

Understanding Community Resilience : Effects of home-based enterprises on community strength, Bangkok.

This project forms part of ongoing research collaboration between the Global Urban Research Unit at Newcastle University with supervisor Dr. Peter Kellett, and a team led by Dr Rittirong Chutapruttikorn at Bangkok University. The project also formed ties with KMITL University in Bangkok



Figure 1. Case Study Community Khlong Bua Kwan

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Introduction

There are 1604 informal settlements across Bangkok. The most visible kinds of which are the canal waterfront settlements. Traditionally Bangkok's canals not only helped to control the city's water levels but were used for transport. The introduction of the automobile meant the canals fell into disrepair, used only for dumping sewage. Today the informal canal-side settlements face serious social and economic hardships. In light of the recent 2011 flooding further physical hardships are becoming a concerning issue.

My personal research within the group investigated the home-based enterprises found within two case study canalside settlements, Khlong Bua Kwan and Khlong Bung Pai. As Tipple (et al) say "For many households in developing world cities, home-based enterprises are essential for a sustainable livelihood." (2002 : pp2). My research focusses on all forms of home-based enterprises looking specifically at how the communities' income generation were affected by the flooding and their role in increasing community resilience. The case studies selected were informed by Yins (1989) framework. Both were of a similar size: one was urban, within Bangkok's city flood defences, the second was rural, situated just outside of the flood defences.

This research project formed part of a detailed group study into the risks and vulnerabilities facing informal communities in Bangkok. A secondary focus of the group research was to test methods for collecting the relevant data, in particular methods of overcoming the language barrier.



Figure 2. Case study community Khlong Bua Kwan



Figure 3. Case study community Khlong Bung Pai

Aims

- To understand how the communities generate income and how it was affected by the flooding.
- To explore how home based enterprises increase the resilience of the community to natural disaster such as flooding.
- To test methods of gathering the data and communicating when there is a language barrier.

Methods

To gather the data required we spent a period of eight weeks undertaking fieldwork in Bangkok. In this period we spent time visiting community residents, building relationships and gathering information through informal discussions. I observed residents demonstrating their forms of income generation within the home, such as detergent making. Our willingness to get involved helped to break down barriers, show interest and also gain first hand knowledge of the process involved and how it was affected by flooding. Secondly I organised focus groups to discuss how the individual home-based enterprises collaborate and work together both within the community and externally through the networks. By drawing the physical space within which the home-based enterprises occur I gained a record and detailed knowledge of the physical requirements of residents day to day activities. I also visited at different times in the day which covered different stages of the home based enterprise activities.



Conclusions

Home-based enterprises supplement unstable household incomes, help households to have higher incomes than they would otherwise (Tipple 2006), encourage the development of skills and facilitate social interaction. This helps to strengthen community resilience to flooding.

The types of home-based enterprise alter the nature of resilience. Within the urban setting, the sense of community can be strengthened through shared collaborative skill based enterprises such as garland making. In the rural community the high collective agricultural production helps the residents be self-sustaining; surviving when isolated for long periods by flooding.

The visual methods I tested such as the demonstration were particularly efficient and successful method of obtaining information whilst gaining trust and rapport. Overall the ethnographic approach was invaluable in gaining an understanding of residents day to day lives.

References

- Tipple, G (2006) Developing countries: do they constitute 'decent work'? Work Employment Society 2006 20: 167
Tipple, G, Coulson, J & Kellett, P. (2002) The effects of home-based enterprises on the residential environment in developing countries. Building sustainable urban settlements: approaches and case studies in the developing world, London: ITDG Publications
Yin, R. (1989) Case study research: design and methods, Applied Social Research Methods Series Volume 5) London:Sage publications.



Figure 4. Khlong Bung Pai fishing



Figure 5. Khlong Bung Pai agriculture