

# COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## STRATEGY SUB-COMMITTEE

Paper 02/05

### **Building on the First Engagement Process**

#### **Purpose**

This paper reviews the first engagement process for a Sustainable Development (SD) Strategy for Hong Kong, and seeks Members' view on how to build on the process by improving the way in which we engage the community in the formulation of the SD Strategy.

#### **Engagement Process**

2. The five-stage engagement process, devised by the Council for SD after taking advice from stakeholders, was as follows -

- I. Identify Pilot Areas
- II. Prepare an "Invitation and Response" (IR) document
- III. Directly involve the community
- IV. Report back to the Government
- V. The Government to act

3. The process represented an attempt to implement a stakeholder-led campaign to promote sustainable development in Hong Kong. The following paragraphs review the individual stages and overall conduct of the process, and consider possible improvements, in the light of the considerations set out in the Council for SD paper 07/05, which was endorsed by the full Council at its meeting on 18 April.

#### **Review and Recommendations**

##### *Stage I - Identification of priority areas*

4. The three Pilot Areas for the first engagement process (i.e., solid

waste management, renewable energy and urban living space) were chosen by the Council from areas put forward by the Principal Officials who sit on the Council. This allowed the engagement process to get underway quickly.

5. Based on stakeholder feedback gathered during the engagement process, the Council has already noted in its Report on the Engagement Process: *Making Choices for Our Future*, that: “A process for selecting new areas for engagements should be established that would allow stakeholders to have a greater say in the choice of topic” (paragraph 45 of the report). We therefore propose that the **community be more extensively involved in the selection of new priority areas** for the next SD Strategy exercise. Members will discuss detailed proposals for a stakeholder forum for this purpose in the context of Paper 03/05.

#### *Stage II - Preparation of an “Invitation and Response” (IR) document*

6. The establishment of the stakeholder-led Support Groups to advise on the preparation of the IR document and the implementation of the engagement process helped to promote partnership with other sectors. We propose that **Support Groups again be established to lead the preparation of public discussion documents** for the new priority areas and to assist in implementing the campaign of public involvement.

7. Although the first IR document was deliberately drafted in such a way as to be easily read by a wide cross-section of the community, some commentators took the view that the content of the IR document was inadequate for an in-depth discussion of the Pilot Areas. For the next public discussion document, we therefore propose to **engage dedicated research support to help the SSC and Support Groups** prepare thorough and accessible material as the basis for community engagement.

#### *Stage III - Involving the wider community*

8. The organisation of regional forums, workshops, summits and an interactive online forum helped the Council for SD to involve a wide range of stakeholders from different sectors in direct discussion of the IR document and issues related to the three Pilot Areas. Total attendance at

the various events exceeded 1,400 people, and we received nearly 2,000 written responses through various channels.

9. Nonetheless, many stakeholders commented that more could be done to achieve a broader and deeper reach into the community. Again, the Council touches on this point in its report, noting that: “Appropriate resources should be put into enabling all groups to participate in the process and contribute to strategy formulation.”

10. In order to extend the reach of the engagement process, Members may wish to consider **inviting District Councils to play a more clearly defined partnership role** in promoting community involvement.

11. The engagement of professional Facilitators to guide public workshops helped to ensure that discussion among participants from different backgrounds was well structured and productive. We propose to **continue to engage Facilitators for similar workshop settings**. To enhance the online forum, we suggest that consideration be given to inviting independent Facilitators to moderate the discussion and to provide information and comment that would encourage more in-depth interaction between participants.

12. Trying to involve the community in discussion of a number of Pilot Areas within a relatively short time can lead to “consultation fatigue”. The tight schedule for the first engagement process presented a challenge to the resource management of the Council Secretariat and also required considerable effort on the part of Support Group Members, workshop participants and partner organisations. For the future, the Council for SD agreed at its meeting on 18 April that priority areas should be considered one-by-one, rather than concurrently. The Council further agreed that this Sub-committee and the Education and Publicity Sub-committee should form a joint working group to consider ways to maximise publicity and reach out further into the community.

#### *Stage IV - Reporting back to the Government*

13. The engagement of an independent Rapporteur to analyse public feedback and distill this into a draft report for the Council helped to

underline the open and non-directive nature of the engagement process. However, given the large volume of feedback involved and the short time that the Rapporteur was allowed to present his findings, he was required to depend also on the resources of the Council Secretariat, which might give the impression of Government “interference” in the conclusions of the Council report. In future, to enhance transparency, Members may wish to consider **engaging an independent agency** to analyse feedback and prepare the initial report on behalf of the Council.

#### *Stage V - Government to act*

14. The launch of the Government’s First SD Strategy for Hong Kong, together with the Council Report on the Engagement Process, on 24 May 2005 marked the conclusion of the five-stage engagement process in respect of the three Pilot Areas. Whilst it may be too early to reach a conclusion on the community’s reaction to the SD Strategy, the initial press reaction after the launch reflected a lack of understanding of the distinction between the Council’s Report and the Government’s SD Strategy. It may therefore be worth considering whether in future we should **clearly distinguish the Council’s recommendations by publishing them on a separate occasion** from any Government SD Strategy documents.

15. The implementation of the First SD Strategy will require a concerted effort on the part of the Government and the wider community. Relevant government bureaux will be invited to report to the Council for SD on the implementation of the strategy. Members may wish to consider **involving the three Support Groups** for the initial Pilot Areas in reviewing progress.

#### *Overall conduct of the engagement process*

16. The engagement process enabled the Council to reach stakeholders directly and to arouse their interest in taking part in a constructive and cooperative dialogue on Hong Kong’s sustainability. However, there was some confusion during the consultation period about the Council’s identity, with some members of the public perceiving that the engagement process was a Government-led consultation or that the

proposals contained in the IR document were put forward by the Administration. **Additional PR efforts will be necessary** to emphasise the role of the Council and the Support Groups in the development of Hong Kong's SD Strategy.

17. Stakeholder discussion tended to focus on individual aspects of the Pilot Areas rather than the central theme of the engagement process – sustainable development. Media emphasis on individual topics such as municipal solid waste charges also diverted focus from the purpose of the engagement process. More work is needed to introduce the principle of SD to stakeholders and explain its relationship to specific priority areas.

18. We engaged three partner organisations during the first round of the engagement process – the Business Environment Council, Hong Kong Council of Social Service, and Hong Kong People's Council for SD – and these groups helped in the execution of individual events. However, given the tight timetable and financial and human resource constraints, the partners were only able to play a limited role. It is proposed to **continue inviting partner groups** to help implement future exercises, and to facilitate greater involvement by such groups in promoting the engagement process. We consider that to ensure transparency and objectivity in the preparation of Council documents, partner organisations that help implement the public involvement stage of the SD Strategy engagement process should be distinct from the agencies to be engaged for initial research support or analysis of community feedback.

### **Views Sought**

19. Members are invited to comment on the above recommendations to enable the SDU to plan how best to facilitate the next stage of the engagement process.

Council Secretariat  
May 2005