

BANGLADESH

USING ACCA TO BRING THE POOR INTO THE CENTER IN DIFFERENT WAYS



ACCA in BANGLADESH :

PROJECT CITIES (total 2)

- Gopalganj
- Dhaka

SMALL PROJECTS

Small projects approved : 8
 In number of cities : 1
 Total budget approved : \$15,000

BIG HOUSING PROJECTS

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

SAVINGS (only in 2 ACCA cities)

Savings groups : 321
 Savings members : 10,154
 Total savings : \$116,205

CITY DEVELOPMENT FUNDS

CDFs active in : 1 city
 Total capital in CDF: \$46,528

- from ACCA \$43,000 (92%)
- from coms. \$3,528 (8%)
- from gov. 0 (0%)
- from others 0 (0%)

IMPLEMENTING GROUPS

Dhaka : Housing and Land Rights Forum Bangladesh (HLRF-B) coalition, with support from the NGO DSK

Gopalganj : The UNDP's Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction (UPPR) Program



For more information, a detailed report about an October 2012 field visit to these ACCA projects in Dhaka and Gopalganj can be downloaded from the ACHR website.

Bangladesh gets a bad rap. The mere mention of place conjures up images of calamity, war, overcrowding, poverty and suffering on an epic scale. But there's another side to the story which approaches the miraculous. Alone among most of its Asian neighbors, Bangladesh - one of the world's most densely-populated countries - still produces enough food to feed its 160 million people. It's sumptuous green countryside and fertile soil, which is re-nourished every year by monsoon rains and frequent floods, can grow anything. Those same rivers and waterways that flood so often also bring fertility and a bounty of fresh-water fish. And despite huge problems, the country manages to keep functioning! But the persistence of this miracle rests squarely on the backs of the poor, who account for nearly half of the country's population. The remittances sent home by Bangladeshi laborers working in the middle east are the largest contributors to the national economy. Likewise the country's garment, jute, copra and rice industries - all big earners for the country's economy - are all dependent on an endless supply of tedious, back-breaking and low-paid labor by the poor.

Another peculiarity of Bangladesh is that the development needs of this enormous poor population are being addressed primarily by huge overseas development programs and equally huge local NGOs, which function more like government ministries than what we usually think of as NGOs, with many different departments, employing thousands of staff and running immense portfolios of development projects and programs around the country in every conceivable sector: health, education, nutrition, women, children, education, microcredit, climate change, water and sanitation, etc. Development is big business in this country. But as Dibalok Singha, who directs one of these big NGOs (DSK), points out, "These Bangladeshi NGOs are famous for delivering services, not for strengthening community-based organizations." And the result is that a population of smart, energetic, hospitable, imaginative and hard-working people - much given to breaking into poetry or political debate - find themselves being passive observers or "participants" in a development that someone else designs and delivers.

Using ACCA to help build a coalition of poor community organizations in DHAKA to collectively tackle the issue of land . . .

Dhaka is Bangladesh's capital and it's largest city, with a population of about 13 million. Nearly a third of those people live in the city's 4,966 slums. Almost all of these slums are on land that is not secure, and many will eventually face the threat - or the reality - of eviction. Most also have serious problems of housing and access to basic services, despite a bewildering array of development interventions by NGOs and development agencies. Another problem is that the city's poor have developed very few community organizations of their own, and the ones that do exist are small, scattered and isolated.

The ACCA project in Dhaka has been specifically designed to help build a new and citywide alliance of the key community-based organizations and NGO support groups operating in different parts of the city. The Housing and Land Rights Forum Bangladesh (HLRF-B) is using the modest support from ACCA to implement small infrastructure upgrading projects and set up savings groups to strengthen these community organizations internally, and then to organize frequent exchange visits and meetings to build links of mutual support and learning between them. One of the most urgent reasons for building this citywide coalition is to bring the power of large numbers to help individual communities negotiate with the larger urban development processes which affect them and defend themselves against the terrible evictions which continue to happen in Dhaka - especially in slums on government land. But the longer-term goal of the coalition is to find ways that the urban poor can work with government and NGOs as active partners in developing their own solutions to the country's housing problems.

To spread the opportunity around, each community organization in the coalition was invited to propose projects up to a budget ceiling of \$3,000 per group. The communities then surveyed their own settlements, discussed what needs were the most urgent, and developed their own plans and cost estimates for the projects - most including several small infrastructure improvements, and most involving the construction of toilets, hand pumps, drainage lines or community centers. The communities planned and implemented the projects themselves, with support from the NGO DSK and an implementation committee made up of representatives from all the community networks and support NGOs which link together through HLRF-B. Six of the eight projects that were agreed upon have now been completed. The network has organized lots of exchange visits between the different communities in Dhaka doing ACCA small projects. Many of these exposure visits have given community people their first chance ever to visit their peers in other settlements, to see what others are doing and to talk about problems they have in common. Most of the groups also started new savings groups as part of the process, or reinvigorated old ones. Since the project started a year ago, the savings has grown from 10 groups and 214 members, to 63 savings groups with 5,385 members.





A big housing breakthrough for the poor in **GOPALGANJ**

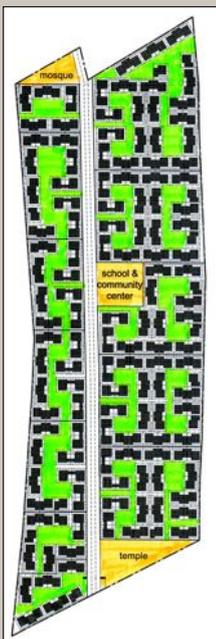
346 evicted families show how a community-driven housing project can work when they get some land, and a little trust and support

It's a sad fact of most slum redevelopment and poverty alleviation programs nowadays that while everybody's happy to invest in micro-credit, water and sanitation and capacity-building projects, which are tidy, easy and unlikely to ruffle any feathers, nobody wants to touch the issue of secure land and housing, which is probably the greatest factor in creating and perpetuating urban poverty; it's too complicated, too political, too hot an issue. The Urban Partnerships for Poverty Reduction Program (UPPR) in Bangladesh - a country which continues to have some of Asia's worst evictions - is a case in point. For twelve years, UPPR has been spending millions in Gopalganj and 22 other cities setting up women's savings groups and community development councils (CDCs) to plan and implement small livelihood and infrastructure improvement projects in slum communities. But when a rare opportunity emerged to demonstrate and test a new, more comprehensive and more lasting form of slum redevelopment, UPPR didn't have a penny for housing.

The story starts with an eviction : In October 2009, one of the big slums in Gopalganj, which had been organized and upgraded with UPPR support, was quite suddenly and brutally demolished, to make way for a sports complex - a pet project of the Prime Minister, who comes from Gopalganj. But there was a lot of sympathy for the 346 evicted families, who were now scattered all over the city and living in extreme difficulty. The eviction made everyone realize that even a high-level UN project intervention was no safeguard against eviction, and that the city needed a new alternative vision for how to deal with slums.

Study tour to Bangkok leads to land breakthrough : Soon afterwards, UPPR worked with ACHR and CODI to organize a study tour to Thailand, to visit community-managed housing projects that showed how urban slums could be turned into beautiful neighborhoods when communities were in charge and the government supported them. The mayor of Gopalganj, along with senior government officials, community leaders from the evicted community and UPPR staff, joined the trip, which helped change minds, introduce new possibilities and turn an adverse situation into the beginnings of a more collaborative and sustainable urban poor housing solution in Gopalganj. Back home, the community people worked with the mayor and UPPR staff to map and scope out possible vacant land in the city for resettling the people. They identified a 4.16 acre (1.68 hectare) piece of low-lying paddy land at Mandartola, under government ownership, just one kilometer from the town center. Eventually, the District Commissioner was able to persuade the Prime Minister to grant the land to the municipality, for re-housing the evictees, on a long-term collective tenure.

The ACCA project in Gopalganj, which was approved in April 2011, was designed to grab this opportunity and help implement a pilot housing project for the evicted families on this land, to show a new, more comprehensive solution to housing and land security which is proactive, people-driven and based in partnership. A month later, ACHR and the Community Architects Network (CAN) helped organize a community housing and layout planning workshop, as a training for both the community people and the professionals in Gopalganj, who had little experience with this new kind of community-managed housing planning and implementation.



The housing project at Mandartola : The layout they developed for the new land, in which 270 houses are arranged in clusters around small shared open spaces, has gone through several adjustments, to answer the community women's imperative to squeeze as many of the evicted families onto the new land as possible. UPPR is now filling the land to above flood level, and the municipality has built an access road and installed a tube well and two pit latrines. The Water Supply Authority will supply trunk water mains to the site, and UPPR will provide the internal pipe network to houses, with people paying the fees for municipal piped water after that. Internal roads, drains, market, school, mosque and temple will all be funded by grants from UPPR and built by the community people themselves. The simple houses the people have designed (with one big room, a veranda in front and toilet and kitchen area out back), will be built in pairs, with one common wall, to save money and leave a little space on the side of the small plots for animal rearing, gardens and rickshaw storage. The UPPR is now negotiating with CDMP (another UNDP project) to provide building materials, as a grant, which will allow the people to build sturdy, storm-proof "core" house structures. Families will be able to take small loans to finish their houses from the new Community Housing Development Fund (CHDF), which was set up with the \$43,000 seed funds from ACCA in a big citywide workshop on October 16, 2012.



"Bangladesh has so many evictions, but it is probably the only country in Asia which has never had the experience of actually implementing a community-driven housing project, to show a new way of doing things. There is no solution for poor people in big cities like Dhaka and in smaller cities like Gopalganj, so I think this project is quite important. And it's very good that this is the Prime Minister's city - we can invite her to inaugurate the project" (Somsook)