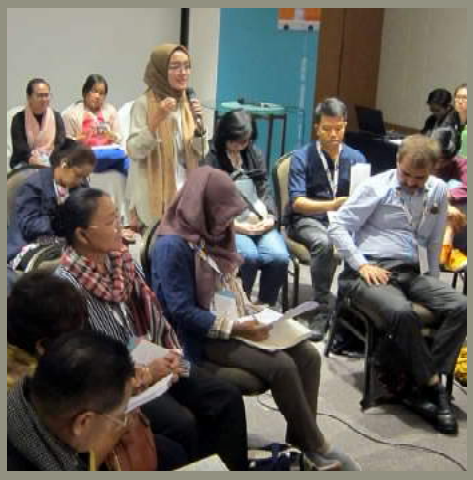


ACHR at the Asia Pacific Urban Forum in Penang, October 2019

talking about grassroots community resilience

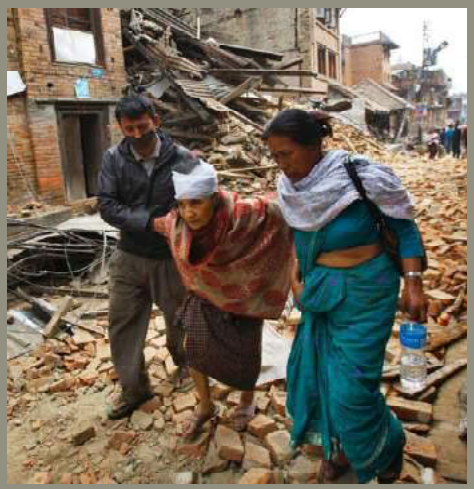
This report presents a slightly edited transcript of a workshop on the subject of *"Grassroots community resilience and disasters"*, which was held on October 14, 2019, during the seventh Asia Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-7), in the city of Penang, Malaysia. The workshop was organized by ACHR, in collaboration with three other grassroots networks: the Huairou Commission, Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and Slum Dwellers International (SDI).

ACHR decided to bring a big team to this meeting, not just for the fabulous food in Penang's historic George Town, but to make a strong case for community involvement in disaster resilience-building and to bring the voice of urban poor community people into a dialogue on climate change and disasters that is mostly cornered by professionals. Our team of about 60 people included community leaders, professionals and local government officers from Indonesia, Nepal, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Thailand, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as friends from Switzerland, Canada, Uruguay and UK.

We made for a substantial grassroots presence at APUF, and were able to take part in a variety of dialogues, side events, round-tables and panel discussions on issues of collective housing, housing finance, urban inequality, partnership, solid waste management and disaster risk recovery organized by our own groups and by others.

The idea of this workshop was to draw on some two decades of experience in which affected communities have taken a central role in managing their relief and rebuilding after disasters and extreme weather events. We also wanted to make a case in this big, regional forum that dealing effectively with Asia's share of disasters and climate change problems is actually possible, if the poor communities most affected by those disasters are part of the solution, and if the great development force which already exists within poor communities can be the at the center of the response.

To bring out this message, we organized the workshop a little differently: instead of putting a panel of "experts" up on a dais to expound and field questions, we asked a few key questions about the role poor communities play in disasters and opened up the floor for answers. Most of the speakers in this lively workshop were community people, but there were also a few support professionals - all of whom spoke from real experience on the ground with community-driven disaster rehabilitation.



Why make a splash at **APUF7**?

The seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, held in Penang Malaysia, October 14-17, organized by UN-Habitat, UN-ESCAP and the Government of Malaysia. The meeting provided a platform to discuss how well we're doing in implementating the New Urban Agenda and various other global and regional agendas.

Since this was a very big event for Asia, and key policy stakeholders would be there, we felt it was important to bring the issues of urban poor communities, informal employment and women's leadership into the event, to bring balance to an agenda which might easily tilt towards conventional top-down urban issues and practices.

We also felt it was important to bring into the forum the voices and experiences of the urban poor, who urgently want change and are already making change, and make their work and their ideas more visible by letting them speak for themselves. Our group included teams from these networks:

- **Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR)**, a coalition of Asian professionals, NGOs and grassroots community organizations working on issues of urban poor housing and land, with an emphasis on community-driven and partnership-based development.
- **Slum Dwellers International (SDI)**, a global network of urban poor federations and networks, with women-centered savings collectives at the heart of its practice.
- **Huairou Commission**, a global network of grassroots women leaders which empowers grass-roots women's leadership in the development of resilient communities through global and local initiatives.
- **Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)**, a global network focused on securing livelihoods for the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy.

Participants in the discussion :

The workshop drew together representatives from the four participating grassroots community networks (ACHR, SDI, WIEGO and Huairou Commission), including the following :

From Bangladesh
- Mr. Khondaker Hasibul Kabir, CoCreation Architects, Jhenaidah
- Ms. Quazi Baby, Participatory Development Action Program (PDAP), Dhaka + Huairou Commission
- Ms. Yaisha, Community leader from Dhaka + Huairou Commission

From India
- Ms. Suranjana Gupta, Huairou Commission
- Mr. Mahavir Acharaya, Hunnarshala Foundation, Bhuj, Gujarat
- Mr. Vikas Ram Gawali + Ms. Najama Kadir Pathan, Sanjaynagar Community, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra

From Indonesia
- Ms. Elisa Sutanudjaja, Rujak Center for Urban Studies, Jakarta
- Ms. Lydia Gonodiharjo ("Ela"), Community architect from Arkom-Surabaya
- Ms. Anisa Zakiyaturrahmah ("Nisa"), Community architect from Arkom-Jogjakarta
- Mr. Jasri Mulia ("Imul"), Community architect from Arkom-Jogjakarta
- Ms. Surati, Community leader from Kalijawi Network, Jogjakarta
- Ms. Roniatun, Community leader from Jogjakarta, Yakkum Emergency Unit (YEU) + Huairou Commission
- Ms. Agnes Meiria, Yakkum Emergency Unit + Huairou Commission

From Myanmar
- Ms. Sandar Pynoe, Community leader, Women's Savings Network, Yangon
- Ms. Naw Lwei Wah Phaw, Women for the World NGO, Yangon

From Nepal
- Ms. Bindu Shrestha, Community leader, Community Women's Forum + Huairou Commission
- Ms. Shobina Lama, Disaster Risk Reduction Program Manager, Lumanti NGO + Huairou Commission

From Pakistan
- Mr. Mohammad Younus, Urban Resource Centre, Karachi

From Philippines
- Ms. Ruby Papeleras, Community leader, Philippines Homeless People's Federation + UPCA + SDI
- Ms. Villa Mae Libutaque, Community Architect with TAMPEII, Quezon City

From Sri Lanka
- Ms. Subashini Kannagara, Community leader, Women's Bank, Colombo
- Ms. Asoka Mudiyanselage, Community leader, Women's Bank, Colombo
- Mr. Nandasiri Gamage, Women's Bank founder, Colombo
- Mr. Ranjith Samarasinghe, Sevanatha NGO + CLAFNet Fund, Colombo

From Thailand
- Ms. Aramsri Chansuksi, Community leader from Nakhon Sawan
- Ms. Amporn Boonyawairojana ("Neng"), Community leader from Satoon
- Ms. Jiraporn Kheawpimpa, Community leader from Nonthaburi
- Ms. Chan Kauapijit ("Paa Chan"), Community leader from Bangkok
- Ms. Jantima Langprasert, Community leader from Bangkok
- Mr. Phatipan Chumpa, Assistant Director, Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI)
- Mr. Jittakorn Payakso, Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI)
- Mr. Chawanad Luansang, Asian Community Architects Network (CAN) + ACHR
- Ms. Kasama Yamtree ("Ploy"), Community architect, Open Space Architects, Bangkok + ACHR
- Ms. Supreeya Wungpatcharapon ("Noot"), Professor of Architecture, Kasetsart University, Bangkok
- Ms. Poonsab Tulaphan, Home Net Thailand NGO + WIEGO
- Ms. Siriwan Noosang, Thai Street Vendors Network + WIEGO
- Mr. Reungyuth Teerawanich, National Housing Authority (NHA), Bangkok
- Mr. Wichai Suksawat, Thai translator, from Bangkok

From ACHR Secretariat in Bangkok
- Ms. Somsook Boonyabancha, Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), Bangkok
- Mr. Thomas Kerr, ACHR in Bangkok

From International organizations
- Ms. Diane Archer, Stockholm Environmental Institute (SEI) in Bangkok
- Ms. Lea Oswald, urbaMonde, Geneva, Switzerland
- Ms. Celine d'Cruz, Urban practitioner + ACHR + SDI
- Ms. Bernadette Bolo-Duthy, Director of Habitat for Humanity Cambodia
- Ms. Stephanie Butcher, University of Melbourne, Australia

Introduction to the seminar :

A lot of community leaders say to us, "You mean all the stuff that we've been doing all all along? Now you're calling it resilience?"

Suranjana *(Huairou Commission, India, who facilitates the discussion)* : In this session, we are going to focus our discussion on community resilience. I don't know how many of you are familiar with the term *community resilience*, which has become one of those much-used buzzwords. In the Huairou Commission, we first started using the term when we spoke about how people try to protect their lives, livelihoods and homes from the negative impacts of disasters and climate change. A lot of community leaders say to us, *"You mean all the stuff that we've been doing all along? Now you're calling it resilience?"*

To introduce the idea a little bit, I think we all know that Asian communities are experiencing disasters of all sorts - big disasters like typhoons, hurricanes, earthquakes, fires and landslides, and smaller disasters like changes in weather or rainfall patterns. There are also man-made disasters like eviction, and the negative impacts of urban development and infrastructure on communities. Communities, and the people who live in them, are constantly battling and struggling to survive in the face of these disasters. We know that within countries affected by these disasters, poor communities that are living in informality, in both rural and urban areas, are almost always the worst impacted by disasters. And there is an assumption that those communities are passive victims who are waiting for somebody from outside to come and save them when disasters happen.

But in fact, many of you are already undertaking practices and initiatives of many sorts to combat the negative effects of climate change and disasters. First we'd like to hear what you are doing. And then we'll go on to see if we can agree on some action and advocacy agendas to bring into the Asia Pacific Urban Forum in the coming three days. That will be part of our declaration: what do we have to offer and what do we want to ask other stakeholders to do? Before we start sharing, though, I'm going to ask Diane Archer, from the Stockholm Environment Institute, and Somsook Boonyabancha, from ACHR, to say a few words and provoke us a little bit.

Diane *(Stockholm Environmental Institute in Bangkok)* : SEI is an organization that is very interested in this topic, particularly in how it relates to the concepts of *inclusive resilience* and *leaving no one behind*. If we're trying to achieve the sustainable development goals, how can we ensure that resilience-building includes people who face challenges with their housing, their access to services and their recognition in the city? People often blame those living in informal settlements along canals of blocking the city's storm drainage system by throwing rubbish in the canal. But they don't consider the fact that the big developers are the ones building over the city's rivers, building over the canals, building over the ponds and wetlands, and they are worsening the city's drainage problems and causing impacts on those who live along those waterways. Low-income communities are not responsible, but they feel the worst impacts from disasters like flooding and typhoons. We're seeing more and more impacts from climate change, and more and more people are moving from rural into urban areas because they can't survive in rural areas any more. In some cases, their land is being washed away because of sea-level rise. Who is responsible for these new populations moving into the city? Is there a role for community networks in supporting them to be resilient in the city as well? And what are some of the gender aspects? We have some very strong community leaders in the room today who are women. Do you see any difference in resilience between you and other members of your communities? Or children, or elderly, or persons with disabilities? How can you ensure that communities are resilient for everyone?

Somsook: Why community resilience? Whenever disasters happen, all kinds of international relief agencies, government departments, professionals and charities rush in to disaster-hit areas, hang up their banners, and then try to help with this and that. With so much help coming from outside, why the need for communities to be resilient? In this room, we have a group of people from many countries who can make it very clear why we need community resilience. The question for us is this: does that community resilience want to be just a small addition to a much larger disaster relief and rehabilitation process that runs very well by itself? Or should community resilience be the main thing, the key mechanism for dealing with disasters - before, during and after they happen? Who can answer that? Why is community resilience so important?

Two kinds of resilience :

(Somsook) When we talk about resilience, there are two sets of things communities have to be resilient to. One is resilience to serious crises like storms, landslides, floods, tsunamis and earthquakes. These kinds of disasters are going to happen more and more. We don't have much control over the causes, but we can prepare ourselves to deal with them better. The other is resilience to the kinds of shocks, problems and unexpected crises that poor people in Asian cities face every day, like evictions, income losses and hunger. How can communities make themselves more resilient to deal with all these serious disasters and also the more daily ones? And how can we make community resilience an important piece of the larger puzzle of a resilient city, and a resilient society? *All of you in this room are the experts on that.* We have an hour to answer these questions, and to convince others that if they want resilience, community resilience must be an important part.

Question 1: What are communities doing to make themselves more resilient to disasters?

"It has also been important for our cooperatives to negotiate political space for ourselves in the disaster relief and reconstruction structures that already exist - both within our communities and in the municipality."

Suranjana: Who would like to start, by giving us an example of what their community is doing, either to prevent or mitigate the damage and destruction that happens during a disaster, or to help the community to quickly recover after a disaster? And by disaster I mean it could be a small disaster like a flood which lasts for two or three days, it could be a drought and water shortage, it could be changing weather patterns which affect farmers and fishermen. Whatever kind of disaster.

Bindu *(Community leader from Kathmandu, Nepal)*: For me, a resilient community is a community that has organized and prepared itself before any disaster actually happens. If communities can prepare themselves to face any kind of disaster, there will be less destruction, and the bad impacts will be less. Communities have to play a major role in this. It's not something outsiders can do for us. The devastating earthquake that we faced in Nepal, in 2015, makes a good example. We had been doing preparedness work in our women's savings cooperatives since 2012, and the women in many of the communities affected by the earthquake had been trained in preparedness - particularly in search and rescue skills and first aid. Because of that, when the earthquake happened, we were ready, and our readiness was able to save many lives in our communities.

It has also been important for our women's savings cooperatives to negotiate political space for ourselves in the disaster relief and reconstruction structures that already exist - both within our communities and in the municipality. In Nepal, we have a government-run structure for disaster preparedness in the form of local-level disaster risk committees. But it has been very difficult for community people like us to take part in those committees. After substantial lobbying though, a group of trained women from our women's cooperatives were able to take places on those committees. That collaboration has allowed us to channel important official news and information about disasters to our communities, to mobilize community women trained in disaster preparedness and to coordinate in times of emergency with other government and formal disaster response agencies.

$12 million worth of community resilience in Nepal: In Nepal, we have a strong system of community-level women's savings groups, which link together into larger, area-based women's savings cooperatives. All the savings cooperatives are registered with the government's Cooperative Department and are fully independent, but since 2007, they have linked together under the national Community Women's Forum network. There are now 37 women's savings cooperatives in 23 cities in Nepal, with 37,379 members, and combined savings of well over US$ 12 million - all of it in constant circulation in loans.

The disaster preparedness funds of women's cooperatives in NEPAL

Bindu: Many of our savings cooperatives have used a portion of the interest generated on loans to members to set up our own special disaster preparedness funds. These funds have been very important when disasters happen, because we don't have to wait for support from the government or aid agencies, but can go right into the affected areas and bring whatever immediate assistance is needed to earthquake survivors, in the form of medicines, food, water and temporary shelter materials.

When the terrible earthquake shook the Kathmandu Valley in April 2015, for example, the response from government was slow and cumbersome. But our women's savings cooperatives were among the first to reach the devastated communities, where many people were without houses, food or means of earning. At first, we brought food, drinking water, medicines, relief supplies and temporary shelter materials, which we mobilized partly from donations and partly from our disaster preparedness funds.

Then we used our women-led savings model to help organize 3,000 poor families in the badly-affected Rasuwa District, setting up 36 savings groups and forming a new cooperative. The savings groups took charge of building temporary shelters, using salvaged materials and government roofing sheets. With loans from other cooperatives and some donor grants, the new cooperative quickly began giving low-interest loans to help women revive their livelihoods - rebuilding shops and replacing lost cattle and stock - so they could support their families and save to rebuild their houses.

Suranjana: Bindu has given us three examples of things that they are doing in their communities: emergency preparedness, creating political space to influence government programs for better coordination and access to information, and then their cooperatives have disaster resilience funds, which they use to assist people affected by disasters and help them revive their livelihoods and repair their homes after the disaster has happened.

Resilience-building lessons from the **PHILIPPINES**

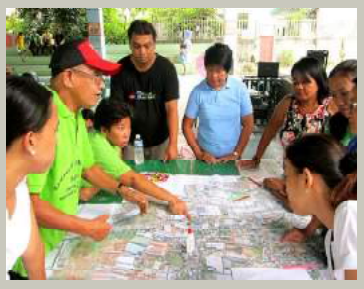
Ruby *(Community leader from Quezon City, Philippines)*: We cannot prevent disasters. But what we can do, as communities, is to prepare ourselves so that we are more ready when disasters happen. Disasters should not drive us. We should plan how to address the issues before the disasters happen. We have a lot of disasters in the Philippines - every kind of disaster you can think of: typhoons, earthquakes, landslides, volcano eruptions, flash floods and fires. For the Philippines Homeless People's Federation, one of our most important tasks has been developing our own strategies to deal with all these disasters and to use the disaster issue to negotiate a safer, more secure future in our communities.

1. Mapping communities in danger zones

For many years, we have been doing participatory community mapping of settlements located in danger zones. Most urban poor communities are in danger zones - on flood-prone lowlands and riversides, along typhoon-exposed shorelines, on landslide-prone hillsides, and in the way of flash floods and volcano eruptions. The information we gather in this mapping process makes communities more resilient because it helps community members understand their situation better, know where the problems are and know where particularly vulnerable people in the community are located - elderly, children, people with handicaps. Through the mapping process, communities begin to organize themselves.

2. Setting up our own funds and savings groups

We also implement a savings and loan program, which helps community members put their resources together into a common fund, learn to manage the fund collectively, and then give loans to members to meet their various needs. This work to collectively build and manage a community-level loan fund is another way we can prepare ourselves for unexpected events.

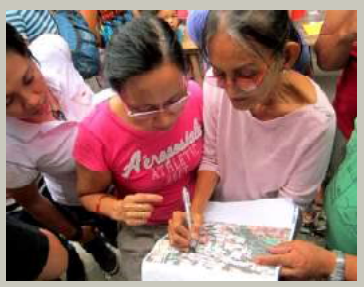


3. Planning for disasters

Besides mapping and saving, our preparation inside communities includes identifying evacuation routes and evacuation centers, so people know where to run when disasters happen, and where they can reunite with family members who might have been separated during the chaos. If a disaster happens when children are in school and parents are at their jobs, this will help them find each other. All these things can be planned for, and when communities do this planning together, in an organized way, it makes them much better able to deal with disasters when they come.

4. Building our networks

We also build networks of communities. This linking of vulnerable communities across barangays [wards] and across cities and regions is another important aspect of resilience. In the city of Muntinlupa, for example, we have gathered communities in eight barangays into the network. The network provides a platform for them to meet each other and learn from each other, and negotiate with their barangay officials and city-level authorities about issues that affect all the communities - such as disasters. The community network in Muntinlupa is now very strong and has been recognized by the city government as a crucial development and disaster-management partner. The network has also been allocated municipal funds to organize training and capacity-building programs at community level, and has been invited to represent communities on the local housing board. This is important, because communities understand their situation best, and that understanding makes for better disaster rehabilitation policies.



5. Developing disaster protocols

In many poor communities in the Philippines, the houses are built of light and flammable materials, and fires are a constant danger. Like all the different types of disasters, fire calls for special planning: where to quickly exit when fires start, how to mobilize help in preventing fires from spreading, and how to retrofit houses to make them less prone to fires. These disaster protocols that communities develop for fires and other types of calamities come right out of the data that they gather in their mapping and the strategies they share, both within and between communities, in their networks. And they all help communities to become more prepared, more resilient and more proactive in developing their own solutions to disasters - in partnership with their barangay-level authorities and mayors.

6. Negotiating a safer, more secure future

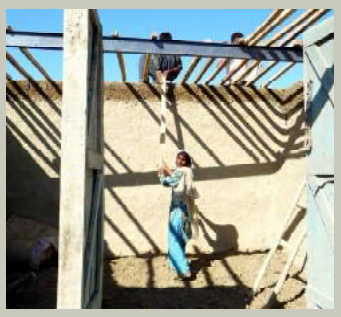
All this resilience-building takes time. But we know now that communities can be the leaders in the process of preparing for - and responding to - disasters. Sometimes, the way to make communities in danger zones less vulnerable to disasters is to make those danger zones into safe zones, by negotiating for government help in providing drainage or paved walkways. And sometimes, when the dangers cannot be removed, communities and networks can negotiate for resettlement to safer and more secure land. These kinds of negotiations and solutions are only possible when communities prepare themselves and make themselves resilient in all these ways, and also cultivate support from other helpers in the city, like architects, NGOs, civil society groups and universities.

Younus *(Urban Resource Center in Karachi, Pakistan)* : In Pakistan's rural areas, most poor families live in very poor housing conditions. In recent years, there have been a lot of terrible floods and excessive rainfall, and these floods and rain have destroyed many of these flimsy houses, killed cattle, left entire villages under water for months, and made hundreds of thousands of poor families homeless. After the catastrophic Indus River floods in 2010, which destroyed the houses of almost 20 million already-poor villagers, the Orangi Pilot Project and the Urban Resource Center worked together to help families returning to their ruined villages to rebuild their houses, in a situation where they had lost everything and could not rebuild by themselves.

The "one room with a roof" strategy in **PAKISTAN**

(Younus) In our "one-room-with-a-roof" program, the family builds the walls themselves, using stones or bricks salvaged from their ruined houses, with simple mud mortar. And then the materials to make roofs - the more difficult part - is provided in kits, by the program, through local partner organizations. In Sindh and Punjab provinces, which are very hot arid places, tin-sheet roofs can turn a house into a raging furnace. So the program instead helped families put up the kind of layered flat roofs people had built in these areas for centuries, which are strong, well-insulated, easy to repair, and can be constructed with cheap, locally-available materials like bamboo, reeds, rice husk, mud and plastic sheets. The system varies from village to village, but the idea is that if the family can build one sturdy room, that can provide them with a safe, comfortable place to live, as they begin the long and difficult task of rebuilding their devastated villages.

Later, when families get back on their feet, they can add to these houses, with a kitchen, a bathroom, extra rooms and shelters for cattle. All the construction is done by the communities, who often work together. This is a very low-cost solution. One house costs less than US$300. We have supported about 30,000 families to rebuild their houses this way. But still there are many thousands of families without houses in these flood-hit areas.



"As poor communities, we are the most vulnerable when disasters happen because we live in the most dangerous places. So it's important that we prepare ourselves before disasters happen, and we can do this in several ways."

Aramsri *(Community leader from Nakhon Sawan, Thailand)* : When disasters happen, it's not just the poor who are affected. Everybody is affected by floods and storms and landslides. But as poor communities, we are often the most vulnerable when disasters happen, because we live in the most dangerous places. So it's important that we prepare ourselves before disasters happen, and we can do this in several ways:

- **KEEP INFORMED :** We have to keep up on the weather news and be aware what's happening around our communities, so that we can prepare ourselves before a disaster comes.
- **SURVEY AND MAPPING :** We have to survey and map our communities, and understand what kind of potential dangers communities in our location might face. If our community is near a river, for example, and the river floods sometimes, we have to see whether we could escape to an upper floor, or if the house is only one-story, where we could escape to. The old practice in Thailand of building houses up on stilts has been a practical way of living with regular floods for centuries.
- **DISASTER PREPAREDNESS PLANNING :** Then we have to plan where to move people to in the event of a fire or flood. We also have to practice evacuation, or it will be chaos when the real disaster happens and nobody knows where to go.
- **COMMUNITY-MANAGED DISASTER FUNDS :** In many cities in Thailand, our community networks have set up special funds to help those affected by disasters, and when communities manage them, these funds can be used quickly and flexibly to mobilize whatever relief materials and human assistance are needed, and to reach the affected communities right away.

Suranjana: I want to emphasize a few important points from Aramsri's remarks. One is the survey and mapping of communities. I think we all know why this is important, but I want to be explicit about it. All of disasters and climate changes have very localized impacts. And very often the data that local communities and informal settlements collect is something that the government doesn't have. And that's why communities can use their ability to collect this important data to leverage a greater role in their cities' resilience-building programs. The second point she made is that when communities are developing their settlements, planning their roads and drains and houses, they have to be mindful of the risks that come with that land. Is it close to the water? Is it in a flood zone? We have to look at development through a resilience lens and see that we're not putting ourselves in danger. The third point is about having an evacuation plan and practicing mock disaster drills. That's to make sure people are regularly practicing what has to be done in the event of an emergency. You can't make a plan and then keep that plan put away somewhere, then never take it out, so it's all dusty when the disaster happens and nobody knows what the plan entailed. The last point in her disaster resilience strategy was about providing quick, easy access to financial resources which communities control themselves, to enable them to move fast and respond to needs right away, when disasters happen, and then to help people rebuild their lives later.

Community resilience tips from **INDIA**

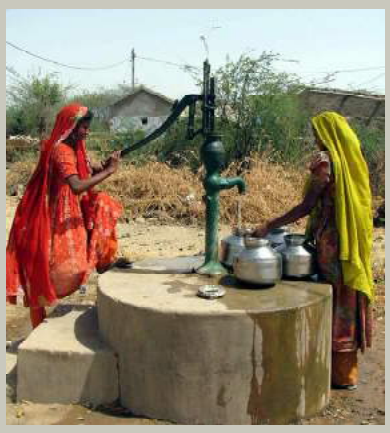
The wisdom of building on what you already have, rather than starting from scratch

Mahavir *(Hunnarshala Foundation, in Bhuj, India)* : My organization, the Hunnarshala Foundation, has been working on disaster rehabilitation continuously since 2001, when our city of Bhuj, and hundreds of villages in the area, were almost totally levelled by an earthquake. Afterwards, we helped hundreds of communities to rebuild their houses in safe, seismic-resistant ways, which local community artisans can manage themselves. Since then, we have helped develop safe rebuilding strategies in Aceh, Indonesia, after the 2004 tsunami, after earthquakes in Nepal and after earthquakes and disasters in other parts of India.

1. Making existing WATER SOURCES more resilient :

In my town of Bhuj - which has a population of about 180,000 people - we are experiencing droughts with increasing frequency. Every three years now, there is a drought, with no rainfall at all. People really suffer during these droughts, with no water for washing or bathing - and often not even drinking water. Now we are dependent on water piped in from big government dams, like the ones on the Narmada River, some four hundred kilometers away. But this isn't necessary. Our natural limestone ground strata can store water deep down in the earth, and store enough to provide for all our needs for the next one hundred years. We don't need to bring water from outside at all. But when the mind-set changes to getting water piped in, we forget about our own resources and diminish our resilience to these droughts in the process.

So we have been working with communities in Bhuj to revive our own ground water sources. This involves helping communities to learn to identify, monitor and carefully maintain our traditional water sources - the water channels, wells and catchment areas, to recharge our groundwater systems. Community volunteers now work together to measure water levels in wells and monitor water conditions on a daily basis. In these ways, communities can be as self-sufficient in their water supply systems as they are with their house-building. Now, in each new settlement we build, and in many of the older settlements, the communities have recharging bore-wells, and decentralized waste-water treatment systems. In these systems, we separate the "grey water" from washing and bathing, from the "black water" from flushing toilets. The "black water" is treated and recycled for flushing, and the "grey water" is treated and used for washing. By recycling waste-water like this, we decrease our use of municipal piped water, and can then bargain with the local government for tax discounts on water bills. Communities may be poor, but they are really leading the city in conserving our natural resources, like water, and making themselves more resilient, in the process, to disasters like droughts.



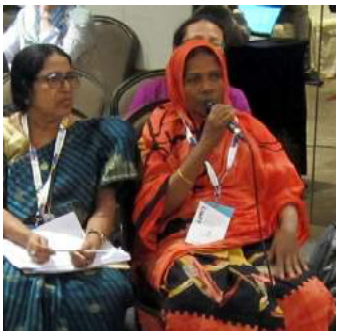
2. Making existing HOUSES more resilient :

The other point I wanted to make is about community resilience in housing. After a disaster like an earthquake, we talk mostly about building new housing according to safer, seismic-resistant standards. We never think about the existing houses that are still standing, or all the investment that has gone into that housing stock. Existing houses can be repaired and retrofitted, to make them much stronger and able to survive the next disaster, without requiring so much money and without forcing people to change their ways of living and housing themselves. Nobody funds retrofitting, though, and no government programs even recognize retrofitting as a legitimate strategy to make existing houses safer. During the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, 110,000 houses collapsed. But ten times that number of houses were still standing after the quake, and the cost of retrofitting those buildings and making them resilient to future disasters represents a fraction of the cost of replacing them.

Suranjana: Two important points from Mahavir. One is conserving natural resources - particularly water - in places where water is scarce, as it is in many communities around Asia. And the second is retrofitting existing houses as a cost-effective way of making housing more resilient, not just building more resilient new structures.

Paa Chan *(Community leader from Bangkok, Thailand)* : To deal with any issue, whether it be a disaster, an eviction or a housing project, we have to be organized and we have to be strong first. That's the most important thing. Because when we are organized and strong, we can deal with anything, with the full force of our community strength. When disasters happen, there is usually a lot of assistance coming from outside, from different directions and different groups. If we're not organized, it will be difficult for us to manage all this assistance, which can divide us and make us dependent. There may be many outside factors we cannot control, like laws and funding, but all these internal factors we can manage and can organize ourselves, as communities.

"If we let other people manage us, organize us, feed us and tell us what to do after a disaster happens, we will never be strong. We have to organize ourselves first, so we can tell these helpers exactly what we need, and help them manage the assistance they are bringing." *(Paa Chan)*



Suranjana: Being organized beforehand is crucial, because there is so much chaos after disasters, and lots of outsiders landing in the communities. If communities are organized, they can do better in proactively coordinating all this outside help, and can make sure that those who really need the resources get them.

Yaisha *(Community leader from Dhaka, Bangladesh)* : During disasters like typhoons and floods, we really suffered a lot, because we didn't know how to cope with the situation. But now, we have gotten some training and learned how to do mapping and other things to prepare ourselves. We have also learned to construct our houses differently, to make them better able to withstand these disasters. Before, we lived on low-lying lands, in houses made mostly from bamboo and thatch. Now we have moved to higher ground, and constructed new houses that are much stronger, with concrete pillars and bricks. We have also contacted the local government's water and sanitation department, and have negotiated for improvements to the drainage, so that now, during floods or heavy rains, the storm water drains away quickly.

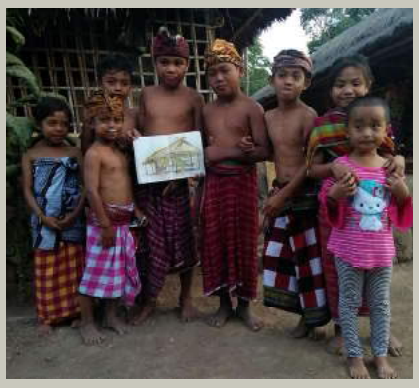
Suranjana: This discussion about the construction of housing and drainage reminds us that when we talk about disaster resilience, we are not only talking about what we do after disasters, but how we can develop our communities and construct our houses in ways that protect us from the negative impacts of disasters and climate change. What parts of that physical development can we do ourselves, and what part do we need to ask our governments to help with, in order to reduce the damage in our communities?

Local wisdom and resilience in **INDONESIA**

Ela *(Community architect from Surabaya, Indonesia)* : I worked for a bit with Arkom's disaster rehabilitation project in Palu and Lombok, after the 2018 earthquakes and tsunami. What I learned by working with those affected communities was how important the local building traditions really are. For hundreds of years, communities in those places have experienced earthquakes and floods, and they have developed a big store of knowledge about how to construct buildings that can withstand those kinds of disasters.

As Indonesia modernizes, though, a lot of that traditional building knowledge is being lost, and many of its traditional buildings are being replaced with standard concrete and brick boxes. There is one heritage village in Lombok, where the houses are all old and all constructed in the traditional ways, with wood, bamboo and thatch. None of those houses collapsed during the earthquake, but almost all the houses constructed of concrete and brick collapsed - many killing the people staying inside. We have to return to our roots, see what this local knowledge has to teach us, and perhaps try to combine that wisdom with the modern technology about how to reduce the impact of disasters.

In Lombok, we worked with one very isolated village. The people there told us that they have always been very resilient in their economy and survival because they produce all their own food. When all access to this village was cut off by the earthquake, they didn't have to wait for the government aid to reach them, because they could grow their own food and had their own systems of self-sufficiency already in place. They don't have to buy a lot from outside. When the Asian economic crisis hit in 1997, they hardly felt it. In fact, they felt very lucky at that time, because when they sold their crops outside, those crops fetched a higher price than usual.



Suranjana: The local knowledge that already exists in many communities can be used to advance a particular kind of development that creates self reliance and is both sustainable and resilience-building. Then, if there is a disaster, you're not waiting for outsiders to bring the things you need, but you have your own food supply. In India, the green revolution has pushed a lot of drought-prone areas into rice and wheat production. Now, with all the drought, more and more women's groups in these areas are trying to grow millets and more traditional drought-resilient crops, so that they can feed their families even during droughts. This is an example of how diversifying economic activities can reduce risk and build resilience. Let me try to summarize a bit, the kind of things that communities are doing to build their resilience to disasters and climate change:

- **ORGANIZATION :** A big emphasis on getting and staying organized, because if you're organized, you can speak with one voice to the government and to the external agencies that enter your communities. And when there's a disaster you're able to tell them what you need, rather than them telling you what you need.
- **PREPAREDNESS :** A whole set of activities around being well prepared: being aware, having a plan, early warning systems, evacuation plans, practicing disaster response drills, setting up emergency disaster funds, gathering data in the community about population, housing, families, economic assets and infrastructure, mapping who is vulnerable and who needs what after a disaster.
- **HOUSING :** More resilient housing construction, both before and after disasters happen, and some ideas about low-cost housing that can be improved and added to incrementally.
- **INFRASTRUCTURE :** Activities to improve infrastructure in villages and cities to make communities more resilient to disasters, with better drainage, better sewage, better construction materials.
- **RELATIONSHIPS :** Building relationships and partnerships that help you coordinate and negotiate with local and national governments and aid agencies before, during and after disasters happen.
- **LOCAL KNOWLEDGE :** The importance of using local knowledge and linking that with modern science and other kinds of technology and information, as well as sustainable use of local resources.

Question 2 : Why should communities be at the center of resilience-building processes?

"We have developed solutions to these problems of disasters, but our solutions need to be supported. We cannot do them alone."

Suranjana: These days, we are talking about climate change and disaster resilience all the time, and we have big agencies like the Global Commission on Adaptation. But a lot of that discussion is not being driven by communities which actually face disasters, but by big global organizations and institutions which are not placing communities at the center. Why should communities be at the center of the discussion? And what action can we take to build more resilient communities? That's the crux of the recommendations that we want to make at the end of this discussion today. What do we really want to say to governments? Why should they be involved with us? What do they need to do more of? And what do they need to do better with communities? And why are communities so critical? What is it they contribute and bring to the table, which is unique to communities, which governments don't have? So what do we do that is better than what governments can do?

Ruby: Why communities? Because our communities are most often on the front line of disasters. We are the ones who are most vulnerable to disasters, the ones most likely to be flooded or swept away or crushed. We are the ones most likely to die, to lose our houses, to lose our belongings, to lose our means of supporting ourselves. And there are a lot of us. We have developed solutions to these problems, but our solutions need to be supported. We cannot do them alone. We need to have the government support our knowledge, our initiatives on the ground. Being in a network of urban poor communities, we should have the space to collaborate with the government, and they should also support the process on the ground. None of us can address these issues alone - they are just too big, too serious, too overwhelming. We can only do it in collaboration.

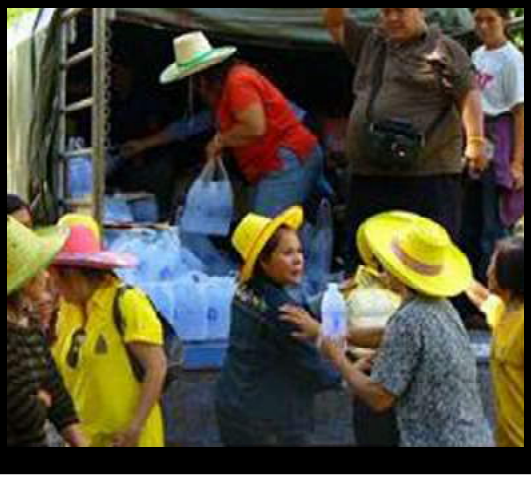
Suranjana: Communities have their own solutions and their own networks. They are asking for more collaboration from government.

Amporn *(Community leader from Satoon, Thailand)* : When we are organized as communities, and as networks of communities, our organization and out network linkages create a common platform where helpers from other sectors can come to offer help of different sorts and be assured that the help will be managed properly. But if disaster victims are not organized and don't work together, but try to cope by themselves as individuals, it will be much more difficult for them, and outsiders will be the ones who decide what they need and take over their relief and rehabilitation.

"Those who know the problems best are those who face them in the affected communities - not outsiders. That knowledge is a power that exists in communities."

Bindu: I want to add some experiences we had working with the government in Nepal, after the 2015 earthquake in the Kathmandu Valley. I think communities have to be at the center, because when they are organized and have prepared themselves, they can play an important role in helping the government to implement the formal disaster plans and policies that are already in place. Governments like ours in Nepal have signed all sorts of agreements at the global level and have policies and programs in place for dealing with disasters. But when it comes to implementing those policies and activating those programs on the ground, they don't know where to start. So they end up doing nothing at all. So we have to help them. Organized communities can facilitate them to do their government work, by showing them clearly what risks communities are facing, what communities need, what communities are prepared to do and how they can work together. This is what we did in Nepal after the earthquake. We had all that information and all those strategies in place, because we'd prepared ourselves as communities and as networks of communities.

Roniatun *(Community leader from Jogjakarta, Indonesia)* : Those who know the problems best are those who face them in the affected communities - not outsiders. This knowledge is a power that exists within communities. They have the power to discuss among themselves and agree on what to do in all phases of disasters: preparing themselves before the disaster, deciding what to do during the disaster, coordinating with outside aid providers and developing their own plans of action and rebuilding after the disaster. Communities are the only ones who directly face all these phases of the disaster, and that direct involvement is their power.



Faster, cheaper, better and more flexible . . .

Jantima *(Community leader from Bangkok, Thailand)* : Why communities? Because we live together, and we know each other well. That is why we have to solve our problems first. Secondly, we have friends in the network. So whenever a disaster happens, we have our networks coming to help us. We are not alone. The support almost always comes first from the network - they come to help us right away, before even the government, before the aid agencies. When we organize ourselves and build our networks, we can set up our own disaster support systems, so that we don't have to rely only on the government too much. And our systems are much more flexible, much quicker. If the network has its own special disaster fund, we can mobilize those funds to help each other, and that can happen very quickly, to respond with emergency help and relief. The government, on the other hand, will require many bureaucratic steps, many permissions, many formalities, and the assistance will come only a long time after the disaster. But communities can do it right away.

Younus: The solutions that come from the government and from professionals invariably come at a very high cost. And they almost never match the local conditions. After the earthquake in Pakistan, for example, the government proposed building houses which were designed by government architects, and nobody in the affected communities wanted to build or live in those houses. In parts of the country that are extremely hot, the architects designed concrete houses which are not feasible, and which turn into ovens during most of the day. People couldn't stay in those government houses, so they used them only for storage. These kinds of top-down solutions don't match the local conditions or meet local requirements, and they waste resources also.

Why women said no to concrete and yes to bhungas in **INDIA**

Mahavir: It is very important that traditional house-building technologies be validated in a post-disaster rebuilding process. We have worked in many disaster situations where people have had to fight hard for the government rebuilding compensation they are entitled to. Why? Because the government would only give money to rebuild houses in modern ways, not in the traditional ways. If the technical rebuilding guidelines can include more traditional and more resilient building technologies, then people can get the compensation and rebuild in ways they know are appropriate. These older building technologies are often quite resilient. They are almost always cheaper, also, and they use locally available materials and locally available expertise. These are knowledge systems which remain in the community, and should be honored, made use of and taken further. Otherwise, these knowledge systems are dying, and people are building with new construction systems and materials which are really not at all good climatically, and not suitable to people's requirements.

In our region, women took the 2001 earthquake as an opportunity and changed the economy of the whole region in the process. Let me tell you how that happened. Kutch is a very hot, desert region in western India. For centuries, people there have built circular, one-room houses called *bhungas*. The *bhunga* houses are built in clusters, with plastered masonry walls and conical roofs made of thatch or tiles. Even in the hottest part of the day, when temperatures can climb up to 45 degrees Celsius, these houses remain cool inside, where the women plaster the walls with spectacular ornaments and niches that glitter with tiny mirrors. After the earthquake, most of the *bhunga* houses survived, while rectangular brick and concrete structures collapsed, crushing the people who were sleeping inside.

When the time came to rebuild after the earthquake, we asked the people how they wanted to rebuild. The men almost always said they want houses like in the city, made of brick and concrete. But when we asked the women, they said no, that's not our culture or our identity. We don't want those outside kind of houses, we want our round *bhunga* houses. The only thing they asked was for help in making their *bhunga* houses safer, with some adjustments to make them seismically stronger. So that's what we did. And because the women took a stand and insisted on their traditional houses, today the *bhunga* in Kutch have become a famous tourist attraction, and the region's economy has been completely transformed as a result.

So my recommendation is that the perspective and vision-making of women should be ensured - both during and after the disaster.

"The greatest source of social support in the circumstances of any calamity is in the community itself and in its unity. Nobody who is part of a community is alone."

Kabir *(Community architect from Jhenaidah, Bangladesh)* : If the rebuilding process goes through the community, it will give the affected people a sense of ownership, and a sense of satisfaction and dignity. These things are very important. If somebody else does it for them, there will be a lot of grumbling and complaints. If people do it themselves, though, and the roof they rebuilt leaks a little, *"We'll repair it,"* they'll say. *"Don't worry!"*

Suranjana: Governments and funders all worry about *sustainability* - what's going to happen when the project is over and the money is spent? Will the benefits of the project be sustained? If communities don't take ownership of the initiative, whether it be the construction of houses or a walkway, then they won't look after it, it won't be maintained and it won't survive for long. So the issue of ownership is linked to sustainability.

Yeti *(Academic from Penang, Malaysia)* : When we talk about community resilience, I wonder about emotional and psychological support? In many disasters, people lose their family members, houses and belongings. How is it possible to help people cope with these great losses? Does anybody work on that?

Somsook: During or after disasters, some people may die, some people may be sick or injured. People have a lot of stress because they've lost all their belongings. There are a lot of serious problems among the affected people. So how can communities help them? Some say the government may have to send in a psychiatrist to advise each person who feels very bad. Is that the way? What could be the community's role in resolving all this stress and these problems? This is something so important - we need to elaborate it.

Roniatun: The greatest source of social support in the circumstances of any calamity is in the community itself, and in its unity. Community members are close to each other. They have kinship. They have good relations with one another and with other communities in their area. Nobody who is part of a community is alone. So when some community members lose their loved-ones or their houses and belongings in a disaster, they can support each other and care for each other, as a matter of course. It will be easier for them to recover from these losses, and to rebuild their lives and houses, because they have these strong relationships and this unity.

Suranjana: There are organizations, I know, that do this kind of work in a more systematic way. But a lot of people would say that actively engaging disaster-affected communities in the rebuilding process is in itself very good therapy and an important part of the psychological support they may be needing after the calamity.

Ela: When we worked on the post-earthquake rehabilitation in Palu and Lombok, the affected people didn't refer to themselves as *victims*, but as *survivors*. This distinction was psychologically important in the process of rebuilding and reorganizing themselves after the disaster. They didn't want to see themselves as powerless receivers of help, but as people who had survived something really terrible, and were now confidently leading the process of getting back up and restoring their lives, on their own power.

Better than before: We also saw that very often, the communities were even better and stronger than they had been before the disaster. Before the earthquake, maybe the community had not been very well planned, and maybe the people had lived by themselves, without very strong relationships between neighbors. The disaster became a chance to reorganize themselves and re-plan everything, so that it was better than before. So they could think, *"Our life after the disaster is better than before."*

Suranjana: I want to add to the point of how we see survivors. Do we see them as victims, or is it an opportunity to see them differently? In the larger humanitarian aid discourse, women, children, elderly and disabled are usually classified as "vulnerable groups." The moment you're classified as a "vulnerable group", you're somehow not included in the planning, your voice isn't heard and you're assumed to be powerless victim. You're a special group which has to be targeted by somebody else and given aid and services. The groups in our Huairou women's network don't like using the term "vulnerable groups" for themselves. They want to have a voice in deciding how to rebuild their communities after disasters and how to prepare for and prevent disasters. We have many groups who have used the post-disaster relief and recovery process to advance their leadership and get involved in local planning. After the earthquakes in Maharashtra and Gujarat, in India, they were appointed by the government to pass on information to households that were doing reconstruction. In the Philippines, they did a lot of work around monitoring relief after Typhoon Haiyan.

"We have disasters almost every month now in Indonesia. But we can't fall into the trap of seeing the people affected by each disaster as helpless victims."

Nisa *(Community architect from Jogjakarta)* : I like the idea of strong communities rejecting the notion of seeing themselves as vulnerable groups or victims. In Indonesia, we have had floods, fires, tsunamis, earthquakes and volcanoes. We have disasters almost every month now. But we can't fall into the trap of seeing the people affected by each disaster as helpless victims. The important thing is we have to learn from the experience of each disaster how to help communities take the leading role in preparing and in rebuilding their lives and communities after disasters.

CONCLUDING REMARKS from Somsook Boonyabancha

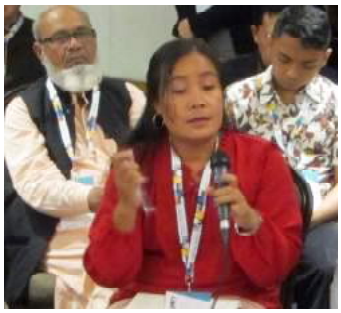
Somsook: When disasters happen in places where the community is very loose and unorganized, the odds are good that they will face a double disaster. The first disaster is the calamity itself - the storm or the tsunami or the flood. And the second disaster will be the things that happen in the aftermath of that calamity, when outsiders come in and impose their badly-fitting rehabilitation program on the community. Or worse, when local governments or profiteers use the disaster as an opportunity to grab the community's land, which has now been cleared of all those poor people's houses, and use that land for their own commercial or development purposes. If the community isn't strong, the people won't be able to resist these forces, and will find themselves facing a second disaster of losing their land as well as their houses and livelihoods.

But if the community is strong, or is able to use the disaster to make themselves strong, the disaster can turn into a new opportunity to rebuild a stronger community, a stronger settlement, a stronger set of possibilities for their future. This is what I have learned in my experience seeing so many disasters over the years. In a disaster, people may get lost, they may get scattered in different places, but community is the only way to bring them back together, to bring back their sense of being together in a community, so they can start moving forward together. If disaster survivors are on their own, they'll only despair and think that their problems are too big and they are too small to solve them.

But when they are part of a larger community, people can start thinking together in a forward-looking way: What are we going to do? How are we going to rebuild? What can we do together right now to start? This can only happen if you have a community.

It's clear that we cannot stop disasters from happening. But after disasters do happen, the communities affected by those disasters can be stronger, if they have the space and support to discuss, to plan and to manage all aspects of their rehabilitation themselves. It is important that resources from the government - both financial and otherwise - should go into this direction and focus on communities as the most important and most immediate actor in developing resilience: resilience in disaster prevention and preparedness and in post-disaster rehabilitation. Whenever a disasters happen, we need to be ready to channel the financial support to the communities, so they can turn the problems that come with disasters into new possibilities and new development opportunities.

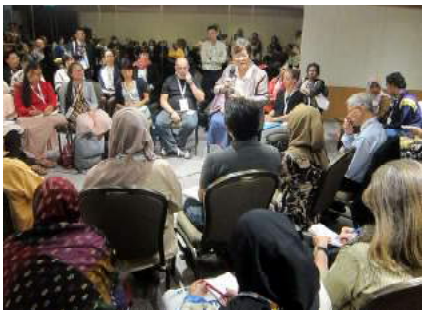
Bringing the voices of Asia's **GRASSROOTS COMMUNITIES** to APUF7



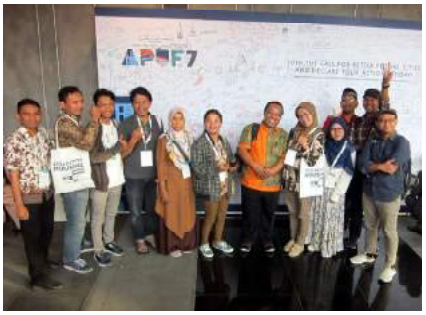
By bringing in the voices and experiences from grassroots urban poor organizations in Asia, ACHR hoped to change the APUF7 meeting's tone - not by grumbling about problems, but by using the forum's various sessions as an opportunity for this group to speak for themselves, and show how they are already being part of the city development process in a variety of proactive ways.

GRASSROOTS ASSEMBLY: The Grassroots Assembly on October 14 gave people from the four participating networks (ACHR, SDI, Huairou Commission and WIEGO) and others a chance to meet each other, hear what everyone's doing and discuss in greater detail some of the key issues they face in their lives and work. Besides our workshop on "Grassroots community resilience," the assembly included sessions on land and housing, community finance, community participation in city management and planning, women's leadership and economic opportunities.

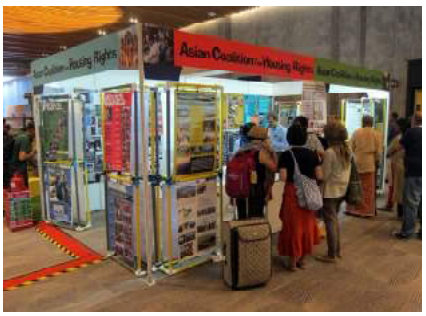
COLLECTIVE HOUSING SESSION: ACHR and urbaMonde jointly organized a side event on October 15 called "Collective housing: building active people and engaged communities." In this lively session, our grassroots community groups described their community-driven initiatives which show new ways for urban poor communities to develop permanent housing solutions, in which the projects are planned, built, financed and owned collectively, in a variety of ways. The session emphasized the importance of making housing and owning land together, as the best way to ensure that even the poorest can be included, and to make sure that housing will not be invaded by the market forces which so often push poor people out.



PATHWAYS TO URBAN EQUALITY SESSION: On October 17, ACHR and research teams in four Asian cities (Yangon, Danang, Nakhon Sawan and Jogjakarta) presented the work they're doing as part of a global study which explores the issue of rising inequality and looks at the innovative ways communities and their networks are countering those forces, cultivating partnerships, addressing their housing and poverty problems and making their cities more equal in the process. The Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) study is being overseen by the Development Planning Unit at the University College of London, in UK.



OTHER EVENTS: Many of the grassroots community leaders and their supporters in our group were invited to take part in other sessions during the APUF event, including high-level roundtables, side events on disaster risk reduction and recovery, "deep dives" on urban resilience and innovative financial mechanisms, inclusive cities and other topics. In the closing plenary's "Declare your actions" session, Ruby Papeleras, from the Philippines Homeless People's Federation, gave a rousing call to arms on behalf of the urban poor in Asia, to let people lead the change.



EXHIBITION: Besides organizing the Grassroots Assembly and several side events at APUF, ACHR booked a double-size booth in the exhibition hall, just around the corner from the CODI booth. We lined the booth and some freestanding kiosks (made by the community architects from colorful PVC pipes and recycled strips of innertube), with posters which showcased many of the collective housing and settlement upgrading projects communities around Asia have implemented. The ACHR booth served as our headquarters for meetings, impromptu dialogues, lunch-breaks and for distributing all the brochures, newsletters, flyers and DVDs we brought with us (which mostly disappeared by the first day!).

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