

Bang Bua Canal Community Network in Bangkok :
The redevelopment of 12 canal-side communities along Klong Bang Bua
(a Baan Mankong project involving the in-situ upgrading of 12 communities along the Bang Bua Canal, in Bangkok's Bang Khen District and Laksi District)

One of the very interesting Baan Mankong upgrading processes going on in Bangkok involves the upgrading of 12 communities located along the banks of the Bang Bua Canal. These 12 communities have formed a network (9 of them have formed a joint cooperative for purposes of Baan Mankong and CODI housing loans, etc., The other 3 communities have started savings groups, but have not yet joined the cooperative.), in collaboration with the District Authority and the Sripatum University. Klong Bang Bua in Bangkok, in Bangkok's Bang Khen District - many canal squatters in that area. The Bang Bua canal is a bigish canal in the northern part of Bangkok, which used to be used for boat transport through the city. Now the boats no longer run along this canal. Sripatum University is in the same area, and for several years, the University has run a program to help the local communities with various development projects - a very nice localized partnership, in collaboration with the District Authority. They have worked together to organize several canal-cleanings, and they have used "E.M." (Effective Micro-organism") to clean the polluted water of the canal naturally.

The Bang Bua Canal Community Network is part of the larger city-wide network of canal communities in Bangkok called, "*The Social Development and Canal Environment Network*" which has become a very active network in the city, working on issues of canal cleaning, environmental improvement, community upgrading, recycling, infrastructure and land tenure.

The process began in the Samaki Ruam Jai community

The Inauguration program of the first community upgrading project on Bang Bua Canal is held on December 10, 2004 in the Samaki Ruam Jai community – a huge .

- **Bangkok's first canal-side community 30-year lease!** In the case of this community, the land is under **Treasury Dept ownership** - public land. (CODI has MOU with Treasury Dept to coordinate to get long-term community leases to communities on Treasury Dept. land for Baan Mankong, so this helped!) Other canal-side communities are on land under the Irrigation Department - also national government. In reality, districts have no say about this land, but can help coordinate.
- **Before the plan was to make a 6-meter street along the canal!** But then after discussion, we decided to make it only 3 meter - much better. If necessary, a car can go in, but normally it's not for car, it's for walking. Now how do we make that walkway lively - so its not only a street, but a very good public place. Too boring! People can add terraces, docks, shape the walkway, playgrounds, landscaping, etc.

12 community network along Bang Bua Canal : (Bang = canal area + Bua = lotus)

- **There are 12 communities along this canal, and they have formed a network.**
- **There are a total of 3,800 households in the whole 12-community network**
- **Mr. Prapaat is the Network Chairman, Mr. Tasanai is the leader of Samaki Ruam Jai community.**
- **Bangkok's first canal-wide community improvement project :** First case in Bangkok where all the communities along a major canal have come together, formed a network and developed their own plans for redeveloping the whole area: housing, infrastructure, environment, canal water quality, etc. The Bang Bua Canal Network has signed an MOU with the two District Offices, and the Sripatum University to improve the area.
- **Have plans to redevelop all 12 communities, under Baan Mankong.** The pilot reconstruction project was in the first community of Samaki Ruam Jai.
- **Two districts :** The Bang Bua Canal runs along the border of two *khets* (districts) : Laksi and Bang Khen. So the communities on one side of the canal are in Laksi District, and the ones on the other side are in Bang Khen District.
- **History of the area :** These communities have been here for over 100 years. The oldest woman in the Bang Bua canal is 105 years old, and she was born here! First they came to live, planted rice in open fields nearby. Later, when the Army set up a big army headquarters across the road, there were some evictions, and people lost their rice farming land. More recently, the government had plans to build roads along both sides of the canal, which would have meant the eviction of all the communities along Bang Bua. Big fight against this road. Earlier, people were not organized, and it was easy for the government to evict them, family by family. That's the reason they linked together into a network, to negotiate with the government as a big block.
- **Land and tenure terms :** The land is under Treasury Department ownership, is being leased to the 12-community network, as one big block, on a 30-year lease. They are still negotiating the lease terms. The Treasury Department wants 9 Baht per square wah (2.25 Baht per square meter), but the people want to pay

only 4 Baht per square wah (1 Baht per sq. meter). The people will begin paying their monthly rent to the cooperative only after their new houses are finished, and the cooperative will then pay the rent to the Treasury Department, on a yearly basis, for all 12 communities.

- **Lease negotiations** : They use "network power" in the negotiations with the Treasury Department – bargaining as a big block with all 12 communities. No power if only one community, or individual families. Invited CODI and District officers from Bang Khen and Laksi Districts, as well as the other actors in the "District Mechanism" to join the meetings with the Treasury Dept.
- **District Mechanism** : In both districts involved in the Bang Bua Canal redevelopment, they have set up a "District Mechanism" for the Baan Mankong process in that district. Includes community network members, District Officers, CODI, Sripatum University, Treasury Department representatives, representatives of the water supply and electricity authorities, reps from the City Planning Department. *(this is the equivalent of the "City Mechanism" in other cities where Baan Mankong is operating. But since Bangkok is so big, they have developed a system in which each district ("khet") acts as a separate city, and develops its own district-wide upgrading plan, with its own district mechanism.)*
- **Developing the 3-meter pedestrian road and canal edge** : It has been agreed that the people will build 3-meter walkway along canal edge (using the Baan Mankong upgrading subsidy) of the whole canal (both sides), and District will build a concrete retaining wall (dike?) along the edge. In this way, the people are effectively "giving back" to the city a big piece of their land, for this public purpose, which will benefit both the communities as well as the public, by providing access and an amenity along the canal. The people call this a kind of "Land sharing." The idea of the 3-meter roadway is that it is wide enough to allow a vehicle inside in an emergency only, but narrow enough that the place will not be accessible to people with cars (to prevent gentrification: any area that is not accessible to cars is not attractive to middle-class, and therefore less likely to gentrify). Only foot traffic, bicycles and motorbikes. Plans also include room for planting trees on the house side of this walkway, which will become an important open space for community activities - playing, vendors, etc. As well as a public walkway to go along the canal, linking all 12 communities. The canal itself is 40 meters wide, and as part of the redevelopment, all the houses that have encroached into the canal (built on stilts over the water) will be demolished and people will rebuild inside.

Pilot project at Samaki Ruam Jai Community (Klong Bang Bua) :

There are 112 households in this community. The reconstruction is planned in three phases :

- Phase 1: build 14 houses
 - Phase 2 : Build 37 – 40 houses
 - Phase 3 : build 35 houses
- TOTAL 112 units (?).

Three house models (which they developed with Acharn Seng from Maha Salakam University plus help from the architecture faculty at Sripatum University) :

- **Detached house** : Construction cost : ? Housing loan from CODI = 200,000 Baht (repay 1,500 Baht per month for 15 years)
- **Double "Twin" house** : (For big, extended families) : Construction cost? Housing loan from CODI = 300,000 Baht
- **Townhouse (row house)** : Construction cost: 180,000 Baht. House loan from CODI of 150,000 Baht (repayment of 1,145 Baht per month for 15 years) 4.5 meters wide x 10 meters deep, with a 0.75 meter space at the back for access to sewer pipes. 45 sq. mts. downstairs + 45 sq. meters upstairs, with balcony for drying clothes, and two bedrooms upstairs. Very close together upstairs!

- **Kitchen waste water treatment system** : They are experimenting with a home-made waste-water filter, made of plastic pipes and buckets, which fits under the kitchen sink. The whole unit costs only 300 Baht. The idea is that the water is filtered and somewhat treated before it goes into the canal. Also, the oil which families collect in the filters can be sold to make candles.
- **Community-wide septic tank** : all the sewage in the community will be collected and treated in a common septic tank, before the treated water is released into the klong. We didn't get a chance to see this system or learn about how it works. *Goal: no pollution in the canal from the communities!*
- **Dealing with pollution in the canal water** : There are also many factories along Klong Bang Bua, which cause the serious pollution in the canal now. Water very dirty, smelly and black. The people have begun to produce their own E.M. ("*Effective Microorganism*" - a kind of organic bacterial canal cleaner and fertilizer, used to bring "dead" canals back to life) behind the Network Office in Samaki Ruam Jai, and have started putting it into the canal once a year, during their annual canal cleaning jamborees. They have also set up nets to catch floating solid waste in the canal, and are growing *pak boong* (morning glory greens) along the canal edge, as a way of naturally cleaning the water. *(We're told that some community members are earning enough from collecting and selling this pak boong in the market to send their kids to university!)* But the pollution is very serious and it is not possible for the communities alone to clean up the water. They are now working with the two districts to identify factory polluters upstream and get them to stop dumping toxic waste and chemical effluents into the canal. The UN is also supporting the development of some kind of waste-

water treatment system in the canal (?). *But the important thing is that the people in these communities are leading the process to clean up the canal!*

- **Community broadcast system** : there are loudspeakers at the end of the new houses for broadcasting announcements, calling people to meetings, etc.
- **Samaki Ruam Jai's Savings Office** : we visit the Samaki Ruam Jai community's savings office. They have had an active savings group here since 1999, and have monthly meetings to discuss all community issues, redevelopment, etc. Also monthly network meetings with the other 11 communities on Klong Bang Bua.
- **Baan Mankong in Samaki Ruam Jai** : They started their Baan Mankong upgrading planning in December 2003, and started construction of the first phase houses in December 2004. The first 14 houses were inaugurated by the Governor of Bangkok in October 2005.
- **Temporary houses** : Now they are constructing temporary houses for the people whose houses will be demolished to make way for Phase two reconstruction. Have to find space for these – in a crowded community. These temporary houses are being built with a small grant from CODI of 18,000 Baht per unit, which is little enough that people have to be resourceful in finding cheap materials and recycling materials to make them within that budget. Same CODI grant for temp houses in all Baan Mankong projects.

Bang Bua Canal Redevelopment in the local-language news :

"Move the houses back from the canal"

A translation of a Thai-language story in the *Kom Chad Leuk* Thai-language Newspaper, 29 March, 2006

They call this building made of only small pieces of wood a "house." They use the old materials from advertisements and vinyl election banners, any old piece of wood that they can find in the lane. The houses are all crowded against each other, at odd angles, and many are interconnected. Some houses are only five by ten meters, some only three by two meters.

Some may call this community alongside the Bang Bua Canal a slum. In official terms, these people are considered to be squatters on public land. But the people have lived here for a long time. After the first families settled here almost a hundred years ago, their relatives began migrating here from other provinces like Surin, Ubon Ratchatani, Sakhon Nakhon and Nakhon Sawan. They all came to Bangkok to look for work, because in their impoverished villages, they had no jobs and were very poor. So in this way, a quiet, canal-side settlement gradually got more and more crowded, as the city grew up around it. The people living here work as construction laborers, vendors, market sellers, or in various jobs in the immediate area.

Mr. Leun Seuman, who comes from Surin Province, has lived here in Bang Bua for 40 years. He has never owned a piece of his own land. But back then, he managed got a job in the Bang Ken area, so he rented this land for 60 Baht a month and built a simple house on it. The whole area, he explains, used to be abandoned land. Seuman says that he has never enjoyed a really deep sleep in all his time along Bang Bua, because there were always rumors that there would be evictions or fires. Two times he was awoken in the night by actual fires. But he still lives here. His sons and daughters have grown up here, gotten married and moved out. Now, only his youngest son is still living with Seuman and his wife. In earlier times, the people used to bathe and swim in the Bang Bua Canal, but now the water is very dirty and smelly.

The process of upgrading of this community began ten years ago. In 1996, the government announced a policy to take back the land for a road-building project. But the people refused to budge, and it was not possible to evict them. Eventually, the people were able to join the Baan Mankong Community Upgrading Program to improve their housing and living conditions, and to consolidate their right to stay there. With help from the Bang Ken District Chief, the people were able to negotiate a cooperative, long-term lease with the Treasury Department, which is the official public land-owner. Some architecture students from the nearby Sripatum University helped the community people to develop plans for redeveloping their community, using loans from CODI and community labor to build the houses very cheaply.

The first 2-story row-house model they designed costs about 144,945 Baht to build, and the first 14 families have taken low-interest housing loans from CODI, as part of the Baan Mankong Program. These households pay back about 40 Baht per day, or 1,145 Baht per month, for 15 years, for the house loans. 14 houses have now been completed, and another nine houses are under construction.

Now the people have a new name for their community: *Samakee Ruam Jai* ("Community united by the heart").

As part of the Samakee Ruam Jai community's redevelopment plan, the people are building a community health center, and will create a landscaped public walkway along the canal edge, with trees and flowers and places to sit and lots of space for children to play. The walkway will be wide enough to allow a fire-truck to access the community, but will not be generally kept open only for pedestrian use. In each house, special low-cost filtration tanks have been installed, so that the "gray water" from kitchens and bathrooms will be filtered and de-greased before being discharged into the canal. This special grease filter tank was designed by the people themselves and uses "local wisdom" of local people.

Now the community is using organic liquid compost ("Effective microorganism" – "E.M."), which they make themselves from kitchen waste, to gradually clean up the water in the canal and bring it back to life, so fish and plants can thrive in it. The people also arrange frequent canal-cleaning jamborees, in which everyone pitches in to collect and remove solid waste from the canal. Already, these efforts are showing effect. The canal water which used to be black and foul-smelling is much cleaner and greener and less smelly. Plus, many community people are now able to grow morning glory greens (*pak boong* in Thai) along the canal edges, which they eat themselves and sell in nearby markets.

In the future, the people in Samakee Ruam Jai have plans to make the communities along the Bang Bua Canal, which is an important linking canal in the city's canal network, into a tourist attraction, with an old-fashioned floating market.

Mr. Channa Petcharat, chairperson of the community's committee, says that there are 112 families living in Samakee Ruam Jai. 25 of these families have already rebuilt their houses. Eventually, all the families will rebuild their houses, according to the redevelopment plans, except for five very poor families, who don't want to take on any debts, who will stay in their old houses. The upgrading project in Samakee Ruam Jai includes not only better houses and living environment, but secure land tenure. People in the community will no longer be afraid of being evicted – by city officials, by government plans or by fire. They feel like nobody can kick them out from this place, because now they have long-term lease for the land.