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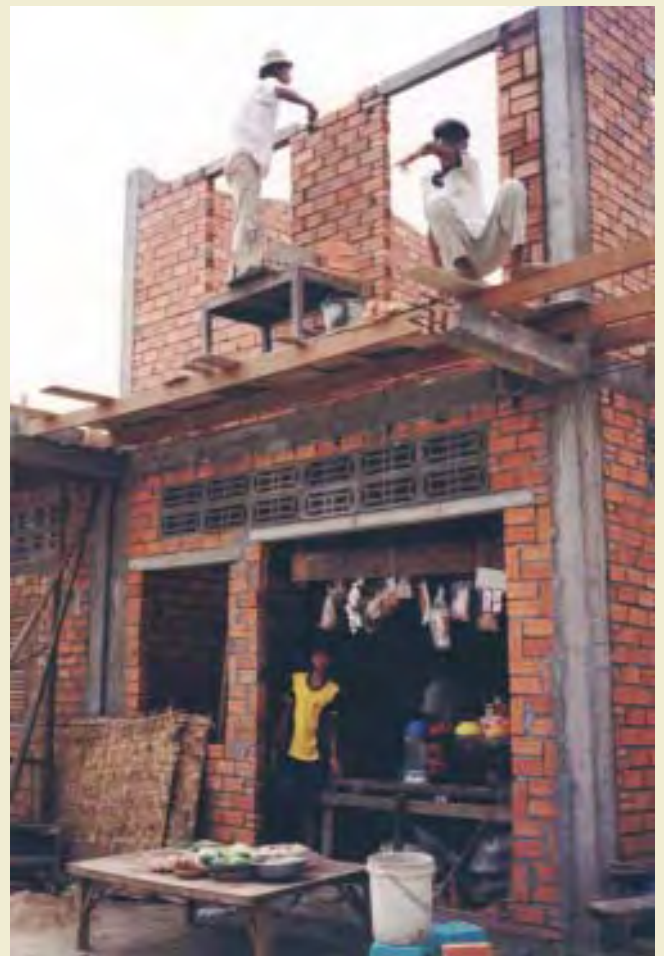
Helping the Asia-Pacific Region Accommodate Its People Sustainably

UN-HABITAT recognizes that urbanisation will persist as the way that developing countries in Asia-Pacific region accommodate their growing populations and seek to lift their poor out of poverty. But, given the scale of existing rural populations in most of the region's developing countries, the process of urbanisation must be managed both intelligently and justly, if it is to enable all of their citizens, rich and poor, to pursue livelihoods and live in decent housing with access to physical and social services. The sustainability of the region's economic, social, and political development will occur only through a more democratic and well-managed urbanisation process. This was highlighted at the 1996 Habitat II Conference on Human Settlements or City Summit in Istanbul.

The Habitat Agenda that emerged from the City Summit specified the actions needed to cope with urbanization in a globalising world economy. It noted that cities, even 'mega' cities, are theoretically able to cope with all kinds of technical problems, including providing adequate urban services and responsible environmental management. However, most cities are facing serious governance challenges, as a result of obsolete national and municipal political and administrative structures and inhabitants who are increasingly concerned only with their individual and local interests, rather than with their common future in their shared city habitat.

Globalisation increases not only economic competition, but also social fragmentation. This division of interests and the denial of a voice for the poor impacts negatively on cities that need to operate as a collective unit both to resolve urgent and complex social and environmental problems in an equitable and sustainable manner and to compete effectively in the global market place.

The Habitat Agenda clearly affirmed that direct citizen and community participation are vital to securing good urban governance and, thereby, shaping cities capable of accommodating all of their inhabitants and of protecting the natural habitat on which all species, including humans, depend.



The ROAP-Fukuoka works primarily with the people whom it is helping.

More than any other sector of urban society, the urban poor have helped their cities to recover a sense of urban community and of collective responsibility for their neighbourhoods, as well as a shared commitment to their cities. This has helped demonstrate to the highly fragmented middle- and higher-income groups, excessively concerned with their own needs and interests, that in a shared city habitat, their well-being and their survival ultimately depend on protecting the common basic needs of all residents.

The poor have learned that leaving everything up to politicians and government officials is to lose the power to act effectively to protect their rights to live in the city and to participate in shaping its future. What the Habitat Agenda explicitly called for was the creation of enabling legal, policy, and administrative frameworks to foster and sustain citizen and community participation in urban governance.

How the ROAP-Fukuoka supports equitable and sustainable urbanisation

While the primary responsibility for the implementation of and follow-up to the Habitat Agenda rests with individual governments and their national and local partners, UN-HABITAT's ROAP-Fukuoka provides support for their efforts and monitors the progress achieved in the region. It is also responsible for supporting UN-HABITAT's global programmes and campaigns, as well as the implementation of the UN system's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Communities can lead their own development process.



A tsunami survivor manages his house construction.

On an action level, the ROAP-Fukuoka's technical cooperation programmes and projects span the entire spectrum of urbanisation, shelter delivery, and poverty reduction issues. These include human settlements development, especially housing, slum upgrading, poverty alleviation, gender equity, urban governance, city and town development strategies, urban environmental planning and management, and post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction and recovery.

As the following overview of its work shows, the ROAP-Fukuoka works primarily with the people whom it is helping – the urban poor, the returning refugees, and the disaster survivors – to ensure more capable, committed and empowered communities emerge to sustain the various shelter and environmental improvements resulting from its projects and programmes.



Community-managed housing construction in Sri Lanka.