

CITY-WIDE UPGRADING IN RAYONG :

The coastal town of Rayong is just 200 kms south of Bangkok. For tourists, it's just a stop-over on the way to the island of Koh Samet and nearby beaches. But the town has an interesting history, as an ancient trading port and as the capitol of a lovely fruit-growing and sea-fishing province. Twenty years ago, the central government decided to make Rayong the center of a new industrial development and manufacturing zone in central Thailand, and began building infrastructure to support. This has brought a lot of investment, created a lot of jobs and led to a big in-migration of people to the area, but it has also made for some heavy problems of pollution and environmental degradation.

Opening up an environment for collaboration :

The collaboration between Rayong's poor communities and its city government to improve the housing and tenure conditions of the city's poor households began in 2003, with the "Livable Cities Project." At that time, the city's progressive mayor, Suraphong Putanapibul, became an important ally in setting up a joint mechanism to redevelop several aspects of Rayong, including :

- Developing housing and secure tenure for all of the city's poor communities.
- Improving environmental conditions in these communities.
- Restoring the city's historic wooden shop-house district on Yom Jindaa Road.

Rayong city facts :

- Urban population : 550,000 people
- Total number of poor communities in the city : 37 settlements (3,024 households - not all of these households live in established communities, some are living in scattered circumstances)
- What people do : Most are general laborers, food vendors, garbage collectors, factory workers and fishermen. Many also work as seasonal workers in the fruit orchards around Rayong Province.

Rayong's upgrading plans :

2003 – 2004 : First pilot was Laem Rung Reung (76 households) On-site reblocking with long-term lease.

2005: Upgrade 4 more communities (269 households).

- ***Kao Yot (60 households)*** On-site upgrading with long-term lease on Port Authority land.
- ***Khon Peak (70 households)*** on-site upgrading with collective long-term lease on National Irrigation Dept land.
- ***Klong Kaya (55 households)*** On-site upgrading with collective land purchase, on private land. Sanam Pao (80 households) on-site upgrading with long-term lease on temple land.
- ***Chai Gapom : (80 households)*** on-site reconstruction with collective land-lease on private land.

"We don't always realize how much we already have . . ."

Rayong's former mayor, Suraphong Putaniapibul, 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 community improvement process at Laem Rung Reung. Here are some of his comments on what he feels the experience in Rayong has to teach other cities :

Cities like Rayong have a lot of good things already: a nice environment, good weather, clean air, fertile soil, a rich history and a lovely beach. If the people and the government become partners, they can bring all these good assets to benefit the society as a whole. Because we live with these things everyday, we don't always realize how much we have! We end up looking for something we don't have, and forget what we do have. We need to be cautious that the new capitalist system doesn't destroy all these good things we already have in our city. We need to understand our history and the roots of our society. And we have to bring all this wisdom and all these good things we already have along with us, as we plan our future development.

New Partnerships to promote renewable energy in Rayong :

As part of the national Baan Mankong process, the Ministry of Energy has been helping several of the pilot communities to develop alternative energy sources. At Laem Rung Reung, these innovations have resulted in some BIG savings for the community people:

1. Community solar cells : There are no electric lines in the community. Before, people used car batteries, which had to be lugged outside on a motorcycle to be recharged each day, costing each family 35 Baht per day. After they installed community solar cells, it costs people only 10 Baht to recharge their batteries. That means each family is saving 25 Baht per day, or almost 10,000 Baht per year! (the equivalent of two months basic salary!).

2. Efficient charcoal cooking stoves are saving families 300 Baht per month (over the traditional wood-burning or charcoal-burning cooking stoves), and this means each family is saving another 3,600 Baht per year!

Laem Rung Reung : Rayong's first on-site upgrading pilot . . .

Laem Rung Reung is an old community of 76 households - mostly very poor fisher folk - located on a sandy peninsula which stretches out into the Gulf of Thailand. Since tidal waters separate this beautiful area (which used to be a graveyard!) from the mainland for most of the day, Laem Rung Reung is practically an island. There have been serious erosion problems caused by companies coming into the area to illegally mine sand.

The houses were loosely scattered and constructed mostly of coconut palm thatch and salvaged planks and tin sheets. Only a few houses were built of concrete blocks. The community had no water supply, drains, toilets or municipal electricity, and so for years, community people have had to use car batteries to power their radios and lights, and buy their drinking water and make do with brackish well water for bathing. Besides reconstructing their houses and develop basic infrastructure in the community, Laem Rung Reung's redevelopment plans involved some repositioning of houses to be closer together and to make way for tree-planting and the creation of a public park at the center, for the whole city to enjoy. With help from young architects, the people developed several simple wooden house types.

The land at Laem Rung Reung belongs to the Ministry of Interior, but the people stayed here for decades 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 obtain long-term leases for all the informal communities located on Interior Ministry land. But the tenure arrangements 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. Eventually, the a 30-year collective lease contract was negotiated.

Laem Rung Reung upgrading facts :

- Number of households : 76
- CODI housing loan : US\$ 40,000 (average \$1,000 / unit)
- Infrastructure subsidy : US\$ 33,500
- Tenure terms : Long term lease (30 yrs)
- Land-owner : Treasury Department