# Manang Kasila

CASE STUDIES OF COLLECTIVE HOUSING IN ASIAN CITIES SERIES • MAY 2021

**Manangkasila was an old, run-down community of fruit vendors and day laborers in the center of Bangkok. After the land was leased to a private sector company to develop commercially, an eviction crisis brought everyone to the table. Eventually, the community negotiated to turn over 60 percent of the land they used to occupy to the developer and lease the other 40 percent to rebuild their community, in a tight layout of rowhouses on small plots. Manangkasila was Bangkok's second example of the "land sharing" strategy being used to avoid eviction and allow the people to stay and improve their housing.**

- **Project** Manangkasila
- **Location** Dusit District, Bangkok, Thailand
- **Size** 197 households
- **Finished** 1988
- **Type** Redevelopment of an old community on a portion of the land they used to rent, under a land sharing agreement between the community, the private company that leased the land and the public land owning agency.

## CONTEXT, PROCESS AND PARTNERS

### Land sharing in Bangkok:

By the 1980s, there were about a thousand low-income informal communities in Bangkok, and a quarter of them were under threat of eviction, to make way for various commercial developments and urban infrastructure projects. Development pressure on land in the city was heating up, and conflicts between the housing needs of the poor and the development needs of the city were increasing. The losers in those conflicts were almost always the poor, who lost their housing, their support systems and their access to nearby jobs with eviction. When poor communities did manage to hold on to their inner-city land, a kind of stalemate ensued: the land owners (whether public or private) couldn't develop their land while the squatters stayed, and the squatters couldn't invest in better houses since their tenure was so insecure.

Land sharing is Bangkok's home-grown strategy for resolving these conflicting claims in a compromise solution which allows both the land-owner and the community people to benefit. After a period of negotiation and planning, an agreement is reached to "share" the land, where the settlement is divided into two parts. One part (usually the less commercially viable part) is given, sold or leased to the community people for rebuilding their houses, in a more compact arrangement, and the rest is returned to the land-owner to develop. There's no rule about how the land is divided: how much land the people get and how much goes back to the owner is all worked out during the negotiations.

At the core of a land sharing negotiation is the ability to translate the conflicting needs and conflicting demands of owners and occupants into a compromise which takes a concrete "win-win" form and is acceptable to all parties involved - not to any abstract policy or set of regulations. Land sharing is also a way of dividing the cream of urban prosperity a little more equitably: the community people may end up with less area than before, and the land-owner may get back less-than-all of the land, but the trade-off is that the poor can stay where they have been living and working, get secure land and decent housing, and keep their community and support systems intact. And the land owner saves the time, cost and loss of face of a long eviction litigation and finally gets to develop the land. Even the government benefits - it gets an added stock of secure land and housing to meet the city's urban poor housing needs, without having to pay for it.

Land sharing is a long and complicated process, and it doesn't work in every situation. Behind a successful land sharing scheme, there must be a very strong community organization, and often, the involvement of a skillful intermediary is crucial. But there are a growing number of cases where informal communities faced with eviction have successfully bargained to rebuild their community on a portion of the land they already occupy. The land sharing approach was first introduced in the Rama 4 community in Bangkok. This case study describes the second land sharing project at Manangkasila.

### The community:

The Manangkasila community is in the clamorous commercial and administrative heart of Bangkok. The community occupied a 1.7 hectare piece of leftover land sandwiched between the railway tracks and a canal to the east, the Padung Krung Kasem wholesale fruit market to the west and south, and Manangkasila House (from which the community takes its name) to the north. Manangkasila House is a palatial, Tudor-style mansion built in the 1920s by King Rama VI for one of his courtiers. The house was used in subsequent decades variously as a government guest house for VIPs, a bank, a political party headquarters, an office for the National Council for Women and a museum.

The community of wooden and thatch houses right behind the back wall of Manangkasila House is much less grand but almost as old as the mansion. Since the Manangkasila community was first established in the late 1920s, the public land it occupies has changed hands among government agencies no less than five times. Most recently, the land is under the control of the Treasury Department. Some of the families in the community had land lease contracts with the Treasury Department, and some were squatters.

By 1970, there were about 485 families living in the community, crowded into an unplanned jumble of 224 houses built of scrap timber, bamboo, thatch and rusty tin sheets. The network of small lanes running through community were waterlogged for most of the year, and whenever it rained, which was often, the whole community flooded. Only a few families had municipal water connections, and those who didn't would pay those who did to fill their buckets and then store the water in big earthen jars beside their houses. For sanitation, there were only a few rudimentary pit latrines. Many in the community worked as porters and vendors in the adjacent wholesale fruit market, but there were also food hawkers and daily wage workers. There were - and still are - lots of earning opportunities in that busy part of Bangkok.

### An eviction launches the project:
The Treasury Department had considered a number of alternative arrangements for upgrading the area behind Manangkasila House, but decided in 1978 to lease the land to the highest bidder, for commercial development. The bid was won by a private-sector developer, the Saeng Uthai Development Company, with the stipulation that it was the company's responsibility to do the dirty work of compensating and evicting the occupants of the community. The company issued eviction notices right away and offered to pay compensation to each family at the rate of 800 baht per square *wah* (roughly $7.50 per square meter) for the space occupied by their dwelling. Only 32 families took the compensation and moved away, though.

The others were determined to stay and organized a noisy public demonstration in front of the prime minister's house. The demonstration was covered in the press, and the prime minister quickly referred the matter to the Finance Ministry, with orders to resolve the conflict in a manner that was satisfactory to all. In mid-1979, representatives from the Ministry of Finance, the Treasury Department, the community and the Saeng Uthai Company sat down together for the first time, to discuss the housing needs of the community residents and find a solution to the conflict. A long and difficult period of negotiation followed, and during that time, many of the families in the community gave up hope and started to leave the area. But a core group of tough, charismatic and determined leaders in the community kept at it.

In 1981, when the land conflict in Manangkasila was still on a high boil, a young Thai architect-planner named Somsook Boonyabancha visited the community and began talking with the residents, as part of a survey she was carrying out of slums in Bangkok under threat of eviction. Somsook was working with the National Housing Authority at that time, in its Center for Housing and Human Settlements Studies. She had been tasked with conducting the eviction survey in preparation for an international seminar on land for housing, which the NHA was to organize in 1982.

In her capacity as a government official, it was Somsook's job to understand and document the causes and effects of eviction, at a time when more than a third of all slums in Bangkok had been evicted recently or were facing eviction. But in her capacity as a planner searching for alternatives to the inhumane and impoverishing practice of eviction, it became a kind of night job to use her planning and design skills to help several of the slum communities she encountered in the survey to work out creative solutions that could prevent eviction and improve people's housing. So she began to work with the Manangkasila residents to develop a series of alternative on-site redevelopment plans to negotiate with. That's where the land sharing strategy was born, and Manangkasila became one of the early successful examples of how it can work.

### The land sharing agreement:
In March 1982, after almost three years of hard bargaining, a land sharing arrangement was finally agreed to, by the community, the Saeng Uthai Company and the Treasury Department. Under the agreement, an area of 0.67 hectare (40 percent of the total 1.7 hectares) of land at the back of the site was assigned for rebuilding the community's housing. The rest of the land (1.03 hectares, or 60 percent of the site) would be turned over to the Saeng Uthai Company to develop commercially.

By then, however, only about thirty percent of the original residents were still staying on the site - 160 families in all. When other families who had moved out heard about the land sharing agreement, they organized their own noisy public demonstration to demand that they be included in the project. As a result of those demonstrations, 37 additional families became part of the project, bringing the total to 197 households in the Manangkasila housing project.

Once the amount of land and the number of houses were clear, the community began planning their new, more compact housing project, with the help of Somsook and her colleagues at the National Housing Authority. Squeezing so many families into such a small piece of land involved some difficult planning decisions. The community leaders participated actively in drawing up the site plan. One of their first decisions was that families who participated in the long struggle and who had previous land rental agreements with the Treasury Department would be eligible for larger plots of 10 square *wah* (40 square meters), while squatters and families who joined the project later would get smaller plots of 5 square *wah* (20 square meters). They also confidently decided that to save space, the houses would be built to completely fill the plots, without any setbacks - in cheerful defiance of the municipal building regulations.

Decisions about who gets to live where in a new housing project can be very traumatic. Everyone understands that different units come with different advantages and disadvantages. To make the allotment process fair, most government agencies and even NGOs eliminate choice entirely and allot the housing units by lottery - so that chance, and not preference, determines where everyone lives. The residents in Manangkasila faced this dillemma too, and understood that different areas in their new layout plan had clear advantages and disadvantages. But they designed a much more realistic and socially nuanced way of allotting the units. First, all 197 families divided themselves into small subgroups of friends or extended family members who wanted to stay together in the new scheme. Each subgroup had about six or seven families. Then they organized their lottery, but instead of individual families drawing unit numbers, each subgroup drew a single number, which corresponded with a cluster of adjacent or facing plots. It was inventions like this that made Somsook reflect many decades later, that *"Those community people in Manangkasila and the other early projects were my first and most important teachers."*

Once the layout of house plots on the 0.67 hectare site was worked out, the community people worked with the NHA architects to design two-storey and three-story rowhouse models to fit on the small and big plots. Since most of the houses share three walls with their neighbors, the house designs included small back porches upstairs, to bring a little more light and ventilation into the houses and to provide a space for drying clothes. The houses were partly built by a private contractor who was hired and supervised by a special community committee, to build the unfinished "core" rowhouses. It was then each family's responsibility to complete their own house (internal walls, doors, windows and interior finishes).

### Project timeline:

**1920s:** First group of residents rent land, build simple houses, and the community begins.
**1978:** Treasury Department leases land occupied by community to the Saeng Uthai Company to develop.
**1979:** Negotiations for land sharing begin between community, Treasury Dept. and the company.
**1982:** Land sharing agreement made to lease 40% of the land to community, and the rest to the company.
**1983:** Construction of new houses begins.
**1988:** Construction of new houses is completed.

### Support groups and partners in the project:

- **Members of the Manangkasila community** were the main actors and decision-makers at every stage of the project: protesting, negotiating, planning, building and managing the project finances through the credit union they set up to finance the house construction.

- **The Treasury Department** is the agency which controls a great majority of public land in Thailand, including the land occupied by the Manangkasila community and many other urban poor communities. The Treasury Department took part in the land sharing negotiations and agreed to lease the land to the residents individually, at a nominal rate.

- **The National Housing Authority (NHA):** Two units within the NHA were involved in the project: the Center for Housing and Human Settlements Studies (CHHSS) and the Community Development Department (CDD). Somsook Boonyabancha, a young Thai architect-planner, was working with the CHHSS and was a key person in helping vulnerable communities like Manangkasila to develop the first land sharing projects - many of which were identified during the 1981 Bangkok slum eviction survey she headed. The CHHSS assisted the Manangkasila community with technical aspects of the land sharing planning, including the development of layout options and house designs. The CDD built and paid for the paved lanes and drains in the community.

- **Credit Union League of Thailand** helped the Manangkasila community to set up their own credit union and channeled loan funds from Cebemo to the community for their housing construction.

- **Catholic Organization for Joint Financing of Development Programs (Cebemo)** was a Dutch Catholic overseas funding agency which operated between 1961 and 1995. Cebemo provided a long-term bulk housing loan to the Manangkasila community, through the Credit Union League of Thailand.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT

### Land tenure:

Before the land sharing project at Manangkasila, the community members were staying on public land under the management of the Treasury Department. Some families had been legal land tenants for decades, paying a nominal yearly rent for the land they occupied, and some who came later were squatters. As part of the land sharing agreement, the Treasury Department offered the residents long-term (20-year) individual land lease contracts, at a nominal yearly rental fee. But the community members, feeling a new sense of security about their tenure, opted for renewable annual leases, which required less up-front capital.

## PROJECT FINANCING

**Project costs and who paid for what:**

**1. Land costs**: The Manangkasila community members rent their house plots individually from the Treasury Department, on renewable yearly lease contracts, at a nominal rent, which today works out to about 150 - 300 baht (US$ 5 - 10) per year per household (depending on the plot size).

**2. Infrastructure costs:**
- The paved roads and storm drains in the project were built and paid for by the NHA (using its community development budget allocation from the government), at a cost of 1,210,872 baht (US$ 52,715).
- The Metropolitan Electricity Authority and the Metropolitan Water Works Authority provided electricity and water supply in the project, and the community members paid a total of 405,820 baht (US$ 17,667) for these household connections. That worked out to about 2,060 baht (US$ 90) per household.

**3. Housing construction costs:**
There were two types of partly-finished "core houses" built in the reconstructed community:
- **Small rowhouse model** (for the 20 m2 plot) cost 48,000 baht (about US$ 2,090 in 1988)
- **Big rowhouse model** (for the 40m2 plot) cost 89,000 baht (about US$ 3,870 in 1988)

After forming their own credit union, the Manangkasila community was able to secure a bulk housing loan of 12.087 million baht (US$ 526,208 in 1988) from Cebemo in the Netherlands (through the Credit Union League of Thailand) to partly finance the construction of the new houses. The families had to make a down-payment of 10,000 baht (US$ 435) for the small house and 20,000 baht (US$ 870) for the big house, and then make monthly loan repayments of 2,100 baht and 3,100 baht (US$ 91 and 135), respectively, to the Manangkasila Credit Union, over a repayment term of six years.

## IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

**Impacts:**
The land sharing project at Manangkasila allowed people who had lived for generations on the land, as insecure land renters and squatters, to stay and get secure land tenure, good housing and full infrastructure. While the land sharing agreement left the community members with only 40 percent of the land they used to occupy, the trade-off was that they could redevelop their houses legally and properly, and the rest of the land could be developed by the private company. In the process, a squalid and insecure slum was transformed into a proper, fully legal, fully thriving community. It was a win-win project for everyone.

The Manangkasila project was an early example of an innovative new kind of housing development in which the residents took full control over every aspect of the negotiation, planning, house design, construction and financial management. The project showed how much can be accomplished when the community is the main actor and is at the center of the housing development process. When housing is planned and developed by a community, it will happen faster, be cheaper, better, more appropriate and more efficient than anything the government or private sector could produce - and Manangkasila offered vivid proof of that.

For other slum communities facing eviction, the Manangkasila project become a much-needed illustration of land sharing as a potential strategy to avoid eviction and redevelop housing, without displacing the people. It so often happens that as a city develops, the poor get evicted and banished to the periphery of the city, in a cycle of impoverishment that pushes them far away from jobs, schools, transport links and opportunities. The Manangkasila land sharing project showed that urban development can successfully accommodate low-income urban housing, and showed that keeping low-income people in the city is good for the poor and good for the city, making for a more inclusive, equitable and healthy form of urban development.

**Problems:**
In 1985, when many of the new houses were still under construction, the NHA carried out a survey in Manangkasila, to see how families in the community were feeling about the project. 59 percent of the 181 families who took part in the survey said they planned to stay forever, and that nothing could make them surrender their rights in the community. But 22 percent of the families in the project had already sold off their rights and were going to move away. The buyers were mostly business people already living in the neighborhood. Why did so many families decide to give up their secure land and housing in the community? Uncertainty about the land lease arrangement and fear of being kicked out in the future were mentioned in the survey as some reasons for selling out.

But the main cause for selling out was financial hardship. For even as the more vulnerable families in the community continued to be poor and to have low and irregular incomes, they now had to make regular housing loan repayments to the credit union. When those housing loan repayments became too great a burden, it must have been tempting to sell out and move back to another slum. Especially when their house in the Manangkasila project was suddenly worth such a lot of cash on the market. By the end of 1984, it was estimated that the small houses in Manangkasila could fetch as much as 100,000 baht (US$ 4,500), while the larger houses could be sold for twice that amount. Before, conditions of insecurity and squalor had kept the market out of the slum. But now that Manangkasila was transformed into an attractive, well-serviced community of brand-new, well-built houses, in a central location, the market forces came marching right in. And because the land leases were all individual, there was no cooperative or legal mechanism to act as a buffer against those market forces and protect the residents.

The Manangkasila land sharing project was implemented almost two decades before CODI would launch its Baan Mankong housing program, which offered infrastructure subsidies and soft housing and land loans to poor communities to develop their own housing projects. It is a hard and fast rule of the Baan Mankong program that any community that wants to access those loans and subsidies must first register as a housing cooperative, and the loans and subsidies are only given in bulk to the housing cooperative - not to individuals. As long as the community is repaying its loans to CODI, the cooperative must remain in place. Many of the public land-owning agencies which lease land to communities for their housing projects also now stipulate that the land leases be made collectively, to the housing cooperative - not to individuals, as in the past.

In practice, these housing cooperatives function as a powerful protective mechanism in communities, to keep the market forces out, and to provide collective strategies for helping poor community members to deal with whatever crises and financial hardships may come up during the vulnerable period when they are repaying their housing and land loans, so they aren't tempted to sell out - the way those families in Manangkasila did - and can keep their housing to pass on to their children and grandchildren. The pioneering community-driven housing projects, like the one at Manangkasila, were extremely valuable learning opportunities for Thailand's community movement. And one of the lessons from the project was how important collective land tenure and a collective mechanism like a housing cooperative are to keep the community together and help the members get over hard times, without losing their housing.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

*This case study was drawn from a 1988 article by Somsook Boonyabancha and Solly Angel, "Land sharing as a alternative to eviction: the Bangkok experience," which described five of Bangkok's early land sharing projects, including this second one at Manangkasila. Please follow this link to read that article:*
http://achr.net/upload/downloads/file_07012020155521.pdf

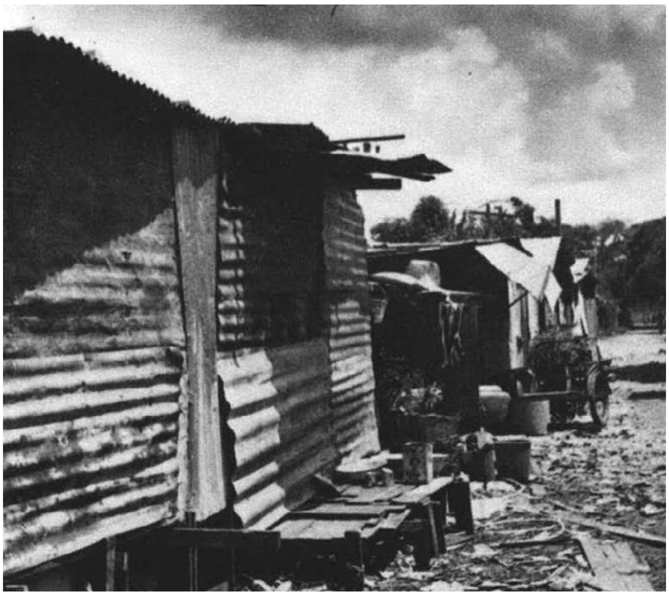
*For more information about other community-driven and collective housing projects in Thailand, that are supported by CODI and the Baan Mankong Program, please visit the English part of the CODI website:*
https://en.codi.or.th/

*For more information, please contact:*
Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR)
73 Soi Sonthiwattana 4, Ladprao Road Soi 110, Bangkok 10310, Thailand
Tel. +66-2-538-0919
e-mail: achr@achr.net
website: www.achr.net

## PHOTOS

The project described in this case study is hidden right behind this grand government-owned mansion, called Manangkasila House, from which the community takes its name.


The Padung Krung Kasem wholesale fruit market is right next door to the community and has long been a source of jobs for community members.



In 1974, a Thai post-graduate architecture student named Ubonwan Ocharoen did a study of some of the urban poor communities in Bangkok, and his thesis included these historic photos of conditions in Manangkasila, taken in the early 1970s.

This is Ubonwan's photo of the Padung Krung Kasem Canal, which runs by the community. Back then, boats from upcountry would bring fruits, flowers and vegetables from farms to the big wholesale market beside the community.

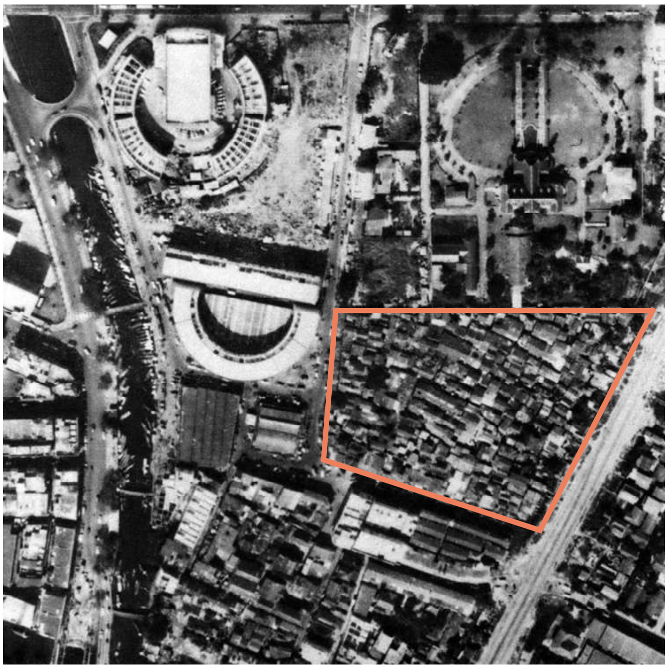
This is a photo from the late 1970s of the maze of tin-sheet and tile roofs in the Manangkasila community, right before the project began.

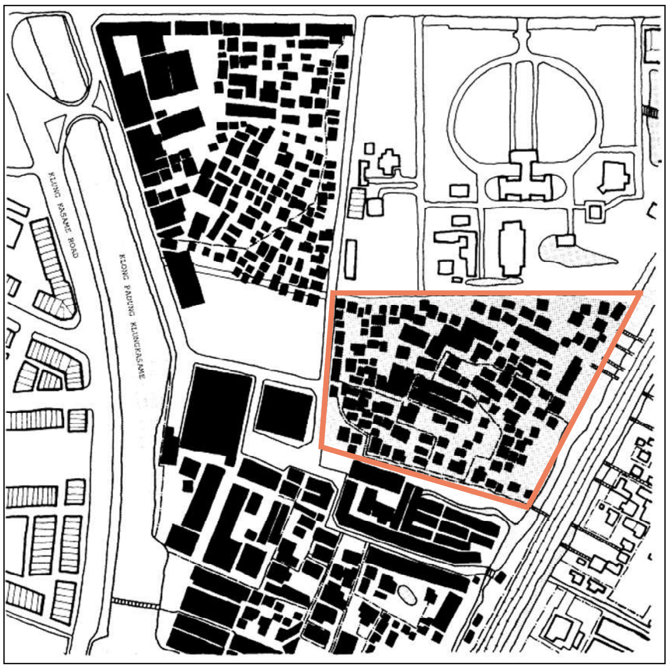
*These photos were taken in 1980, during one of the community planning meetings in the old Manangkasila community, when the people were still in the middle of their negotiations with the Treasury Department and the Saeng Uthai Company about how to "share" the land.*

*The difficult decisions about who will live where and who will get the big and small plots was like a chess game, with bottle-caps representing each of the 197 families in the project.*

*The credit union they set up gave the community an important legal mechanism to receive loans and manage project finances collectively.*

*That was the community's make-shift office before the construction began. The sign reads, "The community behind Manangkasila House."*





*This aerial photo from 1974 shows the community (in red lines), behind Manangkasila House, and next to the railway line and the fruit market.*

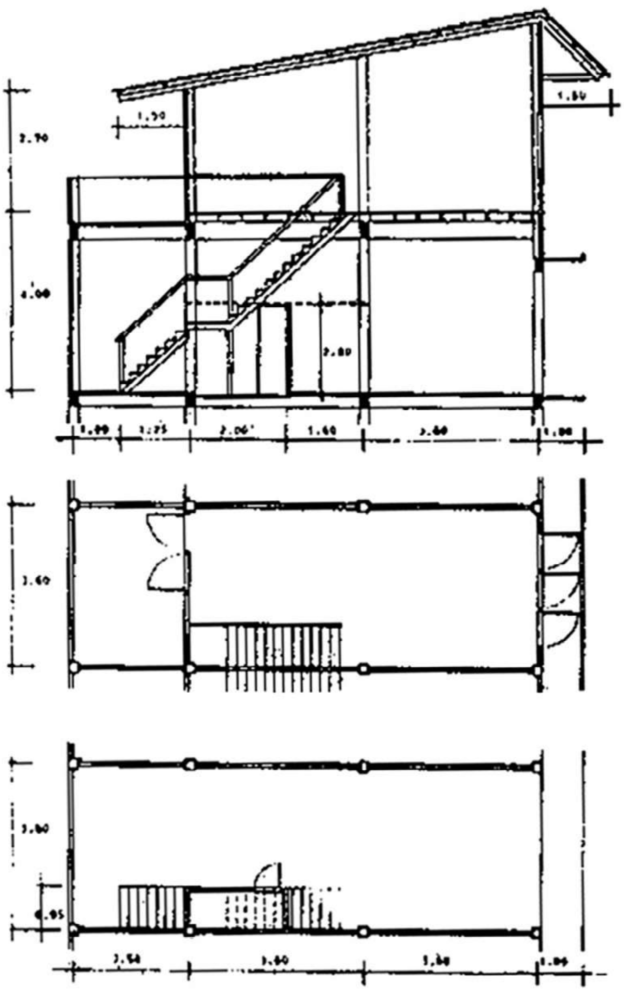
*This is Ubonwan's drawing of the same area (before the new fruit market was built), in which he mapped all the houses in the community.*

**BEFORE land sharing:**

Before the land sharing project, the 224 houses in the Manangkasila community were scattered across 1.7 hectares of public land that was under the Treasury Department.


**AFTER land sharing:**

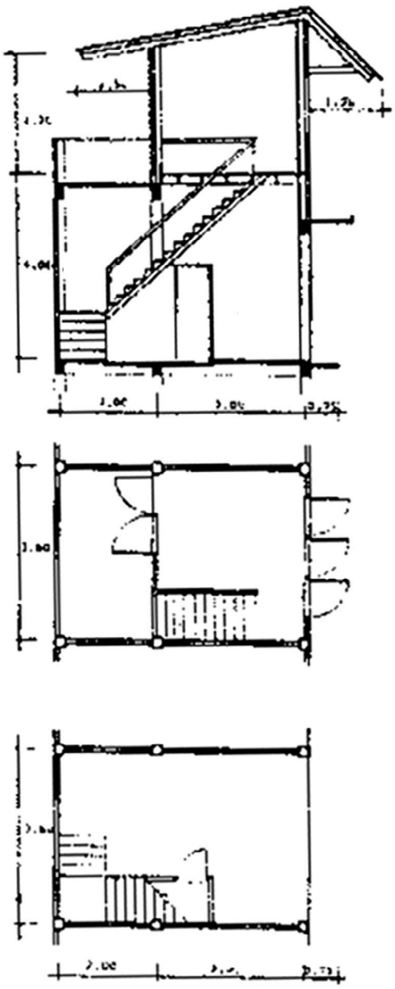
As part of the land sharing agreement, 40% of the land (0.67 hectares) was leased to the community to rebuild its housing in a dense layout of small rowhouses (*in pink*), while 60% of the land (1.03 hectares) was turned over to the private developer that had originally leased the land from the Treasury Department, to develop commercially.



1

## BIG 2-STOREY ROWHOUSE

This house fits on the larger 40 square meter plot (3.6 x 11 meters), has 80 square meters of living space, including a small upper balcony.



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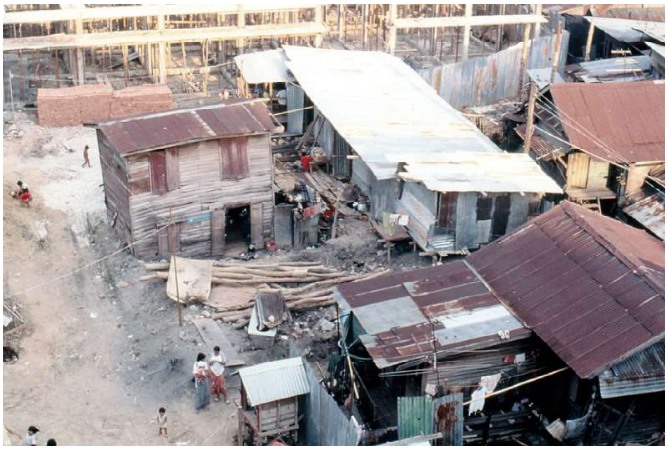
## SMALL 2-STOREY ROWHOUSE

This house fits on the tiny 20 square meter plot (3.6 x 5.5 meters), has about 40 square meters of living space, including the small balcony.

*Two of the early house model designs drawn up by the NHA architects. Finally, most of the families in Manangkasila built 3-story houses, to maximize their living space on the small plots, but they kept the idea of the small open balcony at the back of the third floor, for air and light.*



*By 1984, construction of the concrete building frames had begun, at the back of the site, and people stayed in temporary housing in the front.*

*The community people managed every aspect of the project, from buying materials to supervising the work to managing all the finances.*

To maximize living space on the very small plots, most of the row houses share three common walls. That's not great for light and ventillation, but these little third-floor balconies were a way to bring a little more air and light into the houses.

A photo from 1985, when construction of the new houses was well along. To save money, the "core" houses were built by a local contractor, and then the families did the finish work themselves.



These photos were taken during a visit by a group of slum dwellers and their supporters from India and South Africa, in 1989. Even by then, when the project had just been finished for a year, the land sharing project at Manangkasila had become a lightning rod for communities around Asia searching for practical alternatives to eviction. The two photos above show the visitors outside and inside the Manangkasila Credit Union office.

Another photo from the 1989 visit by the Indians and South Africans, walking around the small internal lanes of the newly-finished community.

In this photo from 1996, you can see the tall, grim shop houses (on the right) that the company developed and sold on its part of the site.

*The welcoming entrance to the Manangkasila community is brightened by vivid red and yellow paint and a spirit house burning incense sticks.*

*A photo of one of the wider internal lanes in the finished Manangkasila community, taken by a team of visitors from Japan in 1996.*

*These four photos were taken by a team of Indonesian visitors in 1998.  Most families ended up building 3-story houses, to get as much living space as possible out of the very small plots.*

*This cheerfully chaotic view of one of the internal lanes shows how intensely - and cooperatively - the shared public space is used.*