

ACHR

e-news

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

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights
e-mail : achr@loxinfo.co.th
website : www.achr.net

SEPTEMBER 2010

- Planning the first-ever community-driven slum housing project in **MYANMAR**
- Fire victims rebuild their community in the sprawling Baseco slum, in the **PHILIPPINES**
- Visiting community architects assist the People's Community Network in **FIJI**
- Update on SDI's Urban Poor Fund International - **UPFI**
- Checking in with some old friends on the 5th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina in **NEW ORLEANS, USA**
- Looking at the city-wide community upgrading process in **CAMBODIA**
- Some thoughts from Arif Hasan on the floods in **PAKISTAN**

REMINDER! NEW SET OF VIDEO FILMS ABOUT UPGRADING IN 8 ASIAN COUNTRIES NOW AVAILABLE . . .



ACHR has released a new DVD compilation of new video films that were produced by ACHR friends from nine countries across Asia. This compilation of short films is an attempt to start a process of video production and dissemination about urban poor issues in Asia, for learning by communities, NGOs and professionals - and in many cases for public education, advocacy and showing on public media. The subject of most of the films in the set is community upgrading, and many look at upgrading projects that are being supported by ACHR's new ACCA Program (Asian Coalition for Community Action), which supported small and large community upgrading projects in more than 64 cities across Asia in its first year. While many of the principals behind these community-driven upgrading processes are common, the political and social contexts in the countries where they are being implemented are very different. And so communities have adapted their upgrading approach in different ways, and in these *differences* there is learning. The compilation includes the following short films :

- **From South Korea** : A film called "Vinyl House Communities" by Se-Jin Kang at the Seoul-based NGO Asian Bridge.
- **From Vietnam** : A film called "Upgrading for the Poor" by ACVN and VTV.
- **From Cambodia** : A film "Shaping their own future" by Peter Swan + Pajjong Laisakul from ACHR and Multimedia Thailand
- **From Nepal** : A film called "Together we can build" by Bishal Shrestha, from Lumanti and Evergreen Films Nepal.
- **From India** : A film on slum upgrading in Pune, by Indu Agarwal, from SPARC.
- **From Pakistan** : A film called "Why Upgrading?" by Abid Hasan, from OPP and URC Karachi.
- **From Mongolia** : Four films about community-driven upgrading in different parts of Mongolia, by UDRC and Nomun Studio
- **From the Philippines** : Two films on community upgrading by members of the Homeless Peoples Federation Philippines.
- **From Thailand** : 3 films about community upgrading projects by Chawanad Luansang and Pisut Srimhok, from Openspace

For a copy of the DVD, with all the films in this compilation, please contact Maurice at ACHR.

MYANMAR'S FIRST-EVER PARTICIPATORY SLUM HOUSING PROJECT :

Chawanad Luansang ("Nad") and Supawut Boonmahathanakorn ("Tee") are the coordinators of ACHR's Community Architects Program. For three days in mid-August, the two of them spent three days with the women in the Pan Thakhin savings group, on the outskirts of Yangon, helping them to develop plans for building a new community for some of their poorest members, on land they will purchase and build new houses on collectively. This small housing project, which is being supported by the Yangon-based NGO Women for the World and by ACHR's ACCA Program, will be Burma's first-ever community-planned and community-built urban poor housing project, so it's a real milestone. Besides the community members, the site planning and house design workshops that Nad and Tee organized were attended by community representatives from other slums and villages in Yangon, some local architects and engineers, and some support professionals from other NGOs working with poor and cyclone-affected communities in Burma. Here are a few notes from Nad and Tee on the process.

Yangon was until very recently the capital city of Burma (Myanmar) and remains the country's commercial center. The city has a population of 5.6 million people, and is divided into 48 townships. When you visit Yangon, you will see a nice, clean, old city, which looks the way proper Asian cities looked 50 years ago, with wide, tree-lined streets, beautiful old colonial buildings and not too many cars. A few urban poor slums are tucked in here and there, but the greatest number of the city's poor and evicted households live in the sprawling informal settlements that lie outside this pleasant and well-kept city center, on the outskirts of the city, without proper water or electricity or infrastructure. A lot of this peripheral land is - or was - farmland, and many of the farmers who own it have either sold out to speculators or divided up their land into plots and rent it out to poor families (at about US\$ 15 - 20 per month and going up fast), who build their own shacks and live there, or rent shacks or tiny rooms that others own, or just squat on whatever open land they can find. These are the only housing options that are affordable for most of the city's poor, who work as daily workers, vendors, domestic helpers, farm laborers, livestock keepers and construction laborers, earning about US\$3 per day per household.



Women's Savings Groups in Yangon : With support from Women for the World (a small Yangon-based NGO), and a special Cyclone Nargis ACCA Project, savings groups have been set up in several slum communities in two of Yangon's poorest townships, on the outskirts of the city (North Ukkalapa Township and Hlaing Tar Yar Township) and the savings process is now spreading.

Burma's First Community-designed housing project in Hlaing Tar Yar Township (21 households, initially) : The Pan Thakhin women's saving group is helping to organize this important pilot project to demonstrate a new model of collective secure housing solution for the poorest landless squatters in Yangon's slums - where no solution exists yet. They have identified a plot of inexpensive land to purchase, and are in the process of negotiating to buy it collectively. The group is working in collaboration with the government's Housing Cooperative Department, which means this cooperative will be able to provide a proper legal status to the cooperative these 50 households set up, to buy their land and develop their housing collectively. The funds from ACCA will be channeled through the women's saving groups and will be used as revolving fund loans to the cooperative, to buy the land and build their starter houses. Loans of about \$800 per family will be repaid in 5 years, in monthly instalments of about \$15 per month. A housing management committee will be formed, to collect the loan repayments every month.



FIRST DAY : Visiting the community, talking with the people, getting the history, understanding the problems. Looking together at land maps to see where land is available and how much it costs.



SECOND DAY : Discussing the savings process, determining how much people can afford to pay towards their housing, in monthly loan repayments. Drawing their "dream" community and "dream" houses. Adjusting the dreams to the realities of the site. Talking about shared toilets and shared water supply to save costs.



THIRD DAY : Discussing housing loans and ACCA support. Looking at different plot sizes at real scale. Looking at site planning alternatives with smaller plots and common spaces. Looking at housing projects in other countries. Getting local architects and engineers involved. Setting up a housing committee.

Project figures :

- each household will have a plot which is 18 ft x 40 ft (720 Square feet) = 75 square meters
- Walkways will be 8 feet wide (2.5 meters)
- The total land for all 21 houses, including lanes and common areas, is 19,200 square feet (60 x 320 ft) = 1,784 square meters
- Each family will build a "core house" that is about 12 x 12 ft. (13.4 m²) with toilets and septic tanks shared between 2 houses. The cost of this core house and toilet will be US\$ 1,200 per house, which will be financed partly by their savings and partly by loans from ACCA. Later on, when the people's earning increase, they can gradually upgrade and expand their houses.



FIRE VICTIMS REBUILD IN MANILA'S SPRAWLING BASECO SLUM :

Baseco is a sprawling squatter settlement of some 10,000 poor households, built on 56 hectares of reclaimed public land which projects out into the harbor in Manila. After years of struggle against eviction, Baseco was "proclaimed" in 2002 by the President as a social housing project for its occupants, clearing the way for the residents to purchase the land they already occupy. But it's no easy thing to get public land transferred to its poor occupants in the Philippines - even in "proclamation" sites like Baseco. There are a lot of difficult and time-consuming procedures communities have to go through first - forming homeowners associations, surveying the land, listing the beneficiaries, developing subdivision plans, reblocking according to NHA norms and negotiating contracts to buy the land from the government, on installments, over a ten-year period. Many large squatter areas in the Philippines have been "proclaimed", but so far, not a single family among the tens of thousands who occupy these sites has actually gotten land title. And in some cases, people have even been evicted from proclamation sites for high-end developments.

Fires : The Baseco community has long been vulnerable not only to typhoons and floods, but also to fires. Since it was first settled in the 1970s, several big fires have burned down large swaths of the Baseco community, leaving thousands homeless. In late January 2010, another big fire destroyed 242 houses in the northwest corner of Baseco. At first, the people camped out in donated tents on the periphery of the ruined site, and they were not allowed to rebuild their houses without first doing a reblocking, with standard plot sizes and road widths, according to NHA standards. Urban Poor Associates, a Manila-based NGO which has been working in Baseco since 2001, mobilized architects and engineers to survey the burned area and help develop a layout plan with the affected families.



Using fires as development opportunities : Jorgie Tenolet, who is the president of Kabalikat (the people's organization in Baseco which is UPA's partner in the work in Baseco), says, "The disastrous fires in Baseco have destroyed people's homes and belongings, but they have also given people opportunities to negotiate for redevelopment in their burned areas. Each time there is a fire, Kabalikat does relief, but we also tell people, *"Don't leave! Rebuild and guard your land, so others don't come and take it from us!"* And in several cases, the fires have led to redevelopment and housing projects in the areas that were burned down. It was Kabalikat's and UPA's idea to use the most recent fire as an opportunity to start this kind of redevelopment process in the burned-down area, with good cooperation from the local Barangay (sub-district).

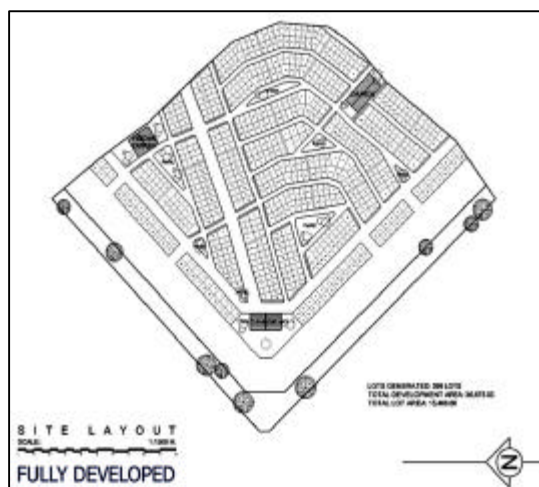
ACCA in Baseco : Over the past two years, the UPA has used funding support from the ACCA Program to help survey the community, strengthen the network of poor communities within Manila, prepare "city profiles" of some of Manila's large slums, and implement two upgrading projects in Baseco: drainage lines in two lanes of the "new Site" area (benefiting the 100 households living along those two lanes, all of whom contributed some labor and some cash to the project) and the construction of a new community office in the same area.



Mapping and surveying Baseco : During 2009, a volunteer architect from Colombia worked with UPA, the community, the Barangay and some local architecture students to survey and map the whole Baseco settlement. By the time of the January 2010 fire, the map was finished, all the houses were numbered, and each number corresponded with a family list. For this survey and mapping, the community was divided into blocks, and each block has its own organization. The short term purpose of this survey and mapping was to establish a proper ID system in Baseco, but the long term purpose was to help Baseco residents get land title, and to make a proper master plan for upgrading all of Baseco. After the fire, this data was used by UPA and the local government to determine who lived in the area before, and who was genuinely entitled to be the beneficiaries of redevelopment assistance.

Developing a new subdivision plan for the area : With help from the Mapua Institute of Technology's College of Architecture, UPA worked with the people to survey the fire area and subdivide it into 599 house plots of 24.5 sq.m - the NHA's minimum allowable plot size for social housing sites. The families who occupy these new plots already have a significantly higher level of land tenure security and so the subdivision process is a step forward for these families towards to goal of getting land title.

Making the fire rebuilding into a community-building process, not just individual delivery of relief : The process of participatory planning and house reconstruction, with more active people's involvement, was seen as a way of helping rebuild the burned-down community in more than just physical ways. Baseco has its share of housing projects handed out by charitable organizations to individuals, but this was a chance for a more community-driven and more communal housing process. And the houses that have been built so have been mostly built by the people themselves. The fire rebuilding process was partly assisted by a US\$ 40,000 grant from ACCA, which included \$10,000 to set up a community welfare fund for fire victims and to support the community housing planning, community process and coordination, and another \$30,000 to support the housing reconstruction. UPA used this budget to provide building materials loans (in the form of materials worth \$200, not cash) to individual fire-affected families, to begin the construction of their new houses. UPA lobbied the Mayor of Manila and the Catholic Cardinal's Office to match whatever resources they could muster and to contribute by constructing new roads and infrastructure in the burned-down area, according to the redevelopment plans the architects prepared with the people.



The fire rebuilding process was partly assisted by a US\$ 40,000 grant from ACCA, which included \$10,000 to set up a community welfare fund for fire victims and to support the community housing planning, community process and coordination, and another \$30,000 to support the housing reconstruction. UPA used this budget to provide building materials loans (in the form of materials worth \$200, not cash) to individual fire-affected families, to begin the construction of their new houses. UPA lobbied the Mayor of Manila and the Catholic Cardinal's Office to match whatever resources they could muster and to contribute by constructing new roads and infrastructure in the burned-down area, according to the redevelopment plans the architects prepared with the people.

Progress after eight months : On August 25, 2010, we got some good news about the progress of the project from Denis Murphy at UPA. 99 houses have been built and occupied by families who'd lost their houses in the fire. The Mayor of Manila has promised to pave the roads in the burned area and take care of the drainage, according to plans developed by UPA and the community. The UPA's architects built a wooden model house so people would have a concrete example of how to build their houses, especially how to add a second floor, making sure people don't use concrete, since the soil is not very firm in that area. The houses built with support from UPA in the fire area are the only ones in that area of Baseco that stand above flood levels. Denis also comments that before the fire, when the families lived in shacks without any land tenure security, they never worried about toilets and just used the beach or open spaces. But now, when they are in their own permanent houses, they all want a toilet, and some have built them. UPA's partner organization, CO Multiversity, is now helping to build toilets in the area, with support from FONDESCO.



"Starter Houses" : The houses that UPA is building in Baseco for the fire victims are "starter-houses", which are enough to provide basic shelter and allow people to move onto their plots . The starter house includes a foundation of hollow blocks and dirt filling (which raises the floor level above the ordinary flood line), wood posts, roofing beams and tin roofing sheets. The people build their own walls, doors, windows over for windows and other items needed. They have been able to do this. The house costs just about 15,000 Pesos (US\$330). The idea is that a family can move in as soon as the foundation, beams and roofing are finished, provided they have some material for walls. This material can be from the shack where they were living after the fire destroyed their old homes. From Day 1 they know they have to complete the house, following steps that have been clearly outlined by the architects in a small booklet.

Expanding the process to other areas of Baseco : "We have learned many things through this process," Denis writes, "that will be useful in helping the other 7,500 families in Baseco." There are still 7,300 poor families living on not-yet-surveyed land within Baseco. UPA has set up a committee, headed by former Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council head Teodoro Katigbak, that hopes to provide houses and land tenure security for all these families. Some areas of Baseco are already asking UPA for help in their areas when they finish with the fire victims. The Mapua Institute of Technology College of Architecture has agreed to help them in this work. Hopefully the work for the fire victims can be expanded to include all those other families. For more information on Baseco, please contact Denis Murphy at : upa@pltdsl.net

VISITING COMMUNITY ARCHITECTS ASSIST IN FIJI



The work of the People's Community Network (PCN) is getting a shot in the arm from an MOU, which is about to be signed between the PCN, the Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment and ACHR, to work together to adopt a city-wide and people-driven upgrading approach on a national level, in 15 new cities around Fiji, over the coming three years. The MOU provides a framework for an enormous expansion of the PCN's work into more and more poor communities, where the poor will be they key actors in resolving their own problems of land tenure, housing and basic services. ACHR's ACCA Program is supporting this process with funds for surveys and mapping, coordination, small upgrading projects and big housing projects.

Over the past few weeks, a team of young community architects from Australia and New Zealand (Hugo Moline, Heidi Axelsen and Anna

Russell), have been spending time working with the PCN and with some local architects, academics and students on surveying, mapping and setting up savings groups in new settlements, and beginning to plan small upgrading projects to get people in these settlements into an active process of bringing about tangible changes in their lives. Here are a few excerpts from the fascinating blog they are keeping to document their work (www.suva-projects.blogspot.co).

August 17, 2010 : Anna and I have arrived in Fiji and are with Semiti (from the People's Community Network) and his team, who are currently running some workshops in Fiji's second largest city, Lautoka, which is the capital of the country's sugar industry, on the west coast of Fiji's main island Viti Levu. We were very warmly received today in the Navutu seaside squatter community. We took part in their planning day and the people already have plenty of ideas for changes they want to see, but only starting to find ways to make it happen. Semiti will organize some people from all the Lautoka settlements to come together to start a city-wide mapping and discussion this Saturday. In the meantime I think we can be useful spending time with the communities around Navutu and supporting Semiti in his presentation to the Western Commissioner. It seems to be critical time here, the media is running a lot of stories about "wealthy" squatters, and the



department of lands is calling for them to be evicted from government lands. We will put up more information on the blog later tonight, so please have a look and add your comments and ideas. *Hugo*



August 18, 2010 : On August 21, Semiti will be organizing representative members of all the informal settlements in Lautoka to meet and discuss their situation, and Hugo and I can start on city-wide mapping and overall information-gathering with them then. It will be good if more community members from the different settlements can also meet to decide on the projects for the small-scale projects grant, we can bring this up at the meeting. So far, only some of the communities have joined the PCN, and the PCN has only been here for the last 6 weeks. Semiti is running empowerment workshops in three communities at the moment, and in these, there is great enthusiasm and energy to get started with what the community can immediately tackle: one project to construct a sea-wall and a drainage system has already been identified. That community has already thought about materials that can be donated and other potential grants and are keen to do

the projects with their own labor. So we'll support them with the planning for these projects. Between these three communities, there is quite a lot of coming together and negotiation happening already. *Anna*

August 18, 2010 : *(From a note from Somsook to Anna)* The idea of making a ceiling of US\$ 15,000 per city, for ACCA small project support, is to allow a more flexible process and to open up room for action at a city-wide scale. We're trying to break the old practice of concentrating on one small project at a time, where everyone's efforts and resources are poured into one single pilot project or one test case, which usually ends up making very little impact. Instead, by letting lots of small projects get going at the same time, we're helping to ignite many communities to get active and to start their planning. If we try working a little more "multi-laterally" with many communities and many actors at the same time, then the activities of one or two communities can impact other communities and other actors as well.

Usually, after the city survey, all the communities are invited together to meet each other, to discuss their problems and their needs, to plan how they would like to work together to improve their priority problems, and to make their various small project proposals, in front of all the other communities and the local development stakeholders. This is how we set up a city development committee. After all communities propose their projects, then they have to decide together and plan together how the \$15,000 from ACCA can help support all those needs. In this way, the \$15,000 is open to everyone. Otherwise it's only the leaders or the development agencies who know about the budget, while the communities remain just passive recipients. There may be a need to start with a few urgently-needed pilot projects, but try not to do them in isolation. And don't worry too much about the projects themselves, but more about the community process and how communities can use the project implementation to learn together, to check and balance each other, to build their confidence and to strengthen their networks. The problems of poverty are never simply technical problems. Resolving poverty involves resetting relationships, and concrete projects like this can be used to help do this.

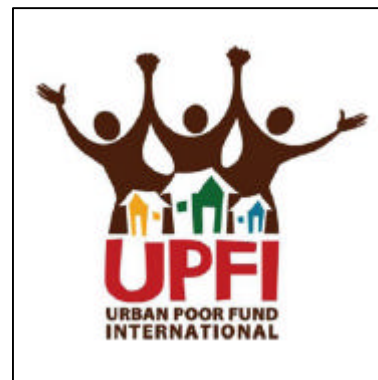
August 27, 2010 : I am back in Sydney after a good first 10 days in Lautoka (second largest city in Fiji, western side of Viti Levu) with Anna working with the PCN as they set up the network there. Many issues and challenges arose even in this brief time but altogether things are moving very positively, particularly in forming a city-wide network of settlements who can begin to work together. We organized a meeting last Tuesday to which people from 7 of around 30 settlements came. It was a very good day of discussion, sharing experiences and compiling common issues. Everyone was very enthusiastic about linking together and supporting each other to solve problems together and have already begun to make arrangements for regular meetings. Anna will continue to work with these groups, and with new ones as they are visited by the PCN on their community survey and mapping over the next 3 weeks. We have suggested a city wide mapping and planning weekend for when Heidi, I and possibly Chawanad return (18-19 September). Anna will also begin to meet with Suva-based architects and academics to discuss how they could support this work in the longer term. For the 3 weeks September-October we were planning to divide our time between Lautoka and Suva. But perhaps it will be better to really focus our effort on Lautoka as it is in a good early stage and there is plenty of energy for both building a city-wide process and local community action. I think in such a short time maybe this will be a more potent way to use time.



FIJI BLOG : For more details about the work Hugo, Anna and Heidi are doing with the community network in Fiji, please have a look at the blog they are keeping (www.suva-projects.blogspot.co), or contact Hugo by e-mail (hugo@informalism.net)

UPDATE on SDI's URBAN POOR FUND INTERNATIONAL :

A couple of weeks ago (April 19-22), Somsook went to Stockholm, where she was invited to take part in a meeting of the Board of Governors of the Urban Poor Fund International (UPFI). The UPFI provides seed capital to the local urban poor funds of national community federations that are affiliated to Slum / Shack Dwellers International (SDI). SDI is a network of urban poor community federations in over 30 African, Asian and Latin American countries collectively developing solutions to their problems of eviction, housing, sanitation, livelihood and security. These national funds channel the capital from UPFI to their affiliate federations, in the form of grants (for technical project support and federation strengthening) and loans (for innovative housing and settlement improvement projects), according to plans that are developed by the community federations and proposed to SDI. The idea is that the money from UPFI catalyzes local initiatives that can leverage further resources, have an impact on urban policy, demonstrate possibilities for reaching further scale, and increase sustainable financial practices of the poor through savings.



The UPFI's main decision-making body is the nine-member SDI board, which is led by Jockin Arputham (the president of SDI and India's National Slum Dwellers Federation) and includes seven urban poor federation members and two support professionals - all selected by SDI's Council of Federations. The fund is administered by the SDI Secretariat in Cape Town, with support from a group of SDI coordinators and a technical advisory team, and overseen by a Board of Governors, who meet twice each year and whose task it is to oversee the fund's operation, help raise capital and elevate the fund's profile. The Board of Governors comprises mostly high-level government ministers from several countries, including Landiwe Sisulu (South Africa's Minister of Defense and Military Veterans), Inês Magalhães (Brazil's National Housing Secretary, Ministry of Cities), Dan Ericsson (State Secretary to Sweden's Minister for Local Government and Financial Markets), Arvinn Gadagil (Norway's Junior Minister of International Development), Dinesh Gunawardena (Sri Lanka's Minister of Water Supply and Drainage) and Selja Kumari (India's Minister of Tourism).

These twice-yearly Board of Governors meetings are not just administrative pow-wows. SDI uses them as public forums to mobilize political support for a people-centered agenda in urban development. High-level government officials from Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America join slum community leaders to discuss how to support initiatives of locally-rooted community organizations in cities throughout the Global South. This Stockholm meeting, which was hosted by the Swedish government, included a seminar on *"Reshaping financial markets to make them more relevant to the poorest of the poor."* The seminar brought together slum dweller activists, academics, NGO professionals, and finance experts, who presented on policy and practice in urban settings in Asia, Africa, and South America. Somsook's contribution to the meeting was a presentation on the work of CODI and ACHR's ACCA Program. Over 75 people from Sweden's government and business world were also invited to attend the seminar, with the hope that private institutions can also begin to develop financial instruments which reach poor communities.

Some powerful remarks were made during the seminar on the subject of the poor's access to finance, by Mr. Mats Odell, Sweden's Minister for Local Government and Financial Markets. Here is an excerpt :

"In the aftermath of the financial crisis, it has become clear to most of us that creating a world based on greed and short term gains does not lead to sustainable development. We need to construct our future on less fragile building blocks. No company, no dynasty, no country can create eternal success and wealth. To invest in developing countries and in people who at present have no access to finance will lead to the establishment of new markets.... But there are not only economical opportunities waiting to be created. There are also words waiting to be filled with substance: respect for human rights, dignity and democracy. In order to prove that we actually mean something when repeating these words, we need to cross borders and support implementation of them practically and globally. One way of filling the words with substance is to support initiatives taken locally around the globe. There are people who fight for their families, for their ideas and who create new projects and collaborations, but in a soil so meager that nothing grows. By simply facilitating financial expansion and investments in deprived areas, the resourcefulness of the "un-banked" will open up new chances and virtuous circles. Most of us are capable of taking our own decisions, planning our own futures and grabbing our own opportunities, but there has to be an opportunity to grab. If politics, industry and investors trust the potential of people in poorer communities, then decisions will be taken and new prospects will open up. And these prospects will be based on the ideas and initiatives of local individuals and communities. To listen to and support people is a fine way of showing respect, and it is one of the most important bases of democracy."

URBAN POOR FUND INTERNATIONAL (UPFI) at a GLANCE :

- Date the fund was established : 2008
- Purpose of loans and grants from fund : Housing, land, infrastructure, sanitation, livelihood, capacity building
- Capital in the fund so far : US\$ 12.6 million
- Funds already released to national funds for projects (in 12 countries) : US\$ 5.1 million (41%)
- Funds already released for technical support + federation strengthening (in 16 countries) : US\$ 5.1 million (41%)
- Funds already released for secretariat, administration, governance, travel : US\$ 2.4 million (19%)

NEW ORLEANS FIVE YEARS AFTER HURRICAN KATRINA :

It's been five years since Hurricane Katrina hit the American city of New Orleans, on August 29, 2005. The worst of the storm bypassed the city, but tidal surges and broken levees left 80% of the city flooded, 1,500 people dead, 200,000 housing units destroyed and almost a million people evacuated by the government to cities across the country. The floods hit the city's poor neighborhoods the worst - historically the most low-lying and flood-prone. And the New Orleanians worst affected by the storm were overwhelmingly poor and black. Of the 350,000 people who lived in these most damaged neighborhoods, 75% were black, 30% were poor, 53% were renters. These were the people least likely to have insurance or the resources to return and rebuild their houses.



Katrina - Tsunami exchange is 4 years old : And it's been four years since hurricane-hit communities in New Orleans began linking with tsunami-hit communities in Thailand and Indonesia, through a series of people-to-people exchange visits organized with support from ACHR and the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) and the National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness (NPACH) in USA. The idea of these exchange visits was to give people from some very different parts of the world a chance to compare notes on how they have dealt with the problems of rebuilding their lives and communities after a major calamity, and to find ways of supporting each others' struggles in direct, human and practical ways - based on their very real experiences they have gone through. Over the years, we've kept in touch with many of the friends we made in this exchange process, and through e-mails, websites and blogs have been able to keep up with the developments in New Orleans.

As New Orleans marks the fifth anniversary of Katrina and begins a long recovery from yet another disaster, the BP oil spill, the media keeps searching for an uplifting angle: stories of the city's rebirth, the Saints' Superbowl victory, the HBO television series about the city's historic Treme neighborhood, the jazz festivals and the rebounding tourism. On the 29th, President Barack Obama paid a high-profile, 6-hour visit to New Orleans with his family, where he toured storm-ravaged poor neighborhoods, ate "Poboy" sandwiches, and assured cheering crowds at town-hall meetings that "My administration is going to stand with you and fight alongside you, until the job is done." The president said there are still too many vacant lots, trailers serving as classrooms, displaced residents and people out of work. But he said New Orleanians have shown amazing resilience. "Because of you, New Orleans is coming back. I'm pleased to report that we've made good progress. We've got a long way to go, but we've made progress."



The day after the president's visit, our friend Endesha Juakali wrote with his take on the situation in New Orleans, which was a little less optimistic. "I wish that things were going better," he wrote, "but they are not." Despite positive developments in the city's recovery, some 150,000 New Orleanians who received a one-way ticket out of town after the storm (most of them black)



haven't yet received any help to come back. Most of these displaced people want to return home, but can't, because of economic realities, skyrocketing rents and house costs and diminishing affordable housing options for the poor. Eleven billion dollars of central government money has gone into the Louisiana's "Road Home Program", which was meant to help the city rebuild by giving grants to homeowners to repair and rebuild their storm-damaged houses. But since the program's payouts were based on home values, rather than amounts of damage, the program has ended up favoring properties in wealthier - often whiter - neighborhoods. Many poorer families who owned houses have had difficulty accessing these federal rebuilding dollars, since their houses had been passed down from generation to generation and the documents were not always available. Many homeowners were elderly and traumatized and didn't know how to

begin navigating the red tape. Plus, the Road Home Program only helped homeowners - there was no government assistance at all for renters, and no assistance to ensure that the city's vibrant market of affordable rental units would be restored. And finally, at a time when New Orleans was experiencing its most desperate shortage of affordable housing, a decision was taken to demolish 4,800 units of perfectly good, solid public housing- despite protests, demonstrations and pleas from residents and activists.

Endesha's "Survivors Village" group had a chance to have detailed discussions with the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) last week - the top housing person in the Obama administration. "It appears that the Obama approach to housing is just as bad for poor people as the Bush policies were," he writes, "Or worse! The two new programs that they are going to promote are *PETRA* (which will allow the government to mortgage public housing and introduce the banking industry into the formula), and *Housing Choice* (which will give the private owners of property the opportunity to determine how public housing works)." The Housing Authority of New Orleans also announced that they intend to move forward on plans to redevelop New Orleans' last remaining public housing project (Iberville) as a "mixed income" development. This project will greatly diminish the number of units available for the poor in the complex. I am sorry that the news is not better. But we continue to persevere!!

For more information on the situation in New Orleans, contact Endesha Juakali at ejkssno@yahoo.com or visit the Survivors Village Blog at <http://communitiesrising.wordpress.com>. For more on the Katrina-Tsunami exchanges, contact ACHR.



ASSESSING CITY-WIDE UPGRADING IN CAMBODIA : ACCA + UPDF

ACCA-supported upgrading projects are well underway in 11 cities in Cambodia now, with some 100 small upgrading projects already finished and about six big housing projects either finished or under construction. Cambodia is a country that had a big head start with ACCA, because most of the things the program is promoting were already happening in a big way in many Cambodian cities: the community savings, the surveys, the networks, the land-searches, the small upgrading projects, the big housing projects, the partnership with government, the negotiations for land, the city-wide focus, the city development funds. Because the soil in almost 25 cities has already been well-fertilized by all these activities over the past fifteen years, the groups in Cambodia have been able to take up the new opportunities the ACCA Program offers and zoom ahead with them. All the ACCA projects in Cambodia are being implemented as a joint venture by the two key partners in all that earlier work - the national Community Savings Network of Cambodia (CSNC) and the Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF). The UPDF also works in close cooperation with the National Committee for Development and Population (NCPD) and with the Provincial authorities in all 25 provinces where the process is active.

With all this experience and all these links already in place, the groups in Cambodia have been able to use the ACCA resources in much more targeted and strategic ways: to get government land in cities where projects were ready but were languishing for lack of finance, to negotiate for government land in "hot" cases where eviction was eminent, to show a more comprehensive demonstration of people-managed housing where no such alternative models had yet been possible, and to start activities in new cities with big problems of land, housing and eviction. They've also used the ACCA program to consolidate horizontal links between cities with more exchanges, more national workshops on savings and city-wide upgrading, more mutual help and more people-to-people learning. Cambodia is also a good example of how working partnerships between poor community networks and their municipal, district and ward-level authorities can be strengthened through joint exposure visits to each other's cities, as well as through the small and big projects and land negotiations and joint exchange learning and seminars.



All the funds from the ACCA Program (for small and big projects) go first into the UPDF, which is in the process of being divided into two funds - a national UPDF (which may soon be registered as a new, independent national foundation) and a Phnom Penh City Development Fund (under an extension of the same MOU with the Municipality and ACHR). From the UPDF, the ACCA funds are transferred to the provincial-level and city-level CDFs which have already been set up in many provinces and have already become strong partnership mechanisms to bring poor communities and local authorities together to work on various upgrading and housing projects. The provincial CDFs then pass the money to the communities doing projects. Repayment of ACCA big and small project loans by the communities is made to the provincial funds, and then back into the national fund.

SAVINGS AND FUND: Using "people's finance" to build a national support system for the poor in Cambodia.

The process in Cambodia began in a situation where terrible evictions were happening, there were no community organizations at all and the whole country was still reeling from decades of war and tragedy. In 1994, some poor communities in Phnom Penh started the first savings groups. Four years later, in 1998, the Urban Poor Development Fund was set up, under an MOU between the community savings network, the Phnom Penh Municipality and ACHR, with a loan capital of \$20,000 from ACHR (from Misereor). The UPDF was set up in response to an eviction crisis, and it funded the city's first community-managed housing relocation project by a roadside squatter settlement. Twelve years later, the fund has grown to over US\$ 2 million, with people's savings and various contributions from outside (including a monthly contribution by the Prime Minister). When there is an eviction threat now, communities can negotiate with the government to try to get land and then get loans from UPDF to build their houses. This process started in Phnom Penh initially, but the savings network and UPDF have expanded to almost all the major towns and cities in Cambodia. There are now over 2,000 savings groups in 26 cities, with 24,000 members and combined savings of about US\$ 700,000. The UPDF remains the only national-scale support system for the urban poor in Cambodia, through the loans and grants it gives for income generation, housing, land purchasing, infrastructure, upgrading, community enterprise and welfare.

Assessment trip and ACCA Committee meeting in Cambodia (September 14 - 19, 2010). Between September 14 and 16, the fourth ACCA assessment visit will take place in Cambodia. This time, instead of going all together in one big group, the visiting teams (from the Philippines, Mongolia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Sri Lanka) will break into three groups, each of which will go to a different region of the country. The Northern group will visit ACCA projects in Siem Reap, Serey Sophoan and Samrong. The Southeastern group will visit ACCA projects in Baveth, Peam Ro District and Kampong Cham. And the South-coastal group will visit projects in Khemara Phoumin and Preah Sihanouk. On the 17th, all the groups will converge in Phnom Penh for an all-day seminar, to share their impressions of the projects they've just visited and to assess the Cambodia ACCA process together. In the afternoon, there will be a site visit to the ACCA housing project in the riverside communities in Roessei Keo District. The ACCA / ACHR Committee meeting, where new projects will be proposed and various ACCA Program matters will be discussed, will start on the 18th, and finish in the 19th.



SOME THOUGHTS from ARIF HASAN ON THE FLOODS IN PAKISTAN

A month after monsoons caused devastating floods throughout Pakistan, some eight million people remain dependent on relief for their survival and surging flood waters continue to threaten towns in southern Sindh Province, where 19 of its 23 districts have been deluged and over a million people displaced. Perween Rahman, at OPP-RTI, continues to coordinate with several of their partner organizations to support flood-affected communities in Punjab and Sindh with emergency relief and help reconstructing damaged infrastructure and houses. The Karachi-based architect Arif Hasan, who has some considerable experience with disaster rehabilitation after earthquakes and famines in Pakistan, sent us the following article he wrote (in the August 27 issue of "Dawn") with his thoughts on the causes of the current floods and the likely ramifications for the millions whose lives they affect..

For a sustainable reconstruction of the physical and social infrastructure of flood ravaged Sindh, it is necessary to understand to what extent the damage caused by the flood is man-made. Some of the broad indicators are obvious. Due to the construction of barrages and hundreds of kilometers of flood protection embankments the flood plains of the Indus have been considerably reduced. They can no longer cater to exceptionally



high floods. As such, these flood waters are carried away by canals to considerable distances away from the flood plains. The canals in turn flood the colonized areas. An important question is whether the water carrying capacity of the flood plains can be increased and whether engineering works can reduce pressure on the canals in case of high floods? Preliminary discussions with engineers suggest that this is feasible.

Not only have the flood plains shrunk but shrub-lands and forests in them have been destroyed to make way for agriculture. This has increased the scale of flooding and the velocity of water. It has also made embankments more susceptible to erosion and collapse. In addition, settlements, some permanent and other semi-permanent, have developed in the flood plains, adding considerably to the vulnerable population. In the colonized areas, over the last century, hundreds of kilometers of road and protection embankments have been built ten to twenty feet above the land level. Except for the major drainage channels there are no culverts and/or gates to let flood waters pass or return through them. If these culverts and gates existed at regular and appropriate intervals, flooding could be controlled and the breaching of these embankments and roads by the force of the water or by design, would not be necessary. Even in urban centers, large areas, especially low income ones, are submerged because they are surrounded by high roads and water from them cannot be drained out. This is especially true of the areas around Larkana, Sukkur and Shikarpur.



There are other issues as well. In search of land to cultivate, inundation and drainage channels and the natural depressions connected to them have been encroached upon for agricultural purposes and around towns for construction of homes and businesses. This is a major cause of flooding, especially in the urban areas, even during normal monsoons.

And then, there are other issues. Much of the post-1970's infrastructure is substandard in quality. In addition, infrastructure, irrespective of its age has not been maintained. Canals, barrages and irrigation headworks have not been properly desilted for years. This is especially true of the minor drainage channels which are the backbone of any efficient drainage system. Most of them are covered with shrubbery preventing effective drainage of fields and agricultural areas.

In the reconstruction and rehabilitation phase, there are other issues that will surface as well. The floods have wiped out landmarks and the definition of fields and survey numbers. Re-establishing them is a major exercise and is bound to lead to disputes and conflicts. During the initial phase of reconstruction of homes and properties, similar disputes will also arise. In this process the worst affected will be the tenant farmers and the poorer sections of the population. The principles on the basis of which these disputes are to be settled need to be clearly and simply articulated. The institutions that are to settle these disputes will also have to be established at taluka level. It is not possible for people to visit the taluka headquarters for the settlement of these disputes. Therefore, mobile teams will have to camp at different locations and invite applications for the resolution of property related conflicts. If justice cannot be delivered through a transparent, uncomplicated and swift process, then power and production related relations will be further strengthened in favor of the more powerful sections of society.

The rehabilitation of major infrastructure (roads, bridges, electricity, water supply, sewage) and the desilting process required for it, will be taken care of by the state agencies through contractors and consultancy firms. The manner in which it will be done is clear and the local population can be mobilized for this work through a cash or food for work program. Our bureaucracy is well aware of how such programs are organized and managed. However, it will be necessary to develop appropriate specifications and concepts for the design, maintenance and operation of all major infrastructure items so that they can withstand the scale of flooding that we have experienced. Also, the institutions that develop and manage infrastructure will have to be strengthened, and on the basis of an evaluation of the problems they face, their constraints will have to be removed.

At the local level, rehabilitation work can be managed by local communities provided they are supported by sound technical advice and managerial guidance by local government (where it exists) and NGOs and professional organizations. For home construction and restoration, it is necessary that building materials are easily available and that their prices are kept under strict control. The profiteering and exploitation around the supply of building materials that was experienced in the aftermath of the 2005 earthquake should not be allowed to take place. In addition, improved methods and technologies related to mud construction need to be introduced as mud will remain the cheapest and by far the most easily available material.

The above is doable and there is a lot of experience available in the country for doing it. It needs to be accessed and organized. However, the most important issue is related to livelihoods. It is doubtful if there will be a *khareef* crop in Sindh this year. For making the next crop possible, cash is required for inputs and for surviving from sowing to harvesting. In addition, livestock has to be fed and looked after. This is perhaps our greatest challenge and this is the concern of many of the IDPs in Karachi. Discussions with them suggest that many of the tenant farmers and landless labor are seriously considering staying on in Karachi and looking for jobs. Small farmers would like to go back but think that by leaving a member in Karachi they will receive some financial support to rebuild their lives in their villages and small towns. A new relationship between the capital of Sindh and the people of its hinterland is in the process of being established. It should be welcomed and supported. (Contact Arif at : arifhasan@cyber.net.pk)