

Mainstreaming Community Partnerships - The Hong Kong Experience

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Introduction

- New contested concepts – community building, social capital and partnerships, strategic to reduce social exclusion and maintain social stability.
- A key challenge is to identify and harness the strength of community ties (social capital) and resources contributing towards a just and harmonious society in general and in specific, poverty, unemployment (community capacity and network)
- Building partnership cutting across sectors becomes an integral part of the community building process (public, market and civil society/ third sector).
- Yet different sectors can have different perceptions and expectations on community and partnership building.



Importance of Community Building

- Civic engagement is core to the development of a democratic and active civil society.
- Facing a more divided, heterogeneous and individualized society, we have to build “bridges”, linking different race, culture, income, and occupation groups.
- U.K., EU, China, Australia and Singapore show efforts to build community-based and cross-sector partnerships to enhance social cohesion and reduce social exclusion.



Building Community Partnerships

- A mixed economy of welfare – changing role of the government (overloaded and overstretched)– shared welfare responsibility with society partners (tripartite partnership). One cannot tackle the cross-cutting social issues by individual sector, department, organization, services, and profession.
- Government reforms – privatization, decentralization and contracting out provide impetus for developing active partnership with the market and the third sector.
- Why (motivation), What (definition), Who (partners), how (governance) and evaluation (impact) of partnerships.
- Bridging social capital, connection of the people with other groups with different background and power, implies the building of cross sector partnerships.



Partnerships (Audit Commission)

- an agreement between two or more independent bodies to work collectively to achieve an objective.'
- Partners:
- are otherwise independent bodies;
- agree to cooperate to achieve a common goal;
- create a new organizational structure or process to achieve this goal;
- plan and implement a joint program; and
- share relevant information, risks and rewards

A huge diversity of partnerships in terms of types, meanings and approaches.



Why - “collaborative advantages”

- which cannot have been provided by an individual organization. Through collaboration, partnership can involve the sharing or leveraging of key resources, including finance, expertise, information and networks.
- Cut costs, increase impact, build capacity. Mutual learning (new technology), entry into new market (strategic alliance).



Effective partnerships

- Openness, communication, trust, understanding, respect, sharing of resources, fairness involvement (early stage)
- Governance – leadership, agreed rules for conflict resolution, responsibilities, and roles (joint decisions), senior staff
- Performance management – common objectives, strategy, plans and evaluation (accountability)
- Mutual and common benefit, inter-dependence (not dependence)
- Investment and track records of collaborations
- Interests and needs of the residents, not organizations

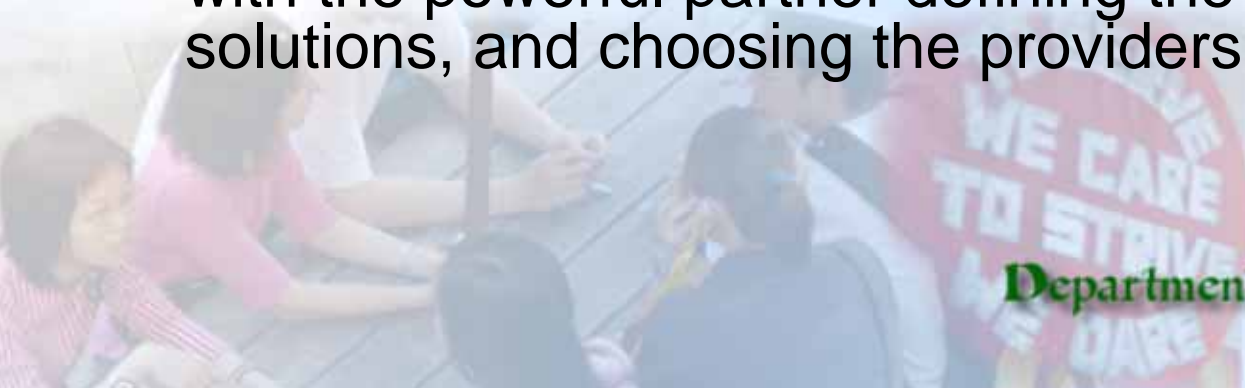
Partnership for What?

- Partnership as means or ends? Sustainability? Time consuming/ process intensive?
- Partnership is not a panacea for solving all social risks.
- Risks in partnerships: Partnerships can be plagued by confused responsibility, weak accountability and governance (UK review of partnerships – 1/3 were failures). Basically collaboration is a conservative incremental change strategy, win-win or compromising solutions?
- PPP (private-public partnerships) – Problem, Problem and Problem!



Learning Partnerships (Kjaer 2003/ European Union)

- Not necessarily a permanent and sustainable structure – temporary and transitory nature (dissolved or transformed after the project completion)
- Sustainable impact
- Learn from impact and ‘growing up’ and become mature, growing sense of inter-dependence between partners, rather than dependent on a few individuals.
- Joint or co-production: engaged in the joint design and implementation of programmes and policies (co-production of services). Not principal-agent relationships with the powerful partner defining the problems and solutions, and choosing the providers for production.



The Hong Kong Social Model

- From a British colony to a Special Administrative Region of China in 1997. Under the “One Country, Two Systems” principle – HK enjoys a high degree of autonomy.
- Governing principles of “small government, big market” – the role of the government is to facilitate and monitor the market mechanism - balanced fiscal budget, low taxation (lowest tax burden) and public expenditures (under 20% of GDP).
- Productivist social policy, investment in human capital (health care, housing and education), no publicly financed social insurance programmes based on risk sharing and redistribution, covering retirement, unemployment and health care, flexible labour market (no minimum wage)



- Mandatory Provident Fund introduced in 2000, with low contribution (contribution is a total of 10% of wages from employer and employees) primarily a forced saving scheme and take 30-40 years to take effect.
- Residual welfare – large social assistance scheme (0.5 million recipients), supplemented by heavily subsidized public health care, housing, social welfare and education (50-60% of government budget).
- Policy emphasis on self-reliance and family responsibility: Employment is the best strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

UNDP Human Development Index (2006)

- Hong Kong was ranked 22nd among 177 countries. Life expectancy was 81.8 years (ranked 2nd); primary-university education enrolment ratio 76.7% (ranked 65th); and per capita GDP at PPP level, US\$30,822 (ranked 12th).
- Hong Kong has the economic ability to become a welfare state. Yet without being a welfare state, it has achieved a high quality of life.
- Peace Index (23rd among 121 countries), based on 24 criteria.

Public Expenditures as a Proportion of the GDP and Government Budget

| | 1995-96 | | 2002-03 | | 2005-06 | |
|------------------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
| | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| ----- | | | | | | |
| • Education | 3.0 | 17.6 | 4.3 | 24.1 | 4.2 | 21.6 |
| • Health care | 2.2 | 12.7 | 2.7 | 15.8 | 2.3 | 12.0 |
| • Social Welfare | 1.3 | 7.4 | 2.6 | 15.7 | 2.6 | 13.5 |
| • Housing | 1.7 | 10.0 | 2.3 | 14.2 | 1.3 | 6.7 |
| ----- | | | | | | |
| • Total: | 8.2 | 47.7 | 11.9 | 69.8 | 10.4 | 53.8 |



P. Wildings (2007)

- the strengths of the Hong Kong social policy rest on a well-established pattern of tax-funded services with a good record in terms of access, coverage and quality of service despite rates of expenditure which are low compared with Western societies. In addition, the achievements in terms of indices of health and education, together with public housing provisions are impressive. The major criticisms are on the government's anti-welfare position, with social policy subordinate under economic policy; growing concern over welfare dependency with the erosion of family responsibility and work ethics; and its firm belief on economic growth as the best route to welfare.



New Risks

- Low fertility. Aging population (11% in 2003, 27% in 2030); Low and declining labour participation rate (60%)
- Moving towards a knowledge-based service economy, Asian economic crisis and SARS – high and polarized unemployment rate (8% in 2003, come down to 4% in 2007). Median income remains at 1997 level. Increase in the proportion of low and high income groups. Gini Coefficient is 0.525 in 2001 (contested figures)
- In 2005, around 1 million people lived below the average social assistance standards.
- Government endorses the need to measure poverty based on 30 social indicators (from income poverty to social exclusion)

Social Welfare Development

- Traditions of NGOs providing a variety of welfare services. Rapid development of professional welfare services, including community development since the 1970s.
- community centre facilities were provided mainly in physically deprived districts through the provision of community centres, community welfare buildings and community halls, and in pockets of deprived areas, the Neighbourhood Level Community Development Projects. Community development services aimed to promote the social integration of the residents and fill the gaps of mainstream welfare services.

- Community work favoured the use of social action, aimed to build people's organizations in deprived neighbourhoods, taking the government, businesses and traditional community organizations as "enemies".
- The government built community-based consultative structures to promote legitimacy and community participation (no local government in Hong Kong), evolving into the formation of district board (district council), with popularly elected representatives in the 1980s – mechanism to co-opt pressure groups and enhance vertical communication between the government and the residents. Yet collaborations between residents groups were discouraged.



Welfare Expansion

- Following economic recession in the 2000s, new vulnerable groups – new arrivals, lone parents, older people living alone, victims of domestic violence, ethnic minorities, low income families, youth at risk.
- Welfare expenditures increased from \$17 billion in 1996 to 34.3 billion in 2006. Subvention to NGO from \$3.99 billion to \$6.7 billion.
- In 2006. 73.5% of the welfare budget went to social security, 9.7% for elderly, 8% for rehabilitation, 3.7% for youth, 3.9% for family and children, and only 0.4% for community development.

Welfare Reform

- Escalating welfare expenditures since 1990s – re-examining the social welfare system – too dependent on government finances and subvention system not cost-effective.
- Increased use of competitive bidding to purchase services from NGOs; lump sum grant subvention mode (delimiting government responsibility and enhancing managerial accountability of NGOs); improved monitoring through Funding and Service Agreements (with specific output standards) and service quality requirements. government- NGO relationships became on contractual terms.
- Annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector on priorities. Lack of a long-term vision and strategic plan for partnership building.



Promoting Community Partnerships

- Promoting tripartite partnership - Core welfare strategic framework of the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (2004)
- Enhanced functions of the District Social Welfare Offices 2002 (district planning – strategic approach to extend social welfare partnerships with district councils and community organizations).
- Enhanced function of District Council (2006-07) - DCs would be allowed to assume responsibility for the management of some 1,700 district facilities, within the limits of the existing statutory powers and resources of the executive departments.
- Government and NGO should become more community-based, engaging community organizations actively.

Tripartite Partnership

- Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (2002): \$300 million
- Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged (2005): \$200 million
- Enhancing Self-reliance through District Partnership (2006): \$150 million



Social Enterprises

- The development of social enterprises has received top government attention as the strategic approach to alleviate poverty and promote employment of vulnerable groups.
- Social enterprises development calls for closer cross-sector partnerships. Mutual learning of values and practices.



The Chief Executive (2006)

- Mutual concern and mutual aid among neighbours is a strong support for families. We encourage community building and friendly neighbourhoods. There are individuals new towns where inadequacies occurred in the course of past development, resulting in imbalances in the course of past development, resulting in imbalances in certain aspects of community development. These imbalances meant that we are unable to provide a suitably favourable environment for the development of healthy families.In the future, the government will allocate resources according to the different conditions in the districts, and strengthen district planning and coordination. **In mobilizing community resources and building mutual support networks at district level, the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) has brought about new models of collaboration....**

Conclusions

- Managing and maintaining networks of community governance to promote community partnerships is not simple and straightforward. One has to recognize the recurring multiple, competitive and conflicting interests in the community. The role of the government needs to be impartial, open and transparent, balancing conflicting interests between community stakeholders and mobilizing them together for joint action.
- Building partnerships in Hong Kong is still hindered by the lack of mutual trust between sectors. It requires changes in our approach and practice, as well as our mindset (cultural shift).



Chief Executive – “People-centred approach”

- “We should ask ourselves: what can we do together with the citizens. ... We will encourage government officials to turn from a policy advocate to an interest coordinator, playing the role of encouraging the public to express their opinions, offering more options, balancing the interests of different parties and ensuring the implementation of policies.”
- In forging partnerships with the citizens, changing the mindset of the government officials is recognized as pivotal.



How can we build trust?

Dialogue and humility (Paulo Friere)

- *Dialogue cannot exist without humility.* The naming of the world, through which men constantly recreate that world, cannot be an act of arrogance. Dialogue, as the encounter of men addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility. How can I enter into a dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I enter into dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from other men – mere “its” in whom I cannot recognize other “Is”? How can I enter into dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of “pure” men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are “these people” or “the great unwashed”? If I start from the premise that naming the world is the task of an elite and that the presence of the people in history is a sign of deterioration which is to be avoided, how can I hold a dialogue? Or if I am closed to – and even offended by – the contribution of others; if I am tormented and weakened by the possibility of being displaced, how can there be dialogue?