

Information Note on Sustainability Assessment System

Introduction

This paper informs Members of the sustainability assessment (SA) system instituted within the Government.

Sustainability Assessment System

2. The SA system is developed under the context of the Planning Department's consultancy study on "Sustainable Development in Hong Kong for the 21st Century" (SUSDEV 21 Study) mainly to integrate sustainability principles within the Government's decision-making process.

3. The Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) put in place the SA system in December 2001. Under the system, all bureaux and departments are required to conduct SA of their new and major initiatives or programmes that may likely bring about significant or prolonged implications on the economic, social and/or environmental conditions of Hong Kong. Examples include regional or sub-regional planning studies, comprehensive transport studies, waste management plans, education or health reform proposals etc.

4. From April 2002 onwards, bureaux and departments are required to include a "sustainability implications" paragraph in their submissions to the former Chief Secretary for Administration's Committee [now the Policy Committee] and the Executive Council to explain their main SA findings.

5. Bureaux and departments are advised to use the SA as a planning tool during planning or formulation of their major proposals. It should help scope out cross-sectoral issues and sensitive areas that require special attention or joint departmental examination at an early stage. It should also facilitate the relevant bureaux or departments to resolve the issues through a concerted effort.

6. To ensure the smooth implementation of the SA system, the SDU has arranged special briefings and, with the assistance of the Civil Service Training and Development Institute (CSTDI), organized series of training courses to equip bureaux and departments with the knowledge and skills to conduct the required SA.

7. Apart from training, the SDU provides technical assistance and support to bureaux and departments to facilitate their proper application of the SA system. The SDU also examines SA reports prepared by bureaux and departments and, where

necessary, provides the Executive Council and Policy Committee with independent interpretation of the main SA findings set out in their submissions.

Computer-aided Sustainability Evaluation Tool (CASET)

8. A computer tool, namely the computer-aided sustainability evaluation tool (CASET), is also developed under the SUSDEV 21 Study to guide bureaux and departments to conduct SA in a systematic manner.

9. The CASET is built upon eight guiding principles and a set of 41 corresponding sustainability indicators. These guiding principles and indicators are devised following two rounds of extensive public consultation exercise conducted under the SUSDEV 21 Study, and updated following our recent discussions with the stakeholder and user groups concerned.

10. The guiding principles translate the abstract concept of sustainable development into more concrete terms, covering economy, health and hygiene, natural resources, society and social infrastructure, biodiversity, leisure and cultural vibrancy, environmental quality and mobility.

11. Based on these eight guiding principles, 41 sustainability indicators are selected to assess the impacts of proposals in greater detail. The guiding principles and sustainability indicators are listed out at **Annexes A and B** respectively.

Regular Review

12. In late 2003, we completed a review of the operation of the SA system in consultation with the stakeholder and user groups concerned and incorporated a number of improvements to ensure the system is effective and up to date. With effect from December 2003, the responsible bureaux and departments are advised to set out the main SA findings of their major proposals in the relevant public consultation documents to help facilitate better informed public discussion and building of community consensus. They may also incorporate the requirement for SA into their planning or feasibility studies of major proposals, as appropriate; to ensure SA findings are taken into account during the planning or formulation process. We have also updated the baseline database in consultation with the relevant departments and included a social checklist in the CASET for assessing social sustainability implications of the major proposals. We would continue to review the operation of the system from time to time and make further refinements as appropriate.

Sustainable Development Unit
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