

## COMMUNITY ARCHITECTS NETWORK (CAN) UPDATE

Community architects around the Asia region continue to be extremely active in many kinds of projects and on many fronts. Here are a few notes on some recent events that have taken place within the Community Architects Network (CAN), as presented by Supawut Boonmahathanakorn ("Tee"), a young Thai architect who has been part of CAN's regional coordinating team.

### WORKSHOP IN AHMEDABAD, JUNE 23-24 :

A national meeting of Indian community architects was organized in Ahmedabad, as a collaboration between CAN and Kirtee Shah. The idea was to create a national platform for collaboration among the country's community architect groups working on low-income housing and to introduce these groups to the Asian regional network of community architect (CAN). About 15 architects, professionals and representatives from development organizations involved in housing joined the two-day workshop and made presentations about their work with poor communities in housing and settlement planning projects and discussed how to support each other's work more concretely through the regional network.



- **First day :** The first day of the workshop was taken up with presentations by the participating groups. The groups which presented their work included : Mahila Housing and SEWA trust, Shelter Associates from Pune, Centre for Heritage Management in Ahmedabad, AVAS from Bangalore, Maharashtra Social Housing and Action League (Mashal) from Pune, HUDCO from Delhi, Mr. Balachandran (a planner working in Bhuj after the earthquake), India Habitat Forum (INHAF), People in Centre Consulting, SAATH from Gujarat, Wonder Grass and Rhizome (two groups focusing on bamboo), Habitat Technology Group from Kerala, and Home in the City Program from Bhuj, CURE from Delhi, Sprout from Mumbai, VINYAS from Delhi, and SEED from Delhi. Nad and Tee also presented the work of CAN in Asia, especially the work supporting ACCA projects.
- **Second day :** The second day began with field visits into the old walled city of Ahmedabad and to a housing project being implemented by SEWA's Mahila Housing Trust, and continued with more discussions on a few key points: how the contribution of community architects can be scaled-up - especially in the Indian context? How our work can create changes in the system and how it can be relocated by communities and their support organizations themselves? How the community architecture groups in India can link more among themselves and with the regional groups through CAN and ACHR?



### COMMUNITY BUILDERS TRAINING IN BHUJ, INDIA IN DECEMBER :

During the CAN visit to India, the group also had a chance to visit the work of the Hunnarshala Foundation in the city of Bhuj, in western Gujarat, where ACCA is helping support their ongoing citywide community housing and upgrading process. Hunnarshala has been one of the pioneers in promoting the use of traditional building knowledge and local artisanship in both earthquake rebuilding and ordinary housing construction. After some discussions, it was agreed that CAN and Hunnarshala will jointly organize a training workshop for community-based builders and craftspeople in Bhuj, some time in December 2012. On the way to and from Bhuj, the visiting community builders will also be able to visit community-managed and built housing projects being implemented by ASAG in Ahmedabad and by the NSDF/Mahila Milan/SPARC alliance in Mumbai. It

has been proposed that two participants from each country (one community builder and one architect) be invited to join this workshop. For more information, please contact Tee.

**CAN at WUF in ITALY in SEPTEMBER:** On September 5th, a training event for community architects entitled "Participatory Design for Slum upgrading and Inclusive City Building" was held at the sixth World Urban Forum in Naples, Italy. The event, which was jointly organized by Architects Without Borders UK and UN-Habitat, was a chance to bring together experiences of participatory design and planning of houses, communities and whole cities. The workshop drew a good crowd of about 100 people, and Tee, May Domingo and Sonia Cardomigara shared their experiences with community housing design and settlement planning in the Philippines and in other countries within the CAN network. UN-Habitat has plans to compile the cases and stories that were presented in this dialogue in Naples into a publication, and has asked CAN and asked CAN to contribute our experiences and keep in touch with this global network.





**NEW CAN BOOKLET FOR WUF NAPLES :** For the World Urban Forum event in Naples, the CAN network prepared a new 24-page booklet entitled, "Let people be the solution", which is full of stories, plans, drawings and colorful photos which describe the work of many of the community architect groups that are part of the CAN network around Asia - work that involves community and citywide mapping, settlement upgrading, comprehensive site planning, community builders training, engaging with academic institutions and sharing knowledge and communicating.

*This booklet can be downloaded from the ACHR website, or else contact Tee at [architect\\_once@hotmail.com](mailto:architect_once@hotmail.com)*

**WORKSHOP WITH RIVERSIDE COMMUNITIES IN KATHMANDU, AUGUST 6-15:** The eviction crisis which is affecting some 2,500 poor families living in 17 informal settlements along the banks of the Bagmati River in Kathmandu, is continuing, as the government pushes ahead with a big project to revitalize the badly polluted river. The project, which involves developing drains, water treatment plants, roads and public green spaces along the river, calls for the eviction of all those informal settlements. Despite protests, court cases and negotiations at all levels, the first of these Bagmati settlements - Thapathali - was brutally demolished in May and 258 families lost their houses and everything they possessed. Some of these families have been relocated to temporary shelters, but when neighboring communities protested the presence of these poor, low-caste relocatees and threatened to burn down their tents, they were moved again. But about 50 households are still camping out on the rubble of their old houses in Thapathali.



After a visit by ACHR, SDI, CAN and Lumanti, plans were set to organize a workshop to explore alternative housing solutions for these embattled riverside settlements (including on-site upgrading, reblocking, land-sharing and land readjustment) and to use these alternative plans and ideas to negotiate for a better and more viable solution than relocating all those people to hostile relocation sites and deepening their poverty. The week-long workshop, which was jointly organized by Lumanti, the community federations and the local and regional groups of community architects, was held in August (August 6-15). The workshop proposed a holistic approach to redeveloping the housing along the whole length of the river, in which the communities would move back 20 meters from the river bank to make room for the project, and then redevelop more densely-planned forms of housing along those smaller strips of land. That would mean the Bagmati communities would returning 61% of land they now occupy to the government and retain only 39% of the land for their community housing.



These proposals and negotiations got a big boost when Mr. Keshav Sthapit, Kathmandu's former mayor and a strong ally of the community movement in Kathmandu, was appointed as Commissioner for the Kathmandu Valley Development Authority, and put in charge of managing the resettlement of the Bagmati families. It was also agreed in the workshop that this kind of participatory exploration of alternative "win-win" housing options - which work for both the city and the poor communities - should be explored not only in the settlements along the river, but in all the other informal settlements around the city.



*(Nad has prepared a detailed report about this workshop, filled with photos, plans and drawings. Please contact ACHR for a copy)*

