

Plenary II

Topic: Social Framework for the Development of Volunteering



The Facilitating Role of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government in Promotion of Volunteer Service

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Abstract

Volunteer service has a long history in Hong Kong. Like many cosmopolitan cities, life in Hong Kong is hectic which puts strain on interpersonal relationships. In view of this, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSARG) recognizes the importance of volunteer service as a means to promote social harmony and closer inter-personal relationship.

The Social Welfare Department of the HKSARG has been making continuous efforts to promote volunteer service in conjunction with various non-governmental organizations and other sectors in Hong Kong. In 1998, a territory-wide “Volunteer Movement” was launched. With the formation of the “Steering Committee on Promotion of Volunteer Service” and setting up of offices at the central and district levels, our Volunteer Movement has gained the support from over 1 300 organizations and 510 000 registered volunteers. Our volunteers provided in total over 12 million service hours in 2004.

Introduction

To build up a caring community, we encourage our citizens to take part in volunteering. Volunteering is an expression of people's concern for the community and has been widely supported by various sectors of Hong Kong. Dating back to the late 19th Century, charitable and religious organisations took the lead in taking care of the poor and the needy. With rapid economic growth in the 1970's and the allocation of more public resources for social services, the role of volunteer service shifted from giving tangible assistance to showing concern for the disadvantaged.

2. Hong Kong however shares the common features of a cosmopolitan city where life is hectic affecting interpersonal relationship. In view of this, the HKSAR Government recognises the importance of volunteer service as a means to foster closer inter-personal relationship and promote community harmony. We believe that through participation in community affairs, our citizens will have a stronger sense of belonging and trust in the community and social cohesion will be enhanced. Volunteering is a very effective channel to promote community participation.

3. Volunteering is primarily initiated by the citizens themselves. Its development and sustainability therefore rely on the motivation of individual members and organisations of the community. The HKSAR Government has over the years adopted a facilitating role in the promotion of volunteerism in the community, through active publicity work and provision of assistance to volunteers and volunteer organisations to enhance their participation in volunteering.

Policy Directive

4. Ever since the handover, there has been strong support for volunteer service. For example, the 1998 Policy Address states that "volunteer service is an individual's expression of concern for the community, and we are keen to encourage greater participation as a means to help build a more caring community in Hong Kong."

5. In the 2001 Policy Address, it is emphasized that "the Government will work closely with the community and voluntary agencies in keeping with the people's positive spirit of self-help, mutual aid, participation and dedication."

6. In the 2004 Policy Address, "Enhancing Social Capital" is set out as a major policy directive of the HKSAR Government :

"The social welfare sector has been encouraging volunteerism, and has proposed many new ideas to involve the business community to participate in community affairs. ... These have sown the seeds for a tri-partite partnership between government, the business community and the third sector (not-for-profit sectors). ...to examine ways to develop this tri-partite

partnership ...to inculcate this concept in the community to help it take root.”

7. Developing volunteer service is an important policy of the HKSAR Government. To build a more caring community, volunteering is actively promoted as a sustained and concerted movement involving people from all walks of life.

Framework

8. To implement these policy directives, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) of the HKSAR Government has worked hard to promote volunteer service, and establish good connections with non-government organisations (NGOs) and various sectors in the society. In 1998, a territory-wide “Volunteer Movement” was launched, with the following objectives :

- to build a caring community
- to promote self-fulfilment of our citizens through volunteering
- to develop community talents and resources
- to promote the citizens’ sense of belonging to the community

9. The “Steering Committee on Promotion of Volunteer Service” of SWD, chaired by the Director of Social Welfare and comprises members from leaders of different sectors and professions, has been set up to serve as the highest consultative body to steer the development of volunteer services by formulating the overall strategies and directions in the promotion of volunteering, and strengthening cross-departmental and cross-sectoral cooperation and collaboration.

10. The Steering Committee is underpinned by four sub-committees, namely :

- the “Sub-committee on Promotion of Student and Youth Volunteering”
- the “Sub-committee on Promotion of Corporate Volunteering”
- the “Sub-committee on Promotion of Volunteering in Community Organisations”
- the “Sub-committee on Promotion and Publicity of Volunteer Service”

These sub-committees, chaired by community dignitaries and leaders in the respective sectors, are to develop focused promotional strategies and activities for the specified promotional targets. We have gained the support from more than 60 members to serve on these sub-committees.

11. The Steering Committee is also supported by an effective infrastructure, both at the territory and the district levels, to co-ordinate, mobilize support and match volunteers to appropriate organisations and tasks. At the territory level, the Central Office for Volunteer Service of the SWD assists in the formulation of policies and strategies, and as the

chief co-ordinator in the implementation of the Movement. At district level ^(Note 1), 12 District Co-ordinating Committees on Promotion of Volunteer Service were set up, chaired by the respective District Social Welfare Officers and supported by the “District Designated Offices on Volunteer Service”, to carry out the strategies set out by the Steering Committee and to co-ordinate local initiatives by building up a pool of volunteers and to provide support to local organisations and individuals in their respective districts.

Overall Promotional Strategies

12. In pursuance of the respective policy directives, the Steering Committee has devised the following promotional strategies :

- to promote the spirit of volunteering
- to increase the popularity of volunteering
- to widen support and participation from different sectors
- to establish links with other parts of the world to enrich our experience and knowledge in the development of volunteer service

Promoting the spirit for volunteering

13. The Steering Committee has been active in promoting **volunteering as a way of life** - a lifestyle for everybody who has a heart to care and serve others. Messages have been put across to encourage people from all walks of life to show their concern to the people around them and provide volunteer services to the vulnerable groups in the society. In the past years, we have adopted the following slogans:-

Year	Slogan	
	In English	In Chinese
1998	Volunteering – Full of Happiness	做義工 獻愛心 社會滿載快樂人
1999	Volunteering – a way of life in the New Millennium	人人一齊參與義工服務新紀元
2000	Serving with Heart	至誠至真 服務由心
2001	Volunteering – a path for our growth and societal prosperity	踏上義工成長路 個人社會同進步
2002	Why not do something positive with your time, help yourself by helping others	借出耳朵傾出心 正面人生建信心
2003	Serve with Heart, Live with Passion	凝聚關懷傳愛心 跳躍生命闖人生
2004	Act Now; Help Others; Show You	互動 互助 互愛

(Note 1) In operation, the Social Welfare Department is organised into 12 districts over the territory.
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	Care	
2005	One team, One heart, One mind, Volunteering for a better Hong Kong	攜手同心 齊踏義工路 情牽你我 共創好香江

14. Efforts have also been made to explore creative and diversified service opportunities for volunteering. New areas identified so far include nature conservation, environmental protection, preservation of social heritage and the promotion of art and culture. Through the promotion of volunteering, the Government also aims at raising the quality of life and building a sense of belonging among people in Hong Kong.

Increasing the popularity of volunteering

15. The Sub-committee on Promotion and Publicity of Volunteer Service under the Steering Committee devises promotional strategies to raise the visibility and popularity of volunteering. To project a positive and attractive image of the volunteer, a famous designer helped us to design the V-shape logo, which depicts the “win-win” situation that volunteering benefits the service recipients, the society and the volunteers. The smile and looking eyes also feature the joy and energy brought forth by participating in volunteer service.

16. Having regard to prevailing social conditions and community needs, new series of thematic publicity and promotional programmes are devised annually to arouse public awareness of volunteering, highlight the meaningfulness of volunteering and the contribution of volunteers, so as to attract more participation. These publicity measures include production of radio programmes, television and radio announcement of public interest; advertisements on buses, trains and the Mass Transit Railway; exhibition and feature articles or volunteer stories in newspapers. These are very effective publicity measures and are largely sponsored by respective companies. A new series of TV Announcement of Public Interests were launched at the end of 2004 and have since been broadcast in all public television channels.

17. To raise the popularity of volunteering, a central award system has been introduced to give recognition to individual volunteers and volunteer organisations in the territory. Gold, silver and bronze service certificates were awarded to volunteers and participating organisations who have achieved the required annual service hours (200, 100 and 50 hours respectively for individuals and 1 000, 600 and 300 hours respectively for organisations). In 2004, more than 40 000 service certificates were issued to qualified volunteers and volunteer organisations.

18. To honour those who have served the highest number of service hours, a "Highest Number of Service Hour Award" was introduced. "Long Service Medals" are awarded to those who have continuously delivered more than 50 service hours annually for 5, 10, 15, 20, 30, 40 and 50 consecutive years. An “Annual Volunteer Award Presentation Ceremony” is organised around December each year, which serves to advocate to the public on the volunteers' zeal and contribution, and to tie in with the "International Volunteer Day".

19. In addition, opportunity for international exchange is provided to outstanding youth volunteers who have made significant contribution in volunteer service and are winners

of the Hong Kong Outstanding Youth Volunteers Scheme. Our outstanding youth volunteers have so far visited Singapore and Tokyo in Japan as well as Shanghai and Dalian in China.

Widening support and participation from different sectors

20. We strategically focus our promotional efforts on “students and youth”, “corporations” and “community organisations” to ensure a more long lasting recognition and participation.

21. Despite the challenge posed by a downturn in the economy in the past few years, volunteering has now become quite common among staff of corporations in Hong Kong. Currently, over 120 corporations have registered with us, and their volunteer teams have served the community for over 10 000 hours per year. This year, we put more emphasis on the quality of volunteer service and encourage corporate volunteers to make use of their own professional expertise in volunteer service.

22. The community organisations^(Note 2) in Hong Kong are well positioned to mobilise their members at times of need. For example, in the past three years, a total of 100 000 scarves and 50 000 origami products (pots of tulips made of paper) were produced and delivered. Earlier this year, we launched the “Caring for our Community – Starting from Serving the Elders” programme to mobilize residents’ associations in housing estates and blocks to serve singleton elders living in the same community. Eighty resident organizations enrolled in the programme to serve the elders. In another programme, volunteers in the community have pledged to hand-make 100 000 Chinese Luck Knots by end of this year, and deliver them to those they wish to show their concern. These programmes well demonstrate the enthusiasm of these community organisations in serving the community.

23. Students and youths in HKSAR widely accept that volunteer service provides them with an alternative learning opportunity. As many of our tertiary educational institutes recognise the applicants’ community participation in their admission application, our volunteer service certificate has become a significant documental proof for community participation. In addition, we help schools and parents to better understand volunteer service and involve them to promote student and youth volunteering.

Establishing links with other parts of the world to enrich our experience and knowledge in the development of volunteer service

24. Apart from collaborating with NGOs and other sectors in Hong Kong, the Steering Committee also establishes links with international organizations through which knowledge, skills, experience on volunteering and volunteer opportunities can be exchanged. Our delegations to overseas conferences and tours, including participation at the IAVE International Conferences and Asia-Pacific Conferences, have gathered very useful information which enriches our experience and enlightens our way for future development.

(Note 2) Community Organisations include religious bodies, women’s groups, trade/workers union, mutual aid committees, kai-fong welfare associations, clansman associations, etc.
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Current Conditions

25. In the past seven years, we are pleased to note that the Volunteer Movement has gained momentum and support from different sectors. There has been a steady and significant increase in terms of number of volunteers and organisations registered under the Movement as well as the number of service hours provided. From December 1998 to September 2005, the number of registered volunteers has increased from 170 000 to 510 000 and the number of participating organisations jumped up from 122 to 1 380. The total number of service hours was well over 12.9 million hours in 2004.

26. We also observe some other changes over these years. Our volunteer services have now become more preventive and developmental in nature rather than limited to remedial and charitable activities. The traditional values of charity, kind-heartedness and giving help to others are complemented by concepts of equality, social responsibility and mutual help. Apart from volunteering by individuals or by joining welfare organisations, more variety of organisations, e.g. corporations, employees' unions, professional bodies, civil servants groups and parents' associations, have now formed their own volunteer teams, and partnered with social service organisations to serve the community together. These reflect that volunteerism is becoming more mature in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

27. We recognize the positive effect of volunteering on individuals and groups. Since the launching of the "Volunteer Movement" in 1998, we have witnessed increasing support from different sectors of the community. We believe that apart from being the World City of Asia, Hong Kong has also become a city of care and concern.

28. Volunteers are a great asset of Hong Kong. In 2003, we faced Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and economic restructuring. But we also saw the very generous donations and support from the community to the SARS victims and their families and the contribution of volunteers from various sectors to assist the affected families to tide over their difficulties. This was the spirit of volunteerism at its zenith.

29. Volunteers and their service, are a precious social capital of Hong Kong. Volunteer service has provided a platform for the tri-partite partnership among government, the business community and the third sector (not-for-profit sectors) to develop and for challenges in the future. The HKSAR Government is committed to continue to promote volunteerism. We would step up efforts to encourage more corporations to develop corporate volunteer schemes, and our civil servants, schools and community organisations to take active part in voluntary work, to help the needy or disadvantaged groups, and to build Hong Kong into a community of care and concern.

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