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Oct 2013

Asian

Exchange visit

To Mumbai

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) brings 10 Asian country groups to Mumbai India for an exchange

Who came:

40 people from 10 countries

Sri Lanka

Nepal

Philippines

Laos

Cambodia

Viet Nam

Myanmar

Japan

Thailand

Bangladesh

Dates: 24th September to 29th September.

Focus was to understand the strategy of NSDF and Mahila Milan to design and execute solutions for the communities by the community while working with government as well.

Many more were to come but did not get Visas.

Everyone came at different time on 24th and 25th and left between 28th and 29th September.

Each team comprised of 2-4 people with at least one person who could do translations from English to the national language.

All discussions were in English and Hindi and Marathi by NSDF and Mahila Milan representatives so at any given time the same communication was translated in two more languages for all to understand.

ACHR has been running the ACCA program for several years and every year there are meetings to visit a new learning site; review ongoing projects and also look at new proposals for the next round of projects financed by ACCA.

In this event, two and a half days were planned with the alliance and one day for project reporting and review of new proposals.

Slum/Shack Dwellers International and ACHR jointly funded this event, with ACHR and Slum/Shack Dwellers International joint financing the staying arrangements, Slum/Shack Dwellers International managing all project visits and meeting expenses and ACHR financing travel.

The schedule:

Afternoon of 25th : at Byculla center Orientation about the alliance and its work with pavement dwellers/

Day of the 26th : field visits to housing projects; relocation projects; and sanitation projects. NSDF and Mahila Milan took them to various sites in Mumbai, The initial plan to have them visit Pune was cancelled due to the shortage of time. Instead Pune Mahila Milan was invited to Mumbai to present their work.

Day of the 27th : The whole day was spent at Byculla where the whole group spent the morning with questions about what they had seen and later presenting what they were doing. Pune Mahila Milan presented their work at the end of the session.

Day of 28th : A whole day review was taken up at the hotel hall about ACCA projects.



What are the special features of the work of NSDF and Mahila Milan and what is the role played by SPARC and professionals.

Somsook Sheela and Jockin spent the first couple of hours in the morning of the 27th sharing the special features of the alliance in India.

- Professionals only do what communities and federations either cannot do or don't want to do.
- Increasingly the scale and long term engagement was the focus of the community federations and although many began their journey as leaders fighting the city, they all worked hard to develop partnership and collaboration with city.
- Surveys of slums at city level was an important feature of how data collected by communities created basis of engagement with government and other stakeholders.
- Many features taken up by ACCA groups had an initial association with NSDF and Mahila Milan such as savings survey, sanitation.
- While most groups had not visited NSDF and Mahila Milan some have been many times to India and are familiar with the work, but wanted more recent news.



Ruby from the Philippines wanted to know about how the pavement dwellers relocation was going on... Jockin replied that the municipality and Mahila Milan were working on the relocation on an ongoing basis and would hopefully clear that pavements in the island city soon,

This note focus is on the 27th September day long review after the field visit.



Jockin welcomed everyone to the session:

“ The work of organizing the poor will go on forever!!!! All of us have to be at it all the time. I am seeing many of you for the first time We will share what we do, and we will help each other and learn from each other.....”

Somsook also spoke of old friendship with the India team, of ACHR was initiated with all these people. Of the very important meeting in 1988 when women from 8 countries came to India and explored the saving program of Mahila Milan, now everyone is savings and our program cannot do without savings. The survey process is also important and we all must do slum surveys in our city many have already started it.

Sheela also welcomed everyone and said that today younger federations are doing things very fast, they get attention of the city also faster and they start working on projects faster because they can pick it from older federations who took much longer to develop the idea. This is the power of the exchange.



The issue of project financing was also discussed at length. Jockin and Sheela answered the questions:

Financing and management of housing and sanitation projects

- All the projects tenders were done by a construction company that was owned by SPARC NSDF and Mahila Milan .
- All contracts were explored by federations, they designed the project and they executed the project.
- All loans and financial accounts were also managed jointly by community and company.
- However all finances on site were managed by the federations.

Dialogue with government

- Jockin said that large numbers organized and which demonstrate what they can do force the government to deal with federations.
- Communities also give message to government that they trust federation so they will only work through them .
- Now government seeks federation help to solve many of their challenges. Right now 15000 households who squat near the water pipes that bring water to the city are being re-located by NSDF and Mahila Milan .

The dialogue with municipal senior officers was to have been in the afternoon of the 27th however, a tragedy had occurred in the early morning where a building collapsed and all people were in the rubble and the officers all had to deal with the rescue operations.

In all the groups the primacy of savings and exchanges was very evident. In each instance the demonstration of having undertaken a project was seen as empowering.

Mangolia Laos and Viet Nam spoke of their challenges ... mangolia about the weather and pollution; Laos and Viet Nam about the socialist structures which help some times but come in the way other times;

But everyone celebrated the power that savings gave to women and legitimacy it produced for the community.

Inspired by what they saw they all wanted

The Highlights of the presentations:

Myanmar The challenges of the Buraku Community are like those of the secluded cast of India or apartheid affected people in South Africa.

Mangolia: Working to develop citywide federation in small towns starting from women's savings groups.

Viet nam: Challenges of doing city wide slum profiles to negotiate for land.

nepal: working on housing, insurance and upgrading



Each group made a 15-12 minutes presentation, in which the power of learning from each other was clear through the rituals of surveys, savings and communities taking up a range of projects.



Japan:



Bangladesh



Philippines



Bhuj, India



Sri Lanka



Thailand

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Philippines: Challenges of doing city wide slum profiles to negotiate for land.

Sri Lanka: working on housing, insurance and upgrading

Thailand: deepening and strengthening community federations working with CODI

Bhuj India: Inspired by Mahila Milan are now working on housing projects in Bhuj.



Report produced by SPARC NSDF and Mahila Milan of the exchange between 10 asian countries to explore the Indian process.

This visit was financed by Slum/Shack Dwellers International and ACHR and facilitated nu Somsook Boonyabancha and A Jockin.

ACHR and Slum/Shack Dwellers International will also be undertaking a joint training program to undertake slum profiles and manage data with STDM through a GLTN program of the UNHABITAT in October 22nd to 25th.

Now the strategy is to help the barangais in manila who are already working with the Mayor to undertake city wide surveys of slums which will be done before the event, and the event itself will have all the trainees doing survey and entering data which hopefully will be presented to the world bank who is undertaking a slum upgrading project as well as mayor and national housing company of government.