

**For information on  
21 January 2010**

**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services**

**Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation**

**Poverty Alleviation Work in Yuen Long and North District**

**Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the district-based approach adopted by the Government and the specific measures to address the poverty situation in Yuen Long (including Tin Shui Wai (TSW)) and North District.

**Background**

2. The Administration attaches great importance to poverty alleviation work and to this end adopts a pragmatic and multi-pronged approach. We consider that the key to tackling poverty lies in promoting economic growth, thereby creating more job opportunities. In tandem, we provide training and retraining opportunities to raise the competitiveness and skills of our workforce, in particular the middle-aged and low-income earners. At the same time, we invest in education and child development to enhance social mobility and reduce inter-generational poverty.

3. In view of the unique situation and characteristics of individual districts, the former Commission on Poverty (CoP) recommended a district-based approach to complement centrally-driven poverty alleviation measures. A district-based approach can help us better understand the challenges faced by different communities and hence introduce more targeted measures for the needy. It can also allow the adaptation of services at district level to meet the changing district demographics and needs. The Government agreed with CoP and relevant bureaux and departments have implemented a number of district-based initiatives over the years to meet the specific needs of local residents. The progress of CoP's recommendations relating to the adoption of this district-based approach is highlighted in the ensuing paragraphs.

## **Understanding District Needs**

4. CoP considered it important to understand the needs of different districts and analyse how their capacities in addressing local challenges could be strengthened. For this reason, CoP adopted six community-based poverty indicators which seek to reflect the general well-being of different districts, in addition to the 18 life-cycle-based poverty indicators, to help the Administration keep track of the poverty situation. These six community-based poverty indicators are updated regularly and continue to provide useful reference for bureaux / departments to implement district-based measures for the needy.

## **Strengthening the role of District Officers (DOs)**

5. CoP recommended strengthening the role of DOs and giving them a clearer mandate to address district needs through closer cross-sectoral collaboration. In this regard, DOs have been carrying out community involvement programmes in collaboration with District Councils (DCs) and district organisations to meet the district needs, helping the under-privileged and alleviating local poverty. With greater flexibility in the use of available funds, DCs have also been cooperating with other sectors in providing worthwhile programmes for the local community and establishing a support network to help those in need.

6. DOs will, in collaboration with DCs and their committees, continue to work closely with district organisations on community projects, with a view to identifying and addressing the local needs.

## **Developing Social Enterprise (SE)**

7. To promote sustainable poverty prevention and alleviation efforts at district level, the Home Affairs Department introduced in June 2006 the Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme (ESR Programme) to provide seed money for eligible non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and district organisations to set up SEs. The ESR Programme aims at increasing the skills and capacities of employable persons, providing opportunities for the disadvantaged to upgrade themselves and promoting their self-reliance. By the end of 2009, the ESR Programme had provided start-up funding to some 90 SE projects which created some 1 500 job opportunities.

8. To further promote SEs through participation of different sectors, the Home Affairs Bureau is preparing for the establishment of a new “Social Enterprise Advisory Committee”. Meanwhile, the Government will continue to enhance cross-sectoral collaboration by encouraging more management experts to join the mentorship scheme and forging partnerships between SE operators and commercial organisations or professionals.

### **Building up Social Capital**

9. Social capital is effective in promoting self-reliance and enhancing the capacities of the disadvantaged. Set up in 2002, the \$300 million Community and Investment Inclusion Fund (CIIF) provides seed money to promote social capital development through encouraging mutual support in the neighbourhood, community participation and cross-sectoral partnerships. By the end of 2009, the CIIF had approved 218 projects amounting to more than \$200 million spanning all 18 districts. Some 530 000 people of different age groups, social strata, cultural or ethnic backgrounds have taken part in the projects.

10. Separately, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) launched the District Caring and Support Trial Scheme (DCSTS) in 2009-10 to support district projects implemented by NGOs and district organisations which can enhance support for local disadvantaged groups and strengthen the resilience and capacities of districts in face of the financial tsunami. By the end of 2009, some 50 projects had been implemented throughout the 18 districts benefiting some 129 000 people, including low-income families, non-engaged youths, middle-aged unemployed, the elderly, as well as the middle class affected by the economic adversity.

### **Specific measures implemented in Yuen Long and North District**

#### Yuen Long

##### *District Profile*

11. In 2008, there were 538 600 people from 173 100 households living in Yuen Long. The proportion of persons aged 0-14 and 15-24 were 16.2% and 15.4% respectively, ranking second and third respectively among the 18 districts. The educational attainment of the labour force (excluding foreign domestic helpers) in the district was relatively low, with only 22.6% attaining post-secondary education level

(ranked the lowest among all 18 districts) as compared to 32.1% in the whole territory. The unemployment rate in Yuen Long in 2008 was 4.4%, compared to 3.6% in the whole territory.

12. About half of the population of Yuen Long lived in the newly and rapidly developed TSW new town. Around 61.5% of TSW residents resided in public rental housing (PRH), compared to a territorial average of 31.0% in 2006. Many TSW residents are either relocated from other districts or new arrivals from the Mainland.

### *Specific measures implemented*

#### (i) Providing more job opportunities and enhancing employment services

13. To address the relatively high unemployment rate in Yuen Long and the training needs of residents, departments concerned have undertaken a number of new initiatives over the years, including the following:

- The Housing Department has required the service providers of security and cleansing services contracts for all PRH estates in TSW to employ a certain percentage of TSW residents. Over 80% of job opportunities created by these contracts had been taken up by local residents as at the end of 2009.
- The Housing Department has assisted the Hong Kong Jockey Club in setting up a Telebet Centre cum Volunteers and Training Centre in Tin Heng Estate, which commenced operation in May 2009. A total of 2 500 workers were recruited.
- A total of 11 SE projects, covering businesses in catering, beauty / hair care, etc., are being / will be carried out in Yuen Long (some are cross-district projects).
- SWD introduced the pilot Special Training and Enhancement Programme (My STEP) in Yuen Long in 2006 to provide more intensified employment assistance to unemployed youth on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). In the first two phases of My STEP implemented between 2006 and 2009, 118 participants in the district had successfully secured employment or returned to mainstream

schooling. The third phase of My STEP, which commenced in October 2009, will assist 110 unemployed youth on CSSA in the district.

- The Vocational Training Council set up a youth college in TSW in early 2009 to provide 2 000 pre-employment training places annually. The Construction Industry Council Training Academy also opened a training centre in TSW in September 2009 to provide 700 full-time training places for new entrants to the industry. Up to the end of 2009, 70 trainees had graduated from the training centre.
- The Labour Department (LD) has organised ten large-scale job fairs since 2008 for job seekers in the district, including four for young people. These job fairs attracted more than 22 800 job seekers. Moreover, LD is planning to set up on a pilot basis Hong Kong's first one-stop employment and training centre in TSW in early 2011 to streamline, integrate and enhance the existing employment and training / retraining services of the LD, SWD and Employees Retraining Board.

#### (ii) Strengthening children and youth services

14. Having regard to the higher proportion of children and youth in the district, bureaux / departments concerned have implemented new initiatives to provide more childcare services as well as learning and development opportunities for children and youth:

- The pilot Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) was launched in TSW in 2005, aiming to identify and meet, at an early stage, the varied health and social needs of children aged 0-5 and those of their families. CCDS was subsequently extended to the entire Yuen Long in 2007.
- The pilot Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP) was launched in October 2008 in Yuen Long to provide more flexible forms of day care services for children aged below 6 to meet the needs of parents at neighbourhood level. From November 2008 to November 2009, a total of 538 children had been served.

- One of the seven Child Development Fund (CDF) pioneer projects was rolled out in TSW by an NGO in December 2008, providing more personal development opportunities for 100 children from a disadvantaged background. The second batch of CDF projects will be launched in early 2010.
- In 2009-10, SWD's District Support Scheme for Children and Youth Development (DSSCYD) launched a total of 18 developmental projects and provided cash assistance for eligible children and youth aged 0-24 in disadvantaged circumstances in Yuen Long to address their developmental needs, benefiting some 5 500 children and youth.
- In the 2009-10 school year, the School-based After-school Learning and Support (SALS) Programme provided funding to 84 schools in Yuen Long to organise suitable activities for 22 000 disadvantaged students. In addition, the SALS Programme sponsored 20 community-based projects serving about 9 500 students.
- A total of 313 community involvement projects, amounting to about \$2.5 million, have been approved by the Yuen Long District Council (YLDC) since April 2006 for youth services, including sports training, interest classes, visits to government departments, seminars and national affairs studies, etc. One of the major events was the 2009 Yuen Long Youth Festival which targeted disadvantaged youth amongst others.

(iii) Provision of more community facilities

15. In view of rapid development of the district, especially in TSW new town, more community facilities have been / will be provided:

*New facilities since 2005:*

- Public Library in Tin Chak Shopping Centre;
- Tin Shui Sports Centre;
- Dragon Park and Tin Sau Road Park;
- Tin Ching Community Hall;
- multi-purpose rooms and activity rooms at Tin Heng Estate Carpark Building; and
- renovation of Ginza Square in TSW South.

*New facilities to be completed in the coming years:*

- the Amenity and Community Building in TSW Area 104 in late 2010 to accommodate about 20 NGOs for the provision of a wide spectrum of social services;
- TSW Public Library cum Indoor Recreation Centre in mid-2011; and
- a sport centre and community hall in TSW Area 101 in mid-2012.

16. Since the introduction of the District Minor Works Programme (DMWP) in 2008, a total of 26 projects have been proposed to improve existing facilities or add new facilities to existing leisure and recreational venues in Yuen Long. Of these, two projects have been completed, 20 projects are under construction and four are under planning. Another 14 new leisure and recreational projects have been proposed, of which one project has been completed, four are under construction, and nine are under planning.

#### (iv) Enhancing community support

17. Having regard to the large number of residents who were relocated from other districts or new arrivals from the Mainland, the Housing Authority set up a pilot Housing Advisory and Service Team in TSW in April 2008 to help new tenants adjust to the new living environment and advise them of the availability of social and community education services in the district. The service will be extended to Yuen Long for two years from April 2010. In addition, YLDC has approved nine community projects for new arrival services since April 2006.

#### North District

##### *District Profile*

18. In 2008, there were 296 000 people from 93 600 households living in North District. The proportion of persons aged 0-14 and 15-24 were 14.2% and 16.2% respectively, ranking fifth and first among the 18 districts. The educational attainment of the labour force (excluding foreign domestic helpers) in the district was relatively low, with only 26.3% attaining post-secondary education level (ranked 13<sup>th</sup> among all districts). The unemployment rate in North District in 2008 was 4.1%.

### *Specific measures implemented*

#### (i) Providing more job opportunities and enhancing employment services

19. To provide more job opportunities and support to job seekers, the following measures have been undertaken by departments concerned:

- A total of three SE projects, covering businesses in catering and recycling, are being carried out in North District (some are cross-district projects).
- The second phase of My STEP, which was extended to North District in 2007, helped 24 unemployed youth on CSSA secure employment or return to mainstream schooling. The third phase of My STEP, commenced in October 2009, will assist a total of 40 unemployed youth on CSSA in the district.
- A total of 11 community involvement projects, amounting to about \$1.1 million, have been approved by the North District Council (NDC) since 2005 for the provision of employment services, including workshops on Putonghua, interpersonal skills and occupational safety, and job training for working in the catering industry.
- Job fairs are organised by LD in Sheung Shui Job Centre regularly. In particular, a large-scale job fair was held in October 2009, with 45 participating companies providing 2 100 vacancies for job-seekers.

#### (ii) Strengthening children and youth services

20. In the light of a higher proportion of children and youth in the district, departments concerned have strengthened the children and youth services to meet the district needs:

- The second phase of the pilot NSCCP was launched in Tai Po / North District in March 2009 to provide more flexible forms of day care services for children aged below 6 to meet the needs of parents at neighbourhood level. From April 2009 to November 2009, a total of 238 children had been served.



- In 2009-10, DSSCYD had launched a total of eight developmental projects and provided cash assistance for eligible children and youth aged 0-24 in disadvantaged circumstances in North District to address their developmental needs, benefiting some 6 300 children and youth.
- In the 2009-10 school year, the SALS Programme had provided funding to 51 schools in North District to organise suitable activities for 10 760 disadvantaged students. In addition, the SALS Programme sponsored 11 community-based projects serving about 2 500 students.
- A total of 38 community involvement projects, amounting to \$563,000, have been approved by NDC since 2005 for youth services, including workshops on job interview skills, leadership training programmes and job training on catering and retail industries.
- The Working Group on Youth Affairs in North District was set up under the Social Services, Labour and Economic Affairs Committee of NDC in May 2009 to enhance district participation in providing community projects for young people. A series of programmes, including workshops, social activities and voluntary services, were organised by district organisations in 2009 for young people and youth at risk.

(iii) Provision of more community facilities

21. More community facilities have been / will be provided in the district to meet the needs of local residents:

*New facilities since 2005:*

- Pak Wo Road Playground;
- Po Wing Road Playground / Open Space; and
- three mobile library stops to strengthen the mobile library services.

*New facilities to be completed in the coming years:*

- A new covered playground in Ching Ho Estate by the end of 2010;
- the Harmony Land for Families in Ching Ho Estate providing a variety of services to be run by Po Leung Kuk in March 2010;
- a sports centre in Fanling / Sheung Shui Area 28A in 2011; and
- a skateboarding ground and a BMX cycling ground in Fanling in around 2012.

*Under planning:*

- Open Space in Fanling / Sheung Shui Area 25;
- Open Space in Fanling / Sheung Shui Area 47 / 48;
- Cross-district Community Cultural Centre in Fanling Town; and
- Community Hall in Fanling / Sheung Shui Area 44.

22. Since the introduction of DMWP in 2008, a total of 38 projects in North District have been proposed to improve existing facilities or add new facilities to existing leisure and recreational venues. Of these, 19 projects have been completed, 12 are under construction and seven are under planning. Another seven new leisure and recreational projects have been proposed, of which one project has been completed, one is under construction, and five are under planning.

#### (iv) Enhancing community support

23. Working groups have been set up under the Social Services, Labour and Economic Affairs Committee of NDC to enhance district participation in providing community projects for the new arrivals, to organise volunteer visiting programmes in the district, and to invite local organisations to carry out activities for persons with disabilities to encourage their participation in the community.

### **Performance of the community-based poverty indicators in Yuen Long and North District**

24. Given the overall economic growth and specific measures implemented in these two districts, it is observed that the performance of the community-based poverty indicators in Yuen Long and North District has generally improved over the years.

25. Between 2004 and 2008, an across-the-board improvement has been observed in all six community-based indicators for Yuen Long. Insofar as income is concerned, the number of households with income below average CSSA payment decreased from 28 900 (19.7%) in 2004 to 21 700 (13.8%) in 2008. Among these low-income households, the number of single parent households with income below average CSSA payment also fell slightly from 3 200 (2.2%) in 2004 to 3 000 (1.9%) in 2008. Over the same period, the median monthly household income and median monthly employment earnings increased from \$13,000 and \$9,500 to \$15,000 and \$10,000 respectively. The number of unemployed persons and unemployment rate fell from 20 700 persons and 8.2% to 12 000 persons and 4.4% respectively. The proportion of workless households also decreased from 11.3% (16 600 households) in 2004 to 10.0% (15 800 households) in 2008.

26. As to North District, five community-based indicators have shown improvement between 2004 and 2008. Insofar as income is concerned, the number of households with income below average CSSA payment decreased from 14 100 (17.5%) in 2004 to 10 900 (12.9%) in 2008. Over the same period, the median monthly household income and median monthly employment earnings increased from \$15,000 and \$9,500 to \$16,500 and \$10,000 respectively. Both the number of unemployed persons and unemployment rate registered a decrease, from 11 800 persons and 8.2% to 6 200 persons and 4.1% respectively. The proportion of workless households also decreased slightly from 10.9% (8 800 households) in 2004 to 10.4% (8 700 households) in 2008.

## **Way Forward**

27. We will continue to monitor the poverty situation of the individual districts through regular updating of the set of multi-dimensional poverty indicators. Bureaux and departments concerned will continue to adopt a district-based approach to address the special needs of districts.

Labour and Welfare Bureau  
Home Affairs Department  
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