

The struggle for shelter (and livelihoods)

THE STRUGGLE

THE THEME OF this issue, the struggle for shelter, was determined by the number of papers submitted to *Environment and Urbanization* on the topic. However, this has also been the underlying theme of many papers in previous issues, as described later. In virtually all urban centres, low-income groups always have to struggle to find housing. The less they can afford to spend on housing, the fewer the options and the greater the gap between what they would like and what they can find. This gap is greatly widened by the unwillingness or inability of government authorities to help increase the supply and reduce the cost of housing, and land for housing, and to ensure the provision of infrastructure and services. In order to reduce the cost, almost all low-income groups end up having to accept housing that is inadequate, dangerous, overcrowded, insecure and poorly located.

Many of the papers in this issue show the struggle that low-income groups face in obtaining housing. The paper on Huaycán by Pedro Arévalo T. gives an example of the scale and severity of this struggle in Lima, Peru. The author is well placed to describe this, being a community leader who had a key role in organizing the struggle of thousands of families, first for land on which they could build their homes (in a new settlement in Lima, Huaycán) and then for basic infrastructure, services and, above all, the right to manage their own township. His paper describes the complex political struggles that the inhabitants faced, especially with the guerrilla group *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) which sought to control Huaycán for its purposes. A number of community leaders were murdered by *Sendero*, including the democratically elected leader of Huaycán, Pascuala Rosado. (The author had to write this paper from exile in Norway, where he was forced to go because of death threats.) His paper also describes the inhabitants' struggles with other political factions and

parties including negotiations with government agencies and marches organized to make politicians keep their promises. The author highlights not only the inhabitants' struggle for shelter but also their struggle for the right to have their own democratic institutions in order to manage their township.

Two papers in this issue consider what the struggle for shelter implies for one particular low-income family. Janet Jarman's photo-essay, by concentrating on a Mexican family from Matamoros, illustrates the extent to which the struggle for shelter is conditioned by the struggle to find an adequate income. The photo-essay concentrates on how the family makes a living and the implications this has for their housing at two points in time. In August 1996, the mother and all but one of the children lived in a small shack they had constructed on land that was illegally occupied close to the city dump. The father and the eldest son were in the United States working as farm labourers. Most of the family's income came from recovering goods that could be reused or recycled from the dump. By January 1997, the whole family was in the United States with the mother, father and elder children working as farm labourers. They hope to return to their home in Matamoros and to rebuild it using permanent materials - but recognize that the search for income may require them to stay longer in the United States. By March 1997, they are having to pay US\$500 a month for the mobile home they rent close to the farm where they work.

The paper by Sheridan Bartlett considers the difficulties facing the many low-income households in the United States who constantly move - for instance because of eviction or as they search for better conditions. It includes a description of the experiences of one low-income family who has moved 24 times since the birth of their nine-year old daughter. The low-paying, poor quality jobs they find do not encourage them to stay in one location and the family income is never sufficient to pay for decent housing. Moving becomes an escape from unsatisfactory con-

Introduction

ditions and gives hope of better conditions in the new location. But it also means constant disruption for the children as they change school and lose friends and causes great difficulties for the whole family in maintaining social relations. The paper suggests that if low-income groups could find decent housing that they could afford, it would help break this cycle of constant moving and the heavy costs it imposes on all family members.

Jan van der Linden's paper concentrates on one of the key reasons why government "low-cost" housing projects have delivered too little of too expensive a product - with the "low-cost" housing also so often ending up in the hands of middle-income groups. Governments have been unwilling or unable to facilitate low-income groups' access to land for housing and of ensuring that their settlements have piped water, paved roads and other forms of infrastructure. But many governments have tolerated the work of illegal sub-dividers. As the paper describes, a complex and poorly organized bureaucracy gives great scope to "patrons" who have some power to influence their clients' access to land and basic services. The patrons profit from the public authorities' ineffectiveness and lack of transparency and accountability. Their power would be much diminished if low-income households no longer needed their help to obtain land, infrastructure and basic services. The paper also describes a sites and services project in Hyderabad which proved more successful at reaching low-income households than previous government projects but where the government's attempts to work through community leaders tended to reinforce patronage. As the paper notes, the chances of representative leadership are enhanced when the inhabitants of any settlement can gain access to land titles, services and information independently of their leaders.

NEW MODELS OF SUPPORT BY EXTERNAL AGENCIES

THREE PAPERS IN this issue are about programmes to improve housing and living conditions for low-income groups. All three have to address the fact that most of the low-income groups in Rufisque (Senegal), Buenos

Aires (Argentina) and Fortaleza (Brazil) live in districts with inadequate or no provision for piped water, sanitation, drainage and health care. They live in these districts because finding or building a home in better served ones is beyond their means. The paper on Fortaleza by Yves Cabannes describes two programmes: the *comunidades* programme which primarily supports the development of new homes, settlements and income-generating activities for the lowest-income groups through *mutirão*, mutual self-help; and the *casa melhor* (meaning "better house") programme which provides loans, subsidies and technical support to households living in squatter settlements or other poor quality settlements to improve, rebuild or expand their homes. The paper on Rufisque by Malick Gaye and Fodé Diallo describes how problems of inadequate provision for water, sanitation, drainage and the collection and disposal of garbage were tackled in nine low-income communities - largely by the inhabitants themselves but in partnership with an NGO (ENDA-Tiers Monde), local authorities and other agencies. The paper on Buenos Aires describes the developments achieved over a ten-year period in a low-income informal settlement (Barrio San Jorge); this concentrates on developments in the last five years, since the period 1987-1991 was covered in a previous paper published in *Environment and Urbanization* in 1991.⁽¹⁾

Although the programmes that each paper describes take different forms, and were developed in very different contexts and within very different social and political structures, they have certain key elements in common:

- Local non-government organizations with a strong commitment to participation; local (or international) NGOs often do not have this and they can take on the characteristics of the patrons described in Jan van der Linden's paper as they act as intermediaries between distant funding agencies, local government and community organizations. But it should also be recognized that such a commitment is difficult to realize in practice, even in highly motivated organizations. In Fortaleza, the programmes that Yves Cabannes' paper describes benefited from the already strong

people's organizations that were working in the city.

- A desire to keep down costs and to achieve cost recovery where possible. This might seem contradictory since these NGOs are working with low-income groups who, by definition, have very little money to spend on housing. But these programmes represent an increasingly important trend amongst Southern NGOs: keeping costs down, and achieving cost recovery where possible, because this also means that residents are much less dependent on external funding. The residents also have a greater chance of retaining control of their own development. This commitment to keeping down costs and to cost recovery also allows more to be done with available funds and allows for the development of approaches that can be applied on a much larger scale as less funding is needed per household.
- An understanding of the need to develop ties with local authorities and national agencies. Local NGOs will always be limited in the scale of the work they can fund - or find funding for. But they can demonstrate new approaches and work with low-income groups and their community organizations to persuade local and national authorities to adopt such approaches. Even though most local authorities have limited funds and technical capacity, they can often provide land or legal status for those living on illegally occupied or sub-divided land. They can also support the provision of basic services, with their limited funding made to go much further, by working with NGOs and community based organizations in developing low-cost solutions which seek cost recovery wherever possible. But in doing so, as Jan van der Linden's paper explains, they must be careful not to reinforce the role of NGOs and community leaders as patrons, to the disadvantage of the wider population.
- These programmes also reveal a critical role for international agencies - that of funding programmes such as those in Buenos Aires, Fortaleza and Rufisque

which can then draw on local and national resources when the approach is shown to work. As Pedro Arévalo's paper describes, the residents of Huaycán also benefited from some external funding for basic services and this strengthened their position as they negotiated with the government of Lima and national agencies for basic infrastructure and services.

The above papers concentrate on the means through which those with low incomes can find or develop housing that is more secure and of better quality, and with provision for basic services. The paper by Sinead Hanks and Tessa Swithinbank describes a relatively new approach to the problem of homelessness in Europe and North America, a problem that has grown considerably in recent years. It describes how street papers such as *The Big Issue* allow homeless people (or, in other instances, unemployed people) to obtain an income without begging or relying on charity handouts. At any one time, between 8,000 and 10,000 homeless people in the United Kingdom are earning some income by selling *The Big Issue*. This paper also describes the growth of street papers in many other countries and how most (including *The Big Issue*) try to help homeless people find work, or acquire skills useful for employment, or obtain adequate accommodation. Most street papers also allow the homeless and those who work with them to reach a larger audience with their views - although, as this paper points out, one of the reasons for *The Big Issue*'s commercial success is that it covers many issues of interest to the 300,000 people who purchase it, every week.

THE STRUGGLE FOR SHELTER IN PREVIOUS ISSUES

THIS IS THE first issue of *Environment and Urbanization* since October 1989 that concentrates on housing. But the struggle by low-income groups in their search for a safe, secure shelter with access to piped water, sanitation and other forms of infrastructure and services has been one of the underlying themes for many papers in previous issues. As in this issue, they can be divided into those that are about the struggle and its costs and

Introduction

those that are about projects or programmes that allowed low-income groups to buy or build better quality housing.

We have published many memorable papers about the struggle for shelter - starting in the first issue in April 1989 with the account by the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights of the millions of people who were forcibly evicted from their homes in Seoul (South Korea) between 1960 and 1989, and the groups within the nation who were seeking to oppose this.⁽²⁾ The October 1989 issue had many papers describing the difficulties that low-income groups faced in finding adequate accommodation in places such as Bangkok, San Salvador, Lagos, Khartoum and Surabaya. The April 1990 issue had two concrete examples of "struggle" - the case study by Lisa Peattie of how a land invasion in Lima was organized and the case study of a land invasion and settlement consolidation in Buenos Aires by Beatriz Cuenya and her colleagues.⁽³⁾ The April 1990 issue included an interview by Julio Davila with one of the main organizers of CONAMUP, a federation of community organizations in Mexico, and on its role in voicing its members' demands to the government.⁽⁴⁾

The April 1994 issue on "evictions" with case studies in Bangkok, Manila, Karachi, Durban, Rio de Janeiro, Lhasa and Israel/Palestine was also largely about the struggle by low-income groups to avoid being evicted from their shelters. Later issues included J.M. Lusugga Kironde's paper describing how the land allocation system in Dar es Salaam still excluded those with low incomes and little political power even though the land was publicly owned;⁽⁵⁾ and Graham Alder's paper on Nairobi showed how and why more than half the city's population (and most of its low-income households) are squeezed onto illegal or informal settlements which cover less than 6 per cent of the land area.⁽⁶⁾

Previous issues of *Environment and Urbanization* have also included many case studies of interventions that seek to narrow the gap between what low-income groups need and what they can afford. These include:

- the *Mahila Milan* crisis credit fund in India which is developing a range of facilities, from funding for emergencies to collateral allowing women pavement dwell-

ers to obtain loans for housing;⁽⁷⁾

- the many and varied community based, community directed programmes for water, sanitation, housing improvements, health promotion, health care and child development in the illegal settlements of Guatemala City;⁽⁸⁾
- the two papers on the work of the South African Homeless People's Federation to develop their own savings and credit programme and their struggle to get official support for this;⁽⁹⁾
- the many profiles of NGOs who work with low-income groups and their community organizations in improving housing and in lobbying governments to support low-income groups efforts - for instance the work of CENVI in Mexico, FEDEVIVIENDA and Fundacion Carvajal in Colombia, the Orangi Pilot Project in Pakistan, SPARC in India, and Homeless International in the UK.⁽¹⁰⁾

TENANTS

THE OCTOBER 1997 issue of *Environment and Urbanization* will be on tenants. The current issue includes a paper by Alan Gilbert, Alan Mabin, Malcolm McCarthy and Vanessa Watson which reminds us of the importance of rental accommodation for a significant proportion of all low-income households in urban areas. It is now widely recognized that in most cities, a considerable proportion of low-income groups rent accommodation and, as this paper points out, rental accommodation meets the needs of many such groups, especially the young, the mobile and new arrivals. The paper also points out that many tenants are not in conflict with their landlords and that many landlords are of a similar social class to their tenants - this is illustrated with a case study of rental accommodation in two South African townships. The October 1997 issue of *Environment and Urbanization* will draw together a number of case studies of organizations that have been working to improve either the quality or accessibility of rental accommodation.

FEEDBACK AND PARTICIPATORY TOOLS AND METHODS

MARK PELLING'S PAPER describes the various ways in which low-income households are generally more vulnerable to flooding in Georgetown, Guyana and describes also the failure of local authorities to work with such groups to reduce their vulnerability and to take measures to allow them to find housing that is less vulnerable to flooding. Mathew Titus's paper, describing the work of an NGO in India, picks up on the theme of our April 1993 issue on "Funding community-level initiatives". That issue concentrated on the role of credit in housing and neighbourhood development, with credit emerging as important both because it strengthened community organizations and reduced the cost (and thereby increased the scale) of development interventions made by external agencies such as NGOs, local government and international agencies. In the paper on "developing financial services for the urban poor", the author describes one NGO's experience with savings and loans, including both the changes that the NGO needed to adjust to and the ways in which the relationship between the NGO and savings groups needed to be negotiated and amended.

The papers by Olga Nieuwenhuys and by David Sanderson, although very different in their focus, both reveal the extent to which real participation is not only allowing people to "participate" in discussions but also in developing and managing solutions. Olga Nieuwenhuys' paper explains why participatory action research is not only important in helping the children of the urban poor, and those who work with them, to learn about their specific needs and priorities but also in helping these children influence decisions that are taken about their lives. As the au-

thor stresses, such research should help to negotiate more spaces for children in their environment and more power in their relationships with the state and society. The paper by David Sanderson picks up some of the issues raised by Mark Pelling with respect to working with people who are vulnerable to physical hazards. His paper describes the methods used by a small group of agencies to evaluate risk. In order to achieve risk reduction, the project then brought together the different stakeholders to discuss possible measures and how these might be implemented. Looking back at the lessons identified from the papers on interventions in Rufisque, Fortaleza and Buenos Aires, there are some similarities: a willingness to understand residents' perspectives (and also consider why previous initiatives had failed); the identification of low-cost solutions; engagement with the local authorities; and (indirectly) the contribution of international agencies.

Finally, there is the paper by Carolyn Stephens and her colleagues in Accra and São Paulo which describes the methods used to study inequalities in health status and environmental conditions between different groups in the cities of São Paulo and Accra. We requested this paper as a follow-up to our October 1996 issue on "City inequality" as it explains how the studies of inequality in Accra and São Paulo were undertaken using existing data drawn from different sources - and also how the studies involved staff from different government agencies (from city authorities and higher levels), academics and NGOs to determine how best to use it. This can serve as a guide to other groups who want to investigate inequalities in health between the best quality and worst quality zones of a city and also on how health risks differ by age group.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Hardoy, Ana, Jorge E. Hardoy and Ricardo Schusterman (1991), "Building community organization: the history of a squatter settlement and its own organizations in Buenos Aires", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.3, No.2, October, pages 104-120.
2. Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (1989), "Evictions in Seoul, South Korea", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.1, No.1, April, pages 89-94.
3. Peattie, Lisa (1990), "Participation: a case study of how invaders organize, negotiate and interact with government in Lima, Peru", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.2, No.1, April, pages 19-30; also Cuenya, Beatriz, Diego Armus, Maria Di Loreto and Susana Penalva (1990), "Land invasions and grass-roots organization: the Quilmes settlement in Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.2, No.1, April, pages 61-73.
4. Davila, Julio D. (1990), "Mexico's urban popular movements: a conversation with Pedro Moctezuma", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.2, No.1, April, pages 35-50.
5. Kironde, J.M. Lusugga (1995), "Access to land by the urban poor in Tanzania: some findings from Dar es Salaam", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.7, No.1, April, pages 77-95.
6. Alder, Graham (1995), "Tackling poverty in Nairobi's informal settlements: developing an institutional strategy", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.7, No.2, October, pages 85-108.
7. Patel, Sheela and Celine D'Cruz (1993), "The Mahila Milan crisis credit scheme; from a seed to a tree", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.5, No.1, April, pages 9-17.
8. Espinosa, Lair and Oscar A. López Rivera (1994), "UNICEF's urban basic services programme in illegal settlements in Guatemala City", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.6, No.2, October, pages 9-29.
9. Bolnick, Joel (1993), "The People's Dialogue on land and shelter; community driven networking in South Africa's informal settlements", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.5, No.1, October, pages 91-110; also Joel Bolnick (1996), "uTshani Buyakhuluma (The grass speaks): People's Dialogue and the South African Homeless People's Federation, 1993-1996", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.8, No.2, October, pages 153-170.
10. Connolly, Priscilla (1993), "The go-between; CENVI, a habitat NGO in Mexico City", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.5, No.1, April, pages 68-90; also Fedevivienda, the National Federation of Self-Help Community Housing Organizations in Colombia (1991), *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.3, No.2, October, pages 87-91; Fundación Carvajal; the Carvajal Foundation, Luis Fernando Cruz (1994), *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.6, No.2, October, pages 175-182; Homeless International (1992), *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.4, No.2, October, pages 168-175; Orangi Pilot Project (1995), *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.7, No.2, October, pages 227-236; and SPARC - developing new NGO lines (1990), *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.2, No.1, April, pages 91-104.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WE ARE PARTICULARLY grateful to Carlos Robles from the Moray Institute in Lima and Una Dean for translating the paper by Pedro Arévalo T., to Ruth Mayo for help in proof-reading, to Matthew Thomson and Liz Riley for help in preparing Book Notes and to Catherine Pyke at the University College of London for preparing maps.