

ACHR e-news

News from groups around Asia about what's happening in the region . . .

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

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- First land and housing breakthroughs in Fiji
- East Asian caravan to Hong Kong, Korea, Mongolia
- Cage homes and cubicles still there in Hong Kong
- Thailand's growing network of community builders
- Thailand's first district-wide community fund
- ACCA Program completes first six months
- Dream houses in Bharatpur, Nepal
- News from railway slums and "goths" in Karachi

FIRST LAND and HOUSING BREAKTHROUGHS in FIJI :

At the ACHR / ACCA Regional Community Forum in the Philippines, in April 2009, Mesake Dakai, who is a member of the People's Community Network (PCN) in Suva, presented a brief update on the network's activities in Fiji, which included some good news about breakthroughs in land and housing for the city's poor there :

The People's Community Network : 45 squatter settlements in Fiji's capital city of Suva are now linked together under the People's Community Network, which was formed just two years ago. The PCN is working with its NGO partner ECREA (Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy) to design and test alternatives to eviction in which the poor themselves take the lead in securing land and building better housing for their families - on land where they are already staying or else very close by. The network has several programs, including a daily savings and loan program, in which its members have now saved US\$33,000. A team from ACHR (which included community leaders from Thailand and the Philippines and two community architects) visited Fiji in May 2008 and met with the community network and government leaders.



Committee on Squatter Housing (COSH) : A high-level government committee has been set up to deal with the problem of housing, and Mesake, from the PCN, sits on that committee.

Lagilagi : Fiji's first community-driven housing upgrading project on government land : The Community Network's first on-site housing upgrading project is now underway at the Lagilagi community, which is part of Jittu Estate, one of Fiji's largest squatter settlements with over 2,000 households. With support from the network, 100 families living in Lagilagi have negotiated to collectively lease the seven acres of government land they had been squatting on, for a nominal rent of US\$235 per year, for 99 years. The families will own their houses, but the land will belong collectively to the community, and if anyone wants to move out, they'll have to sell their house back to the community, which can then re-sell it to a new family. This project is a first-ever partnership between the government, the community, the network and the support NGO. The project will combine funds from three sources: the government will contribute US\$659,000 as a subsidy, the people will contribute the labor and half the cost of the houses through their savings, and the NGO will contribute US\$612,000 (using funds from Misereor). The community is now in the process of doing its planning, which should take about three or four months.

Houses : Their two-story house model will cost US\$ 11,300, of which half will be paid for by the people (US\$ 5,650, on installments at \$8.50 per week for 12 years, through their savings groups) and the other half will be paid for as a subsidy by the government. The money the people repay will become a revolving fund which will eventually enable more houses to be built. The houses will be built by a private-sector contractor, but the families will provide the labor, and as part of this "sweat equity" deal, ten people will be trained as block layers and ten will be trained as carpenters. The network sees this as a strategy for building its own "in-house" source of building skills for future housing projects. Everyone is hoping that if this pilot project works well, it can be expanded to upgrade the rest of Jittu Estate and duplicated in other squatter settlements around Suva, wherever secure land tenure can be negotiated.

For more information about the project at Lagilagi, please contact Mesake or Father Kevin Barr at : econjust@ecrea.org.fj

EAST ASIAN CARAVAN to HONG KONG, KOREA and MONGOLIA :

In the ACCA / ACHR meeting in Rayong Thailand in April, a decision was taken was to send a team to Mongolia, to support the emerging city-wide savings and upgrading process in Mongolia and to help the different groups share strategies and build a common platform at the national level. When we figured out that most flights to Ulaanbaatar go through Seoul, it was decided to stop off in Korea on the way to visit the groups there. And then, when Ho Hei Wah invited us to visit SOCO's work in Hong Kong and a third stop was added, the trip became a proper East-Asia caravan, with a mixed team of community leaders, community architects and professionals from Thailand, Japan, Korea and Philippines. The ten-day trip (June 4-14, 2009) was partly a very rich exchange visit, partly an ambitious ACCA Program advisory tour and partly a big chance to help build an eastern-Asian sub-group for mutual learning and mutual support. ACHR is preparing detailed reports on the three countries we visited and will have them up on the ACHR website soon. But in the mean time, here is a brief outline :

Who took part in the East Asian Caravan?

- **From Thailand :** Chaan Kuaphichit and Angkhana Khaophueak (Community leaders from Bangkok), Chawanad Luansang (Freelance community architect), Somsook Boonyabancha, Thomas Kerr and Erin Torkelson (ACHR)
- **From the Philippines :** Ruby Hadad and Jocelyn Cantoria (Homeless People's Federation), Fr. Norberto Carcellar (PACSI)
- **From South Korea :** Yang Seok Seo (Vinyl House Community Leader), Hyo Woo Na and Yun Mi Seo (Asian Bridge NGO)
- **From Japan :** Yashihiko Yamamoto (Buraku Liberation League, Osaka), Masako Tanaka (ACHR Japan)
- **From Germany :** Gregor Meerpohl (Advisor in Urban Community Development)

1. HONG KONG : In Hong Kong, the group was hosted by the Society for Community Organization (SOCO), and managed to squeeze quite a lot into the 3-day visit, which included visits to cage home and cubicle apartments in Sham Sui Po (see *Hong Kong article below for more details*), presentations about evolving problems of poverty and housing in Hong Kong, participation in the moving rally to commemorate the June 4 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre of student protesters, and meetings with some of the NGOs which are working in China on issues of human and housing rights. *More info at:* soco@pacific.net.hk

2. KOREA : When the huge evictions were taking place in Seoul 20 years ago, in preparation for the Olympics, the crisis galvanized Korea's housing rights movement, drew support from sympathetic activists and professionals around Asia and led to the birth of ACHR. The struggle against those evictions brought about some positive changes for the poorest urban Koreans - particularly the right of poor tenants in neighborhoods undergoing "redevelopment" to be re-housed in subsidized public rental housing in the same area. Twenty years later and after Korea's rise to the ranks of Asia's most powerful economies, we expected things in Seoul to have settled down. In fact, the process of "redevelopment" in Seoul is not only still going on but it's speeding up! Some 50 neighborhoods are right now in the process of being bulldozed, to be replaced by gleaming and high-priced condo blocks and 8-lane boulevards. The sad news is that the laws that were fought so hard for, which entitle tenants to public housing in these neighborhoods, have been scrapped, and the more developer-friendly "New Town Act" has replaced them, which requires that only a small fraction of tenants be re-housed, even in areas with 80% poor tenants. So the evictions are still going on, and they are, if anything, still as brutal as ever.



And with dwindling housing options for the poor families being flushed out of Seoul, squatter settlements are making a comeback. Our group was hosted the Asian Bridge NGO and the network of "Vinyl House" squatter communities, which prepared several delicious Korean feasts for us (always with *kimchee* - the ubiquitous Korean spicy preserved vegetables). During the four-day visit, we got a chance to visit several of these "vinyl house" squatter settlements, which are home to some 48,000 households - many of whom have been evicted from housing redevelopment areas but do not have enough money to rent even a single room in low-income residential areas. Only 16% of the houses in these settlements have toilets, and because the government forbids them to use "permanent" materials, the houses in these settlements are built with cheap, flammable materials and insulated against the sub-zero Seoul winters with industrial felt, so there are often fires which

burn down whole communities. Despite all these problems, these communities are starting savings groups, building their network and trying to develop their own solutions to their housing, land and infrastructure problems.

The visiting team also spent a morning with one of the very active public housing tenant's committee at one of the redeveloped areas at Wang-sip-li, and to learn about the history of Korea's housing policy from Professor Seong-Gyu Ha, in a lecture he

presented to us in a semi-demolished room at the edge of an eerily abandoned neighborhood undergoing redevelopment. There were also reunions with old ACHR friends at KOCER and KCHR, as well as an emotional visit to the ailing Father John Daly, who was one of the key leaders in Korea's housing rights movement and one of ACHR's founders. Contact : nahyowoo@yahoo.com

A June 22 Korea update from Na, with some GOOD NEWS: When we came back to Korea after the trip to Mongolia, filled with fresh air, we got good news: that Vinyl House people can get their addresses registered formally now. One of the problems vinyl house dwellers had always faced was that as squatters, they had no legally-recognized addresses, because of the "illegality" of their occupation of the land, even though they have lived there for ten or twenty years. In 2007, the Jandi Vinyl House community people filed a class action suit for the right to their legitimate addresses. Finally, on June 18, the Supreme Court handed down a judgment allowing them to register their vinyl house communities as legal addresses. This means that they can now get legal water supply and electricity connections - but they still can't rebuild their houses. People are very excited about this little victory and believe it came true somehow with the energy from the ACCA team's visit. Please follow the following link for a Korean newspaper story on the case: http://www.asianbridge.asia/?document_srl=2401#0 We will be organizing a public forum about secure tenure for Korea's vinyl house communities with congressman on the 26th of June, and a team of women savings group leaders from vinyl house communities will join the Women's Bank's 20-year celebration in Colombo in early July, with a stop-over in Bangkok to visit savings groups and community upgrading projects there on the way - hosted by the two community women who'd come to Korea.



3. MONGOLIA :

After a short flight and a very big cultural leap, the team landed in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia - a beautiful country with so much land and so few people that the Seoul's super-crowded, polluted and hyper-developed reality seemed as far away as Mars. In Mongolia, the visiting team was hosted by the Urban Development Resource Center (UDRC) and the Center for Housing Rights and Development (CHRD). These two NGOs are working very hard to support informal communities around the country to start savings groups, implement upgrading projects and develop more community-driven ways to improve the housing and living conditions in the country's fast-growing "ger-areas" (the vast informal settlements which fill the hillsides around most Mongolian towns and cities, named for the traditional nomadic tent structures which many people in these settlements still live in - at least in the sub-zero winter months). The visiting team was able to visit active savings groups in *ger areas* in several districts of the capital city Ulaanbaatar, and in the copper-mining city of Erdenet, 350 kilometers north, near the Russian border, with a stop in the small district town of Bayanchandmani along the way, and an overnight stay in a special tourist *ger* camp. And everywhere we went, we were welcomed with ceremonial blue silk scarves, basins of fresh milk, bowl-fulls of yogurt sweets, tumblers of vodka - and sometimes even entire sheep cooked in the *hot-pot* - in one long, uninterrupted show of Mongolia's warmest hospitality. And everywhere we went, there were intense exchanges of curiosity, stories, mutual concern between the community leaders from five different countries.

The savings process began in Mongolia only four years ago, with its first push coming from a visiting team of ACHR and Thai community leaders, but has already spread around the country. There are now hundreds of savings groups actively saving and borrowing from their collective savings and from their joint community development fund, for income generation projects, housing improvements and small environmental improvements like fence-painting, tree-planting and setting up playgrounds and collective craft making enterprises. With support from the new ACCA Program, many of these *ger areas* are also planning and carrying out projects to scale up these kinds of housing and environmental improvements. On the last day, the team joined a national workshop in Ulaanbaatar organized jointly by UDRC and CHRD to review the progress of the savings and *ger-area* community development process so far, to set up a national platform to coordinate the Mongolian ACCA process.

The communities presented their small and big project proposals at the meeting, and these projects (to pave lanes, build eco-toilets and greenhouses for growing vegetables, set up felt-handicraft and garbage recycling enterprises, make house-building and road-paving blocks, beautify fences, construct community centers and playgrounds and lay freeze-proof water supply systems) were themselves a vivid indication of how ready Mongolia's poor communities are ready to bring about change in their lives and settlements, and how bursting they are with ideas about how to do that - *and energy to start now!*

For more information on the work in Mongolia, please contact Enhe at UDRC: udrc@mobinet.mn or Urna at CHRD: chrd@mongolnet.mn



CAGE HOMES and CUBICLES STILL THERE IN HONG KONG :

It's been 19 years since ACHR organized a fact-finding mission to Hong Kong (September 13-18, 1990) to visit the "Cage People" - poor and elderly poor people who were living in tiny rented cubicles, partitioned like animal cages and stacked up on top of each other within apartment rooms. Although this fact-finding mission didn't involve any outright evictions, the predicament of human beings being forced to live in such conditions represented an extremely serious housing rights problem. The ACHR team visited several cage-dwelling areas and spent some time with the local organization that helped organize the visit and had been working with these cage dwellers (and other marginalized groups), the Society for Community Organization (SOCO). In the years since then, we have kept in close touch with SOCO, following each other's work, and SOCO has participated in some ACHR seminars and meetings. But when another ACHR team took up SOCO's invitation to visit Hong Kong in early June, as part of the Hong Kong-Korea-Mongolia "Caravan" (see previous story), they were shocked to find that although the city has gone through some enormous changes, cage homes are still there. Here are some notes sent by SOCO's director, Mr. Ho Hei Wah, shortly before the visit :

There have been some significant changes for the urban poor in Hong Kong. On the positive side, the number of people living in inadequate housing has decreased. But at the same time, problems of poverty and unemployment are increasing. Hong Kong's per capita GDP keeps going up and up, but this statistic masks a gloomier reality of increasing inequality and a widening gap between rich and poor. The percentage of people living in poverty in Hong Kong has increased from 11.9% (in 1986) to 20.1% (in 2006). The city has over a million poorly educated laborers who used to find good jobs in the city's manufacturing sector, but as Hong Kong has shifted to a less industrial and more service-sector oriented economy, these workers are losing their jobs. Many of them come from mainland China, and since a 7-year residency requirement was introduced in 2004, many cannot apply for social welfare or public housing. And as the city's population ages, the number of elderly and poor people living alone or with elderly spouses is increasing sharply.

Hong Kong once had one of Asia's most admired public housing systems, but as the system has been commercialized and rents have skyrocketed, more and more people find themselves either priced out of affordable flats or pushed so far down the waiting list for public housing units that their number may never come up within their lifetimes. Plus, the Housing Authority has introduced a point-system to limit access by single people to subsidized housing units. Since Hong Kong has a fast-increasing population of single, elderly and poor people, these changes have left many middle age and elderly citizens with no choice but to find living (or sleeping) space at the very bottom of the city's private-sector housing market. The introduction of laws requiring people to reside in Hong Kong for at least seven years before they can access public welfare and apply for public housing units has also forced tens of thousands of migrant workers and families to squeeze themselves into rented nooks and crannies.

So where do Hong Kong's poorest citizens live, when they can't get into the public housing system? SOCO estimates that there are at least 100,000 people living in inadequate housing in Hong Kong, in a variety of situations, including private temporary housing, rooms, bed-spaces, cage homes, cubicles, cocklofts and roof-top huts. Here is Ho's description of two of the bottom-of-the-ladder housing types the private sector offers:

CAGE HOMES : Cage homes emerged in the 1950s and 60s, when the city's population was swelling with refugees from mainland China and creating a big demand for low-cost rented "bed-spaces." Many single men were arriving in Hong Kong during those times with hardly any possessions, and they would work as coolies during the day and stay in 1 x 2 meter rented bed-spaces at night. Enterprising landlords would get hold of apartments and subdivide them into warrens of these bed-spaces, which they would stack on top of each other, enclose in iron grille-work cages and rent out to these poor workers. The cages allowed the men and women to lock up their meager belongings and to get a little air circulation in Hong Kong's hot and sticky climate. At the peak, there were over 500 or 600 of these cage home apartments in Hong Kong. There are still about 100 of them (25 licensed and 75 unlicensed), with about 4,000 residents.

CUBICLES : A slightly roomier version of the cage home is what's called a "multi-partitioned apartment" or a cubicle - a slightly larger unit which is made by dividing a room into at least four smaller spaces using wooden planks or glass panels. These cubicles have 3 or 4 square meters of space in them - just enough room for a bed and a small wardrobe - and they rent for about HK\$1,000 (US\$130) a month (*which works out to be more expensive per square meter than some luxury apartments!*). Cubicles offer minimal accommodation for singles, the elderly and poor families, who often clash with each other over the use of shared toilet and kitchen facilities. Hong Kong's 1998 *Bed-space Apartments Ordinance* sets the nomenclature for these different versions of misery like this: any apartment that has been divided into less than 12 units is a *cubicle*, and one that's got more than 12 units is a *cage home*.



For more information on cage homes and cubicles in Hong Kong, or to get a copy of SOCO's "Brief on Poverty in Hong Kong", please contact Ho Hei Wah at : soco@pacific.net.hk

THAILAND'S GROWING NETWORK OF COMMUNITY BUILDERS :

Over the past four years, as the number of community upgrading projects has mushroomed in Thailand, with support from the nation-wide *Baan Mankong Community Upgrading Program*, community networks in many cities have begun putting together teams of masons, carpenters, plumbers, electricians and skilled construction workers who live in poor communities (both men and women) to draw on when communities doing upgrading projects need help. These teams are technical support mechanisms for the upgrading process, but they're also job creation schemes and collective businesses. Many community people are also picking up and refining some serious construction skills "on-the-job" (skills like carpentry, brick-laying, steel reinforcing, foundation planning, street-paving, plastering, electrical wiring and plumbing), through the process of designing and rebuilding their own communities. A lot of this new expertise is being channeled into these community construction teams, that are now taking on jobs with other communities as well as small contracting jobs outside.



These teams are now calling themselves *Chang Chumchon* ("Community Builders") and proudly wearing T-shirts that say so, while they work, which gives a new status to their work and to their movement. Most of these teams prefer to work for other poor communities, for which the workers get paid a fixed amount (which is a little less than the usual rate for hiring outside skilled laborers). And many communities are finding it cheaper and more reliable to hire *Chang Chumchon* when they need help, instead of risking getting ripped-off by a private contractor or hiring workers from outside. Sometimes communities hire *Chang Chumchon* as they would a contractor, to build everything, and sometimes they just ask them to help out with the heavy work of laying foundations, when communities opt to do most of the work themselves. Sometimes *Chang Chumchon* groups provide the labor force, and sometimes they're asked to provide specific technical expertise to help work out problems of drainage, structural engineering, or house design.



Most of the regions around the country now have their own *Chang Chumchon* community workers collectives. The community network in the eastern city of Chantaburi, for example, has a *Chang Chumchon* team that provides full-time employment to about 100 women and men. There is a big market for skilled construction labor in Chantaburi, even from the 11 Baan Mankong upgrading projects that are now underway around the city alone!

So far, *Chang Chumchon* collectives have helped to build over 75 upgrading projects in 25 cities, including some 9,000 housing units. If you add up the labor costs involved in building all these houses (which usually averages at about 40,000 Baht per unit), these projects have generated at least 360 million Baht (US\$ 10.3 million) worth of employment for some of the country's poorest (but skilled!) urban citizens.

Chang Chumchon renovates the ACHR office : The *Chang Chumchon* collective in Bangkok has recently agreed to take on the job of renovating ACHR's office in Bangkok. After years of nest-building in our increasingly cramped quarters in Ladprao 110, and after being unable to find any place

cheap and accessible to move to, one of CODI's young community architects has helped us to figure out how to expand our working space without moving to new quarters. The beautiful plans that A has come up with call for widening rooms, raising ceilings and adding lots of storage, and *Chang Chumchon* will start building next month.

A lively new source of news about community upgrading in Thailand :

For years, readers outside Thailand have despaired at the relatively few resources available to English-speaking audiences about the Baan Mankong Upgrading Program. The English page of the CODI Website (www.codi.or.th) has a few useful reports and newsletters, but these documents in no way keep up with the scale, speed, vitality or dynamism of the actual upgrading program. A young Thai architect named Yanyong has been breathing new life and color into the English part of the website, which is now being updated regularly with fresh stories, photos, lively discussions, articles and figures about the city-wide upgrading process that is now going full steam in 240 Thai cities. Please visit the CODI website and click the British flag in the upper right-hand corner to access the English section of the website. If you can't find the link to Yan's new Baan Mankong page, you can go directly there by following this link: www.codi.or.th/housing/

THAILAND'S FIRST DISTRICT-WIDE COMMUNITY FUND

Bang Khen District is in the center of Bangkok - a district which is intensely developed with housing, commercial areas and universities and criss-crossed by major infrastructure and transport arteries. There are many poor communities scattered around the district, but the greatest number of them are squeezed along the banks of the Bang Bua Canal, which runs along the edge of the district. For almost half a century, some 3,500 families have lived in squalor and uncertainty in the 13 informal communities that line this 13-kilometer canal, with the daily risk of fires and eviction and facing constant accusations of polluting the canal.



History of the community organization's work : The communities in Bang Khen District - especially the network of communities along this Bang Bua Canal - have had active community savings groups for many years and have undertaken a variety of small environmental improvement projects. In recent years, four of the communities along the canal have negotiated long-term collective leases to the public land they occupy, upgraded their settlements and built new houses, with support from CODI's Baan Mankong upgrading program. These community upgrading projects, which were done in close collaboration with the district authorities, have become much-visited "learning centers" for communities all over Thailand and Asia to visit and learn from.

Sophisticated analysis of the district. In 2003, the community network surveyed and mapped all the slums in the district. Since then, the network has continued to refine their understanding of the district and develop their information. As part of their analysis of the district, they identified government development plans which will affect various communities in the district (including a sky-train extension line, expressway construction plans, etc.), mapped the land-values, determined the land ownership in all the surveyed slums, and surveyed open land in the district that might be used for relocation and determined who owned it. They then used this district analysis and survey data to develop a district-wide upgrading plan, in which they classified all the surveyed settlements according to whether they could stay and reblock or do land sharing *in situ*, or whether they would have to relocate, and set plans to upgrade *all the slums in the district*. This district-wide planning process was carried out in close collaboration with the District Office and with other local partners (like the nearby Sripatum University), and it is now being implemented, bit by bit.

The Bang Bua Canal Network is now taking the "group power" of their network a big step further, and have joined with several other communities in the district to form Thailand's first district-wide community development fund, which was established as a collaboration between the community network and the Bang Khen District Authority, and to which each community will contribute. The communities in Bang Khen District will then use this common fund to finance the continued upgrading of poor communities in their district and to back up their negotiations with various public agencies for land tenure and assistance with infrastructure. The MOU was signed during the inauguration of the most recent Bang Bua Canal upgrading project, on May 25, and was witnessed by the Minister for Social Development and Human Security. This will be the first district-wide community fund to link all the urban poor communities to work together to implement district-wide upgrading, with contributions from communities and from other development organizations. ACHR's ACCA Program will contribute \$30,000 to help build this pioneering fund, with the hope that it will spread out and inspire other districts and cities to move in this direction.

WHY NOT JUST BORROW FROM CODI? Last year, CODI (the Community Organizations Development Institute, Thailand's main financial support system for the poor) reached a difficult milestone when all the money in its US\$ 80 million revolving loan fund had been given out in housing loans to all these upgrading projects. The well had run dry. Although they have managed since then to supplement the fund by negotiating some additional funds from the fiscal budget and selling some outstanding community loans to the Government Housing Bank, CODI still faces a big problem: the real scale of Thailand's national community upgrading process is just far, far too big for the CODI fund to finance alone.

The existence of CODI (and the easily-accessible budget assistance for community upgrading and soft housing loans it offers) has left communities all over the country feeling perhaps a little too relaxed. There are good community networks in most of the 240 cities already involved in the Baan Mankong Program, with several thousand communities linking together and doing things together. But what these communities haven't had to do is to manage any kind of development fund together, at city or district level. The community-organized savings groups are still scattered, they have no financial links with each other, and there are no city-based funds which mobilize people to put their community savings funds together or to establish their own financial mechanisms.

The funding crisis at CODI made the community networks all over Thailand realize that even CODI - like all government programs and institutions - is also vulnerable to the fickle whims of national politics and that there are good reasons for communities and for cities to begin developing financial mechanisms which they *DO* control themselves, right there within their own constituencies. There have been several national meetings to discuss this crisis and to begin exploring ways for communities in each city to find ways to stand on their own feet, as much as possible. City-based funds, which link together all the savings groups and housing projects in one city (or workable constituency) are not just a way of making locally-controlled financial systems for the poor, but of pooling local resources, of strengthening relations between the poor and their local governments, and of pulling other poor communities in the area to join together and to start their upgrading process. The launching of this new district-wide fund in Bang Khen is an important opportunity to demonstrate this important new development direction and help build a city fund movement in cities all over Thailand. *Contact CODI for more information: codi@codi.or.th*

ACCA PROGRAM UPDATE :

ACHR's new ACCA Program (*Asian Coalition for Community Action*), which was launched officially during ACHR's regional meeting in Bangkok in January 2009, has now come to the end of its first six-monthly period. Three major meetings have been organized since then to discuss the ACCA process in different countries and to consider the projects presented for approval so far.

First ACCA Committee Meeting in Kathmandu, Nepal (26-28 February). This meeting, which was hosted by the NGO Lumanti, was the first opportunity to discuss in greater depth the ACCA Program's implementation, including ideas about using the program more strategically and agreements on issues of process, budget and procedures. During the meeting, the committee approved the first batch of proposed cities, which covered 11 big projects, 54 small projects and a variety of city and national and disaster-related activities in 17 cities in ten countries, with a budget of US\$ 772,100. A 2-day field visit to the ACCA pilot city of Bharatpur was organized as part of the start of the meeting.

Workshop on Community Process in Quezon City, Philippines (30 March - 3 April). This regional workshop, which was hosted by the Homeless People's Federation Philippines (HPFP), was organized to build a stronger platform for communities to work together in their own countries and in the region, as an important part of boosting the ACCA Program. The workshop brought together 92 community leaders and their supporters from 12 Asian countries. The participants made field visits to five cities and learned about the HPFP's work on savings, livelihood, land acquisition, resettlement and disaster rehabilitation in those cities. The group also discussed the people's processes in all of the participating countries and brainstormed about how communities can play an important role in the ACCA Program.

Second ACCA Committee Meeting in Rayong, Thailand (26-28 May). This meeting closed the first six-monthly period. After a field visit to the city-wide slum upgrading process in the city of Chantaburi, the meeting began with a review of the progress on the first set of city projects approved in February. More details about the ACCA Program's directions, procedures, information management and finance systems were discussed and refined. A new set of projects was proposed for consideration.

- **Small and big projects :** By the end of the first six months, a total of 159 small upgrading projects (in 159 slum communities in 29 cities in 12 countries, with a total budget of US\$ 377,800) and 23 big housing projects (in 23 cities in 10 countries, with a total budget of US\$ 870,000) were approved and are now underway.
- **Surveys :** City-wide information gathering has begun in 37 cities and nation-wide surveys have begun in three countries.
- **Savings and funds :** All 37 cities in the ACCA Program so far have already got quite extensive community savings and credit activities going on, and the program is giving a big boost to the process of strengthening and expanding these savings groups.
- **Community funds :** In 23 of these cities, the savings groups are in the process of linking together through new city-wide community development funds, through which the funds for their big projects will be channeled. Some cities are also opting to channel their small project budgets (as both grants and loans) through their city-wide funds. The funding support from ACCA has thus made it possible to establish and seed new city development funds in 25 - 30 cities.

Read up on the ACCA Program! The ACHR Secretariat in Bangkok has been producing all kinds of documents, meeting reports and city-wide upgrading profiles, filled with stories and photos and news, as part of this exciting new program, and all of them can be downloaded from the ACHR website: www.achr.net

CALL FOR WRITINGS to HONOR FATHER JORGE'S 80th BIRTHDAY

The discussions have been continuing about how to honor Father Jorge Anzorena, on the occasion of his 80th birthday next year. The idea that seems to have caught on is to put together a collection of writings to honor his unique and wonderful contribution to our lives and work. Ken Fernandez, who has a biography that was put together in 1994 by the Magsaysay Foundation when Father Jorge won the award, would like to sit with Father Jorge, update this biography and publish it, along with a number of contributions written by his colleagues and friends around the world. A team consisting of Lajana, Younus, Hosaka, Ken and May Domingo will gather and edit the contributions. Here are some recent additions to the discussion about this project, beginning with a request from Father Jorge himself :

Father Jorge : I would prefer that people who are willing would write a few pages, talking about the occasion of their involvement with the poor, how they have developed, how they have handled the problems, what they have learned and what are their dreams for the future. These words, I am sure, could be very useful to encourage many young people to be involved.

Ken Fernandez : I suggest that we all follow this guidance from Father Jorge in writing our pieces. Anybody who is interested in contributing to this project to honor Father Jorge, please send your writings back to us by September 15, 2009. And please do invite any others who may not be in the loop to contribute - professionals, young architects, students, community members. It would be helpful if you could let us know if you are interested in writing something, so we can gently remind you as the deadline nears.

Please send your written contributions by September 15, 2009 to Ken Fernandez : stopevictions@yahoo.com.au

MAKING DREAM HOUSES INTO REALITY IN BHARATPUR, NEPAL

Salyani is a small and very poor squatter settlement of 30 households (most working as daily-wage laborers) in the provincial town of Bharatpur. Bharatpur is Nepal's first city to begin implementing the ACCA Program, and Salyani has been selected to be the city's first BIG comprehensive upgrading pilot project. Like many of Bharatpur's poor settlements, Salyani is located at the edge of town next to the "buffer zone" of the national forest (this "buffer zone" is managed as a community forest). It is a new community - the people have lived here for less than ten years, and all the houses, which are arranged in a long line along the road, are made of mud, thatch and bamboo - not a single brick and concrete house in the community. The land belongs to the National Forest Department, which has agreed to allow the people to stay and redevelop their community there.

The ACCA city-wide upgrading process in Bharatpur is being supported by the Kathmandu-based NGO Lumanti, and Lumanti's only community architect on the staff (whose name is also Lumanti) has just recently joined and hasn't had much experience yet supporting a complex community housing redevelopment project. So they invited a young Thai architect named Chawanad Luansang ("Nad") to come help. Nad has for several years been working with communities in Thailand to help them develop their community upgrading and housing plans, with the support of the Baan Mankong Program, and has helped people to develop several very beautiful community plans, with the houses arranged in clusters around small open spaces and gardens.

A couple of years ago, Nad spent some time in Nepal and had helped the people in Salyani to design and build some extremely inexpensive toilets, using a system in which 5 families share a single septic tank (with three chambers), and each family builds a simple enclosure around its own pour-flush latrine using woven bamboo, mud plaster, thatched roofs and simple curtains made of recycled gunny bags - almost free!



So when Nad returned in May, with two of his Thai architect friends, to help the people plan their new housing project, he was a welcome and familiar face.

Nad and his two colleagues spent about a month in Bharatpur with the community, Lumanti staff, community network leaders and municipal staff, organizing a series of workshops to help the people survey, measure and map their existing settlements, to develop low-cost design options for their new houses and community layout, and to begin thinking of ways that they can bring concepts of self-sufficiency into their community planning, by making use of the community forest they live next to - for food and for income.

On the last day of these intense weeks of work, the community people dressed up in their best sarees and showed up for the last meeting with drums and flutes, and presented Nad and the visiting architects a song they had written especially for the occasion. Lumanti's

rough translation gives the title this way: *"Please smile when we have a meeting!"* and the words went something like this: "Because we might not meet each other again, let's come together and work together. After we have a savings group, we should come together and think. You have come from so far away and work so hard to help us! We will not stay as squatters for long, because we have a dream to change things. We are the poor, we work in fields that belong to somebody else, but we're proud that we can sing this song for you!"



For more information, please contact Nad at: chawanad@hotmail.com



GOOD NEWS FOR RAILWAY COMMUNITIES in KARACHI :

Here is an example of how poor communities participate in city level planning decisions and activities and how a little judicious technical support (in the shape of maps, photos, documentation and case studies) can increase their negotiating powers. This story comes from Mohammad Younus, at the Urban Resource Center (URC) in Karachi :

There are 35 informal settlements located along Karachi's railway tracks, with a population of 21,344 households. All these settlements are part of the Network of Railway Colonies, which assists its member communities in their struggles to resist eviction and to obtain secure tenure rights. The network holds regular meetings in different settlements, to give information about land regularization policies and to discuss new eviction threats from the government and from the Pakistan Railways.

As in cities all over Asia, Karachi's railway communities have faced repeated attempts to evict them over the years. This is a tough group of communities, though, and besides being successful in resisting these eviction attempts, they have picked up some useful techniques along the way for bolstering their case to stay put.

When the government decided in 2005 to demolish the city's railway settlements and sell the land for commercial purposes, the URC worked with the network to survey, map and photograph the entire length of the city's railway lines. Their detailed maps showed clearly that besides poor settlements, the railway lines were spotted with commercial and residential buildings. The communities presented their survey findings to the government and the media, and this forced the planned evictions to stop.



The most recent threat comes in the form of a government plan to revitalize Karachi's Circular Railway line. This is a project which everyone agrees is important, for a city of 14 million people without any rail-based or rapid mass transit system. But the project calls for the eviction and resettlement of 6,000 families living along the tracks, and the plans provide no details about who these families are or where they will be moved. Past experience makes the railway communities suspicious that the project will be used as a pretext to grab their land for more lucrative purposes or to harass poor communities for bribes.

The URC obtained the details of the Circular Railway plan in March 2009, and organized several meetings and public forums with community activists and community leaders to analyze the plan and discuss the serious questions about resettlement. The URC also organized a number of exchange meetings between railway community leaders and communities which had faced eviction for the Lyari Expressway project - another huge eviction-causing mega-project. These meetings and exchange visits were very useful to understand problems experienced by the newly resettled families. Rana Sadiq, a railway community member said, *"We heard so many stories of corruption from the Lyari Expressway resettlement. There was no transparency, and many fake people got compensation. Plus, the Lyari resettlement sites were far away from the city, and many families lost their livelihoods. So finally, more than 70% of the families sold their land at the resettlement site and came back to squat somewhere in the city."*

The URC is now working with the railway communities to study and update the documentation of all 35 railway settlements. The URC recently published case studies of three of these railway settlements which show how much the people and the government have already invested in these settlements. In these three settlements alone, the people have invested a whopping US\$ 9.39 million in their housing, infrastructure and social amenities, and the government has invested another US\$180,000 in infrastructure. This kind of information is very useful when communities lobby for land titles and negotiated for alternatives to eviction.

In April 2009, the Environmental Protection Agency held a public hearing, as part of the process of assessing the environmental impact of the Circular Railway project. Over 800 community people showed up at the hearing, but only 60 were allowed to attend, along with 150 other participants from the city, NGOs and government. During the hearing, five railway community people spoke to present their case, and they were well-equipped with photos, maps and case studies. A long discussion took place, and the architects of Circular Railway plan were unable to answer questions raised by the community members - especially their questions about resettlement or about how much land on either side of the tracks would need to be cleared for the project.

The EPA finally set up a 12-member "experts" committee to look into these aspects of the Circular Railway plan, and this committee included three members from railway communities. According to Mr. Waqar Awan, one of the railway community members, if they cleared 100 feet (30m) distance from each side of the tracks, then they would need to resettle everyone, which is not necessary. If they could reduce the distance to 30 feet (10m), they would need to resettle only 10 percent of the communities.

The communities also suggested the government consider shifting the main railway station (which deals with national passengers) outside the city, so that the national network railway lines need not enter the city, which would require more space along the existing lines of tracks. *For more information, please contact Mohammad Younus at: urc@cyber.net.pk*

NEW HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAM IN KARACHI, PAKISTAN

The Orangi Pilot Project - Research and Training Institute's Low Cost Sanitation Program, which helps communities to build their own toilets and lay underground sewers in their settlements (using people's own funds and technical support from OPP-RTI, while government is also mobilized and supported to build trunk sewers), began in Karachi in 1981 and has now expanded to 17 cities and towns around Pakistan, as well as many villages in Sindh and Punjab provinces. The OPP-RTI also runs programs in housing, education and earthquake rehabilitation - all based on a similar model in which communities do the work themselves and the OPP-RTI provides research and technical support. Perween Rahman, who directs the OPP-RTI, has written with the following news about their program to support the traditional rural villages within the Karachi metropolitan area, which are swiftly being swallowed up by the city's expanding development.

How Karachi's goths are quickly being gentrified : There are about 1,800 traditional villages within the Karachi metropolitan area, most of them in the peripheral areas of Gadap, Bin Qasim and Kaemari. These old settlements, which used to be rural farming villages, are now being swallowed up in the fast-expanding city. They are known as *goths* and are occupied mostly by poor, indigenous people, with only traditional forms of "*sanad*" land use rights and no title deeds to the land they've occupied for generations. With land values skyrocketing in Karachi and urban development and land speculation expanding rapidly into these peripheral areas, the *goths* are increasingly being targeted for eviction by the city government. In the past few years, *goth* landlords and village elders all over peripheral Karachi have begun evicting poor families, subdividing the land and selling it off to lower and middle income buyers. Traditionally these villages have no boundary walls, but as subdivision fever sweeps these areas, more and more *goths* are putting up boundary walls around their villages and within the village to demarcate each family's land. This is not only to protect their land, but to facilitate the process of selling it off later on!



This kind of land subdivision is 100% unofficial but highly organized : Even though this subdivision process is technically illegal, OPP's research has found that it is neither chaotic nor disorganized - *and business is brisk*. More than 65,000 plots are being made available every year in this process, in which government officials, political party members and police officers are all partners. OPP-RTI's research in some of these areas has found *goth* lands being unofficially subdivided and sold off to lower and middle income buyers very quickly. It is often the village elders who act as land suppliers, and each area usually has a designated tea shop where interested buyers can contact representatives to purchase land. A 120 square meter plot may cost anywhere between US\$ 900 - 6,000, depending on the area, and this amount is divvied up between the village elders, the police, land officials, politicians, political parties and various middlemen. Estate agencies are selling four or five plots each day and buyers are usually offered the option of paying the full amount in cash or paying in installments within a year. Some agents (including political party activists) buy batches of 10 - 20 plots at a time and sell them sometimes within days. Once people get their plots, they usually build a boundary wall and move in very quickly, because if they don't construct within a period of two months, their plots might be resold. Local *thallas* (building component manufacturing yards) are every where, providing concrete blocks and other building materials on credit, facilitating fast construction and helping families settle in. In many areas, sewerage and water-supply lines are being laid (for an additional cost of \$65 per plot) and electricity and gas connections can also be arranged, through local politicians.

OPP-RTI's Secure Housing Support Program : The OPP-RTI has been working for several years to support these traditional *goth* communities to safeguard their settlements and move towards secure housing, land tenure and infrastructure development. Like so much of its work, the OPP-RTI began by working with local communities, activists and supportive government officials to research the existing tenure situation, land supply systems and people's mechanisms to resist evictions in Karachi's *goths*, and to survey and map these settlements. Armed with this information, the next step was to organize meetings with community activists, area organizations, political activists, land suppliers and officials from the various government departments related to land use, tenure and development in the *goths*. This process of working together has now evolved into a new *Secure Housing Support Program*, to deal with the tenure issue, resist the growing threat of eviction in a stronger, more unified and better-informed way. As part of the process, the OPP-RTI is also helping these villages to plan and undertake infrastructure improvements (mostly sewers and drainage channels), with work already underway in 120 *goths* in the Gadap area (mostly being undertaken by communities themselves, using their own funds, with technical support from OPP).

Lobbying for secure tenure in the goths : As part of these efforts to protect the city's *goths* from eviction, OPP and many partner organizations have been lobbying and organizing signature campaigns to extend the Sindh Provincial cut-off date for providing land tenure to families within Sindh Province, so that families which have been living in informal settlements on government land since before December 2006 can get land titles (the cut-off date used to be March 1985, and this date allowed for many evictions). These

efforts met with at least partial success when the government extended the cut-off date to 31 December 2000, and included all settlements and goths on government land.

Housing improvement loans : In the Zobu goth, in the periphery of Orangi, some 1,500 households have struggled for years and finally won secure tenure rights to their land, but only after repeated evictions and demolitions have left them impoverished and without the means to rebuild their houses. Without having a house on the plot, families can lose their tenure rights, so the OPP-RTI has launched a modest revolving loan fund help the neediest families build at least a single room. The fund gives loans of Rs. 25,000 (US\$300) per house, to which the house owners must contribute Rs. 10,000 (\$125). The fund is starting small, with financing to only 12 houses this year and another 28 houses next year, as they develop systems for selecting house owners, managing the repayments and expanding the facility. A young architect who has recently joined the team is helping these families with technical guidance and documenting the housing developments and other self-help infrastructure projects in the community.

For more information on these two new programs, please contact Perween Rahman at OPP-RTI : opperti@cyber.net.pk

4 NEW BOOKS by ARIF HASAN

Please contact Arif for more details: arifhasan@cyber.net.pk

- **Participatory Development: The Story of the OPP and the URC.** This is being published by the Oxford University Press and should be out in August 2009.
- **The Unplanned Revolution.** This is a revised and expanded version of my earlier book. It is also being published by the Oxford University Press and comes out in July 2009.
- **Planning and Development Options for Karachi.** This is being published by the Rural Development Policy Institute and has already come out.
- **Migration and Small Towns in Pakistan.** This is in Urdu and will be out next week as well.

