

## INSIGHT

## Measured effect

**Raees Baig** suggests the government takes a systematic, longer-term look at the social impact of its welfare policies and services to make sure they answer the real needs of the community

There is a growing awareness in some parts of the world of the impact of social policies. As a result, more people are realising that the systematic study of such impacts could not only ensure more long-term welfare development, but also improve a policy's design, planning and implementation.

In Hong Kong, the concept of a social impact assessment has not been put into practice. However, we are quite used to something similar – the environmental impact assessment, which looks at the effects that a development project could have on the environment and the livelihood of the community. These environmental reviews have been well-received by the Hong Kong public because they systematically present the pros and cons of a particular project.

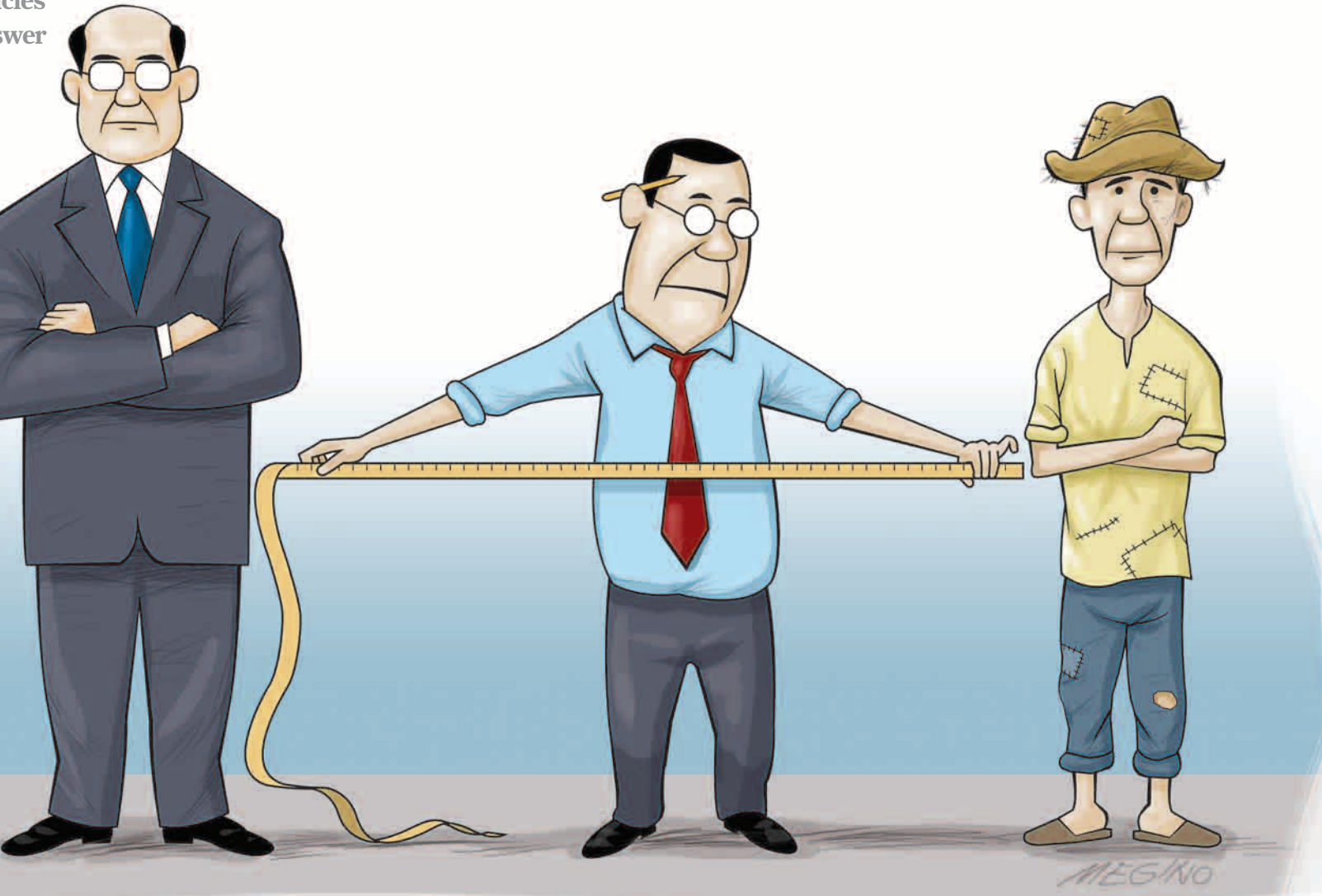
Inevitably, however, any major change in the physical environment is likely to affect the social environment, too, and it is not surprising that there have been growing calls from some legislators and the public for a systematic examination of the social impact of development projects.

Using the same rationale, there has been a growing recognition this past decade of the importance of defining the consequences of a social service.

In Britain, the government has launched a three-year programme to create standard tools to measure the social return on investment, or SROI, of civil society organisations. This is mainly a financial measure of the social, environmental and economic value of a project in relation to its economic investment. To promote the use of social impact assessment, the government provides training and other support to help civil society organisations learn how to use the SROI tool.

A social impact assessment can be implemented on a national level, too. The United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank have worked together to create an analytical tool to help governments understand the impact of their policies on the poor. This helps administrations realise the negative effects of existing policies, identify areas that should be strengthened, and design national strategies against poverty. Studies using this analysis tool have proven effective in influencing donors and policy advice.

Efforts have been made by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service to assess the impact that service projects and civil society organisations have on society. Although it is common practice for services to be evaluated at the end



of a programme, these assessments usually focus on how the service is carried out and its immediate effect on its users. But without systematic evaluations, it is hard to make good comparisons of different programmes.

Assessing social impact involves measuring the changes on various stakeholders at a broader and prolonged level. By asking questions about longer-term effectiveness, such as capacity building and social capital generation, social impact assessments can focus on how a particular project or organisation has influenced individual clients and the community.

Such assessments help us to look not only at a programme's immediate effect on service users, but also how it could bring more long-term benefits to society.

Though the framework for social impact assessment is still being refined, comments so far have been positive. Participants who have taken part in such studies say the review helped them identify areas of their work that could be improved or changed. For example, one assessment of a women's organisation identified

discrepancies in views between a welfare officer and a client about what worked. Understanding these differences helped the organisation with its planning.

Yet another study of a refugee service identified areas for sharing resources with other agencies in the community.

Effective policymaking relies on facts and evidence but, as yet, there is no universal method to measure social impact – indeed, the idea is controversial. Nevertheless, impact assessments could be used to ensure that a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy is carried out to determine whether its objectives have been

**Assessing social impact involves measuring changes at a broader and prolonged level**

achieved and the needs of the public have been met.

The Hong Kong government's piecemeal welfare policy has been under constant attack for its lack of effectiveness and commitment. Such shortfalls show that our welfare policies cannot answer the pressing welfare needs in our society.

Urgent requests have been made for long-term welfare planning that not only tackles social unrest caused by the widening wealth gap, but also to generate potential for sustainable social development.

Effective social impact assessments could generate policy strategies that respond to the direct needs of the public. This will be especially important to encourage collaboration between the government, the private sector and non-profit organisations. It will be the key to transparent and responsible policymaking and effective service delivery.

Dr Raees Baig is manager of the Centre for Social Impact of HKCSO

## One for all

**Eric Schmidt** says Asia is a natural home for an open mobile internet platform that will see every innovation working across borders

Asia has been a leading innovator in mobile internet technology for years. On one side, you have places like Japan and South Korea, where people were paying for train tickets and streaming movies with their mobile phones years ago. On the other side, you have people across Southeast Asia making the most of the SMS as a simple but powerful lever to exploit the internet's banks of servers, turning their phones into a computer.

Farmers in rural India can check agricultural prices from the fields while several Asian companies have used the mobile phone to deliver financial services to the enormous swathes of the developing world where banks have refused to go. GCash, the cellphone-based micro-payment service of the Philippines, is one famous example. A company in India has built an entire mobile operating system around SMS-based apps, including Google and Facebook. The SMS is very much alive and well and doing more than ever before.

People have been hailing the "mobile revolution" for a while now. But what is it that makes 2011 so different from just a few years ago? These changes are being driven by a fundamental shift, one that unites the smartphone and the most simple phones. Asia's mobile community is converging on the open internet from all sides, whether it's through the SMS, the smartphone browser capable of rendering all web pages, or open-source operating systems like Android. In all cases, innovation can quickly spill across devices and platforms.

It hasn't always been that way. In some countries, phones with inventive functionality were introduced but were unable to interact with the internet or phones on other networks. In others, each new phone brought with it new software requirements for developers. In fact, it was not so long ago that, at Google, we were spending as much time trying to make our mobile maps application work on different phones as we spent actually improving the product itself.

It's now a completely different picture. On the high end, the smartphone supplies an open platform that any developer or manufacturer can use and Asia is grasping the opportunity.

China is the second-largest country in terms of downloaded mobile apps. The expectation is that Asia will become a global hub for app development in a few years.

Both Japan and Korea can boast truly international hits for iPhone and Android that would have been hard to catch on across borders a few years ago. As the smartphone gets cheaper, this power will spread across Asia. We expect a billion people will have inexpensive, browser-based touch-screen phones over the next few years.

Both the insurer building SMS-based insurance and the Japanese developer making a photo app for Android can take that technology across the globe in a flash. And for that reason, openness is a much surer foundation for Asia's mobile internet than closed, walled gardens.

We should never underestimate the power of being able to send information without worrying about barriers. In October, the prime ministers of Cambodia and Thailand resolved a minor border crisis via a back channel. Was it a red telephone attached to a hotline? No. It was an exchange over SMS.

Eric Schmidt is Google's executive chairman

## The scandal of News Corp must not be an excuse to curb press freedom

The phone-hacking scandal in Britain seems only to be widening. Rupert Murdoch was questioned for his role in the scandal by a panel of lawmakers last week. At this stage, the truth is still emerging, as is the scandal's impact. This landmark case is set to trigger a radical rethink of journalistic ethics, communications law and the regulation of the media.

It is shocking that a leading international news media group has been implicated in the scandal that originated from its tabloid, the *News of the World*. The scandal has raised questions about the importance of scrutinising the regulation of the news industry. Some in Britain are advocating tighter regulation of the news industry, triggering fears of overregulation. In China, official media has published commentaries concluding that "the incident once again demonstrates the hypocrisy of the Western press freedom".

In fact, the issue is about whether the people involved in the scandal have broken the law. The suggestion that press freedom should be restricted is wrong. Overregulation is not the way out.

The nature of the phone-hacking scandal is very clear. Eavesdropping not only infringes people's freedom of communication, but is a criminal offence, violating such laws as the Data Protection Act and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act. Employees of the *News of the World* who bribed police officers to obtain information clearly broke anti-corruption laws. Their acts went beyond matters of ethics; they are crimes intolerable anywhere.

In Britain, the birthplace of classical liberalism, communication

**Hu Shuli** advocates effective regulation that supports journalistic integrity and independence. State interference is not the answer in Britain – nor in China



laws work effectively with a self-regulating industry. It does not need a major revamp.

What the scandal has instead exposed are problems in law enforcement that have arisen from conflicting interests and the police's unhealthy close ties with the media. The scandal could have been exposed much earlier. But, it was not until early this year that the egregious undertakings of News Corp came to light, when the disgraceful phone-hacking of 13-year-old murder victim Milly Dowler in 2002 was made known.

The belated revelation highlights not only the complicated relationship between interest groups, but also the deep-rooted inertia of bureaucracy. Thus, it would be futile to prevent the recurrence of such scandals simply by ramping up state interference in journalism.

The self-regulatory nature of the media allows the industry to improve itself. And no one can deny the fact that the revelation of the wiretapping scandal was the result of investigative reporting by serious newspapers such as *The Guardian*. Therefore, improving regulations does not mean moving towards authoritarianism, but upholding the core principles of the international press for the past 60 years that stress freedom and responsibility.

The classic Hutchins report,

published in 1947 by the US Commission on Freedom of the Press, stressed the importance of social responsibility while emphasising that self-regulation of the media was preferable to external regulation by the state.

The British government has taken correct measures, highlighting the strength of representative government. Particularly noteworthy is that Prime Minister David Cameron is setting up a committee chaired by Lord Justice Levenson to investigate the scandal. In his report, Levenson will give a full account of the scandal and analyse journalistic ethics, media regulation and other issues.

One of the committee's chief tasks is to examine how to strike the balance between "freedom" and "responsibility". Its task list already suggests the answers: effective regulation that supports the integrity and freedom of the press, and a diverse and independent media. It is also expected to call for higher ethical and professional standards in the industry, and propose ways in which media form more appropriate ties with police and politicians.

If anything, the News Corp scandal has highlighted the urgency that some problems need to be dealt with. For example, should the size of media conglomerates need to be restricted to avoid

monopolies? Can multinational media companies be scrutinised more effectively?

Rupert Murdoch called the scandal a "shame" but refused to take responsibility for it. But he has been widely blamed in Britain and the US for degrading media to boost newspaper circulation and television ratings.

The news media in China cannot sit back and regard the scandal as a British version of Li Boyuan's *Exposure of the Official World*, a Chinese novel depicting the corruption and incompetence of government officials in the Qing dynasty.

China has never enjoyed press freedom or media legislation. Its media, too, is led only by power and money, even though most journalists abide by professional ethics and standards in helping the country forge ahead with reforms and better policies. But, there are still those in the profession with no ideals other than personal gain. Some have even tried to blackmail interviewees. This means that the phone-hacking scandal will probably have a Chinese version one day.

If the current scandal is used as an excuse to curb journalists' rights, the industry is unlikely to make the necessary amends and this will benefit no one. This should not happen in Britain, nor in China.

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## China's high-stakes race for space's strategic ground

**Michael Raska** describes its efforts to close the aerospace gap, post-Atlantis

With the final landing of the space shuttle Atlantis, the US has effectively lost its independent capacity to launch human space flights until it puts other systems in place. The landing will stall America's advance along space's strategic edge, and give second- and third-tier space nations a chance to narrow the technological gaps.

One of the most ambitious countries in the emerging global space race is China, which views space exploration not only as the cornerstone of its national efforts in scientific and technological innovation, but also as vital to its political, economic and security interests.

With its investment in space exceeding an estimated US\$2 billion last year, China became the second-biggest spender on space in Asia after Japan (US\$3.8 billion). In 2010, China conducted as many launches as the US (15), second only to Russia (31).

While many aspects of China's vast space programmes are classified, Beijing has publicised its technical prowess and space ambitions in areas such as launch vehicles, launch schedules, satellites, human space flight, as well as command and control, anti-satellite technology, and sensor abilities.

In 2003, China became the third nation to complete a successful manned space mission by launching the Shenzhou V carried by the Long March 2F rocket. Since then, China has carried out two

additional manned missions. By 2025, China envisions the completion of a 60-tonne orbital space station.

China's evolving abilities in space have benefited from the increasing participation of its aerospace industry in the global commercial aerospace market. Since the late 1990s, Beijing has gradually introduced elements of competition, autonomy, entrepreneurship and decentralisation into its defence-industry base.

The market gives incentives for Chinese aerospace companies not only to increase their revenues, but more importantly to close the technological gaps through global commercial technology transfer and services.

In this regard, China is believed to have embarked on a full-scale development programme on new heavy-lift Long March rockets – the LM-5 series. The LM-5 is expected to be launched in 2014 from the newly built Wenchang Satellite Launch Centre in Hainan (海南).

Space launch vehicles and systems are dual-use strategic assets, valuable to both civilian and military communities. In China, there is no clear separation between its civil and military space programmes and industries.

The People's Liberation Army's General Armaments Department under the Central Military Commission manages the launch, tracking, and control of all space missions, and civilian and military satellites. It also co-ordinates the

technical aspects of China's space activities.

With the pace, scope, and dual dimension of China's space programmes, the key question is whether other countries will also accelerate their efforts to develop similar space capabilities.

According to a Euroconsult study, more than 50 countries are investing in domestic space programmes. Last year, governments around the world spent a record combined US\$71.5 billion on space, and this figure is projected to remain at around US\$70 billion until 2015.

As more nations join the space club, there is growing awareness that space is vital to national security, because space assets may be increasingly vulnerable to threats that can deny, degrade, deceive, disrupt or destroy these assets. Since the great cold war space race between the United States and the Soviet Union, aerospace has been seen as the "international geostrategic high ground". That ground will become increasingly competitive and contested with the globalisation of space, led today by countries like China.

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