

From
A. K. S.
of the

H. K. Standard

1 March 1983

\$300 mil slated for hut dwellers

THE Executive Council has approved a \$300 million plan to provide better public facilities for squatters, it was learnt yesterday.

The five-year plan is now awaiting the final nod from the Finance Committee.

Under it, squatter areas which will not be cleared within three years, will be provided with basic facilities including electricity and water.

This was disclosed yesterday by Senior Housing Manager (Squatter Improvement Division), Chu Chai-kuen, at a Kuntong District Board meeting.

Mr Chu said squatter areas with a large population will be given priority. The scheme would cater for several hundred squatter areas in urban areas and the New Territories.

Sewage and drainage facilities, refuse collection points and public flush toilets and bathrooms will also be provided.

Earlier, the board discussed the findings of a survey on squatter conditions in Kuntong.

The study was carried out late last year by the district office to try to find out the kind of public facilities, social services and leisure activities, squatters need, as well as their attitude towards their neighbours.

It is estimated that about 51,000 squatters live in 28 squatter areas in the district.

MAJORITY

Of the 747 structures surveyed, it was found that the majority were built between 1979 and 1981. But their numbers have fallen since the beginning of last year.

Kuntong Assistant District Officer, Arthur Ng, said though many of the squatters came to Hongkong before 1976, they did not move into the squatter huts immediately.

The survey also revealed that more than half paid between \$5,000 and \$20,000 for their huts.

About 60 per cent said they found it more economical to live in squatter huts. But others said they had difficulty finding rented accommodation big enough to bring up young children, while others said they moved into huts after losing their public housing tenancy rights on getting married.

The survey said the most pressing problems facing squatters are poor sanitation, fire hazards and a shortage of facilities for providing water and electricity.

73 per cent said the government did not do enough to improve their lot.

Mr Ng admitted there was still a lot to be done to improve the livelihood of squatters in Kuntong.

"But the improvements would be difficult to put in hand if squatting cannot be kept under strict control," he said.

However, he said greater attention could be given to improving their lot, now that their numbers are declining.