



## UPCA fund : First \$6,000 loan capital comes from Asia's urban poor . . .

Before the UPCA launch in the Philippines, an idea was floated of setting up a fund, which the UPCA would manage, as a symbol of collaboration and solidarity between the region's urban poor groups. The idea was that the fund would belong to poor community groups in Asia, would support their housing, land acquisition, upgrading and livelihood initiatives, and would help make their ongoing community process stronger, wider and clearer, with better negotiation power.

Instead of just talking, though, several community networks began gathering contributions from their savings members and brought fat envelopes of cash with them to the Philippines, to put in the collection box that was passed around during the meeting. The US\$5,622 that was collected may not be a huge sum, but it was symbolic because this seed capital for the new fund came entirely from the pockets of poor people around Asia - not from any donor or government.

That was just the start, but the idea has been to make participation in this fund something active, that all the groups in all the countries can take part in and contribute to. Later, it was agreed that a sum of US\$100,000 still available in the ACCA Regional Loan Fund would be added to this, for the UPCA coalition to manage collectively.



## A NEW REGIONAL PLATFORM FOR ASIA'S URBAN POOR COMMUNITY MOVEMENTS

One of the most exciting developments of the past year has been the emergence of a new initiative to bring together Asia's urban poor community networks and organizations into a new region-wide platform of sharing, linking, learning and support. In a development process dominated by professionals, even a program like ACCA, which is trying to build more equal working relationships between the poor and their support professionals and local governments, the poor can sometimes find their primary voice being drowned out by their more talkative and more confident professional partners. The launching of the Urban Poor Coalition Asia (UPCA) is an attempt to remedy this imbalance and to create a new space for the urban poor - at community, local, national and regional levels - to strengthen themselves, support each other, and bring their voices and ideas with greater strength into making the ACCA Program a better tool to support their own change process.

When we talk about *supply-driven* processes, we mean processes which start from the system and go down. These are the systems which overwhelmingly govern the world we live in and which characterize most development interventions. They are the systems we professionals are most comfortable with, and the ones we almost automatically fall into when doing things. But *demand-driven* processes reverse that conventional system by starting with the poor people on the ground - with their voices, their realities, their needs, their systems and their initiatives - and then going up. We talk a lot in ACCA about concepts like structural change and a citywide approach, but these abstract concepts may not have much meaning for community people initially. But when the poor come together to survey all the slums in their city, see what kinds of problems different settlements face, and then decide who should do some upgrading projects first, those very concrete activities of surveying, understanding and prioritizing are ways of bringing those big concepts down to the ground, through action, through projects, through concrete activities. Doing practical concrete things is the best way to reach down to the very roots of the community process, to get people organized, involved and active. And that is the real substance of the new Urban Poor Coalition Asia: not just a committee of super community leaders flying here and there, but a new way of using the combined strength and experience of the region's urban poor organizations to help make the community action process in each country stronger.

**UPCA LAUNCH IN QUEZON CITY :** The new coalition was launched in a big regional workshop and community fair in Quezon City, in March 2012. The four-day event was hosted by the Philippines Homeless People's Federation and brought together about 60 urban poor community representatives from 11 countries and another 1,000 from around the Philippines. To start with something concrete, the workshop began with field visits to five different cities, where the groups visited community-driven housing and upgrading projects, talked with the communities and local governments and exchanged ideas. Back in Quezon City, the groups from all 12 countries presented their community-driven development processes back home, discussed the new coalition, talked about issues, set some initial plans and elected a management committee to facilitate the UPCA process for the first year or two (which includes community leaders from 5 countries: Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Cambodia).

**DECLARATION BY ASIA'S URBAN POOR COMMUNITIES :** Any new movement needs to have a declaration, of course, and the UPCA's workshop launch culminated in a festive reading out of UPCA's own "Declaration of Commitment and Action." Afterwards, the declaration was signed by everyone in the hall, including the Mayor of Quezon City, the Secretary for the Department of the Interior and Local Government, and the president of the Social Housing Finance Corporation, who pledged their support for this new people-driven development. (the full text of the declaration can be downloaded from the ACHR website)

**DIALOGUE WITH KEY DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES :** One of the interesting parts of the UPCA launch event was a series of meetings that were organized with five international development agencies, in which the urban poor organizations met with key people in these agencies, introduced the new UPCA process and discussed possible collaborations. The meetings with World Bank, ADB, CDIA, UN-Habitat and Habitat for Humanity were a first step in building a new, friendly political space for the the real "experts" on poverty - the urban poor themselves - to dialogue with these agencies that are tasked with alleviating poverty, but on their own have not been able to deliver the kind of change that's really needed in Asian cities. (Reports also available from ACHR website)

**NEXT STEPS FOR UPCA :** In the months since the launch event, the community networks in each country have been spreading around word about this new coalition and the UPCA Fund, and discussing how they would like this regional grassroots platform and support system to assist their local process. The UPCA's management committee has met twice since then: once in Serey Sophoan, Cambodia (June 2012) and in Chum Phae, Thailand (December 2012). The next big regional UPCA meeting will take place in February 2013, alongside the ACHR Regional Meeting in Bangkok.

