

GLOBAL REPORT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS 2003
CITY REPORT: BANGKOK

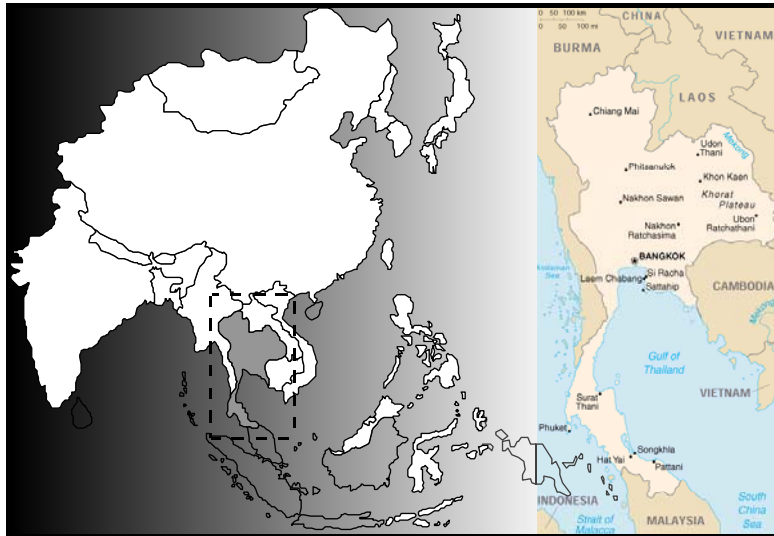
SOPON PORNCHOKCHAI

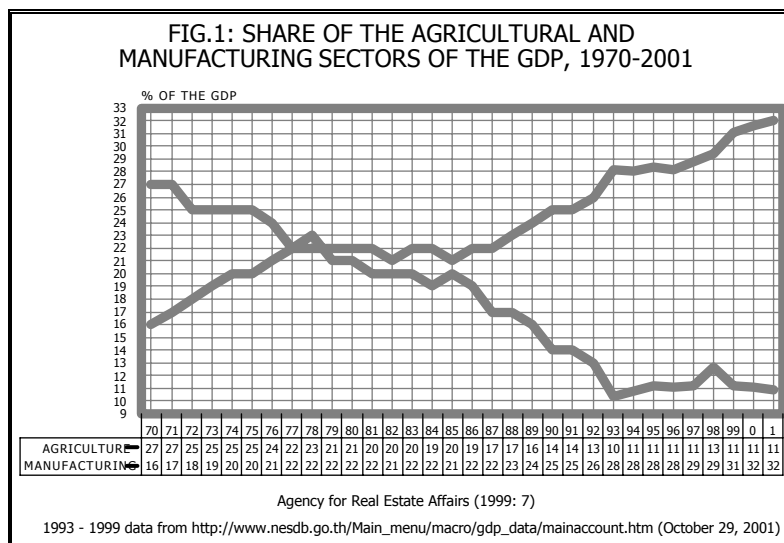
1. Introduction: The Urban Context

1.1 The Urban Context

1.1.1 Thailand At A Glance

Thailand (formerly Siam) is a unified kingdom established during the mid-14th century. People have designated it the "Land of smiles" because Thai people are considered friendly. The Kingdom's total land area is 514,000 sq. km. It has a population of 62,626,068 (as of June 9, 2002, www.dola.go.th). The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) summarizes that after enjoying the world's highest growth rate from 1985 to 1995, averaging almost 9% annually, speculative pressure increased on Thailand's currency in 1997 and led to a crisis that revealed financial sector weaknesses and forced the government to float the Baht (CIA: www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/th.html). Long pegged at Baht 25 to one US dollar, the Baht reached its weakest point of Baht 56 to one US dollar in January 1998. The economy contracted by 10.2% that same year. However, the economy has since recovered. On June 8, 2002, the currency exchange rate was Baht 42.5 to one US dollar (http://www.bbl.co.th/bankrates/fx_rates_curr.htm). This paper uses a conversion rate of Baht 43 for one US dollar.





It can be said that the economic transformation of the country from an agricultural-based economy to an industrial-based economy resulted in a gigantic boom in the housing and real estate markets. Figure 1 shows that since 1987, the manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP has been consistently and significantly higher than that of agriculture. Because of this transformation people have been able to accumulate wealth, thus resulting in the decade long (1987-1997) housing and real estate boom.

1.1.2 Urbanization in Thailand

One unique aspect of Thailand is that its population is relatively un-urbanized. In 1990, only 18.71% of the population lived in urban centres. In 2000, the percentage grew to 31.09%, partly because a large number of former rural sanitation districts were converted to urban municipalities. However, this percentage is still lower than urban populations in comparable ASEAN countries e.g. the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia with 59%, 58% and 42% of the population living in urban areas in 2001 (www.unescap.org/pop/data_sheet/2001/table5.htm).

Year	Total	Total Bkk	Urban Population					Rural
Break-down	Population of Thailand	Metro Region (BMR)	Total Urban Pop	Urban Area of BMR			Other Urban	Population
				Total	Bangkok	Excl. Bkk		
Real figures (millions)								
1960	26.258	3.293	3.282	2.275	2.136	0.139	1.008	22.976
1970	34.397	4.688	5.533	3.443	3.077	0.366	2.090	28.864
1980	44.825	6.871	7.633	5.375	4.711	0.664	2.258	37.192
1990	54.549	8.583	10.207	7.111	5.876	1.235	3.096	44.342
2000	60.607	10.080	18.843	8.220	6.320	1.899	10.623	41.764
Proportion to total population (%)								
1960	100.00%	12.54%	12.50%	8.66%	8.13%	0.53%	3.84%	87.50%
1970	100.00%	13.63%	16.09%	10.01%	8.95%	1.06%	6.08%	83.91%
1980	100.00%	15.33%	17.03%	11.99%	10.51%	1.48%	5.04%	82.97%
1990	100.00%	15.74%	18.71%	13.04%	10.77%	2.26%	5.67%	81.29%
2000	100.00%	16.63%	31.09%	13.56%	10.43%	3.13%	17.53%	68.91%
Annual changes (%)								
1960	3.20%	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1970	2.74%	3.60%	5.36%	4.23%	3.72%	10.20%	7.57%	2.31%
1980	2.68%	3.90%	3.27%	4.55%	4.35%	6.13%	0.78%	2.57%
1990	1.98%	2.25%	2.95%	2.84%	2.23%	6.41%	3.20%	1.77%
2000	1.06%	1.62%	6.32%	1.46%	0.73%	4.40%	13.12%	-0.60%
Proportion to urban population (%)								
1960	n.a.	n.a.	100.00%	69.30%	65.08%	4.22%	30.70%	n.a.
1970	n.a.	n.a.	100.00%	62.23%	55.61%	6.62%	37.77%	n.a.
1980	n.a.	n.a.	100.00%	70.42%	61.72%	8.70%	29.58%	n.a.
1990	n.a.	n.a.	100.00%	69.67%	57.57%	12.10%	30.33%	n.a.
2000	n.a.	n.a.	100.00%	43.62%	33.54%	10.08%	56.38%	n.a.

Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) = Bangkok + 5 vicinity provinces (Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Samut Prakan, Samut Sakhon and Nakhon Pathom)
Source: Based on Population Census of the National Statistical Office, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000
with some minor adjustment where seems irrelevant with registration data from Dept. of Local Authority

One reason for the low level of urbanization in Thailand is the movement of millions of people to forest areas (Angel, 1985). In the past, Thailand had a lot of forests. It can be said that around half of the rural villages existing today were established over 50 years ago. On the contrary, for countries with a lot of islands like Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, there is no large hinterland in the form of forests for people to occupy. Therefore, people stay around port cities or nearby areas and form townships or cities. Thailand, though, has historically had large areas of forest for occupation. This is the reason cited by Pornchokchai (1998: 427) for higher rural to rural migration (1,645,400 people during 1985 to 1990) relative to rural to urban migration (738,400 persons).

1.2 Bangkok

Bangkok is the capital city of Thailand and was established in 1782, the year King Rama I ascended the throne. In 2002, Bangkok is 220 years old. The location was selected with the consideration on natural defense by rivers and canals. Since its establishment, Bangkok grew steadily in size and importance. At the beginning, it covered only 4.14 sq. kilometers. Now, it is 1,568.737 sq. kilometres. Bangkok is a primate city and is the administrative, economic, transportation, and education centre of the country.

At present, Bangkok is considered an administrative metropolis or an economic megalopolis. However, the urban field of Bangkok expands beyond its administrative boundary to adjacent provinces. Greater Bangkok is another definition referring to Bangkok and the two adjacent provinces of Nonthaburi and Samut Prakan. However, another term, the Bangkok

Metropolitan Region (BMR), which refers to Bangkok and the five adjacent provinces of Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Samut Prakan, Samut Sakhon and Nakhon Pathom, is now widely used. The BMR constitutes an area of 7761.662 sq. kilometres. BMR is a planning term, not an administrative one, as the five provinces retain their own administrations. In this paper, Bangkok will refer mainly to the BMR.

1.2.1 The Physical Aspects

Bangkok is situated in the central region of the Kingdom on the low, flat plains of the Chao Phraya River, which is the largest arterial river in Thailand. Due to the large number of canals, Bangkok is also known as "Venice of the East". It is located at a distance extending from 27 - 56 kilometres from the Gulf of Thailand or at latitude 13° 45' north and longitude 100° 28' east. It is in a tropical and monsoon zone with longer hours of sunshine, high temperatures and high humidity. There are three main seasons, rainy (June-October), winter (November-January), and summer (February-May). Average temperatures can be as low as 20°C and as high as 30°C. Further details are available at http://www.bma.go.th/bmaeng/body_general.html#geography.

1.2.2 The Population

During 1782 - 1900, during the initial period of the city's establishment, Bangkok grew rather slowly. The population then was only 600,000 and the urbanized area was about 18 sq. km. After the Second World War, Bangkok grew increasingly populated with rapid urbanisation, which brought about a number of infrastructure and other construction projects. The registered population in Bangkok increased from 1.6 million in 1958 to 5.4 million in 1986 and 5.6 million in 1999. According to the database of the Department of Local Authorities (DOLA), the population of Bangkok is 5,795,267 people (June 9, 2002 <http://www.dola.go.th/cgi-bin/tstat.sh?level=1&ccode=%A1%C3%D8%A7%E0%B7%BE%C1%CB%D2%B9%A4%C3&hrcode=&ttcode=&data=1>). Most residents in Bangkok are native Thais with around 25% of the city's inhabitants being Chinese or of Chinese descent. There is also a sizable population of Indians, Arabs, Malays, and Europeans (http://www.bma.go.th/bmaeng/body_general.html#population).

1.2.3 The Economy

The economy of Bangkok is gigantic relative to the rest of the country. In 1993, the Gross Provincial Product of Bangkok alone was 42% of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The other five provinces of the BMR combined for another 12% of the GDP. The rest of the country contributed only 47% or less than half to total GDP. This implies the primacy of the Bangkok megalopolis. However, the situation improved in 1999, the latest year in which GDP data is available. In 1999, non-BMR areas contributed 51% to total GDP. The share of the five adjacent provinces remained 12%, whereas Bangkok's share decreased to 37%. As expected, the growth of other cities and regions has begun to slightly alleviate the uneven growth of the country.

Bangkok became a primate city largely because of its location, which has allowed it to be a port city, an administrative centre and subsequently an economic stronghold. Figure 2 shows changes in GDP over time. The data was compiled by the National Economic and Social Development Board or NESDB (www.nesdb.go.th/Main_menu/Macro/gpp_data/index.html).

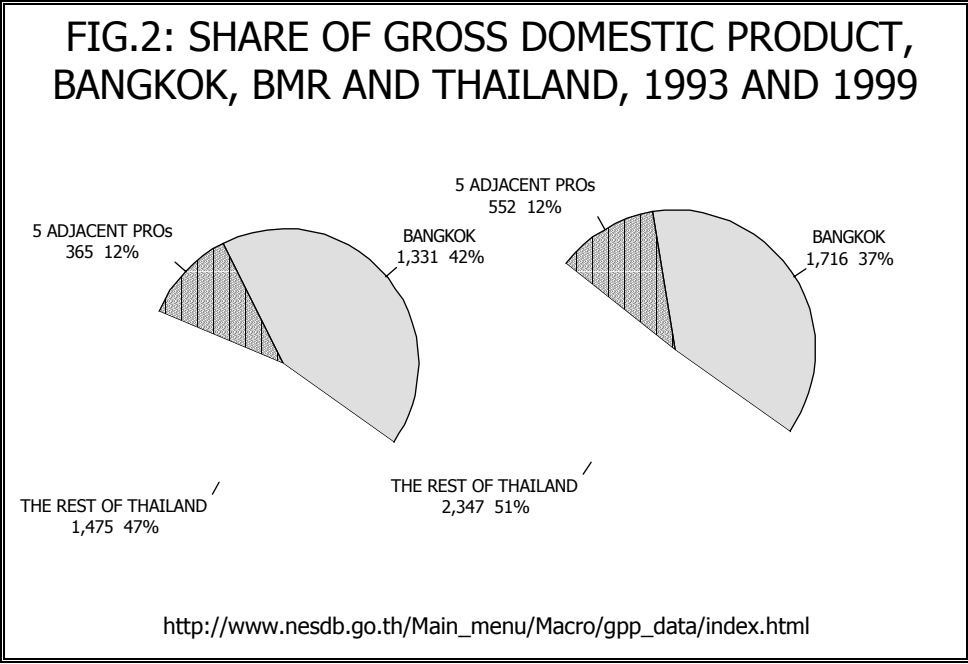


Fig.3: Map of the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR)



1.2.4 The Governance of Bangkok

In the beginning, Bangkok was simply the capital city of the Kingdom. From 1894 to 1906, it was the “Monthon” or precinct of Krung Thep (Bangkok) which fell under the Ministry of Urban Affairs. In 1922, the Ministry of Urban Affairs was merged with, and became, the Ministry of Interior. This Ministry continued to administer Bangkok under a modified Monthon system until 1932. In 1933, the Thai Administration Act abolished the monthon system. Bangkok became a province with a governor. An under the Municipal Governance Act, the urban area of Bangkok became a municipality with a mayor elected to lead the local administration.

On the 21 December 1971, Bangkok and Thonburi Provinces were merged and are now known only as Bangkok. The two municipalities were merged as well. In 1972, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) was established. Since then, Bangkok is no longer a province. It is an autonomous local authority whose municipal area covers the whole of the former province's administrative area. Under the current law, the BMA Governor is elected by popular vote and four Deputy Governors are appointed by the Governor for a four-year term. The Bangkok Metropolitan Council comprises elected members. There are 50 districts. At the district level, a District Council is also elected, each with at least seven members. The Bangkok Metropolitan Council and District Council, each has a four-year term (http://www.bma.go.th/bmaeng/body_the_bma.html).

The BMA's revenues are derived from its own regular income and a government supporting fund. Sources of regular revenue are local taxes, fees, fines, permits, service charges, asset rentals, utilities, and enterprises. The annual revenue of the BMA in 2000 was Baht 22 billion (US\$ 511 million) (http://www.bma.go.th/bmaeng/body_struture.html).

In terms of manpower, as at the end of 2000, the total number of employees was 89,250 officials consisting of civil officials (17,263), teacher officials (12,899), permanent employees (27,732) and temporary employees (25,056) (http://www.bma.go.th/bmaeng/body_manpower.html).

As mentioned, the other five adjacent provinces have their own provincial administrations and there are many other municipalities in different urban centres in each province. There is no direct coordination among these cities although they are located in the same large urban field.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Line	Table 2: Number of Slums in Thailand, 2000										
3	Urban Centres	Communities		Housing	House-	Slum Population		Thailand		% of	
4		Total	Squatters	Units	holds	No.	/Unit	/HH	Population	Slum	
5		No.	Sq.								Pop.
6	Bangkok	796	125	16%	137,806	196,354	1,099,575	8.0	5.6	5,680,380	19%
7	Nonthaburi	60	10	17%	4,712	6,994	34,970	7.4	5.0	859,607	4%
8	Pathum Thani	93	28	30%	10,637	17,099	85,495	8.0	5.0	654,701	13%
9	Samut Prakan	207	13	6%	29,792	41,456	207,280	7.0	5.0	995,838	21%
10	Samut Sakhon	62	4	6%	5,490	8,838	44,190	8.0	5.0	428,814	10%
11	Nakhon Pathom	30	1	3%	2,653	3,038	15,190	5.7	5.0	781,138	2%
12	BMR Total	1,248	181	15%	191,090	273,779	1,486,700	7.8	5.4	9,400,478	16%
13	Provincial cities	341	112	33%	52,312	62,673	277,172	5.3	4.4	52,478,268	1%
14	Thailand Total	1,589	293	18%	243,402	336,452	1,763,872	7.2	5.2	61,878,746	3%
	C6, D6	www.geocities.com/khwandaw2000/slum02.html									
	F6..H6	Tabulated from www.nhanet.or.th/chs/homenow2.html									
	Line 7-11	National Housing Authority (2000a-e)									
	Line 13	Agency for Real Estate Affairs (1996a)									

1.3 Urbanization and Slums

1.3.1 Slum Formation

It is a conventional belief that urbanization particularly in terms of in-migration will cause the formation of slums. In African countries, for example, few can live in rural areas due to drought. Therefore, an influx of in-migrants to cities occurs over time and fuels the development of slums. Bangkok is not such a case. At the beginning of Bangkok's industrialization period in the 1960's, migration may have played an integral role in urban growth. However, the situation has changed over time. According to migration data from the National Statistical Office, migration is not the major cause of slum formation (Pornchokchai, 1998: 426-429). Most

migration is rural-to-rural. Most rural-to-urban migration is not to Bangkok. Most Bangkok in-migrants are not poor. Slums are also not the major destination of most poor in-migrants. Most poor migrants in slums come on a temporary basis. In addition, most of the slum dwellers were born in the slums themselves.

1.3.2 Bangkok and Slums

According to the information above, Bangkok is a primate city. Actually, every urban centre of Thailand depends largely on Bangkok. However, there are some exceptions i.e. border and resort cities whose development results from direct foreign involvement including investment and tourism. These exceptions include Phuket and Samui, world-class resort destinations where resort homes of one million US dollars prevail. In turn, the economy of border cities depends largely on border trade.

Like other living quarters, slums play a vital role in housing the population in Bangkok and other cities where they are located. The occupation data in Table 7 later in this report indicates that around half (48%) of Bangkok workers are blue-collar ones. The percentage of blue-collar workers in slums is similar (64% of male workers and 40% of female workers). Actually, there are many non-slum, blue-collar workers in Bangkok who stay elsewhere such as itinerant construction workers quarters, maids' or factory workers' living quarters, low-cost housing estates as well as on the street.

Because Thailand and Bangkok are substantially industrialized, the value of these people's labour is higher as a commodity than for using it to build their own houses or shacks, as is the case in many African countries. In Thailand, to be employed to do even blue-collar jobs and then to spend the money to buy a turnkey housing unit is more realistic. This has been one of the major effects of Thailand's structural changes due to industrialization. In addition, this is the reason why site-and-service schemes or soil cement have never been applicable in Thailand.

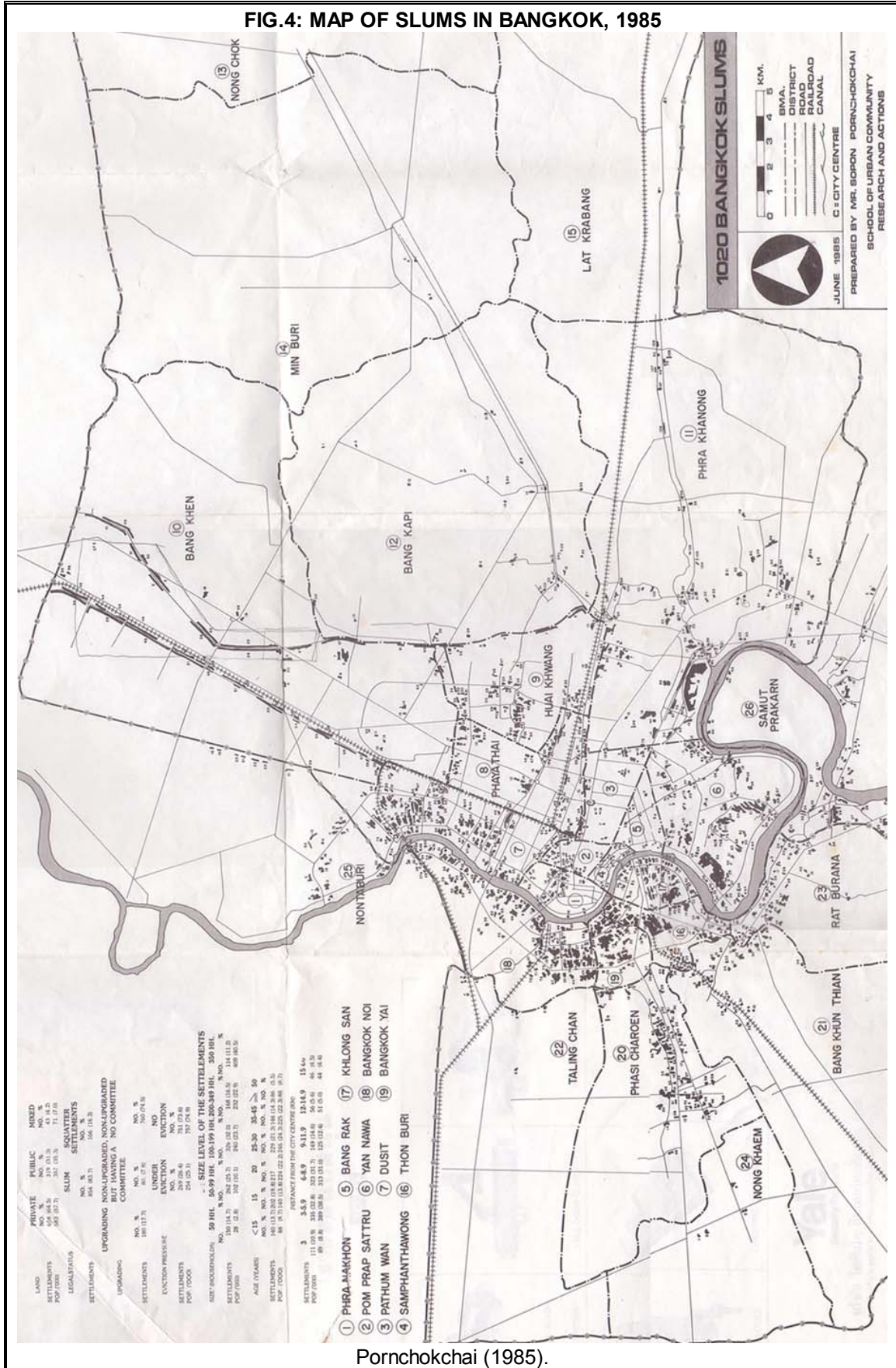
2. Slums and Poverty

2.1 General Overview

According to Table 2, Thailand has a total number of slum population of 1,763,872 or some 3% of the total Thai population. This means that substandard urban housing in the form of slums does not prevail in Thailand. Of the total slum population of 1,763,872, most of them (62%) concentrates in Bangkok alone. Some 22% are in the BMR (excluding BMA). The rest 16% are in other urban centres of the country.

One major reason of the concentration of slums in Bangkok alone is its nature of the primate city where all socio-economic and political activities are clustered in Bangkok. Bangkok is actually one of the oldest urban centres of the countries. Other urban centres are either very small or developed lately. Therefore, there are not many slums in other areas. Therefore, there has been a lot of slums established over time.

FIG.4: MAP OF SLUMS IN BANGKOK, 1985



Pornchokchai (1985).

In the case of Bangkok's adjacent provinces, the urbanization of Bangkok initially intruded into Nonthaburi and Samut Prakan which are located very close to Bangkok and then expanded to Pathum Thani, Samut Sakhon and Nakhon Pathom via highways or development corridors. As a result, there are many more slums in these five provinces than in the other 70 provinces in Thailand, where only 16% of the total slum population lives.

As observed, other urban centres, apart from the six provinces of the BMR, are very small. According to Table 1, 50.527 million people live in the 70 provinces outside of the BMR. Of this total, 41.764 million live in rural areas. This means that only 17% are in urban centres.

2.2 Major Features of Bangkok Slums

2.2.1 Overcrowded

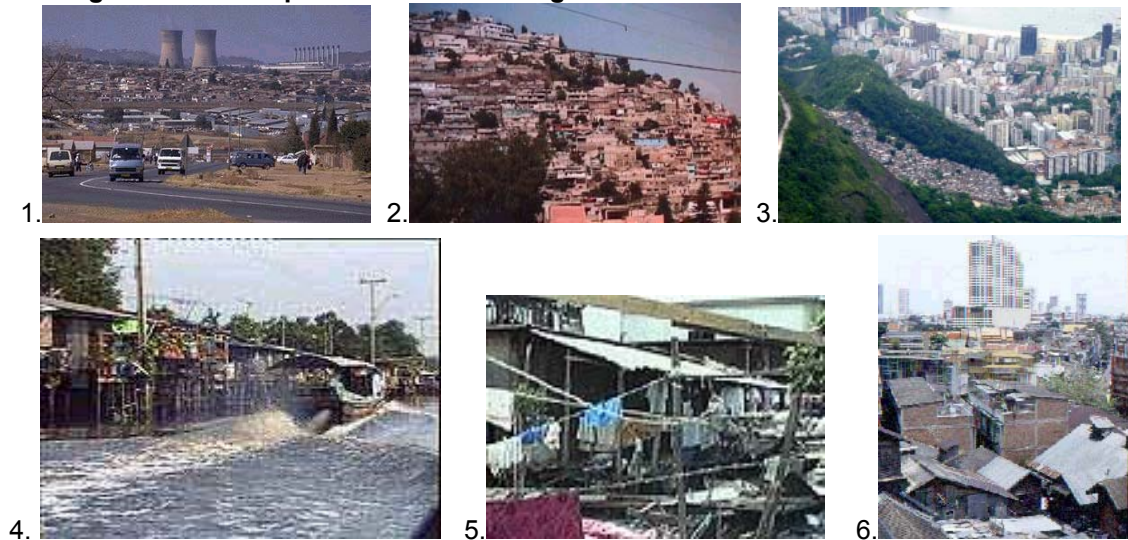
In slums, the number of people per housing unit in Bangkok, the BMR, and Thailand is 8.0, 7.8, and 7.2, respectively (see Table 1). However, it is only 3.75 persons per unit (non-slum housing) in the case of Thailand as a whole. Astonishingly, in Bangkok, the number is 2.99 persons per unit (www.dola.go.th/English/servi/epop2000.html). In other words, a slum house in Bangkok houses almost 3 times more people on average than a non-slum house (8 divided by 2.99 persons per unit).

This implies that there are a large number of rental housing units in a single slum compound where units are subdivided and sublet. That a considerable number of slum dwellers are renters means that slum units are attractive for a reason. One reason is that they may be in good locations and another may be that rents are lower in slums.

2.2.2 Few Squatters

Squatter settlements are major problems in many countries. In Latin and South America, a whole hill can be squatted. Slums may be full of political land grabbers. In the case of Thailand, only a small proportion of slums (18%) are considered squatter settlements. Even in Bangkok, only 16% of slums are squatter settlements. In the case of the five adjacent provinces of Bangkok that form the BMR, the proportion of slums that are squatter settlements is quite low as well. An exception is Pathum Thani where there are a large number of public irrigation canals. There, a large number of people squat on public lands along the canals.

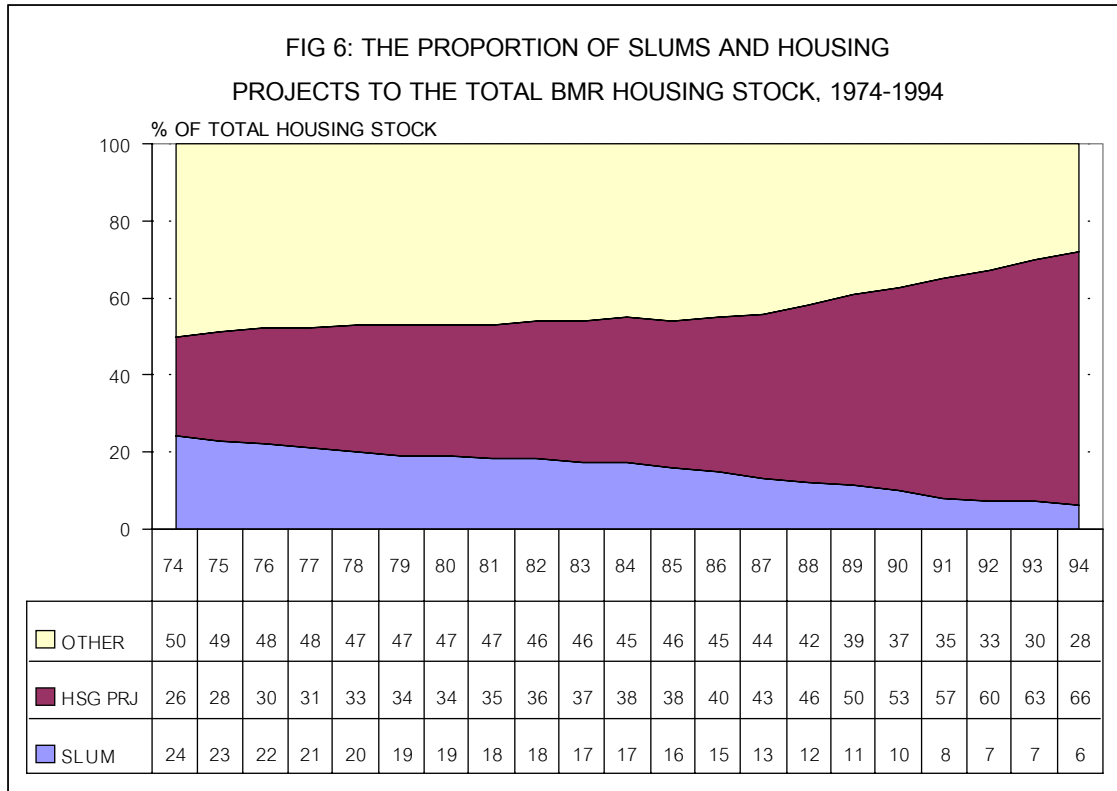
Fig.5: Photo Comparison between Bangkok Slums and Other Third World Slums



- Note: 1. Part of Soweto (an acronym for SOuth WEstern Township), Johannesburg
<http://www.africastudy.com/sa/virtualtour/images/orlando.JPG>
2. Mexico City http://wild-net.com.au/mexico/assets/images/mexico_city_slums_250.jpg
3. Rio De Janeiro <http://www.dd4u.ch/brazil/images/DSC01583.JPG>
4. A Bangkok slum along a canal <http://www.achr.net/bkboat200.jpg>
5. Housing condition in Bangkok slums <http://www.educvideo.com/videos/MTSGIF/mtsjpg/Mtsp2.jpg>
6. Another Bangkok inner-city slum <http://digilander.iol.it/singa/pirasudham/pic/slum6.jpg>

In provincial cities, one-third of the slums are considered squatter settlements. In these remote urban centres which have few modern, intensive land uses, land is not well cared for, particularly public lands including those owned by the State Railway Authority of Thailand and the Treasury Department. Squatters on these public lands prevail. However, the number of squatter settlements in all provincial cities is as small as 112, whereas it is 125 in Bangkok alone (but constituting only 16% of Bangkok slums).

That there are few squatter settlements in Bangkok implies several things. For one, the problem of squatters is not as serious in Thailand as in other Third World countries. There are few street dwellers or homeless as well. People have typically found a way to house themselves through formal channels in the open market. Therefore, opportunities to alleviate potential housing problems are more feasible in Thailand.



2.3 The Shrinkage of Bangkok Slums

2.3.1 Actual Decrease

In 1985, a thorough slum survey (Pornchokchai, 1985) was conducted in Bangkok and some parts of adjacent provinces including Nonthaburi and Samut Prakan, it was found that the number of slums in Bangkok, a part of Nonthaburi and a part of Samut Prakan was 943, 32 and 45 respectively. In 2000 in the same areas, the figures became 796, 26 and 44 respectively (National Housing Authority, 2000a-e). Altogether the number of slums decreased from 1,020 to 866 or by 15%. In the professional opinion of the author, who has kept his eye on development in Bangkok, I believe that the actual number today is smaller than this.

Real estate growth in the past decade has made land more valuable because it possesses more profitable alternative uses. There has also been extensive infrastructure development in the city. Consequently, many slums were demolished. In addition, few new slums could be established because land rent is not a good return for land owners anymore. In addition, land owners now take better care of their land, which is now largely considered real property with potential for economic gain. Therefore, there are few opportunities for squatting.

2.3.2 Massive Decrease in Proportion

The number of slums in Bangkok is decreasing over time. In 1958, 46% of Bangkok's population lived in slums. According to Litchfield Whiting Browne and Associates (1960: 84), "of the total Bangkok Population of 1,626,000 in 1958, there were approximately 740,000 persons living in 'condensed' or blighted housing areas which should be demolished". In 2000, the number of slum dwellers grew to over 1,000,000, but it has decreased substantially as a proportion of total population.

In terms of housing units, in 1974, 24% of the total housing stock in Bangkok was considered as slum housing. In 1994, it was estimated only 6% was slum housing (see Fig. 6 above). The percentage has shrunk substantially over time. The shrinkage occurred mostly during the last 10-15 years, in particular due to massive real estate development in terms of formal housing in an open market.

The increase in housing stock in the formal sector has been gigantic. In 1982 when Bangkok celebrated its bicentennial, there were 1,036,411 housing units including slums (Agency for Real Estate Affairs, 1999: 37). The number grew to 3,354,165 (www.dola.go.th - population section) by end 2001. This implies that the number of units has increased over three times during the past three decades, faster than anytime during the first 200 years of the city's establishment. Most new units have been developed by private housing developers. According to Table 1, the number of slum housing units is 191,090. Hence, it comprises only 5.7% of the BMR's total 2001 housing stock.

The massive development of formal housing resulted in as many as 350,000 newly completed, unoccupied housing units in the BMR (Agency for Real Estate Affairs, 1999: 39). This works to bring down rents and provides alternative housing apart from slums. Therefore, slums are not the only destination of rural migrants anymore. The following figure shows abandoned housing and cheap owner-occupied walk-up apartments in Bangkok.



In sum, people have become more able to afford formal housing such that the stock of slum housing is diminishing. In 1980, it was estimated that 80% of Bangkok households could not afford a house in the open market. However, in 1993, the percentage was only 50 (Pornchokchai, 1998: 435). It is assumed that people who can upgrade will move out of slums to better formal housing. Thus, the number of slum housing units is diminishing over time.

2.4 Definition of Slums

The following discussion explores the conventional definition of slum and examines whether they coincide with or contradict public understanding.

2.4.1 The Meaning of Slum

There should be no debate on the definition of slum. The following are some similar definitions:

According to the Merriam-Webster On Line Dictionary (www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary), “slum”, etymologically unknown but found in 1825, means “a densely populated, usually urban area marked by crowding, dirty, run-down housing, poverty, and social disorganization”.

“A very poor and crowded area, esp. of a city, where the houses are in an extremely bad state and the living conditions are very low”, given by the Cambridge Dictionary Online (http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=slum*1+0).

“Depressed and poorly kept locality, with vacant buildings, which may also be a high crime area. Poor and homeless often live in slum areas” (www.homeglossary.com/s14.htm).

“A part or section of a city or town generally inhabited by the very poor. Such an area is normally characterized by a large amount of deteriorated housing, poor public facilities, absentee ownership, and a high incidence of crime” (www.kcreatestate.to/Dictionary%20S.htm).

In addition, extensive similar elaboration on the word slum can be found at:

- US Municipal Affairs: www.muni-info.state.ri.us/01CDBG/appc.pdf
- World Bank, 1999 Annual Meeting: www.worldbank.org/html/fpd/urban/cws/am_ap_wo.pdf

2.4.2 The Formal Definition

In Thailand, the definition of slum by the National Housing Authority is “a dirty, damp, swampy or unhealthy area with overcrowded buildings and dwellers (sic) which can be harmful for health or lives or can be a source of unlawful or immoral actions. The minimum number of housing units per rai (1,600 sq.metres) is 30”. In 1991, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration gave a similar definition of slum as “an overcrowded, unorderly and dilapidated community with unample (sic) environment which can be harmful for health and lives. The minimum number of housing units per rai is 15” (<http://www.nhanet.or.th/chs/homepoor.html>).

It can be observed that the number of units per rai is different, namely 15 and 30 units. It is understood that the National Housing Authority might have recently changed the definition itself. In 1996, in its provincial slum survey report, “15 units per rai” is still the criterion (Agency for Real Estate Affairs, 1996: 2).

In Thailand, slums and squatter settlements are similar in terms of their substandard housing appearance. The only difference is in legal status. Slums are mostly on rented land; while, squatter slums or squatter settlements are on illegally-occupied land. There are few slums where the land and houses are owned by the dwellers themselves. There are very few building squatters either.

2.4.3 Characteristics of Slums

What characterizes a slum? There are four major physical components, namely, overcrowded conditions, limited privacy, sub-standard housing and sub-standard environment.

2.4.3.1 Overcrowded Conditions

Overcrowding is considered in terms of housing density and population crowding. Generally, 15 houses per rai (1 rai = 1,600 sq.m.) is the minimum density to be considered a slum. The number of dwellers in a house and the number of household members in slums are relatively larger than those in formal housing types.

2.4.3.2 Limited privacy

Density is not the only criterion. It should be noted that density in walk-up apartments is much higher than in slums, but these apartments are not considered slums at all. This is because they are planned physical arrangements.

2.4.3.3 Sub-standard housing

Houses in slums have a rather dilapidated, deteriorated, and makeshift appearance. Initially, they appear as an eyesore. On closer examination, they fit the climate, the functional needs, and dwellers' particular lifestyle. Slum dwellers feel that a house is an economic asset and a symbol of their social status and achievement.

As observed, houses in slums look like those in rural villages. If a slum house appeared in a village, it would be a rural house. If rural houses were clustered together and surrounded by an urban environment, the cluster could be considered a slum.

These sorts of sub-standard houses are the real Thai houses. Traditionally houses of ordinary people were built of wood and bamboo and clustered in villages. Sophisticated traditional houses belonged to upper-income groups who are a small minority.

2.4.3.4 Sub-standard Environment

A sub-standard environment includes a haphazard physical layout and the lack of infrastructure and services, resulting poor environmental conditions such as polluted water, narrow and unplanned catwalks, etc. This is also considered an eyesore.

2.4.4 Interpretation of the Definition

According to the author's experience, the word slum has often been distorted for various reasons. The following provides a few examples and reasons.

2.4.4.1 Propaganda

For the general public or even slum dwellers the definition of slum is of no doubt and clear in itself. Once in 1981, the National Housing Authority tried to use the word "densified community" in Thai to replace the word "slum" in order to relieve the negative connotations of the term. However, "slum" is still in use.

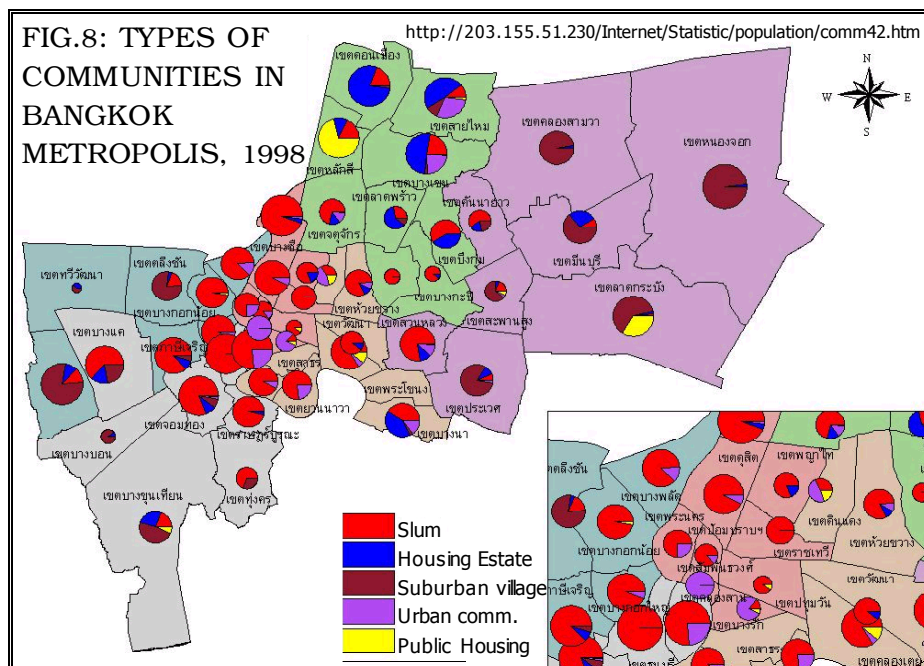
2.4.4.2 Self-centeredness

When the author found 1,020 slums in 1985, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration found only 500 and the National Housing Authority found 700. Newspapers put this discovery of a thousand slums as a news on their front page. The author understood that some involved in solving the problem, particularly NGO's, liked the discovery because it helped attract the interest of the general public on this issue of social problems. However, some local authorities, particularly those in the central business district, might not have agreed and questioned the definition of slum because slums might be considered an eyesore by investors. Eventually, the BMA accepted that there were slums in inner-city districts.

The interpretation of local authorities offers another example. When the author conducted the survey of provincial slums for the National Housing Authority in 1995, he found that the number of slums initially provided by various municipalities were different from those found in actual field surveys. The reason is that some municipalities might feel slums were an eyesore and did not want to recognize them. So these slums were left off the record. On the contrary, some municipalities might want to get more support from the government; therefore, they put many typical urban communities (with no dilapidation or few substandard housing units) into the list as well.

2.4.4.3 The Minimum Number of Housing Units

As mentioned, a community of 15 housing units per rai is one criterion for defining a slum. However, there may be some slum communities with less than 15 units per rai. Some may be concerned that if they were not counted, it would be 'unfair'. Actually, this is not the point. For example, if there are some additional 500 smaller slums with on the average 10 housing units per slum, the total number of housing units would only be 5,000. This is only 2.6% of the total number of slum housing units in the BMR. However, in terms of number of slums, it is another 40% (500 out of 1,248), which is somewhat misleading.



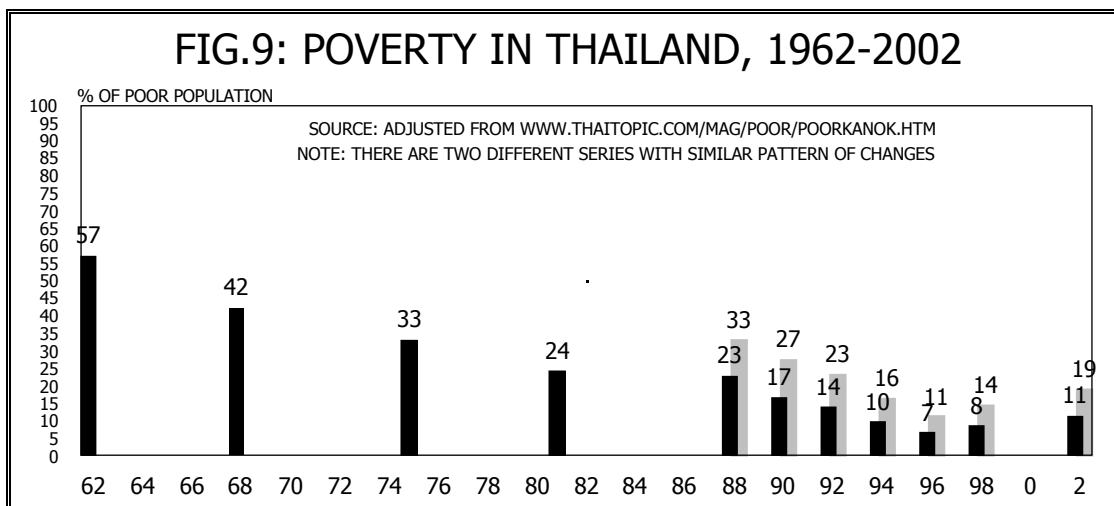
2.4.4.4 Other Types of Communities

In different cities, there exist also definitions of different types of communities as stipulated by local authorities. For example, the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration defines five different communities: slums, housing estates, suburban villages, urban communities and public housing estates (see Fig.8 above). However, there are some delineation between slums and other communities, i.e. physical deterioration or sub-standard appearance.

2.5 Availability of Services to Slums

The following data is derived from the latest Bangkok slum survey, conducted in 1994 by the National Statistical Office (www.nso.go.th/thai/stat/commu/tab3.htm and [.../tab4.htm](http://www.nso.go.th/thai/stat/commu/tab4.htm)).

- 2.5.1 House registration number, 89% available
- 2.5.2 Electricity supply, 99%, available
- 2.5.3 Water supply, 97% available
- 2.5.4 Garbage disposal, 58% available
- 2.5.5 Drainage, 52% available
- 2.5.6 Concrete walkways, (69%) available
- 2.5.7 Fire brigade, (69%) available
- 2.5.8 Day-care centre, 19% available
- 2.5.9 Community committee, 71% available



2.6 Poverty

The National Housing Authority defines the urban poor simply as low-income people who live in slums and other low-income groups (www.nhanet.or.th/chs/homepoor.html). This is quite a vague definition and the definition of the poor and of poverty in general is somewhat different from this simplification.

2.6.1 Poverty in Thailand

According to Figure 9 above, 57% of the total population in Thailand in 1962 were considered below the poverty line. In 1996, only 11% of the population were considered under the poverty line in Thailand. The figure went up to 16% in 2000 before falling again. According to the National Economic and Social Development Board, the percentage of people below the poverty line was 13% by end 2001 (see Fig. 9 above). It should be noted that most poor people live in rural areas. According to the National Economic and Social Development Board, only 0.6% of the BMR population was considered poor in 1996 (www.thaitopic.com/mag/poor/poorkanok.htm). If the situation got worse in 2000, the proportion could have risen to 1%. This means that some 94,000 people in the BMR were considered poor while the total number of slum dwellers was 1,486,700 in 2000. If all urban poor lived in slums, which accounted for only 6% of the total housing stock, which is not the case, this would imply that most slum dwellers were not poor.

2.6.2 Poverty in Slums

On the whole, the income of slum dwellers has improved over time. Data showing this has been derived from three sources. First, there was a 1960 survey of a slum consisting of 1,500 households opposite the Department of Highways. That survey is used as an indicator of slums in Bangkok at the time. Second, the 1971 survey of the Klong Toey Squatter Slum is used to represent slums at that time. There is also a thorough slum survey of 3,594 households that was tabulated by the author in 1985 (unpublished) that is used. Actually, all the figures are updated to 1993 prices with the assistance of inflation records. The 1990 household incomes of Bangkok and Thailand are also updated. Finally, Table 3 is constructed to show the monthly per capita income of different categories.

Table 3: Selected Monthly Per Capita Income at 1993 Prices							
Income Decile (Baht/person/month)			Slums			Thailand	Bangkok
			1960	1971	1985		
1	Less than	1,130	58.6%	48.5%	17.3%	49.6%	10.0%
2	1,130 -	1,529	10.2%	17.1%	27.9%	13.8%	10.0%
3	1,530 -	1,979	10.3%	12.8%	19.5%	8.4%	10.0%
4	1,980 -	2,379	9.0%	6.0%	12.0%	5.6%	10.0%
5	2,380 -	2,899	3.1%	5.5%	10.1%	5.5%	10.0%
6	2,900 -	3,439	3.1%	2.8%	5.0%	4.1%	10.0%
7	3,440 -	4,089	1.4%	2.5%	3.4%	3.5%	10.0%
8	4,090 -	5,189	1.8%	3.0%	2.5%	3.4%	10.0%
9	5,190 -	7,319	1.5%	1.1%	1.9%	3.3%	10.0%
10	7,320 and over		1.0%	0.8%	0.3%	2.9%	10.0%
Slums in 1960 using a 1,500 household slum opposite the Department of Highways							
Slums in 1971 using Klong Toey Squatter Slum							
Slums in 1985 using the data of 3,594 BMR slum household survey							
Bangkok and Thailand data adjusted from the 1990 Census							
Source: Agency for Real Estate Affairs (1993)							

According to the above Table, the first income decile of monthly per capita income decreased from 58.6% in 1960 to 48.5% in 1971 and 17.3% in 1985. In turn, half of the rural population was in this first decile. This is an evidence that by and large slum people have improved their situations economically. This upward trend is a hopeful sign that people are becoming better off over time.

There has been some discussion and some disagreement on the definition of poverty and the poverty line in Thailand and Bangkok. The website www.welfareforall.org/res/res001.doc provides a synthesis of the discussion. For this study on slums, the author makes some assumptions by dividing slum dwellers into three groups. Sections 2.6.2.1 - 2.6.2.3 below provide a brief discussion of the three groups. The sections were prepared by the author in 1998 (1998: 437-438). Please be noted that the sections describe the situation in 1993, when the conversion rate for Baht to US\$ was 25:1 instead of 43:1 in 2002.

2.6.2.1 The Real Poor

In 1993, regardless of any other costs, a person who cannot afford three meals a day at Baht 12 (US\$ 0.48 in 1993 or US\$ 0.28 in 2002) per meal must be considered as very poor. This means a household with a per capita income below Baht 1,080 (US\$ 43) per month is poor.

It is noted that 15.65 percent of slum dwellers (156,500 persons) fall below this line, whereas, 9.02 percent of Bangkok's total population (527,670 persons) fit in this category. This means that there are 371,170 real poor people living outside slums. Where are they? They are street dwellers, itinerant workers on construction sites, coolies and other workers. This implies that not all or most of the poor are in slums.

2.6.2.2 The Typical Poor

It is further assumed that a household with two income earners at the current minimum wage of Baht 125 (US\$ 5) per day and with two dependants is considered poor. Their monthly per capita income is Baht 1,562.50 (US\$ 50). In this case, 47.28 percent of slum dwellers (427,800 persons) are considered typical poor, whereas 20.28 percent (1,215,630 persons) of Bangkok's total population falls into this category. Again, more than half of these typical poor people are staying outside slums.

2.6.2.3 The General Low-Income Group

Who can buy the least expensive house in the open market? It is assumed that the cheapest housing unit is a low-cost condominium unit, located in a fringe economic sub centre of Bangkok, worth approximately Baht 250,000 (US\$ 10,000). Typically, a down payment of 20 percent of the sale price is required. Monthly installments for the remaining 80 per cent of the house (Baht 200,000 or US\$ 8,000) are generally paid back over a period of 15 years at the prevailing annual interest rate, currently 11.5 per cent. Thus, the monthly installment for the cheapest home would be Baht 2,382 (US\$ 95). Typically, 25 percent of a household's income should be used for housing. Consequently, in a household of four persons, monthly per capita income of Baht 2,382 is needed.

In this case, 76.62 percent of slum dwellers, whose incomes are lower than this, could not afford to buy a house in the open market. However, the other 23.38 percent whose incomes are above Baht 2,382 could afford a house if they wanted. If these qualified households are encouraged to buy a house outside slums, the slum population would automatically decrease by one quarter of its current number.

Items	Bangkok Metropolis		
	Thonburi	North & East	South
People per household	6.4%	5.0%	5.9%
Distribution of Population			
0 - 4 years	5.9%	8.2%	6.9%
5 - 14 years	14.3%	14.6%	17.3%
15 - 59 years	70.7%	69.6%	66.7%
60 years and over	9.1%	7.6%	9.1%
Median age (years)	29.5	28.3	27.6
% of ladies aged 15-49 years	62.3%	62.3%	61.6%
Gender (Males : 100 Females)	94.1	93.0	91.6
Households with Debts	31.0%	21.1%	38.5%
Debtors			
Parents or relatives	25.7%	20.8%	21.6%
Non-relatives	49.6%	57.8%	72.3%
Financial institutions	19.4%	14.7%	11.8%
Others	7.9%	4.0%	1.4%
www.nso.go.th/thai/stat/commu/tab1.htm and /tab3.htm			

2.7 Living in Slums

The emergence of slums may have been somewhat of an accident. When a lot of people migrated to Bangkok to form slums in the 1960's and 1970's, wood was still very cheap. Teak was one of the country's major exports. Nowadays, teak trees can no longer be cut. Teak and other wood is imported from abroad. The advantage of wood is that it lasts for an extended period. Nowadays, it is expensive to use wood as a construction material. Therefore, there is likely to be a decline in the appearance of dilapidated wooden homes in slums.

Few improvements can be made to the dilapidated, deteriorated appearance of slums or to upgrade them from the appearance of being a 'slum'. According to the author's experience studying slums, this is even the case where homes in a slum were owner-occupied (Pornchokchai, 1992: 135-142). The appearance of the homes could not be improved significantly even if they were given land to build a new house with assistance from the National

Housing Authority. Indeed, most relocation sites witness few substantial physical improvements over the previous slum compound.

This implies that improvements that can be made to slums are mostly marginal, along the lines of minor physical improvements such as walkways, water supply, and electricity provision. Improvements in terms of socio-economic development can also be made. But it should be clearly noted that these improvements typically work on a one-time basis. When slum dwellers' immediate needs are met, they tend to desist from being involved in other activities. Other evidence can be cited along these lines, including the typical way slum leaders arise. Most slum leaders are well to do or bourgeois.

In owner-occupied slums and slum relocation sites, many people simply move out after making money from selling their residential plots. When we interviewed people living in slums, quite a number of them expressed their intention to move out of the slum. They feel that the social environment in a slum is not good for their children. It must be accepted that slums offer sub-standard conditions for decent living. Therefore, better housing should be provided to the people provided that the government has adequate capital and slum dwellers have jobs and a willingness to upgrade themselves.

There has been no direct study on the lives of slum dwellers and other Bangkok populations after the economic crisis in 1997. However, there should be little differences between slum dwellers and others because each works in similar sectors. To date, some have concluded those affected most by the 1997 crisis were not the general population. For example, if a man were fired from a job, he would start life over again at 'zero'. Some may have moved back to their rural hometowns. Entrepreneurs were the victims of the 1997 crisis. When they failed and went bankrupt, their lives started over at 'minus'. Some even went to jail. However, due to hedonism, as will be seen in the slum survey presented later in this paper, ordinary people such as slum dwellers may face heavy debt in future due to their manipulation of credit cards and engagement in other extravagant activities.

3 The People in Slums

3.1 General Characteristics

As mentioned earlier, household size in slums is generally larger than those of other Bangkokians. One interesting point is the proportion of dependent household members in slums. On the whole, only one-fourth to almost one-third of the population is considered as dependent (those aged below 15 or those over 60 years old). In terms of average age, people seem, for the most part, to be about 30 years old or below. In terms of gender, there are slightly more females in slums than males.

Considering debt, around one-fifth to one-third of slum dwellers are indebted. It is worthwhile to note that most debtors received loans from informal money lenders. This will be their burden in the future.

3.2 Improvements in Education

According to Table 5, the education of slum dwellers is improving. In the past, few received an undergraduate degree. This number has increased over time. Also, the number of those who completed only primary grade education has decreased from three-fourth to half of the population. Opportunities are open to slum people. Nowadays, free, compulsory education is available up to Grade 9. In addition, education equipment at municipal schools in the Bangkok Metropolitan area is very modern. Due to better education, better jobs can be expected. This will help better slum dwellers better themselves in long run.

Education Level	1	2	3	4	5	
	Klong Toey 1960	Klong Toey 1971	47 slums 1981	3594 Households 1985	1994 NSO Bangkok Slums	
					Male	Female
No Education	23.9	13.5	13.4	8.4	6.9	10.2
Primary School	71.5	77.5	69.8	57.9	53.2	55.1
Secondary School	4.3	8.5	16.8	30.6	32.7	26.1
Undergraduate	0.3	0.5		3.5	7.2	8.6

1 = Pasookniran (1960, 32)
 2 = Faculty of Social Administration (1971, 74-75)
 3 = Archawanitkul et.al (1981, 59)
 4 = A survey of the National Housing Authority tabulated by the author (unpublished)
 5 = National Statistical Office (www.nso.go.th/thai/sta/commu/tab2.htm)

The following table shows the increase in the number of years of education of a man 15 years old. Unfortunately, the data on slums is not available, but should be similar. According to the table, a 15 year-old man had approximately 8 years of education in 1992; whereas, the number increased to 10 in 2000. This is a great improvement.

Year	Region					Over- all
	BMR	Central	North	NE	South	
1992	8.1	5.8	5.1	5.1	6.0	6.1
1993	8.4	6.0	5.3	5.3	6.2	6.3
1994	8.6	6.2	5.5	5.5	6.4	6.5
1995	8.8	6.4	5.7	5.7	6.6	6.7
1996	9.0	6.6	5.9	5.9	6.8	6.9
1997	9.2	6.8	6.1	6.1	7.0	7.1
1998	9.5	7.1	6.4	6.4	7.3	7.4
1999	9.7	7.3	6.6	6.6	7.5	7.6
2000	9.9	7.6	6.8	6.8	7.7	7.8

NESDB (2002: 27)

3.3 Better Economic Situation

Table 6 shows the occupations of Bangkokians and slum dwellers during different periods of time. On one hand, there has been a decrease in the proportion of people in slums who work as blue collar workers (such as transport workers, production workers and service workers). On the other, those of white collar workers particularly those at a higher level (professionals and managerial staff members) have increased over time.

The better economic situation implies some improvement in the living conditions in slums. It also implies a positive trend for the prospect of slum dwellers in the future. In sum, due to upgrading their occupations, slum dwellers' incomes and quality of life should improved over time.

3.4 Migration Not Factor of Growth

One unique feature of the slum population is that its growth is not due to migration but to natural growth instead. This was first found in 1985 when the author discovered 65% of slum populations were born in their existing slum (Pornchokchai, 1992, 74-75). However, when looking at household heads, only 41% were born in their slums. This is a classic case of carelessness characteristic of previous surveys that sampled only heads of households.

In 1993, the author also found that first, Bangkok was not major destination of rural people (only 9%), second, only 46% of the migrants to Bangkok were poor, third, slums were not the

only destination of the rural poor, and fourth, only 24% of the migrants to slums were permanent ones (Pornchokchai, 1998: 426). It is amazing to learn that instead of moving to the cities which are more friendly than forests, the Thai rural population cleared vast areas of forest for settlement (Angel, 2000: 153).

Table 7: Occupations of Bangkokians and Slum Dwellers					
Occupations	A	B	C	D	
	Bangkok 1990	Klong Toey 1971	3594 Households 1985	1994 NSO Bangkok Slums	
				Male	Female
Detailed Occupations					
1. Professional, technical and related workers	13.9%	1.5%	6.5%	5.9%	8.3%
2. Administrative, managerial, government officer	6.3%	1.5%	0.7%	4.8%	2.1%
3. Clerical workers	11.4%	3.0%	11.9%	10.6%	16.4%
4. Sale workers	19.5%	18.5%	20.0%	14.6%	33.3%
5. Agricultural workers	2.6%	0.5%	0.2%	0.4%	0.4%
6. Miners, quarrymen, well drillers	0.1%				
7. Transport and related workers	6.1%	13.5%	7.2%	19.7%	0.9%
8. Craftsmen and production workers	29.0%	22.5%	23.1%	36.3%	24.0%
9. Service workers	10.1%	10.0%	4.3%	7.7%	14.6%
10. Others	1.0%	29.0%	26.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Groups of Occupations					
White Collar (Group 1-5)	51.1%	24.5%	39.1%	35.9%	60.1%
White Collar Higher (Group 1-2)	20.2%	3.0%	7.2%	10.7%	10.4%
Blue Collar (Group 6-10)	48.9%	75.5%	60.8%	64.1%	39.9%
A = National Statistical Office (1991: 23) B = Faculty of Social Administration (1971, 74-75) C = A survey of the National Housing Authority tabulated by the author (unpublished) D = National Statistical Office (www.nso.go.th/thai/sta/commu/tab2.htm)					

According to the Department of Local Administration (DOLA - www.dola.go.th), the 2001 population growth for the BMR was 1.5% of which 1.2% was due to natural growth and 0.3% came from net migration. In the case of Bangkok, the overall growth was 0.9% of which 1.5% was due to natural growth and -0.6% came from net migration.

In June 2002, an ad-hoc slum survey was conducted for this study. It found that 59% of the total slum population was born in the slum in which they resided. The rest were born outside the slum. In the case of heads of households, it was 35%. Table 8 shows this data.

Table 8: Findings of An Ad-hoc Slum Household Survey, June 2002	
Items	Figures
No. of household members	5
No of Household members born in the community	3
% of population born in the community	59%
% of household head born in slums	35%
How many years living in the slum	30
No. of household working members	2.2
% of working members per household	44%
Average income of household heads	10,522
Average income of household heads	17,481
Average per capita income	3,469
Average age of household heads: overall	50
Average age of household heads: house renters	38
Travel time from home to school (minutes)	12
Travel time from home to work place (minutes)	25
Women privilege, if men = 10, women =	9

3.5 Situation in A Sample Community

Table 8 shows recent findings on an ad-hoc slum household survey (June 2002) taken for this paper. This is the 40-year old Chong Nonsee community which is a typical land rental slum on Narathiwat Rachanakarin Road in Yannawa District. In this slum, there are 65 houses with 120 households of which 15% are house renters. There is one HIV infected man and 20 drug addicted residents. However, the crime situation has improved.

On average, people have been in this community for 30 years. Similar to other surveys, the proportion of people working per household is 44%. The average per capita income is Baht 3,469 (US\$ 81). The travel time to school for children and to workplace for heads of household is quite short. This implies that many slums are in central locations.

In terms of gender, people surveyed stated that on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 implying the most privilege, men scored a 10 while women scored a 9. This implies that women are somewhat less-privileged in the minds of slum residents. However, the difference is minimal. In addition, all of the respondents said the rights of women improved considerably during the past ten years as well.

None of the respondents expressed any intention to move out of their community within the next two years. They also did not express any intention to buy a house in the near future. However, some ten percent of respondents had already bought a house of their own outside the slum.

One major difference between home owners and house renters is the average age of heads of households. The average age of a head of household for those owning a home is 50 while those of renters is 38. Another difference is their duration of stay. Rent is approximately Baht 1,500 - 2,000 (US\$ 35 - 47) per unit (excluding water and electricity costs). This is similar to the rent charged at small, formal apartments nearby. In terms of occupation, house renters surveyed included security guards, a taxi driver, a chief golf caddy, and a messenger.

Assets	% to total households	No. available*
Television	100%	1.6
Refrigerator	96%	1.3
CD set	65%	1.1
Washing machine	65%	1
Cell phone	65%	1.5
Home telephone	54%	1
VDO set	46%	1
Motorcycle	42%	1.1
Automobile	27%	1
Air-conditioned	15%	1.5
Hot water machine in bathroom	15%	1.3
Microwave Oven	12%	1

* per household (counting only households who have assets of each item)

3.6 Assets of Slum Households

The survey revealed some interesting findings related to household assets. All slum households have a colour television. The average number of TVs per household is 1.6. There is only one household which has a broken TV and one with an unclear picture. Almost all of households have a refrigerator (96%). Two-thirds of the households have a CD player, a washing machine and more than one cell phone. Approximately half of the households have a home telephone, a VDO player and a motorcycle. However, only one-fourth (27%) own an automobile. Only 15% of them own an air-conditioner or a hot water machine in a bathroom.

It should be noted that televisions and refrigerators are considered common properties for daily life and cell phones are very popular in Thailand. VDO players are outdated and have been recently replaced by CD players.

These findings help confirm that a minority of slum dwellers are truly poor. In addition, this illustrates the continuing economic improvement of Thailand, which has helped better the lives of slum dwellers in long run.

3.7 Perspectives from the Interviews

3.7.1 People in Slums

On the whole, people in slums can be classified into four groups. The first group can be said to be relatively affluent. People in this group also act as money lenders. They get used to living in slums (substandard housing and environment) and they develop a certain amount of mutual dependence or symbiosis with the poor in slum. Second, there are the general people who have been in slum for long time. A slum formed some 30-40 years ago may now be in a prime location today. Therefore, although this group may be able to afford a house in the open market, they do not move out of the slum. They get used to the environment and can enjoy locational benefits. However, if this group is ever evicted, they can afford to own a house. The third group consists of people moving into the slum. They are mostly house renters who enjoy the locational benefits of the slum as well as those who come to build a house of their own on sublet land. The fourth group are dwellers who are poor. They cannot move out to buy a house in an open market and slum houses are their major asset to make their living.

3.7.2 Loan Provision

A slum head does not want to get involved in the government loan program for slum dwellers. There is a possibility that loans can become bad debt. However, according to Lieutenant Col. Songsaeng and Ms. Pathum, two money lenders, they said that the success factor for lending money includes the careful determination of the debtor's credentials, close monitoring and following-up by creditors as well as the general influence of the creditors. As mentioned, money lending is one form of mutual dependence or symbiosis among slum dwellers.

3.7.3 Failure Factors

As observed during the survey, some slum households are quite poor but some are successful. What are the reasons behind the failure? Generally, factors for failure include lack of capital and knowledge. These leave people stuck in their poor lives. In addition, failure is generally due to lack of industriousness. Lack of saving, extravagant living, and gambling form another side of a coin.

Fig.10: People interviewed in Chong Nonsee Slum, Yannawa District, Bangkok



A slum Head and an affluent slum dweller.



A community committee and active women coordinator in the community



A man and his family:
a gas truck driver with success in upgrading his life



A couple who has no children who earn high incomes, and possess salient gold ornaments

3.7.4 Success Factors

According to interviewees, one major factor for success is the character traits of individuals, such as industriousness. For example, Lieutenant Col. Songsaeng drove a taxi for many years prior to his retirement. Mr. Yern-yong emphasizes honesty which helps him refrain from involvement in vices like gambling and drugs. In addition, vision is a key character trait for success. In their childhood, almost all of the heads of household completed only elementary school. Their parents had no vision to encourage them onto further study. A second factor for success is a good couple at the head of a household. In other words, it is helpful to have husbands and wives who help each other to pave way for family's betterment.

One thing that should be observed is that the betterment of people depends mainly on individual struggles and efforts, not their environment. That a man who came to a slum some 20 years ago and is still staying in slum today, means many possible things. However, it should be accepted that one implication is that he cannot upgrade himself. The government can help by conducting vocational training for the public. Of course, those who can use the skills learned for their betterment must be exceptional ones who are creative, industrious, and persistent. No program can make everyone better at the similar level.

3.8 Future of Slums

The future of slums depend on two considerations:

3.8.1 Better Education

In the recent survey, household heads were found to have lower education levels. Few have an undergraduate education. However, the proportion is increasing. The average number of years of education for slum children is increasing as well. If, in the next two decades, these children grow up and more than half of them have a college education, conditions may change a substantially. They will have a better education and need not and would not likely be willing to stay in the slum anymore. Hence, fewer slums may exist in future.

3.8.2 Dilapidation

Today, most slum houses are still made of wood. In the past wood was the cheapest building material. However, wood is now more expensive than cement, brick, and mortar. Therefore, in the next few decades, the appearance of dilapidated wooden housing will decrease as existing wooden houses deteriorate and are replaced over time. As a result, substandard housing will gradually disappear.

4. Housing Policies

4.1 Previous Policies

This section summarizes from Pornchokchai (1998: 442 - 444).

4.1.1 Housing Production Policy, 1948-1958

After World War II, social welfare policy was first introduced into Thailand. At that time, the government constructed housing for the urban population. The Government Housing Bank was established in 1953. During this period, 3,462 housing units were built (Litchfield Whiting Browne and Associates, 1960: 84-85).

4.1.2 City Beautification, 1960-1971

Slums were considered an eyesore. Therefore, public housing was built to replace slums. However, the government did not have sufficient funds so walk-up apartments were not built extensively and effectively. Only 7.1% of the applications for public housing were responded to (Sakornpan, 1975: 20). Actually, this policy was a blind attempt to imitate western countries to house the poor but Thailand had very little funding available for this type of program.

4.1.3 Slum Improvement, 1970's

The establishment of the National Housing Authority in 1975 came with loans for slum improvement from the World Bank and other international organizations. The benefit of such loans have been questioned. They were non-productive which cannot help solve core housing problems. In 1983, the World Bank mentioned that "developing countries must recognize the need to stop funding projects that focus on narrow physical objectives. . . Instead, they should target institutions that are capable of changing inefficiencies and inequities" (www.worldbank.org/html/dec/Publications/Briefs/DB10.html).

4.1.4 Land for Housing the Poor, 1980's

Another major policy implication is the concept of land for housing the poor. The logic is that if land is given to the poor, they would have a sense of belonging and develop their own homes and community. As a result, there have been a few land sharing and slum relocation projects in Bangkok.

4.1.5 Recognition policy, 1990's

Slums have become more recognized through the efforts and experience of people involved. In 1992, the Urban Community Development Office was established with an initial fund of Baht 1.25 billion (US\$ 50 at 1992 exchange rates) to help support the development of saving groups and generate loans for slum dwellers. In 2001, a Baht 1,000,000 fund was established in rural and urban communities to help people initiate investment for their economic betterment.

4.2 Policy Assessment

4.2.1 Promotion of Walk-Up Apartments

Actually, the government should have promoted walk-up apartments like Singapore did. However, the initial target group should have been the middle and higher income groups instead of the poor. If the government first built walk-up apartments for middle-income groups who could afford more, what would have happened?

4.2.1.1 Housing needs of middle-income households could have been met.

4.2.1.2 This would have enabled a housing filtering process whereby households with better economic standings move out and lower-income groups move in by renting or buying. This would have saved a lot of effort in providing housing in the city.

4.2.1.3 Flats would have had a good image. Until recently flats and walk-up apartments seemed "less privileged", simply because they were known as places where lower-income groups lived. However, if at the beginning they had been built for higher-income groups, they would have had a better image, to the extent that even lower-income groups would have felt privileged to leave the slums.

4.2.1.4 Revolving funds for further development could have been generated. As understood, middle-income people have a qualified affordability level. Therefore, the provision of housing would not have required subsidies. The government would still have had a revolving fund to build houses.

4.2.1.5 A well-planned Bangkok would have been possible. If flats and walk-up apartments were widely accepted, housing would have developed vertically, so that land would have been used intensely, instead of in the endless, horizontal development seen today. The city would thus not be as spread out as it is today. As a result, the cost of infrastructure development would be minimized and problems would be more manageable.

4.2.2 Possibilities for Slum Relocation

Slums consist of substandard housing and environments which should be replaced with decent housing for the people. Even slum dwellers think that they would want to move if they had an opportunity (Pornchokchai, 1992: 141-142). A problem appeared in the past, namely, unplanned relocation / eviction schemes that made many people feel relocation is an inappropriate strategy. In reality, relocation is inevitable, as public infrastructure is developed to improve the city as a whole. The economic pressure for intensive urban land uses as the city

develops is another factor in slum eviction. Hence, a proper relocation program is an essential tool to alleviate the situation.

Some planners think that slum dwellers cannot be relocated far from the city, resulting in no concrete action apart from a rather laissez-faire policy of 'haphazard' slum improvement. Actually, long-distance relocation would be feasible if an efficient transport system could be provided. For example, with an intercity train travelling at 60 kilometres per hour, dwellers could even be relocated to Ayudhaya, the ancient city north of Bangkok.

People in the informal sector can find and change jobs more easily than those in the formal sector. White-collar workers may need to work in the city centre because few jobs are available in suburban neighbourhoods. However, unskilled dwellers can find alternative jobs in the informal sector because they do not need to stay in any particular type of work.

Those who continue in their particular activity can change workplaces. It has been observed, for example, that some workers still earn a living as construction workers at different sites. Some taxi drivers change their garage to a nearby area. Some vendors still trade in the market place closest to their residence.

With a good transport system, many slum dwellers could move to the suburbs. Often slum dwellers remain 'untouchable' due to the belief that they cannot live far from their workplaces in town. This hampers city redevelopment. It should be mentioned that non-slum dwellers in suburban housing estates have to leave their homes at 5 a.m. and arrive back after 7 p.m. on crowded buses. This situation is unsatisfactory. But since most people have to tolerate it, slum dwellers are no exception.

4.2.3 The Problem of Land for the Poor

It is commonly stated that when slum dwellers own a plot of land on which they can live, they are provided with security as well. However, this is often an unaffordable option for many poor and may lead to their eventual eviction by market pressures. Some people may think that house renters, for example, are not secure because they do not own a house or land. However, security of tenure does not necessarily imply land ownership. Rental housing is an alternative for those who cannot afford a house of their own, with security being provided by the regular payment of rent. Since renting a housing unit is cheaper than buying a house, rental housing for slum dwellers is another consideration.

4.2.4 Land Sharing

One of the most innovative and successful programs to help solve the eviction problem is land sharing. This is where a portion of land in the existing slum is sold to the dwellers so that they can build a new community through a house reconstruction process. However, one crucial problem - default in payments - remains after the initial success of land sharing.

As of June 1987, the majority of landowners in three land-sharing projects had not paid their installments. If this is not resolved, the success of these projects will be diminished and the security of tenure of the resident will be threatened.

The crux of the matter is the concept of land ownership. A large number of slum dwellers are relatively poor. Land sharing requires slum dwellers demolish their old houses, rebuild new ones and purchase a plot of land. But a significant number of slum dwellers cannot afford to do this even though they may state that they can.

Another serious concern is political will. It is accepted that the existence of land sharing projects is mainly based on the special efforts of high-ranking government officials. If there were

no such involvement, land sharing could hardly have come into existence (Angel and Boonyabancha, 1985). These projects seem to be the exception rather than the rule. Thus, it is rather difficult to apply land sharing to the majority of evicted communities if strong political involvement cannot be ensured.

It cannot be expected that providing slum dwellers with a tiny plot of land makes them 'safe' forever. Housing conditions are dynamic, varying according to changes in people's economic status. That is the reason why many families in land-sharing projects sell their plots (which are sometimes the result of a hard-won struggle under eviction pressure) and move away.

4.2.5 Don't Relocate the Poor Together

A single type of housing cannot respond to the needs of all families. If different levels of affordability are accepted as a fact of life, it is not necessary to transfer all the dwellers in a community together to a new area. In low-income public housing projects, for example, different housing types remain a problem. Thus people should be able to move separately to different types of shelter according to their level of affordability. A community should not necessarily move together to one single location.

There are two pieces of empirical evidence on this issue. In the land sharing projects discussed above, only a minority of the original residents participated. The rest disappeared because of fires that demolished the slum, or they had given up on the struggle to stay, or they could not afford to stay there any more. Many could, in fact, find alternative shelter.

The other piece of evidence is related to the eviction of the Rachadapisek community in May 1987. During negotiations, the community chairman eventually submitted a proposal to let the dwellers move in small groups of five to ten families to NHA-improved slum communities instead of all together to a remote relocation site (Pornchokchai, 1993).

Thus, moving separately to find alternative shelter is in the nature of slum dwellers. It does not make sense to try to keep all of them together in one particular project.

4.3 Policy Questions

A few policy questions exist that need to be addressed so that better housing policies can be formulated to benefit slum dwellers and the general public.

4.3.1 The Betterment of Slums

That slums disappear is due to the betterment of the economy. If the economy is bad, even a thousand 'angels' cannot help much except at the margins. This implies that most of the budget spent is for immediate needs and would not affect substantial changes in slums. The benefits of these slum improvement programs must be assessed closely on financial, socio-economic and political aspects.

4.3.2 NGOs

Case studies and detailed explorations of NGOs working in slums over the past two decades must be assessed clearly to eventually pave way for better services for slum dwellers. Surveys should be conducted to track the changes in the lives of slum dwellers in terms of their social status, political achievement, and psychological changes over time.

5 Conclusion

The path of development in Thailand is towards an industrial based economy. However, Thailand experiences a very low rate of urbanization compared with other ASEAN countries. This is due to the invasion of forest land in Thailand, while other countries in the region are island

countries without this option for its people. In the case of Bangkok, it is a primate city and the centre of everything of the country. That is why 15% of the population of the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) are slum dwellers. However, in terms of housing, only 6% of the total BMR housing stock is considered as slum. Actually, only 3% of the Thai population live in slums.

Only 15% of slum dwellers in Bangkok are squatters. The rest are mostly home owners on rental land. One good prospect for slums in Bangkok is that they are decreasing proportionally over time. Slums comprised 46% of the housing stock in 1958 and became only 6% of the total in 2000. Hopefully, slums or substandard housing and environments will soon disappear.

Life in slums is improving. Almost all households have access to water and electricity supplies. Children are receiving a better education over time. The proportion of the dependant population is only one-third of the total. Only a few slum dwellers stay below the poverty line. Some one-quarter of slum households can afford to buy a house in the open market. In terms of gender, women are perceived as being less privileged than men. However, the situation has improved substantially during the past ten years.

Considering Thailand's past policies on slums, imitating western countries without scrutiny will not work well in Thailand. Walk-up apartments should have been initially built for non-poor groups not poor ones. Proper relocation can help provide decent housing for the poor. However, giving them rights to land is irrelevant. Land grants typically end up being resold or exploited. People in arrears are the result of failed land sharing projects. Finally, in solving the problems of the poor, measures should not be applied for all but should be selective based on the needs of different target groups.

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