

# AN APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE LOW-INCOME HOUSING

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## ABSTRACT

Squatter settlements providing housing to 30-70% of the population in many urban centres in the developing countries have grown due to widespread poverty, and inadequate housing finance and land development systems. Governments assisted by the international agencies have improved environment, tenure security, income and resources in many settlements, but could not eradicate the problems as outcome did not multiply into overall development due to lack in institutional development, policy implementation, governance, participation etc. Because the problem was enormous which the government could not overcome, enablement was advocated to sustain long-term solutions. On the other hand past growing developing world cities are facing environmental problems; coupled with low level of economic and social development, which in turn is threatening sustainable development in cities. This paper argues that the spontaneous settlements in informal sector have more positive attributes in terms of social, economic and environmental sustainability as compared to dominant public housing approach. This paper further discusses the changing approaches to the issues of low-income housing worldwide in the above context, and examines the issues related to sustainable housing.

**Keywords:** *Housing Policy, Self-Help, Sites-and-Services, Squatter Settlement, Sustainability, World Bank.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of cities as the unchallenged site of human development and the goal of sustainable development have pushed hundreds to act as levers for strategic change, and facilitate sustainable development (Holden, 2006). Rapid urbanisation taking place in the developing world's cities needs to be critically managed. There has been greater appreciation now of their growing importance in the national economies as development has become dependent on the

ability of urban centres to meet the essentials like housing. A rising standard of living and political ideologies have increased the awareness of human needs and social values (UKGP, 1998); the Habitat Conferences put the onus on the government.

The developing world's urban population is going to double by 2030, accompanied by dramatic growth in the number of slums where a sixth of humanity lives today (UNHCS, 2003). Given the social, economic and political situation of these people, most of them can afford only these ill-built and ill-served houses (World Bank, 1993). The global community is falling short of the MDG-target (Millennium Development Goal) which is to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 (UN, 2000).<sup>1</sup> Thus rather than shunning these settlements, governments should attempt to enhance their sustainable qualities.

This paper attempts to infer sustainable housing out of the concepts of sustainable development and compare low-income housing to the changing approaches in the developing world. It particularly examines the role of international bodies in setting the core development themes since 1950s. The paper also highlights housing as a process and the advantages of self-built incremental in situ upgrading, and supports such developments as an affordable and enabling means of providing sustainable housing to the low-income groups in developing countries. In the last section, it tries to draw a relationship between development, poverty and sustainability.

## 2. SUSTAINABLE HOUSING

According to the WCED (1987, p. 8), sustainable development means meeting "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their

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1 Slums, the 'shelter dimension of urban poverty' (have a broader meaning than inadequate housing. The number of slum dwellers in the world has increased from 715 million in 1991 to 913 million in 2001 and 998 million in 2005, adding another 50 million in 2005-7. UNHCS (2007) projects that there will be 1.4 billion slum dwellers in 2020.