

IMPROVING RURAL SHELTER IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)

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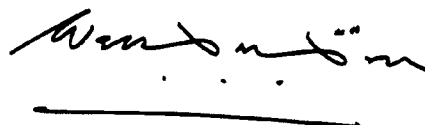
Foreword

The Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 (GSS) was launched in 1988 as a guiding framework for national shelter policy formulation. Despite considerable progress since then, many countries still do not have explicit policies on rural shelter. Many national shelter policies cover urban shelter only and it is assumed that there are no significant rural shelter problems and that rural inhabitants will, in one way or another, manage to provide their own shelter without assistance from government or other formal institutions. Yet the large majority of the rural inhabitants of developing countries live in inadequate shelter - inadequate in terms of security of tenure, quantity of shelter and its physical quality. This phenomenon is itself a manifestation of the more general problem of rural poverty. Researchers have also tended to neglect the problem of rural shelter, and there is at present little published material which policy-makers can consult for guidance. In spite of this, there have been several innovative and interesting rural shelter improvement projects in different parts of the developing world from which some basic lessons can be learnt.

This publication aims at beginning to fill the above policy vacuum: firstly, by developing a conceptual framework for rural shelter policy which takes into account several issues which are currently important in development, namely, poverty reduction, the enabling approach and sustainable development; secondly, by analysing some successful rural shelter improvement projects and programmes in order to isolate both positive and negative lessons; and thirdly, by presenting general guidelines for the formulation of national rural shelter policies in developing countries, within the framework of the Global Strategy for

Shelter to the Year 2000. The publication is also in response to one of the themes of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (Istanbul, June 1996), "Adequate Shelter for All". It is my hope that, in the long-term, this publication will contribute to general improvement of the quality of life of rural inhabitants in developing countries.

Earlier drafts of this publication were discussed at the 1992 and 1993 meetings of the United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Task Force on Rural Development (now the ACC Subcommittee on Rural Development). Mr. Josephat Makundi supplemented these earlier drafts by providing case studies on successful methods of financing rural shelter development projects in developing countries. On behalf of UNCHS (Habitat), I wish to acknowledge the contributions of both the ACC Subcommittee on Rural Development and Mr. Makundi. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Mr. Naison Mutizwa-Mangiza (UNCHS staff member), who coordinated the production of all the above inputs and prepared the publication.



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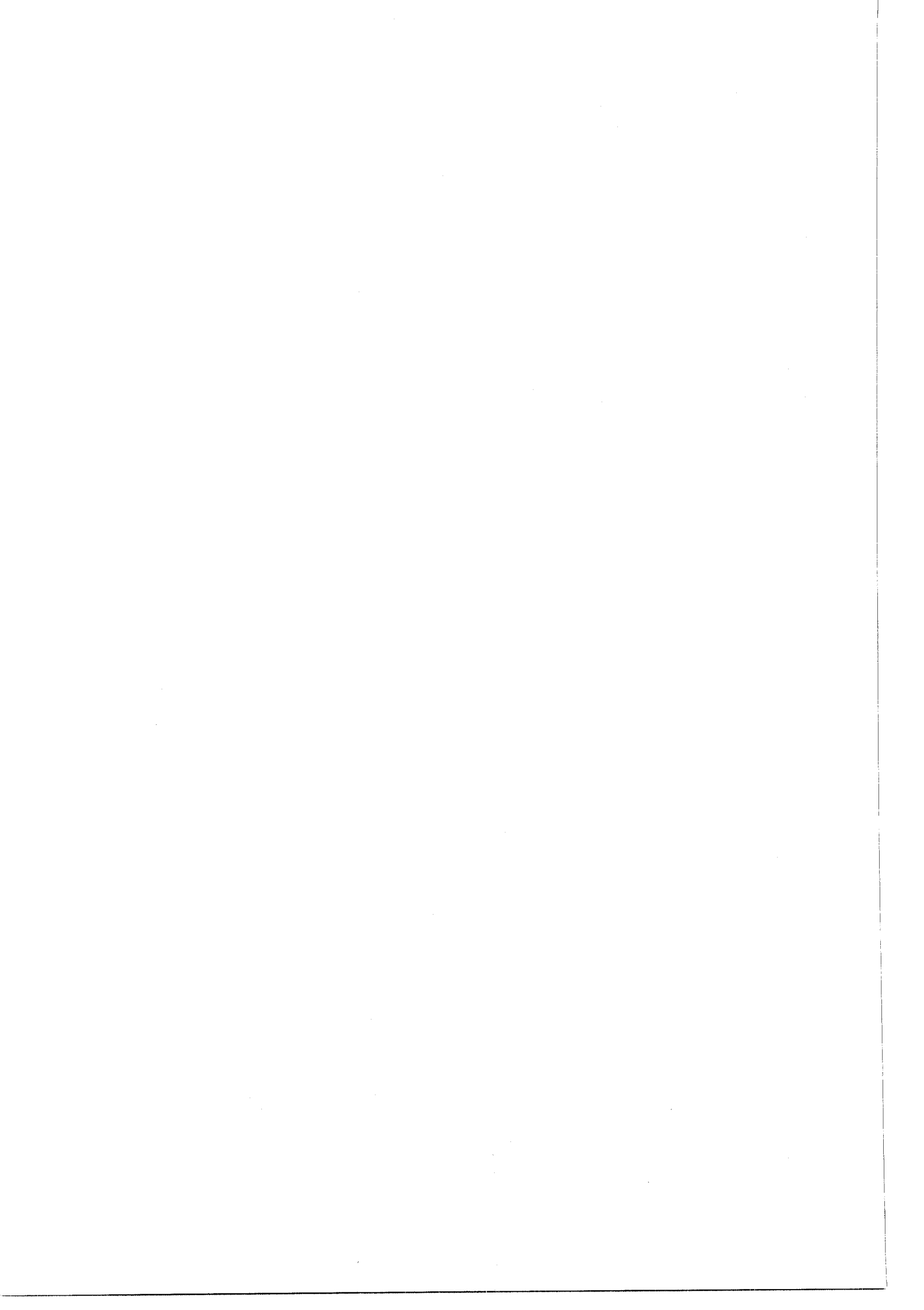


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1. Introduction

One of the most visible ways in which rural poverty is manifested is poor shelter, yet very few developing countries have explicit and coherent rural shelter policies. The principal reason for this is the fact that the majority of rural inhabitants in developing countries are able to provide their own shelter, largely within the context of subsistence economies, even though such shelter may be of poor quality. In addition, shelter has traditionally been considered from the consumption rather than from the production perspective. For these reasons, shelter development has generally been relegated to the bottom end of rural development priorities.

While most rural inhabitants within developing countries have low-household incomes and use simple technology and materials in shelter construction, they have, over the years, evolved forms of shelter that are well suited to their natural environments, both in terms of the materials used and adequacy of protection from the elements. A number of problems persist, however. These include:

- (a) the widespread absence of safe water supplies and sanitation facilities;
- (b) the inability to increase the size of homes as individual households grow, resulting in overcrowding;
- (c) in some situations, the inability to separate the accommodations of domestic animals from those of human beings;
- (d) the prevalence of a number of deficient features of housing structures, including leaking roofs, unstable walls and poor floors, all requiring frequent repairs and prematurely becoming structurally dangerous; and

(e) related to (d) above, the inability to construct houses robust enough to withstand the vagaries of nature, including floods, cyclone winds, earthslips and earthquakes.

As far back as 1974, the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs highlighted the policy vacuum characterizing rural housing, as well as the gap between policy and implementation in the few countries where rural housing policies existed (United Nations, 1974, pp.10-11). In many countries, government housing departments tend to concentrate on urban housing, partly in response to the politically more organized pressure from the urban populace. Where rural housing has been included in development plans, the institutions and finance necessary for rural housing policy implementation are very often not created or provided.

The geographical dispersal of rural communities in many countries often means the absence of scale economies, resulting in higher costs per housing unit. The existence of customary or cognatic land-tenure systems in many countries means that individuals have only use rights to their land, resulting in their inability to use the land holdings as collateral. In other countries, particularly in Asia and Latin America, many rural inhabitants are landless and, in these situations, rural shelter programmes can only be implemented within the overall context of agrarian reform. In addition, information on rural housing and financing needs is often lacking, partly as a result of inadequate means of communication, including roads, railways, public transport and telecommunication services. These and other factors have generally kept housing finance institutions away from rural areas.

Table 1: Global trends in population distribution between rural and urban areas (1970-2010)

Continent	Date	Total population (per thousand)	Urban Percentage	Rural Percentage
Africa	1970	364206	23.0	77.0
	1980	475664	27.3	72.7
	1990	632669	31.8	68.2
	1995	728074	34.4	65.6
	2000	831596	37.3	62.7
	2010	1069378	43.8	56.2
Asia	1970	2147491	23.4	76.6
	1980	2642110	26.7	73.3
	1990	3186446	31.8	68.2
	1995	3457957	34.6	65.4
	2000	3735846	37.7	62.3
	2010	4263948	44.3	55.7
Europe	1970	656441	64.4	35.6
	1980	692995	69.2	30.8
	1990	721734	72.0	28.0
	1995	726999	73.6	26.4
	2000	729803	75.1	24.9
	2010	728741	78.4	21.6
N. America	1970	226480	73.8	26.2
	1980	252461	73.9	26.1
	1990	277838	75.4	24.6
	1995	292841	76.3	23.7
	2000	306280	77.4	22.6
	2010	331571	80.3	19.7
Latin America	1970	283214	57.4	42.6
	1980	358437	65.1	34.9
	1990	439716	71.5	28.5
	1995	482005	74.2	25.8
	2000	523875	76.6	23.4
	2010	603843	80.5	19.5
Oceania	1970	19310	70.8	29.2
	1980	22685	71.2	28.8
	1990	26428	70.6	29.4
	1995	28549	70.3	29.7
	2000	30651	70.2	29.8
	2010	34814	71.1	28.9
Less Developed Regions	1970	2694524	25.1	74.9
	1980	3364395	29.2	70.8
	1990	4141474	34.7	65.3

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