

COMMUNITY news

A PUBLICATION OF UPDF AND SUPF IN PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA • ISSUE NUMBER 3, JULY 2003

Government gives land for first five on-site upgrading projects :

Since the Prime Minister announced the policy to upgrade 100 urban poor communities at the big UPDF anniversary celebration in May, there has been a lot of excitement around the city - in communities and in government. On July 12, 2003, a high-level meeting was held in the Municipality to discuss the community upgrading policy and to officially approve the first set of projects. Government officials from national, municipal and district level attended, including the Vice Governor of Phnom Penh, representatives from the Education, Land Finance and Planning ministries, community leaders from SUPF and UPDF and ACHR.

In the meeting, it was announced that the first five community upgrading projects had been approved and signed by the Prime Minister on 4 July 2003. Four of the communities (Borei Keila, Dei Krahom, Santhi Pheap and Roteh Pleong) will redevelop their communities on part of the land they already occupy, under a "land-sharing" agreement. The fifth community at Prek Toel, near the garbage dump, is being given land by the Municipality for resettlement nearby.



others stay permanently. When a community's land tenure is regularized and its conditions are upgraded, all these complex conditions have to be discussed and dealt with in ways that satisfy everyone, so that nobody is excluded from benefiting from the process. **This is never easy!**

Thailand has recently launched a similar community-upgrading program called "Baan Mankong", in which 2,000 poor settlements in 200 towns and cities around the country will be upgraded by their residents and receive secure land tenure in the coming 5 years, with

full government support. At the July 12 meeting, Somsook Boonyabanha, whose organization CODI is helping to coordinate this huge upgrading process in Thailand, shared some ideas about how community upgrading can be planned, what steps could be followed, what options are available and how some of these problems can be dealt with by communities themselves.

It was also proposed to bring some groups of community leaders and government officials to visit some on-site upgrading projects in Thailand to get some ideas.

Government policy on the urban poor turns upside-down :

Mr. Mann Chhoeurn, Municipal Cabinet Chief, spoke recently about the changing attitude towards the urban poor within the national, municipal and district government since the UPDF anniversary two months ago. After visiting Ros Reay, people in local and national government are beginning to see things differently and to listen more. This may be because of the clear support for community upgrading from the Prime

Minister and the Governor, but it is a very important change of attitude. More and more officials are recognizing that poor people are important actors in solving the city's housing problems and have to be involved, and community leaders from SUPF are now being routinely invited to participate in meetings held in the Municipality and in the districts to discuss the community upgrading policy.

First 5 community upgrading projects :

Now that the first five community upgrading projects have been approved by the government, work can begin right away. In four of these projects, the communities will reconstruct their houses on part of the land they now occupy, in a "land sharing" re-development. People will have less area, but the trade-off is that they will no longer be squatters, but will become legal occupants of their land! Because these first four land sharing projects are complex, they may take a bit longer in the preparation and planning stages than more simple on-site upgrading projects. Why? It is important that a lot of potentially messy issues which don't come up so strongly in on-site upgrading situations get resolved openly and to everyone's satisfaction. Two of the most important steps include conducting detailed household surveys to fix the list of who is entitled to houses in the new scheme and deciding what kind of housing unit is acceptable to the community people but still can be fit into the smaller space they've been allotted. There are many house design possibilities: individually-built houses, row-houses with common side walls, blocks of flats, or "core housing" in which the structure is provided and people fill in the walls, doors, windows and finishes.

What is land sharing?

Land-sharing is a compromise strategy for resolving urban land conflicts between poor communities (who need the land they occupy for housing) and private or government land-owners (who want the land back to develop). After a period of planning and negotiation, an agreement is reached to "share" the land, where the community is given, sold or leased one part of the land for reconstructing housing and the rest of the land is returned to the land-owner to develop. So everybody wins.

1 Borei Keila is a crowded inner-city settlement of 1,776 households living in and around some 4-story apartment blocks built in the 1960s for athletes in 7 Makara District. For years, the Sports Ministry has tried to evict the people to build a new stadium. But this strong community, which settled here in 1979, is determined to stay. After surveying and mapping their settlement, they've worked with UPDF architects to explore land-sharing plans to rebuild their community with very small row-houses, for which the government has agreed to give 4.6 hectares (31.5% of the existing land).

Borei Keila is an important test-case for land sharing, which makes room for poor people's housing while allowing the government to proceed with its plans.

2 Dey Krahom is another large settlement of 1,465 households near the river in Chamkarmon District, which now occupies 4.7 hectares of public land. The government has agreed to a land-sharing proposal from the community in which 78.6% of the land (3.7 hectares) is given to the community to rebuild their houses and 1 hectare is returned to the government.

3 Santhi Pheap ("Railway A") is a settlement of 70 households on 1.3 hectares of public land along the railway tracks in Daun Penh District. After years of eviction threats, the community began negotiating for a land sharing plan in which the people keep 30% of the land for developing small 2-story row-houses, and return the rest to the government. Finally, the government agreed to give the community 25% of the land for their housing.

4 Roteh Pleong ("Railway B") is another railway settlement of 255 households which were going to be evicted from the 10 hectares they've occupied since 1979 in Toul Kork District. The government had leased the land to the *Usma Hasan Company* to build a high-rise hotel, but most people didn't want to go to the resettlement plots offered by the developer. So they drafted their own land-sharing plans, which they presented to the government and the developer in a public meeting last April. The government has now approved the people's plan, in which 25% of the land will be kept for housing, and the rest will go back to the government, which can then lease it to the developer.

When the man from the Usma Hasan Company agreed to attend a public meeting to discuss the development plans for Railway B, he never expected to find a poor community ready with fully worked-out plans of their own!

5 Prek Toel is a settlement of 106 very poor families who survive collecting recyclable waste on the garbage dump in Meancheay District, where they also live in miserable conditions. The Municipality has chosen and purchased a 0.73 hectare site (for \$150,000) three kilometers from the dump, which will be given to the families to build a new community on.

GETTING READY : How communities can prepare for upgrading projects?

The upgrading policy is now official, the government has pledged land and support. So now the hard work begins laying the organizational groundwork and preparing for the upgrading activities! This 100 communities upgrading policy offers a big opportunity to strengthen SUPF, build the people's process and expand the information about the city's poor settlements which is in poor people's hands. The preparation process in communities - and the upgrading work which follows - will be driven by people's own energy, and will include the following important steps :

- 1 Expand savings groups :** All poor communities in the city need to start preparing for this opportunity, beginning with saving, which is vital. SUPF's seven district units will now set up teams of community leaders and savings groups to help new communities to start savings groups and expand the community savings activities to include as many communities in their districts as possible.
- 2 Survey all the households :** Earlier SUPF surveys gathered only information about settlements. For this upgrading program, accurate, detailed information about every family in every poor settlement in the city is needed, to establish clearly who lives where, what jobs they have, where they came from, when they settled in this community and what problems they face with basic services. Gathering this information is a big job, but communities will be able to do it vigorously because it is tied directly to an active process of improving their lives and communities.
- 3 Map existing settlements :** To prepare for the process of planning their upgrading projects, communities will first have to number their houses, map the layout of houses, measure the land they occupy and understand the infrastructure conditions in their settlements - both what is already there and what is missing.
- 4 Strengthen SUPF district support systems :** Supporting and coordinating all this upgrading work will require a very strong, hard-working and dedicated team from the SUPF federation, and so the first step will be for the existing federation teams in each district to review their work, discuss how to strengthen their capacities and set up strong coordinating and support teams in each district.

NEXT UPGRADING PROJECTS ...

While these five projects are being implemented, a second group of upgrading projects will be chosen, similar to the now-completed Ros Reay project. This second group of projects will be important because the strategy of upgrading communities without rebuilding or restructuring them is a much cheaper, more straightforward and less complicated than land-sharing. These projects will make good energy-spinners and enthusiasm-builders for the city-wide upgrading process. It has been proposed that in this second group, one community will be chosen to be upgraded in each of the city's seven districts (seven communities total) through a series of discussions and priority-setting by the SUPF units in each district, from among the communities with active organizations, strong saving and leadership. This selection process can begin right away, and can happen together with all the surveying and preparation process in the districts. These upgrading projects will become training opportunities for greater and greater numbers of people.

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