a conversation about upgrading at Bang Bua

You thought upgrading a slum was just a matter of paving a few lanes and laying a few drainage pipes?

THINK AGAIN!

For a few days in September, 2008, a team of 14 people who are working with the UN-Habitat's Slum Upgrading Facility (SUF), visited Bangkok to spend some time learning about CODI and its Baan Mankong Community Upgrading Program, which is being implemented in 240 cities around the country.

The SUF team was headed by Ruth McLeod, an old ACHR friend and supporter from Homeless International, who is just coming to the end of her three-year term as SUF advisor on slum upgrading finance. The others were housing finance professionals from the national management teams in the four countries where SUF is being piloted: Ghana, Tanzania, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. In these four countries, the SUF is working with governments, slum communities and local financial institutions to find new ways to mobilize investments for slum upgrading in which slum dwellers themselves are the key actors and key implementers. Its objective is to develop, test and apply new and innovative means of financing pro-poor urban development with a strong emphasis on the mobilization of domestic capital.

While they were in Bangkok, the SUF team visited several community upgrading projects that are underway around the city, and talked with the community people who are planning and building these projects. One of their visits was to the large upgrading project being undertaken by a network of 12 squatter communities along the 13-kilometer length of the Bang Bua canal, in Northern Bangkok. This report describes the lively exchange that took place during that visit to Bang Bua - an exchange between an international team of professionals who are struggling to find ways to support community-driven upgrading, and a group of community people who are actually doing it.

About **Baan Mankong** :

The *Baan Mankong Community Upgrading Program* was launched by the Thai government in January 2003, as part of its efforts to address the housing problems of the country's poorest urban citizens. The program channels government funds, in the form of extremely flexible infrastructure subsidies and soft housing and land loans, directly to poor communities, which collectively plan and carry out improvements to their housing, environment, basic services and tenure security, using budgets which they manage themselves.

Instead of delivering housing units to individual poor families or bringing in a few standardized infrastructural improvements, the Baan Mankong Program (which means *"Secure housing"* in Thai) puts Thailand's slum communities (and their community networks) at the center of a process of developing long-term, comprehensive solutions to problems of land and housing in Thai cities.

Under this unconventional program, which is being implemented by the *Community Organizations Development Institute* (a public organization under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security), poor communities develop their upgrading plans in close collaboration with their local governments, professionals, universities and NGOs.

A little background on the upgrading of Klong Bang Bua

About 3,400 families live in the 12 informal settlements which line the 13 kilometer stretch of Bangkok's Bang Bua Canal (canals are called *"klongs"* in Thai), many of them vendors, laborers and daily-wage workers. After almost a century of living in insecurity, with the daily risk of fires and eviction, and facing constant accusations of polluting the canal, the people living along the Bang Bua canal joined hands with the Baan Mankong Program to upgrade their communities and secure their land tenure.

This was Bangkok's first-ever case of public land being leased to a network of canal-side squatter communities :

Klong Bang Bua was the first network of canal communities in Bangkok to successfully negotiate a long-term lease to the public land they occupy, which is under Treasury Department ownership. This lease could never have been negotiated by a single community, which has no bargaining power. But as a network of 12 communities, and with the "network power" support of the city-wide network of 200 canal-side communities in Bangkok, Bang Bua was able to convince the authorities that redeveloping their communities in the same place is good for the people and good for the city as a whole.

The 30-year renewable lease is key to long-term tenure security to these communities. After long negotiations, the people bargained the Treasury Department down to a rental rate of about 1 Baht per square meter per month, with adjustment for inflation every 5 years. This means that each family will pay between 40 and 70 Baht (US - 3) in land rent every month, depending on the size of their house. Each family pays the cooperative, which then makes a collective payment to the Treasury Department.

Besides new houses and infrastructure in the community, the canal is also getting a face lift and a brand-new, tree-lined, 6-meter lane along its edge, built partly on the swampy edges where houses used to perch, and partly on land reclaimed by the District Authorities in the canal. This new canal-side walkway will provide access to the communities along the canal and enable fire-trucks to enter the slum in an emergency. Though it will be open to motorbikes and cycles, the community people see this walkway as an important pedestrian amenity, providing space for children to play, people to visit and vending carts to sell their food and wares.

For years, the Bang Bua communities have held regular canal-cleaning jamborees, used unconventional organic "E.M." compost and water plants to bring the water in the canal back to life, set up grease-trap waste-water filters in all the kitchens and continue to negotiate with upstream polluters to reduce toxic effluents in the canal. Eventually, when the upgrading work is finished, the communities have plans to set up a traditional "floating market" on the canal.

All these activities, which have been strategically planned with other Bangkok canal networks, are ways of demonstrating to the city that these canal-side communities are not polluters but are an important asset to the city in its efforts to maintain its canal system.

With good collaboration from the two district authorities (Bang Ken and Laksi) on either side of the canal, the nearby Sripathum University and CODI, the 12 communities along Klong Bang Bua formed a network, started savings groups, prepared plans for redeveloping their settlements and revitalizing their canal and formed a cooperative society. In the process, the Bang Bua communities have become the city's ally in revitalizing and cleaning this important canal.

Samaki Ruam Jai was the first of the Bang Bua communities to begin rebuilding, in December 2004. Since then, two other communities (Chumchon Bang Bua and Saphan Mai 1) have begun and almost completed work on their reblocking and upgrading projects. The network has plans for all 12 communities along the canal to be fully upgraded within three years.

"We started with the issue of **DIRTY WATER**"

Khun Gomeen (Bang Bua community member) : Fifty or sixty years ago, when we first came here, the canal was so clean and full of fish and clams and shrimp. All you had to do was scoop a bucket into the water and it would come up full of shrimp! Even 20 years ago, we used the canal water for washing, swimming and bathing. We even used the canal water for drinking, but we had to boil it first. The canal was a resource - we got a lot of our food from the water. And not only us: there are 1,060 canals like this in Bangkok, and there used to be three times that many.

We started our organizing process in Bang Bua about 15 years ago, and we began with the issue of the canal, which had become so black and polluted by then. When the communities along Klong Bang Bua set up a network, we focused on environmental conditions of the canal. We started with six communities on the Bang Ken District side of the canal, and three communities on the Laxi District side of the canal. The network committee was made up of three representatives from each of the nine communities, and this first committee's job was to coordinate about how to solve the water problems.

Our first Bang Bua Network project was to bring back people's awareness of the canal and its importance, and to to start dealing with the problem of people throwing garbage and discharging their toilets and kitchen waste into the canal. We began organizing big events where everyone would get together and clean out the garbage from the canal. It was hard work and very dirty, but we made it like a celebration. The first time, we pulled out 30 garbage truck-fulls of of garbage from the water! There were bicycles, tvs, refridgerators, even sofas in there! Now we have a good system to address the problem of our household waste on three levels :

1 **Septic tanks :** Each house in the redeveloped communities has its own septic tank, which cleans the toilet waste before it is discharged into the community's main drainage system.

2 **Kitchen grease filters :** Each house also has a small grease-trap filter in the kitchen, which filters the dirty kitchen water before going into main drain. We make these filters ourselves, using simple things we can buy in the local market: PVC pipes, plastic buckets, gravel and charcoal. Each filter costs only about 300 Baht (US$ 8) to make. And we can sell the grease collected in these filters to make candles.

3 **Community-wide waste water treatment :** Each community collects all the the "gray water" from the kitchens, bathrooms and septic tanks in its main drainage system, which carries it to a central treatment plant, where it is cleaned and filtered and treated before some is used to water trees in the community. The rest goes into the canal - *without polluting it one bit.*

We get a lot of visitors from other communities, and now this system that we developed in Bang Bua has spread around. Lots of communities in other parts of Bangkok and around Thailand are now doing it the same way!

KLONG BANG BUA : then and now . . .

Khun Prapaat (Bang Bua Network leader) : We were a *real slum* before! There were drugs for sale, and lots of outside organizations did their drugs trading here. There were kids sniffing glue and paint thinner. There were lots of dark corners and plenty of vice. Back then, when the weekend came, most people would sit around and get drunk - that was the only way to relax. There was nothing else to do, no activities. And the worse thing was that the people here had no confidence in themselves, no idea that things could be different than this.

Before, everybody lived separately, everybody did their own thing. We had no community savings, no welfare system, no projects, no links with each other. There was no mutual anything in Bang Bua. Now all that has changed, we are so busy and active now.

Back then, a lot of the houses were built on stilts right over the canal, and when one of these houses would collapse - which happened a lot - we'd say, *"That's your problem, not mine!"* When we got bad flooding and the water came up so high, we'd have to raise the beds up in order to sleep, and if you rolled off the bed, you'd fall into the water! Once when there were very heavy rains and the floods were very bad here, an old lady in a very bad house on the opposite side died in the flood - nobody took care of her!

Most of the walkways used to be built of bamboo and old pieces of wood, right over the water, and they were only about a half a meter wide. When there was a fire, there was no chance to help - only one person could pass along those rickety walkways. If two people walked together, one of them would fall in the water. But now our walkways are three meters wide and solid concrete - it is a real big change in our lives! These are *proper, dignified lanes and walkways.* Outside, the roads may be ten meters wide for cars, but here we are quite happy with three meters. We don't need to bring in the cars anyway.

Back in those earlier days, if you died, you had to find your own coffin - nobody would come to help you. Now we are all organized about deaths: our welfare fund gives 10,000 to 20,000 Baht to all those who die, for the flowers, coffin, ceremonies, etc. All the savings members contribute 20 Baht when someone dies.

Now we are very strong and have many activities. We have survey figures about all the elderly people in the community, we organize many ceremonies and celebrations together and have many links and activities together. We invite the elders to participate in everything, and they have their own fund and their own activities. The elderly group gathers on the 20th of every month, and a doctor comes during that time to give them check-ups. They have set up their own club and organize all sorts of things themselves. We also organize special groups and activities for children and youth, and we provide school fees for poorer kids through the welfare fund. There are also tuition classes and libraries and play groups for all the kids in the community. We have a children's savings group in which all the kids save 5 Baht per day. They also have their own club, which organizes camping trips nearby. So it's not just physical change, but social changes in our community.

It's very warm here now, we feel a lot of togetherness here. Even still, earning is difficult. We are still a poor community, and our members still face a lot of crises and troubles. But now we help each other.

QUESTION : Could you do all this without any CODI subsidy?

Prapaat : **When we started all these activities ten years ago, there was no money from anyone, no subsidy at all!** Five years ago, we started savings and linked these savings groups in the different canal-side communities together. Before starting Baan Mankong, we had 3 million Baht (US$ 86,000) in savings - our own money! We used this money for loans and for giving small welfare benefits to savings members. So when the Baan Mankong project started, and the upgrading projects were planned and proposed and started, it was very easy for us. We were ready, we had a lot of experience already! And the Baan Mankong subsidy is only for infrastructure - not for welfare. Our welfare program is by us! And the social activities are ours!

QUESTION : How do you get people organized? And how do you get them to work together, to believe in the project?

Lek Sompop : (Community Organizer with CODI) This change in Bang Bua came about in three stages:

1 STAGE ONE : Do something to get started.

When the community started their environmental program, they were being accused by the city of polluting the canal and causing the problems. The community's first survey of the canal showed clearly that the real canal polluters were the factories, hospitals, restaurants, apartments upstream, But the question was still, *what could the people do themselves to solve the canal's pollution problems?* So they discussed what they could do, *inside the community,* and they came up with several ideas: making treatment systems to clean their kitchen waste, dredging the portions of the canal that go through the community and fishing out all the garbage. *The important thing is that people did something, they acted.* The garbage might come back for sure, but the act of cleaning out the canal was a declaration to the public that they were serious and were doing this together! The community kept building on that, kept organizing more and more activities together.

2 STAGE TWO : Take the collective planning process seriously.

The next important stage of change came with the process of planning the community's upgrading. They began working with architects and tried out many kinds of organizing techniques to get people thinking and planning together. Finally, they settled on a "small group management" system, with five houses in each group. Each one of these little groups would discuss their housing ideas with the architect. In the Samaki Ruam Jai Community, which was the first one to start, there were 38 of these small groups, each with its own planning process, each going through more than 20 meetings to get the agreement of all five of their members on issues of layout, planning, rights and house design. So if you add it all together, thousands of meetings went into the planning of Samaki Ruam Jai's upgrading!

These small group discussions were a process of transformation! Before, there were lots of difficult situations in the community, lots of inequity: some people had very big houses and big land, some were renters, some lived on the canal on stilts, some had many rental rooms and some had almost nothing at all. The agreements reached in this intricate planning process involved lots of compromises and difficult agreements, so that everyone would be included. One guy, for example, owned 20 rental rooms and was earning 1,500 Baht per month from each room. Now he has just one unit, like everyone else, and the space where he had all those rental rooms is a little park for the community! They managed to come to that agreement! Also now, all his former renters have rights and are part of the cooperative, as well.

3 STAGE THREE : Make the project a reality through implementation.

When the community leader Prapaat told everyone about Baan Mankong, nobody believed him. Only when Prapaat demolished his own house (he was the first one), the sacrifice of the leader helped start things. Before that, there was a lot of hesitation and mistrust, a lot of fights and accusations!

"The real upgrading that you won't find in any of the books"

Somsook : There are always people who benefit from a slum, and when we organize the improvement, sometimes these benefits are compromised. Every slum has its own mafia which benefits from things remaining exactly the way they are - drug peddlers, slumlords, local politicians, outsiders. And they will fiercely protect their system if they sense it is being threatened. Here in Bang Bua, there were lots of attacks on Prapaat and on his wife. This it not something easy, this community upgrading! All slums have their dark powers and their dark influences. The question is, do community people have enough power to challenge that power and change it, or negotiate with it? Only when the poor organize themselves and come together can they break through this. The leaders and committee members in these communities get no salary, no benefits. They have to be clean, if people are going to listen to them and trust them. This is the real upgrading of poor communities , and it's not something you'll find in any of the the books!

Lek Sompop : At first, Prapaat was opposed to the Baan Mankong project! He didn't believe it. He thought it would involve too much sacrifice, and he didn't want people to have debts for housing loans! Change came about by linking people together - not linking communities with CODI, but linking communities with other poor communities. In this case, it was the Bangkok Canal Network - the district branch - that helped to balance a lot of the problems that came up in Bang Bua and open up people's eyes to new possibilities.

The network system is the main mechanism for poor people to link together and help each other. "People to people" is the main mechanism. All of our plans for this year's World Habitat Day involve "people-to-people" learning, discussing, seeing, visiting, exchanging experiences and ideas. All of us have mobile phones now, and we are constantly in touch with each other.

QUESTION : How do you manage an upgrading project with 1,800 families along such a long canal?

Prapaat : We started out by setting up one big cooperative, which would include all 12 communities along the Bang Bua Canal. But now we decided to divide ouselves into separate community cooperatives, each with its own contract from CODI, and its own land lease. Each community does its own planning and implements its own upgrading project, with its own 100 or 200 households. We found it's much more manageable that way. But we all work together and help each other, and keep encouraging the communities that are slower in getting started, or the ones who are still sitting on the fence. And we still link together as a canal network.

Using very SMALL groups to manage a very BIG upgrading project :

Prapaat : We use the small group management system now for almost all our work, with five houses in each group. Here in the Samaki Ruam Jai Community, for example, we have a total of 37 small groups. Each group discusses how to do all the various activities, savings, welfare, upgrading, etc. The idea of breaking into these very small groups is to create a platform for all five members to get involved, to help each other and to deal with stubborn members and persuade them to join!

When we first started, we had a system where a small group of leaders who sat on the committee were making all the decisions. But we found that system didn't work. When you are a member of the community committee, you have power and you make a lot of decisions. Sometimes there are problems when people in the community don't know what the committee members are doing. It works like a kind of centralizing of the process - the power was centralized, the management was centralized, the knowledge was centralized. But this completely changed when we began using the five-household small group management system! So now, everyone knows everything that's going on and takes part in what's going on - they have to!

How do we choose the five families to be in these small groups? They select themselves! Usually people chose to join a group with people who live nearby or relatives. But it doesn't happen all at one time! We start first with the small groups who are easier and ready. No need for all the groups to start at the same time! Then, the easy ones show the example to others, show the impact and changes to the others and inspire them to join in.

There are always lots of difficult negotiations about exchanging plots in this upgrading process, so neighbors and relatives and friends can stay together in the new community after reblocking. Some houses didn't want to demolish because they had invested a lot in their construction or because they had shops and didn't want to lose one day's business. This caused serious problems and delays. So we boycotted those shops. We said *"Don't buy anything from that shop which is stopping the project!"* And finally the boycott worked - the shop-keeper agreed to join and to demolish his shop. Now that guy has a good plot and a new shop and his sales are better than before! And after he demolished and agreed to move, everybody praised him for "sacrificing" his land for the children's playground! He got "good face" this way. *There are so many stories like this in the process!*

QUESTION : Prapaat, why don't you go into **REAL POLITICS**, where you can make some **REAL CHANGE**?

Prapaat : We are making a new kind of politics right here, and we are making it ourselves, by the poor together and working together. It's a new politics by people, not the old political system! We do have to play politics with that upper system from time to time, to get things we need and to get support. And mostly, they agree to what we propose! If not, we have to "shake" them, so they follow us! It's politics in the people way.

Lek Sompop : Savings gives people the freedom to do their own development. It's a kind of ***political system by people themselves - and it's working!*** We are not playing their politics, we are making our own politics!

QUESTION : How do you make the formal system agree to the people's way of doing it themselves, in their own way?

"We make change not by waiting, but by action."

Prapaat : We cannot wait for government to give permission! The government said the roads have to be 8 meters wide! We didn't have room for such wide roads here. If we made all the roads as wide as the regulations require, the space left over for our houses would only be about the size of a coffin! So we asked if we could make the lanes inside just 3 meters wide. The government said, *"Wait!"* You wait forever! Every project we have to just start right away, even before we get the lease! Even before the District gives clearance!

By moving ahead with our upgrading process, we are negotiating!

Many houses we build are sub-standard, according to the building regulations. But the important thing is to build now: start now and fight later. People have to organize and start, they have to do it. Don't just wait for permission. Fight for permission later, when you have the momentum on your side. If you ask, they will say. *"No way! That's illegal! That's substandard!"*

"We can't fight with **THEORIES**, we have to fight with **ACTION**."

Lek Sompop : When we fight with the government, we can't fight with theories! We have to fight with action! If they say a 20 square meter house is substandard, you have to build it and then invite them to come and see that house. Once they see it, they will understand that that house is just fine! In these ways, we prove things by action and we make change by action, not only by talking!

I grew up in a slum here in Bangkok. In the past, I used to do so much fighting with the government. I have screamed and shouted and picketed and demonstrated in front of so many government branches and departments and ministries in Thailand, believe me! But we never had success, we never won those fights.

But when a poor community like this one is accused of polluting the canal, and when they organize themselves and develop a simple filter system for their kitchen water, that is the way to make change, to get the system to change. This little filter system and this organized community is a much stronger and more effective way to argue and to show an alternative than all our protesting in the past.

"When you are very determined, they can't stop you."

Khun Prapaat : At one point, the District Building inspector posted a *"STOP WORK"* notice here. He said we have no permit, our houses do not meet the District's building standards and we can't continue to build our houses. He said it's against the law and you will be arrested! So all 228 community members marched over to the District office and offered to go to jail! When you are very determined, they can't stop you.

Now the District Chief invites us to see him. After all this time and all these struggles, we have finally come into a compromise where the District Authority accepts what people are doing here and gives us permissions. Not only that, now the District sends us their own engineer to help us with our planning and structures! And the District has agreed to build half of our canal-side walkway: the community is building the inner part, and the District will build the outer part, with the railing and the stairs down to the canal.

The story of how one of the most unusual canal-side walkways in Bangkok came about . . .

Question : Why is the walkway along the canal only half-finished in some places?

Khun Prapaat : **At the beginning, it was our plan to make a 6-meter wide public street along both sides of canal.** The canal itself is 40 meters wide, and as part of our redevelopment planning, all the houses that used to be built on stilts right over the water and encroached on the canal were demolished and the people rebuilt new houses inside.

This was our way of "giving back" to the city a big piece of land for a public purpose which will benefit both the communities as well as the public, by providing the main access to all 12 communities and an important amenity along the canal. We call this a kind of "land sharing."

The idea of a 6-meter wide street along the canal came up because a lot of people were worried about fires in the community and wanted to make sure fire trucks could easily get in to put them out. But later on, after a lot of discussion, we decided to make it only 3 meters wide, so we wouldn't lose so much of our very limited land for housing. If necessary, a car or a fire-truck could go in, but normally it's not for cars, it's for walking and for bicycles and motorbikes.

Somsook : So the people build half the walkway and the District Authority builds the other half. I think this kind of compromise solution is something that would only be possible in Thailand, where anything is possible, truly!

We then negotiated with the District Authority to share the cost and work of building this 3-meter wide road. As part of our agreement, the community people are building and paying for the inner 2-meter part of the walkway, using all community labor and part of the upgrading subsidy from Baan Mankong, and the District is building the outer 1-meter part of the walkway along the canal, on land reclaimed from the canal, along with all the railings and steps down to the canal.

But this lane will not be open to cars generally - only to pedestrians, motorbikes, bicycles, carts and vendors. The idea is for this walkway to be a very nice, lively public space, not a highway! We have planted trees and flowers along the way, and it's already a place where kids play and people put our their washing or their chillies to dry in the sun. A lot of residents in Klong Bang Bua communities are street vendors, and this canal-side lane provides them with a long market at all times of the day, besides making it easier for vendors to move along the canal and ply their goods. We've also been discussing the possibility of reviving the old Bangkok tradition of floating markets, once we finish the upgrading and have been able to clean up the canal a bit more.

BEFORE : Since houses were built right out over the water, most people in the community couldn't access the canal, and the only way to get into the community was to walk along the network of dangerous, narrow, rickety walkways made of wood planks and bamboo.

AFTER : Here is a section of the newly-completed canal-side lane, with the inner 2-meters built by the community (with main drainage lines underneath) and the outer 1 meter part built by the District, on land reclaimed from the canal, with the railings, planters and steps down to the canal.

QUESTION : How do you deal with people who couldn't afford houses in the new project? Or with renters?

"Nobody gets pushed out of this community in the upgrading process - not even the renters."

Prapaat : Nobody gets pushed out of the community in the upgrading process - not even room renters. Most community members have taken housing loans from CODI, which have to be repaid in 15 years, with monthly repayments of about 1,000 Baht (US$ 30). Most families can afford that. Each house has one or two earning members, with an average household income of about 15,000 Baht (US$ 425) per month. Ten years ago, our survey found that the per-household earnings were about 6,000 Baht ($ 175) per month. But for people who can't afford that, or for people who were renting and didn't own structures in the old community, we have ways of helping them get housing and staying in the community :

1

Houses built without loans : There are some families in the community who are very poor, and a lot of these families didn't want to take any housing loans and end up getting stuck with big debts they couldn't repay. These families still have rights in the new community, though, and many of them have built their houses with whatever funds and recycled materials they could put together, even though they have not taken loans from CODI.

2

Using recycled building materials : There are also many families who are taking housing loans and are using a lot of recycled building materials in their new houses, to bring down the loan amount and reduce their monthly loan repayments. If they use the housing loan from CODI only to pay for the parts of the house they cannot build themselve - the foundation, the concrete frame, the floor slabs and the roof - they can then do the rest themselves, using old timber, old doors and window frames, second-hand tin sheet and asbestos boards, broken or mis-matched floor and bathroom tiles. You wouldn't believe how resourceful people can be when their budgets are extremely limited like this!

3

Welfare house for the poorest : In the Samaki Ruam Jai community, we have identified in our surveys seven elderly and disabled people who have nobody to look after them. And we have built a *Baan Klang* ("Welfare house") for them - and for future needy community persons - in our new community, as part of our planning. This house was built and financed by community members collectively, with a small subsidy from CODI. [CODI has encouraged similar *Baan Klangs* in many Baan Mankong projects, and the concept is now becoming a standard feature of community upgrading projects all over the country, in which communities make plans for looking after their own most vulnerable members, right inside the community.]

4

Long-term support for the poorest : The community savings group in Samaki Ruam Jai has a welfare program, which is financed partly by member contributions (in which each member puts in 1 Baht every day) and partly from a portion of the interest margin the community earns on CODI housing loans (we borrow from CODI at 2% but on-lend to families at 6%), and this added margin supports most of our community activities, adds funds to our welfare program, and provides a buffer fund to take care of repayments in cases where individual members have problems repaying.

5

Housing for renters : As part of Samaki Ruam Jai's plans, we are also building 20 rental rooms in the upgraded community to accommodate the 20 renter families who lived here before the upgrading process started, but did not have structure-owner rights. This is how the community has decided to deal with the renters. In some Baan Mankong projects, renters have been kicked out, but here, we've made plans so they can stay. If they stay and rent for ten years, then they will get full rights, and can build their own houses. The rents the community cooperative earns on these 20 rental units will partly be used to feed and take care of the seven people staying in the welfare house, and will also be used to build up a fund for taking care of future needy people in the welfare house.

HOUSE DESIGNS:

The community people at Bang Bua developed three basic house types, which most families build, adding whatever small variations they like. There is a detatched house, a double "Twin" house and a row house, each offering at least 90 square meters of living space, each with a little space at the back for accessing sewer pipes and a balcony upstairs.

QUESTION : Who builds the houses?

Prapaat : Here in the Samaki Ruam Jai community, we started our Baan Mankong upgrading planning in December 2003, and began constructing the first phase houses in December 2004. The first 14 houses were inaugurated by the Governor of Bangkok in October 2005, and we went on to build the second and third phase houses. All 112 houses are now finished. We build the houses ourselves, here in Bang Bua, and we have a proper system for how we manage the construction, how we purchase the materials, how we divide up the work, who does what, how much we do together and how much people do on their own.

1 TEMPORARY HOUSES : While the construction of new houses is going on, people whose houses are being rebuilt stay in "knock-down houses" which we build for them right inside the community, using a small temporary housing subsidy from CODI of 18,000 Baht (US$ 520) per house. These are simple, one-room houses built of plywood, tin sheets and timber in whatever little bits of space are left over or on borrowed land nearby. Some families stay in these and others decide to camp out on the sites of their new houses or stay in rental rooms nearby while their new houses are being built. We try to finish the houses within three months, so nobody has to stay in these temporary houses longer than that. But you know, the standards of comfort and convenience in these temporary rooms are equivalent to - *or much better than* - many of their old houses!

2 SKILLED AND UNSKILLED LABOR COMES FROM THE COMMUNITY : Almost all of the laborers working on the new houses were recruited from within the community - both the unskilled laborers and skilled masons, carpenters, plumbers and electricians. It's our idea to make sure everyone in the community has work, and to spread around the employment opportunities the upgrading project creates around the community, so those in need of work can earn, while they rebuild their community's houses.

3 KEEPING THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF UPGRADING IN THE COMMUNITY : This is also a way of keeping the economic spin-offs of the project inside the community. The skilled workers get paid a fixed rate of 250 Baht per day, and unskilled laborers get paid 220 Baht per day. The money for labor comes out of the Baan Mankong infrastructure budget (for work on the communal infrastructure) and from the individual family house building budgets (for work on the houses, according to what kind of house each family builds). Community members provide food and water to the workers - it's a friendly arrangement.

4 LABOR COSTS : It costs about 70,000 Baht in labor to build a detached ("single") house, and about 65,000 Baht to build a semi-detached ("twin") house. Because of the common walls and common central columns in a pair of houses with a party wall, you save money on the labor.

5 A NEW GENERATION OF SKILLED CONSTRUCTION EXPERTS : A lot of people who never knew anything about building a house when we started are now experienced, skilled construction workers, and many of them are going to work on Baan Mankong projects in other communities now, where they get a good wage and steady work with their friends.

6 HOUSE MODELS : All the houses 2-floors, but we have a few different models, including detached (single) houses, row-houses and semi-detached ("twin") houses. Most have kitchen, bathroom, living and dining room downstairs, and two rooms upstairs, with a little balcony out in front. There are some variations in size, but not too much. In Samaki Ruam Jai, families with more than 8 people can get a slightly larger house, with another room, but they still have to pay for the extra cost of constructing the larger house.

QUESTION : How does CODI handle the upgrading budgets?

Somsook : In the Baan Mankong Program, CODI acts as a kind of intermediary, and we pass the development on to the people directly, in the form of the budget. CODI receives the budget from the central government, and then passes that budget directly to the communities, with the consent of a committee of community leaders and various development partners in each city - especially local authorities and community networks in that city. So people take care of the budget.

We make it very clear from the first day that all the budget will be handled by people on the ground, and that they are going to determine what kind of development should happen in their communities. If you set a system this way, this is how to strengthen people, so they have that capacity to do it by themselves, so this is *their* work, *their* upgrading. Once we find a support process which comes to that point, *this is real upgrading.*

Upgrading doesn't only mean physical upgrading of a slum settlement. Baan Mankong isn't the conventional kind of upgrading, where the community gets a little budget to make their walkways, drains and water supply a little more proper. In the Baan Mankong program, we are upgrading houses and infrastructure, yes, but we are a lot more ambitious than that!

Upgrading EVERYTHING!

This program is upgrading the capacity of poor people in poor settlements, upgrading their knowledge, upgrading their confidence, upgrading their managerial capacities, upgrading their awareness, upgrading their relationships with the government and administrative systems, upgrading their social organizations and their status in the city, upgrading their financial systems - *upgrading everything!*

If it is just physical upgrading you're doing, the whole project can be finished in a few days. You don't need to do much work, you can just send in a contractor to do it. But the people won't be changed. Their capacities won't be changed. Their financial systems won't be changed. Their relationships won't be changed Their land tenure insecurity won't be changed. It will still be a poor, vulnerable, marginalized and unorganized group of people who happen to live together in the same slightly-improved squatter settlement. And two years later, they might still find themselves being evicted. *That's not upgrading*. Upgrading means a lot more than that.

(With big thanks to Ruth McLeod for the use of some of her beautiful photos!)

Why is it so important to **THINK BIG** with community upgrading?

Somsook : When we first started the Baan Mankong Program in 2003, CODI set a slum upgrading target of achieving "cities without slums" in 200 Thai cities, covering 2,000 slum communities, within five years. At that time, we had information on slums in 300 Thai towns and cities, and this target represented about two thirds of those cities. That upgrading target was important, because it reflected the real scale of change needed, and it was big enough to be attractive to politicians and policy-makers, so we could ask the government for a good-sized budget allocation!

And it was a big enough target to allow us to play with scale. That is very significant. This is the real scale of the problems, the real scale of the people. If you don't play with scale, you are playing only with projects. And it's *your* project, it's not *people's* project. But if you play with scale, it means we play with the real politics and the real relationships of things in our societies - with the root causes of povety and slums in cities. So you need to deal with scale. It could just as well be 100 cities and 1,000 slums - it doesn't matter. But a sense of scale is very important.

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

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More information on Baan Mankong : There are a lot of good documents, newsletters, scholarly papers and reports about CODI and the Baan Mankong Community Upgrading Program in Thailand which can be downloaded from the CODI website **(www.codi.or.th)**. Just click on the British flag on the CODI home page to access the English language portion of the site.