

COMMUNITY BUILDING IN SHANGHAI

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Executive Summary

1. The implementation of market-oriented reforms has profoundly shaped local governance in urban China, weakening the work-unit system as the main pillar of governance and control.
2. In response, the Chinese government has initiated extensive community building programs in the cities since the 1990s. The neighborhood organizations, including Street Offices and Resident Committees, have been transformed to become a key player in local governance and community participation.
3. The community building programs are aimed at strengthening social control over and providing social services to citizens, which used to be the main functions of the work-unit system.
4. First of all, the Street Offices and Resident Committees are required to monitor residents and take care of the aged, the poor and the unemployed. They organize a number of activities to provide social services, and to promote reemployment and poverty reduction as well.
5. To enhance community cohesion and integration, the neighborhood organizations not only initiate neighborhood upgrading and landscape works, but also organize recreational activities to encourage community participation.
6. Along with the expanding functions and services, the importance of local administrative institutions, especially Street Offices and Resident Committees, for local governance has been on the rise.
7. To enhance the legitimacy of the regime, the government also initiated democratic reforms in the neighborhoods, requiring civil associations such as Resident Committees and Homeowners' Committees to elect their representatives and leaders so that they can represent the interests of citizens.

8. The government also promoted “community party-building” by transferring retired party members to party branches in the neighborhoods. For those who are still working and thus are affiliated with their work units, the Party nonetheless encourages them to actively participate in the activities organized by party branches in their neighborhoods.
9. Community building in Shanghai and elsewhere in China is not meant to promote democracy in the grassroots. Instead it is a mechanism for engaging urban residents to achieve party-state legitimacy and domestic stability.
10. By and large Shanghai’s community building has been quite successful in shifting from a work-unit based system of governance and control to one that is based on community or neighborhood. The new approach has worked reasonably well thus far in Shanghai in accommodating the everyday needs of local residents.