

# HOUSING BY PEOPLE IN ASIA



Published by Urban Poor Associates and Asian Coalition for Housing Rights July 1994

## From The Editor

The Indian writer Kalpana Sharma accurately describes Asian cities today:

*"Cities across the Asian region are beginning to look strangely alike. Whether in Bangkok, Manila or Hong Kong, the similarities are overtaking the distinctive features that once marked these urban centres apart.*

*"Today in the newly-emerging 'global cities' the same brand-names greet you as you land, the familiar beat of the latest pop or rap song can be heard on car-radios as you drive at less than 10 km an hour in interminable traffic towards a hotel which offers you your choice of television channels, including STAR TV.*

*"Apart from the superficial gloss and glitter, some of these cities are turning into virtual urban nightmares — too many people in too little space; an overabundance of traffic and pollution and a virtual absence of open, green spaces, crime, atomization and the subsequent breakdown of communities and families."*

Add to this the grim statistics on housing, health and education presented at the first inter-ministerial meeting on urbanization in Asia held last year in Bangkok, and one has a grasp of the problem. Add, too, the awareness that Asian cities are growing at a rate equivalent to a new city of 140,000 people everyday.

What to do about the problems is less clear. Certainly there were, as Sharma reports, wide differences of opinion between government officials and NGO groups at the ministerial conference. NGOs wanted themselves and the people they spoke for included in all the phases of planning and urban management programs. Some government officials thought this was beyond the abilities of NGOs and the ordinary poor people who need solutions most. The discussion on solutions will continue straight through the Habitat II meeting in Istanbul in 1996 and beyond.



This Dhaka woman is preparing to enter a literacy program for women. She and her neighbors should be part of all the planning that concerns their communities. No one knows more about the problems of the slums, or cares more about a solution.

ACHR took a position on this long ago: it believes no wide ranging solutions are possible unless peoples organizations (and their NGO supporters) are allowed to participate in all the decision making processes.

Whether one likes this idea or not, all other approaches have failed.

• **Mayor Jesse Robredo of Naga City, Philippines** received an award recently from President Fidel Ramos for his work with the urban poor of Naga City. The mayor has two principles that guide his anti-eviction, upgrading, landsharing and in-city relocation work. One, he will only deal with poor people who are organized, preferably with NGO help. Second, the poor group must agree to work with government and landowners for equitable solutions. Mayor Robredo attended the ACHR-TAP workshop in Surabaya on slum upgrading.

• **Lim Jee Yuan of the Consumers Union of Penang** edited this newsletter for several years. Due to the press of work he has turned it over to others. ACHR thanks Lim for all his services. ■

# URBANIZATION SHOULD NOT BE RESTRICTED

*Kalpana Sharma*

*[The first interministerial conference of the Asia Pacific region on the problems of urbanization took place in Bangkok in November 1993. Following is an article on the subject by Kalpana Sharma from The Hindu, Oct. 28, 1993]*

**T**he key shift that has taken place in the thinking of many national governments and international organizations, according to the executive secretary of ESCAP, Mr. Rafeeuddin Ahmed, is acceptance of the fact that urbanization is inevitable and that it should be facilitated rather than restricted. "It is clear that past attempts to restrain urbanization have, more often than not, exacerbated the problem and increased city inequities."

Speaking for the press after the opening of the symposium, Mr. Ahmed explained that this happened because of the historical urbanization in many countries where cities had grown not just due to factors of natural growth. As a result, urban areas were forced to absorb most of the overall increase in population. Governments had also realized that cities could be the engines of growth. This did not mean that rural areas should be neglected, he said. On the contrary, linkages between urban and rural areas had to be built, specially in the production process.

At the present rate of urbanization there would be the equivalent of a new urban centre

with a population of 140,000 created every day for the next 30 years. Presenting the voluminous state of urbanization in Asia and Pacific, 1993 report, Mr. Ahmed pointed out that most governments had very little knowledge and experience in managing megacities. By the year 2000, the Asia Pacific region will contain 13 of the world's 21 megacities.

While the facts about the growth of cities, and the problems they present, are now fairly clear — and have also been documented in the report presented at the symposium — what is not clear is how they will be solved. The present exercise initiated by ESCAP aims at providing policy makers ideas about how some of the problems of urban management can be tackled through an exchange of information. ESCAP also hopes to create linkages between policy-makers, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organization) and the media on these issues. This is the reason parallel meetings have been organized before the inter-ministerial conference.

However, in the thickly carpeted corridors of the spanking new conference centre, where the traffic and pollution of the city outside appear like a distant dream, there also appear to be parallel thought processes. At least some of the NGOs are approaching the entire exercise with considerable skepticism. "What we need is complete restructuring of the decision-making process in our countries so that the poor are consulted and integrated into the

planning process", said the representative of a Thai NGO. However, this would require major political change, she pointed out.

A senior official from South Asia also told this correspondent that while the facts in the report on urbanization were indisputable, it glossed over several social factors that were central to the process taking place in many countries. For instance, the increasing criminalization of aspects of urban life and the factors responsible for this were not even mentioned even though representatives from megacities where the gun is literally the law were present at the discussions. Some of these issues may be raised in the individual fora but as the compulsion of such conferences to prepare recommendations sometimes overwhelms all else, it is more than likely that they will be by-passed in favour of some general statements that can be accepted by all the disparate nations and groups present here.

*Housing By People is prepared by Denis Murphy and Melinda Romero with the help of Binbo Fernandez, Lim Jee Yuan, Sheela Patel and Ho Hei Wa.*

*Please send articles and suggestions to Urban Poor Associates:*

*80-A Malakas Street, Brgy. Pinahan, Quezon City, Philippines.  
Tel No. : (632) 966-755  
Fax No.: (632) 987-001*

# City of Joy and Sorrow

The Editors

India's economy is now subject to World Bank adjustment guidelines, after years of following its own form of mixed socialism but nothing in Calcutta seemed changed.

Park Street, one of the important centers of the city, looked exactly the same as it did 25 years ago: the same buildings, ruins, even the same broken stretches of sidewalk.

More important, nothing beneath the surface seems to have changed. In a squatter colony of outcaste scavengers and street sweepers, a man said in answer to our questions, "Nothing's changed. India has the atomic bomb and rockets that go into space, but we still remove the night soil (human excreta) by hand."

The pavement dwellers, coolie labourers and rickshaw pullers (Calcutta is based on the thin bandy legs of its poor workers) are still there.

Better off people and the poor share this unique troubling city where you're forced to ask the ultimate questions about life. It's a human city too: Mother Theresa who lives in Calcutta was bitten by a dog in April. Where else in the world could that happen?

One of the mystifying aspects of Calcutta and all India is the caste system. There are changes in the works that may bring a better life to the outcastes in the future, experts say. There are quotas for jobs in government and university slots for the outcastes. Also they are politically active as a sector and control one state.

Still these trends hardly touch most outcastes or "Dalit" as they prefer to be called. In a squatter area in Calcutta we talked with men and women who are street sweepers, scavengers and night soil removers. Only outcastes do these types of jobs.

They told us their ancestors moved to Calcutta 90 years ago because life in North India was so difficult for outcaste people. They had lived in poverty, but on top of that they were despised by the higher castes and considered sources of pollution.



This Calcutta outcaste or Dalit woman sees little hope her people will retain their land in the city given them 90 years ago. Only one Dalit woman in twenty such communities has finished high school.

When they arrived in Calcutta they took the menial jobs no one else wanted. They built homes on land the city gave them. Now 90 years later, when that land has become very valuable, the city wants them out. This happens under a Marxist government supposedly committed to the poor.

There was a deep sense of defeatism among the people. Some of their leaders had been bought off, others had left the area. They are manipulated by the Marxist and Congress parties. They seemed to have no hope. It wasn't just the normal timidity one meets in other poor people. "They've lost their backbones," a Bengali social worker said.

The people believe no one in power cares for them. There are tremendous problems of alcoholism and drugs. "Don't go after 7:00 p.m., they're all drunk," the social worker told us.

There is a Dalit Forum of 20 slum areas in which a group of dedicated men meet to find solutions, but even these men seem discouraged. Few can read, only one woman in the 20 communities has finished the equivalent of high school. It seems outcastes accept Hinduism's judgment that they are pollutive.

Change is coming but it needs to come much faster. Maybe it will. On the last day of our stay in Calcutta they began fixing the sidewalks on Park Street. ■

# STOPPING EVICTIONS IN ASIA

## EVICITION WATCH — A NEW ACHR PROGRAM

*[After years of discussion, ACHR's Eviction Watch program began this year. Basically it monitors forced evictions and other housing rights violations in Asia. It will do this in much the same way as Amnesty International monitors the observance of civil and political rights. Eviction Watch will issue semiannual reports (the first in January 1995); it will organize fact finding teams and other forms of action responses when there are especially serious violations; and it will help document and share the means ordinary people use to resist evictions. Following are excerpts from a trial, preliminary report issued in June.]*

**Introduction.** The fear of eviction hangs over the slums and squatter areas of Asia. Approximately 200,000-300,000 families, or 1-2 million people, are evicted forcibly each year in Asia. It is a very uncertain estimate but probably the best that can be made at present.

The number of evictions is huge. In the Philippines and India alone, more than 200,000 people are evicted each year. This is still only a small fraction of Asia's poor urban population of above 500 million people. But the fear of eviction on the other hand affects whole urban centres and hundreds of millions of people. It is a rare squatter family in Asia that at some time in their life does not worry about government demolition teams and police arriving some morning to destroy their homes.

The fear of eviction settles into the bones of squatter people, helping to destroy their confidence in themselves and their associations — "we're only squatters" they say, as if they had little value. The fear of eviction helps make people fatalistic and puts an end to their determination to improve their homes and neighborhoods.

One reason we have slums is because people ask whether it is worthwhile building decent homes when they can be evicted at any time. Paradoxically, it is the government officials, who instill fear in the urban poor, who are responsible for the shabby state of the slums and squatter areas. Ordinary people with security of land tenure keep their areas neat and spend to improve them.

Over the next few years the Philippines government says it plans to evict 20,000 families because of its public works programmes; in Bangkok, 30,000 will be evicted over the next two years. Countries that

previously did not generally evict people are now doing so: in Vietnam, 10,000 families living along a canal in Ho Chi Minh City will be evicted; in Malaysia which, a few years ago, seemed to be without a squatter problem, several violent evictions have recently taken place and an estimated further 10,000 people are likely to be evicted; and in Dhaka, people are also being evicted in increasing numbers.

### Hong Kong

*Reported by Ho Hei Wa*

In the 1990s Hong Kong is moving from secondary industry to tertiary industry. Core urban lands are being developed for financial, service and commercial sectors. Parks, high-rise commercial offices, modern hotels are replacing workers homes. In this plan the poor do not have a place. Even when there are vacant urban lands, the government will not consider building low-income, congested public housing. Government plans to get rid of whatever slums still existing in the core urban areas and resettle the residents to remote areas. This in sum is the content of Metropolitan Plan 2000 of Hong Kong.

This plan calls for thousands of evictions in which private developers play the most important role. According to official statistics, over the last ten years private developers evicted about 500,000 tenants, most of whom were low income families, elderly people, single people, or new immigrants.

Neither the government nor the private developers resettle the evicted tenants. These people cannot afford the high rent of the redeveloped buildings or new buildings in the private market and either go to live in a remote place or in terrible situations, such as, the "cages".

Country/City	Period	Number of Demolitions	Number of Affected Families - Persons	
Philippines, Metro Manila	July 1992 -April 1994	82	14,190	/ 85,190
Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur	Sept 1992 -early 1993	2	1,150	/ 10,750
Hongkong	Jan 1994 -April 1994	2	200	/ 450
China	April 1994	2	5,000	/ 30,000
Korea	Sept. 1993-March 1994	6	7,650	/ 30,250
Pakistan, Karachi	Feb. 1993	1	850	/ 10,000
Bangladesh	1990 to 1992	27	27,000	/ 162,000
India, Bombay	Jan. 1994 - March 1994	14	6,366	/ 45,008
Jaipauri, West Bengal	February 1994	1	194	/ 1,140
		<b>137</b>	<b>62,600</b>	<b>/ 374,788</b>

These are bedspaces, often one on top of the other bunk bed style. They are covered with wire for security reasons and measure about 8 sq. m. Some 100 cage dwellers may live in a 800 sq. m. unit. The end result is worse living conditions for the affected tenants.

## Malaysia

### Reported by V. Selvan

Two evictions were reported. In one at Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, in early 1993 some 1,000 families were evicted from land they had occupied for 35 years. The government that owned the land had sold it to a private company.

The people were given 14 days notice. There were no consultations prior to the demolition. Police and gangsters carried out the eviction which was marred with violence. People resisted the demolitions and held demonstrations. The press covered the whole event.

The land will be developed as a new township. Twelve low-cost storey flats will be built for the settlers and condominiums for the better offs and a commercial center.

The relocated residents are now in longhouses — temporary housing — with a promise of rehousing in the low-cost flats. Each family also received cash compensation of US\$153. Some have opted to rent houses in other places while some have transferred to other squatter settlements. Evictions are still ongoing. But the police and the politicians are being more subtle in their moves.

## India

### Reported by Minar Pimple

Six major evictions of pavement dwellers were reported between January to March this year. Bombay is considered the commercial and financial capital of India — the economic core of the nation. Nearly 60% of this metropolis' population lives on the pavements or in slums. As many as 600,000 people live on the pavements alone. Most pavement dwellings are found in and around the city's central business district and production centers — areas with high employment opportunities.

Pavement dwellers were evicted to make way for public works, for commercial activity, or because they backed losing candidates. In only one of the evictions did the government give notice.

People organized themselves and launched actions to get back their belongings, to settle in the same place or to get alternate accomodation. Women undertook actions to prevent the authorities from entering their houses, they formed human chains, lay down on the road, etc. After the eviction, they went to see the concerned bureaucrats to demand the restoration of their houses. They also went to the press. Most did not go to the courts because the courts refuse to accept their petitions. Demonstrations were also held.

Their demands were:

- Pavement dwellers must be given legal status.
- A comprehensive policy towards pavement dwellers must be formulated.
- The State should not undertake relocation unless it be done within five kilometers of the original place of residence of the pavement dwellers. Land can be acquired

under the Urban Land Ceilings Act and the extra Floor Space Index under the Development Control Rules to rehabilitate pavement dwellers.

*[The India report also analyzed the over-all housing situation in India through the years and discussed worker colony evictions and evictions in West Bengal.]*

## Bangladesh

**Reported by Dr. Dibalok Singha**

In the last three decades Bangladesh experienced rapid urbanization attributed mainly to rural-to-urban migration, territorial expansion of existing urban centers, and the natural growth of the urban population. (Some characteristics of this urbanization are found in the article of Prof. Nazrul Islam elsewhere in this issue.)

Many evictions are carried out. It is difficult to estimate their exact number because government does not keep a record of these evictions. Media do not report on evictions. However, according to a collated urban poor report, twenty seven big slum evictions took place in Dhaka City from 1990-1992. An average of 1,000 families were affected by each eviction. Thus an estimated 162,000 people (at six people per family) were evicted during that period.

---

*Twenty seven big slum evictions took place in Dhaka City from 1990-1992. An average of 1,000 families were affected by each eviction. Thus an estimated 162,000 people (at six people per family) were evicted during that period.*

---

Authorities are not bound to follow regulations on evictions since there are none. It has been noticed recently that more cruelty is now being used during evictions: police cordon off a slum area to be cleared, hired goons move in to set the houses on fire, and are followed later by bulldozers to clear the settlement completely. More hoodlums are now employed.

## China

Two evictions were reported in China, both in Guangdong Province. One was in Shitan County, Gangbei Village in Zhencheng, Guangdong Province.

About 30,000 villagers held a street demonstration to protest government repossession of their lands without compensation. Police violently suppressed the demonstration and used tear gas to disperse the

demonstrators. Police arrested four villagers.

A Hong Kong private developer bought 200 hectares of land from the government. The village government received US\$1.3 million from the developer. The people, however, did not receive any compensation from the government and accused the village representatives of pocketing their compensation. Repossession would mean the loss of livelihood for villagers who had been paying the agriculture tax of US\$65 every year to the government.

In the early 1980s the government began urban development in Gangbei village for which lands were repossessed by the government from the farmers. The size of the farm land is 1,600 hectares on which depend some 3,000 villagers. Land sales of the village would bring US\$9.6 million. According to officials figures some 320 hectares of land have already been sold for US\$461,000.

On April 1, 1994 angry farmers clashed with the police on the issue of land compensation. One farmer was shot in the leg. Three days later 200 Xinhua villagers demonstrated against Huiyang county officials, accusing them of corruption. Another demonstration was also held in Xiaquinwei village in Danshui city to protest corruption among village representative.

## Pakistan

**Reported by Kenneth Fernandez**

In the past decade large-scale evictions did not take place in Karachi mainly because the city government was weak and did not have strong legitimacy. This will change once a strong city government is in place.

In Karachi the following are under the threat of evictions:

1. Those living on amenity land and settlements located in ecologically hazardous zones. When land values rise in areas near them, private developers find ways to evict or buy off the residents.
2. Some of those living in katchi abadis (squatter settlements). Regularization and upgrading of katchi abadis often mean some households will have to move out.
3. Settlements in the central areas of Karachi where land values have increased tremendously. These settlements are found along the banks of the river Lyari which cuts across the city.

4. Settlements in the way of large scale development projects, like mass transitways, flyovers, flood protection schemes, etc.

5. Settlements of ethnic minority groups such as Bengalis, Afghanis, and religious minority groups such as Christians and Hindus.

There have been some evictions, for example, in Rehmanabad, District Central, Karachi.

On December 9, 1993 a fire broke out in Rehmanabad, an old squatter settlement, destroying 700 houses and rendering some 5,000 people homeless. Four people, including a young girl and boy were killed in the blaze. Seventeen were seriously injured. The residents were squatters who had been living there for 25 years.

There had been several attempts in the past to remove the people from the land. On February 23, 1992, some 850 houses in the settlement had been bulldozed, rendering some 10,000 people homeless. The eviction was carried out by private persons and the police. Violence marred the eviction: one person was killed and several were injured. The people's leaders had to go underground since they were threatened by the goons of the senator interested in the land. People began living with their relatives; some rented houses in other areas.

The people have since filed a case of arson against the senator and his goons. They also want government to lease the land to them. Catholic Social Service is willing to provide them housing loans if they get the leasehold. Urban Resource Center and a human rights NGO are also helping them. Some journalists have written about their case and some political parties support the people's struggle.

## Philippines Reported by Ted Anana

On March 24, 1992, Republic Act 7279, also known as the Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992 became law. It seeks, among other things, to "uplift the conditions of the underprivileged and homeless citizens.... by making available to them decent housing at affordable cost, basic services and employment opportunities." It will accomplish this by setting up socialized housing projects and resettlement areas. It also sets forth mandatory procedures for effecting evictions and demolitions in a just and humane manner, as demanded by the Philippine Constitution.

Nonetheless, the law's potential for social change remains unrealized two years after its passage due to a number of factors:

1. The absence or lack of implementation of the various aspects of the law.

2. The frequent violations of the law by public officials and peace officers, or their acquiescence to the same.

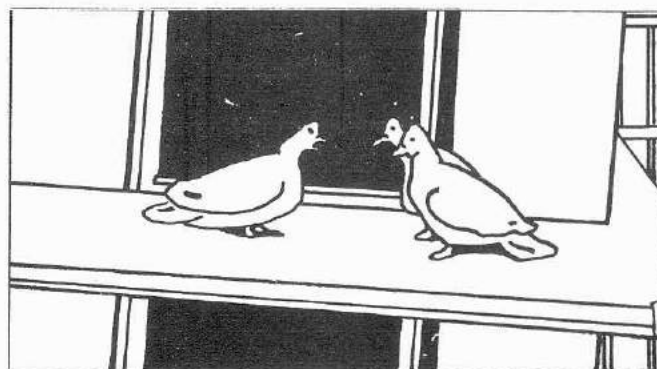
3. The paucity of any serious information and education campaign even among ranking public officials tasked with the enforcement of the law.

4. The failure of government to aggressively pursue the repeal or amendment of inconsistent law.

5. The failure of government to establish adequate mechanisms within the legal system or to issue proper administrative guidelines to those on whom will fall the task of enforcing the law.

## Thailand Reported by Hotline Housing Team

NGOs monitored 40 demolitions in Bangkok and other urban centers from October 1987 to March 1994. The evictions affected 2,097 families or 9,056 people, mostly squatters. Some 33 evictions were in Bangkok. Some 75% of the 40 evictions involved government lands. Eviction on government lands were mainly caused by large scale projects, such as, the Klong Toey Complex Project of the Port Authority of Thailand, the Sky Train Project of the Express Way Authority of Thailand, and the Makkasan Complex Project of the Railway Authority of Thailand. The evictions outside Bangkok were mostly linked to tourism and environmental projects. Evictions on private lands, on the other hand, occurred because the owners wanted to use the lands for commercial purposes or to take advantage of the rise in the land values. Private owners have to go to court to secure eviction orders against the urban poor squatters."



Location, location, location!

The New Yorker

## Book Review

# Housing the Poor — The Asian Experience

Fr. Jorge Anzorena, S.J.

ASIAN COALITION FOR HOUSING RIGHTS

In 1976 Fr. Anzorena came to Manila from Tokyo where he was, and still is, a professor at Sophia University and asked people at the Asian Bishops' Office for Human Development how an architect like himself could help the poor of Asia.

No one at the office knew, nor did his Jesuit superiors. Finally after discussions a trial program was arranged: Fr. Jorge would travel through Asia, make friends, see what was going on in low cost housing and share what he learned with people along the way.

It was meant as a temporary arrangement till he learned what his project or his work would really be. The temporary became a permanent method, however. He is still travelling, meeting, sharing, and in the process building networks of friends and allies. He was nominated for the Ramon Magsaysay prize in 1993 for this special work of his, but he refused to be considered for reasons of his own.

His very informal, grassroots pilgrimage approach to development became a model for a time at the Office for Human Development. It was called simply the "Anzorena Method". Unfortunately few could do it as well as Fr. Jorge. It takes someone willing to live in very poor situations, someone completely unbiased, open to all levels of society, always positive and upbeat — and above all someone who can find something to praise in even the most hopeless project. No one must be left behind discouraged.

This book is a selection of articles from the SELAVIP newsletter he has published for 16 years. It is divided into categories, such as, community organizing and housing, use of professionals, lessons in reducing costs and financing. It is a treasure house of ideas, personalities, successful projects, lessons and reasons for encouragement. No one interested in housing in Asia can afford not to read the book.

Two quotations, at the beginning and end, sum up Fr. Anzorena's view of low cost housing in Asia and Latin America:

*Housing is a basic human right. It is an essential*

*requirement to a life of dignity for the person and peace and economic prosperity for the nation.*

*Yet decent housing is wantonly denied to a large number of people all over the world, so many of them live under bridges, on the streets, in the squalid slums and in bed spaces worse than animal cages. And the situation is getting worse, primarily due to land speculation, the ever-growing foreign debt and the trend towards privatization.*

*There are however efforts all over the world which promote housing for the poor. They are for me the beacon of hope that decent shelter is indeed possible for all.*

His newsletter, he says, wants to hold up these beacons of hope for all to see.

There is nothing naive however about Fr. Anzorena. He places community organization in the first chapter to show the poor must organize and struggle for their housing rights. These will not be given freely without the people's efforts.

The second quotation is from the last page of the book:

*This book has shown several ways wherein thousands of families have found access to housing. The last ten years showed remarkable developments as evidenced by the work of hundreds of committed leaders, community organizations, Non-Government Organizations, professionals and even at times government. They have shown through actual experience that it is possible to solve the problem of housing of the poor using very little resources. What is required is political will to implement this in a large scale.*

*But there is no political will.*

*Miserable as they already are, the poor face forcible eviction. And this threat of eviction painfully grows.*

*The situation is not right. We reaffirm our conviction that housing is a basic human right. Our work continues.*



# The Slums of Dhaka

*Professor Nazrul Islam*

Director, Centre for Urban Studies

DHAKA UNIVERSITY, BANGLADESH

Dhaka is one of the world's poorest large cities. It is also among the world's least developed cities. It has one of the highest levels of illiteracy and some of the lowest levels of commercial energy consumption, motorized vehicles and telephones per capita, and is low on most other indicators of development. However, the city is also blessed with a lower level of automobile—caused pollution, due to their small (but increasing) number.

Over half the poor of Dhaka live in extremely congested slums or squatter settlements with densities ranging from 1,000 to 2,000 person per acre. Per capita floor space is less than 20 sq. ft. The structures are either *kutcha* (temporary) shacks or semi *pucca* (permanent brick) buildings and are devoid of any facilities. Thus less than 20% of the households have water within their houses. On the average, less than 20% of the urban poor households have access to proper sanitation.

There has been an overall deterioration in caloric intake of the urban population (from 2,310 in 1965 to 2,094 in 1975-76 to 1,943 in 1985-86). High mortality rates (Over 150/1000 in some areas) and high incidence of malnutrition have been recorded.

The huge urban poor community of Dhaka according to a recent survey, is spread all over the city in 2,156 slums and squatter settlements. Most of these slums (75%) are located on private lands. The rest are located on public land. The average size of these slums has been calculated to be .37 acres. A total of 718,143 persons were living in these slums representing 129,700 households. The number of slums without electricity was 778 (36%), without gas facilities was 1449 (67%), and the number of slums without primary schools was found to be 1,462 (68%).

## Community Based Solution

Urban poverty alleviation cannot be made effective if a land policy is not adopted with consideration for the very large poor population who now have virtually no or very little access to urban land. Regularization of "unauthorized" settlements, improvement of security of tenure of land in urban poor settlements, scope for improvement of environmental and housing situations are all important

requisites for alleviation of poverty in urban areas.

The most crucial issue is that of the urban poor's right to stay in the city, and his/her right to conduct his/her income earning (or livelihood) activity. Not only eviction of squatter and slum settlements but also eviction of informal sector operators like hawkers from sidewalks of busy roads are detrimental to the interest of the urban poor. These are clearly anti-urban-poverty-alleviation moves. City planning approaches in Bangladesh do not show a good understanding of the reality that obtains in its major cities. Thus sufficient allocations for residential or commercial space for the poor are not made in the official urban plans. The informal sector which is the principal area of employment for the poor, is not properly recognized.

The land market is dictated by the free economy, which marginalizes not only the poor but gradually also the lower middle income households. Without government intervention, access to land by these groups would be extremely difficult in the large cities. NGOs have so far taken only a passive role in assisting the poor in their struggle for tenure security.

---

*Over half the poor of Dhaka live in extremely congested slums or squatter settlements with densities ranging from 1,000 to 2,000 persons per acre.*

---

If the land issue could be resolved by the government sector, NGOs could be encouraged to provide assistance to the poor in their housing activity. The success of the Grameen Bank in housing for the rural poor is now well known. Grameen Bank has been able to support nearly 300,000 rural poor households in becoming owners of new houses during the last six years by giving small loans at 5%-8% interest. This was possible mainly because of the fact that these households had owned enough land to build a small house upon.

*[This article is taken from a longer paper by Professor Islam presented at an UMP Regional Workshop in Kuala Lumpur May 9-13, 1994. Professor Islam will speak during the ACHR annual meeting to be held in Dhaka Aug. 12-16. He will open a day long discussion of Dhaka's land and housing problems. There will also be visits to slum areas.]*

## The Informal Sector

*[Most urban poor people with land and housing problems are employed in the so called "informal sector" of the economy. Increasingly it's clear that knowledge of people's economic lives is needed for good housing solutions. Following are excerpts from a new book on the subject by Sandra O. Yu of the Institute on Church and Social Issues, Manila.]*

The informal sector in general refers to the large number of subsistence enterprises which, because of their size and precariousness, do not bother to register with public authorities (and are largely ignored by the national governments.) As such, they are unrecorded in official statistics and do not pay taxes. It is these legal and fiscal attributes, strictly speaking, which give these enterprises a stamp of informality. However, these businesses may be registered with local governments and may be paying local fees.

The International Labor Organization (ILO), the first to pin down this phenomenon 20 years ago, defines the informal sector as having the following characteristics: ease of entry, the very small scale of operations, unregulated and competitive markets, and skills learned outside of formal education.

The roots of the informal economy are found in the weak capabilities of formal institutions to provide employment, productive resources, and sufficient infrastructure for a dynamic and growing society.

How large is the informal sector? In the Philippines the Department of Labor and Employment estimated that as of July 1992 informal employment constituted 52 percent of total employment.

Informal sector participants begin with several disadvantages. Because they come from the ranks of the poor, they have insufficient funds. They operate with very small capital and do not earn enough to plough back funds as reinvestment. Often, household consumption competes for the use of business earnings. Because the amount that can be reinvested is limited, business growth tends to be very slow.

Most of those found in the informal sector are lacking in skills. The few who are skilled have gone into

such businesses as food processing, machine repairs, iron works, and shoe making. The majority who are unskilled engage in vending, which is the most common trade. In the practice of their trade, many do not have business skills, cannot keep track of incomes and expenses, and lack the consciousness to save or reinvest their earning. Most fundamental in many cases is the lack of self-confidence.

Although informal enterprises are distinguished from the formal business sector, the two are inevitably linked. Informal enterprises which trade household items get their goods from groceries and retail them in poor communities. Others act as dealers of Pepsi and Coke. The informal sector extends the market reach of the formal sector down to the low income market. Informal enterprises also do subcontracting work for large firms, an arrangement which lowers the labor costs of these firms.

Unfortunately, the link between informal and formal enterprises does not go much farther. Although the informal sector exhibits needs no different from larger modern enterprises — e.g. capital support, skills training, consultancy, and education — resource institutions available to the modern sector do not cater to the smaller-sized needs of the informal sector.

At present, the business requirements of the formal sector are being served by banks, training institutions, marketing corporations, and consultancy firms. In contrast, informal sector participants are largely left to their own initiatives.

This is the vacuum which many non-government organizations have sought to fill.

### NGO Work

Basically NGOs try to reach the people where they are. Also NGOs realize local institutions and capabilities already exist and try to use them.

Assistance to the informal sector can be classified according to three objectives:

1. helping people enter the informal sector.
2. helping people do better and operate more profitably within the formal sector, and
3. helping people graduate from informal sector.

The first two objectives can be said to apply to existing credit programs, where businesses are set up or expanded with the use of loans. The contribution of such assistance is usually in increasing business incomes or in simply stabilizing income flows. In effect, the assistance is toward multiplying informal activities and assisting them "horizontally".

It has often been stressed, however, that NGOs should not only help multiply informal activities and move them "horizontally". They should also help informal participants "vertically" up the income scale and, if possible, out of informality. This pertains to achieving the third objective, that of helping people graduate from the informal sector.

The informal sector should not be romanticized

as a permanent fixture of the economy or accepted as a necessary catchbasin of surplus labor. To do so is to perpetuate the duality between the formal and informal economies where a minority enjoys disproportionate access by virtue of decades-old policy biases. The third objective hopes to make the informal sector become more integrated with the mainstream economy.

Businesses are assisted in "graduating" from the informal sector mainly through some form of business consultancy. This type of assistance involves giving advice to informal enterprises on different aspects of business management, so that these enterprises may be able to realize more substantial and more permanent improvements and thus escape marginal existence altogether.

## ACHR — TAP NOTES

The Training Advisory Program of ACHR is well into its second year.

- **Cambodia.** Dinky Soliman, two other Filipinos and a Thai community organizer will run a two month CO Training Program July 1-August 30 for 25 Cambodians centering on urban problems and solutions.

- **Pakistan.** There will be an Asia-wide training program Oct. 24-Nov. 2 at the Orangi Pilot Project outside Karachi. Participants will study the OPP's projects, especially the sanitation project, to draw lessons for their own work.

- **Mayumi Kato** of Tokyo, the coordinator of TAP Young Professionals Program, has set up office in Bangkok.

- **The ACHR-TAP Meeting** will be held in

Dhaka, Bangladesh on 12 to 16th August 1994. One day will be devoted to interaction with local groups and discussion of directions for ACHR and TAP activities in Bangladesh. Agenda for both meetings will be sent out soon from Bangkok.

- Efforts have begun by **Jayaratne of Sri Lanka** to prepare a participation research program useful for Asian cities. There will be a regional consultation in September.

- **Vietnam.** ACHR people who visited Ho Chi Minh City in April were able to help government and peoples groups initiate a community based housing finance and credit program that will be tried in three districts of the city.

- **South Africa.** Since 1991 SPARC of Bombay has helped the People's Dialogue communities to save money and organize themselves to solve their land and housing problems. In June SPARC with Somsook of Bangkok ran a workshop on housing finance.



Cool, calm arguments always win the day!



Dinky Soliman in slacks. Somsook Boonyabanha beside her at ACHR TAP meeting, Bangkok, January 1994.

# MOSQUE, GRAVEYARD, COMMUNITY

The Editors

In the heart of downtown Bangkok is one of the most unusual squatter communities in the world. It's a Muslim community in a city 95% Buddhist, and it's 200 years old, as old as Bangkok itself. King Rama I gave his loyal Muslim troops the land after he defeated the Burmese and established Bangkok as his new capital.

Its antiquity hasn't saved the community, named Ban Krua, from the threat of eviction. The government's Express and Rapid Transit Authority (ETA) wants to put an exit ramp for a major highway through the heart of the community. Usually the ETA has its way, but in the community of Ban Krua it met its match.

The people of the community number about 20,000 people living in 1,700 houses. They have resisted the government eviction plan for seven years. April 18, some 4,000 community people marched to the government offices in charge of highways and sat there for three days till the government called off the most recent of eviction initiative.

The Muslims carried a coffin that day that they said was for any of their number killed during the march. Before they left their homes that day they took the media to the small graveyard within the community to show some new open graves that were prepared for persons who might be killed in the march.

Ban Krua's people are legally speaking squatters despite the generations they have lived there, because they never secured titles. Under Ram VI they could have done so, but most thought it wasn't necessary. About a third of the community is non-Muslim.

We asked Saroj Pueksamlee, 41, the leader of the community what lessons the struggle of Ban Krua had for other Asian communities. Saraj is a pudgy, pleasant man who says he doesn't want to marry so he can be free. He didn't say free for what.

He told us religion and the methods he learned in his labor union organizing years were the basis of the people's success. Above all religion is important, he believes. "In the beginning many people in the community didn't see any relation between religion and the community's problems, but then

we studied the Koran and found support for our opposition to the government plan in the words there that say it is good to fight injustice."

This conviction spread through small meetings and the preaching of the Imams. "The mosque is the center of the community, the center of our struggle. We believe mosque, graveyard and community must be together. If the government wants to put its roads through our mosque or graveyard, we cannot agree. What are a people without their mosque and graveyard?"

From the unions he learned how to delegate responsibility and the principal of democracy. In unions and Ban Krua, he says, everyone is equal, meaning everyone's voice is heard, everyone has a chance to speak out.



The 200 year old Muslim community at Ban Krua, Bangkok is threatened by highway construction, but religion and good organizing are helping the people resist.

The community hardly looks 200 years old. There are small two storey houses of wood or concrete blocks and narrow lanes as in every Asian city. There is a constant fear of fire, or better, arson. Pumps are always available that can be rushed anywhere in the community to draw water from the nearby canal to fight the fire. We walked to the graveyard where the community has buried its dead for 200 years.

"We weren't exaggerating when we showed the media the open graves here,"

Saroj said. "Islam teaches us to live as if we die tomorrow. We know it's also a good organizing tactic."

The community got the government to appoint an official "open hearing" group of well known citizens to review the ETA plan. The group decided the ramp would not assist the flow of traffic. Saroj says it will only benefit a few rich merchants.

Ban Krua gets excellent press coverage. While we were in Bangkok, there were editorials and a column in the leading English dailies supporting the people. The matter is still being discussed. The community believes it will win because God assists them and they are in the right.

Not all planned public work are useful. Not all squatter communities are 200 years old, but they are just as valuable in dignity.