Designing Homes for the Urban Poor – Professional Intervention

Experience in Public Sector Housing Schemes in Colombo

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Introduction

The city has became a place of attraction to a considerable share of world population today. Growth of the city is due to the urbanization process, absorbing millions of people into it. The reasons for this attraction appeared in many ways from survival to health, power, comfort etc. etc. However, the growth rate is highest in underdeveloped, developing or third world countries.

The city dwellers are, in terms of income, social and cultural backgrounds, forming a number of social classes or divisions. The urban poor, whose whole aim of city life is survival, share a major part of urban population especially in third world countries. Although they are often labelled as an unwanted group, the city essentially needs their service for its smooth functioning. With the increasing population and the subsequent increase of urban poor, almost every city is burning with the issue of land and space scarcity, insufficient infrastructure facilities etc. Perhaps the most important among these issues is the problem of housing. It is the urban poor and the lower income categories with their unstable economic conditions that are subject to this problem quite often.

As in many countries, also in Sri Lanka housing these 'homeless' has been undoubtedly a major concern of respective governments, policy makers, professionals and the community in the field of throughout. Many aspects of the problem have been identified and solutions given. But it has continued to be a hot issue in every urban centre, especially in Colombo.

The problem remains, however, with increasing scarcity of space and land, cost of materials etc., the problem of 'housing the homeless' appears to take new avenues day by day.

With limited land and space available and difficulty in providing necessary infrastructure facilities and other services demanded for the development of cities, rather than just allowing people to build purely by themselves, building housing flats and apartments (vertical development) for these poor families has been as usually the strategy of the recent governments with the help of other organisations according to the Ministry of Housing and Construction. At the same time they are about to put forward the rules and regulations to stop development of squatter settlements in the city.

The experiences of the author, as a member of a state corporation, in the design process of such a development activity is that the lack of recognition of peoples' potentials in making their own place of living. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse these situations in order to provide suitable solutions to housing and uplifting the living standards of the squatter families.

In this context, this paper will explore the issue of designing homes for the homeless in an urban situation of Colombo and with respect to the government and professional involvement. Firstly it starts by stating some background information of Sri Lanka as well as the study area. The housing sector and current housing situation are also looked at. The three following chapters will subsequently describe the strategy(ies), design and actors in building home. Concluding remarks will be the last chapter of this paper.

General Background of Sri Lanka

Geographical Pattern

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean close to southern India and lies between 6-10° North latitude and 80-82° East longitudes. The Palk Strait, which divides India and Sri Lanka, is only 30 km wide. But with historical background of more than 2500 years old, Sri Lanka has retained its own political and cultural identities.

The total land area of the country is about 65,610 km² and it is 435 km long and 220 km wide at its widest point.

Fig. 1

Tolami in his first world map identified as 'Taprobane'

'Ceylon' was the British Identification and they recognized as the pearl in the Indian Ocean

Sri Lanka

Basically, the periphery of the country is flat and the centre is with hill rise about up to 2200 m above from the mean sea level.

People and Population

The total population of the country is about 18 millions. The population density is approximately 274 people/km². Out of the total population, Sinhala community constitute 74%, Tamil community 17%, Muslim community 8% and the remaining 1% comprises Malays, Dutch Burgers and pre Sinhala aborigines, a few jungle 'Veddas'.

The Portuguese, the Dutch and the British invaded and occupied the island, mainly the coastal areas of the country from early 16th century to mid of 20th century. The British influences still prevail in administration and in other segments like education to a certain extent.

The official languages of the country are Sinhala and Tamil, the language of main ethnic groups and English is used as the coordinating language.

The Colombo City and the Issues of the Housing

Colombo is the commercial capital of Sri Lanka. Its resident population is 800,000 and transit population is about 400,000. The area of Colombo is 37.31 km² and the annual population growth rate is 1.41%. The total numbers of tenement gardens (informal settlements) are about 1070. Therefore it is understood that almost a half of its total resident population is living in sub standard houses consuming 11% of the land area.

Migration of the people into Colombo city became widespread especially after independence in 1948. Introducing the free market economy in 1977 was also able to increase this urban process. As a result a rapid population growth took place in the city centre parallel to a great expansion of the employment opportunities. The economic and corresponding social factors have been the major reasons for this inflow of people. Apart from the above, increasing and cheaper transportation and communication facilities would seem to have played a major role in this urbanisation process. Location of the industries, expansion of government administration and concentration of opportunities for acquiring education and skills, only to mention a few, have also played an important role in attracting migrant.

With the rapid concentration of people into the urban centre, the Colombo city was faced with the problem of sheltering them with at least the minimum standards of supportive service facilities. Not only Colombo but most cities especially in the third world, failed to fulfil these targets, the result of which was the homelessness and the mushrooming of sub standard houses such as slums and shanties. This phenomenon continues even today with new magnitude and proportions all over the world urban cities including the urban situation of Colombo.

With the above considerations, housing has been given a prime concern during the recent past in Sri Lanka. The government launched massive housing programmes such as hundred thousand housing programme and the million houses programme to meet with the shelter needs of the low-income people not only in Colombo but also in the country as a whole.

Urban Poor and the Strategy for Building a Home

Homelessness is mostly two fold. On one hand, there is a lack of place to live; the quantity problem. On the other, there is the lack of opportunity to in the place one lives to make a home, the problem of quality.

In the urban situation of Colombo, mostly the poor are faced with homelessness both quantitatively as well as qualitatively. For them, there are often very limited spaces to live. What are left for them are only a few square meters of land covered in a very temporary nature. Further, such places do not get adequate service facilities.

The nature of this particular group is such that;

- They are not in a position to build those own places of living simply because they are poor. Day to day earnings of these poor people is barely sufficient to spend the day.
- On the other hand to build within their capacity, they have to find suitable land, which is the most scare resource in the urban context. Due to low-income levels the poor cannot afford distant travelling, and thus have to get themselves settled in close proximity to their working places. As a result they have to live with the city limits where there is a very high demand for land.
- The purchasing of building materials required due to the prevailing construction industry is far behind the reach of the category.
- There is a difficulty in finding suitable and affordable technical advice with skilled labour to suit the needs and requirements of the said group.

It is in this context that governments, responsible public authorities, NGOs etc. have intervened and built houses for them. At the same time being with the profit oriented economic structure and political intervention this issue has been lying within the quantitative limits neglecting the potential avenue of quality.

Under these aspects and patronage of the above parties, various solutions have come up and the most effective space utilisation is given in the form of 'Multi storey' housing. Affordability is a key factor to be considered in housing the urban poor. And, in flats along with the number of floors, the cost too increases. As a result to cut down cost, lifts, escalators and other supportive facilities such as water supply, electricity, etc. have to be reduced, making the flat rather uncomfortable for the people.

At the same time, in this form of housing, the user participation in the process of house building is kept to a minimum, as a flat entailing complicated methods of construction lies within the hands of professionals. As such, perhaps what is left for the occupant is only marginal interior modifications in personalising the given place.

Housing the homeless essentially brings with itself the concept of home. It is much more than a physical shelter. Every house is not a home, may have the potential to be a home. A house becomes a home, only when the user family is involved in the making of it. The entire process of house building, the special arrangement, and the possibilities to adjust and modify it to suit the requirements of the inhabitants, contributes greatly in making a home. The real answer to the problem is to identify the potentials of the user family in creating their own place of living.

Housing – A Holistic Perception

Housing is a term loosely employed to mean a board spectrum of activities. Most often it is mistakenly identified with house design, or housing projects. It can be further added that, housing is the process, enabling the act of dwelling, establishing one's existence as appropriate for his living on earth in the form of making homes. ''House design, and the settlements are intricately inter-twined in the process.''[1]

However, to make a positive and a worthy contribution to the process of 'home making', the architect with his team of professionals has to understand the broader perspective of 'Housing, Dwelling and Homes'.

House, Dwelling and Home: The Definition

House is man's most intimate place of living. Similar to the term 'man' which denotes an impersonal and a generalised meaning, the term house too brings out a generalised version as the shelter of man.

Home, on the contrary, carries a highly personal flavour with it. It is THE man's place of living. Making homes as such is entirely a private, personal affair.

Dwelling is the process by which homes are made. And, enabling dwelling is the way to make the home-making possible. This is the ultimate aim of housing, the process of enabling dwelling and home making.

Home is a dream, an emotional bond built-between the person and the world around him manifested through the dwelling. ''Homes are cherished with memories, personal emotions, histories and sense of belonging (ancestral home etc.). They provide the centre of the world or the point of references for individuals, identity and the desire and the strength to live; to become human.''[2]

In the identified list of basic housing needs shelter is considered a more basic need than security.

1 Shelter – Need for privacy, food consumption, sexual behaviour, etc.
2 Security – Need for stability, protection, freedom from fear, structure, etc.
3 Comfort – Need for freedom, reputation, prestige, dominance, dignity, attention, etc.
4 Socialisation and self-expression – Relation with people and places, homes and neighbourhoods, etc.
5 Aesthetics – Need for order, symmetry, colour, texture, system & structure, etc.

Transformation of a House into a Home

Every person has a private existence as well as a public existence. Houses are also the same. In dwelling (the process), a house forms these two realms into particular ratio depending on the way of thinking, feeling and behaving of the occupant. It is in this process that a house gets itself transformed into a home. Within its private or personal realm, a house has essentially to satisfy a certain psychological require-ments such as privacy, identity and territoriality to become a home. It is at this point that the occupant is transforming a house into his home, adjusts, modifies and changes it continuously along with his changing needs.

At the same time in the public realm, a house has to satisfy the social aspect. Every house therefore, has to achieve a certain degree of flexibility thought for the dweller to change, modify and personalise itself.

Fig. 2

Place making (in the process)

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1   Dr. Dayaratne, Ranjith, 'Personal Space', 1995, Vol. 100, p. 7
2   Dr. Dayaratne, Ranjith, 'Personal Space', 1995, Vol. 100, p. 10

Homelessness and its Consequences

Lack of a little space on the earth leads to the feeling of homelessness. As the home is man's most personalised and intimate place of living, lack of such a place leads essentially to serious physical as well as psychological consequences. In such homeless categories, there is often frustration, lethargy and many other psychological implications. It even leads to breed crime.

Homelessness goes hand in hand with the lack of land for home building as cited above. The competition for land has become high both within the city and on its periphery. Congestion has necessitated result and made streets impassable. It has made life difficult as well as dangerous, particularly for children. In some areas, the traditional one-or-two story building with easy escape to the street or yard is being replaced by vertical living quarters full of tiny compartments. Even where land has developed under the public authority, some people prefer the one-story squatter hut with easy access to the street. The land that should have been reserved for recreational and other purposes is being damaged by rows of monotonous dormitories. As a result the sense of togetherness and the concept of community life causes many people to be 'homeless' even within their own places of living.

Fig. 3

Make life difficult and dangerous especially for children

Passage through the squatter huts

Actors Perspective: The Mechanism

In transforming the urban housing scenario into an enabling process, the existing frame of the team enguaged in this sector and their roles and responsibilities are very important. At the beginning itself, every party of the team has to orient themselves for an integrated approach in which the all responsibility becomes 'shared' rather than being made individual and isolated. Under the above circumstances the government of Sri Lanka has implemented several policies, priority given to the housing development of the country, since independence in 1948 with direct intervention of the housing and planning agencies, financial agencies, the construction industry, research and training institutes with the participation of professionals and people themselves.

The Role of the State

In making housing an enabling process the state has given priority, quite positive and unhesitant, in recognizing the urban poor as an equally important segment of the entire social system in the national development. And, that they need not remain poor forever. Therefore, necessary initial push has been given in uplifting themselves equal socio-economic standards of other social classes. For such an attempt, while making necessary changes and modifications in the economic system of the country and encouraging the private sector investors on housing by offering

tax incentives, duty concessions and land for housing development at concessionary terms, the state recognizes the validity of the process of home building in the social and moral upliftment.

Housing takes an important position in any regional or national development plan and primarily the state may have to take certain policy level decisions in making necessary clear grounds. The contemporary urban housing scenario is activated by the following agencies under the direct intervention of the state.

Housing and Planning Agencies

In the philosophy of making housing an enabling process established by the state in order to address the urban poor housing problem, these agencies have a vital role to play in achieving desired results, according to regional and national development plan prepared. In considering the nature of housing, public sector agencies are conceived as providers of those elements, which people cannot provide for themselves.

The Urban Development Authority (UDA)

In 1978, UDA was established under the Urban Development Authority act of 1978. This authority was expected to make development proposals stipulating with zoning, planning & building regulations, environmental & density control etc. for priority areas. It was also to develop the capabilities of the local authorities, municipal councils and urban councils and give them the assistance of professional planners and architects, prepare urban development plans, identify proposal and projects, estimate costs, generate funds and implement the programme.

The National Housing Development Authority (NHDA)

The main objective of the formation of the NHDA in 1979 was to accelerate the housing development activities of the country. The authority was empowered by the NHDA act to operate wider spectrum of activities, which included;

- Implementation of housing programmes and the slum and shanty upgrading programmes, amalgamated to the national plan.
- Operational & maintenance functions of the urban housing settlements.
- Assistance in the low-interest loan and essential credit facilities

Financial Agencies

Low-interest financial benefits for the ownership or upgrading of the settlements are offered through the various national agencies such as State Mortgage Bank, National Housing Development Authority, Housing Development and Finance Company and other State Banks. The above banks offer land acquisition and house development loans, annual interest rates vary between with 14% to 18%, according to the estimated cost of the land or building for the maximum pay back period of 25 years. In addition, special low-interest loan schemes are available to government workers such as five years salary and ten month salary loans with 6% annual interest, directly offered by the government.

Infrastructure Development and Social Service Agencies

In a city, the central elements are the adequate availability of land in the places where it is needed, the provision of infrastructure services such as water supply, sanitation, electricity, roads etc., and social services, locally available and inexpensive health clinics together with schools are important. The Common Amenities Board was established especially for the above-mentioned infrastructure facilities. It offers service amalgamated with the Water Supply and Drainage Board, Electricity Board, etc. Local authority is responsible for operational and maintenance functions of common elements including infrastructure services and social services in the housing settlements.

Construction Development Agencies

As a developer on behalf of the government, government agencies construct new housing schemes for lower middle income and low-income homeless people both in urban and rural areas. The State Engineering Corporation one of the major construction agencies formulated in 1962 under the Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Construction for the nourishment of the construction industry with following major constrains.

- Development of housing strategy by means of innovative and productive designs, architectural as well as structural with providing consultancy and project

management services with consideration of cost, time and quality from inception to completion of the project.

- Development of the construction industry, introducing low-cost construction systems, technology and innovative building materials both in terms of quantity and quality.
- Provide training facilities for the upliftment of the construction industry in terms of design, construction and services from skill level to professional level.
- Provide job opportunities in the construction field as well as in the Organization itself.

Re-adjustment of the Role of Housing and Policy Agencies

''If it is a really considered necessary to disperse population, it must be acknowledged that an equal dispersal of economic activity would also be required and relationship between people and public sectors.''[3] Having laid down in this philosophy as the theme, the author senses through his experience with the prevailing urban housing scenario of the country, that the State has to address the issue of urban housing in the widest perspective as it often comes with a complex array of problem. There is need of following changes or re-adjustment under the direct intervention of the state.

The Need for Administrative Reform

In order to increase the effectiveness of design and planning and to prepare the basis for alternative models, major organizational changes would appear to be indicated in the framework within which designing and planning operate. At present, administrative structures tend to isolate designers, planers and policy makers from the result of their actions, and the separation of policy implementation agencies serves to reduce the element of accountability to the public as a whole. The application of unquestionable approaches within a rigid professional hierarchy completes this process and discourages any attempt to generate new approaches.

The Re-definition of Building Regulation

Designing and planning restrictions, and building regulations are often not satisfactory to the needs and resources of either builders or users, in general they reflect the standards achieved in more wealthy industrial countries. For example, many of the Sri Lankan building regulations (light angle etc.) follows the U.K. or European standards without any justifiable reason.

At the same time there are the 'minimum' standards, which some times go beyond the minimum comfortable level of the people. In re-defining the regulations both these ends should be avoided as much as possible since irrespective of the social category judged in terms of the income level all are human beings having equal rights to enjoy life and comfort.

It will also be noticed that none of these aspects involve the actual provision of housing, so much as the frameworks or parameters within which housing can be constructed. It is therefore the responsibility of the government to organize and form these public sector authorities in such a manner that all the said aspects related to urban mass housing is well addressed.

Re-organization of the Construction Industry

One of the major draw -backs in present day construction industry is that is in quite an unorganised position as there is no proper guidance or a controlling body to monitor the following aspects.

Building Materials

Poor quality of building materials such as bricks, tiles etc., and even cement has become a common experience today. For instance the size of bricks is so inconsistent that it varies very much from one manufacturer to the other. Same is the

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[3] Payne, Geoffery K, Urban Housing in the Third World, 1985, p. 77.

strength and durability. And, the prices of the materials, too, fluctuate quite often affecting the people engaged especially in house building.

Accessibility to Construction Industry

Especially for the poor, there is not much choice as against the money at hand. In other words, affordability of materials, labour and professional input are often beyond the reach of the poor.

Innovative Construction Methods

At present there is no encouragement in the housing sector in terms of introducing low-cost construction systems, new building materials etc.

These factors demand the formation of a separate governmental body to cover all such aspects at the policy level itself.

''With the decentralization process of the activities of the house building to facilitate to grass root level of a particular country also there has to be one governing body to advice, control, monitor, develop, research and establish new norms for the benefit of the entire nation, among most needy, distribution from surplus to the where it requires.''[4]

Research and Training

Research and related training activities are most essential components of any field for its meaningful growth and spread. This very much relevant in the field of housing as it comprises the major portion of the construction industry and is directly related to each and every individual of the society.

The construction industry itself, related to housing, contains a number of avenues, which need constant research. For example, innovative building materials, technologies etc. need to be introduced constantly as standards vary day by day and, the quantity of raw materials too are limited. With the changing phase of development, easier and quicker methods of construction (e.g. pre fabrication, etc.) should be introduced into the field.

More importantly, there should be novel design and approaches to housing especially in urban contexts as such situations demand maximum utilization of space, available services, etc. Constant research should be encouraged by the government in all the aspects.

At the same time, there should be a well-trained work force both in terms of quality and quantity to deal will all aspects of housing in terms of design, construction and services.

The Role of the Professional

It seems that the professional is at present somewhat deviated from the mainstream of urban housing due to many reasons of which some are political, some are due to various other reasons while some are due to the fault of his own. The professional contribution is essential for urban housing at every level, starting from policy formulating stage to the basic designing stages as it is the professional who possesses the knowledge and know-how analyses the situation in the present solutions. His role in the process of the urban housing for the poor can be summed up in the following phases.

Policy Formulating Level

In formulating the national development plan the involvement of the professional has been undermined today in the increasing interference of politicians. However, within the limitations he should be bold enough to present his arguments and act with vision to convince the other parties when and where necessary.

Co-ordination

Urban housing demands an integrated approach to its complexity and as such at every level proper co-ordination is essential for a successful product. In this respect the architect as the leading professional in the field has to deal with planners, sociologists, engineers, economists etc. constantly for the input of all these parties.

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[4] Payne Geoffery K, *Urban Housing in the Third World*, 1985, p. 79.

Designing

It is at this stage that the professional input is more required as the solutions to urban housing requires a great variety of constrains in the design as well as in other inputs. The architect and the other professionals may have to rely upon to obtain maximum input from the other supportive forces. ''Architecture for the poor should not be approached like a treatment for a special disease; it is architecture that can be used by rich and poor alike and is not unique. We deal with aesthetics, culture and economics in all architecture. Unfortunately the poor are not now given the advantage of aesthetics. People wrongly associate poverty with ugliness, which is a mistake. The less expensive, the poorer the project, the more care and attention that should be paid to aesthetic.''[5]

The Role of the People

The author seems, the people, neglected there due position as the user themselves, have major role to be played in the process of making their own homes.

In this respect their specific task is to question and make positive criticisms without any hesitations as housing is their right and not a gift or donation of any parties. Only such an attempt would make worthy the contribution of providing homes for the people, for themselves, by other parties. Such an attitude will make it much easier for these parties to play the supportive role in transforming housing into an enabling process.

Designing Homes for the Urban Poor: The Basis for an Alternative Approach

As discussed earlier, the urban poor especially in the Colombo city contain a considerable proportion in relation to its total population. Coincidently, providing homes for them too became a complex problem to be dealt with the city is constantly facing with a host of problem day by day.

However, the urban poor render an indispensable service to the overall mechanism of the city structure in the maintenance of the city, in providing skilled and semi skilled labour, and various other similar activities. Hence the urban poor, no doubt, are an essential segment of a city's social profile.

Shelter, however, is a basic need for these people as well.

Housing: The Solutions Given

Multi-Storey Flats

As discussed in the earlier chapter, due to the scarcity of land, in urban situations, the most effective space utilization is given in this form of housing. Flats range from three or four storeys to more in many situations. However, flats for the urban poor have so far not been a successful venture, for many reasons.

Fig. 4

High density, high rise housing jungle?

''It is wrong to blame architects for designing high-rise, high-density monstrosities. The blame for this should rest upon the shallow thinking of sociologists and

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[5]   Steele, James, 'Hasan Fathy', Architectural Monographs, 1988, p.26, 27.

politicians, and indeed of the whole of the society; but insofar architects have actually advocated this kind of housing they obliviously have revealed themselves as mirrors of society, not as leaders.''[6]

Outright Houses (Private Sector Housing Development)

This type of housing is mostly beyond the reach of the low and middle income people, as the purchasing of such a house involves a very high capital. Therefore it mainly caters to the upper income people. The government intervention is very minimal in this process. This is mostly the property developers approach in housing, and a private sector approach to housing. At the same time user participation in this process is completely ignored.

Core/Shell Houses

This is a another concept of house building mainly focused on the poor people. In this process of house building the core of the house is provided with the essential spaces such as the kitchen and the toilet and, the rest of building has to be completed by the user, with affordability and his own aspirations. This type of housing has the potential for user involvement and, to use a variety of locally available materials, building techniques etc. and their social, cultural and economic aspects.

Coming to the urban housing situation this concept of housing could be modified as against the problem of availability of land and infrastructure facilities, by going for serviced vertical development (multi-storey housing development projects), bringing them a flexibility of change with a core/shell of the housing unit, at different levels which are incorporated horizontally as well as vertically with communal spaces to hang around, minimizing the effect of living away from the ground.
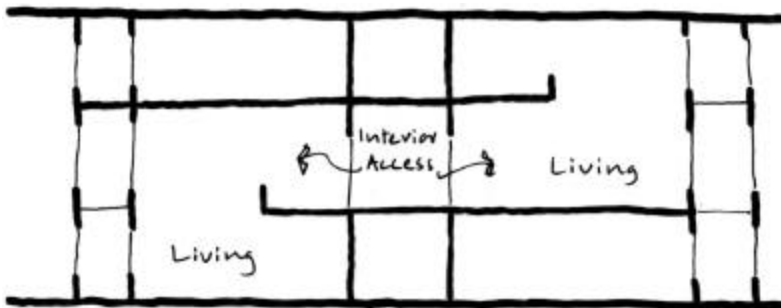

Fig. 5 – The typical section denotes the interior access of the complex

On the other hand what is really lacking in this concept is the necessary infrastructure facilities required, especially in urban situation. Acquiring necessary infrastructure facilities, distributing over the entire scheme, or in vertical and horizontal directions, having individual connections sometimes in community use etc. needs a great degree of professional and expert involvement bringing this together with user's social, cultural and economic aspirations.

Site and Services

This concept of housing is focused on sub-urban context where there is a difficulty of having necessary infrastructure facilities for the poor and the cost of previously settled land is very high and, that land had been in high demand for the development activities for the emerging city. The result is that fairly large plots of land are subdivided into small plots and, very basic services are provided, creating grounds for house building.

In this process there is little professional involvement as it is in the hand of property developers. Converting large areas into residential neighbourhoods within a short period of time, there are often possibilities for environmental degradation, imbalances in the socio-economic profiles. The other negative aspect of this housing concept is that people or the real user is uprooted and replanted in a new social, cultural context.

Government, professionals and NGO's are not responsible for the construction of their houses. In this concept, people have the flexibility to put -up their own place of living according to their social, economic and cultural aspirations. Sometimes this

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6   Risebero, Bill, *Towards a Humane Architecture*, 1992, p. 42.

leads to the development of the settlement in a haphazard manner as the development is very fast within a short period of time.

This process is too often beyond the reach of low-income people as the initial cost is high. However, this has become successful in situations where government, and public authorities get involved and bear the cost of infrastructure services.

Among the advantages of this concept is significant the people's innovativeness in housing construction as there is the freedom to design and plan their own.

Support Based Housing

This the kind of concept has a lot of potential to develop to into a workable housing philosophy for the urban poor without direct government intervention. Instead of controlling, the government and respective authorities provide maximum support for the people in terms of planning approvals, land registrations, supportive services, technical knowledge etc.
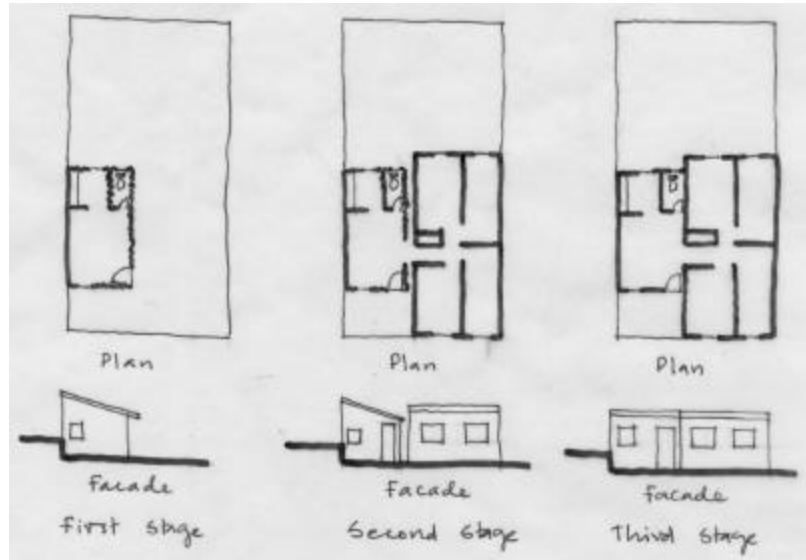
*Fig. 6 – Progressive building plan for mini-houses*

Specially in an urban context where the land cost, construction cost, skilled labour, complex building regulations and social, cultural and economic constrains are involved, the support based house concept in housing makes a great provision to facilitate the process in which people are involved in solving their shelter needs. As discussed earlier, the role of three major parties such as government (or the housing construction industry), the professionals and the community or the actual user are the key parties to come together to achieve desired results in support-based housing. Finding suitable land in the proper context, kind of basic utilities and amenities to be provided, level of infrastructure facilities to be supplied, desired housing density to be achieved, construction methods to be adopted, and the social, cultural, economic atmosphere to be created are key issues to be addressed in support based concept.

The Need for an Alternative Approach

In most of the existing approaches to urban housing, it is seen that there is clear dominance in all the parties other than the user himself. For instance, in an urban situation as discussed earlier due to the complexity and rather sophisticated nature of house building, the urban poor who are in an utmost need of any form of shelter are forced to accept whatever the solutions coming from the parties. It become a blessing for them due to the position they are faced with and do not even think of such a solution in a critical eye.

These solutions usually come as packages, which means, the capital required for houses is borne by the government or an NGO, development plans from some other institution, etc. Sometimes the professional intervention is kept at very minimum level and the much-needed integrated approach to such a solution is thereby neglected. As a result these parties exclude and sometimes totally unaware of what people really want and what their capabilities and potentials are. The other notable thing is that, due to the prevailing economic structure of the country these parties are

not in a position to look after these poor people. In this connection the government has to take necessary measures to organize and prepare all the state and non-governmental bodies as the benefit of the whole community.
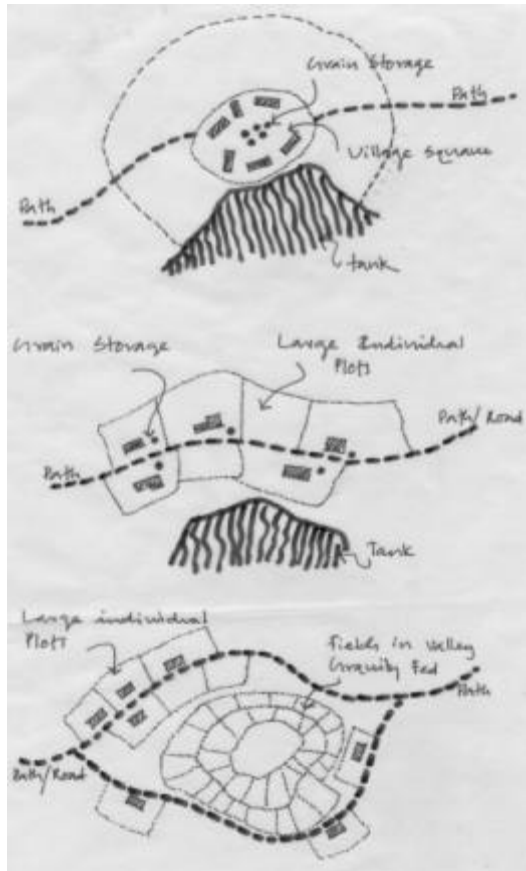
1. Historical village neighbourhood
Houses clustered around the focal point

2. Rain fed village neighbourhood
Houses arranged along roads

3. Hill country village neighbourhood

Fig. 7
Diagrammatic representation of various traditional neighbourhood patterns denotes the people's potential in the development of settlements. Not only that the solutions for the new approach to housing needs to be considered the historical evaluations of the society.

Throughout the process, however, what is significant is the inadequate recognition of the most important party-the dweller, and his right to make his own place of living. He is usually regarded as an incapable body in taking correct decisions in making his home and the result is ready-made or pre-designed type houses. More importantly, what is lacking in almost all the existing solutions is the lack of understanding of the changing and incremental nature of house building over time. Therefore, a new approach to housing which exceed these limitations has become a need of the day.

Conclusion

Family is the smallest and the most important unit of the society. Home is the most intimate place of living of this unit, the most important segment of the entire built environment. As such a home is one of the fundamental needs and rights of any person, any family. Homes contain the major share of man's entire built environment.

However due to many reasons and socio-economic disparities, housing has been a issue all over the country, especially in urban situation. Solutions have come in many ways, in some; dominate the political objectives, in others, professional bureaucracies, and many other factors whole the issue remaining without much successful answers.

The major reason for this failure as the study reveals is that the lack of recognition of peoples potentials in making their own places of living. As such the solutions do not absorb the aspirations, lifestyles, attitudes and value system of the people in its true perspectives. Therefore, a novel approach is necessary in providing suitable solutions to housing and as it is revealed the people essentially have to take the central position in this respect. The government, professionals and all other

parties are the supportive guiding factors of this entire process, which transforms it into a enabling process.

In finding a concept for a new approach, at the vary outset, every one has to accept that the occupant is the most important in this whole process. Therefore, the long established views may have to change or modify their approach in the process. Their existing role as the 'determiner' will have to be brought down to a more realistic ground as 'enablers', while the occupant has essentially to be identified as the determining agent.

What is underneath this re-shuffling is the re-establishment of the occupant in his due position. Ones the preliminary ground is cleared by other parties in the process of housing (site selection, size of neighbourhood, provision of supportive services, etc.) the occupant is able to take final decisions with regard to his place of living (the size of his home, internal spaces, exterior appearance, etc.) He will be furnished with a maximum number of options and possible ways to suit his specific need, within any housing situation. Such a solution will have the maximum possibility to become 'home' instead of houses.

However, this also contains only a part, the immediate solution to the problem. While aiming at this answer the society as a whole should at the same time make efforts for analysing the root causes of this entire phenomenon; poverty and its subsequent manifestation in many forms such as lack of homes to live, social segregation, illiteracy, etc. Such an analysis and then the necessary steps forward would only give a long lasting solution not only to the problem of housing which is only a result of the said course, but to the cause itself. Such a solution essentially will have equal or lesser disparities of the distribution of resources and as such lesser social segregation. And, the inevitable end result would be a just society enjoying equal rights.

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