

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

### **District Visit – Kwun Tong**

#### **Purpose**

This paper provides an overview of the community profile of Kwun Tong, the services available to the residents there relevant to poverty alleviation, and some of the community's assets as well as challenges faced by the community. It serves as a background reference for Members' visit to Kwun Tong on 29 April.

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

2. The second meeting of the Commission on 11 April agreed that the TSW visit was useful in enhancing understanding of poverty and in facilitating deliberation on measures to tackle it, including how a district-based approach might be taken forward. The meeting welcomed the efforts of the Yuen Long district poverty alleviation task force, while noting that different districts might have different models in enhancing district coordination and in tackling local issues. The meeting agreed that further visits to Kwun Tong (29 April) and Sham Shui Po (5 May) be conducted.

#### **Community Profile**

3. Kwun Tong is one of the first satellite towns in Hong Kong. Public housing development began in the 1960s, the time when large-scale reclamation was carried out along the coast of Kwun Tong to provide land for industrial development. Following the migration of production lines to the Mainland and overseas in the past decade, the Kwun Tong Industrial Area is now gradually being transformed into a commercial and business centre. While some parts of the industrial area have been redeveloped into modern-day office blocks, a large part of the area is still consisted of old-fashioned industrial buildings. Many of

them have been turned into offices and storerooms. The rest of the district is mostly residential, with some of the older public rental housing estates undergoing redevelopment, such as the Ngau Tau Kok Estate. The old factory blocks and old public housing estates together give the district a relatively “old” image.

4. Kwun Tong is the third largest district in Hong Kong and is growing rapidly. It has a population of over 570,000 and is forecast to increase to some 650,000 by 2010. It is often perceived as a poor district - the median monthly domestic household income in 2004 was HKD 13,100, the third lowest in Hong Kong, compared with the Hong Kong territory wide figure of HKD 15,500. The district is also relatively old in terms of population as it has the highest number of elderly people. Elders consist of 16.3% of the district population (above the territory-wide average of 11.7%) while those under the age of 15 only make up 13.9% (below the territory-wide average of 15.2%). Nearly 61% of the population live in public housing, while 16% live in Home Ownership Scheme housing and just 23% in private housing estates.

### **Brief Summary of the CSSA Case Profile in Kwun Tong**

5. As at 28.2.2005, Kwun Tong constituted 11.7% (34,561) of total CSSA caseload of the whole territory. By case nature, more than half (56.6%) of the total CSSA caseload in Kwun Tong are old age cases. In fact, Kwun Tong has the highest number of old age CSSA cases in the whole of Hong Kong. Within Kwun Tong, 27.4% (5,363) of the old age CSSA cases concentrate in the Sau Mau Ping area.

6. As at 28.2.2005, there were a total of 4,920 unemployed CSSA recipients in the district, representing 10.6% of the Hong Kong total at the time. Out of these 4,920 recipients, 53% possessed no skills and 16.6% were sam hong workers. Over 70% of the recipients were at their middle age ranging from 40 to 59 and more than half of the recipients received primary education or less.

7. With a view to assisting and encouraging the CSSA recipients to seek gainful employment, Social Welfare Department (SWD) has introduced the Support for Self-reliance Scheme in 1999 and the Active Employment Assistance program under which the Employment Assistance Coordinator and the Job Developers of the four Social Security Field Units in Kwun Tong provide services

to encourage the unemployed recipients to find job and match them with suitable job vacancies. Besides, seven non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are commissioned to implement ten Intensive Employment Assistance Projects (IEAPs) to provide tailor-made employment services to CSSA and near-CSSA participants, serving a minimum of 700 participants a year.

### **Provision of Social Services in Kwun Tong**

8. In Kwun Tong, welfare services are provided through four core services programmes, namely elderly, family and child welfare, children and youth, and rehabilitation. In general, residential care facilities under respective programme area are operated on a territory-wide basis. Community support services, on the other hand, are provided to the specific target group in the district either through re-engineering, re-allocation of resources or close collaboration among the service units operated by SWD and NGOs.

9. Through the transformation of service units and pooling of resources, six Integrated Family Services Centres (IFSCs) have been set up in October 2004 [two operated by NGOs and four operated by SWD] to provide “one-stop” and easily accessible service to individuals and families at remedial, developmental and preventive level. SWD has also developed a wide range of support services for the families in need, including time-out services at The Family Crisis Support Centre, family life education, support groups, financial assistance, hotline service, out-of-home-care services for those children and youth coming from vulnerable families. For those children and youth aged 6-24, we have put in place two Children and Youth Centres and 12 Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres providing centre-based service, outreaching social work and school social work service to meet the multifarious needs of these target groups who are exposed to various life challenges and difficulties in their personal growth and/or changing environment and circumstances. There is also a range of community support and residential services for the elderly and their families with a view to enabling them to age in the community; details are given in paragraphs 22 to 25 below.

## **Provision of Education Services in KT**

10. In 2004/05, there are 27 secondary schools, 41 primary schools, 3 special schools and 51 kindergartens in Kwun Tong. As Kwun Tong is a relatively old community, demand for pre-school education is decreasing.

11. Kwun Tong has a high concentration of new arrivals from the Mainland. It ranks the 4<sup>th</sup> in the number of new arrivals in the 2001 Census. To facilitate the new arrival children (NAC) to adapt to local environment and learning style, the Education and Manpower Bureau commissions NGOs to operate Induction Programmes for these children. Furthermore, 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. In 2003/2004 school year, 337 NAC were recorded in primary schools while the number for secondary schools was 287. In the third quarter of 2004/2005, a total of 77 NAC attended the courses run by commissioned NGOs in Kwun Tong.

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

12. The unemployment rate in Kwun Tong was 8% in 2004 (ranked 6th among the 18 districts). The Labour Department (LD) operates 10 Job Centres throughout the territory and one of them is in Kwun Tong. To facilitate access by job-seekers to its vacancy data bank, LD has installed Vacancy Search Terminals (VST) at the four SWD's Social Security Field Units in Kwun Tong. Another VST will be installed at the Public Enquiry Service Centre of Kwun Tong District Office by end of April.

13. From time to time, LD also stages promotional activities in East Kowloon. For instance, a Retraining and Recruitment Expo 2004 was held at Plaza Hollywood, Diamond Hill on 4 November 2004. There was also a two-day exhibition on employment services held on 13 and 14 April 2005 at Hau Tak Shopping Centre in the neighbouring Tseung Kwan O. Job-seekers of course can also make use of LD's website and telephone service.

14. LD has launched the "Employment Programme for the Middle-aged" to assist middle-aged job seekers to secure sustainable employment through targeted

employment assistance and on-the-job training (OJT). Job seekers aged 40 or above and have registered with LD are eligible for the Programme. Participating employers will be given a training allowance of \$1,500 per month up to a maximum period of 3 months upon completion of OJT for each of the job seeker.

### **Public Housing in Kwun Tong**

15. At present, there are 26 public rental housing estates and another 19 estates under the Home Ownership Scheme/Private Sector Participation Scheme, providing a total of some 136,000 rental and subsidized housing flats. About 3,000 flats originally constructed under Home Ownership Scheme at Yau Tong will be used as quarters for staff from discipline services departments and will be ready for occupation in June 2005 tentatively. The Choi Wan Road and Jordan Valley development project in the western part of Kwun Tong will provide new public rental housing for about 39,000 people by 2010.

16. To assist public rental tenants with low income, the Rent Assistant Scheme (RAS) was introduced by the Housing Authority in 1992. Under the Scheme, one-half rent reduction will be granted to eligible tenants subject to annual review of the eligibility. About 2,400 families living in public rental estates in Kwun Tong are currently benefitting from the RAS.

### **Local Facilities in Kwun Tong**

17. Kwun Tong has a wide range of leisure and cultural facilities managed by Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The main facilities include two swimming pools, eight indoor recreation/leisure centres, twelve parks and playgrounds, five public libraries and seven mobile library stops. The Home Affairs Department manages eight community centres and community halls mainly for local resident associations and NGOs to organise community engagement activities.

## **Key Assets**

18. Although Kwun Tong is often seen as a relatively “poor” and “old” district, it has in fact a rich local support network much facilitated by the high concentration of public housing estates in the district. Many of the Mutual Aid Committees and Owners’ Committees in these housing estates participate actively in community affairs. Kwun Tong also has many long-established local resident associations. These organizations help to instill a sense of belonging and community spirit among the residents in the district.

19. Kwun Tong also has a fine tradition of cross-sector dialogue and partnership. Social services provision is well-coordinated under SWD’s district coordinating committees/local committees on family and child welfare, children and youth, elderly and rehabilitation services as well as on promotion of volunteer services. Membership of these committees comprises concerned government departments, NGOs, Kwun Tong District Council members, service users, medical professionals and local resident associations. These committees serve as useful platforms to exchange views on welfare issues in the district. The participating parties have fully utilized these platforms to engage in cross-sector and cross-service collaboration to initiate joint programmes in many different areas and most notably in the fight against SARS in 2003.

## **Key Challenges**

20. The key challenges faced by Kwun Tong as reflected by recent statistics are -

(a) the elderly population in Kwun Tong is the largest in absolute number in the whole of Hong Kong, and ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> among the 18 districts in terms of percentage of the local population; and

(b) the number of domestic violence cases in Kwun Tong is the third highest in the whole of Hong Kong.

Two key challenges faced by the community, namely the concentration of elders and the high rates of domestic violence, and how the local community has responded to them, are set out in the following paragraphs.

## **Concentration of Elders**

21. Kwun Tong has the largest elderly population in Hong Kong (93,330). Over half of the CSSA cases in the district are old age cases (19,547) and there are about 49,505 elders receiving Social Security Allowance in the form of Old Age Allowance or Higher Old Age Allowance. To address the needs of the elders in the district, the Kwun Tong District Social Welfare Office of the SWD (KTDSWO), in collaboration with the NGOs operating elderly services and the medical sector, have placed strategic focus to provide different forms of support services for the elderly.

22. For elders in the community, there are four District Elderly Community Centres (DECC), 14 Neighbourhood Elderly Centres and 12 Social Centres for the Elderly providing counseling services, educational and developmental activities, information and referral centre on community resources, volunteer development, carers support services, social and recreational activities, meal and laundry services, and drop-in service etc. to meet the needs of both healthy and frail elders living in the community.

23. For the frail elders living in the community, there are five Day Care Centres for the Elderly operated by NGOs providing a range of centre-based care and support services during daytime to enable the frail and demented elders to maintain their optimal level of functioning, develop their potential, improve their quality of life and to enable them to live at home as far as possible. This group of frail elders is further supported by Integrated Home Care Service Teams and Enhanced Home Care and Community Service operated by NGOs to enable them to live in the community and acquire the necessary skills to adapt to changing health status and to prevent premature admission to hospital and residential care.

24. For the vulnerable elders living in the community, DECCs have dedicated Support Teams for the Elderly (STEs), having networked a total of 5,800 elders living alone, lacking in family support/social network/knowledge of community resources, with poor health, having financial difficulties, or living in a less favourable environment through an outreaching and proactive approach. Elder volunteers and social workers of STEs would identify and review the needs of this vulnerable group through regular contacts. The STEs would step up their efforts to network and support these elders through collaboration with SWD, and the community at large.

25. For those elders not depending on CSSA but with limited resources, operators of various elderly community support services exercise their discretion to waive or reduce the charges to be incurred on the services. Besides, in-kind assistance and one-off financial assistance are also provided to those in need.

## **Domestic Violence**

### *High occurrence in Kwun Tong*

26. The number of newly reported battered spouse cases in Kwun Tong ranked the third highest in the whole of Hong Kong in 2004. While there were 227 newly reported cases in Kwun Tong in 2003, the number has increased to 255 in 2004, of which over 85.5 % was physical abuse and 11.4% was multiple abuses. While tackling family violence may not be perceived as a poverty alleviation measure per se, it is recognized that family violence is an extremely complex social problem with interwoven individual and societal causes, and could lead to serious damages to the victim or other members of the family. To strengthen support for families and especially those at-risk, KTDSWO has adopted a three-pronged approach, viz. providing specialized services and crisis intervention, supportive services, and preventive measures through cross-sectors and multi-disciplinary collaboration.

### *Enhancement of support to combat domestic violence*

27. The Family and Child Protective Services Unit (East Kowloon) of SWD is responsible for handling majority of battered spouse cases in Kwun Tong and it provides a spectrum of integrated services to high risk families. On top of the specialized services provided by the Unit, the six Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) in the district take care of families at-risk and those with potential or with non-high-risk domestic violence problems, with back up from the Unit. In 2004, the Unit organised a total of 23 training activities for different disciplines in the district ranging from school personnel, medical staff, social workers, police officers and estate management personnel.

28. Recognizing the importance of effective collaboration of different government departments, professionals and NGOs in preventing and tackling family violence and having reviewed the local consultation mechanism, the KTDSWO has since 1998 set up the Kwun Tong District Coordinating Committee



on Family and Child Welfare. The Committee is tasked to coordinate services provision on family service, including services relating to domestic violence, and to plan and launch various district publicity activities with the theme of ‘Strengthening Families and Combating Violence’ to enhance public awareness. Since March 2005, a Kwun Tong District Liaison Group on Family Violence has also been set up with participation of the Unit, the Police and the six IFSCs in the district to strengthen district coordination to tackle family crisis and violence problems at the operation level.

*Cross-sector collaboration to strengthen support for high-risk group*

29. To take a more proactive approach in addressing this social problem, KTDSWO launched a pilot initiative, namely the ‘Kwun Tong District Welfare Concourse’ (the Concourse), in July 2004. The Concourse is a cross-sector and multi-disciplinary forum convened by the District Social Welfare Officer and aims to provide a platform to identify the welfare needs of the district. Members of the Concourse come from various government departments, academia, NGOs and medical sector, community organizations, the Kwun Tong District Council, schools, volunteer organization, and commercial sector as well as service user. In late 2004, the Concourse has identified domestic violence as the welfare issue that should be given priority attention and cross-sector collaboration in the district.

30. The statistical profile of family violence gathered from the Central Information System on Battered Spouse and the latest service statistics in Kwun Tong in August 2004 show that the victims were mostly housewives who were not locally born, and over 70% of the victim families involved Mainland–Hong Kong marriage, and most of the victims were either CSSA recipients or from low-income families. As such, the Concourse has implemented a 9-month project (the Project) since January 2005 in Sau Mau Ping area, a locality with population and service profiles most compatible with the risk factors above. The Project is to promote early identification and early intervention to at-risk families or those with domestic violence problems through cross-sector and multi-disciplinary coordination and cooperation, and an evaluation study will be conducted by the end of the project period.

## **District Coordination**

31. In response to policy initiatives of the Commission on Poverty and to coordinate interdepartmental efforts, an inter-departmental task force has been set up at the district level. The task force is chaired by the District Officer (Kwun Tong) and comprises officers of all Government departments concerned at the district level. With their local knowledge, the task force is to review regularly the various services relevant to poverty alleviation already in progress and the relevant issues being discussed under different district forums and to consider if additional measures need to be implemented.

32. With the strong tradition of cross-sector cooperation in the district, the task force will keep in close dialogue with the District Council and especially the Working Group on Concerns on Poverty under the Kwun Tong District Council. The task force is considering to organise a district round-table meeting together with the Kwun Tong District Council, NGOs and local organisations to exchange views and share experience in poverty alleviation and to review how services related to poverty alleviation could be improved.

33. Members are invited to note the content of this paper. Issues and observations arising from the visit to Kwun Tong on 29 April would be followed up at the third meeting of the CoP on 26 May.

## **Commission Secretariat**

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

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