

COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY SUB-COMMITTEE

Paper 05/03

**Stakeholder Engagement and Public
Involvement in the Sustainable Development Strategy Formulation**

Purpose

This paper outlines some of the issues related to public involvement in the development of a Sustainable Development (SD) Strategy, and considers how to begin the process of stakeholder engagement.

Proposal

2. In order to provide for a manageable strategy formulation process that involves stakeholders of varying backgrounds at the appropriate level, we propose the following –

- (a) while the Council for Sustainable Development (CSD) is to consider and advise on the initial vision statement, structure and objectives for the SD Strategy, we should discuss these at an early stage with “focus groups” of stakeholders that have previously been involved in research or other projects related to sustainable development; and
- (b) as a first step to arouse public awareness before we may witness community involvement in the formulation processes of an SD Strategy, we should, in consultation with the Education and Publicity Sub-committee (EPSC), identify demonstration programmes that would create wider community awareness and stakeholder involvement and ensure that sustainable approach or practices are well publicised.

Considerations

3. The issue of stakeholder involvement is central to the whole concept of sustainable development. The Plan of Implementation from the 2002 World Summit of Sustainable Development states that one of the objectives of implementing sustainability is to –

“Enhance partnerships between governmental and non-governmental actors, including all major groups, as well as volunteer groups, on programmes and activities for the achievement of sustainable development at all levels.”

4. If we are to “achieve sustainable development at all levels”, we shall need a carefully structured participatory process that takes account of the varying levels of capacity of different sectors of society.

Initial Vision Statement

5. Considerations related to the “role” and content of the vision statement for an SD strategy are outlined in paper 04/03, “Preliminary Ideas for a Draft Structure for a Hong Kong Sustainable Development Strategy”. Here we are concerned with the question of how stakeholders might be involved in the formulation of a “vision” for the strategy.

6. In order for a vision statement to set out a clear overall direction for sustainable development, one could argue that it should be the responsibility of a “leading group” to develop and promulgate such a statement. This is not to suggest that the wider community should necessarily be bound to accept the views of a “privileged” few. But in order to show leadership and commitment to the principle of sustainable development, it would seem appropriate for the initial draft of a vision statement to be based on the views of a “core” stakeholder group, which could then facilitate more broadly-based discussion.

7. It is important that the development of an SD Strategy not become “bogged down” in the early stages by over-emphasis on the “vision” – which is, after all, only one component of the strategy. Encouraging too wide a debate on this issue in the early stages of strategy formulation could result in “strategy fatigue” and a general apathy towards the process setting in before the debate on more “concrete” issues begins.

8. With these considerations in mind, the SDU will attempt a draft vision statement based on proposals put forward by this Sub-committee and the CSD's advice. This can then be promulgated as the Council's initial formulation of the "vision" for the SD Strategy, but one that could be subject to future modification depending on progress with other aspects of the strategy.

Approaches to Broader Stakeholder Involvement

9. While the formulation of the initial SD Strategy "vision" can rely primarily on the advice of the CSD as a "leading group", drawing up the structure and content of the strategy would require the involvement of a broader range of stakeholders. In very general terms, these can be broken down into two groups: the "informed" stakeholders and the wider community.

10. "Informed" stakeholders are typically groups and individuals who have engaged in the research or advocacy (or both) of sustainable development principles and practices. In Hong Kong, many such stakeholders have taken part in local, national or international forums on sustainability issues, and have already shared their views and ideas with the SDU or individual Members of the CSD or this Sub-committee.

11. In the wider community, people may be aware of the general concept of sustainable development, but are likely to see this as something abstract, with little relevance to immediate issues affecting their livelihood or quality of life. At the same time, many people may already be involved in practices that are (or are *not*) sustainable without being aware of this.

12. Given the broadly differing capacities and interests of these two groups with regard to the development of an SD Strategy, in order to make good progress with strategy formulation and at the same time ensure a broad level of stakeholder and public involvement, we **propose** a "two-tone" approach to the involvement process, whereby –

- (a) we engage the **informed stakeholders** in the discussion on the structure and key objectives of the SD Strategy from an early stage; and

- (b) we build on the work done to date by the SDU and non-government groups in raising **wider community** awareness of the importance of sustainable development, in particular through identified demonstration programmes and the use of concrete examples of sustainable and non-sustainable practices.

13. In time, we should link the work done in public awareness raising to the development of a strategy. Initially, however, there is a need to build greater public understanding of and confidence in the benefits of a sustainable approach, thereby developing greater capacity in the community to contribute to medium- and longer-term strategy formulation processes. At the same time, there is a need to convey the message that many of our daily practices are *already* sustainable, and that we should build on these.

Beginning the Process

14. In terms of broad community awareness-raising, the SDU and non-government groups have already carried out projects and programmes aimed at educating the public on some of the basic principles and practices of sustainable development. The proposed establishment of the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) will allow us to take this work further, in that it will create opportunities for a more “hands-on” approach and the generation of tangible results from practical projects. The EPSC is currently advising on the procedure for setting up and managing the Fund, as well as considering a programme of “Council-led” education and publicity initiatives. We **propose** that, at an appropriate juncture, Members of this Sub-committee jointly consider with the EPSC which projects might complement the development of capacity-building for the purpose of raising public awareness of and interest in the strategy-making process.

15. As regards the informed stakeholder groups, we **propose** the following initial course of action –

- (a) upon the development of a broad draft structure for the SD Strategy, we select *one* of the key areas within the strategy for discussion with stakeholders; and
- (b) we should organise a “round table” session with stakeholders identified as having an interest in the area

chosen at which a discussion of the strategy framework as well as the chosen issue can take place.

16. In order to facilitate the discussion on the selected key issue, it will be necessary also to identify relevant areas in which current practice may or may not be considered sustainable. Appropriate baseline data will need to be collected and cross-sectoral issues highlighted to better focus the discussion. We will take this as the initial “process testing” phase. To this end, it might be appropriate to select an issue of relatively lesser complexity in order to build up confidence in the process and allow for “fine-tuning” of the stakeholder involvement mechanism.

Further Action

17. Subject to Members’ views, the SDU will –
- (a) prepare draft SD Strategy vision statements for discussion by this Sub-committee and the full Council in due course;
 - (b) subject to this Sub-committee’s and the CSD’s advice, draw up a broad SD Strategy framework structure and identify potential key issues for discussion with appropriate “informed” stakeholder groups; and
 - (c) arrange for discussion between this Sub-committee and the EPSC on the interface of their work (in particular, proposed use of the SDF) and wider community involvement in the strategy-building process.