

# FIELD TRIPS TO COMMUNITIES

9th August 2012

## Introduction

### ▪ Vinyl-House Settlement:

Vinyl-house settlement was formed by the poor tenants evicted from the redevelopment areas without receiving enough money to rent a room in other residential areas. These people either took the empty greenhouses made out of vinyl or built new ones to live in—thus the name vinyl-house settlement. Originated from this first type of settlement, the term generally refers to the areas where the squatters settle in the vacant hillside or public open space without receiving any permission from the government or the landowners.

### ▪ Jokbang Settlement:

Jjokbang is a daily or monthly rental room that does not require a deposit and is not bound by any legal leasing contract.



Figure 1 Vinyl-House Settlements



Figure 2 Jokbang

## Summary of the field survey in May 2011

Based on the data we collected, we estimated that there are about 4,900 households and 10,000-15,000 residents in the vinyl-house communities in Seoul. These numbers include the 23 communities of 2,347 households where the survey was done, as well as the 16 communities of about 2,500 households that need further research. Including the 3,300 people living in jjokbang, we assume that about 14,000-18,000 people are living under the inappropriate living conditions. However, given the fact that the available data on jjokbang is mostly on some concentrated jjokbang settlement areas, it rather seems likely that the actual number of the low-income households with unstable housing is more than the given estimate.

- **Communities prefer upgrading in situ to public rental housing and compensation**

It has been shown that most residents do not prefer the public rental housing (apartment) and compensation options due to: 1) their inability to pay the deposit, rent, and management expenses of rental housing, 2) the proximity of their workplace to their current residence, and 3) their unwillingness to leave the familiar neighborhood. Meanwhile, more than 60% of the communities responded that they prefer to live with their current neighbors unless they are evicted. In the other communities where this preference was not high, individual preference has still been observed.

- **The average term of residence is over 20 years**

The municipal office of Seoul has been passive in improving the conditions of the vinyl-house communities, cautious of the speculative forces who might rush into the area to get redevelopment interest and compensation. However, the average term of residence in those communities was over 20 years, which indicates that many people have been living in the vinyl-house settlements for the pure purpose of habitation.

- **Evicted people form new vinyl-house settlements**

There have been few cases where the evicted people by redevelopment plans have formed new vinyl-house settlements. For example, a community near Taehwa farm, which has existed for less than 10 years by now, was formed by the people evicted from Jangji redevelopment area. Given this context, it seems necessary to perform an in-depth research on the evicted people and their resettlement status.

- **Jjokbang: small change in the number of residents for the last 10 years**

There has only been a slight decrease in the number of jjokbang residents—from 2,824 in 2002 to 2,692 in 2011—which indicates the lack of a proper governmental policy for the low-income households for the past 10 years. It has also been observed that the number of jjokbang remains similar while the number of jjokbang building has decreased by about 100, which means that the density of jjokbang has increased from 10/building to 12/building. Considering the fact that the same buildings have been used for jjokbang, then, it seems to be the case that the existing jjokbang has been compartmentalized into smaller size, and this in turn might indicate that the living conditions of jjokbang residents have worsened.

**Following is the analysis of data collected from the 23 vinyl-house communities in Seocho-gu, Gangnam-gu, and Songpa-gu.**

**1. Land ownership:** It has been observed that 40% of the 23 communities are established on private land, 43% on public land, and 17% on both private and public land. While some part of the public land is reserved for parks, most part is *chaebiji*, an area of land secured by the authorities in recompense of development outlay.

**2. Average term of residence:** Most vinyl-house communities were formed around 20-30 years ago, and the average term of residence is over 20 years. This indicates that the residents are occupying the land for the pure purpose of living and not for speculation.

- 3. Land tenure security:** For the past 2-3 years, residents of the vinyl-house communities have received an increasing number of eviction notices and compensation claims for their illegal occupation of land. About 60% of the communities responded that they feel increasingly insecure about their living status.
- 4. Legal address:** Although the moving-in register that grants legal addresses to the vinyl-house residents has been officially possible since 2009, more than 40% of the applications have been rejected. Residents without legal addresses are having difficulties in sending their children to school, receiving letters and enjoying welfare benefits.
- 5. Water supply:** About 30% of the communities do not have a proper water supply system. Residents from these communities drink bottled water or groundwater, although the latter is not qualified as potable in most cases. It has also been observed that communities with a sound water supply system built it by themselves without any government support.
- 6. Toilets:** More than 50% of the communities use pit latrines.
- 7. Community solidarity:** More than 40% of the communities hold monthly meetings, and about 20% hold meetings on specific need.
- 8. Preference for the current housing policies:** It has been shown that most residents do not prefer the public rental housing (apartment) and compensation options due to: 1) their inability to pay the deposit, rent, and management expenses of rental housing, 2) the proximity of their workplace to their current residence, and 3) their unwillingness to leave the familiar neighborhood.
- 9. Preference for community-driven housing projects and upgrading in situ:** More than 60% of the communities responded that they prefer to live with their current neighbors unless they are evicted. In the other communities where this preference was not high, individual preference has still been observed.

## Goolbeol Community, Gwacheon city

Goolbeol community is in the city of Gwacheon which is located near Seoul. It is located just out of the Seoul boundary, consists of 120 households. The community does not have access to public water pipes and sewage. People used to use underground water, but the water is not drinkable anymore due to contamination: all wasted water and excreta directly go into the ground.

In 2009, the community joined the ACCA programme, went through several community meetings for small projects not only within the community but also with local government and institutions. The followings are the **summary of small projects** and other major activities.

June 2009	<b>Installed fire extinguishers</b> - 80 Fire extinguishers and fire detectors in each household were sponsored by local fire station - Fire extinguisher container boxes were built by communities, funded by ACCA (\$ 600)
Aug 2009	<b>CCTV Installation:</b> \$ 1,900 from ACCA, \$1,100 from community
Sep 2009	<b>Pavement:</b> recycled abandoned pavement blocks
Oct 2009	<b>Recycling centre</b> - USD 500 funded by ACCA - Income: \$300 in 2009; \$1,000 in 2010; \$1,300 in 2011 - Income is saved for community fund: total saving is \$2,000 (Jan 2012)

Series of small 'Small Projects' were more effective than one Small Project. The Goolbeol community spent \$3,000 grant for 3 small projects in June, August and October in 2009. By doing so, community meetings were continued, tangible changes were accumulated, and, as a result, trust and confidence between community members were built up. It was different from a community that spent \$3,000 for one small project and then its activities became depressed.

The Goolbeol community' activities stimulated by the ACCA led to a good relationship between vinyl house communities and local government and also with local CSOs and other organisations in Gwacheon. In the negotiation process for fire prevention facilities, communities became to communicate with a member of a legislative body who became the city councilman in 2010. The Goolbeol community helped him with local CSOs and citizens in the municipal election campaign in 2010, and it could build a good network with varies organisations in the city. For example, community library for children was built with funds from the organisations, and its management cost is funded by local public official union (\$100 per month), and religious and civil society organisations (\$300~400 per month). Also, the seed money (\$7,000) for the library management was formed from a fundraising party held at the community. All the process influenced the preconceptions of government and citizens on the vinyl house settlements in Gwacheon.

<p>Jun 2010</p>	<p><b>Participated in an election campaign</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The member of a legislative assembly who the community supported was elected as the chairman of the Gwacheon City Council</li> </ul>
<p>Oct 2010</p>	<p><b>Community library for children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- space: a community member donated her house</li> <li>- funded by: local CSOs and NGOs, religious organisations</li> <li>- seed fund: community organised charity event, and raised \$7,000</li> <li>- until now, the seed fund is maintained: management cost is regularly funded from local government officer’s union, religious organisations and other local CSOs NGOs.</li> </ul>



Recycling centre construction



Children’s library construction



Fire extinguishers and container boxes



The city councilman at a community meeting

## Jeonwon Community, Seoul

*“Humid air and contaminated groundwater is killing us...”*

- Location : Namtaeryung, Bangbae-dong, Seocho-gu, Seoul
- History : About 20 years
- Number of Households : 100



### Community Story

Jeonwon Community is divided into the upper and lower villages, and the living condition of the latter is worse than the former. Although the residents have not received any warnings from the landowners, the infrastructure including toilet and water facilities is poor due to the community's illegal occupational status. Many of the

residents are over 60 years old, and they make their livings by taking daily jobs, doing chores at a local restaurant, running second-hand junk stores or working as a visiting housekeeper. Humidity inside the vinyl-houses and the contaminated groundwater contribute significantly to the health problems of the residents; however, as most of them are not covered the health insurance program, they usually stay at home even when they are seriously ill. Residents hold a monthly meeting and run common savings account in smaller groups.

### Telling Hope

“It is heartbreaking to see our kids being reluctant to bring their friends home. We didn't know what to do with our difficulties before, but we now understand that we can improve our situation by cooperating with other communities. We believe we can come up with some good alternatives.”

## Dongjadong Community(Jokbang), Seoul

In 2008, Dongjadong community opened a community centre, which is called ‘Sarangbang’. The community centre has provided diverse service to Jokbang residents, such as consultation, showing a movie once a week, weekend farm, delivering side dishes to residents, taking care of emergent patient.

It launched the Sarangbang Deduction Cooperative in 2011 to improve their lives by forming a cooperative. The cooperative was formed by community members based on community saving. Any Jockbang residents can be a member of the cooperative with \$1 membership fee. The members have responsibility of saving certain amount of money regularly, and it forms the investment money of the cooperative. The fund is loaned to residents with 2% interest. The average amount of loan is \$100~200 and the interest is used for other poor people. The community also opened a restaurant as a community business.

## Sujeong Community, Seoul

*“ We are trying hard to support ourselves”*

- Location : Gaepo-dong 1197-1, 1197-4, Gangnam-gu, Seoul
- History : About 27 years
- Number of Households : 61



### Community Story

The land is owned by Seoul and Jeonranam-do. Out of the 61 households (123 people), 23 consist of senior citizens living by him/herself, 4 consist of the handicapped, and 13 live under the poverty line; 26% of the residents receive minimum living expenses and 87% are either daily workers or the unemployed; 80% have bad credits.

Most of the vinyl-houses in this community are older than 20 years and need to be fixed. In 2003, Gangnam-gu office installed infrastructural channel that draws water up to the entrance of the community, and the residents installed the water pipes with their common savings. In 2009, Gangnam-gu office also installed a common toilet upon the request of the residents. Community meeting is held once a month at the community hall, and those participating in this meeting have been paying the membership fee to make a community fund.

Penalty and fine have been charged for people’s illegal occupation of the city-owned land, but most residents are financially incapable of moving into the public rental houses.

### Telling Hope

“We are planning to run a community business to get out of poverty. We believe that we can make it happen.”

## Jaegun Community, Seoul

*“We are the legal residents of this land since the government had made us move here. It would be inevitable for us to fight if the government keeps treating us as illegal settlers and imposing penalty”*

- Location : 266 Poi-dong, Gangnam-gu, Seoul
- History : About 30 years
- Number of Households : 96

### Community Story

In 1981, the Korean government gathered war orphans and vagabonds from all over the city to make a group of self-supporting labor working under the supervision of the police; the land of today’s Jaegun Community was where they were first accommodated. The intention of creating this group

was to give these frustrated people the will and the means to make their own livings. The number of workers was over 2,300 in 1982, and the government kept having trouble dealing with the frequent internal conflicts. Fearing that these workers might spoil the appearance of the city, the government forced them to stay within the area during the 1988 Seoul Olympics; the government then disbanded them when the Olympics were over.

The address of this community was changed a couple of times in the process of readjusting the division of land. Gangnam-gu office had rejected to give these residents the right to register, claiming that they were illegal occupants who moved to the area after the labor group was disbanded. The residents, however, give a different account; they say that they are the very ones who were forced to move to the area by the government decades ago, and that the relevant receipts they have been collecting since the 80s can prove that point. Jaegun community is still fighting against the government and Gangnam-gu office in order to make their legal occupancy officially recognized. Ever since the government had readjusted the division of land, it began to impose fine to the residents for their illegal occupancy. Each household is now charged with 60,000,000~80,000,000 KRW (about 60,000~80,000 USD), two-thirds of which is the pure interest. The total fine of the community is 1.2 billion KRW.

Most residents make their livings by collecting and selling wastepaper, and still some others work as housekeepers or retailers at a market.

### **Fire on 12 June 2011**

Jaegun(Poidong 266) Community was burned to the ground in a massive fire on Sunday, 12 June 2011. 75 out of 96 households living there were left homeless by a three-hour fire started from a boy who was playing with fire at a junkyard.



Before the fire (7 May 2011)



After the fire (12 June 2011)

### **Recovery efforts**

After the fire, the community put enormous efforts on letting public know their situation and received some donations from individuals and many organisations. With the fund, the community began to rebuild their houses by themselves with volunteers. Once 100 Yongyeocks, who are hired by the local government for eviction, destroyed some of rebuilt houses by force. However, the community kept rebuilding their houses.



As a result of continuous efforts of the community people and a grassroot organizations, the local government promised not to demolish houses and evict the community people until a redevelopment plan is fixed on the site. However, it does not necessary mean that community's housing right became secure.

Recently, the local government and Seoul government announced a redevelopment plan on the site: they will build a public rental apartment building, and provide the community some units of the apartment at 70% of the original rental price. However, because the rental price is set according to the land price, which is located in the most expensive area in Seoul, the community people actually cannot afford to live there. Also, the penalty fee imposed on the community in terms of 'illegal settlements' will follow the residents.

The current community plans(or wishes) are: 1) establishing a housing cooperatives, with a long term loan for land; 2) establishing a community social enterprise, a recycling centre that the community has been doing for 30 years; and 3) building a culture centre, which is for remembering the past sad story of the community and dreaming a bright future by running, such as, educational programme, exhibitions, and performances

### **Telling Hope**

“We're not asking anyone to make us rich. We just want to continue living in this community, which might be poor but always full of love.”