

## **Report on US Phnom Penh.**

*UPDF fifth anniversary gathering in Phnom Penh, May 24 - 26, 2003  
A report on the meeting from ACHR*

### **Big breakthrough for the poor in Phnom Penh:**

On May 24, 2003, the Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen announced a policy to provide secure land tenure and to assist in the on-site upgrading of 100 inner-city poor communities each year for the coming five years, until all of Phnom Penh's urban poor communities have secure land tenure and full basic services. The prime minister announced this policy in front of a gathering of 5,000 urban poor people from Phnom Penh and 10 provincial cities, national and local government officials, representatives from local NGOs and bilateral and multilateral aid agencies, and community leaders from 9 other Asian and African countries. The gathering was organized to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Urban Poor Development Fund and to promote the idea of on-site community improvement, as an alternative to eviction and relocation to distant resettlement sites.

On May 24th, 2003, the Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF) celebrated its fifth anniversary with a large gathering in Phnom Penh which drew together over 5,000 poor community members from around the city and from ten other provincial cities, community leaders and their NGO partners from 9 Asian and African countries, representatives from the highest levels of the local and national government. The event was organized by the Solidarity for the Urban Poor Federation (SUPF), UPDF and the Municipality of Phnom Penh, who jointly decided to use the occasion to boost the strategy of on-site community upgrading, as an alternative to eviction and relocation to remote sites. Upgrading is a concept which most of us are familiar with, but in Cambodia, where the chief solution used in the last ten years to land conflicts has been to evict and resettle poor communities to the outskirts of the city, this is still a new and unknown idea. So the idea was to use this big event to change this at a policy level with more concrete programs to come.

The gathering provided a venue to showcase the hard work communities in Phnom Penh have been doing in recent months around community upgrading, and to invite the government to support the people's proposal to upgrade 100 of the city's informal settlements in the coming year. The government's response to this proposal surpassed almost everyone's expectations, when on May 24th, the Prime Minister declared his government's full commitment to provide secure tenure and support the community-driven upgrading of 100 inner-city settlements in the coming year, as well as another 100 settlements in each subsequent year, until all the city's informal settlements are secure and improved!

### **Background: Turning around the cycle of eviction and relocation:**

In the past five years, over 11,000 families (nearly a quarter of Phnom Penh's informal settlers) have been evicted from their settlements in central Phnom Penh. About two thirds of these families have been resettled. A small percentage of these families are doing all right at relocation sites they have chosen and planned themselves. But many more are camping out in shacks without water, toilets, roads or flood protection in remote resettlement colonies that are far from job opportunities, support structures, schools and clinics. Resettlement has deprived these families of the means to develop themselves, deepened their poverty, compromised their health and put into question their very survival. But for lack of better ideas, resettlement continues to be the city's response to any land conflict that comes up in Phnom Penh's urban development. The government's commitment to provide alternative land to evicted families has been extremely important, but as Phnom Penh develops, evictions are increasing, and there is a danger that resettlement becomes the only option.

In fact, most of the city's poor settlements are on land which is not needed for urban development or infrastructure projects, and these settlements could be very nicely upgraded for a fraction of the cost of resettlement. These communities provide a much-needed stock of housing for the city's workers which neither the poor nor the government can afford to replace. An enormous investment in housing and services has already gone into these settlements, whose central locations and built-in social support structures are vital to poor people's survival. Upgrading the basic infrastructure and

environmental conditions in these settlements is the cheapest and most practical way of improving the lives of Cambodia's urban poor, while making the city a more beautiful place for everyone to live.

Showing a better way: A few months back, the city's urban poor set about showing the city another way, when SUPF teamed up with UPDF and ACHR to launch a vigorous and proactive campaign to promote community-driven on-site community upgrading as an alternative to eviction and relocation. Each of the SUPF federation's seven district units plunged into a process of re-surveying the informal settlements within their districts and selecting three communities to be improved, as pilot demonstration projects (one to upgrade in-situ, one to redevelop on a portion of the land through landsharing, and one to relocate to land very close by).

While the process of planning how to upgrade these 21 communities began, three of them were chosen to be implemented right away, as part of a city-wide "training-by-doing" process to show everyone in the city how "comprehensive community upgrading" can transform informal settlements into beautiful, secure neighborhoods, and how people can plan and carry out this work themselves, with very modest resources, without contractors. With technical assistance from the young architects at the UPDF and funding support from ACHR, these three communities set to work discussing their infrastructure problems, drafting their improvement plans and setting to work. The in-situ upgrading of Ros Reay Community (see below) was the first pilot upgrading to be completed in May 2003, and was inaugurated by Phnom Penh's Vice Governor on the second day of the UPDF anniversary celebration.

While these community upgrading activities were going on, a series of studies were being carried out under the CDS to understand the development forces behind all these evictions in the city, to measure the effect these relocation have had on the lives of people, and to gather information on development plans and vacant land which will be useful when the districts start planning the upgrading of settlements within their districts.

#### **UPDF Anniversary Event: May 24 - 26, 2003**

May 24: First Day's big gathering: Over 5,000 people from poor communities around Phnom Penh and from ten other provincial cities in Cambodia made their way in their best silk sarongs (many with babies on their hips) to the morning's meeting near the Tonle Basaac River in central Phnom Penh. The meeting was jointly organized by SUPF, UPDF and Municipality of Phnom Penh. The new Governor of Phnom Penh, Mr. Chuk Tema, welcomed everyone and then introduced Cambodia's Prime Minister, Mr. Hun Sen, who was the key speaker.

Since attending the inauguration of the community-driven relocation project at Akphivat Mean Cheay in April 2000 (when he first learned about the work of SUPF and UPDF), the prime minister has made regular monthly contributions to the UPDF from his personal funds. In his speech, he announced that he's stopped giving money to a lot of other NGOs and funds he supported because their processes weren't transparent and he didn't trust their systems, but he continues to give to UPDF because he's confident about UPDF's process, in which people are the key actors and take part in all the decisions about how the fund is used. Mr. Hun Sen described the elements he feels should be part of a housing policy if it is to be successful: a strong partnership between the poor and the local government, the strong involvement of poor people themselves in developing their own communities and improving conditions in their own settlements, and the need to decentralize decisions about land and land-tenure to the local level.

#### **BIG BREAKTHROUGH:**

Prime Minister agrees to provide secure land tenure to 100 inner-city poor settlements in the coming year, and assist in a community-driven process to upgrade those settlements:

· The Prime Minister's hour-long speech culminated in his announcement that his government has agreed to the proposal from SUPF and UPDF to support the upgrading of 100 poor communities in Phnom Penh in the coming year and promised to provide secure land tenure to all those settlements, except where communities fall in the way of planned civic projects such as parks or drainage improvement. In those cases, he pledged the government's help in securing relocation sites that are nearby, close to job opportunities. The Prime Minister even took the people's idea a step further,

asking why stop at 100 settlements and proposed upgrading 100 settlements every year for the coming five years, so that in five years, almost all of Phnom Penh's poor settlements could be improved and have land title! To show his commitment, the PM immediately called for a meeting with his Minister of Interior and various national and municipal land authorities on the following Monday afternoon to talk about the logistics of providing land title to families living in these 100 communities. He even said that the government can even help pay for the upgrading, not only providing the land or secure tenure.

### **Exhibition of on-site community upgrading ideas:**

The venue for this first day's large gathering was in the grounds of the burned-out National Theater, in Basaac, where the SUPF's first model house exhibition was held six years earlier, in May 1997. As part of this very large gathering, the SUPF federation, with help from the young architects at the UPDF, put up three model houses of wood and cloth, that were specially designed for being built in very tight, inner-city communities where upgrading could happen. All three house models were designed to fit onto a typical inner-city house plot of 30 square meters (3m x 10m).

1. Model 1: Small row-house with internal half-loft: The first model was a simple row-house, with common side walls, which could be built of timber or masonry, with a pitched roof that is high enough to accommodate an internal half loft, with a toilet and small enclosed washing space at the back.

2. Model 2: Two-story "upwardly expandable" row-house, with common side walls, built on the same sized plot, but with a full second floor.

3. Model 3: Two-family duplex row-house : In this row-house model (which also fits on the 30 s.m. plot), one family lives on the ground floor, with 4-meter ceilings to provide room for an internal sleeping loft, and one family lives up above, also with 4-meter ceilings and an internal loft. The upper unit is reached via a narrow external stairway at the side, which would access two adjacent units. This double unit was designed as one option for those few extremely crowded situations where very little land is available, and where communities have clearly made remaining in the same location a higher priority than larger houses or plots in distant relocation areas.

Community upgrading projects from Phnom Penh's 7 districts: In a series of tents beside the model house exhibits, the SUPF communities presented their preliminary on-site community upgrading projects, which they have developed with young architects from the UPDF and URC. Besides the three pilot upgrading projects (including Ros Reay, see below), drawing, plans, models and photographs of the second round of 14 upgrading projects selected by the people in the city's seven districts were presented. There is still a great deal of work to be done on refining and improving these initial 17 community upgrading schemes, but the drawings and models (and the extensive community discussions which helped produce them) provided an important first step in helping community people and government officials begin to see a range of viable, beautiful and affordable possibilities for providing housing for the poor, besides eviction and relocation to sites outside the city. These projects take a broad definition of community upgrading to include three key alternatives to relocation:

- upgrading or reblocking communities on the same site
- redeveloping communities on one portion of the site they currently occupy, through land-sharing agreements
- relocating the community to nearby land, in cases where on-site options are not possible.

Community upgrading ideas from other countries: Beside the exhibition of local upgrading projects, a special booth was set aside for displaying community upgrading ideas from other countries in the Asian and southern African region:

- Homeless People's Federation of Zimbabwe
- Kampung Improvement Program (KIP) in Surabaya

- Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in Pakistan
- "Baan Mankong", Thailand's national community upgrading program, being coordinated by CODI.
- National Slum Dwellers Federation and Mahila Milan collectives in India

These groups all brought posters and materials which showed vividly how on-site community upgrading can work in many different context. Many of the posters had very attractive "Before" and "After" photographs. All the government representatives and the community people had a chance to look at these ideas, and to see that on-site upgrading is not a strange concept that's fallen from the moon, but is an inexpensive, socially just and widely-accepted strategy for transforming the vital and much-needed housing stock which informal settlements provide in Asian cities into healthy, beautiful neighborhoods, proud additions to the city. These posters, all of which were mounted and laminated, will remain in Cambodia, to be put up and the UPDF and toted around for meetings and discussions, to add to the stock of new ideas about community upgrading as the idea takes root in Phnom Penh.

### **How did people respond to the big news?**

1. Farouk Tebbal (UN Habitat, Nairobi): "Indeed things have gone in Cambodia beyond my expectations. The Prime Minister made a one hour speech in which he announced that 100 slums (and not 100 houses, as previously suggested by the administration) will be upgraded annually, and secure tenure is a prerequisite! ... The campaign that I came to propose for 2004 is on its way and how!"

2. Somsook Boonyabancha (ACHR, Bangkok): "This is a festival of people, and a chance to negotiate for their ideas with the highest level of government. Many people feel that change in cities comes from the rich or from professional people. In this process in Phnom Penh, poor people are the agents of change, they are the ones influencing the government and persuading it to support what people want.

This idea to upgrade 100 settlements in one year came from the people - from SUPF and UPDF - not from professionals or housing experts. . . . This is a new politics of slum upgrading. In the past 20 years, upgrading is something that only happened in isolated pockets, here and there, and the work was always done by contractors, according to formal standards that were set by the city government. Today's announcement by the Prime Minister represents a totally new direction. And this direction is only possible because people have done the ground work first. There is a critical mass of the urban poor in place now in Phnom Penh. All the network-building and all the basic groundwork that has been done over the past 5 years (savings, surveying, environmental activities, income generation, linking, etc) makes it possible to link with this new policy and make it a mass policy, not just a few scattered projects."

3. Jockin Arputham (National Slum Dwellers Federation, India): "We asked for 100 settlements in one year, but he said 500 settlements in five years! He (Hun Sen) took the ball we threw him and ran with it!

4. Bethsheba Biti (Dialogue on Shelter NGO, Zimbabwe): "This announcement from the government itself may mean nothing. In our experience, governments have very short memories. Tomorrow the government could change its mind, or forget its promise. But this announcement gives space to work and push to make this idea actually happen. So now you've got to move fast with this opportunity. If you take a year to organize yourselves and prepare your projects and then go back to the Prime Minister, he may have forgotten his promise."

### **Awards ceremony:**

#### **Acknowledging the hard work on the ground which set the stage for this development:**

After the Prime Minister finished his speech, he toured the model houses and looked through the display of on-site upgrading ideas, guided by UPDF and SUPF leaders. After he left, Phnom Penh's vice governor, Mr. Chev Kim Heng, and Municipal Cabinet Chief, Mr. Mann Chhoeurn, and several of the international guests were invited to preside over a ceremony of granting awards of achievement to a long list of the best community leaders, best community organizations, best district officials, best

savings groups, etc. The idea of this big public awards ceremony was to publicly recognize and reward the difficult, ongoing hard work people in Phnom Penh's poor communities are doing to organize their communities, strengthen their savings groups, nurture partnerships with their local and officials and push for change at all levels of the city. In all, 47 awards were given, each with a certificate signed by the Governor, a tall gilded trophy and a wrapped gift. After a performance of classical Khmer dance by children from the communities, the crowd broke for lunch.

#### **Afternoon meeting, May 24:**

After lunch, all the Khmer-speaking community groups from Phnom Penh and from the ten other Cambodian provincial cities gave presentations about the work they've been doing and shared ideas. All seven of the SUPF's district units reported on their activities, the progress of their savings groups, the expansion of their work into new communities in their districts, etc. The community leaders from the provincial cities all spoke about the situation for the urban poor in their various cities and expressed strongly their desire to develop the community process in their cities.

#### **Inauguration of Ros Reay Community comprehensive upgrading, Morning, May 25:**

During the last six months, the UPDF and ACHR have supported a few pilot upgrading projects selected by the communities for comprehensive upgrading. One community, Ros Reay, finished its upgrading just in time for the meeting, with full community participation. The other two are still in process (one involving a delicate land-sharing negotiation with the government and the other involving the purchase of nearby land for resettlement), and another 14 projects have been selected from all of the city's seven districts. Since the theme of the meeting was on-site community upgrading, it was decided to make the city's first comprehensive, community-driven on-site upgrading at the Ros Reay Community the centerpiece of the celebration. Phnom Penh's vice governor Mr. Chev Kim Heng cut the red ribbon at the top of the community's central lane, which was decked out with balloons, flowers and Cambodian flags. After the five hundred or so visitors had a walking tour through the beautifully paved and landscaped lanes (see the attached Ros Reay photo report with "before" and "after" photos), they gathered down the lane, where a large tent had been set up for the meeting.

This community-driven upgrading at Ros Reay represents a very important turnaround in poor people's housing development in the city of Phnom Penh. It represents a strategy for enhancing rather than destroying the city's existing stock of affordable informal housing. Ros Reay also shows clearly to a doubting city that it is possible for the poor to stay in the city in settlements that are beautiful, healthy and well-serviced, and that communities can do the work of improving themselves, cheaply and simply and efficiently. The cost of laying sewers, storm drains in Ros Reay, paving the roads, planting trees, painting houses and fences and upgrading the house fronts came to less than US\$ 200 per family.

#### **Some key comments from the speakers at the Ros Reay Inauguration:**

· Somsook Boonyabancha (ACHR, Thailand): "At first, we started the work in Ros Reay without official permission from the Municipality. People just started working. When the city got a little nervous, we called it part of the CDS training - not exactly "upgrading" but a kind of "training in how to upgrade". All the SUPF people chose this community as their pilot and all of them took active part in the process, along with a very supportive sub-district leader. There were at least 200 people from other settlements around the city helping with the initial survey, and groups of visitors at every stage of the work of digging the street, laying sewer pipes, concreting the road, painting the fences, planting trees. Ros Reay shows that the poor can do very nice work where others cannot do it that easily. If a big contractor were given the job of upgrading Ros Reay, it would have cost ten times as much and it would not have been done as delicately or appropriately. They would impose their designs and their standards and nobody would be able to influence or touch that design. This improvement is important because you did it with your own hands, you dug the soil yourselves and carried the rocks, laid the pipes, carted the bags of cement yourselves - women, children, kids, everyone. Everybody participated and everybody benefits. Now a whole new community is emerging here, and it has been built by people in the community."

· Mrs. Keo Yin (, Ros Reay's energetic leader): "We first discussed our problems together, and formed a committee to write down all the things we'd like to do together to improve our settlement and submitted these ideas for support. After it was approved, we immediately set to work. The next step in Ros Reay is to get land title, so we can be secure here."

· Mr. Peter Swan (UNCHS Project, Phnom Penh): "Ros Reay is the first community in the campaign of upgrading communities in the city. You are paving the way, showing the larger society in Phnom Penh that poor people don't want to live in dirty, unhealthy, ugly settlements but clean, beautiful, well serviced neighborhoods of which they can be proud. The government is listening to this by its support. And proving you are capable of doing things yourselves, instead of waiting for others to come in and do them for you. This is probably the most significant policy change we've seen in Phnom Penh in the last ten years. It is a policy which acknowledges that people can improve their environment if they have security of land tenure and have the space to do so. And they can do it cheaper and more effectively than the contractors. So we'll see more families staying in the city and prospering, not being reduced to beggars at remote resettlement sites, waiting for aid handouts from others."

· Mr. Mann Chhoeurn (Municipal Cabinet Chief, Phnom Penh Municipality): "When we first came here, there was garbage and mud everywhere. One old lady with a shop poking out into the lane agreed to move her shop back to make room for straightening the lane."

· Mr. Tonderai Kanyoka (Community leader, Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation): "It is like you were fighting with a very fierce lion and you won the battle!"

· Mr. Chev Kim Heng (Vice Governor of Phnom Penh): "This city doesn't only belong to the rich and high-ranking. It belongs to all of us, so we should all be involved in improving it... Now we have a lot of work to do, we have to sit down and set a concrete plan for this upgrading program together."

· Ms. Nome (Community Leader, Uttaradit, Thailand): "The important thing is that we concentrate on what are our problems and how to solve them. Then the money will come. Instead of getting deflected in our work by this program or that one. We're not "asking for permission", we're making a proposal to the government where our position is strong because we are linked together, so it's difficult for the government to say no."

The morning session at Ros Reay ended with a question and answer session chaired by three of SUPF's key women leaders (including Ms. Keo Yin, Ros Reay's community leader). Having seen with their own eyes how Ros Reay was transformed by its own residents in just a few months into a clean and beautifully serviced and landscaped neighborhood, the community people at the inauguration were all understandably keen to know how they could do the same thing in their settlements - how they could access the funds, how they could organize their planning, how they could negotiate with the city for land titles. The questions came rapid-fire from the crowd of about 500 people, fanning themselves under the tent. The women were unanimous in their advice to them to not wait for the green light from the city or from the UPDF, but to start organizing and planning and saving right now.

Opportunities to upgrade like this at Ros Reay come out of strong savings, strong community dialogue and untiring negotiations with donors and government. If communities can present very well worked out and costed plans, they said, these plans can be powerful tools when you go to negotiate for permissions and for resources.

#### **Afternoon meeting at the Phnom Penh Municipality:**

Each of SUPF's 7 khan units present their plans of their next round of upgrading projects in their Districts.

The next step of expanding the community upgrading process involves undertaking a set of two or three pilot community upgrading projects in each of the city's seven districts. So in the afternoon session, which was hosted by the Municipality in one of their large meeting rooms, each of the seven SUPF district units presented the drawings and plans for the pilot upgrading projects they have selected for the next round. These presentations were preceded by a welcome speech by Cambodia's Minister of Women's Affairs, Ms. Mour Sok Hour, who has been a good friend of SUPF.

The district teams also explained briefly the process they had followed to select these pilot communities, and described the additional work they have to do to improve the plans. The process of preparing these plans, some of which involve relocation to nearby land and full community layout planning, house-type planning, etc, were assisted by young architects at the UPDF and at the Urban Resource Center (URC). This round of planning is still quite preliminary, and now there is a need for the district units to sharpen their survey information, solidify their process and find ways to bring in more communities - even those not yet part of the SUPF federation - into the upgrading process.

After all the presentations had been made, there was an interesting response from the Indonesian team, who came from the Kampung Improvement Programme (KIP) in Surabaya, one of the oldest government-driven community upgrading programs in Asia. "These plans all look like dreams," one of the team members said. "How can poor people afford to build such expensive blocks of flats? Even in Surabaya, we could never afford the elaborate plans some of these projects involve, and nobody will give us these buildings for free! Now your job is to go back and make these dreams into practical plans which poor people can afford, and which can be built and maintained by community people themselves. "

### **Support from overseas friends of SUPF and UPDF:**

Teams of federation and community leaders and their NGO partners from nine other Asian and African countries came to take part in this event and to share their experiences, especially in the work of community upgrading. In all, there were 50 overseas visitors from Zimbabwe, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, India, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Pakistan. Here is how Somsook describes the boost that comes of having this kind of support from friends outside Cambodia:

"This is the new super-highway of learning, this international and national exchange sharing. At the same time we share our experiences, we learn about the politics of another country. Each place is different, different housing situation, different government, different level of preparedness in poor communities. Federations and politics are very different in different places. Being here gives the Cambodians a big boost. This is a new politics! This creates change, this type of gathering, it produces a new policy and can do the same in other countries. That is why being here is so important." (Somsook Boonyabancha, ACHR, Thailand)

### **Third days meeting back at the Basaac Theater venue, May 26:**

The morning meeting on May 26 was the last session in the UPDF anniversary. In the first part of the program, officials from the Municipality and central government were invited to explain to the large gathering of community people and visitors some of their policies regarding land and housing in the city and in the country.

First, Mr. Chhurn Sothy, the Chief of the Phnom Penh Municipality's Department of Land Management, Construction and Urban Planning explained the process of obtaining land title (less than 20% of the land in Phnom Penh is so far registered under this new system of land titling, which has been set up by GTZ and the World Bank.). There is still a big hurdle in Phnom Penh, where the only system of land ownership is individual title, which makes even tiny pieces of land owned by poor families in inner-city slums easily and readily marketable, and therefore extremely precarious. In countries like India, there are many forms of secure tenure which work to prevent market forces from gentrifying communities by making it very difficult for the rich to buy land under informal settlements.

Second, Mr. Penghong Socheat Khemaro, from the Ministry of Land Management's Department of Urbanization, gave a detailed power-point presentation of the government's various land and housing policies for the poor, amply illustrated by figures. He explained that UNCHS and UN-Habitat are now assisting the government to draft a land and housing policy for Cambodia, and for Phnom Penh.

The session continued with more presentations from the seven SUPF Khan Units of their community upgrading projects, and ended with Jockin's call to organize a set of criteria for selecting the 100 communities to be upgraded. In the afternoon, another meeting was organized in Khan Dangkor District, which was attended by representatives from all seven districts, to discuss together the steps to be taken in each district to implement the new upgrading policy.