

They didn't feel helped

Low income earners could have lacked awareness of Govt's measures: IPS

Neo Chai Chin

Today, 28 June 2010

SINGAPORE — Even as the Manpower Ministry yesterday announced new efforts to get workers retrained, a local think tank survey has found that over half of low-wage earners did not perceive any personal benefit from Government measures to help them cope with last year's economic downturn.

■ TOP 5 SOURCES OF RESILIENCE

Savings: 78%

Getting any job regardless of pay: 39%

Family and friends: 28%

Getting someone else in family to work: 8%

Government: 8%

Source: Survey on Resilience in the Economic Crisis, by the Institute of Policy Studies

Despite the fact that by December, Singapore's economy had enjoyed two quarters of growth coming out of the recession, low-wage earners "continued to languish", according to the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) study conducted over December and January.

Fifty-six per cent of those with household income of less than \$1,999 said they did not feel any positive impact from the slew of Government initiatives. While the proportion is lower than the 64 per cent average across all income groups who felt this way, IPS noted that it was ironic, given how "a good number" of measures were targeted at the low-income group.

This could be due to the public's lack of awareness of such schemes, or if they were eligible, said the IPS.

"Some schemes are somewhat complicated — so on the ground, we have to improve our ability to convey these schemes and make them relevant and accessible to those who are truly distressed," said Dr Gillian Koh, senior research fellow at IPS.

Agreeing, National University of Singapore social work professor Ngiam Tee Liang said that with an array of schemes like Jobs Credit and Workfare, as well as re-skilling courses, it is unlikely that existing schemes are inadequate in helping the needy. More sustained efforts should be made in reaching out, through void deck exhibitions or house-to-house visits by grassroots members, he said.

The poll of 2,109 people was similar to a first survey done in February last year, and it provided a measure of Singaporeans' resilience to the economic crisis over time.

While findings showed resilience had improved among most of the national population, it was the poorest that saw their resilience "weathered away", said IPS.

Nonetheless, the institute's report stressed the importance of job-saving schemes like Jobs Credit, skills training and work placement programmes, in preventing massive job losses and economic hardship.

And as the economy improved, there was less reliance on help measures like tax rebates, financial assistance and job training. One in five (19 per cent) of respondents said none of the

measures mattered in helping them cope, up from 5 per cent in February last year; the largest proportion was among the well-off.

Overall, a hefty 77 per cent still believed taking personal initiative was more important than relying on the Government during an economic crisis.