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Bleak outlook for MACs

"Human services" seem to be the only area in which Hongkong's mutual aid committees have a future.

This was the view of three co-authors of a paper entitled "Organising participatory urban services: the Mutual Aid Committees in Hongkong."

They are Mr Lau Siu-kai, Mr Kuan Hsin-chi and Mr Ho Kam-fai from the Chinese University's Centre for Hongkong Studies.

The academics said human services were one area where the possibility for participatory urban services was the greatest.

"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 standardisation of activities as in the present.

"Participatory urban serv-

ices may prosper only when they are geared to the felt needs of the citizens. Therefore, they must be programmed and organised right at the level where they are to be delivered and consumed," the paper said.

At present, the paper said the kinds of activities undertaken by MACs were largely unrelated to the needs of the residents who participated only infrequently.

Residents doubted the usefulness of the MACs as service providers, while the Government began quietly to reduce its support for them.