

# Visit to Fiji

## Third Visit

This was the third visit of ACHR teams to Fiji. The first in 2007 saw the reorganizing and strengthening of the local people's network - PCN. The second visit paved the way for community up-grading process under ACHR's ACCA program.

During this third visit the focus was on "information and money" to strengthen the community process. i.e. practical workshops and in field experiences ... in the form of community surveys and participatory planning by communities. The community savings process was extended beyond just savings for housing to a new level of savings **and loans** ( credit) through workshops, presentations and practical in-field starting processes. The third level of interchange was interaction with various levels of Fiji government; from local administrations through to the national level.

The teams from ACHR were also able to have intensive dialogue with the PCN leaders and suggest ways in which ( from experience in Asia) structures may be modified to strengthen the organization, upscale links between communities and broaden participation of the grassroots members in management and activities.

## Visiting Team

From ACHR Sec.  
Somsook Boonyabancha, Maurice Leonhardt,  
Community Architects : Hugo Moline, Nad Luangsung  
Community leaders from Homeless Peoples Federation  
Philippines – Ruby Haddad and Celia Tauson and supporter  
Fr Norberto Carcella.

## Fiji Hosts

People's Community Network Fiji.  
National Ministry of Housing Land  
Environment,  
City Administrations of Ba, Suva,



## Summary

1. Community Surveys, Mapping and Participatory Planning
2. Beyond Savings for Housing, to Savings and Loans and bringing women into more active participation.
3. Government Policy level; Engaging National and local government
4. Discussions with the People's Community Network

## I. Community Surveys, Mapping and Participatory Planning

In order to organize and negotiate effectively, it is important that communities have as much information as possible about their city, community and members. In this visit, 2 community architects (CA's) – Hugo Moline from Australia, and Nad Luangsung from Thailand, preceded the main teams visit to Fiji by 1 week to help communities compile information and maps of their communities and cities. The two were accompanied by 3

young local CA's who could carry the experience forward once the regional CA's departed.



Local architects photos left

In Lautoka, workshops and practicum's were held. The first mapping exercise enabled the community members of the city of Lautoka to make a city map detailing where present squatter communities were located and who owned the land.. They also mapped vacant land and its ownership for potential development or relocation if necessary. Base maps of the city were given through cooperation of the city administration. Google maps were also helpful.

The second maps were drawn up when community members met with the CA's who helped them map their own community. Large-scale maps were drawn up with information detailed about how many households, incomes, work, children, affordability to payback housing loans etc. People were also encouraged to use their imagination to design a site to suit their needs. (they later included community farming concepts where possible). The larger community maps were some 2 meters by 2 meters with location and details of over 200 households.

Later when potential land for relocation was identified ( and agreed to by city officials - more later), community members were taken through a workshop on participatory planning. People went through exercises to understand spatial concepts of site planning and affordable house design. Once completed, they set out to design their future community, to present to and negotiate with city authorities.



Community explain the mapping process to other members of the People's Community Network

At a network meetings in Lagi Lagi ( central Suva), the local CA's and community members were able to present their plans and process to a wider audience of community members from other cities. The impact was quite powerful, as PCN members could immediately see the necessity for such information. Local mappers were very confident that each community was capable of drawing up their own community and city maps, and many signed up with local CA's to quickly start the mapping process in their communities.

### More information on CA's in Fiji at the following websites:

#### Informal Settlements Upgrading and Network Building in Fiji

<http://suva-projects.blogspot.com/>

a record of upgrading work done together by dwellers in informal settlements in Fiji, the PCN (People's Community Network) in Fiji, and ACHR (the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights), alongside network building with local architects, academics and students.

The Informal Settlements of Fiji at <http://www.informalism.net/>



Hugo Moline and Semiti from PCN

## 2. Beyond Savings for Housing, to Savings and Loans and bringing women into more active participation.

Before the visit the PCN had informed ACHR of the need to broaden the savings process in Fiji to include LENDING for members needs such as in emergencies and for income generation activities. For this reason, included in the visiting team were community savings experts from the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines. Experience in Asia indicates that the spread of lending from savings varies greatly from country to country depending on factors such land security, trustworthiness, mobility of families and many historical, cultural and socio-economic factors.



The Philippines team (Celia and Ruby) started with a workshop in Suva ( *with 30 people – who were all treasurers of the Suva City Central Division*). Community members and PCN staff were encouraged to share their experiences with savings up to the present time. The Philippines team then gave an overview of their own experiences. From here it was agreed by PCN members that they would like to expand their process to include LOANS. The Philippines team was careful for the PCN members to tailor a loans process to suit Fiji conditions, and proceeded to devise a process with the local members. By the third day, the locals were confident enough to start. later in the western division city of Lautoka, the Philippines group went to the field with locals to start the savings and credit process in Fiji.

Members who attended the workshops in Suva were able to present their learnings in a very articulate way to other communities who could not attend in Suva.

As part of a process of strengthening women's participation in the PCN, the loans process in Fiji will be organized and conducted by the women. The name recommended for the savings and credit process is "Melumane" - the phrase / word has multiple meanings - from "we love each other" to "be as one" (united).



### 3. Government Policy level; Engaging National and Local government

PCN consultant Fr Kevin Barr (left below) has for many years had links to national and local government as a strong advocate for the poor and for Fiji's wage-earners. Fr Kevin has written to ACHR

*".... in October last year you (ACHR) invited our Minister for Local Government and Housing as well as Semiti Qalowasa (Director of PCN) and myself to come to Bangkok and sign a Memorandum of Agreement between ACCA, PCN and the Fiji government.*

*These visits or interchanges have been very beneficial not only in assisting and inspiring us but also in changing the attitudes of those in authority – our government and City Councils. In particular our Minister's visit to Bangkok last year helped him to understand at first hand what we have been proposing to our government over the past few years. He came back with new ideas and new energy to work with us in changing the mindset of people in government and City Councils. He is very much on side with the idea of encouraging people's participation in their development.*

*... At a recent Squatter Summit we had speeches from the Administrators of various towns and cities and the ideas they expressed were very different from the ideas they would have expressed four or five years ago. "*



At the first meeting, officials presented their experiences with “squatter settlements” in Fiji. It was reported that since his visit to Bangkok, the present Minister has enabled squatters secure tenure at a number of sites in Suva. It was reported that Fiji's present land ownership situation (with 90% of land tied up in Native Custodian Trusts) has inhibited re-distribution of land to the poor, (albeit having some advantages for the poor and native population in other ways). The Minister has plans to devise a system of incentives to enable or circumvent the disadvantage to “squatters” by enabling long term leases. The Ministry also made a presentation of an Agricultural scheme / project to help poorer rural Fijians; in recognition that city squatter communities expand through poorer rural migrants to the city in search of employment and economic opportunities.

At the second meeting - (participants comprised the Minister and his personal staff) discussion centered on the fine tuning and implementation of MOA signed in Bangkok last year as well as the potential to establish an institution resembling CODI (Thailand) in Fiji which would, like CODI, be attached to the Ministry, but with a certain independence in operation.

The third meeting with government officials took place later in the small town of Ba (west coast) where administrators from surrounding townships were invited to share their experiences working with “squatter settlements”. PCN also shared their experience of advocating for the poor and their attempts at a new bottom up approach. ACHR explained the ACCA - city-wide upgrading program to the officials and invited them through their “squatter communities” to submit proposals. Most were keen to start setting up City Development Fund structures to enable participation. This would involve committees of community representatives, government officials, NGO supports and professionals / academics forming a new CDF for the re-planning development of “squatter settlements” on a city-wide scale. The Administrator of Ba (appointed “Mayor”), then accompanied the team on field visits to “squatter settlements” and urban poor projects around the city of Ba. He joked many times that he was ready to start projects with ACHR and PCN “from tomorrow”.

Both Fr Barr and the Ministry have expressed keenness not only to cooperate with ACCA / ACHR in the future, but have also expressed that “Fiji can provide a model for other Pacific Island Countries. *“We can share our experiences with them and spread the good news”.*

## 4. Discussions with the People's Community Network

Throughout the 5 days visit the ACHR team was hosted by the PCN. During this time and at specific meetings there was time for sharing ideas and suggestions on the future directions for the poor of Fiji. Following are some of the ideas to consider - from both the PCN and ACHR.

Points for each to consider:

1. The growth of the PCN over the past years: especially the role of PCN co-ordinator; PCN is larger and has more activities; the interaction of PCN with government has greatly increased: this requires perhaps thinking about new roles and management structures to facilitate the increased work.

2. In interactions with government it would be good if more community people and women could participate - attend - to learn from the interactions and ensure transparent understanding.

3. Greater interaction with government requires a diplomacy and cooperation, but not at the expense of co-option by government. There is still work to be done to enable government to understand the benefits and dynamics of the new bottom up approach.



4. PCN and community leaders may need to link more and more communities together in city-wide and nation-wide networks to improve conditions for horizontal learning, negotiations and solidarity. This may require encouragement, facilitation new forms of communication and even a stipend for transport (allowance).

5. PCN is encouraged to submit proposals to ACCA for a least 2 more cities in the very near future. The formation of CDF's in more cities is encouraged.

6. The newly formed Women's Savings and Credit facility should enable a stronger women's presence in the PCN structure and bring another layer to its management structure.. We should also be sensitive to the traditional roles of men and women in Fiji culture.

7. PCN and the Ministry should be aware of the CLIFF program of infrastructure upgrading and be encouraged - with support and cooperation from ACHR - to enquire and propose participation.

8. The local, young Community Architects should be encouraged to participate in many mapping exercise with the communities; The regional CA's - particularly Nad and Hugo (Anna if possible) will make plans to come and help on more frequent occasions.

9. A team from the Women's Savings and Credit group and supporters should make an exchange visit to the Philippines in June 2011 to share with and learn from the experience of the Homeless People's Federation in the Philippines. The SDI "Hub" in SE Asia can support this.

10. The Ministry, PCN and the ACHR team each suggested that the urban programs could reasonably easily be extended to some rural areas. Some principles would remain the same and some programs would specially relate to rural conditions.

