ACHR e-news

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

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NEW MUSEUM SHOWCASES HIMALAYAN BUILDING CRAFTS in LEH

Take a break for a minute from the poverty, the evictions and the homelessness and feast your weary eyes on this beautiful building. It has recently been completed by our friends in the Tibet Heritage Fund, in the old town of Leh, where they have been working for many years to restore the town's traditional houses, neighborhoods and infrastructure. The Central Asian Museum, which was designed by Andre Alexander and built by the team of artisans he trained, has been built to showcase the history of Ladakh, which was once an important crossroads on the Central Asian caravan trade routes. Ladakh's culture and artisanship have been shaped by the transmission of goods and ideas from such far-flung regions as Tibet, Yarkand, Kashmir, Afghanistan and the city states of Samarkand and Bukhara - all connected by various branches of the Silk Road. And Andre's museum has been designed to feature those influences. Each of the four floors has wood structures and architectural detailing carefully and authentically reproduced from the building traditions in East Turkistan (1st floor), Kashmir (2nd floor), Tibet (3rd floor) and Baltistan (4th floor), and a long hand-woven rope hangs down from the roof lantern to the ground floor, symbolizing the connection which binds these different cultures.

The museum has been built in the Tsas-soma garden, on land where the caravans used to camp after they arrived in Leh. Today, when Leh has become a bustling city with traffic jams, the Tsas-soma garden is still a secluded, peaceful area in the heart of the old town, and water for the agricultural fields down the valley still flows through the garden's willow trees. Besides the main museum, the complex includes a historic mosque, a Trans-Himalayan Research Library, a Ladakhi Kitchen Museum, a bakery and conference rooms - all either designed and built or restored by the THF team. The museum is being developed in cooperation with a local organization, which provided the land and will manage the museum complex after it's finished. If you can't get up to Leh to visit the museum, the THF has produced a beautiful brochure which summarizes its features and beauties.

For a PDF copy of the brochure, contact Pimpim at: **pemamarpo@yahoo.com.hk**

HOW TO FIX VIETNAM'S RUN-DOWN COLLECTIVE HOUSING BLOCKS?

In early April, Tee and Minh Chao traveled to Vinh, where they met with local architects, planners and volunteers and presented CAN's activities in the Asia region. The team also talked with UN-Habitat and Boram (a UN volunteer from Korea) about doing a joint study of housing in Vinh, and helped facilitate a participatory mapping and community planning workshop in the Hung Hoa Commune, on the outskirts of Vinh, with three DPU planning graduates (Johanna, Barbara and Francesco). The team also discussed ways to strengthen the city's community network, in preparation for proposing Vinh as one of Vietnam's ACCA "Big Sister" cities.

Vinh is a city full of 99 old, dilapidated collective housing developments - both one-story row-house types and 5-story blocks of flats. Vinh is the hometown of Ho Chi Minh, and towards the end of the war, the city was planned to become an industrial center, where young workers from around the country were encouraged to come and work for their country's development. An East German architect was brought over to design apartment blocks to house all these workers. 35 years and three generations later, 19 of those five-story blocks (each containing 80 units of 20-30m2 each) are still standing, and they are home to some 1,300 families (some original owners with certificates and some sub-tenants without certificates, to further complicate things!). Conditions in these buildings are bad, and many families have extended their rooms with structures that project outwards from balconies and windows, in dangerous ways, to add a little more space for their growing families.

The ACCA-supported housing project in Vinh showed one very powerful example of how a community living in crowded and run-down collective row-houses could re-plan and reconstruct their own housing very nicely, on the same site, and this model is already being replicated in several other row-house type collective housing areas in Vinh, where the ACCA big project funds are already revolving through the CDF to finance housing loans in other projects.

But the problem of collective housing in these 5-story blocks is considerably more difficult. After the mapping workshop, Minh Chau, Tee and the DPU students got together with community leaders and Women's Union staff from 25 wards in the city to go around and look at some of these dilapidated housing blocks, many of which are now threatened with eviction. When the team talked with people in these blocks, they learned that the ACCA housing project in Cua Nam Ward is now very well known, and people in these blocks would like to do a similar community-managed upgrading that would allow them to stay in the same place. But the building type makes it very difficult and potentially very expensive to renovate and expand the living space. Plus, the city government has its own 5-part plans for redeveloping the city's 99 collective housing projects. The good news is that the women's savings groups in many of these collective housing blocks are very strong, and the foundation of community management is in place. At the end of the visit, the whole group had a meeting with the city, chaired by the Vice Mayor (Mr. Chin, who came with us to the WUF in Naples), to discuss possible alternative solutions to the city's collective housing which allow people to stay in the same place, with more management by the communities and the savings groups. A workshop in Vinh is now being planned for June, to discuss this further and work out a next step.

Exploring new links with community architects in Hanoi.
On the way to Vinh, Minh Chau and Tee spent a couple of days in Hanoi meeting with local NGOs, architects and students who are working with urban poor communities to design community centers and open spaces. Several of these groups organized a "Community Architecture Night" where about 50 participants from these groups had a chance to present their work and to hear Tee's presentation about CAN's activities in Asia. Some of these new friends in the CAN network then took part in the mapping workshop in the Philippines.

For more info, please contact Minh Chau at ACHR.

OSAKA'S BURAKU COMMUNITIES FACE DOWN "INTEGRATION"

3 million people in Japan come from a community which has traditionally been discriminated against in housing, employment, marriage, education and social status. Many used to live in *burakus* ("outcast settlements"). The Buraku Liberation League (BLL) has struggled for a century for their rights, and since the 1970s has won support from central and local governments which enabled people in some 840 Burakus to improve their communities.

Yamamoto Yoshihiko, who was one of the founders of ACHR in 1989, has been the leader of the Asaka branch of BLL in Osaka. Asaka is the community that in the 1970s challenged the city's discrimination against buraku people and changed the city's planning to accommodate the needs of people living in these burakus and to subsidize their housing and settlement upgrading projects. In Asaka in 1988, they even persuaded the city to demolish a subway train yard that blocked access to their riverside community and then took part in redeveloping the site as parks, playgrounds, housing and schools. But Yamamoto understood that the BLL strategy of pressuring government to deliver preferential services and subsidies could lead to dependency on the government, and searched for a more self-reliant strategy. Yamamoto and his colleagues in Asaka established small companies, community enterprises and community-managed welfare programs. The idea behind these enterprises was to wean themselves from government funding and find their sources of income to fund their Buraku activities. *(the photos at right show the Asaka buraku before and after redevelopment)*

But now the buraku settlements in Osaka are running down. Changes in rent control laws have driven up public housing rents and driven out young people, and those who still stay in these half-empty settlements are mostly elderly, mostly living alone and mostly poor. Many times, even in a close-knit community like Asaka, they have noticed newspapers piling up for several days on someone's doorstep, and then discovered that the elderly person inside had died alone. Osaka's new mayor, who himself comes from a local community with buraku settlements, is making matters worse by pursuing a policy of taking back and selling off to private commercial interests the public land, housing and amenities (like schools, community centers, playgrounds and public bathhouses) in burakus and cutting off many of the municipal subsidies the buraku communities have received in the past, to make up for centuries of discrimination.

Yamamoto and other buraku leaders are understandably alarmed to see all these community-managed services they have painstakingly built over the past decades being seized and sold, and they have set up joint study team, with support from a local university team, to look at how to cope with this new situation. Originally, most of that land belonged to the Asaka buraku settlement, but when the community was being redeveloped in the 1980s, a deal was struck where the land was sold to the Municipality (becoming "public" land), and the money from the sale was put into a special fund that belongs to the Asaka BLL branch. With this fund, the Asaka community has been able to buy back some of the sites the city decided to privatize and sell off. The study team is also proposing to revive the practice of community management and to bind the remaining buraku community people into an active process through a variety of community activities. This is important, Yamamoto-san says, not only for Asaka and the neighboring communities, but for the national Buraku movement, to keep it active and to create a new generation of leaders.

In May, Somsook was able to visit Asaka, and asked Yamamoto-san what he thought about Osaka city's "integration" policy. Some people - like the new mayor - believe that buraku people should not remain in isolated islands, and that the discrimination will disappear only when they "integrate" and become indistinguishable from other Japanese people. But Yamamoto doesn't buy this line. "I am proud to be from a buraku, where we have built mutually-supporting communities of people who live together and help each other. But this doesn't mean we should be an island. Because we have been discriminated against, we have become aware of other forms of discrimination against women, against elderly people and against those with lower incomes. That is why the Asaka BLL has built welfare programs and organized so many community activities over the years, to give space to these various groups, both inside and outside burakus, to rekindle the community spirit. Through this process, real integration will be possible."

NOT ONLY JAPAN: "Affirmative action" programs in USA have tried to make up for historic discrimination against black people, native Americans, women and other minorities by making it easier for them to get into universities and get jobs, and subsidizing their education, health-care, housing, access to day-care, etc. But all those programs are under serious attack and disappearing fast, in the face of market-driven politics, which calls these programs "reverse discrimination" against the larger society, and says they are creating islands of poverty instead of integrating these discriminated groups into the larger society. We saw this in New Orleans, where after Hurricane Katrina, the government decided to demolish all the public housing and privatize it, and by doing so, "integrate" all the poor black people who used to live there into the larger city. *Contact Hosaka at:* **hosaka.m@k6.dion.ne.jp**

PAKISTAN UPDATE FROM ARIF HASAN

Honoring Perween : The big battle between the people of Pakistan and the Taliban and their supporters continues. Pakistanis have never voted for extremism or even for religious parties in the county's entire history, but now we are confronted by an enemy that has no boarders and straddles the Afghan-Pakistan-Tajikistan-Iran-India frontiers. Much of this is our own fault for involving the country first in the anti-Soviet War in Afghanistan and then in the post-9/11 Afghanistan invasion by NATO. Many friends and acquaintances, some very beautiful people, have been gunned down - two after Perween. We just hope that the present elections, in spite of their violence, will ultimately help to distance ourselves from Afghan and regional politics. In the mean time, we have been discussing how we at the OPP and ACHR could honor and remember Perween Rahman, the director of OPP who was killed in Karachi in March. We have decided to honor her memory and keep the spirit of her work alive in two ways:
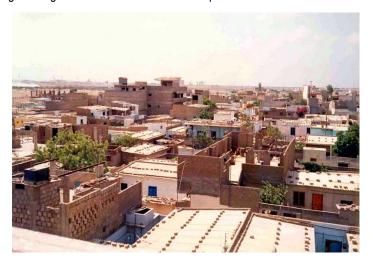
- *Making a film on Perween's life:* We have decided to make a film on Perween's life and work, and her sister (who is a writer) has discussed the idea in detail with a well-known film maker.
- *Organizing an annual community architecture forum in honor of Perween:* We would also like ACHR to initiate an annual Perween Rahman forum on community architecture. It could bring practitioners and community organizations from around Asia together. We can discuss the form and content if the idea is acceptable.

The OPP is carrying on: The work of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) is continuing, without Perween's stewardship, but it is not easy. Election violence has destabilized the city. But the OPP-RTI's involvement in the regularization and upgrading of goths (urban villages) is going to continue. Also, the mapping of human settlements in Sindh and the expansion of training to communities in the mapping process will continue.

Big changes in how low-income housing is being developed and supplied in Karachi : A lot of my [Arif's] recent work has been looking at the changes that are taking place in low-income housing in Karachi, as compared to the previous pattern of setting up katchi abadis (informal settlements).

- **Old katchi abadis are being replaced by informal apartment blocks** (sometimes as high as eight floors, without lifts) and a whole new set of financers, developers and tenure systems have emerged to replace the old system. This is especially true of the settlements nearer to work areas. The arrangement is between a house owner and a developer. The house owner gets one or two apartments and/or cash, and the developer gets the ground floor and the rest of the apartments. Most of the apartments are then rented out to poor families at costs much higher than rents in the katchi abadis on the periphery. One of the reasons for this is that more people now prefer to live and rent near the city center, rather than own single or double-story homes in the katchi abadis in the city's periphery, since it saves them transport costs (which have become exorbitant) and time. It also makes the lives of working women easier, in addition to other numerous social advantages such as proximity to education, health, entertainment and recreational facilities. This new form of informal development is completely changing the physical form of the formal city and introducing new value systems. The IIED has funded a film on this, which is in the process of being filmed, in spite of the anarchic conditions in Karachi.

- **New katchi abadis are being formed but they are very different from the old katchi abadis**, both in physical and social terms. The settlers in the old katchi abadis came from very stable societies and made a conscious decision to come to the city to improve the lives of their families. The new settlers, however, come from rural societies where the traditional governance systems have broken down, and increasing numbers of them are being forced by social changes or by man-made and natural disasters to come to the city. Many of them are circulating migrants. The earlier settlers had the benefits of the government's katchi abadi regularization program and a sympathetic political environment, but the new settlers have no hope of regularizing their "encroachments".
- **The government has liberalized loans for housing and the developers have made good use of it.** A much larger population is now being served by the formal housing market than before. However, the builder's product is poor in design and construction quality and is made as small as possible so as to be "affordable". This new developer-driven low-income housing process is creating "slum" conditions that will, with the passage of time, become much worse than the earlier katchi abadis. *For more information, please contact Arif at:* **arifhasan37@gmail.com**

NEW BOOK BY ARIF : "Land Ownership, Control and Contestation in Karachi and Implications for Low Income Housing" by Arif Hasan, Noman Ahmed, Mansoor Raza, Asiya Sadiq, Saeedud Din Ahmed and Moizza B. Sarwar (103 pages) can be downloaded from **http://pubs.iied.org/10625IIED.html**.

ROOM FOR POOR COMMUNITIES in the CLIMATE CHANGE DEBATE?

A lot of the discussion going on around the world about climate change - and how to respond to it - is a highly exclusive one between technicians, "experts" and consultants. Even if we could listen in, most of us wouldn't be able to understand much, because of the thick crust of jargon and technical terminology that makes the issue all but inaccessible to ordinary human beings. This is a serious problem, because the people who are directly experiencing the most dramatic effects of climate change are not the consultants, but the flash-flooded, typhoon-battered and landslide-wracked people living in vulnerable poor communities. They are on the front lines of climate change, and the big question is how these communities can play a more central and more active role in the global climate change agenda?

Donald Brown is working at IIED on urban poor funds and climate change adaptation, and he is helping to organize a workshop at IIED in London (June 13-14) which will explore the idea of using this big global climate change agenda to create a big new space for poor people - and particularly the urban poor - to take action to solve the increasing environmental problems in their settlements and to play a bigger role in how their cities respond to the changing climate. One way to support this movement is to use flexible finance from community development funds as a tool to allow people to set their own plans and take immediate and practical action. This two-day meeting in London will explore this development direction. In preparation for the meeting, we asked friends in the ACHR network to send in their ideas on this, and got some very interesting responses. Excerpts from a few of these are given below :

(Arif Hasan in Pakistan) I have many problems with the climate change lobby in Pakistan. The information they give us is far too general and technical: they are responses to terms of reference developed for consultancies, and are not area and/or cause specific. Also some of their conclusions are not supported by metrological data. For example, some NGOs with climate change-related contracts have tried to tell local communities in the Indus River delta that sea intrusion in their communities was happening because of climate change. But the communities insist that it is being caused by the construction of dams up-river, and point out that there is no sea intrusion in Karachi - in fact there the sea is receding. What is clear is that we need to understand the local context of climate change better. The problem is too many consultants with pre-determined conclusions are setting the agenda.

(Le Dieu Anh in Vietnam) Vietnam has been vulnerable to natural disasters since long before the climate change agenda came into fashion. But things are definitely getting worse, as huge numbers of disaster-affected people migrate into cities, where they face problems finding housing, jobs and support systems. But the disasters we face in Vietnam are also man-made. In big cities like Ho Chi Minh, some of the most serious floods have not been caused by storms and rising sea levels, but by bad urban planning which has destroyed natural drains and paved over natural wetlands. In smaller cities, many of the floods have been caused by deforestation and mismanaged hydro dams upstream. In response to all this, the government has set climate change adaptation strategies and established offices and departments at all administrative levels. But ordinary people are not aware of these highly technical, top-down plans, nor have they been involved in any climate adaptation activities, though they are at the front lines.

(Kirtee Shah in India) Most information on climate change in the public domain is either too technical or too upper-end. Yet when you talk about floods, rising sea-levels or other natural calamities, the main sufferers will be the poor: the fisherfolk living along the coast, the farmers working along the rivers or the slum dwellers living in low-lying urban land. Though these are the front-line victims of climate change, they are the ones who know the least about its causes and consequences, and are the least prepared to protect themselves from it or to contribute to local efforts at mitigation. Willing donors should support projects which reach vulnerable communities, give them space to examine and understand the implications of climate change on their lives and settlements - on their own terms - and then help them plan and implement their own bottom-up mitigation strategies.

(Celine D'Cruz from SDI) This is a good opportunity to set up a special community disaster fund. This fund should be for building the capacity of communities to manage the disasters that affect them: to prepare themselves *before* the disasters, to organize crisis support *during* the disasters and to make long-term capital investments *after* the disasters.

(Marco Kusumawijaya in Indonesia) Urban poor communities can actually adapt more easily because of their *low-entropic* life-styles (especially their low consumption of industrial products). But they are under assault by new industrialized products and impacts by the rich. So the work we do with them should follow three directions: to protect and improve their *low-entropic* livelihoods, to contribute alternatives to the larger society and to demand a larger share of the urban commons. I am very interested in this issue, having pursued some studies on this in the last six years or so.

(Lajana Manandar in Nepal) Nepal is regarded as the fifth most climate-change vulnerable country in the world: glaciers are melting, rivers are flooding and weather patterns are changing. All these changes are bringing hardship on people's lives and living conditions. Many committees have been set up at national and district level to address the issue of climate change, but communities are left out. There is an urgent need for these communities who experience the effects of climate change in their everyday lives to be supported to take action to reduce their vulnerability and build their resilience, through various activities

(including ACCA projects). Lumanti has established a network of grassroots women's organizations and professionals to support community-based initiatives to build resilience. The network has established a special fund which communities can borrow from to develop their small-scale collective resilience activities. Some interesting activities have already been initiated in Pokhara.

(Enhe Tsedendorji in Mongolia) In Mongolia air pollution has became a major problem, caused by smoke from stoves in ger area that heat houses in the winter months, between November and March. Many different projects have focused on improving the stoves and fuel, to make them less polluting and more energy-efficient, but without any community participation. If the communities are organized and well aware about improved energy-efficient housing and stoves, fuels or other simple heating technologies, then the problem can be solved faster than by distributing these technologies to only certain areas, in a scattered way. People's saving and contributions from other actors cold be combined to create a community-managed "energy efficiency" fund which would be a good tool to help reduce the pollution which causes climate change.

(From Mahavir Acharya in Bhuj, India) The poorest 40% of the world's population uses less than 5% of the world's energy and less then 5% of the world's land. A lot of our environmental problems are being caused by centralized, top-down systems to provide energy and services. Why can't we think of ways to deliver services and housing in a more bottom-up way? Why can't we trust people in communities to manage issues like solid-waste disposal and water supply in a more decentralized and community-managed way? Building codes often prevent people from building houses with traditional building materials that are good for the planet. These houses often have a much longer life than houses made of concrete and steel - both materials which require more energy and cause more pollution to produce. A concrete house consumes six times more energy then houses built with local and traditional materials like mud, adobe, stone, bamboo and thatch.

MOU WITH UN-HABITAT :   CITYWIDE UPGRADING in 500 ASIAN CITES

For several years now, we have been having discussions with the Asia regional office of UN-Habitat about the possibility of a collaboration between ACHR and UN-Habitat, to promote community-driven and citywide upgrading in Asian cities. Initially, we were very ambitious and set a target of raising US$ 30 million to do that in 300 Asian cities. Finally, we weren't able to raise the $30 Million, but we did raise $3.5 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and a little more from the Rockefeller Foundation, and those funds are allowing us to expand the ACCA-supported citywide upgrading process from 165 cities to about 250 cities. From our perspective, we think it's quite important to use the international status the UN brings to link to the system within these various Asian countries where the community-driven upgrading process has already begun.

Finally this long-planned collaboration with UN-Habitat is really happening, and on May 24, 2013, Somsook, Jayaratne and Hosaka traveled to Fukuoka to sign the MOU with friends in the regional UN-Habitat office. In the new MOU, our original target of 300 cities has been upped to an even more ambitious 500 cities (which is not really so ambitious, if you add the 165 ACCA cities so far and the 300 Thai cities already doing citywide upgrading, and others).

We're all hoping that this MOU signing will not be just another grand gesture without any action, as is usually the case, but will help link the citywide upgrading activities that are being supported by ACCA and other organizations to become more effective and more numerous, and to have more impact on the structures and policies in Asian countries. At the country level, the collaboration can open up political space for the national government, the communities and UN-Habitat to sit together and explore ways to strengthen and broaden the people-driven and citywide upgrading process at the national scale, with UN-Habitat playing a supporting and facilitating role. At the regional level, the MOU can also be a means to influence the Asian Ministerial Platform (which is also facilitated by UN-Habitat) and to persuade them to take citywide and people-driven upgrading into their agenda. In these ways, the UN-Habitat's involvement can bring a broader range of stakeholders and government organizations on board and help move the upgrading work poor people have been doing into a much broader and more open agenda.

Please contact ACHR for a copy of the MOU between ACHR and UN-Habitat.

ACCA PHASE 2 BEGINS WITH COMMITTEE MEETING IN YANGON

In its first 3-year phase, the Asian Coalition for Community Action (ACCA) Program supported a process of citywide and community-driven slum upgrading in 165 cities, in 19 Asian countries. In all these cities, community people are the primary doers in planning and implementing projects which tackle problems of land, infrastructure and housing at scale, in partnership with their local governments and other stakeholders. The ACCA program has demonstrated a new kind of development intervention, in which the poor have the freedom to decide things and manage their own development. And flexible finance is the program's chief tool to let community people themselves make the change. All these projects have proved that urban poor communities and their development partners in all these and other cities are ready to address citywide problems and citywide development together.

That process is continuing, and in early May, the ACCA program's second phase was launched with an ACCA / ACHR committee meeting in Yangon, Myanmar (May 5-6, 2013). This was the first committee meeting in the program's second phase, but the 13th since the ACCA program began. The Yangon meeting, which was hosted by Women for the World (WFW) and the new Women Savings and Development Network (WSDN), was attended by 25 people from 8 countries. Several new ACCA projects were proposed during the meeting, and after reviewing and discussing them, a total budget of US$ 797,000 was approved, to support projects in 9 new cities and 12 ongoing cities in 12 Asian countries (including 11 Big housing projects, 1 loan from the ACCA Regional Revolving Loan Fund and 62 small upgrading projects).

The meeting began with a silent moment of remembering Perween Rahman, the director of OPP-RTI and long-time ACHR friend and muse, who was killed in Karachi on March 13, 2013. A good session followed in which all the meeting participants reflected on the community process they had witnessed in Myanmar, and offered their suggestions to the Myanmar team for how to move it forward. There were then reports on the ACHR / ACCA activities over the past few months, and a presentation from Nad about the recent activities of the Community Architects Network in Asia (CAN). Brief updates were also give by Ruby on the Urban Poor Coalition Asia (UPCA), by Maurice on the Video / Media Network in Asia, by Somsook on the Regional Revolving Loan Fund, and by Minh Chau on the Decent Poor Program. Before the new project proposals were presented, discussed and decided upon, there was a discussion and review of the ACCA Phase 2 guidelines and budget ceilings.

In the two days before the ACCA Committee meeting, the international participants had a chance to plunge into the exciting community development process which is taking off in Myanmar with gusto. Besides joining the one-day national workshop on "Support for Secure Affordable Housing and Building Strong Communities in Myanmar", we had a chance to visit community-driven rebuilding projects in cyclone-hit rural areas, and 3 urban housing projects for landless squatters and room-renters that were designed and developed by women's savings groups that are part of the newly established Women Savings and Development Network (WSDN), with support from Women for the World (WFW), a small local support organization. There were also opportunities to have some in-depth discussions with the women's savings groups in Yangon. *Three detailed reports have been prepared on the Yangon meeting and all of them can be downloaded from the ACHR website:*

- **Report on the 13th ACCA Committee Meeting in Yangon**, Myanmar, May 5-6, 2013
- **Report on the National Workshop** on May 4, 2013, on community-driven development in Myanmar
- **Field visit notes** on the urban housing and savings projects, and the rural cyclone-rehabilitation projects in Myanmar.

TWO-WAY LEARNING : When we organize these ACCA meetings, we don't want to organize just a meeting. We would like to expand the meeting into an opportunity to interact with and impact the national process, one way or another. For those who come to these meetings, that exposure to the local situation and the national politics is part of a two-way learning process. This Yangon meeting demonstrates our direction that whenever we organize a meeting anywhere, we want a collective process which contributes to the change in that host country - and vice-versa. So we organize these ACCA meetings with the national change process. We make use of these ACCA meetings to be meaningful to the host countries, not only to the committee members. *This is our culture in organizing the meeting: the action, the change process and the learning - all in one bundle at the same time!*

Regional CAN workshop in the Philippines (May 20 - 28, 2013) It's been a long time since the last regional gathering of the Community Architects Network (CAN) in Chiang Mai, in June 2010, and so they decided to organize another one. This one was in the Philippines, and 45 international participants (community architects, planners, engineers, community builders and community leaders) from 14 countries took part, along with a big team of local community architects, students, community leaders and support NGOs. The hands-on workshop focused on citywide upgrading pilots in three cities in Metro Manila: Caloocan (especially the "Barangay-wide" upgrading in Barangay 177), Valenzuela and Bocaue (in Bulacan Province, on the outskirts of Manila). These three citywide upgrading pilots are being supported by a collaboration between ACCA, HPFP, FDUP, the Social Housing Finance Corporation (SHFC), the Community Mortgage Program (CMP) and the World Bank, to test and demonstrate a more citywide and more within-city approach to slum upgrading and to financing urban poor housing, in a context which is still mostly project-by-project, and where relocation of slum dwellers to faraway sites is still the norm. *Maurice joined the workshop and wrote up this brief report:*

1. Show and tell: On the first two days of the workshop, the visiting and local groups gave presentations about their rich and varied work supporting urban poor communities in their mapping, surveying, house-design, housing planning, alternative building materials and settlement upgrading initiatives.

2. Field work in 9 communities : In what has become second nature now in these CAN workshops, there was a real attempt to use the workshop as an opportunity to engage with local communities and to include activities which have a lasting benefit for them, so the learning and the benefits of the workshop were two-way. This time, after months of planning, the community architects brought their design and planning skills to help find potential solutions in nine selected poor communities, in three constituencies within Metro Manila: Caloocan City's Barangay 177, Valenzuela City and the town of Bocaue. The community architects divided themselves up into nine teams, and each team spent three days (and nights!) in one of the nine communities, where they supported the communities in an intense process of mapping, surveying, understanding the larger city and the local problems, and developing preliminary community-driven solutions to their housing and environmental problems.

3. National workshop: Later, community representatives from the nine settlements and their supporters from CAN presented their plans to the local authorities, the key national government organizations and international development agencies at a special workshop in a municipal hall. The mayor of Valenzuela gave an enthusiastic response to plans presented by communities from his city. Several MOUs were subsequently signed between CAN, community representatives, NGOs and various national and local authorities to continue this collaboration to find citywide solutions for housing the urban poor in the Philippines. At the same meeting, Somsook made a presentation about the citywide and community-driven upgrading initiatives that are being supported by ACCA, in over 165 Asian cities - many also being developed with good support from community architects. The workshop, and the intense process of community planning and solution-crafting which preceded it, was an opportunity for the CAN network to demonstrate and promote to the key government shelter agencies a more community-driven and more city-wide process of housing and upgrading planning, with a longer term view of persuading these agencies to adopt, institutionalize and make resources available for such processes.

4. Next steps: The mayor of Valenzuela *(in the photo at right)* said that this is the first time he has encountered a bottom-up planning process, where plans and development proposals came from communities, and that he really appreciates this and looks forward to discussing how his local government can work with national agencies like SHFC to support these people's plans. Right after the workshop, activities are being carried out to continue what started in the
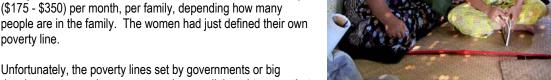
communities. A discussion with SHFC to explore possible financing for the eight communities in Valenzuela and Barangay 177 is scheduled for July 1st. CAN and SHFC have also discussed how to support community mapping and planning beyond the two cities. Meetings are scheduled with three universities interested in being more actively involved, after some of their students joined the CAN workshop. Preparations are also underway for a citywide settlement mapping training for UPCA-Philippines and the Valenzuela community network, as a way to start off actual citywide mapping in Valenzuela

IIED-ACHR STUDY :   FINDING A BETTER WAY TO SET POVERTY LINES

During the recent visit to Myanmar, for the ACCA meeting, we had a chance to sit down and talk with some of the women who had set up the pioneering savings groups in Yangon's poorest and most vulnerable squatter settlements. The women told us that their dream for the future is very clear: to be able to support members of their savings group to be successful enough in their small businesses to survive on their income, without having to take any loans, so that their savings can help others to reach that point. Nad asked them what kind of income would be enough to do that, and their answer was 150,000 - 300,000 Kyat ($175 - $350) per month, per family, depending how many people are in the family. The women had just defined their own poverty line.

Unfortunately, the poverty lines set by governments or big development agencies are not nearly as well thought-out as that, or as realistic. The one-dollar-a-day poverty line that was set ages ago by the World Bank, for example, is still used by governments, UN agencies and all sorts of development institutions to set their policies and plan their programs. And because that poverty line is so low, it becomes possible for World Bank publications to assert all kinds of statistical absurdities, like *"Urban poverty has been eliminated from Delhi."* So the question is, what really is the poverty line? Our friend David Satterthwaite at IIED would like to argue that in different countries and different cities, you have different living costs and different levels of poverty, and that poverty is complex and multi-faceted - it's not just a matter of how much a person earns, or how many calories she ingests each day. You could argue, for example, that instead of the old "dollar a day", insecure housing is the line that more clearly divides the poor and not poor. And insecure housing comes with many other factors, like lack of access to sewers, water supply, electricity, house registration, public education, etc. So how can you adopt just one single poverty line and use that in every single city and every country around the world? It's not fair or right to do so. Perhaps the World Bank set that one-dollar-a-day standard because they didn't know how to deal with all those differences and complexities or didn't know how to measure poverty in different places, so they took the easy way out - *and didn't!*

In January 2013, IIED organized a meeting in London on Urban Poverty Assessment, which Somsook, Ruby, Father Norberto, Tom and several friends from SDI attended. At that meeting, IIED and ACHR decided to look together at this issue of poverty lines and do a joint study on how to assess urban poverty in Asian countries. That may sound a little boring - *urban poverty again?* - but how poverty is assessed is actually a very serious issue in Asia and in the world, because the key development institutions are using standard poverty lines which misrepresent the scale and extent of poverty and cause distortions which affect budgeting, policies and programs for the poor. We would like to try to determine the real poverty line, in different countries, at the local level. What is the line above which a person can reasonably live, in different countries? And what do we mean by *living reasonably*? And what do we mean by country? For within any country, there are greatly different costs of living, between small towns and giant capital cities. Manila and Kidapawan, for example, will have very different levels of subsistence and should have different poverty lines.

IDEA : **Organizing a regional workshop (or perhaps two) to discuss the meaning of poverty and poverty lines - from the perspective of poor people themselves**. Our ACHR network includes many urban poor groups, and many of these groups are now accomplished surveyors and mappers and data managers. How can we bring those groups into this discussion and get them to discuss and determine all the elements which would constitute a poverty line in their places? If we discuss this issue with poor people, they will have all sorts of ideas. The only problem will be how to organize all that richness and all those ideas into a system with which to talk to the larger society about assessing poverty, to make it comparable?

1. Housing for the Urban Poor: From Local Action to Global Networks : Three German researchers at the Technical University of Berlin are conducting a research project on networking of the urban poor around housing issues. Peter Herrle, Astrid Ley and Josefine Fokdal came to Thailand in January 2013, where they met with ACHR and CODI, and spent some time visiting housing projects being implemented by poor communities in the Thai community network, with support from CODI's Baan Mankong upgrading Program. At the end of May, they organized a small symposium in Berlin, at the Technical University, which Somsook attended, where their preliminary "proposition paper" (in which the ACHR and SDI community networks in Asia and Africa were prominent case studies) was presented and discussed. After the meeting, the paper will be adjusted, and we hope we can get a copy to distribute around the region.

2. Citynet moves to Seoul and calls for applications for a new set of Citynet office-bearers : The Citynet Secretariat has moved from Japan to Seoul, Korea and is now planning their Citynet Congress, which will take place in Seoul, November 3-6, 2013. During that congress, the election committee will conduct elections for all Citynet office bearers for the period 2014-1017, including Secretary General, President, Vice President, Members of the Executive Committee, Auditor and Members of the Election Committee. The Citynet Secretariat has asked us to circulate this call for applications for these positions to friends in the Asia region. If anybody is interested in applying for any of these positions with Citynet, the applications must reach the Election Committee c/o the Citynet Secretariat by July 31, 2013. For more information, please contact :
- **Citynet Secretariat, Seoul Global Center 10F, 38 Jongno, Jongo-gu, Seoul, Korea**
- **Tel. +82-2-723-0639 / e-mail: info@citynet-ap.org / Website: www.citynet-ap.org**

3. HIC is looking for a new General Secretary : We've also gotten word from Ana Sugranyes that the Habitat International Coalition (HIC) is looking for a new General Secretary, and have been asked to disseminate the news through our network, in case anyone is interested in applying. The job, which begins in January 2014, will be based in Cairo and will involve leading the coordination of this global network for the right to habitat and social justice. Here's the official institutional profile, for interested applicants: "Habitat International Coalition (HIC) is an international collective of civil society organizations, social movements and individuals that mobilizes and advocates in defense, promotion and enforceability of the human rights of homeless, evicted, displaced, landless and inadequately housed people and communities, including those under occupation, in urban and rural areas. HIC seeks to empower people and communities to improve their conditions based on the principles, norms and standards of human rights, diversity, gender equality, social production and environmental sustainability. HIC produces knowledge and promotes public awareness about habitat issues and serves as a platform for the formulation of programs, policies and strategies for constituent social movements and civil society organizations working to promote the human rights to housing, land, and the city, and acts as their representative to public, national, regional and international bodies and forums." If anybody is interested, please note that you must submit your application by the stroke of midnight, on Monday, 15 July 2013, to Ana Sugranyes, who is HIC's current General Secretary, at: **gs@hic-net.org**   *For more information, please visit the HIC website:* **www.hic-net.org**

4. Regional Workshop on Eviction being planned for the end of 2013, or early 2014: Sadly, the scourge of eviction shows no sign of disappearing from Asian cities - or from Asian rural areas either. Especially now, as cities are being emphasized as the "engines of economic growth" and huge investments from all sectors are pouring into them, we're seeing land-grabbing, land-speculation, real-estate development and mega-infrastructure projects displacing millions of poor Asians. In the past few years, ACHR's ACCA Program has been dealing with the issue of eviction through the strategy of citywide upgrading, in which poor communities in a city come together to survey all the vulnerable settlements in the city and then develop plans to upgrade them and secure their tenure, in collaboration with the local government and other stakeholders. This is one way of dealing with eviction, by preventing the evictions long before they happen. But there are other ways to understand and deal with eviction, and now is the time to re-examine this serious issue and explore ways that we can deal with it more properly, as a regional coalition. The regional eviction meeting is part of that. We would like the people who come to that meeting to prepare some information about the evictions happening in their own countries, so that we can compile these stories and put them together into a regional document, to disseminate and use in various forums on the issue. *If you have any ideas on this, please contact Minh Chau at ACHR.*

5. 100 films by the Video / Media Network Asia now being compiled: We now have a collection of nearly 100 videos from 12 countries, ranging in length from 5 to 30 minutes.   Some of the videos are about ACCA projects and some are about problems of Asian cities. Some are community-made videos and some were made by architects and professional film-makers. Some of these films were made with support from ACHR and the Rockefeller Foundation and some without. ACHR is now in the process of selecting about 20 of these films to include in a DVD compilation to distribute in the region, as we did with the videos produced in the first stage. The internet now gives us a way to share some of these videos, on Youtube and Vimeo and other video-sharing sites. We just uploaded a film of Perween's mapping presentation in Bangkok on Vimeo, and you can get the link from the ACHR website to see it. Another video of Somsook's presentation to donors on ACCA and citywide upgrading at IIED last January has been uploaded and can be viewed on Youtube. If anybody is interested in making a film on these kinds of issues, please contact Maurice at ACHR - we still have some budget left for this video activity - don't let it sit in the bank!