

3 Community-Based Upgrading of Housing and Settlements

Throughout its first 10 years of operations, UN-HABI TAT'S ROAP-Fukuoka has helped poor people to improve the quality of their housing and their access to basic services and infrastructure, such as drainage, water supply, and sanitation, through a number of slum-upgrading projects. All of these projects formulated jointly with the communities, government agencies at various levels, and NGOs drew on the insights and learning gained from pioneering demonstration projects from the early 1980s that had adopted and promoted people's participation under UN-HABI TAT's Community Development Programme (CDP) projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Genuine community participation in slum upgrading and poverty alleviation projects has demonstrated a number of benefits over the government provision, or public welfare, approach that relegates individuals, households, and the community passive recipients with virtually no say in what they receive, how it is delivered or allocated to them, and how they pay for part or all of the costs.

When communities are getting what they think they need, rather than what others think they need, people living in those communities are also willing to contribute some of their own precious financial and other resources, such as ideas, skills, labour, and time, to ensure things are done properly and well.

Basic service improvements are vital to people's well-being.



Decades of experience in a wide range of developing countries has shown that projects designed and implemented jointly with communities achieve better-quality and more cost-effective results. Community-based projects help disperse scarce financial and other development resources more widely so they benefit more of those in need.

Because community members contribute to the project's activities, they earn the right to have a voice in deciding on designs and in managing the project's implementation. Through this direct involvement, community members learn new skills and develop confidence in their own capacity to change their lives for the better.

In summary, community-based projects not only achieve better results and user outcomes, but also contribute to better functioning communities with improved linkages to government agencies, other communities, and other city stakeholders.

By gleaning and documenting such insights and by learning both from local partners worldwide and from its own initiated projects, the CDP has been able to develop a number of institutional and procedural tools to engage households and communities directly in the design, implementation, and management of projects that improve their housing and living conditions.

One key participatory tool developed in Sri Lanka under the CDP was the Community Action Planning (CAP) process, a series of community workshops in which the community members discuss, consider, and take decisions on planning, implementing, and maintaining physical improvements to their settlements, as well as other useful developmental activities of their own choosing. Project, NGO, and municipal or governmental agency personnel only facilitate and support the CAP process, thereby ensuring full ownership of the initiative by the community itself.

In Sri Lanka, whenever viable, the selected community physical improvement projects are implemented through another CDP community support mechanism developed with poor urban communities and the National Housing Development Authority there, Community Contracts (CCs).



A UN HABI TAT project led to 15,689 micro-project installations in Myanmar.

CCs enable skilled artisans and unskilled labourers in a community to carry out the physical construction work in their neighbourhood with any necessary technical support provided by the project and other collaborating government agencies and NGO partners.

The CAP approach marks a dramatic shift from the traditional agency-led approach where the only participation of poor communities is to provide labour (often unpaid as an 'in kind' community contribution) to a people-centred approach with the community itself designing, managing, and implementing slum upgrading and basic urban services projects.



Women have developed the capacity to engage in activities outside their traditional roles.

Alleviating poverty in Bangladesh

One major ROAP-Fukuoka project that applied such community-based tools very successfully and on a very large scale is the Local Partnerships for Urban Poverty Alleviation Project (LPUPAP) in Bangladesh. Formulated in the early days of the ROAP-Fukuoka in 1998, the project gained approval to begin in early 2000. By mid 2007, it had reached and supported 600 poor communities in densely populated and seriously under-serviced settlements in 11 cities and towns in Bangladesh. In terms of its overall impact, the project has achieved an impressive coverage by improving the living conditions and social organization of over 650,000 people.



A project in Bangladesh is assisting seriously underserviced settlements in 11 cities.

Women especially have developed the capacity and confidence to engage in activities beyond the traditional confines of their families and local communities and have developed and used new capabilities and skills formerly considered beyond them. Through its responsive and flexible management approach, the project has cost-effectively completed a set of basic service improvements vital to people's well being. In the process, it has empowered communities to organise, develop their capabilities, and improve their current living conditions and their future prospects.



In Myanmar, much of the construction of water supply and road improvements is done by villagers themselves.

Water and sanitation for Myanmar villages

Another large-scale example of a community-based project for basic services provision is the Community Water Supply and Sanitation Project in Myanmar. Part of the UNDP's Human Development Initiative from 1994-2002, this project was essentially rural, being implemented in eleven townships within three zones, namely, the Shan State, the Dry Zone, and the Delta. Covering 2,297 villages, this project provided water supply and sanitation systems to around 1.2 million people. While the physical achievements (15,689 micro-project installations) were impressive, what was perhaps even more important was the community development component and the capacity building for democratising local decision-making.



Providing a safe water supply for rural villages in Myanmar.

Community Contracts Getting money to where it really works

ROAP-Fukuoka has promoted the community contract system in the region by issuing significant numbers of them in a range of countries. Community contracts are not only used in slum upgrading projects and programmes, but also increasingly in post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction and recovery situations.

