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(*Activity 1: Group discussion on Government policies on income distribution*)

Please read the following article and discuss the questions.

Report of Commission on Poverty:
social security and working opportunity

The Commission on Poverty (COP) released a report last week. Mr. Stephen Fisher, the Secretary of COP, said that the poor population reached 820,000 in Hong Kong. A number of measures for tackling poverty were put forward in the COP report.

Mr. Fisher said, "The target of COP is not to greatly reduce the number of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients, because over 60% of those on CSSA are the old, the disabled and the long-term patients. These groups of people are not able to work and basically rely on CSSA." Even though there was a big increase of those on CSSA for three or more years, Mr. Fisher stressed that CSSA was the very basic safety net and therefore did not agree to set a time-limit for receiving CSSA as a time-limit would affect a great many families in Hong Kong.

Mr. Fisher pointed out that when facing the structural change of the Hong Kong economy, the low-skilled, less educated and middle-aged labourers were the first to be hit and hit the hardest. Once they lost their jobs, it would be very difficult for them to get another one. The COP therefore suggested various types of training for them to prepare for the change. For example, those who used to be semi-skilled labourers could now switch to cleansing, to be security guards or to join the food and beverage industry.

Mr. Fisher stressed, "Handing out money to help the poor could only attract applause, but could not solve poverty at the root." As such, the COP suggested pooling in resources to help the jobless, the low-income and the single parents to get a job, namely to go for "job in place of subsidy". The most important thing now is to consolidate the various functions of the Employees Retraining Board, the Labour Department and the Social Welfare Department so as to provide one-stop employment assistance.

But some local scholars criticised some measures as being impractical and not helpful to reduce the number of the poor. Mr. Fisher said the public should not hold high expectation of the COP.

Source:

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