

Our Social Welfare Vision— Everyone Shall Live a Good Life with Happiness and Dignity

Taiwan's social welfare system began to develop in the 1990s with the social rights and social welfare movements. Back then the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) took the lead in promulgating the idea of the welfare state. Over the past 20 years, systematic social welfare was gradually established, improving livelihood protection. However, despite continued development, the system still has numerous flaws, and public services remain incomplete and are not universally available. Social security's financial problems are hard to address effectively. Democratic participation in the system's establishment has been insufficient, which resulted in a decoupling between the policy formation process and actual needs that makes it difficult to effectively respond to different challenges.

Anxiety over impoverishment is growing in society. Such sentiment does not only exist in low income families who are unable to make ends meet when their income shrinks. Average real wages of workers, a major segment of society, or the salaries of employed middle income earners are all declining, whereas only a small group of high income earners can accumulate wealth. That people feel so strongly about the social crisis caused by the widening wealth gap is also due to rapid population ageing, which places an extremely heavy burden on families that have to support elderly parents on top of raising children. Due to globalization Taiwanese society faces another heavy challenge from fast and frequent free trade contacts. Young people face a rapidly changing environment with competition on many fronts.

The presidential and legislative elections in 2012 will be a crucial moment for reforming

Taiwanese society. Under the government of President Ma Ying-jeou, the public service system has failed to expand, unemployment and income distribution have worsened as the government took the lead in creating a low-wage working environment. In order to tackle these multiple difficulties, we believe that the values and propositions of the welfare state should be upheld. In a globalizing community, this means demonstrating national values, deepening the democratic system, and making systematic welfare the defining characteristic of an independent country. In a society with a widening poverty gap the interests of different classes need to be reconciled, social justice must be maintained and social unity consolidated. There should be a division of labor between the state and families, and a family-friendly working environment so that every single person is able to live a happy and dignified life. Embracing these core values Taiwan Brain Trust (TBT) makes the following policy recommendations:

I. Universal Public Services

(1) Public childcare services

The government should gradually raise the ratio of public childcare and complete the legal framework for childcare as soon as possible to build highly accessible and affordable childcare services. It should also promote afterschool care programs for elementary students and protect the working conditions of professional employees.

(2) Establishing a complete long-term care system

Universal, community-based, public long-term care services should be established with the

government rises its public funding to build a service system that citizens can afford. Long-term care facilities must be expanded and a management mechanism for long-term care services must be established. A high quality workforce must be trained in sufficient numbers to work in long-term care, with priority given to the recruitment of local workers to reduce Taiwan's dependency on imported labor.

(3) Expanding public services for the unemployed and low income families

Employment services centers must become more widely available to provide the unemployed with personalized vocational training services. An "unemployment assistance" system should be established to assist long-term unemployed from low income families. Such families must also be offered comprehensive services to help them escape from poverty.

II. Fair and Sustainable Social Security

(1) Reforming the National Health Insurance into a sustainable system

Insurance premiums paid by the insured should correspond to the size of income. The government should develop new sources of revenue to increase the government's share of premium payments. At the same time the government should subsidize the national health insurance and medical expenses of disadvantaged persons whose income is below a certain level, low income households, indigenous people and children.

(2) A more fair system for economic security in old age

A "Great National Pension" system should be established that integrates the National Pension

Insurance, Labor Insurance, and Old-Age Farmers Welfare Allowance and creates a balance between social security for different occupations and status categories. A pension adjustment mechanism should be established and government expenditure must give priority to the economically disadvantaged.

(3) Protecting child survival and children's rights, implementing child benefit

The government should use funding from public coffers to pay child benefit for children under the age of six. Benefits should differ in amount for the first, second and third child in a family to encourage families with multiple children.

III. Broad Social Tolerance and Public Participation

(1) Tolerance toward the socially disadvantaged, avoiding systemic exclusion

We must create an environment for equitable development to prevent the exclusion of socially disadvantaged groups. The state should invest more in society including hard infrastructure as well as soft infrastructure that supports people's everyday lives.

(2) Delivering policy in the communities, creating local services, jobs and a local economy

Communities should become the vehicle for delivering government policy. Public services should be created together with local residents by recruiting local people and procuring goods and services locally to raise the credibility of community-based interpersonal networks and create communities with different features.

(3) Broad democratic participation

Government information must become open and transparent, while deliberative democracy and national referendums should be widely used to systemize democratic participation. Non-governmental organizations must become part of the governmental decision-making process to include a broad array of opinions from civil society through consultation and joint decision-making.

In order to establish social welfare values and ideals as well as a relevant system the government and its citizens need to join hands in a step by step social engineering campaign for the universality of public services! Provided the government uses a policy framework and national resource allocation that favors middle income and low income earners and maintains a stable and consistent policy, the achievement of universality depends on whether people from all corners of Taiwanese society will be able to develop their individual potential and the potential of society as a whole, and realize social justice so that every single citizen is able to live an adequate, happy life. 