

Preface

Environmental problems of developing countries have generally been regarded as the results of poverty or as the consequences of the early stages of industrialization. This perspective has invariably led to the conclusion that what is needed to improve the situation is to hasten the pace of development and to pay greater regard to reducing its negative environmental impact. Especially in the urban areas, such negative impact is manifested in the poor housing of vast numbers of people, the inadequacy of services, the resultant pollution of water, air and solid wastes, and the general insanitary and dreary living conditions.

There can be no doubt that development is, in the long run, the answer to most of these problems. But, in the short run, such a conclusion implies that developing countries can do very little to improve the squalid and dehumanizing conditions found in their human settlements, particularly in the large metropolitan centres. These conditions, it is implied, must be endured by the majority of the population until the socio-economic situation in the country changes significantly for the better.

The present report represents a contrary assertion. Its main objective is to show that a judicious review of the standards and criteria that govern the provision of shelter in human settlements can help to bring about rapid and remarkable, if not dramatic, changes in the present situation. The volume therefore reviews what is perhaps the most important factor leading to current environmental stresses in developing countries, namely the rapid rate of urbanization. It then considers the type of living environment which the vast majority of those caught up in the urbanization process have been forced to create for themselves as they seek to solve their problems of shelter. This environment is shown to have arisen in a situation of a policy vacuum. The absence of policy guidance in this vital area is reflected in the continued enforcement of systems of standards and criteria that aggravate the deplorable situation. The critical analysis of these standards in this report leads to suggestions for a new approach to standard-setting in developing countries.

This review has involved individuals and institutions in all six continents of the world. Although the emphasis has been on the situation in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, important conceptual and analytical inputs have come from scientists in the other continents. To all those who have contributed in diverse ways to the present report, I wish to express my sincere gratitude. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the work of the staff of the three collaborating institutions in Buenos Aires, Mysore and Ibadan who have provided the original data for this report.

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