Canal-Side Community Upgrading at Scale in Bangkok

Submitted By: Community Organizations Development Institute



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Community Organization Development Institute (CODI)

Organization Type: National government

Website: https://en.codi.or.th/

Practice Details

Country(ies): Thailand

City(ies): Bangkok

Start Year: 2016

Ongoing: Yes

End Year: N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Affordability & Financing
- Communal & Self-Build Housing
- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance

Relevant SDGs:



UN-HABITAT

Problem & Context

The Bangkok canal community project was born from recurring problems of flooding and urban encroachment. By 2014, over 11,039 homes were illegally built along the city's main canals, obstructing water flow and worsening floods. This was compounded by a lack of secure land tenure, which left residents in a cycle of poverty and insecurity.

Past policies, centered on "eviction and relocation," proved ineffective. They failed to address core housing needs and lacked community participation or integrated cooperation among various government bodies.

The new project fills these policy gaps by shifting to a strategy of secure housing and community-led development. This approach not only aims to solve the flood issue but also improves the quality of life for the affected residents by empowering them to be partners in the city's development

Solution Developed

The project's primary beneficiaries were the urban poor and low-income families living in precarious, illegal settlements along Bangkok's major canals, specifically the 11,039 households (approximately 36,183 people) identified in 2014.

The project's objectives were multifaceted and aimed for sustainable, long-term change: 1) Provide secure housing and infrastructure 2) Improve drainage and prevent floods 3) Enhance environmental quality 4) Empower and strengthen communities 5) Reduce inequality.

The project's innovations:

- This community-centric model puts residents in charge of planning, designing, and managing their own housing projects.
- Flexible Financial Mechanisms: subsidies and low-interest loans from the CODI were channeled directly to community cooperatives.
- Collective Long-term Land Lease: The project secured long-term, 30-year land leases from the Treasury Department
- Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration: The project successfully integrated various sectors
- Community Capacity Building: Through active participation in all project phases, residents developed new skills in construction, financial management, and negotiation.

Implementation

The project holistically addressed canal encroachment and housing insecurity by empowering communities. Residents were the main drivers, collaborating with multiple stakeholders to implement key actions. They tore down illegal homes to allow the BMA to build flood control embankments, then rebuilt on-site or relocated, creating homes with proper utilities and green

spaces. Communities also launched initiatives to clean canals and formed cooperatives to manage funds and develop local enterprises.

The project's success relied on a phased timeline and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

- 2014-2015: Following the severe 2011 floods, the government made canal encroachment a priority. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between key agencies.
- 2016: The Cabinet approved significant funding (approx. 4.06 billion Baht) for the Khlong Lat Phrao and Khlong Prem Prachakon projects.
- 2022-2025: As of March 2022, the project had housed 4,394 households in 44 communities. By August 2025, it had reached 6,106 households out of a target of 13,455
- Key actors included the
- CODI, which provided subsidies (up to ฿147,000 per household) and low-interest loans (up to ฿300,000 per household).
- Treasury Department leased state land for 30 years,
- NGOs and academic institutions provided on-the-ground support and technical expertise
- The BMA coordinated the construction of the embankments

Enablers & Obstacles

Enablers included strong political support, with the government allocating over ฿4 billion after the 2011 floods. This provided the necessary policy and financial backing. Community engagement was a major driver, as the project empowered residents to manage their own projects and negotiate a 30-year land lease from the Treasury Department. Flexible funding from CODI, offering subsidies and low-interest loans, bypassed traditional bureaucracy. The project also thrived on integrated collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and academia.

Obstacles included community resistance from some who were unwilling to participate or sacrifice land. This was addressed through continuous negotiation and showcasing successful pilot projects. Internal conflicts over land allocation were resolved by expanding eligibility to include renters. Legal and physical constraints were overcome through long-term group land leases and collaborative urban planning, with communities working with architects

Results & Impact

Impact on Low-Income Households: The project has provided secure land tenure through renewable 30-year leases at a very low monthly rate, ending the constant threat of eviction. This has improved safety, security, and residents' physical and mental health. The provision of adequate housing has also reduced overcrowding and increased access to essential utilities like water, electricity, and sanitation

Impact on the Community and Society: The project has strengthened social cohesion and community bonds. Communities have gained skills in project management, accounting, and construction. By collaborating with government agencies, residents have gained acceptance as active citizens and partners in urban development. The new walkways, green spaces, and community centers have also fostered a sense of togetherness and provided spaces for social activities and economic opportunities

Environmental and Economic Impact: The voluntary demolition of homes has allowed for the construction of wide, solid canal-side walkways, helping to mitigate flood risks for the entire city. Communities have also become proactive environmental stewards, organizing regular cleanups and implementing household waste management systems, which has led to a visible improvement in water quality. On the economic front, the new infrastructure and stability have created opportunities for home-based enterprises and even led to the formation of a cooperative construction company.

Replication & Scale Up

The canal-side projects in Bangkok, particularly the successful model along Khlong Ladprao and Khlong Prem Prachakom, served as a pilot that provided convincing evidence for the approach's feasibility. This model was then replicated on a larger scale. The canal-side project also served as a crucial prototype for large-scale government initiatives such as the the dual-track railway project and the Lower Chao Phraya River Basin project, among others, to address issues affecting low-income populations.

1. Community Networks: Encourage the formation of community networks to increase bargaining power and facilitate shared learning and support.
2. Policy and Financial Support: Secure continued political will and flexible, dedicated funding from the government, which is then channeled directly to community groups.
3. Integrated Collaboration: Promote multi-stakeholder partnerships between communities, government agencies, NGOs, and academia
4. Capacity Building: Invest in training and empowering communities with the skills needed to plan, manage, and implement their own projects.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has been fully adopted into formal policy frameworks and legislation, and is being implemented at scale with institutional support.

Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI), a public organization, serves as the central mechanism, coordinating policies, managing the budget, and creating the national housing development plan. This institutional framework allows for flexible financial systems that can directly support communities.

The Baan Mankong program itself has become a model for solving housing problems, with its successes providing a tangible example for both government agencies and communities. This proven model has enabled the practice to be implemented at a large scale with full institutional backing.

Lessons & Takeaways

In hindsight, the housing practice could be improved by elevating it from a project-specific approach to an integrated urban strategy. Instead of focusing solely on individual canal communities, the model should be a continuous part of local and regional development plans. This would allow for the simultaneous resolution of housing issues and other urban challenges across the city. The project could also benefit from a more formalized collaboration with local government bodies to ensure the community-driven model is institutionalized as a standard practice, not just a one-off initiative.