



16th WEDC Conference
Infrastructure for
low-income communities
Hyderabad, India 1990

Site and services programmes in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

This paper will attempt to discuss one of the main housing programmes introduced by the Sri Lankan government in order to improve the quality of life of the Sri Lankan urban poor.

Sri Lanka is a small island with difficult socio-economic problems confronting its fifteen million inhabitants. Approximately 16% of the total population lives in urban areas and one half of the urban dwellers are without steady jobs and they live in old buildings or in unauthorised shanties.

Sri Lankan government believes the housing provides a key to the solution of many problems in the country and the sites and services programme was introduced in urban cities to provide the urban poor a buildable land with necessary services and a housing loan.

The National Housing Development Authority of Sri Lanka is responsible for making the programme a success with minimum involvement of government and maximum commitment of the target communities.

Beneficiaries are given a plot of 50 meter square in size under this programme and it is the task of the Engineers and Planners to fit in all the services in this little space.

The programme was launched in 1984 and the Housing Development Authority of Sri Lanka is proud to say that this was able to solve the urban housing problem to a greater extent and wide experience and knowledge gained through this had made the programme well improved.

So far the lands and the services had been given to the communities free of cost and now the strategies are being worked out to recover the costs involved from the beneficiaries.

THE SCOPE OF THE PROGRAMME

The main aim of the site and services programme is to improve the living conditions of the slum and shanty dwellers in urban areas.

The informal settlements of the urban

low income group are called gardens and the people who live in these gardens are migrants who had moved into cities from various places many decades ago.

They are the people with worst houses in Sri Lanka. The rural poor also suffer the housing problem. But they can put up a house with mud walls and a thatch roof without any cost. Thatch and the necessary roof timber can be easily obtained from forests. Mud is freely available. They can dig a bore hole toilet in the bush. There is plenty of land in the rural areas and they can dig the pit for the latrine as well as the drinking water well in the same plot without violating public health standards.

But in the city the things are very different. Everything has a price and even the marshy land is very expensive. Urban poor will have to buy cardboard cartons and the drums for the roof. Water is not free for them. They don't have proper sanitation facilities. Therefore the infant and child mortality is relatively high. These people suffer from water related diseases due to lack of access to sanitary toilets and safe drinking water.

Unfortunately these communities had never been received the attention of city planners since 1984 even though they consist of one half of the city population. They were not conventionally recognised as a part of the city.

Before 1984 almost all the urban development plans were for the first half of the city and investments on roads, sewers, electricity, drainage, water services etc. was only for the areas where the middle class and the formal working class lived.

But in 1984 with the introduction of million houses programme this conventional thinking began to change and doors of urban benefits were opened for the slum and shanty dwellers as well.

In 1984 sites and services programme was introduced by the government to look

in to the housing and related matters of this shanty dwellers and the main components of the programme were

1. Provision of land and security of tenure.
2. Provision of infrastructure and services.
3. Assistance for house construction.
4. Skill development and social promotion activities.

HOW THE PROGRAMME WAS PLANNED

The site and services programme had been planned in an entirely different way based on the lessons learnt and the experience gained in the hundred thousand housing programme implemented between 1978 and 1982.

The new policies were drafted in the year 1982 and the year 1983 was the planning year.

The programme planned to recognise the efforts of the urban poor to improve their standard of living conditions and to support such efforts by providing security of tenure and access to resources and amenities which they can not reach otherwise.

National Housing Development Authority Of Sri Lanka and its role in the programme

The National Housing Development Authority Of Sri Lanka was formed in 1978 as a semi government organisation to provide better housing conditions for the majority of the population in the country.

The organisation has Administration, Finance, Rural Housing, Urban Housing, Engineering Services, and property management departments. The Urban housing, Finance and Engineering Services division are the key units involved in the sites and services programme.

The role of N H D A in this programme was to intervene minimally while providing maximum support to the beneficiaries.

To achieve this objective it was planned to have two way communications between N H D A and the house builders. The aim was to assure the communities that the support is to achieve what they want, what they can operate and what they can maintain. Almost all the decisions in the planning stage to be taken through negotiations between N H D A and the beneficiaries.

As it is not practically possible to dialogue with all of them the community development committees (CDC) are formed from the target communities. N H D A officials and the CDC will have to negotiate and draw

up plans regarding following activities.

- Demarcation of project boundaries
- Registration of house holds
- Socio Economic Survey
- Preparation of regularisations plans
- On site blocking out
- Detailed engineering designs
- Issuing of deeds
- Preparation of contract documents and awards
- Contract payments
- Issue of housing loans and loan repayments
- Technical advises on house construction
- Skill development and social promotion activities.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

Provision of land and security of tenure

When government recognises the efforts of a certain shanty community to improve their life style N H D A is informed about that particular settlement.

Then a socio economic survey about the community is conducted by N H D A with the community members.

Very often these people live in private government or municipal lands which are reserved for public purposes such as road reservations, canal banks, railway reservations etc.

N H D A look for alternative lands for the resettlement of these people. the majority of lands available for urban resettlement are marshy and the risk of flooding is very high in those lands. Therefore they have to be reclaimed to provide a buildable land for the shanty dwellers.

The sites are selected by N H D A with the Community Development Council of the target Community and they are purchased by N H D A from the owners. Then these are filled at a gradient of 1/300. The site base level is determined from one in 5 year flood level. Adequate drainage facilities are provided to avoid inundation of the site due to waters from surrounding areas. Land preparation is often done by private contractors with the supervision of N H D A officials as well as the CDC members.

Once the land is prepared the blocking out is done on site by N H D A planners surveyors, engineers and technical officers with the beneficiaries. Normally 70% of the project area is allocated for housing and community buildings and 30% is allocated for roads and other open spaces. Due to scarcity of lands in major cities of

Sri Lanka very often beneficiaries are given a plot size of 50 m².

Deeds are issued to them by N H D A and they become rate payers of the municipal council.

Provision Of Infrastructure and Services

Infrastructure and services provided by N H D A to support the housing are

- Drainage
- Roads
- Water Supply
- Sanitation.

The solid waste collection and the electricity supply is the responsibility of the municipal council and therefore N H D A does not involve in them directly.

Drainage - Provision of adequate drainage system is essential to prevent the site deterioration. Very often N H D A provides drains to carry storm water as well as sillage. Mostly the main drains are lined and the sillage is carried away by earth drains. The drainage network is decided and drawn by N H D A engineers with the help of the CDC members and very often the construction of drains is done by CDC, with N H D A funds.

Roads - As the land is very expensive in the urban areas and very often a substantial amount of money has to be spent on the ground preparation the road widths are reduced to the minimum required.

The roads are usually constructed with gravel. Only the site access roads are paved with bitumen.

Road construction is usually done by the CDC with N H D A funds.

Water Supply - Very often the communities prefer to have house hold pipe borne water. N H D A makes arrangements to get the water connections from the city water mains.

Pipe laying and the other constructions related to water supply is often done by CDC with N H D A funds.

Sanitation - Even though the Plot sizes are so small individual pour flush pit latrines are constructed in many schemes. If city sewers are running closer to scheme N H D A makes arrangements to connect the sewerage network of the site to the city sewers.

ASSISTANCE FOR HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

When living in unauthorised settlements

the dwellers know that the land on which they reside is legally very insecure and at anytime they can be evicted. Therefore always they make very temporary structures and the construction of permanent houses is outside their experience.

So once these families get access to land and other urban amenities N H D A has to guide them regarding all the technical matters related to house construction.

All families are offered access to a housing loan of 230 sterling pounds at 10% interest rate which is much lower than the commercial interest rate on housing loans. Beneficiaries will have to pay 2.5 pounds a month over a period of 15 years to settle the loan.

The average cost of building a house with 2 bed rooms, kitchen and a living area is 575 pounds. So the housing loan provided is not sufficient to complete the house and some people borrow additional money and some people complete with their savings.

Different loan packages and housing options are offered to people who can not afford to pay 2.5 pounds monthly.

Skill Development and Social welfare

Skill development Training and education is provided to communities in order to make them self reliant. Within a short period several community training techniques had been developed and integrated with the project development process.

Various workshops are organised by N H D A in order to familiarise the communities with the potential as well as the limitations of participatory approaches. Leadership workshops are organised for community leaders to train them in various managerial aspects.

Social Welfare - Programme had provided good access to health services, child care practices, pre schools and various training classes.

The health visitors make frequent visits to new settlements and various instructions are given especially to pregnant mothers and children. The immunisation works are carried out in the settlements itself.

Pre schools and day care centres had been started in the new settlements by the municipal councils and various non governmental organisations.

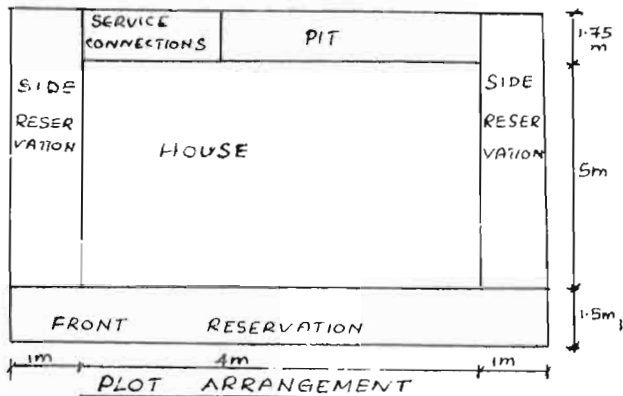
PROGRAMME FUNDING AND COST RECOVERIES

There are 2 ways by which the programme is financed. They are the government funding and the funds from various non government organisations and lotteries.

N H D A has to spend 260 pounds on

land and 364 pounds on infrastructure and services. Another 230 pounds is provided for house construction. So the total expenditure per plot is 854 pounds and only 230 pounds is paid back.

This is a very poor cost recovery and N H D A is now making arrangements to implement the ways of recovering the land and infrastructure cost from beneficiaries.



PROGRAMME EVALUATION

The author had been closely involved in the programme since 1984 and had studied about operation and maintenance, housing loan repayments and cultural and social changes of people in many completed projects.

Operation and maintenance - These schemes are planned to be operated and maintained by the beneficiaries with the assistance of the municipal council. So far these had been done up to satisfaction in many completed projects.

But failures had been observed in some projects and it was found that the cause is that the beneficiaries had not been provided what they want and what they can maintain and operate within their capacities.

Housing loan repayments - It was mentioned earlier that the beneficiaries get the land and infrastructure free and only the housing loan has to be repaid. The studies done in this reveals that the percentage of loan recoveries is about 35% on average.

Cultural and social changes - Middle class urban societies has a certain image of snanty dwellers. They are considered as people prone to violence who are unreliable and engaged in many illegal activities. So these people had been rejected culturally and socially by the other city dwellers.

Once these people are resettled and given the basic amenities it has been observed that they make attempts to integrate themselves into an urban lower middle class style of life and try to dismantle the image of them as a kind of threat to urban formal sector.

They express a desire to keep to themselves.

The way of thinking about the 'rights' over the material assets of the community also had been changed. Usually snanty dwellers do not oppose their neighbours using amenities such as toilets, taps, foot paths etc. But it was observed that these attitudes had been change and now they take strong objection to people from neighbouring snanties using water or sanitation facilities.

CONCLUSION

In concluding author wishes to say that the programme had proved it self as an efficient and responsive system for, low income housing, This had been largely succeeded in achieving most of its initial targets.

To achieve all the objectives of the programme poverty should be alleviated and the present government had introduced a gigantic poverty alleviation programme throughout the island.

ABBREVIATIONS

NHDA - National Housing Development Authority of Sri Lanka.

CDC - Community Development Councils

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