

PAPER NO. 252

URBAN DEVELOPMENT WITH FOCUS ON HOUSING

By

ABDUL HALIM PARACHA

URBAN DEVELOPMENT WITH FOCUS ON HOUSING

Abdul Halim Paracha

Pakistan has been facing serious housing problems since independence. The large influx of refugees resulted in an acute housing shortage and the emergence of Katchi abadies. The rapid increase in urban population due to rural migration over the years made matters worse.

Physical Planning & Housing Departments, Local Area Authorities and Provincial Housing Authorities were also established in big cities for the planning of physical environment and to follow a policy of developing housing schemes for general public as well as Government employees with providing facilities like roads, water supply, sewerage, drainage, parks, electricity, gas, telephone etc and residential plots with social services and public building. The purpose of which is to increase the supply of developed plots for house construction by the private sector, cooperative housing societies and government sector.

Economic survey of Pakistan 2005-06 recently released by the government revealed that the housing is one of the basic human requirements, as every family needs a roof. Providing shelter to every family has become a major issue as a result of rapid urbanization and higher population growth. On the other hand, the provision of house has not kept pace with the above phenomenon and resulted in the deterioration of living condition, increased health hazards and rapid growth of slums and squatter settlements (Katchi Abadies). The improvement of slums and katchi abadies and provision of affordable housing to shelter less population will not only help alleviate the urban and rural poverty but also increase the productivity of the low income population through improved public health. The present Government is committed to give priority to housing sector and has demonstrated its commitment by allocating significant resources for its accelerated development, which would contribute to the economy in the form of additional employment and support 30 - 40 allied industries. The multiple effects of the housing and construction sector have the potential to create maximum employment opportunities besides generating industrial, commerce and trade activities.

According to housing census 1998, the housing backlog, which stood at 4.30 million, has been currently projected at 6.19 million. It is estimated that to address the backlog and to meet the housing shortfall in the next 20 years the overall housing has to be increased to 500,000 housing units annually. The present housing stock is also rapidly aging and estimates suggest that more than 50 percent stock is over 50 years old. It is also estimated that 50 percent urban population now lives in slums and squatter settlements. Meeting the backlog in housing, besides replacement of out-lived housing units is beyond the financial resources of the Government. This necessitates putting in place a framework to facilitate financing in the formal private sector and mobilize non-government resources for a market based housing financed system. The government of Pakistan is, therefore, encouraging participation of local as well as foreign investors/developers and private sector companies in housing sector to build more and more housing projects to meet the demands of a vast segment of society. Having realized the importance of housing sector in the overall economic development of the country, the government, as an immediate measure, declared Housing and Construction as a priority industry and simultaneously formulated a pragmatic and workable National Housing Policy in order to revitalize the housing sector providing therein various incentives for the construction and private sector builders/developers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The housing needs of the nation must be considered in respect of basic and cultural needs. The basic needs include the provision of shelters, safety and service. The secondary needs are the result of our society's values, and involves aspects of comfort, status self-expression. There is strong argument for the skeletal housing system which Habraken has proposed, in which the

support and serves intake is a professional responsibility, and all else is the concern of the householder.

Habraken's preoccupation with the communal support and service structure carrying individual detachable units, a development of archigrade "plug in city ", may suggest the role of the building in future.

2. Today, housing has come to be inseparably related to community planning. Therefore, in order to determine the quantitative and qualitative needs in housing a study of family groups and neighbourhood relations is essential. The design of a project is not merely an engineering problem; various family and social aspects require due consideration. Thus it is obvious that a purely technical approach to housing programme is inadequate and intergrated approach involving human relations and skills in necessary.
3. The satisfaction of housing needs must be considered in relation to the time scale of changing conditions, and to the resources available. The problem is one of providing for the needs of tomorrow with the resources of today. One of the major resources available is the existing stock of dwellings. It is foolhardy to maintain that old buildings should be preserved purely because of their age, just as it is unwise to advocate comprehensive redevelopment without due consideration to the social and economic implication of such a strategy. Each case must be treated on its own merit.
4. A viable and self-sustaining local government is a pre-requisite for the provision of infrastructure and effective management of cities. Towards this end all bottlenecks need to be removed and such institutions be freed of bureaucratic control.
5. A new approach to needs to make towards urban development through public-private partnership. In particular the housing policies have got to be pro-poor and based on community participation. Role of the public sector may be limited to that of the facilitator in the provision of land services. Construction of houses does not have to be done by the public sector and is best left to the people.