

Approaches for Engaging Self-Reliant Housing Sector towards  
Sound Living Environment in the Southeast Asia and Vietnamese Cities

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This paper explores multiple approaches for applying the energy and resources of the self-reliant housing sector, whereby people construct their own houses using individual resources, usually outside of the required legal process, towards formation of sounder residential environment within a framework of the city planning policies, through community organization and collaboration with public/private entities. Section 2 presents the findings of previous study on urban housing development in Hanoi/Vietnam, particularly the “booming” of self-reliant housing since the 1990s and related issues. Recommendations for addressing such issues have mainly been for the government, and/or policies on involving private institutions. However, based on the experiences by other developing countries in the Southeast Asia, a shift in housing development/provision activities and related policies from the public to private sector leave out those who could not afford the market price housing.

Alternatives to housing supply by profit-making enterprise include self-reliant activities and those supplied by the non-profits. Collective efforts in housing construction and living environment improvement have long existed in both the West and East; and the majority of housing supply is still provided by such efforts in many of the Southeast Asian cities today. In Sections 3, examples in Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand are introduced whereby people organize themselves to develop their own houses/improve their living environment through collaboration/networking. Such initiatives are taken by cooperatives and the community-based organizations (CBOs), with a support by, and partnership with government institutions and non-government/non-profit organizations. While these examples may not be directly applicable to Vietnam considering differences in political, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, they may provide an idea for approaches in engaging SR housing sector toward more cohesive development of living environment as a whole. Section 4 considers potential for building of more sustainable living environment in future Hanoi/Vietnam by organizing self-reliant activities through community-based approach.

*Keywords: self-reliant housing, living environment improvement, community based approach*

## 1. Introduction

Between 1999 and 2004, the country of Vietnam's economy grew steadily. Just like many of the cities in other developing countries, Vietnam's major cities face the shortage of housing with the growing number of population. The construction of public housing has been at halt since the political reform in the late 1980s, and while the government housing agency and private developers are now engaged in new housing development, the most of the housing supply has been supplied by the self-reliant activities of individuals using their own resources. In many cases, the land tenure is unclear where self-reliant constructions take place. And only to exacerbate the situation, these activities usually take place outside the legal/organizational framework1).

## 2. Issues of self-reliant housing in Hanoi/Vietnam

Researchers affirm self-reliant housing construction practices, which basically originated out of the political/economical situations and needs of people. Yet they voice concerns for the issues related with self-help housing that need to be addressed:

1) Need for change in legal institution/procedural requirements concerning land use right certificates

-people often do not have required documents to obtain land use right certificates

-without the land use right certificates, people cannot apply for construction permit

2) Need for policies/programs to ensure adequate public infrastructure provision

-road construction/upgrading are necessary for automobile access necessary to address traffic/fire safety concerns

-adequate provision of infrastructure (water, electricity, sewer, garbage collection, etc.) necessary for social welfare and public health.

3) Need for a device to engage individual households in collective decision-making for community planning/urban design

A streetscape of self-reliant housing, close-up image, and construction of self-reliant housing are shown in Figures (Fig.) 1, 2, and 3, respectively.



Fig. 1 Streetscape of self-reliant housing



Fig. 2 Close-up image



Fig. 3 Construction process

### 3. Living environment improvements by people and community in the Southeast Asia

#### 3-1. Movements for the right to adequate housing in Asia

Countries in the Southeast Asia other than Vietnam also face the problems associated with existing and on-going self-reliant housing activities (both formal and informal) in the urban area. Many countries in the region (such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand) shifted the national housing policies from mass production/provision of affordable housing by the government to market-oriented housing supply by the private industry since the mid-1980s.

However, because the for-profit housing market usually targets mid- to higher-income groups, lower income group would be left out of such market without some form of financial support (such as government subsidy). Also, it is often the case that lower income groups do not have access to formal financial market to take out on a loan/mortgage<sup>2)</sup>.

Table1. Examples of Community-based Settlement Improvement Projects by Country

Country Name	Project Name	Project Location	Target Community	Land Tenure					Physical Improvement				Social/Economical Empowerment					
				Own	Lease Rent	Land Sharing	Re-location	Land Acquisition	Up-grading	Re-blocking	New Construction	Infra-Provision	Community Organization	Mgmt. Training	Skill Training	Loan	Information	
Indonesia	Kampung Improvement Project (KIP) <sup>(1)</sup>	Tanah Tinggi (Jakarta)	Mix of lower- and higher-income									•						
		Habun Pisang, Habun Sayur (Jakarta)	Lower income		• <sup>(1)</sup>							•						
	Comprehensive Kampung Improvement Project (C-KIP) <sup>(2)</sup>	27 kampungs in Surabaya	Lower income		• <sup>(2)</sup>				•			•	•	•	•	•	•	
	De la Costa Project	Manila suburb	Lower income	•				•			• <sup>(3)</sup>	•						
Philippines <sup>(4)(5)</sup>	Anni Multiple-Purpose Cooperative (AMPC)	Auripolo	Squatter settlement	•				•					•				•	
	Brotherhood of Urban Poor (BUP)	Marikina City	Squatter settlement	•				•				• <sup>(5)</sup>	•				•	
Thailand <sup>(6)</sup>	Baan Mankong Program	Nao Sang	Low income			•							• <sup>(6)</sup>				•	
		Charoen Chaisatitmai	Low income	•						•				•				
		Nlong Toey	Low income	•			•											•
		Ruan Samaki	Low income			•					•	• <sup>(6)</sup>				•	•	

Notes:

- applicable
- (1) Type of the right is *hak pakai* (the right to use).
- (2) 1998-2001 achievements include: 660 land certification and 176 building permits.
- (3) Provision of core housing (with a roof, doors, windows and a kitchen); house owners to work/invest on the interior of the house
- (4) Community is planning to construct 124 townhouses with a common area.
- (5) Road is donated to the city for maintenance and operation.
- (6) Community began preparing plan for laying basic infrastructure.

Source: (a) World Bank (1995)  
 (b) Dhakal (2002)  
 (c) Kawano (2004)  
 (d) Otsuki (2004)  
 (e) ACHR (2003)

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### 5. Conclusion

In Vietnam's major cities, just like the metropolis in other Southeast Asian countries, housing shortage brought by economic and population growth has been dealt with the self-reliant housing activities, through which people use individual resources in satisfying their own housing needs. While such activities are encouraged for provision of adequate housing for urban population where government attempts and industry market fall short, they also raise issues such as legality, adequacy of public infrastructure provision, and conformity to urban planning/design of such activities.

This paper sought approaches for engaging the self-reliant housing sector to form sounder residential environment through community organization and collaboration with public/private entities. Indonesia's projects were successful in engaging the community through GO-NGO partnership, in which the international aid organization and a local university demonstrated strong initiative. Examples in Philippines reflect the establishment of NGOs/NPOs that play a prominent role in the country's community development. Thailand's program builds on the successes of the community organizations and their network through which information on

effective undertakings were shared and learning were provided.

As much as there are dissimilarities that stem from each country's socio-economic, cultural and historic background, these examples have in common the process to which people of the community participate, and the system that ensures such process with people's commitment of resources (such as time, labor, and in some cases money), as well as the support provided by the governments and NGOs/NPOs.

Notes:

- (1) For example, Loan and Nishimura (2004)<sup>13</sup>) indicates the data of the Chief of Architects Office of Hanoi as follows: the share of self-reliant housing construction to the total area of new housing construction in 1998, 1999 and 2000 was 74.7%, 68.7%, 68.6%, respectively.
- (2) According to the government statistics, 73% of houses acquired during 1998 in Indonesia were from the self-reliant sector (Sato, 2002)<sup>14</sup>). In 2001, 58% of the newly registered housing in Thailand was built by individuals (Aoyama 2003, in Kawazoe 2004)<sup>9</sup>).
- (3) Vietnam's economic growth rate in terms of GDP between 1999 and 2004 were 4.77, 6.79, 6.89, 7.04 and 7.24, respectively<sup>15</sup>)
- (4) Loan and Nishimura (2004)<sup>13</sup>), Luan (2001)<sup>16</sup>), and Evertsz (1997)<sup>17</sup>) point out the negative social impacts of self-reliant housing construction that: are not in compliance with city planning, break the spatial order, often lack adequate infrastructure provision.

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