13 THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY ARCHITECTS

After years of hibernation, ACHR's regional program of support to young professionals has come back to life, thanks partly to an infusion of support from the Rockefeller Foundation, partly to the many new projects being implemented with ACCA support, and partly to the energy and enthusiasm of two Thai architects, Chawanad Luansang ("Nad") and Supawut Boonmahathanakorn ("Tee"), who are helping to coordinate the involvement of community architects in the housing and upgrading projects being implemented around Asia - both under the ACCA Program and otherwise. The Rockefeller grant is now finished, but a new funding support from Misereor is now helping the Community Architects Network (CAN) to continue their work providing technical support to communities around Asia. Here are some notes from Nad and Tee :

TECHNICAL SUPPORT FOR A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DESIGN PROCESS

When we talk about doing citywide slum upgrading in the whole Asia region, we need lots of architects, para-architects and community-based builders to work with people in hundreds of communities and to help them develop and implement their upgrading plans. We've been trying in different ways to link with groups of young architects and professionals in various countries and to help them work with communities - on both ACCA-supported upgrading and housing projects and on other community initiatives. The movement is becoming quite active now, and lots of things have been happening over the past few years, as more and more countries open up this process. Of the 19 Asian countries involved in the ACCA Program, 18 have active groups of community architects now: Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Indonesia, Philippines, Fiji, Nepal, Mongolia, India, China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Japan and Malaysia. So far, we have focused our work on four activities to support, strengthen and expand this community architecture movement in Asia :

1 **Building groups of local architects to work with people, in each country.** Many countries don't have groups of local community architects to work with the communities yet. So in some countries, we have assisted by organizing pilot community-upgrading and housing design workshops that are tied to actual projects, with support from the local NGOs (in Nepal, Lao, Myanmar, Fiji, Penang, Bangladesh). An important part of these projects is linking with faculties of architecture and young professional people in that place, and inviting them to participate in these projects and to learn how to work with communities. After that, we try to support the young people to keep working with the communities.

2 **Organizing training seminars and lectures :** In several countries, we have given lectures at architecture faculties (in Vietnam, Mongolia, Lao PDR) and organized hands-on training seminars with students, young professionals and community people about how to work with communities, to support a community-driven housing design process (in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Fiji, Bangladesh, Philippines). This is not just to develop technical support skills, but to show these young people how to make communities become the designers and technicians of a design process which belongs to people (community design workshops in Vientiane, Phnom Penh and Yangon; earth-block making workshops in Vinh, Phnom Penh and Ulaanbaatar; a community mapping workshop in Fiji, a bamboo construction workshop in Davao, a slum-upgrading architectural competition in Surabaya, regional mapping workshops in Yogyakarta and Valenzuela.)

3 **Building a regional network of community architects in Asia,** to share their experiences, share their knowledge and assist each other in different ways. In June 2010, we organized a 5-day regional gathering of 100 community architects and community builders in Chiang Mai, which gave a chance for all these groups to meet, present their work, compare notes and begin to set joint plans as a regional network of community architects. (*Full transcripts of the interesting presentations at this meeting can be downloaded from the ACHR website*.) Many of these groups also travel to join in the design workshops and training seminars in other countries. One of the first activities of this new regional Community Architects Network (CAN) has been to support fledgling community architect groups in each country with small seed funds of $5,000 per country. So far, community architecture groups in nine countries have received this support and are using it in a variety or ways to initiate pilot projects with communities or to build their own national community architects networks. In some countries, these groups already existed (as in the Philippines, Cambodia, Pakistan, Indonesia and Vietnam) and in some countries they are just getting started (as in Lao PDR, Myanmar, Fiji and Mongolia). These groups can include young architects, architecture students and professors, engineers, planners and community builders.

4 **Sharing experiences :** We are also working to document the work of community architects around Asia and to help disseminate their stories, experiences and ideas through various media, including publications (books on community architecture work by key groups around the region; handbooks on mapping, community planning, bamboo construction and the poor in historic cities),documentary films about the work of community architects, an e-news letter on the work of CAN members around Asia, and the setting up of a regional community architects blog and website.

▲ *During the citywide riferside community planning workshop in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in April 2014.*

▲ *During one of the heritage mapping workshops in the historic towns of Techo and Thankot in Nepal, in October 2013.*

▲ *Citywide mapping and community planning in Tuntone Ward, in Mandalay, Myanmar, in May 2012.*

▲ *The citywide mapping and slum up-grading workshops in Comilla, Bangladesh, in Feb-March, 2014.*

> **I think it is very important for community people to have a space to share their ideas and to exchange the knowledge about houses and settlement planning which they already possess, and to visualize what can happen in the future when they think and plan together - as a community rather than only as separate households. The question for architects is what kind of design process can bring people in a community into this kind of dialogue and can create consensus about what form they would like their community to take? And how can professionals like us facilitate this kind of discussion?** *(Chawanad Luansang)*