish to note that our public social expenditure as a ratio of total tax revenue compares favourably with other developed economies, like Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, despite our simple tax system and low tax rate (please see *Annex F*).

45. Members are invited to note the contents of the paper.

**Government Policies and Measures in Alleviating Poverty**

**Education and Manpower Bureau**

**Educational Policies and Services  
for Needy Students and Youths**

**Purpose**

This paper briefly introduces the educational policies and services for needy students and youths provided by the Education and Manpower Bureau.

**Existing Policies and Services**

*Free and Universal Education*

2. Children aged six to 15 are provided with nine-year free and universal education up to Secondary 3 level. Thereafter, students who are willing and able to continue with their study are given the opportunity to receive subsidized senior secondary and university education. For academic low-achievers, intensive remedial teaching programmes are offered in primary schools, and school-based remedial support/curriculum tailoring programmes in secondary schools. Free assessment services are provided for students suspected of having physical/sensory disabilities, speech and language impairment and behavioral problems. Students with special education needs may attend special schools.

### *Student Guidance Support Services*

3. A comprehensive student guidance system is put in place in primary schools. The student guidance officers in primary schools work in close partnership with teachers and parents, conduct developmental and preventive guidance activities as well as provide casework and/or group-work service to help individual students overcome their personal and social problems. Students in need of welfare services are referred to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the Social Welfare Department (SWD). School social work services in secondary schools are overseen by the SWD with a view to identifying and helping students with academic, social and emotional problems, maximizing their educational opportunities, developing their potential and preparing them for responsible adulthood.

### *Extra-curricular Activities*

4. Schools today provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Many schools are able to ensure that every student joins at least one activity in each of the areas of art and physical education. In addition, the Jockey Club Life-wide Learning Fund was set up in 2002 with a sum of about \$140 million from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust. Primary 4 to Secondary 3 students who receive Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) or full-rate grant under the financial assistance schemes administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) are eligible to apply for funds to pay for extra-curricular activities for which a fee may be charged. Over the past two years, some 60 000 eligible students from more than 1 100 schools received assistance through the scheme each year. The average amount of assistance is \$160 for each primary school student, and \$240 for each secondary school student.

### *IT Assistance*

5. At present, each primary school has an average of about 90 computers, and each secondary school about 250 computers to facilitate students' learning with IT. To enhance access to IT facilities, laptop computers are provided to secondary school students who do not have computers at home (the "Digital Bridge" project supported by the Quality Education Fund), and grants are being provided to schools to facilitate them to extend the opening of their computer rooms beyond school hours for use by their students. On top of this, we will work with NGOs to recycle used computers by giving them to students who cannot afford to have their own computers at home.

### *Financial Assistance*

6. Primary and secondary school students from low-income families not receiving CSSA are eligible for financial assistance under various means-tested schemes administered by the SFAA in the form of travel subsidy, textbook assistance, tuition fee remission and public examinations fee remission. Eligible full-time local students of publicly funded and self-financing programmes at post-secondary level may apply for financial assistance in the form of grants and/or low-interest loans to cover tuition fees, academic and living expenses, where applicable.

7. Financial assistance is also provided to eligible non-profit-making kindergartens through reimbursement of rent, rates and government rent, and the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme to alleviate the impact of rental and teachers' salary respectively on kindergarten fees. We also provide financial assistance in the form of fee remission to kindergarten students from low-income families through the means-tested Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme.

### *Training and Retraining Services*

8. To enhance the employability and competitiveness of the poor (including the youths), we provide training and retraining services through the Vocational Training Council and the Employees Retraining Board. We have also launched various training initiatives, such as the Skills Upgrading Scheme and the Continuing Education Fund, to help enhance the skills and knowledge of the workforce.

### **New Initiatives**

#### *After-school Learning and Support Programmes*

9. We will earmark more resources in the coming financial year (\$75 million per annum) to enable schools to strengthen co-operation with NGOs at the district level to provide school-based after-school learning and support programmes to those most in need of them. We expect that the programmes will increase students' learning effectiveness, broaden their learning experiences outside classroom, and raise their understanding of the community and sense of belonging. Details would be developed in consultation with schools and NGOs, and would take into account existing school activities and funding. We aim to launch the programmes this summer.

#### *Enhancement of Uniformed/Youth Groups Activities*

10. Uniformed/youth groups have long been an integral part of the extra-curricular activities in schools. A new scheme will be devised to sponsor the uniformed/youth groups to set up leagues in districts with a high concentration of needy students, and to provide uniforms and

subsidies on outing activities for these students. Details of the operation are being working out in consultation with schools and groups concerned.

### *Strengthening the Training and Retraining Services*

11. To provide choice for youths who may not be academically oriented, we shall encourage schools to diversify their senior secondary curriculum by offering career-oriented courses. For those who have left schools, we shall step up retraining services in districts where there is demand.

### **Way Forward**

12. Education breaks the circle of poverty. Through the existing policies and services, we provide free and universal education, financial assistances and various training and retraining programmes to help students and youths who need support. We will continue to work with the school sector, NGOs, uniformed/youth groups and parties concerned to identify service gaps and improve coordination among service providers.

Education and Manpower Bureau

February 2005

## **Enclosure III**

### **Government Policies and Measures in Alleviating Poverty**

#### **Economic Development and Labour Bureau**

#### **Employment Services Provided by the Labour Department**

The Labour Department (LD) provides a comprehensive range of free employment services to help job-seekers secure employment. It has launched a number of employment and training programmes for young people and the middle-aged. These services and programmes, though not designed to alleviate poverty, will indirectly help to ease the financial position of the unemployed if they could be placed into gainful employment. These services and programmes including the new initiatives in the pipeline are set out below.

#### **Employment Services to the Able-bodied**

- LD operates 10 Job Centres. Job-seekers can use the facilities provided there to complete the whole job-hunting process at one stop. They can also make use of the Interactive Employment Service website to complete the registration procedure and obtain the most updated vacancy information.
- In 2004, LD received 297 186 vacancies from the private sector and achieved 86 257 placements. Both figures are all-time records and represented respective increases of 38% and 31% over the figures of 2003.

#### **Employment Services to People with a Disability**

- LD also renders a personalized employment service to people with a disability.

- In 2004, we registered 4 002 job-seekers with a disability and achieved 2 391 placements.

### **Employment Programme for the Middle-aged**

- The Re-employment Training Programme for the Middle-aged, launched in early May 2003, aims at assisting those aged 40 or above who have been unemployed to secure employment through the provision of a training allowance to encourage employers to hire them.
- As at end- 2004, the programme placed 8 606 into employment.

### **Incentive Allowance Scheme for Local Domestic Helpers (LDHs)**

- To address the mismatch in supply and demand in the LDH market and to promote LDH service, the Labour Department, in conjunction with the Employees Retraining Board, launched the LDH Incentive Allowance Scheme in June 2003.
- Qualified LDHs<sup>1</sup> who work in a district different from the one in which they reside or during unsocial hours (i.e. 5 pm to 9 am) may apply for a daily allowance of \$50 per day for a maximum of 24 days per month or 144 days in a year. The maximum allowance to be obtained by each LDH is \$7 200. The scheme also seeks to promote the development of the LDH market, thereby creating job opportunities for people in the low-skilled and middle-aged groups.
- As at end-2004, there were some 3 700 approved applications.

### **Training and Employment Programmes for Young People**

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<sup>1</sup> Those who (1) have completed the LDH training offered by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB); (2) are in possession of a competency card; and (3) take up a job through the referral of ERB's Integrated Scheme for LDHs.

### ***Youth Pre-employment Training Programme (YPTP)***

- The YPTP was launched in September 1999 to enhance the competitiveness and employability of young school leavers aged between 15 and 19.
- It provides a wide range of employment-related training to help young people build up their confidence, upgrade their interpersonal, computer and job specific skills.
- Over the past five years, more than 57 000 young persons were trained under the programme. In 2003/04, the Programme has provided training to 11 327 young people and about 72% of them secured employment after training.

### ***Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme (YWETS)***

- To help enhance the employability of young people, the LD launched the YWETS in July 2002 to provide on-the-job training to young people aged 15 to 24 with education attainment below degree level.
- As at end- 2004, 18 283 trainees have been successfully placed in training vacancies. In addition, 10 925 trainees were able to find jobs in the open market with the assistance of their case managers. This far exceeds our original target of 10 000 placements in two years.
- The Centre for Social Policy Studies of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which has been commissioned by LD to evaluate the performance of YPTP and YWETS, has affirmed the effectiveness of both schemes.

### ***Youth Self-employment Support Scheme (YSSS)***

- In May 2004, LD launched a new pilot scheme – the YSSS -- to train and assist young people who have motivation, entrepreneurship and innovation to become self-employed.

- About 1 500 trainees have been enrolled to receive training under 36 projects in different areas of business. On completion of initial training, trainees have started to undergo hands-on practices in self-employment since mid-September 2004.
- As at end- 2004, the trainees conducted 1 420 business transactions with gross profits of about \$940,000 recorded.

## **New Employment Initiatives in the Pipeline**

### *Work Trial Scheme (WTS)*

- LD plans to launch the WTS in the second quarter of 2005 to enhance the employability of 2 000 job-seekers who have special difficulties finding jobs. The trial will be for one month and the participants will receive an allowance.
- Details of the scheme are being finalized in the light of the recent public feedback.

### *Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS)*

- LD will launch the WOPS in April 2005 to help place 1 000 disabled job-seekers into employment.
- Disabled job-seekers will be provided with a short pre-employment training programme.
- For each disabled person engaged, the employer will be paid a monthly allowance equivalent to half-month's wages, subject to a ceiling of \$3,000, for up to three months.

## **Government Policies and Measures in Alleviating Poverty**

### **The role of Home Affairs Department and its District Offices**

#### **Purpose**

This note outlines the role of Home Affairs Department (HAD) and its District Offices (DOs) in the District Administration Scheme and in coordinating Government departments' programmes at the district level.

#### **The Role of HAD and DOs**

2. HAD is responsible, inter alia, for the implementation of the District Administration Scheme and community building activities to foster social development and stability. It facilitates communication between Government and the community to promote public understanding and acceptance of Government policies. These responsibilities are discharged primarily through the 18 DOs as follows :

- (a) ***as a link between District Councils (DCs) and government departments***

DCs are the main component of the District Administration Scheme which aims to ensure that public services and facilities are provided in an efficient and effective manner at the district level. Departments are required to consult DCs on local matters that affect the livelihood, living environment or well-being of residents in the districts.

DOs play an active role in lobbying the DCs' support for Government policies and programmes. They also serve as a mediator between DCs and Government departments when necessary to facilitate the resolution of problems over the provision of government services in the districts. Through the arrangements of HAD/DOs, bureaux and departments can send representatives to attend DC meetings; or organize joint briefings and seminars for DCs to introduce and explain their policy measures.

(b) ***Maintaining close liaison with different sectors of the community and reflecting their views to Government***

The District Administration Scheme also helps ensure that public opinions are effectively channelled to Government and that the Government is responsive to district needs and problems. The aim is to promote the smooth implementation of government policies and measures in the community as a whole.

DOs assess and reflect public opinion on relevant government policies and programmes affecting the community. They monitor community feedback on government policies and programmes, which are referred to policy bureaux and departments for reference.

(c) ***Promoting residents' participation in district affairs***

The Government has a long established policy of encouraging greater public participation in community activities. The aim is to help promote a harmonious and stable community.

DOs help promote public participation in district affairs and foster community spirit in the local community, through collaboration with the DCs, local organizations and community

leaders. Community involvement activities led by DOs, in collaboration with the DCs and local organizations, include district clean Hong Kong activities, district fight crime and fire safety measures, the summer youth programme, the promotion of civic education and activities for new arrivals from the Mainland.

(d) ***Coordinating the implementation of Government departments' plans and programmes affecting the districts***

Departments whose activities are district-based, e.g. Housing Department, Leisure and Cultural Services Department, are required to submit to the DCs their annual district plans setting out the initiatives and changes to be implemented in the year. They need to incorporate the DCs' views into their work plans as far as practicable. Other departments dealing with matters affecting residents in the district are also encouraged to submit annual progress reports.

DOs monitor the implementation of departments' work plans in the districts and will discuss with the concerned departments if their work plans are behind schedule. They also advise the departments if their work plans need revisions in the light of new circumstances in the districts.

Home Affairs Department

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