

APRIL 2020

Who could ever have imagined how completely our world and our lives would change in just a few short months? What began in January with a little news item, on page six of the newspaper, about a mysterious pneumonia outbreak in a Chinese city has exploded into a global pandemic that grip the entire world now. As of April 18th, there were 2.2 million confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus around the world, and 153,000 people had died. These official numbers are almost certainly much lower than the reality, though, because comprehensive testing for the virus is happening in only a few spots, and nobody really knows how far the virus has actually spread. Meanwhile, more than half of humanity is now under some form of lockdown, curfew or quarantine, and these measures to contain the virus have brought the world's economic life to a grinding halt, leaving hundreds of millions stranded at home, without work or the means of meeting their own and their families' basic needs.

In theory, everyone is vulnerable to the virus, and there has been much pious talk of the pandemic being a great "equalizer" that affects princes and prime ministers as well as migrant workers and rag pickers. But in practice, people's capacity to cope with the virus and its repercussions has much to do with conditions that are not only medical but also economic, social and political. The pandemic, which has also triggered an economic catastrophe, has made those differences sharper than ever. We can already see that no matter where we look, those dying of the virus are more likely to be poor and uninsured, more likely to suffer from bad nutrition and chronic health problems, more likely to have no savings or safety nets, more likely to be unable to afford health care, and more likely to live in shoddy and crowded housing conditions where precautions like social distancing and frequent hand washing are impossible.



**But the effect of these health-affecting inequities is nothing compared to the economic ones. For the poor, the pandemic has very rapidly become a challenge to their very survival. "If we don't work, we don't eat. We're more afraid of starvation than the virus." Some variation on this stark reasoning is now repeating itself in urban poor and vulnerable migrant communities around the globe.**

There is still so much uncertainty, so much that isn't known about this virus or how it is spreading or how it will end. And governments are dealing with the crisis in wildly different ways, leaving huge gaps and so many vulnerable constituencies. But what is clear, even at this early stage, is that everything - everything! - is different now. The virus has changed our world forever, and it's unlikely that the puzzle pieces of our societies that the virus has scrambled into disarray will never fit back together in the same way. That may not be such a bad thing, because there was so much that was wrong in that world we lived in just a few months ago! As Kirtee points out in his note (*in the India section below*), "It may sound overly optimistic to say so, but I feel this crisis gives us an opportunity to rethink the way we live, produce, consume, interact, transact, move, grow and develop."

Meanwhile, our community partners and their supporters around Asia are not sitting around watching their world disintegrate. The purpose of preparing this e-news bulletin is to circulate the inspiring news of how our friends from around the region are coping with this crisis. And there is much cause for optimism in the stories of how people are using their community power and their solidarity to make sense of what's happening, to figure out what's needed, and to do whatever they can to develop projects and systems to help those most profoundly hit by the virus crisis. As Rajesh Tandon emphasized in his remarks on April 3rd (*in the India section below*), "In this moment of crisis, we have to trust people. We have to trust the urban poor and their associations. The poor themselves know best who needs what help and how to deliver that help. If you want to reach informal communities and informal workers, you have to use informal channels."

## WHAT ARE COMMUNITY GROUPS IN ASIA ALREADY DOING?

With so much bad news coming from every direction, it's tempting to give in to despair. But as you'll read in the reports from our friends in this newsletter, Asia's poor community organizations and their supporters are not watching passively as the crisis unrolls. On the contrary, they are taking energetic action to do what they can to organize themselves, see what's needed and take immediate action, even at this early stage of the pandemic, and even without almost any support from anyone. Brenda has started keeping a list of the kinds of things community groups and their partners in the region are doing - and already it's a lot. You can be sure this cheering list is going to get much, much longer before the crisis is over, but here's her April 18, 2020 version for starters:

- Using community surveys and monitoring to track the impacts of the virus on the poor, to identify vulnerable families and individuals within the community and to determine who needs what assistance.
- Monitoring the impacts of government regulations and interventions, and coordinating with local government agencies to make sure those government interventions like emergency food packet distribution reach everyone, especially those most in need
- Setting up community kitchens and distributing meals and groceries to vulnerable and virus-infected households
- Starting food banks and buying staple foods in bulk, to distribute or to keep in storage to bolster community-level food security
- Raising funds to support specific vulnerable communities and providing cash assistance to needy families
- Promoting community-level quarantine in crowded settlements where household-level quarantine is impossible
- Distributing accurate information about the virus and how to keep safe and prevent its spread
- Stitching face masks and personal protective equipment and producing hand-sanitizers
- Keeping in touch with locked-down and quarantined communities and sharing virus news by phone, video chat and instant messaging applications like Line, Messenger and WhatsApp
- Developing systems for exchanging basic goods and necessities between communities or networks when the usual supply systems close down or are off limits during lockdowns
- Using community savings and credit groups to help families survive and meet their families' urgent food and medicine needs, with loans and savings withdrawals, or reducing expenses by suspending loan repayments or reducing interest on loans

## VIRUS NEWS FROM BANGLADESH

**FROM DHAKA:** *John Taylor from the UN's Food and Agriculture Office (FAO) in Dhaka wrote on March 30: We are working with the community federations in North and South Dhaka to try to track the impacts of COVID-19 on the poor and learn about how they are coping and what they need. Through a network of some 100 community women, we have been able to monitor the prices of basic foods sold in the open air markets near their slum communities, as well as other social and economic impacts of the virus - and of various government regulations and interventions. Since the crisis began, there has been a huge exodus of people out of Dhaka - millions of people - going to their villages in the countryside, where they perceive it will be easier to survive. [Note: John is one of the founders of Kota Kita in Solo, Indonesia. He has been with the FAO in Dhaka for a while and has been working with ACHR and Cecilia Tacoli at IIED to extend in Bangladesh the community-led food security study we started in Nepal, Cambodia and Thailand.] For more information, contact John at: [indojota@gmail.com](mailto:indojota@gmail.com)*



**FROM JHENAIDAH:** *Kabir, from the Jhenaidah-based community architects group Co.Creation wrote on April 15: Bangladesh is under lockdown until April 25th, but that will likely be extended, since the COVID-19 virus crisis is not yet under control here. The number of affected people increases every day. People can still get food from a few designated fresh markets around the city, but only for a certain period of the day. All public gatherings and religious rituals like praying together have been officially suspended now. People are praying at home, and when the holy month of Ramadan begins on April 23rd, they will have to perform their Ramadan fasting inside their homes. Yesterday was our Bangla new year, and we had to celebrate that separately also, inside our homes. We manage to communicate with our friends in the communities by phone, and found some money to distribute to the community people to buy food for needy families during the virus situation. Some are using their time at home to make handicraft products. Overall, people's mental environment here is gloomy and disoriented. It is a very sad time, but COVID-19 is giving us an opportunity to go inside ourselves and think about many things. Lots of my busy architect friends and colleagues are talking differently now than they used to, and asking more useful questions. This is the positive side of the virus. Suhailey and I are working in our home vegetable garden every day, and that gives us happiness and lots of ideas about how to cultivate more kitchen gardens with the communities around the city. For more information, contact Kabir at: [khondaker.kabir@gmail.com](mailto:khondaker.kabir@gmail.com)*

## VIRUS NEWS FROM INDIA

**LOCKDOWN IN INDIA'S CITIES:** On March 25, the Indian government imposed the world's largest lockdown, in response to the fast-growing number of virus infections. That lockdown has now been extended to May 3rd. On April 3rd, one week into the lockdown, the Delhi-based NGO PRIA (Participatory Research in Asia) organized an online seminar to discuss the impact the lockdown was having on informal workers and communities in Indian cities. Sheela Patel from SPARC, and Gautam Ban from IHS in Bangalore were among the panelists. The discussion highlighted some of the terrible choices slum dwellers are facing with this lockdown, which is one of Asia's most harsh and punitive so far. There are some 450 million informal workers in India, accounting for a staggering 80% of India's workforce, and many of them are now stuck at home and unable to work. In the early days of the lockdown, many realized they could not survive in the city without working and tried to get home to their villages, despite buses and trains being halted. But many of those who have made their way home, on foot for hundreds of miles in the Indian summer heat, have found themselves welcomed with beatings by state-level authorities or with jeers of "virus bringers" from their fellow villagers.



For the majority of the poor who remain in cities, locked in densely-cramped and under-serviced settlements, with no possibility for social distancing or frequent hand-washing, the situation is dire. With shops closed, pockets empty and everyone forbidden to go out to earn, many are facing the terrible choice between what Gautam calls "death by virus or death by starvation." The poorly-planned lockdown has also interrupted food supply systems and made it much harder buy, sell and distribute food. Sheela spoke about how the lockdown has left small producers in the rural areas around cities like Mumbai with no way to transport their milk and vegetables into the city markets, so a lot of fresh food is rotting at source, even as the millions who need that food go hungry.

PRIA's founder, Rajesh Tandon, spoke movingly at the end of the seminar with words that will chime well with ACHR's history and work. "All our systems of planning and policy-making are focused on the formal. What the virus disaster has shown to us is that you cannot reach informality through the logic and frameworks of the formal systems that we have inherited and that we practice."

**"If you want to reach informal communities and informal workers, you have to use informal channels, my friends. And as we have heard today, those informal channels are informal associations of the urban poor, informal community-based organizations and even informal food supply systems and [local provisions] stores. In this moment of crisis, we have to trust people. We have to trust the urban poor and their associations. The poor themselves know best who needs what help and how to deliver that help. We have to give them the feeling that they can lead it, and we have to put resources in their hands. Please, allocate [government funds] to the urban poor to deal with this crisis."**

You can watch the entire seminar (108 minutes) on You Tube by following this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6W4IAaO8C1U>

Or you can also download a report on the online seminar from PRIA's website, at this link:

[https://www.pria.org/knowledge\\_resource/1586760383\\_Webinar%20Report%203%20April%202020.pdf](https://www.pria.org/knowledge_resource/1586760383_Webinar%20Report%203%20April%202020.pdf)



**FROM MUMBAI:** As the COVID lockdown continues in India, SPARC has launched an online fund-raising campaign to raise money to ensure those living in slums and slum relocation colonies are supported with basic food essentials to survive the lockdown and be hopeful. This is from the blurb on the site: Working with grassroots organizations of slum dwellers, the National Slum Dwellers Federation and Mahila Milan, SPARC and its extended federation network has seen tremendous impacts on poor families from the COVID-19 virus and the national lockdown. Families living in slums and slum relocation colonies are facing an unprecedented crisis with the loss of their livelihoods and difficulties accessing food. Many earn their living day-by-day, as daily laborers, house painters, food vendors, balloon sellers and beggars. Some communities have a large number of TB patients and it is essential that

they get access to good nutrition. While food rations that are subsidized by the state are available, but there are many without the ration cards needed to access these entitlements, making them dependent on friends for support.

Since 1984, the Alliance of SPARC, Mahila Milan and the National Slum Dwellers Federation has invested in insuring people get access to basic services such as water, sanitation and housing. Over 30,000 families in Mumbai continue to be associated with the alliance, and in a crisis situation like COVID-19, the alliance needs to channel immediate relief to needy families, at accessible locations. The alliance will also continue to support the rebuilding of disrupted livelihoods after the lockdown ends. By April 10th, the alliance had supported over 2,500 families with food assistance, which is just a drop in the ocean of real needs. Please help us reach families who need help, as part of our long battle against the devastation caused by this catastrophe.

For more information, please contact SPARC at: [sparcssns@gmail.com](mailto:sparcssns@gmail.com)

or visit the online fundraising campaign at this link:

[https://www.ourdemocracy.in/Campaign/SupportSlumDwellers?smed=wh&fbclid=IwAR1oyQv-5P8NvjVnzCBvoDCEw3KZRXP2mc\\_31m0aBelB2rae-R1k3yxjJdo](https://www.ourdemocracy.in/Campaign/SupportSlumDwellers?smed=wh&fbclid=IwAR1oyQv-5P8NvjVnzCBvoDCEw3KZRXP2mc_31m0aBelB2rae-R1k3yxjJdo)

**FROM AHMEDABAD:** Kirtee Shah, who is locked down but safe at home in Ahmedabad, circulated a note in March with some of his thoughts on the COVID-19 crisis: "No one ever knew, just three months back, that we would see the entire world struggling to find out how to stop this invisible virus, what it will do, how it will end or what human, social, economic and psychological damage it will cause. . . . But there is no doubting that we have brought this terrible virus to our doorsteps through our own actions. It may sound overly optimistic to say so, but I feel this crisis gives us an opportunity to rethink the way we live, produce, consume, interact, transact, move, grow and develop. It's also an opportunity to rethink our ambition to conquer nature. This rethinking has to be done at many levels, from the food we eat, to the water we consume, to the rivers we pollute, to the poverty we create, to the vehicles we use, to the villages we neglect, to the inequality we foster, to the model of development we keep following." Please contact Kirtee at the e-mail address below for the full note.



**A project to provide food aid to locked-down workers in Ahmedabad and Pune:** Kirtee has also circulated a call for donations for a project to provide food assistance to urban poor families and workers in two cities (Ahmedabad and Pune) to tide them over during the COVID-19 lockdown. The project targets migrant workers, daily wage earners and others who are most vulnerable without shelter, income, savings, livelihood or support from families. The government has announced multiple relief packages, but it will take some time before they effectively reach those most in need - and food is the need that can't wait. Feeding these stranded, income-less and savings-less families and individuals is a top priority now. The assistance is being provided in the form of food items like rice, wheat, dal, oil and vegetables, distributed in packets that can last an average family for 10-15 days.

- **In Ahmedabad**, the operation is a joint effort by 8 agencies who are working together under an umbrella called CISHAA; Citizen Shelter and Housing Alliance, Ahmedabad.
- **In Pune**, the work is being jointly managed by two partner agencies: the Pune-based NGO Mashal and INHAF (a national network of civic groups, professionals and others working on issues of shelter, housing and livable cities).

Please contact Kirtee for more details: [kirtee@inhaf.org](mailto:kirtee@inhaf.org)

## VIRUS NEWS FROM INDONESIA



**FROM JAKARTA:** Gugun works with the Jakarta-based NGO Urban Poor Consortium (UPC) and is also a community leader in his riverside community of Kampung Tongkol, which is part of a network of kampungs, street vendor groups and pedicab bases called JRMK. This is from the note he sent us on April 14: Jakarta is now the epicenter of the virus outbreak in Indonesia. The municipal government has imposed social distancing rules, asked residents to work from home and tried to limit the movement of people who don't provide essential services in health care, food supply and public transport. But despite these restrictions, commuter trains are full of passengers and lots of people still go out to work or do other things. As a result, infection figures in the city continue to climb. Most of the urban poor in Jakarta work in the informal

sector or have jobs in small companies that can't afford to pay them when they don't work. Under the virus restrictions, vendors and small traders are losing income, motorcycle taxi drivers have fewer customers and workers in many sectors are being laid off without pay. Markets and shops are still partly open, but the prices of food staples have started to rise. On top of that, social distancing is almost impossible for people who live in small houses in crowded kampungs.

Our network has been very busy trying to solve these problems as much as we can: collecting data on community needs, raising funds, promoting kampung-wide rather than household quarantine, distributing information about the virus and initiating several projects to directly address people's needs in the kampungs. We are producing our own hand sanitizers to give to community members, distributing spice drinks from Jogja to help people maintain their stamina, spraying disinfectant in kampungs and distributing information about the Corona virus and government policies. When community members experience virus symptoms and have to be quarantined inside their houses, we help provide family meals during their isolation. We are also raising cash donations for community members who have lost jobs or are experiencing lower incomes. By April 14th, we had given cash assistance to 452 families (out of a target of 800 needy families) with a total of US\$ 37 per family. The idea of the cash assistance is to enable the family to stay home and keep safe from the virus. We have also begun to stockpile rice, so the food needs of our community members can be met in the coming weeks. We buy the rice directly from farmers in Central Java and can then sell it cheaply to our community members. *May we all be healthy and get through this crisis.*

For more information, contact Gugun at: [gugunmuhammad21@yahoo.com](mailto:gugunmuhammad21@yahoo.com)

**FROM YOGYAKARTA:** *Nisa, from the ARKOM group of community architects in Yogyakarta, wrote on 27 March:* All of us working in Arkom are still safe and in good health, even though we are trapped in Yogyakarta and unable to move around, because several cities have imposed lockdowns and restrictions, according to the virus transmission in each city. Here in Yogyakarta, the government has not yet formally imposed a lockdown, but the Sultan has asked the people to remain calm in this "emergency phase" of the virus outbreak. And many here - including our ARKOM team - are following the president's instructions to reduce public gatherings and work from home, to slow down the spread of the virus. This has driven us to organize a lot of online meetings, which can be much more exhausting than face-to-face meetings. But the crisis is forcing us to be creative in how we can still work together under these difficult circumstances. We keep in close touch with the communities through WhatsApp messages, phone calls and video chats.

So far, the most serious issue in the communities is not the virus, but loss of income. Most of the community people in Yogyakarta work in the informal sector as food vendors or construction laborers or informal pedicab drivers. When public activities are down and tourist places are closed, their opportunities to earn are badly curtailed. Many in the Kalijawi Community Network support their families as online gig workers, as drivers and delivering packages or food. Even as virus conditions get more and more dangerous, they have to go out each day in order to earn enough money to feed their families. If they don't earn, their families go hungry. Also, most live in very small and poor quality houses, with poor services and in crowded and unhealthy conditions in the kampungs. The government has promised that the prices of basic needs like rice, vegetables, fish and cooking oil won't be allowed to rise, but even still, the community members are afraid they won't be able to meet their families' needs without being able to earn. We have been using crowd funding to raise funds for helping the communities with emergency needs during this phase of the virus response. We are also developing plans to help the communities assess their needs, strengthen their capacity to help each other, and develop community-driven plans to address needs that come up and to help their own most vulnerable neighbors.

*(More from Nisa on April 9)* Arkom has been working with three informal communities in Yogyakarta for several years: Kalijawi (230 households), Pringgomukti (38 households) and the Selaka Kotagede Silversmiths community (20 households). All the families in these communities earn their living informally, and all have seen their incomes drop dramatically during the virus crisis. Arkom has worked with them to launch a crowd-funding campaign to raise money to do two things: to meet the community's immediate basic needs, and to set up a collective community enterprise to produce an instant traditional medicinal drink which helps stimulate people's natural immune system. As part of the process, the three communities are negotiating direct supply links with the farmers who grow the ginger and herbs that go into the drink. In these ways, the production of the herbal drink does several things at once: it boost incomes in these vulnerable communities so they can meet their basic needs during the pandemic, it strengthens the immune systems of their customers, it preserves cultural traditions, it builds urban-rural collaboration and it scales up network power at a time when network power is badly needed.

For more about ARKOM's work in Yogyakarta and other cities, please contact Nisa at: [annisahadny@arkomindonesia.id](mailto:annisahadny@arkomindonesia.id)

**Bagaimana komunitas bersolidaritas melawan COVID-19?**

Kekuatan utama masyarakat informal adalah keberesamannya, untuk melawan apapun, termasuk COVID-19

- ✓ Melakukan belanja bersama
- ✓ Mengelola dana donasi untuk pembelian kebutuhan pokok
- ✓ Mendistribusikan kebutuhan pokok kepada anggota yang membutuhkan

**COVID-19 masih belum berlalu. Yuk terus bantu mereka ! Donasi masih dibuka**  
<https://benihbaik.com/campaign/solidaritasyogyakartaancorona>  
(Klik link di bio)

\*Dokumentasi foto gratis dan hasil karya seni ilustrasi tidak akan kami ambil

Yeyan ARKOM Indonesia BenihBaik.com



## VIRUS NEWS FROM MYANMAR

**FROM YANGON:** Many of the urban poor who live in Yangon now were pushed into the city in 2008, after Cyclone Nargis destroyed their villages and farms, killed their family members and cattle and made it all but impossible to continue living as they had before. Gradually, they have made new lives for themselves and their families in cities like Yangon and Mandalay, where the opening up of the country has triggered an explosion of economic investment and growth, and created new employment opportunities in textile factories and on construction sites. Housing conditions for the city's workers remains abysmal, though, and most still live in ramshackle huts in the city's sprawling squatter settlements, or rent partitioned rooms near the industrial areas and construction sites where they work. Now with the Corona virus, their lives are being turned upside-down again - not so much by the virus itself (yet), but by the massive closure of factories and loss of jobs and earning opportunities that are part of the global economic crisis that COVID-19 has caused. To make matters worse, hundreds of thousands of people from Myanmar have migrated to neighboring countries to work as undocumented manual laborers, fishermen, domestic workers and factory hands. With Southeast Asian nations closing their borders to ward off the pandemic, many of those workers have rushed back to Myanmar, where their prospects of earning are grim.

For weeks, Myanmar government officials dismissed warnings that the virus could overtake the country, claiming that the Burmese diet and tropical climate would stop the disease from spreading. Myanmar's health care spending is among the lowest in the Asia region. Although only 85 cases have been confirmed so far, and only four people have died in the country, very few people are being tested, and the Myanmar version of the Corona Virus time bomb is ticking.

*The Yangon-based NGO Women for the World (WfW) has been working with the urban poor in Yangon for many years, and has helped poor women's savings groups to buy inexpensive land and develop 14 extremely low-cost housing projects which the women build and finance themselves. These projects provide modest but secure and permanent housing to 1,405 poor families, so far. WfW is now linking with the local government to build more such projects on free land being provided by the city. Marina is a young architect and urban planner from Greece who came to Yangon as a DPU fellow and decided to stay on and work with Women for the World when her fellowship ended. This is the news she sent us on March 27:*



We are well and safe - for now. The reaction to the virus in Myanmar has been a bit slower than in most other places. Since mid-March, the government has been telling people to avoid large social and religious gatherings, even going as far as suspending the celebration of Thingyan, the Burmese New Year water festival in April. The country's first five cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed only in the last couple of days. Since then, schools and universities have been closed immediately until further notice, and many government offices have reduced their staff by half, except for health departments. Facilities are being prepared for the quarantine of suspected cases, like hotels, stadiums and existing medical facilities. In late March, many migrant workers came back to Myanmar from Thailand, and they were ordered to self-quarantine at home for two weeks. Some of those migrant workers live in the WfW community housing projects, and we have distributed detailed guidelines about prevention and necessary practices in every settlement. Given the growing danger, the WfW office closed on March 26, and will remain closed until the end of April, depending on how the situation evolves. All big meetings, workshops and activities that involve the presence of many people are suspended during this time. This includes also the regular savings group meetings inside the communities. Most of our communication with the communities is by telephone now, and if some meeting is necessary, we meet only with community representatives and all precautions are taken to make sure nobody passes the virus to anybody else.

*(Update on April 10)* There are still only about 40 confirmed cases of the virus in Myanmar, but testing capacity is still very low. The country is now under a soft lockdown, which means people are recommended to not go out. Many factories in Yangon have closed, and that has resulted in some protests. Some international agencies are supporting people who've lost their jobs, but it's not clear how long that aid can be sustained. The government has been distributing food in poor communities, but the process has been messy because it's not clear who is and who isn't eligible for the food aid.

For more information, please contact Van Lizar at: [womenfortheworld@gmail.com](mailto:womenfortheworld@gmail.com)

## VIRUS NEWS FROM NEPAL

**FROM KATHMANDU:** *Lajana Manandar, from the Kathmandu-based NGO Lumanti, wrote on April 11:* This is a very disturbing time, and it's hard to focus on any one thing. But we are trying to do some coordination from home, to ensure that at least in the communities where we work we can provide some help to vulnerable families at this time. We are in lockdown until April 15th, but that is likely to be extended. International flights are banned until April 30th. Compared with other countries, we seem to be blessed in Nepal, with only nine confirmed cases of infection and no deaths yet. One of those cases has already recovered and the others under treatment, but thousands are in quarantine. One serious issue is the thousands of people who had gone to India and are now stuck at the borders and not allowed to come home, as the borders are all sealed. The Indian government is expected to take care of them, but things don't seem to be going well in this pandemic time.

Another key issue is the lack of medical equipment and facilities. Ventilators, thermometer guns, masks, hand sanitizer and personal protective equipment (PPE) are all in short of supply. Some women's groups in Kathmandu have started stitching masks and PPE, and efforts are being made to set up quarantine units, virus testing facilities and fever clinics in different parts the country. In medical terms, we have almost zero strength to fight with COVID-19 in Nepal, so lockdown seems to be the only weapon we have to slow down the spread of the virus.

The other emerging issue is how to feed vulnerable families affected by the lockdown and unable to work or earn. In Kathmandu and in other areas, markets, grocery stores and small shops are still open, and people with money can still buy and store food. But those poor people who can't work and don't have money to buy any food at all are everywhere. This includes out-of-work daily wage laborers, elderly women living alone or whose children are overseas and have grandchildren to look after. All are in great need of the most basic nutrition. The government has prioritized the provision of relief to them, and local governments are taking charge of channeling food aid to needy families. Since late March, Lumanti and our partners - including the national network of women's savings cooperatives - have been working with the ward offices and the municipal authorities to distribute food to needy families identified in the community surveys. We have been able to access some small funds from one of our donor partners who supported our earthquake rebuilding work. That has been a big help in this challenging time. I am amazed that during this difficult time, all our community leaders are conscious, are showing solidarity, are making efforts for harmony and peace, and are taking care of their most vulnerable neighbors. Hats off to our community leaders, our front line workers!

*(More from Lajana on 18 April)* This week, we brought leaders and staff of the savings cooperatives together through an online zoom conference and invited an experienced medical doctor to brief them on safety measures to follow in the cooperative offices around Nepal. They are planning to resume business for one or two hours every day, since the members are wanting to withdraw their savings to meet their urgent needs during the lockdown. We plan to use zoom to organize more of these orientations and interactions. Next week, we will be taking part in an online brain-storming being organized by the Nepal National Urban Form to discuss what happens in Nepal's cities after the COVID-19 crisis is over. That period is going to be very challenging for Nepal. The country's two main sources of income - tourism and remittances from overseas workers - are going to be badly affected. At least have of the hundreds of thousands of Nepalese workers abroad are expected to return to Nepal because of the virus. We are already seeing migrant workers walking back to their villages. The worry is that if they find no opportunities in the villages, they will come to Kathmandu and to other cities, which means more slums and more crowding. It is important that we recognize this old pattern and take steps to avoid it. That means investing in creating opportunities for the people in villages, and partnering with government, communities, civil society and the private sector to strengthen agriculture, improve access to services and health care and education in villages, cultivating rural-urban economic linkages. This is the time to look at how to more fairly distribute our resources in Nepal, so they go to the areas of need - not only to Kathmandu.

For more information, please contact Lajana at: [lajana.manandhar@gmail.com](mailto:lajana.manandhar@gmail.com)



## VIRUS NEWS FROM PAKISTAN

**FROM KARACHI:** *Mohammad Younus, from the Urban Resource Center in Karachi, wrote on March 28:* The situation of the COVID-19 virus is getting worse in Pakistan. The government has imposed a complete lockdown for 15 days, until April 8th, as a precautionary measure to stop the spread of the virus. Nobody is allowed to leave their homes unless there is an urgent family need. The government has ordered the closure of all offices and other work places. So at the URC, we have instructed our team to work from home and to stay connected with the communities as best they can, by phone and by social media. We continue to offer networking and information-sharing on health care and food supply services to the communities from home.

This lockdown is badly affecting poor communities and daily-wage workers, because the poor cannot work from home and they cannot follow social distancing rules or self-isolate if they get sick. The great challenges now are how to supply food and proper medical care to these vulnerable communities. The government relief packages are insufficient, and their distribution networks are improper. After just a few days of the lockdown, we are already seeing a very large-scale human crisis unfolding. Poor communities, the homeless and displaced families are the most vulnerable in this situation. We do not see any short ways to get past this COVID-19 virus crisis. Certainly this situation will continue. But how will the vulnerable communities survive and when they will be able to go back to work and start their livelihood activities again? Nobody has the answer to these questions. But we are observing the situation, and let's hope the world will be able to control this virus sooner rather than later. In the past, we have faced many disasters, but this is a very different kind of disaster, in both its nature and its scale. And I wonder, is it a natural or a man-made disaster?

*(April 8)* Things are getting worse. Because testing is so limited, we still don't have any idea about the scale of spread of COVID-19, and nobody trusts the government's figures, which put the infection and death rates very low. The lockdowns are getting longer, which makes it harder for people in poor communities. Almost everyone has been out of work for at least a month now, and the prices of basic food items are going up, making it harder and harder for people to feed their families.

No safety net and no government support system is in place yet, but the good thing is that people are donating a lot of food - both individually and through local charities. *(April 15)* The government is extending the lockdown for another two weeks, with a little relaxation of some of the restrictions, but most of workplaces still remain closed. As the lockdown is prolonged, many in poor communities are out of jobs. They are hanging now between the virus and hunger.

For more information, please contact Younus at the URC at: [urckhi@yahoo.com](mailto:urckhi@yahoo.com)



## VIRUS NEWS FROM THE PHILIPPINES



Like so many other Asian countries, testing for the virus has been sparse in the Philippines, and everyone seems to agree that the official figures of 4,195 infections and 221 deaths (as of April 10) are far below the reality. On March 16, the government of Rodrigo Duterte responded to the growing COVID-19 pandemic by abruptly declaring all of Luzon under "enhanced community quarantine" (ECQ) - a fancy term for a total lockdown and curfew, with temporary closure of all non-essential shops and businesses and severe restrictions on people's ability to move around, work and get the things they need to survive. This island-wide quarantine came two days after the implementation of community quarantine in Metro Manila - a city where about 40 percent of the 13 million inhabitants live in squalor, crowding and insecurity in informal settlements. It's hard to

imagine a more congenial environment for a virus to spread rapidly. But from what we hear from our friends in the city, the virus is the least of the troubles the crisis has brought upon Manila's urban poor. Here are some updates from our friends in Metro Manila, as well as some other provincial cities in the Philippines:

**FROM MANILA:** *Ruby Papeleras, from the Philippines Homeless People's Federation in Metro Manila, wrote on April 10:* The community quarantine was supposed to end on April 14, but the government has extended it in all cities in the country, until



April 30, with only essential services like supermarkets, pharmacies and food outlets allowed to open, and only nurses, doctors, food deliverers and other essential service-providers allowed to work. All public transportation has been suspended. Banks, offices, construction sites and businesses are all closed, and this has had a domino effect on jobs and economic activity, leaving millions without work and worried about their daily subsistence. The government has very strictly enforced the curfew, under which only one person from each family is allowed to go out to buy food in the market. Many people who have no money and nothing to eat have gone out looking for some way to earn, and been caught by the police and the military. These strict rules are supposed to slow the spread of virus, but the number of infections keeps going up.

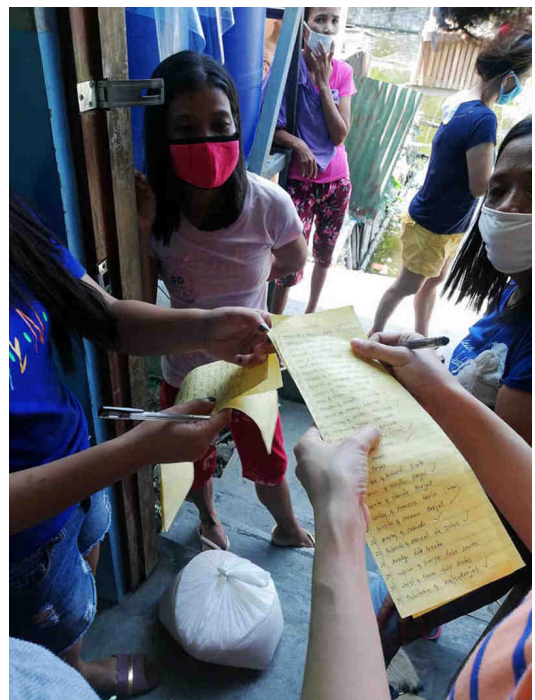
The government has a *Social Amelioration Program* to provide food packs and cash support of US\$150 to qualified families, but the top-down distribution of this aid has been riddled with problems. It's interesting to see that in cities and barangays where we have done citywide community mapping, the DWSD has worked with the community organizations, which already had all the information ready, and could respond to the urgent needs in good time and get the assistance to those who really need it.

The other issue is discrimination against those thought to be infected by the virus. If you are a Person under Investigation (PUI), a Person Under Monitoring (PUM), or if you are actually infected by the virus, people won't allow you to come inside their community. Some have built make-shift barriers around their settlements to keep out possible virus carriers. The news recently reported a sad story about a woman security guard who had been tested by a thermal scanner and showed a high temperature of 38 degrees. When her landlady found out she had a fever, she was kicked out of her rented room, and all her belongings were thrown out on the street. Now that woman is sleeping on the roadside near the hospital she doesn't have enough money to enter. This kind of discrimination against sick people is actually working against the public good, and encouraging people to hide their illness.

The Homeless People's Federation is planning to organize a pandemic response with our member communities across the regions, using the funds from ACCA and SDI for housing loans which have already revolved. We'll use part of the money to assist communities with their immediate needs in this difficult time, and part will be kept for longer-term economic and health revival.

Contact Ruby for more information at: [rpapeleras1705@gmail.com](mailto:rpapeleras1705@gmail.com)

**FROM QUEZON CITY:** *Maricel from the NGO Foundation for the Development of the Urban Poor (FDUP) wrote on April 10: We are all working from home now, receiving text messages from leaders about the situation in their settlements and overwhelming requests for help. People need food most of all, and the food assistance programs from the government are either absent or inadequate. The lockdown has had a tremendous impact on the daily wage earners who have to stay home: construction workers, pedicab and tricycle drivers, public transport workers, vendors and daily wage laborers. Even the owners of small stores in the communities have hardly any business these days, because people in the communities are broke. It is bad! It's almost a standstill situation in the whole of Metro Manila. Even the city's notoriously traffic-jammed thoroughfares are almost empty now. The government (through the barangays) has issued quarantine passes to each household: only one person in each house is allowed to go out to make the necessary purchases from the market or drug store, if they have cash, and they must carry their quarantine pass with them or risk being arrested. This is the situation we all are in now.*



Without much preparation and when nobody knows where funds to meet our next staff payroll will come from, FDUP has now been obliged to expand our traditional focus on secure housing to include helping poor community members access food. In recent weeks, we have worked with our partner communities, with several NGOs and with religious and corporate donors to identify the most needy families and help distribute to them food packs, frozen chicken meat, rice and cash assistance in communities around Metro Manila.

Contact Maricel for more information at: [mmgenzola@gmail.com](mailto:mmgenzola@gmail.com)

**FROM ILOILO:** *Sonia Cadornigara, from the Homeless People's Federation in Iloilo, wrote on April 11:* In Iloilo, as in other cities, we are all under Enhanced Community Quarantine - or in other words lockdown. Here's what that's like. We are not allowed to go out, there is no public transportation, classes at all levels have been suspended, malls and department stores are closed. Only grocery stores remain open, as well as restaurants and fast food outlets selling takeaway only. A night curfew is in effect from 8pm to 5am, and a 24-hour curfew is in effect for the elderly and children below 18 years old. Those who violate the curfew are arrested. Each household has been given a quarantine pass, which can be used when we go out to buy food or other essential items. Each barangay (sub-district) has set up checkpoints at their boundaries and nobody is allowed to go outside their own barangay. Even in the informal settlements and in homeowners associations, people have put up barricades and are guarding them around the clock, to keep strangers from coming inside their community and possibly bringing in the virus.



The city government has been very responsive in this extreme situation. They give everybody relief goods like rice, canned goods, milk and sanitation kits. But because there hasn't been much help from the national government, the Iloilo municipal government's resources have not been enough to help everybody who needs it. In Iloilo so far, we have 39 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and seven people have died. These figures do not include deaths suspected to be because of virus, because a shortage of testing kits and testing centers means nobody really knows how far or where the virus has spread.



The shortage of food among federation members is probably our biggest challenge. So many people have not been able to work since the lockdown began - taxi, jeepney, pedicab and tricycle drivers as well as others. Lots of our federation members have been using their savings to survive, and some have taken loans from our UPDF to meet their families' urgent food and medicine needs. We have also set up some community kitchens and begun cooking food collectively every single day, to save money and make sure nobody goes hungry. The challenge for all of us is how to sustain these efforts and make sure that everyone can have at least enough rice to sustain them through the next 20 days, with the hope that the lockdown will finally be lifted. The government and the private sector have helped to provide some relief goods, but not enough for the long period of time this virus crisis is dragging on.



Contact Sonia for more information on Iloilo: [scadornigara@yahoo.com](mailto:scadornigara@yahoo.com)

**FROM CEBU:** *Bimbo Fernandes, from the Cebu-based NGO Pagtambayayong Foundation, wrote on 13 April:* The situation here in Cebu is better than I had expected, which is surprising, considering that I am an incurable optimist. There have been 34 confirmed virus cases and six deaths in the entire Cebu island so far. Of the six who have died, I personally knew three of them - two of whom were doctors. Our first two confirmed cases inside Cebu City emerged just two days ago, in an urban poor community. Because of the low numbers so far, we have enough facilities to look after the confirmed cases and the "persons under investigation." But even before the pandemic, our hospitals were always full, and if the virus explodes, I don't know what we'll do.

The poor communities are coping very well so far in the lockdown, but very few are able to work, and city residents cannot travel home to their villages. Many have received food assistance from the local governments, the church and some businesspeople. In Cebu at least, this has been good enough for two weeks. People are waiting for a promised 7,000 Peso (\$138) assistance from the national government, but this is going to be very problematic: the cash has not yet come, and it will not go to everybody. The markets and shops are open, and for those with money, there is a good home delivery system. The problem is that all public

transport has been shut down, so those without vehicles cannot get out of their neighborhoods. Pagtambayayong has closed our office but we continue to keep in touch with the communities and work from home, as much as possible. We are also selling and delivering dressed chicken to urban poor communities.

Contact Bimbo for more information on Cebu: [bimbo\\_fernandez@yahoo.com](mailto:bimbo_fernandez@yahoo.com)

## VIRUS NEWS FROM SRI LANKA

**FROM COLOMBO:** *Ranjith Samarasinghe, from the Colombo-based NGO Sevanatha, wrote on April 10:* The situation with the virus is not so bad in Sri Lanka so far. The number of cases is still low here, but people seem to understand the importance of the lockdown, and realize that if the virus spreads out in Sri Lanka, we will have very few resources to handle it. The government imposed a 24-hour curfew on the entire country on March 20th, but lifts the curfew every third day to allow people to go out and buy provisions. In Colombo and the six other districts that have been identified as critical areas, the curfew has been continuous since March 24th. No one is allowed to go out, public gatherings are outlawed, traveling is difficult and only those performing essential services can get permits to go out during the curfew. Shops are closed, but many are offering systems to deliver things to people at home, or selling things discretely from the back door.



So far, private sector and government employers continue to pay the salaries of staff forced to stay home. But with the lockdown, there is no work for daily-wage workers, and informal workers of all sorts have been left without any income. As you know, urban communities face more difficulties than rural people in a crisis like this. But those in cities can more readily access government programs. The government and various organizations have arranged programs to provide food supplies and essential goods to needy households, and the National Poverty Program is giving some assistance to the poor. Sri Lanka's parliamentary elections are coming up, and even if they have to be postponed, the government is keen to show it is supporting the people, to get their votes. This political reality has very much benefited the poor here.

At Sevanatha, we are all working from home now, but we have been able to keep in touch with communities through the leaders. Some people I talked with said that they have very little savings to tide them over the crisis, and will be able to manage their food for only two or three weeks. The virus is causing serious problems for all of Colombo's poor citizens, but they seem to be facing the situation together, as communities. We are regularly communicating with the Women's Bank team. As their members face difficulties, they have decided to stop collecting loan repayments for a while, and are coordinating with area-level government officials to help channel various government assistance and subsidies to the people who need it. But there are still lots of gaps in the process, and hunger is becoming a real danger. So Women's Bank branches are also distributing food packs, with rice and other essential goods, to their needy members.

Contact Ranjith for more information: [ranjith.kap@gmail.com](mailto:ranjith.kap@gmail.com)

## VIRUS NEWS FROM THAILAND



**FROM BANGKOK:** *Update from ACHR on 15 April:* On March 27th, the Thai government declared a national emergency in the face of growing spread of the virus - especially in Bangkok. Shopping malls, schools, universities, sports and entertainment venues and many businesses and government offices are now closed, and the entire country is under a night curfew. Some provinces have closed their borders to traffic in and out of the province, and many Thais are following the government's suggestion to wear masks in public and practice social distancing. But markets and grocery stores and all the 7-11 convenience stores are open, and people can buy takeaway food from many restaurants, small shops and vendors. The poor in Thailand are already being seriously affected by this COVID virus. But so far, the effects of the virus lockdown are mostly economic,

not medical. The health affects might come later, but at this stage, the urban poor are losing work, losing jobs and earning opportunities, and facing dire realities - like hunger.

**FROM NAKHON SAWAN:** *Supreeya ("Noot") from Kasetsart University in Bangkok, wrote on March 31:* In Thailand, the number of infected people is increasing and will definitely reach over 1,000 cases soon. It turns out that our well-known Thai boxing ring in Bangkok has been identified as a "super spreader" of the virus early on. Many government offices and universities are now partly closed, and most of us are working from home, to follow the recommended physical distancing. That is certainly challenging our working habits at the same time it is encouraging us to learn new technologies to keep in touch with each other.

In the city of Nakhon Sawan, where we have been working on the KNOW project, there is only one confirmed virus case so far. The Provincial Authority has prohibited gatherings of more than ten or twenty people, and that may make it difficult to organize the next steps of our research. The very active community network in Nakhon Sawan is busy investigating the effects of COVID-19 on community people's health and livelihoods, in collaboration with government agencies and volunteers. Later, the network will discuss what kind of support it can arrange for communities with their collective community welfare fund, to which all community members have been contributing 30 baht (US\$1) per month for many years. The Thai Government announced today that it would provide a basic income for daily-wage and informal workers of 5,000 baht (\$156) per month, for the next three months. The government will also provide individuals access to low-interest loans, to tide their families over the crisis. We expect to see the government announce an Emergency Decree soon, and will see what we will face in the next phase of COVID-19. *For more information, contact Noot at: [supreeyaw@gmail.com](mailto:supreeyaw@gmail.com)*

**FROM CODI:** *News about a new national community-driven virus response program:* The progress of the national Baan Mankong housing program, which is implemented by the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) has had to be put on hold, as the virus crisis has consumed the country. What that means is that the government budget that was approved for this year's Baan Mankong Program before the virus hit (nearly 700 million baht, or US\$ 22 million) cannot be used for housing projects. At the same time, it has become clear that people in the communities cannot work much, can't have meetings, and even the CODI workers can't go to the communities very easily. Everything has been frozen.

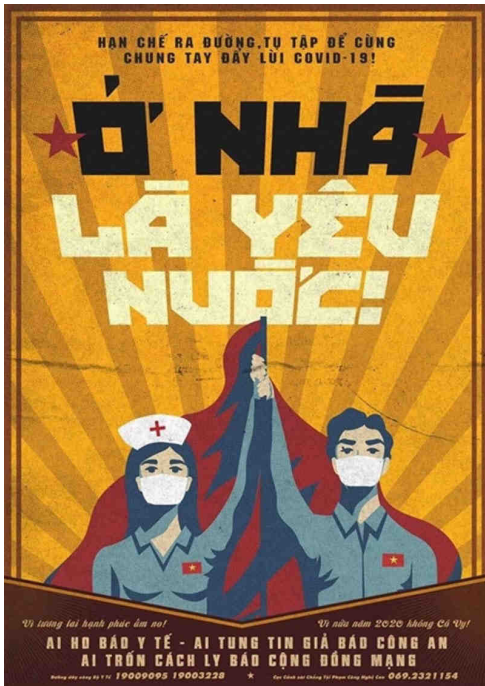
So instead of leaving that substantial Baan Mankong budget unused, a proposal has been made to use part of it where and when it's needed most urgently, to enable communities to take the lead in responding to virus needs across the country. Somsook, who has been playing an active role as advisor to the Baan Mankong program in recent years, took part in thinking-up this new virus program. She reports that as soon as the CODI board approves this budgetary change-of-purpose, the country's first national-level and community-driven virus response program will begin, in 300 cities and 1,500 rural wards. The design of the program is still being finalized, but the idea is that a special budget of about 200,000 baht (\$6,250) will be allocated to the community network in each of about 300 cities, and a smaller amount will be allocated to the community councils in 1,500 rural wards.

The networks and community councils will use this modest budget to survey the needs among the poor in existing slums, in the Baan Mankong housing projects and in the rural communities, make plans and take action to address those needs right away. That action could include distributing free food, setting up community kitchens, launching virus news exchange centers, bolstering food self-sufficiency by producing food in community gardens on vacant lots, livelihood support, basic welfare, housing improvements for the poorest and most vulnerable. The networks could also use this money strategically to leverage other funds being allocated by various other government organizations and programs dealing with the virus. Here's how Somsook puts it: "Communities will have no problem collectively inventing all sorts of ways to address the crisis in appropriate and creative ways. The idea of this initiative in CODI is to ensure that the poor are not left out, and that they are not only part of the virus response planning, but can lead the way. This program will support communities to do that, to be the first to move. The government departments are all talking about budget for the virus now, but nobody will give money to the communities at this stage. If we move fast, we can allow communities to start first: survey, talk, make their plans and take immediate action to address the needs. So the communities on the frontlines of the pandemic will be the key drivers of the solutions - in any city or rural constituency - and start moving before others. That's the idea."

*For more information on this new community-led virus response program from CODI, please contact ACHR at: [achr@achr.net](mailto:achr@achr.net)*



## VIRUS NEWS FROM VIETNAM



**FROM DANANG:** *Trang Phan heads the Community Engaged Learning Center at the Danang Architecture University, and she has been leading the KNOW research project in Danang. She wrote on March 25:* In Vietnam, the number of virus cases is increasing day by day. Because of the very strict measures imposed by the government to slow the spread, there are only about 150 COVID-19 cases in Vietnam so far, and no deaths. All schools are closed until at least May, and thousands of people with virus symptoms are isolated in hospitals and military barracks, where their food, housing, health-care and treatment are 100% covered by the government. Most businesses, social activities and tourism have also been stopped, and this has dealt a big blow to Danang's economy. We are encouraged to stay at home until at least the middle of April. The good news is that local residents have a high awareness of the dangers of this virus and are strictly following the instructions from the government. I would say that the government has earned the people's trust by playing a good role in fighting against this virus outbreak. We are still very vigilant and careful, we hope that the situation will get better and everything will be back on the right track soon.

*(Minh Chau adds) Since the time of the war with America, the government in Vietnam has set up civil systems that are deeply rooted at all levels of society, right down the ward and block and community level. Examples of this are the mass organizations in Vietnam like the Women's Union and the Farmers' Union. In times of crisis, like the current one with COVID-19, this national*

*system that reaches everyone is a mechanism to make sure the government's instructions are followed by the whole society. But it also provides a quick and efficient channel for distributing important health information, identifying new cases and channeling assistance to people who are infected with the virus.*

For more information, please contact Trang Phan at: [trangptk@dau.edu.vn](mailto:trangptk@dau.edu.vn)

**RICE ATMs IN HO CHI MINH CITY:** There is a perpetual attraction to the idea that complex social problems can be solved by technology, if only a clever inventor would come along, size-up the problem and invent the gadget or the app or the formula that will magically make the problem go away. Well here's a story in that category that comes from Vietnam, where a young entrepreneur named Hoang Tuan Anh has invented a new way of distributing free rice, around the clock, to people who are out of work and have no money to feed their families, while still ensuring social distancing during the pandemic. The "Rice ATM" machines he invented, which distribute a bagful of rice at the press of a button, were first put into operation in Ho Chi Minh City in early April, and they are both a mechanism for distributing free rice and a gimmick for attracting rice donations. Unlike real ATMs, these don't require any kind of card - anyone who needs a bag of rice can help themselves. The initiative has drawn international attention and attracted large donations of rice from businesses and individuals around Vietnam. Nguyen Thi Ly's husband is among those who have lost their jobs. "This rice ATM has been helpful. With this one bag of rice, we can have enough for one day," said the 34-year-old mother of three children. "Now, we only need other food. Our neighbors sometimes give us some leftover food, or we have instant noodles." Big news agencies like CNN, Reuters and Strait Times have given the invention rave reviews. A number of rice ATMs have now been set up and are safely dispensing rice to those in need in Hanoi, Danang and many other big cities.



For more about the COVID-19 situation in Vietnam, please contact Minh Chau for a report she has prepared: [achr@achr.net](mailto:achr@achr.net)

## UPDATE FROM THE ACHR SECRETARIAT

All the regional and global activities on the ACHR calendar for February, March and April have been cancelled or postponed, and that has given us more time to slow down, think and work quietly on pending projects. At ACHR, we are observing the Thai government's recommendations and working from home, for the most part. On the rare occasions when we do meet at the office, we all swaddle ourselves in face masks like surgeons and observe the two-meter physical distancing that is believed to prevent the

spread of the virus. In truth, this has not been easy. The ACHR office is usually a fairly quiet place where work gets done and we all come and go as we please. But a lot happens in the impromptu gatherings over tea in the kitchen, and in our regular marathon office meetings, where we talk and talk of many things and infect and re-infect each other with enthusiasms and ideas, and work together to get over humps. I think we're all missing those more subtle benefits of working within a team, but are carrying on as best we can, under these strange circumstances. As everyone is. Here are a few notes about some ACHR projects still on the bubble:

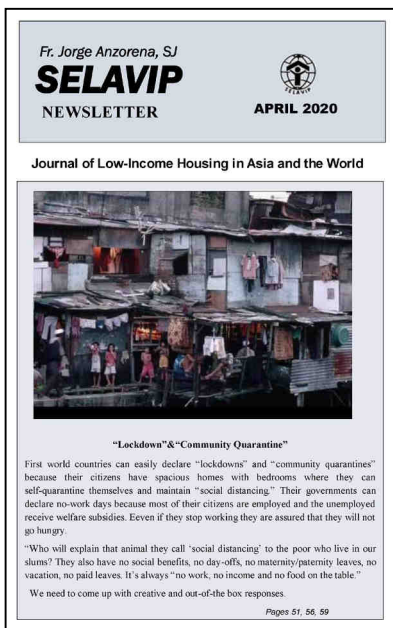
- **SELAVIP "5 MODEL CITIES" PROJECT:** Finally, we received proposals from groups in ten cities (including Dhaka, Mahalaxmi, Sakrand, Bhuj, Jakarta, Palu, Valenzuela, Iloilo, Manila and Yangon) for this important new regional project. The original plan was to organize a small regional meeting in early April to assess these proposals and select the five cities together. But as meetings of any sort have become impossible, we've decided to try organizing a participatory remote assessment process, in which we've asked many friends around the region, from different sectors, to comment on the proposals and evaluate them on a "scorecard", according to a list of ten criteria. The "scorecards" are due by April 20th. We will then add up the scores, collect together the feedback, and organize an online meeting with the proposing groups in early May, to give them a chance to explain their proposals and answer any questions that came up. We will then make the final selection in the ACHR secretariat, and let the groups know right away. Then, even if it's not possible to start the citywide projects right away, the implementing groups can start seriously making their plans, so that things can take off with a bang when the virus crisis is behind us.
- **URBAMONDE COLLECTIVE HOUSING PROJECT:** The meetings and national processes that are part of this regional project are definitely on hold, but we continue to work remotely with groups around the Asia region who are preparing lovely case-studies of some of their blue ribbon collective housing projects, and posting these case studies on the urbaMonde global website platform.
- **KNOW STUDY IN 4 ASIAN CITIES:** This research project which ACHR is facilitating with DPU in four Asian cities (Yangon, Danang, Yogyakarta and Nakhon Sawan) has been put partly on hold, since meetings, travel, seminars and gatherings are not possible for a while. But Brenda is keeping in close contact with the study teams in the four cities, and coordinating with the locked-down team in London - and somehow, all sorts of reports continue to be written and circulated.
- **UN-HABITAT EMERGENCY FUND PROPOSAL:** ACHR has been coordinating with the Bangkok office of UN-Habitat to develop a joint proposal to respond to some of the immediate needs in five virus-hit countries in southeast Asia: Thailand, Myanmar, Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam. The "Community-driven social and livelihood recovery project" will include a component of funding for small, community-led projects to address a variety of virus needs, and this part will be facilitated by ACHR. Cross your fingers the UN can find funding for this one soon.
- **DEVELOPING A COVID-19 CONCEPT NOTE:** A lot of us are coming to the conclusion that as catastrophic as it may be, this COVID-19 crisis that is turning the world upside down is presenting us with a once-in-a-lifetime chance to re-think the whole bloody wrong system that is the cause of most of the problems we have all been dealing with for decades: housing problems, poverty, inequality, hunger, food insecurity, environmental degradation, runaway individualism - the list goes on. How can we make sure we don't squander this opportunity to see what our economic system is doing to people and the environment and to imagine a new and more just way of living, in which communities are not only secure places for everyone to live, but support systems that allow everyone to survive and thrive? These kinds of questions will be part of a concept note we're in the process of preparing, here in the ACHR secretariat. After preparing a preliminary draft, we will circulate it among all our friends in the region and ask them to add to it and help make it stronger. That way, the concept note can expand and sharpen and become a position paper for the whole wide ACHR network. Then, with this document in hand, we can approach donors, development agencies, governments and allies in other parts of the world to see what can be done to start taking action. More on this soon.

## NEWS FROM FRIENDS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

**FROM MANCHESTER:** *Diana Mitlin, who works with IIED and teaches in Manchester, has been blogging about the COVID-19:* In her post entitled, "Dealing with COVID-19 in the towns and cities of the global South," Diana looks at the particular challenges the COVID-19 outbreak will pose to people living in informal settlements, what steps can be taken to reach the populations in need, and how community organization networks can be supported to scale up their efforts. *Follow this link to Diana's COVID-19 blog post:* <https://www.iied.org/dealing-covid-19-towns-cities-global-south>

**FROM LONDON:** *Caren Levy is a professor at the Development Planning Unit, University College London, and has been leading their Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) program. Caren wrote from London on March 30:* In these unprecedented and disturbing times, we are all having to make considerable adjustments to our lives. In doing so, we find ourselves confronting a range of daily challenges on all fronts which are riven with practicalities as well as emotions. There is a developing discussion now about how inequalities are playing out in the experience of COVID-19. The prospects are daunting, but the creativity, care and solidarity that is emerging around family, community and work is a beacon of hope for something different and better in the future. I quote from Somsok here: *"It looks like the world will not be the same after this.... I only hope that this crisis will open up an opportunity for our societies and the world to rethink, reshape and reform our new world development direction."* I do believe that the current crisis makes our KNOW [study on how cities can be made more equal] more urgent than ever. We have

started a discussion about what this pandemic might mean for our work in the KNOW study, both practically and in terms of content. This will be an ongoing discussion as things unfold in our different contexts... We will continue these discussions remotely, collectively and individually. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you want to share anything or need any information or support. *For more on the KNOW project in Asia, please contact ACHR.*



**FROM TOKYO:** *New Selavip Newsletter from our Father Anzorena:* Bimbo Fernandez (who co-produces the newsletter with Father Jorge) wrote on March 31 that Fr. Jorge, who had just turned 90, continues to research and produce the Selavip Newsletter that he has written twice a year, every year, since 1978. The latest issue, which contains some fresh stories about the early stages of the effects of COVID-19 lockdowns, can be downloaded at this link: <http://bit.ly/SELAVIP2020APR> *Back issues are also available upon request.*

**FROM GENEVA:** *A message from our partner in the collective housing project, urbaMonde, in Switzerland:* Solidarity and international cooperation play a more central role than ever in collectively addressing this global health crisis, the impact of which promises to be particularly severe for low-income populations, especially in the Global South where they are often dependent on informal activities and live in precarious conditions that make it difficult to apply lockdown and hygiene measures. This crisis highlights the critical importance of ensuring access to adequate, secure and affordable housing for all. Convinced that the inhabitants must be at the center of the production of their habitat, urbaMonde continues to support and make visible community-led housing initiatives implemented by organized and resilient communities that provide innovative solutions adapted to their needs. *For more about urbaMonde, visit the website:* <https://www.urbamonde.org/en> *or e-mail Lea Oswald at:* [contact@urbamonde.org](mailto:contact@urbamonde.org)

**FROM SANTIAGO:** *Joan MacDonald, with the SELAVIP Foundation's office in Santiago Chile:* I hope all our ACHR friends are safe and taking care. We are trying to gather as much news as possible of good practices and experiences in how to deal with Covid-19. Unfortunately, the strategies in most countries are set by the national-level health authorities, who are not working in informal and poor settlements, where a more comprehensive approach is needed. We organized a WhatsApp group to gather and share practices that can be more appropriate for these neighborhoods. If ACHR and its friends in Asia have developed or implemented such practices, or any insights that you can share with us, it would be great. *If anyone has any stories or ideas, please send them to Joan at:* [joanmacdonald@vtr.net](mailto:joanmacdonald@vtr.net)

**FROM KARACHI:** *Arif on 30 years of OPP:* Arif writes that his paper, *What Has Emerged From 30 Years of the Orangi Pilot Project*, has been published by the Oxford Research Encyclopedia on Global Public Health. It deals with the background, principles, evolution, impact, and legacy of the project in the larger context of Karachi in particular, and Pakistan and the world in general. Readers are welcome to quote from the paper or use it as a reference. The paper can be accessed through this link: <https://oxfordre.com/publichealth/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190632366.001.0001/acrefore-9780190632366-e-150> To access the full, bulging library of Arif's papers, books, monographs and poems, visit his website at: [www.arifhasan.org](http://www.arifhasan.org)

**FROM NAPLES:** There are many touching stories of ordinary people in different parts of the world finding ways to help each other during these difficult times. There was a lovely one that came from Italy - a country which has been harder hit by the virus than any other European country. 175,000 people have got the virus, 22,750 people have died and the entire country remains under serious lockdown. But in the city of Naples, a group of street singers were out of work and penniless decided to revive an old Neapolitan tradition, in which housewives would lower baskets from the windows of their city apartments to collect the things they purchase from food vendors in the street down below. In their new version, if people have something to give to the poor and hungry and homeless, they drop it down in these "solidarity food baskets." If someone comes along who is hungry, he can help himself from those baskets to whatever is on offer: bread, cans of tuna, coffee, sugar, pasta, parmesan. Initially, the street singers helped manage the whole thing and also to deliver donated items to the baskets of hungry families lowered down from their apartments above. But now the "solidarity baskets" filled with goodies go up and down and the exchange of kindnesses carry on by themselves, without anybody managing at all.

