

About ACHR

The following article was written in 1998. A revised version will appear soon. You may read the entire article or select different sections by "clicking" the various headings below.

1. [Introduction](#)
2. [Development of Activities](#)
3. [Recent ACHR Activities: 1994-1998](#)
4. [Involvement and Influencing UN and Intern'l Agencies](#)
5. [Roles and Functions of ACHR](#)
6. [ACHR Structure](#)
7. [Financing/Funding Support](#)

Summary Before the emergence of ACHR there was no common forum or facility for NGO's, professionals and grassroots groups working in Asian cities to exchange ideas, despite an expressed need to share experiences, tackle the large problem of forced evictions in the regions cities, develop opportunities for organisations of the poor and consider their place in city planning. It was with these intentions in mind that ACHR was formed in 1988. Since then, the links between coalition members have matured, regional programmes have been formalised and ACHR has become recognized as one of the most important players in urban poor development in the region by international agencies and urban actors.

ACHR The Asian Coalition for Housing Rights

1. Introduction

In June 1988 a group of professionals and social activists involved with urban poor development activities in various Asian countries established the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (to be called in short, "ACHR" onwards). The first activity the group implemented was a Regional Campaign against evictions in Korea. This led to a number of new regional activities with a larger number and broader range of contact groups. ACHR evolved into a regional network and representative for Habitat International Coalition, for Asia. It has also become the main regional network on human settlements and urban issues consulted by many UN agencies such as UNCHS, UNDP and ESCAP.

Since its inception the ACHR secretariat has been located in Bangkok, keeping itself small, low-cost, and with only a few full-time staff. It has encouraged the decentralization of various regional activities and related coordination to other member groups in the region, as far as possible. In Bangkok, which is centrally located in the region, communication costs are efficient and cheaper and related services such as foreign exchange and finance are flexible. These factors make Bangkok a convenient location for the secretariat. Because of this, the secretariat has gradually taken more and more coordinating functions as ACHR has grown. Today ACHR has the strength of being an effective regional network to promote necessary changes for people. This depends on the ACHR secretariat's coordinating capacity to promote many activities in collaboration with its diverse number of contact organizations.

In the past several years, ACHR regional activities have grown considerably. This is mainly due to the implementation of the Training and Advisory Program (TAP) which in its first 3 years organized more than fifty regional activities of various kinds. In parallel with the growth of TAP, was the emergence of some common key issues / themes in the region affecting most countries, and thus Regional Functional Units were set up to provide a clearer scope and focus for a regional sharing / working on these themes. As of April 1998, the following have become ACHR's active Regional Functional Units

Regional Eviction Watch Program
Asian Women and Shelter Network (AWAS)
Young Professionals Program (YPP)
Savings-and-Credit Activities
Community Organising and Strengthening

The larger the organization, the more challenges, and promises / potential for better opportunities to change the present situation, and we are all committed to such change. However, with such growth there is also potential for more problems to emerge: differences of interests, theories, beliefs, and expectations. These have to be accounted for, and compromises made at certain levels. Since its establishment, we have adopted a decentralized system to share tasks to organize various regional activities among members. Decentralised coordinators are expected to develop constructive working relationships with other groups in the region. In the past several years, it has become apparent that there is still a need to develop a new processes and operational techniques to ensure accountability and broader participation in all activities, while maintaining the principle of decentralization. It is timely to mutually reorganize the decentralized working structure with increased effectiveness and self-accountability.

Another interesting aspect which has emerged over the past several years is a clearer national process in many countries; with the spontaneous formation of national ACHR networks amongst contact groups in each country. This means better facilitation and stronger connections and actions both at national and regional levels. The following countries have a defined national contact facility or form of organizational set-up to coordinate within their countries/cities: Nepal, Korea, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Thailand and Japan.

It is now evident that the role of ACHR coordination has increased considerably. The range of its activities has grown rapidly. Recently ACHR has been involved in various regional grassroots exchange programs, training workshops, meetings, seminars, fact finding missions, publications, extensive information dissemination. ACHR also presents itself at various UN and international meetings. In this connection, the secretariat office in Bangkok has taken most of the general coordinating roles.

It is necessary and important that the present regional coordinating and facilitating functions of ACHR Secretariat in Bangkok continue to be effective. However, the present situation is regarded as a transitional stage to a new form of regional coalition and networking which aims to be more decentralized, action-oriented and with a clear direction to promote changes and the initiatives of people.

This requires broad participation and unified involvement of groups in the region. This can happen in various forms but needs to be firmly based on local contexts to be sustainable in the future.

2. Development of Activities

- ACHR's path for the decade 1988-1998

2.1 Regional Action in Korea - Forming “the spirit ” of ACHR -

ACHR was inaugurated in June 1988 after a regional meeting of Asian NGOs working on urban housing issues in the region. It was first intended to make an immediate response to the case of eviction in Seoul, Korea. Regional Eviction Campaign was organized to send a fact finding mission to Korea. The campaign drew broad participation from most concerned groups in the region and in the world, which consequently brought some impact on the country's situation.

This action also gave the form to what ACHR is: action-oriented, serious concern for the urban poor and emphasis on actions to bring concrete positive changes to the people's lives. It is different from other regional organizations whose members tend to speculate on benefits from such serious activities. ACHR aimed at facilitating a process where participating groups can perceive commonness with each other in their problems and actions. These are some special and genuine elements that helped form ACHR.

2.2 Asian People's Dialogue - Forming “ a grassroots oriented approach”

Major activities of the second year 1989 were; Asian People's Dialogue (APD meeting) in Seoul Korea, Women's Grassroots Workshop in Bombay India and follow-up activities of the campaign program in Korea. The Asian People's Dialogue was an historic even for the urban poor in Asia. It involved 100 participants, two-thirds of whom were leaders of grassroots organizations in urban slum settlements throughout Asia. Thus it required a lot of organization work including 2 preparatory meetings within the region. The Women's Grassroots Workshop in Bombay were attended by more than 100 leaders from grassroots organization. It made an important bench mark sparking off a grassroots direction. The first ACHR regional meeting was organized on the last day of the APD meeting in Korea: 22 organizations from 9 different countries participated. The meeting came up with an outline of regional activities to be launched in 1990. The first ACHR regional committee was also established then to share responsibilities for different activities.

2.3 Attempt to Diversify Regional Activities 1990-1991

At the end of 1989, the ACHR secretariat office was set up in Bangkok. It was a sign of a commitment for a more unified regional activities for people and by people.

The second ACHR meeting held in Bombay India at the end of 1989 was a changing step from the first two years. It mapped out 11 different regional projects to

be implemented from 1990- 1991. With financial support from external agencies, the following activities were organized in 1990

Publication: "A Decent Place to Live" by Denis Murphy
Bi-annual newsletter "Housing by People"
Project on rural eviction by YUVA
Project on community-based improvement in Ho Chi Minh City with UN-ESCAP
Fact Finding Mission to Hong Kong and Assessment Mission to Korea, followed by publication of the mission reports

More projects materialized during 1991-1992

Publication: "Housing the Urban Poor in Asia" by Fr. Jorge Anzorena
Regional Exchange Program among India, Thailand and the Philippines proposed by SPARC, Bombay
Database of information on organizations involved in housing in the region

2.4 Regional Community-Based Development Project in Ho Chi Minh City 1990-1994

This project was implemented jointly with UN-ESCAP in cooperation with Land and Housing Department of Ho Chi Minh City. It was intended as a move to introduce alternative housing solutions by promoting a community-based improvement approach. Hiep Thanh Community was selected as a pilot community for the project. The initiative brought a significant new dimension to the ACHR process. It is another form of collaboration toward change in policies and approach based on local context, Viet Nam in this case. In the beginning, the regional intervention seemed to have brought changes to perceptions and policies up to a certain level. Later, changes in the local organizations, leadership and the whole urban situation caused stagnation to the implementing model, and this continues up until now. However, there has been intensive collaboration and experiences of drawing inputs from the region for the project. They were all aimed at developing an appropriate solution for the local processes which were very much in need of support. These efforts have added another lively dimension to the ACHR process. New efforts for interventions are being explored.

2.5 Emergence of Regional Training and Advisory Program (1st Phase April 1993- March 1996)

Considerable changes in the ACHR process emerged with the implementation of a three year Training and Advisory Program (TAP). The program is financially supported by ODA-UK (presently called Department For International Development-DFID). TAP aims to improve the living conditions of urban slum dwellers by developing new ideas and practices of community based organizations through sharing of experiences with similar organizations in other countries in the region. The process involves collective learning and exposure trips for combined groups of grassroots organizers, NGOs, professionals, and government officials to successful urban processes and projects in Asia.

2.6 Emergence of Functional Units

During this period other independent activities such as the Regional Eviction Watch and Housing Rights Program and the Asian Women and Shelter Program have been slowly consolidating their particular regional activities and projects. Functional units were formed to enable a more organized and independent regional processes and programs while maintaining close links with all existing regional contacts. This paved a clearer way to coordinate diverse regional activities into a more organized manner based on participation of various interest groups in the region.

2.7 Fact Finding Mission to Central Asia; Kazakhstan and Kirgystan

The first Fact Finding Mission to Kazakhstan and Kirgystan was made in March, 1996 at the request of Dutch Interchurch Aid (DIA) and Habitat International Coalition (HIC). The ACHR team was hosted in Almaty, capital of Kazakhstan by Baspana which was an alliance of several NGOs and federation of homeless people . During the first visit to Kazakhstan, it was decided to set up research into the housing processes already functioning in Almaty's dormitories and informal settlements. To learn about ways of refining these processes collectively and incrementally, NGO activities and community leaders from Baspana have made two exposure visits to Orangi Pilot Project in Karachi. A follow-up visit by ACHR was made in April, 1997 with support from DIA, ACHR-TAP's New Initiatives component. There are plans to set up teams to initiate and strengthen savings-and-credit groups in Almaty's informal settlements.

2.8 Support for Strengthening of Urban Community-based Initiatives in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Support to Cambodia started in February, 1994 under the New Initiatives Component of TAP. ACHR-TAP then helped organize survey activities of urban poor communities of Phnom Penh with a team of slum dwellers from Bombay, India. Squatter communities of Phnom Penh, local and international NGOs actively participated in the activities. The outcome of the surveys were presented for representatives of the Municipality of Phnom Penh and the Cambodian Government. The process provided an opportunity for communities and, local NGOs, international NGOs and the government representatives to come together to discuss the concerns of the urban poor for the first time after twenty years of war and internal conflicts.

Since then extensive support and input has been provided through different functional units and TAP such as Savings-and-Credit, Community Organization (CO), and the Young Professionals Program (YPP).

Urbanization is still a new process in Cambodia and the country itself has been struggling for reconstruction and to formulate policies and programs for the poor. The Squatter and Urban Poor Federation (SUPF) and Urban Sector Group (USG) are outcomes of the effort of facilitating the strengthening of communities.

2.9 Inter-regional and intra-regional exchange and networking

Setting up "Shack / Slum Dwellers International"

ACHR groups have been closely in touch with South African Homeless People's Federation (SAHPF) and People's Dialogue since March 1991. They have been engaged in a "people-to-people" learning process. This has resulted in the amazing growth of a community people's process and brought a tremendous impact on formulating government policies and programs for the homeless poor. When the groups from Asian and Latin America joined the SAHPF's anniversary last year (1997), the participants decided to set up "Shack Dwellers International". The network is a child of South-South cooperation. The fund was provided by Miserior as the seed fund to support inter-regional activities.

Sub-Regional Exchange and Collaboration

For the past few years, exchanges within the sub-regions have been active. There have been exchange of experiences between Korea and Japan, Nepal and Pakistan, India and Cambodia, Philippines and Cambodia. There is much to share and learn from each other when those in similar contexts and situations come together. Intensive and concrete learning can happen through these exchanges. ACHR intends to give further support to this approach in the future.

3. Recent ACHR Activities: 1994-1998

3.1 Activities from Regional Functional Units

- Regional Training and Advisory Program (TAP)
- Regional Housing Rights and Eviction Watch (EHR)
- Asian Women and Shelter Network (AWAS)

Major Activities emerging as Regional Function Programs through TAP

- Community Savings and Credit Activities
- Community Strengthening
- Young Professionals Program
- Participatory Research

3.2 Other ACHR's Regional Activities

- Regional Exchange Program and small visits
- Viet Nam Project
- Support for Cambodia
- Joint regional study project with HIC on GO/NGO cooperation
- Study on Housing Policies and Approaches in a Changing Asian Context
- Ramesh Fund, contributions from various sources to set up a small development fund in Nepal
- Central Asia Project
- E-News and information services

3.3 Publications

- ACHR bi-annual newsletter Housing by People In Asia
- TAP bi-annual newsletter News on TAP

Young Professionals Newsletter
Evictions / Housing Rights Abuses in Asia Edited by Denis Murphy and
Minar Pimple (compiled from “ Eviction Watch monitoring reports),
Nov 1995
Housing Finance for the Poor A joint publication HIC / ACHR / IIED /
UNDP 1994
Housing The Poor: Asian Experiences by Fr. Jorge Anzorena, 1994
Housing Crisis in Central Asia by Arif Hasan
How Communities Organize Themselves by Kenneth Fernandes
Working with Government by Arif Hasan
ACHR Calendar 1998

4. Involvement and Influencing UN and International Agencies

ACHR has become a major regional network on human settlements and other related urban issues and is acknowledged as such in official documents of various UN and international agencies.

4.1 Nature of involvement

Co-organizing regional activities and workshops
Influencing regional policies such as ESCAP/UNDP’s Urban Forum,
Ministerial Conference on Urbanization, and Study on Living in Asian
Cities
Joint Mission and joint regional intervention in national processes in
Cambodia, Viet Nam, Lao PDR, and Bangladesh
Sub-contracting regional projects to ACHR members
Consultancy for projects
Providing regional experts for regional activities
Serving as regional executive committee members in various regional
forums and networks
Getting funding support for some member countries
Co-financing interesting and strategic projects

4.2 Types and Methods of involvement

UN Habitat II processes

Participating and co-organizing regional workshops and events related to
Habitat II both at regional and global levels
Joining Best Practices
Involvement with HIC for Habitat II process

UN-ESCAP

Co-organizing regional meetings and workshops
Joint-projects in Viet Nam, Lao PDR, and Cambodia
Co-organizing the “ Living in Asia” publication project as the major official
paper for Habitat II from Asian region

CITYNET

CITYNET is the Regional Network of Local Authorities, NGOs and CBOs working on human settlements. The secretariat is based in Yokohama, Japan. ACHR, as a regional NGO is one of the executive committee member of CITYNET. Joining the executive committee is intended to help establish contacts for better dialogue among NGOs and local municipalities. Being an executive committee member, ACHR has involved in all activities of the network.

UNDP

UNDP has supported various regional activities and initiatives so far. For example, UNDP has been supporting video production of exchanges between South Africa and India. Not only receiving support, ACHR has co-organized some regional activities of UNDP on urban issues.

Habitat International Coalition (HIC)

ACHR is the HIC focal point for Asia with 2 board members and the president of HIC

Participation in most HIC activities

Close cooperation in HIC Housing Rights and Eviction Program

Cooperation on developing links with central Asian countries

Joint research project on GO/NGO cooperation

UNCHS/Habitat

Collaboration with Community Development Program-Asia (CDP-Asia) in Sri Lanka, Lao PDR, Thailand, Bangladesh and Indonesia

Working under subcontracts for projects in Viet Nam and Cambodia

ACHR also collaborates with other International organizations including: IIED, ACFOD, the Ashoka Foundation and many others.

5. Roles and Functions of ACHR

Acting as a pressure group and for crisis intervention in specific problems. Actions taken include fact-finding missions and regional campaigns

Information dissemination : this happens at all levels.

Providing opportunities for community organizations to facilitate sharing of experiences at the community level and for international members to deepen understanding of the major forces affecting the urban poor

Facilitating experience sharing and exchange among groups especially among the grassroots and NGO groups

Providing professional consultation for groups based on needs

Coordinating with related agencies both international and local especially with regard to regional activities

Support to empower local organizations and strengthen links among each other

Support for the grassroots struggle for housing with an aim to develop the process that enables people to strengthen their own capabilities

Research on key issues and innovative initiatives in the region
Advocacy at international, national and local levels; Creating space for change and facilitating dialogue on local situations through by organizing activities with local groups
Support and encourage young professionals to get involved in community development work and deepen their understanding of the people's process

6. ACHR's Structure - 5 elements

ACHR Contact Organisations

While ACHR has a "membership" of nearly 500 contact organisations and professionals throughout the region: there is no strict membership as such. Membership is open to any who wish to become **involved**. National focal points in countries throughout the region are expected to identify active NGO's, CBO's and even government and private sector professionals, irrespective of their organisational status so that they can be included in the national processes supported by ACHR and linked into the ACHR regional network

National Focal Points

Over the past decade, particular group members of ACHR have emerged as focal points in their respective countries. These focal points, are the key contacts for the secretariat and members in other countries and coordinate national activities and inputs into ACHR meetings, policies, programmes etc. In some countries the ACHR National Focal Points provide regular platforms for discussions, exchange of ideas amongst various national groups.

Regional Functional Units

Through ACHR's decentralised structure, various ACHR national groups volunteer to manage and implement particular regional ACHR programmes or activities throughout the region on behalf of ACHR. These groups volunteer on the basis of their strength, experience, and interest in the particular programme activity. For example the Savings and Credit activities have been managed by UCDO, Bangkok, SPARC, Bombay and the Women's Bank, Sri Lanka.

ACHR Committees

For the most part, ACHR does not have many formal committees and is flexibly and informally managed through a process of consultation with ACHR coalition groups. Nevertheless, there is what could be referred to as an active "*Executive Committee*", which meets annually to review ACHR's overall activities, make recommendations and provide broad guidance and planning. Members of the Executive Committee also function as advisors to regional activities. When required, the executive committee establishes "*Special Committees*" to examine issues in greater detail.

ACHR Secretariat

The general roles and functions of the Secretariat are as follows:

- General coordination and support for all ACHR activities
- Coordination with international agencies, UN agencies, governments and local organizations
- Information dissemination
- Facilitating linkages among different organizations
- Facilitation and advisory support for Regional Functional Units
- Assessment and review of ACHR projects and activities
- Accounting and organizing reports for most ACHR projects to be sent to funding agencies
- Fund raising and assistance in fund raising for regional projects
- Encouraging broad participatory and decentralized process in ACHR
- In specific cases the Secretariat also takes the lead responsibility for particular programmes, activities and therefore is akin to a Regional Functional Unit.

In the future, ACHR would aims to more constructively and proactively evolve into a Regional Facility, which facilitates innovation amongst its groups as well as implementing meaningful and effective activities to intervene in development directions in countries in the region, and in the region itself. This means that its Secretariat must continue to be effective and facilitative and that management of regional activities become more decentralised, self-managed, and action-oriented to promote change initiatives in people.

7. Financing/Funding Support

Financial support for ACHR activities as at 1998

<i>Regional programs</i>	<i>Source of funding</i>
TAP	SEAD, DFID- UK
Housing Rights and Eviction Watch	Miserior, Netherlands Govt.
AWAS	AP2000, UNCHS, Miserior
Viet Nam Project	Miserior, UNCHS/UNDP
Publication	TAP, Miserior
Secretariat	Miserior, EZE
Central Asia Project	HIC, Dutch Inter-Church Aid, TAP
Cambodia Project	UNCHS, SELAVIP, Miserior, CDP-Asia/UNCHS
Small projects and assistance	Miserior, EZE, SELAVIP, CDP-Asia/UNCHS