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# Organizing Participatory Urban Services:

# The Mutual Aid Committees in Hong Kong

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by

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## Acknowledgement

## About the Authors

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ORGANIZING PARTICIPATORY URBAN SERVICES:

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### Conceptual Framework and Methodology

This paper aims to study mutual aid committees (henceforth: MACs) in Hong Kong in terms of their capacity to organize participatory urban services. Participatory urban services are those services provided in an urban context, which require the consumers to participate as co-producers. A group of residents hiring commercial watchmen to guard their building are not organizing a participatory urban service, whereas another batch of tenants taking turns in security patrol are. This definition is admittedly narrow. Hence, it is likely to lead to significant methodological problems. It is better, however, to begin with a narrow definition rather than with a broader one for the sake of theoretical clarity. A mutual aid committee is a self-help group (Durman 1976: 433) based on the principle of neighbourhood. The concept of neighbourhood used throughout this paper is much narrower than what has been commonly used in the literature (Downs 1981). It is defined in terms of dwellings within the same building. Since a MAC is voluntary, its capacity to organize participatory urban services is heavily circumscribed by the following conditions:

First, there must be an adequate functional environment of the MACs in relation to the larger society;

Second, there must be among the members the perception of deprivations and problems which need amelioration;

Third, these felt needs must be viewed as services susceptible to production through community involvement;

Fourth, the committee itself must have developed a level of inter-

action sufficient to prevent residents from nonparticipation and riding free on the services provided.

Information on the MAC activities and some possible underlying conditions are drawn from a larger study of grassroot politics and participatory urban services in four selected areas in Hong Kong, Kwun Tong, Tuen Mun, Tai Hang Tung and Sai Ying Pun. With the exception of the sample of local officials, the other two samples are not identical with those used in the larger study. Specifically, a subset of MAC chairmen was created from the larger sample of community leaders. Likewise, from the sample of residents, those respondents who reported having MACs in their buildings were drawn to make up a sub-sample. Therefore, the samples are not specifically designed for the present study, thereby incurring serious methodological problems.

One of the problems is in the unit of analysis. The MACs are, strictly speaking, not the units of analysis in our design. While community leaders and local residents were invited to supply us with information about the MACs, those informants did not belong to the same MACs. Occasionally, information from different sources may be contradictory. More seriously, we cannot confidently combine findings from the leaders and the residents survey to form a coherent picture of, for instance, the patterns of interaction between leaders and members in the MACs. Another implication arising from our survey design has to do with the representativeness of our MACs. Of the 3,724 MACs in Hong Kong in 1982, those in private buildings made up 73 per cent. In contrast, the majority of residents who reported on their MACs (77 per cent) happened to reside in public housing. This should caution us when comparisons are made between the MACs in public housing

and that in private housing. The last methodological problem is conceptual. As the concept of participatory urban services is foreign to our respondents, we asked our MAC residents for information on whatever kinds of activities undertaken by their MACs. Community leaders were expected to be able to make distinctions among different types of activities: those of self-help nature, joint ventures with the government and campaigns initiated by the government. Apparently, the first type of activities came nearest to our concept of participatory urban services. It turned out that only a few MAC chairmen failed to make the distinction.

Before we proceed to present our survey findings, a briefing on the historical development of the MACs is in order.

## History of the MACs

Unlike the self-help movement in the United States, the establishment and growth of the MACs in Hong Kong has had neither the element of a religious movement (Hurvitz 1976) nor that of a social movement (Back & Taylor 1976). It has been an outgrowth of a governmental experiment based initially on a genuine public concern with inadequacies in the provision of public security services.

The background was provided in 1972 when the increasing rate of crime[1] brought about a tidal wave of public pressure on the government to take drastic measures. The government responded initially by legislating tougher sentences, by increasing police recruitment, by commissioning

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[1] It was widely reported in the press that violent crime had increased twofold in four years.

research studies and last but not least, by organizing campaigns to publicize preventive measures. As time went on, it was recognized that these measures alone could not bring home the desired effect and that crime of such a magnitude as existed in the early 1970s could not be curbed without community involvement. Among the callers, Wilfred S.B. Wong, a legislative councillor, spoke in unambiguous terms. In January 1973, he recommended the revival of the traditional Chinese neighbourhood watch system - Po Kak - as a move to combat the rising crime rate. He believed that robbers were successful because they used the element of surprise. Once robbers knew someone was watching, the element of surprise would be removed. The neighbourhood watch system could be provided by residents' associations or a street tenants patrol.[2] It cannot be ascertained whether and to what extent Mr. Wong's recommendation was related to the subsequent efforts on the part of the government. It seems that the decisions by the government were incremental, building upon experiences gained from the Keep Hong Kong Clean Campaign in 1972. With the decision to enlarge the publicity campaigns organized by the police force into a colony-wide fight violent crime campaign, it became evident that an organizational structure with public involvement was indispensable. Thus, a campaign promotion network was set up in residential blocks in June 1973. The MACs served as front line groups to support the area committees which are in turn coordinated by the city district committees. It should be noted that although a few neighbourhood security patrols were formed as an experiment, the immediate objective of the government was to secure public support of the campaigns and the

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[2] *South China Morning Post*, 6 January 1973.

initial target was multi-storey private buildings.[3] Two years later, the experiment with the mutual aid committees was assessed by the government as successful and allowed to become permanent.[4] The total number of MACs has increased more than threefold since 1973. During this period, government efforts have been directed towards public buildings and towards the rapidly developing New Territories.

As regards the neighbourhood security patrols, there were initial fears that they might be misused by harmful elements against their neighbours. This fear had proved unfounded, and it was decided in November 1974 to encourage the MACs to develop security patrols at their own pace whilst providing supervision and training by the City District Offices of the Home Affairs Department and Community Relations Officers of the Royal Hong Kong Police Force. The neighbourhood security patrols did not increase in number as quickly as the MACs and the trend has been in fact declining since 1977 (218 units in 1982).

These developments raise the question of whether or not the mutual aid committees are at present operating under conditions which are quite different from the past. In the following pages, some research findings will be presented to bear on this question.

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[3] Home Affairs Department, *Mutual Aid Committees in Hong Kong*, 15 November 1974.

[4] Apart from the internal reviews, see the public announcement by government officials, such as that of the Secretary for Home Affairs before the Legislative Council on 11 November 1976.

## Kinds of MAC Activities

According to the residents, two kinds of activities were most popular among their MACs. One was related to law and order, while the other was recreational, cultural and sports activities. They each made up 31 per cent of the total MAC activities reported. Clean-up activities ranked second, claiming 20 per cent of the total. Districts appeared to fare differently, with MACs in Kwun Tong concentrating on "law and order," those in Tuen Mun and Tai Hang Tung preferring "recreation, etc." and finally Sai Ying Pun undertaking more "keep clean" activities. Except for Kwun Tong however, the above area characteristics can be accounted for by referring to the types of housing (see Table 1). MACs in public housing estates tended to favour recreational, cultural and sports activities, whereas those in the private buildings seemed to do more clean-ups. The high percentage in law and order activities for the private buildings was truly exceptional as it was influenced by the special weight given by Kwun Tong. Kwun Tong presented a clear-cut emphasis on law and order activities, overshadowing all other kinds of activities.

Why was it that one kind of activities was more popular than others?

To begin with, the stated objectives of the MACs may give some explanation. The responses by the MAC-chairmen to our open-ended question about the objectives of MACs fell into two major categories: one in general terms and the other in terms of activities. As reported in Table 2, 40 per cent of our respondents mentioned specific activities as MAC objectives. Among them, recreational, cultural and sports activities were by no means the most popular kinds of activities. If we assume, however, that they constituted the only means for the promotion of neighbourliness, they would

Table 1. Kinds of MAC Activities, by District and by Type of Housing[a] (in percentages)

| | District[b] | | | | | | | All | | Grand Total |
| Activities | KT Public | KT Private | TM Public | TM Private | THT[c] Public | SYP Public | SYP Private | Public | Private | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Keep clean | 20 | 35 | 10 | 25 | 16 | 67 | 35 | 16 | 35 | 20 |
| Law and order | 42 | 45 | 16 | 13 | 13 | 33 | 31 | 30 | 35 | 31 |
| Recreation, etc. | 30 | 8 | 45 | 13 | 47 | 0 | 11 | 37 | 10 | 31 |
| Public facilities | 0 | 3 | 4 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 2 | 8 | 3 |
| Neighbourhood relations | 4 | 10 | 14 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 7 |
| Others | 4 | 0 | 11 | 38 | 22 | 0 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 7 |
| Total | 100 | 101 | 100 | 102 | 101 | 100 | 100 | 101 | 101 | 99 |
| (N) | (199) | (40) | (148) | (8) | (32) | (3) | (65) | (382) | (113) | (495) |

Notes: [a] The question reads: "What did the MAC in your building do?" Multiple answers were allowed.

[b] The abbreviations for the districts are:

KT = Kwun Tong    TM = Tuen Mun    THT = Tai Hang Tung    SYP = Sai Ying Pun

[c] No private building in this research site.

come to an equal proportion with law and order activities. Then, the MAC objectives defined by the leaders come close to the pattern of distribution among kinds of MAC activities as reported by the residents. Cleaning-up, law and order, and recreational activities thus made up the three major kinds of activities undertaken by the MACs in Hong Kong.

According to Table 2, 31 per cent of the chairmen regarded the MACs as vehicles for problem-solving through mutual aid. Did our MACs live up to this ideal? Did their activities correspond to the problems perceived by the parties concerned? Let us first turn to the most urgent problems as perceived by the various parties.

Table 2. Objectives of MAC as Perceived by MAC Chairmen[a]

| Objectives | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| To promote neighbourliness | 7 | 11 |
| To solve problems through mutual aid | 19 | 31 |
| To serve the residents | 4 | 6 |
| To provide linkage between the Government and the residents | 5 | 8 |
| To undertake activities (general) "environmental improvement" (1) "community movement" (1) | 2 | 3 |
| To undertake activities (specific) cleaning-up (11) law and order (10) recreational, cultural and sports activities (3) fire prevention (1) | 25 | 40 |
| Total | 62 | 99 |

[a]The question is "What are the major objectives of your organization?"

From Table 3, we know the differences among government officials, MAC chairmen and residents in their perceptions about the most urgent problems. Views also varied from area to area. Nevertheless, all participants shared the same views that recreational, cultural and sports services were the least urgent needs while the lack of public facilities was the most urgent problem leaving all others far behind. Among public facilities, transportation was the most urgently needed service. (49 per cent of a total of 461 residents' responses). Law and order was perceived as the most urgent problem by about the same proportion, namely from 10 to 12 per cent, of the respondents from each of the three samples. Housing did not appear to be a problem to as many residents as to the community leaders and officials, probably because our sample did under-represent those living in very poor conditions. As to medical and health services, officials and MAC chairmen were possibly out of touch with the mood of the residents. Medical and health services must pose a serious problem to quite a number of Hong Kong residents, as witnessed by the recent upsurge of public demands for a comprehensive hospital in the Eastern district. The differences in opinions between officials and the other participants with regard to unemployment and economic development in Tuen Mun were most illustrative of how problems can be perceived differently. Tuen Mun is being developed as a new town, and officials were concerned with creating enough job opportunities in situ for the new residents who, however, preferred to travel a long way back to the urban areas for employment, thereby aggravating the problem of transportation. No matter what divergences existed and why, we hold that the views of the residents were the most important for understanding the activities undertaken by the MACs. Therefore we may safely conclude that

Table 3. The Most Urgent Problems as Perceived[a] (in percentages)

| Problems | KT | | | TM | | | THT | | | SYP | | | All | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | C | R | O[b] | C | R | O | C | R | O | C | R | O | C | R | O |
| Public facilities | 31 | 40 | 23 | 88 | 68 | 51 | 31 | 18 | 30 | 48 | 48 | 38 | 42 | 52 | 33 |
| Housing | 34 | 18 | 42 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 23 | 15 | 38 | 14 | 7 | 38 | 23 | 9 | 31 |
| Medical & health | 11 | 5 | 5 | 13 | 18 | 7 | 8 | 29 | 3 | 0 | 11 | 5 | 8 | 13 | 5 |
| Law and order | 11 | 23 | 17 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 23 | 18 | 5 | 19 | 4 | 0 | 12 | 11 | 10 |
| Recreation, etc. | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 12 | 8 | 5 | 16 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Education & welfare | 6 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 5 | 14 | 15 | 0 | 3 | 10 | 2 | 0 | 8 | 3 | 7 |
| Unemployment & economic development | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 17 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| Others | 3 | 10 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 11 | 5 | 11 | 10 | 3 | 6 | 4 |
| Total | 99 | 100 | 101 | 101 | 99 | 99 | 100 | 101 | 98 | 101 | 99 | 101 | 98 | 99 | 100 |
| (N) | (35) | (167) | (139) | (8) | (215) | (74) | (13) | (34) | (37) | (21) | (45) | (21) | (77)[c] | (461) | (271) |

[a] The question is "What is, in your opinion, the most urgent problem in your community?"

[b] C = Chairmen; R = Residents; O = Officials

[c] Some respondents had given multiple answers

transportation was the most salient need, followed by medical and health services and then by law and order. Recreational, cultural and sports needs were not urgent items on the agenda.

Comparing the kinds of MAC activities to the perceptions of problems, we discovered that the MAC activities were not geared to the satisfaction of the most urgently felt needs of the residents, despite the stated objectives of MACs as problem-solving vehicles. Hardly anything was done in areas where problems were most serious, namely the provision of public facilities. Where needs were less urgent, i.e. recreation etc., one finds the most efforts spent. We shall discuss this anomaly again. In the meantime, let us have a look at the types of MAC activities.

## Types of MAC activities

Knowing the kinds of activities undertaken by the MACs does not give us a picture about their capacity to organize participatory services. For instance, the MACs in the private buildings did undertake activities to improve public security. But the measures were definitely confined to hiring of professional watchmen, installation of iron gates and electronic anti-burglary devices, etc., since no neighbourhood security patrol in private building has been licensed by the government. To solicit more detailed information, the MAC chairmen were requested to give unstructured answers to our questions about the MAC activities. The responses were then classified into two categories: those activities initiated by the MACs and those by the government. The findings seem to confirm the commonly held views that the MACs are under too much influence of the government, rather than that of the residents. No less than 46 per cent of all MAC activities undertaken

in 1982 were prompted by the government. The role of the government was particularly strong in "keep clean" (59 per cent) and "law and order" activities (51 per cent), most of which were campaigns. It is also noteworthy that among the 16 activities organized by the MACs for "law and order," only two were related to security patrols. The initiatives of the MACs were largely confined to recreational, cultural and sports activities. To a large extent, the MACs can be regarded as campaign offices for the government.

This close relationship between the government and the MACs is understandable. MACs are creatures of the government; they operate under the guidance of government officials. Was it not natural that MAC activities were cast in official moulds? What did the government officials advise? How did they encourage the citizens to solve their own problems through mutual aid? We found that most of the works done by the government (46 per cent of the total) consisted in organizing self-help groups, followed by governmental campaigns (34 per cent) and recreational, sports and cultural events (10 per cent). The types of MAC activities fitted therefore into the pattern of governmental efforts.

The impact of the government was not always direct, or for that matter, intentional. We have seen that the MACs in public housing estates often liked to organize autonomous recreational, cultural and sports activities. We surmise that this resulted from the context in which the MACs operated. In the beginning, the MACs in public housing were established primarily for the purpose of securing public order. Unlike their counterparts in private housing, MACs in public housing have had no role to play in building management, which falls within the jurisdiction of the Housing Authority.

To the extent that the government improved its policing work, the role of the MACs in public housing in maintaining law and order also diminished. As our survey indicated, security patrolling within public housing estates was no longer the major activity of the MACs. We have reasons to believe that where it still was, it could be maintained only with difficulties. The result of our survey may be viewed as corroborated by the government's information on the decreasing number of neighbourhood security patrols. The reduction of this participatory services can be regarded in turn as a result of the improvement of policing work through the establishment of neighbourhood police units and police reporting centres since 1974. As at January 1, 1983, there were 85 and 67 units respectively. In contrast to the neighbourhood security patrols of the MACs, these government units are to be increased towards an eventual coverage of 1 neighbourhood police unit/ police reporting centre per 20,000 persons. It must be against this context that the MACs in public housing estates turn more and more towards recreational, cultural and sports activities.

MAC Activeness

The role of government not only determined directly or indirectly the kinds of activities undertaken by the MACs, but it also influenced the extent of their activeness. MAC chairmen were asked whether they had in the past year done anything related to the following three types of activities: those of a self-help nature, joint projects with the government and campaigns initiated by the government. The picture that emerged (see Table 4) reveals a positive relationship between the involvement of the government and the activeness of the MACs. Only 32 per cent of the total MAC chairmen (N=71)

Table 4. Activeness of the MACs[a]

| | MACs in District | | | | |
| Activeness | KT | TM | THT | SYP | Total |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A: No. of MACs | 21 | 10 | 16 | 24 | 71 |
| B: No. of MACs having had self-help activities | 10 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 23 |
| (B/A %) | (48) | (20) | (56) | (8) | (32) |
| C: No. of MACs having had joint projects with the Government | 12 | 2 | 12 | 4 | 30 |
| (C/A%) | (57) | (20) | (75) | (17) | (42) |
| D: No. of MACs having supported Government-initiated campaigns | 15 | 5 | 13 | 14 | 47 |
| (D/A%) | (71) | (50) | (81) | (58) | (66) |

[a]The questions read:

1. Did the organization in last year launch some mutual aid activities to solve the problems of the residents?

2. Did the organization in last year cooperate with the government in organizing activities?

3. Did the organization in last year support community campaigns initiated by the government (e.g.: Keep Clean Campaign, Fight Crime Campaign, etc.)?

reported that they had ever launched any self-help activities in the past year, while 66 per cent of them had supported government-initiated campaigns. Joint projects took the middle ground with 42 per cent. The same pattern of relationship held across all four research sites. Disregarding the types of activities, there were marked differences among districts in terms of MAC activeness. The MACs in Tai Hang Tung seemed the most active, whereas those in Sai Ying Pun the least. Finally, if all other community organizations were used as a control group, the MACs were less active than

other groups. Our findings reveal that 54 per cent of all non-MAC organizations had self-help activities, 72 per cent of them did cooperate with the government in joint ventures and 74 per cent of them supported governmental campaigns. Area differences in this control group seemed to be in reverse, with non-MAC groups in Sai Ying Pun being the most active, while those in Tai Hang Tung the least active.

Since we did not ask about frequencies of each type of activities, the above assessment of the activeness of MACs may not be convincing enough. Hence, a table was compiled on the basis of the negative responses to the three questions to indicate the level of inactiveness of the MACs. According to Table 5, 39 per cent of our MACs had never launched any self-help activities in the past year; 30 per cent of them never participated in any joint projects with the government; and finally 10 per cent of them never supported any government-initiated campaign. Again, the MACs in Sai Ying Pun were the least active of all. But the MACs in Kwun Tong, not that in Tai Hang Tung as can be inferred from Table 4, were the most active. As compared to all other community organizations, the inferiority of MACs was confirmed: the percentage of non-MAC groups which had never had any self-help activities or joint projects with the government was substantially lower (28 and 13 respectively) than that of the MACs. The inactiveness of non-MAC organizations with regard to the support of government-initiated campaigns (12 per cent) was, however, on a par with that of the MACs.

By now we may have two conclusions. First, the MACs were not active in organizing self-help activities. Second, they owed their activeness in the other types of activities to the government. Furthermore, the degree of government involvement may be employed to partly account for the area

Table 5. Inactiveness of Community Organizations by Type of Organization, by District and by Type of Activities[a]

| Inactiveness | Groups in District | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | KT | | TM | | THT | | SYP | | Total | |
| | Non MAC | MAC | Non MAC | MAC | Non MAC | MAC | Non MAC | MAC | Non MAC | MAC |
| A: Total no. of organizations | 52 | 21 | 25 | 10 | 10 | 16 | 34 | 24 | 121 | 72 |
| B: No. of organizations having never had any self-help activities (B/A %) | 13 (25) | 3 (14) | 9 (36) | 4 (40) | 5 (50) | 6 (38) | 9 (26) | 15 (63) | 36 (28) | 28 (39) |
| C: No. of organizations having never had any joint projects with government (C/A %) | 5 (10) | 3 (14) | 6 (24) | 3 (30) | 4 (40) | 2 (13) | 1 (3) | 13 (54) | 16 (13) | 21 (30) |
| D: No. of organizations having never supported Government-initiated campaigns (D/A %) | 6 (12) | 1 (5) | 7 (28) | 0 (0) | 2 (20) | 2 (13) | 0 (0) | 4 (17) | 15 (12) | 7 (10) |

[a]The questions used are the same as in Table 4.

differences in terms of MAC activeness. Specifically, the fact that the MACs in Kwun Tong were the most active and those in Sai Ying Pun the least active could be a result of the different degree of government involvement in the two communities respectively. When asked whether they did in the past three years encourage the residents to undertake some mutual aid activities to solve their own problems, 86 per cent of the local officials in Kwun Tong answered yes, while only 55 per cent of officials for Sai Ying Pun gave an affirmative answer.

Why were our MACs inactive in organizing mutual aid activities? It cannot be due to the lack of community problems, as only two respondents from the total MAC-chairmen sample (N=71) thought there were no problem at all in their communities. It must be because the problems were thought to be not suitable for solution through mutual aid. In our survey, for those MAC chairmen who had named the most urgent problems, no one believed that the residents could have a role to play in their solution, while 81 per cent of them charged the government with the responsibility. This total denial of one's own responsibility was rather surprising, for apparently at least in the area of law and order the residents did have a role, albeit a limited one, to play. We may of course refer again to the context in which the MACs were related to the larger society. That is to say, the MAC chairmen might have sat back thinking that crime rates were not serious enough and the police had stepped up their efforts and so why bother? However, the per capita crime rates in Hong Kong in the past few years (1,616 in 1982, for instance) were higher than those during the heydays of the MACs (1,200 in 1976). The complacency, if any, cannot be explained away. We suspected that, with the rapid expansion of government services in the past decade,

community leaders as well as citizens in Hong Kong acquired a sense of dependency which in turn inhibited local initiatives for self-help.

A sense of dependency is defined as the perception that community problems can be solved only by expanding governmental efforts. This sense of dependency was prevalent among our MAC chairmen. When asked to choose the most preferable strategy for solving community problems generally, 59 per cent of the MAC chairmen opted for the strategy of expanding governmental efforts, 35 per cent for generating self-help by residents and 6 per cent for joint efforts by government and residents. As expected, variations existed across the research sites, with Tai Hang Tung being more favourable towards self-help activities. One is reminded of the Table 4, which reveals that Tai Hang Tung had more active MACs than other areas, engaging themselves in self-help activities. Moreover, when the problem-solving strategies were cross-tabulated with the degree of activeness in self-help activities, a negative relationship emerged between the sense of dependency and the degree of activeness (see Table 6).

The sense of dependency can also help explain why the MACs were not as active as the other community groups. We found that the MAC chairmen were more dependent on the government than the leaders of other community organizations. With this comparison, we have raised the possibility of using leadership characteristics for explaining the different degree of activeness among community organizations.

Our findings do suggest that the MAC chairmen, when compared to other community leaders, were relatively younger, lower educated, less wealthy and employed in lower paid professions. The suspicion that lower social-economic status might be associated with lower degree of self-help

activeness does not seem able to survive the test applied to our MAC chairmen. It turned out that age and educational background of leaders were unrelated to the degree of MAC activeness. Income seemed to have some effects. Wealthier chairmen seemed to organize more activities for their MACs.

Table 6. Problem-Solving Strategy and MAC Activeness

| Activeness[a] | Strategy[b] | | |
| | Expand governmental efforts | Both | Gather Self-help |
|---|---|---|---|
| | % | % | % |
| Low | 62 | 100 | 59 |
| Medium | 31 | 0 | 24 |
| High | 8 | 0 | 18 |
| Total | 101 | 100 | 101 |
| (N) | (26) | (2) | (17) |

No. of missing observations = 26

[a] Low = no activity at all in last year
Medium = 1 to 4 activities in last year
High = 5 or more activities in last year

[b] The question is "In general, which one of the following strategies you think is better for solving problems in your community; to expand the existing activities and services of the government or to mobilize residents and groups in this area to solve the problems through mutual aid?"

Finally, we found that the aspiration of MAC chairmen may be positively related to the degree of MAC activeness. Specifically, those MAC chairmen who aspired to become city-wide leaders were likely to be more active in organizing self-help activities than those who were contented to be local leaders and that those who aspired to become local leaders are more active than those who had no aspiration at all.

Residents' Participation

In the above section, we have seen how active the MAC chairmen were in organizing various types of activities. An excursion into some background factors has also been attempted. We now turn ourselves to the role played by the residents in whose buildings there were MACs. Table 7 represents a shift in frame fo reference from the activeness of MACs as led

Table 7.  Residents' Participation in MAC Activities[a]

| | District | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participation | KT | | TM | | THT | | SYP | | ALL | |
| | N | (%) | N | (%) | N | (%) | N | (%) | N | (%) |
| Frequent | 23 | (14) | 12 | (7) | 2 | (6) | 4 | (11) | 41 | (10) |
| Average | 30 | (19) | 19 | (11) | 3 | (9) | 11 | (30) | 63 | (15) |
| Infrequent | 108 | (67) | 144 | (82) | 30 | (86) | 22 | (59) | 304 | (75) |
| Total | 161 | (100) | 175 | (100) | 35 | (101) | 37 | (100) | 408 | (100) |

No. of missing observation = 153

[a] The question reads: "In general, how frequent did you participate in those activities?"

by their chairmen to the activeness of residents in joining in those activities once organized. The picture is not encouraging either. Among a total of 408 MAC-residents, only 10 per cent did frequently particpated in the MAC activities as against 75 per cent who did infrequently. Since our question did not, regrettably, allow the response of "no participation at all," the missing value for Table 7, namely 153 responses of "don't know" and "no answer," might be interpreted as an indicator of low participation, too.

In terms of area differences, residents in Kwun Tong seemed the most participative, whereas those in Tai Hang Tung were the least active. When Tables 4, 5 and 7 are taken together, it can be suggested that Kwun Tong did perform best, in the sense that it had both active leaders and citizens. On the other hand, the no less active leaders in Tai Hang Tung failed to promote a high level of participation by the residents.

The type of housing had only a slight impact on the level of residents' participation in MAC activities. While frequent participants made up the same percentage (10) of the respective samples in the public and the private housing, more residents in the former group (76 per cent) participated infrequently than those in the latter (67 per cent). However, a note of caution is in order. As private housing is rather heavily underrepresented in our sample, any interpretation concerning the type of housing must be taken as suggestive only.

In studies on citizen participation, social-economic variables are usually thought to be important variables. Likewise, we cross-tabulated sex, age, education and income of our respondents with their level of participation in MAC activities. The results were that more male than female residents participated frequently; older people were more likely to be frequent

participants than younger ones; those with post secondary education were more participative; and finally, the middle income group, namely those with HK$5,001-10,000, tended to participate more frequently than other groups. However, the relationship between these socio-economic variables and the level of participation all failed to meet the test of significance at the 0.05 level.

Can we invoke the sense of dependency to explain the low level of citizens' participation in MAC activities, as we have applied it to study the activeness of MAC chairmen? In fact, we did find a strong sense of dependency among our residents. Of a total of 521 MAC-respondents, 56 per cent preferred expanding governmental efforts to gathering self-help as the better strategy for solving community problems, with only 23 per cent favouring the reverse order. This general sense of dependency intensified itself when applied to more specific problems. Of those who had named the most urgent problems facing their communities, only 15 per cent viewed them as susceptible for solution through self-help. Residents in Tai Hang Tung were most favourable to self-help solution than all other districts, but it is to be recalled that they were the least active in MAC activities. It is of course understandable that some community problems cannot be solved by the MACs, for one reason or another. Take transportation for instance. It has been the most urgent urban problem for the majority of residents in Hong Kong. The provision of transportation services is, by law, subject to franchise by the government which would, in view of the complexity of the problem, under no circumstances allow the MACs, even in federation, to have a role to play. On the other hand, it is surprising that even in areas where the MACs had been playing a role, our respondents still were not

inclined towards self-help. It was found that among those who named law and order as the most urgent problem, only 21 per cent (N=43) regarded it as susceptible for self-help. Of those who mentioned recreational, cultural and sports services as the most urgent problem, just 14 per cent (N=14) thought them susceptible for self-help.

In examining the relationship between the choice of problem-solving strategies and the level of participation in MAC activities, we noted that adherents of self-help participated more frequently than those who advocated expansion of governmental efforts. The relationship between these two variables was, however, statistically insignificant. In a sense, the result should not be surprising. As we did not differentiate among types of MAC activities, as we did with regard to the information given by the MAC chairmen, the level of residents' participation we had measured does not refer to the self-help activities alone, but also government-initiated campaigns and joint projects. Hence, the relationship between the choice of problem-solving strategies and the level of participation cannot be accurately demonstrated. On the other hand, to the extent that the MAC activities were mainly government-initiated campaigns and joint projects, a more meaningful question can be addressed to the capability of the MACs to mobilize the residents to participate in these activities in which they might not be interested. Theoretically, group dynamics can take the place of salient needs to activate the rational residents. Our research design however did not allow us to probe into the group dynamics within the MACs. Since the MAC chairmen and residents in our samples did not belong to the same MACs, we may, at our best, have only rough and separate ideas about the interaction between leaders and followers in the MACs. We were interested in knowing how

frequent our MAC chairmen visited and helped the residents. We hypoth-
esized that should this kind of contacts prove frequent and useful in normal
times, the MAC chairmen would be able to mobilize residents in times of
need. As it stood, interaction between MAC chairmen and residents was not
frequent and useful. Our findings reveal that only 8 per cent of our MAC
chairmen had very frequent contact with residents. During the whole past
year, 35 per cent of them did not visit the residents at all and 18 per cent
of chairmen maintained only infrequent contact with the residents, namely
several times a year. On the other hand, not many residents called on the
MAC chairmen for help. More than a half (55 per cent) of the MAC chairmen
reported that in the past three months, no residents at all came to seek
their help; 20 per cent of them reported help-seeking visits from 1 to 5
residents and only 7 per cent of them had more than 20 visits. These find-
ings are supported by information given by the residents. When asked
whether in the past three months, he or his family members had ever con-
tacted the MAC for assistance, 93 per cent of our respondents (N=561)
answered no. Were those chairmen who were active in contacting and helping
residents more likely to be active in organizing self-help activities? The
answer is a cautious yes. As Table 8 suggests, 82 of those chairmen who
had never contacted the residents were rather inactive in organizing MAC
activities. On the other hand, those MACs with chairmen who contacted
residents only infrequently scored a high level of activeness. In comparison,
Table 9 is more clearcut. MACs which were inactive in self-help activities
also had chairmen who received no residents seeking help. The more helpful
chairmen were indeed more active in organizing self-help activities.

Table 8.  Chairmen Contacting Residents and MAC Activeness

| Activeness[a] | Chairmen Contacting Residents[b] | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Very frequent | Frequent | Infrequent | None |
| | % | % | % | % |
| Low | 50 | 50 | 50 | 82 |
| Medium | 50 | 38 | 17 | 12 |
| High | 0 | 13 | 33 | 6 |
| Total (N) | (4) | (16) | (6) | (17) |

No. of missing observations = 28

[a]For keys to the levels of activeness, see Table 6.

[b]Very frequent = every day or several times a week
Frequent      = several times a month or a quarter of year
Infrequent    = several times a year

Table 9.  Residents Seeking Help and MAC Activeness

| Activeness[a] | No. of Residents Seeking Help | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | None | 1 - 5 | 6 and more |
| | % | % | % |
| Low | 80 | 50 | 33 |
| Medium | 20 | 25 | 41 |
| High | 0 | 25 | 25 |
| Total (N) | (25) | (8) | (12) |

No. of missing observations = 26

[a]For keys to the levels of activeness, see Table 6.

## Participants' Evaluation of MAC

The picture we have thus far presented can be summarized as follows: not many MACs were active; for those that were, the kinds and types of activities organized were largely divorced from the felt needs of the residents; residents' participation in these activities tended to be low. As such, were the MACs successful or useful in the eyes of the parties concerned?

The government, being the strongest party in the game, has never regarded the MACs as an authentic mechanism for producing urban services through mutual help. One may wonder whether the neighbourhood security patrol has ever enjoyed the whole-hearted support of the police force. Nevertheless, the MAC was regarded as a successful social experiment (Bray 1976). Today, the MACs are still regarded as useful in improving communal facilities and environmental amenities in private buildings, in facilitating building management in public estates, in assisting the police neighbourhood units, in promoting a sense of belonging and neighbourhood, and finally in improving the communication between the government and the citizens.

As regards the MAC chairmen, their evaluation of the MAC activities is presented in Table 10. Overall speaking, the MAC chairmen were quite satisfied with their work. It is interesting to learn that only 51 per cent of MAC chairmen regarded government-initiated campaigns as successful. Self-help activities tended to be more successful (74 per cent). It was, however, the mixed type of activities, namely joint projects, that received the positive evaluation by the greatest majority of the chairmen involved (83 per cent). Leaders' evaluations of MAC activities differed from district to district. Sai Ying Pun, which had, as we have concluded above, the least active MACs,

was also the district with the lowest degree of satisfaction. Tai Hang Tung, where most of the MAC chairmen were active, scored the highest degree of satisfaction. In a nutshell, activeness breeded success or participation brought satisfaction.

Table 10.  Success of Activities as Perceived by MAC Chairmen

| Type of Activities | No. of Groups | District | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | KT | TM | THT | SYP | |
| | Total No. of MACs in district | 21 | 10 | 16 | 24 | 71 |
| Self-help Activities | A. No. of MACs involved | 10 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 23 |
| | B. No. of chairmen finding activities successful (B/A%) | 7 (70) | 1 (50) | 8 (89) | 1 (50) | 17 (74) |
| Joint Projects | C. No. of MACs involved | 12 | 2 | 12 | 4 | 30 |
| | D. No. of chairmen finding projects successful (D/C%) | 9 (75) | 2 (100) | 10 (83) | 4 (100) | 25 (83) |
| Govt'al Campaigns | E. No. of MACs involved | 15 | 5 | 13 | 14 | 47 |
| | F. No. of chairmen finding campaign successful (F/E%) | 8 (53) | 2 (50) | 8 (62) | 6 (43) | 24 (51) |

As in Daniel Katz et. al. (1975), this study places an emphasis upon citizens' evaluations of services. We hold that any study of participatory urban services must have a citizen perspective. In our case, 29 per cent of the residents interviewed regarded the activities undertaken by the MACs as successful, 20 per cent somewhat successful, and 11 per cent unsuccessful. What is most striking about the area differences is that Tai Hang Tung where the MACs were most active received a rather cool evaluation from the residents who were, as compared to residents in other districts, most favourably inclined towards self-help but least active in MAC activities. There the percentage of no response was the highest among all districts and the percentage of respondents who viewed the MAC activities as successful was the lowest of all.

When the respondents who gave answers were classified according to types of housing, it seemed that the MACs were slightly more successful in public estates than in private buildings. In addition, these respondents were invited to name the most successful and the most unsuccessful kinds of activities undertaken by their MACs. The overall picture (Table 11) is that recreational, cultural and sports activities were most likely to be successful, while opinions about keep clean activities and law and order activities were evenly divided. The variations in terms of the types of housing seemed important. In public housing, recreational, cultural and sports activities were likely to be the most successful activities, whereas in private buildings, the MACs were most likely to be successful in keep clean activities. Activities related to law and order were controversial in both types of housing. These findings correspond to the fact that a large number of MACs in public housing estates organized recreational, cultural and sports activities while a

Table 11. Residents' Evaluation of MAC Activities by Kinds of Activities (in percentages)

| Kinds of Activities | Most Successful[a] Activities | | | Most Unsuccessful[b] Activities | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Public housing | Private housing | All | Public housing | Private housing | All |
| Keep clean | 13 | 40 | 18 | 20 | 17 | 20 |
| Law and order | 32 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 21 | 31 |
| Recreation, etc. | 35 | 5 | 30 | 7 | 4 | 7 |
| Public facilities | 2 | 5 | 3 | 9 | 13 | 10 |
| Neighbourhood relations | 8 | 2 | 7 | 10 | 25 | 13 |
| Others | 10 | 17 | 11 | 20 | 21 | 20 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 101 | 99 | 100 | 101 |
| (N) | (188) | (42) | (230) | (99) | (24) | (123) |

[a]The question is: "Among those activities, which kind was the most successful?"

No. of missing observations = 331, i.e. 59% of the total sample.

[b]The question is: "Among those activities, which kind was the most unsuccessful?"

No. of missing observations = 438, i.e. 78% of the total sample.

equally large number of MACs in private buildings tended to organize keep clean activities (see Table 1). As different kinds of activities bear different meanings for different types of people, we cannot but ask about the effect of socio-economic variables of our respondents on their evaluation. The findings seem to indicate that the evaluations of MACs by the residents were unrelated to their sex, age and education but related to their level of income ($p < 0.05$). Poorer people tended to find the MAC activities successful. But

the relationship was not strong (gamma = 0.14). Finally, level of partici- pation was significantly and strongly related to residents' evaluation (p 0.0001 and gamma = 0.43). Those residents who participated more frequently in MAC activities were also most likely to evaluate MAC activities positively.

Our conclusion so far is that, in general, the MAC activities were evaluated positively by the residents in terms of successfulness of the activi- ties per se. Residents' evaluations became less favourable when the terms were changed to the utility of the MACs to the residents. We regard this way of evaluation more important than the former one as it reflects more realistically and faithfully the role of MACs in the minds of the residents. When asked whether they found that the MACs served the residents adequately (Table 12), only 17 per cent of the respondents answered yes,

Table 12.  Residents' Evaluation of MAC Services[a]

| Evaluation | District | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | KT | TM | THT | SYP | |
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| Adequately | 17 | 18 | 6 | 25 | 17 |
| Somewhat adequately | 33 | 14 | 26 | 33 | 23 |
| Inadequately | 23 | 30 | 27 | 19 | 26 |
| D.K./N.A. | 26 | 37 | 40 | 32 | 33 |
| Total | 99 | 99 | 99 | 99 | 99 |
| (N) | (209) | (246) | (54) | (52) | (561) |

[a]The question is "Do you find that the MAC serves the residents adequately?"

23 per cent found the services of the MACs somewhat adequate and 26 per cent found them inadequate. Tai Hang Tung again had the most dissatisfied residents. In terms of types of housing, the MACs in private buildings were much better placed than those living in public estates. In the latter, 43 per cent of the residents found the MACs inadequate, while for those in private buildings, the percentage was 23. Here lies apparently a paradox. MACs in public buildings had more successful activities, but MACs in private buildings served the residents better. This paradox and perhaps also the one of Tai Hang Tung mentioned above can be explained, partially, by pointing to our previous findings on the types of MAC activities and the role of the government. To the extent that the MAC activities were not geared to the felt needs of the residents but to the requirements of the government, activities could be organized successfully in the sense that for instance a fun-riding campaign did attract a crowd drawn from a small percentage of people each from a block. These activities however did not serve the interests of the residents. This explanation is more relevant to the public housing estates than to the private buildings, for the former were more easily penetrated by the government than the latter. The result was, that the MACs in public housing were more active but less salient to their residents whereas those in private housing were less active but served the residents better.

In this connection, we want to ask whether the residents' evaluation of the MACs in terms of services utility was related to the kinds of activities undertaken. The answer is quite clear in that law and order stood out as the kind of activities likely to put the MACs in a far better light than other kinds of activities. One may recall that the residents were divided in their

opinions about the successfulness of the law and order activities undertaken. This might be due to the variety of ways in organizing such kind of activities. Whatever the ways, law and order activities are salient to the felt needs of the residents. Recreational, cultural and sports activities on the other hand, although popular and successful, were more remote from the concern of the residents. It is not surprising then that those MACs which organized this kind of activities were regarded to have served their residents inadequately.

Finally we look at factors other than the types and kinds of activities which may have some effect on the residents' evaluation of the MACs in terms of services. We found that education and income were unrelated but sex and age were significantly related to evaluation, but not strongly. Female residents tended to regard MACs as having served the residents inadequately. Older people were less likely to evaluate the MACs negatively. As with the other method of evaluation, the level of participation was both significantly ($p < 0.005$) and strongly related to the evaluation of the MACs in terms of services (gamma = 0.34). Those residents who participated more frequently tended also to opine that their MACs served the residents adequately.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This research is concerned with the performance of urban services delivery as a function of specific interaction among the government, the voluntary grass-root organizations and the citizens. We have discussed the birth of the MACs in the early 1970s, which reflected the idea of involving

residents in the prevention of crime. Unlike the United States (Washnis 1976), citizen involvement in crime prevention did not outlived its initial enthusiasm but degenerated into a ritualistic manipulation of community respect for government activism in community development. Neither could the MACs establish themselves as viable structures for other participatory urban services. The kinds of activities they undertook were largely unrelated to the felt needs of the residents who participated only infrequently. Given the fact that almost half of the MAC activities were not of the self-help or mutual help type, MACs depended heavily upon the initiative of the government for their organizational viability. The residents doubted the usefulness of the MACs as service providers, while the government began quietly to reduce its support for MACs. What went wrong with the development of the MACs?

First, the problem begins with the nature of the organization. Despite the stated idea of mutual aid, the MACs have in practice suffered from a serious ambiguity in objectives. Given the active role of the government in the formation and operation of the MACs, they hardly fit into the categories of mutual help organization classified in the literature (e.g. Killilea 1976). To the extent the MACs represented "a kind of effort at administrative penetration" (Lau 1981:882), they served as linkages in political communication. When they were called upon to support public campaigns, they were appendages to bureaucracies interested only in the successful implementation of their own programmes. When the MACs did deliver services to their residents, it was not quite clear whether the organizations themselves were viewed as adjunct to professional services, or an alternative form of services delivery, or possible competitors to the professional modes of services (cf.

A.H. Katz 1981:133). Should the MACs do a bit here and a bit there, they become general purpose associations which, however, lack a community base for success. In the absence of a clear-cut role, the MACs could not develop themselves towards self-direction (Turner 1968:74-75); they could not programme activities that create values for residents; they developed a kind of nominal self-help that had no real meaning except perhaps for organizational survival. In light of their past performance, the future of MACs is bleak indeed. There is today simply no self-sustaining activity within the MACs that can persist and have a force of its own once governmental assistance is withdrawn.

Second, the nature of the MACs has been shaped by the context in which they operate. The context has not been favourable, however, to the devlopment of participatory urban services. We share with the thesis of C.W. Anderson (1975) that the context within which institutional elites interact is much more important for the understanding of social policy and change than the socio-economic and motivational characteristics of the elites themselves. The context for participatory urban services is complicated and changing, but several features did stand out in our study. The first feature is: to the extent that urban services, in this instance crime prevention, were professionalized and decentralized, the effectiveness of developing self-help activities, namely the neighbourhood security patrols was threatened. The tension between self-help and professional services has been one of the common themes in the literature. What stands in contrast (to the literature) is the detrimental effect of decentralization on the development of self-help (Lipsky 1980:196). Decentralization of police work in Hong Kong seems to have brought about an improved relationship between the police and

the public, but it also dampened citizens involvement in crime prevention. The second feature of the Hong Kong context pertains to the effect of socio-economic changes on the option of participatory urban services. This is less obvious, but no less important than the previous one. As our residents' perception of urban problems demonstrates, Hong Kong has reached a level of development where basic needs in urban services, e.g., water, drainage, electric power etc. are no longer problems. Residents are rather concerned with the quality, cost and convenient availability of services. Need gratification in this regard, we may reason, requires a higher level of technical sophistication, organizational complexity and differentiated attention. This may explain partly why our respondents regarded so many community problems as not suitable for solution through mutual aid. Finally, the most important contextual variable concerns the role of the government. In an earlier article, two of the present authors (Kuan and Lau 1981:178-180) highlighted the advantaged position of the government in structuring the interactions between itself, local leaders and residents in facilitating the process of development. In the present study, the position of the government is still paramount but its impact worked in the reverse direction, i.e. to the detriment of participatory urban services. This finding seems also to run counter to experiences in the United States, where government involvement and encouragement was the most important factor leading to a high level of citizen participation in services programmes (Cole, 1974:73). We have found a strong sense of dependency on the part of our MAC chairmen and residents, a low level of activeness of MACs in terms of organizing self-help activities and a low level of residents' participation in MAC activities. On the other hand, the government did spend a good deal of efforts in

"encouraging" the MACs. Our argument is that the government has spent its efforts in the wrong manner. Instead of enhancing the ability of the MACs to promote mutual aid, the government has been too anxious to directly implement its own programmes through campaign movements which had more symbolic meanings than real services, by control over leadership and organization and by influencing mass behaviour rather than attending to indigeneous interests. To the extent that MAC activities were centrally and bureaucratically determined, the MACs were forced to divorce themselves from their base of support. So divorced, the MACs were left helpless in terms of their ability to mobilize residents for genuine mutual aid activities. In a sense, the government succeeded in taking over the role of political entrepreneur at the local level; the MACs were thus deprived of the opportunities for leadership development.

The final difficulty lies in the residents. Our study has confirmed not only the apathy of the residents but also the lack of interaction between leaders and residents. There appeared to be no group life in buildings with MACs. Under these circumstances, membership in MACs was fictitious. Residents were still mobile consumers living in an open economy and an open society. If the MACs did provide estate amenities or other services, they could be coolly evaluated in comparison with other modes of production; and even if there was no choice, these amenities and services could be enjoyed by all, including those who had not participated in their production. The dilemma we are facing is that without a sense of community, no voluntary activity can be sustained, but without activities, there can develop no sense of community. It is clear that the MACs cannot be communities as traditional families, villages or walled cities could be. Therefore, the critical question

is what kinds of activities can build up some sense of mutual identification among the residents. We surmise that some way has to be found to appeal to the self-interest of the residents on an individual basis (O'Brien, 1975: 40). Nevertheless, residents' participation should not be conceived as a political input through which policies concerning urban services can be introduced, modified or abolished in favour of the disadvantaged (e.g. Marshall, 1971; Smith, 1976). We are concerned with citizen participation as voluntary efforts gathered at the local level for the purpose of production and delivery of urban services. In this sense, participation is less a kind of conflict and bargaining, but rather consensus and cooperation. Consensus and co-operation must be based on concrete interests and needs. Residents will devote their time to what concerns them greatly, or else they would not volunteer at all. Regrettably, activities undertaken by our MACs were largely not related to the felt needs of the residents. No wonder that they evaluated the MACs negatively in terms of services provided.

What then, are our recommendations? Should the MACs be abolished? If not, how can they be improved? These questions will be taken up in the following pages.

We do not recommend the abolition of the MACs, firstly because we have not yet evaluated them in terms of their political functions the government wishes them to perform. Moreover, we believe that the residents would not favour such a radical step, although they did not hold their MACs in high regard. To put it differently, the residents may support the MACs once they are strengthened with more responsibilities and freed from government control. As a matter of fact, 74 per cent of our resident respondents thought that MACs need more responsibilities, especially in the field of law

and order and social welfare. On the other hand, 25 per cent of the respondents held that the government's control over the MACs was strong, especially in public housing.

To improve the ability of the MACs in participatory urban services, the government must change its role from entrepreneurship into real encouragement. The government should no longer act as the organizer of activities, not even the major one of many. Instead, it may satisfy itself with encouraging, primarily through financial incentives, the MACs to develop their own programmes of activities. Rather than dominating and socializing the MACs to pre-conceived government norms and standardized programmes of activities, the government should let the MAC be independent, relating cooperatively with the governmental structure when need arises. We are not advocating a bootstrap approach to substitute government responsibility with self-help, which would be the reverse extreme to government dominance. We are in favour of a genuine relationship of cooperation in which the government needs not fear the loss of control, the community leaders need not despair over a sense of dependency and the citizens need not feel powerless. As one of our findings indicates, joint projects between MACs and the government were more successful than self-help activities and government-initiated activities, in that order. Let this tradition continue, but with more initiative coming from the bottom.

At present, the MACs are under the guidance of the City and New Territories Administration. Given its role requirements, perception and training of its employees, the Department naturally tended to mould the MACs into political transmission belts for the government, rather than to help them to their own feet as genuine mutual aid associations. If the MACs

are to become effective mechanisms to mobilize unutilized resources - a source of productivity and labour not otherwise tapped for the delivery of urban services, they should be put under the guidance of another government department which is by role requirements, perception and training more service-oriented.

Finally, let us entertain no illusion towards the future of our MACs. Government officials, professionals and MAC chairmen still have a hard time in defining the kinds of services which are likely to be effectively provided through mutual aid. The nature of the organizations and of the context in which they operate is not such that the residents can be easily mobilized into coproducers of urban services. It is only in an abstract sense that it is possible to speak of the common intersts deriving from the neighbourhood situation. It is further difficult for the MACs as neighbourhood organizations to venture into physical urban services in a complex and advanced setting like Hong Kong. Under certain assumptions (such as the maintenance of the neighbourhood principle, the monopoly of estate management by professionals etc.), there seems to be only one area, in which the MACs may have a future. That is human services, where the possibility for participatory urban services is the greatest. This is so, because, as Gartner and Riessman (1977:13, 16 and 107) submit, so much of the essence of human services depends on the involvement and motivation of the consumer. In human services, the consumer is potentially a producer and to the extent that he or she is involved more heavily as a producer, the effectiveness of the services will be enhanced. This paper offers no recommendation on the concrete activities to be undertaken by MACs in human services. These are for the individual MACs to consider, and different MACs may do different

things. The last thing we would like to see is the standardization of

activities as in the present. Participatory urban services may prosper only

when they are geared to the felt needs of the citizens. Therefore, they

must be programmed and organized right at the level where they are to be

delivered and consumed.

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