



FJI

HOUSING AND LAND PROBLEMS EVEN IN PARADISE

The beautiful island nation of Fiji may be a hot destination for affluent surfers and beach-lovers, but it has big problems of poverty, housing and land, not to mention the coups d'etat, ethnic strife and political turmoil of recent years. There have been growing numbers of evictions in Fiji in recent years - evictions of farmers from their rural land and of urban squatters from their informal settlements in the cities. Poor communities in Fiji are not much different than in other Asian countries. Many residents are rural migrants who come to the city looking for work, but can't find affordable housing, and so they occupy small plots of open land (40 - 80 square meters) and build their own houses. Conditions can be pretty bad in these settlements, but many communities are slowly making improvements using their own resources. In Jittu Estate, one of the largest slums in Suva, the community built a concrete walkway in 2005 and began looking for ways to bring piped water into the settlement. These early initiatives by community members themselves might have been lacking in technical know-how and support, but they demonstrated the strong desire people have to improve their living conditions.

ACCA in FIJI

PROJECT CITIES (total 1)

- Suva

SMALL PROJECTS

Small projects approved : 5
In number of cities : 1
Total budget approved : \$15,000

BIG PROJECTS

(none proposed yet)

IMPLEMENTING GROUPS

The ACCA project in Fiji is being implemented by the People's Community Network (PCN), with support from the Suva-based NGO ECREA (Ecumenical Center for Research, Education and Advocacy).

NEW SAVINGS PROCESS, NEW NETWORK

Fiji is the newest member in the distinguished club of poor community savings and credit movements in Asia. In November 2006, the first daily savings groups were launched in a few informal settlements in Suva, with support from the NGO ECREA (Ecumenical Center for Research, Education and Advocacy). In January, 2007, these communities came together with several others in a workshop and decided to organize themselves into a network, which they called the People's Community Network (PCN). It was all very new, but one idea everyone understood was that this was their first step in breaking their dependence on outsiders for whatever things they need. A committee was formed comprising two representatives from each settlement, and the committee began meeting once a month to review the savings process and discuss issues that came up in community meetings. The network has now grown to include 50 poor communities in the Suva region, all with active savings groups, with about 15,000 members and combined savings of US\$ 60,000. The savings and network process has also been bolstered by friends in Asia, through both visits to Fiji (by teams from ACHR which included Thai and Philippines community leaders and two community architects) and exchange trips which have allowed community leaders from Fiji to visit community initiatives in Thailand, Cambodia and the Philippines.

This energetic and hard-working new network, which is expanding quickly into other cities, is working to design and test alternatives to eviction in which the poor themselves take the lead in securing land and building better housing for their families - on land where they are already staying or else very close by. Two important network-initiated housing projects are now underway (see box below). As a sign of recognition of its work, the network has been invited to sit on a high-level government committee that has been set up to deal with the problems of housing for the urban poor. The process was slowed a little by difficulties in the relationship between the network and the NGO which had so far been its key support partner. But the network is now in the process of negotiating a new relationship with ECREA, which may be healthier in the long run and allow the network more autonomy.

The People's Community Network has been using the ACCA program a little slowly at first, and hasn't been sure quite how to use the tools the ACCA Program offers. When the network proposed to ACCA to use big project funds to buy a piece of very expensive land in one case, the ACCA committee felt it was important to look for other alternatives where government provides the land, and that proposal was put on hold. And shortly afterwards, as if on cue, the network scored a major land breakthrough when it was able to negotiate almost-free government land in the Lagilagi community, where they are now developing Fiji's first community-driven on-site housing upgrading project (so far without support from ACCA).

First land breakthrough for the network at LAGILAGI :



The People's Community Network's first on-site housing upgrading project is now underway at the Lagilagi community, which is part of Jittu Estate, Fiji's largest squatter settlement with over 2,000 households. With support from the network, 100 squatter families living in Lagilagi have negotiated to collectively lease the 2.8 hectares of government land they had been squatting on, for a nominal rent of US\$235 per year, for 99 years. The families will own their houses, but the land will belong collectively to the whole community, and if anyone wants to move out, they'll have to sell their house back to the community, which can then re-sell it to a new family.

This project is a first-ever partnership between the government, the community, the network and the support NGO. The project will combine funds from three sources: the government will contribute US\$ 659,000 as a subsidy, the

people will contribute the labor and half the cost of the houses through their savings, and the NGO ECREA will contribute US\$ 612,000 (using funds from Misereor). The community is now in the process of preparing its project plans for the new housing, which should take about three or four months, and plan to start work in December 2009.

Their two-story house model will cost US\$ 11,300, of which half will be paid for by the people (US\$ 5,650, on installments at \$8.50 per week for 12 years, through their savings groups) and the other half will be paid for as a subsidy by the government. The money the people repay will become a revolving fund which will eventually enable more houses to be built. Everyone is hoping that if this pilot project works well, it can be expanded to upgrade the rest of Jittu Estate and duplicated in other squatter settlements around Suva, wherever secure land tenure can be negotiated.

CITY: SUVA

Lami-Suva-Nausori Corridor, Fiji Islands

Fiji, like so many countries in Asia, is a study in urbanization which is happening at break-neck speed. A hundred years ago, it's capitol city Suva was a sleepy British-colonial outpost, but today half the sprawling metropolitan region which includes three municipalities: Suva, Lami and Nausori. There are 82 large informal settlements around the city, where nearly half the city's population live. Many of these settlements began 20 or 30 years ago in remote jungle areas far outside the city, where nobody bothered much about the land. But as the city has expanded into the surrounding jungles, many of these settlements now find themselves in prime locations and facing eviction from the land which as now become valuable real estate. 50 of these communities now have active savings groups and are part of the People's Community Network (PCN), which is implementing the ACCA project in Suva, in collaboration with their NGO supporter ECREA.

EVICTIONS IN SUVA : One of the main issues being faced by communities in the network is eviction. If settlements are on government land, they can sometimes negotiate to be given the right to stay, but if the land is privately owned, evictions are likely and they happen all the time. If the land is under "native" ownership, the people are usually allowed to stay "at the will of the owners" but without any legal title. If communities are unable to secure land tenure where they already are, the government or the Housing Authority sometimes relocates them to the outskirts of the city where there are few schools, no transport and no job opportunities. The ACCA project in Suva is seeking to demonstrate and scale up a community-managed alternative process for resolving the serious land and housing problems of those being evicted or relocated.

SURVEY : Several socio-economic surveys of squatter settlements in Suva have been done over the years, by the Ministry for Housing, by ECREA, by UNDP and by some individual researchers at the university. A lot of the information they gathered is not comparable, though, because it was gathered at different times and for different purposes and according to different sampling systems. In 2008, the PCN surveyed five of the largest squatter settlements in Suva, with support from ECREA, but have not yet conducted a city-wide survey.

SMALL PROJECTS : The ACCA small project funds are being managed by the network, which passes the funds to the community savings groups as grants. The projects are all being built entirely by community people themselves, who also contribute to the project budgets. Two of the three projects so far are in process and one has been completed.

- **Biliwai Community (300 households) Community Network Meeting Hall.** Total budget US\$ 24,000 (which includes \$10,000 from ACCA, \$6,000 from PCN and \$8,000 from other sources).
- **Wailea Community (1,000 households) Paved walkway construction.** Total project budget US\$ 7,000 (which includes \$3,000 from ACCA, \$2,000 from PCN and \$2,000 from other sources).

SMALL PROJECT : Construction of a paved access road which links 9 poor communities (1,600 households) in the Wailoku area of Suva.

For 60 years, they had only been reachable by a mucky, unpaved road which school buses and taxis refused to enter. When the nine poor communities in the Wailoku area joined the PCN and started saving, they discussed the problems they faced in their communities and what they'd like to fix. Priority number one was to pave the road. They formed committees to plan the project, purchase materials, supervise construction and manage the finances, and began work in October 2009. They planned to finish the road in two months, but half way through, the central government's Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs came to help, so they were able to complete the project in just six weeks. All the labor and meals for workers were provided free by members from the nine communities benefiting from the road building project.

BUDGET : The total project budget for the road came to US\$ 20,000. The ACCA funds ended up comprising only 30% of this budget. The network was able to leverage the rest from several different sources (\$6,000 from ACCA, \$4,000 from community members, \$7,000 from the Ministry of Multi-Ethnic Affairs, \$500 from St. John's Primary School, \$1,750 from the Randwick Parish in Australia, and \$800 from the PCN).



CITY INFORMATION :

URBAN POVERTY IN SUVA

| | |
|--|--|
| Total urban population | 248,571 households (870,000 people) |
| Urban poor population | 111,429 households (390,000 people) |
| Number of slums | 82 settlements |
| % population in slums | 45% |
| Latest survey (5 settlements only) in 2008 | |

SAVINGS

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Date savings started | November 2006 |
| Savings groups | 50 groups in 50 communities |
| Savings members | 15,000 members |
| Total savings | US\$ 60,000 |
| CDF started | not yet |

ACCA BUDGET APPROVED SO FR :

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Small projects (5) | \$ 15,000 |
| City process support | \$ 3,000 |
| <i>no big project proposed yet</i> | |



STANDING TOGETHER : "One important part of the project was getting people to believe in themselves. In the past, many of our Wailoku leaders felt that any development in their communities should be the responsibility of donors. But this kind of thinking only created dependency and stifled our initiative and creativity. The projects at Wailoku and Lagilagi have proven to the communities that if we lead the way with our own planning and resources, the donors and government will follow us. These projects have also shown us that we'll never get anywhere if each community only thinks about itself. We're all related, and we can only make a better future for our children if we all stand together and work together." (Semiti Qalowasa, PCN President)