

# ACHR e-news

News from groups around Asia about what's happening in the region . . .

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

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**JANUARY 2019**

Where on earth does the time go? Here we are starting the year 2019 and so many items on the "to-do" lists from 2018 - and even 2017 - haven't yet been ticked. All of which brings to mind this little poem by the American poet Ezra Pound:

*And the days are not full enough  
And the nights are not full enough  
And life slips by like a field mouse  
Not shaking the grass.*

Well before we turn back to the piles of work and the extended deadlines, all of us here at the ACHR secretariat would like to send our friends and colleagues around the region our fondest wishes for a happy and productive new year. We hope that the new year will bring with it new strength and new inspiration to your work - and our work - and bring new possibilities to bring about much-needed change for communities and for our societies. And with those warm wishes, let us include a few brief notes about what the ACHR has been up to over the past year:

## ACHR AT THE WORLD URBAN FORUM IN FEBRUARY 2018

We started the year 2018 with the UN Habitat's ninth World Urban Forum (WUF), in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in February. Since this WUF was happening here in Asia, right in our own back yard, and since the theme was "Cities for All: Implementing the New Urban Agenda", ACHR decided to take active part. With a limited budget, we could only invite a certain number of friends to join our team, some of whom were already invited by other organizations to take part in various activities during the forum. But with support from SDI and UN-Habitat, we were able to muster a good team of community leaders, support professionals and key local government officials from seven Asian countries to describe the kind of people-driven and citywide housing processes they have developed in their cities, which show that "Cities for all" is something that can really happen.

Besides booking a booth in the exhibition hall, which we papered from floor to ceiling with posters of community-driven housing and upgrading projects around the region, we jointly organized two key networking events: one seminar on people-driven and citywide collective housing (with SDI and UrbaMonde), and a second on using local city partnerships and people on the ground to help achieve the goals of the New Urban Agenda and to show that "Cities for all" is something that can really happen (with UCLG-ASPAC, SDI and UN-Habitat). Besides those two seminars, ACHR and the members of our team joined colleagues from SDI, Huairou Commission, Wiego, CODI, UN-Habitat and UN-ESCAP to take part in other training events, seminars, and discussions during the WUF, including a long-overdue visit to some evictees who have been languishing in "long-house" temporary accommodation for over two decades and were about to relocate to permanent housing in government-built high-rises.

As these big gatherings always do, the World Urban Forum gave us a chance to take advantage of so many friends being in the same place at the same time, to organize several parallel regional meetings, and all kinds of informal gatherings and evening sessions at the hotel or in the park, to reflect on what went on during the day, and to plan how to marshal our forces together for the next day's events. (For transcripts of the two ACHR seminars at WUF, please contact Tom at ACHR)



## COMMUNITY PROFILING GETS A BOOST IN ASIA FROM SDI



Poor communities and their networks and federations in Asia and Africa have been surveying and mapping their settlements for over three decades now. This gathering of information about their own lives, living conditions and land tenure has grown in scale and sophistication over the years. Community networks in many countries now use computers to tally and update the information from their citywide and settlement-level surveys. Though a lot of community mapping is still done in the most essential and human way - with marking pens, measuring tapes and big pieces of paper - community groups in many countries are also using professional survey equipment, Google Earth maps and phone-linked GIS applications to plot extremely accurate maps of their settlements. And the way urban poor groups use that information to analyze their problems, to understand the larger structural issues which exacerbate their poverty, to provide baseline data for developing solutions to those problems and to negotiate with their governments for land and resources has also grown sharper. Mapping has led to all sorts of breakthroughs in land, housing, access to resources and constructive working partnerships with the cities that used to look down on these informal communities as parasites, or ignore them. For the urban poor, surveying and mapping have become essential tools in their process of self-development - tools which have proved time and time again that old adage that *information is power*.

Community surveying and mapping has long been on the agenda of Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), and in recent years they have developed a system of procedures and a fixed questionnaire which allows them to standardize the data gathering in different places and to use that data to analyze and compare factors of housing and informality across borders and across regions. At the Asia Hub meeting which SDI organized in July 2017 in Mumbai, it was decided that the SDI's "Community Profiling" model would be piloted in five Asian countries, as a joint effort of ACHR, UPCA and SDI. As part of the agreement, a target was set for the pilot phase, in which 500 informal settlements would be profiled in 25 cities in five Asian countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The first step was to organize hands-on survey training programs in one city in each of the five countries, in collaboration with local community networks and their support NGOs and community architects, and then carry on with the community profiling in other settlements. The process has been coordinated by a regional team which includes Ruby Papeleras, Celine d'Cruz and Minh Chau. At the next Asia Hub Meeting in Bangkok, in October 2018, groups from the first five countries reported on the progress with their community profiling, and an agreement was reached to expand the process in a second phase, in four more countries: Pakistan, Nepal, Vietnam and Thailand.

This collaboration between ACHR and SDI is giving a big boost to the process of developing citywide information about urban poor settlements that is in people's hands. And it's doing this in a number of ways: understanding land ownership, tenure security, access to basic services and environmental problems; giving new tools to communities to talk with their governments and develop a common understanding of problems of informal settlements and solutions; strengthening links between communities and making stronger city networks; linking local community information and knowledge with other countries to build a stronger global community network. (For more about the community profiling project, please contact Minh Chau at ACHR)

## COMMUNITIES IN NEPAL and CAMBODIA LOOK AT FOOD SECURITY

One thing that came out strikingly in ACHR's people-driven poverty line study a few years ago was how important food was in how community people defined poverty - the quality, quantity, affordability and availability of what people eat. Many of the community groups observed that the poorer a family is, the more of their income they will likely spend on nourishing themselves. Some of the poorest families spend more than half their earnings on food, and that nourishment is often inadequate. In the big words of the global development world, those poor households are experiencing **food insecurity**. And they are not alone. Some 800 million people in the world now (one out of every eight humans) aren't getting enough to eat, despite the fact that there is more than enough food being produced in the world to feed everyone.



The reasons for this growing undernourishment are complicated, and have to do with how food is produced, distributed, made accessible and consumed. The Right to Food is enshrined in the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights, and "Ending Hunger" is number two on the list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Food security is now a serious global development topic, but it is mostly very high-level professionals and academics who study it, explain it and make recommendations about how to deal with it.

But what about poor people themselves? How do they experience and define food security? And how do they understand the local food supply and distribution systems which allow them to eat well, or which prevent them from eating well? How do they manage to nourish themselves and what ideas do they have for how to eat better? These questions have been part of another community-driven study that ACHR has been conducting over the past year, in two countries, in collaboration with IIED, and with support from the Thai community networks. In Nepal, the study has been facilitated by Lumanti, the Community Women's Forum and the Mahila Ekta Samaj Women's Federation, and in Cambodia by the Community Development Foundation (CDF) and the national network of community savings groups. Our key project partner at IIED in the food study has been Cecilia Tacoli.

Like the earlier studies on Poverty Lines and Community Finance, the main researchers in this new study have been community people themselves (and mostly women), and the chief research method has been discussions of various sizes. The idea has been to bring the voices and understanding of the urban poor (the *real experts* on how to feed their families with very little money) into the larger discussion about food security, and give them an opportunity to analyze in detail their own strategies and systems for providing food to their families. Before the study ends in 2019, the communities that have been taking part in the study will have the opportunity to use some small "action research" grants from the project to develop some community projects to improve their access to good food: community gardens, buyers coops, planting producing trees, etc. A final regional meeting on the food study will be organized in Bangkok on January 23, 2019, and a newsletter-style report on the food study will be prepared and distributed after that. *(For more information about the food study, please contact Tom at ACHR)*



**REPORT ON HOUSING POLICIES and PRACTICES IN ASIA, FOR UCLG**



United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is a worldwide network of some 1,000 cities and 175 local and regional governments, across 95 countries, which advocates for democratic local self-government and represents the voice of local governments on many fronts. Every three years, UCLG produces an important global report which focuses on a specific aspect of local governance. This year, their report looks at housing policies, practices and the role of local governments in providing housing to all. When the UCLG invited ACHR to prepare the Asia regional contribution to this global housing policy report, we saw an opportunity to link with this active global coalition of local governments and to bring voices from the region - and from the ground - into this important housing report. But instead of contracting someone to research and write the paper alone, we decided to use the extremely modest \$20,000 budget from UCLG to turn the project into an opportunity for sharing, collaboration and learning across the region, as much as possible.



We began by organizing a small regional meeting in Bangkok, to discuss the UCLG project, review the prevailing housing issues and trends in the region, and set plans for producing the report, in a collaborative manner. The ACHR secretariat team was joined by Arif, Kirtee, Hosaka and a new colleague from China, Bingqin-Li, who teaches in Sydney, as well as two young professionals from Thailand, Ploy (a community architect) and Noot (an architecture professor). At that meeting, a decision was taken to use most of the UCLG budget to support the key ACHR

groups who work on housing issues in Asia to write ten-page country reports which summarize the urban housing issues, trends and striking innovations and promising programs in their countries, to use as base material for the Asia-wide report. After these country reports came in, from 13 countries, in May and June 2018, another collaborative team was set up to draft the regional report

(including Brenda Perez-Castro in Yangon, Hamza Arif in Karachi and Somsook and Tom in Thailand), drawing on both the country reports and ACHR's document archive, and with advisory inputs from senior friends in the ACHR coalition.

Because the report was produced by a coalition of doers who work on the ground, and not by academics or consultants, the report's core material is description of pragmatic housing strategies and programs, in many different contexts, that convey strongly the message that solving Asia's enormous housing problems is possible. Our Asia regional report is now undergoing a final round of revisions, after some questions came back from the UCLG team in Barcelona, and the final report will go out shortly. Our good friend David Satterthwaite at IIED will be in charge of putting together all the regional reports into a global report, which should be coming out in June 2019. There has also been discussion about publishing our Asia regional housing report separately. When the regional and global reports are finalized, we'll send you all copies via the email.

## MEETING WITH IIED ON ASIAN RESEARCH STRATEGIES in JULY 2018

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) is an important and respected research institution whose work has sought to link the institutional and academic sides of development with the real issues, real practice and real networks of doers on the ground. IIED has been a close friend of ACHR since the very beginning, and we have worked together on many projects and in many ways ever since. A few years back, IIED's willingness to channel the Gates Foundation funding for our ACCA Program allowed ACHR to work on a bigger scale than ever before, and ACHR collaborations with IIED continue today on the food security study and the UCLG housing policy report.



In 2018, IIED was in the process of drafting a five year global plan for the institute's research directions and priorities. It is one of ACHR's old principles that whatever issues are being discussed, or whatever plans are being made, it is crucial to open up that process so that everyone can learn, everyone can improve what they're doing and make progress. That way, whatever we do in our difficult, isolated contexts can lead to stronger linkages, stronger strategies, stronger policies and stronger change. So in like fashion, ACHR proposed to IIED that instead of sitting in London and setting its global agenda there, why not come here and talk to people on the ground, and let us bring some light from the Asia region into the making of those research plans. IIED took the bait, and Tom Bigg (Director of IIED's Strategy and Learning Group) and Diane Archer (who has since left IIED and moved back to Bangkok) came from London, and sat for two days (July 3-4) in Bangkok, with a roomful of participants working on a range of issues in eight Asian countries.



The discussions began with a lively and detailed review of some of the key issues, directions, trends and enduring development challenges in the Asia region, as well as the role international institutions and funding agencies can play. Some ideas were floated about how to make the links between the institute and groups in the region stronger, how to keep the relationship active, and how to plan joint research projects that create space for a new kind of dynamic knowledge that will lead us to make a better change and better relationships between things that already exist. After the meeting, Tom wrote from London saying the meeting had been useful, and that the results had been incorporated into IIED's global formulation policy and the institution's work.

## ACHR FACILITATES DPU's "KNOW" RESEARCH PROGRAM IN ASIA



The Development Planning Unit (DPU) of the University College of London is conducting a four-year global research program which is looking into the new directions around the world in housing, inequality and urban development. The program is called Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW), and it is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council under the Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF). Part of the KNOW Program involves conducting deeper research studies in a set of eight cities across Africa, Latin America and Asia. Over the past couple of years, ACHR has been working with this KNOW program. Initially, the DPU's plans included only two cities in Asia - one in India and one in Sri Lanka. But later on, after some discussion, the Asia part of the study was reconsidered and broadened, to allow more cities to be studied and more groups from the region to take part and to bring the knowledge that will be generated from those particular cities to the region. Finally it was agreed that in Asia, instead of just one city in Sri Lanka, ACHR would facilitate a comparative research study of four cities in the region: Da Nang (Vietnam), Nakhon Sawan (Thailand), Yangon (Myanmar) and Jogjakarta (Indonesia). The first workshop to kick off this regional process will take place on January 24-26, 2019 in Nakhon Sawan. The work will take about two years, and the final results will be shared with the region.

## ASIA HUB MEETING IN BANGKOK IN OCTOBER 2018

For some years, one of SDI's strategies to support community processes in Africa has been to establish "hubs" in African sub-regions which become platforms for mutual sharing and support between community networks in neighboring countries. To strengthen its support for community processes in Asia, SDI worked with ACHR to organize the first Asia Hub meeting in 2017, in Mumbai. Seven countries participated in that meeting. Then in October 2018, ACHR and UPCA collaborated with SDI to organize a second Asia Hub meeting. On the suggestion of SDI's president, Jockin Arputham, this Asia Hub meeting was held in Bangkok.

We haven't had many opportunities in recent years to organize many substantial regional gatherings. So this second Asia Hub meeting was a welcome opportunity for groups in the region to come together, as we have done now for three decades. But this meeting had a particular focus on Asia's community networks and federations, and gave them an opportunity to share stories and experiences and to discuss how to strengthen Asia's people-driven development processes in different ways. The meeting included sessions to plan the direction of the Urban Poor Coalition Asia (UPCA) and the next phase of the community profiling project.

The Asia Hub meeting was scheduled to take place alongside the celebrations of World Habitat Day (WHD) in Thailand, which was jointly organized by the national community networks, CODI and UN-ESCAP. The Asia Hub participants were able to join many of the WHD events on October 10, including a formal inauguration of World Habitat Day and exhibition at the United Nations Building, a gala inauguration of an important canal-side housing redevelopment project and meetings with two Thai ministers, during which the ACHR group proposed the idea of Thailand promoting the development of "Housing for all", with stronger support from Asian governments, when it becomes chair of ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) in 2019. On October 11, the national community network in Thailand organized programs of community visits, seminars, exhibitions and housing project inaugurations in cities around the country, and Asia Hub participants were able to join these events in cities that were not too far from Bangkok. On October 15, after the meeting was over, Asia Hub participants joined a one-day trip to join the World Habitat Day celebrations in the city of Nakhon Sawan, where there were many new housing projects to see.



**Jockin's planning for the Asia Hub in Bangkok proved to be prescient, for while the meeting was going on, he collapsed in Mumbai, after a long health decline. The India team rushed back and could all be with him when this man, who has been our great friend, teacher and inspiration in Asia, passed away on October 13th. He was 72 years old. Somsook was able to join the memorial service for Jockin that was organized in Bangalore on November 18th.**

## COLLECTIVE HOUSING PROJECT WITH URBAMONDE ABOUT TO START

Over the last three years, ACHR has been linking with the Swiss-based NGO UrbaMonde, which advocates for community-driven and collective housing models in Switzerland, in Europe and around the world. UrbaMonde has been working with key groups and networks in Europe, USA, Latin America, Africa and Asia to support the creation of a global collective and cooperative housing movement. Part of this work includes supporting the documentation of collective housing projects around the world and the development of a website "platform" which will make information about all those housing projects accessible to everyone online.

Community-driven and collective housing has been at the core of ACHR's work for thirty years, and we all feel that building this global collective housing movement is something we'd like to support and take part in. It is both important and timely, since individualized and market-driven housing development is overwhelming everything and making housing ever less accessible and less human. ACHR has joined several global meetings that UrbaMonde has organized, and a network has been



established. As part of the process, each region is developing a proposal to study and document collective and cooperative housing models and projects and to boost the collective housing movement in their region. UrbaMonde is working with these groups to develop the proposals and has negotiated to get funding for these regional studies from an unusual source: the City of Geneva. ACHR has been working with UrbaMonde to develop a proposal for a three-year project to study collective housing in Asia. The proposal has been a long time in the making, but after nearly three years, it looks like the project will finally start in early 2019. Our part in Asia will involve surveying and mapping of collective and community-driven housing projects and models around Asia, and organizing training workshops, exchanges, and documenting good projects and processes in handbooks, guidelines and online project databases. So be ready for this new one - and polish up your best collective housing projects. A regional meeting to kick off this exciting new initiative will likely be organized in the first half of 2019.

## EXPLORING SOME NEW POSSIBLE FUNDING OPTIONS

The ACHR secretariat continues to explore possible funding options, develop proposals and circulate concept notes for a variety of projects to support different aspects of the regional work. A few notes on these:

- **Another ACCA-style project with SIDA:** In 2017, we drafted a concept note describing a three-year project to build on the ACCA Program's base and promote a stronger and more focused community-driven, citywide and partnership-based housing development process in 30 Asian cities (about two cities per country). These cities would become model cities, and would get everyone to work together: communities, NGOs, local government and other stakeholders. The project is now being considered by SIDA (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency), and they may prefer to bundle the project with another proposal by SDI, with whom SIDA has a long funding relationship.
- **Other donors, other projects:** We are also exploring other funding possibilities with the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, Misereor, the Norwegian Overseas Aid Organization and a few others. For donors able to support only smaller projects, we are developing concept notes on projects to support work on the food issue, disasters, mapping, community finance (savings + funds), community welfare safety net, eviction (info, networks, strategies) and disaster housing.

## WHO'S DOING WHAT AT THE ACHR OFFICE in BANGKOK?

We'll close with a little update on who's doing what at the ACHR office in Bangkok these days. Somsook took a nasty fall last year and hurt her back, and her slow recuperation from that injury has prevented her from being quite as active as before. Even so, she still comes into the office regularly and is involved in everything. She has also been spending more time supporting the Baan Mankong housing program at CODI. Minh Chau continues to manage several things and to focus on the community aspects of ACHR's work, and has been working closely with Ruby and Celine to manage the ACHR-SDI-UPCA community profiling project. Tom has been back from his sabbatical in Portland for over a year now, and has been putting in most of his time on the IIED-ACHR food study and the UCLG housing paper. Nat and Chai continue to manage all the ACHR secretariat's substantial administrative and financial work. Maurice has retired all the way and moved up to Chiang Mai, but Im continues to help us out now and then with Thai translation. We have been helped greatly on many fronts in recent months by Brenda Perez-Castro, a sociologist from Bogota, Columbia, who has just finished a few years stint working with Habitat for Humanity in Manila. After taking a break to bicycle around southeast Asia on her own, Brenda has been volunteering with ACHR, helping us out with the UCLG housing study, the UrbaMonde and KNOW proposals and exploring new funding possibilities. In the new year, Brenda may be joining us part time, working on various projects, including UrbaMonde and KNOW.