

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

JULY 2008

MONGOLIA : UDRC in Ulaanbataar wins the IYSH Memorial Prize



The good news from Mongolia is that in July, the 3rd IYSH Memorial Encouragement Prize (given by the Japan Housing Association) was awarded this year to the **Urban Development Resource Center (UDRC)** in Ulaanbaatar, with whom ACHR has developed close working and sharing links in recent years through a series of exchange visits, seminars and joint ventures in savings and credit and community fund activities. UDRC is an NGO that was set up in August 2005 with the aim of reducing poverty in Mongolia by improving the living environments in Ger areas (informal communities of nomadic dwellings on the outskirts of cities) based on active community participation and people-driven efforts.

UDRC, which consists of civil engineers, architects, urban planners, and financial managers, provides services including consulting, research, training, assistance to the planning, designing, and construction of the urban environment, and sharing of information on urban development, building, infrastructure, and housing. But the organization's special emphasis is on helping low-income households and communities to improve their living environment and to build affordable and energy-efficient houses, as well as to form savings groups in order to gain access to housing loans. The UDRC's major achievements for the past two years include:

- Establishment of more than 100 community savings groups with 1,000 members in twelve provinces and Ulaanbaatar City.
- Total amount of savings accumulated by savings groups: 23.8 million Tugrug (US\$20,400).
- Total amount of loans made to savings groups for improving their living environment: 18.2 million Tugrug (US\$15,700).
- Eighty training sessions conducted for about 6,000 residents to encourage their active participation in improving the living environment and savings activities.
- Forty-two small-scale Ger-area improvement projects initiated.
- National Forum on Community-based Ger-area Development organized in collaboration with the Government of Mongolia, ACHR, UNDP, and UNESCAP.



Ms. Enhe (Enkhbayar Tsedendorj) from the UDRC responds : On behalf of the communities and my staff, I would like to express our deep appreciation to the Japan Housing Association and UNCRD for awarding the 3rd IYSH Memorial Encouragement Prize to our organization. Upon receiving the great news of having received this prize, all of us, who are

involved in community-based living environment upgrading activities in the poorest communities of Mongolia, feel even more invigorated to broaden our activities so that we will be able to include an increasing number of communities in the future. We fully understand that it would be encouraging to others if we replicated these kinds of activities in more areas and expanded its beneficiaries. Thank you very much again for your strong support and encouragement. We will continue to do our best.

CONTACT : Ms. Enkhbayar Tsendorj (Enhe), Urban Development Resource Center (UDRC)
P.O. Box 686, Ulaanbaatar 46, Mongolia
Tel (976-11) 344-889, 9985-1833
Fax (976-11) 344-889
e-mail (1) : udrc@mobi.net.mn
e-mail (2) : chrd@mongolnet.mn

CAMBODIA : Seed fund loans from UPDF to three southern cities CDFs

On July 18, 2008, the Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF) organized a reflective seminar in the southern coastal provincial city of Koh Kong. The meeting brought together community leaders from the national community savings network, local authorities and representatives from UN agencies and other development agencies to meet and reflect on the UPDF's 10th anniversary event and to move forward. During the seminar, a further set of three seed loans from UPDF were officially disbursed to the community development funds that have been set up in three coastal cities in southern Cambodia: Koh Kong, Kampot and Sihanoukville. About 100 people attended this workshop.



CONTACT : Mr. Somsak Phonphakdee, Mr. Sok Visal, Urban Poor Development Fund (UPDF)
House No. 254B, Street 180, Sangkat Boeung Raing, Khan Don Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Tel / Fax (855-23) 218-674
e-mail : updf@forum.org.kh
NEW UPDF WEBSITE : www.updfkh.net

AFGHANISTAN : Young Bhutanese architect goes to work on community upgrading in Afghanistan

Manjusha Rai is a young architect from Bhutan who spent several years working in the Government of Bhutan's Department of Public Housing, where she met and became close friends with Jon Price and May Domingo (who are now living in Iloilo, Philippines). In recent years, Manjusha has spent a lot of time working as a roving "Young Professional" with ACHR, spending quite a bit of time in Cambodia (working with the UPDF on the community upgrading program) and also with the Uplink Network in Indonesia (working on their project to support the rebuilding of the 25 villages in Banda Aceh destroyed by the tsunami). In the past year, Manjusha has been back in her home town of Thimpu, in the mountain kingdom of Bhutan, where she has been working informally with some poor communities and trying to see whether it would be possible to start some kind of an Urban Resource Center there. In July we received word from Manjusha had taken a break from her work in Thimpu to go work in Afghanistan for a while. Here are some excerpts from her e-mails :

July 16, 2008, Kabul : I am sorry that I haven't been corresponding with you for a while but and things have been quite hectic at my end. Thank you for all the encouragement you gave me and for believing in starting a project in Thimphu, which is taking such a long time and lots of hurdles to initiate it. I was excited at one point that I could start then the Government (some environmental head) intervened and kept it pending. The informal settlement I was working with in Thimphu is in the process of being moved also. It was very frustrating trying to negotiate with the government to start a URC in Bhutan. So I decided to take a break and go work for a short while on a project for UN-HABITAT in Kabul, where I've been for over a month now.



I am here working as a "Community Urban Planner," and am helping with the community planning aspects in three different projects - in Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad. I work directly with the communities (which is not easy here, since a war is still going on here and there are so many safety and security issues!), under a "National Solidarity Programme" - an urban community planning program that was formulated by UN-Habitat in partnership with other agencies and is now being reviewed. The programme seems to have a good methodology, but it doesn't fit all situations. We have been struggling to persuade the community mobilizers (who are *not* community people or activists, like in our projects in Southeast Asia, but are highly qualified Afghans who are trained as doctors and engineers!) to be more flexible in dealing with community people and to look at upgrading as encompassing more than just roads and side ditches.



I am fortunate to be working with some really good dedicated people in all three of the projects. My work is very interesting and involves mobilizing communities to upgrade their settlements. Besides the physical aspects of upgrading like drainage ditches and paved walkways, I am trying to include more of a focus on upgrading livelihood options. Women are much less visible in this culture and their participation in everything is almost nil, and so I am trying to concentrate more on working with the community women, helping them to set up savings and credit groups and to start some income generation projects, as part of the upgrading planning.

My experiences in Cambodia in the many other Asian projects you helped me to visit - especially involving women in savings, in surveying and in community upgrading activities - have helped me to put my points across and to give people here more examples of how upgrading is done in other countries. Hopefully we will be able to bring about some changes, if not at the policy level, at least in people's attitudes. I am also trying to organise some workshops and exchange visits (maybe to visit OPP in Karachi?) for community people, as we did all the time in Cambodia, but the security situation and people's strong ethnic divisions seem to pose problems.

Besides Kabul, Jalalabad and Kandahar, I have been to several other Afghani cities, and have had the first-time experiences of flying from army bases in propeller-planes and driving around town in armoured cars with armed escorts. The security situation keeps getting worse and worse, across the whole country, with frequent bombings and kidnappings. The recent bombing of the Indian Embassy here in Kabul was a bit unnerving - four windows were broken in the house where I am living during that blast, but thank God I was away. My contract is short term and ends in December 2008, and as much as I enjoy working here, the tension I have been putting my family through back home is making me rethink. After that, I have no definite plans. Many thanks to Somsook, who sent me a very encouraging email, which lifted me up a lot. As always, *Manjusha*



CONTACT : Ms. Manjusha Rai, e-mail : manjusharai@yahoo.co.uk

VIETNAM : ENDA-Vietnam to focus on supporting 8-Cities Savings Network

The Ho Chi Minh City-based NGO ENDA-Vietnam has become the key organization working to link and support the 8 provincial cities community savings process in Vietnam, in collaboration with the Association of Cities of Vietnam (ACVN) and ACHR. On July 26, ENDA organized a meeting of its advisory board, of which Somsook is a member. Here is a brief update from Somsook on ENDA's work and the changing relationship of their organizational base to the 8-cities process :

A study was recently conducted to assess ENDA's work so far, and the July 26 Advisory Board meeting was an important chance to review that assessment and to discuss what the new role of ENDA should be, as the organization enters a new phase of its work. ENDA is now a prominent NGO with a good status in Vietnam, and its work is well recognized by the various levels of government. Besides their other various projects, they continue to support the work of the eight cities community savings and fund process and to link with the ACVN.



The community savings process in these eight cities has already put down some roots: the savings groups there are active, the community development funds are established in each city and operating, there are all kinds of collaborations and trust and relationships with the local government in these cities. In the city of Viet Tri, they now have more than 130 savings groups, which is extraordinary for Vietnam! All these cities have some kind of fund, and there is good collaboration between the cities, the Women's Union and the communities.

So the key question for ENDA is how to move forward and to look at this growing savings network process more holistically, so that all these experiments become something more than just another stand-alone NGO project. We suggested in the meeting that in this new phase of work, ENDA concentrate on this eight-cities process, and focus more on a city-wide (rather than a project-based) change process. The idea is to make the eight cities process into something that has an impact on the new governance of cities and expands the process to cover as many communities in these cities as possible, and begins to include the implementation of more activities such as upgrading and housing projects, all implemented within the community-driven savings process - not separate from it.

And as part of this work, we all agreed that we need to strengthen the capacity of the ACVN, which is now a rather small organization, but which could be very powerful because it links all the cities in the country and has a very good back up from the government. In Vietnam, you need some link with the government and the official system like this - without it, they may not cooperate that well, and so we think this ACVN is a very important strategic partner.

By strengthening the ACVN, opening up space for implementing more activities in these eight cities and linking whatever activities ENDA has been doing to this savings process, their work will become part of a much larger whole. Instead of implementing a lot of scattered, unrelated development projects here and there, this is a way for ENDA to help lead the country in a unified, community-driven change direction and a more holistic city-wide process as much as possible, to demonstrate and scale up a new governance system between poor people and their city. This focus on the eight-cities process doesn't mean stopping their various projects, but is a strategy for linking them all to the eight cities process and making it more integrated, part of the larger whole. *Some follow up plans in Vietnam :*



- **National community savings meeting in Viet Tri** planned for August 2008, coordinated by Minh Chau, with ACHR support.
- **More city-wide meetings in the 8 cities :** Tui (who works with ENDA) proposed that some of the cities would like to have a more city-wide process - maybe some city-wide grassroots meetings. This idea was agreed upon and Tui will start organizing it right away, with ACHR support.
- **Documenting ENDA's work :** Dr. Liam and Tuan (ENDA's director) proposed that they would like to prepare a good documentation of ENDA's work so far - a lot of it documented in Vietnamese, but very little in English. ACHR may provide some editorial and financial support for this documentation.

CONTACT : Mr. Bang Anh Tuan, Ms. Minh Chau, Ms. Tui, ENDA Vietnam
C2 Buu Long Street, Cu Xa Bac Hai, Ward 15, District 10, Ho Chi Minh City, VIETNAM
Tel. (84-8) 970-3273, 970-0243, Fax (84-8) 970-3273
e-mail: endavietnam@viettel.com.vn

INDONESIA :

A new governor in Jakarta and a new space for finding solutions to urban poor housing

The city of Jakarta has a new governor - the first ever to be directly elected by the people of Jakarta, and not appointed by the central government, as in the past. Our friends in Jakarta report that the new governor, Mr. Fauzi Bowo, is an architect and an experienced civil servant with an open mind who has a strong intention to do good for the city, and for the city's poor. He replaces General Sutyo, a fanatically anti-poor governor who in recent years has overseen some of the city's most brutal and largest scale evictions of poor communities. There was a plan organized in July for Governor Bowo to come to Bangkok to see first-hand what CODI is doing to help urban poor communities in Thailand upgrade their housing, infrastructure and land tenure under the Baan Mankong Program. A whole program of meetings, powerpoint presentations and field trips to some upgrading projects was carefully worked out. But at the very last moment, the Governor fell ill and the trip was cancelled. So instead, Somsok proposed going to Jakarta instead, and our friends in UPC and the Uplink Network all arranged for a meeting with the new Governor, along with a strong team of Indonesian housing activists, architects and NGOs involved in urban housing. Here is a brief note from Somsok about that trip :

We briefed the new governor about the upgrading work we are doing in Thailand, and explained how we use flexible finance and allow the people to be the main actors. There wasn't much time, but the good thing was that all the key Indonesian groups, activists and housing professionals were there in the meeting and they were able to link with him. And Mr. Bowo reaffirmed clearly his strong intention to solve the urban poor housing problems in Jakarta in a more peaceful way than his predecessor.

We had an interesting discussion with him about how to find land. He was complaining that there is not enough public land in Jakarta for housing the poor. This is the same complaint that we hear from virtually every public official in every single city across Asia! I proposed the idea of allowing the people to organize themselves, start saving and the letting them search for land themselves, as we do in Thailand. This is a very new idea - new to everyone! - and the governor might not have taken this idea too strongly. But he embraced enthusiastically the idea that communities themselves should be strong actors in the process of solving the city's housing problems, and he said that he had been thinking about giving community people the legal status they need to receive funds by helping them set up community cooperatives. Which is similar to what we are doing in Thailand. This would be very good, but the governor was uncomfortable with the situation that is common in Jakarta slums in which there are many intermediaries and outsiders who manipulate the people for their own advantage, making any kind of development in the slums extremely difficult.

Architect speak : I also suggested to him the idea that sometimes if we set the "form" of a solution too quickly, without the "function" being organized properly, we run into many problems. When he announced that all the communities can organize cooperatives as legal entities, the existing system will start organizing themselves too fast. But if he first lets the people organize their savings groups, it is a better way to build the "function", and little by little, the right "form" will emerge by itself. That is how I tried to explain this idea to an architect - *form and function!* I think he got the key points - the question will be how well he can understand the people process.

So our friends in Indonesia will continue working on this. This team in Indonesia is very strong. After meeting with the governor, they organized a workshop and invited all the key groups. It was a very good group of people, including a number of government people, highly-respected people who have worked for the World Bank (like Porwoto), UN people (like Marco), NGO housing activists (like Wardah and Dian), architects (like Antonio and Andy Siswanto) and journalists. The friendly relationship these people have is very good and strong. They are all in touch with each other all the time, linking together, phoning each other up, helping each other out all the time. In this meeting, there was a discussion on how they should move forward from here, because this new governor is clearly open to good ideas and is searching for new ways of doing things. All the people I've met from Indonesia on various teams that have come from Indonesia, including professionals, bureaucrats, community leaders, activists and architects, are all very good quality people, all searching for good ideas. And Indonesia already has a lot of good housing processes - like the Kampung Improvement Program (KIP), which I always regard as my teacher. Another thing is that there are lots of funds in Indonesia, but most of these funds have been implemented in the conventional bureaucratic way, through the existing systems mainly.



A Supply-driven or Demand-driven housing approach? Today, the Ministry of Housing in Indonesia has proposed another new program to construct high-rise blocks of social housing - a program similar to Thailand's *Baan Eua Arthorn*

program, which is facing all kinds of troubles reaching its target group. This is public housing of the old style. There was a lot of discussion about this program during our meeting. If we go according to this typical "supply-driven" solution, we wondered why we keep doing the same old mistake here and there? I was trying to get this group to push for a new "demand-driven" approach. I personally feel that Indonesia is ready to move beyond this, into a more demand-driven model, and the group liked the idea, but couldn't see how it would work very clearly. So how to move out from the supply-driven boundary and see the community people at large scale as the key entrepreneurs and main actors in solving the housing problems. That is the breakthrough we are searching for. And Indonesia has very good experience, and has been doing a lot of good projects in the past (supply-driven), but it has stopped. And now, because the city is developing so fast, there are a lot of evictions going on, and people aren't able to find the place to live in this change.

Changes in KIP communities in Jakarta : We're used to studying the KIP program mostly in Surabaya, where it was probably the most successful, but actually it was a very large scale national program that was implemented in cities all over the country (both the in-situ community upgrading and the construction of apartments in cases of relocation or also some in-situ cases) one of the very good things in the past in Indonesia. But at some point it slowed down. The finance that went into that program did not go to community cooperatives and it did not promote a more comprehensive kind of upgrading where people are able to look at the total picture of how they would like to develop together as a big group, but only financed very specific improvements, according to pre-set construction standards. Under the old KIP program, some old kampongs in Jakarta were upgraded and the residents were given land tenure individually. Later on though, there were problems as families needed more space and the kampongs were frozen at too low a density, as the city grew around them. Individual families could eventually get loans to improve their houses and many built 2 or 3 story houses on their very tiny plots. Each family did its own thing, with no common planning or agreement at all, more and more crowding and the environmental quality in many of the kampongs deteriorated badly. In the past, Kampongs were communal, and there were systems in which people designed things together. You could see the physical system of kampong in the culture and power involved.

We talked about how we could look more into housing models that are more demand-driven, and which could allow the people to be more active actors in the process in Jakarta. The group concluded that they would do the following as a follow-up:

- **Continue this discussion among themselves and expand it** to include more actors, to keep this group alive, and open up the sharing.
- **Conduct an open, participatory study of the current low-income housing situation in Jakarta:** Someone in the group proposed doing a study, but I suggested that instead of having a few researchers or professors make a deep study and then put it on a shelf somewhere, how about making an open study, a more participatory study where we use the study process as a reflection on what is happening in the Indonesian process, and to look at the good things that already exist in that society, and the problems, and how they would move forward. And they took up this idea.
- **Exchange visits :** they will organize exchange visits to Thailand to visit Baan Mankong.

(16 July, 2008) *Dear Somsook, We all would like to thank you for coming and opening up the space for dialogue between us here in Jakarta and the local government. I do hope it will be a new start in our communication with the Jakarta government that will benefit the city and the poor in particular. We will reconfirm with the municipality about their exposure visit to Thailand, and Lana is trying to persuade the Ministry of Social Welfare to adopt the idea discussed at Marco's office. Below is the coverage by Jakarta Post of your visit. - Wardah*

Build trust among people, give them access to funds

(An excerpt from an article by Tifa Asrianti, in the Jakarta Post, Wednesday, 16 July, 2008)

It is often said that governments can empower poor communities by involving them in planning processes, a claim discussed at a recent meeting of the Jakarta Art Council. Somsook Boonyabancha, director of Thailand's Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI), said another way to empower poor people was to give them access to funds. "Money is power. We have to give people that power. But first people need to prepare themselves to manage money collectively and with trust - as communities. To create trust, we have to first build people's capacity," she said on Monday, during a discussion at the Jakarta Art Council. Boonyabancha was in Jakarta to share CODI's experiences with building low-income housing.

CONTACT : Ms. Wardah Hafidz, Urban Poor Consortium / UPLINK Urban Poor Linkage
c/o Urban Poor Consortium (NGO)
Kompleks Billy Moon H 1/7, Jakarta 13540, INDONESIA
tel / fax (62-21) 864-2915
e-mail (1) : uplink@uplink.or.id
e-mail (2) : upc@urbanpoor.or.id

JAPAN : More eviction of homeless men from their tent communities in Tokyo

(July 3, 2008) Now, 34 homeless people living in tents in Miyashita Park (in Tokyo's Shibuya District) are facing the possibility of being evicted from the tent community where they have been living for many years, because the city is moving ahead with its plans to fully renovate Miyashita Park and make it into "Nike Park". This is not only an issue of eviction of homeless people but also an issue of the wrongful commercialization of public spaces and the city's poor being socially excluded from even public spaces. A group of people from various backgrounds have organized together to support the homeless men living in Miyashita Park and established the "Coalition to Protect Miyashita Park from Becoming Nike Park." Our own NOJIREN (Shibuya Free Association for the Right to Housing and Well-being of the Homeless) is one of the organizations in this coalition. To learn more about the Miyashita Park situation, about homelessness in Japanese cities, or to add your name to the coalition's protest campaign, please contact Fr. Peter Shimokawa at the e-mail addresses below.



CONTACT : Fr. Peter Shimokawa, The Coalition to Protect Miyashita Park from Becoming Nike Park
E-mail (1) : miyashita@riseup.net
E-mail (2) : pmshimo@aa.mbn.or.jp

GABY in PAKISTAN, CAMBODIA and INDONESIA :

Gabriela Sauter (Gaby) is a bright young Canadian graduate student from Ottawa and a crack-document writer who has just finished doing her masters at DPU in London with David Satterthwaite and has been working on documentation projects with IIED for several months.

As part of the IIED / ACHR collaborative project to document the work of local organizations in Asia, Gaby spent most of June and part of July in Asia, helping three local groups gather their stories for this project : first she was in Cambodia working with the Urban Poor Development Fund, then in Karachi with the Orangi Pilot Project, and finally in Indonesia helping the national UPLINK Network to document its work supporting the community-driven disaster rehabilitation of affected communities in Aceh, Surabaya, Porong and Yogyakarta. Before going back to Canada to begin a Ph.D. program in Toronto, Gaby is helping these groups to prepare draft reports on their work.



(The photo here shows Gaby with friends in one of the earthquake-affected villages in Yogyakarta)
(gabrielasauter@yahoo.ca)

SDI GLOBAL FUND APPROVES IT'S FIRST ROUND OF LOANS :

(July 9, 2008) Dear all, Jockin and Sheela met the SDI Secretariat in Cape Town on the 4th and 5th of July, 2008. The other two Global Fund coordinators, Celine and Rose, were unable to make the meeting. Jockin and Sheela and the Secretariat examined the first six calls for funds that have been received so far and have already been considered by the SDI Board. . . It is already clear that a very interesting process has evolved with the new global fund. There has been a knitting together of the different decision-making bodies of the SDI alliance in such a way that its *bottom up* characteristic has been reinforced, at the same time that due consideration has been given to external and internal professional expertise.

All calls for funds have been significantly reduced. This is not only a reflection of the kind of caution that is appropriate for a new initiative but is an indication that locally-driven requests will need external verification and amendment for some time to come. Some calls for funds were referred back to the countries that submitted them. This is by no means a reflection of the lack of need or even the lack of preparedness of these affiliates. It is first an indication that their finance model is complex and second that this complexity requires closer scrutiny and more intensive planning before a reasonably informed decision can be taken by the SDI Global Fund's Board. Thanks to all who have participated in this "design-by-doing" process. For those who have been watching from the sideline, believe me, this is only the beginning, and your input in the near future will be welcomed. *Joel*

SDI Global Urban Poor Fund : First set of funding requests approved in July 2008				
<i>Country</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Lending capital</i>	<i>Tech. assistance and federation building</i>	<i>Total</i>
Sri Lanka	For the construction of permanent houses for 43 families affected by the tsunami in the Jayagathpura community, Moratuwa City.	US\$ 25,000	\$ 3,500	US\$ 28,500
South Africa	Pre-finance for 250 subsidy houses in Mpumalanga and Western Cape – part of the Ministerial Pledge	US\$ 130,000	\$25,000	US\$ 155,000
Zimbabwe	Temporary water and sanitation for 1,270 families	US\$ 104,000	\$ 7,000	US\$ 111,000
Malawi	The construction of 350 federation houses in 3 separate projects	US\$ 50,000	\$ 10,000	US\$ 85,000
TOTAL		US\$ 309,000	US\$ 45,50	US\$ 345,000

CONTACT : Mr. Joel Bolnick, Shack / Slum Dwellers International (SDI)
 Unit 7, Campground Centre, 85 Durban Road, Mowbray, Cape Town, SOUTH AFRICA
 Tel. (27-21) 689-9408
 e-mail (1) : sdi@courc.co.za
 e-mail (2) : bolnick@mac.com
 website : www.sdinet.org

NEW REPORT : COMMUNITY SAVINGS AND FUNDS

Last November (2007), a big group of community leaders and their supporters from 21 Asian and African countries gathered in Bangkok to talk about the financial systems that poor community organizations are building and managing themselves, to support their initiatives in housing, land, livelihood, welfare and a host of other development activities. This report describes the important discussions that took place during that meeting, which was an important milestone for the community savings and fund movements in Asia and Africa. The meeting was jointly organized by ACHR, SDI, CODI and IIED. A report which documents the fascinating discussions that took place during this meeting, and the presentations which groups from the different countries made has been prepared and edited jointly by Tom Kerr and Diana Mitlin, and is about to be published as an IIED working paper entitled, "*Community savings and credit & community funds : The news from Asia and Africa.*"

CONTACT : For an illustrated copy of this report, or for a copy of the special November 2007 issue of ACHR's newsletter "*Housing by People in Asia*" on savings and funds, please contact ACHR. Both the newsletter and the savings report can be downloaded from the ACHR website (www.achr.net) or e-mail Tom at ACHR.

3 MORE YEARS SUPPORT FROM MISEREOR for ACHR's regional activities

(July 19, 2008) ACHR's long-time donor partner MISEREOR has recently approved a budget of 800,000 Euros to support ACHR's regional activities for three more years, from April 2008 to May 2010. Although the amount of support is much smaller than in previous proposals, it will enable us to continue our regional activities, especially activities which include exchange programs and horizontal learning, regional workshops (about 4 per year), national workshops (about 4 per year), exploratory visits and support for new initiatives, research, documentation (newsletters, video, publications, websites), young professionals program, engaging international agencies, advisory visits (about 10 total), organizational development, evaluation and administration. All administrative costs are capped at about 35% of total activities budget. With this budget available, it is now possible for all groups to propose activities to support learning, strengthening process of change in their countries in relation to regional support and learning.

NEW ACHR PROPOSAL :

New possibilities for ACHR with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Many of you have received the draft "Concept Note" that ACHR has sent to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as part of our discussions with this new potential partner about the possibility of launching a new project in Asia, in collaboration with IIED. We are waiting for a little more firm answer before moving forward on this, but we'd like to propose calling for an ACHR Regional Meeting (perhaps some time around October or November 2008) to plan together. This meeting will include three important agendas :

- to assess the current changes and developments in the Asia region and discuss how we should adjust ourselves and our plans and work accordingly
- to reflect backwards on the roles and support strategies of ACHR in the past, and to look forwards on how those roles and support strategies can be sharpened and made more effective in the future
- to work together to plan this new large-scale project that we have proposed to the Gates Foundation, which we hope will contribute to significant change in the region, if we plan it properly and share the implementation together.

We may need a little more time together in this big planning event than in earlier meetings. We'd like to propose a meeting of four or five days, which would include one day for country presentations. It would be nice to exchange more ideas about what's happening and what changes are occurring in the various Asian countries and in the region overall before we begin to plan how we will move forward. Please let us know your thoughts on this meeting - when would be a good time and where you'd like the meeting to be organized.

ACHR'S 20 Year Anniversary in 2008 : Remember that this year also is the 20th year anniversary of ACHR and the 20th anniversary of the strong regional linkages we agreed to establish and strengthen in Korea in June 1988. The ACHR secretariat is now gathering together stories about the past 20 years' work, records, achievements and significant changes that ACHR has participated in, supported or intervened in the region in the past twenty years. We hope to finish a draft of this "ACHR 20 Years History" in time for the regional meeting. So this forthcoming regional meeting will be an important gathering and a milestone in our long process of thinking together, working together and making change together in the more intense and risky world than twenty years ago.

Summary of the concept note : The proposed project will transform development options for the urban poor in Asia through its simultaneous support for community-led change processes in 150-200 cities in 12-15 Asian countries over the next three years. The activities will build on an established and successful model of people-led community and city development, and take this model to a new level of significance by repeated replication across Asia. Low-income communities will act as the key change agents to demonstrate that it is possible to address issues of land tenure security, infrastructure access, social and economic development and housing improvement at the required scale.

The core activity will be the implementation of 500 small community development projects (addressing the lack of toilets, drainage, paved roads and walkways, water supply and social amenities) and at least 50 larger housing development projects. These will be led by local residents, organized in savings schemes, with the support of key stakeholders through city-wide coalitions with municipal involvement. ACHR will work with key national partner groups within its coalition to ensure that these interventions build effective pro-poor partnership arrangements within the selected cities. The Coalition will consolidate these city change processes, bringing them together with existing initiatives into a visible, large-scale, region-wide demonstration of alternative practice, replicated at scale, and thus changing discourse and practice across Asia.

THAILAND : Land for housing the poor - by the poor

A new article about the unconventional ways that land for housing the urban poor in Thailand is found, secured and kept - by poor people themselves - in the Baan Mankong Upgrading Program is about to be published in the IIED Journal, Environment and Urbanization, a special upcoming issue on land for housing the poor. For impatient land tenure groupies, the bulldog edition of this article can be requested from Tom ACHR (achr@loxinfo.co.th). Here is a brief excerpt from the paper :

Land for housing the poor - by the poor:

Experiences from the Baan Mankong nation-wide slum upgrading program in Thailand

By Somsook Boonyabanha, Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI), Thailand, July, 2008)

The conventional belief among most Asian governments and international development institutions is that there is simply not enough urban land for housing the poor. At the same time, slums and squatter settlements in Asian cities keep increasing in size and number. The fact that all those millions of poor people continue to find pockets of land to squat on means that land for housing the poor *is in fact available* in our cities - but the land they find to live on doesn't belong to them, it isn't legal and it isn't secure. So it's fair to conclude that the problem is not with the *availability* of urban land for housing, but with how the *management* of urban land is failing to deliver this most basic component of decent housing to the city's poorer citizens, bringing about the anarchy, the illegality and the social consequences of slums, which everyone deplores. Slums are a direct outcome of mismanagement of land and of a city's failure to address the basic housing needs of the poor.



The question of land is nothing new. In the early stages, the strategies of building public housing on public land or expropriating private land for social housing may had some successes. But after these kinds of projects slowed down and land problems increased, the basic thinking on land has persisted in following the same assumption that *land for housing the poor should be provided by the government* - through the use of public land, or through legal means by expropriating private land or purchase land for resettlements so far away or regularizing the land occupied by existing slums.

In most Asian countries, land has increasingly become a commodity to be bought and sold to the highest bidder - especially urban land. It's no surprise that this commercialization of land and control over both public and private land by the ruling elite has dampened the enthusiasm for most governments to set aside urban land - either public or private - for housing the poor. As a result, the strategy of government providing land for social housing is more or less defunct across Asia. So if the old assumption that governments should provide land isn't working very well, how *can* we get urban land to those who are in most need of it? What kind of new strategies can be developed to get much-needed land for poor people's housing in sufficient quantities and with sufficient speed to meet the scale of housing needs Asian cities are facing today?



One possibility is that poor people themselves - on a very large scale - can become key actors in the process of acquiring land for their housing. Because poor people are on the "*demand side*" of the housing equation, they themselves encompass the large scale of the problem and they are the ones with the most urgent motivation to resolve these land problems and the most powerful drive to find decent housing for their families. That drive for change and that enormous energy has not factored into housing policies or programs in the past, where the poor have continued to be regarded only as passive "beneficiaries" or "recipients." The question is how can we support that *huge people's force*, and what tools to provide poor communities so that their combined energy can be channeled into resolving our city's serious land and housing needs - according to their own requirements and conditions and on a very large scale?

This paper describes the attempts being made by the "Baan Mankong" nation-wide slum upgrading program in Thailand to demonstrate and scale-up slum upgrading activities, in which community people themselves secure the land and develop various kinds of housing for themselves on that land. The paper will look particularly at three important aspects of how land is dealt with in the upgrading program, based on this *demand-driven* and *community-driven* approach :

- **How to GET land :** The strategy adopted in the Baan Mankong Program turns over the task of identifying and acquiring land for housing by communities and their city-wide networks. The accessible and flexible finance which the program offers enables poor people in communities around the country to search, negotiate for and acquire public or private land under variety of purchase and lease-hold arrangements, often in collaboration with their local authorities. Because communities themselves are exploring different kinds of land options in their cities - in their own ways and according to their own requirements and conditions - the upgrading program is yielding a variety of unconventional secure land options for the poor.
- **How to KEEP that land :** In many slum regularization schemes, public housing projects and even people's housing projects in the past, as soon as land has been secured and the housing project is finished, poor people start selling off and moving out. Communities end up fragmenting, since land prices in the project increase tremendously and poor communities - even newly secured ones - are selling and accepting offers from market buyers. In the Baan Mankong Program, the strategy of collective land tenure has been adopted to ensure that poor people can keep the land and secure their housing and sustain themselves as a community.
- **How to build a new strong community and social support system on that land :** Unfortunately, the poor do not stop being poor the instant they get secure land and housing. The Baan Mankong Program is also searching for ways by which the relationships that land creates and the conditions by which land is found and held help build new social systems in poor communities to link people together and to spark off a variety of collective development activities for addressing other needs and other aspects of their lives in a more integrated way. In these ways, the housing project is not an end in itself, but the beginning of more community development, in which a group of poor people can live together and can continue to address the real issues of their poverty, as a matter of course.



OTHER NEWS FROM THAILAND :

1. Somsook leaving CODI : *In December 2008, Somsook's term as director of the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) will come to an end and a new director will be appointed take her place at the head of this organization she has helped to build and guide from the beginning. Here is a brief note from Somsook on what this big change may mean for ACHR:*

I have long been ACHR's key coordinator, since it was founded 20 years ago. During the past seven and a half years, when I've been working as CODI's director in Thailand, I occasionally feel a bit guilty that I could not coordinate the regional activities of ACHR as fully as I'd intended, but I have been able to fully link the work of CODI to the active regional circle of learning and sharing during all those years. Now that my term as CODI Director will be ending at the end of this year, and now that ACHR is on the verge of entering into the next reviving round of its work, it will be very interesting to receive suggestions about my role with ACHR. I would be glad to receive your suggestions and friendly ideas about what would be good for me to do - for ACHR or for others. *Somsook*

2. Young Indonesian architect spends a month studying Baan Mankong : Andrea Fitrianto ("Cakcak") is a young Indonesian architect who was one of the team of architects who spent almost two years in Banda Aceh, working with Uplink on its project to assist the Udeep Beusaree Network of 26 coastal villages to completely reconstruct their houses and villages, after they were destroyed during the catastrophic December 2004 tsunami. *And that was some incredible architectural support work, believe me!* Cakcak is now taking a year's break from work with Uplink. He got a scholarship to do a masters course at the Institute for Housing Studies (IHS) in Rotterdam, and is now preparing his thesis there on community upgrading in Thailand and Indonesia. As part of his studies, ACHR helped make arrangements for him to spend a month working with the team of architects at CODI, tagging along and learning as much as he can during that time about the Baan Mankong Community Upgrading Program. (andrea.fitrianto@gmail.com)

KEN still stirring up the dust in AUSTRALIA :

For the past year or so, ACHR's old friend Ken Fernandes, besides helping to manage the Eviction Watch Program and assist with the new links with Fiji, has been struggling through several milestones in his battle against cancer: surgeries, bone marrow transplants, rounds of radiation and chemotherapy. We received the following note from Ken on July 9th, and are happy to announce that after a bit of a quiet spell, the e-mails and forwarded George Monbiot articles are filling the inbox once again with fire and brimstone!



(July 9, 2008) Dear friends, For the past few weeks I was undergoing a series of tests to ascertain the reason for the pain in my back and right shoulder, as well as to see if the radiation and all the other treatments have been successful in eradicating the cancer. The good news is that the cancer is no more in my hip and spine, where it was there most of last year and up till early May this year. However it is proving to be stubborn, and despite six months of chemo, a bone marrow transplant and radiation the cancer has returned and is in my lymph nodes under my right my arm and in the right deltoid region. It has occurred so quickly after my treatment. This indicates the aggressive nature of the cancer. I started a 12 week chemo treatment last Monday evening. This is a strong dose of chemo. If my cancer recurs, and it can within a month to 2 years, (90% chance, but I am highly skeptical about statistics) after the chemo, my only hope is good pain relief. or a miracle cure. . . .

I was quite excited with our recent visit to Fiji and the developments there. It was good to meet up with Somsook, Maurice, May, Nad, Sonia and Chad. I looked forward to being involved more that side of the world. Hopefully I can still continue to contribute to the development of the proposal. I was still plodding through a paper on housing rights which I began last year. I have to be patient and take life as it unfolds.

I am reminded of this poem, by great Persian poet Rumi:

**This being human is a guest house
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.**

You all have and continue to inspire me with your passion and compassion to develop a better world where there is justice and decency. I will continue to be at my computer and try to learn how to set up a blog so I can share my thoughts and insights to those who may be interested in them. Of course when I do come across some stimulating, relevant articles I will certainly share them with you. Thank you for your presence in my life. Warm and loving wishes. *Ken*

CONTACT : Mr. Ken Fernandes, e-mail : stopevictions@yahoo.com.au