



## Asia – Pro poor reforms

The performance of Asian countries in carrying forward major pro-poor reforms and programmes in land and housing provision has also been generally good. In India, national policy guidelines on housing are being finalized, drawing on the Urban Land Ceilings and Regularization Act from the 1970s, which allowed municipalities to set aside land for the shelter needs of the urban poor. Individual states and cities have undertaken innovations such as the use of transferable development rights to free up land for low-income housing. In 1996, India's Slum Rehabilitation Act allowed state authorities to offer land development rights to slum and pavement dwellers.

India is also implementing reforms that go beyond the housing sector, but which have the potential to significantly improve the lives of slum dwellers. India's five-year development plan aims to promote universal coverage of water supply and sanitation. In pursuit of this goal, several central government-sponsored schemes and programmes have been implemented. Under this programme, by the end of the first quarter of 2005, a total of 5 million sanitation units were constructed. Similarly, the National Slum Development Programme (NSDP) looks specifically into upgrading of urban slums by combining physical

infrastructure with social services, including water supply, community latrines, storm water drainage, community bathrooms, sewers and other amenities. The government has also recently launched a new programme – the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) – that aims to bring about mandatory reforms both at State and municipal levels to improve basic service provision and secure tenure in urban poor neighborhoods. The programme, the single largest national government initiative in the urban sector, was launched in December 2005 and is to be implemented over a period of 7 years. The programme's special components include water supply and sanitation, sewerage and solid waste management, construction, and improvement of drains and storm water drainage. However, because of massive backlogs in housing and basic services, and because of high levels of urbanization, these important programmes may prove insufficient in the face of the huge challenges that they need to address, particularly with regard to annual slum growth rates that are estimated to be 1.72 per cent per annum.

In Sri Lanka, the provision of housing has been considered a major priority by successive governments since independence in 1948. In 1977, the government ventured into significant and ambitious attempts to increase the housing stock in the country and increase home ownership. A distinct and separate authority, the National Housing Development Authority, was established to implement and promote mass housing programmes such as the One Hundred Thousand Housing Programme and the One Million Housing Programme, and provide long-term subsidized loans for new developments and upgrading activities. In 1994, it focused its attention on high density housing in urban areas. In view of increasing land scarcity, the government decided to stop slum upgrading and initiate a programme to relocate slum and shanty dwellers in apartments built by the government. The Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004 had a deep impact on housing in the country's coastal towns, but the government's commitment to rebuild houses and communities has remained unaltered, which bodes well for the island nation's prospects for recovery.

Cities in Thailand have adopted different kinds of innovative land-use mechanisms. Local context-specific solutions are designed with close guidance from government, community groups and NGOs. In the 1980s the ministry of finance reorganized the Government Housing Bank, which is now a leading in-

stitution in Thailand's housing finance system. It has improved housing affordability in the country and enabled large sections of the population to buy houses. In the past seven years, the economy of Thailand has grown at a rate of more than 8 per cent per annum. Since public sector housing has become very common, the private sector has had to lower the costs of housing, which is making housing affordable to the majority. The private housing market has also developed its operations effectively and offers the lowest lending rates in the market, challenging other financial institutions to lower their interest rates in order to compete for business.

*For further information, please contact: Mr. Sharad Shankardass, Spokesperson & Head, Press & Media Relations Unit, or Ms. Zahra A. Hassan, Media Liaison, Press & Media Relations Unit, Tel: 7623153, 7623136, 7623151, Fax: 7624060, E-mail: [habitat.press@unhabitat.org](mailto:habitat.press@unhabitat.org), website: [www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)*