

Bangkok slum lands

Policy implications of recent findings

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This pilot study of the size and growth of slum lands in Bangkok from 1974 to 1984 forms part of the general investigation by the Bangkok Land Management Study Team entitled *The Land and Housing Markets of Bangkok: Strategies for Public-sector Participation*. This paper examines four recent findings from two studies based on air photographs, and draws some initial policy implications from these findings.

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The study was prepared for the National Housing Authority of Thailand by Planning and Development Collaborative International (PADCO) with financial support from the Asian Development Bank.

Two studies were conducted using air photographs of Greater Bangkok taken in 1974 and in 1984. The first compared residential land use during the two periods, slums and squatters being one of the land-use categories.¹ The second used only 1984 air photographs but coupled them with field surveys to obtain an overall inventory of all slums in the city, their population, tenure status, landlord category (private or public), age, year of upgrading (if any), perceived threat of eviction, and levels of infrastructure services.² The Land Management Study Team extended the first study to more refined spatial units by collecting the data on a sub-district level, which enabled a more precise recounting of the earlier residential land-use categories. A further study by the authors of all slum lands in public ownership identified which agency owned which parcel of land. Further analysis by the study team identified which slums existed prior to 1974, and which were initiated after 1974 and could be identified in the 1984 air photographs. Finally, all slums which were identified in 1984 as being under threat of eviction were surveyed by the National Housing Authority (NHA) in early 1987, and preliminary results are now available on the extent of eviction during 1985–1986.³

This article attempts to draw some initial policy implications of four recent findings from the two studies:

1. The comparison of air photographs taken in 1974 and in 1984 revealed that the slums in Bangkok are growing at a slower rate than the city as a whole, and that the share of slums in the residential total decreased from 25.2% to 17.8% in the intervening period.
2. A survey of land tenure in all Bangkok slums revealed that the land rental system which supplied most land for slums, and was thought to be extinct, is still actively supplying land. More than 200 land rental slum communities were formed between 1974 and 1984.
3. A recent survey identified for the first time all the public agencies which own land parcels currently occupied by slums: temples and mosques (118 parcels); the Crown Property Bureau (74 parcels); the Royal Irrigation Department (48 parcels); the Treasury Department (37

¹National Housing Authority, *Bangkok Metropolitan Region: Housing Sector Study*, Bangkok, 1985.

²Sapon Pornchokchai, 1020, Japanese Volunteer Center, Bangkok, 1985.

³National Housing Authority, *Slum Eviction Survey – 1987*, Bangkok.

parcels); the State Railways of Thailand (34 parcels) and other agencies (72 parcels).

4. A still more recent survey of Bangkok slums facing a threat of eviction made it possible to obtain a clearer picture of the current magnitude of eviction and slum demolition on public and private lands. During 1985–1986, more than 5000 slum households were evicted and an additional 1500 were under demolition.

Generally, these findings indicate that, taken as a whole, housing conditions in Bangkok have improved over the past decade. Specifically, they call for further exploration of four related policy directions: the creation of viable alternatives to future slum growth; the maintenance and expansion of the land rental system; the preparation and implementation of comprehensive land sharing plans on public lands; and the effective management of eviction disputes by the National Housing Authority.

Four recent findings

1. The growth of slums

An overview of the growth of the residential sector in Bangkok is given in Table 1. While the residential sector increased by 62.9% over the period 1974–1984 (from 551 990 units in 1974 to 902 137 units in 1984), slums and squatter settlements grew by only 14.9% (from 139 326 units in 1974 to 160 147 units in 1984). In annual terms, the residential sector grew at 5% per year, while the slums grew at 1.4% per year. As a consequence, the share of slums in the residential total decreased from 25.2% in 1974 to 17.8% in 1984.

In terms of the number of households, it is estimated that in 1984 there were 183 677 households living in slums, an average of 1.15 households per slum housing unit. A survey of 2000 slum households by the National Housing Authority in 1985, analysed by the study team, reveals the average household size to be 4.95. Given this average, the population living in slums and squatter settlements is estimated to be of the order of 900 000, and given the added population living in small mini-slums which could not be identified precisely from air photographs, the total slum population is probably of the order of 1 000 000.

The average annual population growth rate for Bangkok from 1972 to 1982 was 3.6%, of which 1.2% was attributable to migration and 2.4% to natural growth.⁴ If we take densities in the slums to have remained approximately the same, the annual growth of the slum population would also be of the order of 1.4%, slower than the growth rate of the city as a whole including migration, and even slower than the natural

⁴National Statistical Office, *Statistical Yearbook, 1972–1983*, Nos 30–35, Office of the Prime Minister, Bangkok, 1972–1983. The average annual net migration rate was calculated assuming an identical population growth rate for urban and rural areas.

Table 1. Growth of the residential sector in Greater Bangkok, 1974–1984.

Housing type	Area		1974		1974–1984 (increase)				1984 (total)			
	KM ²	% of total	Units	% of total	Area	% of growth	Units	% growth	Area	% of total	Units	% of total
Land and house projects	13.3	7.2	20 193	3.6	29.8	223.9	93 562	463.3	43.2	14.5	113 755	12.6
Land subdivisions	76.5	41.2	31 393	5.7	20.2	26.4	39 072	124.5	96.7	32.3	70 465	7.8
Shophouses	8.5	4.6	134 766	24.3	6.8	79.2	112 787	83.7	15.3	5.1	247 553	27.4
Individual buildings	60.7	3.2	209 084	37.7	51.3	84.6	62 182	29.7	112.0	37.4	271 266	30.1
Slums	19.5	10.5	139 326	25.2	1.4	7.1	20 821	14.9	20.9	7.0	160 147	17.8
Institutional housing	7.1	3.8	19 156	3.5	4.0	56.4	19 795	103.3	11.1	3.7	38 951	4.3
Total residential sector	185.6	100.0	553 918	100.0	133.5	61.2	348 219	62.2	299.2	100.0	902 137	100.0

growth rate excluding migration. This means that other segments of the residential sector are accommodating part of the natural growth of the slum population. It also means that, if the slums are absorbing migrants, they must be losing local residents to other forms of housing to make room for these migrants. In general, migration rates to Bangkok have been rather low, partially accounting for the slow growth of slums.⁵

In addition, other forms of low-cost housing have made it possible for many slum families to move out of the slums into better housing with more secure land tenure, in such arrangements as informal land subdivision projects, low-cost housing projects and low-cost rental housing. The slums have grown and expanded, even though many communities were evicted to make way for new forms of urban development. Given the growth of population, however, slum housing has become more scarce than before, and the market in slum housing has become less active than other low-cost housing markets in the city.

The growth of slums between 1974 and 1984 is shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows two categories of slums: those existing prior to 1974, and those created in the intervening period. Slum areas which disappeared during the intervening period are not shown. These have been estimated to be of the order of 150 communities. Overall, therefore, there were approximately 890 slums in Bangkok in 1974, and this had increased to 1020 by 1984.

Slums are now generally absent from the core and outlying districts, concentrating in districts in the middle ring. The average distance of slum communities from the city centre increased from 7.5 kilometres in 1974 to 8.4 kilometres in 1984. New slums, created in the intervening period, are located further away from the city centre, at an average distance of 14.9 kilometres. In comparison, however, slums are still better located than other residential communities. Residential areas as a whole were 10.4 kilometres away from the centre in 1974, and 12.1 kilometres away from the centre in 1984. New residential projects are located in the same ring as new slums, approximately 15 kilometres from the city centre. Most new slum communities are smaller in size. Average community size was 205 households per community in the slums existing prior to 1974. Slum communities created in the intervening period had an average of 114 households per community, decreasing the overall average to 180 by 1984.

2. The growth of the land rental system

In general, there are two main types of land tenure in Bangkok slums: land rental and squatting. Both private and public landlords rent land on which people construct small, temporary structures. Later, the landlords supply the houses with basic infrastructure services: walkways, water and electricity. This arrangement has been in existence for a long time, and has made it possible for large numbers of low-income families to obtain housing in good locations, as landlords rarely charge economic rents. Most landlords rent land (even in the most central locations) for US\$0.03–US\$0.05/square metre, which amounts to US\$5–8 per house per month. In addition, there are charges for water and electricity which amount to US\$12–15 per month. Landlords generally overcharge for these services, perceiving them as a form of land rent which is simpler and easier to collect. Thus the real monthly rent for a plot may be of the order of US\$17–23.

The total capital investment of landlords consists of building a set of

⁵For an analysis of the factors accounting for the slow migration rate from rural to urban areas in Thailand see Shlomo Angel, 'Where have all the people gone?', paper presented at the International Seminar on Planning for Settlements in Rural Regions: The Case of Spontaneous Settlements, United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), Nairobi, Kenya, 11–20 November 1985.

catwalks, leaving the land unfilled and subject to flooding. In addition, there are minor investments in electricity lines and small-diameter water pipes. Houses are then built by the people themselves, who may invest between US\$800 and US\$2800 for a wooden house on stilts, usually with a septic tank for sewage disposal.

Earlier slum surveys have identified the land rental system as the main land tenure system, with squatters forming a minority system. It was assumed, however, that in recent years landlords no longer rented land, and that this system had become obsolete. A comparison of air photographs taken in 1974 and 1984 shows this not to be the case. Of a total of 740 slum communities which were already in existence in 1974, 632 communities (85% of the total) were land rental slums. In 1984, of a total of 1020 communities, 845 communities (83% of the total) were rental slums. Between 1974 and 1984, therefore, a total of 216 new land rental communities were added to the total, an average of more than 20 communities per year. In parallel, a total of 67 squatter communities were added to the 108 existing before 1974, bringing the total to 175, an average increase of seven communities per year. In relative terms, squatter communities have been growing faster than land rental communities, unfortunately an unhealthy sign, and possibly the result of a shortage of land rental arrangements in the more central locations.

In terms of the overall residential land market, however, these additions to the housing stock are rather small. If we consider the average size of a new community to be of the order of 115 households occupying 100 housing units, we find that the net addition of land rental slums is of the order of 2000 units per year, and the net addition of squatter communities of the order of 700 units per year. Given these orders of magnitude, we must conclude that most of the slum units which were destroyed through eviction were replaced by the expansion and densification of existing slums, rather than through the creation of new slums. Indeed, the overall area occupied by slums grew by only 7.1% between 1974 and 1984, increasing from 19.5 square kilometres to 20.9 square kilometres during the 10-year period.

Significantly, the proportion of slums on private land has been on the increase, most of this being in land rentals. This is demonstrated in Table 2. Slums on private land increased from 61% of the total in 1974 to 65% of the total in 1984, and 74% of all the new slums created in the intervening period were on private land.

Even though the increase in land rental communities, and particularly those on private lands, was not very significant in terms of its contribution to the overall residential totals, the continued existence of such arrangements is very important. It confirms that landlords are still interested in renting land for housing, rather than selling it outright. It suggests that the land rental system is alive and functional, and that its magnitude may be dependent on changing economic conditions as well

Table 2. The increase in the proportion of slums on private land.

	Public	Land-ownership category		Total
		Private	Mixed	
1974 slums	218 (29%)	451 (61%)	71 (10%)	740 (100%)
New slums	69 (25%)	207 (74%)	4 (1%)	280 (100%)
1984 slums	287 (28%)	658 (65%)	75 (7%)	1020 (100%)

as on government policy. The land rental system is more acceptable to the Thai people than the squatter system in that it does not infringe on the maintenance of property relations in land. Landlords are able to collect rents regularly, and slum residents usually clear the land peacefully once landlords decide to sell or transfer it to others. There has not yet been a case of a private landlord not being able to clear his land, provided there is no dispute with the existing residents. Landlords have usually paid compensation, both in the form of stopping the collection of land rents a year or more prior to clearance, or through direct payments to departing families to enable them to relocate their houses elsewhere. Successful land clearance has usually taken a year or more, allowing the residents ample time to find alternative locations.

3. Public ownership of slum lands

Previous studies of slum land ownership have only identified land as being either privately or publicly owned. The authors, in a new survey of all slums located on public land in 1986, identified the public agencies owning land currently occupied by slums. This included both land rented to the residents and land squatted on without the permission of the landlords. In some cases, particularly after slums had been destroyed by fires, slum dwellers who were previously land renters have become squatters, as landlords withdrew their rental contracts following the fires.

By 1984, there were a total of 287 slum communities located on land in public ownership, and an additional 75 communities located on land in mixed public-private ownership. There were a total of 382 slum land parcels in public ownership in these communities. In 272 cases, these parcels formed entire slum communities owned by a single landlord, while in the remaining 110 cases they were part of larger communities owned by more than one landlord.

Significantly, of the total 383 slum land parcels, 311 were owned by five major land owners:

1. temples and mosques;
2. the Crown Property Bureau;
3. the Royal Irrigation Department;
4. the Treasury Department;
5. the State Railways of Thailand.

The main characteristics of slums on land owned by these five public agencies are shown in Table 3. Other agencies owning slum land include the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, the Petroleum Authority, and the Port Authority, each of which is responsible for more than 10 land parcels occupied by slums.

The concentration of slum lands in the hands of a very small number of public agencies makes it possible to devise strategies for dealing with

Table 3. The characteristics of slums on land parcels owned by public agencies.

Public agency	No of parcels	No of households	Average age (years)	Upgraded %	Average distance to city centre	Threatened with eviction
Temples and mosques	118	30 248	14	20	5.8	16%
The Crown Property Bureau	74	20 481	33	15	3.9	44%
The Royal Irrigation Department	48	10 716	18	4	12.9	44%
The Treasury Department	37	15 876	37	43	3.9	27%
State Railway Authority	34	4 338	16	6	4.3	59%
All five agencies	311	81 659	22	18	6.2	30%

these slum communities in a more comprehensive manner. In the past, it was possible to carry out land sharing projects on single land parcels occupied by slums under the jurisdiction of the Crown Property Bureau, the Treasury Department, and the Port Authority of Thailand. These projects were based on a negotiated agreement between the landlord and the community, usually with the participation of intermediaries including the National Housing Authority. The landlord and the people agreed to share the land, part of it was returned to the landowner and the community resettled on the remaining part. Such schemes have been implemented in three slum settlements, and land sharing agreements have been signed in three other communities. In the future it may be possible to plan and execute land sharing schemes on a larger scale.

4. Rate of eviction

As mentioned earlier, the comparison of air photographs taken in 1974 and 1984 revealed 150 slum communities that disappeared in the intervening period to make way for other land uses. The large majority of these communities were cleared silently, in line with the understanding among land-renting slum residents that eventually the land would revert back to its owner. Given that there is no legislation in Thailand to protect tenants from displacement by landlords, there has been no recourse for slum dwellers in the courts. Thai law is very clear about property rights and consistently supports the legal owner of the land. The land titling system, particularly in the Bangkok area, is highly developed and leaves little or no ambiguity concerning property rights. Needless to say, there have been a number of incidents involving serious disputes between landowners and disaffected tenants who claimed they were short-changed, cheated, threatened with violence or arson, or stripped of their rights by corrupt officials in collusion with greedy developers. In a minor number of cases, invariably involving the occupation of public lands, squatters and slum dwellers have successfully appealed for more humanitarian treatment by the authorities, saying they had no place to go once their homes were destroyed.

Thus, while some communities have captured considerable media attention, others were demolished or removed without mention. Recently, however, a survey conducted by the Housing and Human Settlements Research Center of the National Housing Authority has attempted to provide a broader perspective on the magnitude of eviction in Bangkok. In essence, the Slum Eviction Survey of 1987 focused on 258 slum communities as 'threatened with eviction'. A summary of the preliminary findings of this survey appears in Table 4.

Between 1985 and 1986 more than 5000 households were evicted, and an additional 1500 were under demolition, an average of more than

Table 4. Summary results of the 1987 slum eviction survey.

Eviction status	Number of communities	Number of households
Outright eviction 1984-1986	49 ¹	5 073 (2.8%)
Under demolition	9	1 485 (0.8%)
Court order/preliminary action	12	1 226 (0.7%)
Eviction notice received	43	7 890 (4.3%)
Within planned land expropriation area	10	3 030 (1.6%)
Rumours of pending eviction	72	14 337 (7.8%)
No clear sign of eviction	825	150 636 (82.0%)
Total (1984)	1020	183 677 (100%)

¹Number includes communities only partially evicted, as well as households already evicted in communities under demolition.

Source: National Housing Authority, 1987 Slum Eviction Survey, Bangkok, (forthcoming).

3000 evictions each year. Given that there were a number of evictions from canal dwellings following the massive floods in late 1984, these years may have been unusually harsh years for slum dwellers. Still, if the pattern persists, the slum housing system may no longer be reproducing itself. Unfortunately, no new data exist on slum formation during the 1985–1986 period, and a more precise estimate on the rate of growth versus the rate of destruction of slums must await a new cycle of airphoto interpretation and analysis. It is sufficient at this point to note that the rate of demolition is of the same order of magnitude as the rate of new slum formation. It is also of the same order of magnitude as the total number of housing units produced by the National Housing Authority in a typical year. Moreover, it is usually the low end of the housing market which is being demolished, and in general this is not replaced by similarly low-cost alternatives, thus raising housing costs for the lowest income households.

Initial policy implications

1. Alternatives to future slum growth

Our findings show that the slum housing stock has increased at a slower rate than the natural growth rate of the city as a whole. At this point in time it may be barely reproducing itself, let alone 'growing like a cancer' as some would like to believe. The main supply-side factor limiting the rate of slum growth is the rapid growth of alternative housing arrangements.

At present there are several housing markets catering effectively for low-income people. First, there is a small market in core houses produced by the National Housing Authority at prices affordable to very low-income groups. Second, the private sector is now producing house-and-land packages for sale in the range of US\$6000 to US\$10 000. Many of these houses require monthly payments of less than US\$60 and can be afforded by at least the better-off third of households in the slums. Unfortunately, the slums offer better locations, being situated much closer to the city centre, in close proximity to many employment and income-earning opportunities. The richer people in the slums are thus occupying cheap houses, while they could afford more expensive ones. This, in turn, prevents lower-income families from finding low-cost housing solutions, particularly at short notice when facing imminent eviction.

Parallel to the low-cost housing market, there is an effective informal land subdivision market offering plots of land with minimum infrastructure services at prices affordable to the better-off slum families. Better still, there is a low-cost house and apartment rental market, offering cheap rental units ranging from US\$12 to US\$48 per month. These rental units are still being produced, and may yet turn out to be the natural replacement of the land rental system. They do indeed cater to the basic needs of poor people, providing a cheap place to live in an accessible location. In the majority of cases, they are also cleaner and better planned environments, escaping the 'slum' image of the self-built spontaneous settlements.

To the extent that housing policies are not oriented towards the maintenance of the more legitimate housing markets, people in need of a cheap housing arrangement may be forced to resort to squatting, thus

leading to a further deterioration of housing conditions. In a serious sense, a 'middle path' attitude is required to allow cheap housing arrangements to continue in low-cost projects, informal land subdivisions, low-cost house and apartment rentals and land rental arrangements, making special provisions to reduce housing expenditures for low-income groups so as to prevent more serious breaches of the law through squatting.

2. Maintaining the land rental system

The land rental system currently provides the largest bulk of low-cost housing arrangements in the city. It is a system that has worked for a long time, and is accepted by landlords as well as by tenants. Instead of looking for an alternative to this system, in the form of standard houses or apartments, ways of improving and extending it in the future need to be explored.

Low-income people who accept land rentals in good locations may not necessarily be looking for secure tenure and for the investment of their savings in housing. They may be looking for adequate shelter in a good location instead. Once their economic circumstances and their social standing become more secure, they may opt for a house in the suburbs, a plot of land to build on, or an apartment in a high-rise condominium. They would not be able to afford to pay the full market price of a plot of land in the location which they now inhabit in the slums.

If this is true, then there is a need to reorient housing policy towards land rental slums. There is no need to press for secure tenure in the form of proper land titles, but rather a need for proper leasing arrangements between landlord and tenant. Such contracts would increase tenure security by spelling out the duties and obligations of the parties, and in particular by setting time limits on the renewal of leases. Five-year or 10-year leases may be appropriate, allowing tenants ample time to benefit from any investment they may have in their houses. The key to such arrangements is increased understanding between the parties, the main tool to avoid future conflicts and disputes at the time of lease renewal. Tenants may be granted the right of first refusal when the landlord wishes to sell his land upon the termination of the lease. They may offer to buy his land at its current value, both individually or as a group.

The improvement of both the physical and legal arrangements in existing land rental slums may thus function to transform these slums into normal communities, eradicating their 'slum' image. This may be done physically, through the geometric ordering of houses and paths, and through clean-up campaigns. It may also be achieved through better community organization.

Beyond the transformation of existing slum communities, the land rental system for low-cost housing needs to be further promoted and expanded to create new communities. New landlords must continue to rent their land for housing. This may provide them with adequate incomes (of the order of US\$1000 per acre per month), while the value of their land appreciates. It may also help urban development by keeping land off the market until it reaches its full development value. New land rental communities may function as resettlement sites for older communities, without requiring heavy investments in land purchases. Given that tenants do not have to pay the full cost of the

land, land rental communities will continue to offer better and cheaper locations than land-and-house project sites. They may thus continue to appeal to low-income families seeking to trade off a more secure tenure for a better location.

The National Housing Authority, as the government organization charged with the promotion of affordable housing, should seek and find new landlords willing to lease their land. These landlords may be offered a number of services to facilitate the leasing of their land:

1. feasibility studies showing the income they could expect to receive from leasing their land;
2. legal advice and standard lease contracts;
3. site plans and infrastructure plans which would ensure orderly development;
4. financial assistance in the form of loans for the installment of walkways, electricity, drainage and water supply;
5. marketing assistance, particularly through contacts with families looking for a resettlement site.

At this point in time it may be necessary to initiate a pilot project, with a view to creating and testing the procedures for attracting and working with landlords wishing to lease their lands. The NHA may benefit from negotiating and working with landlords, particularly if it can obtain resettlement sites for evicted families at no cost. The NHA may also offer a number of services to the families themselves, both in planning and organization, and in financing construction.

3. Comprehensive land sharing plans on public lands

Given that most slum land in public ownership belongs to a very small number of agencies, the NHA may find it possible to negotiate with each one of these agencies for a comprehensive plan. Such a plan would aim at transforming all land in slum use into improved housing, while returning key land parcels to the agency for its own use or sale. While until now it has only been possible to negotiate land sharing agreements on a parcel-by-parcel basis, in the future it may be possible to negotiate a single agreement which would cover a large number of parcels belonging to one agency.

Inventories of all land parcels owned by each of these agencies have been prepared. What is needed is an agreement between the NHA and each agency to prepare a master plan for transforming all these land parcels into proper residential communities within a given time period. The NHA may engage in planning and implementing such schemes on a profit-making basis, using some of the land parcels for building houses for sale or rent to its own clients.

Many of the public agencies owning slum land perceive it as an asset on which they can capitalize, one which they can sell or lease to finance their operations. They are, however, more vulnerable to public pressure and to political pressure to use their land parcels which are currently occupied by slums for the social good, as well as for their own agency needs. Land sharing provides a potential tool for achieving both goals – freeing some of the land for the agency's own use, without displacing the original residents.

4. The management of eviction disputes

A Cabinet Resolution taken in 1986 urges, but does not require, public

agencies wishing to evict slum dwellers from their homes to offer them alternative housing. This resolution expresses the common feeling in Thailand that eviction produces hardship and suffering, and that it is a serious crisis in people's lives. The destruction of communities which have existed for long periods of time is a major loss of human contact and mutual support. It is also a financial loss, almost always leading to a deterioration in housing conditions.

The rate of eviction at present is alarming, particularly because other forms of low-cost housing cannot replace the housing stock destroyed, either in terms of its low price or in terms of its accessibility. There are indeed other alternatives, but they are less attractive to the lowest income families. They cost more, they are further away, and they offer better housing than necessary for the people's immediate needs. In an important sense, present slum housing is cheap and attractive to low-income people, even though it may look hideous to outsiders. Any action to destroy this housing stock which does not consider its proper replacement with viable alternatives thus contributes to worsening the housing situation in Bangkok.

Indeed, eviction without a viable housing alternative is the one blot in a generally improving housing situation in Bangkok. Housing is improving and is becoming more affordable to large numbers of households. The very poor, however, who can only expect to rent a small place, are still excluded from most forms of new housing. What they appear to need are cheap rental arrangements, stable enough to provide a good location in proximity to income-earning opportunities. Fortunately, the low-cost rental market is still active, and any measures to maintain and expand it will directly benefit those at the bottom of the economic ladder. Whether or not cheap house or land rentals can be produced at the same rate that slums are being destroyed is a matter for further investigation.

As mentioned earlier, the most important asset of slum living is access and not housing. Hence all arrangements which would enable people to stay where they are will better meet their needs than resettlement in distant locations. Extensions of existing rental arrangements, slum upgrading coupled with improved tenant-landlord relations, and the partition of lands through land sharing are all to be preferred to resettlement.

Legally, slum dwellers may not have any rights at all. They are often able, however, to exert political pressure on landlords and to embarrass them, particularly when landlords resort to illegal or corrupt means to achieve their objectives – arson, harassment and intimidation, and illegal dealings. In such cases, slum dwellers may feel that they have a moral right to stay where they are, and refuse to leave. Unresolved disputes between landlords and tenants may function to the disadvantage of both parties.

The NHA has been playing an important role in the management of eviction disputes. It has functioned as an intermediary between landlords and tenants, and it has promoted innovative means of resolving such disputes. While it cannot be expected to carry the burden of resettlement at its own expense, it can continue to play a major role in the resolution of eviction problems. These may take place in existing locations or in new locations. The cost of such solutions should be paid for from the benefits generated in the land development process.

In general, eviction disputes occur when land is ripe for development.

This is a time when the benefits from the land are at a maximum, and this is the time when the cooperation of the people is most necessary. It stands to reason, therefore, that all should share in reaping the benefits. This principle of sharing the benefits should guide those managing the urban development process, so that it may benefit all.