



## E-News: November - December 2005 - January 2006

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### 1. ACHR and UN Habitat Day: Follow-up Activities

The October's international event on community-led upgrading movement, organized by CODI, ACHR, UN ESCAP and the Thai Government, has attracted interests from several governments and organizations. Following the event, in November and December, several governmental delegations visited Thailand to learn more about its community upgrading activities under the Baan Mankong Project by CODI.

From Mongolia, a delegation including the Minister of Construction, the Deputy Finance Minister and several Parliament members, in November, met with Thailand's PM, Deputy PM and local communities. Somsook had a chance to discuss with the Minister of Construction the need to start a pilot project in Ulaan Baatar to kick start a larger program of community development in Mongolia. A Thai team helped start a grassroots savings network in Mongolia in 2005.

In December, a team of East Timorese government ministers, linked with an UN ESCAP project, visited the National Housing Authority of Thailand to explore housing options for poor communities. The team had discussions with ACHR and CODI and visited various Baan Mankong projects.

ACHR started – albeit on a small scale – grassroots savings groups in East Timor last year with the help of the Philippines Homeless People's Federation.

After the success of the Habitat Day event, City Alliance has asked CODI to host the Public Policy Forum at the end of 2006 (November/December). This could be a great opportunity for us to bring together ACHR and HIC partners in the region and to organize a Ministerial level meeting. The focus would be on people-centered, holistic city-wide upgrading.

Present at the Habitat Day events was a team from South Africa which included the Minister for Housing, NGO and grassroots leaders of the South African Homeless People's Federation. As a follow up - Somsook will present Thailand's Baan Mankong Project to an African Ministerial level meeting in February 2006.

### 2. ACHR People and Friends

**Gregor Meerpohl** who is about to retire (September 2005), was guest of honor on the last night of the 4th Tsunami Survivors Dialogue in Banda Aceh Jan 3-7. You can see photos of the King of Aceh [here](#) Click "start slide show" for larger pix. How about "4 more years", Gregor.

Philippine Young Professional **Arlene Lusterio** is now in her third week in Can Tho Vietnam and struggling to learn Vietnamese. Arlene is doing research in "urban" coastal human settlements, at the Mekong Delta Development Research Institute of Can Tho University.

**Somsak and Wut** report .... UPDF Cambodia has expanded up-grading and savings activities to 13 other cities besides Phnom Penh - with over 30 small community based up-grading processes in place. There's some information about this on our website at <http://www.achr.net/Cambodia/Cambodia%202005.htm>

During a visit to Europe in November, **Somsook** met with donors Selavip and Cordaid to update them on ACHR activities and to discuss how to coordinate a common direction. Somsook also addressed a seminar in Denmark on the topic of Tsunami Rehabilitation and Communities. In December Somsook addressed the World Bank's Social Policy Forum in Tanzania on the social dimensions of development policies.

Where's **Fr Jorge Anzorena**? After spending October in Thailand and Cambodia, Fr Jorge spent most of November in Europe with donor SELAVIP, then December in South Africa with CURC and SAHPF. Fr is back "home" in Japan from 25 January before traveling to the Philippines on 15 February for a month, then back home until August. News from grassroots groups and supporters is gathered by Fr Jorge during these visits and is published in the SELAVIP newsletter "Journal of Low-Income Housing in Asia and the World"

**Wichai Poey** a young Thai who has advised many communities living along Bangkok's canals about drainage and canal ecology will visit river-side communities of Surabaya Indonesia in February. Many of the communities are under threat of eviction due to city's "normalization of river banks" process. Thailand's Canal Communities Network has a history of successfully negotiating permission to stay along canals which among other things involves community taking responsibility for the clean ecology of the canal. Wichai will help kick-start this process in Surabaya.

**Ken Fernandes** recently resigned from COHRE and will resume lecturing in development studies in Australia. Ken will still collaborate with ACHR with hopefully an increased role in Housing Rights and advising on Urban Resource Centers.

**Peter Swan** is crafting the final minutes of a video documentary for ACHR on the people-centered rehabilitation of tsunami survivors. Due for completion in February.

**URC Karachi, OPP and Arif Hasan** have been involved in relief efforts and advisory support to the areas affected by the earthquake. ACHR also invited a group of affected community members and supporters from OPP and CHIP to attend the tsunami commemoration in Aceh (Indonesia) in January 2006. We believe this will further the Survivors' Dialogue and link horizontal support in the region.

### **3. Laos: Savings and Community Fund Expansion**

Under the 3-year Memorandum of Understanding between CODI and the Lao Women's Union, signed in 2002, the network of community savings and credit groups has grown outside the initial Vientiane province to include thousands more members from other provinces. The Lao Women's Union has been ready to take the community process to a higher level and to expand nation-wide. In December 2005, CODI and the LWU renewed the MoU pledging support to the Laos community network for the next 2 years in a 3-day event, from 5 – 7 December. ACHR supported community groups from Cambodia, India, Thailand and Vietnam, who together with hundreds of local community members and Lao Women's Union staff from 5 provinces participated in the 3-day event, including field trips to communities under the Pak Ngum savings and credit program.

Day 1: The celebration of the success of the Lao Women's Union was held in the Lao Cultural Center in Vientiane. The LWU's representative gave an overview of the savings and credit activities in the 5 provinces over the past 3 years. Teams from Cambodia, India, Thailand and Vietnam also gave a brief description of their activities and community organizations. Local communities participating in Pak Ngum project displayed their handicraft products (woven products

such as silk and cotton scarves, rattan and bamboo baskets, agricultural products, etc.) in several booths outside the Cultural Center throughout the event, attracting numerous visitors, including tourists.

Day 2: International participants teamed up with local community members to visit the 4 districts of Vientiane that are participating in the Pak Ngum project. In each district, the visitors and local communities exchanged their views and lessons on savings and credit activities. They also had a little cultural exchange through folk dancing and singing. Meanwhile, CODI's Board of Director and the LWU leadership signed the 2-year MoU in Vientiane.

Day 3: All participants gathered in the Cultural Center to reflect on the field trip, and to express the support and solidarity to the LWU.

Learn more about Savings, Networking and its impacts in Laos from our web site.

<http://www.achr.net/Countries/Laos/Lao%20Savings.htm>

#### **4. Cambodia – UPDF expands to 14 Cities in 2005**

Community upgrading project under UPDF has expanded to 14 cities in the year 2005. Local authorities have been supportive to UPDF's works and have participated in several community exchange activities inside and outside Cambodia. Recently, Phnom Penh's municipal officials joined with the Cambodian team to the Laos event in December.

#### **5. Nepal – Community Upgrading Inauguration**

These days, most of the news coming out of Nepal is very dire: civil war, coups d'état, election boycotts, strikes, black-outs, bomb blasts. But in the midst of these large-scale upheavals, a great milestone for the country's landless squatter communities has been quietly taking place. On December 24, 2005, Nepal's first community-planned and community-built housing relocation project (for squatters evicted to make way for a road-building project) was inaugurated at Kirtipur, a small but ancient municipality in the Kathmandu Valley.

The project is small – only 44 houses – but it represents an important breakthrough for all the partners that helped make it happen: Nepal's national federation of squatter communities, its sister federation of women's savings and credit collectives, the Lumanti support NGO, the Municipality of Kathmandu, the new Kathmandu Urban Poor Support Fund, ACHR, SDI, WaterAid and several others.

ACHR supported groups of community leaders and their NGO and government supporters from India and Thailand to join the Kirtipur project inauguration, share ideas about community upgrading and people-driven housing and to attend the women's savings federation's annual gathering, along with women and men community members from 22 districts around Nepal. For more information, please contact Lajana at Lumanti. (email: [shelter@lumanti.wlink.com.np](mailto:shelter@lumanti.wlink.com.np) or visit their website: [www.lumanti.com.np](http://www.lumanti.com.np))

#### **Tsunami Anniversary**

On the first-year anniversary of the devastating Asian Tsunami of December 26, 2004, governments in Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India organized some big, high-profile commemorations to honor the hundreds of thousands of lives that were lost in the waves. Much less publicized, but as big and as important, were some one-year-after events organized by some of the tsunami's most vulnerable survivors, living in coastal fishing communities in Thailand and Indonesia. These "People's Tsunami Commemorations" gave large numbers of traumatized communities a chance to collectively mourn their dead, and at the same time to reflect on the big issues of land-tenure, housing and livelihood revival they have struggled with over the past year. Here are two brief stories of the one-year-tsunami "people's" events that happened in Banda Aceh, Indonesia and in Phangnga, Thailand:

## 6. Regional Tsunami Survivors Dialogue No 4 in Banda Aceh Indonesia

It appears that progress has been slow in most of Aceh since the tsunami struck. The reconstruction activities are scattered under different projects. Among these projects is the Udeep Beusaree ("Live together" in Acehese) Network that operates in 25 villages along the coastline with the support from the national Uplink Network and Misereor of Germany. In this area, over past few months, new houses have been springing up like flowers after a winter's thaw.

Between January 4-8, after the government's big tsunami commemoration event, the Udeep Beusaree Network hosted its own regional tsunami dialogue with more than 150 participants. ACHR collaborated with the Indonesian groups to give tsunami survivors and supporters from coastal villages in India, Thailand and Sri Lanka a chance to compare notes on all the key issues of rehabilitation (such as land tenure, housing, livelihood revival, dealing with misguided government regulations, etc) with the Acehese, as well as with some earthquake survivors from Pakistani and Kashmir, and community leaders from several other parts of tsunami-hit Aceh and other parts of Indonesia who are part of the Uplink network.

The centerpiece of the dialogue was the enormous, people-planned and people-built rebuilding program that is happening in the 25-village area - a program which involves the construction of 3,200 earthquake-resistant houses (800 already finished), full infrastructural facilities like concrete roads, storm drains, solar street-lights, water supply, and an extensive "eco-development" program which involves restoring the coastal mangroves and creating layers of built and planted safety barriers between the sea and the villages. These villages were all totally leveled by the tsunami, and most lost between half and three-quarters of their populations. The project to rebuild these villages makes a very potent demonstration of how much faster, cheaper, more appropriate and more comprehensive post-disaster rehabilitation can be when the survivors themselves - as a large collective group - are in charge, and are supported to do what they need.

During the last of the 4-day event's dialogues, the Deputy Director of the national government's Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency for Aceh-Niwas (BRR), pledged support for the Udeep Beusaree Network's work, and for the principles of people-centered, people-driven tsunami reconstruction in other parts of Aceh, with the Udeep Beusaree Network's reconstruction as a model for other areas. For more information on the project in Aceh, please contact Wardah at [upc@centrin.net.id](mailto:upc@centrin.net.id) or check out the special tsunami issue of the ACHR newsletter on the ACHR website ([www.achr.net](http://www.achr.net))

## 7. One year after the tsunami in Phangnga, Thailand

On 24-27 December the Thai communities in collaboration with the Andaman Network held a 3-day commemoration in Phangnga. People from many provinces joined in a ceremony by the sea. Gifts were placed on a boat and then the boat was set free to drift seaward.

At Tung Wa (Moken Sea Gypsy village), locals and Thais from other villages and networks in Thailand gathered with supporters to discuss what they had achieved over the past year. They also systematically discussed what had not been achieved and how they may go about further rehabilitation.

Amongst the achievements are:

- 1,030 permanent houses have been constructed or are nearing completion in 19 communities.
- 1,700 fishing boats were built or repaired. 37 boatyards (both temporary and permanent) have been built. 27 are operating.
- 49 vocational groups have been established: including those for fish breeding, handicraft, batik, weaving, laundry, grocery shops. Approximately 1,500 members.
- 72 revolving funds were established for loans for the fisherfolk, income generation and community development.
- 12 focused activity groups were formed such as those for youth and special activities such as mangrove preservation.

- 56 cases involving land problems of Tsunami survivors have been submitted to the Sub-Committee to Resolve Land Problems of Tsunami Victims. 13 cases have been resolved enabling 1,156 families to live with security.

A major strength of the Andaman Network has been its ability utilize an exchange process amongst affected communities whereby each learns from each other across the 6 affected provinces. Also important was its ability to integrate the resources of Thai urban poor networks who brought their considerable experience to the south since the beginning.

Problems included insecure land and housing issues in approximately 40 communities; lack of basic service provision in some communities; over priced water and electricity; citizenship rights inhibiting rehabilitation; basic education and rights of children without citizenship as well as inconsistent support for orphans; increased funding for income generation projects is needed; there are many government supported programs which are adversely affecting fisher-folk communities (in favor of rich private investors in popular beach front areas). The coastal ecology is also being adversely affected by these projects.

In the early evening of Day 3, a Thai National Minister joined the meeting at Tung Wa and listened carefully to a panel of survivors presenting their problems such as land disputes, identity cards, alienated groups such as Burmese workers, etc. On Jan 5<sup>th</sup> the Minister held a special follow-up meeting with a committee selected from the meeting. He has vowed to resolve the remaining problems within the month.

*For more news of the tsunami rehabilitation activities please visit our website ([www.achr.net](http://www.achr.net)).*

## **8. For those who take life soooooo seriously .....**

Chelsea? Iraq? Poverty?

*From my friend J. Wright:*

Son: Dad, is God on our side ?

Dad: I don't think God is playing anymore ....

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ACHR E-News compiled by Le Thi Huyen and Maurice Leonhardt

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<http://www.achr.net/>*

*For a brief timeline of activities in the year, view **ACHR Online Calendar** at <http://ical.mac.com/mauriceleonhardt/ACHR>  
(click Month View at the top for clearer presentation)*