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Towards a Sustainable Development in Shelter and Community

By

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**TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN
SHELTER AND COMMUNITY**

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**SEMINAR ON
URBANIZATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT : PROBLEMS AND
SOLUTIONS**

Towards a Sustainable Development in Shelter and Community

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TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SHELTER AND COMMUNITY

Introduction

The World Commission on Environment and Development, better known as The Brundtland Commission, in 1987 has defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation".

More and more general public and decision makers in non-environmental fields are taking extra effort in promoting a more environmentally aware development agenda for the country and region. This is apparent in the broadening of equitable growth model of the sixties which incorporates social issues such as income distribution in the economic growth to include environmental concern, hence the concept of sustainable development is most prominent in the eighties. The notion of sustainability in urbanization is multi-dimensional and involves a balance inter-sectoral linkages and development in not only natural resources, services and infrastructure but also in human resources.

The implication for implementing a sustainable urban development in today's informative economy poses a challenge to society as a whole to actively involve and commit to community interest, provision of basic human needs and concern for the environment. Journalist and communication practitioners will play an increasingly important role as "conscience" for society to better understand the issues and their roles in promoting sustainable development. This paper focuses on shelter as it implies one of basic human needs and not on housing per se which, on the other hand, is perceived to be a "luxury" item by most of urban poor. The first part of the paper is an overview of the urbanization trend which has a significant impact on the demand for urban services

particularly shelter for the urban poor. The later part of this paper will brief on the sustainable shelter strategies in the developing countries.

Urbanization Trends

The developing countries are undergoing a rapid growth compared with any other countries in the world. In terms of per capita income, countries like the United Kingdom took sixty years from 1880 to double its income but the developing countries matched the achievement within twenty years after the World War II. However, strictly economic progress must look beyond the growth in per capita income to the progress in human resources, provision of shelter, education, health, reduction of poverty and also the protection of the environment.

The world's population is growing at an average of 1.9% per annum since 1950 and this has resulted in a doubling population in 35 years period. Since then, the population growth took a turn to increasingly concentrated in the developing countries. By the year 2000, 8 out of 10 people are expected to be living in the developing countries.

Similarly, the pace of doubling urban population has been increasingly faster. In 1950, only about one third of the world's population lived in urban areas. However, by the year 2000, it is expected that nearly half of the estimated world's population at 6.1 billion will live in towns and cities. As in the case of population growth, it is the developing countries that the rate of urbanization will be particularly rapid. In 1960s, the developing countries were still overwhelmingly rural with one in five of total population living in urban areas with 30 countries having less than 10% urbanized areas. By year 2000, it is projected that the urban population in developing countries will reach 40%

with only two countries having less than 10% urbanized areas (Table 1). The rapid growth of developing countries' population living in urban areas is attributed principally by the natural increase from the already large urban population rather than the rural-urban migration factor.

It is a general misconception to equate urbanization with the growth of cities. Urbanization is the process by which a national population shifts from rural occupation to urban occupation and hence the transformation of rural settlements into urban settlements of all sizes.

The sheer size of the urban population indicates a global problem and challenge to the policy makers to accommodate an additional 140,000 people everyday with shelter, services and employment.

Issues in Shelter and Community Development

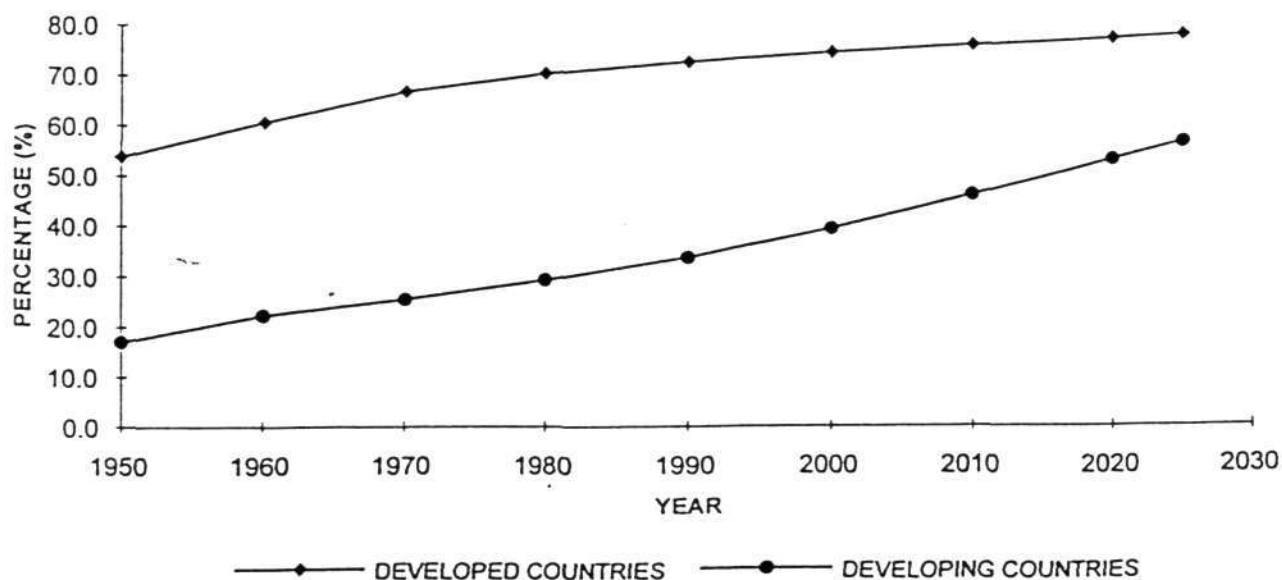
One of the serious issues that has become a universal trend is the decreasing percentage of people that can afford new housing and increasing urban poor without proper shelter. As urban population of developing countries rises, the demand for shelter also increases. The primary shelter problem in the developing countries is the shortage of affordable housing for the low-income majority of households in urban areas. This in turn proliferates slums and squatter settlements. The lack of updated statistics on inadequate housing has magnified this problem through the underestimation by the national and local authorities. A general overview of the World Bank's estimate has shown that in 1990, more than a third of the developing world's population lived in urban areas and a third of this number was living in informal settlements with poor housing condition.

URBAN POPULATION IN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, 1950-2025

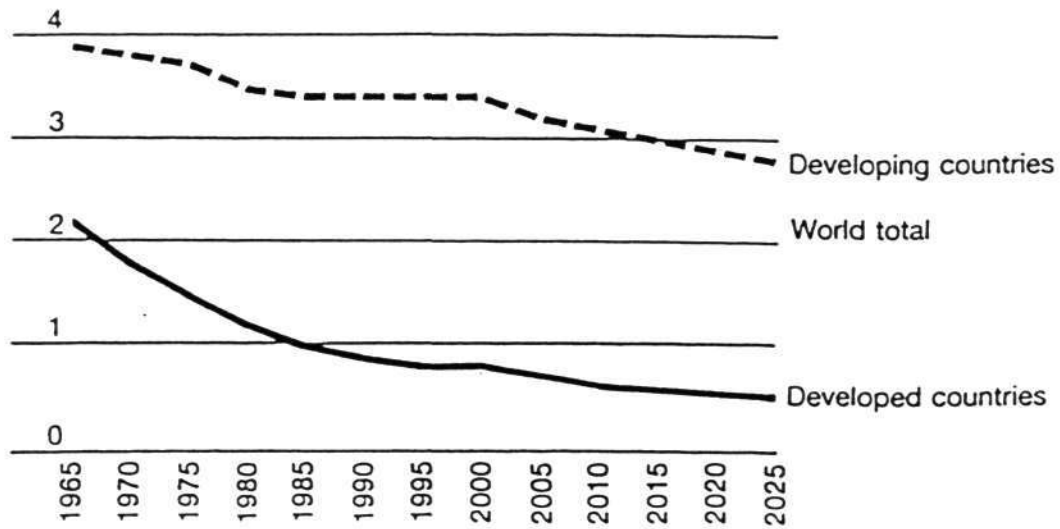
YEAR	DEVELOPED COUNTRIES		DEVELOPING COUNTRIES	
	URBAN POPULATION (MILLIONS)	% OF TOTAL	URBAN POPULATION (MILLIONS)	% OF TOTAL
1950	447	53.8	287	17.0
1960	571	60.5	460	22.2
1970	698	66.6	673	25.4
1980	798	70.2	966	29.2
1990	877	72.5	1357	33.6
2000	950	74.4	1904	39.3
2010	1011	76.0	2612	46.2
2020	1063	77.2	3425	53.1
2025	1087	77.8	3845	56.5

Source: Global Report on Human Settlements, UNCHS, 1987, pp.23

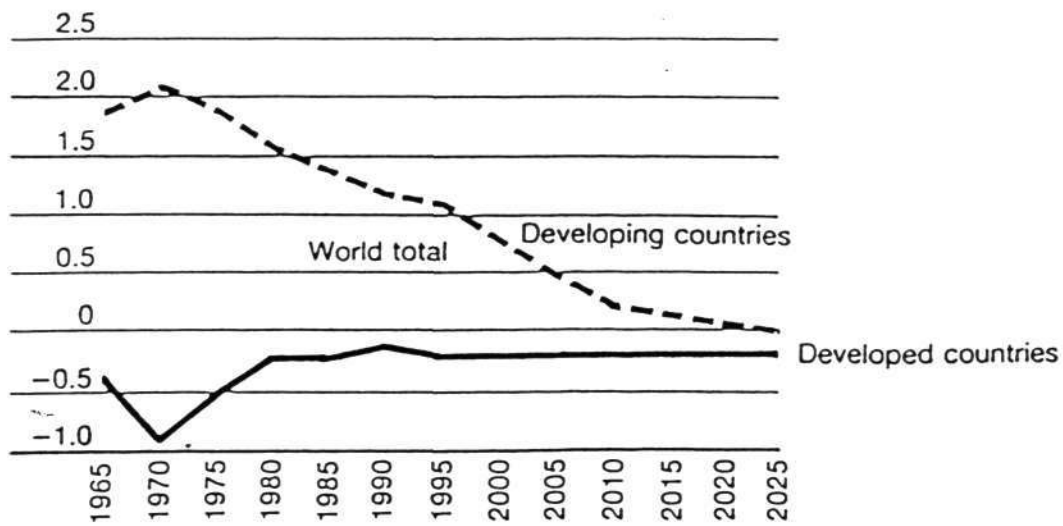
PERCENTAGE OF URBAN POPULATION IN DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, 1950-2025



Annual average urban population growth rates, by areas, 1965-2025



Annual average rural population growth rates, by areas, 1960-2025



It is estimated that 17% of the world's stock of housing is made up of one-room shelters and majority of these shelters is in the form of multiple occupation by more than one household unit. This further enhance the underestimation of inadequate shelter. Most of these shelters in developing countries are in unhealthy living environment and devoid of any amenities.

The authorities in these countries are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the demand for decent accommodation to the low-income households. The provision of shelter has implications not only on accommodation, but also better basic urban services including health and sanitation, and expanded economic opportunity to the urban poor. Despite the commitment made by the governments on this ground, the provision of affordable shelter has been in many countries, increasingly hampered by persistent economic and financial difficulties.

In the developing countries, rapid and massive urbanization is also a major cause of the depletion of natural resources which in turn causes severe health problems particularly to the poor due to the discharge of unprocessed wastes into the environment, polluted water resources and ambient air. In addition, air pollution caused by the motor vehicles particularly in congested urban areas and industries has hazardous effects far beyond the area of its occurrence. Studies have shown that environmental impacts of air pollution from a city include damage to vegetation and crop yields in its hinterland.

This trend poses problems of social and institutional change, infrastructure investment and pollution control.

Sustainable Shelter Strategies

The need for shelter strategy cannot be seen in isolation from macro-economic and social development strategies. If for instance, industrialization is seen as a precondition for growth in some countries, low cost housing might be appropriate in overcoming the problem of housing but may not be the most applicable solution for countries with growth strategy in agricultural economy whereby provision of shelter is deemed more appropriate. In general, however, inculcating a culture for a sustainable environment and community within the shelter strategy calls for inter-alia, the following,

Institutional reform. In the past, national policies in a developing world in dealing with adequate shelter in urban areas include eviction, demolition and stringent migration controls. These policies, however, have repercussions on the destruction of assets of the poor households who invested in their dwellings and destruction of informal-sector jobs which in turn deteriorates the situation as sources of livelihood is taken from their hands. The low-cost housing schemes, however, impose great financial burden on many governments as the projects have to be heavily subsidized to make them affordable to the poor. The principle of self-help and mutual aid have been increasingly accepted in many countries particularly in squatter-settlement upgrading and sites-and-services schemes and should be promoted and regulated. The attitudes of administrators, policy makers and the people themselves must be responsive and sensitive to the needs of the community and the changing system.

Enabling framework for national housing policies. The enabling framework outlined in the United Nations Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 (GSS) and launched in 1988 should be used by the national governments to address the housing issues in the countries. The role of national governments will be that of "enabling" and to

establish the right legislative for a development of institutional and financial framework that enable public and private sectors, community organization and individual household to contribute most effectively to shelter development. The three key elements of the framework are (1) the establishment of an organization for better coordination and more supportive regulatory frameworks; (2) mobilization and allocation of resources for housing finance and subsidies; and (3) ensuring the key inputs to the housing production process are adequately supplied.

Regulation on new urban land development. The responsibility for the provision of housing on new urban land development can be transferred to the hands of the developers or private sectors in cases where new towns are being developed at the periphery of existing urban core, new industrial estates, employment centers or institutional centers.

Community participation and private sectors involvement. Part of the institutional reform would be to increase community participation in the decision-making process to improve their living conditions. It is important that support be given to low income people to have access to housing by forming self-help groups such as cooperatives and encouraging networking among community groups, NGOs, training institutes and various government bodies. These poor communities possess the skills, motivation and sometimes resources to provide or improve basic shelter for themselves. The need and motivation in this community can be tapped into and further be enhanced by mobilizing the energy and resources of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in various community projects involving the upgrading of shelter for the poor. The progressive transformation of NGOs/CBOs into local-level planning and implementation bodies would open the way to forms of participation responsive to the requirements of the poor and establish a forum in which self-help could, over time, become self determination.

Roles of women. A greater emphasis has to be given to women as majority of urban poor comes from households with women as the head of the households. Women also, particularly in the developing world, play a very important role in protecting the environment, family planning and providing education to the children. It is therefore important to involve women in productive activities that can generate income and enable them to have enough to secure shelter for the family.

Environmental-friendly shelter. A decreasing percentage in the number of population which can afford new housing implies a need for clustered medium-density housing with smaller and more flexible units, energy-efficient structures, more shared facilities and densified suburbs. The future trend would be to promote an environmental-friendly shelter by constructing dwelling units using the non-toxic and energy-efficient materials surrounded by greeneries.

Housing data requirements. Under-estimation of the actual number of urban poor has been one of the major factors undermining the governments' efforts in keeping up with the demand for shelter. In a globalized economy, computerized and comprehensive database will enable the policy makers and administrators to have an updated information on the current trends of shelter provision. In addition, access to international research can be tapped into fairly easily to observe the similar experiences in other countries.

Sustainable communities. Increasing social awareness throughout the world has placed the social aspects of development into the sustainability concept. Major cities and towns are faced with the social problems such as crimes and homeless people. Historically, cities were areas of rich farmland surrounding the other economic activities. As countries shifted the economic base from primary to secondary and tertiary sectors,

cities are stripped of farmland and being replaced with financial and commercial structures. City dwellers become separate individuals, traditional values and cultural practices deteriorates, percentage of urban poor rises and crime rate increases. This trend calls for the promotion of a sustainable community where community and family values are stressed, residential design reflects the need for social cohesiveness and metropolitan agriculture or "rurbanization" concept strives. Shelter projects have to impose from the very beginning, a sense of belonging to the community to promote and sustain community cooperation among the housing dweller. It is a challenge to us all to strive for sustainable community and environment by incorporating the concept of primary environmental care through community participation, voluntary work and information organization at community level, zero-waste management of available resources and creation of a "prevention is better than cure" culture at all levels of government and society.

Conclusion

The promotion of shelter strategies has been a universal issue and it is each and everyone's responsibility to shoulder this for a betterment of present and future generation. It is of great importance to be able to differentiate between the need for shelter as opposed to the need for housing, especially in the developing countries where poverty still persists.

Providing shelter will always be a socio-economic issue and problem to be dealt with by every government, more so in the rapidly growing and more populous developing countries than their counterparts in the developed countries. Nonetheless, awareness of the present as well as future urbanization trends and issues will prepare the urban

practitioners, policy makers and society in general to the challenges of materializing the concept of sustainable urban development. The media practitioners have the means and should therefore, reach the authority as well as the society, and increase their awareness of the need to work together for a sustainable shelter development. Strategies for sustainable shelter development form a most crucial input to the success of the overall sustainable urban development strategies and this can be achieved inter alia, institutional reform, community and private sectors participation, greater emphasis on the roles of women, promotion of environment-friendly shelter and primary environmental care, creation of sustainable communities, intersectoral and inter-agency coordination and networking, and information organization at national, local and community levels.