

Executive Summary

1. Poverty affects the livelihood of grassroot people and may undermine Hong Kong's long-term competitiveness. All along, the Government, the civic society and the business sector have worked together in alleviating poverty through policy initiatives, services and donations respectively. The Bauhinia Foundation Research Centre (the Centre) supports the continuance of the three-pronged approach to ameliorate the poverty problem. Nevertheless, the Centre is of the view that community discussions have mainly been focusing on the work of Government, while understating the active involvement of the civic society and the business sector. Meanwhile, the usual practice of giving donations has not made full use of the potentials of the business sector in contributing to poverty alleviation work. To this end, the Study focuses on the involvement of the business sector, exploring how they could break the convention by adopting other ways to help the underprivileged. By examining and referring to the business sector's experiences in supporting the underprivileged, as well as understanding their strengths and limitations, the Centre makes recommendations which hopefully will incentivise the business sector to do more to help the targeted needy people.

Study Findings

2. The Study has examined approximately 1,000 projects carried out by business organisations of different sizes in various sectors to help the underprivileged. It is estimated that about 80% of the examined projects are implemented by large enterprises and the remaining 20% by small and medium enterprises.
3. The Study noted that apart from making donations, the business sector has participated in poverty alleviation work either by proactively reaching out to the targets through an enterprise-led approach, or by cooperating with other organisations. The former is more common to large enterprises. While the advantages of this approach lie in the ability to maintain autonomy and

flexibility, the limitation is the lack of relevant experience and knowledge of the enterprises concerned. The latter approach is suitable for enterprises of any size. The enterprises are able to leverage the benefit of the experience and knowledge of the social service agencies which could communicate with the public and the community more effectively. The limitation is, however, the lack of enterprise autonomy in carrying out such work.

4. The Study also found that poverty alleviation work by the business sector has been extended from donations to areas like skills training, entrepreneurial opportunities, education, medical care and housing assistance. The involvement of the business sector could achieve a win-win situation for both the enterprises and the beneficiaries as the poverty alleviation work may provide enterprises with promotional opportunities as well as enhancing their reputation. Furthermore, boosting the ability of the underprivileged could increase overall productivity and promote economic development.
5. To make the best use of resources, the Study has selected seven underprivileged groups as priority targets, namely the working poor families, students from low-income families, marginalised youth, ex-offenders, single-parent families, new arrivals from the Mainland and ethnic minorities. Despite the differences in their population structures, characteristics, difficulties encountered and support needed, they all belong to the less-educated, low-skilled and consequently low-income group.

Study Recommendations

6. In carrying out poverty alleviation work, the business sector should focus on providing opportunities for those with work ability so that they could become self-reliant and move upward. This would achieve the aims of poverty prevention, poverty removal and the reduction of social exclusion. Enterprises may implement appropriate, effective and sustainable schemes having regard to resources available, areas and experiences where they have expertise. The Study has put forth nine recommendations under three areas,

namely education support, employment opportunities and support, and awareness building.

7. **Education Support**

Education and Learning Development: Enterprises could offer scholarships / grants to children of low-income staff to encourage them to study hard; enterprises could also launch an incentive-driven ‘reading scheme’ to help nurture positive reading habits in the younger generation. The schemes could be extended to other qualified low-income families.

Vocational Education and Training: The business sector could help create platforms of vocational education and training for young people from low-income families along with the development trends of industries in Hong Kong (such as the cruise industry). Beneficiaries include those who have good command of other languages (including new arrivals from the Mainland and ethnic minorities) and young people with low educational levels but other potentials.

Social Skills Training: Enterprises could invite eminent people to be mentors of young people from target families and help them develop social skills. Enterprises could also offer job interview coaching to them.

After-school Tutoring and Assistance: Enterprises could encourage staff members to provide free tutoring services, as well as sponsoring venues and food. Enterprises could also give secondary school students financial subsidies for joining online tuition classes.

8. **Employment Opportunities and Support**

Internship and Work Opportunities: Enterprises could provide average students from low-income families with longer-term internship and work opportunities, allowing them to experience work life, receive interpersonal skills training, understand the industry and its job nature, and put theory into

practice. Enterprises could also consider employing the well-performed interns as permanent staff.

Tailored Job Opportunities for People with Special Needs: Restaurants and eateries could sell breakfast or drinks to the target groups at a discounted price, which could then be resold for a profit to those working in the vicinity. They could also organise food and beverage production courses for low-skilled people. Large corporations could let those who have completed relevant training courses make use of their pantries to provide simple breakfast to their staff members at a very reasonable price. Enterprises could also facilitate the soon-to-be released offenders to participate in employment assistance schemes and attend job interviews.

Assistance for Business Start-ups and Self-employment: The business sector could allow qualified target groups to run pop-up stores in the circulation areas of their shopping malls, on a short-term and free-of-charge basis. Enterprises could help enhance the applicants' business plans. Social service agencies could provide applicants with relevant training and trade organisations could provide experts as their advisers.

9. **Awareness Building**

Activities to Encourage Positive Self-expression: Enterprises could offer scholarships to artistically-talented young people from low-income families to support their studies at art schools. Enterprises could also provide living allowances for beneficiaries during their study period and up to two to three years after graduation so that they could concentrate on developing their career.

Building Positive Values and Spirit of Mutual Assistance: The business sector could implement projects to help enhance self-reliance in accordance with individual situations. For instance, saloons could offer free-of-charge haircut services to low-income people during designated timeslots. This could help needy people while providing training for employees. The

business sector could also allow charity organisations to sell flags inside their shopping malls, aiming to mobilise all sectors to participate in community services.

Encouraging More Enterprises to Involve in Poverty Alleviation Work

10. Helping the underprivileged well deserves commendation. Their meaningful work also serves as a role model to influence more people to take part in poverty alleviation work. Aiming to applause and recognise the business sector's work, especially that done by the small and medium enterprises, the Centre suggests the Government to set up a new awards system, establish an online platform for providing relevant resources and information, compliment the enterprises with active participation, encourage the media to report and advocate such activities, work with the media to identify and recognise the most outstanding projects on combating poverty on a yearly basis, and provide additional tax incentive.

11. During the study, the Centre has consulted various organisations in the business and social service sectors. We understand the business sector is positive about the poverty alleviation concept and in general supports our recommendations. Therefore, we very much look forward to the Government and the Commission on Poverty to seriously consider and adopt our recommendations when formulating poverty alleviation policy and measures.