A new housing program which puts poor communities in the driver's seat in a national process of forging comprehensive solutions to problems of housing, land tenure and basic services in Thai cities...  

In January 2003, the Thai government announced an important policy to address the housing problems of the country's urban poor citizens which aims to provide secure housing to one million poor households within five years. This ambitious target will be met through two distinct programs. In the first, the Baan Ua Arthorn Program ("We care" in Thai), the National Housing Authority will design, construct and sell ready-to-occupy flats and houses at subsidized rates to lower-income applicants who can afford the monthly "rent-to-own" payments of 1,000 - 1,500 Baht (US$ 25 - 37). The second Baan Mankong Program channels government funds, in the form of infrastructure subsidies and housing loans, directly to poor communities, which plan and carry out improvements to their housing, environment and basic services and manage the budget themselves. Instead of delivering housing units to individual poor families, the Baan Mankong Program ("Secure housing" in Thai) puts Thailand's existing slum communities - and their networks - at the center of a process of developing long-term, comprehensive solutions to problems of land and housing in Thai cities. As part of this unconventional program, which is being implemented by the Community Organizations Development Institute, those poor communities are working in close collaboration with their local governments, professionals, universities and NGOs to survey all the communities in their cities and then plan an upgrading process which attempts to improve all the communities in that city, over the next four years. Once these city-wide plans are finalized, CODI channels the budget (both in-structure subsidies and housing loans) from the central government directly to communities.

The Baan Mankong Program makes the urban poor the owners of a national housing upgrading process

Instead of obliging them to be passive recipients of welfare-style giveaways or someone else's idea of what they need, the Baan Mankong program allows poor communities to study the physical problems in their settlements, develop their own plans for resolving those problems and then implement those plans themselves, collectively, using infrastructure subsidies and low-interest housing loans which they manage themselves. This strategy of making communities- and community networks - the key actors in resolving the serious problems of housing in Thai cities represents an important milestone for the process of decentralization in Thailand.

The program makes physical upgrading a first step in a larger and more holistic community building process

People-driven upgrading can be a powerful means of bringing structural change to poor communities - change that goes beyond a few physical improvements or secure tenure. The Baan Mankong Program uses the upgrading activities to kick off a broader, more holistic and more integrated process of building people's ability to collectively manage their own needs such as housing, communal finance, credit, environment, income generation and welfare. Upgrading can mobilize people to look at all these things, because it touches the lives of every single person in a community, not only the leaders or the savers, and gets everyone involved.

The program puts city-wide housing on the list of structural issues which can be resolved through partnership

By creating space for poor communities, municipalities, professionals and NGOs to look together at all the housing problems in their city, Baan Mankong is bringing about an important change in how the issue of low-income housing is dealt with: no longer as a piecemeal welfare process or a civic embarrassment to be swept under the carpet, but as an important structural issue which relates to the whole city and which can be resolved. The community upgrading program is helping to create local partnerships which can integrate poor community housing needs into the larger city's development and resolve future housing problems as a matter of course.

The program makes room for poor communities to reawaken the lost art of citizen involvement in Thai cities

When community people do the upgrading themselves and their work is accepted by all the city stakeholders, upgrading becomes a process which legitimizes their status in the city and showcases their capabilities as a partner in helping to manage serious problems which affect the whole city: not only housing, but environment, water management, solid waste disposal and social welfare. In Thai cities, where top-down systems of governance and globalization have left most urban citizens feeling they have little say in their own environment, this is a vital way of reactivating citizen involvement in city development, and it comes from the bottom-up.
Big housing problems give the upgrading option a second life

Over the past few decades, Thailand has been transformed with astonishing speed into a modern, industrial country. This transformation is most visible in Thai cities, where formal planning and policy making have been unable to keep up with the exploding urban growth. This has led to serious problems of environmental degradation, over-crowding and the propagation of slums in most of Thailand’s cities. Today, over a third of Thailand’s urban population lives in informal communities, some as land-renters, but increasing numbers as squatters with no security at all. Of the 5,500 informal settlements in these urban areas, over two-thirds are under insecure tenure situations.

But though their physical conditions may be grubby and their tenure security tenuous, these communities represent an enormous social asset. They provide a large, vital and flexible stock of affordable, centrally-located and socially-supportive housing to the people whose hard work and entrepreneurial spirit has been such an important ingredient in the country’s growing prosperity, but whose needs are too often overlooked.

This is a housing stock which neither the government nor the private sector nor the poor themselves can afford to replace easily. For many, the idea of upgrading these settlements and turning them into clean, healthy, green and secure neighbourhoods - instead of evicting or relocating them - is a radical new idea. But increasing numbers of cities and government agencies are realizing that when it comes to housing for the poor, improving is a radical new idea. But increasing numbers of cities and government agencies are realizing that when it comes to housing for the poor, improving their human needs are too often overlooked.

In countries like Denmark, you still find highly sophisticated cooperative housing projects being developed by groups of urban families who decide against living in isolated houses or apartments, and choose instead to join with others to plan a new community for themselves. Instead, we try to create space for such projects (in many forms, ranging from individual houses to condos to blocks of flats) and sell or rent those units at rates which are affordable, centrally-located and socially-supported. They provide a large, vital and flexible stock of affordable, centrally-located and socially-supportive housing for the poor.

CODI aimed to create such projects of its own. People in the Baan Mankong Program in Thailand, for example, managed to link together several villages to improve the housing of enterprising families who had been refused loans by the Thai government. They created a cooperative to design and develop housing projects for themselves, using government and other sources of finance and found that this housing delivery system was extensively beneficial in situations where there were financial arrangements to finance them, legal instruments to give some legal status to the groups which developed them, and some tradition of communal organization to support the process. Most of the housing projects which CODI has financed during the 1990s and early 2000s aimed to develop projects in this way, and comes out of a process in which all the local stakeholders look at the situation and plan together.

CODI’s update: One of the most significant developments has been the upgrading of slum settlements. In the 1980s, CODI worked with the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO) to establish the Mankong Program. This involved linking together communities within a given constituency to look at their housing problems as a whole, devise a plan which resolved those problems and which allowed all those communities to be developed, with government finance and support. The form that development takes in each individual community is flexible, and could involve in-site upgrading, shifting to nearby land, land sharing or rebuilding. More important than the form is the fact that the housing plan covers all the settlements, and comes out of a process in which all the local stakeholders look at the situation and plan together.
A short history of community upgrading in Thailand . . .

During the 1960s and 1970s, when urban renewal generally meant demolishing all the old wooden houses and building multi-story concrete buildings, eviction was just about the only option on the list of solutions to the problems of slums in Thai cities. Towards the end of the 1970s, towards the end of that era, and people's schemes or to blocks of subsidized rental flats was added to the list. It was also in the late 1970s that the concept of upgrading existing slums first appeared in Thailand.

Back then, urbanization was still something very new and very bewildering to everyone in Thailand. And because cities didn't know how to deal locally with the problems of land and housing this explosive growth was bringing with it, the central government set up the National Housing Authority (NHA) in 1973 to tackle the housing issue on a national scale. In its first years, there was a lot of new thinking about slums within the NHA, and many good processes of upgrading and bringing basic services and infrastructural improvements to existing poor settlements, regardless of their tenure status. In the first decade the program operated mostly in Bangkok, where the problems were greatest, and only later in the provincial cities. It was a considerable break in policy because it signaled increasing acceptance of the idea that letting people stay where they were already living was a viable alternative to eviction, if improvements could be made to those settlements.

1 Cost-recovery model : The NHA's first community upgrading projects followed the World Bank's “cost-recovery model”, which stipulated that engineers design the improvements, contractors build them and communities pay for them. But when people were told they'd have to pay hefty fees for their self-built wooden walkways to be ripped out and replaced with expensive concrete ones, they said no way, and a strong, unified veto of such projects helped nix the cost-recovery model early on.

2 Subsidy model : The NHA then changed gears and adopted a subsidy system in which government paid the bill for infrastructural improvements, not communities. The first upgrading programs in the late 70s were 5,000 Baht per household and had six years, but gave a big push to the notion that poor communities can plan, construct and even help pay for their own environmental improvements, which turn out to be cheaper, more varied, more appropriate and better maintained than the government's improvements. The UCEA channeled small grants of less than 100,000 Baht directly to urban poor communities to improve the infrastructure and common amenities in their settlements, according to plans they developed themselves. Because grants from UCEA came through city-based networks, after an extensive process of collective prioritizing within each city, in partnership with other city stakeholders, the program was an important partnership builder and community-linker. In UCEA's first phase (1996 -98), 196 infrastructure and environmental improvement projects were constructed, benefiting 40,500 households in 220 communities around the country.

3 NHA / Municipality upgrading model : In the 1990s, the NHA began devoting more of its energies to developing rental flats or serviced relocation sites (some for sale, some on rental contracts) to accommodate all the people being evicted from inner city settlements. At the same time, there was considerable debate within the NHA about whether it made sense for a national agency based in Bangkok to be making decisions and managing infrastructure construction projects in cities hundreds of kilometers away. As a result of these discussions, the NHA began passing on its community upgrading budgets to municipalities, which increasingly took on the role of identifying communities for upgrading and managing the projects themselves, using local contractors. This decentralizing of the NHA’s upgrading program to municipalities lasted until the Asian economic crisis hit in 1997.

4 Community-driven environment activities : The new frontier in the post-crisis years has been community involvement in delivering infrastructure to the poor. The Urban Community Environment Activities Project (UCEA) operated on a limited scale for six years, but allowed them full freedom to develop their own activities. From working initially with scattered community savings groups, CODI gradually moved towards helping these groups come together and form networks, as a means of learning from each other and multiplying their activities themselves. The emergence of community networks at various levels and scales - in Thailand has been one of the most important developments of these past turbulent years. As a structure which allows individual poor communities to move from isolation and powerlessness into collective strength, the community network has become a powerful development mechanism in the country - a mechanism which belongs entirely to people. Besides providing a means of idea-sharing, asset-pooling and mutual support, networks have opened channels for communities to talk to their local governments and national agencies, and to undertake collaborative development activities of many sorts, of which housing and community upgrading are only two. Through this new collective process, communities have begun delivering housing and community improvement projects by themselves, with loans from CODI.

5 Community savings group based model : At the same time that first wave of upgrading was slowing down in the late 1980s, the urban community savings movement was taking off in Thailand. Through savings groups, people in poor communities were coming together, developing managerial capacities and exploring collective ways of dealing with problems they faced. The UCD (CODI’s maiden name) was set in 1992 to support this collective process and to provide community savings groups with finance that could assist their initiatives but allow them full freedom to develop their own activities. From working initially with scattered community savings groups, CODI gradually moved towards helping these groups come together and form networks, as a means of learning from each other and multiplying their activities themselves. The emergence of community networks at various levels and scales - in Thailand has been one of the most important developments of these past turbulent years. As a structure which allows individual poor communities to move from isolation and powerlessness into collective strength, the community network has become a powerful development mechanism in the country - a mechanism which belongs entirely to people. Besides providing a means of idea-sharing, asset-pooling and mutual support, networks have opened channels for communities to talk to their local governments and national agencies, and to undertake collaborative development activities of many sorts, of which housing and community upgrading are only two. Through this new collective process, communities have begun delivering housing and community improvement projects by themselves, with loans from CODI.

Another take on community-driven upgrading . . .

The prevailing economic orthodoxy holds that if the market is allowed to do so, it will solve any problems which ever needs arise, and that the government’s role is not to regulate this mechanism but to support it with finance and a supportive policy climate. Back then, it comes to low-income housing, leaving poor people out of this model has left a big gap between need and supply. In the new approach towards housing being experimented with in Baan Mankong, the model is similar: people develop whatever projects which meet their living needs, and the government interferes as little as possible, but supports those projects with finance and a supportive policy climate. But within the new idea of housing, the work has a considerable social aspect, and it’s happening collectively, making ample use of this well-established culture of doing things together.

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This upgrading program gets the people to do the ...More than just physical upgrading...

As each community prepares its upgrading plans under the Baan Mankong Program, it is important that people consider how to develop their settlement and their lives in ways that go well beyond simply improving their housing and physical conditions. Because the program is working to promote a much more comprehensive and holistic kind of community development, which brings about improvements to all aspects of people's lives, each community is required to take into consideration - and budget for - all of the following four aspects of comprehensive upgrading in their plans:

1. **Infrastructure development** plans for communities prepare might include such things as land filling, paved lanes and roads, water supply and electricity systems, storm and drainage drains, solid waste disposal, at household and community levels.

2. **Environmetal development** plans might include tree-planting and greenery, house painting, canal cleaning, community space for local activities and sports, alternative energy systems, playgrounds, recreational areas, etc.

3. **Social development** plans for the community might include establishing a central welfare centers, youth and day-care centers, clinics, hostels for poor or elderly members, community centers, coopera-

4. **Economic development** plans for the community might include developing markets or community stores, establishing carving workshops, community training centers, etc.

**What budget tools does the program offer?**

1. **Infrastructure subsidies:** The program provides subsidies, which allow communi-

2. **Low-interest housing loans:** Soft loans will be made available to families and households wishing to improve their housing conditions.

3. **Administrative support grants:** An grant equal to 5% of the total infrastructure subsidy will be made available under the program to whatever organization the community - or community network - selects to assist and support their local upgrading process under Baan Mankong. This could be an NGO, another community network, a local university, a group of architects, or a local government agency.
The Baan Mankong upgrading program is experimenting in a number of ways with participation, partnership, the control of money, and how state finance is used as a tool - not only to improve living conditions in a certain number of slums, but to create locally-based mechanisms for resolving housing problems in the future, as a matter of course.

**Experiments in Baan Mankong:**

1. **Makes communities and their networks the core actors.** Most conventional housing programs for the poor run into a trouble because they stimulate a government agency - and not people themselves - to do all the work. And in most cases, that agency just can’t keep up with the scale of need. The Baan Mankong’s strategy of using communities - and city-based partnerships in which communities take the lead - to solve the problem of housing Thailand’s urban poor represents an important innovation for the process of decentralization in Thailand, and a creative way of developing local capacities to resolve local housing problems. By tapping the energy of community involvement and participation to upgrade so many settlements, the program is building stronger community organizations and boosting people’s capacities to manage their own development.

2. **Is “demand-driven” rather than “supply driven.”** Because the Baan Mankong program allows communities that are ready to implement the improvement projects themselves, according to needs and priorities they identify through an extensive process of surveying, discussion and horizontal-sharing, the program creates a “demand driven” approach to community upgrading. This is something very different from the more conventional “supply-driven” approach to solving urban housing problems, in which the state constructs housing units, resettlement sites or standard infrastructural facilities - all according plans, selection criteria and development methods set by the government.

3. **Lets people control the money.** Perhaps the most radical innovation in the program is that the money (it’s a big chunk of money, with a five-year total budget of about 20 billion Baht - US$ 500 million) actually goes right down to the community to manage and develop their upgrading plans and negotiate their land tenure. For example, by placing the money directly into people’s hands, the program puts communities in control of the upgrading process, instead of a government agency or NGO. The people themselves decide how to use the per-household subsidies. A community may decide to save money to buy new land, to make a small set of buildings that can be swelled up in order to have enough money left to build a creche. The program’s flexible financial management process allows communities to make these decisions themselves, and to manage their construction in ways that match the realities of their lives, while its multi-party participation provides transparency and self-assessment at every step of the process.

4. **Makes more efficient use of state resources for the poor.** Because this upgrading model makes people the initiators and gives them control over the finances, it gives them the opportunities to make much more efficient use of precious state resources. When the money usually spent to construct the conventional government improvements is passed directly to communities, instead of to contractors, they can build those same improvements for a fraction of the cost, and then have loads of money left over for other things. When communities people sit together and decide how to use the budget, they get very thrifty and very creative: a thousand variations and innovations occur naturally, bringing out all the untapped resourcefulness, thrift and creativity which exists in poor communities. If a community of 200 families, for example, has a five million Baht subsidy for infrastructure, they could use it to make improvements which answer many more of their needs than the old standard upgrading, which would have swallowed up the whole budget in little more than drains and walkways. Besides improving their roads, drains and water supply systems, they could build a community center, or paint all their houses with coordinating colors, plant trees, lay out organic kitchen-gardens, anything the whole community identifies as priorities.

5. **Allows people to choose their own helpers.** Another important aspect of the program is that communities and the local actors - not the government and not CODI - have the freedom to select whatever persons, NGOs, architects, institutions or universities they would like to assist them in the process of developing their community improvement plans. The group they select to assist them will then receive an administrative support subsidy to cover their expenses. The total amount each city receives for administrative support is 5% of the total upgrading budget. In many cases, these relationships between communities, local governments and other organizations have been established and have opted to use this support subsidy more flexibly as a communal budget for all aspects of the program’s management.

6. **Promotes a broader concept of upgrading.** The Baan Mankong Program uses finance to promote a much broader, more holistic and more integrated process of community improvement. The program aims well beyond physical improvements and tenure security, to improve people’s social, environmental and economic well-being as well. Because physical change is something immediately tangible, it can be a potent means to bring about other deeper, but less tangible changes to social structures, managerial systems and confidence within poor communities.

7. **Promotes variation rather than standard solutions.** In the past, when existing communities were upgraded, or new relocation sites were developed, the process followed a rigid set of design standards and engineering norms, all in the name of efficiency. As a result, all their improvements and all their layouts looked exactly the same, regardless of where they were or who lived there. Who said that planned communities have to look like a machine-made grid of streets, without beauty or any sense of community? In fact it is possible to upgrade old communities - or to design new ones - in ways which follow the spatial patterns which can often bring such charm and delight to informal settlements: winding lanes, houses built in clusters around quiet culs-de-sac, shady places to gather and sit, places for markets and temples, playgrounds, etc. When communities plan their own improvements under the Baan Mankong program, they will work together to identify the social and spatial features they want to preserve in their settlements and build their new lanes and drainage lines around them.

8. **Works to develop communities as an integrated part of the city.** In the upgrading process under Baan Mankong, communities do not plan and implement their improvements in isolation, but as part of a comprehensive, collaborative process of finding lasting solutions to the city’s problems of housing for the poor. This involves identifying the settlements in the city, and then preparing upgrading plans which attempt to resolve the tenure, housing and infrastructure problems of all these communities, as much as possible, within a few years. No one is left out. This is a way to link the housing problems of the city’s poorer citizens with the larger town planning process. This is very different than the conventional project-by-project approach, in which a few scattered communities may be improved, but because they are neither linked with each other, nor linked to the other development processes in the city, they have no strength. Nice little projects in nice little communities may bring benefits to people living in those places, but seldom do they transform the lives of the poor or bring change at any significant scale. In the longer term, the upgrading process can also lead to larger development processes in which new communities are increasingly accepted not only as legitimate citizens, but as valuable partners in solving problems of the whole city.

9. **Changes dramatically government’s role.** In the most conventional housing programs, the government takes the role of planner, implementer and construction manager, leaving communities with little room for participation, and almost no role but as passive beneficiaries of solutions someone else designs. This housing process, which focuses on building very few scattered communities, leaves no space for community decision-making, no opportunity to change relationships to grow or learn, no opportunities for other social developments to be sparked off by the process. In the Baan Mankong program, because it is communities - and community networks - that make all the decisions and do all the work, the government is finally able to take the role of facilitator as opposed to communities, which now take on the role of delivering housing. And with such a small coordinating staff to facilitate this enormous process, CODI couldn’t control the process centrally even if it wanted to.

10. **Secure tenure:**

    Another important aspect of the Baan Mankong program is its broadening of the scope of upgrading to cover not only physical conditions but secure land tenure - as well as what is seen as the foundation of secure, sustainable communities. Because the program deals with the issue of land, it also deals with patterns of how people are settled on that land. It is up to the communities to negotiate their own tenure arrangements, as a precondition to participating in the upgrading process, through such strategies as cooperative land purchase, long-term leases, co-ownership, land-sharing or user rights. These negotiations can be made individually by community members or collectively by larger networks, but the main emphasis is on obtaining collective rather than individual land tenure. CODI assists in these negotiations only where necessary, or where they involve high-level negotiations with state land-owning agencies.
Using the first ten pilot projects to “nationalize” the learning

What kind of upgrading is possible?

Instead of promoting a single development model for obtaining secure land tenure and improving housing and living conditions, a range of options are being tried and tested by communities. As the work spreads out and scales up, these strategies are being expanded, refined and adapted to suit the particular needs, aspirations and conditions in each city and each community. The five broad strategies listed below are by no means the final word on what’s possible, but they make a good starting list of options for communities under the Baan Mankong Program:

1. Upgrading: Slum upgrading is a way of improving the physical environment and basic services in existing communities, while preserving their location, character and social structures. Besides improving the physical conditions and quality of life in these poor communities, the physical improvements made under an upgrading process can act as a springboard for other kinds of development among their members, like income generation, welfare, etc.

2. Relocation: Relocating communities is a more systematic way of improving the infrastructure and physical conditions in existing communities by making adjustments to the layout to install sewers, drains, walkways and roads, but doing so in ways which ensure the continuity of the community. Communities can then develop their housing gradually, at their own pace. When communities opt for relocating, some houses may have to be moved and partially or entirely reconstructed to improve access, or some lanes may have to be realigned to enable drainage lines, water supply systems or streets to be connected. Relocation is often undertaken in cases where communities have negotiated to buy or obtain long-term leases for the land they already occupy. In both cases, the process of relocating is an important step in the progress towards land tenure security and improved housing.

3. Reconstruction: In this strategy, existing communities are totally rebuilt on the same land, or on land that is nearby, within the same general area, either under long-term leases or outright ownership. This strategy is less likely to get stuck in the working out of tenurial arrangements and more likely to become a good example for other communities on state owned land of various sorts. The details of the budget for these first ten pilot projects is outlined in the table below.

4. Land sharing: Land-sharing is a housing and settlement improvement strategy which allows both the land-owner and the community people living on that land to benefit by dividing the land and allowing the community to buy or rent a portion of the land for their housing, in exchange for agreeing to return a portion of the land to the landowner, free to develop commercially. In this strategy, the community gets secure tenure via land-ownership or long-term leasehold, and the people can then work together to design and construct their own new housing on their portion of the site.

5. Slum Upgrading: Slum upgrading is a way of improving the physical environment and basic services in existing communities, while preserving their location, character and social structures. Besides improving the physical conditions and quality of life in these poor communities, the physical improvements made under an upgrading process can act as a springboard for other kinds of development among their members, like income generation, welfare, etc.

10 Pilots at a glance

(All figures given in Thai Baht. Exchange rate as of May 2004: US$ 1 = 40 Thai Baht)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Land owned by (after project)</th>
<th>Number of households</th>
<th>Years of land tenure after the project</th>
<th>Infrastructure costs</th>
<th>House costs (average unit cost)</th>
<th>Total loans for housing (from CDDI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Charoenchai Nimitmai</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Community Co-op</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>Cooperative ownership</td>
<td>2.45 million</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>0 (used savings)</td>
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<td>2. Bonkai</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Crown Property Bureau</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>Long-term lease to co-op</td>
<td>8.9 million</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>35.36 million</td>
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<td>3. Klong Toey Block 7-12</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Crown Property Bureau</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>Short-term lease</td>
<td>10.5 million</td>
<td>216,000</td>
<td>26.18 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Kao Pattana</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Crown Property Bureau</td>
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<td>Long-term lease</td>
<td>794,094</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>3.32 million</td>
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<td>5. Ruam Samakkee</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Crown Property Bureau</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>Long-term lease</td>
<td>2.7 million</td>
<td>180,000</td>
<td>17.15 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Klong Lumnoon</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Community Co-op</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Cooperative ownership</td>
<td>3.48 million</td>
<td>172,200</td>
<td>4.85 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Boon Kook</td>
<td>Uttarakart</td>
<td>Municipality</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Long-term lease</td>
<td>0 (from NHA)</td>
<td>99,000</td>
<td>15 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Laem Rung Reung</td>
<td>Rayong</td>
<td>Treasury Department</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Long-term lease</td>
<td>1.34 million</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>912,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Kaoseng</td>
<td>Songkla</td>
<td>Treasury Department</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>Long-term lease</td>
<td>9.6 million</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>21.12 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Kolok Village</td>
<td>Narathiwat</td>
<td>State Railways</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>Long-term lease</td>
<td>31 million</td>
<td>225,000</td>
<td>62.79 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL: 1,584 units 70.81 million 186.65 million

Each figure shows the total budget for the ten pilot projects, which include the following costs:

- Infrastructure costs
- House costs (average unit cost)
- Total loans for housing (from CDDI)

Learning by doing... There are plenty of big concepts at work behind the Baan Mankong program and the larger structural issues of poverty and land the upgrading process touches. But as the actual upgrading work takes off and expands in cities around the country, the ideological discussions tend to get drowned out by the hammering of nails and the ker-shlugging of discussions tend to get drowned out by the hammering of nails and the ker-shlugging of discussions tend to get drowned out by the hammering of nails and the ker-shlugging of discussions tend to get drowned out by the hammering of nails and the ker-shlugging of...
Pilot Project: Land purchase and reblocking at Charoenchai Nimitmai

After becoming owners of their land, the people decided to use a contractor for the infrastructure work that involved heavy machinery, to improve conditions using reblocking techniques. In the process of designing the new layout, the community went through a phase of planning, and they selected a plan of land to be developed. After that, they took a loan from a financial cooperative in order to build their land.

The community’s complete reconstruction has been supported by outside interests. Bonkai is the first case of a community’s complete reconstruction, and the community used the crisis to negotiate a more secure future for themselves. After forming a cooperative, they entered into lengthy negotiations with CPB and eventually got a 30-year (renewable) lease on the land.

Thailand’s first “Community Lease” is, in the past, most state agencies lease land to poor families individually, which makes it easy for communities to be manipulated by outside interests. Bonkai is the first case of a land lease contract being made to a community cooperative, on a nominal rent of 150 Baht per month per household. The community cooperative is in one big monthly payment. Collective land tenure arrangements can be a powerful tool for bringing community members together and one of the best safeguards against speculation and gentrification in inner-city communities like Bonkai.

The community’s complete reconstruction has been planned in three phases, which allow the new housing to be built without anyone ever having to leave the site. In the first phase, 72 houses are being built to accommodate the worst affected fire victims, who lived in tents between the rows of new houses during construction. 288 units will be built in the 2nd phase: 42 in the third.

Bonkai is a 25-year old squatter community of 566 households, living in extremely crowded conditions in the Klong Toey area of central Bangkok, on land belonging to the Crown Property Bureau (CPB). In December 2001, a fire destroyed 200 houses in one area of the settlement, and the community used the crisis to negotiate a more secure future for themselves. After forming a cooperative, they entered into lengthy negotiations with CPB and eventually got a 30-year (renewable) lease on the land.

“Expandable” row houses: In order to squeeze so many families into such small land, the community worked with young architects to draft an extremely efficient layout plan with narrow lanes and compact 3-story row-houses built on tiny plots of only 24 square meters. To keep the new houses as cheap as possible, they designed an extra-tall upper floor with a half-light, which can later be made into a full third floor. These fully-finished houses cost 200,000 Baht. The community opted to use a contractor to build the first phase houses, but to reduce house costs, the second and third phase houses will be built by community members themselves.

The Charoenchai Nimitmai community occupies 4.9 hectares of land in Bangkok’s Chathubai District, border on one side by the railway tracks, on another by a roaring container storage area and is completely covered with 15 cm thick concrete, which has been covered over with 80 cm of soil, to prevent flooding, and pierced in 800 places to reduce house costs, the second and third phase houses will be built by community members themselves.

“Like the word slam. It means freedom, it means community, it means you can build according to your needs, not according to any official rules. Whatever suits you! Your house becomes organic, it grows with your family, it is lively. Our houses here in Klong Toey may look bad from the outside, but inside they are filled with life! And the houses in our new settlement will also be filled with life.”

Nitya Pratthawichai, community leader at Block 7-12

“Black 7-12” was an informal community of nearly 400 families (mostly port workers, daily laborers and small traders) who’ve been squatting for over 50 years on land belonging to the Port Authority of Thailand (PAT). In the sprawling informal settlement of Klong Toey. Over the years, the community experienced fires, chemical explosions and imminent attempts by the Port to evict them for its various projects. Some families took compensation and moved away, some shifted to NHA-built flats or to remote resettlement colonies, some just disappeared. After 20 years of struggle, the remaining 46 families (the real fighters!) negotiated a deal with the Port which allows them to redevelop their community on PAT-owned land in the same area, one kilometer away, on a 30-year lease contract.

The community has now prepared its relocation plan, which includes some “Black 7-12” families who were old renters or had already been evicted. The new community, which is now under construction, is laid out in a simple grid of small lanes, with a community center and a water tower in the center, which can double as public open space for meetings and markets. The new land used to be a container storage area and is completely covered with 15 cm thick concrete, which has been covered over with 80 cm of soil, to prevent flooding, and pierced in 800 places to reduce house costs, the second and third phase houses will be built by community members themselves.

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4  

Pilot Project: Relocation to nearby land with long-term lease at Kao Pattana

The Kao Pattana Community is a tiny squatter settlement of 34 families living on land under Crown Property Bureau ownership, in the intensely busy area of Bangkok’s Ramkhamhaeng Soi 31. The community covers an area of about 0.8 hectare, with wooden and concrete block houses and walkways built on stilts over land which is so low-lying that it is more like a stagnant pond than a piece of land. Most people here earn their living as daily wage laborers, vendors, market stall holders and artisans, earning between 5,000 and 8,000 Baht per month.

Initially, the community was determined to stay in the same place. After beginning their negotiations for a lease contract with the Crown Property Bureau, they set to work preparing plans to completely reconstruct their community on the same site, which involved replacing their existing houses with 2.5 story townhouses. Unfortunately, in the process of preparing their plans, the people learned that making their existing land “buildable” would involve filling the land by several meters, and would involve so much expense it would have eaten up all their infrastructure subsidy under Baan Mankong, leaving little for building other amenities and basic services.

Meanwhile the larger seven community master plan process in Ramkhamhaeng had begun (see box below). As part of that plan, an agreement has been reached in which the people from Kao Pattana will build a slightly altered version of their town house community plan on another piece of CPB land in the same area, where their cooperative will be given a collective long term lease.

6  

Pilot Project: Land sharing at Klong Lumnoon

The small, canal-side community of Klong Lumnoon in suburban Bangkok was far from everything when the people first moved there 20 years ago. But by 1987, the area was gentrifying and the land owner decided to evict them and develop the land commercially.

Some residents accepted the cash compensation the landlord offered and moved away. But 49 families who worked nearby and had nowhere else to live held on. In 2010, the eviction struggle got very hot: two community members were thrown in jail and the others filed a court case against the land-owner, which they lost. The battle raged on, but the people remained.

Eventually, Klong Lumnoon residents linked with Bangkok’s large network of canal side communities, who showed them how to organize themselves, how to deal with the district canal authorities and helped them to form a savings and credit group. Meanwhile, the eviction struggle continued. Eventually, some senior community leaders from the network helped to negotiate a compromise solution, in which the land owner agreed to sell the people a small portion of the land for their housing, in exchange for their returning the rest.

With the District Office acting as mediator, the people even managed to haggle the land-owner down to a below-market selling price of just 750 Baht per square meter for their part of the site. After registering as a cooperative, the community took a loan from CDI at 1% to buy the land, which the cooperative on-lends to individual families at 3%, using the 2% margin for coordination, social activities, hosting visitors and religious ceremonies.

An extraordinary thing about Klong Lumnoon is that at the end of this long and bitter struggle to resolve the conflicting needs of community and land-owner, these two adversaries have ended up friends. The land-owner even agreed to contribute 250,000 Baht to build a new concrete walkway into the settlement.

The project details:

- **Households**: 29
- **Land-owner**: Crown Property Bureau
- **Tenure terms**: Long term lease (30 yr)
- **Type of upgrading**: Land sharing reconstruction
- **Infrastructure cost**: 14.58 million Baht (US$ 189,750)
- **Housing costs**: 5.78 million Baht (US$ 70,500)

Project Details:

- **Households**: 124
- **Land-owner**: Crown Property Bureau
- **Tenure terms**: Long term lease (30 yr)
- **Type of upgrading**: On-site reconstruction
- **Infrastructure cost**: 1.8 million Baht (US$ 45,000)
- **Housing costs**: 5.58 million Baht (US$ 144,500)
- **Total cost of land + housing + infrastructure**: 21.38 million Baht (US$ 528,250)

5  

Pilot Project: On-site reconstruction at Ruam Samakkee

Ruam Samakkee is a larger squatter community of 124 families occupying 0.8 hectares of CPB land in Ramkhamhaeng Soi 39, not too far from Kao Pattana. The community’s original idea was to regularize their tenure status by negotiating a long-term lease for the land they now occupy. They have completed their cooperative registration (which provides the legal status to obtain a collective lease agreement with the CPB).

In May 2003, the people worked with young architects to develop a new layout plan and to design 2 story townhouses which will cost 180,000, involving monthly repayments of between 1,000 and 1,300 Baht for 15 years.

In the three months that followed, they demolished all the old houses and laid the new infrastructure. By December 2003, they had completed construction of the first 31 houses. The construction in Ruam Samakkee has been suspended, though, while the people work on the development of this larger 7-community plan.

In April 2004, CODI signed an N.R. with the CPB to assist in developing this master redevelopment plan for all seven settlements, which will create new residential areas instead of redeveloping each in isolation, these areas of land and over 1,000 families.

Ramkhamhaeng area, involving about 40 hectares and over 1,000 families.

Instead of redeveloping each in isolation, these seven communities are now working together to develop a master housing redevelopment plan which provides housing and secure land tenure for all of them as a group - in the same area. In April 2004, CODI signed an N.R. with the CPB to assist in developing this master redevelopment plan for all seven settlements, which will create new residential areas which are linked to markets and parks, and will involve reblocking in some areas and nearby relocation in others. But the idea is that everyone will remain in the area, on CPB land, for which they will get long-term lease contracts through their community cooperatives.
The NHA's GRID layout plan arranged in clusters, so people could continue to live near their old neighbors. The plan also included a big shed ("Boon Garbage") for sorting recyclable waste, since many of the relocatees were informal waste-pickers, and a communal "Central House" for housing poor, elderly or needy community members. Attempts to persuade the NHA (which was subsidizing the site development) to approve this cluster plan failed, however, and a more conventional grid of cross streets was substituted, which the NHA argued would minimize infrastructure costs.

Since the NHA’s agreement to develop the Boon Kook site had been arranged before the Baan Mankong program began, the community was obliged to go along with the grid. They did, however, manage to persuade the NHA to include big community spaces for their recycling activities within the grid layout, and to allow people to select housing plots near their neighbors. People will also build their own houses in their chosen neighbor groups, to take advantage of bulk materials discounts and the greater efficiency of building together. (Those who want will take CODI housing loans. (more details on page 12)

To resettle these families, identified by the Community Network’s involvement in resolving Rayong’s low income housing problems, and was instrumental in launching the improvement process at Laem Rung Reung. Since he lost the election earlier this year, the momentum of the redevelopment process has slowed a bit.

The community BEFORE

The community AFTER reblocking

The upgrading of the lively beach-front community at Kaoseng, in the southern city of Songkhla, is the largest and most complex of the ten pilot projects. Besides being home to 480 households of mixed ethnicity and religion, with widely divergent occupations and income levels (from very poor fishermen to very prosperous traders), the community has a long history of displacement and tenure uncertainty. In the early 1960s, Kaoseng was the official relocation site for people evicted from a large settlement on the cape in northern Songkhla.

Although they were given no formal leases, the people have occupied this new land in peace ever since, and the settlement has grown into a thriving and colorful neighbor- hood, with a mosque at the center and an afternoon fresh market. Then in 2000, the municipality unveiled plans to redevelop Kaoseng as a tourist beach and an- nexed that the community would have to move again.

However, negotiations between the community and the provincial government were successful in slowing this project down, and transforming an eviction threat into plans to redevelop their community as a thriving, beachside resort. The Treasury Department, which owns the land, has agreed in principle to lease the land to the people, but the details of the contract haven’t yet been finalized. Rayong’s former mayor, Suraphong Putananpol, was for eight years a key supporter of the community network’s involvement in resolving Rayong’s low income housing problems, and was instrumental in launching the improvement process at Laem Rung Reung.

Laem Rung Reung is an old community of 67 households mostly very poor fisherman located on a sandy peninsula which stretches out into the Gulf of Thailand from the port city of Rayong. Since tidal waters separate this beautiful area from the mainland for most of the day, Laem Rung Reung is practically an island.

The houses are loosely scattered and constructed mostly of coconut palm thatch and salvaged planks and tin sheets. Only a few houses are built of concrete blocks. The community has no water supply, drains, toilets or munici- pal electricity, and for four years, community people had to use batteries to power their radios and lights, buy their drinking water and make do with very well water for bathing. Besides plans to reconstruct their houses and lay basic infrastructure in the community, Laem Rung Reung’s redevelopment plans will involve some repositioning of houses to make way for the infrastructure lines. The community’s plans also include a major tree- planting campaign on the peninsula and the creation of a public park for the whole city to enjoy.

The land at Laem Rung Reung belongs to the Ministry of Interior, but the people have stayed here since the community was established without any formal lease contract. There are many communities around Thailand on land under Interior Ministry ownership, with whom CODI has signed an M.O.U. to work together within the Baan Mankong Program to ob- tain long-term leases for all the informal communities located on Interior Ministry land. But the tenure arrange- ments are decided only on a project-by-project basis, and in some cases where the ministry wants the land for other purposes, they’re giving only three or five year leases. The lease contract in Laem Rung Reung is still being negotiated. Rayong’s former mayor, Suraphong Putananpol, was for eight years a key supporter of the community network’s involvement in resolving Rayong’s low income housing problems, and was instrumental in launching the improvement process at Laem Rung Reung. Since he lost the election earlier this year, the momentum of the redevelopment process has slowed a bit.

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n important condition to taking part in the Baan Mankong Program is that communities in each city must come together, think together, plan together and work together. But besides linking horizontally, communities and their networks must also come together with their municipal governments, NGOs, academicians, architects and other local development actors to build a common understanding about the city’s housing problems and to develop city-wide plans to resolve those problems as partners, drawing as much as possible on local resources such as land, technical expertise and finance.

Forging new working partnerships between these different groups is an important goal of the upgrading program and the key to establishing local mechanisms in all the 200 target cities to resolve housing problems in the future and ensure those cities can provide decent living conditions for all their citizens - rich and poor alike - long after the Baan Mankong program has officially closed down.

Once the community network, the municipality and the other stakeholders have come together and formed a committee to oversee the upgrading process, the first step is to jointly gather and understand information about all the poor communities in their city. After gathering their helpers and sitting down with all this information, they begin planning an upgrading process which covers all the communities in the city, as much as possible. Once this plan is finished, they put everything together into a proper document, called a comprehensive report - a Bahai-like map, community layout plans, new housing designs, budget details and a city-wide working plan which explains how they’re going to provide secure tenure, good infrastructure, better houses to all the poor communities in the city in three years.

After the budget is released, the really big work of implementing their city-wide plan begins. But because the communities and the city are doing this work in collaboration, with the back-up of budget and support from the government, achieving this kind of city-wide target is actually possible.

The Baan Mankong Program represents a historic change in how the housing issue is dealt with in Thailand. Why? Because it operates not at the scale of isolated projects, but at the scale of the whole city.

This gives a new dimension to the problem of informal settlements - a structural dimension which includes all the big urban planning issues like land use, land-ownership, environment, infrastructure and transport. When slum upgrading becomes a city-wide system, it changes the relationship between informal settlements and the city as a whole and makes housing a legitimate planning issue.

This is important, because poor people’s housing has traditionally been seen not as a structural problem of the city, but as a question of welfare or the rights of a marginalized minority. As a result, evictions were dealt with on an ad hoc basis, with a little upgrading here, a little relocation there.

When the lens that looks at the problems of individual settlements is widened to take in the whole city, we see the housing issue in a very different light. And by seeing it as a structural problem of the whole city, it makes these issues less threatening, somehow, more manageable, more soluble. The upgrading program becomes not just a way for cities to begin understanding and addressing the urban poor housing issue at this scale and as a group. And because poor communities are the driving force behind this collaborative upgrading program, the process legitimizes their status in the city as an important partner in resolving an issue which is everybody’s business.

Most cities don’t believe they have the power to deal with their problems of land or housing for the poor. In fact, finding tenure solutions and upgrading all the settlements in the city is something that is actually highly possible.
Notes on the subtle art of municipal matchmaking . . .

**Lek Sompoph, Baan Mankong’s national co-ordinator, talks about collaboration between groups which haven’t collaborated before and why “Here in Thailand it’s the relationship that we are serious about.”**

A hundred years ago, it was considered the city’s job to make all the decisions and do everything to meet everyone’s needs. But cities then and cities now are very different! Cities are more complex now, and the quality of citizenship has also changed. Citizens today are much more independent, more stubborn and they have much higher expectations than a century ago. So it figures that the way cities are managed has to change. Unfortunately, the change in how cities are managed is moving much slower than the change in urban societies. What we are trying to do with Baan Mankong is to create space for all these different actors in Thai cities to come together, look honestly and constructively at this new reality, and then figure out how to manage it together, with a positive feeling and a good mood. It’s something like arranging a marriage! If we want these people to get together, we have to introduce them and then organize a courtship, so they learn to like each other. The point of this collaborative space, which the upgrading program creates, is to get these actors to be happy enough working together that it isn’t just a one-time date, but turns into a long-term marriage.

The people sitting in these committees might feel some uneasiness at coming together, especially at first. In many cases, city governments and the poor are old adversaries, with plenty of reasons to mistrust each other and not much history of cooperation! But in this upgrading program, we said no, that old relationship isn’t working. We need to call a truce and create a collaborative space so that they can come together, in different ways, and start learning from each other.

It’s surprising how few problems there have been with this collaboration in the dozens of cities where Baan Mankong is underway, or how often the different parties end up confessing that this is not so bad after all! As their respect for each other grows, they stop being adversaries and become a team, working on a common project, with a lot of excitement. Then everybody wants to change in how cities are managed is moving much slower than the change in urban societies. What we are trying to do with Baan Mankong is to create space for all these different actors in Thai cities to come together, look honestly and constructively at this new reality, and then figure out how to manage it together, with a positive feeling and a good mood. It’s something like arranging a marriage! If we want these people to get together, we have to introduce them and then organize a courtship, so they learn to like each other. The point of this collaborative space, which the upgrading program creates, is to get these actors to be happy enough working together that it isn’t just a one-time date, but turns into a long-term marriage!

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An important part of CODI’s role in the Baan Mankong process is helping to promote and balance the new relationships between all the different actors involved in the city upgrading process, so they can sit down with each other and work together, in ways which allow the people to take the lead. This is something very delicate, and often calls for the skills of a diplomat to bring together those of a organizer. For development workers trained in the old style of managing everything, there is a lot of learning in trying to cultivate these relationships in practice. Here are some thoughts on the subtle art of nurturing this collaborative space and the process creates, drawn from discussions with Lek Sompoph, CODI’s national coordinator for the Baan Mankong Program:

### Decentralization:

There are other good reasons to build stronger and more equitable working relationships in Thai cities. According to the government’s policy on decentralization (which is part of the Thailand’s 9th National Plan), since 2003, 22% of the national government budget has had to pass to municipalities to decide how to use. And from 2006, cities will receive 35% of the national budget.

### Big events:

Now, whenever a big event is organized to launch an upgrading process in a city or to inaugurate a pilot project, people from neighboring cities are invited. In the process, people talk to each other, get inspired, feel excited to go home and start their own upgrading program. In these ways, other mayors and city managers learn from the experience of others and the ideas spread automatically, driven by people’s own initiative and inspiration.

### Subcontracting:

Instead of adding lots of staff, CODI’s working model is to sub-contract most of the support and coordination work to partners in various cities. Once CODI and these partners have established a common understanding about the upgrading concept and how to proceed, who does what and in that city, CODI’s limited staff can concentrate on making balancing inputs when there are problems.

### Constant meetings:

As part of the upgrading process, there are more and more unconventional housing pro-

### Exchanges:

One of the most potent strategies for ensuring that learning about all aspects of the program is opened up is a constant stream of exchanges between communities, pilot projects, cities and regions - involving people, official NGOs, academics and all the possible forces in the cities. Once CODI and these partners have established a common understanding about the upgrading concept and how to proceed, who does what and in that city, CODI’s limited staff can concentrate on making balancing inputs when there are problems.

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Years before Baan Mankong, the northern city of Uttaradit was pioneering collaborative, people-driven and city-wide strategies for providing secure land and decent housing for the 10% of the city’s population who live in insecure and degraded environments. In 1999, CODI began working to expand the savings process to include the city’s squatters, whose serious housing problems were not being addressed. Besides setting up daily savings groups, they used the issue of saving for better housing to begin building a parallel community process in the city. A survey of all the poor settlements in Uttaradit helped link the groups and began building a community network. As part of the survey process, the people mapped all the slums and small pockets of squatters, identified land owners, and indicated which slums could stay put and which needed to relocate. Two young architects helped, along with a group of supportive monks and the mayor, Prakaike Watananakoa, who became the network’s enthusiastic and strategic ally.

To find sustainable solutions for the 1,000 families in the city with housing problems, they looked at the city as a whole and developed plans which made room for all those families, within the fabric of the city. To find that room, they used a range of planning techniques: land-sharing in one area, rehoming in another, aggregating or upgrading here and relocation there. The city-wide housing plan which they developed has since become the basis for the city’s upgrading program, under Baan Mankong, and includes infrastructure improvements, urban regeneration, canal-cleaning, wasteland reclamation, park development, and the creation of amenities which could be enjoyed by the whole city. Work began in the Jarem Dham community, where eight river-side squatters negotiated to lease temple-owned land nearby and worked with the young architects to design and build solid 2-story row houses for themselves there, at the unheard of cost of just 40,000 Baht each (with loan repayments of only 15 Baht a day!). This left space beside the river for the remaining house to reblock and develop kitchen gardens. CODI provided loans and the new houses were officially inaugurated in a seminar on “Livable Cities” which brought together government housing officials and community leaders from networks all over Thailand.

As Lek Somporn from CODI says, “Bangkok is going to be very difficult! If it wasn’t so difficult, the NHA would have been able to solve the city’s housing problems already! But we believe that the situation is ripe now, the other factors are favorable, so it’s a good time to start in Bangkok.”

Bangkok is also a key target for the government’s new poverty reduction policy (which has involved a controversial nation-wide program of “registering” poor people), and the Baan Mankong upgrading program is included in this policy, as one strategy to reduce poverty. As part of this policy, a center for poverty reduction has been set up in Bangkok, which CODI has agreed to be part of.
New friends with drafting pencils:  
Khon Kaen University gets involved in upgrading . . .

In the northeastern region, architecture faculties at three big universities have become active in supporting the Baan Mankong program: Maha Sarakham University, Korat University and Khon Kaen University. Besides working with communities in their own cities, they are also arranging to send teams of students to work with communities in nearby cities which don’t have architecture faculties.

These professors, architects, planners and students who have begun working with communities play an extremely important role in the upgrading process. In a program which has to do with physical change, their ability to make lovely drawings and models, help community people to visualize new possibilities and put together professional presentations is an essential ingredient in the success of the program. For most of these technical people and academics, assisting communities with their upgrading and housing plans and sitting on these local committees is something very new. And many are finding that it’s not simply a matter of making a few models. Some are finding themselves being dragged into all the messy, complicated realities of communities in the process, getting phone calls at all hours with questions and requests, being called to endless meetings, being asked to sign forms and negotiate with contractors. But this only happens because through the work they’re doing, a relationship of trust and respect is growing. No longer is it the community, the people they’re working with asking for anything, but them communicating to the community, the people they’re working with.

In these ways, the process is building a relationship between the university and the communities in Khon Kaen. And in the same way, the university is finding itself the beneficiary of the process. Through the work they’re doing, the university is growing in terms of their visibility and respect in the community. Plus, when it is a university supporting the people, as a team, rather than an individual architect, there’s a much greater continuity to share and discuss. Architects may come and go, but university staff stay put. No matter how many different students they send to the communities, the faculty base remains strong.

Khon Kaen has 69 communities, of which 50 (which are the poorest) will be improved in this first phase of the Baan Mankong Program. The others are mostly communities within market or older communities whose housing needs are not so urgent and can come later.

Railway slums in Khon Kaen:
Some of the poorest and most insecure communi-

cities in Khon Kaen are those settlements along the railway tracks. All these railway communities are included in the first year’s upgrading projects. Some will have to relocate to nearby land, but most will have to stay, according to an agreement negotiated by national network of railway communities, in which:

1. Communities located within 20 meters of the tracks will have to relocate.
2. Communities located 20 – 40 meters from the tracks can get 3-year lease contracts and upgrade their settlements in situ.
3. Communities on railway land beyond 40 meters from the track can get 30-year lease contracts and upgrade in situ.

Railway community residents have to decide which of these three options is best for them. It’s not that easy. Not everyone will be jumping up and down with joy. It’s not everyone will be jumping up and down in society with dignity and all good things.”

In a society which is becoming ever more individualized, poor people alone don’t stand a chance. For the poor, the collectivity of the communities they live in is an important survival mechanism, which helps them meet needs and resolve problems that can’t be met individually.

So in the project, the collectivity is able to deal with whatever minor problems which come up, as a matter of course. Collective land management (through cooperative lease-hold or cooperative ownership) can help safeguard against speculation and gentrification, which are always a danger when the tenure of inner-city settlements is secure. But besides assuring the people keep their community, there is an automatic and binding element in the cooperative management of land which links people together. The monthly rituals of collecting the rents as land payments on the process of making decisions about land which is collectively owned are more ways of bringing people together. Like saving groups, cooperative land management gets people meeting each other all the time, so they learn what their neighbors are up to. If someone’s sick, or needs rice or has kids who can’t go to school, this collective force can find a way to help. These support systems are vital to people’s survival in poor communities.

In a number of the Baan Mankong housing projects, this force becomes visible. In the Boon Koon resettlement community in Uthai Thani, for example, the people have designed into their community six units of “communal housing” for poor or handicapped members of their community who have nowhere to stay. In Bangkok’s Rong Lammoon community, and in Udon Thani’s Wat Po community, the people have also built “central houses” for old, crippled, needy and ill people. These are the real high-lights of the highly decentralized, richly human social welfare system, in which communities collectively look after their own.

These kinds of communal facilities are appearing in many community upgrading projects because the program creates space for people to think about these issues and provides tools and resources for them to do something about them. In these ways, the Baan Mankong Program is beginning to see the potential that social welfare and collective housing can have to improve community people’s security and well-being in many other ways than purely physical ones.

Collective land management
Collective financial management
Collective social management

Why doing things collectively makes sense for the poor and is an important part of the Baan Mankong approach:

In society, regardless of what you are doing, you have to think about what is happening to you and your families. In all those projects, there are many more problems than in projects where the land is rented or owned by individuals. The reason the collective is able to deal with whatever minor problems which come up, as a matter of course. Collective land management (through cooperative lease-hold or cooperative ownership) can help safeguard against speculation and gentrification, which are always a danger when the tenure of inner-city settlements is secure. But besides assuring the people keep their community, there is an automatic and binding element in the cooperative management of land which links people together. The monthly rituals of collecting the rents as land payments on the process of making decisions about land which is collectively owned are more ways of bringing people together. Like saving groups, cooperative land management gets people meeting each other all the time, so they learn what their neighbors are up to. If someone’s sick, or needs rice or has kids who can’t go to school, this collective force can find a way to help. These support systems are vital to people’s survival in poor communities.

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A few years back, UNESCO designated the old Thai capital city of Ayutthaya a “World Heritage Site.” That was good news for historic preservation, but a big problem for the city’s poor, who are as defending as the ruins, but suddenly found themselves in danger of being evicted from their city. On the oldest island” part of Ayutthaya, where most of the historic monuments are and where the tourists go, 80% of the land is under government ownership, and that has created a situation in which the poor’s only housing options is to live in squatter settlements, scattered here and there between the ruins.

The six-year-old community network in Ayutthaya has linked communities around the idea that poor people and historic monuments can cohabit in mutually beneficial ways.

The network began by surveying and mapping all of Ayutthaya informal settlements, finding 53 informal communities within the municipal boundaries (6,611 households). To open a public dialogue on the city’s critical housing problems, they organized a public seminar in July 2000 and presented their survey information to the city and to all the actors with a stake in Ayutthaya’s development. The idea was to look at the city as a whole, and to jointly develop a comprehensive housing plan for the entire city, rather than just doing a project here and a project there.

The people’s idea for historic Ayutthaya? Monuments need to be maintained and tourists who come to see them need guides, drink vendors, souvenir sellers, bicycle-renters. The people who are already providing these services are Ayutthaya’s poor citizens and they’ve lived all their lives in the shadow of those ancient spires and battlements. If they allowed to improve conditions in their settlements, bring in basic services and construct proper houses, shifting their houses a little where necessary to allow the monuments to be rehabilitated, then the unupright shanties the preservationists are so vexed about will turn into healthy, attractive neighborhoods.

Since then, CODI has coordinated with the NHA, the Municipality and the Department of Fine Arts (responsible for Thailand’s historic monuments) to promote the idea that poor communities and historic monuments can make good neighbors. An agreement was eventually made to test the idea in a series of pilot community improvement projects, and then to use the experience of those pilots to inspire a city-wide community adjustment and reconstruction process.

1 Arkorn Songkroa: Ayutthaya’s first full-scale, community-driven on-site community redevelopment. (see box above/)

2 Trok Kanom Touay: This settlement of mostly wooden houses on Treasury land stood in the way of a planned road building project, and had been resisting eviction for a long time. Here people used the process of making environmental improvements to organize and unite their settlement, through action, and to strengthen their negotiations to stay.

3 Wat Pechalai: Another community under threat of eviction, here from the temple which owns the land and the wooden shops houses the people have rented for 50 years. The people used the process of repairing the building and widening the public gallery in front to organize and unite the community, and to show the temple they can make everything look nice, no need to evict! The network linked with the Provincial Development Committee to help facilitate discussions with the Abbott to allow the people to make improvements instead of eviction.

Arkorn Songkroa: Ayutthaya’s first crack at on-site upgrading...

The Arkorn Songkroa community began life 40 years ago as an early social housing project, in which the government built two lines of simple row houses for families whose dwellings had burned down in settlements nearby. Later, more households moved into the open spaces and the tightly-knit community grew to 67 households. The people work as vendors, factory laborers, taxi-drivers and traditional Thai massage therapists—all active members of the savings group. With the help of two young architects from Bangkok, the community spent 3 months designing a full-redevelopment plan for Arkorn Songkroa which included the realignment of all the houses to equalize plot sizes and to create some much-needed open spaces, and the complete reconstruction of the community’s housing infrastructure. For Ayutthaya’s community network, the upgrading of Arkorn Songkroa was the first step in showing the city and the preservationists that improving the living conditions and tenure security of poor communities answers the imperatives of both historic preservation and need for housing, and is a big step towards making Ayutthaya “livable” for all its citizens.

When the Baan Mankong process began in the central Tokyo city of Korat last year, everyone thought it would be very fruitful, for many reasons. The communities were very powerful, the network was strong, and the people understood the problems very clearly. There was also a very active and enthusiastic mayor who had become a close ally of the community network and had understood the Baan Mankong concept. (This mayor was famous for suggesting to a group of 20 other mayors at a seminar in Korat that it actually makes better sense for the poor to stay in the city, where they live in settlements now, close to their workplaces, and let the rich live outside of the city, since they have cars!) But other factors slowed things down. The mayor lost the election recently and the network has had to start all over building a relationship and educating the new mayor. Also, the NGOs in Korat have been slow to understand the concepts behind the upgrading program: that it’s not their job to construct houses for people, but to support the people to do it and to help change the relationship with the city also. But despite these factors, the project committee has been set up and the upgrading process has moved forward, because the communities are strong enough and clear about their problems.
The Baan Mankong Program in the city of Udon Thani, in northeastern Thailand, was officially launched in December, 2004, with a three-day national seminar on community upgrading. Community savings in Udon Thani began just nine years ago in a few of the city’s 51 informal settlements, but since then has helped build a city-wide network of poor communities. Nine of these settlements have been selected by the joint committee and the community network for upgrading in the program’s pilot phase, of which the first is the Wat Po Teewaram community (see box below).

The seminar, held at Udon Thani’s Rajabhat Institute, brought together about 500 community leaders from around Thailand, all involved in developing community upgrading plans with the municipalities and other partners in their own cities, under the Baan Mankong Program. There were also visiting teams of community leaders from Cambodia, Lao PDR, and India, as well as architects, planners and academics who also wish to support this community-driven upgrading process and came to learn. On the first day, community leaders gave reports on the progress of the Baan Mankong upgrading in their various regions. On the second day, participants broke into subgroups to discuss in more detail issues relating to the upgrading program such as the role of the municipality, community surveying, holistic social development, community planning and strengthening links with local partners. The third day began with a gala parade through the city, complete with marching bands and dozens of community groups in matching t-shirts - all triumphantly headed by the city’s mayor, driving a decorated tuk-tuk!

The parade ended up at Wat Po Teewaram, where the ceremonies to inaugurate Udon Thani’s first community upgrading project were held. The program drew a big crowd of community people from settlements around town, as well as officials from local, provincial and national government, academics and professionals - and more than a few curious on-lookers. Community upgrading plans and house models from the nine pilot projects were on display, while up the dais, several very important milestones for the city’s poor were taking place:

1. The signing of the M.O.U. between the municipality, the urban community network and CODI to officially launch the Baan Mankong community upgrading program in the Udon Thani, which was celebrated with the ceremonial ringing of a big gong by the Provincial Governor.

2. The signing of land lease contract for one of the first pilot projects and the making of the first land-purchase payment in another.

3. The ceremonial cementing of the first reinforced concrete column in the Wat Po community’s reconstruction across the street, with various officials and visiting dignitaries and community leaders taking their turn pitching in a shovel full of fresh concrete. Afterwards, the crowd toured the settlement, now under reconstruction.

The joint committee that was set up to manage the city-wide upgrading process in Udon Thani includes 15 people: eight community representatives (two leaders from each of the city’s four zones), four representatives from the municipality (including the mayor), one development professional and two representatives from CODI. The preparation process in the first year went very quickly, thanks to a strong community network and a supportive municipality. Here’s a brief look at the working process in Udon Thani:

April 22: Large meeting of the urban poor from all the city’s 51 poor communities to discuss the new program.

April 28: Plans drawn up to carry out surveys in all 51 poor communities in the city (including information about households and physical problems).

May 3: Survey is carried out in the Wat Po Teewaram community to test the survey process; survey results are summarized.

May 4: The joint committee and community network work together to set criteria for selecting the 9 communities to be upgraded under the program’s pilot phase.

May 10: A committee is formed to select pilot projects in the first phase.

May 14: A committee is formed comprising leaders from these 9 pilot communities.

16 May: The working plan for upgrading these first nine pilot communities is set:  
- Complete survey (households/problems)
- Prepare house designs
- Prepare community redevelopment plans
- Office improvements in 10 pilots in first year
- Expand the upgrading process to include the remaining 42 communities within the next four years.

## Udon Thani’s first pilot project at the Wat Po Teewaram community

Wat Po Teewaram is a settlement of 136 families on temple land in the middle of Udon Thani. Because of its land tenure situation, strong savings organization and active involvement of the municipality, the community was chosen to be one of the cities first nine pilot upgrading projects. A few poor migrants built the first houses here 50 years ago on land they rented from the temple. Over the years, more joined and the land gradually filled up. Different families pay different rents, according to when they moved in and how much land they occupy, but all the rents are very low. The people have managed to negotiate a 3-year rental contract with the temple, but everyone knows if someone with big money approaches the temple with plans to develop the land, they might get thrown out. So the community is now negotiating for a longer-term lease contract.

The upgrading program has pushed membership of household savings up to 100% and given a big boost to the spirit of self-help in the community. It was, as one leader says, “like throwing a rope into a deep well, so that people can now climb out, one by one!” When the survey process first began, only five or six people would show up for the meetings, asking “Is this program real?” But gradually, more and more got involved, bringing more energy into the upgrading preparations. The design process took about six months and involved a lot of extremely delicate negotiations. Some wanted to demolish everything and start over, so everyone would have same-sized plots; others wanted to keep the houses they’d invested so much in over the years. Some families owned only the house they lived in, while others owned several structures and earned income by renting them out. Finding ways of accommodating all these differences was never easy.

The reblooming plan that finally emerged calls for some houses to be moved to allow internal lanes to be straightened and widened and most houses to be rebuilt. Young architects from the Rajabhat Institute helped the people to design three “ad-justable” house types which allow old materials to be re-used. The construction of all the infrastructure and new houses will be done collectively, by the people themselves. The community’s savvy materials purchasing committee has become infamous among building suppliers for haggling the lowest of low prices for materials.

## It’s much easier when the mayor is on your side . . .

Community networks in many cities are now working hard to develop working relationships with their municipal governments, especially with their mayors. In Udon Thani, the mayor has played a very important role in the Baan Mankong process. Some old-style mayors, who operate along more traditional lines, have been among the slowest to come to grips with this new program which places communities at the center of a process and have been reluctant to give their full support. But in a few cities, a new generation of mayors, who operate more participatory and community-driven upgrading program. Udon Thani’s progressive young Mayor, Khun Harachat, who has been an enthusiastic supporter of the community network’s initiatives and a key ally in the city’s Baan Mankong process, has been a powerful model to how to build community-city partnerships in other cities.

On the first night of the big launch program in December, the ten pilot communities hosted dinners for all the seminar participants, featuring all kinds of local delicacies and followed the traditional northeastern Thai rice-creamy, in which elderly in string around the waist, traditionally food, dancing and singing and smiling and murmuring of good-natured blessings. The mayor and a big contingent of his municipal staff made the rounds of all ten settlements that night, taking a little dinner with each community and joining in the blessing ceremonies.

This very personal gesture of support was only the public side: he has done a lot of behind-the-scenes work helping to negotiate lease contracts and tenancy agreements for all the settlements and worked closely with the network to find pragmatic ways the city can support their upgrading efforts.
Baan Mankong Targets: (January 2003 - December 2007)

For almost everyone involved, the short time-frame (5 years!) and huge scale (100,000 units nation-wide) of the Baan Mankong Program are not seen as obstacles to success, but as an inducement to think big, to create capacities and strengthen linkages within communities and within cities to bring about change at a very large scale. This is a deliberate strategy to put the era of individual little projects, in individual communities behind us. Here’s a brief look at the targets:

2003 Targets
10 pilot community upgrading projects (total 1,500 units) and national preparation starts in 20 cities. First year’s budget of 146 million Baht (US$ 3.65 million) covers 10 pilot projects and preparation process in 20 cities.

2004 Targets
Plan to upgrade about 15,000 units, in 174 slum communities, in about 42 cities, while city preparation goes on in 50 cities. The second year’s budget of 1,000 million Baht (US$ 25 million) has now been approved by the government. It was agreed to keep the targets modest for this second year, when second round pilot upgrading projects would be carefully selected and carried out in such a way as to:

- provide maximum learning within (and between) various cities in the program.
- demonstrate to communities and city governments as broad a variety of upgrading options as possible (i.e. land-sharing, reblocking, upgrading, nearby relocation).
- organize communities and use the projects to bridge the relationship between the cities and the city, as upgrading possibilities become more real and move evident.

2005 - 2007 Targets
Initial target of 285,000 units in 200 cities. Then, during the third and fourth years, that’s when things should accelerate, and the scale will go up. During the course of the program, the process will be consolidated and everyone will be working in “front ways to transfer the upgrading program to the city process, so that the withdrawal of CODI’s intervention will not stop the upgrading process but allow it to be carried on by the cities. By the end of 2007, the Baan Mankong program should have been able to upgrade and secure at least half the urban poor communities in Thailand.


- Total number of cities in the process: 70 cities
- Total number of projects approved: 31 projects (some cover several communities)
- Total number of communities covered: 67 communities (in 18 cities, 13 provinces)
- Total number of families covered: 3,134 families
- Total budget approved: 99.6 million Baht (upgrading subsidy)
  - 254.6 million Baht (housing loans)
  - 8.9 million Baht (administrative grant)

Projects organized by type of upgrading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Upgrading</th>
<th>Projects</th>
<th>Households</th>
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<td>Homeless</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3,134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Projects organized by nature of housing problem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Projects</th>
<th>Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solving eviction problems</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1,158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing after fire</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resettling scattered squatters</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redeveloping indebted communities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing secure tenure</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing for homeless</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3,134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Projects organized by terms of tenure security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Tenure Security</th>
<th>Projects</th>
<th>Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative ownership (with title)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual ownership (with title)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term lease to community cooperative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term lease to community cooperative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lease to individual households</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permission to use land</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3,134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“The Baan Mankong program means that all our children are getting security in their lives. We won’t have to migrate somewhere else any more. Land and housing is the focus of the Baan Mankong program, but the upgrading process is pushing all of us into thinking about security in general - how to make our communities and our lives and our futures more secure.”

Khun Ratchanee, community network leader from Niskket

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66% of these households have been upgraded in the same place or on land which is very close by.

65% of these households have secured their tenure in resolution of eviction crises or serious land conflicts.

78% of these households got long-term land security; of these, 92% are on cooperative terms.