

The Causes and Effects of Slum Eviction in Bangkok

by Somsook Boonyabancha
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Causes and effects of slum eviction in Bangkok

*Somsook Boonyabancha**

This study describes the characteristics and patterns of slum eviction in Bangkok, a process which is now endangering hundreds of thousands of people living in low-income settlements throughout the city. A large proportion of these settlements are old residential areas, which were inhabited before or during the period of rapid development of the city but have become high density reception areas for newly arrived rural migrants during the past two decades.

Although these settlements fulfill an important social and economic function by sheltering a large portion of the city's labor force, aggressive urban development pressures, reinforced by rampant land speculation, have put them under an increasing threat of demolition and eviction, and have now led to the displacement of large numbers of poor residents from their dwellings. These people have rarely been offered alternative accommodation and have had to reestablish themselves in new settlements with equally low or lower security of land tenure. They have become "urban refugees" in their own city, many of them having been evicted more than once, with no prospects of improved tenure security in the future.

The following sections discuss in greater detail the magnitude of the population evicted or threatened with eviction in the city, land ownership in eviction areas, the locational pattern of evictions, development pressures affecting evictions, the spectrum of eviction threats, the plight of the evicted and resistance to eviction.

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I The magnitude of slum eviction in Bangkok

According to the most recent Bangkok Slum Settlements Survey, conducted by the Slum Upgrading Office of the National Housing Authority of Thailand in 1981, 551,420 persons, comprising about 13 per cent of the total population of Bangkok are living in 410 slums and squatter settlements within the metropolitan area.¹ This population figure is rather conservative in comparison with earlier estimates of over 1,000,000 by Khoman and others.² One reason is that there has been no census of these areas, and estimates are based on field observations and reports by residents. A second reason is that the above figure excludes the "mini-squatter" settlements which house an increasing proportion of the urban poor in small concentrations of temporary houses located in unused or unusable plots of land amid other land uses. For lack of better data, however, the 1981 estimates will be used to demonstrate the relative magnitude of slum eviction in the city. About 38 per cent of the total slum population, or alternatively 129 out of the 410 settlements, have been evicted during the past three years or are currently being threatened with eviction. At least 200,000 people are in various stages of being evicted from their homes, as shown in table 1 below.

The findings described in this paper are the results of the Bangkok Slum Eviction Survey, undertaken by the author under the auspices of the Training Center for Low Income Housing of the National Housing Authority. This survey, conducted in 1981, is in fact a re-survey of 84 areas identified by the Slum Upgrading Office of the NHA in 1977 as slums that might potentially be evicted. The recent field survey identified two new areas threatened with eviction, yielding a total of 86 areas housing approximately 22,130 families. The areas covered by the Bangkok Slum Eviction Survey amount to two-thirds of the areas identified as evicted or under eviction by the Bangkok Slum Settlements Survey, while the number of families covered by the survey amount to 59 per cent of estimated total number of families evicted or under eviction.

The Bangkok Slum Eviction Survey included field observations, informal discussions with residents and neighbors,

Table 1: The relative magnitude of slum eviction in Bangkok, 1981

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of areas</i>	<i>Number of families</i>	<i>Number of persons</i>	<i>Percentage of slum population</i>
Already evicted ^a	39	11,350 ^b	61,600 ^b	11.2
Under eviction	90	26,180 ^c	148,600 ^c	26.9
No threat of eviction	281	60,940	341,220	61.9
<i>Total</i>	410	98,470	551,420	100.0

Source: Slum Upgrading Office, National Housing Authority, Bangkok Slum Settlements Survey, Bangkok, 1981 (unpublished).

^a These areas were identified as slums from earlier surveys and from air photographs but were found to be vacant during the 1981 field survey.

^b Data from earlier surveys.

^c These figures have been adjusted by the more recent Bangkok Slum Eviction Survey undertaken by the author in 1981.

interviews with slum landlords, and selected interviews with the residents of settlements under threat of eviction. In each of the areas, at least seven residents were interviewed - two senior residents, two leaders, one youth leader, one member of a poorer family, and one resident at large. The survey aimed at uncovering general patterns and trends in the city as a whole without attempting statistical precision. In large measure, therefore, the results presented below are exploratory in nature.

II Land ownership and eviction

An examination of the data reveals that a key decisive factor in any eviction in Bangkok is whether the land on which the slum happens to be located is in public or private ownership. Contrary to eviction patterns in other cities in Asia, eviction from slums on public land is much more prevalent in Bangkok. Table 2 below shows the distribution of slum areas evicted or being evicted in Bangkok. It is evident that eviction and the threat of eviction are more frequent on government lands.

Table 2 : Slum eviction and threat of eviction on public and private land in Bangkok, 1981

<i>Category</i>	<i>Public land</i>	<i>Private land</i>	<i>Total</i>
Already evicted	6,680 ^a (18.4) ^b	4,670 (7.5)	11,350 (11.5)
Under eviction	17,350 ^a (47.8)	8,830 (14.2)	26,180 (26.6)
No threat of eviction	12,300 (33.8)	48,640 (78.3)	60,940 (61.9)
Total	36,330(100.0)	62,140(100.0)	98,470(100.0)

Source: Slum Upgrading Office, National Housing Authority, Bangkok Slum Settlements Survey, Bangkok, 1981 (unpublished).

^aThese figures have been adjusted by the Bangkok Slum Eviction Survey undertaken by the author in 1981.

^bFigures in parantheses indicate percentages of vertical totals.

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Approximately two-thirds of the families in slums under eviction or already evicted are on government land, despite the fact that slums on government land house only one-third of the total slum population. Two out of every three families residing in slums on government land were evicted or are under eviction, while only one out of five families residing in slums on private land are in these categories. This pattern is further illustrated by comparing figures 1 and 2 presented below. The first figure shows the locations of slums in Bangkok and identifies which slums are on public land and which slums are on private land. The second figure shows which of these slums have recently been evicted or are currently under the threat of eviction. Most of the slums evicted or under eviction are seen to be on government land. Some of the predominant characteristics of slum land ownership by public agencies and private landlords are discussed in the following sections.

The following observations may explain why slums on public land are more prone to eviction or the threat of eviction than slums on private land. First, as can be observed from figure 1, slums on public lands are more centrally located and hence are subject to greater pressures for demolition and redevelopment. Second, the status of residents of slums on public land is generally less secure, as large numbers of these residents are squatters. In contrast, most residents on private land have some form of land rental agreements with landlords. In practice, however, government agencies owning public land behave in much the same way as private landlords. In many cases people have been allowed to rent vacant public land, and in many cases rental agreements have been withdrawn in preparation for eviction. Public agencies have used their vacated land for their own purposes, as well as for sale or lease to commercial enterprises to supplement their revenues.

There is no government policy to guide the utilization of public land under the jurisdiction of the various agencies, and each agency has taken a different attitude towards slums located on its land. These attitudes can be categorized into three major types: passive, speculative and utilitarian. Passive agencies are generally tolerant towards slum dwellers on their land, collect low monthly land rents, and have no alternative use for the land.

Speculative agencies are those desiring to use the land for income generation through eviction and commercial development. Utilitarian agencies are those needing the land to carry out their own work. Many of the agencies display different attitudes towards slums in different locations, and therefore belong to more than one category. Table 3 below broadly classifies the main land-owning government agencies according to their attitudes toward slums and squatter settlements on their land.

The Crown Property Bureau is the largest land owner in Thailand and it is not surprising, therefore, that it is also the owner of the largest proportion of public land occupied by slum dwellers in the city. The Bureau itself is not a user of land per se, and uses its land for generating revenues through lease to other public agencies, to commercial enterprises, or to private households. Many of the sites owned by the Bureau and occupied by low-income households for long periods of time have now become prime commercial sites, and the Bureau has been increasingly involved in efforts to increase revenue generation from its land holdings. These efforts have greatly reduced the security of tenure previously enjoyed by residents on the Bureau's land, and a number of communities are in various stages of eviction. Since the Bureau is a semi-governmental body, not under the administrative control of any ministry, it can and does pursue an independent land policy. Recently, it has started to cooperate with the National Housing Authority in making plans for developing some of its slum areas but its long-term policy towards the future use of slum lands remains unclear.

The Treasury Department manages public lands which do not fall under the jurisdiction of other public agencies, and as such is also not a user of land. The attitude of the Department toward the continuing occupation of its land by slum dwellers has been generally passive.

The Department's regulations require that the redevelopment of slum lands must be subject to a responsible solution of the housing problem of the residents currently living there. In practice, however, the actual position of the Department varies in every case, depending on the reaction of the residents. If residents are quiet they are likely to be evicted. If they protest, the Department will respond positively. Currently, only two of

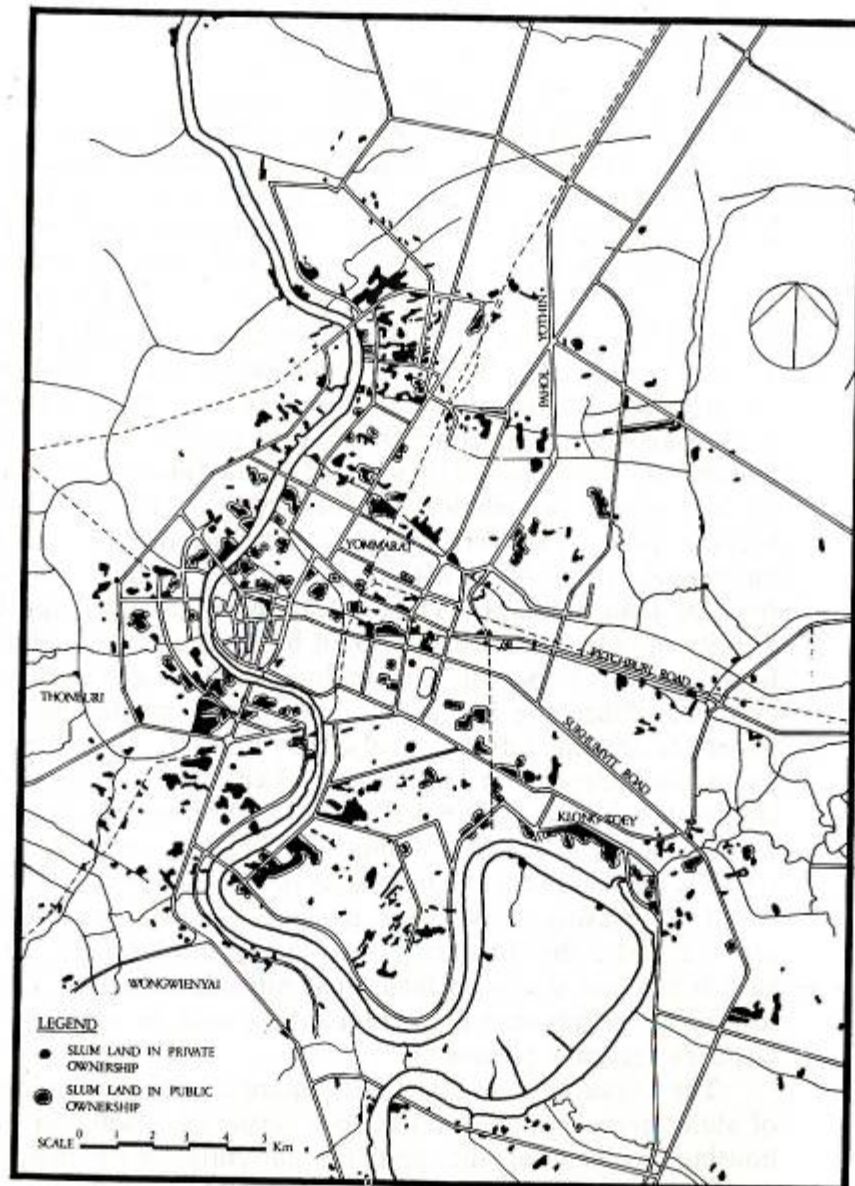


Figure 1: The slum land ownership pattern in Bangkok, 1981



Figure 2: Slums under eviction in Bangkok, 1981

Table 3: Attitudes of major land-owning public agencies toward land utilization in Bangkok, 1981

Public agencies	Attitude toward land utilization			Type of tenure	
	Passive	Speculative	Utilitarian	Land Rental	Squatter ^a
Crown Property Bureau	x	x		x	x
Treasury Department	x		x	x	
Monasteries	x	x		x	
Port Authority of Thailand		x	x		x
Petroleum Authority of Thailand	x		x		x
State Railways of Thailand		x	x		x
Bangkok Metropolitan Administration	x		x		x
Chulalongkorn University		x	x	x	x
Others	x			x	

^a Squatters may be of two types: those who originally occupied the land illegally, and those who originally had rental agreements which have been withdrawn in preparation for their eviction.

the sites under its jurisdiction are being evacuated, one of them for the purpose of constructing a school.

Monasteries own substantial tracts of land donated to them over the years. Each monastery is a legal body which can initiate projects on its land on a long-term lease basis, without the approval of the Department of Religious Affairs. Abbots need only inform the Clerical Council of their proposed projects. Some abbots have been quite tolerant of slum dwellers on their land while others have initiated plans to use the land for commercial development.

The remaining public agencies all own land by virtue of their need for land to conduct their operations. Much of the land under their jurisdiction, however, is not needed for their operations and has remained vacant for many years. Some of this land has come under use by slum dwellers, usually with the consent of the responsible officials. There have been many attempts by these agencies to evict slum dwellers from specific sites, sometimes to free them for their own use, but sometimes to dispose of them commercially for the generation of revenue. Both Chulalongkorn University and the State Railways of Thailand have cleared lands for lucrative commercial developments.

While a complete register of the number of families occupying land owned by each public agency is not available, it has been estimated that approximately one third of the families reside on Crown Property land, almost half of the families occupy land belonging to the Port Authority, the Petroleum Authority, the State Railways, Chulalongkorn University or the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, and the rest reside on land belonging to the Treasury Department, to monasteries and to other government agencies.

As shown in table 2 above, more than 60 per cent of the families residing in slums in Bangkok occupy private land. Slum settlements on private lands are usually smaller than settlements on public lands, and tend to be located further away from the city center. Most of the land had previously been used for rice cultivation and had come under residential use by low-income groups as the city expanded toward the periphery. Fourteen of the 20 landlords interviewed during the Slum Eviction Survey of 1981 were found to own plots measuring between one and five

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rai (0.16 - 0.80 hectares), and only two owned more than 20 rai (3.2 hectares). Eleven of the landlords interviewed owned additional plots of land in the city as well.

Conversations with landlords reveal that the predominant reason for eviction from private land is the change of ownership brought about by the death of the original landowner, particularly when the land is inherited by more than one person. While the original landlord may have had a close relationship with the residents on his land, the new owner or owners have no such relationship and usually wish to dispose of the land for financial gain. Table 4 below shows that half of the interviewed landlords wanted to clear the land so that they could divide the proceeds among a number of heirs to the property.

Table 4: Reasons given by slum landlords for wanting to evict the residents, Bangkok, 1981

<i>Reason given</i>	<i>Number of landlords</i>
Need to divide a common inheritance	10
Need to liquidate assets	3
Desire to develop the land	4
Land confiscated for road building	1
No specific reason given	2
<i>Total</i>	20

III The locational pattern of evictions

The threat of eviction does not loom equally largely over the entire metropolitan area. Slums in certain locations are more prone to be evicted than others. There are four interrelated locational factors affecting eviction: centrality, accessibility, land use and land value. The four are generally related to one another, but can be studied independently.

An examination of figure 2 presented earlier reveals that the general momentum of evictions is highest near the city center and

diminishes toward the periphery. This relationship is demonstrated in greater detail in figure 3 below which shows a declining percentage of families already evicted or facing eviction with increased distance from the city center. The central area itself contains no low-income settlements and thus experiences no eviction.

The centrality of evictions and the predominance of evictions in the ring between one and five kilometers from the city core comes as no surprise, as this is the area currently experiencing the greatest development pressures. This ring also contains a number of the larger slums on public land, some measuring as much as 50 rai (8.0 hectares). As it is nearly impossible for land development companies to assemble such large sites in central locations, these areas become highly attractive to them.

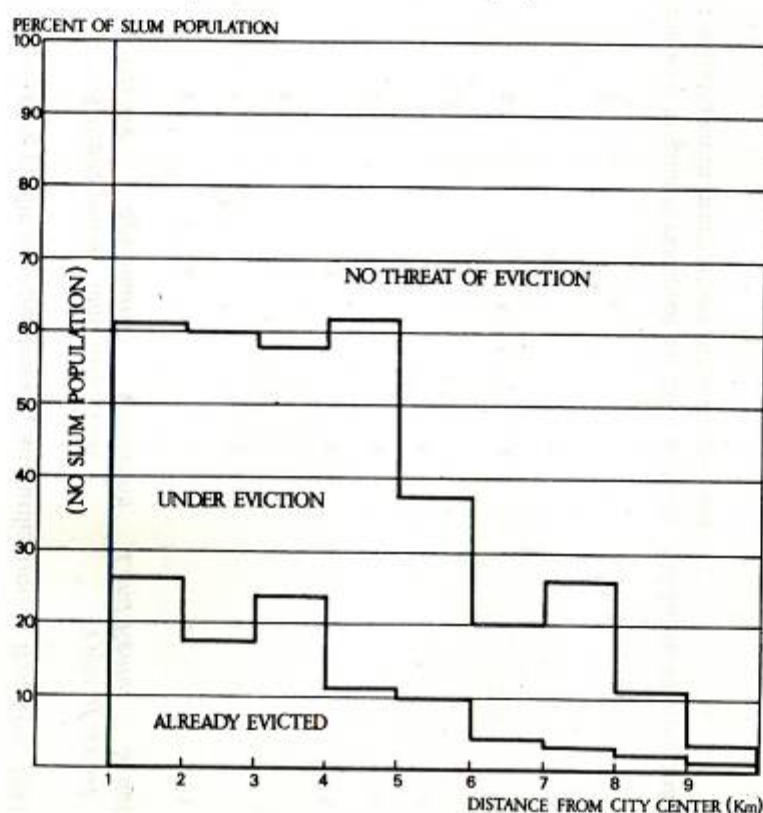


Figure 3: The locational pattern of evictions in Bangkok, 1981

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But centrality is not the only locational factor in eviction. Slums at greater distances from the city center are being evicted as well, as road improvements greatly increase accessibility and invite invasion by higher income groups. While walkways and unpaved roads may be sufficiently inconvenient to discourage middle- and upper-income residential developments, road improvements bring about significant changes in land use. The development of roads and expressways in the fringe areas of the city has resulted in a number of evictions in areas adjacent to the roads.

Evictions have also occurred in locations where land values have significantly increased because of changes in land use, particularly in the areas surrounding the expanding secondary commercial centers on the city fringes. Land values have tended to reflect, in general terms, the desirability of specific slum locations for alternative development in terms of location, accessibility, land use, ripeness for development, and restrictions on development. The higher the land value, the greater the potential for eviction to take place sooner or later.

IV Development pressures affecting eviction

Eviction becomes more imminent as pressures on land-owners to put their land into alternative use increase. Such pressures may be brought about by public authorities seeking land for the extension of public works, or by private companies seeking to develop high valued, urban land for commercial gain. Pressures brought on landlords may be political, administrative, or financial. They may be forced to give up their land or enticed by offers they cannot refuse. In Bangkok, where the mechanisms for compulsory acquisition of land are slow and cumbersome, financial incentive tends to be the norm. Landlords, whether public or private, are lured by prospects of financial gain to agree that the slum residents on their land should be evicted to make way for more profitable developments. Modern planning ideologies assist in easing their conscience by focusing on the benefits generated by urban development projects for the country as a whole, on the modern values they represent, and on the need to put the limited urban land resources to the highest and best

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use. The fact that these development projects do not benefit the country as a whole but only a rich minority, and the fact that they benefit this rich minority at the expense of large numbers of evicted families is conveniently ignored.

The Bangkok Slum Eviction Survey has attempted to classify the types of alternative uses for slum areas which are most common in creating pressures for eviction. These are summarized in table 5 below.

Road construction accounts for 22.4 per cent of the families evicted or under threat of eviction. Commercial developments - shopping complexes, shophouses, and other commercial land uses excluding residential buildings - account for 20.5 per cent of the families under eviction. Noticeably, almost half of these families occupy government land being cleared for private use. Construction of public buildings, such as government offices and schools, accounts for an additional 12.7 of the families under eviction. Most of the areas required for these buildings are in public ownership.

Residential development of townhouses, row houses and flats accounts for only 10.1 per cent of the families evicted or threatened with eviction. This low figure suggests that eviction and development lead to an absolute reduction of the city's housing stock, destroying many housing units and building a few in their stead. Needless to say, new residential units are largely meant for middle and high income families. In a number of instances, however, the National Housing Authority has rehoused slum dwellers in flats constructed on land vacated by slum clearance. Of a total of 22,130 families evicted or under the threat of eviction, less than 3,000 families have been resettled in public housing in the same location or in the vicinity. Other alternative uses of slum lands include warehouses and tennis courts, and account for the displacement or potential displacement of an additional 7.6 per cent of slum families identified in the survey.

In several evicted areas, there is no clear evidence of proposed alternative use. In fact, areas where no alternative use has been planned for the land after eviction has taken place account for 26.7 per cent of the total families evicted or under eviction, the highest percentage of all categories. There are two main reasons

Table 5: Development pressures affecting slum eviction in Bangkok, 1981

<i>Type of development</i>	<i>Public land</i>		<i>Private land</i>		<i>No. of areas</i>	<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No. of families</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>No. of families</i>	<i>Percentage</i>		<i>No. of families</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Road construction	970	19.6	3,980	80.4	17	4,950	22.4
Commercial development	2,085	46.0	2,450	54.0	16	4,535	20.5
Public buildings	2,190	77.7	630	22.3	14	2,820	12.7
Residential development	1,195	53.2	1,050	46.8	9	2,245	10.1
Other	360	21.4	1,320	78.6	5	1,680	7.6
Land held vacant, under dispute, or without plans	4,830	81.9	1,070	18.1	25	5,900	26.7
<i>Total</i>	11,630	52.6	10,500	47.4	86	22,130	

for the lack of plans for future use. In the majority of cases, land is cleared and held vacant for speculative purposes, waiting for the highest bidder to declare his proposed use for the cleared site. The Crown Property Bureau holds a number of evicted areas vacant with the intention of leasing them to commercial developers in the future. In a number of other areas the land, although cleared for development, is under dispute. Its future use remains unclear as long as litigation is in process.

In general, it may be concluded that apart from road construction, development for profit is the main source of pressure affecting slum eviction in the city.

V The spectrum of eviction threats

Slum dwellers may have already been evicted at one end of the eviction spectrum, and may face no threat of eviction at the other end. While the earlier Bangkok Slum Settlements Survey divided this spectrum into three categories: already evicted, under eviction and no threat of eviction, the Slum Eviction Survey had developed a larger number of categories of slums under eviction. The reason for developing a more refined spectrum is that threats of eviction vary considerably in their degree of seriousness and may range from actual demolition having started to an unsubstantiated rumor being circulated in the area.

The survey identified seven categories of threats of eviction. These are summarized in table 6 below. Forty-five per cent of the total number of families covered in the survey were already evicted by the time of the survey. These were residents of slum areas that were identified in an NHA survey in 1977 as threatened with eviction. By 1981 they were already evicted.

The different categories of threats of eviction have been arranged in descending order of seriousness, except for one category, "under negotiation", which is a special category. The most serious threat of eviction looms over families residing in slums where demolition has already commenced and other families are already in the process of evacuating the area. A somewhat lesser, although severe, threat endangers the residents of slums destroyed by fire. Municipal regulations prohibit the

*Land for housing the poor**Table 6: The spectrum of eviction threats in Bangkok, 1981*

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of families</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Already evicted	9,930	44.9
Partial demolition	430	1.9
Fire or arson	630	2.8
Litigation	50	0.2
Eviction notices with fixed date	1,320	6.0
Verbal notice with no fixed date	4,960	22.4
Rumors	3,950	17.9
Under negotiation	860	3.9
<i>Total</i>	22,130	100.0

reconstruction of houses in these areas and landowners often resort to swift action to remove the residents after fires. Since fire is an effective way of initiating a change of land use, landowners in the city often encourage arson to accelerate evictions. A number of slum communities threatened with eviction have formed vigilante groups to patrol the area at night and attempt to prevent intentional fires.

In the few cases where residents refuse to vacate the land after being formally notified of their pending eviction, landlords resort to court action. The courts usually uphold the landlords' right to evict the settlers, and once their case is under litigation, the final stage in the legal procedures - forcible removal of those refusing to leave - is just a matter of time. Eviction cases handled by the courts usually take one to two years from start to completion. During the period of legal struggle, residents usually begin to look for alternative housing arrangements.

An earlier stage in the eviction process is the serving of eviction notices with fixed dates. The fixed dates imply that plans for the redevelopment of the area and negotiations for the transfer of land to the prospective developers have been completed. It is therefore perceived as a concrete threat of imminent eviction.

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A somewhat lesser threat is a verbal notification by the landlord that dwellers should prepare to leave the area, without specifying a precise date. This is an indication that the landlord has decided to vacate the land for development, but that no firm project has yet been formulated.

Finally, in many settlements rumors of pending eviction, substantiated by various types of indirect evidence, threaten residents that they will sooner or later have to leave. In many of these instances, since landlords seek to avoid confrontation and therefore tend to withhold information from the slum dwellers, these rumors turn out to be true. Often landlords have already notified the authorities of their intention to develop their land or have refused to allow the National Housing Authority to upgrade infrastructure on their land. Occasionally, landlords initiate a land assembly process to make their land more attractive to developers. While these activities are in process, the residents are not necessarily informed directly, but learn about the landlords' plans through the grapevine.

In the recent past, two slum communities, one in the Rama IV area and one in Ban Manangkasila, which have previously been threatened with eviction, have been in the process of negotiating agreements with the landlords to stay on the land they occupy. While negotiations are underway the threat of eviction is considerably reduced, although not altogether eliminated. As such, communities where future plans are under negotiation can be threatened with eviction in various degrees, depending on the probable outcome of negotiations.

VI The plight of the evicted

Eviction is harmful. It brings with it substantial human suffering and financial loss, pushing the people further down the path of misery to worse housing in worse locations.

Communities from which people are being evicted have been in existence for thirty to forty years on average. They are places where people have spent the greater part of their lives. Leaving them unwillingly brings with it a feeling of humiliation and powerlessness. For many it is disorienting. For some, particularly the older population, it may be a severe life crisis. People leave

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behind friends and neighbors they have learned to trust, a familiar environment, and a supportive community. For the great majority, the move is a change for the worse. When asked about their future plans, the majority reply that they do not know, almost as though they refuse to face their future.

The financial loss brought about by eviction is a cumulative loss resulting from higher housing expenditures as well as higher transportation expenditures in the new location, substantial resettlement costs, and loss of income. The compensation given by landlords is rarely, if ever, sufficient to cover these losses.

Slums are attractive to low-income people because they supply affordable housing in good locations. They provide for flexible housing arrangements, making land available for self-help construction, as well as having a variety of houses and rooms for rent at low cost. Typical monthly rents for different arrangements are shown in table 7 below. The table shows that 48 per cent of the sampled families paid no rent at all, 76 per cent paid less than 100 baht per month, 84 per cent paid less than 300 baht per month, and 97 per cent paid less than 600 baht per month. These expenditures are low in comparison to monthly incomes. Thirty per cent of the households in Bangkok with the lowest incomes earned between 1,000 and 4,000 baht per month in mid-1981. The average monthly income of this group was 3,300 baht.³

Eviction brings with it increased rents. All new house seekers in the city pay considerably higher rents than long-time occupants. In addition, as the number of evictions increase, the number of houses available in good locations declines while the demand for them increases. The result is higher rents. If houses cannot be found near the old location because of high demand and high rents, more distant locations must be sought. This in turn results in higher transportation costs to work, school and social services and increased commuting time, which in practical terms means less working hours and reduced incomes.

Reduced incomes from increased commuting time are further aggravated by reduced incomes from loss of income earning opportunities. Many families in the slums engage in a wide variety of informal economic activities to supplement basic incomes. These activities rely to a major extent on the development of contacts with people who can offer occasional

Table 7: Typical monthly rents for different housing arrangements in slums under eviction in Bangkok, 1981^a

<i>Range (Baht)^b</i>	<i>Land rental</i>	<i>House rental</i>	<i>Room rental</i>	<i>Squatting</i>	<i>Total</i>
0	—	—	—	169	169
0—100	94	—	5	—	99
101—300	9	11	11	—	31
301—600	7	17	21	—	45
601—900	—	5	—	—	5
901—1,200	—	4	—	—	4
More than 1,200	—	1	—	—	1
<i>Total</i>	110	38	37	169	354

^a Questionnaires were administered to seven or more families in each of 54 slums threatened with eviction. 57 responses that did not correspond to the categories in this table were eliminated. These included respondents who did not know, had special arrangements, or did not answer the question.

^b US\$ 1.00 = 23.00 Baht in 1981.

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work, supply merchandise at a discount, or make credit available. They also rely on the gradual development of relationships with clients, people who are committed to buying the merchandise being sold, or pay for the services being offered. All these contacts rely on remaining in one place. Once people are forced to move, these contacts are lost.

But higher rents, higher transport expenses and loss of income are not the only costs of eviction. The process of resettlement itself involves considerable expenditures. Houses may have to be taken down and transported to a new location. Rebuilding them will require new materials, new foundations, new septic tanks, new water and electricity connections, etc. The new house site may not be suitable for rebuilding the same house, requiring a change of plans and additional expenses. Renting a house in another location may also involve substantial expenses to make it suit the new inhabitants' needs.

The compensation offered to evicted families is far from sufficient to cover the losses incurred by evicted families. Table 8 presented below provides some details of the type and amount of compensation offered by landlords. In many cases, families may not be sufficiently aware of the real costs of eviction, and may therefore be attracted by offers of cash payments which are immediate and real. In other cases, families may be willing to accept their fate and will agree to any amount of compensation. In yet other cases, they may be intimidated and confused by the landlords or their representatives, and may find themselves evicted with no compensation at all. There are no rules regarding compensation, and since the residents have no legal rights to stay, the amount of compensation largely depends on the outcome of negotiations in each case.

Over and above the financial losses involved in eviction, housing conditions of evicted families deteriorate. Since expenditures are likely to go up after eviction, since incomes are likely to suffer, and since compensation is usually inadequate, evicted families suffer a decrease of their housing budget. They consequently suffer a further narrowing of their range of alternative accommodation. Evicted slum dwellers are naturally excluded from the formal housing market, as they cannot afford to pay for the cheapest house or flat produced by the private

Table 8 : Compensation for evicted residents of 38 slums on public and private land in Bangkok, 1981

<i>Rate and type of compensation (Baht)^a</i>	<i>Public land</i>		<i>Private land</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No. of families</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>No. of families</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>No. of families</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No compensation	530	8.8	—	—	530	5.3
1,000—5,000	1,370	22.6	960	24.8	2,330	23.5
5,000—10,000	580	9.6	750	19.3	1,330	13.4
10,000—20,000	1,260	20.8	1,300	33.5	2,560	25.8
More than 20,000	50	0.8	710	18.3	760	7.6
Provided government flats	900	14.9	—	—	900	9.1
Provided B 1,000 to relocate to nearby site	1,120	18.5	—	—	1,120	11.3
Unknown	240	4.0	160	4.1	400	4.0
<i>Total</i>	6,050	100.0	3,880	100.0	9,930	100.0

^a US\$ 1.00 = 23.00 Baht in 1981

Land for housing the poor

sector. A few may gain access to government flats, which they can usually afford because flats are rented out below economic costs. An additional few may gain access to government sites-and-services projects on the city's fringe. In general, however, the production of flats and serviced sites has been slow, and falls far short of the need. Consequently, the majority of the evicted population will continue to seek slum and squatter housing.

Three options are usually available to evicted families: moving to an existing slum in the vicinity, squatting, or building a house in a growing spontaneous settlement on the periphery of the city. Slums in the vicinity of evicted areas generally do not have available open plots for the construction of houses. If they do, the plots are small areas between houses. Families moving in thus lead to increased densities, and may usually have to do with smaller houses. In other cases they may not be able to rebuild their house at all and will have to rent a house, losing their old house materials and increasing their housing expenditures in the process.

Evicted families that cannot find places in nearby slums may resort to squatting on vacant land. While squatting has been very limited in extent in the past, a number of new squatter settlements have appeared in recent years within the urbanized area.⁴ These squatter settlements house the poorer evicted families that can no longer afford living in the more established slums on rented land.

The third option available to evicted families is building a house on the periphery of the city, where rented plots can still be obtained. Moving out may involve an increase in transport expenditures, a decrease in income earning opportunities, and reduced access to schools and markets. It may be possible, however, to obtain a bigger plot, sometimes in an emerging new settlement and sometimes in a semi-agricultural area among the plantations and the rice fields. There is emerging evidence that the housing alternatives for the poor in the fringe areas are also shrinking, as the land is being bought by speculators for future use.⁵

In general, evicted slum dwellers face a shrinking number of alternative housing arrangements. As they move from one slum to another, their housing conditions tend to become worse. As

many of them have to move more than once, their housing conditions deteriorate even further.⁶ The powerlessness of the evicted families and their inability to resist eviction has an effect on other slum dwellers as well. They see their own situation as less and less secure, and have little or no incentive to improve their dwellings and the environment in which they live.

VII Resistance to eviction

Since there is no legal protection for slum residents, regardless of their length of stay in the area, they cannot resist eviction by appealing to the courts. Landlords on their part always insure that slum dwellers understand that their stay on the land is temporary and that they may be asked to leave eventually. They do not allow the residents to construct permanent structures on their land, and refrain from signing long-term agreements. Yet landlords generally prefer to avoid a direct confrontation with the residents, partly as a result of their goodwill toward the people and partly because of their desire to prevent revenge and violence. They therefore prefer to come to terms with the residents and to offer compensation, if necessary, to facilitate the clearance of the land.

In general, resistance to eviction from private land is considerably more subdued than resistance to eviction from public land. Many slum dwellers facing eviction feel that the landlords' behavior has been acceptable in the past, allowing them to stay on their land for low rents. They are, therefore, willing to leave. Some resistance can still be felt as many of them have nowhere to go and try to appeal to the goodwill of the landlord, asking for a prolonged stay. In general, however, there has been no successful resistance to eviction from private land.

Resistance to eviction from public land has been somewhat more successful, scoring sporadic successes in postponing and even preventing eviction. Resistance to eviction from public land usually takes the form of a humanitarian appeal to the government to help the poor people who are made to suffer through government action. The people appeal to the responsibility of the government toward them, again pointing out

that they have nowhere to go, and that the government has a duty to help them, by either allowing them to stay or by offering them alternative accommodation.

Successful resistance to eviction is primarily dependent on the level of organization in the threatened settlements. Where such organizations have come into being, either spontaneously or with outside support, and where the leadership has been able to clearly understand the situation and the alternative courses of action open to it, residents have been able to employ various strategies to resist eviction. These have ranged from demonstrations near the Prime Minister's house to petitions to the royal family for help. There have also been delegations to the directors of the concerned government agencies, as well as interviews with the press to bring public attention to the plight of the community. The press has been generally supportive of the people's appeals and has reported extensively on eviction struggles.

In at least three cases, these campaigns have had positive effects on stalling or preventing eviction. The Port Authority, for example, which for years has been seeking to evict the squatters on its Klong Toey port land (see cover photo) has not been able to do so because of organized resistance by the people in the community, supported by a wide range of charitable organizations and a sympathetic press. The Treasury Department has recently come to an agreement with the community occupying its Ban Manangkasila land. The community is to vacate part of the land in exchange for a long-term lease to the remaining part. Plans are now underway to rehouse the community in an organized manner on the allotted site. In a third community, the Rama IV slum, agreement has been reached to rehouse the people in high-rise flats on the site, in conjunction with a large commercial development there. This again has been brought about through a concerted struggle of the community and its supporters to prevent the expulsion of the people from Crown Property land to make way for the construction of a lucrative commercial complex.

These three cases have been isolated cases of success amid a much larger number of failures to resist eviction, particularly in areas where no community organization has emerged. While these may point the way to more and better organized resistance

to eviction from slums on public land or on land belonging to foundations and religious organizations, effective resistance to eviction from slums on private land is yet to emerge.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to present the initial results of the Bangkok Slum Eviction Survey without necessarily offering any recommendations for action. As the study shows, there is rampant eviction in the city, despite the government's declared policy of slum upgrading and improvement. Development of commercial and office complexes, as well as townhouses and roads, result in the eradication of large numbers of low-income housing units. Needless to say, the agents and agencies involved in the destruction of the housing stock do not see themselves as responsible for replacing it with alternative housing. The overall result is the reduction of the quantity of low-income housing in the city, particularly in the locations in which it is needed most. Public construction of flats in central locations is on the decrease, and the production of serviced sites in peripheral locations serves only a limited number of families. While the prospects of slum dwellers for secure tenure seem to be grim, there seems to be an increasing potential in the prevention of evictions through intelligent leadership, particularly in slums on public land. Such resistance will benefit from directing the attention of the public, the slum dwellers themselves, and the agencies of government to the plight of the evicted poor and to the responsibility of society toward them. Eviction is much easier when no one is looking, and much more difficult when a large number of poor families are seen to be thrown out of their homes with nowhere to go.

Notes and references

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