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For discussion

**Public Awareness and Education
on Environmental Protection**

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the current strategies and initiatives implemented by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) to promote environmental protection in Hong Kong, and the way forward for enhancing public environmental awareness.

BACKGROUND

2. Promoting public environmental awareness is one of the major responsibilities of the EPD amid a wide range of pollution prevention and control activities. The EPD set up the Community Relations Unit (CRU) in 1992 to coordinate campaigns, publicity, education and action programmes for promoting public environmental awareness with a view to harnessing the community's support for and contribution to achieving desired environmental goals. The CRU also provides administrative and secretarial supports to the Environmental Campaign Committee (ECC) and the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) Committee.

3. The ECC has worked closely in partnership with the EPD to promote public awareness of environmental issues. Since its establishment in 1990, the ECC has implemented a series of territory-wide campaigns

annually which involve and mobilize people from all walks of life to contribute actively towards a better environment.

4. Public participation in environmental protection and conservation is also encouraged through the setting up of the ECF, a statutory trust fund, which offers grants to non-profit making organisations, tertiary institutions and schools for carrying out educational, research and technology demonstration projects in relation to environmental protection and conservation, as well as community waste recovery projects. The ECF also provides funding support to the ECC for its operation and implementation of campaign activities. Since its establishment in 1994, the ECF has financed over 1,200 projects with a total commitment of about \$230 million.

CURRENT STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMMES

5. Over the years, a wide variety of environmental education and community programmes have been organised by the EPD and ECC. The programmes can be categorized under two major strategies, namely, stakeholder engagement and capacity building.

(I) Stakeholder Engagement

6. Stakeholder engagement is an integral part of the EPD's efforts in fostering greater public participation in environmental protection. The CRU has maintained links with its major stakeholders which include schools, community groups, green groups and private organisations. Details of major programmes are provided in ensuing paragraphs.

(a) Nurturing Environmental Awareness in Schools

7. Educating the young people is a major focus of the EPD's and ECC's community programmes. The Hong Kong Green School Awards have been organised with the Education Bureau (EDB), formerly the Education and Manpower Bureau, since 2000. The scheme aims to encourage schools to formulate a school environmental policy and

implement environmental management for developing environmental awareness and an environmentally-friendly attitude among school managers, non-teaching staff, teachers, students and their parents. Schools competing for the awards are assessed in the aspects of environmental infrastructure, environmental management, environmental education and environmental activities.

8. Schools are also involved in waste recycling through the Waste Separation and Recycling Scheme in Schools organised since May 2000. The scheme aims to enhance students' understanding of the importance of conserving resources and to engage them in practising waste separation in a school setting. About 865 primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong are participating in the scheme. The ECC has committed \$6 million for providing new recycling bins for schools by late 2008 or early 2009.

9. Environmental awareness among students is also promoted through on-going programmes such as Disney's Environmentality Challenge, essay competitions organised with Lions Clubs International and Tree Conservation Competition for schools. All these programmes help nurture young people's aspiration for green acts.

(b) Mobilizing Public Participation

10. Public participation is essential to the success of environmental policies and measures. The Waste Recycling Campaign in Housing Estates began in 1998 encouraged residents to separate waste for recycling in the daily life. In 2005, the programme was replaced by the territory-wide programme on Source Separation of Domestic Waste which aims to increase recovery rate by collecting a wider range of recyclables on each floor of apartment blocks. By June 2008, 922 housing estates and buildings have signed up for the programme involving a population of 3.4 million people.

11. Territory-wide publicity programmes are also organised from time to time to remind the people of the importance of protecting the environment. The World Environment Day has been organised since 1990 in the local community to echo the United Nation's annual call for actions to protect the environment. The Hong Kong Environmental Protection

Festival is another major event held since 1995 to raise public concerns about environmental issues. Different themes have been adopted every year to spread relevant green messages. To echo government's waste reduction initiatives, "Waste Reduction" is set as the local theme for both events in 2008, which promotes public participation in "Source Separation of Domestic Waste" and the "3Rs - Reduce, Reuse and Recycle waste".

12. Thematic large-scale publicity programmes are also held to urge the public to take actions to protect the environment. We launched the Action Blue Sky Campaign in 2005 which encouraged the public and the business sector to join hands in cleaning up the air. Messages on setting air-conditioned room temperature at 25.5 degree Celsius, dressing down in workplace, turning off idling engines, avoiding the consumption VOC-containing products were promoted. In 2007, we have the "I Love Hong Kong I Love Green!" Campaign calling for collective efforts of the community to switch to a greener and cleaner lifestyle, including turning off the light and computer when not using them, bringing our own bags for shopping and using less disposable utensils.

13. Reaching out to the community is another effective way to gain understating and support for environmental protection. The Mobile Environmental Resource Centre (ERC) disseminates green messages through its visits to schools, housing estates and shopping centres. The Community Green Network Programme started in late 2002 sets up roving exhibitions in housing estates and answers residents' questions about environmental issues.

(c) Involving the Private Sector

14. The business sector is one of our important partners and their involvement is multi-faceted. Sponsorship has been provided by the businesses to support school environmental schemes. For example, the Bank of China (Hong Kong) has provided cash awards to the winners of the Hong Kong Green School Awards for setting up environmental resource facilities in schools since 2000, and the MTR Corporation has sponsored the environmental projects or overseas environmental study visits of Student

Environmental Protection Ambassadors since 1997.

15. The business sector's commitment in practising environmental management and green initiatives is also acknowledged through various award schemes, such as the Hong Kong Eco-Business Awards, the Wastewi\$e Scheme and the Hong Kong Energy Efficiency Awards. In February 2008, these schemes were merged to form the Hong Kong Awards for Environmental Excellence (HKAAEE) with the intention to optimize resources and establish a prestigious awards scheme to cover a wider scope of sectors. Under the Scheme, Environmental Labels will be awarded to those organisations which have achieved significant self-improvement in the aspects of waste reduction, energy conservation, indoor air quality and environmental friendliness of product design. Sectoral Awards will be given to those organisations with outstanding performance in environmental management which has been verified through an annual competition.

(d) Collaborating with Environmental Concern Groups

16. Environmental concern groups have been our major partners in promoting environmental awareness. Local green groups have been engaged by the EPD to operate the ERCs at which the public can access to updated environmental information through interactive exhibitions, guided visits and education programmes. The ERC at Tsuen Wan has been operated by a local green group since its establishment in 1997 through a management agreement contract. In September 2006, the operation of another ERC at Wan Chai was also contracted out to a green group. The Lung Fu Shan Environmental Education Centre opened in August 2008 is a joint project with the University of Hong Kong which offers education programmes featuring nature conservation and global warming.

17. Green groups have also been engaged in the delivery of environmental education programmes for the public. Environmental training programmes have been jointly organised with the green groups for different target groups including teachers, students, youth groups, property management staff and civil servants.

(II) Capacity Building

18. For years, the onus for organising environmental action and awareness programmes was fallen on the EPD and green groups. In recent years, the emphasis of our community awareness programmes is on helping others acquire the ability, skills and resources to take the lead in protecting the environment. Capacity building is the key phrase of EPD's long-term approach for community programmes.

(a) Training up Ambassadors

19. The idea of training others to promote environmental protection and organise related events began in the schools. To encourage students to take the lead to improve the environment, the Student Environmental Protection Ambassador Scheme has been jointly organised by the ECC, EPD and EDB for students of all primary and secondary schools since 1995. Environmental training, capacity building programmes and competitions are conducted under the Scheme. The number of Student Environmental Protection Ambassadors (SEPAs) increased from 1,600 in 1995 to 17,654 this year.

20. Apart from students, more targeted capacity training has also been carried out for specific stakeholders through the Green Leader Programme which was launched in late 2001. Stakeholders in 10 fields, namely, commerce and industry, transport, District Councillors, non-government organisations, teachers, women's associations, business and services, youth groups, resident representatives and green groups attended 410 workshop sessions organised by EPD. Guidebooks were produced for respective sectors and green leaders have been trained up and help promote green practices.

21. Ambassador programme has also been organised for the property management sector since 1999. Participants learn how to introduce environmental management systems and set up waste recycling programmes in housing estates through training sessions and visits. After training up, they help promote the Source Separation of Domestic Waste

among the residents. Their efforts were recognised in the Forum on Source Separation of Waste and Award Presentation on 20 August 2008 organised jointly with the Hong Kong Association of Property Management Companies Ltd. and the Hong Kong Productivity Council.

(b) Supporting Environmental Projects

22. Community groups and non-profit making organisations are invited to apply funding from the ECF for implementing environmental projects of different nature, namely, Environmental Research and Technology Demonstration Projects, Environmental Education and Community Action Projects, Community Waste Recovery Projects, Programme on Source Separation of Domestic Waste, Conservation Management Agreement Projects and Public Education Programme under the “Policy Framework for the Management of Municipal Solid Waste (2005-2014)”. The aim of such grants is to empower these groups with the necessary resources to promote community environmental awareness through organising their own green activities.

23. To strengthen support for more community-initiated environmental protection and conservation activities, the Government injected a one-off sum of \$1 billion into the ECF in early 2008 with focus on the following priority programme areas:

- (a) territory-wide educational and community involvement campaigns on environmental protection;
- (b) technology transfer from professional institutions to practitioners to enhance environmental performance of industrial process;
- (c) minor works projects to demonstrate and promote energy efficiency and conservation and waste reduction; and
- (d) regional and international policy and technology conferences to promote exchanges amongst professional bodies on latest developments and best practices on environment and conservation matters.

(c) Fostering District-based Environmental Activities

24. The District Councils' strong network with district groups and residents enables effective dissemination of messages and mobilisation of local support. In this connection, long-standing partnerships have been fostered with the District Councils to promote environmental awareness in the local community. Such activities cover a wide variety such as carnivals, waste reduction campaigns, exhibitions, workshops, competitions, performances and tree plantings, which help disseminate green messages to every corner of the community.

25. Besides, the District Councils have been enlisted to organise district-based activities under the annual events of World Environment Day and Hong Kong Environmental Protection Festival. Themes are designated for these activities echoing the two events such as "Waste Reduction", "Clean Air", "Protect Our Water Resources" and "Save Resources". These activities are supported and funded by the ECC.

THE WAY FORWARD

26. With years of hard work, the efforts in promoting environmental awareness have started to bear fruits as evidenced from the growing public awareness and increasing concerns of the public about environmental issues and acceptance of behaviour changes for environmental causes. Tackling environmental problems is a long-term mission which requires the support and participation of every sector of the community. Through stakeholder engagement, capacity building and publicity campaigns, efforts would continue to be made to educate the public and initiate behavioural changes in daily life, with a view to fostering a greener lifestyle among the people of Hong Kong.

27. With the expanded scope and enhanced operation of the ECF, we would press ahead a series of programmes to promote environmental protection and conservation in particular in the areas of greening, energy conservation and waste reduction/recycling. Major programmes include –

- (a) support schools and charitable organisations to implement greening works projects at their premises including green roofs and demonstration set-ups on renewable energy;
- (b) support proposals from suitable organisations, namely NGOs, professional organisations, universities, resident-based organisations, etc., to develop and implement energy conservation projects (e.g. energy audit and installation projects for community buildings, elderly homes, etc.) at district level;
- (c) extend the funding of the source separation programme from housing estates/residential buildings to commercial and industrial buildings;
- (d) collaborate with the District Councils in promoting large-scale, district-wide programmes on green lifestyle. The ECF Committee has agreed to set aside \$50 million to fund such district-wide environmental programmes; and
- (e) support regional conferences to promote exchanges amongst professional bodies on latest developments and best practices on energy and nature conservation matters.

ADVICE SOUGHT

28. Members are invited to note the progress of public environmental education and awareness programmes carried out by the EPD and comment on the proposed way forward for enhancing public environmental awareness as set out in paragraph 27.

**Environmental Protection Department
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