Executive Summary

Study on "The Future Directions of Providing Social Work Services under the New Urban Renewal Strategy"

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Background

1. During the review of the Urban Renewal Strategy (URS) began in July 2008, one major issue discussed has been the role of the social service teams (SST) engaged by the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) to help affected individuals in its urban redevelopment projects. The major concerns are related to the professional autonomy of the social workers and whether the SSTs should be engaged by the URA directly or whether the SSTs should be engaged by a third party such as a trust fund, the Social Welfare Department, Development Bureau, etc. This study is an extension of the research on the Achievements and Challenges of Urban Renewal in Hong Kong which was basically completed in March 2010. This study was commenced in mid-April.

Objective and scope of study

2. In view of the possible overlap of services provided by various bodies, there is a need to conduct a systematic review of the related issues mentioned above, before we can draw conclusions on the future directions of the SSTs. This review will cover the following aspects:

- The work done by SSTs engaged by the URA
- The work done by the local organizations engaged by the URA in doing rehabilitation work in various districts
- The work done by the Hong Kong Housing Society to help organizing Owners Corporations (OCs)
- The work done by the existing 13 Non-government Organisation (NGO) Community Centres (CCs) with respects to urban renewal
- The work done in by Neighbourhood Level Community Projects/Integrated Neighbourhood Projects (NLCDPs/INPs) in the past in the old urban areas that may have relevance to urban renewal, in particularly, the views and position of the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) on this issue.
- The work done, experience, and subsequently changes in practice by the Buildings Department in related aspects
- The work done by the Home Affairs Department with respect to its building management and work with OCs.
- Work done by the social workers doing community liaison work in the URA
- The views of staff of URA who work closely with the SSTs

Methodology

3. This study consists primarily of a review on existing documents and research study reports complemented by interviews with informants.

The background of SSTs engaged by the URA

4. Under Section 33 of the URS (2001), "the URA should set up an urban renewal social service team in each of the nine target areas to provide assistance and advice to residents affected by URA's redevelopment projects. Such a team should operate independently and should preferably be in place before the first redevelopment project has actually commenced in a target area".

5. There are four main elements in the section of the URS
   - Number of SSTs: A SST in each of the nine target areas
   - Independence: The team should operate independently
   - Scope of service: The SST is to provide assistance and advice to residents affected by URA redevelopment projects
   - Timing of forming of SST: The SST should preferably be in place before the first redevelopment project has commenced in a target area

6. In the current URS review, the foci of views expressed so far were related to two aspects, namely, the "independence" and types of service to be provided by the SSTs.

Number of SSTs

7. At the time of study, the URA engaged three NGOs to provide SST services to seven of the nine target areas, except for Yau Tong and Tsuen Wan as there was no redevelopment project actively implemented. This practice is not exactly consistent with the provision in the URS.

Independence of SSTs

8. While the URS has emphasized on the "independency" of these SSTs, the way to achieve such independency is not specified.

9. Views expressed by social workers in various occasions during the community engagement processes of the URS review, in an earlier study carried out by the URA, and during this study unanimously requested a mode of operation where not only the SSTs can operate independently, they can be seen as independent, particularly to those

affected by urban redevelopment projects.   The basic rationale behind this view is that the work of SSTs depends very much on the trust and rapport that they can build with the affected individuals, the "association" with URA will make it very difficult, and sometimes impossible, for the SSTs to deliver their services, particularly to those who felt being adversely affected or at grief by the actions of URA.   Sometimes, these difficult cases are the most needy individuals and families.   There were occasions in the past where a third-party NGO was brought in to help such difficult cases.

Scope of service

10. While the URS has emphasized on the provision of assistance and advice to residents affected by URA redevelopment projects, in the "Scope of Services" for the URA engaged SSTs, part of the function is "to provide service in promoting owners' and residents' ability to help themselves and participate positively in the urban renewal process including redevelopment, preservation, rehabilitation, and revitalization (4Rs)". However, in actual practice, most of the work done by the SSTs are related to "redevelopment".   We noted that SST service was also provided to residents of the preservation projects of the Blue House and the Mallory Street.

11. Likewise, social workers also expressed strong objections to the suggestion that the work of advocacy and organizing can be separated from casework and that URA could employ their own social workers to deal with the casework for affected individuals and families.

12. There were suggestions made during the URS Review that social workers should be involved in organizing and promoting participation of local residents in the planning of the urban renewal programmes at district level.   One specific suggestion was to set up a "Participatory Community Planning Centre".

Timing of forming of SSTs

13. While the URS "preferred" SSTs to be set up in each target area before the first redevelopment project has commenced, in actual practice, there is hardly any "first" redevelopment project as URA, when it was first set up, has picked up projects already started by the Land Development Corporation (LDC).   If the intention of having a SST in a target area before the "first" redevelopment is to enable the relevant SSTs to establish working relationship and rapport with the residents even before the redevelopment starts, this objective has never been clearly spelt out.   In the case of

Shamshuipo, for example, there were a number of URA projects and though a SST was established in the district before some of the projects started, the SST was not supposed to know the exact timing of the implementation and in most cases the SST will only come into contact with the residents after the project announcement.

14. Thus, the timing of setting up SST depends very much on the scope of service. If the SSTs are to help the residents to participate in planning for urban renewal projects, then such SSTs should have been formed in each district irrespective of timing of implementing individual redevelopment projects.

The work done by related community development services

Community Centers operated by NGOs

15. There are a total of 13 Community Centers (CC) operating in Hong Kong run by NGOs. Six of these CCs operate in eight of the nine target areas of the URA, i.e. except for Sham Shui Po. Only one of the NGOs operating CC also runs another SST funded by URA but operating in a different district.

16. Basically, all the CCs are involved in urban development issues in terms of organizing and mobilizing residents to participate in various planning processes. For those CCs operating in target areas of URA are also involved in issues related to urban redevelopment. Their major roles are primarily organizing and advocacy. They also worked very closely with the SSTs of URA within the project areas. In redevelopment projects where both CC and SST are both present, the CC will take the advocacy and organizing role while the SST will take more the case work approach.

Neighbourhood Level Community Development Projects

17. Neighbourhood Level Community Development Projects (NLCDP) were introduced in the 1970s to deprived and transient communities where the provision of welfare services and facilities were considered inadequate or non-existent. By 1987, NLCDPs were engaged to serve Mark III to IV public housing estates affected by redevelopment.

18. While there had been discussions in the local literature on the role of community development in old urban area, the focus has always been helping the deprived disadvantageous groups living in the old urban areas and helping them to receive other main stream social service.

19. In 1995, two pilot NLCDPs were set up in Mong Kok and Nam Cheong. After the review in 1998, these projects were terminated and in their places new Integrated Neighbourhood Projects (INP) were formed to strengthen outreaching efforts for three types of target groups, namely, new arrivals, elderly, and low income families.

20. After another review in 2002, in the midst of budget cuts and efficiency savings, the INPs were gradually phased out with part of the resources deployed to form Family Support Networking Teams, which eventually were dissolved, with part of the resource saving contributing to the government efficiency saving and partly pooled to form the Integrated Family Service Centers (IFSCs) since 2004. This has ended the history of community development projects in the old urban area under the auspice of the Home Affairs Bureau and Social Welfare Department.

Building management – Home Affairs Department, Buildings Department, HK Housing Society, and URA

Hong Kong Housing society

21. In 2005, the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) set up its Building Management and Maintenance Scheme (BMMS). Property Management Advisory Centres (PMAC) staffed by qualified and professional property management and maintenance staff are set up by the HKHS to provide property management advisory services to building owners, residents, Owners Corporations (OC) and Mutual Aid Committees (MAC) in different districts in Hong Kong to help them to solve problems in building management, repair and maintenance. At the time of study, there were a total of 11 PMACs set up in various districts.

22. In 2008, in one of the PMAC, the HKHS collaborated with the Senior Citizen Home Safety Association to provide a Total Housing Solution for the Elderly pilot project "to provide the elderly with advice and information on housing-related issues, in particular on home safety and hygiene, home repairs and improvement to their living environment[1]".

Buildings Department

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[1] HKHS, Annual Report 2009, page 30.

23. In 2002, the Buildings Department (BD) began to engage NGOs to set up "in-house" SST to take care of the financial, psychological and social needs of complainants and owners/occupants affected by the Department's enforcement actions; and also to enhance mutual understanding and streamline the communication between occupants and BD. In the course of action, the SST may also help to get the residents organized to form OCs. Though the contractual arrangement used by the BD is very similar to that used by the URA in engaging NGOs to operate the SSTs, the BD described these SSTs as "in-house" SSTs. Accordingly, the SSTs under BD work very closely with the relevant Building Officers.

24. While there may be cases where residents are not happy with the repair orders issued by the BD and hence not very cooperative with the SSTs, apparently, the "independency" was not considered to be a significant issue for these SSTs. Probably because most of the issues are either technical or psychosocial in nature, policy "advocacy" is not seen as one of the roles of these SSTs.

25. The BD SSTs may also work with local organizations, the Liaison Officers of the Home Affairs Department to help the residents to form OCs.

26. At the time of study, the Buildings Department (BD) has engaged four NGOs to operate a total of seven "in-house" SSTs.

Home Affairs Department

27. The policy of building management is under the Home Affairs Bureau and the Home Affairs Department is responsible for the implementation of the Building Management Ordinance and the relevant policies.

28. In each of the 18 administration districts, there is one District Building Management Liaison Team (DBMLT) and these teams
- visit owners of private buildings in the district to promote the good practices of building management;
- advise owners on the procedures of the formation of an owners' corporation (OC);
- issue an exemption certificate to the convenor of an owners' meeting for obtaining a free copy of record of owners of the building from the Land Registry for the purpose of convening a meeting to form an OC.
- attend owners' meetings and give advice to owners as and when necessary;
- process applications made to the Secretary for Home Affairs for an order to

convene a meeting of owners under section 3A of the Building Management Ordinance;

- organize training courses, seminars, talks and workshops on building management for members of the OC management committees;

- organize educational and publicity activities, e.g. arranging roving exhibitions on building management and producing a series of publicity materials on building management, maintenance and insurance to promote proper and effective building management;

- handle enquiries and complaints relating to building management;

- assist law enforcement departments in enforcing building maintenance and fire safety improvement; and

- help resolve disputes between owners, OCs and management companies, and arrange the provision of voluntary professional mediation service, if there is a need.

29. At the time of study, the HAD has set up three Building Management Resource Centres (BMRCs) where consultancy services by housing related professionals are made available to the general public.

Local organizations engaged by the URA

30. The URA also engaged a total of 9 local organizations on annual contract basis to help the owners of private buildings to form OCs.

- Marketing URA's building rehabilitation incentive schemes through organizing workshops, seminars, briefings and promotional activities;

- Assisting owners to form OCs with a view to organizing rehabilitation works;

- Providing estate management advice and administrative support to the OCs in initial planning of rehabilitation works as necessary with a view to persuading them to successfully join the schemes;

- Assisting to resolve neighborhood relation disputes arising in the course of planning and organization of building rehabilitation; and

- Facilitating owners with financial difficulties to apply for URA's loan and grant and providing special assistance, where appropriate, to elderly or owners with special needs in the application process.

Other Observations

31. There are some inconsistencies between the provision in the URS related to SSTs and the actual practice in terms of the number of SSTs, the scope of service, the timing of

forming the SSTs.   The independence of URA SST is a matter of key concern among social workers.

32. There are apparently considerable overlap in various types of work, particularly in community organizing and policy advocacy, though the relative emphasis and methods may vary for different bodies.   For instance in organizing work, BD SSTs, DBMLTs, local organizations, District Council members and political parties focus on the formation and operation of the OCs, while URA SSTs organized affected individuals to express their views to the URA.

Type of work	Bodies involved
Social Planning	CCs
Community Organizing	Public Funded: CCs, BD SSTs, URA SSTs, local organizations (URA funded), DBMLTs Not directly public funded: District Council members Others: Political Parties
Policy Advocacy	Public funded: CCs, URA SSTs Not directly public funded: District Council members Others: Political Parties, pressure groups, and advocacy groups
Case work with needy families and individuals	BD SSTs, URA SSTs and other social service units in the community whenever needed NGO engaged by HKHS operated in PMAC for elderly residents

33. There are some variations across different districts in terms of the network of bodies that are involved in various aspects of urban renewal.   In particular, there is no CC in the Shamshuipo district, though there are other NGOs in the district which are also active in community organizing and policy advocacy, e.g. the Society for Community Organization (SoCO).

Options for the way ahead

34. There are apparently three possibilities for future directions of forming SSTs under the auspice of urban redevelopment
   - The status quo, i.e. URA contracting NGOs to operate the SSTs.
   - Forming independent SSTs funded and monitored by bodies other than URA
   - Forming district base SSTs for social planning, policy advocacy and community organizing while URA employing its own social workers to perform case work

35. In the URS review and in this study, hardly anyone expressed the wish to retain the status quo option. The pros and cons of the three options are summarized in the following table:

Option	Pros	Cons
1. The status quo	Fair coordination between URA and SSTs	The issue of independence is not adequately addressed
2. Forming independent SSTs with monitoring by bodies other than URA	SSTs are seen to be more independent	Requires more coordination efforts between URA and SSTs
3. Forming district based SSTs for social planning, policy advocacy and community organizing while URA employs its own social workers to perform case work	There will be no role conflicts within the SST teams; and much better coordination between the acquisition team and social work team within URA	URA social workers will find it hard and sometimes impossible to build rapport and hence working relationship with needy individuals and families when they have a grievance with the work of URA; recommendation of Compassionate Re-housing and other forms of assistance may not be seen as independent and fair; and SSTs' work overlap with other services in the community

36. The major advantage of the second option (i.e. SST monitored and funded by bodies other than URA) is its apparent independence while its disadvantage (i.e. coordination between URA and SST) can be remedied by additional efforts of coordination and possibly by additional training provided to the social workers in SSTs.

37. The advantage of the third option (i.e. separating advocacy/organizing work from casework) is the removal of role conflict and the improvement in coordination at case

work level, while its disadvantages can hardly be remedied except for seeking outside help, e.g. Integrated Family Service Centers[2].

38. Apparently, Options 2 is more acceptable to the social work field while the URA management would have worries about the management and coordination of the SSTs. On the other hand, social workers have expressed strong objections to option 3, while some URA staff members in the acquisition team also worry about the loss of "independency" and the possible reduction in "credibility" of recommendations coming from within the URA as an interested party in the redevelopment process, particular in cases of disputes.

Recommendations

39. While no option is perfect, option 2 appears to be more acceptable or the least unacceptable to most parties. Moreover, remedies are more readily available for the disadvantages of option 2 than for those of option 3.

Option 2 – Independent SSTs

40. If option 2 is taken on board, it is possible for the source of funding coming from either the Development Bureau or the URA, while contracted and monitored by the Development Bureau, Social Welfare Department (SWD), or a new trust fund as advocated by some social workers. If the resource comes from the Development Bureau, the SSTs would be seen as more independent from the URA

41. Comparatively, having the Social Welfare Department to serve as the contracting and monitoring agent, with its established contracting and service performance monitoring system in place, would be relatively more efficient than setting up new systems in the Development Bureau or even a new trust fund. Furthermore, professionals in the SWD serving in related service branches, district offices and subvention branch are social workers and these will facilitate better communication and interfacing with other related social services in the community. While it would be more efficient if the contracting and monitoring work is performed by the SWD, there may still be some resource implications for the SWD.

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[2] We will expect strong resistance from the IFSCs as reflected in the recent review exercise done on the IFSCs. In fact, in the recent review, many social workers of IFSC congratulated that the URA has its own contract SSTs while regretting that they have to do the job "for" the Housing Department.

42. It would also be necessary to set up a steering committee, at least, in the early stages of development, under the Development Bureau including representatives from the URA and other stakeholders in the community to ensure that the service directions are in line with the urban renewal strategy and the needs of the community affected by urban renewal.

43. As there would be variations in the demand of services in different districts depending on the number of redevelopment projects and households being affected, there is also a need to develop funding standards according to the scope of services and possible caseloads.

44. Regular induction training programmes for social workers would also be advantageous to help them acquire the basic understanding of the relevant knowledge in urban renewal, the community dynamics in urban renewal, and the needs of the individuals and families affected by urban renewal.

Option 3 – separate SSTs and in-house caseworkers for URA

45. If option 3 is taken on board, the relevant issues related to funding, contracting and monitoring of the separate SSTs would be similar to those of option 2.

46. Similar to option 2, there still exists some possible service overlap between the SSTs and the existing community development services in the community, and this has to be sorted out on individual district basis.

47. Having in-house social workers to provide the necessary casework services, it would still be necessary to keep some degree of independence for the social workers by putting them into a different department from the acquisition team and managed by a senior social worker accountable to the senior management instead of to the project management team.

48. There is also a need to develop protocols spelling out the procedures where cases should be referred out to other case service centers, such as the Integrated Family Service Centers. Such protocols and possible caseload management issues would have to be sorted out with the relevant steering committees or working groups under the Social Welfare Department.

Scope of Service

49. As noted earlier, to enable a bottom-up planning approach in urban renewal, the existing community centers operated by NGOs can already serve as an agent to help organizing and mobilizing local residents to participate in the planning process, and they will be doing that anyway.   If option 2 is taken on board, there is probably no need to include social planning in the scope of service except in communities with no NGO community centers, and in such cases, the more efficient method is to add "planning" in the relevant funding and service agreement with consideration of additional resources.

50. Since the nature of service needs arising from relocation caused by some forms of preservation is very similar to redevelopment, it appears to be logical to include these cases in the scope of work of SST.   As for cases related to rehabilitation, due to the number of players involved currently, there is a definite need to streamline the services provided by various bodies to organize the residents to deal with the management, repair and maintenance of their buildings.   However, this issue is beyond the scope of the present study.