

**Subcommittee on Welfare Services for
Squatter Areas in the New Territories**

**Community Support Networking Service for
Squatter Areas in the New Territories**

INTRODUCTION

This paper briefs Members on the Administration's proposal to strengthen community support networking service for residents in squatter areas in the New Territories (NT).

THE PROBLEM

2. The Executive Council (ExCo) had decided in December 1995 that Neighbourhood Level Community Development Projects (NLCDPs) should not be extended to new areas other than public housing estates (PHEs) under redevelopment and temporary housing areas (THAs) qualified for such service under the existing policy. Notwithstanding the ExCo's decision, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) and the Rural Community Services Alliance (The Alliance) (鄉郊社區服務大聯盟) have been requesting the Government to extend NLCDP service to squatter areas in the NT.

BACKGROUND

Policy on NLCDPs

3. NLCDPs were introduced in the 1970s to serve deprived and transient communities where the provision of welfare service and facilities was considered inadequate or non-existent. NLCDP service is provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) subvented by the Government. Approval for such service is granted having regard to a set of established criteria, including a population criterion of between 3,000 to 15,000.

4. The substantial improvement in the provision of welfare and community services and the full implementation of the District Administration Scheme in the past two decades have gradually reduced the role of NLCDPs in filling social service gaps. Having taken into account views of the relevant parties including the welfare sector and residents' organisations, the ExCo decided in December 1995 that NLCDP service should not be extended to rural

areas, new towns and PHEs not yet affected by redevelopment.

Subsequent Developments

5. In October 1997, the Audit Commission conducted a review to assess whether public funds had been spent on the NLCDP service in a cost-effective manner and in accordance with the established policy and criteria. On the basis of the review findings, the Audit Commission recommended, among other things, that the Government should review the justifications for maintaining NLCDP projects with no clearance or redevelopment date and improve the performance management of the teams. The Administration has agreed to follow up the Commission's recommendations. We are currently examining the grounds for maintaining NLCDP teams without a scheduled clearance or redevelopment date.

6. In the light of the ExCo's decision and the Audit Commission's recommendations, the Administration finds it difficult to justify a departure from the existing policy and extend NLCDP service to squatter areas in the NT, most of which do not have a clearance date.

THE WELFARE SECTOR'S CONCERNS

7. Despite the concerted efforts made by the Government to improve the environment of rural areas in the past few decades, the HKCSS remains of the view that the improvements made so far are not sufficient to meet the community and welfare needs of the NT squatter areas. In particular, the HKCSS considers it necessary to resolve the problems arising from poor environmental hygiene and the lack of community facilities in these areas. It has also suggested the need to strengthen the provision of welfare services and community support network for the residents in the squatter areas.

8. The Alliance considers that "integrated" social services such as those provided by the NLCDPs should be provided to squatter areas in the NT taking into account their specific needs and characteristics (e.g. the squatters are geographically isolated and scattered).

THE ADMINISTRATION'S VIEW

9. For the reasons given in the preceding paragraphs, the Administration remains of the view that there is no justification for extending NLCDP service to NT squatter areas and that the problems pertaining to the squatter areas could not be resolved simply by providing NLCDP service.

Any service needs of these residents will have to be met ultimately by the relevant service units (be it social welfare, housing, education, environmental hygiene, community facilities or transport, etc). However, in view of Members' concerns about the accessibility of the services to the residents in NT squatter areas and their awareness of the existence of such services, the Administration is prepared to consider measures to strengthen the **local community support network** in order to better serve the residents in NT squatter areas.

10. Accordingly, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) proposes to establish **Rural Mobile Service Teams** in the NT districts with a high concentration of squatter areas. These include Tai Po/North, Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan/Kwai Tsing and Sai Kung districts. The objective underlying the Administration's proposal is three-fold:

- (a) to build up a stronger network for mutual help in the NT squatter areas;
- (b) to enhance the residents' awareness of the full range of welfare and community services available to them; and
- (c) to assist the residents in resolving their problems by referring them to the appropriate departments or agencies for follow-up actions.

11. The mobile service teams will comprise volunteers recruited from a broad cross-section of the community (e.g. students, youths, elderly people and housewives). The District Co-ordinating Committees on Volunteer Movement¹ (DCCVMs) will oversee the operation of the teams, evaluate their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. The volunteers will be trained and supervised by the respective units participating in this project.

12. In addition to regular visits to residents of the NT squatter areas, the rural mobile service teams will organise a wide range of activities for the residents including recreational and developmental programmes as well as community education projects. Upon completion of the visits, the teams will refer the requests and problems raised by the residents to the social welfare services units or the relevant government departments for follow-up action.

13. It is Government's policy to encourage volunteers' participation in

¹ A DCCVM is established in each of the districts under the Social Welfare Department. The DCCVM is chaired by the District Social Welfare Officer and comprises representatives of the district-based NGOs, government departments, schools and other local bodies.

the provision of district and community-wide activities. Their involvement in community work on the one hand helps achieve the objective of creating a caring community and, on the other, raises the social awareness of the citizens and widen their exposure.

14. To give publicity to the initiative, the respective teams will organise activities including exhibitions, distribution of information leaflets to the residents, etc. This will enhance the residents' knowledge of the welfare and community services available to them in the district. The NT District Offices will participate in the promotion of the services provided by the teams through their regular liaison network and through mounting promotional campaigns where necessary. They will also mobilize local leaders and bodies for their joint efforts in achieving the objective of this project as stipulated in paragraph 10 above.

ADVICE SOUGHT

15. Members are invited to note the new service initiative described in paragraphs 10-14 above.

*Home Affairs Bureau
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