

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. If 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)

