

Hong Kong Institute of Social Impact Analysts

Submission on Public Consultation on Proposal on Family Impact Assessment Checklist Tool

Introduction

1. The Hong Kong Institute of Social Impact Analysts (“the Institute”) is a membership-based professional body promoting the development of social impact assessment and social value accounting in Hong Kong and around the region. It is a local affiliate of Social Value International, the largest social value network in the world.
2. This paper presents our views on the proposed implementation of the Family Impact Assessment Checklist Tool.

Our Response to the Consultation Document

3. Overall, the Institute supports the approach as laid out in the consultation document on the implementation of the Family Impact Assessment Checklist Tool. The Institute would also like to suggest additional measures to further strengthen its application.
4. In response to the four questions included in the feedback form of the consultation document, the Institute’s views are as follows.
 - a) The Institute strongly agrees that family impact assessment (and social impact assessment more generally) should be undertaken ex-ante in the early stage of social policy formulation. A related question is whether ex-post evaluation also needs to be conducted during/after policy implementation, and if affirmative, under what circumstances that ex-post impact assessment has to be performed (or at least recommended).

- b) The Institute believes that a set framework is useful for guiding the impact assessment process and yet at the same time there should be room for the future users of the Checklist Tool to incorporate new and novel elements should those new areas of concerns arise during the course of the impact assessment.
 - c) The Institute believes the Checklist Tool has provided comprehensive coverage of different family contexts and family types and yet at the same time there should be room for the users of the Checklist Tool to add new typology and/or additional family circumstances.
 - d) The Institute suggests two additional measures to further strengthen the application of the Checklist Tool:
 - i) To minimize selective/arbitrary application of the Checklist Tool and to ensure for overall consistency in its implementation, in addition to incorporating the ten principles as detailed in the Family Impact Assessment Checklist, the Checklist Tool should also lay out another set of general principles (which could be made in the form of a preamble or as a set of supplementary guidance notes) for facilitating the future users of the Checklist Tool to make appropriate judgements while going through the entire Checklist process (see further elaboration in paragraph 5 below).
 - ii) With regard to the substantial contents of the Checklist Tool (the lists of family diversity and contexts, the four dimensions and ten principles of family impact assessment, etc.), other than presenting the Checklist Tool as a framework that is exhaustive and covers all possible scenarios, there should be room for the users of the Checklist Tool to incorporate new areas of concerns that are peculiar to the policy circumstances (see further elaboration in paragraph 6 below).
5. The Institute recommends that additional guiding principles be developed and provided to the users of the Checklist Tool for facilitating the making of judgements which are necessary in the assessment process and should

be made in a highly consistent manner.

- a) In promoting the wider application of social impact assessment, the Institute along with its international network has been promoting the adoption of a set of Social Value Principles for facilitating the social impact practitioners to make appropriate professional judgements (see Appendix 1).
- b) We notice that the spirits of many of the principles have already been incorporated into the Checklist Tool through the inclusion of various checklist items. For example,
 - i) some level of stakeholder engagement has been included in the Checklist process
 - ii) some level of evidence would be required for supporting the making of judgements
 - iii) the application of the materiality principle in identifying impacts as insignificant, some impact, substantial impact, etc.
 - iv) in addition to examining the materiality of outcomes, there is also the need to determine the relative importance of outcomes
 - v) the need to identify all material outcomes including positive or negative, intended or unintended, anticipated or unanticipated, etc.
- c) These are examples of the application of the Social Value Principles that could be found in the Checklist Tool. In practice, however, it may be difficult for the future users to determine the extent of work one has to perform to meet the requirements. It will directly affect the quality of the judgements made and there is also resource implications as the impact evaluator has to determine the level of rigour one has to achieve in trying to answer the Checklist questions. It is thus recommended that some general guidelines be provided in the Checklist Tool (for example as a set of supplementary guidance notes) so as ensure for

consistency in the application of the related principles and to minimize selective/arbitrary application of the Checklist Tool.

6. The Social Value Principle on “Understand What Changes” asks the impact evaluators to “articulate how change is created and evaluate this through evidence gathered, recognizing positive and negative changes as well as those that are intended and unintended.” The Checklist Tool offers a set framework to describe, understand and map the possible changes that may be realized with the implementation of the new social policy. The Institute believes the use of a set framework could greatly enhance consistency and comparability of the findings of family impact assessment, while the current proposed framework would also be flexible enough to cover most if not all family contexts and policy circumstances. However, given there is always a risk that a set framework may miss out important areas of concerns, it is recommended that there should be options available for the future users of the Checklist Tool to add new items and highlight new areas of concerns that are peculiar to the policy circumstances, should those new areas of concerns arise during the course of the impact assessment.

Summary

7. The Institute supports the introduction of the checklist approach of Family Impact Assessment, so that effects of new/revised policies or legislative proposals on families and families’ ability to contribute to policy objectives can be assessed before their implementation.
8. The Institute promotes the use of the Social Value Principles which have been constantly reviewed and updated to meet the changing demands of the professional practice. The Institute believes the new framework for conducting family impact assessment should also embrace and adopt to the largest extent possible the relevant Social Value Principles as the guiding principles for conducting impact analysis.
9. The amount of work to be performed in an impact assessment should be commensurate with perceived significance of the new/revised policy.

While all assessment/evaluation should be evidence-based, the future users of the Checklist Tool should be given guidance on how much time and resources they should devote to undertake the impact assessment. In this connection, the Social Value Principles could also offer the directions for making those judgements (e.g. under what circumstances the review of overseas policy experience would suffice and when local firsthand research has to be conducted).

10. The evidence for supporting the conclusion of an impact assessment, including all important judgments made, should be well-documented. Verification mechanisms should be introduced under some circumstances.

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15 November, 2016

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Appendix 1: The Seven Principles of Social Values

5 general principles on conducting impact assessment:

1. **Involve stakeholders**

Inform what gets measured and how this is measured and valued in an account of social value by involving stakeholders.

2. **Understand what changes**

Articulate how change is created and evaluate this through evidence gathered, recognizing positive and negative changes as well as those that are intended and unintended.

3. **Value the outcomes that matter**

Making decisions about allocating resources between different options needs to recognize the values of stakeholders. Value refers to the relative importance of different outcomes and is informed by stakeholders' preferences.

4. **Only include what is material**

Determine what information and evidence must be included in the accounts to give a true and fair picture, such that stakeholders can draw reasonable conclusions about impact.

5. **Do not over-claim**

Only claim the value that activities are responsible for creating.

2 additional general principles on reporting the findings of impact assessment

6. **Be transparent**

Demonstrate the basis on which the analysis may be considered accurate and honest, and show that it will be reported to and discussed with stakeholders.

7. **Verify the result**



Ensure appropriate independent assurance.

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