



thinking **CITY-WIDE** in **CHANTABURI**, Thailand

NOTES ON A VISIT TO THE CITY OF CHANTABURI, THAILAND, APRIL 26, 2009



On April 26, 2009, a busload of some 50 community leaders and development professionals from ten Asian countries spent the day in the city of Chantaburi. This exposure visit was part of the second ACHR/ACCA Committee meeting, which was held in the neighboring province of Rayong (27 - 29 April, 2009). In Chantaburi, the group visited upgrading projects and talked with the network of urban poor communities and local government agencies that are tackling the city's serious problems of land, housing, infrastructure and livelihood in new ways that are collaborative, comprehensive and rich in the central involvement of the poor communities who experience these problems directly.

In the past five years, the city-wide community upgrading process in Chantaburi has transformed a city where the poor and the city used to have nothing to do with each other into a city which is well on the way to achieving secure land and housing for all its poor citizens, through an upgrading process that is managed and implemented by communities themselves, in close partnership with the local government and other local actors. For that reason, the city makes another very good case-study for the kind of city-wide processes the ACCA Program is trying to promote. The following report gives a brief picture about the visit and the larger city-wide community upgrading process in Chantaburi.

Forging **CITY-WIDE** solutions to problems of land, housing and basic services in Thai cities :

The *Baan Mankong 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 infrastructure subsidies and soft housing and land loans, directly to poor communities, which plan and carry out improvements to their housing, environment, basic services and tenure security and manage the budget themselves.

Instead of delivering housing units to individual poor families, the Baan Mankong Program ("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.

As part of 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 work in close collaboration with their local governments, professionals, universities and NGOs to survey all the communities in their cities and then plan an upgrading process which attempts to improve all the communities in that city - *all of them* - within a few years. Once these city-wide plans are finalized and upgrading projects are selected, CODI channels the infrastructure subsidies and housing loans directly to the communities.

By creating space for poor communities, municipalities, professionals and NGOs to look together at the housing problems in their cities, Baan

Mankong is bringing about an important change in how the issue of low-income housing is dealt with: no longer as an ad-hoc welfare process or a civic embarrassment to be swept under the carpet, but as an important structural issue which relates to the whole city *and which can be resolved*. The upgrading program is helping to create local partnerships which can integrate poor community housing needs into the larger city's development and resolve future housing problems as a matter of course.

For more information on the progress of the Baan Mankong Community Upgrading Program in Chantaburi, contact ACHR or visit the English-language website of the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI), which has a lot of good downloadable documents in English.

www.codi.or.th

CITY-WIDE UPGRADING IN Chantaburi



Chantaburi is a bustling provincial capital of about 500,000 people in the eastern part of Thailand, not far from the Cambodia border, where you can see the purple-colored Cardamom Mountain range looming in the distance. In a food-loving country like Thailand, Chantaburi (which means *City of the Moon* in Thai) is especially famous for its edible products. The tropical fruits, which are grown in orchards which fill the agricultural land in the surrounding province and are exported all over Thailand, include durian (the national fruit), mangosteens, langsat and rambutan. The city is also famous for its rice noodles, which are manufactured in hundreds of work-shops around town and exported all over the world.

Chantaburi is also an important gem trading center, where sapphires and rubies from all over southeast Asia are bought and sold in shops along the Trok Kachang and Thetsaban roads in the city. During the first week in June every year, the city gets very crowded for the annual gem festival. This gem trade creates a lot of jobs and draws a great many migrant workers into the city. But what the city hasn't been able to provide these migrant workers is affordable housing. That's why the city is filled with squatter settlements and run-down rental rooms, where these workers live in squalor and uncertainty.



Two points :

1 No city has to go alone

Active networks of people-to-people support exist at local, provincial, regional and national levels in Thailand. The community network in Chantaburi does not work in isolation, but is part of a larger provincial network that brings together poor communities in many towns and cities in the province and in the nearby provinces of the Eastern Region. Because these towns and cities are not far from each other, it's not a big deal for a group of community leaders to jump into a van or bus and visit each other. The Eastern Region Urban Community Network is almost constantly on the move, with leaders from one city visiting others to help each other, to assist in land negotiations, to learn, to pass on news, to share tips, to take part in each other's big events. There is a constant flow of comings and goings and learning. The same holds true for the national network. During this exposure visits in Chantaburi, for example, a group of senior community leaders from Baan Mankong projects in Bangkok came along.

2 Finding cheap land

In smaller towns like Chantaburi, it can often be cheaper, easier and more secure in the long term for poor communities to buy a piece of cheap private land than to negotiate leases to the public land they already occupy. With private land, there is also the advantage of having no worries about evictions in the future as government policies change. It's much easier to search for cheap and unserviced land in smaller towns like this, and then negotiate to bring in the infrastructure later. The distances are less, too, so even plots on the outskirts of town are not too far from jobs, schools, markets and employment opportunities to be viable for poor families. Here in Chantaburi, for example, you can still buy unserviced land for only 500 Baht per square wah (\$3.50 per square meter).

Chantaburi city facts :

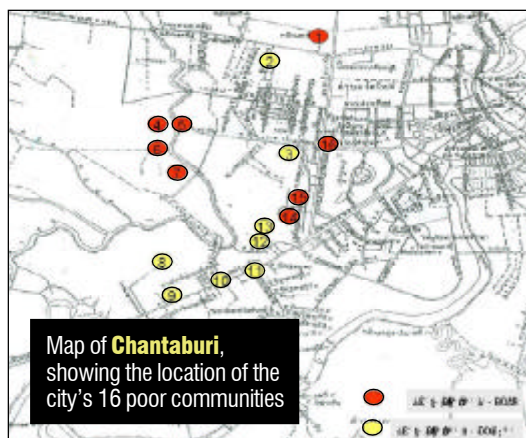
- **Urban population : 500,000 people**
- **Poor and informal communities in the city : 16 settlements (1,223 households)**
- **What poor people do :** General laborers, food vendors and garbage collectors. Many also work as laborers in jewelry-making and gem-cutting businesses, or as seasonal workers in the fruit orchards.

Chantaburi's upgrading plan :

The city's upgrading process got a push from two young architects : Chantaburi had a long-established community network and a few scattered savings groups here and there, but neither the network nor the savings were very strong before Baan Mankong. In 2004, two young Bangkok architects, Baan and Ter, came to Chantaburi and played a crucial role in getting the city-wide upgrading process started. They worked with the network to organize the first city-wide survey, selected the city's first pilot upgrading project at Naa Technique and provided some very creative design assistance which made that project a very beautiful and striking model to get people all over the city excited.

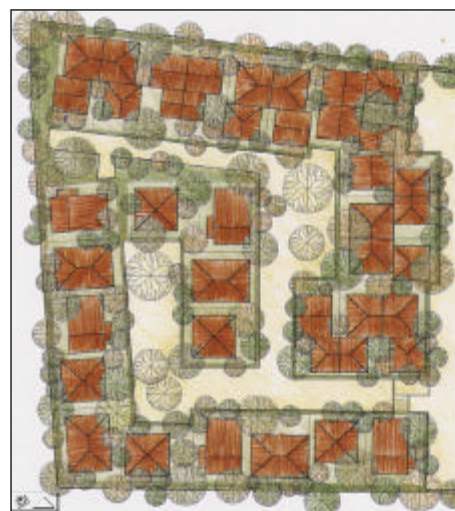
City committee : That first survey counted 1,223 households living in shoddy and insecure housing in 16 communities. As part of their efforts to develop secure housing for those families and to build a common understanding about the city's serious housing problems, the network network then set up a mixed committee comprising representatives from the Municipality, the provincial administration, civil society groups (lawyers, professors, technical school people), the Chantaburi community network, CODI and the provincial unit of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security.

Starting with a pilot upgrading project : After the survey, the committee organized meetings in all 16 settlements to explain how the Baan Mankong program works and to get people organizing, saving and planning. The committee set a target of improving seven of these communities initially (493 households), starting with a pilot project at Naa Technique - a community which was facing immediate eviction. Two other projects followed at Soi Amon and Baan Lang Poonsap. The first pilot upgrading projects "started waves" in the city, and involved lots of sharing and exchange visits. It didn't take long before other communities began to negotiate for land and start their own projects.



Map of Chantaburi, showing the location of the city's 16 poor communities

By April 2009, 15 of these communities were in the process of upgrading under the Baan Mankong Program. 10 communities were finished or under construction, and another 5 communities were in the process of doing their infrastructure. 11 of these projects were resettlement to other land and four were on-site upgrading projects with long term leases to the public land the people already occupied.



Naa Technique Community : Chantaburi's first pilot upgrading project . . .

The first community in Chantaburi to be upgraded under the Baan Mankong program was inaugurated by the Prime Minister on 2 August, 2005. The Naa Technique community takes its name from the Changburi Technical College, which it used to be near. Most of the community people earn their living as construction laborers and vendors. The 42 households (about 200 people) in the community had been living for the past 30 years in houses they built themselves, on privately-owned land. Only 23 of these households had land rental contracts with the land owner, and the rest were squatters. In June 2004, the land owner decided to sell the land to a business and tried to evict the people.

When the two young architects from Bangkok came down to Chantaburi to help organize the city-wide information gathering, they helped the people in Naa Technique set up a housing saving group and begin their search for alternative land nearby. They found a piece of good land that was still being used to grow rice just 2.5 kms away. The people began negotiating with the owner of this new land, who finally agreed to sell the people 2 adjacent pieces of land (total 8,240 sq. meters) for US\$ 29,500 (which works out to a very low price of US\$ 3.60 per square meter). The people formed a cooperative and took a loan from CODI to buy the land, which they now own collectively.

Once the people had the land, they began working with the architects to plan their new layout, infrastructure and houses. They decided to put 28 units on one of the plots, and 42 units on the other - total 70 units (which included houses for extended families and renters from that old community). The new layout includes different plot sizes, according to people's affordability, and they designed 6 different house types (4 types of single detached houses, and 2 types of cheaper "twin" attached duplex houses). The layout plan includes some lovely, innovative "cluster planning," in which the houses are organized around shared green spaces, rather than along the usual long, straight streets.



▲ **BEFORE :**

▲ **AFTER :**

Upgrading Project Details :

Number of units : 61 houses

Type of upgrading : Nearby relocation

Land owner : Community cooperative

Tenure terms : Collective ownership by the Naa Technique Community Cooperative

CODI land loan : 850,000 Baht
(US\$ 24,286)

Infrastructure subsidy : 4.47 million Baht
(US\$ 127,570)

CODI housing loan : 9.8 million Baht
(US\$ 280,000)

The poor as development pioneers

Using people power to draw down development resources and make new allies : negotiating a new road into the land . . .

One of the reasons why the land the people at Naa Technique found was so cheap was that it was “blind land”, which means the site was not accessible by any road. But after buying the land, the community was able to persuade the District Authority to build a brand new, 2-kilometer concrete road into the land, and then planted trees along its length. If communities are strong enough to leverage this kind of assistance and persuade their local authorities to chip in to the infrastructure development in and around the community, it can help reduce project costs, improve living conditions and build longer-term partnerships. Once the new road was built and this very popular housing project was completed, another relocation project at Soi Amon was launched very close by and land values in the area doubled very quickly. In these ways, the poor can act as homesteaders, bringing development and investment into neglected parts of the city.



PLAYING POLITICS :

What happens when you invite the Prime Minister to inaugurate a community upgrading project? There's no underestimating the power of some strategic political maneuvering to bolster support for a community driven change process and transform the whole vibration in a city. At Naa Technique, the access road into the settlement - which had been very slow in getting finished - was completed in three days, once the district authority learned the PM was going to be coming. The big man's visit also convinced the mayor to support this community upgrading process, and gave the city a sense that supporting what poor people do was something worth doing.



The moment when things in a city start to **CLICK**

The process in Chantaburi started with a survey of whole city, to get all the information about all the poor communities in the city, so everyone understands the overall scale, and everyone begins to know each other. In the process, different people and different organizations and institutions start getting involved, so the city-wide upgrading becomes a working process in which everybody has a part. Then in the process of doing, the community people get ignited to be the main actors, and the others are involved in the process of allowing people to be the key actors.

The people start with savings and credit. And then comes selection of the pilot project. The pilot upgrading project is like a ground breaking for the whole city. We have to be serious about these first projects - they are super important. Everyone should feel happy to see this direction and feel like it's their project too, not just the people's who live there! Everybody should want to do the same thing and that creates lots of new energy.

A week before the prime minister was to inaugurate the Naa Technique pilot project in Chantaburi, a lot of the landscaping and house-painting still wasn't finished. Everybody was in a panic, so about 200 community people from other Chantaburi settlements - and from cities all over Thailand - came for a week to help. A community upgrading pilot project like this is an important breakthrough not just for its own residents but for communities around the city. (Somsook)

CHANG CHUMCHON

A province wide community-builders collective is born out of Chantaburi's city-wide upgrading process . . .

The communities in Chantaburi have now organized a network of community builders, many of whom have picked up and refined their building skills through the process of constructing their own Baan Mankong upgrading projects - skills like carpentry, brick-laying, steel reinforcing, foundation planning, electrical wiring and plumbing. They call this community building collective *Chang Chumchon* (“Community Builders” in Thai). Instead of hiring a contractor or skilled workers from outside, a lot of communities in the province are now hiring Chang Chumchon to help out with their house-building and upgrading projects, for which the workers get paid a fixed amount (which is a little less than the usual rate for hiring outside skilled laborers). So it's an income-spinner for a growing group of about 100 women and men, plus it keeps the profits in the community network!

Is this construction team permanent? (Question from Gregor) Samat says yes! And it can provide people with permanent employment! There is a big market for skilled construction labor, even from only the 11 Baan Mankong upgrading projects going on around the city alone! Plus, it's cheaper for communities to hire community workers. And there is a scarcity of cheap labor here in Chantaburi. Now we have about 100 men and women on our Chang Chumchon team. Each region around the country now has its own similar Chang Chumchon community workers collectives.



Baan Lang Poonsap : Chantaburi's poorest community upgrades . . .

BETWEEN A GARBAGE DUMP AND A SLAUGHTERHOUSE : Baan Lang Poonsap, the second of three housing projects in Chantaburi, was a run-down, unserviced squatter settlement of about 300 poor households, located on a strip of swampy public land between a slaughterhouse and a municipal garbage dump. The people had been staying here for 40 years, and were among the poorest in the city. Though both the dump and the slaughterhouse bring disease and environmental hazards to the area, they also provide much-needed employment and earning possibilities to the poor squatters in the area, many of whom earn their livelihoods as trash recyclers. For several years, the community had been threatened with eviction by the Chantaburi Municipality, but since nobody had anywhere else to go, the people had held on, and the situation got more and more tense.

LAND OPTIONS : After the city-wide slum survey, Baan Lang Poonsap was chosen by the community network to be one of the first pilot upgrading projects, and the process began with setting up a daily savings group in 2005. The next issue to be resolved was land. One option was to buy some land and relocate, as several other Chantaburi communities were doing, since inexpensive land was available not too far away. But the people at Baan Lang Poonsap didn't want to move any longer, felt attached to this area, and decided to negotiate to stay on the public land they already occupied.

MOVING TO LAND NEXT-DOOR : With help from some seasoned land negotiators from the Eastern Region Urban Community Network, the people eventually negotiated a deal in which the Municipality agreed to lease them a big piece of land immediately adjacent to the existing settlement, if the people would vacate their old land, which the city wanted for a municipal project. The residents agreed, formed a cooperative and signed a 5-year (renewable) collective lease contract for the new land, on a nominal rental rate. Although initially only 88 families from the community joined the savings group, the new land had enough space for 124 plots, so there was room for other squatter families from the surrounding area, or fence-sitters from the old Baan Lang settlement.

NEW COMMUNITY, NEW SECURITY, NEW HOUSES : The whole community was involved in the many meetings and workshops to design the layout of roads and house plots in their new settlement and to develop a range of affordable "stilt-house" designs for the 80 square meter plots. As the community leader, Mr. Samat, emphasized in all his stories, *"The project included EVERYBODY, nobody was excluded, no matter how poor they are."*

PLANNING THE NEW COMMUNITY : The layout of the new community was planned by the whole community, in a series of intense workshops, with the assistance of two young architects from CODI, but the people designed the houses themselves. After they had developed the new housing layout, some plots were considered better than others, and everybody wanted the good plots. So instead of fighting over who gets which plot, the people decided to ask everyone to select the plots they liked (the good plots got many applicants), and then sit down and negotiate. This made the people decide themselves, not the committee. And finally, everyone was more or less happy with their plot.

CONSTRUCTION : The houses were constructed mainly by a team of about 40 community members, working together. In the beginning, they were not very confident about their work, but there were a few skilled masons and carpenters in the community who taught the others along the way. By the end of the project, the building team was so skilled that they could go out and help other communities. Why were the houses so cheap? Samat: *"We built everything ourselves and managed everything ourselves, from the beginning! The house owners checked all the materials themselves, not any contractor. Plus, we bought our concrete blocks from the people's block factory at Lam Roong Rueng!"*



LABOR COSTS : Samat says that when you hire a contractor, he charges a certain price per square meter, or workers get paid by the day. So they did it differently. They determined how much budget they had available for the houses, and after buying the materials in bulk together, they shared the amount left over for the construction team. It might have been a bit less than standard labor wages, but everyone got some employment, and they were working on their own community.



Getting KIDS involved : *With the help of those two young Bangkok architects, even the children in Baan Lang (many of whom also help out with their parent's trash recycling work) were drawn into the design process, making paintings and models of their dream houses and even setting up their own savings group and "Community Youth Bank."*

Upgrading Project Details :

Number of units : 124 houses

Type of upgrading : Relocation to adjacent land

Land owner : Municipality of Chantaburi (total land area is 1.68 hectares)

Tenure terms : 5-year renewable lease to the community cooperative

Land rental rate : 20 Baht / year / family

Infrastructure subsidy : 3.1 million Baht (US\$ 88,571)

CODI housing loan : 13.85 million Baht (US\$ 395,800) (only for 119 families)

Thinking **BEYOND** housing . . .

After the housing, the Baan Lang Poonsap community has developed a lot of other activities to keep up the momentum of their upgrading process and to deal with other long-term community needs. As Samat tells us, the lesson of all these activities is that all the various problems which communities like theirs face can be absorbed into the community process: drugs, youth, unemployment, elderly, welfare, etc. The community can find ways to take care of all these problems internally.

- **Garbage bank** : The community has organized their own cooperative garbage bank, which buys recycled materials from members at fair prices, eliminates the profit of middle-men and then sells the recyclable materials to factories as a group, so they get better prices.
- **Youth group** : There are lots of problems with young people dropping out of school or getting into trouble or drugs, if there is no space for them and no system to channel their energy into a good direction. So they set up a youth group which organizes a variety of activities and offers skills and vocational training in different trades, like mechanics and carpentry.
- **Housewives group** : They also set up a housewives group which helps stay-at-home women and mothers to supplement their household incomes with various income generation projects - making sweets, local products, recycled crafts, etc.
- **Welfare fund** : The community's welfare fund, into which every member contributes "one Baht per day", provides benefits for most emergency needs of its member families, from birth to death: maternity benefits, school scholarships for needy members, elderly benefits, sickness. "It's not just physical problems the welfare program addresses, it makes people feel secure. It's a social security system, and it covers all of us, from birth to death." (Samat)

FEEDBACK . . .

(Gregor) The development world is always divided into sectors, but here, the process of people resolving their specific housing and land problems has opened broader possibilities for them to tackle other social problems as a community and to deal with urgent issues of welfare, income, elderly, young children, health care, education, well-being - *the community can cover everything*. And when people presented their work to us, we can see clearly that they have been able to regain their human power and their human dignity in the process, and gained the acceptance from society, better incomes, etc. So it's not only housing. This kind of more holistic approach should be the long-term goal in the ACCA Program - and in all our work.

How to activate a community?

One question from the India team was "How to activate a community?" This was Samat's answer: "The most difficult thing is how to boost and wake people up to understand that they have the power to change! In most community meetings, everyone gathers, the leaders say some things, the people listen and agree - but actually, they don't know at all, and there's no success. It's very difficult to make things work only from big meetings, since people really don't come to understand things that way. The leaders don't go inside the community, don't really talk to the people. We go to everybody's house and talk to them about the important issues. We keep going around and talking and getting people's ideas, so that people start thinking before the meeting. It's a process of building trust, and it's a very warm, human process that way. If this deeper work in the community is going on, the meetings will become more strong, and people will bring in their ideas - and we always show respect for their ideas."



▲ **BEFORE :**



▲ **BEFORE :**



▲ **AFTER :**



▲ **AFTER :**

MORE FEEDBACK . . .

(Ruby) They were very proud to show us their situation before and after. If people have the drive and the space to improve their community, it almost automatically becomes a process to develop their community in other ways. Once people have their secure land and houses, that's great, but what next? So they are doing other activities, to get better incomes and better jobs, and so they will be able to repay their loans. In Payatas, even after the housing project is finished, the people are still scavengers and we still have a lot of work to improve incomes.

(Minh Chau) All cities worry that if they support "illegal" communities, so many more poor migrants will come. But the mayor said "Yes, when we support the redevelopment of these poor community, we are answering the larger issues of city planning and helping people to resolve the city's housing problems themselves." From the mayor right down to the poorest garbage collector - they are sitting together at the same table here in Chantaburi! In Viet Nam, we separate everyone: the community people sit together separately, and the city officials sit together separately.

I propose that the ACCA Program support more exchanges of municipal authorities, so they can go and listen to each other. Because they will listen to each other, not to us. We can form a network of municipal authorities interested in this community-led direction.

Refining the city-wide survey process to include scattered squatters and room-renters :

A lot of the poor people in Chantaburi are not living in established slum communities at all, but in scattered squatter pockets or in small rental rooms, where they are isolated from any kind of community support systems. When the community network worked with CODI and the two young architects to conduct the first survey in Chantaburi in 2005, they only looked at people living in groups in the city's established communities and squatter settlements. Other cities did the same.

Three years later, the network made another city-wide survey, and this one was a considerable refinement and expansion of the earlier survey process. This new city-wide survey wasn't just an academic exercise, where survey data is recorded in some thick report and then put on a shelf to collect dust!

This survey had a very clear objective : to find as many poor people as possible - including not only those in communities but scattered squatters and poor families living in isolated pockets and rental rooms - and bring as many of them as possible into the Baan Mankong upgrading process. In this way, the survey process worked like a people's own system for registering where the poor people are and who the target groups are in their city - *and it was all done by the poor people themselves.*

The purpose of this survey was to find solutions - clear, possible solutions to the land and housing problems faced by all these poor people in the city. It may not be possible to cover 100% of these poor room-renters, but as the upgrading process in the city progressed, more and more isolated renters began joining the process. The project at Lam Roong Rueng was the city's first housing project that brought together a big group of these scattered renters and squatters to make a new community. They also want a secure house and a supportive community to live in.

Upgrading Project Details :

Number of units : 220 houses

Type of upgrading : Nearby relocation

Land owner : Roong Rueng Community Cooperatorative (total land area is 1.2 hectares)

Tenure terms : Cooperative ownership

Infrastructure subsidy : 5.5 million Baht (US\$ 157,150)

CODI housing loans : 25 million Baht (US\$ 714,285)



Your own house and community for HALF the price of room rent:

The monthly housing loan repayments at Lam Roong Rueng range between \$18 and \$29. That's about HALF the amount these families were paying for room rent before. And they never got to own those rooms and lived alone in them, as individuals. So it goes to show that if you organize it properly, you can own your own house and have your own community!

Lam Roong Rueng : Building a new community for the city's scattered room renters . . .

USING SAVINGS TO BUILD A NEW COMMUNITY : With support from the community network, a group of 220 room-renters and scattered squatters went to see the community upgrading projects being implemented by the communities at Baan Lang Poonsap and Naa Technique. They were inspired by this to set up their own savings group in 2007, in which they did three kinds of saving:

- **saving for housing**, in which members saved weekly or monthly, according to their income-earning pattern, and within three months had saved a whopping 1 million Baht - US\$ 28,600.
- **saving for their own internal needs**, in a community-managed revolving fund, from which members could borrow for emergencies and income generation projects.
- **saving for welfare**, with which they established their own community welfare fund.

FINDING NEW LAND : After forming a cooperative and giving themselves the upbeat name *Lam Roong Rueng* (which means "glory" or "prosperous" in Thai), the group began searching for possible land for their new housing development. They eventually found and bought this big 1.2 HA piece of peripheral land with their savings - *without any loan from CODI!*

ORGANIZING THE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT : As in many other Baan Mankong upgrading projects, the new community at Lam Roong Rueng organized themselves into two different sets of groups, to manage the community planning, house designing and construction implementation. The idea of all these different committees was to get as many community members actively involved in the process as possible and to make the whole community into a group of entrepreneurs.

- **Task-based committees** to manage book-keeping, fund management, savings, welfare, and several construction committees to manage purchasing of materials, labor, auditing and materials checking. There was also the cooperative structure and the community committee.
- **Area-based subgroups** to break up the big community into smaller groupings of 5 - 7 households, which would form smaller social units (self-chosen), do their planning together and live together in clusters in the new community.

INFRASTRUCTURE : After buying the land, the new community was able to negotiate subsidies and loans to develop their infrastructure and housing on the land from several different sources :

- They got **5.5 million Baht** (\$157,150) infrastructure subsidy from CODI's Baan Mankong Program.
- They also negotiated to get **10 million Baht** (\$286,000) assistance from the city for developing the access roads and trunk infrastructure to the new site.
- They also negotiated to get another **800,000 Baht** (\$22,860) from the District Administration for roads, walkways and access road paving.

PROGRESS SO FAR : By April 2009, 115 houses had been finished, and the first 52 households had moved in. They expected to complete the whole project by 2010, at which time a big group of young men in the community vowed to be ordained as monks, as a way of making merit and adding honor to that great moment for the community.

Making their own building blocks

To bring down the cost of constructing their new houses and infrastructure, the community at Lam Roong Rueng set up their own factory to manufacture building materials: concrete blocks, ventilating blocks, drain pipes and pre-cast man-hole chambers. All these products are produced by the community. The operation has become so successful that besides supplying their own project, they are now selling blocks and building components to other housing projects in the city (including Baan Lang Poonsap). This operation employs a small army of young men and women from the community.

Block costs : A concrete wall block costs 4.5 Baht in the market, but the community sells its blocks for 3.5 Baht each (which includes 2.5 Baht for materials, 50 satang for labor and 50 satang profit for the community cooperative). The community's operation can produce about 2,000 blocks each day, and sold 1.2 million Baht (US\$34,290) of blocks last year to other community housing projects around the city. The block making machine cost 800,000 Baht (US\$ 22,860), which was supported partly by a grant from CODI and partly from other sources.



DEVELOPING NEW SKILLS THROUGH PRACTICE : Many construction-related skills have been developed through the building process here, and many young people are now getting jobs as skilled masons, plasterers, electricians and pipe fitters. The newly-skilled people at Lam Roong Rueng have also joined forces with the local authority to help improve other communities, including helping one community with their house construction, building a walkway across a canal in another community, and constructing community centers in two other communities.

OTHER INCOME-EARNING PROJECTS : Besides the building materials, the community has launched a lot of other income generation training projects to help members increase their monthly incomes, and have built a special community vocational development center. The community now has livelihood projects in tailoring, pillow and mattress making, preparing edible products (like naam prik and traditional Thai sweets), raising ducks and fish, growing vegetables, making washing liquid, running a rice-polishing mill and a drinking water purifier, house painting and gems cutting.



EVERYONE LEARNS : The municipality was very uncertain about this project at the beginning. Little by little, the mistakes were corrected and problems that occurred in the process early on were corrected. Later, the people started manufacturing building materials and the houses got better and cheaper. Knowledge accumulated and the quality went up and up. And other communities also learned.



▲ **BEFORE :**



▲ **AFTER :**

FEEDBACK . . .

(Lajana) In Nepal we also have a lot of poor families living in rental housing - 31% of Kathmandu's population live in rental housing, many in conditions that are much worse than squatter settlements. We need to do something, but what? These people have no organization, they are not linked together, nobody advocates for them. We have learned a new possibility here to form an organization, get land and make a new community.

(Jaya) To get the Municipality's attention, they initiated the project by themselves, saved their money, found land and bought it with their own money. In the process, they changed the attitude of the authorities. Only later, CODI and the municipality came to help.

(Somsook) We tend to look at slums and think they are the poorest, but sometimes there are poorer people living in isolation in small, scattered rental rooms, without any organization or support systems that communities provide. Their conditions can actually be much worse. Here is a way to make an opportunity for these room renters to come together and make their own permanent housing solution. And finally, the price of their land rent and housing loan repayment is half of what they were paying in rent - and now they also have a community and support. The project has changed their lives.

(Ruby) This community is very strong, and part of the reason for its strength is all these different committees and sub-groups! These committees make it possible to pull more people into the process and give people different kinds of spaces to get involved in their new community's construction. Plus, we are inspired by the way they have found a technology for making building materials that allows the people to control the quality and the price of the blocks themselves.

(Jaya) The technology they've chosen is simple and something that everyone already knows and understands how to use. But they've figured out how to make it cheaper by making the building blocks themselves.

(Somsook) These exposure visits that are part of our ACCA meetings relate directly to the kind of city-wide thinking we are trying to strengthen in ACCA. This way, we are starting to change our thinking together. Like the renters community, for example: here is an example of how we can use very small amounts of money to make a very big change. The people organized themselves, started saving, found their own land, negotiated to get various subsidies and built their new community - and now they are being visited by a big international group. This is some real change! Change is possible. And people on the ground are the real resource for making that change possible, as we see today.

DIALOGUE WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Chantaburi

After leaving the Lam Roong Rueng community, the visiting group all converged on City Hall, where they were scheduled to have a meeting with the Mayor. Because the whole day's program had fallen behind schedule, we missed the Mayor, but got a chance to have a good dialogue with many of the key officials from the Chantaburi Municipality, from the Provincial Administration and from a few other neighboring municipalities - all of whom have become key partners in the Baan Mankong community upgrading process in the province. Here are a few notes from the discussion :

Provincial Councilor speaks :

He explains the provincial governance system in Thailand, in which the provincial governors are appointed by the central government (and are very powerful), but the provincial council (which oversees all development in the province) is made up of locally-elected people.

Finding affordable land for housing just outside the city limits : Because land within the Chantaburi municipal limits is sometimes too expensive for the poor, many communities have opted to buy cheaper land in neighboring municipalities and relocated. They may move to another municipality, but they are still very close - this is a small town! The Baan Mankong upgrading projects in Chantaburi are now being implemented in three adjacent municipalities. After the people move, all of us in the Provincial Authority collaborate with the various municipalities to learn from each other and to support the communities in various ways - especially with the development of infrastructure.

Before, we never knew people had this strength! Before the Baan Mankong community upgrading process began in the city, we didn't have this picture of people developing their own housing and doing everything themselves! It is so important that both the community people and the government officers change at the same time, and absorb this new vision of how to solve the problems of poor people's housing in the city, with people as the main doers. It's not only a matter of changing poor people, but changing the city and the concept of what people can do, and changing the belief in people. It seems impossible that people can build such good houses so cheaply. The first time I visited the first upgrading project in Chantaburi, one old lady embraced me and told me, *"I never thought I would have a house of my own in this life! That was my only dream."* We were so touched by this and decided to do as much as we could to support the Baan Mankong upgrading program in Chantaburi.

Chantaburi Community Network leader speaks :

The role of the people in the housing projects so far is the most important thing. We organize the working process by setting up network-level working teams to support the different community upgrading projects in four important aspects: a construction team, a social team, a welfare team and a land team. But communities can't claim success alone. We need to go forward together, with the Municipality, the provincial authority and other actors, so we get success and can feel happiness together.

Land is the most difficult issue. So we have a special network task-force to deal with land which helps communities find and negotiate for land - both public land and private land. Communities can't usually negotiate for land by themselves, or they will not get such a good price or such a good lease contract. For this, we have had very good support from the Municipality, which has provided land for four on-site upgrading projects in Chantaburi, on a long term lease, with very small land rent.

Ruby Papeleras (Community leader from the Philippines Homeless People's Federation)

We can see that the Chantaburi community network has strong relationships with the other stakeholders in the city. And we can see that there is a good social cohesion between communities in the city, and good support from the local government, which have allowed more solutions to come up to address the main problems of the poor in the city. This support from the government for a people's housing process is really an inspiration to us in the Philippines. And we give our thanks to the provincial and municipal authorities for seeing the power in people's initiatives to solve problems at scale.

Gregor Meerpohl (Senior community development consultant from Germany)

What is the main ingredient of this success in Chantaburi? TRUST! You trust the communities, and you have trust in the people's capacity to do and to find lasting solutions to these big problems of land and housing in the city. And people trust their politicians to support them and to help create a friendly and supportive atmosphere for working. You are using housing and infrastructure initiatives by people to set a new development precedent. And the new "social product" which is coming out of this process is the ingredient needed to make real change. Maybe Barak Obama came to Chantaburi to learn *"Believe in change."* Chantaburi is known as the city of jewels, but the most precious jewels here are the people and the network. Chantaburi has to become a learning place for other cities and countries to visit to learn about how to overcome the economic crisis!



Getting the system to move in the same direction with people

(Somsook, speaking after the meeting) In the beginning, many of the local politicians here were very skeptical and didn't believe poor people could make these kinds of beautiful housing projects themselves. "How can people save 20 Baht [half a US dollar] and get a house? I don't believe the people can organize this. They must be cheating!"

But when people started saving their money, and moving like this, these politicians saw what the people were doing - and they changed. At lunch today, the local district chief was telling me, "It's very easy to be a politician now. When we have a problem, we just let the people solve it!" And he went on to say, "I'm part of the group, not a separate system."

This kind of change comes about when the people and the formal system start working together - people start and then gradually persuade the system to go along with them, getting support with things like water supply, electricity, roads, house registration.