



Unequal Development affecting the Urban Poor: Case Study of Bunromsai Community, Soi Phetchburi V.

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Abstract

This research aims to study effects of development on urban poor, how the urban poor handle unequal development and to study the urban poor's viewpoint to development. The research is qualitative research with participatory observation research method. The researcher interviewed 12 key informants such as the leaders of community, unofficial leaders, slum dwellers in the community and staff in a non-governmental organization. Together with documentary research from related research papers, related academic articles about the urban poor. The result finds that unequal development affects their housing rights and affects the workplace of the people in the community. Most of the people in the community earn their living by being hawkers, so that if their houses or land are expropriated and they have to move to suburb area, it will threaten their occupation. The people in the community have established a savings cooperative to accumulate community savings for the 'Secured Housing' project, or to negotiate with the State Railway of Thailand to allow them to rent its land for the community's use. The viewpoints of the people in the community toward the development of the Bangkok Metropolitan area are: 1) the development of the metropolis should be along with development of the urban poor and everyone who lives in such metropolis. In addition to this, such development should empower the urban poor and others who live in the metropolis without any suppression 2) Development of Metropolis that doesn't consider the urban poor is capitalist's investment that doesn't care about its effects to the urban poor in the area. Their habitats are expropriated and forced eviction occurs.

Keywords: urban poor, unequal development, inequality, EEC

1. Introduction

Bunromsai community is situated along a railway stretching from Phayatai Rd. to RamaVI. Rd., spanning one kilometer in length. The community itself is one of communities in the land reclamation plan of State Railway of Thailand, SRT, that legally owns land in the area. The land reclamation plan results from Eastern Economic Corridor, EEC, which is a part of 20-year strategy for Thailand to achieve high-income status by 2036, initiated by the National Council for Peace and Order, NCPO, the military junta who overthrew Yingluck's government in 2014. Such Strategy is called the strategy "Thailand 4.0". As of 2017, prime minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha had invoked the special authority of Section 44 of the interim charter to revoke city plans in three provinces in Eastern Thailand, namely Chachoengsao, Chonburi and Rayong in order to terminate obstacles to EEC development. Bunromsai community is situated in the land that would be prepared for high-speed rail connecting three airports, namely Donmueng International Airport, Suvarnabhumi International Airport and U-Tapao International Airport. General Prayut Chan-o-cha's cabinet approved in principle to develop high-speed rail connecting three airports on 27th March 2018 to be a part of EEC mega project. Later, there was a signed agreement between SRT, and a private company named Asia Era One Co., Ltd, formerly known as The Eastern High-Speed Rail Linking Three Airports Co. Ltd., in affiliation with CP Group, one of the biggest capital groups in Thailand.

The high-speed train project connecting three airports led to land reclaim in Bunromsai Community, where the urban poor lived for many years without any notification from SRT. Moreover, the project will worsen inequality situation in Thailand. According to Credit Suisse report on inequality, 1% of the population owns 58% of all properties in Thailand (Credit Suisse Global, 2018). The number of billionaires increased from five people in 2008 to 28 people in 2015. In contrast, 10% of Thai population or 7 million people lives below the poverty line. This data reflects that Thailand's national economic and social planning initiated in 1961 failed to reduce economic inequality. The urban poor who live in the community will face eviction and have no shelter led to crisis in earning their living. As a result of this, the



researcher wants to study how urban development affects the urban poor. How the people in community handle urban development that exclude them and to study viewpoint of the urban poor toward city development to find solution for them.

2. Objectives

- 1) study how city development affects the urban poor.
- 2) study how the urban poor encounter development affecting their lives.
- 3) study viewpoint of the urban poor toward city development.

3. Materials and Methods

This research is a qualitative study. The research methodology used is area-based research for resistance. The researcher takes the standpoint of the oppressed who have been affected from state power and threats from development, collecting data from related documents, then setting up research questions, research objectives and conceptual framework. The researcher collects data by in-depth interviewing 12 key informants e.g., community leader, informal community leaders, non-governmental organization staff and slum dwellers. Such key informants play a vital role in organizing the organization called the Network for the Urban Poor Affected by Railways, NUR, and have played a vital role as leaders to struggle for their rights for habitat.

4. Results and Discussion

Most key informants in Bunromsai community defined the urban poor as ones who have very little income, living from hand to mouth, have no roles and rights to live in urban area. Some of them might rent shelter close to their workplaces. Some might reclaim land along railways or vacant property in order to build up their shelters because they didn't have enough income to rent for residences. In addition to this, some of them are big families and cannot live in vertical habitat e.g., apartment, dormitory etc. As a result of this, they had to build horizon habitat in order to live with the whole family and to reduce their rental cost. Some of key informants admitted that they have trespassed the area without any intention to occupy the area. They just wanted to rent the land for their living place at a reasonable price matching up with their income.

Additionally, most of the key informants informed that the urban poor are ones who shoulder the burden. They are linchpins of Bangkok metropolitan area because most of the urban poor are informal-workers, hawker stalls, and workers in service sectors close to the community. They sell goods and services at low prices to salarymen or some middle-class who work in offices at reasonable price, so that their customers can afford to buy cheap food and goods. In contrast, the urban poor must face difficulties in high cost of living e.g., electricity etc. Some of the middle-class's viewpoint toward the urban poor is that the urban poor sell cheap food they can afford that leads to reduction of their expense in urban area. However, some middle class see the urban poor as ones who invade public land.

In the article names "sharing SRT land for community habitat" (Wisetpreecha, 2021), the community's leader interviewed that the middle class who buy a house in suburb area think that they have to travel tiredly through traffic jam to work in the city center why the urban poor can't do so? He explains that because their occupation and their income source differ from the middle class. "Try to think about vendors or hawker stalls, they used to push their stalls to the place nearby, they will not be able to push their stalls from Lakhok station in suburb area to work in Phetchaburi Soi 5. In addition to this, the people in the community who earn their living by being housekeepers whose income are very low will face difficulties if they have to pay for transportation, their expense will be increased till their income won't be enough for living expense. Moreover, children in the community will face difficulties in education after the eviction, since they have to study in another school close to their new house, which means the children have to adjust themselves to the new place, new schools, new friends etc. (Supaporn, interview). The research finds that the development the urban poor in Bunromsai community are excluded from participation process in the project affects both habitat and their occupation because most of them earning their living by being hawker stalls, motorcycle taxis, sewers, and other informal workers. Development in the area leads to



forced eviction, even though they have lived there for many generations without any notification from SRT. The area will be rented out to the developer corporate to run the railway connecting three airports. As a result of this, the people in the community will be evicted. However, they attempt very hard to negotiate with SRT in order to be able to rent the land in the community or other lands in urban areas to be able to live in the city center to further their occupation (Shao Kerdaree, interview).

Fighting a lawsuit is not the only problem the community faces, they try very hard to find solution for a new land to build up new habitat under the project of Ban Mankong from the Community Organization Development Institute (CODI) in order to secure their rights to housing. The community's committee negotiates with the Ministry of Transportation to rent a 18 Rais of land in Makkasan Complex for Bang Mankong project, but the proposal is rejected. Makkasan Complex is a part of the speed railway project belongs to SRT and SRT rejects this proposal because it will affect SRT's income.

The reason they ask for 18 rai of land comes from the fact that they have discussed building a horizontal shelter to suit with their occupation of hawker stall, they have some equipments such as push carts, etc. If they move to vertical shelters, they will face difficulty finding space to keep their equipments. The solution from the negotiation with SRT is that if they cannot build up Ban Mankong in Makkasan Complex, SRT will allocate land for them to rent in Soi Morleng with the area of 4 Rais, close to Makkasan swamp. In addition, the shelter will shift from horizontal shelters of Ban Mankong of Codi to vertical shelters of the National Housing Authority, and the community accept this solution (Keongpaiboon, 2022).

Even though SRT and the developer company, Asia Era One Co., Ltd, want them to move from the land, a people's organization called Four Regions Slum Networks with support of NGOs tries very hard to organized urban poor affected from city development especially those ones who live along railways and set up the Network for the Urban Poor Affected by Railways, NUR. The Network for the Urban Poor Affected by Railways is a network of the urban poor affected from SRT's expropriation of land, established in late 2022. More than 10 communities have joined the network. The researcher observes that there are some rules for people to be able to join the NUR such as 1. must be ones who are really affected by SRT land expropriation project. 2. must join every activity organized by the community 3. must strictly and continuously have montly saving and the Network will survey the community to check that they really live in the land because they must count for the number of the people who are affected in order to calculate for area, they have to rent from SRT for a new habitat. Moreover, there is support among communities affected from SRT and developing the area in the communities in the Network to have better environment. As a result of this, the NUR is the network of the uban poor who need secured habitat area.

The researcher observes that the people in the community are in unity and trust the community's leaders very much, so they have the same direction of struggle. Currently, they live illegally in the area, but they want to legalize it which means they must rent the land from SRT legally. However, it's in a negotiation process. People in the community have set up a saving cooperative in order to save some money to rent new land. Even though the shelters in the community are already pulled down, the community leader and members of Bunromsai community built some temporary shelter for one who will be expropriated. Not only the unity of members in the community, but also NUR assistance helps them to be confident for stronger struggles.

As the urban poor realize effects from city development that exclude them from the pariticipatory process, they have some viewpoints toward city development. Most of them understand that the city must be developed, but the urban poor should not be excluded. They should be developed at the same time and shouldn't be excluded from the development process. The informants want no one to be suppressed. The Urban poor must be able to voice out in order to participate in the development process as well as others do. From seminar titles "the cities exist with many lives", Sanon, Deputy of Bangkok Governor says, "there will be no city if there are no communities". Because a city consists of many communities. The most important point is to strengthen the smallest unit, if so, the city will be strong at the same time. When considering city development, most people think about streets, tunnels etc. In his view the city development is people's development at the same time as communities' development. The core of the economy comes from people's contributions. For example, travel involves the transportation of people, while construction requires manpower. It is essential for

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millionaires and workers to stay closer. As a result of this, taking care of communities is the core. There will be no economy building or tourism sector if we don't take care of communities.

From analysis of how development affects the urban poor can conclude that city development affects the rights to housing and occupation of the community dwellers which conforms with data in Siamrath online (2017) that describes about the most severe problems of the urban poor is the opportunities to earn their living which leads to insufficient income, more debt, low quality of lives and less access to state welfare. These problems are the effects of economic development that neglect social development. These problems lead to unequal development that widens inequality. The more a city is developed, the more inequality occurs. Solutions to problems are unity, cooperation, and struggle for the rights of the communities' dwellers.

5. Conclusion

The researcher finds that city development affects the community dwellers' rights to accommodation and their occupation, because they must be evicted. Moreover, because they earn their living by being hawkers and other informal workers, if they lose their shelters, they will face difficulties in earning their living. The viewpoint of the urban poor toward city development reflects from their opinions that they understand that they live illegally in the community, which belongs to SRT. However, they don't want to permanently occupy the land, but want to have rights to secure houses they can afford. Development should not exclude them from the participatory process while also being developed themselves as the city develops will be much better than contributing economic interest to the capitalist with the government's authority. In order to cope with the problems, the urban poor must be in unity and have strong networks with NGOs and support other communities as well as establishing a network of people who face the same problems. In addition to this, they prepare for long-run solutions by having a savings cooperative in order to be able to rent land to build secure shelter in urban area, so that they can earn their living in the city center with reasonable cost. Researchers suggest that there should be further research for the effects of eviction of community dwellers affecting from city development. Moreover, there should be some research about how the urban poor accomplish their demand by collective bargaining. What are the strategies and tactics of the movement.

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