

Chapter XII

BEAT DRUGS FUND AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

BEAT DRUGS FUND

(A) Background

12.1 Combating drug abuse requires collaboration among different stakeholders in the community. NGOs and tertiary institutions are among the key partners of the Government in the anti-drug cause.

12.2 Many NGOs are providing programmes and services in preventive education and treatment and rehabilitation. Tertiary institutions are a major source of expertise to undertake anti-drug projects and drug-related research, on their own initiative or in collaboration with relevant NGOs.

12.3 Recurrent subvention and Government expenditure are a principal source of funding to support their work. Many of them also, or solely, rely on community and other resources. This is important in many respects, not least in tapping into the community itself in tackling a social problem. It is also incumbent on Government to play a part. The Beat Drugs Fund (BDF) is a major Government commitment in this regard, which aims at providing a steady source of additional funding to augment Government subvention to finance worthwhile anti-drug projects.

12.4 In 1996, the Legislative Council approved a one-off allocation of \$350 million for setting up BDF. The intention is to keep the capital base of BDF intact and to generate income from investment for disbursement. The actual amount of funds allocated each year depends on the level of income generated as well as the quality of applications received. To date, BDF has supported 395 projects, with a total approved grant of \$196.4 million.

12.5 The administration of BDF is entrusted to the Beat Drugs Fund Association, which is a non-profit making company limited by guarantee. The Association decides on the use of the Fund on the advice of ACAN.

12.6 The Beat Drugs Fund Association is governed by the Governing Committee (GC) which comprises the Permanent Secretary for Security as Chairperson, three non-official members and two official members, namely the Commissioner for Narcotics and the Director of Accounting Services. ND provides secretariat support to the Association.

(B) Use of BDF

12.7 Applications to BDF are normally invited once a year. ACAN and GC may set specific priority areas to solicit projects in response to the prevailing drug abuse trend. For example, in the 2008-09 annual funding exercise, one of the priority areas is to fund preventive education and publicity projects in support of the territory-wide campaign against youth drug abuse recommended by the Task Force (Recommendation 4.3).

12.8 Over the years, BDF has also established special funding schemes to meet specific needs. In 2002, a dedicated scheme was set up to support drug treatment and rehabilitation centres to undertake upgrading or reprovisioning capital works in order to meet the licensing requirements of the Drug Dependent Persons Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres (Licensing) Ordinance (Cap. 566). In early 2008, a dedicated scheme was established to support measures recommended by the Task Force. The projects already launched or being planned include -

- Resource Kit for Parents (Recommendation 4.4)
- Resource Kits for the School Sector (Recommendation 5.5)
- Anti-drug Training for Medical Practitioners (Recommendation 6.16)
- Study on School-Based Drug Testing Scheme (Recommendation 7.7)

- Review on the Various Methodologies for Estimating the Drug Abusing Population (Recommendation 11.2)
- Study on the Drug Abuse Situation of Non-Engaged Youth in Hong Kong (Recommendation 11.4)
- Qualitative module of the Supplementary Drug Abuse Monitoring System (Recommendation 11.5)
- Further Studies to Understand the Harmful Effects and Impact of Psychotropic Substance Abuse (Recommendation 11.6)

(C) Continuous Improvements

12.9 Over the years, continuous efforts have been made to improve the operations of BDF. The Task Force noted a few latest initiatives being pursued in support of its work.

(a) Improving the vetting process

12.10 A list of factors has been developed as assessment criteria (see **Annex 7**). One of the factors listed is whether the proposed project is innovative and can convey in-depth anti-drug knowledge. It is also provided that programmes eligible for Government subvention, and conventional non-capital works projects spanning more than two years are normally not considered. Grants disbursed will not normally exceed \$3 million. But for exceptionally innovative projects, the maximum grant can be \$5 million, and the maximum funding duration, three years.

12.11 There has been feedback from stakeholders in the anti-drug field that the innovation factor in vetting BDF applications has made it difficult to obtain resource support for many worthwhile projects. Some NGOs have reflected difficulties in hammering out "innovative" projects, as there is little room for innovation in substance (e.g. anti-drug messages) or form (e.g. distribution of leaflets, anti-drug ambassador schemes). There are also views that some approved BDF projects, though demonstrating benefits and effectiveness, have to be terminated upon expiry of the funding, as BDF would not renew support and no other source of funding could be made available.

12.12 There are other views that the current list of assessment criteria is important to ensure that only worthwhile projects would be funded.

(i) The vetting process

12.13 The initial vetting of BDF applications is carried out by ND and relevant Government agencies such as SWD and EDB. Consideration of applications is based on the strength of information provided.

12.14 Each of the Government agencies will draw up their own assessment which would be collated for consideration by a vetting panel with members drawn from ACAN and its Sub-committees. Research applications are considered by RAG. The vetting panel will consider applications in accordance with the assessment criteria and make a recommendation for funding approval or otherwise. Subject to ACAN's support, the recommendation will be submitted to GC for endorsement.

(ii) Consideration for improvement

12.15 Innovation is only one of the assessment criteria and, like any other factors listed, should not be construed as an overriding factor. While innovative projects should be encouraged, other worthwhile anti-drug projects should also be considered on their own merits and sponsored if sufficiently meritorious. It is incumbent on parties concerned, at various stages of the assessment, to adopt a "totality approach" by considering all relevant factors.

12.16 In practice, the vetting process might have, on occasion, inadvertently discouraged or given insufficient credits to some worthwhile projects. There might be occasional overplay of some particular factors without sufficient regard to a totality approach. Some moderation of the varied practices among parties would be helpful to the overall vetting work.

12.17 Furthermore, it may sometimes take a longer time than the normal funding period of two years to fully demonstrate the effectiveness or value of a project. This is especially the case when a programme, after some operational experience, may need fine-tuning for sustained running,

which might not easily be foreseen at the programme planning stage. Without proven efficacy, it may be difficult for an agency to seek long-term funding from Government subvention or other sources.

12.18 In terms of procedures, it would require perhaps the best logistics planning to demonstrate the effectiveness of a project in a timely manner and to fit into the appropriate Government budget cycle in order to sustain or continue a worthwhile project with little or no gap in funding support. This is not easy for many NGOs. While the vetting criteria themselves would not automatically disallow projects seeking renewal¹ pending further demonstration of the project efficacy or outcome of the application for long-term support from other sources, the vetting process might not always have paid sufficient regard to the legitimate claim of such projects or the mechanism of alternative funding sources.

(iii) Improvements to the practice

12.19 Having considered the above, the following improvements to the vetting process have been introduced in BDF 2008-09 annual exercise –

- (a) Prior to each stage of the vetting process and for the benefit of all parties participating (Government agencies, vetting panel and ACAN), ND would recap the original design of BDF, underline the totality approach in applying the assessment criteria and seek to resolve any differences in understanding among parties in the vetting process.
- (b) ND would also remind all parties concerned that due consideration should be given to BDF applications relating to similar projects approved in the past, where such applications are meant to fully demonstrate the efficacy of past projects or

¹ The list of vetting criteria provides that, among other things, projects which have been completed and projects which would commence before completion of the vetting process are normally not considered. The intent is to avoid retrospective funding of projects already carried out or being carried out before funding approval, but not to reject a proposal for prospective funding of a renewed part of a past project if it is sufficiently meritorious. Such past projects might have been supported by BDF or other funding sources in the first instance.

to bridge a funding gap pending determination of the outcome of long-term funding arrangements. To avoid abuse of BDF as a substitute for recurrent subvention, such applications shall be subject to the same approval process as new applications.

- (c) Where information of an application is lacking to enable a considered assessment, ND would request appropriate clarification or supplementary information from the applicant and possibly advice from relevant departments as well for the benefit of parties doing the vetting.

(b) Enhancing performance evaluation

12.20 Following a review by the Audit Commission and an internal review by ND and GC in 2002, the following improvements were made to the evaluation mechanism -

- (a) All BDF applicants are required to propose a set of performance indicators in their applications for evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of their proposed projects.
- (b) A guideline on self-evaluation is provided by ND (see **Annex 8**). Having regard to the nature of the projects, applicants may devise appropriate performance indicators in terms of outputs, outcomes, impact and effectiveness.
- (c) The self-evaluation proposed by applicants will be considered by ND and relevant departments in vetting the applications. Their comments will be provided to the vetting panel.
- (d) Successful grantees are required to evaluate their projects with regard to the indicators in the Full Report upon project completion.
- (e) The transparency of BDF has been enhanced by enriching the information disseminated on ND's website, which includes an application form and guidelines, a summary of approved projects and project statistics. Final Reports of completed

projects are available for viewing at the Hong Kong Jockey Club Drug InfoCentre (DIC).

(i) Self-evaluation

12.21 The self-evaluation approach gives grantees the flexibility to devise their evaluation methods having regard to the nature of projects and resources without imposing a disproportionate burden on them. It strikes a balance between the need for systematic project evaluation and resource constraints.

12.22 The actual effectiveness of the self-evaluation mechanism relies heavily on the resources, knowledge, skills and commitments of individual organisations. While some have established elaborate performance evaluation mechanisms, there are cases where organisations only have an elementary understanding of the self-evaluation concepts and methodologies.

12.23 To improve the self-evaluation of approved BDF projects, ND is planning to take forward the following measures –

- (a) providing training (e.g. seminars) on self-evaluation concepts, practices and skills for potential applicants. A tertiary institution or an NGO with relevant expertise may be commissioned. Materials of the training sessions may also be uploaded onto ND's website for reference; and
- (b) organising more sessions for successful grantees in the past to share their self-evaluation experiences with potential applicants.

(ii) Final Reports

12.24 At present, the Final Reports of all research projects are subject to vetting by RAG. For all other projects, their Final Reports are submitted to the BDF Secretariat for adoption as a matter of course. Grants are usually disbursed on a reimbursement basis (occasionally in advance). These procedures are largely uneventful, unless the deliverables

cannot be achieved. To promote oversight of the self-assessment, ND is planning to pursue the following measures –

- (a) a sample of grantees may be required to present the Final Reports to panels that comprise a few members from GC, ACAN or its Sub-committees for adoption²; and
- (b) views of the panels should be provided to the grantees and documented for future reference, especially on identifying exemplary or effective projects.

(iii) Transparency and knowledge base

12.25 Transparency can play a great part in encouraging sound performance evaluation by grantees and identifying and promoting effective practices and programmes. Apart from the Final Reports, some of the deliverables of the projects, like research findings, publications, audio-visual materials (like songs and videos of anti-drug dramas and films), etc can indeed be very helpful reference. These are made available in DIC to different extents, but not on the web. To enhance transparency and promote effective practices, ND is planning to build up an online knowledge base of BDF projects for ease of access and reference by all.

(iv) Overall effectiveness of BDF

12.26 Apart from evaluating individual projects, it is important to assess the overall effectiveness of BDF. The last overall review was conducted in 1999. ND is planning to pursue another overall review in due course, subject to other competing commitments (notably implementation of the other improvement measures which should take priority). Where appropriate, an external party may be engaged.

² In sampling the grantees for such presentation, a number of factors may be considered, such as the amount of grant (focusing on, say, projects with a grant of over \$1 million), special interests shown by ACAN members when vetting the applications, innovative elements of projects, etc.

(c) Encouraging applications for research projects

12.27 Given their distinct nature, research projects under BDF have all along been treated differently from other types of BDF projects. Applications for research projects are assessed and monitored by RAG. Through the support of BDF, researchers have conducted many important research projects and provided invaluable evidence-based contribution to combating drug abuse in Hong Kong.

12.28 Feedback from academic researchers is that taking up BDF projects would require a substantial amount of time, as such research projects are usually complicated with significant administrative and analytical work. Worse still, the research work will be added to their normal duties in the absence of any relief. Many are therefore reluctant to submit BDF applications. ND has experienced difficulties in finding quality researchers to undertake specific assignments. The number of research applications has been on the low side over the years³.

12.29 The situation is unlikely to abate as the Task Force has recommended a number of important research studies as part of the overall anti-drug strategies. BDF is an important source of funding to support these studies (see paragraph 12.8 above). Their results will carry significant implications for the future direction of our anti-drug work.

Improvements

12.30 To encourage more academic researchers to submit quality BDF applications and to facilitate the process, ND is planning to –

- (a) put in place an arrangement to allow the employment of relief teachers, subject to appropriate conditions, as part of the legitimate claim of a research proposal; and

³ They took up only 4.8% of the total number of applications. 13 have been approved, which is some 6% of all approved projects.

- (b) tailor-make a new set of guidelines and application forms for research proposals, setting out the specific requirements, including details on the research methodology, milestones and interim deliverables.

(D) Summing up

12.31 The Task Force recognises BDF as a key vehicle for the Government to support anti-drug work initiated or undertaken by our community partners. It provides a flexible means beyond Government subvention to help players in the anti-drug sector and the community at large respond to the changing drug scene and rise to the challenges of new threats, by undertaking new programmes, pilot schemes, research projects and other measures on their own initiative or in support of strategic initiatives of the Government.

12.32 The Task Force looks forward to continuous, effective application of the BDF scheme to support community participation in the anti-drug cause.

Recommendation 12.1

The Task Force supports the latest initiatives being pursued to improve BDF operations and recommends that continuous efforts should be made in this direction to make the most of the BDF scheme to support community participation in the anti-drug cause.

Measures taken thus far

Improvements are being made to the operations of BDF so that it would -

- (a) better focus on worthwhile projects;

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| <p>(b) identify from approved projects exemplary programmes and practices and promulgate them; and</p> <p>(c) encourage research projects.</p> |
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INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

(A) Narcotics Division

12.33 The five prongs of our anti-drug policy cut across the policy and operation areas of many bureaux and departments, ranging from law enforcement to social welfare, medical services, education, community affairs and so on. There are also many stakeholders in the community involving schools, NGOs, teachers, social workers, medical practitioners, parents and others. All along ND of the Security Bureau plays a central policy formulation and coordination role. It is headed by the Commissioner for Narcotics who is the only directorate officer in the setup.

12.34 To support the work of the Task Force and the Commissioner, a supernumerary directorate post of Principal Assistant Secretary has been created temporarily.

(B) Need for Enhancement

12.35 Following conclusion of the work of the Task Force, the bureaux and departments concerned will focus on the implementation of the recommendations individually and collectively. The Commissioner for Narcotics and ND will continue to play a critical coordination role among bureaux, departments, NGOs, and many other stakeholders in the community. They will need to spearhead the comprehensive strategies recommended by the Task Force on a sustained, long-term basis, addressing many complex issues straddling policy, legal, resource and other areas.

12.36 The Task Force considers that combating youth drug abuse, or the drug problem more generally, cannot be a short term or time-limited exercise. The nature of the tasks demands intensified steer, input and coordination at the directorate level.

Recommendation 12.2

The Task Force recommends that a permanent directorate post of Principal Assistant Secretary should be created in ND to underpin the Commissioner for Narcotics as soon as possible, in order to strengthen the directorate support to combat the drug abuse problem and, in particular, to take forward the recommendations of the Task Force.

Measures taken thus far

The Administration is planning to seek the approval of the Legislative Council to create the proposed directorate post in ND within the 2008-09 legislative session.