

ACHR team visits INDONESIA

Updates from the local collective housing movement • 02/2025

In February 2024, the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) visited partner organizations in Indonesia to gain deeper insights into the local collective housing movement, particularly the ongoing efforts to scale up housing cooperative networks to a national level. This process is being led by the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC), one of urbaMonde's newest project partners in Asia. The collective housing movement plays a crucial role in addressing housing inequality, not only in Indonesia but also in urban settings worldwide. Marina Kolovou Kouri (ACHR) joined the visit, engaging with organizations in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Bandar Lampung to exchange experiences and gather insights.

Contextualizing UPC's efforts

Housing challenges in Indonesia

Indonesia's market-driven land and housing system has resulted in a staggering housing backlog of 12.5 million units, with the government pledging to produce three million units annually to meet growing demand. However, much of this responsibility is placed on private developers and state-owned companies—a model that has consistently failed to provide affordable housing for lower-income populations.

Despite 70% of homes in Indonesia being self-built by communities, these efforts receive little to no government support. Existing financing systems often exclude the urban poor, who lack access to banks and collateral, making homeownership unattainable. At the same time, large-scale urban developments are accelerating displacement risks for vulnerable communities in Indonesia's rapidly transforming cities.

In contrast, collective housing—founded on shared ownership, pooled resources, and participatory decision-making—provides a sustainable alternative. This approach not only reduces costs but also prioritizes inclusion by ensuring access for the most vulnerable populations, while fostering social cohesion. As urbanization continues to reshape cities, addressing these inequities presents an urgent and timely opportunity.

Setting precedents in Jakarta

In Jakarta, UPC and the Jaringan Rakyat Miskin Kota (Urban Poor People's Network) have long advocated for on-site upgrading over eviction and redistributing land and resources to benefit low-income residents. Following a brutal wave of evictions in 2015-2016, political support from Jakarta's Governor from 2017 onward led to significant breakthroughs in the city. Participatory upgrading programs, like the Community Action Plan (CAP) and Collaborative Implementation Program (CIP), have facilitated infrastructure improvements in kampungs without the need for formal land titles. These initiatives have transformed 21 kampungs, with plans to expand to 445. Another notable breakthrough is the government-funded reconstruction of housing for previously evicted communities. Through this initiative, cooperatives have been granted management rights, paving the way for eventual ownership of their newly upgraded housing.

Learnings for the national movement

These successes offer valuable lessons for scaling up collective housing initiatives in Jakarta and beyond. Building on this momentum, the UPC project, in partnership with urbaMonde, aims to replicate these strategies in eight additional cities—Bandar Lampung, Semarang, Demak, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Makassar, Palu, and Kendari—where urban poor residents face similar challenges, such as insecure land tenure and inadequate housing.



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Key goals of the project:

- Consolidating and strengthening people's organizations,
- Gathering community-sourced data on land and housing needs,
- Establishing cooperatives at city and national levels,
- Developing community-led finance mechanisms, and
- Collaborating with architects, planners, and universities to design participatory upgrading plans.

At the national level, the project seeks to address structural barriers, including outdated land regulations and the lack of legal frameworks for urban housing cooperatives. By advocating for urban land reforms that grant cooperatives collective land rights, the initiative aims to position cooperatives as key housing project managers within Indonesia's cooperative system.



Jakarta's diverse collective housing landscape



To better understand the trajectory of the local collective housing movement and its connection to UPC's current project, we visited some of Jakarta's notable settlement projects.

1 On-site Upgrading and Reblocking

Kampungs Tongkol, Lodan, and Krapu

These three settlements along the Ciliwung River faced eviction threats in 2015 due to the government's river normalization program. In a unified response, residents proposed an alternative on-site upgrading plan and embraced the role of "guardians of the river." They agreed to set back their homes to create a 5-meter-wide access road and began regular river-cleaning activities. Their plan included improving infrastructure, initiating planting and farming projects, capturing tourism opportunities, and showcasing a two-story bamboo house prototype as a sustainable model for riverside living.



Kampung Marlina

In densely populated Kampung Marlina, house extensions had nearly blocked the narrow access road, creating poor lighting, poor ventilation, and a dark, congested alley. Seven families upgraded their homes on-site, demonstrating how healthier living principles could transform the community. The improved homes now feature better air circulation, natural lighting, and reduced humidity, making them less vulnerable to fire and flooding. Meanwhile, the alley is gradually being revitalized into a green corridor, offering a more livable space for residents to rest and grow herbs, improving the overall quality of life in the area.

2 Land Consolidation

Kampungs in Muara Angke

Situated along Jakarta's coast, Kampung Blok Eceng, Tembok Bolong, Blok Limbah, and Blok Empang have faced displacement threats due to infrastructure development projects. In 2019, residents started collaborating with UPC and the Rujak Center for Urban Studies to craft a land consolidation plan that would allow them to remain on-site with improved living conditions. By highlighting how their traditional livelihoods, such as fishing and fish processing, support the local economy, they strengthened their case against relocation. Their plan proposes a mixed-use settlement, dividing the land between infrastructure and residential development. The community now awaits land status clearance to initiate upgrades.

Kampung Gang Lengkong

Once a larger settlement, Gang Lengkong has endured a protracted land conflict with overlapping claims and persistent eviction threats. While most residents settled with the company claiming the land and moved away, 12* families remained, fighting for a land consolidation proposal. With support from UPC and Rujak, they designed a concept that allocates part of the disputed land for rebuilding their homes, ensuring their right to stay and secure their future.

**At the time of publishing, only seven families remain in the community and continue negotiating with the government for relocation with compensation money.*



3 Vertical Kampung

Kampung Susun Akuarium

In 2016, the Akuarium community faced the sudden demolition of their homes with only a few days' notice. Refusing to relocate to government-subsidized housing (*rusunawa*), 88 families rebuilt their homes from the rubble and, with the support of allies, successfully negotiated for a *kampung susun*—a mid-rise “vertical kampung” designed with assistance from Rujak. Funded by the government and built on the same site, this housing project became the first settlement to be entirely managed by a cooperative, which will eventually own the building.

Kampung Susun Kunir

Kampung Kunir experienced a similar eviction, despite previously being recognized as a “green kampung” and even receiving an award from the government. Rejecting relocation to *rusunawa*, 33 families mobilized until their request for on-site reconstruction was accepted. With design assistance from Architecture Sans Frontières Indonesia (ASF-ID), a four-story building was completed in 2022, offering new homes for the families. These families have since formed the Kunir cooperative to manage the building and coordinate various collective activities.



The government's alternative: Rusunawa



To contrast the government's conventional housing approach with community-led initiatives, we visited a public mid-rise rental complex, or *rusunawa*, in Waduk Pluit, North Jakarta. Discussions with residents and JRMK members revealed significant shortcomings in the *rusunawa* model.

A key concern is its lack of emphasis on community building and economic development. Unlike community-led housing projects, which prioritize not just the physical structures but also how residents interact, live, and thrive together, *rusunawa* often neglect these important aspects of daily life. In addition, many *rusunawa* complexes are located far from residents' original neighborhoods, affecting livelihoods, prolonging children's commutes to school, and breaking essential social ties that strengthen resilience.

While *rusunawa* may offer shelter to those unable to afford homeownership, it is neither a sustainable nor universally effective solution. The challenges it presents vary by residents' economic circumstances. Formal workers with stable incomes might find the model adequate, but for informal workers, whose livelihoods often rely on fluctuating earnings or home-based businesses, adapting can be particularly difficult. As UPC Coordinator Gugun Muhammad explains, *rusunawa* often disrupt both their income sources and economic activities, making it an impractical option for many.

Housing solutions must go beyond shelter to address the social and economic dimensions of residents' lives. Increased community participation in housing decisions is essential to create models that respect and preserve the livelihoods and social networks of affected populations, rather than imposing one-size-fits-all solutions.

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The movement's achievements — and why they matter

1 Building people's collective awareness and organization

One of the most remarkable achievements of Jakarta's housing movement is the unification of residents, who have come to recognize the power of their collective voice. Over time, they have shifted from merely reacting to threats of displacement to proactively organizing for their future. This growing awareness—that they can claim their rights not only during crises but also to achieve lasting improvements in their quality of life—has empowered entire communities. A prime example of this transformation is the establishment of 26 registered cooperatives in Jakarta, which now serve as a foundation for housing cooperatives across Indonesia. For the first time, these communities have access to a legal mechanism to secure tenure and collectively manage their housing resources. This shift—from being vulnerable to eviction to actively shaping their neighborhoods—is the direct result of solid community organizing efforts and a shared collective vision for the future.



2 Fostering a cross-sectoral movement

The housing movement has also cultivated a robust network of cross-sectoral collaboration, uniting NGOs, academic institutions, grassroots organizations, and professionals from diverse fields. This collective advocacy has built a bridge between the urban poor and influential policymakers, forming a powerful coalition for systemic change. By leveraging these alliances, the movement has gained momentum and visibility, amplifying its capacity to drive meaningful reforms. The impact of this cross-sectoral collaboration is evident in successful advocacy campaigns that have secured increased government support, redirected resources toward better housing and infrastructure, and reshaped public attitudes toward kampungs and their residents. These achievements underscore the transformative potential of collaborative action.



3 Shifting the system from the ground up

Bottom-up regulatory changes and resource redistribution

One of the most tangible outcomes of Jakarta's housing movement is the shift from top-down government control to more inclusive, bottom-up approaches. Initiatives like the Community Action Plan (CAP) and the Collaborative Implementation Program (CIP) enable residents, NGOs, and government bodies to collaborate on shaping their neighborhoods. The CAP institutionalizes dialogue, allowing residents to actively participate in decisions on upgrades in housing, infrastructure, and overall quality of life. Meanwhile, the CIP opens doors for informal communities to access government budgets, integrating them into official city plans for development.

Collective building permits

Another significant breakthrough is the issuance of collective building permits to cooperatives in several kampungs in Jakarta, transforming once "illegal" buildings into legally recognized assets. These permits not only protect residents from eviction but also allow them to use their homes as collateral for loans, improving their financial stability. While these permits are temporary, they represent an important step toward securing the rights of the city's poorest communities.

Urban Land Reform Program

The Urban Land Reform Program aims to provide an additional layer of security by granting land rights to urban poor families who have lived on these lands for generations. It seeks to redistribute land in urban areas, addressing both economic and social injustices while also contributing to environmental justice by empowering communities to make sustainable decisions about the development and preservation of their neighborhoods. Although still in its early stages, the program explores various modalities to offer different pathways for communities to secure long-term tenure of land (whether state, coastal, government, or private) through cooperatives. This program is key to allowing residents to invest in and improve their quality of life without the looming threat of eviction.

Land-use conversion in spatial plans

Another major achievement is the successful advocacy for land-use conversion in Jakarta's spatial plans. By formally recognizing numerous kampungs, or "high-density settlements," as residential areas, land-use regulations have been amended to protect them from commercial development. While this doesn't entirely eliminate insecurity, it provides an additional layer of protection for kampung dwellers against gentrification, fostering a more supportive environment as land tenure statuses are clarified. This shift represents a major transformation in how Jakarta views its urban poor, gradually recognizing them as permanent and valuable members of the city's landscape.

Reactivating the people's movement in Bandar Lampung



Bandar Lampung, located on the island of Sumatra, is one of the nine cities where the UPC project is currently underway. As a coastal city, it faces the dual threat of flooding from both tides and heavy rainfall cascading down from the surrounding hills. Its 27-kilometer coastline is dotted with kampungs, each facing a multitude of challenges and varying levels of tenure insecurity.

While the local people's movement had previously secured land certificates for many families, the 2004 announcement of Bandar Lampung's vision to transform into a modern waterfront city—complete with plazas and tourist facilities—cast uncertainty over the future of existing kampungs. A regulation imposing a 100-meter setback from the shore to mitigate flooding further exacerbated this uncertainty, despite investors continuing to buy large tracts of coastal land, speculating on future profits once the city's vision materialized.

Despite these ambitious plans, progress has been slow, and coastal redevelopment remains stalled. Although no evictions have occurred in recent years, the looming threat has left many residents hesitant to upgrade their homes, fearing displacement either due to enforcement of the setback regulation or because investors are claiming ownership of the land.

The community-led movement, which had slowed to a near standstill in recent years—particularly during the pandemic—is now being reactivated through the UPC project. Efforts are underway to revive people's organizations in the city, establish and register cooperatives, and develop upgrading plans for coastal kampungs. This initiative is supported by another ACHR-backed project funded by the SELAVIP Foundation, which will offer pilot housing and infrastructure upgrades. Drawing inspiration from other cities, the goal is to showcase inclusive, climate-resilient solutions that prioritize local livelihoods and activities, offering an alternative to government- and investor-driven waterfront developments.



To gain deeper insights into local challenges and aspirations, and to initiate the process in Bandar Lampung, we visited three coastal kampungs—**Kangkung, Bumiwaras, and Kunyit**. Each settlement faces unique issues stemming from its coastal location and socioeconomic conditions, presenting a mix of housing types, from sturdy brick homes to fragile stilt houses over the sea. Tenure arrangements also vary, with some households holding land certificates while others remain entangled in long-standing disputes. These settlements confront significant environmental challenges, including recurrent flooding, the decline of the local fishing industry, poor sanitation from public toilets built over water, and inadequate waste management.

After visiting these communities and engaging in discussions with residents and leaders, a meeting was held to forge a collective path forward. It became clear that the issues these communities face are not isolated but shared challenges that require collective solutions. Central to their strategy is the development of an **alternative people's plan for a waterfront city**—a demonstration of their ability to manage their land responsibly. United by this understanding, the communities decided to pursue collective land certification together, recognizing the power of solidarity. Improving housing and living conditions, as well as managing waste, emerged as essential goals—not only to enhance daily life but also to shift the kampungs' reputation and build trust with authorities.



Scaling up cooperation in Yogyakarta's housing movement

Our final stop on the journey took us to Yogyakarta, Central Java, another of the nine cities actively engaged in the housing cooperative movement, where we met with ACHR partners **Arkorn** and the **Kalijawi Community Network**. Yogyakarta, renowned for its rich cultural heritage, faces unique challenges, including some of the lowest income levels among Indonesia's urban centers. As a Special Region under the Sultan, its governance adds another layer of complexity to the ongoing struggles for land and housing access, making the city a focal point for both community-driven solutions and larger systemic changes.

The Kalijawi Community Network, established in 2012, brings together more than 300 households from 15 kampungs along the city's rivers. With support from Arkorn, the Kalijawi network has made significant strides in implementing upgrading projects along the riverbanks, accumulating over one billion rupiah in collective savings, and securing tenure for several households. In recent years, many members formalized their efforts by registering as a cooperative. However, challenges persist, including the Sultan's control over land and increasing market pressures, underscoring the urgency of advancing collective housing models to safeguard these gains.

Reflecting on their trajectory, Arkorn and Kalijawi find themselves at a pivotal moment of transformation. Yuli Kusworo, co-founder and current Director of Arkorn, emphasized that while





community organizing has been at the core of their efforts for years, the movement has now reached a strength that allows them to shift focus. Moving forward, they aim to expand their efforts to address broader urban and national challenges, including land reform and climate change.

In collaboration with UPC and the Kalijawi Community Network, Arkom is now working to extend the reach of people's organizations in Yogyakarta by establishing new cooperatives that will lead local efforts to improve access to land, housing, and essential resources. This expansion, part of the urbaMonde-supported project, involves transitioning from the current cooperative model—which unites families from various kampungs—towards cooperatives that are based on territorial proximity. The rationale behind this shift is to align cooperative membership with the geographic areas where people live, enabling these cooperatives to become the legitimate entities holding land rights and managing housing units.

A key initiative that stands out is Arkom's effort to bridge the gap between communities and technical professionals through the **Akademi Arsitek Komunitas (AKAR)**, or the Community Architects Academy. AKAR is designed to foster a deeper understanding of urban issues among community architects and other professionals. Offering a year-long, flexible course, the academy incorporates interdisciplinary perspectives from sociologists, architects, planners, and other experts. The curriculum covers topics ranging from urban theory to practical workshops focused on solutions for issues such as waste management, water systems, and transportation. AKAR's inclusive approach has already attracted participants from 21 cities across Indonesia, including community members eager to improve their neighborhoods. This initiative not only enhances the capacity of professionals but also provides a platform to build the skills needed to strengthen and scale up the community-driven cooperative housing movement across Indonesia.

Scaling change: People, power, and urban reform

The collaborative spirit witnessed across Indonesia's urban reform movements is both encouraging and promising for the future. From Jakarta's progress in gaining formal recognition for informal settlements, to Lampung's efforts to reactivate people's movements and Yogyakarta's cooperative-driven housing initiatives, there is a clear ambition to scale up these efforts—tailored to the unique contexts of each city. The lessons learned in Jakarta are already being leveraged to inspire and inform similar movements in other cities, reflecting a strong commitment to expanding the reach and impact of community-led urban solutions built on three key pillars: secure tenure, people-driven alternatives, and cooperative-based collective action. Despite the challenges posed by shifting political dynamics and market pressures, the pace of the movement is undeniable. As these communities continue to organize, innovate, and collaborate, there is a growing sense of optimism that, through collective action, urban inequality, access to land, and climate resilience can be addressed in a sustainable, community-driven way. The momentum is building, and the groundwork is being laid for transformative change across Indonesia's urban landscape.

