Notes on Canal-side networks in Thailand:

In Bangkok and other cities . . . (These notes from 1999, gathered by Thomas Kerr at the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights in Bangkok)

Klong-side Settlements Network update -
new Klong federation, many NGOs and groups work together, city plans to evict them, idea of wave echos causing trouble on concrete-walled klongs, klong-cleaning story, visit by klong settlers from Chiangmai, also to Songkla.

1997 - 98: First ever survey of klong settlements
The Survey was a joint venture of UCDO, BMA and Rajabhat Panakorn University. Survey involved NGOs and the local housing mafia. According to that survey, at that time, there were 184 canal settlements in Bangkok, with a population of 52,438 people, in 11,653 households. This survey was undertaken during the administration of Dr. Pichit, one of the more community-friendly governors of Bangkok.

BMA wants to evict them, even though they are on land under many different owners. City is very hyper and worried about flooding - big political issue, because Bangkok is at sea-level, built in the Chao Phraya delta and flooding is natural, but here is this huge city in a swamp! Much flooding. Always new Plans to “improve” city’s drainage system, mostly evict houses to build concrete retaining walls along klongs, so they have a “hard edge.” Also planning more pumping stations and water gates, which inhibit the old systems of water flowing in the klongs and keeping them naturally flushed clean. Now many stagnant water klongs eally foul! But these walls cause “eco waves” when boats go past, don’t absorb waves like old “soft” edges (with legs of houses, plants, dirt, etc). Klong federation forming? Let people take care of the canals - they do better than the city can.

• Also, refer to newspaper clipping from BKK Post (in Thailand File) “Reprieve for 4,200 households which encroached on canals”
• Simple Federating Principles (techniques) - “Just add water”
• “Water Soluble Federating Techniques” - The principle of coming together around a common problem or landlord or land ownership has been a tried-and-tested federating technique (Railways, Airport, under-bridge, etc) in India, Thailand, etc. Here the common thing is the water, the klong, which flows to connect so many communities. Bonding together in larger numbers for strength, ideas, larger pool of skills, negotiating clout, shared savings, etc. That’s called “federating” - the benefits of being part of something BIG rather than isolated. person - family - community - federation. Where there are no social programmes, no safety net, no welfare, like Denmark!
• Little picture, Big picture : What happens there affects here.

updates from Somsook January 1999 :
• In early Jan, there was a meeting with BMA. People met the BMA governor about 6 or 7 cases along the Bangkok klongs. These cases couldn’t be resolved within the district process, so went to BMA. All cases awarded to communities. This is because of the power of federating - bigger numbers have clout. Most of the other cases were negotiated within the district and agreements were reached about what to do with the settlements.
• Most of the cases involve the city’s plans to repair the klongs and concrete the walls, (big drainage problems in city in rainy season) etc. Houses come in the way, so agreements to shift a little, reblock, pull ack - each one different. Main priority at this pint is STAYING THERE!! Klong feds make clear they want to stay there, fist - NOT relocate. Willing to shift, reblock, land-share, etc, but not move.
• First city announced wide evictions. People protested and go reprieve (newspaper). Then negotiations began on two levels. First within each district (and there are 20 or 30 districts within BKK with Klong Settlements in them - check this number in survey) there was a negotiation where the district’s plans and communities discussed and came to resolution. This worked for most cases, but those that couldn’t be resolved came to the city level, BMA. All cleared there.

BOX :
Some statistics from the Bangkok Klong Survey - as presented to the BMA (Get from UCDO)
1. Chumchon Klong Ong-ang (also called Pam Mahakan):

Behind the Pam Mahakan (old tower and fort wall built by Rama 1). Rama I built 14 walls around the city to protect it, this is one. 200 years later, 4 Rai of area outside this wall is occupied by a 50-year old settlement of 77 houses (280 people). Now the land ownership is under the BMA. At the front of the settlement is the Pam Mahakan, and at the back is the historic Klong Ong-ang. Right in the middle of the historic part of the city. You’d never know it was there, when you pass by the battlements of the crisply white-washed old wall.

Beautiful settlement, with many old banyan and bo trees, a special little enclosed garden for children, large and shady open square at the middle, with a lean-to housing free weights for boys to lift, and meeting space. Tucked cozily between an ancient Klong Ong-ang, and the ancient city wall. At one end of the community are several artisan families who are traditional bird-cage makers, using bamboo to fashion elaborate filigree bird-cages with elaborate hooks, and some sell the birds and seeds to feed them too.

A board was put up telling the whole history of the settlement, with facts about population, area, etc. Earlier, the BMA tried to evict people, used police aggressive tactics and offered compensation and free plots far away at Chalong Krung. (When was this?) At that time, people didn’t have any alternatives, had no Klong federation, community wasn’t organized, didn’t know they could bargain collectively, and people were worried, so 15 families were intimidated into taking the compensation and moving out there. Some of these people have not been able to survive out there, and want to move back, and have asked the BMA if they can repay the compensation in installments. Lek says now the community has much more confidence, and many “friends” in the same situation. Before, they were lonely! Now they will not allow the police or the BMA to enter the settlement to evict them. Now they are doing two things:

- bargaining with the BMA about their own settlement
- strengthening the klong network.

Garbage Cleaning Day: When we visited, they were doing their monthly cleaning and garbage removal, bit party atmosphere, Thai Rock and roll music was blaring, crows were shrieking, people (women, kids and men) sweeping garbage everywhere and carrying it out to the BMA truck, which is arranged to come on the fixed day, women cooking lunch for everyone (they take turns, 10 families cook together each month, rotating this task). This activity uses no money - everybody chips in, and nobody gets paid.

Leaders here are Pi Lek and Pi Wiman. Our guide is Pui and Duang from UCDO.

Part of New Klong Network: Now they are part of the all-Bangkok Klong federation, and are developing their own plans to stay where they are. Community members all contribude 20 baht per month to a special fund to support sending the community committee members to Klong federation meetings and activities elsewhere. Several people from other settlements in the Klong Federation had come to help out, and after the work is over and everyone had eaten lunch, they would all have a klong fed meeting. People came from Ladprao, Chatuchak, Bang Bua, others. Many helpers! So far, there are 35 communities in the Klong Federation.

Land-sharing plans! They have developed a detailed proposal (from a series of options) in which they all move onto 1 rai of the land and build tightly packed rows of small 2-story shop-houses (total 65 houses) like at Manangasila (4 x 6 metre plots = 24 sq.mt. plots x 2 stories = 48 sq. mt of living space per family) (the idea is to keep the houses lower than the old wall, so you won’t see them from the street) and then turn over the other 3 rai to the BMA to develop a public garden. In addition to giving back 75% of the land, they are proposing to become the official caretakers of the park and the old wall. There is a young architect with a pony tail living in the settlement - he is out of work and helped draft up several land-sharing options, of which the people picked one to send to the BMA negotiations. The proposed plans include generous space for parking their carts, since many people living here make their living selling food, souvenirs and other goods from carts in the Sanam Luang nearby. Community members have visited all the other land-sharing projects in BKK, and other
housing projects in Udon, Khonkaen and Chiang Mai. Now the proposal is with the BMA, and is being negotiated for at two levels, - within the district in the Klong Committee, and at the BMA with the central Klong committee.  (check this?)

Tuang (UCDO) says the only other Land sharing project that has been done in BKK on BMA land is at Pawet - not finished yet, and took a long time.  In that project, BMA does all the development, design, etc, as a kind of pilot project.

Other preparations : Every household in the community is part of the 6-months old savings group. People have three saving options - daily, weekly or monthly, depending on how they earn their money. They save mostly for housing, but also for revolving fund to give loans to each other. But the overwhelming focus is on saving for house building. Their rule : If you want to borrow from the revolving fund, you can only borrow 75% of what you have saved, maximum. They learned the ropes of savings from other groups that which they visited and hosted, via exchanges.

Coming Back : We meet one severely handicapped guy (maybe later stages of Multiple Schlerosis?) who makes beautiful little terra cotta figurines in the shape of buddhas and traditional Thai musicians. He gets the clay from the bed of the Klong Ong-ang out back. His father was one of the families which took the compensation and moved to Chalong Krung. But this man, his son, could not survive out there, couldn't sell his figurines and support he and his wife. Here, he makes 10 figurines a day, which he sells for 60 Baht each to a middle man (who then sells them for several hundred). So he asked the community if he could come back, and they agreed, but only as a special case, on humanitarian grounds, since anyone who took compensation and moved away cannot return. They have given him a space where one of the abandoned houses was, and he (or his wife) has built a very poor shack with odds and ends.

2. Visit to Siri Amat Community  (another klong-side community near Sanam Luang)

This 80-year old community falls in the way of a planned BMAroad, which will cause the evictionof over half the 48 houses. Some of the people here are garbage collectors, Sa-Leng, and many are vendors who sell drinks, snacks and souvenirs from carts around the Sanam Luang nearby, or near the Sapan Put. They mostly work evenings, and start preparing their carts in the afternoon, work late.

Siri Amat is part of the new Klong Network, and has just recently started savings, but not everyone is a member yet. They show us the yellow and pink savings ledgers and the passbooks that are standard with UCDO-connected savings (?) in Dao Kanong underbridge community, Patrick (South Africa) came and pushed for daily savings.

3. Pracha Ruam Jai (1) Community

(pracha = people, Ruam = working together, Jai = heart)

This is one of the settlements in the Federation of settlements along the Klong Perm. This settlement is right behind Wat Sumean Nalee, Bang Khaen area in BKK. 255 houses here, on one side of Klong Prem. 28 families have gotten together and are leading the way in showing how people can make their own plans to develop the klong and settlement - a pilot group.

They unroll a LONG map of all the settlements along the Klong Perm. Ruam Jai - 1 (255 houses), Ruam Jai-2 (173 houses) and one other settlement (94 houses) - total 522 houses. Each community does its own mapping. Intense work going on now to organise all these settlements and bring them into the fed. Starting savings, doing mapping, visiting other settlements, forming committees, doing detailed surveys of pollution sources along the klong.

The long map they show is extraordinary - very detailed, showing all basic services, houses, and they have located sources of pollution along the klong - a pepsi factory, a paint factory, a middle-class housing colony, a district office newspaper printing house, car factory, a hotel. "We are not the people who are making the canal dirty. We don;'t throw our garbage in any more. We have clean ups now." They show newspaper stories of BMA Governor Bichit coming to see the cleaned klong in a boat.
**Principle:** “Our struggle is not to confront the government, but to show the way, with ideas and creative solutions of our own.”

Earlier the BMA tried to evict this settlement in order to build concrete walkways and dikes to improve the Klong, but the people want to stay and are making their own plans for redeveloping their settlement. Yps are helping with Patama-style workshops. People say no concrete dikes (walls?) but plant trees instead to shore up the klong edges and make beautiful. A “soft” dike system instead of concrete.

**Objective:** If we work together, we can stay. Otherwise, we’ll be kicked out - if not by this administration, by a later one. Need to start savings scheme.

**Problems:** bad smell in Klong, no money to improve houses, need fire protection, toilets too close to the water, walkway through settlement is too narrow, access to main road is not good, houses too old, need waste-water treatment before going into klong. They are thinking about all these problems: “we need to start cleaning up our own settlement before pointing fingers at other polluters.”

**Pulling Back from the Klong:** When we visit with the Napalis, there is a little workshop with the 28 families in the pilot group, and the Yps, to look at the canalege, and reblocking to pull the houses back from the Klong. On the map, the yellow line = 20 metre wide klong (minimum) and the red line = 24 metre klong (better for BMA). Either will mean cutting off of the houses that overhang the klong. Utipan trying to get consensus on doing this. Reluctance. Some tension between UCOD community workers (Uttipan and Tuang) and the YP’s who say the UCDO interferes in their workshops, interrupt and don’t let us do our professional thing. Same kind of thing as at Songkhla - pulling back houses to make a consistent width of Klong, and pulling back toilets from Klong.

**New Bangkok Klong-community Network:**

**Activities:** cleaning klongs, campaign for right to stay, Environmental awareness, improve houses, monthly meetings, remote youth groups, promote welfare for health and funerals.

**The klong network is structured like this:** each klong has its own network made up of settlements along that klong. So far, 36 communities living along 8 klongs in BKK are in the network. Many still not part of work. (Total figures in newsletter).

**Born in a crisis!** The network began in 1998, with the big eviction scare after BMA announced plans to evict thousands of canal-side squatters in order to improve the klongs to prevent flooding. Didn’t happen - get this story - then big klong community survey. Subsequent negotiations led to a city-wide policy in which all the klongs can stay and … (tell story, district and central mechanisms), but the district bureaucracies and old regulations keep this new good policy from working well. It’s a clash between the new and old thinking. Also, Bichit, the current governor of BMA (or mayor?) is a good klong network supporter, and helped see this new policy through. But he is at the end of his term, a “lame duck” and a lot of the District officials are dragging their feet on negotiations with klong communities progress, waiting to see how the wind will blow with the next governor.

**I ask all these klong leaders why start a klong network?** Strong and together! Most have same problems. Want to gather around same issue to have power and togetherness, even though the BMA has allowed us to stay. Who knows how long this will last? The network has to outlast fickle changes of politics! You never know what will happen. Governments never last long, but the network has to be permanent! If we do alone, we have no power. Together, we have lots of people, lots of ideas. Good solutions come from lots of ideas and people involved. Strength in numbers. The October 14 revolt also gave idea. Everybody has these problems, have to share the ideas and need to have a forum to do this. Need to pool ideas. Tuang says “the law of the community worker is how to make a forum for people to discuss, NOT to make a solution - that has to come from people themselves.” The BMA keeps trying tp push the poor out to the city periphery - why? But if you have only rich people in the centre of the city, who will work? Who will sell things to eat? Who will do all the jobs if the poor are far away?

**Three things the Klong Feds are doing:**
1. Starting savings groups to show that people have resources, have money for their houses
2. Bargaining as a federation to stop eviction of Klong settlements
3. Bargaining for temporary housing registrations in Klong settlements- only a network can do this, not individual people - the policy to issue registration is with the BMA, but the extension of registrations through districts - many of which are not cooperating, obstructing. There are “good and bad” districts
4. Plan projects to clean the canals and help BMA to learn about these, and to find out who the real polluters are.
5. Want to decide our lives ourselves, not the BMA.

The BMA’s policy is good, even radical! to let people stay and redevelop, rather than evict them, but the implementation of the policy gets clogged in the lower levels - in district administrations, with old regulations and old attitudes towards Klong-side communities as “squatters” and encroachers.

Klong Clean-ups:
- **Songkhla:** In the southern Thai city of Songkhla, the communities along Klong Samrong, which runs through the middle of the city, were threatened with eviction. They developed plans to improve their settlement, first cleaning out the klong, then using funds from LIFE program (in which they built their own wooden walkways along canal-edge) and later with NHA budget (in which contractors built concrete walkways and other infrastructure, according to the redevelopment plans the people developed themselves, in a series of extraordinary workshops conducted by a young Bangkok architect, Patama Roonrakwit.

- **Chiangmai communities along two canals (klong Mekhaa, and Klong Koowai)** visit to Songkhla for klong cleaning ideas. August 9th 1999 canal cleanup in Chiangmai, along Klong Mekhaa, with groups from BKK and Songkhla coming up to help. Consolidating ownership by cleaning up the place. Can take some stuff from Diana’s notes. Patama’s idea about “Pa Paa” concept, in Northern Thailand, where people in community ager together to sdo things. Maybe this could be in a caption for the Chiang Mai klong cleanup. (get photos of Chiangmai cleanup from Tun at DANCED / UCEA)

Nick’s E-mail notes on Chiangmai Klongs :
The klongs are mainly fed from the city moat, and other sources originating in the surrounding hills. The water is already polluted by the time it arrives in the city, at which point various markets and industry add to the pollution. By the time it reaches the communities, the water has clearly visible signs of pollution - dark colouration, dense algae and solid waste. The lives of those living around the kolong is tied with the water, naturally once cleaner and higher. There are still fish living in the water, abut it is more of a hazard than an asset. With the communities, I am trying to develope a process of slowly filtering the pollution and redevelop the areas along either bank into usable green space. What I am looking for now is readings on river ecology that are relevant to this context and might help provide models of healthy systems towards which the communities can work. Models of river-canal systems that have been cleaned out elsewhere, ideas about filtering sytems that the community might implement themeselves as an initial step.

Klong Samrong in Songkhla :
- **Community-built walkway** first, then later community planning excercise with Patama and new NHA walkway. When the NHA built it’s heavy concrete walkway according to the design worked out by th people. Pi-leng’s house. Photos from Pi-Duk of before and after on the Klong, and also food photos in the Japanese publication in Thailand File.

- **Community planning and city policy - how they relate** : Somsook says this is a good “precedent-setting” situation, where communities planned and convinced the city to go along with them. Also, using a klong clean-up project to consolidate tenure.

- **The Klong clean up** - getnotes from visit to Songkla, with Howard and Nick - the stages. What communities can do, what the city has to do - the deep-dredging and moving back the house to make the klong wide enought for the heavy municipal dredging raft. Distance across maintained. Also, agreement to move back toilets, so they don’t feed into klong. Sand gbar at the end traps water. what to do.

**BANGKOK Klong Update** :
(copyed from a column by Sanitsuda Ekachai’s in the Bangkok Post, September 23, 1999)
In mid September, 1999, the Minister for science, technology and the environment, Dr. Arthit Ourairat, reportedly publically blamed the communities along Bangkok’s canals of being the main cause of water pollution and announced a policy to evict them. Clean canals, he explained, are not only important for Bangkok’s public health and environment, they also are potential sources of tourism money. According to his reasoning, the polluters must go. But is his reasoning sound?

Believe it or not, Bangkok, a city of more than 10 million, has no effective wastewater treatment. Basically, wastewater from all the households goes into the sewage and flows directly into natural waterways - together with polluted and often toxic waste water from factories. This is how canals and the Chao Phraya River have become the city’s giant sewage lines. And how can this sewage be clean?

It is rediculous to expect Bangkok’s canals to be crystal clear simply by removing the canal-side communities without also tackling Bangkok’s central sewage and water treatment system and the polluting businesses.

Although biased, Dr. Arthit’s view struck a chord with Bangkok’s middle class prejudice against the urban poor. For affluent Bangkokians, slums - whether along the canals or inland - are the hub of bad people who illegally encroach on public land, destroy the environment and turn any plac into an underworld of drugs and crime, thus posing a danger to city safety. Few realize that without the cheap labour and goods supplied by the slums, the cost of living in BKK would be much, much higher....

But evicting BKK’ slum communities won’t be as easy as....among the grassroots movements in Thailand, Bangkok’s slum movements are by far the strongest. After over two decdes of fighting for housing rights, It is now standard parctice for slum communities to take part in settlement negotiations. There’s also a fund to give them long-term, lowinterest loans for permanent residence. It’s also clear that once the people feel safe from eviction, the slum environment improves immediately. As part of a growing civil society, the slum movement has proved how conflicts can be solved if people have security of land and a say in how to manage their environment. ....