

Thai Breakthrough

Dear Friends,

Just to inform you that finally the Thai Government have approved 4 year upgrading plan to be implemented in 200 cities during 2005-2008 targetting to upgrade and develop community housing in 2000 communities reaching 300,000 families. It is a city-wide "Cities Without Slums" housing development process by communities and municipalities and city development agencies where communities will be the key actors and owners of the project to plan and develop the whole upgrading and housing process collectively. Thai Government will provide total subsidy of about 19,300 million Baht (470 million US\$) to CODI for the program. CODI will provide housing loans to communities from CODI revolving Fund and will link and try to transfer to the Banks to take over community loans later on.

It is expected that this total subsidy by government (average about 1,650 US\$ per unit which include infrastructure and all social economic facilities, local and all central management and administrative cost, 2% interest rate subsidy and all expense about capacity building, learning, meetings, seminars, exposure trips, etc.,) will share about 25-30% of total investment cost in which communities will be responsible for about 60-65% (mostly for housing loans and labour contributions) and the local authorities about 10%. This total investment is, in deed, believed to be able to generate related economic activities of about 3-4 times.

To reach this huge scale in 4 year which could be amount to about half of existing slums in the country, it is therefore, designed to work out at city-wide process in which all the existing slums in the city will all be included and work together with city authorities to survey, set up saving groups, plan for upgrading, negotiate or search for alternative land together, organize various city task forces to assist each other communities, link with universities, etc. so that each city should be able to come up with plan of upgrading covering all existing slums in the city within a period of about 3 year for each city simultaneously. So all related development actors in the city, particularly communities will all be workers and participants and observers, learners, advisers to whole city active upgrading activities. The holistic upgrading elements include changing land tenure status for secure and collective lease or ownership, replanning of existing community, housing improvement or reconstruction, environment development such as family waste water treatment, community recycle system, growing plants and garden, community facility building, economic generation area or activities, community welfare system, house of the elderly or very poor persons, etc.,. It is not mere physical upgrading as such but whole lot of physical and social upgrading managed by community people together.

Since 2003 in which first 10 upgrading projects was approved uptill July 2005, we have now working in about 130 cities/ districts in about 55 provinces (total 76 provinces in the country). A total number of 175 projects have been approved covering about 300 slum communities 21,500 families. It is very interesting to share with you that in this process of city-wide and all key actors working together, we found that communities under threat of eviction or squatters are always selected as priority for upgrading and being negotiated for better land deal which amount to about 66%. This is probably the effective way to find solutions for communities to be faced with eviction beforehand !!! It is also very interesting to find that 77% of former insecure slum communities can stay in the same location with improved tenure security either purchasing the existing land

or have long lease deal with better housing development either reblocking or reconstruction or land-sharing. Only about 23% relocation and almost half of the relocation move to the land nearby. So of all total upgrading approved, only about 12.5% relocate to land further away from former slums location. 82% of total have long term land security, the rest have short term deal, with about 90% as collective ownership. I think the above figures are very significant finding showing no problem at all for urban poor communities to stay in the city where they have been with better status and social physical improvement.

However, I will have harder work next since more money will always bring more problems and surely new more problems I have not faced before. This nation-wide upgrading program have brought me so much more knowledge in the past two years, however, they have also taken much of my energy and time. I only hope that this work in Thailand will help contribute to the knowledge and struggle we are all working in our countries. I will be glad to share all these knowledge with you in whatever requested. I would also like to assure you all that it is possible to upgrade or develop slums all over the country if we have the strong will to do so with communities.

The day this nation-wide program was approved by the Cabinet on 2nd of this month, there was also cabinet reshuffle in the evening of the same day and the Minister and Deputy Prime Minister who strongly support this program were transferred. So now, I have faced with totally new Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in this program again. This is just to tell you that there will never be an end to difficulties if you want to keep doing and changing things. Sometimes, I think God is very kind to me to keep showing me to develop more and more knowledge and patience to deal with more and more difficulties.

So, this is just to share with you what I am upto here in Thailand so I hope some friends could probably apologise me for being so bad not to be able to participate in some of the event you kindly invited.

Also I would like to let you know that we are also planning big regional meeting event in early October to link this Thai city-wide slum upgrading process with Regional World Habitat Day and Regional meeting in which Habitat Executive Director and probably Thai Prime Minister will be joining. More information soon.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes
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