

ACHR e-news

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

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

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JANUARY - MAY 2014

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ANNOUNCING the PERWEEN RAHMAN FELLOWSHIP

Perween Rahman was an architect, social scientist and planner who for many years directed the work of the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in Karachi, Pakistan. Through the delicate interventions and technical guidance of the OPP, Perween was able to help informal communities across Karachi - and Pakistan - to develop simple, practical and affordable ways to access sanitation, water supply, housing improvements, education, health care and secure land tenure, in which communities themselves are the key doers and professionals are their supporters. Perween was also one of the founder members of ACHR in 1989. But even though so many of us have learned from and been inspired by the work of this busy and committed woman, Perween very seldom agreed to leave her work in Karachi to join our gatherings. But on one of those rare occasions, in January 2011, she offered us these wise words: *The situation in Pakistan is indeed very tough - the Taliban, the bombs, the violence, the disasters. Yet everywhere we look, there are signs of hope. And we need to see these signs of hope with eyes of respect, to support them, to link them, to make them strong, and to see what new can be done.*

Since Perween was killed last year, on March 13, 2013, her colleagues in Pakistan have begun projects to commemorate Perween's work in several ways. The Perween Rahman fellowship is a way her friends in the ACHR network mean to keep alive the woman's extraordinary spirit and the innovation of her work. Perween was above all a consummate community architect, and the fellowship is being launched to nurture a new generation of community architects and community-based builders to follow her example of working closely with poor communities, as equals, and of merging the professional with the people, to create a new kind of community planning and construction process that makes big change in the lives of the poor.

Each fellowship offers US\$2,000, to partly support a budding community architect or community-based builder to work with poor communities on the ground for at least 6 months, on various kinds of initiatives, such as housing and settlement planning and design, community mapping, alternative and low-cost construction techniques, or many other things. The budget is quite small, so it's important that each fellow find ways to contribute and to make big change with small funds - which was a guiding principal of Perween's work and is a key part of ACHR's working philosophy also. The fellowships will be embedded in the work of ACHR, which links community groups, NGOs and support professionals in 20 Asian countries around a process of citywide and people-driven slum upgrading, in which the poor are the key doers in finding creative solutions to their problems of land, housing and services. Fellows will also be part of the Community Architects Network (CAN), which has become an important technical support system for this people-driven change process in Asia. The Perween Rahman Fellowship Fund will start with a capital of \$30,000, drawn from the Rockefeller Foundation's institutional grant to ACHR. This means that initially, we will be able to support about 15 fellows. But we hope the fund will grow with contributions from other sources, so the fellowship program can continue.



HOW TO APPLY: For more information about the Perween Rahman Fellowship, please contact Tee at this special e-mail address: perweenrahmanfellowship@hotmail.com To download the 2-page fellowship application form, please go to: www.communityarchitectsnetwork.info/getinvolve

OPP UNDER SIEGE in KARACHI + LYARI RESETTLEMENT UPDATE

Since Perween was killed last year, things have not gotten any better in Karachi - for the city as a whole, but especially for our friends at Orangi Pilot Project. In May 2013, another OPP activist and ardent supporter of participatory community development, Abdul Waheed, was shot dead by passing gunmen as he sat with his daughter and brother in front of the family's medical shop. Abdul was a lifelong friend of Perween's and had for many years managed the work of OPP's Orangi Charitable Trust in Karachi's Baldia town. Then in January 2014, the OPP's new director, Salim Aleemuddin, was injured when men on a motorcycle hurled a bomb at the car he was travelling in in Orangi Town – the same car Perween was in when she was shot. Fortunately, Salim survived the attack with only an injured shoulder, but the threat of more trouble has grown so ominous that the OPP has finally been forced to leave the office in Orangi they built 22 years ago and move in temporarily with the URC, in a safer part of town.

Why this sustained attack on the OPP, one of the oldest and most respected NGOs working to improve the lives of Pakistan's poor? The police were quick to blame it on extortionists, or the Taliban. But our friends in the OPP suspect the attacks may be related to the work the organization has done to expose land grabbers and illegal water hydrants operating in Orangi and other parts of the city (which work includes the OPP's project to survey and map the traditional goth settlements on the outskirts of Karachi and use the maps to lobby the government for land tenure). "There are people of all political affiliations benefitting from these illegal rackets, so it could be any one of these groups. There is money everywhere and practically no semblance of state, so we make enemies whenever we publish reports on such illegal activities," said one OPP staffer. Here's more on the situation from Arif and Younus:



Update from Arif (Feb. 17, 2014) So finally, we, who have been fighting for so long against evictions, are being evicted ourselves. After the attempt on Salim's life, we decided to move most of our work out of the the OPP office in Qasba and relocate to the URC office. Qasba has been taken over by the Taliban, although Orangi has not. The Taliban, who target those they consider ideologically opposed to them, do not want us there, and we cannot risk another person being killed. The police feel that Anwar Rashid's life is in danger so they have provided him with police protection. After Perween's murder, Anwar Rashid has been a source of strength and comfort to the OPP staff and community. We are very worried about him. By shifting to the URC, the OPP's manner of working will undergo a change. Luckily, much of our work is in the other areas of Sindh and southern Punjab, and we hope to concentrate there. Luckily also, the community institutions the OPP has created in Orangi – like Sirajuddin's TTRC - are in a position to carry on working locally, with advice from the OPP. Slowly and surely, we are heading into a major civil war between two very different ways of thinking about politics, religion and society. And Karachi, being multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-class and also the economic power house of Pakistan, is where the fate of this conflict will be decided.

Update from Younus (March 28, 2014) The situation in Karachi is a bit complicated. The security situation in the area around the Urban Resource Center (URC) office, where the OPP has now moved their operations, is peaceful, but at my home in Lyari, things are much, much worse. In Lyari town, various rival criminal gangs have been fighting to get control over the area, and hundreds of families – particularly Christian families - have been attacked and forced to leave their houses and take refuge in other parts of the city. After they left, their houses were then looted. These families have sought shelter with friends and relatives, plunging those already poor relatives into deeper economic stress and vulnerability. It is important to mention that children are no longer able to attend school, and the livelihoods of many women and men have been curtailed by this exodus. The government has been unable to maintain peace in the area, and the security forces and police refuse to intervene. In late March, there was a ceasefire among these gangs, and it held for a few weeks. But nobody thinks this voluntarily ceasefire will last long.



MORE NEWS FROM THE BLIGHTED LYARI RIVER COMMUNITIES: The Urban Resource Center (URC) has been monitoring evictions in Karachi since 1992. Since then, more than 41,000 houses have been bulldozed by various government agencies. As a result of these evictions, 286,300 people have been displaced - in most cases without any compensation or alternative shelter or land. In the few cases where there has been resettlement, it is so badly planned that it impoverishes people. Right now, there seems to be a lull in evictions in the city, but the threat of eviction continues to loom over the city's poor communities, as land-grabbing, real-estate development and mega-projects keep expanding.

As a result of intense research, lobbying and public discussion by civic groups, media, NGOs and organized networks of affected communities – in which the URC has played a key role - the government has taken some steps which make poor communities in

Karachi a bit more secure, including changing the cut-off date for regularization of poor communities and providing them with land titles, giving land titles to the peri-urban "Goths" (villages) in Karachi and adopting a policy of providing compensation and resettlement when development projects cause displacement. These hard-won policies have brought considerable relief among poor communities across the city. But the government-managed resettlement process has been a disaster, and the URC has been focusing more of its efforts on understanding the problems of resettlement and trying to support networks of poor communities in their battle for better resettlement policies.

One of the biggest resettlements has been the one caused by the construction of the Lyari Expressway, an ill-planned and environmentally disastrous boondoggle which broke ground in 2001. Thirteen years later, the expressway is still only half built. After a long battle waged by the Lyari communities to defend their houses against demolition, the government finally agreed to make changes to the expressway plan which would avoid demolishing the remaining communities. But this victory comes after 16,542 Lyari families have already watched their houses reduced to rubble.

The good news is that 15,045 of those families got free 80m2 plots in the government relocation colonies and cash compensation of 50,000 Rupees (\$500) to help them start over. But the bad news is that the Lyari relocation sites are like textbook examples of everything NOT to do in resettlement: far from the city and job opportunities, no community participation in the locating or planning, incomplete infrastructure, no drinking water, schools built but no salaries for teachers, no hospitals, no public transport at night. Add to that the corruption in the resettlement process which has left 1,478 evicted families with nothing and delivered plots and compensation to some 12,000 "fake" beneficiaries nobody has ever heard of. But whether they are the real or the fake Lyari beneficiaries, the resettlement sites are a disaster for everyone, and many families are selling their plots and moving back into the city, where many have no choice but to pay steep rents for houses and rooms in increasingly over-crowded established informal settlements.



When Arif visited one of the Lyari Expressway relocation sites in September 2009, he was so appalled by what he saw there that he was moved to write the following poem, which offers a revealing catalogue of the human costs of forced resettlement:

LAMENT OF A RELOCATED PERSON

by Arif Hasan

They came with bulldozers
And a gun carrying police force
They gave no notice
They held no dialogue
They turned the house I built
Brick by brick
Over thirty years
Into unusable rubble.

The utility connections
Legally acquired
Paid for by my wife's savings
Through years of bisi committees
Are now just dangling wires and pipes
Disconnected from the life of the city
Soon to be buried under new construction.

They have dumped us in the wilderness
Where my child has no school

And my wife no job
And I spend hours in expensive commuting
With no time for them.

They have dumped us in the wilderness
Far from the joys, sorrows and friends
Of our childhood and adolescence
And from the spaces whose evolution
Gave us a new vision
And transformed us
From members of different clans
Into equal citizens of an expanding city.

They have robbed us of our identity
Made us poor again
Told us by their actions
That we are the residue of the city
Who can own no land
For it only belongs to the rich.

For more information on the situation in Karachi, please contact Younus at the Karachi Urban Resource Center: urc@cyber.net.pk or Arif Hasan: arifhasan@cyber.net.pk or visit the OPP's website: www.oppinstitutions.org

HOUSING POLICY BREAKTHROUGHS in CAMBODIA

The news from Cambodia always seems to come with equal parts of the bitter and the sweet. And so it is with this little update, so let's get the bitter out of the way first, so we can concentrate on the sweet:



Phnom Penh's pioneering land-sharing project at Borei Keila in trouble:

In 2003, a pioneering land-sharing agreement was reached between the Municipality and the large Borei Keila slum community, in which the 1,776 families would be re-housed in 10 apartment blocks built on part of the same site, by the private developer who was granted the concession to develop this inner city public land with high-end housing. The people would get 4x12m apartments completely free, and the developer would pay for them with part of the huge profits earned from sale of the market-rate developments. This high-profile and much-visited project became a point of pride for the Municipality, for it showed a practical and win-win way of solving the urban poor housing problems in the city without evicting poor families - and still allowing the city's development to continue.

But by the time the 8th apartment block was finished and occupied, land values in the area had risen so high that the developer decided to break its agreement. With the blessing of the city's former governor, plans were made to relocate the remaining 340 families to an undeveloped piece of land 45 kilometers outside the city, where they would be given a bag of rice, 10 zinc roofing sheets and a few bamboo poles. Meanwhile, on the land reserved for the last two apartment blocks, the developer built some expensive market-rate housing and sold it off at a huge profit. This violation of the agreement provoked a justifiably angry response from the Borei Keila families, created a scandal and made Borei Keila one of the hot cases on the international housing rights agenda, with the Municipality being shown in a very bad light. Phnom Penh's new governor has inherited this mess and is now trying to find other land for relocating the remaining families, since it is not clear whether anybody can survive on that far-away site. But the families who have waited for 11 years for their flats are not giving up, and the struggle drags on.



New housing policy possibilities in Cambodia: In May 2010, the Cambodian government issued "Circular 3", a progressive housing policy that was based largely on the work of the UPDF, with inputs from ACHR. The policy focuses on community-driven, collaborative and citywide slum-upgrading, with on-site slum upgrading as the first housing redevelopment option, and relocation within the city to free government land only in cases where *in-situ* upgrading is not possible. Then, two years ago (March 15, 2011), ACHR was asked to prepare a concept note for the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, with suggestions how to scale up and institutionalize the people-driven upgrading that was already happening under the "Circular 3" policy into a

national housing program. After some time, the government now seems ready to set up the country's first housing department, and has asked for ACHR's continued collaboration and support. In January 2014, Somsook and the team from the Community Development Fund (CDF) Foundation met with Mr. Im Chhun Lim, the Minister of Land Management, to discuss this. It was agreed that ACHR would continue to assist in the "Capacity building" of the Ministry and staff in several ways:

1. Inviting Minister of Land Management to visit Thailand.
2. Organizing exposure trips (of joint teams - government and community) to Thailand and CODI
3. Organizing a training workshop for government officers with knowledge on housing development and housing processes of the poor.
4. Supporting the Ministry to develop a 5-year Housing Plan (along with UN-Habitat).
5. Signing an MOU between the Ministry, CDF Foundation, UN-Habitat and ACHR.
6. Working in one pilot area, to test the collaboration between the Ministry and CDF Foundation, where they will concretely work together. One suggestion was to select one good province and work on both the existing good urban process and then expand into the rural areas also. The Ministry can help facilitate solutions to the land issue.

This collaboration with the Ministry of Land Management is an important step in boosting the status of the CDF Foundation, institutionalizing it and getting it accepted by the larger system in Cambodia.

For more information, contact ACHR or Nylen at CDF Foundation: info@cdfcambodia.net

THE DEVELOPMENT CAT IS OUT OF THE BAG in MYANMAR

Since Cyclone Nargis hit in 2008, and since the enormous political changes that began in 2011, Myanmar has been opening up to the world at breakneck speed. Investors are flocking in to tap the country's vast natural resources and cheap labor, while market forces and real estate development are sending land prices soaring. Evictions are increasing, slums are getting bigger and bigger, and problems of urban and rural landlessness are growing. At the same time, consultants and development agencies of all sorts are flooding into Asia's newest poverty hotspot, all with their own ideas about what Myanmar's poor people should be developed.

All these problems are bad in Yangon, but also in Mandalay, the country's second largest city. Though smaller and less dense than Yangon, the city has very high land prices, partly because of the heavy investment from China in this important trading city, which is right at the geographical center of Myanmar - 300 kms from the Chinese border, 300 kms from the Thai border, 350 kms from India and 400 kms from Bangladesh. Mandalay was built in the 19th Century by Burma's last king, right before the British took over. Mandalay was to be the center of the country's courtly and religious life, and the palaces and gilded pagodas in their hundreds are all still there. But Mandalay is now a city full of squatters. Most are migrants from impoverished rural areas or refugees from conflict-racked or disaster-hit regions, who settle in squatter settlements along roads, rivers, canals and on empty land in the fringe areas of the city. Nobody knows who owns a lot of the land these poor families occupy, but people are increasingly showing up and claiming to own the land, and there are lots of evictions happening – most with the full support of the government.

But the good news is that women's savings groups have started and are growing fast in two wards of Chanmyathazi Township, the poorest and most squatter-rich of the city's seven townships. With support from Vanlizar and her team from Women for the World (WFW), and with borrowed wisdom from the women's savings groups in Yangon, the embattled squatter communities in Mandalay have been very busy trying to figure out how to respond to the growing eviction crisis. The situation they find themselves is one most other Asian cities faced decades ago, but because this kind of urban "development" has come so recently to Myanmar, the urban poor are experiencing this sudden assault by market forces as a very rude awakening.

In Yangon, the women's savings groups were able to buy-up three pieces of inexpensive peripheral land and develop their first small housing projects, with help from WFW and loan capital from ACCA. Those three projects were an important breakthrough in demonstrating how poor communities can plan and develop their own affordable housing, but they provided secure land and houses to only 100 poor squatter families. As land prices have skyrocketed – sometimes increasing ten times in just three years! – that kind of land-buying-by-people in Yangon and Mandalay has quickly become an impossible dream, at least for the poor. So what about the other millions of homeless families in Myanmar? If the poor can no longer afford to buy any urban land, and aren't being allowed to stay on the public or unclear land they already occupy, what to do? Fortunately, these communities are not struggling in isolation, but have many friends in the ACHR network who have faced similar eviction situations and developed tools which can help to strengthen themselves, develop their own alternatives to eviction and negotiate for those solutions with the authorities. And one of the most powerful of those tools is citywide survey and mapping: locating where the squatters are, finding out who owns the land they occupy and whether that land can be negotiated for or not, and identifying other possible land for housing, where relocation is necessary.

The women's savings groups in Mandalay had begun to do a little settlement surveying, but their efforts got a big boost in March, when WFW and the Thai community architect Nad (from CAN) organized a week-long workshop in community mapping and citywide upgrading planning, concentrating on the most densely-settled squatter area in the city: Tuntone Ward. After surveying and mapping all the squatters in that ward, they undertook a ward-wide planning exercise to develop schematic housing plans which would allow everyone in the ward to stay and get secure land – some through on-site redevelopment of existing riverside squatter settlements, and some through nearby relocation to highly dense new housing layouts within the ward. As part of the planning, they developed a very efficient alternative layout plan in one 9.2 acre block, with 328 house plots (of about 65m² each) arranged in clusters around small shared open spaces. The next step is to get the government to buy into this idea and provide the land – either free or on some nominal long-term lease to the communities. Which of course will not be easy. But armed with a clear alternative plan and with a more citywide vision, the communities are now in a much stronger position to negotiate.



For more information on the process in Mandalay, please contact Vanlizar Aung at: womenfortheworld@gmail.com

CITYWIDE SLUM UPGRADING TAKES OFF in COMILLA, BANGLADESH

Another interesting citywide and community-driven slum upgrading initiative is taking shape in Bangladesh, in the city of Comilla - one of five provincial cities chosen to be part of the *Pro-poor slum integration Project*, which is being implemented by the National Housing Authority (NHA), with financing from the World Bank (\$80 million dollars, as a loan to the government) and technical support from BRAC University. Everyone is hoping this project will show a new direction in a country with some of the most serious evictions and housing problems in Asia. And for all the partners involved in the project, the learning curve so far has been steep. The NHA, which was set up 42 years ago as the chief public-sector agency to solve the country's enormous housing problems, has implemented only one slum housing project. So ACHR helped organize study tours for NHA and WB staff to Thailand (where they visited the Baan Mankong slum upgrading projects) and the Philippines (where they visited community-driven housing initiatives by the Homeless People's Federation and others).

Comilla is a very old city of about 350,000 people in eastern Bangladesh, on the Dhaka-Chittagong road. There are more than 100 slum communities in the city, scattered across the city's 27 wards, and many of them now have very active women's savings groups that have been set up and linked together into "CDCs" and "Clusters", with support from the UNDP-UPPR project. For several months now, Kabir (from BRAC University) and a team of 7 community architects and 5 community organizers have been working in Comilla, with all the various stakeholders (*and there are lots of partners in this project!*). They are in the process of forming a citywide community housing network, and have visited and made short profiles of more than 60 communities that were suggested by community leaders, local NGOs and ward councilors, and begun to identify communities that are ready for upgrading and housing projects.

Kabir reports that two of the national slum federations (NDBUS and NBUS) are actively helping the team in Comilla to organize possible communities. The Comilla team is also being assisted by Nat (from CAN) and Ruby and Helen (from HPFP in the Philippines) to help organize workshops and strengthen the community process. In February, they organized a big citywide upgrading workshop in Comilla, during which the team took the Secretary from the Housing Ministry, BRAC University's Vice Chancellor, NHA officers, the Mayor, the Divisional Commissioner and other important local authorities to visit the first five communities slated for on-site upgrading (two with support from ACCA). Last month, a group of 20 architecture students from BRAC University also came to support the team's work with those first five communities.

Washim from UPPR writes that the city-based Community Housing Development Fund (CHDF) has now been set up in Comilla, which will be jointly managed by the women's savings groups and the local government. The women's savings group network in Comilla has already identified several settlements with potential for secure land tenure and housing improvement projects, which will also be assisted by Kabir's team of community architects. Most of these settlements are on private land, but the communities are negotiating with the land owners to support housing improvement projects, and the Municipality has agreed to support these communities in their negotiations for land tenure and housing improvements.



For more information on the process in Comilla, please contact Kabir at: khkabir@bracu.ac.bd



ACCA PROGRAM UPDATE

The Asian Coalition for Community Action Program (ACCA), which is promoting a process of community-driven and citywide slum upgrading in cities around Asia, is now well into its sixth year of implementation. Up to now, the ACCA Program has supported citywide projects in 231 cities, in 19 Asian countries. In all these cities, community people are the primary doers in planning and implementing projects which tackle problems of land, infrastructure and housing at scale, in partnership with their local governments and other stakeholders. The ACCA program has demonstrated a new kind of development intervention, in which the poor have the freedom to decide things and manage their own development. And flexible finance is the program's chief tool to let community people themselves make the change. All these projects have proved that urban poor communities and their development partners in all these and other cities are ready to address citywide problems and citywide development together.



The 15th ACCA committee meeting (and the third in the program's second phase) was held by e-mail, in March 2014. Because we are coming to the end of the ACCA program, a lot of projects were proposed. After reviewing and discussing them by e-mail, a total budget of US\$1,577,000 was approved to support projects in 41 new cities and 32 on-going cities, in 15 Asian countries (including 19 "big" housing projects, 5 loans from the ACCA Regional Revolving Loan Fund and 281 small community upgrading projects). (A full report on the March e-mail ACCA meeting can be downloaded from the ACHR website). Here are a few figures from the ACCA program so far :

ACCA PROGRAM UPDATE (as of November 2013)		(all figures in US\$)	
	ACCA Phase 1 (2008-2012)	ACCA Phase 2 (2013-2015)	TOTAL (as of May 2014)
Number of cities	165 cities	66 cities	231 cities
Total program budget	\$ 11 million	\$ 3.5 million	\$ 14.5 million
Big housing projects	111 projects (\$3,929,767)	37 projects (\$1,270,000)	148 projects (\$5199,767)
Regional fund loans	8 loans (\$242,000)	8 loans (\$266,500)	16 loans (\$508,500)
Small upgrading projects	1,185 projects (\$2,189,300)	450 projects (\$669,800)	1,635 projects (\$2,859,100)
City process support	158 cities (\$447,006)	--	158 cities (\$447,006)
Understanding Asian Cities	26 projects (\$344,577)	--	26 projects (\$344,577)
National coordination + activities	(\$1,369,961)	(\$511,300)	(\$1,881,261)
Disaster	30 projects (\$439,868)	5 projects (\$52,000)	35 projects (\$491,868)
Community savings + funds	projects in 23 cities (\$307,825)	--	projects in 23 cities (\$307,825)
Welfare seed funds	--	funds in 48 cities (\$96,000)	funds in 48 cities (\$96,000)
Special strategic support	--	8 projects (\$142,500)	8 projects (\$142,500)
TOTAL Budget Approved	\$ 8,322,584	\$3,047,300	US\$ 11,269,884

- The next regional meeting will be the Women's Bank anniversary and UPCA meeting in Sri Lanka in June 2014.
- The concluding ACCA meeting will probably be held at the end of 2014 (to be discussed in Sri Lanka)

What next? The generous donor support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which allowed us to dream up and actually implement a region-wide program on the scale of ACCA, is now coming to an end. But you can be sure that your champions in the ACHR secretariat have been hard at work exploring other funding possibilities and developing project proposals to carry on, including proposals to DFID's BRACED Program (with SDI, already rejected), to Misereor for CAN's work in the region (approved!), to USAID's Development Innovations Ventures Program (also rejected), to the SAARC Development Fund (in process) and to the Cities Alliance's Catalytic Fund to support citywide mapping and information (also in process).

Bob Buckley's World Bank report on ACCA: Back in 2012, Bob Buckley was hired by the World Bank to write a review of the ACCA Program, its finance mechanisms and its approach to slum upgrading. The paper was published in August 2013 and subsequently read widely within the World Bank. The paper described our program in refreshingly positive terms. We all hope that a big global institution like the World Bank might learn something from Bob's report and find ways to work more for the poor and to support the kind of people-driven solutions that ACCA shows are possible. Here is an excerpt from Bob's executive summary:

"The analysis in the paper compares ACCA's approach to the provision of housing and infrastructure in low-income areas, to more common ways of managing slum upgrading and housing finance. The analysis shows that, in the countries where the macroeconomic and institutional context exclude the urban poor from financial solutions and access to services, the community finance mechanisms implemented through ACCA and the creation of community development funds offer a reliable alternative in the provision of housing and infrastructure for low-income communities. This alternative does not aim to replace already existing institutional and financial structures, but through its incremental process, promotes deep transformational and systemic changes. The program achieves this through relatively simple steps, but is conceptually elaborate in that it addresses a composite nexus of market and government failures, which affect the urban poor and diminish the dynamism and livability of the cities where they live."

NEWS FROM THE DECENT POOR PROGRAM

ACHR's Decent Poor Program is entering its third year, with new projects in 8 countries so far. Inspired by a similar program pioneered in Thailand, the Decent Poor program is a tool to help communities and community networks to develop their own systems for ensuring that even the very poorest community members will not be excluded from taking part in the upgrading and housing initiatives being developed in their settlements, even if they cannot afford to take loans or make payments for houses. The program begins with the premise that any urban poor housing process which excludes the poorest and most vulnerable is not solving problems but creating new ones. In our kind of slum upgrading, *everyone is in the boat*, no matter how much they can or can't afford to pay. The program allows community groups to explore a variety of alternative low-cost construction techniques to build houses for the poorest families, with a grant subsidy of only \$500 per family, and a ceiling of \$10,000 per country (20 grants). The program's total budget for 2014 is \$100,000, which includes \$80,000 from the Selavip Foundation and \$20,000 from ACHR. The Decent Poor Program was the subject of a lively discussion in Khon Kaen, Thailand, in February, during the first gathering for the IIED/ACHR Urban Poverty Study. Here are a few excerpts:

Boonlorm (Thailand) : I haven't seen one single program like this one that supports the people the world has forgotten about. This program does see them, and it reaches out to them. The program also allows us to know about other cases among our friends in other communities in the same city, in other cities and in other countries. The program offers these forgotten people a chance to stand up. Yesterday, we asked ourselves, can we get out of poverty? Yes we can! Once these forgotten people are given an opportunity, they can also stand up on their own and can step out of poverty. I feel a real pleasure to be part of this program.

Somsak (Cambodia) : We tried to develop the Decent Poor program in Cambodia in ways that spread out the opportunity as widely as possible. So each city got just one grant for one family. We also made the grant a little smaller, so 21 cities could get Decent Poor grants. But finally, many cities opted to make the grants even a little smaller, so that 30 or 35 families could be supported, using the money for only 20 (\$10,000). This is our way to "wake up" 17 cities.

Malee-Orn (Thailand) Everyone agrees to continue the program, but the question is, how to improve it? We shouldn't emphasize on the money part, but should focus on people. Our aim is not just to give money to people to improve their houses, but we want those people to be part of society. We want them to feel their own capacities. I think we need to look at this as a program to improve our society. How can we do that? We shouldn't just select more and more families and give them the money. In my case, our network doesn't care if we have to raise the funds ourselves to reach these poor families. But I don't want the recipients to feel that they are "receivers" - they have to have dignity and learn to give to others as well. Nobody can love others without loving and taking care of yourself. You can feel discouraged sometimes, and once you feel desperate, you will get poorer and poorer. We have to encourage people in this downward slide to look up and move forward. Whatever failures a person has passed through, he can always stand up again.



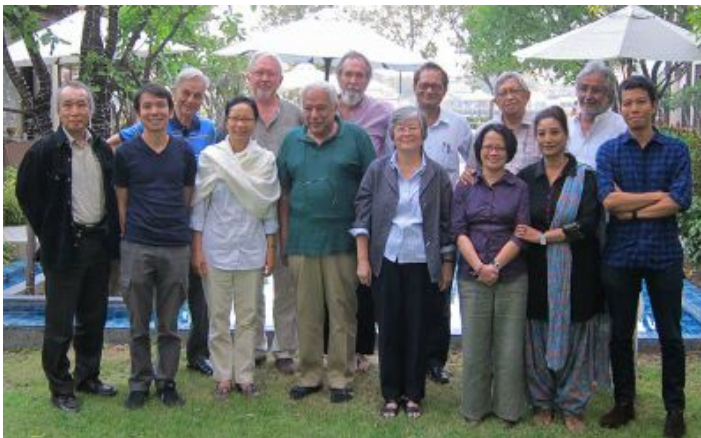
DECENT POOR PROGRAM 2013 - 2014						
Country	2013			2014		
	# of cities	#families	Budget	# of cities	#families	Budget
Sri Lanka	6 cities	20	10,000	6 cities	21	10,000
Mongolia	6 towns	20	10,000	9 cities	20	10,000
India	1 city	10	5,000	not yet		
Nepal	2 cities	20	10,000	5 cities	31	10,000
Bangladesh	2 cities	20	9,000	not yet		
Cambodia	17 cities	21	10,000	20 cities	25	10,000
Lao PDR	2 cities	16	8,000	no info	20	10,000
Myanmar	2 cities	10	5,000	not yet		
Viet Nam	1 city	20	10,000	not yet		
Thailand	no info	20	10,000	no info	20	10,000
Philippines	3 cities	17	8,500	not yet		
Indonesia	1 city	9	4,500	3 cities	28	10,000
Pakistan	0	0	0	3 cities	45	10,000
TOTAL	44 cities	203	\$ 100,000	47 cities (so far)	210 fam. (so far)	90,000 (so far)



ACHR NEWS BRIEFS

1. IIED - ACHR Poverty Study Update: For many years, most development agencies, UN organizations and governments around the world followed the one-dollar-a-day-per-person poverty line that was set long ago by the World Bank. If you were below that line, you were poor, and if you were above it, you were not poor. That standard was applied to every city and every country in the world, as well as to rural and urban, provincial and mega-city situations. As simple as that! Now, the WB has bumped the figure up to \$1.25, and that is now the world's official line for measuring poverty. Never mind that all cities and all countries have dramatically different costs for housing, food, transport, education and health care. And never mind that income is not the only thing that determines poverty, for many who earn more than \$1.25 a day live without access to secure land, or functioning toilets or clean water or enough nutrition to keep their health. In Delhi, for example, almost everyone earns more than \$1.25 a day and the city is proudly billed as being almost "poverty-free", yet there are slums and miserable poverty everywhere you look. Over the past few months, ACHR and IIED have teamed up to look at this issue of poverty lines and poverty definitions, and have engaged some of the world's poverty experts - the poor themselves! - to help us buck this dollar-a-day nonsense and find out what the real poverty lines in various Asian cities are. In February, the first meeting in Khon Kaen, Thailand, brought together community teams from Cambodia, Thailand, Nepal and Philippines, and the next one in Bangkok, in March, added teams from Vietnam and Sri Lanka. The Khon Kaen report is on the ACHR website, and the Bangkok report is on the way. Here's a teaser from Malee-Orn, a community leader from Khon Kaen, who had this to say about the World Bank's \$1.25-a-day poverty line:

"Yes, we could probably make our bodies just survive on that small amount - the poor are very resourceful, after all. But \$1.25 is not sufficient. It would mean that we could only eat one meal a day, and our children's brains would not develop fully for lack of proper nutrition, and they would not be able to get the education they need to move ahead in the world. With our stomachs empty, we would become more selfish, more frustrated, and our mental health would deteriorate. We wouldn't be able to sleep well at night, and besides our health going down, we would stop feeling good about life in general, stop finding anything to be happy about. In our heads, we would be so unhappy and confused. And it would mean that there would be big social problems as a consequence - the numbers of thieves would increase so fast! How can a society with such people in it go on?"



2. ACHR Seniors meet in Bangkok in December

2013: As ACHR moved towards the end of its 5-year ACCA Program, and marked the quarter-century mark in its history, some questions naturally came up: *What have we accomplished? What has changed in Asia? What are the new challenges? And what role should ACHR play in these new circumstances?* In the age-old tradition of so many Asian societies, the coalition's elders were therefore called together, to spend a couple of days together discussing these things and sharing their wisdom: Kirtee, Arif, Hosaka, Father Jorge, Lalith, Gregor, Lajana and Father Norberto joined the ACHR team, along with a sprinkling of ACHR's prominent "juniors" - May, Nad and Tee. Besides the decision to launch the Perween Rahman Fellowship (see story

above), the meeting didn't yield many concrete plans or specific answers. But it was a marvelous chance for this small group of experienced practitioners and old friends to mull things over. The meeting report is still on the "to do" list, but here are two nice bits:

- **Arif Hasan:** How do people house themselves today? They don't house themselves in the same manner as they used to house themselves in the 1970s and 80s. What has happened to the old settlements in which we worked in the 180s - in physical terms, in social terms, in political terms? Who are the new migrants? Are they different from the older migrants? Are they similar to the older migrants? What has happened to the villages and small towns in these past twenty years? When I answer these questions, I find a totally different world. I don't see any similarity between now and the period in which I started working. It's a very big change. And the question is, how do you respond to these changes? This whole new world, I feel is important to us, and perhaps we could discuss some of this, because I'm sure everyone else has observed these changes also - I don't think they are specific to Pakistan.
- **Supawut Boonmahathanakorn ("Tee"):** I think the way society has formed my generation makes us quite different than the earlier generation. My generation isn't fighting for human rights and against eviction so much any more, but we are fighting against the capitalism and individualism that are tearing apart our society.



3. Housing workshop in Sri Lanka with CAN in March 2014: The Government of India has funded a big project to build 50,000 houses in the war-torn Tamil areas of northern Sri Lanka. Kirtee Shah, who acted as advisor to the project, was able to convince



the Indian government to apply an "owner-driven" rather than "contractor-driven" solution, where the funds are passed directly to the bank accounts of individual families, so the families can build their own houses, with minimal room for the usual top-down corruption usually involved in such a large project. Several international organizations (including UN-Habitat) have divided up the area between themselves and are helping to facilitate the process. Kirtee invited a small team from the Community Architects Network (CAN) to observe the process and see whether they could help make this big housing process more participatory, and to help the families build better-quality houses and infrastructure in their war-destroyed villages, in ways that also help deal with their deep trauma. Ranjith from Sevanatha, and Mahavir from Hunnarshala Foundation in India helped organize the workshop. For more information, contact Kirtee at: kirtee@ksadps.com

4. Women's Bank will celebrate its 25th anniversary in June 2014: This big event will bring together some 5,000 Women's Bank members in Colombo for a celebration, seminar, field visits and politicking. A discussion is now on with the Urban Poor Coalition Asia (UPCA) to use the Women's Bank event as a venue for community leaders from many other countries who will join the event in Colombo to organize a parallel gathering. For more information, contact UPCA coordinator Ruby Papeleras at: rhaddad67@yahoo.com



6. Symposium on "Conservation of old cities" in Leh, May 14: Pimpim from the Tibet Heritage Fund (THF) writes with the alarming news the historic old town of Leh, where they have been restoring houses and infrastructure for many years, has been



officially designated as a slum, and the Ladakh Government has used that designation to apply for funds from the central government to upgrade the city. To our friends in THF, upgrading means working with the resident families to lovingly restore their ancient Tibetan-style houses and revive the building crafts that go into these beautiful buildings. But to the Ladakh government, upgrading means widening roads and replacing crumbling traditional buildings with modern concrete apartment blocks. The Prince Claus Fund (PCF), which is one of THF's sponsors, suggested the idea of organizing a symposium to highlight the importance of the old town and to invite all the stakeholders to have an open discussion about the government's upgrading plans. For more information, contact Pimpim at: permamarpo@yahoo.com.hk

7. DPU students in Cambodia in May 2014 : The partnership between the University College of London's Development Planning Unit (DPU), ACHR and the CAN network goes back to 2010, when the first field trip for DPU students was organized in Bangkok, in collaboration with CODI. In May 2011 and again in May 2012 and May 2013, groups of 50 DPU students came to Bangkok for intense two week workshops where they visited community upgrading projects and studied issues of urban development, community engagement and housing planning, working closely with community architects and local groups. Since then, Somsook has given several lectures at DPU, and DPU students and faculty have come to Thailand and the Philippines to explore possible mutual learning and support links between DPU students and community networks and their upgrading projects here in Asia. Last year, DPU, ACHR and CAN organized a "junior professional internship" program, which supported six DPU grads to spend six months getting on-the-ground experience working with community organizations on citywide slum upgrading projects in Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia and Philippines. Although the DPU is based in London, the course draws students from all over the world, and one of the reasons ACHR continues to invest in this ongoing cross-pollination is because many of these students will go back home afterwards and eventually become key professionals and officials steering the development in their own countries. This year in May (May 2-17), another batch of 30 DPU students came – to Cambodia this time - for a two-week program of field visits and study, with support from the CAN teams from Thailand and Cambodia. This year, there were 30 students, and the idea was to find areas where the studies would be beneficial to both the visiting students and the local communities they visit. For more information on the DPU - ACHR collaboration, please contact ACHR.



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8. SDI Nominated for Nobel Peace Prize : The stunning good news from our friends in Slum/Shack Dwellers International is that SDI has been nominated for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize (prizes are announced in December 2014). The nomination came from Sweden's Minister for Public Administration and Housing, and received high-level political support from Norway and South Africa. In his letter supporting the SDI nomination, Billy Cobbet, the director of Cities Alliance, wrote that "SDI has played a critical and positive role in re-shaping the global debate around slums and slum-dwellers, demonstrating that they are not only an essential part of the solution, but also the originators of practical and innovative solutions. SDI forces governments, mayors, ministers, and presidents - as well as multi-lateral and bilateral organizations - to recognize slum dwellers as citizens, neighbors and future mayors. It is also worth recording that the majority of SDI members are women, a powerful fact also represented in its local, national and global leadership profiles." The press release on the SDI website puts this news in perspective: "According to UN Habitat figures, slum populations are growing by a staggering 25 million people per year, and by 2050, more than half the population in the developing world will live in urban slums. Urban poverty is thus the radical new face of inequality. Most of the mushrooming new slums in Asia and Africa are not even on any official map. SDI has been promoting an international alliance and partnership between slum dwellers organizations on three continents delivering housing, water and sanitation and other facilities to millions of people. through a strategy that is based on cooperation, not confrontation." *For more information, visit the SDI website: www.sdinet.org*

9. And more laurels for Jockin from Canadian philanthropists: We've also learned that Jockin has been honored with another award for his work as a social entrepreneur with SDI. The Skoll Foundation, which was set up by Jeffrey Skoll, the Canadian billionaire who founded the internet auction firm eBay, presents the Skoll Awards for Social Entrepreneurship each year to "transformative leaders who are disrupting the status quo, driving large-scale change, and cracking the code on issues that matter the most to humanity." Each awardee receives \$1.25 million to scale up his work and increase its impact. They also gain leverage through their long-term participation in a global community of visionary leaders and innovators dedicated to solving the world's most pressing problems. Jockin and the other six awardees were honored at the 11th Annual Skoll World Forum in Oxford, April 9-11. *For more info, check out the website: www.skollfoundation.org*



ACHR SAYS GOODBYE TO FATHER BEBOT



On May 13, we got the sad news from May Domingo that Father Norberto Carcellar - a long-time friend of ACHR - had died that morning, in his room at the Vincentian seminary on Tandang Sora Avenue, in Quezon City, where the Homeless Peoples Federation Philippines has had its headquarters for many years. Father Norberto (or "Father Bebot" as he was affectionately known inside the Philippines) devoted his energies to the poor during the whole course of his long career as a Catholic priest. But in the late 1980s, he made a big shift from running church-based welfare programs among the waste-pickers who lived around the garbage dump in Payatas to supporting the development of self-help savings groups, which began showing the waste-pickers that they could solve their own problems of housing, livelihood, children and health through their own savings and organization. These self-help savings groups among the waste-pickers began reaching out to poor communities in other parts of Manila and in other cities, and in 1989, they all came together in Payatas for their first assembly, and the Homeless People's Federation was born.

That community process that Father Bebot helped start in Payatas is now a national people's movement. The Homeless People's Federation is active in 33 cities, and uses community-managed savings as the core strategy of a community-led development process which includes citywide mapping, land acquisition, community

upgrading, house construction, disaster planning and rehabilitation, city-fund management and partnership with government. Father Norberto, as the director of PACSII, the federation's NGO partner, has played a very difficult and delicate role of supporting all these activities and nurturing all this growth, through good times and bad, while standing quietly at the back, and letting the community leaders do the talking. Here are some remarks Father made at the ACHR "Seniors" meeting in Bangkok, last December:

"When the Homeless People's Federation was first established in 1998, it focused only on activities within the Philippines. But now the federation helps manage many regional activities also - like UPCA, ACCA, CLIFF, SDI. Many of the communities in Asia have a high expectation of the Philippines federation, and they come to Ruby and Sonia for many things now. They are always willing and they have a lot of energy, but I think they are being stretched too far. Because they have plenty of local problems to deal with also. How are they going to manage all that? I don't want them to get burned out. There is part of me that wants to find new ways to support and prepare them for these expanding demands. But there is another part that feels it is time for me to retire - I am 63 years old now! - or to find a new role for myself. But when I talk with the leaders, they are asking me, 'Just be there, just be around - that's enough.' And that's OK with me."