

LCQ4: Implementing gender mainstreaming and promoting gender equality

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Man-kwong and an oral reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (April 28):

Question:

Regarding the efforts to implement gender mainstreaming and promote gender equality, will the Executive Authorities inform this Council:

(a) given that the information provided by the Home Affairs Bureau has indicated that the overall women's participation rate in advisory and statutory bodies (ASBs) was 27.6% as at April 2009, of the current number of ASBs with less than 30% of their non-official members being women, together with a table setting out the numbers and percentages of such non-official members on each ASB; whether it has assessed the reasons for women's participation rate falling short of 30%; if it has, of the outcome;

(b) whether at present the authorities have any plan to raise the work target of at least 25% for each gender for the purpose of appointing non-official members of ASBs; if they have such a plan, of the timeframe and details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(c) given that the Government has indicated that to encourage and promote women's participation in community affairs, the appointing authorities will continue to adopt various measures to identify and cultivate more women to participate in the work of ASBs, including conveying the message to professional bodies or institutions that the Government is making efforts in enhancing women's participation rate in ASBs, of the specific actions taken by the Government since June 2009, and whether it has assessed the effectiveness of such actions; if it has, of the assessment outcome?

Reply:

President,

(a) At present, the Government calculates the women's participation rate in advisory and statutory bodies (ASBs) on the basis of the number of non-officials appointed by the Government. Members appointed in other capacities or by other

means such as being the representatives of the industries or members elected amongst professional organisations or institutions are excluded. According to information provided by bureaux and departments, as at March 31, 2010, among some 400 ASBs, 384 have Government appointed non-official members. Amongst them, 171 ASBs record a women's participation rate of more than 30% and women take up half of the seats in 51 ASBs out of these 171 ASBs. 213 ASBs have a women's participation rate of less than 30%. The numbers and percentages of such non-official members on each concerned ASB are attached at Annex.

There are different reasons why most ASBs have not yet reached a women's participation rate of 30%, which are in general as follows -

- (i) the majority of practitioners in the sectors relevant to the ASBs are male;
- (ii) some candidates for appointments to ASBs as non-official members are mainly recommended by the relevant professional bodies or institutions. While taking note of the 25% gender benchmark target set by the Government, these bodies have difficulties in identifying a sufficient number of suitable female candidates for the consideration by the appointing authorities due to the small number of female practitioners in the respective trade; and
- (iii) few female candidates in the relevant sector can meet the appointment requirements (i.e. candidate's expertise, experience, etc.).

Overall speaking, there are reasons arising from the culture and practices of society that are formed over a long period of time to account for the relatively low women's participation rate. Through efforts in recent years, the women's participation rate in Government-appointed positions in ASBs has gradually increased from 25.2% in December 2005 to 28.1% in March 2010.

(b) We have already issued internal guidelines to bureaux and departments, promulgating that the gender benchmark target for participation in ASBs will be raised from 25% to 30% with effect from June 2010.

(c) The Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) often reminds the appointing authorities of the importance of further enhancing women's participation in ASBs. Moreover, HAB has taken the initiative to alert respective appointing authorities around six months before the expiry of ASB membership and encourage them to take into account

gender balance when making appointments for the new term. To review how to enhance women's participation rate in ASBs, HAB has held exchange sessions with relevant bureaux in early April. Bureaux concerned have all indicated that they would make efforts to enhance the women's participation rate in ASBs under their purview. HAB has encouraged departments to draw the attention of all relevant professional organisations and institutions which are involved in candidate nominations to the Government's efforts in enhancing women's participation. HAB has also proactively encouraged female to contribute their curriculum vitae (CVs) for inclusion in the Central Personality Index (CPI). In the nine months between July 2009 and March 2010, the number of female non-official members of ASBs has risen by 80, representing a net increase of 5%. During the same period, the number of CVs of female in CPI has increased by 256 to 6,728.

The main principle of making appointments by the Government to ASBs is appointment by merit, i.e. each ASB appointment takes into account the candidate's ability, expertise, experience, integrity and commitment to public service, with due regard to the functions and nature of business of the ASB concerned and statutory requirements (for statutory bodies). The appointing authorities need to secure the services of the most suitable persons and to ensure that their composition can reflect the views of stakeholders in the community.

Appointing more women to ASBs is our goal. The Government would continue to monitor the situation and make every effort to enhance women's participation in ASBs.

Ends/Wednesday, April 28, 2010

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