

Against Child Abuse Ltd.
Responding to
Long-term Social Welfare Planning for Hong Kong
Possible questions to consider

What are the prominent features of Hong Kong's social and economic conditions?

The following would be our recommendations and some prominent features that may impact on children and families and social welfare planning for Hong Kong:

- a. The pace, the long hours, fluctuating and lack of reasonable wages and importance attached to economic development and achievement and thus the decrease in quality time, caring and positive approaches and relationship with children and families. **A child and family perspective is essential to ensure social harmony.**

This perspective needs to be written in our social policy and an independent high power mechanism such as a Child Commission needs to be set up to ensure such actualization in Hong Kong.

In pursuit of a child perspective, 30 jurisdictions have appointed child ombudsmen or commissioners. Such ombudsmen or commissioners receive the mandate to require child impact assessment upon formulation or amendment of policy and legislations; to look into unjust situations on behalf of children and families; to systematically obtain data and conduct research into trends and matters impacting children and families; to ensure education and promotion in child protection and child's rights; to ensure a quality and safe system for children and to monitor and measure progress.
http://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/progress/prohib_states.html

In the absence of a Child Commission or a Child Commissioner, the Family Council has to acquire also a child perspective to allow child protection and children's rights receiving high priority in the meeting agenda. Multidisciplinary Experts in the child protection and child rights field should be invited to serve on such important mechanism.

- b. In view of large number of women working in the labor force, large number of children in low income families, thus unless Hong Kong **ensures wide and**

affordable child care options and acquire clear legislation ensuring children supervised and not left unattended, attending to their special needs, domestic violence and child abuse/neglect will be increasing rather than improving with the seriously decline in family solidarity and child development index, as quoted in the 5 social development index reports of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

Specific allocation of government budget to ensure such affordable options sustained in high standard and rendered by responsible personnel is essential. The recently launched self help mutual groups could be more systematically promoted with funding and venue support from the government in all Hong Kong regions. Such service could help to employ and supervise responsible personnel to ease the unemployment and under employment concerns.

A sound system to screen and monitor responsible employees working specifically with children should be set up. A mandatory, restrictive child sex offender's registry is one important part of the system which helps and should be put in place promptly.

Fundamental systems such as the set up of a more progressive and more universal Mandatory Provident Fund scheme and the review of the Comprehensive Social Security Scheme are essential to ensure social harmony in a long run.

- c. The fluctuation and sudden often unprepared adverse impact experienced during financial crisis experienced locally, in the region and globally. The 1998 and 2003 financial crisis was cases in point.

During the crisis there were interim measures and long term changes brought in however child impact assessment were not observed as made with a strong preventive child perspective as there weren't any central coordinating and monitoring body such as a Child Commission or a Child Ombudsman taking on such role.

Furthermore some of the budget cuts were not in the best interest of children and families. Such as the levy arrangement for the domestic helpers who have the care of large number of children and families, the changes in Comprehensive Social Security of new arrivals and the changes relating to children born by non

Hong Kong resident parents yet they are Hong Kong residents under the Basic Law.

- d. The unique feature observed has been that while Hong Kong suffered economic pressure, there would be reduction in budget and emergency measures brought in and the major changes in the civil service personnel structure may be considered timely and necessary but the recognition for and the retention of dedicated and high standard professionals had been insufficient. Similarly for the non civil service field as they were also adversely impacted.
- e. Sometimes in view of hardship of the specifically identified under privileged group during different period of hardship and the outcry of advocates and the mass media, special budget were allocated and yet such would have contributed to more comprehensive changes if allocated in a more long term, well coordinated and strategic manner.

Furthermore it would be more cost effective if funds such as the Community Investment & Inclusion Funds could be more ready to support more innovative projects and to ensure projects found effective being launched as universal projects to benefit a wider population. Furthermore funds could have been allocated for review and evaluation to ensure evidence base for projects a reality as it would be hard for NGOs, especially those in smaller scale, to raise their own funds for research.

- f. We do not see a prompt allocation of budget to actualize the spirit of prevention particularly during difficult times. A more long term and strategic allocation of budget is required to retain a prevention angle. This could be done when society retains a promising surplus but it would need to be a sustained policy rather than a one time effort.

Regarding the duration of funding, instead of annual earmarked grant, it is preferable to have block grants with indication of the level of funding for the planning and evaluation period. A longer term planning time frame ranging from three to five years will enhance stability and staff security. An interim evaluation could be put in place in addition to annual appraisals for monitoring and if appropriate, adjustment purpose.

Rather than having NGOs to use a lot of time in dealing with different funding bodies and fund raising is a waste of valuable time and resources which could

otherwise be used in the provision of services.

Is our welfare system able to cope with these and future changes?

- a. No. Unless there is more recognition, appreciation, collaboration and cooperation between GOs, NGOs, the corporate sector and the community. The current scene has sometimes been stressful if not depressing as there is a lack of common goal, passion and leadership for the field.
- b. In the past, i.e. in the eighties and early nineties, NGOs have taken the lead and enjoyed their innovative capacity of introducing innovative ways of services. However in from the nineties with the GOs taking a more active lead, the NGOs had to face rapid changes and would appreciate genuine consultation with professionals and public in the days to come.
- c. There were researches and surveys conducted through the past decades on directions and service models yet sometimes not adequately analyzed, publicized and utilized for planning and development purpose and if so resources and important recommendations would be missed.
- d. The welfare system also lacks a blue print reflecting community policy and philosophy and directions. Such blue print is essential as a guiding light for all GOs, NGOs and the community at large. Such blue print would outline core values and important standards and directions upon consultation at all levels identified.

After removing the importance attached to the Social Welfare White Paper, it was said that the community could look for such direction in the Chief Executive Policy Address. Unfortunately this is an important but inappropriate document to identify social welfare policy and directions. Furthermore even if the community wishes to do so, there would be very limited coverage on such matter such as a strong child and family perspective.

- e. Without a common front the GOs and NGOs were often considered rivals and not collaborators. Furthermore NGOs had to compete for resources and thus lacked a common front for the best interest of children and society. More collaboration and cooperation may help to maximize scarce resources in terms of money, knowledge and talents.

- f. Manpower ration has been an aspect often debated in the eighties but not as often in the nineties and into the recent era. Systematic improvement and maximizing resources would require more long term manpower planning and development.
- g. The social welfare system has turned from generic to specialized and in the recent years to integration. While acknowledging the importance of integration, we must continue to strive for specialization particularly in services such as domestic violence and child abuse prevention, identification, treatment and education. NGOs with specialized experience and their good practice should be acknowledged, funded and their effective models made universal.
- h. The Government has been monitoring the NGO services but has not proved to the community how the GO services have been supervised and monitored to ensure a child and family perspective in addition to high standard professionalism.
- i. Consolidation of good practices, highlighting difficulties and possible resolutions, and expert personnel and programs did not receive sufficient attention. Such good practices should be written down into publications and training manuals to share locally, with the region, China in particularly and globally.
- j. Specific preventive efforts should be shared, consolidated and acknowledged by giving incentives in consolidation, documentation, publicity and sharing.
- k. A more multi-sector and cross department platform would be desired as compared with a fragmented approach in doing ones own business.
- l. A cross border platform would be essential attending proactively to the current cross border demands for children and families. Such cross border platform could help to compile updated data and information on child and families. Base on such data and information to design educational and social-psycho programs for cross border families and advocacy for cross border improvement in resource and manpower allocation.

Cross border policy, education, children and family support, legislation such as extra territorial collaborative efforts must be emphasized.

- m. Practitioners have been trained in their own field and would require more multi sector training and working together. Practitioner also required a broader, more dynamic and flexible mind set in appreciating the intricate and interactive

elements of the field and the work. Opportunities for sharing and debate at different levels with the involvement of necessary parties such as service-users, children, policy makers, legislators etc. could be established to facilitate such interactions.

- n. The recent practice of the government has been annual briefing and consultation sessions on welfare progress and development. Such enabled representatives to get together, share and make recommendations. However it was not possible to trace which recommendations were actualized and if not, why not. This exercise even with good intention may appear superficial and ineffective and could be improved to ensure better impact.
- o. The current system and manpower required a strong public health and human rights perspective to ensure children and relevant parties contributing and participating in planning, in review, in service design, monitoring and implementation.
- p. More systematic (not sporadic) support and services at all levels of prevention: tertiary, secondary and primary are necessary.
- q. The Comprehensive Child Development service required increase in manpower and resources, to cover all new born families in all regions in Hong Kong and for home visitation instead of merely risk identification and referrals.

Effective volunteer home visitation program such as those rendered by the Against Child Abuse required recognition, funding to be made universal. Turning service users into volunteers made the program more cost effective.

- r. Resources in remedial efforts and also prevention need to come from government revenue on a more long term and strategic manner. Private bodies and corporations role in social welfare must be educated and encouraged to participate.
- s. The current social welfare system turned integrated in policy yet recognition of specialization required special efforts. Some of the specialized agencies ran into hardship and should deserve attention and support.
- t. To ensure professionalism and not only fair service, professional ethics and screening, training and supervision are important. The current cases of social

- u. The welfare sector should continue to work actively with the mass media to ensure the agreed blue prints, the philosophy, the core values, the rationale and objectives of service design and the challenges in implementation being widely publicized. The welfare sector should also be tracking public response towards the social welfare progress and development in order to make or urge for prompt reform and improvement.

- v. Government advisory mechanisms such as the Committee on Child Abuse, the Youth Commission, Women's Commission, Elderly Commission, the Child Rights Forum and the District Forums should be reviewed to ensure time and resources well utilized recommendations and interests consolidated. Multidisciplinary personnel being involved with children and service users properly consulted through the review and formulation of policy and practices.

- w. A change of mind set in more readily use the law to protect must be emphasized particularly in stopping corporal punishment and the situation of leaving children unattended. A comprehensive review of child and family related legislation may help to ensure the spirit under the UNCRC being put in place. The law is not the only answer but an important part of the comprehensive and strategic plan to ensure a Hong Kong safe and child/family friendly. The change of mind set requires collaborative and collective responsibility at all level with the strong, humane and democratic leadership of the government.

Prepared by: Priscilla Lui

Date: 16 September 2008