

COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Paper No. 03/03

Formulating a Sustainable Development Strategy for Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper outlines considerations relevant to the formulation of a sustainable development strategy for Hong Kong, and suggests a way forward with the development of such a strategy.

Proposal

2. In order to set in motion a process for developing a sustainable development strategy for Hong Kong, we propose that –

- The Council secretariat should prepare a report setting out the public views and expectations that the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) has collected from different sectors and stakeholder groups with regard to the scope and possible agenda for considering a sustainable development strategy for Hong Kong.
- The Council secretariat should also propose a practical timetable with a view to completing consultations on and formulation of the strategy in 12 - 18 months. The proposal should include details of a consultation programme and mechanism that would facilitate full public participation by different sectors and stakeholder groups both within the Government and outside, and members of the community generally.

- Subject to the Council's consideration of the report and proposal above, and subject to the Council's advice on the establishment of a Strategy Sub-committee, it may task the Sub-committee to oversee the implementation of the consultation programme within the general scope and framework for public consultation as agreed by the Council.
- The Strategy Sub-committee may organise a series of facilitated workshops with stakeholder groups and the general public in order to gauge community views on the objectives and priority areas for facilitating Hong Kong's long-term sustainable development.
- Government bureaux and departments, being core stakeholder groups themselves, should also be involved closely in the consultation programme and drawing up of the sustainable development strategy.
- The Strategy Sub-committee should report regularly to the Council on progress of its work and submit the views it has collected from the consultation forums for the Council to map out the framework and detailed content of the strategy.

Considerations

Public Concern and International Trends

3. In the course of the extensive public consultation exercise on the Planning Department's "SusDev 21" study in 1999 and 2000, some respondents commented that there was a need to develop a sustainability strategy for Hong Kong and to draw up a local Agenda 21. Section 28.3 of the United Nations Agenda 21, promulgated following the 1992 Rio "Earth" Summit states that –

“Each local authority should enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organisations and private enterprises and adopt a local Agenda 21.”

4. Following the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in August - September 2002, the United Nations issued a Plan of Implementation aimed at encouraging more urgent and concrete action to implement Agenda 21. Section 149 of the WSSD Plan of Implementation calls for enhancement of –

“the role and capacity of local authorities as well as stakeholders in implementing Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the [World] Summit and in strengthening the continuing support for local Agenda 21 programmes and associated initiatives and partnerships”.

5. On 23 October 2002, in his response to a motion debate in the Legislative Council, the Chief Secretary for Administration said that the Government would start preparatory work with a view to devising a consultative mechanism that would allow for extensive community participation in developing a framework for pursuing sustainable development.

6. From papers presented at the WSSD, we note that over 6,400 local governments worldwide have engaged in local Agenda 21 processes.

The Purpose of Sustainable Development Strategy or “Local Agenda 21”

7. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have jointly published a guide on how to develop, implement and assess sustainable development strategies.¹ In their publication, the UNDP and OECD explain that by taking a strategic approach to sustainable development, societies will have the means to develop an underlying vision

¹ OECD (2002) “Sustainable development Strategies : A Resource Book”, Earthscan: London

for the future through a **consensual, effective and iterative process**. A strategy encourages the setting of objectives, identification of the means of achieving them and the creation of tools for monitoring achievements in the chosen field. In particular, it helps a society move towards –

- A view that responsibility for our future rests with society as a whole
- Transparent negotiation, cooperation and concerted action
- A focus on outcomes and the quality of participation and management processes
- Integrated planning

8. The very process of developing a local Agenda 21 can help to meet some of the aims described above. In particular, by devising a mechanism for consulting widely on the elements that should fall within a local strategy for sustainable development, a government would already be promoting the concept of shared responsibility for our future, as well as giving a clear signal that there is a place for cooperation and concerted action in addressing the issue of sustainability.

The Development of a Strategy

9. The UNDP and OECD define a sustainable development strategy as comprising a set of processes that integrate the economic, social and environmental objectives of society. Key elements of a strategy would normally include –

- Linking of short and long term objectives, as well as links across different sectors

- Access to information for stakeholders and effective networking
- A strong institution spearheading the implementation of the strategy
- Commitments to building on existing knowledge and expertise.

10. In other administrations, those responsible for drafting sustainable development strategies have identified certain key elements for success in the drawing up of their strategies. These include –

- **Multi-sectoral engagement** in the planning process, with a local stakeholder group serving as the coordination and policy body for preparing a local sustainable development action plan
- **Consultation with community groups**, in order to create a shared vision and to identify priorities and proposals for action
- **Participatory assessment** of local social, economic and environmental conditions and needs
- **Participatory target-setting**, through discussion among key stakeholders
- **Monitoring and reporting** procedures, including local indicators, in order to track progress and allow participants to hold each other accountable for results achieved.

Process for drawing up the strategy

11. Success in developing a strategy will depend largely on the extent to which stakeholders, including those within the Government, are involved at an early stage in the process. People with an interest in this issue must feel a degree of “ownership” of the strategy before they will be willing to endorse it and participate in its implementation. In order to achieve a high degree of consensus in the community, we envisage that an open and participatory approach would be required in our discussions with stakeholders including, for example, environmental concern groups, social service organisations, business groups and government bureaux and departments. We would need to organise appropriate forums, workshops and seminars where stakeholders could discuss and present their own vision and strategic priorities. Holding a “strategy summit” at an appropriate stage of the process might also be an option in working towards a consensus.

Further Action

12. Subject to Members’ views, the Council secretariat will prepare a report on the views and expectations that the SDU has collected through its regular but informal discussions with the stakeholder groups on the scope and possible agenda for the strategy. The secretariat will also prepare a detailed proposal including a timetable for setting in train the consultation programme and for drawing up a sustainable development strategy for Hong Kong as in paragraph 2 above. Subject to Members’ advice, the report and proposal will be considered by the Strategy Sub-committee, before a formal submission is made to the Council.

Council Secretariat
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