

**Commission on Poverty (CoP)  
Task Force on Children and Youth**

**Pilot Projects in Building Social Capital For Children and Youth**

**Introduction**

Members were briefed at the first meeting of the Task Force held on 26 May 2005 on a mentorship project being explored by the Commission Secretariat. This paper seeks to update Members on pilot projects being explored and developed, namely the “Mentorship Fun” Project and the “Adopt-A-School” Project, which aims to build social capital and helps prevent and alleviate poverty.

**Objective of Pilot Projects**

2. No attempt at poverty alleviation and prevention will be sustainable without a caring community as the backbone. Nurturing social capital in support of the healthy and balanced growth of our younger generation, and equipping them with essential skills and knowledge for future challenges is key to reducing the risk of intergenerational poverty. It is also one of the Commission’s terms of reference to build and mobilize social capital in preventing and alleviating poverty. In proposing projects to help implement this term of reference, the Commission Secretariat focuses on initiating those projects which represent a new mode of delivery/a new approach. The aim is to reduce duplication with the work of other parts of the Government and NGOs so that, overall and altogether, more is achieved.

3. Business and community organisations have over the years undertaken programmes and activities in various forms in helping the development of children and youth, including those from disadvantaged background. The Commission should consider ways to further *encourage*, *promote* and *facilitate* such efforts.

### **Development of Pilot Projects**

4. In order to fulfil the above objective, the Secretariat is currently exploring/developing a couple of pilot projects, namely the “Mentorship Fun” Project and the “Adopt-A-School” Project -

*(i) “Mentorship Fun” Project – Building Social Capital in the Education Sector*

This is a mentoring project among tertiary, post-secondary, secondary and primary students with a view to imbuing the younger generation with a sense of community responsibility and in the long run, to build social capital.

The concept of mentoring among students is not new. Some education institutes have also initiated mentorship schemes on their own. Their experiences echo well-established research studies that both mentors and mentees gain from the experience. What is new in this project is the extent of networking and its inclusive nature which can help promote a more empathetic society and sense of self-reliance. For instance, students from CSSA families with strengths in a particular area can provide mentorship services to other students in that area. This can also help raise his self-esteem and provide training in communication and leadership skills, being soft skills essential to future academic and career success.

For details of the project, please refer to *Annex A*.

*(ii) “Adopt-A-School” Project – Preparing the Younger Generation for Future Challenges*

The “Adopt-A-School” Project recognises the importance of business

firms as a resource of support and exposure. It also recognises the merits of using schools as a platform to reach out to the needy students and through them, the needy families.

Social and philanthropic services by businesses in Hong Kong are not new. What this project aims to encourage is the establishment of a *closer, growing and longer-term* relationship between the Adopting Companies and the Adopted Schools. With the transition to knowledge-based economy, integrating schools with the wider community and the business sector and providing students with exposure and life experience is key to preparing our younger generation for future challenges. While companies are free to choose secondary schools to adopt, they are encouraged to adopt schools with more students from disadvantaged backgrounds and CSSA families. This project will not merely benefit our younger generation, but also nurture a sense of community responsibility among the companies and their employees. Details of the proposal are contained in *Annex B*.

## **Next Steps**

5. The above projects will complement the policy work undertaken by the Task Force and the Commission, as well as work of other bureaux/departments and NGOs. The Mentorship Fun Project will be officially launch in October 2005, while the pilot Adopt-A-School Project is expected to be implemented in the second half of 2005. The Commission Secretariat will keep the Task Force posted of development.

Commission Secretariat  
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## **Building Social Capital in the Education Sector**

### **“Mentorship Fun” Project**

“Mentorship Fun” is a mentoring project among tertiary, post-secondary, secondary and primary students with a view to imbuing the younger generation with a sense of community responsibility and in the long run, to build social capital.

#### **Mentors**

2. Students from tertiary institutions will serve mainly as mentors for secondary and primary students. Students of Vocational Training Council (VTC) and secondary school students can be both mentors and mentees with the discretion left to the Council/school heads.

3. Mentors are themselves students and should not be treated as cheap labour or expected to work with complete independence. They should be given treatment befitting of student-volunteers. The school receiving service should assign adult(s) (preferably a teacher and/or a parent) to supervise the programme and assist the mentor in understanding the school, the mentees and the programme requirements.

#### **Services to be provided under the project**

4. The scheme will be school-based with the mentors providing the services on the premises of the mentees' schools. No rigid service scope will be set for the project; it can be homework support, ball games, discourse about issues of mutual interest. For safety considerations, the mentee schools should provide a venue easily accessible and visible for the conduct of the mentoring services, e.g. covered playground and there should be an adult around.

#### **Mechanism of offering services and engaging volunteers**

5. Conventionally, schools need to approach individual tertiary institutions for voluntary services while tertiary institutions have to use their networks to identify schools to take forward their voluntary service programmes. To facilitate the implementation of this project and to enhance access to information on the

supply and demand of voluntary services for the education sector, an electronic platform will be developed.

6. The electronic platform will be a web-based platform listing out categorized voluntary service offers and demands. It will only be accessible by schools, tertiary institutions, VTC and registered tertiary students. Tertiary institutions/VTC and secondary schools will post services offered. In addition, institutions could, if they so wish, permit registered tertiary students (as individuals or in groups) to post their service/location preferences on the platform so that schools require voluntary services can find the most suitable offer available and approach the provider direct. The electronic platform will also allow those who want to offer voluntary services under this project to look for voluntary service opportunities available so that they can approach schools that might need their services.

### **Collection of feedback**

7. Some institutions/schools see the project as a service learning opportunity for their students and thus desire to have feedback on the mentors to facilitate reflective learning by the students. Schools receiving voluntary services through this project are thus expected to provide feedback on the performance of the volunteers to respective tertiary institutions/schools once a year by filling a short and easy-to-complete feedback form.

8. Apart from the regular feedback, schools may contact respective institutions/schools in exceptional circumstances when immediate attention of the institution is required.

### **Recognition**

9. Volunteers serving not less than 50 hours (excluding time for transport) in a year will be issued with a Certificate of Participation. A Certificate of Appreciation will be issued to those who serve not less than 100 hours in a year. For the purpose of this project, a year would run from 1 July to 30 June of the next year.

10. Some schools and institutions indicate that they will factor into account

students' performance in this project in assessing their eligibility for leadership and other development programmes that some schools and institutions currently have in place. The Secretariat to the Commission on Poverty will also liaise with non-governmental institutions with a view to exploring similar opportunities.

### **Travelling Allowance**

11. A \$20 per occasion travelling allowance may be paid to the volunteers. The disbursement of travelling allowances will be subject to institutions'/schools' discretion. For example, institutions/schools may choose not to disburse the allowance if the mentee school is very near to the institution/secondary school (say, within 10 minutes' walk) or if the institution/school will centrally arrange transport for the mentors.

12. Voluntary services or service-learning programmes organized by tertiary institutions/schools for students in other schools, regardless of whether they are arranged through the electronic platform mentioned, will be eligible for claiming the traveling allowance and the service hours could be counted for the purpose of award of certificates.

13. Training given to the volunteers can be counted as service hours with a limit of 5 hours for each service programme, up to limit of 10 hours per mentor per year. Such training should be arranged at the institution's/school's own discretion.

14. As a start, \$200,000 will be parked with the Dean of Students Office of every participating tertiary/post-secondary institution. An amount of \$50,000 would be parked with every secondary school offering voluntary services. The ledger for the amount should be kept separately from the other accounts of the institution / school. A balance sheet with brief record of claims would be passed to the CoP Secretariat on an annual basis (Detail procedures and requirements will be announced separately).

### **Insurance for mentors**

15. Insurance for mentors will be covered by the institutions/schools the mentors studying in.

### **Commencement date for the project**

16. The project will be officially launched in October 2005. But as some institutions/schools may wish to conduct pilot programmes during the summer holidays, the start date for claiming traveling allowance and counting service hours will be set on 16 July 2005.

Secretariat to the Commission on Poverty

July 2005

## **Pilot “Adopt-A-School” Project**

### **Gist**

Using schools as a platform, the proposed pilot project aims at fostering cross-sectoral partnership, especially the participation of business sector, in preventing and alleviating poverty, including inter-generational poverty.

### **Genesis of the Proposed Project**

2. Members will recall that under the auspices of the Kwun Tong District Council and Kwun Tong District Office, a successful Forum was held on 25 June. The most salient message from the dialogue was that anti-poverty work should regard families as an intervention unit and, given the implementation of basic education, schools would be a good platform for identification of needy families and initiation of intervention. Schools and NGOs present also shared the need and scope for cooperation enhancement. During the discussion, broadened exposure and job placement opportunities were regarded as effective means of empowering the disadvantaged and cultivating a more inclusive and empathetic society marked by dense community and human networks.

3. Reflecting on the dialogue, the CoP Secretariat therefore proposes launching a pilot “Adopt-a-School” Project with a view to making the best use of the experience and resources of the private sector to help the needy and the development of our younger generation, especially students from disadvantaged background. Through the provision of community services and assistance to students, it can also promote corporate social responsibility among companies and their employees. A possible positive spillover is that the provision of services and support to a needy student may help uncover the needs of his/her family, thus enabling the provision of targeted services by the Government, NGOs and other sectors, including, where appropriate, job placement opportunities through neighbourhood, NGO and business networks.

## Key Features

4. At present, some companies are quite active in providing funding, material support, mentoring services and advice to schools<sup>1</sup>. Most of such services and donations are on an ad hoc basis or activity-based. The “Adopt-A-School” Project aims to encourage the establishment of a *growing* and *longer-term relationship* between the Adopting Company and the Adopted School.

5. Through participation in the project, the Adopting Company will become the “godparent” of a school. Through close dialogue between the Adopting Company and the Adopted school, the former will appreciate more the needs of the latter and its students, thus better able to mobilise its resources and connections to try to help meet such needs in a targeted manner. The progressively dense and extensive organisational and human links will also provide a good platform and social context for needs identification and satisfaction between the two.

6. Since different schools have different needs, we do not find it prudent to lay down the service scope rigidly in a top-down fashion. The level, nature and intensity of the services would depend on the different needs of the Adopted School, the resources the Adopting Company can deploy and the evolvement of the partnership between the two. Services may include, for instance, the following -

- (a) provision of funding and material donations;
- (b) after-school care, organisation of extra-curricular activities;
- (c) mentoring, sharing of experience, advice on personal and career development;
- (d) provision of training, workshops, placement/internship opportunities<sup>2</sup> etc.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, the Young Entrepreneurs Development Council (YDC), with the support of the Education and Manpower Bureau and the business community, has organised the School-Company Partnership [since 2002]. Some business organisations have also provided mentoring service to schools.

<sup>2</sup> While companies are free to consider whether they are in a position to offer placement/summer internship opportunities to students as a positive spillover of the project, experience demonstrates that such opportunities are highly valuable to students, particularly those from disadvantaged background, in sharpening their soft skills and preparing them for future career/academic pursuit.

- (e) joint participation in worthy community/philanthropic projects such as helping other needy groups.

7. The Adopting Company would be encouraged to mobilise its employees to provide different services and assistance to students. Drawing analogy to the development of a new relationship between godparents and adopted children, the Adopting Company may start off by providing some basic service and explore areas which it may further help the Adopted School and students through enhanced understanding between the Company and its employees and the School and its students.

### **Targetting & Pilots**

8. Corporate social responsibility cannot take root without voluntarism and a sense of ownership towards the project. Hence, there should be minimal central directive and impediment to the formation of any partnerships. What Government should do is to facilitate, encourage and appreciate. This would also reduce the risk of labelling.

9. Noting the relatively nascent development of long-term (as opposed to largely activity-based) partnerships between businesses and social services delivery units (with schools constituting one category thereof) in Hong Kong and the need for early focus on poverty prevention and alleviation, some initial targeting in our promotional work would be warranted. We propose to focus our initial encouragement to firms with a greater customer interface for two reasons. These firms, by virtue of the nature of their business, are likely to be more responsive to the merits of community networking and social empathy. Secondly, they also stand a better chance to provide more job placement opportunities or suitable career counselling/sharing for the students and/or their family members. Insofar as the target schools are concerned, we propose secondary schools since secondary students should be able to appreciate more the exposure in the wider community and the business world. Among secondary schools, we would further propose that initial emphasis be put on those schools with a higher proportion of students from disadvantaged background.

10. As a start, the Commission Secretariat will foster a few “adoption” between business organisations and secondary schools. We envisage that,

after the initial matching, the involvement of the Commission Secretariat in the actual delivery of service is minimal. No capital and recurrent cost from the Government is required. Subject to experience gained in the implementation of the pilots, the Commission Secretariat will explore ways to publicise the good outcome and best practice in order to encourage more companies to adopt schools.

### **Collection of Feedback & Recognition**

11. The Secretariat will liaise with the Adopting Companies and the Adopted Schools to gauge if the project is bringing the envisaged benefits, its growth potential, whether it should be continued and if so, how it may be improved and adapted. The Adopting Companies and the Adopted Schools would be encouraged to develop additional assessment tools to collect feedback from employees and staff, and monitor progress and positive outcomes of the project. The aim of the evaluation is developmental rather than judgemental.

12. The publicity efforts referred to in paragraph 10 will serve the dual purpose of being a recognition and appreciation of the services of the company as well as attempts to encourage emulation by other private sector companies.

### **Way Forward**

13. Subject to Members' views, we target to start the pilots in the second half of 2005.

The Commission Secretariat  
July 2005