

KOREA

Searching for alternatives to policies causing eviction in the name of “redevelopment” . . .



Korea is considered one of Asia's most highly-developed countries, but in the capitol city of Seoul, “development” means demolishing the affordable housing which already exists, evicting the poor tenants and turning over the land to big contractors to redevelop as high-rise real estate developments, with super-highways running between them. This is government policy, and every area of the city can be demolished and rebuilt this way - even nice old neighborhoods that seem to have nothing wrong with them. All this redevelopment generates a very high GDP, but the poor are really suffering, because those new condo blocks are far too expensive for the poor and low-income renters who used to live there. Growing numbers of poor tenants evicted from housing redevelopment areas in Korean cities are being forced to live in crowded, far-away and sub-standard rental accommodation or to make their own dwellings in informal “vinyl house” squatter settlements, named for the flimsy and flammable materials the houses are made from - some sheltering under the tunnel-like plastic greenhouses intended for raising flowers and vegetables. About 50,000 households are living in these informal communities in Korea (more than half of them in Seoul), built on leftover bits of public and private land, on low-lying and flood prone areas. Only 40% of the houses in these settlements have toilets, and many are vulnerable to floods and fires and poorly protected against Korea's harsh winters.

The one ACCA project in Korea so far, which is being implemented by the Seoul-based NGO Asian Bridge, is being used to bring these informal vinyl house communities together, help them build a network, start savings, start undertaking small upgrading projects and use their “group power” to gradually begin to develop their own solutions to the serious land, housing and infrastructure problems they face. The network is now expanding to the neighboring cities of Gwacheon, Busan and Daejeon, and more ACCA projects are in the pipeline.

Five of these vinyl house communities in Seoul have used the \$3,000 grants from ACCA to implement small projects in their settlements to lay drains and water pipes, pave lanes, install briquette boilers for heating, repair flood-damaged houses and build community centers and recycling stations. The communities have also taken part in international exchange visits to other Asian countries, through the ACHR/ACCA process, where they have learned more about the importance of community savings and the potential for even the most poor and marginalized communities to bring about change in their lives.

Their dream is to eventually build their own housing, rather than move into box-like units in the faceless high-rise apartment blocks which are increasingly the form which both public rental housing and market-sector housing in Korea takes. But the astronomical price of land is a major obstacle, and few want to move to remote sites far from the city, where land might be more affordable. In the mean time, the network is looking at the possibility of using the ACCA big project funds to set up a revolving loan fund to finance housing improvements where the people live now.

The network scored a considerable triumph in June 2009, when their 2-year court case against the government resulted in a Supreme Court judgment which allows them to register their vinyl house communities as legal addresses - an important prerequisite for getting legal water and electricity connections and accessing public entitlements like education and health care. The network has also begun organizing dialogues with local government about the various problems they face and have been successful in negotiating government subsidies for flood relief and private-sector fuel and cash donations.



▲ Two vinyl house dwellers proudly flash the legal address registration cards they fought so long for.



▲ The people at Sancheong laid a water supply system in their community, with ACCA support.



▲ The 35 families in the Jopsi community installed fuel briquette burners to heat their houses in winter.



▲ The Joenwon community used a \$3,000 ACCA small project grant to build a new community center.

ACCA in SOUTH KOREA :

PROJECT CITIES (total 1)

- Seoul

SMALL PROJECTS

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

BIG PROJECT

Big projects approved :	1
In number of cities :	1
Total budget approved :	\$40,000

SAVINGS (only in Seoul)

Savings groups :	4
Savings members :	54
Total savings :	\$5,000
CDFs active in :	0 cities

IMPLEMENTING GROUPS

The ACCA project in Korea is being implemented by the Asian Bridge, a Seoul-based NGO that was set up in 2003 to support evictees and poor tenants with housing problems and to work with them to find sustainable solutions to Korea's urban poor housing problems. Asian Bridge works in close collaboration with the network of “vinyl house” communities in Seoul and surrounding cities.

Reopening the DIALOGUE on eviction and redevelopment :

The secretariat of Citynet is now in Yokohama, and when that city's term ends in two years, the Seoul Municipality is keen to host the new secretariat. To win this honor, the city will want to present itself as a progressive, respectable and pro-poor city. But the reality is that Seoul is a city where massive evictions continue to happen in the name of Korea's contractor-driven style of urban redevelopment. So the Citynet link presents a strategic opportunity to open up a dialogue on the issues of eviction, redevelopment and urban poor housing in this difficult city. ACHR has been working with Citynet to plan a regional workshop, in which the Seoul Municipality, Citynet, ACHR and many groups from around the region can take part, to show alternatives, to link with the local Korean groups and communities on the ground, and to move this issue forward in a more proactive manner. The workshop “Inclusive Cities: Developing Asia's Urban Future with People” will be organized some time in the later half of 2011.