

**First Workshop on a
Sustainable Development Strategy for Hong Kong**

8 November 2003 (Saturday)

Report on the Workshop

Background to the Workshop

Sustainable Development (SD) strategies have been recognised by the international community as highly participatory instruments, which help promote socially responsible and environmentally conscious economic development.

The task of advising the Government on how to put together an SD Strategy for Hong Kong has been entrusted to the Council for Sustainable Development (the Council), chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration. The Council sees its immediate task as being to design an engagement process that will harness the views of the community in helping to provide a strategic platform for implementing sustainable development in Hong Kong.

A Strategy Sub-committee (SSC) has been formed under the Council to oversee the design of an engagement process, which would help gather and organise the views of the community into a shared vision for Hong Kong's development.

The First Workshop aimed to bring together people from various sectors of the community to discuss the proposed engagement process, and marked the first step in the process of building an SD strategy for Hong Kong.

Proposed Engagement Process

The SSC proposed an engagement process aimed at securing public involvement in the formulation of an SD strategy for Hong Kong. The proposed process, which was put before workshop participants for their consideration and discussion, involved the following key steps –

- **Identification of Priority Areas** – As a way of “kick-starting” the process, the Council would invite the Government initially to identify a number of Priority Areas for inclusion in the SD strategy. The Council would then make a recommendation as to which of these areas should be taken forward for wider stakeholder consultation.
- **Strategy evolution** – Once the initial Priority Areas have been identified, the Council would establish Strategy Support Groups (SG) to gather background information on the areas concerned, with

particular reference to key issues relevant to sustainable development. Such information would be presented in the form of “Invitation and Response” documents to be issued by the Council as the basis for wider public consultation, as well as an invitation to the Government to provide a response.

- **Presentation of findings** – The SG would collate the views of stakeholders in the community and present them to the Council. Areas of consensus, as well as issues where there are conflicting views on the way forward would be highlighted.

This process would be repeated on a “rolling” cycle, with new Priority Areas identified and new issues examined and incorporated into the SD strategy. Following the initial “round” of the engagement process, the community could be more directly involved in selecting the priority areas.

Facilitated “Break-out” Group Discussion

Participants were divided into groups of 8 to 9 people and engaged in a discussion moderated by a facilitator. The list of workshop facilitators is at **Appendix A** and the programme run-down is at **Appendix B**. Participants were invited to comment on the proposed engagement process and to advise on how this might be modified or improved. Each group appointed a representative to report back on their conclusions to the plenary session.

The agenda for the group discussion was set out in the form of the Discussion Guide at **Appendix C**, which was tabled at the workshop. A detailed description of the proposed engagement process was given to workshop participants in the form of the Background Paper at **Appendix D**.

Reports by Break-out Groups

Group 1

The engagement process should parallel the pursuit of sustainable development for Hong Kong. The process, which could help establish the legitimacy of Government policies, should be continuous and “four-dimensional” - involving the Government, the private sector, individuals and the “third sector” so as to achieve knowledge transfer among these sectors.

The Priority Areas should fall within five categories: environmental, social, economic, cultural and political. Weighting could be given to the Priority Areas according to their urgency. The Council should first tackle “easier” issues and leave more difficult issues to a later stage when a positive mindset had been nurtured within society.

The SG could act as the “arms and legs” of the Council, which would be the “brain” in the formulation of the SD strategy. The SG should assist the Council in researching subject matter, promoting the policy under consideration and engaging the community. The SG should not be too large, and other task forces could be formed to provide further support should there be specific tasks that the core membership could not handle. There should also be appropriate resources allocated for the SG to work with.

The presentation of findings should be part of the consultation process, and not merely an information disseminating exercise. The Council must be able to demonstrate to the public that the process would have an effect on the formulation of government policy.

Group 2

The Priority Areas should be a few specific items linked with the Hong Kong's overall situation. A long-term, “visionary” approach should be taken and a regional perspective adopted, rather than focusing solely on Hong Kong. There should be reference to overseas experience in the formulation of an SD strategy.

Before putting forward a subject for wider consultation, there should be a “framework” built up with the input by experts in the relevant areas. In the selection of the Priority Areas, there must be involvement from all levels of the community, and stakeholders must have the common interest of Hong Kong in mind rather than concentrating on localised or “private” interests.

The SG should include: experts in the relevant priority area, local community representatives, stakeholder groups and high-level Government officials. Instead of calling these groups “support groups” (which gave an impression that the Government had a predetermined agenda) they might be called “research” or “development” groups.

Group 3

There should be a clear objective, structure and framework for the implementation of SD in Hong Kong. It was of paramount importance to present an overall picture to the public in order to effectively engage them in the discussion. There should be appropriate reference to successful overseas experience.

The Priority Areas should be matters of genuine public concern. The proposals to address these areas must be achievable in order to produce results, and there should be appropriate levels of public involvement. Ideally, the Priority Areas should epitomise the “conflicts” among the “three pillars” of SD and suggest ways to resolve these conflicts.

The SG should comprise experts in the field who had a vision and mission for Hong Kong, as well as concern for the common interest of society. The groups should not be too big (8 to 10 people), and their focus should be on collating background information on the selected Priority Area with a view to facilitating a rational evidence-based public discussion. The SG might also help facilitate public discussion, draft the strategy document and monitor implementation.

Public involvement might take the form of plenary stakeholder sessions and public forums. Public involvement must be informed by the principles of “openness” and “transparency”. To this end, there should be press briefings on public events and records of meeting should be made available. The Council could make use of information technology, such as the Internet, to invite public views and opinion. Early “buy-in” by the relevant Government bureaux should be secured on top of their participation in the work of the SG.

Indicators should be drawn up to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of the relevant policies. In finalising the SD strategy, the Council should be responsible for providing a vision and directional guidance on policy issues but should leave actual details to the relevant bureaux.

Group 4

There should be a clear policy platform to aid the selection of Priority Areas, and the public should be aware of this in order to facilitate informed discussion. The Priority Areas must be of fundamental importance to Hong Kong, relevant to the urgent needs of society, and accepted by the community. The solutions to problems identified in the Priority Areas must be achievable in a cost-effective manner. Equally important, Hong Kong must seek to fulfil its international and regional obligations for SD by playing a leading role, in particular in the field of infrastructure development.

The SG should be panels of experts in the relevant fields but should not include consultants. They should also be involved in the monitoring of the implementation of the related policies in the longer run.

All Government policies should be realigned according to the SD strategy and there should be high-level Government commitment to and responsibility for implementing these policies.

Group 5

The whole concept of SD must be people-focused and involve the entire community. Appropriate level of public education are important for the sake of integrating the concept in the community. In this context, the Priority Areas should be understood by people from all walks of life. Proposed solutions must be achievable and represent agreed values and the community’s aspirations.

The SG should comprise impartial experts with relevant experience in the field. There could be two levels of taskforce to assist the SG, namely a “supporting taskforce” for interested parties, and more “focused discussion taskforce” for other parties. An annual SD conference could be held with the involvement of “district partners” in order to map out a sustainable future for the community.

The top echelons of the Government should take the lead in facilitating the engagement process. The Government should not appear to be “dictating” the way forward - rather, it should be responsive to the community on different issues.

Group 6

SD is a continuous process. In order to facilitate discussion outside the “converted” or “informed” groups, there should be a framework for SD to be created comprising the following elements – justice, public health, heritage, culture, environment and economics.

In identifying Priority Areas, the baseline situation for the relevant issues should be ascertained. Furthermore, “constraints” and “limitations” must also be taken into account. Such constraints might include limits on economic growth or the pressure put on the society by a growing or ageing population.

The engagement process should be continuous and not subject to an artificial timeframe. Mechanisms should be developed to involve the younger generation. The active involvement of the media might also be desirable for the smooth implementation of the strategy.

The Government and the Council, which were resourceful in terms of money and information, should take the lead in the process. To help assess the financial implications of proposals, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau might be involved at an early stage.

Group 7

The vision of Hong Kong as Asia’s “world city” was valid, and should be shared by everyone in the community.

On this premise, the selection of Priority Areas should take a broader view to include impacts on the Pearl River Delta. The Priority Areas should concern the quality of life of Hong Kong people, and our position as a regional hub vis-à-vis our competitors in the region. The Priority Areas should reflect the need to strengthen Hong Kong’s human capital and create credible institutions.

The formation of SG should be based on the “inclusiveness” principle. The

groups could include: academics, non-governmental organisations, District Councils, Legislative Council members, Government officials and concerned individuals. The SG should not just play the role of conventional Government advisory bodies. Members should be willing to dedicate time and effort to the consultation and lobbying of stakeholders in the community.

It would not be necessary to re-engage the public in the implementation of the SD strategy if the SG had properly engaged them in the first place. The SD strategy should permeate all Government policies.

Group 8

The approach to drawing up the SD strategy should be pragmatic and should lead to real action and results. Future generations must be involved in the process, as it would affect them directly. In order to make SD more accessible to the public, a demonstration project, such as an urban renewal programme, could be used to illustrate how SD would improve the quality of life. In general, there was a need for a high level commitment by the Government to the process.

The Council could make use of “panels of stakeholders”, “stakeholder forums” and “public briefings” to conduct consultation on the formulation of the strategy. The “public briefings” could be used to explain issues fully to the public and seek their agreement to abide by collective decisions.

Council Members should take the initiative to communicate with the public on a regular and continuous basis with a view to collecting opinions and views.

The community and stakeholder panels should act as watchdogs to monitor the progress of implementation of the SD strategy. The Council’s role in monitoring implementation should be defined, and in order to make the entire process transparent, the Council should produce an annual report on implementation.

The Government should consider enhancing its sustainability evaluation tools in order to measure progress with achieving SD. Furthermore, the task of taking the strategy forward should not be left with the Council or the Government alone. There should be a real partnership between the Government and other sectors.

Concluding Remarks by the Facilitation Team

The Team observed that groups had generally concluded that there was no single way to achieve SD and that society would have to engage in a constructive discussion on this issue. There were diverse views on how to select the Priority Areas, although there appeared to be a broad consensus that the Council should make an early start on this. It was important to take a measured approach initially, and the Council might wish to start with a relatively straightforward issue that could be well understood by the community so as to

get the process underway.

There was a general view that that the Council should not pick “difficult” subjects as the initial Priority Areas. Subjects that were familiar to and relatively easy to explain to the community should be selected at the early stages of the process.

As regards the engagement of stakeholders, new processes would be needed to cater for factors such as changes in demography and societal aspirations. Consultation should not just be a preserve of elite and long-established groups, but should be as inclusive as possible. Also, given the regional and national context, Hong Kong should considered involving our neighbours in the region in this process, where appropriate. Groups had also raised questions as to the level of information required in order to ensure an informed process of engagement.

The process of engagement should be a “core competence” of the Council, and it was observed that participants felt strongly that there should be a high level of Government involvement – and at senior levels - in the process. In order to build consensus and facilitate trust-based engagement, there was a need to institutionalise a suitable engagement process in Hong Kong.

It was important to consider how to ensure a high level of engagement from the younger generations. Their aspirations might well differ from those of the current generation of Hong Kong opinion leaders, and given their strong stake in the future, their views would be crucial to defining key issues related to our long-term sustainability.

Council Secretariat
November 2003

Appendix A

Facilitation Team

Lead Facilitator : **Dr Thomas K F LEUNG**
Vision in Business Consulting Ltd

Facilitator : **Professor Peter HILLS**
University of Hong Kong

Ms Kay KU
The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr Albert LAI
Hong Kong People's Council for Sustainable
Development

Ms Christine LOH
Civic Exchange Ltd

Mr Chandran NAIR
ERM Hong Kong Ltd

Dr Eden WOON
Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce

Mr Plato YIP
CK Lifesciences Ltd.

Appendix B

Run-down of Workshop Proceedings

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|----------|--|
| 8.30 am | Registration of participants |
| 8.55 am | Welcome by Sustainable Development Unit |
| | Keynote Remarks by Hon Donald TSANG, GBS JP
Chairman, Council for Sustainable Development |
| 9.15 am | Brief Remarks by Dr. Edgar Cheng,
Chair, Strategy Sub-committee |
| 9.20 am | Introduction by Dr. Thomas Leung and the Facilitation Team |
| 9.40 am | Convening of Break-out sessions
(discussion in small groups) |
| 11.15 am | Short Break |
| 11.30 am | Plenary Session: Break-out Groups to report back |
| 12:30 pm | Summing-up by Ms Christine Loh; |
| | Concluding Remarks on Next Steps by Dr. Edgar Cheng |

Appendix C

Discussion Guide for Participants of the Workshop

In the group discussion, we aim to address the following points and report your views to the Plenary Session.

The Engagement Process

“Identification of Priority Areas”

What criteria the Government should adopt when selecting the proposed Priority Areas for the first “round” of the engagement process?

For future “rounds” of the process, what might be alternative ways of identifying Priority Areas?

“Strategy Evolution”

Guidelines for establishing the Strategy Support Groups – for example, size composition, terms of reference, etc

Suggestions for conducting an effective public consultation process, in particular, how best to engage members of the wider community and solicit high quality input from them.

“Presentation of Findings”

How should the strategy relate to the development of the Government’s overall policy platform?

How should we ‘re-engage’ the community and feedback to them about the outcome? What else do we need to do in order to build a broader consensus on the outcome?

Overall, do you support adopting the “Engagement Process” as an effective way forward to engage the wider community on significant SD issues?

Appendix D

Background Paper for Participants

The purpose of the Workshop is to provide guidance to the Council for Sustainable Development on how best to establish a transparent and participatory engagement process that will support the development of a Sustainable Development Strategy. This paper provides a brief explanation as to why we need such a process and an outline agenda for the Workshop.

The engagement process is intended to be a significant departure from traditional consultation methods. Your involvement will be crucial to its success.

Background

Over the past 15 – 20 years, there has been growing international recognition that future development throughout the world should be *sustainable*. In straightforward terms, this means that we should aim to achieve social and economic progress in such a way as to protect the rights and opportunities of future generations.

At the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, a number of governments made a commitment to adopt Sustainable Development (SD) strategies. The Agenda 21, which was adopted at the Rio summit, described such strategies as *highly participatory* instruments intended to ensure socially responsible economic development that would also protect the environment for the benefit of future generations. A key element of sustainability, therefore, is the involvement of stakeholders in deciding how to define and implement sustainability objectives.

The Council for Sustainable Development (“the Council”) was appointed in March 2003. One of its terms of reference is: “to advise on the preparation of an SD strategy for Hong Kong that will integrate economic, social and environmental perspectives.”

The immediate task before the Council is to design an engagement process that will harness the views of the community and help provide a strategic platform for implementing sustainable development in Hong Kong. To this end, the Council has developed the following initial proposal for an engagement process, as a basis for discussion with stakeholders.

You are invited to help the Council develop an engagement process that will be instrumental in shaping a sustainable future for Hong Kong.

Proposed Engagement Process

The Council has initially proposed that the engagement process have the following few key steps –

- **Identification of Priority Areas** – To “kick-start” the process, the Council would invite the Government initially to identify a few **Priority Areas** for inclusion in the SD strategy. These should reflect issues that are important to Hong Kong’s sustainable development, including those previously raised at stakeholder events and by the general public. The Council would decide which of the areas identified should be taken forward for in-depth stakeholder consultation. This would promote early high-level Government involvement and help ensure accountability in terms of implementation of the strategy.
- **Strategy evolution** – Once the initial Priority Areas have been identified, the Council would establish **Strategy Support Groups** to gather background information on the areas concerned, with particular reference to key issues relevant to sustainable development. Such information would form the basis of “**Invitation and Response**” documents to be issued by the Council as the basis for wider public consultation, as well as an invitation to the Government to provide a response. These documents would present information and ideas on how to address the Priority Areas. The support groups and the Government would participate throughout this stage of the engagement process and the support groups would regularly review comments and views from the wider community on the “Invitation and Response” documents.
- **Presentation of findings** – The support groups would collate the views of stakeholders in the community and present them to the Council. Areas of consensus, as well as issues where there are conflicting views on the way forward would be highlighted. Relevant government agencies would in parallel give their responses. The Council would then advise the Government on the way forward with the preparation of the SD strategy.

This process would be repeated on a “rolling” cycle, with new Priority Areas identified and new issues examined and incorporated into the SD strategy. Following the initial “round” of the engagement process, the community could be directly involved in selecting the Priority Areas.

The Workshop

The Workshop will begin with a short address by the Chief Secretary and a brief welcome by the Deputy Chairman of the Council. The facilitation team will then introduce the proposed engagement process and the workshop format, and

participants will divide into “breakout” groups for a facilitated discussion on the engagement process. Each group will report back with its views and conclusions. A detailed workshop programme is attached.

Participants will be free to raise for discussion any aspect of the proposed engagement process. The following questions, for example, could be considered –

- What criteria should the Government adopt when selecting proposed Priority Areas for the first “round” of the engagement process?
- For subsequent “rounds” of the process, what would be an appropriate way of identifying Priority Areas?
- How should the Strategy Support Groups be formed and what type of information they should gather to facilitate informed public discussion?
- How can we ensure appropriate levels of representation and participation throughout the process?
- How should the SD strategy be presented to the public?
- How should the strategy relate to the Government’s overall policy platform?

Overall, do you support adopting the proposed engagement process as a way forward to involve the wider community in discussion of Hong Kong’s sustainable development?

Further Information

Detailed background material, including recent Council papers can be found at www.susdev.gov.hk. A more detailed discussion of the engagement process can be found at www.susdev.gov.hk/html/en/council/SSCPaper06-03e.pdf