

SHUM SHUI PO CITIZENS ORGANIZATION ALLIANCE
2015 Shumshuipo Citizens Platforms (Abstract)

Listening to People's Demands
Re-examining District Council's Role

Developing Community Visions
Promoting Citizens Participation

(A) Background

As a mechanism which represents voices of the local communities, District Councils have always been found inadequate because of the limitation of function and power. In the past few years, the general public have witnessed more unreasonable and unprincipled decisions made by District Councils, for example in allocation of social resources. This has aroused more questions and doubts towards the practices of the District Councils and the performance of the district councillors. In the midst of policy change where District Councils are responsible for managing and allocating more social resources, District Councils' decisions have to be more responsive to community needs. Against the above backdrop, and in view of the forthcoming district council election in this November, the SSP Citizens Organization Alliance has launched a Shumshuipo Community Listening Movement 2015. In this 8-month campaign, we used community listening approach to dialogue with 33 community organizations and 430 individuals in the district, through which we collected 626 pieces of community opinions. Based on the opinions collected, we conducted 3 discussion forums and for further discussions and exchanges of views, and finally came up with the Shumshuipo Citizens Platforms 2015 to serve as guiding principles for the local district council in its decision making and resources allocation.

The Shumshuipo Citizens Platforms are derived from the above-mentioned community listening process. The voices and opinions of people in the community are organized into the following 7 aspects, including community services; environment and hygiene; community integration; transport and traffic; culture and recreation; and public space. This Platform also corresponds to the existing functions and practices of the local district council.

The community is formed by different social groups of different backgrounds. In order to express the needs of different social groups, the Shumshuipo Citizens Platforms have two components: platforms concerning social groups with special needs and civic platforms.

(B) The platforms concerning social groups with special needs are developed by different social groups according to their specific needs in the community:

Platforms Concerning Old People

The District Council should:

1. work together with elderly service organizations to promote an "Elderly Friendly Community" in Shumshuipo;
2. collect opinions of old people and to promote communication and dialogues between old people and various government departments in the district;
3. urge the government to improve services for old people and in particular to implement the universal retirement protection programme in Hong Kong.

Platforms Concerning Women

The District Council should:

1. conduct an overall review of the existing child care services, including day care services, occasional child care services and extended hour day care services;
2. conduct a comprehensive review of recreational facilities for children in the district;
3. increase resource support for parents;
4. improve accessibility of information;
5. introduce participatory gender budget initiatives in its budget planning.

Platforms Concerning Ethnic Minority People

The District Council should:

1. increase resources to subsidize ethnic minority people to learn Chinese and English;
2. improve personal security of ethnic minority people against unlawful treatment;
3. improve community hygiene;
4. increase more cricket practice fields in the district;
5. promote ethnic integration and harmony in the community.

Platforms Concerning People with Mental Deficiencies

The District Council should:

1. base on the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, review existing policies and services;
2. formulate information accessibility principles, such as the use of simple info-graphs, so as to ensure public access to and understanding of government and community information;
3. review the existing mechanism of Productivity Assessment for Employees with Disabilities and to formulate measures to ensure the protection of minimum wage;
4. provide appropriate information and concrete support to disabled persons who participate in various kinds of performing art activities so as to promote community integration.

Platforms Concerning Young People

The District Council should:

1. evaluate the conditions and provisions of various kinds of recreational facilities in the district;
2. increase resources for the promotion of youth needs and development;
3. establish a community innovation fund to encourage young people to participate in community improvements.

Platforms Concerning Cultural and Art Practitioners

The District Council should:

1. survey the unused and idle land in the district so as to release more public space;
2. promote urban life cycle and promote community links;
3. establish a committee on culture;
4. encourage wider public participation.

Platforms Concerning the Visually Impaired

The District Council should:

1. monitor and improve bus services through regular questions and suggestions;
2. liaise with different government departments to remove regularly obstacles on the road;
3. establish a working group on social integration in the community;
4. promote effective civic education.

Platforms Concerning Mental Rehabilitees

The District Council should:

1. comprehensively review the support provided for mental rehabilitees and their carers;
2. develop a platform to assist the employment of mental rehabilitees;
3. promote mental health education;
4. advocate for the provision of night psychiatric clinic;
5. establish a committee on mental health.

Platforms Concerning People with Hearing Impairments

The District Council should:

1. promote the ability of public, private and subvented service organizations to identify deaf people;
2. co-ordinate different departments which provide emergency services for regular training;
3. monitor the provisions and use of barrier-free facilities in the district.

Platforms Concerning Tenants of Old Urban Households

The District Council should:

1. propose and promote rent control;
2. survey comprehensively the unused and unoccupied housing units in the district;
3. monitor the relocation arrangements of the Urban Renewal Authority;
4. regulate the 3-Nos buildings in the district;
5. improve the “meet the public scheme”;
6. increase public space and facilities in the district.

(C) Citizens Platforms: Demands for the Prospective District Council

Through the community listening campaign, we have identified 5 major structural factors causing problems in the community:

1. The District Council lacks comprehensive understanding of the needs and expectations of the local community so that its works are only ad hoc problem solving and fall short of long term development and direction;
2. The operation of the District Council lacks transparency and fails to enable residents to understand its decisions and resources allocation;
3. The District Council is ineffective in discharging its functions. It lacks the necessary power to hold government departments responsible for their services. The operation of the District Council is routine and bureaucratic, and fails to tackle real community problems;
4. The District Council is insensitive to the diverse needs of the community. The unfair allocation of resources can easily bring about conflicts between different groups. In facing conflicts, some district councillors fail to address the problems fairly and this has caused more problems for the vulnerable groups in the community;
5. The District Council has not paid enough attention to community groups with special needs, such as the elderly, disabled people and the ethnic minority people, etc.

(D) Citizens Platforms: Suggestions for the Prospective District Council

Based on the above, we request the District Council to reform its culture and practices and to set up effective mechanisms to meet the needs of the diverse groups in the community.

1. Understand diverse needs and formulate visions for community development

- 1.1 To conduct a comprehensive survey of community needs and capitals, and to formulate community visions and a blue-print for long term development through participatory approach;
- 1.2 To conduct participatory budget planning. Allocation of resources must adhere to the long term development plan;
- 1.3 To launch large-scale projects to promote citizens participation and to include this plan in its budget so as to allow different stakeholders to participate in deciding how funding should be allocated.

2. Strengthen information accessibility and ensure accountability

- 2.1 To evaluate the existing approach in dispatching information so as to ensure that people of different cultural backgrounds are cognizant with the works of the District Council and its decisions in resources allocation. This is to ensure the rights to information of the general public;
- 2.2 To report its work to the public regularly (e.g. monthly or quarterly) and to collect public feedback;
- 2.3 Resembling the practice of the Legco, to conduct public hearings in the district level so as to allow direct dialogues and questions between community groups and the government. This is to strengthen communication and accountability and to ensure public voices are heard.

3. Promote citizens participation and establish platform for community decisions

- 1.1 To increase community groups and residents' direct participation in decision making, for example by increasing the representation of community groups in various committees and working groups. The representatives of community groups should be elected rather than appointed;
- 1.2 To establish community consultation and decision making platforms to allow different stakeholders to express their concerns and to participate in decisions in important social agenda;
- 1.3 To arrange regular meetings with the Shumshuipo Citizens Organizations Alliance to report and follow up the progress of implementation of the Shumshuipo Citizens Platforms.

4. Look squarely at potential community conflicts and establish consultative culture

- 4.1 To establish working groups to address issues related to the 'social market' and the street sleepers so as to promote dialogue and communications between different stakeholders;
- 4.2 To allocate funds to projects which promote co-operation and understanding between different social groups in the community;
- 4.3 To allocate funds for activities which promote community discussions and consultations.

5. Respond to people with special needs and promote equal participation

- 1.1 To investigate the diverse needs of different groups in the community and respond actively;
- 1.2 To review the practices of various District Council committees to make them responsive to people with special needs. In all necessary and possible circumstances, appoint or co-opt people with special needs (e.g. people with disabilities; people of ethnic minorities and representatives of NGOs) to these committees to ensure due considerations are included in decision making;
- 1.3 In addressing the special needs of vulnerable groups in the community, to set up relevant working groups and allocate additional funds to encourage community participation of people with special needs.