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e-news

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

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JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2012

- Eviction threat for 2,500 families living along Kathmandu's Bagmati River in NEPAL
- Tibet Heritage Fund and the ACHR coalition lose a beloved colleague and friend - Andre Alexander
- ACCA Program update, as we finish the program's third year + DOCUMENTING ACCA with friends at IIED
- News about the regional DECENT POOR Program
- Urban Poor Coalition Asia (UPCA) prepares for its first big regional gathering in the PHILIPPINES
- Update on the work of Asia's busy COMMUNITY ARCHITECTS

BAGMATI RIVER COMMUNITIES FACE EVICTION in KATHMANDU

There are 17 informal settlements on the banks of the Bagmati River, which passes through the middle of Kathmandu. Most of these settlements have been there for decades, and are home to 2,343 families who have fled to Kathmandu from poverty and the Maoist civil war in rural areas. But with skyrocketing land prices, they couldn't afford formal housing and were forced to settle on the riverbanks. Although conditions are far from perfect, these communities have made many improvements in their housing, infrastructure and sanitation over the years. Many of them have active women's savings groups, and some have explored on-site redevelopment and land-sharing options with community architects. The headquarters of the national squatters federation is in Sankhamool, one of the Bagmati River settlements. The government is now planning to implement a big project (funded by a loan from ADB) to revitalize the

rivers in Kathmandu, which are badly polluted and choked with garbage. The project involves developing drains, water treatment plants, roads and public green spaces along the river. All the political parties which make up the current Maoist-led government have agreed that all the riverside settlements must be evicted to make way for the project. So in early December 2011, the government posted eviction notices in all these riverside settlements, giving the people just two weeks to vacate their houses. If it actually happens, this mass eviction of riverside squatter communities will be the largest in Nepal's history, and a strange showcase project for a political party which has dedicated itself to refocusing development towards the country's poorest citizens.

Protest, dialogue, court case: In the short time since then, there have been protests by community people fighting for their land, with support from local human rights groups. Lumanti, which has been working with these communities for 16 years, has helped to initiate a dialogue with various ministers, political leaders and government agencies concerned with the project. They also filed a court case to try to stop this forced demolition and to push for alternatives. The court gave the government a week to present their justification for demolishing these settlements, and in a day-long hearing on December 12, lawyers on both sides (for and against the demolitions) presented their arguments. In this struggle, the Land Reform Minister and Mr. Keshav Sthapit (the former mayor of Kathmandu, who helped start the Kathmandu CDF) have been strong allies. The court handed down a verdict directing the government not to demolish the houses for the next 35 days, to identify the real *sukumbasi* (landless poor people) and work on developing some housing alternatives for them. This was the first time in Nepal's history that poor informal settlers have filed a court case demanding alternatives before demolition and the first time the court decided in their favor.

But the 35-day stay order has run out, and the communities are again facing the prospect of eviction by a government which still seems determined to clear the Bagmati banks, and the bulldozers are already rolling into the riverside areas. The government has offered to provide evicted families with a little cash to rent rooms elsewhere for three months, by way of compensation - which is nobody's idea of a reasonable housing alternative. In the mean time, Lumanti is working closely with the riverside communities to keep the dialogue with various government agencies going, and to help the communities to develop their own alternative housing and settlement plans - both as individual settlements and as a united network of Bagmati riverside settlements - to use in their negotiations for on-site redevelopment or relocation to good secure alternative land (which people are willing to do). It is never an easy thing to develop long-term plans in the heat of an eviction crisis like this, with armed soldiers and bulldozers looming, and most of the efforts so far have gone into the court cases and advocacy. ACHR has sent letters to the key government officials in Nepal urging them to use the river project to strengthen the housing development and rights of the people in the city at the same time they redevelop the river, and offering our support in doing that. *For more info, please contact Lajana at* **shelter@lumanti.wlink.com.np**

ANDRE ALEXANDER, January 17, 1965 - January 17, 2012

We have some very sad news to convey, about the loss of one of ACHR's beloved and long-time colleagues, Andre Alexander, who directed the Tibet Heritage Fund (THF). Andre died quite suddenly - without any warning and without evidence of any illness - on the his 47th birthday, in Berlin, where he was spending some time lecturing, writing and negotiating donor support for a new round of THF projects. He and a friend had gone out in the morning to do some shopping, and just a few meters from his building, Andre lost consciousness and fell from his bicycle. Neither the medics in the ambulance nor the doctors in the hospital could revive him. Andre was never much given to seeing doctors, and if he had some health problem, his friends - and probably he himself - didn't know about it. Pimpim writes that in the hospital, the doctors were puzzled over the death of a man so young and vigorous as Andre, but said it sometimes happens like that, that the heart just stops beating.

The Tibet Heritage Fund, which was founded by Andre and his friend Pimpim de Azevedo twenty years ago, in Lhasa, is a non-profit organization committed to preserving architectural heritage in general and Tibetan heritage in particular, and to improving the lives of people living in traditional and historic settlements through sustainable development. This intrepid group of Asian and European activists, scholars, artisans, architects and Tibet-lovers works in Tibet, India and Mongolia to restore traditional houses, neighborhoods and Buddhist monasteries. They use the restoration process to revive the traditional building crafts and cultural practices that go into these beautiful buildings, which continue to be under serious threat in many ways. Although their work has focused on the meticulous physical restoration of historic structures, the group has always sought to find ways that the mostly poor families who live in these old buildings and neighborhoods can stay and be part of their architectural and cultural revival, rather than be evicted to make way for tourist boutiques or faceless tower blocks.

The roster of THF projects is now quite large, and includes urban conservation work in Lhasa and Leh, the restoration of Buddhist monasteries in Central Tibet, Sichuan, Qinghai, Ladakh and Mongolia, the reconstruction of houses and neighborhoods after the earthquake in Yushu and the flash floods in Ladakh, and an attempt to preserve traditional courtyard houses in Beijing's hutongs. Others include a new conservation project in Sikkim, the recovery of a 10th-century Buddhist stone carving, the design and construction of the Central Asian Museum in Ladakh (a new building built in traditional Tibetan ways) and the the restoration of ancient temples and monasteries in Amdo and Ladakh. THF runs a large vocational training program to keep traditional building skills and crafts alive, and researches and documents traditional architecture and building technologies. Their team has developed interactive maps which are linked to a database of information about several hundred historic buildings. Many of these projects have been featured on TV, in articles and on radio shows, and have won several awards, including three UNESCO Heritage Awards and the honor of Andre's being named a "Heritage Hero" by the BBC. Many of the reports which describe all this work - which are themselves objects of considerable beauty - can be downloaded from the THF website: **www.tibetheritagefund.org**

For the last 13 years, Andre and his colleagues have brought stories of their extraordinary work and a fresh perspective into the ACHR network and taken part in many ACHR gatherings and exchange trips, where Andre's presentations were always guaranteed to delight. He has helped shape some of ACHR's new directions of working with the poor in historic cities, and his experience in Tibet, India and Mongolia has inspired projects in other historic cities. He has also helped ACHR to study the impact of UNESCO "World Heritage" designations on the heritage cities of Hoi An (in Vietnam), Lijiang (China), Pagan (Burma), Luang Pragang (Lao PDR) and Kobe (Japan). Andre and his colleagues have also taken active part in supporting the community architects movement in Asia, where Andre's signature white trousers, flowered shirts, neckerchiefs, pony-tail and avid curiosity have become welcome and regular features.

Since news of Andre's death reached the ACHR office here in Bangkok, we have not been able to stop thinking and talking about this amazing man, who was the son of a chimney-sweep, grandson of a prize-fighting boxer, great-grandson of a ship's captain. His adventurous spirit, his wry sense of humor, his intelligence that always came with kindness, his vegetarian-reggae-loving-swashbuckling persona and all his good work are being invoked almost constantly. Tibet attracts activists and celebrities around the world who have good reason to be furious at what is happening there. But it is so rarely that you find people who believe in something and actually put their anger at injustice into doing something about it. "Andre was a doer and a maker of change", Somsook was saying, "and unfortunately, we don't have in our world many serious doers on the ground, working with people. He quietly went in to this extremely difficult context in Tibet and made new possibilities, opened up diplomatic space for concrete action by local people. He put together his idealism and his creativity with those people and their ancient and endangered culture to make something work, to make something real happen, to show what's right. And he worked in ways that were diplomatic, peaceful and creative, with a lot of careful study into the history of Tibetan buildings and building crafts, to find ways that old ways should not be lost. His writing and speaking were both very good, always very clear and concise and fascinating to listen to." *(The sketch of Andre at the right was made by his friend Tashi)*

"Andre's death was so sudden and so unfair. Everything feels so empty and honestly, the pain for us is unbearable. But we would like to let you all know that the work of THF and the Leh Old Town Initiative (LOTI) will continue. With Andre in our hearts, our work going forward will keep Andre's memory alive and preserve Tibetan culture for future generations. This is what we believe he would like us to do: keep doing our best, working with local people and for local people. With your help, we have always tried to preserve and create beauty in our work, whether for buildings or a book. We have always and always will believe in what we are doing. It will be very hard to carry on with our work without Andre, but we must go on and we will do our best, as we have always done. With your help and the fantastic THF teamwork, we know that we can continue to follow Andre's dream and our own dreams too. Just to let all of you know that we will continue the great work of Andre." *Excerpt from a January 24th e-mail from Pimpim, Yutaka and Sylvester (Andre's colleagues in THF)*

Andre's funeral, which is being organized by Andre's family and his THF colleagues, will take place at noon, on February 9th, 2012, in the Kirchhof Jerusalem in Berlin. If anybody has any questions or would like to send any messages, please contact Andre's friend Pimpim de Azevedo at **pemamarpo@yahoo.com.hk**

"It tells of terrible journeys, of men masked against the sun, riding through ethereal regions with their feet frozen, of welcoming fog-girt monasteries lit by butter lamps at the journey's end."

(From "The Way of the White Clouds", by Lama Anagarika Govinda, from Andre's "Favorite readings" page, on the THF website)

"Everything dies, baby, that's a fact. But maybe everything that dies someday comes back . . ."

(From Bruce Springsteen's album, "Atlantic City" - another gem from Andre's "Favorite readings" page, on the THF website)

The photo above shows Andre and Pimpim and friends in 1989, making a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash, in Tibet. This is a mountain which is a sacred place to Bons, Buddhists, Hindus and Jains. Circumambulating the mountain on foot (a 52-kilometer journey which is to be made in a counter-clockwise direction) is a holy ritual that is thought to bring good fortune and supreme bliss.

ACCA PROGRAM UPDATE

The ACCA Program (Asian Coalition for Community Action) has now crossed the three-years mark, and we are now on the home stretch for completing the program (which has been extended by six months) in July 2012. The most recent ACCA committee meeting was held in Bangkok, Thailand, on December 16, 2011. Several new ACCA projects were proposed during that meeting, and after reviewing and discussing them, a total budget of US$ 336,580 was approved to support new projects in 6 new cities and 5 ongoing cities in 5 Asian countries (including 6 Big projects and 15 small upgrading projects). The meeting was organized right after a 2-day regional meeting to discuss and set plans for documenting the ACCA program (*see story below*). A copy of the meeting report can be downloaded from the ACHR website. Here are some quick figures on the ACCA program's performance so far :

Overall ACCA Program performance so far (2008 - January 1, 2012)

- Total number of countries : **19 countries**
- Total number of cities / districts approved : **153 cities** *(most with city-wide upgrading, but not all of them)*
- Total number of big projects approved : **107 projects**   (total approved budget $3,981,767)
- Total number of small projects : **708 projects**   (total approved budget $1,829,500)
- Support for disaster activities : **19 projects in 8 countries** (total approved budget $481,350)
- Community development funds **in 107 cities**   (about 70 cities directly linked to ACCA)
- ACCA Regional Fund loans **5 loans in 4 countries** (total amount $178,500)
- Total budget approved **$9,335,947**   (**88%** of the total ACCA budget managed by ACHR)
- Budget actually disbursed **$6,840,795**   (**73%** of the total approved budget)

- Budget still available **$1,264,053**   (**12%** of the total ACCA budget managed by ACHR)
- Budget for BIG projects and Disaster projects is finished, so no new proposals in those lines
- Budget for SMALL projects still possible, up to a ceiling of $30,000 per country, for new or "already going" cities.

UPCOMING EVENTS :

- **January 27 - 29, 2012: Community Disaster Workshop in Yogyakarta**, organized and hosted by Arkom-Jogja and UPC. *(the photo at the upper right shows the field visit to Kalitengah Lor, one of the volcano-affected villages in Arkom Jogja's ACCA Mount Merapi project in Yogyakarta)*
- **March 1 - 2, 2012: National meeting of the Lao Women's Community Savings network / CDF process** *(the photo at the lower right shows some of the women's savings group members in Baan Huay Hom village, in Vientiane's Sikkothabong District, where they built that elevated water tank with support from a small project loan from ACCA, via the district-level CDF)*
- **March 12 - 16, 2012: Regional Urban Poor Coalition Asia (UPCA) meeting in Quezon City, Philippines**, hosted by HPFP.
- **March 17, 2012 : ACCA Committee Meeting,** to be held in Quezon City, the day after the UPCA forum ends.
- **Early April, 2012: Video workshop in Bangkok**, to be organized by ACHR, about the next round of community video production.
- **Mid May 2012: Inclusive Cities Workshop in Seoul, Korea**, in collaboration with Citynet and Asian Bridge.
- **April - May, 2012 (3 weeks) : 40 students from the Development Planning Unit (DPU) in London to do field work in Bangkok**, with support from ACHR, CODI and CAN.
- **June 2012 : Regional workshop on City Development Funds (CDFs) + ACCA Committee meeting -** *Venue?*

ACCA GOES TO THE WORLD BANK HEADQUARTERS in WASHINGTON D.C.

In early December 2011, a team of 5 people from ACHR (Somsook, Nad, Ruby, Prapat and Anh) traveled to Washington DC to present the ACCA Program, spending the whole morning with many key people at World Bank headquarters. Their presentations (including the two community leaders) were filmed and broadcast on WB websites around the world (*follow link below*)! At the end of the meeting, an agreement was made to collaborate to make a study about the City Development Fund approach. One of the senior WB officials even suggested giving $200,000 - $400,000 capital to some of the cities identified as possible pilot cities, to show a more concrete example and see how it goes. But others suggested that a study should be undertaken first, to understand the CDF model, determine priorities and select possible pilot cities. Finally, it was agreed that we will organize a study of the CDF performance in the ACCA cities, and some pilot cases will be identified. ACHR is now negotiating to develop a program to support the CDFs, to see how this new finance system can support a people-driven approach. The ACHR Secretariat will draft a concept note about this new program and will circulate it in early February.

To see videos of the ACHR team's presentations, follow this link: http://www.urbanknowledge.org/communityupgrading.html
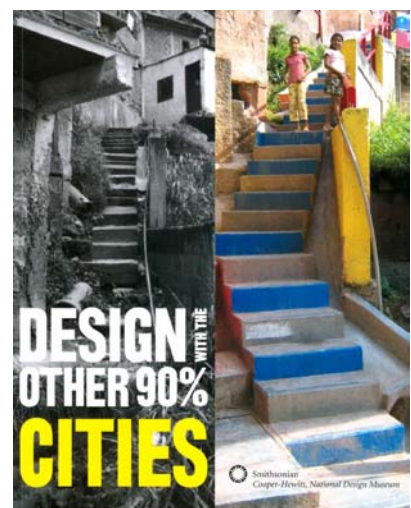
Ruby Papeleras (Homeless People's Federation Philippines) : *This was my first time to join a meeting with the top World Bank officials!* And this high-level WB official was clearly willing to collaborate with us in this kind of process. But a lot of other people around him were less confident, and told us we have to first document our financial systems and demonstrate that CDFs are doing well. So this is our challenge now, that our documentation of these new city development funds should really reflect the financial systems that poor community organizations are managing and how well they are working. For me it was a very positive opportunity, that these key officials were convinced about what we are doing - but still we have to prove that this financial management by poor people is really happening. These are the people who look at financial systems themselves, but we have to show them how poor people can benefit in so many ways from these finance systems when they are designed to work for - and to be managed by - community people themselves. *The photo shows Prapat (community leader from the Bang Bua Canal network in Bangkok) and Ruby (from the HPFP in the Philippines), in front of the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington.*

"DESIGN WITH THE OTHER 90%" EXHIBITION CATALOGUE is AVAILABLE

"Design with the other 90%" Exhibition at the Smithsonian Museum in New York City : This visit to the World Bank headquarters in Washington took place right after the same team (along with a team from CODI) made a presentation at the United Nations headquarters, in New York City. Our city-wide and community-driven upgrading initiatives - under both ACCA and CODI's Baan Mankong Program - were featured in this important exhibition at the UN, through several projects (including the Bang Bua Canal community upgrading project in Bangkok, the Miraculous Hills "Eco Settlement" housing project in Montalban, Philippines, and some initiatives of SDI). ACHR has some extra copies of the beautiful catalogue from this large exhibition (which was put together by the Smithsonian Institution's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York, but set up at the UN Headquarters, while the National Design Museum is being renovated), which profiles many of these projects, and includes essays by Somsook and others in the ACHR network. *Please contact ACHR if you'd like a copy.*

The photo on the right shows the cover of the exhibition catalogue, and the photos below show the ACHR team being guided through the exhibition by its adventurous curator Cynthia Smith, and during the public panel discussion at the United Nations. From left to right: Ruby, Dieu Anh, Thipparat, Acharn Prayong, Prapat and Somsook.

DOCUMENTING THE ACCA PROGRAM

The ACCA Program is now coming to the end of it's three-and-a-half-years' life. There is now a very large stock of big breakthroughs, hard-won lessons and inspiring stories which need to be told about all the things poor community groups in 153 cities around Asia have been able to do, with support from this ACCA intervention, and what all this experience teaches us about how city-wide slum upgrading should go. The idea is definitely not to toot the horn of yet another development program in a world over-full of self-tooting development programs, but to tell the stories of changes poor communities and their networks have been able to bring about in their cities with tools ACCA has offered - real changes in their ability to negotiate for secure land for housing with governments that used to ignore and evict them, changes in the quality of their housing and community infrastructure, and - perhaps most important of all - changes in their belief that they can transform their own lives from marginalized, isolated and illegal squatters, into full, legitimate and respected citizens contributing to the life of their cities.

In mid December, 2011, a small workshop was organized in Bangkok to talk about how to document these stories and bring them to as large an audience as possible, in the cities and countries where the projects are being implemented, and in the larger international development and academic communities. About 38 people from 12 countries joined this 2-day meeting, including key documentation people from each country and Diana Mitlin from IIED, to discuss the ACCA third year documentation process, in several aspects:

1. National 3rd Year ACCA Reports : Presentations of the draft national 3rd year reports were made by the ten groups who joined the meeting (each team gave a short 15-minute preview of the comprehensive ACCA reports that are now being prepared, which will contain reports on the national process and on each city). These national reports will be due at the end of April 2012.
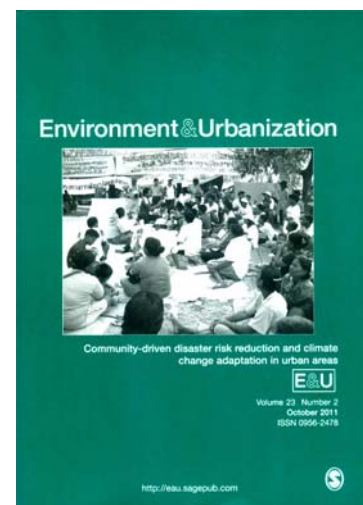
2. Making plans for eight scholarly articles on ACCA to appear in the Sept. 2012 issue of IIED's journal, "Environment and Urbanization" - which will be a special issue on the theme of city-wide upgrading in Asia. Our friends Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite at IIED have honored us with an invitation to contribute a set of articles to this issue, all of which will look at different aspects of the ACCA Program. After Diana described the E&U journal and explained about this special issue, the meeting broke into sub-groups to discuss what kinds of issues, themes, stories and breakthroughs from the ACCA process over the last 3 years they'd like to document in these eight articles, and who would like to help write which articles. After the sub-groups came back and presented their ideas, there was more discussion, and it was agreed that the eight articles would be about the following themes :

1. **Overview :** An overview of the ACCA Program, its key concepts, its progress, its results *(to be written by Somsook, Diana and Enhe)*
2. **Community finance :** The role of savings and city development funds *(to be written by the teams from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand, with support from Diane at ACHR)*
3. **Community networks :** The role of community networks and people's power changes *(to be written by Rupa, Ruby and Lisa from Burma, with support from Maurice at ACHR)*
4. **Assessment :** The learning, and knowledge creation through the ACCA assessment trips (*to be written by Lumanti and Tom*)
5. **Community architects :** The role of community architects, professors, universities and para architects in the ACCA process *(to be written by Nad and the Indonesia team, with support from the ACHR secretariat and Martin Mulenga at IIED)*
6. **Making change :** Catalyzing new strategies, policies and partnerships, how to change governments, and now ACCA is actually an anti-eviction strategy *(to be written by Anh, Ruby and Boram, with support from David Satterthwaite at IIED)*
7. **Regional overview :** A regional overview of the ACCA Program, with short 2-page overviews of the process in 5 - 8 selected countries *(to be written collectively, where each country sends their own 3-page report, due at the end of January, for us to select from, and put together by the ACHR secretariat team)*
8. **Changing power equations :** Pathways to equality, how to unlock it through the process *(to be written by Fr. Norberto, Somsook and Tom)*

3. Regional ACCA 3rd Year Report : This big, fat report, which will summarize the program's progress, figures and breakthroughs from the full three and a half years of implementation, will be drafted by the ACHR secretariat (*with Tom acting as editor-in-chief!*) and will draw on all the national reports and tables and charts all the groups are filling out and sending us now. Hopefully, we can include one page on each ACCA city in this report, which should be finished by the end of May 2012.

4. Preparing local-language versions of each country's national reports to circulate inside the country : These reports could be in newsletter format, or any format that is useful, and could be in only the local language, or bilingual with English.

DECENT POOR PROGRAM UPDATE

About a year ago, the Selavip Foundation approved a grant of US$ 90,000 to ACHR, to create a special joint program to assist some of Asia's poorest community members and help make sure they can take part in the housing and upgrading projects being implemented by communities, with support from the ACCA Program. This Decent Poor Program has been able to subsidize only a very small number of households around Asia, but the idea was to use this small money *strategically*, to get the whole national community movement in all these countries to look at their poorest community members as the subject, and to see how these small funds can bring this new, inclusive way of planning to include everyone into the process. Over the past year, the identification and selection of the grant recipients has been carried out by the community organizations and their networks and support organizations, with some process of agreement at city and national levels, before the names were sent to the ACCA committee for final approval.

This is a strategic program, a challenge to the poor communities we work with. It's not a program to solve the problem of poverty (which is far too great for this tiny intervention!) or to simply identify the poorest and give them a little welfare hand-out. The objective is to make a clearer awareness among the communities and among all the projects about the need to make room for the poorest, and to find a way that nobody is excluded from these community development projects - that everyone is *in the boat*. The most important part of this is the process by which the community networks discuss this issue, survey and make themselves aware who are the poorest, talk about this and think of the solution together. So it's been a kind of training, through a real working process, to boost communities' awareness that the very poorest are essential parts of their communities.

"DECENT POOR" GRANTS *(as of January 2012 - Maximum 20 grants per country @ $500 per grant)*

Country	Organization	Number of households benefiting	Total amount approved (US$)
Cambodia	Community Savings Network Cambodia (CSNC) + UPDF	20	10,000
Indonesia	Urban Poor Consortium (UPC)	20	10,000
Nepal	Women's Savings Cooperative Network + Lumanti	20	10,000
Burma	Women of the World Myanmar (WWM)	10	5,000
	Bedar Rural Development Program	10	5,000
Philippines	Homeless Peoples Federation Philippines (HPFP)	20	10,000
Vietnam	CDF / Community Network + ACVN	10	5,000
Sri Lanka	Women's Co-op	20	10,000
Mongolia	Urban Development Resource Center (UDRC)	9	4,500
	Center for Human Rights Development (CHRD)	10	5,000
India	Hunnarshala Foundation, Bhuj	10	5,000
	Tibet Heritage Fund, Ladakh	10	5,000
Lao PDR	National Meying Lao Savings Network	10	5,000
TOTAL		179 households	US$ 89,500

Most of the grants have now been disbursed, and except for Mongolia and Ladakh (where the harsh winters have delayed any housing construction for a few months), most of the "Decent Poor" grantees' houses are either finished or underway. The Decent Poor Program has been used in different ways in different countries. In some, all the grantees are in one especially needy province (as in Bicol Region, in the Philippines), while in others the grants were spread out to give the opportunity to many cities (as in Cambodia and Sri Lanka). Within cities there were also variations: In Nepal, the recipients from Birgunj were all selected from the ACCA big project community at Shanti Tole, while in Bharatpur, recipients were chosen from several communities around the city.

EXAMPLE : Bhartiben and Jasubhai Adhere's house in Bhuj: In Bhuj, India, the grant recipients were all identified by the Sakhi Sangini federation of women's savings groups. Since the US$500 grant isn't enough to build a full, livable house, they're building the houses incrementally and mobilizing neighbors in the community to chip in with free labor. The Hunnarshala Foundation (the local NGO partner) works with the families to develop house plans and explore cost-saving alternative materials. Nine of the ten houses are now under construction, and four are almost complete. One of the grant recipients is a blind couple, Bhartiben and Jasubhai Adhere. Since the 2001 earthquake, they'd been staying in a temporary shelter run by an NGO outside of Bhuj, but were now being asked to leave and had nowhere to go. Because they come from different Hindu castes, their families disowned them when they decided to get married, and they've been on their own ever since and living in miserable

conditions. One of the savings group members (who is herself a Muslim) knew about the couple's predicament and offered to share her own small plot with them, for their new house, and all the other community members have been helping the couple settle in. *The photo above shows Binuta, a community architect, working with Jasubhai and Bhartiben to develop the plan of their new house, which has been scored with a Braille machine to enable the couple to "feel" the plans of their new house, which will have a main room, a small kitchen, a bathroom and a front porch.*

URBAN POOR COALITION ASIA (UPCA) is BORN

The idea of forming a new region-wide coalition of urban poor groups, to link their lively and fast-expanding self-development process into a regional platform of mutual sharing and mutual support, has been kicking around for quite a while, and now it's finally happening! The **Urban Poor Coalition Asia (UPCA)** is now a reality, and three regional meetings have already been organized to discuss this new platform, which is to belong entirely to Asia's urban poor organizations. At the most recent meeting in Phnom Penh, in January 2012, plans were set for a big Regional Urban Poor Forum, which will take place in Quezon City, Philippines, March 13-16, 2012, and will be hosted by the Homeless People's Federation. Besides lots of presentations, discussions, setting of plans and field trips to see community upgrading projects in a few cities (of course!), the gathering in the Philippines will be a chance to make a big, splashy declaration and "multilateral MOU" signing, to officially launch this new coalition. The new Vice Mayor of Quezon City will be providing the venue for the meeting, where there will be booths for each country to show their projects, upgrading posters and community products. There will be about 50 international participants (about 5 participants per country - 4 community leaders plus one translator) plus about 1,000 Philippines participants. All the countries are now organizing their own national gatherings of community groups, to discuss this new coalition and prepare for the big forum in March, which will include some field visits to community projects and chances for the visiting countries to present their stories.

"We want to make this platform, because we want to be visible. We want to have a voice of our own, as a regional group of urban poor groups in Asia. This platform will be a venue for sharing and learning and supporting each other, for all the countries that are doing development programs on the ground. This platform will also be used as a forum for discussing policies and bringing frustrations and problems which groups are experiencing inside their countries to this regional level, to discuss and work together to resolve. The UPCA will also be used to help strengthen the national community process in each country, and to borrow expertise and experiences and ideas from the region to fill in gaps and strengthen the community process and community-based finance systems in the various countries. An important part of this will be motivating each country to develop their own internal national platform and networks. Each country will identify and endorse three community leaders to take part in the "core team" to facilitate this regional coalition." *(Ruby Papeleras, who is part of the team which is helping to coordinate the UPCA)*

IDEA : Making a regional urban poor fund which belongs to the poor : During the UPCA preparatory meeting in Phnom Penh, in January 2012, the Thais presented their work assisting communities affected by the terrible floods this past year, through their own special community disaster fund. They spoke about how good it felt when they received support from the community savings networks in Vietnam and Mongolia, which had very quickly gathered donations from their members and brought the money to Bangkok, to show their solidarity with the flood-affected Thai communities. And the Vietnamese participants, for their part, spoke about how good it felt to be able to very quickly gather up over $3,000 from their community savings members and be able to send that cash to the community networks in Thailand. The question then came up: Why not make this kind of direct community-to-community support into a fund, which the UPCA would manage, as a symbol of collaboration and solidarity between the region's urban poor groups? Nothing abstract, but a concrete thing which the poor in the region are the owners adn key players. So the idea of establishing a regional UPCA urban poor fund was born. Some proposed starting right away, using their own money, rather than first going around asking donors for resources to start their fund. They all agreed to mobilize their community members in each country to put in one dollar each, and use that as seed capital to start this new regional fund. Each country is now discussing this idea within their own community networks and will bring their ideas to discuss further in the forthcoming UPCA forum in March.

A note on power points VS. long, wrinkly, hand-made and hand-held posters : A lot of community groups are now presenting updates on their work with savings, loans, upgrading and ACCA projects using sophisticated and beautifully composed power points. The Cambodian groups have tried that, but gone back to their lower-tech custom of illustrating presentations about their various activities and community funds with all sorts of hand-lettered charts, colorful posters with squiggly Khmer script and long bolts of cloth to which photos and graphs and drawings had been pasted - all of which are held up for everyone to see by lines of proud, smiling community members. This grand display of charts and figures and photos has become a regular feature of the community network process in Cambodia - and it combines an almost overwhelming "transparency" with a very deep sense of pride in all the work these figures and these unfurled rolls

of photos represent. There are now plenty of community people who are computer savants, who can conjur up power points with their eyes closed. But others are still a bit intimidated by this new technology and tend to become very quiet and respectful when the big screen lights up with these professional-looking electronic presentations. Plus, as the Cambodian's told their friends in the Phnom Penh meeting, *"We can roll up these charts and lengths of cloth and take them with us to show people anywhere, in any conditions! That's the people's style!"*

NEWS FROM ASIA'S BUSY COMMUNITY ARCHITECTS NETWORK

The Community Architects Network (CAN) in Asia, which is now almost two years old, has made good on one of the the plans they set in their October 2011 gathering in Penang, to profile some of the projects architects are working with poor communities around Asia - projects to develop affordable housing types, settlement layout plans, infrastructure, mapping and surveying informal settlements, and promoting the activities of community-based builders and designers. The idea of the newsletter was not only to document interesting projects, though, but to give a boost to idealistic young people in the design fields to get involved in supporting a people-driven development and settlement upgrading process in their cities and countries by showing them that such work is not only possible, but it's going on all over the place - in a hundred variations - with support from the network, and some seed funds from the Rockefeller Foundation and more and more opportunities to work with ACCA housing and infrastructure projects. The first seven-page issue (January 2012) has now come out, and if you didn't get a copy in your e-mail box, please contact Nad and Tee at ACHR for a copy of the PDF version. Here is a peek at a few of the stories that are profiled in the newsletter :

VIETNAM: In November 2011, a team of architects and community members from Tam Ky (a new ACCA city) visited several finished and almost-finished housing projects in Vinh and Hai Duong (some supported by ACCA, others supported by the CDF), to learn about all the steps in organizing such community-planned and community-built housing projects, beginning with the savings groups, land negotiations, community planning workshops, construction planning and the actual building - including dealing with all the legal issues that come up along the way.

CAMBODIA: In November 2011, the Community Architects Network in Cambodia (CAN-CAM) held a four-day training workshop in Kep City, which focused on surveying and city-wide upgrading as a new direction in Cambodia's community-driven process. This coastal city, just south of Phnom Penh, is a new member of the national urban network. Besides YPs and community leaders, community architects and community builders from Lao PDR, Vietnam and Thailand joined the workshop. Then in December 2011, an assessment workshop was organized in Kampong Cham, on the site of the ACCA housing project at the Sesib Pir Knong community, where the beautiful 2-story concrete row-houses, built on land that was provided free by the provincial government, are now finished. This large gathering of community architects, community leaders, NGO staff and local officials was a chance to reflect on all cost, management, design and social aspects of this important breakthrough project, which was designed and built entirely by community people themselves, with good support from the young architects and the local authorities.

NEPAL: Since ACCA was launched in Nepal in 2009, four groups of architects have been formed to provide technical assistance to the growing number of housing and upgrading projects in cities all over Nepal. These groups have now formed a "Pro-Poor Technical Assistance" network, with support from Lumanti, Nad and the local UN-Habitat office in Nepal. They meet regularly to compare notes, support each other's work, explore alternative and low-cost building technologies (like bamboo) and draw more idealistic young professionals and students into the community upgrading process. The group also has plans to contribute a regular column on pro-poor architecture and community architecture to a local architecture magazine. In September 2011, a group of young architecture graduates spent a week working with the Lauri Ghol community (54 households) in Ratnanagar, helping them to plan the new housing they will build on the relocation site, with support from ACCA, through a series of site-planning and housing design workshops. This same group had earlier worked with community members in Techo, in the Kathmandu Valley, helping the people plan modest projects to upgrade their beautiful and historic Newari village.

UPCOMING CAN ACTIVITIES IN THE ASIA REGION :

- **Indonesia :** National meeting of the Indonesian community architects network in late January, after the disaster workshop.
- **Vietnam :** National community architects' workshop in March 2012, in collaboration with Ho Chi Minh Architecture University.
- **Thailand :** 40 DPU students + teachers will again visit Bangkok for 3 weeks (April-May, 2012), with their professors, to do field work in Baan Mankong upgrading projects, with support from ACHR, CODI and the Thai and regional CAN networks.