

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Panel on Planning, Lands and Works and Panel on Environmental Affairs

WORK PROGRESS OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT UNIT

PURPOSE

This paper informs Members of the work progress of the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU).

BACKGROUND

2. The Joint Panels on Planning, Lands and Works, and Environmental Affairs were briefed on the findings of the Planning Department's Study on Sustainable Development in Hong Kong for the 21st Century (SUSDEV 21 Study) and consulted on the establishment of the SDU on 9 February 2001. The Government undertook to brief Members on the work progress of the SDU in around mid 2001.

WORK PROGRESS

3. With the funding approval of the Finance Committee on 9 March 2001, the SDU was established under the Administration Wing of the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office effective from April 2001. Priority tasks of the SDU are to:

- (a) ensure the integration of sustainable development principles into the Government's new major policy initiatives and programmes by instituting a system of sustainability impact assessment;
- (b) examine thoroughly overseas experience in promoting sustainable development and consider carefully the relationship between the Council for Sustainable Development (CSD) and other relevant statutory and advisory bodies;

- (c) provide support to the CSD to be appointed by the Government and work with it to facilitate a concerted effort by the community to put sustainable development into practice; and
- (d) maintain the momentum of community discussions and education programmes started by the SUSDEV 21 Study.

Sustainability Impact Assessment System

4. One of the SDU's priority tasks is to institute a system of sustainability impact assessment within the Government by the end of 2001. Under the system, we will make it a requirement for all Bureaux and Departments to conduct a sustainability impact assessment of each of their new strategic initiatives or programmes which, as a general guideline, will likely bring about noticeable or persistent implications to our economic, social and/or environmental conditions on a territory wide basis, and set out the assessment findings or results in their submissions to the Executive Council (ExCo) or the Chief Secretary's Committee (CSC).

5. To facilitate proper application of the sustainability impact assessment system within the Government, a series of training courses are being arranged, with the assistance of the Civil Service Training and Development Institute, for senior officers in all Bureaux and Departments. The courses will equip them with the knowledge and skills to conduct the required sustainability impact assessment when the system is put in place by the end of this year. We also take the opportunity to remind prospective users that a major objective of the sustainability impact assessment system is to help them identify cross-sectoral issues and scope out the sensitive areas for special attention or detailed examination jointly by relevant Bureaux and Departments at an early stage.

6. In parallel, while we are arranging the procurement of the computer equipment and programme, we are also working with the relevant Bureaux and Departments to refine the technical requirements pertaining to a few environmental indicators. As the programme now stands, the baseline data and required input for the few environmental indicators are not compatible with the database compiled and maintained particularly by the Environmental Protection Department. In response to the useful comments that we have received with regard to some social indicators, we will also

consider as a matter of priority the feasibility of identifying better replacement indicators which can align with the guiding principles on “health and hygiene” and “society and social infrastructure”, and incorporating the replacement indicators with relevant baseline data into the sustainability assessment programme, before the computer programme is rolled out for full implementation of the sustainability impact assessment system by the end of the year.

Council for Sustainable Development

7. Another priority task of the SDU is to examine overseas arrangements and experience in promoting sustainable development and consider the relationship between the CSD and other relevant statutory boards and advisory committees. We have received valuable but diverse views on the structure, composition, terms of reference and modus operandi of the CSD during the extensive public consultations conducted under the SUSDEV 21 Study. The SDU is studying these comments carefully. At the same time, we have been researching into overseas institutional set-ups and examining their experience in terms of, for example, bringing about a partnership between the government and various sectors of the community in working towards the goal of sustainable development; making use of the expertise and resources in the private sector and the community to advance innovative approaches; involving civic society in raising public awareness of sustainable development and encouraging wider community participation in the process. The SDU has just completed examining the European models on sustainable development committees or commissions. These include the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium, the European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OCED). We are also studying the experience in North America and Northern Europe. Based on the outcome of these studies, we would set out a few viable options and consult core stakeholders and relevant bodies, with a view to finalizing the arrangements for the CSD by the end of 2001.

Awareness Raising

8. While the SDU is establishing contacts and introducing itself to the non-government organizations, green groups, academia, the private sector and leading organisations overseas, it is also participating in some major awareness raising programmes such as a youth summit on sustainable development organised by a local university. Furthermore, the SDU is

working out the proposed procedures and guidelines for application and use of the \$100 million Sustainable Development Fund to support community initiatives on sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

9. Members are invited to note the work progress of the SDU in paragraphs 3 to 8 above.

Sustainable Development Unit
Administration Wing
Chief Secretary for Administration's Office

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