

Well-being Indicators in Hong Kong

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Abstracts

In Hong Kong, economic development resonates with social progress. Alongside a steady increase in Hong Kong's income, there is progress in social dimensions including health, education, safety, environment, housing, and community and civic involvement. Both economic development and social progress have contributed to the well-being of the Hong Kong community. Concurrently, a vibrant labour market and better work-life balance provide conditions for Hong Kong residents to pursue individual life satisfaction. Going forward, investment in economic and social infrastructure as well as care for our environment would provide a basis for sustainable development into the future.

Key Words: economic development, social progress, individual life satisfaction, sustainable development

1. Introduction

OECD's Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress is built around three domains: material conditions, quality of life and sustainability, each with their relevant dimensions. The compilation of indicators related to well-being and progress involves inputs from a wide spectrum of disciplines.

In Hong Kong, some indicators, e.g. gross domestic product, employment, are general purpose statistics. They are under the responsibility of the Census and Statistics Department. Other indicators are statistics for dedicated use in subject matter areas including health, education, law and order, transport and strategic planning. They fall into the purviews of statistical units in various government departments and bureaux, such as the Department of Health, the Education Bureau and the Security Bureau. The Census and Statistics Department together with statistical units established in various government departments and bureaux form the Government Statistical Service.

While staff in outposted statistical units are responsible to the departments and bureaux to which they are posted in respect of the day-to-day work, professional advice and assistance are provided to them by the Census and Statistics Department when it is deemed necessary. Through this arrangement, the quality, coherence and standards of statistical work across the government, such as the compilation of well-being indicators, is maintained.

This paper collates and sets out some of the indicators which can be used to measure well-being in Hong Kong.

2. Income

Hong Kong's income grew steadily in the past decade. Per capita GDP grew from US\$24,666 in 2002 to US\$36,765 in 2012, an increase of 49.1%.

The median monthly employment earnings of employed persons was US\$1,547 in 2012, an increase of 20.7% from US\$1,282 in 2002. The median monthly employment earnings of male and female were US\$1,805 and US\$1,289 respectively in 2012. Both enjoyed steady increases between 2002 and 2012, at 17.3% and 25.7% respectively, from US\$1,539 and US\$1,026 in 2002.

The median monthly household income in 2012 was US\$2,669, again an increase of 22.4% from US\$2,180 in 2002.

3. Health

Alongside a steady increase in resources committed to health, life expectancy of the Hong Kong population increased in the past decade. Per capita expenditure on health grew from US\$1,289 in 1999-00 to US\$1,641 in 2009-10, an increase of 27.4%. The ratio of total expenditure on health to Gross Domestic Product stood at 5.2% in 2009-10.

The ratio of health care professionals to population increased steadily in the past decade. For example, every 552 population is served by 1 doctor in 2012, a decrease of 12.0% compared to the 627 population in 2002. The ratios for other health care professionals similarly decreased between 2002 and 2012; dentists, from 3 527 population to 3 177 population; pharmacists, from 4 757 population to 3 373 population; and physiotherapists, from 4 079 population to 2 955 population.

Life expectancy at birth increased steadily, from 78.5 for male and 84.5 for female in 2002 to 80.6 for male and 86.3 for female respectively in 2012. The age-standardised death rates for leading causes of death, measured as the number of deaths per 100 000 standard population, decreased steadily : malignant neoplasms, from 131.2 in 2002 to 105.0 in 2012; diseases of heart, from 52.5 in 2002 to 42.8 in 2012; and cerebrovascular diseases, from 33.6 in 2002 to 22.3 in 2012.

4. Education

More resources have been allocated to education resulting in a better educated population. The total government expenditure on education amounted to US\$10,031 million in 2012-13, an increase of 40.7% compared to US\$7,128 million in 2002-03.

Among population aged 15 and above, the proportion of those having attained secondary and post-secondary levels increased from 71.1% in 2001 to 77.3% in 2011. School attendance rate of population aged 6-11 was 100.0 in 2011.

There has been continued improvement in the quality of education in terms of pupil-teacher ratios. For local kindergartens, the ratio improved gradually from 10.2 in the 2002/03 school year to 9.3 in the 2012/13 school year. For primary level improved considerably from 19.8 in the 2002/03 school year to 13.9 in the 2012/13 school year; while that for secondary level also improved from 17.6 to 13.7 over the same period. The improvement was partly attributable to provision of additional

resources by the Government to create additional teaching posts in public schools through various education policies over the years. The progressive implementation of Small Class Teaching in public primary schools since the 2009/10 school year has also contributed to the improvement in the ratio for primary schools in recent years.

5. Safety

Hong Kong has become a safer place to live in. In 2012, the crime rate, measured as the number of crimes per 100 000 population, was 1 064, a decrease from 1 125 in 2002. The detection rate remained broadly stable at about 39-46% during the period 2002-2012.

Hong Kong has a performance pledge on emergencies like building fire calls and ambulance calls. For building fire, the Fire Services Department respond to calls within 6 minutes in built-up areas and within 9 to 23 minutes in areas of dispersed risks and isolated developments. The target is to meet this response time in 92.5% of all calls. In 2011, the overall performance in responding to building fire calls was 0.9 percentage point above the target of 92.5%. For ambulance calls, the Fire Services Department responds within 12 minutes from the time of call to the arrival of an ambulance at the street address. The target is to meet this response time in 92.5% of all calls. In 2011, the overall performance in responding to ambulance calls was 1 percentage point above the target of 92.5%.

6. Environment

From 2007-08 to the 2012-13, the annual funding allocation on the environment has been doubled, from US\$806 million to US\$1,788 million. This investment is evidence of the importance that the Government attaches to a livable, sustainable environment for Hong Kong.

From 2008 to the end of 2012, over 2 700 projects were supported by the Environment and Conservation Fund to help promote energy saving, waste reduction and recycling, greening, conservation, and scientific research on environmental protection. This investment is paying dividends for the environment. The air quality has shown improvement. Ambient concentrations of sulphur dioxide and respirable suspended particulates in Hong Kong fell 41% and 11% respectively between 2006 and 2011. Our roadside concentrations of sulphur dioxide and respirable suspended particulates reduced by 43% and 19% over the same period.

Whilst providing infrastructure for the cleanup of our activities and management of our waste and wastewater are important, educating citizens and raising awareness on environmental protection are also the key for future sustainable development. To chart the way forward for Hong Kong as a low carbon city, a voluntary carbon intensity reduction target of 50 to 60% by 2020 when compared with 2005 was proposed in a consultation document on Hong Kong's climate change strategy and action agenda published in late 2010. The consultation document outlined an action agenda to further reduce local greenhouse gas emissions through various means, including community-wide participation in enhancing energy efficiency, greening road transportation and use of more clean, low carbon fuels for electricity generation.

A quality public transport system is in place to meet the challenges of population growth and continuous development. Planning for public transport infrastructure is based on sustainable development principles with less reliance on road-based transport

to lessen the impact on the environment. In 2012, the average daily public transport passenger journey was 12.1 million. This compared to the population of 7.2 million in 2012. Number of killed casualties by traffic accident continued to decline in the past decades, reaching 17 deaths per million population in 2012.

7. Housing

The population of Hong Kong increased steadily from 6.7 million 2002 to 7.2 million in 2012, an increase of 6.7%.

The stock of permanent residential flats increased in the past decade. In 2012, the stock of public rental housing and subsidised home ownership housing was 1 152 000 units, an increase of 9.8% from 1 049 000 units in 2002, whereas the stock of private housing was 1 447 000 units in 2012, an increase of 18.7% from 1 219 000 units in 2002.

Flats are also larger in size. In terms of internal floor area, the share of flats of size 30.0 – 39.9m² was 46.2% in all public rental housing in 2012. This compares to 45.7% in 2002. The average living space per person in public rental housing also increased, from 11.1m² in 2002 to 12.9m² in 2012.

8. Community and Civil Involvement

Number of registered electors increased steadily from 2 909 594 in 2002 to 3 466 201 in 2012, an increase of 19.1%. In 2011, subvented agencies have operated 13 community centres and 17 neighbourhood level community development projects. The former had a membership of 70 415 while the latter attracted 262 533 programme attendance. In addition, the subvented agencies have also operated 5 children centres and 4 youth centres, which had 6 397 and 4 771 members respectively in 2011.

9. Employment

Hong Kong has a vibrant labour market. In 2012, the unemployment rate was 3.3%. This represented a relative low level compared to the employment rates during the period 2002-2012, varying from 3% to 8%. The unemployment rates of male and female were 3.8% and 2.7% respectively in 2012.

The labour force participation rate was 60.5% in 2012. This is broadly comparable to the labour force participation rate in the period 2002-2012, ranging from 60% to 62%. The male and female labour force participation rates were 68.7% and 53.6% respectively in 2012.

10. Work-life Balance and Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is more an issue of individual perception. A vibrant labour market and better work-life balance provide conditions for Hong Kong residents to pursue individual life satisfaction.

Among non-government employees having fixed contractual hours of work per day, the proportion of those working longer hours, i.e. >10 hours per day, decreased from 7.2% in 2006 to 5.8% in 2008. The drop was more significant for male, with the

proportion dropping from 10.0% in 2006 to 7.9% in 2008. The proportion for female slightly declined from 3.9% in 2006 to 3.5% in 2008.

Among non-government employees having fixed contractual days of work per week, the proportion of those working more than 5 days decreased from 75.7% in 2006 to 66.8% in 2008. The drop was more significant for female, with the proportion dropping from 72.8% in 2006 to 62.8% in 2008. The proportion for male also decreased from 78.2% in 2006 to 70.4% in 2008.

11. Concluding Remarks

Going forward, investment in economic and social infrastructure as well as care for our environment would provide a basis for sustainable development of the various economic and social dimensions contributing to well-being into the future.

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