

**SUPPORTING
COMMUNITY-BASED HOUSING**

SRI LANKA DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

CASE STUDY

PART II

FOREWORD

This study was prepared by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the Government of Sri Lanka as a midway documentation and assessment of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless Demonstration Project on Low-income Shelter. For the compilation of this study, information and insights were contributed by all project staff members of the Urban Housing Division of the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA) of the Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Construction, Government of Sri Lanka. Special thanks are due to Mr. Disa Weerapana, Project Director, Mr. Susil Sirivardana, General Manager, NHDA, Mr. Lalith Lankatilleke, Deputy General Manager, NHDA, Mr. K.A. Jayaratne, Senior Manager, NHDA, the Project Coordinator, Mr. Dayanande, Senior Manager, NHDA, and Ms. Vajira Pathirana, Monitoring Specialist, NHDA.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Foreword	iii
I. Background and objectives	1
II. Overview of the urban housing subprogramme	3
A. Historical background	3
B. Aims of the Urban Housing Subprogramme (UHSP)	4
C. Actors in UHSP and their roles	5
D. Project planning and development process in UHSP	8
III. Programme implementation at the household level	17
A. The support approach to housing	17
B. The participating households	17
C. Communication support to participating households	17
D. The house-building process	21
E. Case studies of selected households	29
F. Areas for further exploration	32
IV. Programme implementation at the community level	34
A. The urban communities as the focus of UHSP	34
B. The type and structure of communities	34
C. The Community Development Council (CDC)	34
D. The role of NGOs in organizing the community	36
E. Functions of CDCs	38
F. Community participation in land regularization	42
G. Community construction activities	44
H. Training for community action	46
V. Decentralized programme implementation and management	47
A. Decentralization and the Million Houses Programme	47
B. Decentralized implementation procedures	47
IV. Main policy issues	53
A. General overview	53
B. Economic performance of UHSP	54
C. Institution-building and support	58

I. BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to record and analyse the innovative policies and procedures which were introduced through the Urban Housing Subprogramme of the Million Houses Programme of the Sri Lanka Government. The study focuses particularly on those aspects of the programme which are the basis of the Demonstration Project on Low-income Shelter -information and training. This is a joint project of the Government of Sri Lanka, the Government of the Netherlands and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). In Part I, the objectives of the Demonstration Project were detailed, and a description of the Demonstration Project was given.^{1/} The first phase of the project is now finished, and this report, Part II, documents and analyses the preliminary results.

The new approach to low-income housing delivery, initiated in the Million Houses Programme, has received worldwide attention. Housing professionals are anxious to learn from the Sri Lanka experience, but only sparse documentation of the Programme exists. This study documents the basic principles on which the Urban Housing Subprogramme is based and the institutional structures and procedures which have been developed to implement the Programme. A preliminary analysis of the experience in the first few years highlights some of the main policy issues which face the urban subprogramme.

The main aim of the Million Houses Programme is to improve the housing conditions of the majority of the low-income households in both urban and rural areas. In order to implement such a large-scale programme, it is crucial to decentralize programme execution and to devolve the decision-making process as much as possible to local authorities, low-income communities and participating households. Popular participation is central to the approach to low-income housing provision under the Million Houses Programme, and the role of the Government is to provide support to individual households or communities, so that they can improve their housing situation.

The emphasis of the UNCHS (Habitat) Demonstration Project is on strengthening the implementing networks necessary to reach the scale desired, and to

^{1/} United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat). Shelter for Low-income Communities Sri Lanka Demonstration Project - Case Study - Part I (Nairobi 1986)

enhance the capacities of local authorities, communities and households to participate in the implementation of the Urban Housing Subprogramme. The approach of the Demonstration Project is to stimulate innovative uses of:

- (a) Support communication, through training, information provision and motivational support at the local authority and community level;
- (b) Community development, to build capacities for continued community action;
- (c) Monitoring and evaluation feedback processes, to strengthen management at the various levels and to improve housing policies and implementation strategies.

These objectives are intimately interwoven with basic governmental objectives for the housing programme. The results of the Demonstration Project can, therefore, not meaningfully be discussed separately from those of the overall urban subprogramme. The report, therefore, describes the Demonstration Project as an integral part of the urban component of the Million Houses Programme. This is different from the original concept of the Demonstration Project as described in Part I.

The Demonstration Project began in 1983 as part of the Slum and Shanty Upgrading Programme of the Urban Development Authority which was, at that time, the only low-income urban housing programme. Four demonstration projects were selected for testing and documentation of the new approach. When this programme was integrated with the Urban Housing Division of the National Housing Development Authority, the co-ordinating agency for the Million Houses Programme, the support approach of the Million Houses Programme was extended to all components and all projects of the urban subprogramme. The assistance provided under the Demonstration Project could not, therefore, be separated meaningfully on the basis of individual projects. The inputs of the Demonstration Project became targeted on the overall programme.

Consequently, this study focuses on the programme-wide support approach, as it has gradually developed since 1983 and, particularly, since 1985 when the Urban Housing Subprogramme was initiated.

Since the Urban Housing Subprogramme of the Million Houses Programme only began to function in 1985, the intended scale of the programme is not yet reached, and new approaches to supporting the participating communities are being developed continuously. This study describes and analyses the Programme, as it continuously had evolved up to the end of 1986, and must be seen as one stage in a programme which continues to change in response to new experiences.

The organization of the study reflects the priorities of the Programme and concentrates the description of the Programme on the different levels at which the support approach is mobilized - the household, the community and the urban local authority. Chapter II describes the aims of the Programme, the institutional context and the

general implementation procedures, and provides the reader with a framework in which the complexity of the Programme can be understood. In order that this volume may be understood without reference to Part I, some parts of the general policy overview given in the first part are briefly repeated here. Chapter III analyses the way the Programme is implemented at the household level - the way individual households build their houses, with support provided through the Programme, and the problems they face during the building process. Chapter IV describes the role of the community in the implementation of the Programme - the need for and experience with community organizing, the role of non-governmental organizations and the functions of the community in planning and implementation. Chapter V analyses the initiatives which have been taken to develop a decentralized support and management structure for the programme through urban local authorities. The main policy issues which are raised by the study are discussed in chapter VI.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE URBAN HOUSING SUBPROGRAMME

A. Historical background

Housing policies in Sri Lanka have undergone interesting and far-reaching changes over the past decade. At the same time, rural development and other policies have resulted in an extremely modest urbanization rate, and the proportion of the population residing in urban areas has remained at approximately 20 per cent. As has been detailed in Part I of this report, housing policies adopted by the Government before 1977 were aimed primarily at regulating the housing market. Direct investment by the public sector in housing was very limited, particularly compared with the massive income-support programmes in other areas, such as education, health services and food subsidies. Moreover, subsidies involved in publicly provided rental and aided-self-help housing in urban areas did not benefit the poorest section of the population which had the most pressing housing needs. Additionally, the Rent Control and Ceiling on Housing Property Acts, adopted in the early 1970s, created a disincentive for private investment in the housing sector. As a consequence, housing conditions for the poorest urban households deteriorated. However, some of the housing strategies initiated during this period provided an important basis for the present housing programme.

Since 1977, emphasis has been placed on stimulating the economy and increasing production. Income-support subsidies were cut and specifically targeted to the lowest-income groups. Stimulation of the construction industry, particularly through urban development and housing programmes, was one of the main aims of the first five-year plan of the Government, and investment in housing was increased to an unprecedented high of 12 per cent of total public investment in 1980 to carry out the "100,000 Houses Programme". Restrictive regulation of the housing market was relaxed in order to stimulate private investment. The Government assumed an active role as developer in the housing and urban development field. Two institutions were created to implement the Government's programme - the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA), for the implementation of the "100,000 Houses Programme", and the Urban Development Authority (UDA), for the formulation and implementation of urban land-use policy and urban and industrial development projects. The Slum and Shanty Division (SSD) of UDA was charged with the upgrading of selected slums and shanty areas, particularly in Colombo where the slum and shanty problem was most acute.

This programme provided basic improvements in slum and shanty areas of Colombo. In the early 1980s, approximately half the population of Colombo lived in slums or shanties, often without basic services (see Part I). The programme focused on the provision of land tenure and communal water and toilet facilities and the upgrading of roads and footpaths. It developed, for the first time, feasible approaches and procedures for the upgrading of slums and shanty areas. These procedures formed the basis of future low-income housing programmes. However, this programme alone could not cope with the need for urban low-income housing. Only a small percentage of UDA's budget was allocated to SSD (2.25 per cent), and only about half of the yearly budget was spent because of inadequate staffing and other administrative inefficiencies. By 1984, only 8,500 housing units had been covered by the programme.

By 1982, a number of issues had become clear. Housing was recognized as a long-term development concern of the Government around which political support could be gathered. However, with the increasing gap between national savings and investment and a deteriorating international and national economic situation, the Government was forced to reduce subsidies, particularly for housing. At the same time, real incomes of the poor had decreased, because of reductions in income-support subsidies, making it even harder than before to provide affordable housing for low-income groups in urban and rural areas. Experience with rural aided self-help housing and with the slum and shanty improvement work in Colombo had shown that people were willing to mobilize their own resources to invest in their own houses if they had secure tenure to the land and if the Government provided some basic incentives. This made a housing programme a suitable vehicle for reaching another critical goal of the Government, namely the enhancement of people's participation in a decentralized governmental structure. The combination of local government and housing in one Ministry facilitated the concept of a joint effort for achieving the political objectives of both decentralization and housing provision.

A task force was formed to prepare a new housing programme which would take financial constraints and political objectives into consideration and would incorporate lessons learned from previous and existing housing programmes. This was facilitated by the participation of officials from all housing agencies of the

Ministry, including those associated with the "100,000 Houses Programme" and the slum and shanty upgrading programme.

The task force reached agreement on a set of guidelines for a future housing programme:

(a) The Government should play a supporting rather than a participatory role;

(b) The programme should cover a larger number of households than previous programmes;

(c) The shelter solutions should be affordable by the beneficiaries, and the costs should be recovered;

(d) Incremental building methods and the use of local technologies and local materials should be emphasized;

(e) Initiatives by the community and by individual households should be stimulated.

Based on estimates of housing need and on the general guidelines set by the task force, the Prime Minister, who is also the Minister of Local Government, Housing and Construction, announced the Million Houses Programme (MHP). This Programme was based on a radically different philosophy from the "100,000 Houses Programme": the direct intervention of the State in the provision of houses would be minimal and would focus on the provision of support and information to assist individual households to build or improve their own houses. The Programme would cover all types of housing - urban, rural and estate. The ambitious target of 1 million refers to the total number of households to be reached by housing efforts of both public and private

construction or the improvement or construction of individual services. Households may choose one of the loan options according to their needs, preferences and affordability. The beneficiaries are low-income households with incomes up to Rs 1,200 (\$44) per month. They have to be Sri Lankan citizens and residents of the village which has to approve the loan, and they should not own any permanent house other than the one for which the loan is provided.

The Urban Housing Subprogramme started in 1985. In order to execute it, the operations of SSD of UDA were incorporated in the Urban Housing Division (UHD) of NHTDA. For that reason, UHD has a relatively large staff which is directly responsible for the planning and execution of upgrading and sites-and-services projects in Colombo Municipality, a task which was carried out by SSD before the merger. UHD is now involved in the implementation of over 40 low-income housing projects in Colombo alone. Additionally, UHD co-ordinates the decentralized Urban Housing Subprogramme which is described in detail below.

B. Aims of the Urban Housing Subprogramme (UHSP)

The dominant aim of UHSP is to make a substantial and lasting impact on the housing situation of the urban poor. To this effect, scale is the most important requirement. The first objective of UHSP is, therefore, to reach a large number of households and to make resources available to many households instead of providing a few with high-standard housing solutions.

A large-scale programme, reaching a substantial number of households in all 51 municipal and urban coun-

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