

## **Chumchon Wat Klang, Ladprao Soi 132, Bang Kapi District, Bangkok**

*(Field visit notes by Thomas Kerr, ACHR)*

Cleaning up the Canal : **Big celebration on Feb 28, 2003**

***This is not really an informal community (?)***. People own the houses. Doesn't seem to be any tenure or eviction problem here. Community strongly organized on one side of the klong, but lots of renters and apartments on the other side, not as easy to organize. Very old community, mostly Muslim.

The community started to organize activities about 2 years ago, starting with a community meeting where they talked about the issues in their community, which they prioritized as a) drugs, b) garbage, and c) general quality of life. They have focused on prevention for their youth drug threat, which carries over into many of their projects such as the kids garbage bank project. Starting with solid waste in the community, they eventually ended up seeing the smell and pollution of the canal as a next step. Back in on 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2002, the community convened a meeting at the local schools which sits at the mouth of the klong where it meets Klong Saen Saep. At the meeting they set a plan to start a clean up, and set in motion a community canal care program. Only a week later, digging up the garbage from the canal begun, and carried over 4 weekends until more than 20 tonnes of garbage was extracted.

***Chumchon Wat Klang is part of the Bang Kapi District community network of 10 communities***, of which six are doing garbage recycling activities. Activities in the community really got moving

*Very active community, lots of activities :*

- **Have savings group**
- **garbage bank**, where garbage is separated at source (plastic, paper, toxic waste, tin, glass, etc.) The garbage bank's main focus is on awareness raising for the kids who participate in the bank. The kids have a garbage bank book which show "deposits" of X kilos of this and X kilos of that. The garbage is collected at the bank every Saturday, and value is recorded in the book. They can make a withdrawal at any time. The can also take loans up to 10 times the value of their savings, but not greater than 5,000 baht, on which they pay a monthly fee of 2 baht. The bank currently has 175 members with 88,915 baht in savings. The savings don't earn interest (as this would be against Muslim beliefs), but "dividends" are paid to kids in the form of pencil cases, books and other useful and educational equipment. Then recyclable garbage is taken to a recycling center nearby, where 6 other communities also take recyclable waste. It's a SIF sponsored garbage sorting and transfer station, also a learning center "Recycling Transfer Station" - sell cleaned stuff to industry. Awareness raising project. SIF also supported some fo the community committee to visit innovative community garbage projects in Phitsanulok.
- **Boats from DANCED**, involvement of DANCED Bangkok people, who donated boat, to clean klong every week, and to dump in the EM weekly. Originally one boat has been on loan from Bangkokapi district. Now the community has three boats to do their weekly cleaning.
- **Weekly klong cleaning** (take out garbage) and EM dumping to keep water alive.
- **Put flags in the klong, to show respect to the river spirits!**
- **Kids do fashion show of clothes** made from recycled materials (newspaper, noodle packets, carburator filters, etc.) Kids also make sand candles, lots of fun!

***Vichai is the technical assistant from the Thai Community Foundation.*** He helped measure the klong, estimate volume of water, determined how much EM to use and showed people how to make the EM. He's an environmental engineer.

### **Speeches at Ceremony :**

**Khun Saowai (woman) is 72 years old**, and is one of the leaders in the community. She paddles us down the klong in one of the red plastic DANCED boats. She was born in this community, and her 93 year old mother is still alive, and they BOTH take part in the aerobic exercise sessions each evening! When we find out how old this lively, strong woman is, we insist on taking the oars and rowing the boat, Nu, Peter Shimokawa and I, but the going is slow, and we zig-zag back and forth badly, and everyone on shore laughs!

- She says she used to swim and bathe in the canal when she was a kid, but they never drank the water. By then, the roads were good, the houses were good, community was very clean, people

were doing well, but the klong was dirtier and smellier than ever, filled solid with garbage. Got worse over the years. Earlier, people used to throw garbage in the klong, but because it was mostly biodegradable - leaf wrappings, and paper etc. it wasn't such a problem. Then came the era of plastic and foam, and suddenly the klong was clogged with stuff that never went away.

- **Plus, there used to be water hyacinths**, which helped naturally clean the water, nature's water filtering process. But the city believed these caused flooding and so they removed them every year, and there was no biological assistance to clean the water, got dirtier.
- Khun Saowai was the one who finally said, "We have to do something! Can't wait for others to change our community, need to start ourselves." First they cleaned out the klong of the garbage, pulling huge basketfuls of garbage out from under the houses, and dredging up sofas, beds, bicycles, chairs, car parts, shoes, sewing machines, fans, birdcages.
- **Organizing people** : This side of the klong was easy to get organized to clean the klong, but the other side, which is mostly renters, was harder. Used loudspeakers and sent letters to get people across the way involved. Some gave money but not much involved in the work of cleaning or EM or the Garbage bank.
- **Cleaning the Klong** : They dug out 2 tons of garbage, but still water was black with pollution from their houses, from upstream and coming in from Klong Saen Sap. Klong used to be filthy, black, stinky. Used "Effective Microorganism" (EM) to bring water in klong back to life. Put organic waste with molasses (sugar?) and water into drums, it ferments and turns into liquid, which is then dumped into the klong. Now water is green, alive, fish inside.

**Wat Klang community : "The canal protector"**  
(Report by Vichai Poey, December 2004)

**Bangkok, "The Venice of the East" and the waste Venice** : Bangkok was called as the East Venice as it has more than thousand canals in the city and its neighbour. Since king Rama V period canal excavation had done in different places all around the city purposing for transportation irrigation and some canal was built to be the way to attack enemy during war. Later canal became function like main transportation for the city. As city was expanding a lot of people evacuated in city happen residential area everywhere especially near the canal. Urbanization was grow up more a long both side of canal. People like to live near canal because it was easy to move around, food was available canal was plentiful of aquatic animal, a good relaxing place near the canal as cool windy weather with nice synergy, washing cleaning bathing activities and even drinking was done by using water from canal. So canal became thing to keep life easier and convenience that cause it had residential and commercial area more everyday. While the population of the city was increasing everyday the city was changing quickly, road construction cut through everywhere to supply people and became main transportation for the city and reducing the use of canal by the time. Due to the lack of solid waste management and wastewater treatment canal became the place to support the waste from the city, garbage from residential area was dumped in canal drainage line carry wastewater disposing into canal which caused canal bare high pollution and became waste finally.

**Klong Wat Klang - the illness in the canal** : Klong Wat Klang canal is an 800 meters branch of big canal San Seap run through the East of Wat Klang community. It used to be clean and livable beneficial canal in the past but now face the same situation as many canal. More than 20 years canal had to bare the solid waste and wastewater from the resident on both side of the canal today it has such a serious case of high pollution, water is totally black with bad strong smell, garbage float on every and become small dumping island in some portion.

**The care and responsibility to environment - Wat Klang community**: Wat Klang community has long struggling on environmental problem and they started to deal with garbage issue in the year ----- . To deal with garbage management they has set up the recyclable bank named garbage bank. After sometime garbage bank is function well and reduce garbage in household and community which kept community much more clean. Community was more strong and powerful and became learning center for other community. The active leader later they move to fight with next issue, the polluted canal is the big challenge problem to them. To deal with it they need participation from people who live on both side of canal as they are stake holder and should be key actor to take action. The community meeting had set up to find solution together people who lives near the canal express bad feeling to live near canal because of its strong bad smell and an unhealthy synergy they had lost their clean livable canal for long time and now they were going to take it back.

**Cleaning up canal together :** The volunteer team had formed with plan to clean up the canal. The first cleaning day was held on ----- with many people participated and good cooperation from district authority. About 5-7 tons of garbage had been collected on first day. Day by day people work hard on collecting garbage for 40 days about 21 tons of garbage had been collected most work almost done. The canal totally change it's physical to be clean and liable but still remain black color and bad strong smell.

**"Heal the illness" in the canal by EM :** To treat the waste canal people tried EM as they have seen in some community who succeeded in using EM for wastewater treatment and it is the only technology that was lowest cost easy to make by they own and they already made EM. An 800 meters was divided into 7 points and put red flag at every point to be the sign to pour EM at the point. The ratio of using EM was 1: 5,000 ( one part of EM and 5,000 part of wastewater) each point will use about 280 liters approximately and pour EM into canal once a week.

**Efficiency of EM :** First week was not much changing but bad smell was reduced and still remain black color.  
Second week notice more fish in canal and les smell color still remain black.  
Third week was the big changing one day after pour EM the whole canal had changed to be new one , no bad smell and green livable color a lot of fish came in appear the air bubble everywhere small plankton born show quality of water .

**Happy ending together :** People who live near the canal was excited to the new look canal . The hard working for almost 2 months people did together tiredly today bacame big pride when the result came out which was shown by their smile face. The reputation of Wat Klang community had spread out the district admired them as the leader of canal protector community and give them reward. A lot of people came to see and learn from them as a good example for other community. Wat Klang canal today still remain clean as people still clean up and pour EM continuesly