Salyani

This is the first-ever community-led upgrading project in Bharatpur, and the city's first case of an informal community being given secure tenure rights to the public land they occupy. The project was a learning opportunity for the whole city. With help from a team of community architects, the people developed low-cost plans to rebuild their mud and thatch houses, upgrade the infrastructure and negotiate with the Forestry Department, which owns the land, to get subsidized timber, which many used to construct their new houses. The project is much visited and has inspired similar projects in several other cities.

- **Project** Salyani housing project
- **Location** Bharatpur, Chitwan District, Nepal
- **Size** 31 households
- **Finished** 2011
- **Type** On-site upgrading of an informal community on Forest Department Land, with secure land use rights

The city:
Bharatpur is the district headquarter of Chitwan District. It is adjacent to the huge Chitwan National Forest. It is Nepal's third largest populous city, with about 250,000 population. It is located at the junction of several important roads leading to Kathmandu, India and other parts of Nepal, and also at the junction of three rivers. The Narayani River flows through the town. It is one of the fastest growing cities of Nepal. The business in Bharatpur is related to timber, agriculture products and other goods that comes from India and transported to other parts of Nepal.

A city of bicycles: There are many trucks and buses which pass through Bharatpur, on the way to and from somewhere else, but the town's main vehicles are bicycles and cycle-rickshaws. There is a saying when marriages are arranged in Bharatpur, one of the first questions the boy's family will ask the girl's family is, "Does she know how to ride a bicycle?" Bicycles are the important means of household transportation.

Slums in Bharatpur: Like all towns and cities in Nepal, Bharatpur's population is swelling rapidly, especially with poor migrants looking for work. Though the municipality has launched some "pro-poor" schemes, it has been unable to keep up with the housing needs of these poor migrants, and informal settlements are growing in circle around the city - most without any formal water supply, drainage, toilets or electricity, and half under threat of eviction. In 2009, the squatters' federation surveyed and mapped all the informal settlements in Bharatpur. 56 informal communities were documented and most of them on land under the National Forest Department, which accounts for much of the peripheral land around the city.

Lumanti has been working in Bharatpur since 2005, with a small team and local volunteers. Besides supporting the women's savings process and helping set up youth groups and children's' education programs, Lumanti has helped several communities to make environmental and infrastructure improvements (mostly water supply and sanitation), with support from Water Aid Nepal and Misereor. In this work in Bharatpur (as in all its work), Lumanti worked in close partnership with the national slum dwellers federations and local women led cooperative: the Amar Deep Women's Savings Cooperative, Women Slum Dwellers Federation (*Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj*) and the National Federation of Slum Dwellers (*Nepal Basobas Basti Samrachyan Samaj*).

The saving process began in a few settlements in 2005, and has now grown into a citywide women's savings movement. The savings groups collectively registered as the Amardeep Women's Cooperative, and by June 2022 had a collective savings fund of 126.5 million rupees (US$ 951,527). The fund is constantly revolving in small loans to members, both internally within communities and between communities for larger loans. The cooperative committee, which is composed of representatives from all the savings groups, meets once a month. The total number of members of the cooperative in Bharatpur, as of June 2022, was 2,198.

ACCA project in Bharatpur starts in 2009:
With support from Water Aid Nepal and Misereor, Lumanti had been working in Bharatpur since 2006, supporting communities to organize, building the saving groups, helping to access proper sanitation and clean water. In 2009, ACHR's ACCA Program brought some new tools to strengthen negotiations for land and to create a new collaborative process between various groups in Bharatpur. The ACCA program was managed by a collaborative city-level committee, with representatives from the communities, the municipality, the federations of the informal settlements, Lumanti and the women's savings cooperative, which managed all the ACCA funds. After the project began in 2009, there were a lot of meetings within communities, within the federations and with officials from the Municipality, the political parties and the Forestry Department. Through exchange and community-run training, the already-strong savings process expanded to reach more of the city's poor settlements. All the communities have been surveyed and mapped by the communities themselves.

As a result of all this work and these negotiations, the relationship between the communities and the Forestry Department improved dramatically. The people in Bharatpur's informal settlements used to fear being evicted, but now the Forestry Department is offering the communities free wood for their housing and toilet-building projects and the use of land for their community centers, markets and agro-forestry projects. The Forestry Department also agreed to give the land for the first big housing project at Salyani, and the municipality has agreed to give land use rights to slum dwellers in Salyani.

In this whole process, the city has become a positive supporter of a community-driven development and a process towards community achieving secure housing. They might not own the land these settlements occupy or have power over its use, but by saying "Yes!" they are helping to loosen up the negotiations for

land. This team work between the city and the people - together with other development agencies and land-owning departments - is crucial. Bharatpur is showing that when these groups come together and combine their forces, there are many possible resources and many other points of collaboration which can be brought to the task of fixing all the city's problems of land, housing and basic services in the poor communities. And Bharatpur is also showing that it's not necessary to keep demanding that the central government provide this or that, because this collaborative city team has been able to deliver land and resources to the people who need them, and have developed their own pragmatic solutions to the real problems they face as a city.

The community:
Salyani is a small and very poor informal settlement of 31 houses located right next to the "buffer zone" of the Chitwan National Park (this "buffer zone" is managed as a community forest).   The people settled there in about 2000. Many are casual laborers. All the houses, which are arranged in a single long line along the road, are made of mud, thatch and bamboo - not a single brick and concrete house in the community. The land is low-lying, and in the areas behind the houses, there are some swampy bits. Flooding problems during the monsoon.

When the city authorities and federations had their first meeting to identify the pilot project for ACCA housing in the city of Bharatpur, they all agreed on selecting Salyani for the big project because of the very bad situation there - probably the poorest and most vulnerable community in the town. All the other communities agreed.

Salyani became the first-ever community-led housing and settlement upgrading project in Bharatpur, and the city's first case of a slum community being provided secure land tenure. The project has been an important breakthrough and a learning opportunity for the whole city. The 31 families in Salyani, mostly poor laborers, were originally resettled here by the government in 2004, after being evicted from other settlements near municipal drains and along the river. They were given permission to stay on this strip of land on the condition that they prevent any encroachments into the adjacent Chitwan National Park. The possibility of eviction still loomed, however. But once the ACCA project started and things got going in Bharatpur, the people were able to negotiate permission to stay from the Forestry Department.

> **Nepal's Community Forests:** Nepal has one of the world's most successful and well-known community forest systems. In the 1960s and 70s, there were huge problems of deforestation in Nepal, when the government managed the country's forests and gave out huge tracts of forest on concession to wealthy business people and foreign companies to log. But the forests all over the country were brought back into vivid health when they were turned over to communities in one of the world's pioneering and most successful community forest programs.

Initiating the project:
In May 2009, a team of community architects from Thailand and Nepal spent a few weeks in Bharatpur working with the people in Salyani, Lumanti and municipal staff to develop low-cost plans to rebuild their mud and thatch houses and upgrade their community, in a series of workshops which included people from other communities who came to learn. The people decided that the house construction would be funded by loans from the ACCA budget ($40,000), but the infrastructure would come as a grant from the municipality for road, drainage and electricity connection. It was also the beginning of community architecture initiatives in Nepal. Lumanti started linking with local universities and colleges to support the community process in Bharatpur as well as other cities in Nepal.

When the construction of first 8 houses completed, the second batch started, and all the individual toilets got repaired and renovated. The new houses are being built by the people, incrementally, using a variety of construction systems and materials. The Municipality supported the land filling and installed two communal hand pumps, and the people negotiated to get wooden doors and windows at a reduced rate from the Forestry Department. The community worked closely with the Forestry Department to develop the land.

"And now, when we come back here after two years, we can see how much the city has developed. So, good to see this big progress! Very important not only that city-wide upgrading has started, but the project has shown in the case of Salyani: very poor, illegal, encroaching on forest land, about to be evicted for a road building project. So many problems there! We supported the big project proposal at Salyani, but we all worried about it. But now we find that not only has the Salyani situation been turned around, but other communities have also changed, the municipality has changed, other political parties have changed, and the city has given money to support a new people's fund! We feel so happy to see that all that has happened."
(Somsook Boonyabancha, ACHR's director, speaking at the inauguration of Salyani in Nov 2010)

While doing the small ACCA projects, the federation coordinated with other actors, like the Community Forest Department (to get free or cheap wood for the toilets). Linked also with the water supply department and other departments and support institutions in the municipality to get support for the projects. The Municipality, for example, agreed to a request to provide the land filling at Salyani and to put in two wells. Now the CEO is promising also a pre-school there.

A totally negative environment has become totally positive: Before, communities in Bharatpur only dealt with their problems in isolation, by themselves. And the relationship with the municipal government was mostly antagonistic and confrontational. And the public had a negative image of the city's squatters. Now, they get more support from the whole network and even from the political parties! In this way, a totally negative environment has become a totally positive, collaborative environment. The housing project at Salyani was the key ACCA project which helped build this new trust and collaborative relationship between the poor and the municipality, and really changed attitudes.

(Nov 2010) Late Ram Kumari Praja, savings leader in Salyani, speaks: *It was very difficult to start, to initiate, to save, to think, to plan. We didn't believe in any outside organizations, which kept coming and going, with no real change. First Lumanti came here and did a toilet project (30 toilets with soak pits shared between 2 toilets), but only on the condition that we started to save. Lumanti gave us only the materials for the pans and the soak-pits - we had to build our own enclosures and finish the toilets. Now, Lumanti and the ACCA project are helping us to get good houses. Before we stayed in houses that were only bamboo and mud, with no windows and thatch roofs that were full of snakes and frogs and insects. Now there are no snakes in our houses, and we're warmer also. Now the savings groups can get loans for income generation and small projects. Women do it all - we pay back the housing loans every month, on the first day of each month.*

There was a good support from the Women's Cooperative and the Urban Community Resource Center (UCRC), which discussed the progress of the project each month and helped to advocate in the community. The UCRC is a forum of the urban poor in the city. The UCRC forum was used to disseminate info, share news on housing, education, etc. After each meeting, we print small fliers with info about what was discussed in the meetings, with the main points, to post in settlements around town."

SUPPORT GROUPS AND PARTNERS IN THE PROJECT

- **The National Federation of Informal Communities** *(Nepal Basobas Basti Samrachyan Samaj)* is a national federation that was started in 1999, which lobbies and negotiates, especially in eviction cases. They also do rallies and sit-ins, collect information and do surveys. Advocacy with political parties and members of parliament and gives inputs to the government discussions and policies. They also link with media and get stories about the slum issue in the newspaper. The federation's branch in Bharatpur links with poor and families living in informal settlements.

- **The National Women's Federation** *(Nepal Mahila Ekta Samaj)* started in 1999 in Kathmandu and now has branches in 45 different districts around the country. The women's federation is also involved in advocating issues, but especially on issues of women, child development, health and youth groups. The Bharatpur branch of the women's federation is very actively engaged in highlighting the issues of the squatter communities.

- **The Amar Deep Women's Savings Cooperative:** The saving cooperative is legally registered and they deal with savings and credit for income generation, housing loans, etc. At present, there are 2198 women from the communities as members of the Cooperative. There is a collective saving of Rs. 1,26,375,978 which is provided as a loan to the members for housing, livelihood, medical purpose, education etc.

- **Lumanti Support Group for Shelter** is a Kathmandu-based NGO which has been supporting the community process in Bharatpur since 2005. It has supported in setting up savings groups and savings cooperatives and implementation of water supply and sanitation projects and other community development activities. Lumanti also supported to link the communities together as network and helped for the community federations in the city.

- **ACCA Program:** The Asian Coalition for Community Action Program (ACCA) was a five-year program (2009-2015) of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) that supported a process of citywide and community-driven slum upgrading in 215 Asian cities, in 19 Asian countries - including Bharatpur, which

was one of 18 cities in Nepal supported by the program. ACCA provided funds to partially finance the house upgrading in Salyani. City level ACCA project management was established in the city, which was chaired by the CEO of the municipality and the overall management and implementation was done by the Community federations and financial management was done by Amardeep Women's' Saving cooperative.

- **Community Forest Department:** Most of the communities in Bharatpur are settled along the periphery of the community forest and the land is the buffer zone of the Chitwan National Park. For Bharatpur's first housing project, Salyani, the community forest provided land on long term use and the community will not be evicted. In addition to this, they also received timber for cheaper price for doors and windows for the houses. Most of the community members are part of the community forest user groups and are also responsible for taking care of the forest.

- **Bharatpur Municipality:** Salyani was the first ever housing project targeting low income squatter community. Municipality identified the community and coordinated with the Community Forest Department to allow the Salyani community to settle and upgrade their community. Bharatpur municipality was leading the ACCA project Management committee which was responsible for the implementation of the project in the city and was also providing strategic inputs to facilitate the housing construction in Salyani. The municipality also invested in improving the infrastructure in the informal communities such as water, drainage, electricity, toilets etc.

- **Bharatpur Citizens Forum:** Lumanti has also helped establish a citizen's forum in Bharatpur to advocate for urban poverty and housing issues in the city. The forum includes municipal and provincial government agencies, NGOs, local elites, and also includes the two people's federations.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT

Land tenure:
The 31 families in Salyani were all informal settlers on community forest land. Each family was allocated 100 square meters (5 x 20m) of land, on long term use rights. An agreement was done between the federation, the municipality and the community to allow the 31 families prior to initiating the housing project through the ACCA PMC. An agreement was also done between the cooperative and the community for additional fund mobilization needed for the housing construction. Loans for housing were provided through the cooperative (including the housing fund from ACCA)

The Forest Department, the Municipal Council and the political parties, who jointly ran the city during the time when the project was implemented (in the absence of a mayor), met and agreed to allow the people at Salyani to stay here. The municipality allowed and supported for housing and upgrading and will never evict people, they made recommendation to the Informal Settlement Issues Resolution Commission to provide *Lal purja* (a formal land title) to the dwellers of Salyani, since the municipality is not authorized to give land titles on land under national government departments. Later they did. Recommendation was made to give ownership to the people.

They were not and still have not yet given them formal land tenure or land titles. The city agreed to allow the pilot housing upgrading project to be implemented here, and have agreed to the per-family plot size, which the people have decided will be the same for all 30 households. In exchange for being allowed to stay here, the Salyani community has agreed to protect the adjacent forest and not encroach on it.

PROJECT FINANCING

Project costs and who paid for what?

Land:
The land, which has a value of $17,000 at that time, was provided free by the government, on long term user rights. Each family had a 5 x 20-meter plot of land for constructing their house. The municipality provided 3/4 trips of soil to fill the areas which undulated during heavy rainfall.

Infrastructure:

The cost of came to about US$ 3,000 from the local government for land filling, drainage and electric pole installation. Community members themselves also contributed in kind for the implementation of these.

Houses:
The cost of upgrading or rebuilding the houses came to US$ 2,000 - 3,000 per family. This was partly financed by people's savings, and partly by a bulk loan of US$ 40,000 to the community, which came as a grant from the ACCA Program and was channelled through the Amardeep Saving and Credit cooperative. Each family was given a loan of up to a maximum 100,000 rupees (US$ 1,000) for upgrading their house, from the ACCA funds. The loans were given to the families individually, at 5% annual interest, repayable in five years. 4% of the interest charged on the loans went back into the cooperative's loan pool, and 1% was used to support activities of the project management committee.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

House design and layout plans:
The Salyani community covers a total land area of 3,097 square meters. In the upgrading plans they developed with help from the community architects, about one third of the land (1,042 square meters were kept for housing and two-thirds (2,055 square meters) was used for communal purposes. Each house plot is 85 square meters, and the single-story houses are about 33.6 square meters.

Housing construction:
The user committee (UC) formed was responsible for the carrying out all the necessary activities related with programme and implementation of the projects. The UC members were also nominated by the community itself. They are also responsible for coordinating with the ACCA-PMC, Municipality and other concerned stakeholders such as the community forestry, Saving and Credit Cooperative etc. Sharing between other communities, UCRC, other community based organizations is conducted through the UC members.

Thus, UC conducts regular meetings with the community. Through this process, the poor community learns to work together, in partnership, manage through these meetings, the community people were able to understand their own communities, the challenges and constraints they are facing and also the opportunities which could be exploited for solving their common problem. There was maximum participation of women in decision making and management of funds. They were involved in the planning, development phase, and in making crucial decisions up to the implementation phase. What is more intriguing is that repayment of the loans has been very organized and regular. To save on the cost of the purchase of materials, the required quantity for all the construction work were purchased together. The construction was supervised by the builders among themselves with support from Lumanti team and Municipality technician. The community based design process helped to identify the construction team from the community itself. Each helped to build others homes, thus, it was a collaborative effort by all.

There is variation in the type of construction materials in these buildings, depending on the financial status of the households. The houses were built entirely by the people, showing a variety of incremental building strategies and budgets, using a variety of materials and construction systems (purchased collectively in bulk by the community committee), with stone and concrete foundations, brick or bamboo-and-mud walls, timber or bamboo roof structures, zinc sheet roofing, and wooden doors and windows which the people negotiated to get from the Forestry Department at subsidized rates. In addition to this, they managed to negotiate to utilize the open space opposite of their settlement for urban agriculture. This was a collective effort of all and a step to create a self-reliant community. The trend of seeking continuous dialogue with the municipality to collaborate for the benefit of the community was developed. Through this, they were able to receive funds from the municipality for in-filling the land. The municipality also provided them with two public water pumps.

Project timeline:
2005: Lumanti starts working in Bharatpur, with water and sanitation and school projects, organizing the communities through federation building and saving. Women's savings groups start in a few poor communities in the city.
2006: 19 savings groups link together and register as Amardeep Women's Saving and Credit Cooperative.
2009: ACCA project in Bharatpur begins. Thai and Nepali community architects work with Salyani community and local architects to develop upgrading options.
2010: Construction and upgrading of houses in Salyani starts.
2011: House reconstruction in Salyani is finished.
2015: House improvement loans are 100% repaid, and funds all revolve in the cooperative to assist other squatter communities to improve their housing.

IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

What has changed in Bharatpur?

- The pilot housing project at Salyani is the first time a slum community has been provided a secure land and housing. The Lanku and Ramnagar communities (which have done small ACCA projects) have been identified by the federation and the municipality as potential communities for the next round of housing projects, and providing land tenure in these two communities is also possible.
- As managers of the ACCA project, the Community Federation and Women's Cooperative are in a stronger position to negotiate with the local government.
- There is much better coordination and support from the Municipality for implementation of the projects.
- The relationship between the slum communities and the Forestry Department, under whose land most of the settlements in Bharatpur are located, has improved dramatically. The people used to fear being evicted, and now the Forestry Department is offering the communities free wood for their housing and toilet projects and the use of land for their community centers, markets and agro-forestry projects.
- Communities are opting for negotiation and dialogue with government bodies instead of confronting them.
- The many political parties which jointly run the city, in this political transition period, have a more positive attitude towards the poor in the city.

What has changed in the communities?

- The community savings process and network of settlements in the city is stronger than ever.
- Total community participation and maximum involvement of the women in the upgrading process.
- Learning to collaborate with the municipality, and other key stakeholders.
- Project management team in the communities formed.
- All the project finances of the implementation are managed by the project management team.
- Implementation of the projects in the communities is happening with maximum participation of the members and good collaboration with other key stakeholders.
- There is good and constant exchange of people and news and inspiration between communities in the city, creating a city-wide momentum for a physical change process which began in only a few communities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

This case study was written in October 2022 by Lumanti Joshi, a community architect who works with Lumanti and who was involved in every stage of the Salyani project.

Please follow this link to see a film about the housing project at Salyani:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_eDmrAue3w0

For more information about the housing project at Salyani, or about other community-driven housing and disaster-rehabilitation projects around Nepal, please contact Lumanti:

Lumanti Support Group for Shelter
Manbhawan Road, Kumaripati
Lalitpur Metropolitan City, Ward No. 5
P.O. Box 10546
Lalitpur, Nepal
Tel. +977-1-5535157 / 5535156
email (1): lumantijoshi@lumanti.org.np
email (2): lajana@lumanti.org.np
e-mail (3): shelter@lumanti.org.np
website: www.lumanti.org.np

▲ *Bharatpur is a the bustling provincial capital of Chitwan District, with a population of about a quarter of a million people - many of them migrants from impoverished areas in central Nepal, coming to the city looking for opportunities.*

▲ *There are about 56 slum communities in Bharatpur, and many of them are built on peripheral land belonging to the National Forest Department, like this one - the Amtari Community - where the ghostly trunks of many old "sal" trees, shorn of all their boughs, still stand.*

▲ *A photo of the Salyani community, taken in 2005, before the housing project began. The community forest is right across the road.*

▲ *Many of the families in Salyani harvest wood for fuel from the forest, as well as many other forest products which help them earn and survive.*
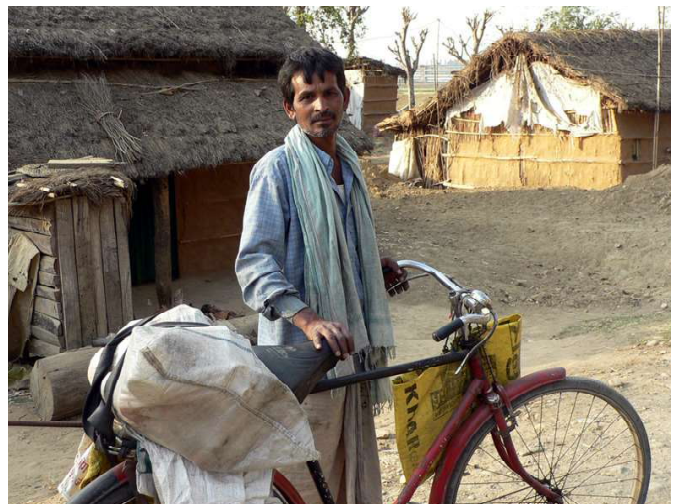
Some residents of Salyani: elderly, young and everything in between, along with some four-legged and two-wheeled residents also.

In the years before the housing project, Lumanti helped the Salyani residents to build shared water pumps and simple toilets with septic tanks.

The women's savings group in Salyani has been active for many years, with mothers and daughters from almost all the houses saving their money together and taking loans from their pooled savings for emergencies, household needs, education and livelihood.

The Urban Community Resource Center in the Ganesthan Community, where the Amardeep Women's Savings Cooperative has its office.

Nepal has one of the world's best known and most successful community forest programs, and it has helped reverse decades of deforestation.

Many of Salyani's community members earn their living by using products gleaned sustainably from the community forest.

Here are some Salyani community members making forest products to sell: bowls, plates and cups made from "sal" leaves (above) and baskets for hauling agricultural goods to market made from bamboo, cane and tree bark (right).

The design process began with a workshop to help Salyani residents understand and analyze all aspects of their community, and to come to some agreement about what parts are good and what parts need improvement.
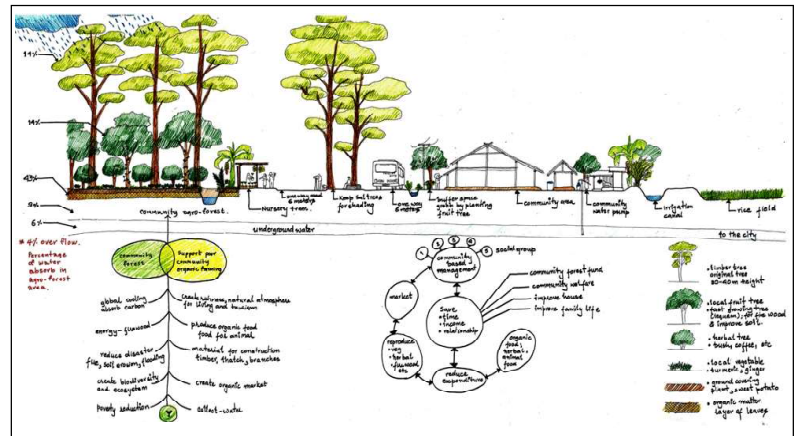
The community architects helped to draw up this poster, which explains many of the features the community members had highlighted, about how their housing and their forest enviroment interact, and how they can use the forest to survive, but also protect and preserve it.

The children in Salyani needed no encouragement when they were asked to draw their dream houses.

The housing planning began with a survey, to gather information about each family in Salyani and to measure and map all the existing houses and secondary structures.

▲ *Here the community women are drawing maps of their individual plots, to show what is where in the existing situation: the house, the kitchen, the toilet, the animal shed, the swampy bits, etc.*
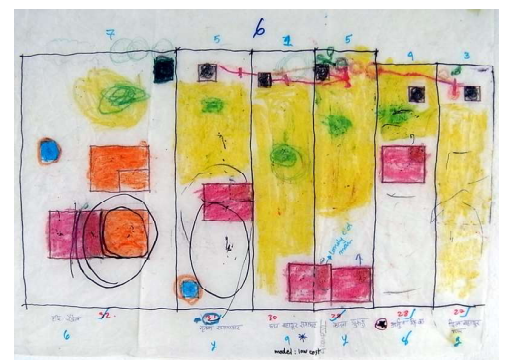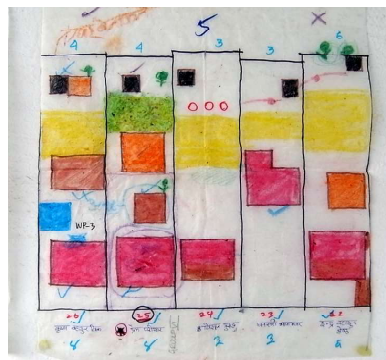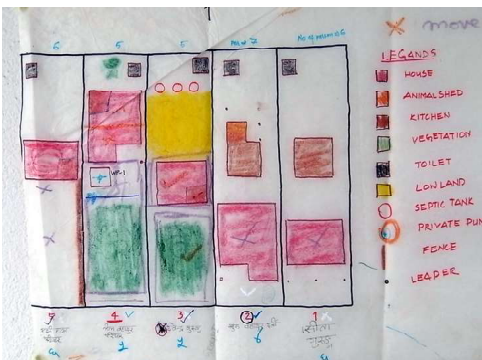
▲ *The drawings of the existing house plans were very colorful, with everyone agreeing to use certain colors to represent certain things, so the problems could be analyzed collectively.*

◄ *The community members gather in the resource center to discuss their ideas for the project with the community architects, Lumanti staff and other stakeholders in the women's cooperative.*

▼ *After the community members had mapped and drawn their own houses and house plots, the community architects put all the drawings together, into one master plan which shows the Salyani community as it was before the project started.*

▲ *More workshops in the community to help residents begin planning and drawing their new houses, and also to plan improvements they would like to make to the other facilities in each house plot, as part of the upgrading project.*

▲ *The women in Salyani were very enthusiastic about the upgrading project and about the chance to make their houses and living environment better for their families and community, and took active part in all the design and planning workshops.*


▲ *There was a lot of discussion about where the house, kitchen, animal shed and other things should be placed on the narrow plots.*

▲ *The children in Salyani were also eager participants in the workshops, and the architects made sure their ideas were included too.*

▲ *Once some decisions had been made about what shape the upgraded houses would take and where they would sit on the site, the families began mocking up the houses using simple clay walls. Later, they also thought about how the roofs on the houses would slope, and used paper to examine different options.*
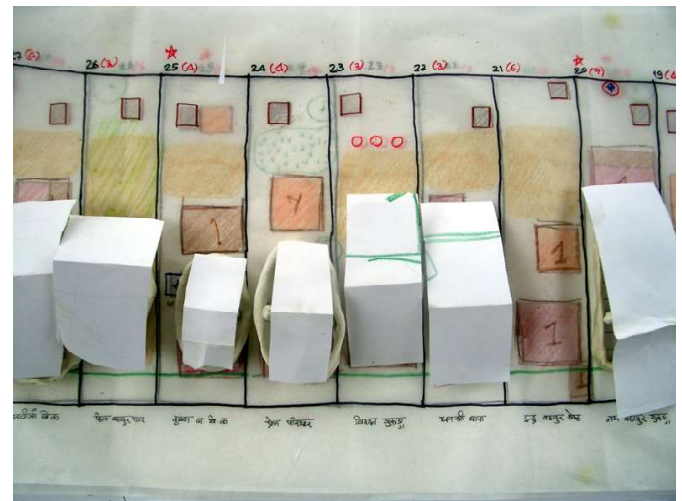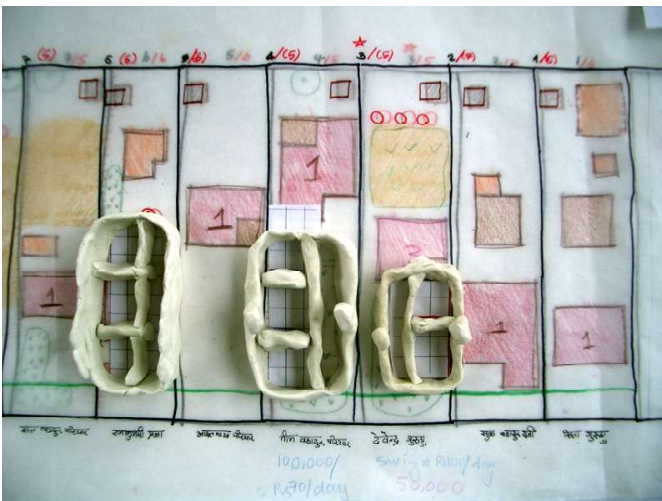
▲ *Some of the beautiful drawings the people made with the architects, with the rough clay house-plans (above left) and some paper roofs put on (above right).*
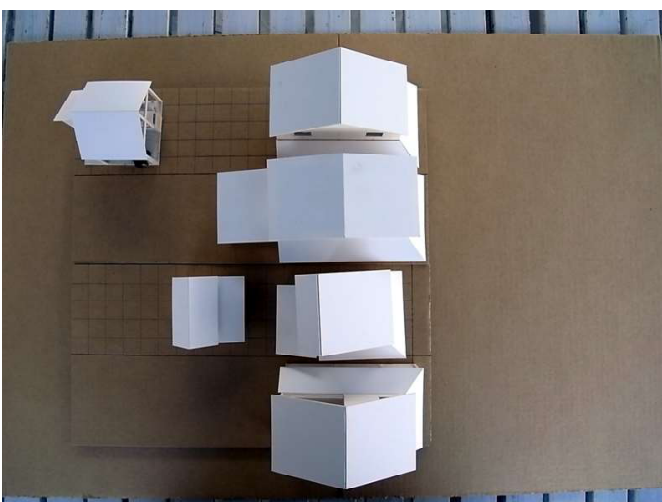
▲ *Based on the house design ideas the people had developed with sketches, clay and paper, the architects then helped formalize those ideas into a set of beautiful cardboard models.*

▲ There were also excercises during the workshops to mock up some of the house designs - first using string at a smaller scale (above left), and later at full scale (above right), to see how big the new rooms would be.

▲ After all the new house designs had been finalized, the architects again put all the designs together on this master drawing, which shows the upgraded Salyani houses and community.

The architects also helped present some ideas about how the houses could be constructed cheaply, using locally-available materials and added to later, with some ideas about solving the community's drainage problems also. ▶
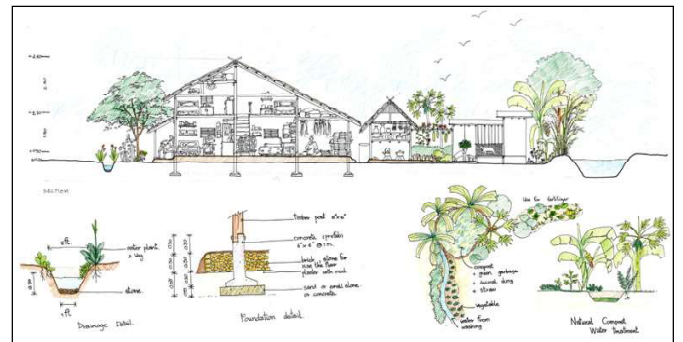
▲ A meeting with officials from the city and the Forest Department, which gave the people a chance to present and discuss their upgrading plans.

▲ A group of Asian visitors from ACHR's ACCA Program visit Salyani in February 2009, just before the construction work began.

Some photos from the construction process in Salyani. The houses were all built very cheaply, for between $2,000 and $3,000 each.

The houses were all different, but all of them used the simplest building systems and the most readily accessible local materials like brick, fiber cement roofing and timber. The timber for much of the project was provided by the Forest Department at subsidized rates.


Here are two of the completed houses, freshly whitewashed for the project inauguration in November 2010. Both these families have opted for house plans with an open corridor on the side, to enable different rooms to be entered separately - a big advantage for joint family households.

More finished and whitewashed houses in Salyani, which also follow the popular side-hallway plan, with separate entrances for each room.
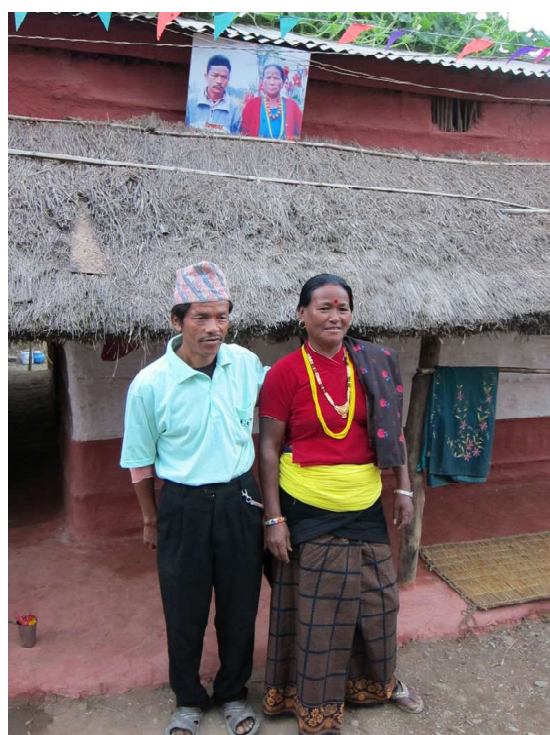
Some families decided to make only modest improvements to their existing houses, like a new window to bring light into a formerly dark interior (above), and a fresh paint (at right).

A light-filled room in one of the upgraded brick houses, with a paved concrete floor, and high shelves for storing things used less often.

Here's what visitors encountered when they came to the gala inauguration of the upgraded Salyani community on November 23, 2010.

Some visitors from Sri Lanka and the Philippines taking a tour of the new houses (above left), and one of the house-proud residents being filmed by a local TV station (above right).