

Foreword

This report is unusual for at least two reasons. In the first place, it is primarily concerned with environmental problems as seen from the viewpoint of the social sciences. The majority of SCOPE projects utilize the outlook and methods of the natural and biological sciences; in this survey of shelter provision and associated environmental conditions, the authors demonstrate the importance of environmental quality for human happiness, and they suggest the environmental damage that results from bad housing and inadequate services. They remind us also that the greatest need is not usually to find technical solutions, but to find the means to implement solutions. It is not difficult to define what is meant by good environmental conditions in human settlements, at least in general terms. But it is extremely difficult to provide such conditions in countries where the government cannot 'afford to provide shelter for all its people, especially the poorer ones, and therefore it must be accepted that most shelter will have to be self-provided.'

The second distinctive feature of this report is that in examining the environmental problems of human settlements in the Third World in Latin America, Africa and south Asia it is the product of a regrettably rare, perhaps even unique, cooperation among research groups in each of the three continents. The authors, and their colleagues who assisted them in the project, acknowledge that they have gained much through this analysis of similar problems in very different geographical and developmental settings.

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which took place in Stockholm in 1972, recognized the clear link that exists between poverty and environmental problems in developing countries. The importance of this link was reiterated in the discussions at the United Nations Conferences on Habitat and on Water, and is evident in the work of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) that is one of the principal results of the Stockholm Conference. This report is a positive and hopeful contribution to better understanding of the relationship between environment and development. SCOPE is grateful to UNEP for providing generous financial assistance to the project.

One of the undeniable handicaps faced by developing countries is that the number of experts they possess in most fields is far fewer than the problems demand. Another is that, in consequence, the experts whom they do possess are constantly in demand and always overburdened. SCOPE therefore invited Dr. C. I. Jackson to edit this report for publication. Dr. Jackson was a member of the international advisory group created for the project, and was closely associated with the work as it progressed. It has been necessary to reduce substantially the length of the report submitted by the authors to SCOPE and UNEP; that draft account itself was only a summary synthesis of much more detailed surveys prepared for each of the three continents. The authors and readers are asked to forgive the omission of details and the compression of argument required by the condensation. However, the basic message of Mabogunje, Hardoy and Misra emerges clearly from the present text.

The message is an important one, for the burgeoning millions who live in the human settlements that are its subject, and for their environment. If it is to be heeded, the prevailing approach to standards for shelter must be modified and the scientific community must become more effective in sharpening the environmental and cultural criteria for setting standards.

GILBERT F. WHITE
President of SCOPE