REPORT ON AN ACHR VISIT TO THAILAND, CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM

By
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1.   PREAMBLE

This report is the result of a visit to Bangkok, Phnom Penh, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Chiangmai between July 19 and August 04, 2001. It was a group visit. The group consisted of Andre Alexandar and his colleague Long (both of the Tibet Heritage Fund) and myself. For the Phnom Penh and Chaingmai visit we were accompanied by Maurice Leonhardt and for the Vietnam visit by Tom Kerr.

The objective of the visit was to try and understand housing and urban related programmes and projects in the cities visited and relate them to larger development issues. We held meetings with NGOs, government officials, community leaders, academic institutions and representatives of international agencies (for names and organisations see **Appendix - 1: Organisations/Persons Met**). The contents of this report are based on the information supplied by these actors in the urban drama and on my observations of conditions in the cities visited and development plans for their future.

The period spent in each city was far too short for developing a proper understanding of who does what and how in each context. Therefore, the report contains many generalisations, which may not be strictly speaking accurate. However, the similarity in the situation in all the cities with the situation in Pakistan (which I know well) is very striking and therefore perhaps these generalisations can be taken seriously.

Towards the end of the report I have tried to put down certain conclusions on the basis of which the ACHR could consider the initiation of certain programmes and the charting out of future directions. I am acutely aware of the fact that this report raises many questions and provides few answers. However, I have been told that most effective solutions are born out of questions - but there have to be people to answer them. If such people do not exist, or cannot be created, then there is something wrong with the questions. I hope this is not the case with the questions I have raised. To make up for this inadequacy, I have put down in **Appendix – 2** some quotations in which we can find some solace.

2.   BANGKOK: 20 July 2001

We had only one day in Bangkok where we attended two meetings at the Community Organisation and Development Institute (CODI) office. The first meeting consisted of community leaders and groups involved in the CODI process. My only comment on the

discussions in this meeting is that the groups seem to be taking on a lot of initiatives. I do not know how they can manage to be involved in so many parallel activities. They are fighting evictions; they are pushing government to adopt processes that are pro-poor; they are working out relocations; they are building infrastructure. During the discussion we got to know that all this is possible because their leaders were housewives (who did not leave their settlements) and unemployed persons (who had a lot of time on their hands). Although, there was a high level of awareness of poverty issues and possible solutions, none of the participants (as in all other Asian cities) knew of government plans for the city of Bangkok. The major problems the groups face in operating are related to keeping accounts and coordinating activities within the group and with other groups. A major problem of coordination is related to the failure to document meetings, decisions and follow-up actions. A question I have often asked myself is related to the nature of leadership within groups. Here again, I was forced to ask whether there is something special about groups being led by housewives and unemployed persons. Are there advantages or disadvantages in this and if so, what are they? How can the advantages be supported and the disadvantages be minimised? May be this is a subject for the department of sociology at a Thai university. Perhaps, the subject is unimportant and I am merely being "an academic".

The second meeting was at lunch. We met the CODI board and Somsook explained the CODI structure and its links with the Urban Community Development Office (UCDO). From the diagrams that Somsook drew, the CODI-UCDO link up is a huge network parallel to government institutions and development plans. How the two will integrate in the future is important. Without such an integration, CODI and the UCDO can die through unsympathetic decisions of a political government. However, if the CODI process continues and consolidates, its leaders and community members will probably get elected to the local councils and in the process control government funds and determine development priorities. Does one need to keep this in mind while developing the process or should the process determine its own future and direction? I cannot say.

3.   PHNOM PENH: 21 - 24 July 2001

3.1   Observations

Phnom Penh has changed since I last visited it in 1996. The changes that I have observed are given below.

- Considerable densification has taken place along the road where the municipal building is located and in areas off this road. This seems to be the down market area of the city. There are hawker's encroachments here and vendors use what is left of the pavements for storing their goods. A number of medium rise buildings have also been constructed. The construction is of poor quality and badly designed. There are a lot more bars and clubs.

- Land use changes have also taken place. Around the central market, storage and warehousing is replacing residential and retail outlets on the ground floors. Although, there are no major land use changes on the streets that form the parameter of the market, the areas off these streets are catering to cargo vehicles and informal truck stations, along with a growing services sector to transport. Similar conditions are developing around the Russian market as well. As Phnom Penh grows, these trends are bound to increase unless these activities are foreseen and planned for. I am

sure, similar developments are taking place around other wholesale markets as well. Also, the number of shops around and within the markets has also increased and so have visitors to them. This process of densification and transport and storage related land use change is causing considerable environmental degradation.

- Informal developments have also taken place along the corridor that links the airport to the city. These developments are in ribbon-form with fields beyond them. Similar developments are also visible on the corridors out of the city. The negative aspects of ribbon development for traffic, transport and the natural environment are well known. What is the reason for this form of development and can it be redirected? May be the Urban Resource Centre (URC) or academia might wish to investigate.

- From a city of bicycles, Phnom Penh has become a city of motorbikes and expensive cars. The parking of motorbikes poses a challenge for the city government. At present most pavements and road edges have been turned into motorbike parking and people walk on the street in many places. No effective public transport system has yet been put in place. People agree that it is needed since an increasing number of people come to Phnom Penh from the ribbon developments way out of the city. As far as expensive cars are concerned, it only shows that the state has removed all controls on the economy.

- People have now started to speak English, unlike before. English tuition classes have become common and so have tuition classes in information technology (IT). Like their brothers and sisters in other Asian cities, the Phnom Penh youth feel that English and IT are the two ways through which upward mobility can be achieved.

- During my last visit almost no women were visible in the streets at night. The situation has now changed considerably. This means that Phnom Penh has either become a safer city or poverty is inducing women to do night work.

- In the culturally and touristicly important areas of the city, the municipal government has done a lot of work. Roads have been paved, pavements have been built, the historic fabric has been protected and a large number of old homes and buildings have been renovated and turned into corporate sector or diplomatic mission offices. However, planning for the expansion of market activities (storage, warehousing), transport (cargo and truck terminals, services sector to transport) and or public housing have not been initiated. These have grown informally and in an ad-hoc manner. What will this do to the city in the next ten years?

3.2 The Players in Urban Development Drama

Discussions with various groups in Phnom Penh have identified the players in the urban development drama in the city. These players and their roles are given below.

- The major player seems to be the international corporate sector and other private companies. They are interested in acquiring land and built-environment assets for building tourist complexes, hotels and other real estate. This process has already started. It seems that government officials and politicians are hand in glove with these companies. A number of persons have mentioned that these developments are really "joint ventures" between politicians, government functionaries and the

companies. This relationship is determining the manner in which Phnom Penh is developing. Because of this relationship, government plans are kept secret and land ownership in official documents can be changed to suit the needs of the "joint ventures". "Private land can become government land and visa versa", we were told. This process is given as one of the major reasons for the relocation of poor communities to outside of Phnom Penh and is related to the nature of the government's beautification plan for the city which will lead to its gentrification. In many conversations it has also been mentioned that drug money is involved in these business ventures.

- There are a large number of international bilateral and multilateral organisations developing projects for the city. However, they have little or no knowledge of each other's work and often they are carrying out parallel development. In addition, almost all their work is project related. It does not fit in to a larger city development plan or programme. Thus, this development work fragments the city and is ad-hoc in nature. From conversations it seems that there is a French conservation plan for the city; ADB and World Bank funded water supply, sewage and drainage projects and a proposal for a ring road around the city. Meeting with a World Bank consultant confirmed that they have no knowledge of the other projects, not even those that relate to their own sector.

- There are a number of international NGOs (some national NGOs as well) working in the city. The work of these NGOs seems to be related to "poverty alleviation". This really means dealing with the repercussions of ad-hoc planning in support of private interest groups, rather than addressing the causes of poverty. Most NGO projects seem to function through huge fundings and as such will not be sustainable once support is withdrawn or curtailed. Again, the emphasis seems to be on projects rather than on programmes related to a city plan or vision.

- Small and medium size Cambodian businesses accommodate themselves in this scenario. They manipulate to find space, however small, in this institutional tyranny, to invest and make returns. Almost all their activities are considered down market by those whom we spoke to. This activity is considerable but there seems to be no organisation that represents it. There is however, a chamber of commerce and industry that is "supported by the French", whatever that may mean. But there are no market associations, hawker's unions, transporter's organisations, that people have heard of. There are reports that the shops around the central market are to be removed. For this reason alone, their association is essential. Again, we were told that motorcycle taxis have been prevented to ply on roads on which buses have been introduced. Is there a possibility of a motorcycle taxi union being created? Who will help create this and how?

- Community organisations and their leaders in Phnom Penh seem to have understood the development game and the actors involved in it. Where they are organised and supported by NGOs, they play the game as well. The game consists in accessing support in the form of funds for their relocation, housing and infrastructure. However, few communities manage to access such support, most become the victims of the government's official or unofficial plans.

- A number of garment industries have been established by foreign companies. These are employing an increasing number of Phnom Penh residents as workers. However, there is no control on working hours or on minimum wages. It seems that the workers are exploited. Recently, some factories were closed down because workers demanded better working conditions. As a result 5,000 workers are said to have lost their jobs. The decision taken by the companies will prevent further demands from being made. Who in "civil society" can articulate effectively the problems faced by the employees of these garment factories and how can they link up with poor communities? May be this would be a premature move damaging both to the workers and to the poor communities.

- "Civil society" in Cambodia is still weak, but there are human rights groups and individual intellectuals and social activists whose integrity is respected and who are out spoken against injustices in the system. Human rights is somehow not seen as the right to shelter and livelihood as yet. This is understandable given Cambodia's political history. These individuals and groups do not have links with community organisations and other interest groups since such groups do not exist, or if they do, they are not very articulate or known.

It is obvious from the points above that a stronger "people's lobby" is required to change the situation in Phnom Penh and the major issue, as in other cities, is the issue of land in or near the city and its non-availability for use by low income communities. Such a "people's lobby" cannot be created within government or with government support. Nor it can be created by NGOs who wish to build projects (not programmes) to alleviate certain aspects of so-called poverty. Nor can it be created by poor communities alone. It can only be created by a link between concerned professionals, organised communities, press and academia. However, support from concerned government functionaries and NGOs to a "peoples lobby" can help enormously.

3.3 Note on the Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) of the UN's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS)

With Peter Swan of the UNCHS, we discussed the PME of the PRS. I have a few suggestions to make. These are given below.

- Neighbourhood infrastructure cannot be properly developed unless it is related to a larger infrastructure plan. Asian cities are full of failed infrastructure projects for this very reason. Sewage systems have no disposal and water schemes have no water source. Drainage cannot take place because natural drains and depressions have been reclaimed. We should try to avoid these mistakes in Phnom Penh. How can we do this? We must ask ourselves.

- Enhancing productivity is one of the aims of the programme. Vocational training has seldom if ever improved economic conditions. Building of assets, reduction in commuting time and distances, formalisation and expansion of existing businesses and enterprises, on the other hand have improved economic conditions. But here again, to make the right decisions an understanding of micro level economic initiatives, their actors, their source of funds, the constraints in their development and their relationship with the macro level conditions is essential. Again, many such

vocational training programmes in Asia have been unsuccessful. The goal should not be to "alleviate poverty" but to develop assets, consolidate and expand businesses and thus create jobs rather than small fragile unsustainable "businesses" outside of the present system.

- The programme also aims at strengthening governance structures. An important aspect of strengthening governance structures is to help create and support interest groups that can promote their claims and guard their gains. Such groups need to be nurtured and supplied with information which can strengthen them and increase their negotiation potential. This will also increase the political voice of such groups and can also lead to the expression of their concerns and solutions in the national media.

3.4   City Development Strategy

The ACHR is involved with the UNCHS in the City Development Strategy (CDS) for the city of Phnom Penh. I feel that the ACHR's objectives for the CDS should be:

- **Overall objective:** To help create a more equitable relationship between the various actors in the urban development drama.

- **Specific objective:** To develop tools, processes and procedures within low income communities and interest groups to negotiate with government and to take over some of its functions within their neighbourhoods. This will empower them and create a more equitable relationship between them and government agencies and NGOs.

Within the 12 month period of ACHR's involvement, the above objectives are a tall order. However, a beginning can be made. What is required in the Phnom Penh situation is to organise communities and groups and link them up with other interest groups to push for the formation and publication of an overall plan for the city. This process should involve various communities and identify their problems in the larger context of the city. To be able to do this an understanding of what is happening in the city is required. What is also required is the identification of gaps in our knowledge of the city and of communities. As such, as part of the CDS I feel that five studies need to be undertaken. These are:

- **Trends** (physical, social and economic); their repercussions (especially on low income groups); causes and gaps in our knowledge.

- **Land issue;** ownership; location; vacant land; proposed land use; identification of gaps in our knowledge.

- **Relocation study;** this can be done by the URC and should focus on the repercussions of relocation.

  - **Economic repercussions:** i) For the land owner who is forced to sell his agricultural land for relocation purposes. It seems there have been protests against forcible purchase for this purpose; ii) for government agencies: the cost of purchasing land and whether the state can continue to purchase it given financial constraints; and iii) for communities who have to invest in house building and infrastructure, commute greater distances to work, establish businesses,

have no jobs available near or in the neighbourhood (especially problematic for women with small children).

- **Social repercussions:** i) Problems of social adjustment; ii) health and education facilities and expenses involved; iii) entertainment and recreation; iv) social isolation from city life. And what does the removal of low income groups from the city centre to the city itself in physical, social and political terms?

- **Physical repercussions:** An analysis of housing and environmental conditions in the new settlements and a search for more viable and sustainable alternatives.

- **Collection of proposed plans for the city:** All proposed plans and projects for the city should be collected and gaps, overlaps, parallel programmes, should be identified. And then, what do these plans mean for the poor?

- **Identification of various actors in the urban drama and of their interests:** These actors include government agencies, national and international NGOs, corporate sector and local businesses, communities, trade organisations, professional organisations, human rights groups and concerned and informed individuals.

In all these studies communities can be involved and their perspective should dominate the information gathering and analysis process. I feel that if this is done, a large number of informed community activists can be produced who will be an asset for the city in the future.

On the basis of these studies and dialogues and workshops around them, a vision for the city can be developed and a consensus on some of its points arrived at between the various actors. May be a permanent forum of interest groups could also be created. How can this be done? Jaya has some ideas and I am sure that he will articulate them in his proposal.

3.5   Urban Resource Centre

The Urban Resource Centre (URC) in Phnom Penh has evolved considerably. Its work is impressive and its staff has a confidence that it did not have when I last visited them in 1996. Maybe I feel this because we can now communicate in English. A number of new initiatives have also been taken by them. Their most impressive achievement is the mapping of settlements with the participation of 122 communities; the Urban Poor Crisis Forum (UPCF) which meets every month and consists of bilateral and multilateral agencies, NGOs and municipal departments; and the Young Professionals Programme (YPP).

URC's work at present deals almost entirely in supporting communities, NGOs and other donor and development agencies in the relocation process of low income groups from within the city to the city fringes. As such, the URC is reacting to government policies rather than proposing or promoting alternatives. It is also supporting NGO "poverty alleviation" interventions and provides legitimacy to them. On overall city planning, land issues, housing and infrastructure policies and related matters, it has not yet developed an opinion and nor has it begun a proper investigation. I feel that the URC should have a vision of the city and should be in a position to promote that vision. A beginning could be made by preparing fact sheets on the following issues: i) Physical trends in Phnom Penh

and their causes; ii) water issues related to the needs of low income groups; iii) sewage, drainage and solid waste management and how they effect low income groups; iv) land related issues and poor communities; v) the job market; vi) transport issues; vii) interest groups in Phnom Penh; ix) government plans: what they mean for the poor; and x) NGOs and their involvements.

These fact sheets do not require much work. Existing information needs to be collected, analysed and tabulated. What is missing needs to be identified clearly and mentioned. A study on relocations has already been suggested in paragraph 3.4 as part of the CDS. In the preparation of these sheets, the knowledge of the communities must be made use of and they must be a part of the process. The information provided by these sheets and the relocation study, will not only help the CDS process but will help the URC in relating city planning issues to the problems of low income communities. This will give a new meaning to the UPCF and to the work of the YPP. The URC must move from crisis related interventions to a position on city planning policies.

Much of the time and energy of the URC is spent in mapping settlements. Very few of the settlement people actually participate in the mapping process. Employing and training young people in the settlement to map and document their environment would have two positive results. One, it would reduce the burden of mapping on the URC as these young persons would perform this function for other communities and train other people. And two, skills within the community would help in the emergence of a parallel leadership to the existing one which it seems is over bearing. A three month training course for imparting these skills can be developed. A small cell of trained people can be set up within a period of a year to provide these skills to others. The creation of skilled "mappers" in the settlement with strengthen the communities and create linkages between them which will not be dependent on the URC, touts of political parties or on NGOs in search of a project into which they can put their money.

The URC structure too, could perhaps be made more rational and less heavy. It could consist of three units: i) Technical and managerial support to poor communities for relocation, fighting evictions and building infrastructure, may be through mobile teams; ii) Research Unit, consisting of one supervisor supported by the YPP. This unit will collect information, acquire government-NGO-other plans, analyse and publish them and help in holding forums around them. In addition, it will keep news clippings on relevant subjects and publish and or disseminate them in other ways so as to create public awareness and involvement. The unit should also suggest alternatives to government plans and promote them. The YPP involvement with the unit should be properly formalised and structured. Young Professionals should have a proper yearly renewable contract and specific subject of study and targets which will help in the formulation of alternatives. And iii) Networking Unit which will try and bring the various interest groups together to dialogue, develop and support and promote the URC alternatives and a vision for the city. Such a vision may include no relocation of low income settlements but their improvement and rehabilitation; the prevention of high-rises; protection of natural assets; the development of infrastructure for market, transport and other economic activities.

4. HANOI: July 27 – 29, 2001

4.1 Observations

Like Phnom Penh, Hanoi too has changed but less, since I last visited it in 1992. The changes observed by me are given below.

- From the air densification of the corridors out of the city has taken place. The little villages with small widely spaced tile roof houses have now been densified. The old built environment is dominated by concrete informal settlements with no proper planning, paved roads or sewage systems. On the fringes of these settlements, and in the open spaces between them, new construction is taking place. All this is visible from the air and in the journey from the airport to the town. These rural settlements are being urbanised in an ad-hoc manner. What is happening within the settlements, or who are the actors that are making this urbanisation possible, is unfortunately not known to me.

- Like Phnom Penh, the Hanoi streets are dominated by motorbikes. The bicycles and cyclos are in the process of fading out. Again, like Phnom Penh, parking of motorbikes is occupying entire pavements and people walk on the roads. Various solutions to this problem are possible and can be explored successfully. Unlike Phnom Penh, Hanoi does not have a large number of posh cars. This means that the state has not yet opened itself up for loot and plunder. There is still hope.

- The presence of the government is visible. New trees have been planted. Footpaths have been paved. Some form of solid waste management is in place, better than other Asian cities such as Bangkok. New street furniture has been installed and the old is maintained. The embankments along the lakes have been landscaped. May be this government input is only in the touristic areas of the city or in areas that the government wishes to conserve? Given our short stay in the city, I cannot answer this question.

- In certain locations old buildings have been renovated to house foreign companies, international food and or ice cream chains and brand names boutiques. The restoration work is impressive.

- A few high-rise buildings (almost all skyscrapers) have been built. So far they do not dominate the Hanoi landscape of beautiful traditional buildings and colonial architecture. Location for such buildings should be carefully identified so as not to destroy the present ambience of the city. But then, will not those owners who are prevented from building high-rises object that they are being discriminated against? If land remains the property of the state and is not made a part of the "free" market economy, this problem can be overcome.

4.2   Information Acquired Through Meetings and Discussions

Through meetings and discussions bits and pieces of information filtered through. Some of it was contradictory but a picture does emerge. The issues I consider important are given below.

- Hanoi has a master plan. However, this master plan does not relate to the demographic, economic and social reality of the city and as such, is more of a burden than an asset. For instance:

  - The population of Hanoi is officially about two million. In reality it is nearer to four million. This is because migrants to the city who do not have a Hanoi identity card are considered illegal. As such, officially their children cannot be admitted to government schools or be provided health care. Nor can they legally acquire a house to live in. The government recognises this reality and therefore rules and regulations are often bent to accommodate the needs of the migrants.

  - There is no provision for the regularisation or upgradation of informal settlements in the master plan. Yet, this does take place since the government sees no other possibility of dealing with this problem, but the regularised settlements do not get integrated into the master plan.

  - There is a conservation plan for the area known as the 36 Streets. The plan conflicts with the social structure of 36 Streets and its relationship to the larger economic context of Hanoi.

- During the last 10 years only 30 per cent of the housing demand in Hanoi has been met. This is because government is no longer providing social housing on a larger enough scale. Even the housing that it is providing is unaffordable to low income and lower middle income groups. These groups are finding houses in informal settlements that are being created by the subdivision of agricultural land on the city fringes or along the main corridors of movement out of the city. These informal settlements have no sewage, proper water supply or road systems. After they have been built, people try to get them regularised and in the process make informal payments to officials of relevant government departments.

- Foreign companies are making inroads into Hanoi. They are increasingly becoming job providers. Meanwhile, the old state industries are closing down due to failure to compete in the open market and with smuggling of foreign goods. Still the major employment in Hanoi is construction, "buying and selling" in Hanoi markets or on the pavements and other service sector jobs. Regular jobs are decreasing and day wage jobs are increasingly sought since there is no other option.

- Government investment in urban development is very large (500 million Dong per city per year) compared to ODA and UN projects which are a fraction of this. Yet, all activity (seminars, workshops, preparation of documents, interest of foreign NGOs, local professional involvements) seems to be centred around the ODA projects. No attempt is made to influence how government money is spent.

- Architects and planners in Hanoi see planning as a purely physical exercise. They do not relate it to social and economic issues. All attempts to bridge this gap have been unsuccessful although a number of studies trying to relate the two have been carried out by the Institute of Sociology at the Vietnam National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities.

- Hanoi has no public transport system. One point of view is that it is not required. This is because the people do not like to walk and would prefer to cycle or use the motorbike to wherever they want to get. If this is true, then what can be done to promote the two wheeler instead of cars? Also, can be have motorbikes with special silencers and run on electricity so as to prevent pollution? The practicality of this needs to be thought out and if feasible, it should be developed and promoted.

4.3   The 36 Streets

Old Hanoi consists of the pre-colonial quarter of The 36 Streets. The old buildings have been added to and subdivided to accommodate the formation of new families. Shops too have been subdivided in an ad-hoc manner. It is estimated that 50 per cent of the shops have been given to renters. Government plans to gentrify the area through a conservation plan which will displace a large number of households and businesses. Shopkeepers in The 36 Streets are not aware of these plans. Conversations with them reveal that they may be willing to live somewhere else but they cannot shift their businesses because this is where "business is possible" for their particular trade.

Conventional conservation of individual buildings for touristic or exclusive cultural use will bring about land use changes in this area. It is important to understand the impact of such changes on the economy, culture and sociology of the families that live in this area. Such an understanding needs to have a greater love and affection for people than for old stones and bricks. The Institute of Sociology has worked on this issue and is opposed to be government's conservation plan. Dr. Luan of the Institute is confident that such a plan cannot be implemented.

4.4   What is Needed?

What is needed in Hanoi is an attempt to bridge the gap between physical planning and social reality. How can this be done? The view of Dr. Luan is that a seminar/workshop on presenting the reality of the city and juxtaposing it to the existing plans would help. He is confident that all government departments and functionaries will attend and take an interest. He feels that examples from other countries would be useful. He is willing to arrange such a seminar/workshop with ACHR involvement. Hopefully, such an initiative can lead to the setting up of a formal or informal group in Hanoi that can promote the objectives of the seminar/workshop. The Institute of Sociology can perhaps be the focal point. For the success of the seminar/workshop, it is essential that a proper presentation on Hanoi's reality is prepared and various interest groups, including communities, participate in it.

Huong from the UNCHS feels differently. She is of the opinion that government agencies will not be interested in such a seminar/workshop and will not attend. Also, she feels that no informal group will be acceptable to the state agencies and that for a group to acquire formal status may take over six to seven years.

5.   Ho Chi Minh City: July 29 – August 01, 2001

5.1   Observations

This was my first visit to Ho Chi Minh City and therefore a comparison with how it was before is not possible. What I have noticed is:

- The canals and the river within the city are full of untreated sewage. Most of the canals are unpaved and silted up. On either side of them are shacks on stilts. The rooms are very small and the ceiling heights oppressively low. There are communal toilets built over the water and the toilet facilities have almost no privacy. I have never seen worse conditions except in certain settlements in India.

- Again, as in Hanoi, the presence of a city government is evident. New trees have been planted, some canals have been channelised and roads built on either side of them, some old buildings have been renovated and the town hall is immaculately maintained. Again, I cannot say if this is true of all areas or only for the town centre and the new redevelopment sites.

- Ho Chi Minh City is over crowded with motorbikes. Can Hanoi be prevented from becoming like this? And if so, how? However, the situation is much better than the traffic congested corridors of Bangkok, Karachi, Delhi or Bombay. In Ho Chi Minh City perhaps this situation appears more serious than Hanoi because of a much larger number of cars. Can cars be curtailed? And how? I feel the answers to these questions are important if the environmental degradation of these lovely cities is to be prevented.

- Skyscrapers have also come up in Ho Chi Minh City. They do not yet dominate the landscape and the old colonial architecture but unless some controls are put in place they ultimately will. Citizens and NGOs need to take up this issue.

5.2   Information Acquired Through Meetings and Discussions

Most of the information regarding the city was acquired through meetings with the Vietnam Youth Association Social Work Centre; staff and students of the University of Architecture; and Environment and Development in Action (Enda). This information is summarised below:

- Policies pertaining to Ho Chi Minh City are made in Hanoi. There was an element of resentment in the tone of the person who made this statement. This is seen as a problem.

- Government has no social housing programme that can be afforded by the poor. As a result, agricultural land is subdivided and sold to prospective house builders by middlemen as a "joint venture" between themselves, the landlords and government officials. Often permission for this subdivision is acquired from the government authorities. Where such permission is not acquired, the land owner and the middleman disappear leaving the new plot owners to negotiate tenure rights with government agencies. In this whole process a considerable amount of money

exchanges hands informally between the various players in the game and government officials. These settlements have no proper roads, sewage and water supply systems, schools and health facilities. However, schools and health facilities in the neighbouring settlements can be used by the residents.

- Much of the low income settlements are along the canals and drainage channels. The sewage of the city also flows through these water bodies. It is estimated that there were 73,000 households living in these conditions. 30,000 of them have been "relocated" and the water channels desilted and paved. The land recovered from them on either side has been turned into embankment roads and green belts. There is a general consensus that no more than 20 per cent of the displaced households have been relocated. The rest have vanished into other informal settlements and cannot be located. Meanwhile, middle income housing is developing along the paved canals. The building of roads and green belts along the water bodies is required under the zoning regulations of the city.

- The job market in Ho Chi Minh City has similar trends to that of Hanoi. Export Promotion Zones are being created for foreign investment; local industries are closing down; and day-wage labour is the only work that is easily available. A very large number of people come every day from the countryside carrying agricultural produce (food and vegetables) which they sell in the city as vendors or to markets and other retail outlets. Middlemen are also emerging in this trade who purchase directly from the producers at points along roads linking the rural areas to the city and then they on-sell to the city markets. The middlemen may emerge as a major player in this game as the city is discouraging vendors on the pavement and also wishes to remove "encroachments" from around the major markets. What does this mean for the livelihood of small producers and traders?

- There are a large number of ODA projects for the city. As in Phnom Penh and Hanoi, there is no coordination between them and nor do they follow an overall city plan. According to our host at Enda, Bang Anh Tuan, "they are a Vietnami soap of various ingredients". As such, they are a waste of resources and since much of them are loan projects, the Vietnami people will have to repay them and with interest.

- There is no sewage treatment facilities in Ho Chi Minh City. Even formal systems discharge into the natural water bodies. There is a World Bank funded sewage project. It is still a proposal which certain government agencies have objections to since "the cost benefit does not work out". The situation is similar to Karachi and may be the two cities can share experiences, perhaps through the suggested Hanoi seminar/workshop.

- At the University of Architecture the staff was interested in social housing and in bridging the gap between socio-economic realities and physical planning. However, this interest needs to be transformed into a formal system or at least a special course on the subject. How can ACHR assist? In this case, it is essential to create and institutionalise a working relationship between the university, a government institution and low income groups. All of them would benefit and a new breed of socially responsive planners and architects would be the result.

5.3   Possibilities

There are three important issues that emerged out of the Ho Chi Minh City visit. These are:

- If the zoning regulations of the city government can be changed, land reclaimed from the channelisation and paving of the natural drainage system can be used for rehabilitating the residents of the informal settlements along them instead of dumping them outside of the city. This can be done beautifully. Can someone prepare and promote such alternatives along with details of all the economic and social benefits of such a plan? Would the University be interested? Could Enda be involved?

- A rational alternative, keeping in view ground realities, should be prepared for sewage disposal for the city. It should consist of building sewers along the existing drainage channels and placing small treatment plants at their end. Looking at the map of the city and a visit to the canal, this is possible as an alternative to the World Bank plan. But then, who will do it, and why, and how?

- There is a need to document the middlemen supported housing processes. This will teach the Vietnam planners a number of important lessons. May be such a documentation and its promotion can lead to the formalisation, or at least an acceptance of such a process. Sensitively done this can go a long way in overcoming the demand-supply housing gap and at very little cost.

6.   CHIANGMAI: August 01 – 02, 2001

6.1   What We Saw and Heard

The high points of our visit to Chiangmai are given below:

- We visited a community living along a canal which has cleaned the canal and planted trees along it. This is a pilot project to illustrate that communities along the canals need not be shifted because they can carry out environmental improvement in their present locations and maintain it. This is an important initiative for it offers a viable alternative to relocation. However, discussions with a community leader pointed to problems for the future, problems that are similar in nature to settlements in Pakistan. The community leader pointed out that once people get educated and get secure jobs, they move out of the settlement to "better" locations. Also, people are getting married outside of the settlement and going away. As in Pakistan, I am forced to ask the question, "What will happen to this settlement after a generation?" Also, how can people be made to continue to live in this settlement?

- We visited the Chiangmai Urban Studies Centre (CUSC) and were impressed by its research work and awareness raising programme. However, its links with community organisations and interest groups perhaps need to be further developed. We were also explained their anti-flyover movement which unfortunately has not succeeded. Would it have stood a greater chance of success if a viable alternative had also been proposed? Would it have helped if a consensus on the subject had been arrived at with other groups outside of the government and then pressure put on state

agencies? These are questions I ask myself and of course, not knowing the city, I have no answers.

- A meeting with Civil Society representatives was also held and the municipal government and its consultant planner working on the city's structure plan, also attended along with professors from the University. The issues that surfaced were:

  - A nexus between politicians, bureaucrats/planners and developers is determining the manner in which the city is developing. Civil Society groups are not happy with this since it is creating environmental degradation of their city.

  - There is a need to protect natural and built environment assets of the city. There is an aversion to the building of high-rises and concerns for the densification of settlements and villages around the city. It seems that the city population more than doubles during the day as people from the urbanising villages come to work in Chiangmai.

  - A lot of dissatisfaction was expressed against the consultant/planner since it was claimed that his team was not consulting people and planning in isolation. However, it is perhaps more important for Civil Society to organise and have an opinion on how planning should be done. On the basis of this opinion they can pressurise the politicians and the planners. The universities can play an important role in this process by analysing government plans and developing alternatives.

  - There was considerable resentment that Bangkok determined the development plans of Chiangmai along with school and university education. There was a feeling that if these decisions were to be taken in Chiangmai things would be different. There was a nostalgia for Chiangmai's past autonomy and a feeling that its rich culture was under siege.

6.2   Possibilities

Chiangmai is lucky. It has a development plan being made by a local consultant. It has a concerned Department of Architecture and Planning. It has concerned citizens. It has a few well-organised low income communities. It has the UCDO and CODI network. Given these assets a workable plan for the city can be developed. What is required is:

- Coming together of the university, interest groups (including developers and tourist agencies), communities, the UCDO and CODI network, shopkeeper's associations (if any), transport mafia, and any other relevant groups to:

  - Identify trends that they feel are detrimental to the physical and social environment of the city.

  - Arrive at a consensus on a minimum agenda which they should get the government to agree upon. This agenda can also simply state what they do not want for the city so that at least that is guaranteed.

- Items for which a consensus cannot be reached, should be investigated, alternative plans developed and popularised. On the basis of these alternatives and research, negotiations can continue.

- The CUSC will have to play the important role of bringing these various actors together. May be it needs to form a larger alliance of like-minded groups before initiating an interest group meeting. Perhaps the press could prepare the grounds for making such a meeting successful. But then, someone will have to take on the responsible of initiating all this. Who is that someone?

7.   CONCLUSIONS

Based on what has been said before, one can draw certain conclusions regarding trends in the cities visited. These trends are very similar to those in Pakistani and Middle Eastern cities that I know. They are listed below.

- There is almost no government investment in public housing left and government subsidies for education and health are being curtailed. It is expected that this trend will continue. As a result, the demand-supply gap in housing for low income groups is increasing.

- Foreign companies are becoming the major investors in the cities and the new employment providers. A strong nexus between them, government officials and developers exists. As such, they are determining to a great extent the future shape and form of the city.

- Gentrification of the inner cities and city centres is becoming a priority with governments. This is displacing poor communities and pushing them far from their places of work and current recreation and dividing the city into rich and poor areas. This process is being supported by proposals for the conservation of the built-environment cultural heritage. This again will deny poor communities space for business and homes. Removal of hawkers and vendors are a part of most conservation plans.

- Multilateral and bilateral agency's development projects are a fraction of government investments in development plans (we have compiled the details about Pakistan and they are very revealing). International NGO inputs are even smaller. However, the involvement of national NGOs (including that of ACHR) is mainly with projects and programmes supported by overseas grants and loans. Attempts at influencing government policy through involvement in government projects are few and far between (in this trip, Thailand was the exception).

- There is no coordination between various projects being funded through overseas grants and loans. Often they do not know of each other's existence and their projects do not relate to any overall development plan for the city. As such, it is generally agreed that such projects are a waste of precious funds which in most cases the cities will have to pay back. Many of the projects are also considered inappropriate and expensive.

- There is big gap between the planning concepts of professionals and the socio-economic reality on the ground. An awareness of this exists in professional academic and research institutions but teaching programmes to overcome this gap still need to be developed and institutionalised.

- Communities, NGOs, UN agencies and their consultants, all complain of an absence of transparency and accountability in the city planning and implementation processes but they have not evolved a common agenda for dealing with this problem.

- In all the cities there are young professionals, academics and NGOs who are aware of the above problems and are doing or wish to do work to overcome them. Unfortunately, many of them are involved in trying to mitigate the negative aspects of government planning (or lack of it) rather than working on viable alternatives.

8.   POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR THE ACHR

The ACHR's support to various projects and NGOs is commendable. However, I feel that we have to go beyond this. Friendly, liveable cities are essential for the poor. It is no good first creating displacement and poverty and then trying to alleviate it. The ACHR has to be pro-active and this means that it will have to relate some of its work to the conclusions in the previous paragraph. Some suggestions are given below.

- On an all Asia level ACHR should press national governments, multilateral and bilateral agencies and international NGOs to coordinate their work. We must discuss how this can be done. Also, a position should be taken on developing certain guidelines that governments, overseas agencies and NGOs should follow so as to minimise the negative effects of foreign funded projects. But before that the negative aspects must be identified and articulated. Who will do this?

- An alternative to the relocation process of poor communities from the city to the city fringes must be developed. This process is being promoted through zoning regulations and building bye laws. However, these regulations are not God's word and can be changed (the Talibaan in Afghanistan have proved that even God's word can be changed). In this regard the Chaingmai canal community development project is important and needs to be supported and its concept, process and results disseminated. My experience of the Pasig River settlements in Manila and the settlements along the river and canals in Ho Chi Minh City is that all these houses can be beautifully redeveloped on their present land and on land reclaimed after the channelisation of the rivers and canals. One needs to prepare alternatives, cost them, identify benefits, organise communities to support them, change the bye laws. Who will do this? This is the only question and the rest will follow.

- Conservation of built heritage and its relation to tourism is an issue that is going to play an important role in determining the future of our cities in the next decade. It is necessary for the ACHR to understand this and have a position that it can promote. This position should protect the interests of poor communities and related interest groups. I suggest that a meeting of people involved in conservation related work should be held and a consensus on some form of criteria should be developed. The Tibet Heritage Fund may be asked to be the focal point for such a meeting.

- Regarding transparency and accountability, the URC in Karachi is pushing the following agenda with the local government.

  - All government agencies should publish a list of their land and real estate assets every year along with their value, current land use and future proposals.

  - All government projects at their conceptual stage should be advertised in the press and exhibited in a public space in the area in which they are to be constructed. Objections and opinions on them should be invited from communities, professionals and other interest groups. Detail planning should be done after this process and should accommodate opinions and objections.

  - A steering committee of interest groups should be established for each project. This committee should oversee the implementation of the project and certify its accounts, which should be published every quarter.

  - One government officer should be responsible for the project from its initiation to its completion.

May be the ACHR components can discuss this agenda and see if it is suitable for their context.

ORGANISATIONS / PERSONS MET

Bangkok: July 20, 2001

- Meeting at CODI office with community leaders
- Lunch meeting with CODI board members

Phnom Penh: July 21 – 24, 2001

- Urban Poor Development Fund meeting at the Municipality
- Meeting at UNCHS office with Peter Swan
- Visit to a relocation site
- Meeting with Kevin Taylor and Mehreen Hussain, consultants to a proposed World Bank funded sanitation project for Phnom Penh
- Meeting with the URC
- Meeting with staff of the UNCHS and discussion on CDS
- Visit to an old public housing site which is in a dangerous state of repair
- Meeting with Maurice and Jaya to discuss Jaya's proposals for the CDS

Hanoi: July 27 – 30, 2001

- Meeting with Huong of UNCHS, Prof. Michael Douglas (working for a UN research project)
- Meeting with Pham Quynh Huong of the National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities
- Visit to The 36 Streets
- Visit to an old public housing scheme and a regularised informal settlement
- Meeting with Dr. Trinh Duy Luan of the Institute of Sociology

Ho Chi Minh City: July 30 – August 01, 2001

- Meeting with the Vietnam Youth Association Social Work Centre
- Meeting with the staff and students of the University of Architecture
- Visit to a canal channelisation and redevelopment project
- Discussion with Enda
- Boat side along a sewage channel and the river

Chiangmai: August 01 – 02, 2001

- Visit to an organised community along a canal which is in the process of improving it physical and social conditions
- Discussion at the Chiangmai Urban Studies Centre
- Visit to a temple where an attempt at protecting the silver etching craft is being made by the monks
- Meeting with Chiangmai concerned citizens and civil society representatives

Bangkok: August 04, 2001

- Meeting with Maurice, Tom, Andre and Ann to discuss the visit and future directions

Some Quotations

- The gap between desire and reality is the extent of ones hell (*Lord Buddah*)

- The seeds of virtue and vice both produce harvests but the field sown with the seeds of opportunism, remains barren (*old Persian saying*)

- When everyone is looking for a chair, it is best to sit on the floor (*Afghan saying*)

- God gave fire to three tribes. One lost it and so fire became a legend. The second was in awe of it and so they started to worship it. The third understood fire, so they used it for their benefit. (*Gist of a story from Rumi, 11th Century Persian poet*)

- Passion without reason is blind and reason without passion is dead (*Spinoza*)

- Accounts (where the money comes from and where it goes) explain a project better than any evaluation. (*Akhtar Hameed Khan, OPP founder*)

- Ignorance confuses, ill-intention complicates, understanding simplifies (*old Urdu saying*)

- To replicate projects you have to first replicate people (*Parween Rahman, OPP-RTI Director*)

- Monitoring simply means regular meetings, informed discussions, detailed minute keeping and follow up on them (*Akhtar Hameed Khan, OPP founder*)

- Anger and hope without knowledge and reason are like saplings without water. (*Arif Hasan*)

- The petal of a flower can cut the heart of a diamond. (*Iqbal, Urdu poet*)

- Let not the best become the enemy of the good (*Chinese saying*)