

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 HPPF 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: khkabar@bracu.ac.bd

