

## Sichuan Earthquake Update

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In the afternoon of May 12, 2008, a massive 8.0-magnitude earthquake hit Sichuan, a province in the Southwestern region of China. The earthquake and its after-shocks have devastated many in Sichuan not just in terms of human loss, financial loss and administrative disarray, but also the psychosocial well-being of survivors, community infrastructure and capacity, and most importantly, the everyday lives of the people in Sichuan.

Many individuals and organizations across the globe are trying their best to respond immediately to support emergency relief efforts in Sichuan. The China Project in the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work (FIFSW) at the University of Toronto has committed to a variety of initiatives since May 12 to support emergency response and long-term psychosocial and community rebuilding in Sichuan.

The following is a brief summary of activities related to the Sichuan Earthquake.

1. Preparation for further training and development initiatives
2. Case conferences for psychiatrists and mental health workers
3. Community redevelopment project in Jiannan
4. Dialogue between the Chinese-Canadian Communities and Federal Departments and Agencies

### 1. Preparation for further training and development initiatives

When we planned our training program in the summer of 2008 for psychiatrists and mental health professionals serving earthquake victims, we were thinking of a longer term strategy to support our Chinese colleagues. Given the reality of geographical distance and the cost of actual visits by Canadian colleagues, our strategy emphasizes the development of a training team based in China and the production of training materials that can be accessed easily by our Chinese colleagues. Working with our colleagues based in Beijing and Hong Kong, we started preparing for the next round of training in November, 2008. Meetings were conducted with Dr. Huang Xuezhong of Tsinghua University, Professor Jia Xiaoming of Beijing Institute of Technology, Ms. Florence Chu and Ms Au Kit-lin, social workers in Hong Kong.

Apart from these meetings, we started a process of producing instruction DVDs that can be used in the training of counseling skills. We were told that there was a huge need for such instructional material, and they could supplement our training efforts effectively. This initiative has received strong support from our Chinese social work colleagues in Hong Kong, especially

Mr. Ivan Yau, Ms Au Kit-lin, Ms Cecilia Man-Sze Cheung, and Mr. Timothy Yuk-ki Leung, who volunteered their time and generously shared their expertise.

## 2. Case conferences for psychiatrists and mental health workers

After the training program in Chengdu in August 2008, Ms Au Kit-lin and Ms Florence Chu made follow-up visits and offered case-consultation to psychiatrists and mental health professionals working with earthquake victims. In January 2009, members of the team (Professor Ka Tat Tsang, Professor Jia Xiaoming of Beijing Institute of Technology, Dr. Huang Xuezhong and Ms Xu Bo of Tsinghua University, Ms Au Kit-lin and Ms Florence Chu) conducted a two day case-conference in Chengdu, attended by over 80 psychiatrists and mental health professionals coming from the various affected areas. Participants presented current cases that they were working with, and received consultation and supervision on them.

In July 2009, members of the team (Professor Jia Xiaoming, Ms Florence Chu) conducted another round of training on basic counseling and psychotherapy skills and case consultation in Chengdu. Over 100 psychiatrists and mental health professionals participated in the program. MSW student Steve Shi was on the team to assist in the coordination, and implement our research protocol.

The feedback from the participants was very positive. Our plan is to continue case-consultation support for these practitioners if funding allows.

We wish to acknowledge the generous gifts provided by the Fu Hui (Canada) Foundation for our Training Program in August 2008, production of training materials, and the follow-up training and development work.

## 3. Community redevelopment project in Jiannan

Professor Ka Tat Tsang met with Professor Cecilia Chan of the University of Hong Kong in Chengdu in August 2008, to explore community redevelopment strategies. Professor Chan, together with Professor Zhang Xiulan of Beijing Normal University, subsequently obtained funding to conduct a redevelopment project in the Jiannan community. Professor Tsang and Ms. Au Kit-lin, a member of the training team, were invited to serve as their consultants. Professor Tsang and Ms Au met with Professor Chan in Hong Kong in November 2008 to set out the broad directions for the project. He subsequently traveled to Beijing to work with Dr. Wang Xiyong, Director of the Jiannan Project, to develop an overall model. A team of 10 social workers had been hired to work on the project and they wished to apply the SSLD (Strategies and Skills

Learning and Development)<sup>1</sup> model developed by Professor Tsang in their community interventions.

Together with Ms Au, Professor Tsang offered training and consultation to the team during his visit to Jiannan in January 2009. The current understanding is that Professor Tsang will continue to provide training and consultation to the team; and Ms Au will make regular visits to Jiannan as a consultant and resource person.

#### 4. Dialogue between the Chinese-Canadian Communities and Federal Offices

Immediately after the earthquake on May 12, 2008, Chinese communities all over Canada responded with tremendous energy and devotion, both in terms of fundraising and organizing various relief efforts. The China Project has since taken on the role of facilitating dialogue and collaboration among organizations and individuals involved in related initiatives. Many community roundtable and specific task (e.g., trauma counseling, resource development) group meetings have been held.

The fundraising efforts, with significant support from Chinese-Canadians, were extremely successful. Together with the Federal matching arrangement, over CAD\$50 million was raised, making Canada the second largest donor in response to the Sichuan earthquake relief, after Saudi-Arabia. The Chinese communities across Canada were excited; and they expected their relief initiatives (e.g., medical assistance teams, redevelopment projects, sponsorship and support for orphaned children and displaced seniors, trauma counseling, etc.) to be supported by such funding. Unfortunately, they were later disappointed to discover that the allocation of funding was based on track-record and demonstrated capacity of organizations in large scale disaster response. Organizations that were set up in immediate response to the earthquake were not able to obtain support from federal funding programs. There was a strong sense of disappointment and a feeling of exclusion. Starting in the Fall of 2008, the Chinese media in Canada ran stories and expressed concerns over the process of fundraising and allocation, and many in the community wondered where the money had gone, and what had actually been done. When Canadian community groups working in Sichuan did not see many initiatives delivered by the organizations who had received funding, a sense of mistrust and resentment began to grow towards the federal funding program.

Working with the Chinese-Canadian National Council, the China Project coordinated a meeting between CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) and leading community organizations involved in the Sichuan initiatives in November 2008. Mr. Victor Carvell and Mr. Serge Koskinen of CIDA came to the meeting and explained the CIDA operations and funding

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<sup>1</sup> Please visit <http://ssld.kttsang.com> for more information on the model

policy to the participants. Community members at the meeting expressed a strong desire to learn more about specific Canada-supported initiatives on the ground, and raised questions regarding possible funding support for their initiatives.

In January 2009, Professor Tsang met with Mr. Shawn Steil and Mr. Ryan Baerg of the Canadian Consulate in Chongqing, and learned more about Canadian initiatives in Sichuan. He reflected the views and concerns of the Chinese-Canadian communities. Mr. Steil and Mr. Baerg were both very enthusiastic in supporting Canadian initiatives in Sichuan, and in promoting dialogue between federal offices and Chinese-Canadian communities. The meeting was followed by a series of emails and a teleconference with officers from the Department of Foreign Affairs and CIDA. The China Project plans to hold further community roundtable meeting to facilitate dialogue and collaboration between the Chinese-Canadian communities and the federal officials involved in earthquake relief initiatives.

#### Note on Funding and Community Needs

Huge sums of money have been designated by governments or raised by NGOs since the earthquake. In theory, billions of dollars have been made available for various redevelopment initiatives, leading to the popular impression that Sichuan does not need more funding and support. There is, however, a dearth of information on how these funds have been allocated and utilized. Our experience on the ground indicates unmet needs are extensive, especially in terms of the psychosocial needs of the affected individuals, families, and communities, and the learning needs of the human service and health care professionals.