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## Views

### Enhance Civic Participation

Every Hong Kong people is a member of the Hong Kong society, has his rights and duties to participate in public affairs. Hong Kong people have been criticised for lack of participation, indifferent to social development and disinterested in politics. However, there have been more and more social participation and concern about politics from different age groups and social strata under the current society conditions coupled with the development of information technology, they develop into multiple forms of expression and means of participation.

Many sociology researches find that the more the social participation from citizens, the stronger their sense of belonging which might sooner or later enhance social development. Yet with more social and public participation to no avail, it could be discouraging. Having said that, we should not be held back, this is a transition period necessary along the path towards democracy.

After all, the society has to continue to cultivate its "Public Capital" accumulated from voluntary protective movement among various districts, say, public election forums. The momentum of "Civic Participation" must be more vigorous with the interaction of social atmosphere and political climate.

An important feature of civic participation is that, it is a transformation from an initiative by the government-centered or country-centered to that of civic society-centered. With the innovative power of civic society, its resources and ability to mobilisation, it can push the government to formulate public policies and other related mechanisms.

Making important decisions for a country depends on the quality of its citizens and social atmosphere built up over a long period of time. Such as the recent topic of staying or leaving the European Union of Britain, whatever its impacts, the process itself is a high level of actualisation of civic participation. (Please refer to the civic participation ladder diagram.)

It is reasonable for social worker to mobilise civic participation because empowerment is one of the values of social work. It is about cognition of social problems, raising the awareness, and in-depth thoughts on various issues and solving problems by mass decision or even lodge complaints against the policies and advocate for its improvement. There are many examples, such as universal retirement protection scheme, minimum-wage, standard working hours, etc.

Hong Kong is now in the critical period of pursuing democracy. The Legco election this September is a good time to practice civic participation: discussions on current affairs, campaigning activities, to learn, to discuss, to be aware of, to think analytically and coming to a decision. It is also an opportunity for public issues to become more transparent, to raise public awareness to monitor public affairs as well.

Although there are different forms, means, goals and motives of participation, there must be meaningful, quality ones reaching for the ultimate goal of a fairer, more harmonised society when at least people can learn about the meaning of participation. The more citizen participation, the more careful the government is in implementing policies.

#### Enhance Civic Participation Ladder diagram

1. **Manipulation**  
Government encourages its citizens to support its policies masked under the auspice of "civic participation".
2. **Therapy**  
Government induces its citizens through different means to accept its policies.
3. **Informing**  
Government put forward its policies, in one-way communication, citizens are unable to participate.
4. **Consultation**  
Citizens can express their opinions, but may not be adopted by the government.
5. **Placation**  
Citizens exercise their influence in the decision making process, but the government make the decision.
6. **Partership**  
Both government and citizens have the decision making power.
7. **Delegated Power**  
Citizens enjoy a great extent of decision making power.
8. **Citizen Control**  
Citizens take the lead in both policy formulation and execution, they have the decision making power.

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