Commission of Poverty (CoP)

District Visit - Sham Shui Po

Purpose

This paper provides an overview of the community profile of Sham Shui Po (SSP) District, 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 SSP on 5.5.2005.

Community Profile

Overview and Demographics

2.   The estimated population of SSP was about 361,000 (in about 123,000 households) in 2004. The figure has been relatively stable in recent years, at 366,000 in 1996 and 354,000 in 2001. It is expected that consequential to the developments at the West Kowloon Reclamation Area (WKRA) and the redevelopments of several public housing estates, the population of SSP District will climb up to 382,000 in 2009.

3.   SSP is often labelled as an old and poor district. In fact there are considerable differences among different areas within the district. The administrative boundary of SSP District covers some middle-class residential developments including the Beacon Heights (畢架山花園), Parc Oasis (又一居) and Mei Foo Sun Chuen (美孚新邨) and a vibrant industrial area in Lai Chi Kok. A study into the domestic income data reveals that low-income households mainly concentrate in the Nam Cheong area (南昌區) near the SSP MTR station and various public housing estates, for instances, the Shek Kip Mei Estate, So Uk Estate and Fu Cheong Estate.

4.   In 2004, the monthly median household income in SSP was $11,700, the lowest among the districts (the figure for the whole of Hong Kong was $15,500). As at 2004, the unemployment rate of residents in SSP was 8.4%, as compared to the overall unemployment rate of 7.0%[1].

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[1] The unemployment figure is based on the findings of the General Household Survey during May to August 2004.

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Caseload in SSP

5.   As at 28.2.2005, SSP constituted around 9% (26,304) of the total CSSA caseload of the territory (295,866). By case nature, more than half (53.5%) of the CSSA caseload in SSP were old age cases. The number of old age CSSA cases in SSP was 14,080, accounting for 9% of the 149,992 old age cases in the territory.

Provision of Government Services in SSP

<u>Education Services Provision</u>

6.   In the 2004/05 school year, there are 32 secondary schools, 43 primary schools, 31 kindergartens and 9 special schools in SSP. Quite a number of schools in SSP were built in the 1960s. Following the development of WKRA, a number of school premises with modernized facilities have been constructed for the reprovisioning of the existing old schools with sub-standard premises.

<u>Employment Services for Job-seekers</u>

7.   Job-seekers in SSP can make use of the services and facilities, including the Vacancy Search Terminals (VSTs), available at the Kowloon West Job Centre of the Labour Department (LD) located in Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices. To enhance the public's access to VSTs, three additional units have been installed at the Social Security Field Units of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and another will be installed at the Public Enquiry Services Centre of the SSP District Office (SSPDO) shortly. LD also organises other promotional activities including recruitment forums, exhibitions on employment services and mini job fairs in West Kowloon periodically. Job-seekers can also use the Internet and telephone at the Job Centre and elsewhere to search for job vacancies and obtain job referrals respectively.

<u>Public Housing</u>

8.   At present, there are 13 public rental estates, 1 Tenant Purchase Scheme estate and 6 Home Ownership Scheme courts in SSP, providing a total of some 57,100 rental and subsidized sale flats. Two redevelopment housing projects, the Shek Kip Mei Phase 1 and Un Chau Phases 2 and 4, will be completed in end 2005 and early 2008 respectively. Six amongst the 13 public rental estates have over 20 years of history.

9.   To enhance the living environment of public housing tenants in SSP, Housing Department has recently launched 3 rounds of transfer exercise to invite those with a family size of 3 persons and above to apply for transfer to a newly completed estate in the district.

Local Facilities

10.   The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) provides a wide range of leisure and cultural facilities and programmes in SSP. The main facilities include 3 swimming pools, 1 sports ground, 5 sports centres, 3 major parks, 51 parks and playgrounds, Lei Cheng Uk Han Tomb and 4 public libraries; the mobile library serves 2 locations in SSP. LCSD is conscious of the demand for leisure and cultural facilities in SSP as a result of population growth in the coming years. To meet the increasing demand, some projects such as the construction of Sham Shui Po Park Phase II and re-development of Cheung Sha Wan Road/ Cheung Shun Street Playground are under planning.

Key Challenges

11.   There are two key challenges relating to poverty faced by SSP:

    (a)   development opportunities for children and youth from low-income families; and

    (b)   a high concentration of the elderly.

They are elaborated in the ensuing paragraphs.

(A) Development Opportunities for Children and Youth from Low-income Families

The Challenge

12.   In 2004, there were 60,600 children and youth below 18 in SSP, many of whom come from low-income families. In the 2004/05 school year, about 3,000 students in kindergartens in SSP benefit from the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme. There are about 11,200 children and youth in CSSA households; 6,060 SSP students received full grants under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme from Students Financial Assistance Agency (SFAA) in the 2004/05 school year. Whilst these children and youth already have access to a wide range of services, and schemes are in place to help low-income families should they need financial assistance[2], concerns remain that children and youth from poor families should be given additional care and development opportunities taking into account of the followings -

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[2] For details of the services and financial assistance schemes available, please refer to paragraphs 3 – 8 of CoP Paper 12/2005.

(a) _Inadequate parental support_: Many of the low-income workers are believed to be low-skilled labourers, who have to work long hours and may not be able to provide adequate attention to the developmental needs of their children.   Some parents may not be well equipped to assist their children (e.g. homework, information technology).

(b) _Poor living environment_: The 2004 Population and Household Statistics indicate that 90.9% of SSP households occupied a whole flat/ floor/ house, which meant that 9.1% lived in other forms of accommodation including rooms, cubicles and cocklofts, where the living condition might not compare to that of whole flats.   Whilst the figure of 9.1% is lower than the corresponding figures of Yau Tsim Mong (12.1%) and Wan Chai (9.4%), it is much higher than the territorial average of 2.5%. Some are concerned that the poor living condition may affect the opportunities for children to develop themselves in their home environment.

(c) _Newly Arrived Children (NAC)_: i.e. students who are newly admitted from the Mainland and are enrolled for the first time in primary and secondary schools in HK: In the 2003/2004 school year, 379 and 267 NAC students were recorded in primary and secondary schools of SSP respectively, amounting to 5.4 % and 13.3 % of all NAC in HK.   There is a need to give special attention to the needs of NAC and their integration with other students.

13.   Despite the above, it is noteworthy that students in SSP are receiving quality education and the academic results are at least on a par with those from other districts.   In a study of the overall basic competency of Primary 3 students in 2004, in the three core subjects of English, Chinese, Mathematics, the majority of primary schools in SSP attained a higher passing percentage in the three subjects than the territory-wide average.

Meeting the Challenge

14.   There are four Integrated Family Service Centres, seven Integrated Children and Youth Service Centres operated by the SWD in SSP, and a number of non-subvented Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) providing a wide spectrum of support services to children and youth and their families.   These services include support groups for parents and children; workshops on parenting skills and resilience training; in-kind assistance in the form of food and daily necessities, medical services at a low cost, stationery and books; free tuition programmes for children; after school care programmes and mentorship schemes. Besides, there are a number of programmes which give more focussed attention to the development needs of children and youth in SSP (paragraphs 15 – 22).

Pilot "Head-Start Programme"

15.   The Government will introduce in phases a pilot "Head-Start Programme" (HSP) for children aged 0 – 5 years in four selected communities to ensure early identification of the varied needs of children and their families so that appropriate services can be made available to them in a timely manner.   The first pilot will be launched in SSP in July 2005.   The Government is committed to making the pilot HSP a success, and will closely monitor the referral statistics and increase in demand for various social services in SSP to see if additional resources are required for respective services.   The Department of Health will conduct an evaluation of the pilot run in SSP.   For further details of the HSP, please refer to paragraph 17 of and Annex B to CoP Paper 12/2005.

After-school Learning and Support Programmes

16.   The new school-based after-school learning and support programmes aim to provide more support to disadvantaged students in enhancing their learning effectiveness, both in terms of academic studies and outside classroom learning experience.   Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) has consulted school councils and NGOs on operational details for the new initiative and formulated implementation strategies.   Schools and NGOs are expected to work in collaboration and organise custom-made activities for students to build up their capacity and self-reliance.   The programmes will be launched in summer 2005. Details of the programmes are at Annex C to CoP Paper 12/2005.

17.   In addition, 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 Primary 4 to Secondary 3 to encourage them to participate in extra-curricular activities.   Schools can also apply for resources such as the Capacity Enhancement Grant (CEG)[3] and the Quality Education Fund (QEF).   Up to 2004, the QEF has approved a total of 218 projects for schools in SSP, which benefits students from 13 kindergartens, 23 primary schools, 24 secondary schools and 8 special schools.   In general, schools in SSP can ensure that every student joins at least one activity in the area of art or physical education every month.

18.   Special attention is paid to those who may fall behind.   According to a recent survey conducted by EMB, over 89% of the schools in SSP organised after-school remedial teaching programmes for the academically low achievers; 80% and 76% provided monetary and material support to the needy students respectively.   74% extended their opening hours of the school premises for their students, and 71% allowed their needy students to borrow musical instruments or electronic dictionaries from schools.

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[3] The Capacity Enhancement Grant (CEG) provides the necessary funds to schools for enhancing teachers' capacity to materialize education reform.   It allows maximum possible flexibility to schools on the use of the grant to help the students in need, in particular in the areas of enhancing students' language proficiency and coping with the diverse and special learning needs of students with varied ability.

Bridging the Digital Divide

19. On average, each primary school and secondary school is equipped with about 90 computers and 250 computers respectively to facilitate students' learning with information technology (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. A sum of $200 million had been allocated from the QEF to public secondary schools to purchase notebook computers for loan to needy students. Some schools in SSP also work with NGOs to give used computers to students who cannot afford to have their own.

20. Additional grants are being provided to schools so that they may extend the opening hours of their computer rooms to after school hours or even Saturdays and Sundays for their students. 27 schools in SSP have extended the opening hours of their computer rooms.

Improving the Living Environment

21. The Hong Kong Housing Society and the Urban Renewal Authority are carrying out 7 redevelopment projects in SSP, which involve around 100 buildings in the district, most of which are located at the northern and southern parts of SSP. Apart from redevelopment projects, both agencies have taken initiatives to improve the condition of the flats and buildings and the streetscape by providing one-stop building management counseling services, grants and loans to owners and street beautification projects etc. Through these plans, the living environment of residents and the dilapidated outlook of SSP will gradually improve.

Helping Newcomers Settle In

22. In response to paragraph 12(c) above, special attention is paid to Newly Arrived Children (NAC) to help them settle in and integrate with the local students. Schools with intake of NAC newly joining the local education system are invited to apply for the School Based Support Scheme Grant. Many schools in SSP run by religious bodies cater for the needs of the NAC students and provide moral and civic education to NAC and other needy students. To facilitate the NAC to integrate into the community and adapt to the local learning style, EMB commissioned 5 NGOs to operate 7-10 induction programmes for these children in 2004 in SSP.

(B) A High Concentration of the Elderly

The Challenge

23. SSP has a relatively large elderly population. In 2004, 16.3% (59,000)

of the total population of SSP was aged 65 or above. This percentage was similar to that of other districts in Kowloon – 15.3%, 17.6% and 16.3% in Kowloon City, Wong Tai Sin and Kwun Tong respectively, but higher than the territorial average of 11.7%. There are about 14,080 old age CSSA cases and about 5,030 normal old age and 27,180 higher old age Social Security Allowance (SSA) cases in SSP, accounting for 5.6% and 7.4% of the total old age and high old age SSA cases in the territory respectively. About half of the elderly reside in public housing estates including the So Uk Estate, Lai Kok Estate, Nam Shan Estate and the Shek Kip Mei Estate. It is estimated from the 2001 Population Census that there were around 16,500 persons aged over 64 who either live alone or live with their spouses only in SSP.

Meeting the Challenge

24.　　　With the high concentration of elderly people, meeting their needs, especially those who are poor, frail and living alone or with spouse only, is one of the major challenges of the district. Aiming at promoting healthy ageing in the community, welfare support services for elderly people in SSP are provided by three District Elderly Community Centres and their respective Support Teams for the Elderly, 16 Neighbourhood Elderly Centres/ Social Centres for the Elderly, five Day Care Centres for the Elderly, 11 Integrated Home Care Teams, and one Enhanced Home Care Team, which offer a full range of support services to healthy as well as frail elders living in the community and their carers.

An Integrated Approach

25.　　　In enhancing support for elders, in particular those who live alone or with their spouses only, the SSP District Social Welfare Office (SSP DSWO) has been focusing on two areas: 1) promoting the development of support network in the community and 2) strengthening collaboration between the welfare and medical sectors. Organisations like estate management committees, religious bodies and Incorporated Owners are being lined up to form an extensive social network to facilitate early identification of and intervention for those in need.

Healthy Ageing

26.　　　Whilst promoting healthy ageing in the community, the demand for support for frail elders who choose to live in the community has been surging. SSP DSWO has been promoting closer collaboration between the welfare and medical sectors to better address the health and medical needs of elderly people living in the community. Regular interfacing meetings between elderly welfare and medical service units in the district had been held since 2001 to enhance cross-sectoral communication and explore and identify opportunities for collaboration.

Meeting Their Housing Needs

27.　　On the housing front, around half of the elders in SSP live in public housing.　Under the Rent Allowance Scheme, low-income families will have their rental reduced by half if their income is below a prescribed limit.　CSSA recipients can apply for a refund of flat deposit.　Enhanced support is provided under the Housing for Senior Citizens Scheme.　Some 900 single elderly and elderly couples are living in the Housing for Senior Citizens in SSP with the provision of 24-hour warden service and communal facilities.

Community Engagement and District Coordination

28.　　Cross-sectoral participation and coordinated efforts are crucial in alleviating poverty.　The SSP District Council (SSPDC), NGOs and Government departments have worked hand in hand in addressing the challenges faced by the district.

Sham Shui Po District Council

29.　　The Working Group on Poverty Problem was established under the SSPDC in early 2004.　It comprises representatives from over 20 district NGOs and serves as a platform for NGOs to explore collaboration opportunities.　A research commissioned to the Chinese University of HK is underway to study the poverty situation in SSP.　Apart from this, the Working Group has developed a cleansing project, in which a group of unemployed were trained to cleanse the homes for the elderly and the disabled before the Lunar New Year.

District Organisations

30.　　An important element of local support in SSP is a network of traditional organisations, most notably kaifong associations (街坊組織).　In the spirit of philanthropy and community harmony, these associations have through the decades established themselves as both a source of support for the underprivileged and a locus of social cohesion.　The Sham Shui Po Kaifong Welfare Association, established in 1949, was the first kaifong association in Hong Kong.　It now runs a primary school, a dental clinic and an elderly centre.　It collaborates with NGOs in the district to deliver poverty-alleviation projects.　It has recently organised a project named 深水埗區社康護耆英 together with two other NGOs under the coordination of the SWD.　Under this project, volunteers pay regular visits to provide singleton elderly people living in private residential buildings with basic health and home safety knowledge.　With their deep roots in the community and remarkable service history, these associations are well placed to serve as anchors in fostering community engagement and a sense of belonging.

Government's Coordinating Efforts

SWD's District Coordinating Committees

31.   SWD has been promoting cross-sectoral collaboration in addressing the changing and multi-facet needs of society.   Towards this end, SWD has formed District Coordinating Committees (DCCs) on different services in all 13 SWD districts including SSP.   These DCCs include DCC on Family and Child Welfare Service; Local Committee on Service for Young People; DCC on Elderly Service; DCC on Rehabilitation Service and DCC on Promotion of Volunteer Service. With a multi-disciplinary, multi-department membership, the DCCs serve as useful forums to examine current needs of local communities and recommend as well as implement effective measures to address needs identified.

32.   Since 2001, SSP DSWO has been convening regular interfacing meetings between elderly welfare and medical service units in the district to facilitate cross-sector communication, explore and identify opportunities for collaboration and implement joint ventures.

SSP District Office

33.   SSPDO works closely with government departments, the DC, and community organisations including NGOs in the districts in responding to the needs and problems of the district.   For instance, recognizing the needs of new arrival families, SSPDO has been convening a Coordinating Committee on New Arrival Services.   This Committee aims to address the needs of new arrival families who are frequently low-income families.   Programmes organised by various NGOs suitable for the participation of new arrivals are condensed into a compendium for NGO's reference.

34.   To further enhance coordination and focus on efforts in alleviating poverty, the SSPDO will establish a working group on poverty.   A preparatory meeting has been held amongst relevant departments to discuss the terms of reference and the way forward.   It is hoped that through this platform, efforts and resources from the district can be further galvanized in meeting the key challenges of the district.

35.   SSPDO has made continuous efforts to encourage community support to the needy groups.   A project of this nature is computer training for needy children and their parents in 2004, where the SSPDC, The Chamber of HK Computer Industry and the SSPDO utilized the proceeds gained from the computer festival to provide free computer training to the needy.   Another project was an internship programme for new arrival women in 2003 jointly organised by the SSPDO and NGOs.   The project aimed at expediting the integration of new arrival women into the community and giving them hands-on working experiences.

Advice Sought

36.   Members are invited to note the content of this paper. Issues and observations from the visit to SSP on 5.5.2005 will be followed up at the third meeting of the CoP on 26.5.2005 .

Commission Secretariat

(with input from Sham Shui Po District Office, District Social Welfare Office (Sham Shui Po), Education and Manpower Bureau, Labour Department, Housing Department, Leisure and Cultural Services Department)

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