



COMMUNITY news

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“ The size of these upgrading project budgets is extremely small, but the size of the hope, the energy, the confidence, the security and the new culture in which people come together and work together after the project is finished is enormous. ”

NEXT STEP : SECURE LAND TENURE ...

The lanes are being paved and drained, trees planted, houses improved and communities strengthened, but the land tenure status of most of the city's poor settlements remains as precarious as ever ...

After three years of community upgrading : As Phnom Penh's "100 slums upgrading policy" enters its fourth year, the city sees more and more dramatic "befores" and "afters" ...

It's been over three years now since May 2003, when Cambodia's Prime Minister announced a new policy to support the community driven upgrading of 100 poor communities, as a first step towards providing secure land tenure, basic services and decent housing to Phnom Penh's poor.

The announcement was made in front of a large gathering of urban poor people, national and local government officials, local and international NGOs and aid agencies, and community leaders from other Asian and African countries, as part of the celebrations marking the fifth anniversary of the Urban Poor Development Fund. The event was jointly organized by the city's poor communities, the UPDF and the Municipality, who used the occasion to boost the strategy of on-site community improvement, as an alternative to the costly and impoverishing practice of eviction and relocation to remote sites.

The upgrading policy makes people the main actors, but they work in close partnership with their community networks, the Municipality and their sangkat (ward) councils to survey, discuss, prioritize, plan, develop upgrading proposals and carry out the work, with funding and technical support from UPDF and other organizations.

Nearly 200 poor communities have taken advantage of the space this new policy creates for people to plan and implement improvements to their lives and living environments that are gradually going beyond a few paved walkways or water taps, to include good basic services, a healthy and beautiful environment, good housing, secure land tenure, a strong and supportive community, good economic opportunities and greater legitimacy as part of the city.

The process has had its ups and downs, but as the city watches increasing numbers of communities transform themselves from squalid "befores" into healthy and livable "afters", enthusiasm for the next phase of upgrading is running high.



BEFORE : The Rothia Meancheay Community before upgrading, where people had to wade through raw sewage on their way home.



AFTER : And here's Rothia Meancheay Community after upgrading, where the concrete-paved and fully-drained road now doubles as a playground.

Sadly, upgrading projects alone do not bring tenure security. The recent wave of evictions in Phnom Penh has been a potent reminder that there is still a lot of work to do to ensure that the poor do not continue to be pushed out of the city they are a part of and contribute so much to.

Most poor communities do not come in the way of any legitimate urban development plans and should be able to stay where they are now, as much as possible – or at least within their sangkats (wards), where they already have networks of support, friendship and employment.

And even when communities are in the way of important development plans, there are many ways to accommodate them close by, with just a little shifting here and there, using such techniques as land-readjustment, land sharing, reblock, land-swapping or nearby relocation. As long as this land readjustment is done with the community's consent and full involvement in the planning process, the city's need to develop and people's need for secure housing need not collide.

Three years ago, community upgrading was a brand new concept that nobody really understood. Back then, if you suggested that urban poor settlements could be beautiful, healthy and green places, they'd say you were crazy. If upgrading is now being mainstreamed, there's no reason why secure land tenure can't likewise become something that is accepted as not only do-able, but as good for the city as all these upgrading "before" and "after" transformations.

What form could this land tenure take? It could be full land title (individual or collective) where people occupy their own land, or collective lease contracts where the communities occupy government land, and it could involve nearby-relocation with land title or long-term lease in cases where communities fall in the way of planned urban development projects. There are many options.

There's ample proof now that getting people to do it themselves is **feasible** ...

In a country like Cambodia, where any official will tell you the government has no money, no man-power and no expertise, a big, expensive top-down government housing delivery system is out of the question. One of the best ways to fill this gap and to mobilize the man-power and resources required to solve the country's serious housing problems is to get people to do it.

The strategy of upgrading poor communities and securing their tenure in the

same location where they already live is by far the cheapest, most straightforward and least complicated way of improving the lives and housing conditions of the urban poor, without using big budgets or requiring all sorts of technical manpower.

Plus, *in situ* upgrading enhances the considerable investment people have already made in their housing, keeps people close to their jobs and makes the least impact on the delicate social support structures which are part of their survival.

Of all the stakeholders involved in housing, people are the most enthusiastic and energetic and resourceful. Why? Because this is all about their own lives, and their ability to survive and grow and flourish.

So getting people to implement their own housing process is a way to multiply the process infinitely, even in a country with great scarcity. And based on the UPDF's experiences of the past eight years, letting people do it is feasible.

Community Upgrading Activities supported by **UPDF** so far :

(Figures as of October, 2006)
Exchange rate: US\$1 = Riels 4,000

Communities on what type of land	Number of communities / households benefiting	Number of Sangkats	Community upgrading grants	Housing improvement loans - Total loans / Number of households
1 Around lakes	20 (1,840 households)	4	US\$ 24,167	US\$ 190,263 (496 households)
2 On Railway land	3 (346 households)	3	US\$ 6,727	US\$ 61,600 (146 households)
3 On rooftops	5 (160 households)	3	US\$ 1,456	US\$ 16,350 (56 households)
4 In resettlement colonies	10 (7,526 households)	7	US\$ 32,359	US\$ 71,745 (289 households)
5 On their own land	38 (4,436 households)	18	US\$ 115,557	US\$ 224,385 (587 households)
6 Along river banks	14 (1,192 households)	6	US\$ 32,340	US\$ 124,855 (370 households)
7 Along canals	2 (303 households)	2	US\$ 2,927	US\$ 20,750 (48 households)
8 Along roads	4 (378 households)	4	US\$ 6,587	US\$ 44,825 (102 households)
9 On government land	3 (507 households)	2	US\$ 1,374	US\$ 12,128 (34 households)
99 communities in 36 sangkats (16,688 households) (out of total 76)			US\$ 223,494 (grants)	US\$ 766,901 (loans to 2,128 households)

Not the only show in town :

The upgrading policy which UPDF helped start has unleashed a wave of other upgrading support projects ...

Since the new upgrading policy was launched in 2003, the political space for improving urban poor communities in the city has opened up substantially. Several organizations besides UPDF have embraced the new policy and raised funds to support upgrading activities, widening the range of resources available to Phnom Penh's poor to put together more substantial upgrading plans over time, and to get support for their projects from different sources. The total number of upgrading projects supported by all these programs now comes close to 200.

The Partnership for Urban Poverty Reduction Program (PUPR) was a 2-year program developed as a collaboration between the Municipality and the UN Human Security Fund, which ended in March 2006. PUPR provided livelihood loans (total

\$56,850) and grants for community organizing (total \$21,910) and physical community upgrading activities (total \$707,502) to 167 poor settlements around the city, affecting 30,119 households. The upgrading projects included paved and graveled roads and lanes, bridges, road repairs, wells, light poles and primary schools.

The Sheila Program is a large, national government development support program being financed by a package of grants and loans from international donors, with a national budget of \$100 million. Sheila supports projects in training, upgrading, socio-economic development, gender, security, infrastructure, and has also channeled funds to the sangkat (ward) councils, some of which have collaborated with poor communities in the ward to develop small, community-driven upgrading projects.

A few upgrading projects :

The UPDF's upgrading support makes communities the main actors and implementers of the upgrading work, in close collaboration with their Sangkat Councils, the Municipality of Phnom Penh, NGOs, and the Savings Community Network of Phnom Penh. First communities survey and discuss their settlement and its problems, then develop a community improvement plan, which includes both immediate upgrading plans and broader, longer term development plans. Once the plan has been discussed with other communities in the sangkat and adjusted, it goes to UPDF for approval. Plans can be quite simple, but must include detailed costs of upgrading and a description of project management, including people's participation in labor, technical aspects, supervision, finances and materials purchasing. The sangkat mechanism supports the whole process. The budget comes in the form of modest infrastructure grants and housing improvement loans. All communities contribute at least 10% of the cost of the upgrading project from their own pockets and use mostly their own volunteer community labor, as much as possible.

1 Samaki 1 is a settlement of 49 households built along the railway tracks in Khan Roessei Keo. The people cooperated with a new railway policy by voluntarily moving their houses 20 meters back from the tracks. Next, with a UPDF grant of \$6,416, they built a beautiful 126m tile-paved walkway in front of the long line of their newly-rebuilt houses, with drains, new trees and community gardens planted in the leftover space. 38 families have taken housing improvement loans totaling \$16,725.



BEFORE :



AFTER :

2 Nesarth 10 is a crowded settlement of 100 families along the Tonle Sap River, in Khan Roessei Keo. Many people here are fishermen, and have taken part actively in the annual cycle of UPDF loans to support the production of *prahok*, the Khmer fermented fish. This was the first community to build a concrete walkway through their flood-prone settlement (280m using a \$4,434 grant). The project has inspired many other walkway projects in adjacent settlements.



BEFORE :



AFTER :

3 Kulalom 1 & 2 are adjacent Cham Muslim settlements (total 447 households) in a densely crowded area along the Mekong River, in Khan Roessei Keo. These communities have also been very active *prahok* makers and community savers. Their upgrading plans have begun with a 350m walkway. They first laid it in gravel and later upgraded to concrete and colored tiles, using a very modest upgrading grant of only \$5,000. Only 33 families have so far taken housing loans, totaling \$15,200.



BEFORE :



AFTER :

4 Phum 4/1 & 4/2 are two adjacent settlements (260 families total) built on public land along the marshy edge of Boeng Kak Lake, in central Phnom Penh. While the Municipality continues to negotiate its own master plan for commercially redeveloping this densely-crowded area, the people used an \$8,800 upgrading grant from UPDF to build a 469m raised "flood-proof" walkway which links all the houses in the settlements. Later, 59 families took housing improvement loans totaling \$24,150.



BEFORE :



AFTER :

5 Prek Tapov is a small settlement of 54 poor families who migrated from rural areas to this river-side land in Khan Mean Cheay shortly after the Pol Pot period ended. Using their own labor and a \$5,000 grant from UPDF, the first step of their upgrading plans was to build a 510m concrete walkway through the settlement. Next, 24 families took housing improvement loans (totaling \$8,050) and 8 families took income generation loans (totaling \$1,625) from UPDF.



BEFORE :



AFTER :

6 Ponlieu Thmey is a tiny settlement of 17 poor families, tucked inside a small lane near the Khan Chamkar Mon headquarters. The land, which the people here settled on in 1987, belongs to them. The first step of the community's upgrading plan involved using a \$1,190 grant from UPDF to build a 135m concrete-paved road through the settlement, with storm drains. So far, only four families have taken housing improvement loans, totaling \$1,500.



BEFORE :



AFTER :

7 Prasath Pich is a small settlement of 25 families built on the rooftop of a building near the O Roessei Market in Khan 7 Makara, where many residents are vendors and moto-dub drivers. Since paving, drainage and basic services were already OK, the people have focused on upgrading their housing. So far, 9 families have taken housing loans from UPDF, totaling \$2,800. The people are now exploring ways to achieve secure land tenure.



BEFORE :



AFTER :



UPDF
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Some other new housing options :

While poor families continue to be evicted and flung out of the city into remote and unprepared relocation colonies, Phnom Penh has also seen recently the development of some decent, practical and replicable alternatives to eviction . . .

1 LAND SHARING with free apartments in 6-story blocks built by the private sector at Borei Keila :

The housing project at Borei Keila is Phnom Penh's first real land sharing project. The 14-hectare piece of government land, which is in the middle of the city and had been occupied by a settlement of 1,776 poor families, has been divided into two parts. The government has given one part to a private company to develop commercially, and the other part has been used to construct ten 6-story apartment blocks, which will house all the families from the old settlement in airy, high-ceilinged 48 square meter apartments. These apartments are being built and paid for entirely by the private company and are given free to the families. This strategy represents a kind of cross subsidy, in which the big profits generated by the other part of the site will offset the \$7 million cost of building these ten apartment blocks for the community people. People only have to pay for maintenance, electricity and water supply, all of which will be collectively organized through their savings groups.



RELOCATION to free, fully-developed row-houses provided as compensation by private sector at Borai Sithipheap :



The 1,465 families who used to live in the crowded settlement of Dey Krahom, near the Tonle Basaac River, had originally negotiated a land sharing deal in which the government agreed to give a portion of this public land to the community to redevelop their housing, and keep the rest for developing commercially – similar to Borei Keila. But because the land was so small, the company calculated that it couldn't afford to house the people on site and still turn a profit on the remaining land. So after much discussion between the community, the company and the municipality, the people agreed to relocate to a fully-

developed colony of 2,000 sturdy, concrete shop-houses at Borei Sithipheap, in Khan Dangkor, 18 kms from the original community. They lost their original central-city location, but in exchange, the people got decent 48-square meter houses with full infrastructure (all free, with land title) and proximity to a developing industrial zone, which is already providing many new jobs.

3 RELOCATION to land provided by Municipality and full community planning and rebuilding at Thnout Chrum 5.

The families who live around the garbage dump at Steung Meancheay, earning their living collecting recyclable waste, are among the city's poorest. When the savings group at this dump site community proposed upgrading to UPDF, the Prime Minister heard about the project and wanted to help. With funds coming partly from the prime minister and partly from the municipality, the community searched for and bought a 2-hectare piece of land nearby, where they moved in July 2003. Since then, the 159 families (including 116 families from the dump site and 43 families evicted from land nearby) have been working to build and develop their new settlement, with housing loans, upgrading grants and technical assistance from UPDF and PUPR. The project at Thnout Chrum 5 represents a form of relocation in which the community was the key actor in every step of the planning process, working in close collaboration with the district, municipal and national government and support organizations, and in which the move supports people's lives and strengthens their community instead of impoverishing them.

