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***REVIEW OF THE ESCAP PROJECT ON HOUSING THE
POOR IN URBAN ECONOMIES – WITH A PARTICULAR
FOCUS ON REVIEWING THE QUICK GUIDES, THE AT
THE GLANCE REVIEW AND REGIONAL INFORMATION
RESOURCE FACILITY***

by Kishore Thapa

Note by the ESCAP secretariat on the findings and recommendations of the report

Quick Guides and At-a-Glance Reviews

The usefulness and the quality of the Quick Guides for Policy Makers have been appreciated not only by the evaluator but by practitioners and other agencies on the ground. Cities Alliance and the Government of India have translated the Guides into Hindi at their own expense. The Guides are being adapted for Africa by UN-HABITAT. United Nations Human Rights Commission has requested copies of the Guides for their training programme on housing rights in Central Asia.

The consultant recommends that ESCAP undertake the preparation of three new Quick Guides for Policy Makers on:

- Low-cost urban infrastructure
- Safe and cost effective shelter
- Disaster Management at the Community-level

Several guidelines already exist on the first two issues. As these issues are more technical in nature, there may not be much value added to publishing Quick Guides for Policy Makers on these issues. ESCAP and UN-HABITAT are discussing development of a Quick Guide on Community-based disaster management.

Regional Information Resource Facility and on-line training course

Most of the changes suggested by the consultant have already been incorporated in the Regional Information Resource Facility and the on-line training course. A follow-up project is being discussed with Cities Alliance for development and embedding of face-to-face training material with local government and public administration training institutes.

Pilot projects

Unfortunately, due to a lack of resources, the evaluator was not provided with the opportunity to visit the countries where pilot projects were implemented. He rightly points out that the most successful results were achieved in Mongolia, followed by Nepal.

The experience in Cambodia was more positive than what the evaluation suggests. While the pilot project in Cambodia could be fully completed during the project, one of the key achievements of the pilot project was the operationalization of the stipulations of the land law on transferring public land to slum dwellers for slum upgrading and resettlement. Like in the other two pilot projects, both the national and local governments were involved in the pilot project. Habitat for Humanity was selected as the civil society partner as no local civil society partner could be identified in Battambang. The pilot project is being followed up by Habitat for Humanity and the provincial and district government of Battambang as part of a World Bank grant.

Bangkok, 24 November 2009

INTRODUCTION

The consultant was asked to review and evaluate the ESCAP project on “Housing the Poor in Urban Economies.” The project had a regional component and country components in Cambodia, Mongolia, Nepal and Timor Leste. As per the documents provided to the consultant, these countries were selected because low-income housing was a relatively new issue in these countries.

The consultant was asked to evaluate four outputs of the project, three related to regional component and then the country component. These are:

1. Quick Guides
2. At a Glance Reviews
3. Regional Information Resource Facility
4. Online training module
5. Country-level pilot projects

The consultant’s review is listed in two parts. First part is the regional outputs that the consultant tested and reviewed directly. The second part on the Pilot projects the consultant conducted desk review as no opportunity was provided to visit the countries. Desk review is based on project progress reports and reports from counterparts from the concerned countries. The consultant also discussed the project in Nepal with Lumanti.

PART I: AN ANALYSIS AND REVIEW OF THE QUICK GUIDES, THE AT THE GLANCE REVIEW AND REGIONAL INFORMATION RESOURCE FACILITY

A. Review of the Quick Guides

The Seven Quick Guides unveiled on the World Habitat Day on October 6, 2008 contains guidelines and strategies for housing the poor in Asia that have been tested and modified over a period of more than two decades in Asia and the Pacific. These have been compiled and presented after a series of regional workshops and consultative meetings in Thailand and country level meetings. The lessons learnt from country level projects both by the individual countries and by external development partners have been the integrated with global and regional concepts and development framework. The Quick Guides have been reviewed with respect to coverage, presentation and content.

1. Coverage:

The Guides have covered seven issues (1) Urbanization (2) Low-income housing (3) Land (4)Eviction (5) Housing Finance (6) Community Based Organizations (7) Rental Housing .

These are very informative and effective tools for mayors and city managers, who may not have education and training on housing for the poor. Generally such people do not get adequate time and resources to conduct research or study to find out the right approach and methodology of resolving common housing issues. In most of the countries, housing and urban development fall under the responsibility of provincial and city governments. Due to the inadequate expertise and financial resources, most of the city governments and urban local bodies are not in a position to address the urban housing issues in a short period of time. Hence Quick Guides help them to choose a right track and gradually build their confidence.

These issues are the most pressing ones for the housing the poor in Asian cities. However, three more issues should be added to the Quick Guides. These are technical guides on constructing low-cost urban infrastructure, constructing safe and cost effective shelter and community based disaster management. Since housing conditions in most of the Asian cities have deteriorated due to lack or deficiency of basic urban services such as proper access, water supply and sanitation and solid waste management system, provision of the same in new housing projects including upgrading projects has been costly and time consuming. Countries of Asia and the Pacific have developed cost effective models that have proved to be a relief to urban poor. Examples can be drawn from India where Sulabh International has grown as a regional enterprise in sanitation from a simple concept developed by a Dr. Bindeshwor Pathak. Similarly the “Ecosan” model of sanitation as well as “Constructed Wetland” (Reed bed sewage treatment plant) promoted in Nepal are also some of the innovative techniques.

The second issue which needs to be addressed is the construction of safe and cost effective shelter. Due to the rise in fuel prices and other factors, the cost of

construction has gone up in Asian countries. The conventional building materials produced by industries are beyond the reach of poor households. Efforts have been made in several countries of South Asia in reducing the cost of production of dwelling units have paid well in several housing projects. India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Thailand have made significant progress in this field.

The third issue which is getting critical since the last one decade is disaster management at the community level. Disasters of one form or the other are striking countries of the region, resulting in huge loss of life and property and unprecedented human agony. The physical infrastructure, social security system and human dignity are shattered in a few minutes when disaster strikes. Whether it is tsunami or earthquake or flood or cyclone or landslides, they all destroy the physical and human assets available in a community and disintegrate the closely knit urban fabric developed over a period of many years. Countries in the region such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Nepal have developed policies, strategies, systems and technology to reduce the risk of disasters at the community level as well as national level. Since the poor people are affected most during and after disasters, there should be a separate guide for reducing the disaster and preparing the urban poor communities for the disasters.

The suggested outline of three additional guides shall be as follows:

In the proposed Quick Guide No. 8- Low-cost urban infrastructure, the following points should be included:

1. What is the community level physical and social infrastructure?
2. What are the constraints in provision of such infrastructure by municipalities and public agencies?
3. What are the issues in maintenance and operation of water supply and sanitation system, particularly public stand post and community toilets?
4. Is there any possibility of producing bio-gas and compost out of the community septic tanks?
5. What are the issues related to gender in provision of water supply and sanitation?
6. How community open spaces could be used for health and well being of a community?
7. How solid waste can be managed at community level?
8. How poor people could be benefited from recycling and selling solid waste at household level?
9. How the cost of provision and maintenance of community level infrastructure can be reduced by mobilizing each and every household of a community?

In the proposed Guide No. 9- Safe and cost effective shelter, the following points should be included:

1. What are the appropriate designs of houses for different climatic conditions?
2. How the houses could be made earthquake resistant and resilient to natural disasters?
3. How a house can be incrementally constructed?
4. What is the efficient layout of group housing?

5. How infrastructure cost can be reduced by efficient layout of houses or design of clusters?
6. What are the innovative and eco-friendly building materials that can replace conventional ones?
7. How local people could be trained to build their own houses and earn a living by working as craftsmen in the community?
8. What is the concept of mass housing and prefabricated housing?
9. How building materials can be produced from wastes?

In the proposed Quick Guide No. 10- Disaster Management at Community level, the following points should be included?

1. How urban basic services can be revived during emergencies such as disasters?
2. How the community should be prepared for natural and man made disasters?
3. What are the good examples of disaster resilient communities?
4. What are the parameters to be considered in slum upgrading for reducing the risk of disasters?

2. Presentation:

The document is well presented. Presentation of the document in separate volumes for each of the issues makes it more versatile and ready to use. The photographs, tables and boxes used in the booklets have helped in making it more informative and illustrative. Important information is highlighted in the boxes, which attract the attention of readers. The list of references in the form of publications and websites included in the booklets helps readers to explore more resources. Translation of the Guides in local languages will greatly help the city managers and community groups to understand the issues of housing for urban poor. It will also facilitate public debate on housing the urban poor and provide background information on training programmes.

The seven quick guides can also be printed and bound in one volume so that it can be kept more easily in library shelves.

The issues of rights of children and disabled people are not adequately addressed in the Guides. These issues have direct implication in the design of house and community level infrastructure.

3. Possible Use

The Quick Guides can be used as an effective tool for training activities by UN agencies, governments, INGOs and NGOs working in human settlement sector. Some of the possible uses are:

For Mayors and municipal Officers:

The Quick Guides can be used in orientation - programmes for mayors, municipal officers, architects and urban planners. Since the principles and strategy outlined in the guides are not available in textbooks, nor are they taught in universities, it is very

important that practitioners understand them and apply in the projects for housing the urban poor.

For Policy Makers:

The quick guides can be a very important resource for drafting housing policies and strategies. It is a very powerful tool to influence bureaucrats and politicians both. Hence the policy makers in government departments and ministries can be benefited by it. Similarly parliamentarians and legislatures should be given a set of the quick guides so that they can play positive role in drafting new constitution (as in the case of Nepal) as well as amending existing legislation which are hindering the provision of housing for the poor.

For CBOs, NGOs and INGOs

The community groups, NGOs, INGOs and donors need to understand the strategies outlined in the Guides. They can include the concepts in their Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and manuals. They can use the Guides for their advocacy programmes. Similarly, it can be used for preparing manuals for Training of Trainers (TOT).

For students and researchers

I have noticed that the Guides are very useful tool for researchers involved in the housing sector. It can help in formulating research questions and hypothesis during policy research. So, academic institutions can use it as a teaching material.

For media

The Guides can be used for creating awareness among journalists and generating public discussion in television and radio programmes. Local FM radios can conduct programmes for sensitizing the public in general and urban poor in particular. Similarly, print media can use the guides for writing feature articles and monitor housing programmes for disseminating information to the general public.

For lawyers:

The judiciary of Third World countries generally looks upon the issue of squatting from the perspective of legality. This perception has hindered implementation of slum upgrading programmes by governments. This is high time that legal practitioners and judges get sensitized on this issue so that they can intervene positively in court cases in favour of squatters and slum dwellers. The lawyers can help their respective governments by drafting housing bills that can address the critical issues of urban poor. Quick Guides can sensitize them on the issue of land tenureship, urban environment, gender and inclusiveness.

B. At a Glance Reviews

The At the Glance Review is a set of newspaper size posters that extract key concepts, messages and strategies from each of the guides. It will be very useful to post it in soft

boards in offices, universities and exhibitions. It can be very conveniently used in training programmes in low income communities. The following improvements are suggested in the posters:

1. Include cartoons and graphic illustrations to make it more eye-catching.
2. Publish posters in local languages.
3. Some posters can be enlarged to make hoarding boards and painted on walls.
4. Produce additional posters on people with disabilities and children.

C. The Regional Information Resource Facility

The online Regional Information Resource Facility has been designed as an informative and interactive webpage. It has two major components viz. Resource Centre and Training. It has also created a Discussion Forum where policy makers and academicians can participate in on-line discussion, exchange ideas and share their experiences. Since part of the Facility will be continually developed, the following points should be considered during the construction stage:

1. Under the title “organizations” there is no mention of government and semi-government agencies. Since these agencies have critical role in formulation of policies and strategies as well as implementation of programmes, they need to be listed under “organizations”.
2. Within the Resource Facility there should be some links to relevant newsletters, bulletins and journals which deal with housing for the urban poor. If there is a space constraint, only selected articles or reading materials can be included.
3. Important initiatives of UNESCAP should also be mentioned under the heading: “About us.”
4. Under the Current Events, events taking places in the region should be included. These include implementation of infrastructure development programmes, advocacy programmes, exchange visits and training programmes.
5. More links should be created to access UN HABITAT information on housing the urban poor.

D. Review of the Self Administered Online Training

In the Regional Resource Facility, only the “Self Administered Online Training” and “Materials for Trainers” are available at present. While going through these materials I have the following comments:

1. The sequence of the lessons should be issues, principles and approaches.
2. It is better to incorporate a pre-test at the beginning of the training session, so that it is easy to assess the level of understanding of the trainees and regulate the test.
3. The questions incorporated in the test are relatively hard. It should be simple and short.
4. The online training should be organized by some training institution in member countries rather than an individual sitting in front of his/her computer at home or office.

Although there are some advantages of online training, it misses the opportunity of interaction between the participants as well as between participants and trainers. The online training has another limitation i.e. city officials and policy makers may not have so much time to undergo training and pass through the test.

Under the Materials for Trainers there is a mistake in the labeling of the power point presentation. The title of the presentation should have matched with the theme. (It is noted that in all the sets of power point it is labeled as “Urbanization”.)

PART II: A DESK REVIEW OF PROJECT COMPLETION REPORTS, MISSIONS REPORTS, REPORTS OF MEETINGS, STUDY VISITS ETC. RELATED TO THE PROJECT ACTIVITIES AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

The project reports prepared by implementing organizations in respective countries have highlighted activities and expected outputs of the Development Account Project. Although there are some common achievements in all countries, some countries have gone a step further by launching innovative programmes.

A. Establishment of Urban Resource Centre

All the countries except Timor-Leste have well functioning Urban Resource Centres. Those centres have not only collected books, journals, project documents and CDs and DVDs on housing and urban development, they have conducted training programmes for their in-house staff as well as community volunteers and leaders. The URCs have engaged researchers as well as students interested in the issue. They have created a network of civil society organizations and conducted periodic meetings.

The URCs have been established in the premises of national NGOs like Lumanti of Nepal. The area of influence of URC is limited to the network of the organization that is responsible for maintaining the same. They are established at the local level and hence they can influence local level organizations working in a limited area. The sustainability of URC is a challenging issue because it can not be maintained by the organization where it is now functioning. Expansion of the activities throughout the country is a need of the time because urban poverty is prevalent throughout the country. The effectiveness of URC can be measured in terms of the accessibility to all the users throughout the country and the quality and quantity of literatures and documents.

B. The Pilot Projects

Pilot projects have been undertaken in three countries. The project documents have highlighted successful completion of the projects but they are silent on whether those projects have been replicated in other parts of the city or the country, except for Mongolia, where the project seems to have been replicated extensively. If the model could not be replicated in other countries, the whole objective of the Pilot Project is defeated. There is a need for further review the process and product of the pilot projects.

C. The high level national policy symposiums

High level meetings organized in those countries have been very effective in educating policy makers on the challenges and the issue of housing for urban poor. They have also helped the government officials to review their existing housing policy and revise it as per the changing context at the national and the local level. The symposiums have also provided a common forum for central and local government officials, NGOs, private sector and academia.

D. Ministerial level study visits to Thailand

Study visits to were significant in terms of sharing experiences between these countries. Thailand has made remarkable success in slum improvement through the

initiatives of Community Organization Development Institute (CODI). Although the exact model may not be replicable, countries of the region can learn a lot from Thailand.

E. The training programmes for community leaders and professional

National level training programs in all the four countries have helped in developing awareness and skills in community development, particularly for provision and maintenance of infrastructure and management of saving credit programmes. Similarly the regional level workshop provided a common platform for all the countries to exchange their ideas and review their achievements and shortcomings.

Some of the innovative works done by individual countries are:

1. Development of housing supply and demand survey software in Mongolia.
2. Creation of Community Forum in Nepal.
3. Signing of Memorandum of Understanding with concerned government department in Nepal.
4. Preparation of draft bill on housing for squatters in Nepal.

PART III: SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUCH PROJECTS IN THE FUTURE.

A. Selection of Countries

While selecting the countries for project implementation, the existing political scenario should be taken into consideration. Countries with political instability and public unrest are not suitable for pilot projects. Since the experience gained from such countries should be shared with other countries of the region, failure or partial success give a very wrong impression of the project and its benefits.

B. Selection of implementing organization

Local Civil Society Organization (CSO) or NGO and not an INGO should be selected as the implementing organization. It is noted that this was done in Cambodia. Engaging an INGO may lead to completing the pilot project on time but it does not lead to local level capacity building. Similarly concerned government ministry or department should be held responsible for implementation and monitoring of the project. One of the objectives of this kind of project should be the capacity building of government agencies in policy formulation and programming in housing for urban poor. Local NGOs or CSOs may not be able to influence the government agencies during the implementation of the project. However UNESCAP can play a very effective role in influencing governments to formulate pro-poor housing policies and strategies.

C. Selection of Project activities

This kind of project should be limited to policy and strategy formulation, training, advocacy, knowledge sharing and lobbying. It should lead to infrastructure development or upgradation projects to be funded by local or national governments or multilateral agencies like the World Bank or ADB. The Quick Guides should not be limited to documentation and education; rather it should influence governments of the region to review their own plans, policies and programmes related to housing.

D. Linkage with broad national policy and programmes

Programmes shall be designed to fit into the framework of broad national policy and programmes. By implementing such programmes, UNESCAP helps the countries in achieving some of the national targets or the targets set by local governments. Hence housing policies, urban policies and other relevant policies should be referred to while designing the project/ programme.

C. Replication and Sustainability

UNESCAP should take special care that the lessons learnt during the implementation of the project shall be shared with all stakeholders including government agencies and some of the models get replicated with their own initiative rather than with the support from UNESCAP. Local and national governments should be encouraged to

allocate funds for long-term sustainability of the programme. If the implementing organization is resourceful and experienced, they can influence government agencies to launch similar programmes in other regions. Otherwise, it would be very difficult to sustain the project after UNESCAP's assistance is completed. It is expected that government and local authorities contribute part of the fund for implementing the project rather than UNESCAP taking the whole financial burden. This only seems to have happened in Nepal, Mongolia and to some extent in Timor Leste.

ANNEX I

Terms of Reference for Review of the ESCAP project on Housing the Poor in Urban Economies

1. Background

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) undertook a project entitled “Housing the Poor in Urban Economies.” The main objective of the project was to build capacities of national and local government officials and policy makers, civil society organizations and organizations of the poor to address the issue of low-income housing more effectively in their countries.

The project was implemented on two interlinked tracks: a regional track and a country-level track. In the regional track the project produced seven “Quick Guides,” and “At-a-glance Reviews” in collaboration with UN HABITAT. The seven issues identified for the Quick Guides were: (a) urbanization, urban development and housing policies, (b) approaches to low-income housing, (c) land for housing the urban poor, (d) evictions, (e) housing finance, (f) community organization and development, and (g) rental housing.

The Quick Guides are targeted towards elected and appointed policy makers. These policy makers are often not subject specialists, but they are required to formulate policies based on the advice of the technical staff in their departments. Therefore, they need to acquire a basic knowledge of concepts and major approaches in low-income housing.

In addition to outlining basic concepts and approaches, the Quick Guides extract key lessons and messages and highlight these in boxes or in the margins of the text. Anyone browsing through the guide and reading just the key messages should receive a series of clear and consistent messages on that particular issue by the end of the guide. Because the guides only provide basic information on concepts and approaches each Guide has an annotated list of websites at the end of each guide from where those who are interested can obtain more information.

The At-a-Glance Reviews are newspaper size posters that extract the key concepts, messages and strategies from each of the Guides, so that the reader gets a quick overview of the issue.

Each Guide and the Review is designed a stand alone document that looks at low-income housing from a particular perspective. Each Guide and Review is linked and cross referenced to others so that if a reader wants more information on related issues she/he can read that Guide or Review.

The regional track also developed the on-line regional information resource facility on housing the urban poor in Asia www.housing-the-urban-poor.net. The objective of the regional information resource facility is to serve as the internet portal on low-income housing in Asia and the Pacific. Therefore it comprises the Quick Guides and Reviews as

well as a searchable annotated database of key organizations involved in low-income housing; on-line self administered training course on housing the poor in Asia and an extensive annotated bibliography. It is linked to intermediate organizations such as urban resource centres, research and training centres and NGOs at the country level that can extract information from it and feed information into it. The resource facility will be officially launched at the World Urban Forum IV.

At the country level, the project undertook pilot projects and capacity building activities in four countries, namely Cambodia, Mongolia, Nepal and Timor Leste. Country-level activities were complemented by regional activities such as advisory services, exchange visits and study visits.

In Cambodia, the project partnered with Habitat for Humanity and undertook a pilot project in Battambang to develop a model for transferring public land for low-income housing. The pilot project worked towards upgrading, regularizing and densifying a squatter settlement of 250 households by resettling an additional 250 households from other marginal and untenable slums.

In Mongolia the project undertook capacity development in community-based development by undertaking a pilot project on community-led and managed refurbishment of barrack apartments as well as introducing and subsequently strengthening community-based savings and credit schemes. It also supported and strengthened a country-level urban resource centre to ensure that such work continued after the end of the project.

In Nepal the project undertook two demonstration projects on community-based development and management of water and sanitation facilities to two different types of low income settlements. The first was community-based sanitation system for the Kirteepur resettlement scheme. The second was the development of a community designed and built piped water system using extra water from an inner-city communal water spout in Kumbeshwor, Pattan. It also supported and strengthened URC of Lumanti allowing it to strengthen its community networks and research and documentation abilities.

In Timor Leste the project assisted local actors and the government to establish the Timor Leste Urban Resource Centre. It also strengthened the community-based provision of basic infrastructure through the UN HABITAT Dili Slum Development Strategy project.

A considerable amount of the information, concepts and approaches listed in the Quick Guides were used in training at the country-level and a considerable amount of information and knowledge from the country level was used to prepare the Quick Guides.

2. Objectives

The objective of the consultancy is to evaluate the Development Account project on Housing the Poor in Urban Economies, particularly its regional outputs, but also its country level activities through:

An analysis and review of the Quick Guides, the At the Glance Review and Regional Information Resource Facility.

A desk review of project completion reports, mission reports, reports of meetings, study visits etc. related to the project activities at the country level.

3. Outputs from the work assignment *(must be tangible and measurable)*

Outputs:	Delivery Date:
Submission of an evaluation report of around 5,000 to 6,000 words, that analyzes the achievements of both the regional track of the project and the country-level track of the project and provide recommendations for further improving and strengthening the regional information resource facility	15 Dec 08

How are the outputs to be delivered? The consultant will deliver the outputs in electronic format.

Specify performance indicators for evaluation of outputs: 1. Timely delivery of outputs;
2. Practical recommendations on improvement and strengthening of the regional information resource facility on housing the urban poor in Asia