

News from Thailand's busy Homeless People's Networks

There is a lot going on these days in Thailand's Homeless People's Networks, which are active in the country's three largest cities: Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen. The country's first completely self-managed homeless shelter in Bangkok's Taling Chan District is celebrating its tenth year of operation. A fresh infusion of support from the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security has given new life to long-discussed plans to build similar self-managed homeless shelters in Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen. Land for the new shelters has been acquired in both cities and the new shelter in Chiang Mai has been constructed and inaugurated. Meanwhile, the first batch of twelve pioneering families from the Bangkok Homeless shelter has taken the big step of moving into the country's first-ever permanent housing project that is being designed, built and financed by (formerly) homeless people themselves, on land leased inexpensively from the State Railways Authority in the nearby Thawi Watthana District. Here is a brief update and some background notes on all these projects, drawn from both recent and past visits by teams from CODI and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR).

THIS REPORT DATED JULY 2018

1. Launch of the Chiang Mai Homeless Bank, in October 2008

In October of 2008, Father Jorge Anzorena (Selavip Newsletter) and Thomas Kerr (from ACHR) joined General Surin and a big team from CODI on a visit to the Chiang Mai, to take part in the celebrations to launch the Chiang Mai Homeless Bank, and to sit in on a meeting at City Hall with the Mayor of Chiang Mai and the Homeless Network to discuss plans for establishing their own homeless shelter in the city. These are Tom's rough notes from that visit.

Launch of the Chiang Mai Homeless Bank (CHB)

Afternoon : Gathering of the Homeless Network in the main square in front of the Tha Phae Gate. An awning has been set up in the public square, with tourists all over the place. There is an exhibition of posters about the situation and the activities of homeless groups in Chiang Mai and Bangkok. Also, several support agencies have set up services here (free medical clinic, free haircuts, free lunch, second-hand clothes) for homeless people.

- **Somsook proposes a deal to the Homeless network and the Mayor of Chiang Mai:** If the Municipality will provide a little land somewhere (about 400 square meters), CODI will provide the budget to build a house for the homeless, and the network will build and manage the house. The land could be free or a very cheap rent. Or even an old, unused building that might be adapted to be a center.
- **Many young people among the homeless in Chiang Mai.**
- **Old homeless man :** "I have been caught by the Social Welfare Department 16 times and taken to their shelter. And 16 times I have escaped from that place. Yes, they gave me a bed and food, but I felt like a prisoner there. We like to work and do as we like with our lives. We like to be free."



Somsook : The solution is very simple and easy and cheap: set up a shelter which the homeless people make and run and maintain themselves, according to their own needs! All we need to do is understand their nature and let them do it!

- **Somsook :** I can see clearly a big change in the confidence now. Before, some of these homeless people could not even speak.
- **New Homeless Center in Bangkok, in Taling Chan + 2 other Homeless Centers in Bangkok** (total 3 centers now! Taling Chan + Bangkok Noi + Mochit, which just started): They run it themselves, and look at the impact! About 100 people live there and use the center. They have their own savings group, their own welfare fund and income generation activities. CODI gave a grant of 2.3 million Baht - what a modest investment for making a change in the lives of 100 human beings who were never considered even human!
- **Somsook :** Society says that poor people living in slums are stupid and uneducated and lazy. That's bad enough, but it's much worse when poor people start believing it - believing that they are stupid, believing that they are powerless to do anything about their lives.
- **In Baan Mankong, we broke this myth.** No, people can do this project and they can be the owners. How can poor people construct houses who have never held a hammer or



trowel in their lives? Once they start, they find it's no big deal at all! We use the housing projects as a way to wake people up, to do it themselves, and to take back their power, their confidence, their self-determination.

- **And it's very cheap when people do it - half the price of a contractor!**
- **Poster : People can do it, no matter who they are.**
- This is the first time for Chiang Mai's Homeless to have such a forum!

Chiang Mai Homeless Bank (CHB) is officially launched today : The Chiang Mai Homeless Network began their savings and bank in April 2008, but today is the official opening, with support from the Homeless Network in Bangkok, and from the Human Settlements Foundation NGO. Somsook asks CODI staff to also keep track of the progress and see how to help. Somsook becomes a member of the CHB, makes a deposit and gets a passbook!

- **This new Homeless Bank will be mobile!** The cart will be here every Monday to collect people's savings and give loans and transact repayments for homeless Bank members. The rich people have a fixed bank branch - we also have our bank branch, but our branch moves!
- **So every Monday all the homeless will come to meet each other** and save their money and use that fixed gathering place to coordinate health checks, links with support groups, etc.



Chiang Mai Homeless Network leader speaks:

- We are pushing for ID cards for homeless people and legislation (?)
- Looking for a place to stay, set up a homeless center which we run ourselves, since we face problems of harassment by police and social welfare workers.
- want to establish an understanding between poor homeless and the government
- **want to show the public the progress of our network's work:** our negotiations with government for a homeless center, our savings group, our new homeless bank, our organization of free health checks and hair-cutting today. We are trying to do many things ourselves and we want the government to understand.
- **We started saving in July 2008**, and have very good savings, good system, even though people don't earn much.
- Homeless people face many problems: no place to sleep, no place to have a shower. Mafia come and hassle us and steal money from us if we have it.
- But when we link together, we are still free, but we have friends and can help each other. For us, we don't want to be rich, just earn enough money to survive!



Group discussion : Exchange between homeless groups in Chiang Mai and Bangkok, with rural landless network leaders.

- **Rural landless Network leader speaks :** We are just trying to find land for cultivation. So much rural land is empty and unused, without clear ownership. So we grab that land and start cultivating it. We have experience in how to deal with that situation! There is so much land! And because rural land is cheap, the rich come and buy it and then they don't use it, they just hold on to it and wait for the price to go up. Little by little, rural people and small farmers are losing their land, selling off when they have debts or problems. Or the banks take the land when we can't pay our agriculture debts. *But we need land for our lives.* The rich own land but don't use it, just leave it idle. So we start growing things on that empty land, and right away that landlord shows up! We are making a point that there are so many cases like this, this is a way to get the government to understand the policy on land and to improve it.
- **David - a formerly homeless guy from UK :** joining in the discussion, wants to support these Chiang Mai homeless people, and comes to the meeting with the mayor later in the day



Homeless network discussion with Mayor at City Hall in the evening

(about 20 or 25 people come, including many homeless people from Chiang Mai and Bangkok, plus dreadlocked and pony-tailed activists working with Human Settlements Foundation, plus CODI staff and us)

- **Mayor :** *Can we trust these homeless people? Who are they?*
- **Homeless leader from Bangkok:** *Oh no problem! We've already checked ourselves! They have a network and a savings group and activities and everything!*

- **Mayor :** Why do people become homeless? I have very little idea what being homeless is like.
- **Young homeless guy named Tommy :** I like to be free, I don't like to be tied down to one place or one job. When we link together as a group, I found many others like me. It's like looking through the garbage: it may look dirty and forgotten, but you can find many good things, many treasures there!
- **Mayor :** I want to solve the problem of homelessness in Chiang Mai. If you build a center, are you sure the homeless will stay there? Will it be safe?
- **Bangkok homeless leader :** NO problem! Our center is Bangkok is very nice, very safe, people love to stay there, they feel it works for them.



- **Mayor :** How many homeless people are there in Chiang Mai? How many will stay at the center?
- **Homeless leader :** We did a rough survey and we found about 60 homeless people in the city. When we build the center, we will survey more properly, and old people will be the first priority for staying there.
- **Somsook :** Why not go ahead with your survey now? And don't just count heads, but try to get some good information about the people, life stories, jobs, details.

Land for the new homeless center? : Homeless leader says the land can be very small, but it's important that it not be too far away, close to the city center. Otherwise it's difficult for people to get there, no transport. Also, many of us earn our living collecting recyclable garbage in the city center, need to carry and sort and sell it there.

2. Notes from a visit to the Homeless Center in Taling Chan District, in March 2014

These are Tom's rough notes from a visit to the Homeless Network's Center in Bangkok's Taling Chan District. The visit took place in March 2014, during the second regional meeting of representatives from poor communities in six countries to discuss the progress of the ACHR + IIED-supported study on "Assessing Urban Poverty by Poor Communities Themselves." We meet with a group of about 40 homeless people and community people from the Railway Settlements, under an awning out in front of the Taling Chan Homeless Center.

Homeless network in 3 cities: There is a national network of homeless people in Thailand, which links city-based networks of homeless people in three cities so far (Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen). For many years, the homeless network has been supported by the Bangkok-based NGO Human Settlements Foundation (HSF). The homeless network is also part of the national 4-Regions Slum Network, which includes all the communities living on State Railway land.

Homeless leader (man) presents:

- **Why do people become homeless?** Because landless farmers migrate to the city and can't find jobs, because their families have broken up, because they suffer from illnesses like AIDS, because after being released from jail society doesn't accept them, or because they are elderly and their families won't take care of them.
- **Many of the people who first become homeless stay in the park or near the train stations or in the Sanam Luang (parade ground) in front of the Grand Palace.** It's a very difficult time for them, with no help, and there are many dangers for homeless women especially. Homeless people suffer from being raped, robbed, beaten-up, chased by the police, harassed by staff from the government's Social Welfare Department and forced to sleep in the rain.



- **The homeless reject the government shelters:** At that time, the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) ran some shelters for homeless people in the city. But the homeless people all hated those places, which did not help them, but took away their freedom and made them feel like criminals. The government shelters didn't allow families to stay together, but had separate shelters for women and men and children, locked doors, and you have to follow many rules that were set by others. So they always ran away. *"That's a jail for us, a welfare shelter! We want our freedom."* And sometimes, the people were rounded up by the Social Welfare Department in vans, in eviction raids of homeless areas and taken to these shelters against their will.
- **First survey of the homeless in Bangkok:** In 2003, the Human Settlements Foundation NGO conducted the first survey of homeless people in Bangkok, to try to find out what they wanted to do with their lives. In August of that year, the Governor of Bangkok announced a policy of evicting all the homeless people from the *Sanam Luang* parade ground. In the crisis of this eviction, they organized their first meeting. They decided to go as a group to the BMA to negotiate with the Governor to be given some alternative place to stay. But the government didn't help, and the cat-and-mouse game of evictions in *Sanam Luang* continued.



Building the first shelter run by homeless people themselves: A few years later (about 2007) the network began discussing the idea of establishing their own center for homeless people in Bangkok, which they would manage themselves, in their own way. They began looking for possible land, and found this plot of railway land in one of the informal railway squatter settlements in Taling Chan District, Thonburi, across the river from Bangkok. With support from CODI, they were able to negotiate permission to use the land from the State Railways Authority, on the condition that the land be leased by the BMA for the shelter. At first, the BMA agreed to lease the land from the State Railways, but didn't offer any support beyond filling the land a little bit - no support for building the shelter, as they had promised. That gave the network time to plan and strengthen their organization and build their network. They went back to CODI to ask for help, and CODI persuaded the BMA to allow CODI to take over the lease. CODI also gave a grant to build the shelter, which was designed by the homeless network, with technical support provided from the CODI community architects.

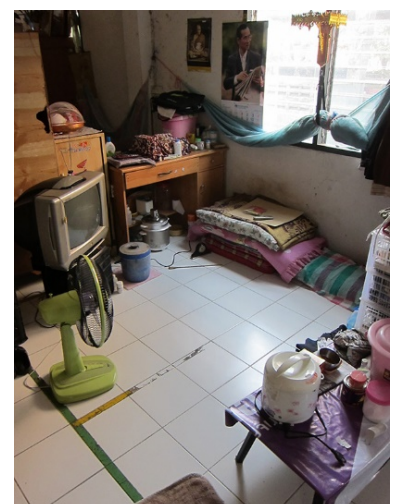


- **Constructing the shelter:** The two-story shelter was built by a local contractor which the network selected themselves, but all the unskilled labor was provided by members of the homeless network, to keep costs as low as possible. As a last step in taking possession of their center, the network persuaded the State Railways Authority to transfer the land-rental contract from CODI to the Homeless Network, so now they collect money from their members and pay their land rent themselves: the land rent is a nominal 1,000 baht (\$32) per month, and everyone who stays at the shelter contributes 50 baht (\$1.50) per month towards the rent.
- **Savings group:** Many of the homeless people who stay here save together in an active savings group. Each member saves 180 Baht (\$5.60) per month, which includes savings for their communal welfare fund ("the most important!"), savings for their 50-baht monthly contribution to the land rent, and savings for their future housing, since some have planned to collectively build their own houses at the new housing project they are now planning.



"In our shelter, all the rules and regulations are set by us!"

Space allocation: 42 people live in this center (some single, some couples, even some children). Another 20 homeless people live in two other small centers in Bangkok. Inside the shelter, there are two big open rooms - one room upstairs and one downstairs, with the bathrooms at the back. They have a system for dividing up this big open space by using the 12-inch ceramic floor tiles: A single person gets a space 4 tiles wide (1.2m), while a couple or a family of 3 gets 8 tiles wide (2.4m). One group of 8 deaf people stay together in one little cluster - they get about 16 tiles. Most of the people set up little enclosures around their space, with boxes or shelves, mosquito nets, mattresses on the floor. But it doesn't seem cluttered - people have very few belongings. And everything is very clean.



The homeless network named their center after a man named Suwit Watnoo, an activist and friend of the homeless who worked with the Human Settlements Foundation for many years and who died a few years ago.

Now about 400 homeless people join in the Bangkok network:

The network's main activity now is reaching out to other homeless people, inviting them for coffee or tea, talking to them, offering help with whatever they need, telling them about the network. They invite them to come live in this shelter, if they are ready, but many are still reluctant to give up the freedom of the streets. "It's different than social workers doing this, because we are homeless people too, and so we can talk as equals who know the hardships they are facing and their hesitations, from our own experience."

- **How the homeless center helps:** Even if these homeless people are not interested in moving into the center, the center can help them with many other problems, like getting ID cards or medical help. They can use the Homeless Center as their official address to get a house registration, which they need to apply for jobs ("that completely changes their status!") or finding some income sources, like from the network's soap and detergent-making enterprise (we're all given beautifully-wrapped little bars of glycerin soap, as mementos of our visit to the center) or a recycled materials cooperative they have which gives fair prices for recycled materials people collect, like paper, plastic, tin cans, etc. The main thing is to help them out of their isolation, help them realize they are not alone and have friends who can help them.
- **The Bangkok Homeless network meets once a month with its sister networks in Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen.**
- **The status of the homeless in the network has totally changed** when they got this new shelter as an address and could get house registration. Now the government starts to see them as citizens, and even opens up possible jobs to them. When the homeless stay here in the center for a while, they change, their self-confidence improves, they make friends, and they start to think about having their own permanent house one day. Nobody wants to stay here in a common shelter forever.



3. Government budget for more self-managed homeless shelters, 2015 - 2017

In 2015, the Minister of Social Development and Human Security paid an official visit the homeless shelter at Taling Chan District, which after ten years was still going strong. By then, two other smaller homeless shelters had also been established and were being managed by the Homeless Network in other parts of Bangkok. This was the minister's first exposure to the idea of a self-managed homeless shelter. He seems to have been won over by the idea, because a short time later, the cabinet approved a two-year project called "*Quality of Life Improvement of the Homeless*", with a budget of 118.6 million Baht (US\$3.6 million) from the central government, to buy land and construct more of these kinds of self-managed homeless centers in Thailand's three principal cities: Bangkok, Chiang Mai and Khon Kaen. The project is being implemented in collaboration with CODI, the Human Settlements Foundation and the Homeless Networks in those three cities. A mixed committee composed of representatives from the Homeless Network, relevant professionals and support organizations was set up to assist the project and provide technical support.

Progress on the shelter in Chiang Mai: The northern city of Chiang Mai is Thailand's second largest city, and the most recent survey by the Homeless Network and the Human Settlements Foundation counted 136 homeless people in Chiang Mai. Some of the budget from the new project was used to purchase a small plot of prime inner-city land (300 square wah) (1,200 square meters), where the Chiang Mai homeless network will design, build and manage a two-story shelter which will eventually house some 90 homeless people. The construction cost will be 9.87 million Baht (US\$ 308,000), and they will use local materials and unskilled labor from the network and volunteers to keep construction costs as low as possible. On June 1, 2017, the Minister of Social Development



and Human Security took part in the ceremony to put up the shelter's first column, to start the construction work, with a lot of national press about how poor people are showing the way. In this new model, which is now catching on, the government finances the land and construction, and the homeless people design the shelter and run it, making their own rules, according to the real needs of the homeless who live there. Their system has been accepted by the government. Because the land this Chiang Mai shelter occupies is so valuable, the network has been looking into setting up a cooperative, or a foundation to manage the center, to make it a little more independent from the government, to insure the shelter will continue to function, despite development pressures all around it.



Progress on the shelter in Khon Kaen: In September 2017, the project approved a third homeless shelter in the northeastern city of Khon Kaen, where the network was able to negotiate to buy a large piece of land (3 rai) (0.5 hectare), where the local homeless network will design and construct a shelter which will eventually house 120 homeless people. The most recent survey by the Khon Kaen Homeless Network and their partners in the Human Settlements Foundation counted 166 homeless people in Khon Kaen.

4. Visit the Homeless Network's first permanent housing project, in March 2014

These are Tom's notes from a visit to the site of the Bangkok Homeless Network's first permanent housing project, in Bangkok's Thawi Watthana District, not far from the Homeless Center in Taling Chan District. The visit took place in March, 2014, before the work had been started on the new housing, but after the land lease terms had been negotiated, between the State Railway Authority and the Homeless Network. These notes describe a presentation given by Tui, who is on the staff of the Human Settlements Foundation, which is a long-time support partner of the Homeless Network.

First 10 homeless households to build their own houses: Now some of us want to live in our own houses, but have decided to move and build as a group, and to do everything collectively - not as individuals. At first, we will start with ten households, to see how it works.

- **This will be the first group of homeless people to "graduate" from the center,** move out and make their own housing and stay on their own. But we have to be careful - it is a big step, it means a big change of life: having to repay a housing loan, having to manage many complicated things which they don't have to do when they are homeless. They will have to increase their monthly saving to 300 Baht (\$9.40), to make their house loan payments to the network fund, which will provide them with small housing loans. This is a very important test case. If it works, they have the power to inspire others and will show the way to other groups of homeless people, in Bangkok and other cities.
- **Land provided by State Railway Authority:** The land where these 10 families will build their houses is in an area called Puthamonthon 2, in Bangkok's Thawi Watthana District. The homeless network negotiated with the State Railway Authority to get land for the project on a nominal 30-year lease, at 20 Baht (\$0.60) per square meter per year. CODI will lease the land from the railway authority and sub-lease it to the homeless group's new housing cooperative. This project is right across the tracks from another housing project being supported by the Baan Mankong program (46 households in the "7 communities" project - all people relocated from railway land for rail expansion projects).
- **Row-houses arranged in a cluster plan:** In the group's initial plan for the new housing, each family will get a 45m² plot (5 x 9m). With help from the community architects, the people developed a site layout with the 10 houses arranged in clusters around common open spaces.
- **Now registering as a cooperative:** The 10 homeless families are now registering themselves as a cooperative, so they will have a legal body to take the land lease and get loans.
- **Housing finance package from three sources: CODI, ACCA and Selavip Foundation:** A \$20,000 revolving loan fund from ACCA, for partly financing their new houses, will be managed entirely by the Homeless Network. This is also a first. The fund's first



loans will go to these first 10 families, for housing. They will also use some of ACHR's Decent Poor Program funds (from the Selavip Foundation) and maybe also some loans or a grant from CODI (that's still being discussed). Each 2-story row house will cost about \$5,000 to build (but the people will contribute most of the labor). Loans to be repaid in 15 years. Those who don't want to take on such a big housing loan may opt for a 1-story house, with a loan of \$1,700.

- **Who chose these first 10 families?** *They selected themselves!* At first, 20 people said yes! But after they discussed the project and the new responsibilities it would bring into their lives, the people were not so sure, and the number reduced to just eight people. Now it's back up to ten. These are the people who really believe that they can do it and are ready to make it happen.
- **The housing project for the first 10 will be implemented by the whole homeless network!** Other homeless people who stay in the center will help with the construction of the new houses. "We will stay friends." Later, more will follow them and build their own houses, as they develop their income and become more ready to take on the burden of repaying housing loans. But they need the example of the first group.

5. Second visit to the Homeless housing project in Bangkok, in October 2017

On a rainy October 24, 2017 morning, Chai and Tom from ACHR paid a visit to **Chumchon Mai Kohn Rai Baan**, the name the Homeless People's Network has given to their new housing project in Bangkok's Thawi Watthana District, in Thonburi, across the river from Bangkok. This historic project is the country's first permanent housing project to have been planned, constructed, managed and occupied by homeless people who are part of Bangkok's Homeless Network, with support from the Four Regions Slum Network, the Human Settlements Foundation, CODI and ACHR's ACCA Program. The first twelve houses have already been built, and the first group of homeless people who had been living at the Homeless Center in nearby Taling Chan, have moved in. We meet briefly with two residents (Awd, a woman who is a leader in the Homeless Network and helps people get ID cards and go see the doctor when they're ill, and Chang Lek, an electrician who works with the Chang Chumchon Community Builders Collective) and with Dong, who is on the staff of the Human Settlements Foundation and has been supporting the Homeless Network for many years. Dong lives and works in this area.

Community name: Chumchon Mai Kohn Rai Baan (New Community of Homeless People)

This is the first group of homeless people who had been living at the Homeless Center in Taling Chan, who were ready to take the big step of making and paying for their own permanent houses, in this new community being developed especially by and for homeless people.

Housing project details:

- **Land is rented from State Railways:** nominal rent of 20 Baht per m2 per year - same rate for community housing projects on railway land around the country, rate negotiated earlier. The land is zoned as agricultural land, so they can only build small houses, not buildings here. This land was to be part of a larger Baan Mankong housing project on the other side of the tracks (name: Baan Mankong Kruakai Lot Fai Sai Tai Tawantoke), but the Homeless Network asked to share a little of that land, for this housing project, and everyone agreed.
- **Each plot:** 4m x 7m = 28m2 (560 baht per year for *baan dio*, and 280 baht for *baan ruem*) 8 plots in phase 1.
- **Two house types:** Stand-alone houses (*baan dio*) and 4-unit shared buildings (*baan ruem*) (2 single rooms up, 2 down). Each room in the *baan ruem* has its own toilet and small kitchen, all cook separately. They also have a community bathroom, but most bathe in their own bathrooms.
- **Housing loans:** Housing loans came from the Homeless Network's own fund, and are given without interest. For this first phase of the project, the Homeless Network Fund got a grant from CODI of 1 million baht, and 600,000 from ACCA, which went into the fund (total 1.6 million baht). In the second and third phase, they will not have the ACCA funds, only additional CODI housing development grants, and whatever has been repaid from the loans. Each family borrowed 100,000 baht for the housing. *baan dio* repay 700 baht/mo, and *baan ruem* repay 400 baht/mo.



- **Construction costs:** The 100,000 baht was enough to construct a simple *baan dio* (2 of them) incrementally, and almost complete all the 2-story *baan ruem*. The concrete houses (2) cost 200,000 and the families had to pay the extra from their own saving. The *baan ruem* are all done.
- **12 units built so far in Phase 1:** 4 units of stand-alone houses (*baan dio*) + 8 single room units of shared houses (*baan ruem*). Total 12 households living here so far (19 people, including Khun Awd's 2 teenagers, no small kids).
- **They have the land for Phase 2 (25 more units).** 13 new homeless households (20 people) are now ready to join Phase 2 and are planning their house construction, will start soon. They might have a third phase also – it depends on how many homeless people are ready to take the step of joining the project and making their own permanent housing.
- **The Homeless Network is supported by the Human Settlements Foundation (HSF), the Four Regions Slum Network and CODI.**



A discussion about food with Awd and Chang Lek:

This new community practices the king's "sufficiency economy" principles and raises most of the fresh food they eat: they have a vegetable garden (where they raise papaya, bananas, cha-om, chilies, eggplant, pumpkin, bitter gourd, long-beans and other produce), and also raise ducks, chickens and pigs and have a pond and a big tank for raising *plaa duk* (catfish). Those who invest in seeds and help take care of the garden can take what they need for free, while those who work and don't have time to help, pay a nominal amount for vegetables (10 baht for a bunch of vegetables). There is enough for everybody. It means everyone has to spend much less, and everyone here eats very well.

- **Awd cooks for 4 persons in her family, 3 full meals a day, and spends 200 baht per day.** That sum includes the half-kilo of rice she cooks each day (@40 baht per kilo)
- **Chang Lek cooks for 2 people in his family, 3 full meals, spends 120 Baht per day.**
- They have to buy just a few vegetables that they don't grow, like *hom daeng* (shallots) and *gachai* (Chinese ginger) for their soups and curries, but they try to cook from what's in the garden, as much as possible. And even these extra vegetables they can buy at a nearby market very cheaply. Today, for example, Awd is going to cook *gaeng makaam*, and she will use the *dok-khae* (Hummingbird Tree flowers), chillies, tamarind leaves and green papaya from the garden.
- Their cooking staples like oil, bottled sauces, sugar, etc. they can also buy nearby and cheaply. One family in the nearby Baan Mankong project runs a small store that carries all the essentials, so no need to go far.

Khun Awd won a cooking contest recently! (Sept 17, 2017, from the Bangkok Post) Headline: "Army of homeless chefs seize control of their lives" (with photo of Khun Awd) Participants cook up a dish as they join the 'Aroi RICE Ban' cooking contest aimed at providing homeless people with career opportunities. The homeless team squared up against professional chefs as the event was co-hosted by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) and a network for homeless people in front of the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre. (Photo by Pattarapong Chatpattarasill) Kannika Pujina (Awd), a former vagabond accustomed to sleeping in public squares, found herself competing with chefs from prestigious restaurants in Bangkok this month in a cooking contest aimed at providing homeless people with career opportunities.



6. Inauguration of the Homeless Shelter in Chiang Mai, in June 2018

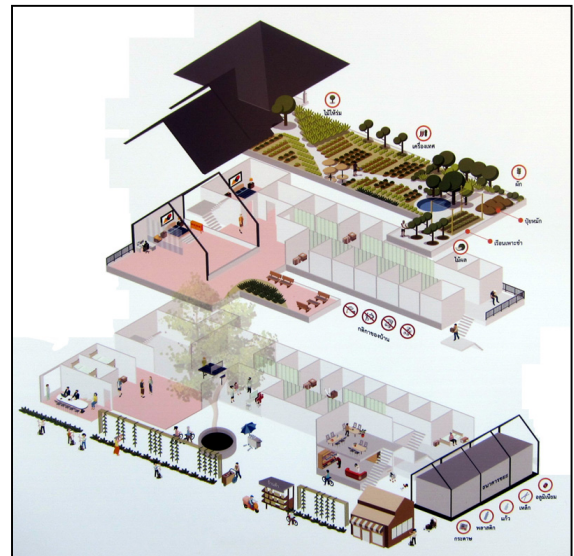
On June 28, 2018, a big crowd gathered to celebrate the opening of the new Chiang Mai Homeless Center, including the Minister of Social Development and Human Security and ministry staff, the vice mayor of Chiang Mai and city council members, the CODI director and staff, support NGOs, community network leaders from other cities, homeless network members from Bangkok and Chiang Mai, and a big group of homeless people from Chiang Mai. After the visiting dignitaries are taken on a tour of the new center, everyone gathers down in the courtyard, where marquees have been set up, for the speeches and awards. These are Tom's rough notes from the inauguration ceremony:

The new center building: The 2-story C-shaped building is arranged round a big courtyard which is shaded by a great big centuries-old rain tree (*ton kampoo*) that has been carefully preserved in the design. The main block on each floor is divided up into partitions for homeless singles, couples and families to stay, with bathrooms, meeting rooms and generous balconies on each floor. Lots of windows and good cross ventilation everywhere.

- **Building process used to improve building skills:** For the heavy excavation and concrete structure of the building, a local contractor was hired, but to bring down construction costs, a lot of the labor and finishing work was done by homeless people themselves. The building's design, which was developed by homeless network members themselves, with help from CODI's community architects, included a patchwork of wall construction systems, so the homeless people could learn how to build with different materials (brick masonry, plastering, wood, bamboo and recycled bits and pieces), so they could get construction work jobs later. This construction training was conducted by community builders (*chang chumchon*) teams from sister networks in Chiang Mai.
- **Spaces for singles and families, partitioned and not-partitioned:** The spacious living areas on two floors have some areas that are left open, without partitions (separate areas for men and women) and some areas that are partitioned-off, for families, singles or couples. That way, the center can provide a variety of shelter options for people, according to what they are comfortable with.
- **Roof garden:** On the third floor, a big roof terrace is being used for raising vegetables, in a project they are calling "Finding Green."
- **Cafe and bakery:** The network wanted their center to be a place that is open and welcoming to everyone - not just the people who live there. So when they were planning the new center, they decided to include a cafe and bakery on the ground floor. The cafe will generate income for the center and also function as a place to train bakers and baristas.
- **Spaces for income-generation activities,** like making tie-dyed clothing, community enterprises to make organic fertilizer, soap and washing-up liquid.

Homeless leader, Khun Narin, speaks: We homeless people have gathered together as a network for 11 years now in Chiang Mai. We also link with homeless networks in Khon Kaen and Bangkok. We hope to make an MOU with the Minister to support us and carry on this good effort to help other homeless people in Thailand. We appreciate that all of you have come to celebrate with us this important milestone in our development, as we open this new homeless center in Chiang Mai.

- **We started 11 years ago by gathering in public areas,** in parks and along the street, and began discussing with each other our ideas about how to have a better life. We made a trip to Bangkok to see the homeless network's center in Taling Chan, and came back determined to work hard to build our network in Chiang Mai. When I saw that homeless center in Bangkok, it changed my thinking totally: it's not possible to live alone in the street as homeless people any more - we need to find a way to work together and live together and support each other.
- **"Walking with coffee"** After the Bangkok trip, we began organizing an activity where we would go around at night to talk with homeless people in the places they tended to sleep or



gather, and invite them to a nightly meeting, with coffee, at 6 PM, outside the city's Tha Phae Gate. This was our chance to hear each other's stories, share information about what kind of services are available and find ways to support each other.

- **Started to plan our own center in Chiang Mai.** Ever since that trip to Bangkok, we have wanted to make our own homeless center here in Chiang Mai. We started to look for possible land and to negotiate with the local government, but land in this city is very expensive. We did find a small house to rent and set up a temporary shelter there, but the people in that neighborhood didn't like having us there and we didn't feel secure. And because the place was so small, most homeless people continued to sleep on the street, not in the shelter. We needed a more proper and more permanent shelter. We demonstrated for government support during the Abhisit government, and the prime minister agreed to support our shelter plans, but the money never came. So we demonstrated again, and a few years ago, the current government allotted a budget of 180 million baht (US\$ 5.5 million) for homeless centers in 3 cities. So we could finally buy this land and start planning our center.
- **This was private land, and it cost 26 million baht (US\$ 797,900).** The land is owned by the homeless network.
- **The building cost 5 million baht (US\$ 152,000),** and we are very proud of it because we all helped with all the planning and worked on the construction every single day, making progress little by little, until the building is now 90% finished. We will keep working on it.
- **Today we are proud to show show you what we can do,** and to give our big thanks to the Ministry and CODI and our friends in the Human Settlements Foundation for supporting us, and for all of you coming to celebrate with us today. We hope the center will help solve the problems of the homeless in Chiang Mai and will help give a better future to people who live in the streets.

We have decided to name our new center Baan Tuem Faan ("House of Fulfilled Dreams")

Another homeless leader speaks: This new center is not just a place to sleep, but a place where all the homeless people in Chiang Mai can gather and support each other to find their way to a better life. As we've seen in the Bangkok shelter, we hope that after staying in this shelter for a while, our homeless people can also build up their strength and be able to go out and have a normal life and make their own housing some day.

- **Rules and regulations in the new center:** In the Bangkok shelter in Taling Chan, their rule is that people can stay up to six months, and after that they have to stand up by themselves. We decided we don't want to have that rule here, and people can stay as long as they need to. But when newcomers come to the shelter, they can stay in the area on the ground floor with no partitions. After they stay a while, learn to live here with the others and commit to the process of supporting each other, they can move upstairs, to a partitioned space.
- **Savings:** We also have our own savings program, for people who live in the center and those who still live in the streets.
- **Waste recycling:** A lot of the homeless people in Chiang Mai earn a little income by collecting, sorting and selling recyclable waste. The new homeless center has a waste-sorting area on the side of the building and on the 25th of every month, all the materials are sorted and sold. Part of the profit goes into the member's savings, and part is used to support the center.
- **Welfare fund:** Homeless people have lots of health problems, many are elderly and crippled, and so one of the important things the homeless network does is manage its own welfare fund, to help with clinic visits and medicines, to which every member contributes 3 baht a day, or 150 baht (\$5) per month.

Giving of House Registration papers: One of the big problems of having no legal address is that homeless people cannot get house registration papers. These documents are like a citizenship document and enable people to access the Thai government



social programs like public health care, schools, access to public amenities like metered water and electricity. After the speeches by the two homeless leaders, officials from the local government formally grant house registration documents to the residents of the new center.

Award-giving: Awards are then given by the Minister for the network with the best saving, and three people get brand new electric fans as awards for "best participation in savings and participation"

The Minister for Social Development and Human Security speaks: I have heard that the project of making this new center has been a very long and difficult one, and I am happy to be here to appreciate what you have done. The homeless are our most vulnerable citizens. Like all of us, they have needs and they need a home. It is important that you have come together and found the way to meet those basic human needs using your own strength and your own togetherness. I can feel your commitment and your strength today, and it shows others that the homeless want to develop themselves and make a better life. Our ministry is happy to have the opportunity to support your work.

- It's good that your center is open to everyone in the area, and good that you are helping to open up the issue of homelessness to our society.
- It is also very important that you have your own committee and have set your own systems to govern yourselves and to set your own voluntary rules for the center, so you can live well together. That is something that is very important for our society, to live together happily - that is what I think of as being a *real community*, and ideal for Thailand. Our government keeps writing more and more laws, but I don't know why? I feel we should reduce the laws and support the people to set up their own rules and regulations, as you have done. I know your center here will inspire others. And if your rules and regulations don't work, you can adjust them. This center has no fences around it, and it allows freedom to people who live here - but with that freedom comes responsibilities to share, to participate, to follow the agreed-upon rules.
- I appreciate so much how you have used recycled materials and your own labor and participation to keep the cost of the building very low. And I appreciate the roof garden - I am a village boy and I like this idea of growing your own vegetables up on the roof very much.
- I know that the homeless network in Khon Kaen has gotten the land, but not yet started building their center.
- Keep going. The more you work together, the more CODI and the Ministry will help and keep listening to you. Now we know that 5.7 million people are still homeless or living in squatter settlements in Thailand. So we still have a lot of work to do together to make sure these people have secure homes too. *Thank you and happiness to all of you. (The minister and his entourage are accompanied to their vans by a group of young men in traditional Lanna dress beating drums)*



Some reflections on the inauguration of the new Chiang Mai Homeless Center

Later on the the day, the national Baan Mankong sub-committee held its monthly meeting at the CODI office. But before going into their committee work of reviewing and approving new housing projects, a few of the committee members offered these reflections on the morning's program and the new homeless center here in Chiang Mai:

Supat Chanthana, Director of CODI's Northern Region Office: We are all so inspired by what the homeless network has done, to find their way to a solution. The center is well designed - it is their own design and reflects how they want to live. Two things are important about this: (1) it is very important that they have linked together as a network and have worked out their solutions together, and (2) in the beginning, some of the neighbors around the new land were not happy about having the homeless living there, but the network spent time to meet their new neighbors and build a friendship and understanding with them, so that now they are welcome in the neighborhood.

Chawanad Luansang ("Nad"), Thai community architect: Here is proof again that no matter how poor or marginalized they are, if people have an opportunity to come together, organize and manage themselves, they can start with small steps and make



a big change together. The center explains itself in the participatory design, which shows how the homeless are developing themselves at the same time they develop their new center.

Professor Vimut, Mahidol University: It's not easy to find land in this expensive city, especially in that central neighborhood. The fact that the homeless network kept searching, kept negotiating for many years, together with their cost-saving design, is the key to their big success. Getting land is the key issue, in both urban and rural areas, because in Thailand now, there is extreme inequality in income and in land: 10% of the population own all the land, and 90% of the population are landless.

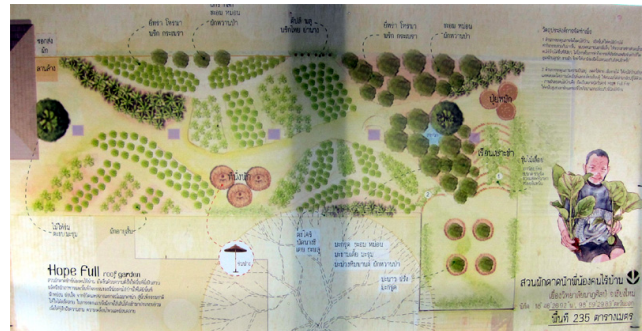
Professor Pao, Arsom Silp University: The role of the

local government in developing this project has not been as strong as it could have been, and the local government doesn't show this project as an important initiative in their city. The building design seemed a bit rigid to me, and it will be difficult to adjust how the internal spaces are used because of the built-in partitions. It's important to look at the design as being able to transition and accommodate new uses in the future. Last point: now there is homelessness everywhere, and it's increasing: it is good to question why homeless are more and more, and fix the root causes of that.

Mr. Palin, Rural Social Welfare Network: During the inauguration program, I went walking down the lane and spoke with some of the neighbors, and got a good response from them. They feel the new center makes the lane look nicer, and have now accepted the homeless network as part of their neighborhood.

La-Ong Dow, Rural Land Reform Movement: The rooftop garden is a very good idea, but they need a more efficient system for using that area, if they are serious about growing vegetables up there. We can help them to make a very productive farm in that small area, and turn that center into a vegetable supermarket!

Mr. Name?, from 4-Regions Slum Network: I am also very proud of this project because our network took part in initiating it. During the project, we had an idea to do construction training, so the homeless can develop the skills to build a whole house. Now many of them have these skills and will go to Khon Kaen to help the homeless network there to build their center.



Naticha ("Oy"), community leader from Khon Kaen: When this project first came to the CODI committee, we all asked, can this homeless network manage such a big budget? Now we realize that they have potential and can do the project so well! It is proof that all human beings have a lot of potential and dignity. And it's also important that this project can show how the poor can live in the middle of a rich city. Now we have a class system in this country, and this project can help make things more equal, can soften the distinctions between those who have and those who don't have.

Paa Nong, Community leader from Chum Phae: In my province, if you are homeless, you will be taken away to the government's shelter, which is not a fit place for any human being. This good project gives the homeless the freedom to do what they like, to think about their lives and to encourage each other - and nobody is locking them up, nobody is telling them to *do this* or *do that*. I can feel that the homeless here realize now that only they can make their own future. We have to support the homeless people, because the work they are doing to collect scattered homeless people into a network is not easy! When we build a network of slum dwellers or homeless people, that work can make us very tough, because we have to fight for everything. But there is also a human process behind that fighting that we can't forget about - a human process which makes us more gentle, and enables us to trust each other better, listen to each other better and respect each other more in our communities. Those are the things that make our lives worth living.



Ms. Pasana Srisattha ("Kanor"), Community leader from Narathiwat Province: The government has to re-evaluate what it is doing about homelessness, because their shelters are like prisons, and they dehumanize people. If they can come see this project in Chiang Mai, they will see there is no need to do it themselves, but only let the homeless do it themselves. Today, we saw the Minister visit the homeless people's project - and the minister hugged them all! I only regret that the local government in Chiang Mai has been slow to show respect for the power and potential of the homeless in their city.

Somsook: The role of the community architects in this project - and in so many of the housing projects around Thailand - is so important. The architect can help transform homeless people's ideas into something tangible and concrete. For that reason, the design process is a very important and very exciting part of the process of making change. If that design process is managed well and with a lot of creativity and sensitivity, even the poorest and most marginalized can take part, and the process will make people stronger at the same time it makes something new. This is not only true for the homeless, but for other communities also, in rural and urban areas: *the design process can make people strong.*



7. Historic news of Bangkok's Homeless, from ACHR Newsletter in October 2003

In October 2003, ACHR published a special issue of its newsletter, "Housing by People in Asia" on eviction. In the Thailand section of that newsletter, there was a page devoted to the problems of Bangkok's homeless people, and their early efforts to organize and negotiate with the city for their own shelter. Here is the text of that page (the whole newsletter can be downloaded from the ACHR website at www.achr.net):

The case of the homeless: *How a high-profile eviction from Bangkok's historic parade ground became a launching pad for a homeless people's movement in the city*

For two centuries, the Sanam Luang (parade ground) in front of Bangkok's Grand Palace has been Thailand's premier public space, the venue for coronations, royal funerals, festivals, democracy demonstrations. For the city's homeless, this vast expanse of turf has offered a safe shelter in an increasingly hostile concrete mega-city. But in August, 2001, the city announced plans to close Sanam Luang from 11 PM to 5 AM, effectively evicting hundreds of homeless people and vendors. The closing was part of a much larger plan to clear the entire historic center of Bangkok of virtually everything built since 1910, and turning the area into a kind of tourist park. If this mad scheme ever actually happens, it will mean the eviction of slums, housing colonies, ministries, universities, theaters, public buildings and entire neighborhoods (but that's another eviction story...).

Over the past few years, the **Human Settlements Foundation (HSF)**, a Bangkok-based NGO, has worked with the Four Regions Slum Network to use eviction crises to organize large numbers of communities living along the railway tracks and under traffic bridges to come together, form networks and develop their own on-site and resettlement housing programs with which to negotiate long-term secure housing solutions. When plans of the Sanam Luan closure were made public, they decided to try using the same networking techniques with Bangkok's homeless groups.



1. Making contact : The first step was to make contact with homeless groups in different parts of the city. This was no easy task, since most have had bad experiences on the streets, are reluctant to trust anybody and quick to move on. The only contact most homeless people have with officialdom is with the police, who hassle them, or with staff from the Social Welfare Department, who herd them into vans and transport them to rehabilitation centers. So they were understandably wary when some young activists began coming around to talk about the government's plans to close Sanam Luang.

2. Surveying : Once they'd made some friends among the homeless groups, the next step for the HSF was to carry out a survey, which they had to conduct in a single night, so nobody was counted twice, using several teams to cover 13 inner-city locations where groups of homeless people congregate. They counted 630 people, which they estimate represents about half the homeless people in Bangkok.

3. Meeting : In July, 2001, before the planned closure of Sanam Luang, the HSF organized a public seminar to discuss the issue. Sirinanad, a homeless woman leader, presented the survey information to an audience of academics, officials from the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA), media people, activists and homeless people. "Homeless people are not criminals," was her message to this historic meeting, "We want to have a better life, but what we are lacking is opportunities."



4. Negotiating with BMA : The HSF and the newly-formed homeless network were unable to persuade the city to postpone the closing of Sanam Luang, but they were able to get the city to provide a temporary homeless shelter, first in a tent close to Sanam Luang, later in a space offered by community people in a railway settlement at Talingchan. The streets and open grounds offer little in terms of safety or amenities - especially for women and kids. So the first task was to set up a shelter for the homeless. The city also agreed to construct the city's first permanent homeless shelter on a piece of railway land at Bangkok Noi, which the people found and negotiated for themselves. The HSF is now working to strengthen the homeless network, expand the savings groups, and begin exploring longer-term shelter options which work for this extremely poor and vulnerable group, such as subsidized rental rooms or transitional housing in vacant buildings.

Photo caption : The prevailing myth is that Bangkok's homeless people are drug addicts, beggars or mental cases. In fact, most are workers from Bangkok who've lost their jobs during the economic crisis, but because they lack family or support networks end up becoming homeless and isolated. Some earn their living collecting recyclable waste, some are daily laborers, some are vendors. Most are working-age men, but the survey also revealed that there are homeless families, whose children, as they grow up, become vulnerable to the drug scene and prostitution.

8. Boonlert from the Human Settlements Foundation talks about his work with Bangkok's homeless, in September 2002

In September 2002, Thomas Kerr from ACHR had the following conversation with Boonlert Wisetepreecha, from the Human Settlements Foundation, about the volunteer work this 29-year old Thai man had been doing with the homeless in Bangkok, while he was a masters student in anthropology at Thammasat University. This transcript of that discussion provides a useful record of a very early stages of the process by which the homeless in Bangkok began organizing themselves and finding allies...

What kind of work you have been doing with the Homeless? First essential thing for helping the homeless is to set up a shelter for the homeless. Don't force them to live in the streets or Sanam Luang or anywhere. There is no safety for them in those places, and conditions are bad - especially for women.

Where do people stay? Sanam Luang, Morchit transport station, Hualamphong station, also in one big area under the expressway where over 100 homeless people live.

Who are these homeless people? Are they poor country people coming into the city looking for work or coming to try to do something without family contacts to help them here? I don't know the homeless group - difficult to talk about. They don't have a problem about their mind. Normally, people look at homeless and misunderstand them, think they have mental problems, think they are crazy. This is not true - most are fully sane. A lot of homeless are NOT migrants from rural areas coming to Bangkok looking for work. No! When the economic crisis, they lost jobs and lost support structures, and don't have kinship network to help them, so they are alone, and isolated, so when they have problems, there are not family networks to help them, so they end up becoming homeless.

Are homeless mostly men? More men than women, but when we survey them, we also find many homeless families. I study about this in international documents about the problem of homeless families.



Have you done a survey of homeless people in Bangkok? We surveyed homeless people at 13 points where they stay. Found about 630 people, which we estimate represents about half the homeless people in BKK. I think that the homeless in BKK are around 1,500 people total. Human Settlements Foundation and the Homeless People's network are working to asking to talk about the giving information and going to count people at the same time, everywhere, in one single night. Because many people move from place to place, so we had to do the survey in one night, so nobody gets counted twice.

Is there a network of homeless people? Our objective is to set a network of homeless people. That is difficult to set up. The homeless have freedom to move around, so difficult to pin them down to one location, lack of community. Also, they aren't aware of their rights. They aren't reliable (?). In Thai language the homeless people call themselves *Pi*, which means ghosts! Normally the public doesn't use this word for homeless people - its the word they use. Why? Because they don't have reliable place, always moving around, here and there, transient, invisible. Tell lies, don't speak the truth and don't trust each other, don't trust anybody. When we suggest that they gather into an organization, they don't trust together. They will speak that they are interested, but in reality they are not interested.

Why don't they trust? Many have had a lot of bad experiences and they don't trust anybody. We will have many times to work closely with their group, to make them to understand that we are NGO working to help your group. It takes a long time before they trust me. So I don't like to working with other things, I concentrate on the homeless group. Because if I don't stay a long time with the homeless group, when they have freedom to go out, I cannot see the group again. They are moving a lot. Hard to catch them. They don't understand we are NGO, because in their way of life, they meet only government staff and police, who hassle them. And they don't like the staff of Social Welfare Department. Most of the Homeless people think we are the government staff from Social Welfare!



Why don't they like the Social Welfare staff? Because the Social Welfare staff will bring the homeless people to the government's center - but in the center, which is very far from the center of the city, they have no freedom, no jobs. And they will have to stay together with people with mental problems! They don't want to sleep with these mentally disabled people - like an asylum.

Asking government for a homeless center near the center of the city: So our presentation to the government is asking to set up a center near the center. We don't want the big land. I think in some area, we can start a few pilot shelters to begin. First one is near Sanam Luang. Our group pressures BMA to set shelter for homeless. But its very late. The negotiating happened in September 2001, and the government agreed, land was allocated, etc. but now it is a year later and the government doesn't move. Still not finished.

Didn't the government set up a shelter after the homeless were evicted from Sanam Luang? No. The government gave the reason to the public for cleaning Sanam Luang. But when they evict the homeless. This method, the government must have many staff and officers to prevent homeless people to protect the Sanam Luang from sleeping there. But now many homeless have come back to sleep in Sanam Luang. Samak has plan to make a wall around Sanam Luang to keep the people out, but many people and civic groups around the city have moved strongly against this - fencing off an area which has for 225 years been a public ground! Sanam Luang is the public place, not like any other park in Bangkok. Sanam means open field - its not a park to be locked!

If the government wants to have the healthy city, the method of setting a homeless safety budget done, you will use many staff to protect from the homeless. The BMA will waste a lot of money to keep the homeless away. If you want a healthy city and clean city, the city needs to set up a homeless shelter, it shouldn't evict and patrol Sanam Luang. Will have social welfare.

When people are homeless, how do they make their living? Many collect and sort recyclable garbage. Some are vendors: like selling paper or plastic to sit on at Sanam Luang during outdoor concerts to sit on. Also daily employees laborers - day by day.

How about the homeless families, how do they manage? Many times, the children will stay together with the parents while the parents are working. But when they are teenagers, they go alone, leave the family. That is the big problem because they grow up without home. Especially for girl children, who are sexually exploited and lured into prostitution, and for boys lured into drugs - using and selling. If government doesn't take care of this problem, it will become big!

How many of the 630 homeless people are children? I don't have the data with me, I'll give you later.

What about the Homeless Network? Next year, we will start with the project to campaign with the public that these homeless people are not criminals, and they want a better life, but they have lost the opportunities. Ask society and government to give them opportunities only. During the Sanam Luang eviction, that provided an opportunity for the homeless to negotiate directly with the government. But otherwise, there are not opportunities to negotiate directly, because they are so scattered.

I think this campaign will pressure the government to make something for the homeless. We will start to contact with the NHA to interest about the homeless. In the past, homeless people were connected only to the social welfare, but if we look at homelessness in a new way, we look in the direction of housing problem. Their problem is lack of housing, not social welfare and insanity, etc. Really the role of the Social Welfare is keeping beggars out of center! But most homeless are not beggars - just a few! In Thai, begging is against the law.

When the eviction happened in Sanam Luang, what role did you play? I will have the document about - we give information to the homeless people about the governments idea to close Sanam Luang - what do you think about it? Most of the people think if Sanam Luang closes, we will move to sleep anywhere. We also present to the people why the government will close Sanam Luang, and present alternative solution. First time, I went to Sanam Luang and gathered about 20 homeless persons to talk about the closure. Before the eviction we gathered and discussed. Then when we talked to BMA, it was not only the homeless and vendors, went all together to negotiate with BMA, supported by the 4-Regions Slum Federation - I have many pictures about this meeting and activity! I have the photos of the first meeting of homeless people at Sanam Luang - the historic first meeting!

Negotiations with BMA about Sanam Luang closure: And photos to negotiate with BMA, but BMA confirmed it would close Sanam Luang. They agreed to set up a tent for the homeless people. Our group tried to negotiate to delay the closure of Sanam Luang, to give time to prepare the homeless and plan alternatives. But BMA refused to delay closing, but set up tent.

Problems of temporary tent for homeless: Tent was near Sanam Luang, around 200 or 300 meters away. Very near, but it is an open place. No management. Foundation cannot manage, authority of BMA has no interest to manage. They just set up the tent and let people come and go - no management at all. Open, no control of traffic. HSF tried to use the tent as a headquarters to try organize the homeless people for around two months, but many problems there! Many lessons for us! One problem: in an open tent, we cannot screen the people who come in and go - and when we don't screen, some people make a problem, especially for selling or buying drugs. This became a big problem. And our group is not police. Second lesson: problem about fighting between homeless people - not too much but some aggressive people, especially teenagers and young men. When they have the aggressive, some people don't want to gather or come together. Selecting people is very important to set the group of the homeless.



Tent closed, HSF and community make temporary shelter: Now the tent is taken down, and our group has made a temporary shelter inside the railway slum community at Chumchon Talingchan (about 3 or 4 kms from Sanam Luang), on railway land, with support from the community. Community people offered the space, and HSF supported to build the building, people built by themselves. In May - June 2002, this year, rains came, so need to get place for people. Rainy season very difficult time for the homeless, so our group needed to set up a temporary shelter for the people while we wait for the BMA to make good its promise to set up the proper shelter. And even though this temp shelter has been in use for 5 months, we just had the formal opening ceremony on 19 September 2002, calling monks to bless. So we are very busy! We invited the BMA to see what happened, but they did not come.



What about the BMA's land for the permanent shelter? Any developments? BMA agreed to give the land.

1. **First step**, we negotiate with the BMA to set up the homeless shelter and present alternative to rent land from the State Railway for the shelter. Because near Sanam Luang don't have land for the shelter - all expensive land and old buildings.

So idea to rent Railway land not so far away. 4 Regions Slum Federation has a strong working relationship now with the State Railways Board, so we used that connection to negotiate for a piece of land. Movement of the Homeless people has a lot of support from the 4 regions slum network.

- 2. Second Step.** BMA agreed to set the shelter and prepare the budget for the building. But we asked the BMA to contact the Railway to rent the land, but now the homeless are going straight to the Railway to approve and permit the land rental for the shelter. Where is the land? Near Baan Khunnon, near Bangkok Noi. Thonburi Bangkok Noi, near Sirilat Hospital, near Jalansili (?) Road. Most of homeless content for this area, very close to Sanam Luang, good location for homeless. So we negotiate directly with Railways to approve the land and BMA to rent the land. BMA will pay the rent and provide the building.

Delays : Railway has approved the BMA to rent in March 2002, and still we are waiting for BMA to start process of building! IN the bureaucracy it is very slow. BMA says it is looking for contractor. And setting the plan for the center. Are you working together with the BMA to make the plan for the center? This is the bad for the process. When we started to negotiate with the BMA, we negotiated with the secretary (?) - not Samak. Process to rent is made by city governor. He does not want the people to participate in the process - participation is not his style. So the city will design the building? His plan is to divide totally women from men. He doesn't understand that there are many homeless families where men and women need to stay together. You can't break up families inside the shelter. He doesn't understand.

When we negotiated about the staff of the BMA, they said please don't delay this project and let building continue, and when building is finished, we will make an agreement about the homeless families and regulations about using the homeless center.

Who will manage the homeless center? The BMA's Community Development Division. It will be managed by the city government, not by the network or by HSF. This division we hope that the experience will be able to work together with HSF. This department has worked with HSF in the past with the under-bridge communities, so we have experience working together, they have had a good exposure to our way of doing with people. So when we talk to the staff of the Community Development Division, it looks like they understand OK.

So eventually, are you going to try to find land for these people so they can have proper houses, like with the under-bridge settlers? Or now only shelter? I think it's two or three steps:

- 1. The homeless shelter** - this is not complete housing for the homeless people - just short term. In the long term, we will think about housing for the homeless. This is not similar to under-the-bridge - these are very poor people! We cannot make a building, this is a long way away for these people.
- 2. Rental rooms in center of city :** Next, we will present to the BMA to have special rental rooms - very cheap - for these people, in the center of the city. And rent rate about 300 or 400 baht per month. I think now many poor people rent rooms in very bad condition for at least 1,000 Baht per month. If NHA makes cheap rental rooms, this will be real welfare to the poorest and homeless people. New idea!
- 3. Transitional housing in vacant buildings :** I'm not sure about the building of economic bubble. Now there are a lot of vacant buildings in Bangkok - one idea is to improve shelter for homeless is to make shelter in vacant buildings. In shelter, have fee for electricity and water, but don't charge rent. In the long term, this is temporary for one or two years. IN the mean time, they can work, save money, prepare themselves for a more permanent situation. It's a kind of transitional housing while they strengthen their organization and their economic position.

Do the homeless have a savings group? Now, it started in the tent after Sanam Luang eviction. I talk people one thing that we communicate with the public, we want to show that we want a better life, and we have the saving group to show this. The homeless were interested. But to organize that first group, I took a lot of time and a lot of work! *And now the saving group is going?* Yes going. About 22 or 23 members. *Save daily or weekly?* They save whenever they have money - daily, weekly, monthly. *Where is money kept?* Staff of HSF together with leader of Homeless, save together. When we start saving group, the homeless people were not reliable together, so need support from HSF. *How much do people save?* Altogether about 1,000 Baht per person aggregate saving. So maybe total saving around 40,000 - 50,000 Baht so far. So far no loans - only saving and withdrawal. No loans yet. HSF proposed starting loans for occupation, but the people said no not yet! Don't trust people to pay back, will bring a lot of problems.

How about the movement to keep Sanam Luang open? Civil groups, NGOs, academics, architects, homeless people, communities all joined this movement? Homeless people joined this movement too. Sirinanad (?) she is the key homeless person to communicate with public, to explain that we are homeless, we are not criminals! We want to better life, but we lack opportunities. When we organized a seminar, she made a public presentation. From this seminar, a July 23, 2001 newspaper article (*shows clipping*), before the Sanam Luang was closed, we invite the academics and NGOs to come and comment on the policy to close Sanam Luang. My teacher came!

Ratanakosin Development Plan: what about governments plan to evict many people from area? Koh Ratanakosin. In Thammasat University, there is a big movement to oppose that plan! This cannot be implemented I think because there is not the budget to do this. Because many people live near the river. I hope it doesn't happen! This opinion is the copy from Europe -

they think tourists want this kind of thing, with transport by boat and river without community, no shops. Thammasat is also anti this - but now they are moving Thammasat students to Rangsit. And the student movement is not strong now to resist this. Very bad. B.A. students at Thammasat is now moving to Rangsit. Only Masters students will stay there. Thammasat University has not enough money, is looking for income - if they remove masters students from this Tha Patat campus, nobody will come to study there and pay the big fees! So Thammasat keeps the MA students there. People like to study in that place, in the middle of the city, historic location. Now a lot of the best teachers are fleeing Thammasat and going to Chiang Mai University, which is the strong university now.