

## **Commission on Poverty (CoP)**

### **District Visit – Tin Shui Wai**

#### **Purpose**

This paper provides an overview of the community profile of Tin Shui Wai (TSW), the services available to the residents there relevant to poverty alleviation, and some of the challenges faced by the community. It serves as a background reference for Members' visit to TSW on 7 March.

#### **Background to the Visit**

2. The Commission on Poverty held its first meeting on 18 February 2005. The meeting endorsed its Terms of Reference -

- to study and identify the needs of the poor;
- to make policy recommendations to prevent and alleviate poverty, and promote self-reliance; and
- to encourage community engagement; delineate responsibility between the government, social welfare sector and community organisations; foster public-private partnerships and mobilise social capital in alleviating poverty.

3. Members agreed to adopt a district-based approach in studying and identifying as well as addressing the needs of the poor. The Commission would conduct district visits to better understand the special needs and challenges of different areas in Hong Kong. As a first step, members of the Commission agreed to conduct a visit to TSW in March.

#### **Community Profile**

4. TSW is a newly developed town within the Yuen Long District. The housing development began in 1992 in the southern part of TSW (TSW(S)). Population of TSW has since then increased from 14,700 in 1992 to 185,300 in 2001. There was a rapid increase in population since 2001 when newly developed housing estates in the northern part of TSW (TSW(N)) started its intake. The total population of TSW is expected to reach 312,900 in 2011.

5. TSW is a relatively young area. Nearly 38% of the total population is under the age of 24 vis-à-vis only 12% above the age of 55. The majority of TSW residents live in public housing. Nearly 58% of the total population live in public housing while 22% in Home Ownership Scheme Housing and merely 20% in private estates. The concentration of population in public housing is particularly high in TSW(N), which is a result of the change in housing policy in the 1990s when all the subsidized housing projects originally planned in TSW(N) have turned out to be public housing.

### **Brief Summary of the CSSA Case Profile in TSW**

6. The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme provides a safety net of last resort for those who cannot support themselves financially. There are now three Social Security Field Units (which will be split into four in April 2005) serving a total population of 539,100 in Yuen Long.

7. As at 31.12.2004, Yuen Long constituted 10% (29,771) of total CSSA caseload of the whole territory (294,482). Among the Yuen Long caseload, 49% (14,717) of the cases resided in TSW. By case nature, the percentage of able-bodied CSSA cases (including unemployment, low income and single parent) in Yuen Long was relatively higher than that of the territory-wide. The number of unemployment CSSA cases in TSW (2,491) was higher than that in the town area (1,065) and rural area (1,255) of Yuen Long<sup>1</sup>.

8. As at 31.12.2004, there was a total of 6,299 unemployed CSSA recipients, i.e. 13.2% against the Hong Kong total of 47,890. Out of these 6,299 recipients, 52.6% possessed no skills and 15.5% were sam hong workers. Two-third of the recipients were at their middle age ranging from 40 to 59, and 46.7% received primary or even no education. In general, the profile of the unemployed CSSA recipients in Yuen Long was more or less the same as that of the territory.

### **Education services**

9. It is the government's policies that children aged 6 to 15 are provided with nine-year free and universal education up to Secondary 3. Students are also given the opportunity to receive subsidized senior secondary and assisted university education. Intensive remedial teaching programmes and school-based remedial support/curriculum tailoring programmes are developed in primary and secondary schools respectively to support those academic low-achievers whereas students with special education needs may attend special schools.

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to slide No. 82, 83 and 84 of the Brief on "District Characteristics and Service Provision of Yuen Long" prepared by YLDSWO for details.

### Provision of Education Services in TSW

10. In 2004/05, there are 18 government and aided secondary schools, 27 primary schools and 33 kindergartens in TSW. As TSW is a relatively young community, demand for pre-school education, especially in the newly constructed estates, is great.

### Student Guidance Support Services

11. A comprehensive student guidance system is put in place in primary schools. The student guidance officers work in close partnership with teachers and parents, conduct developmental and preventive guidance activities as well as provide casework and/or group-work service to help individual students overcome their personal and social needs. The Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) have also commissioned NGOs to conduct a series of preventive and developmental guidance programmes, such as the Understanding Adolescent Project (成長的天空), to enhance students' resilience in coping with their daily life.

12. In view of the relatively low socio-economic status of students in TSW, schools, by utilizing all available resources such as the Capacity Enhancement Grant (CEG), Quality Education Fund (QEF) and their private funds, are actively implementing school-based guidance and developmental programmes to help students to acquire knowledge and skills on resilience and attitude to cope with their daily life challenges.

### Extra-curricular Activities

13. Schools today have provided a wide range of extra-curricular activities (ECA) to students. Basically, they are able to ensure that every student joins at least one activity in each of the areas of art and physical education. The Jockey Club Life-wide Learning Fund set up in 2002 with a sum of about \$140 million provides financial support to needy students of P4 to S3. As TSW is one of the districts in which CSSA families are concentrating, many needy students are benefitting from the Fund and have equal opportunities like other students in widening their exposure.

14. Schools in TSW also allocate necessary resources from the CEG and their private funds to support needy students for both local and overseas visits too.

### Information Technology Assistance

15. On average, primary schools are each equipped with about 90 computers and secondary schools with about 250 computers to facilitate students' learning with IT. To enhance access to IT facilities, laptop computers are provided to those students who do not have computers at home under the "Digital Bridge Project" supported by the QEF. Additional grants are being provided to schools so that they may extend the opening hours of their computer rooms after school

for their students. Some schools also allow students to use the computers on Saturdays and Sundays. EMB also works with NGOs to give the used computers to students who cannot afford to have their own.

#### Financial Assistance

16. Primary and secondary school students from low-income families not receiving CSSA are eligible for financial assistance under various means-tested schemes administered by the SFAA in the form of travel subsidy, textbook assistance, fee remission and public examinations fee remission. Eligible full-time local students of publicly funded and self-financing programmes at post-secondary level may apply for financial assistance in the form of grants and/or low-interest loans to cover tuition fees and academic and living expenses.

17. Financial assistance is also provided to eligible non-profit-making kindergartens through reimbursement of rent, rates and government rent, and the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme to alleviate the impact of rental and teachers' salary respectively on kindergarten fees. EMB also provides financial assistance in the form of fee remission to kindergarten students from low-income families through the means-tested Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme.

#### Training and Retraining Services

18. To enhance the employability and competitiveness of the poor (including the youths), EMB provides training and retraining services through the Vocational Training Council and the Employees Retraining Board. EMB has also launched various training initiatives, such as the Skills Upgrading Scheme and the Continuing Education Fund, to help enhance the skills and knowledge of the workforce.

#### Support to New Arrival Children

19. In order to facilitate the new arrival children (NAC) to adapt to local environment and learning style, EMB commissions NGOs to operate Induction Programmes for these children. The School Based Support Scheme (SBSS) Grant is provided to schools to operate educational programmes/activities to help NAC catch up with the local academic standard, especially in English language learning.

20. In 2003/2004 school year, 423 NAC were recorded in primary schools while the number for secondary schools was 88. In the third quarter of 2004/2005, a total of 26 NAC attended the courses run by commissioned NGOs in Yuen Long District.

## **Employment Services to Job-seekers**

21. The Labour Department (LD) operates 10 Job Centers throughout the territory and provides a comprehensive range of free employment services to the public. To facilitate access by job-seekers to our huge vacancy data bank, LD have installed Vacancy Search Terminals (VST) at 38 Social Security Field Units of the Social Welfare Department (SWD). Two VSTs have been installed in Tin Wah Estate. Job-seekers in TSW may approach our Job Centre located at Tuen Mun Parklane Square for employment services. LD will also install VSTs at the Public Enquiry Service Centres of Home Affairs Department's District Offices (DOs) shortly.

22. Job-seekers need not visit LD's Job Centres in person as they can make use of the user-friendly Interactive Employment Service website (address: <http://www.jobs.gov.hk>) to complete the registration procedure and browse job vacancy information through computers at home or at any free computer stations installed in government or non-government organization. They may also make use of our Telephone Employment Service (Tel. No. 2969 0888) to obtain job referrals.

## **Special Employment Programmes for Youths**

### *Youth Pre-employment Training Programme*

23. In 1999, the LD launched the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme to provide comprehensive pre-employment training to our school leavers aged 15 to 19 to enhance their employability. Each year, LD provides 12 000 places. Over the past five years, some 57 000 young people have been trained and about 70% of them could find jobs after completing the training.

### *Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme*

24. LD launched the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme (YWETS) in July 2002 to provide employment through on-the-job training of six to 12 months' duration for young people aged 15 to 24 with an education attainment below degree level. Special employment projects tailor-made for different trades and occupations are launched to provide diversified training opportunities for trainees. As at end-January 2005, LD has placed 18 865 trainees into training vacancies while another 11 259 were able to find work in the open employment market.

25. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been commissioned to offer induction training and counseling service to trainees to help them adapt to the world of work. There are currently seven NGOs with service points in TSW. Out of about 16 000 trainees registered in this programme year, 5.8% of trainees reside in TSW. In order to help young people living in remote areas to find jobs, YWETS will co-organise job fairs with NGOs for youths living in Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai on 8.4.2005 and 22.4.2005 respectively.

## Public Housing and Other Local Facilities

26. At present, there are 10 public rental estates and 6 estates under the Home Ownership Scheme in Tin Shui Wai, providing a total of some 72 000 rental and subsidised housing flats. Two public rental housing projects have also been planned in Areas 103 and 104 to provide some 6 300 rental flats. The public housing developments in Tin Shui Wai are supported by a wide range of welfare, recreational, community and educational facilities to meet the needs of both residents in the estate and its vicinity. These include ball courts, schools, nursery, centres for the elderly, children and youth centres, integrated family services centres etc.

27. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) provides a wide range of leisure and cultural facilities in TSW. The main facilities include TSW Swimming Pool, TSW Sports Centre, TSW Sports Ground, TSW Park and 5 other parks and playgrounds, TSW Public Library and a mobile library stop. LCSD is conscious of the demand for leisure and cultural facilities in TSW as a result of population growth in the district. To meet this demand and local aspiration, considerable number of capital works as well as minor works projects are under construction/planning in the district.

## Key Challenges

28. TSW is often perceived to be a “poor” area in Hong Kong as reflected by -

- (a) the median monthly domestic household income for the Yuen Long District<sup>2</sup> in 2003 was HKD 12,500, the third lowest in Hong Kong, compared with the Hong Kong territory wide figure of HKD 15,000;
- (b) as at 31.12.2004, the number of CSSA cases in TSW presented almost 5% of all CSSA cases in Hong Kong (see paragraph 7 above); and
- (c) there is often an impression that TSW is a remote area. With the improvement in road network and the commencement of West Rail, the traveling time from TSW to the urban area has indeed been substantially reduced. Nevertheless, transport costs remain a concern for commuters, especially the working poor.

Two key challenges faced by the community are set out in the following paragraphs.

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<sup>2</sup> Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) produces only district-based figures on median monthly household income. Area (such as TSW) specific figures are not currently available.

### Employment

29. Unemployment is a major challenge for TSW. The unemployment rate of Yuen Long District in 2003 was 12.3%<sup>3</sup> which was the highest among all 18 districts in Hong Kong.

30. To address the high number of unemployment CSSA cases built up over years, the SWD introduced the Support for Self-reliance Scheme in 1999 and enhanced measures in 2003 to provide active employment assistance for the unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients to seek gainful employment (see paragraphs 7 and 8 above). These measures include the Active Employment Assistance programme under which Employment Assistance Coordinators of the Social Security Field Units in collaboration with Job Developers of the District Social Welfare Office (DSWO) provide personalized service to encourage and help the unemployed recipients to find job and match them with suitable job vacancies. NGOs have also been commissioned to operate Intensive Employment Assistance Projects which provide tailor-made employment assistance services such as workshops, employment counseling, job matching and post-placement support services to help CSSA and near-CSSA customers to enhance their employability and ability to sustain employment so that they can move towards self-reliance. At present, there are 9 such projects operating by 7 NGOs in Yuen Long and 4 projects are mainly serving TSW. Besides, the unemployed recipients are also arranged to take up unpaid community work to sustain their work habit and build up confidence in employment. To enable the unemployed or low income families to take up full time job, a range of child care support services including extended hours for day nurseries, occasional child care service, after-school care programme and fee assistance scheme for child care centres are also available for families in need.

31. There has been continuous improvement in the overall economy and unemployment rate in Hong Kong in the past year. The number of CSSA unemployment cases has recorded a continuous decrease from 49,237 in January 2004 to 45,231 in December 2004. However, Yuen Long seems to have not benefited from the improved economy as the number of CSSA unemployment cases in 2004 remained the region of 5,700 to 5,780. Unless more job opportunities could be created and the burden of transport costs could be reduced, it is envisaged that the unemployment problem in Yuen Long will last for some time.

32. On local job opportunities, TSW is by design a residential area with limited business activities. There are only a few shopping malls and one hotel in TSW which simply cannot sustain the large working population. To promote local community economy (LCE), Yuen Long District Council has successfully launched a series of promotional campaigns resulting in both sales volume

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<sup>3</sup> C&SD produces only district-based unemployment rates. Area (such as TSW) specific figures are not currently available. Note the 2003 unemployment figure is influenced by SARS outbreak.

increase of local shops and restaurants, and creation of job opportunities<sup>4</sup>. However, the large unemployment population simply outnumbers employment opportunities created by LCE projects.

### Children and Youth

33. Yuen Long district, in particular TSW, is characterized by a large proportion of young population. The population in TSW below the age of 24 constitutes 38% of the total population (23% for age below 15 and 15% for age 15-24). The majority of this young population comes from low-income families. With limited resources, the children and youth heavily rely on the welfare sector for social, recreational and supportive activities. The need for welfare service is therefore prominent.

34. The youth problem can be reflected by the youth crime rate. As revealed by the Statistics Office, Crime Wing of Hong Kong Police Force, the number of young offenders at the age group of 10-15 and 16-20 in Yuen Long district ranked 2nd (534 in number) and 3rd (518 in number) among 23 police districts respectively in 2004. As regards reported individuals of age under 21 at Central Registry of Drug Abuse 2003, Yuen Long ranks 3rd (162 in number) among 18 District Council constituencies.

35. To address the developmental needs of the children and youth especially those with high risk, the SWD has all along allocated more resources in Yuen Long especially in TSW in terms of setting up of Youth Outreaching Teams and Outreaching Teams for Young Night Drifters. With anticipation of the increase in youth population in TSW Area 103 and 104, an additional Integrated Children and Youth Service Centre is planned to be set up. To help the unemployed youth in enhancing their motivation to work and equipping them with the necessary work and social skills, various employment-related training programmes have been launched by various NGOs under different funding source such as the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund. Some examples are : Rainbow Operation (天虹行動), Let's Walk Project (有網能量), Weaving Operation (織葉行動), Working Opportunities for Young People (青業行動), 青雲計劃, 天織網絡, Creating Dreams in TSW (青年夢想園地).

36. The Administration will introduce in phases a pilot "Head-Start Programme" for children aged 0-5 years. TSW will be one of the four selected communities. This programme will involve inter-sectoral collaboration among Department of Health (DH), SWD/NGOs and EMB at the district level, using DH's Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) as a platform. The initiative aims at strengthening interface between health and welfare service, and to establish a mechanism to identify children and their families which might require further

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<sup>4</sup> According to a survey conducted by Yuen Long District Office in October 2004, local restaurants and shops directly participated in Yuen Long District Council's LCE projects recorded an average increase of 12.5% in sales volume with 16 new job opportunities created.



attention, with a view to providing timely and prompt intervention.

37. EMB would also allocate additional resources in the coming financial year (2005/06) to enable schools to strengthen collaboration with NGOs at the district level to provide school-based after-school learning and support programmes. Students with learning difficulty can obtain extra-support in terms of learning and personal development. TSW will be one of the targeted areas to implement such services.

38. Uniformed/youth groups have long been an integral part of the ECA in schools. A new scheme will be devised to sponsor them to set up leagues in districts with a high concentration of needy students, and to provide uniforms and subsidies on outing activities for these students in consultation with schools and groups concerned. Uniformed groups, such as scouts, is one of the major ECA in TSW in particular.

39. Another major collaboration with NGOs in TSW will be on parent education. The Federation of Parent-Teacher Associations (FPTA) is now being organized with a view to offering more support on parent education, which is an important area that helps facilitate students' learning. School-based support on parent education with NGOs is now being piloted in TSW.

### **District Coordination**

40. A new task force will be formed in the Yuen Long district as a forum in response to policy initiatives of the Commission on Poverty and coordinate interdepartmental efforts at the district level. It will be chaired by District Officer (Yuen Long)(YLDO) and comprise officers of all Government departments concerned at district level, as well as Mr Leung Che Cheung, a member of CoP and the Vice-Chairman of Yuen Long District Council (YLDC). With their local knowledge, the task force would be in a position to spearhead the implementation of measures relevant to poverty alleviation by taking district-specific circumstances into account. The task force would bring to the attention of CoP issues which cannot be resolved at the district level alone or require further review of territory-wide cross-bureau policies and measures. The CoP would work with the district and consider how best such issues be addressed.

### **Community Engagement**

41. Community participation is one of the key elements in the successful implementation of poverty alleviation. The YLDC, local community, organizations and local business sector should be mobilized in the provision of assistance to the poor. Some examples are -

- (a) *Promotion and Caring Campaigns*

YLDO has been working closely with YLDC to promote caring and self-reliance messages at district level. For instance, YLDO and YLDC organized with SWD two large caring campaign in TSW in late 2004 and early 2005 respectively. Through these campaigns, caring messages and information about social resources and services in the community were disseminated to residents in TSW. Some 25,000 families were visited by volunteers and NGOs. Follow-up social and counseling services were provided by SWD for families who had indicated such needs during the visits.

*(b) Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) Programmes*

NGOs and local organizations can be encouraged to apply for funding from CIIF. For example, DO has assisted the Yuen Long Town Hall, NGO in Yuen Long, to secure a sum of HKD 2 million from CIIF to set up a multi-cultural community centre for ethnic minorities, many of which are from low income families. SWD has also been working closely with Pok Oi Hospital in supporting its CIIF initiatives “你我一家親，生活樂繽紛” which aims at promoting integration of new arrival families and increase job opportunities through training.

*(c) Employment Initiative by District Council*

YLDC has organized with YLDO a household cleansing or programme for the unemployed. Unemployed persons were hired to provide household cleansing services to the elderly in the district, with a view to offering employment opportunities as well as promoting self-reliance and enhancing self-esteem of the unemployed persons.

*(d) Other Possible Measures to Fostering Community Support*

Other possible support from the local community may include assistance in enlisting caring persons in the community as mentors so as to encourage young people to learn and advance, and recruitment of youth volunteers to participate in YLDCs' activities in order to build up their self-esteem and a positive outlook on life.

42. Members are invited to note the content of this paper to facilitate understanding of the needs and key challenges faced by the TSW community. Issues and observations arising from the visit to TSW on 7 March would be followed up at the second meeting of the CoP on 11 April.

Commission Secretariat

*(with input from District Office (Yuen Long), District Social Welfare Office (YL), Education and Manpower Bureau, Labour Department, Housing Department, Leisure and Cultural Services Department)*

February 2005