The basic principle of the urban redevelopment projects led by Urban Renewal Authority (URA) is to improve residents’ living conditions in dilapidated urban areas. Residents in Kwun Tong and Wong Tai Sin, however, have been kept in deteriorating living environment for more than a decade due to project delays.

“I heard of the redevelopment project when I was about ten,” said Yuen Yan-fai, chairperson of the Resident Association On (Kwun Tong) Old Urban Renewal. “The district is getting more decayed, with serious hygienic, security and rodent nuisance problems. The situation is intolerant.”

The redevelopment project of Kwun Tong Town Centre was first announced by the former Land Development Corporation in 1998 but was postponed because of the Asian financial crisis the same year. The URA reinstated it in 2005 and started a freezing survey in March of last year, registered by those who own properties or lived there. People who buy properties there after the announcement of the freezing survey would not receive any compensation. However, no work has been carried out in the district until now.

A committee member of the owners’ corporation of Kwok Tai Building at Yue Man Square, Mr Yuen said most owners were not willing to spend money on maintenance because of the announcement of
the redevelopment project. “The one (committee member) who proposes maintenance would be criticised,” he added.

Chui Wai, Chairman of Alliance of Kwun Tong’s Urban Renewal, has been living in Kwok Tai Building for over 20 years. He said he water infiltration problem in the buildings is serious.

“The buildings here are called ‘salty water buildings’ because a large proportion of them were built with salt, water and bricks instead of concrete in the 1960s, when fresh water was insufficient,” he said.

Built over 40 years ago, most buildings in the project area also lack proper public facilities. “There are no lifts in these buildings. The residents have to rest several times when they climb the stairs,” he added.

An old woman who suffers from nephropathy (a disease of the kidney) cannot climb up the stairs. Her son has to carry her on his shoulders to bring her home,” recalled Mrs Koo Yuen Lai-yum, member of the alliance.

Jacky Fung Wun-yin, former chairperson of the Resident Association On (Kwun Tong) Old Urban Renewal, said the redevelopment project of Kwun Tong Town Centre involves about 5,000 residents, 70 percent of whom have been living in the district since 1957.

“What most residents hope is the URA can offer a reasonable acquisition price and deal with them as soon as possible,” he said. “Over 90 percent of the residents want to buy another flat before the price of real estate price fluctuates too much from the present level.”

According to the acquisition policy of the URA, proprietors affected by the redevelopment project would be offered compensation in the sum of the market value of the property and an ex-gratia allowance, namely a Home Purchase Allowance (HPA).

Mr Fung added, however, the estimation of the market value of the property, calculated by comparing them to properties in the same district that are seven years old, does not reflect the reality.

“There are no properties of such age in the project area. No residential buildings can be used for reference,” he said.

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Residents of another redevelopment project Nga Tsin Wai Village, the last urban walled city located in Wong Tai Sin, are also discontent with the delay of the project which, they claim, benefitted the URA and a developer, at the expense of the residents.

The former Land Development Corporation revealed its intention to redevelop the village in early 1990s, but had announced no concrete plan for a decade.

Meanwhile, Cheung Kong (Holdings) Limited purchased the houses in the village for redevelopment since 1982. It held about 70 per cent of the concessions in the village.

Early this year, the URA unveiled a redevelopment plan in the village in cooperation with Cheung Kong.

Village tenant representative, Ng Hau-chuen, criticised the compensation offers made by the URA as unfair and not accommodating to the needs of the residents.

Some villagers are also concerned about the preservation of the historical buildings in the village.

Nga Tsin Wai village, also known as Hing Yau Yu Tsuen, was established in the mid 14th century. Some traditional buildings such as the township office and the temple have high historical value.

According to the written response from the URA, it commissioned a team led by Laurence Loh, member of conservation expert panel of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in 2006 to carry out a conservation study. Under the concept ‘Conservation by Design’ to balance the old and the new, the original village houses along the Central Axis, Tin Hau Temple, the embedded stone tablet ‘Hing Yau Yu’ and the gatehouse would be preserved.

Village representative Mr Ng Shin-hung said, however, the URA is not committed to preserving these buildings.

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