

# **The State as Enabler in Urban Policymaking in Colombo, Sri Lanka**

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# The State as Enabler in Urban Policymaking in Colombo, Sri Lanka

*Ambe Njoh*

## Introduction

Western urban planning in the form that it was transplanted from Europe to other regions of the world in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century was rooted in statutory frameworks. In the case of Sri Lanka, one of the few erstwhile colonial nations in the process of revamping Western planning models to suit local realities, these frameworks included the Housing and Town Improvement Ordinance No. 19 of 1915 and the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Ordinance No. 16 of 1946. The country's urban planning policy field during the colonial era and for about three decades into the post-colonial époque mirrored that of other erstwhile colonized polities and possessed four major characteristics. First, it involved international actors from Western Europe or domestic actors influenced either through training or acculturation by Western European concepts of urban planning (see Box 1). Second, it was a state function executed exclusively by government bureaucrats and technocrats. Third, it possessed a highly centralized structure and employed top-down approaches to decision-making. Finally, it maintained rigid prescriptive as opposed to performance-based policy implementation standards. Several global trends, such as global economic crises, the need to universalize democratic ideals, have led to the increasing adoption of unorthodox planning schemes, especially those involving ordinary people in the urban planning process.

This case study identifies and analyzes such schemes involving citizens, international actors and other stakeholders in selected subfields of urban planning in Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital city. Although since 1993 there has been a marked return to centralization, government control and top-down decision-making, it is worth noting that during the 1980s, the Sri Lankan state moved considerably in the direction of relinquishing its role as provider and regulator, and increasingly assumed the role of enabler in efforts to address the basic needs of the citizenry. However, it is not clear what this entailed in practice. This case study examines the following four planning subfields in Colombo to deepen understanding of these roles:

### Box 1: Brief History of Modern Planning in Colombo

- 1921: First city plan, using the 'Garden City' template, drawn for Colombo by reputed British Town Planner, Sir Patrick Geddes.
- 1946: Town and Country Planning Ordinance for Colombo enacted.
- 1949: Second city plan for Colombo City designed by yet another prominent British Town Planner of the time, Sir Patrick Abercromby.
- 1978: Third major plan for the City of Colombo, the city's first master plan was drawn.
- 1985: The fourth major plan for Colombo City, the city's first plan with significant local input was drawn.
- 1998: The fifth major plan for the City of Colombo prepared largely by domestic actors in the city's planning field, the Urban Development Authority.
- 2002: The sixth detailed plan for the city and Western Region, undertaken by foreign (Singaporean) Consultants.

*Source: Van Horen (2002)*

- Environmental Health and Waste Management;
- Urban management;
- Slum upgrading; and
- Housing.

These four planning subfields are important in the context of this report because they have witnessed some of the most intense collaborative activities between international and local stakeholders in the urban development policy field in Sri Lanka since the 1980s. The report is divided into four sections. Section II follows this introduction and presents background information on the City of Colombo. Section III analyzes the roles of stakeholders in the four planning subfields of interest here. The final section deduces the main lessons that can be gleaned from Colombo's experience for cities in other regions of the world.

## Background

Colombo is an ancient city, dating back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century when it served as a trading post mainly for merchants from Arabia, Morocco and Persia.<sup>1</sup> It is located on the West Coast of Sri Lanka (formerly, Ceylon) (see Figure 1). Colombo constitutes a glaring manifestation of urban primacy within Sri Lanka's socio-economic and geo-political structure. This is on account of its dominance in terms of politico-administrative activity, population size, industrial, commercial and economic activities and public infrastructure. The region contains three contiguous Municipal Councils, namely Colombo Metropolitan Council (CMC), Sri Jayawardanepura Kotte Metropolitan Council (KMC), and Dehiwala Mt. Lavinia Metropolitan Council (DMMC). These three councils contain a total population of 1.2 million and occupy a total area of 75 sq. km. The Colombo Municipal Council, which is the largest of the three, is home to 800,000 inhabitants (60 percent of the total), constitutes the core area of Metro-Colombo City and serves as the administrative, financial, commercial and cultural core of Sri Lanka.<sup>2</sup> The Colombo Metropolitan Region alone is home to 25 percent of the country's total population of about 18.6 million.<sup>3</sup> Slightly more than half (51%) of the population of the Colombo Metropolitan Region live in squalid, dilapidated and insalubrious housing.<sup>4</sup> Such housing falls into four distinct but overlapping categories as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- slums,
- shanties,
- un-serviced semi-urban neighbourhoods; and
- labour lines or derelict living quarters.

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1 ACDS (Asian City Development Strategies) (2000)

2 ACDS (2000)

3 Van Horen (2002, p. 217)

4 Sevenatha (2003); Van Horen (2002); ADB (2004); CMC & SEVENATHA (2002)

5 Sevenatha (2003)



**Figure 1: Map of Sri Lanka showing Colombo**

*Source: Van Horen, 2002*

Slums include obsolete and ruined housing units that are built of permanent materials. These units are often of the single-room, multi-family variety and situated in crammed subdivisions. In contrast to inhabitants of comparable housing units, residents of slums possess legal status of occupancy. Shanties are comprised of illegally constructed makeshift housing units built of industrial waste or by-products such as cardboards or other improvised materials. Housing of this genre is typically located on illegally occupied land. Un-serviced semi-urban neighbourhoods are peopled by individuals with legal titles over their plots and building units. However, as the name suggests, such neighbourhoods usually lack basic public infrastructure and services. Labour lines or derelict living quarters include physically and functionally obsolete housing units that were developed by the state, particularly municipal or national government agencies. Such units are typically occupied by temporary or casual labourers.

According to an Asian Development Bank (ADB)-sponsored study, the number of settlements or neighbourhoods lacking basic public infrastructure and services in the Colombo Metropolitan Council (CMC) area increased from 1,506 in 1998/99 to 1,614 in 2004.<sup>6</sup> Local and international development authorities have significantly increased their efforts to combat problems and improve living conditions in human settlements in Colombo during the last two decades. Such efforts have concentrated on improving the access of the poor to basic public infrastructure and services.

## Case Studies

### Environmental Health and Waste Management

*The Problem:* Commercial and industrial sources account for most of the solid waste generated in Sri Lanka.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, urban areas, the locales for most commercial and industrial activities, are those highly affected by solid waste management and disposal problems. In 2003, the Colombo Metropolitan Area alone generated 1,500 tons of solid waste material per day.<sup>8</sup> Domestic sources also account for some of Colombo's solid waste problem. In fact, 15 to 20 percent of all municipal domestic waste produced in Colombo is of the solid variety, including paper, plastics, glass, metals and other inorganic matter, while 80 to 85 percent consist of organic waste, including food and garden waste. Some of this waste, particularly waste of the organic variety, has a strong negative impact on environmental health. In Colombo, this problem is aggravated by improper waste disposal practices, such as the disposal of waste material at the outskirts of the city, illegal dumping on roadsides, vacant land or rivers/streams.

The disposal of human waste is also a problem in Colombo as there is a general lack of toilet facilities throughout the city. Additionally, "there is no proper garbage discharge, so the sanitary conditions are poor due to animals like goats, dogs, cows, cats and crows foraging for food."<sup>9</sup> Also, the limited size of the few concrete bins available throughout the city has meant that garbage is often dumped around, instead of inside the bins. Furthermore, most drains throughout the city are poorly designed hence, constantly clogged with garbage, thus creating further sources of environmental health problems, such as stagnant water and the seepage of chemicals through the ground. Chemical seepage through the ground leads to the contamination of ground water sources while stagnant water has been incriminated as a contributing factor to mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria, filariasis, dengue and other viral diseases which infect about 5,000 to 6,000 persons in Colombo each year, with barely 10 percent of the cases reported to city health authorities.<sup>10</sup>

In Western countries, the source of conventional urban planning and management models, the responsibility for collecting and disposing of waste of both the collective and household genre falls squarely on the shoulders of municipal governments. British colonial authorities transplanted this system to Colombo. The indigenous leadership inherited and maintained the colonial system in which municipal authorities were responsible for urban waste collection. Since the 1970s municipalities have been growing increasingly unable to shoulder this responsibility and have sought to craft more innovative environmental health and waste

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6 ADB (2004)

7 Perera (2003)

8 Perera (2003)

9 Perera (2003)

10 ADB (Asian Development Bank (2004)

management strategies. One upshot of this has been the participatory environmental health and waste management strategy.

### **Participatory Environmental and Waste Management (PEWM)**

The problem of environmental waste management in Colombo has proved difficult to handle through conventional means, thus leading to the introduction of unorthodox strategies. The most prominent of these strategies involve citizens and other stakeholders, such as the domestic and international actors mentioned below, in urban policymaking. In the area of environmental management, this has assumed the form of what is commonly known as participatory environmental and waste management (PEWM). Three disparate projects employing this strategy are discussed below to shed light on the strategy's nature and utility as an alternative to conventional methods of environmental management. The common thread running through the three programmes is the high level of citizen and other stakeholder participation.

*PEWM Case 1:* The first of these cases, the "Environmental Health and Community Development" project was initiated in 1979.<sup>11</sup> This project, which targeted slum settlements, was sponsored by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and implemented from 1979 to 1983. Seven different entities were involved in the implementation process. The entities include:

- UNICEF;
- The Public Health Department of CMC (the project administering agency);
- The Common Amenities Board (CAB) (As the public authority responsible for controlling and managing public amenities, the CAB was the lead implementing agency for the project);
- The Women's Bureau (advocate and defender of women's environmental health interests);
- The National Youth Services Council (NYSC) (in charge of training the health wardens);
- Health Wardens (the 'foot soldiers' responsible for conducting immunizations, health and nutrition education and administering worm treatments); and
- Ordinary citizens (project beneficiaries, who were assigned the task of exercising proper hygiene and sanitation norms).

Coordination of the activities of these various entities was the responsibility of the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC). For waste management purposes, the city is divided into six districts, each consisting of six to eight wards for a total of forty-seven. Each of the districts operates a solid waste management depot that is managed by a trained engineer working under the supervision of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.<sup>12</sup>

*Accomplishments:* In 1982, a year before the end of the implementation phase, evaluators listed the project's accomplishments to include: the training of 98 health wardens, who had in turn conducted immunization programmes, health and nutrition education and worm treatment; the provision of potable water through standpipes; the construction of latrines, bathrooms, garbage disposal and facilities; and the creation of income generating activities for women.

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11 POPLINE (Online)

12 Jarayatne (2004)

*Problems:* On the negative side, the project evaluators regretted that the health wardens were not afforded more support than they actually received. They further noted that little use was made of the audiovisual equipment that was provided by UNICEF.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, they pointed to the need for regular participation by local leaders in city-level project planning, incentives for government field officers, increasing participation of private organizations, and increasing leadership roles for women in the project.

*PEWM Case 2:* The second case is the “Green Star Homes Project” (GSHP).<sup>14</sup> This programme, also known as the “Integrated Program of Action to Improve Health and Environmental Management in the Colombo Municipal Area,” was initiated as a local authority-community partnership using community action plans in July 2001. Supported by the Sustainable Cities Programme of UNDP, in partnership with the Colombo Municipality, a consortium of leading private sector companies, and a group of NGOs operating in Colombo, the project was designed to alleviate environmental and sanitary conditions especially in the slums and shanty settlements throughout the Colombo Metro-Area.<sup>15</sup> The project ranks among the topmost public health initiatives ever carried out in the Colombo Metro-Area in terms of the number of organizations, agencies and other entities that participated in its planning and implementation. These participants include:

- The UNDP, particularly its Sustainable Cities Programme, which provided funding for the project;
- The Colombo Municipal Council (CMC), which was the lead host agency and the state’s representative in the programme;
- A consortium of leading private companies within the Colombo municipality, which provided volunteers and logistical support;
- Local NGOs, which also provided personnel and logistical support;
- Three hundred CMC staff, particularly healthcare personnel of all levels, who provided the necessary medical expertise;
- Schoolchildren, who were enlisted to participate in cleanup campaigns.

In concert with its pro-citizen participation orientation, the project actively elicited the input of residents of the target areas. As an incentive, households were awarded the Green Star Certificate when their premises were judged as clean and free of breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

*Accomplishments:* During the first phase of the project, 45,410 households were evaluated on the basis of how well they kept their surroundings clean and free of mosquito breeding grounds. About a quarter of these households (10,316), earned passing grades and were awarded Green Star Certificates. Conversely, 1,000 households received citations for unhygienic surroundings, while 675 were penalized for non-compliance under the Mosquito-borne Disease Regulations of the city. Above all, citizens reacted favourably to the programme.

*Problems:* In the end, the project’s success depended as much on the availability of funds as it did on the extent to which individuals and households were able and willing to rid their surroundings of breeding grounds for mosquitoes. This project deviates from conventional planning to the extent that it involved a lot of community participation at the implementation level. However, it is necessary to note that the specialist knowledge necessary for developing

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13 Jarayatne (2004)

14 Van Horen & Pinnawala (2005)

15 Van Horen & Pinnawala (2005)



effective disease prevention strategies prevented the participation of lay citizens during the planning phase.

*PEWM Case 3:* This case concentrates on The Metropolitan Environmental Improvement Programme (MEIP). The programme was initiated with funding from the World Bank and the UNDP. It was intended as a pilot programme with the purpose of introducing and testing potentially innovative concepts and practices in urban environmental management in Sri Lanka. One area of the programme's focus, solid and hazardous waste management, is of particular interest because of its implications for participatory planning. This component of the programme has two elements, namely: a) promoting community-based recycling efforts and b) solid waste management. Among the many projects that were initiated as part of this programme is the development of a solid waste management plan for the Colombo Metropolitan Area (CMA). In addition, the programme also identified the need to develop a new sanitary landfill to replace obsolete and insalubrious open dumps and the need to assist local authorities in preparing a detailed long-term waste management strategy and disposal plan; and the need to separate hospital and municipal waste. The project was funded by the World Bank. The solid waste management component was projected to cost around US\$12.5 million. This amount was supposed to cover the following elements:<sup>16</sup>

- Construction of a sanitary landfill at Hanwela to meet the disposal needs of the CMC and 14 of the 30 urban local authorities located north and east of the metropolitan area from 1998 to 2004.
- Capacity building of CMC and other local bodies to improve their capacity to manage garbage collection;
- Management and operation of facilities, and technical assistance in the disposal of hospital waste.

The MEIP planning and implementation processes are designed to be very participatory, involving a steering committee of stakeholders, a national programme coordinator and a technical working group charged with the responsibility of providing specific guidance, and building the necessary environmental constituency. Stakeholders were required to prepare an environmental management strategy.

*Accomplishments:* Among the programme's many achievements are the following: actively involving citizens in the planning process—a defining feature of non-conventional planning, raising the environmental awareness and changing waste disposal behaviour of members of the programme beneficiary community; and creating opportunities for gainful employment in the sanitation sector.

*Problems:* Among the few problems encountered are: initial resistance; and lack of expertise in specialized waste treatment, such as the disposal and management of hospital waste.

## **Urban Governance Through Community Participation**

*The Problem:* The Community Development Council (CDC) system was established by the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) and the Urban Basic Service Improvement Project (UBSIP) of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 1979.<sup>17</sup> It was part of an effort to improve planning policy implementation in Sri Lanka. At the onset, the CDC system comprised 600 councils, representing an equal number of communities. The system was

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16 World Bank (1998)

17 Pieterse, (2000)

responsible for promoting stakeholder participation in efforts to improve local social, physical and environmental conditions. Efforts on the part of authorities to promote stakeholder participation included initiating “policy reforms to recognize CDCs as relevant institutions for people’s participation in municipal service delivery” providing CDCs with the resources necessary for functioning, and revamping the CDCs’ structure.<sup>18</sup> However, the system proved ineffective at this. By 1998, all but one of the five CDCs were defunct due to the fact that CDCs were always intended to be NGOs with no defined managerial or administrative obligations or responsibilities.

### **The UMP-City Consultation (UMP-CC) Initiative**

Desirous of reinforcing and reviving the CDC system, the CMC, Sevenatha Urban Resource Centre (a local NGO), and the Urban Management Programme signed an agreement in November 1998 to initiate the Colombo City Consultation initiative. The main task of the UMP-CC initiative in Colombo was to make the CMC more citizen-friendly by developing a participatory governance structure that actively involved the private sector, citizens and other stakeholder groups in the urban policy-making process.<sup>19</sup>

The UMP-CC’s initially created a multi-stakeholder forum that actively involved municipal officials and leaders of the CDCs. This entailed creating 15 advisory committees consisting of selected citizens and professionals in addition to the 15 standing committees that were already operating within the CMC. In addition, the UMP-CC created a Housing and Community Development Council. This council provided a forum for representatives of poor communities and under-served areas to interact with city officials. However, the CMC remained weak in the areas of revenue generation, financial management and urban service delivery.

To strengthen its capacity in these areas, CMC enlisted the support of the UMP in November 1998. The Colombo Municipal Council found the UMP attractive because of its proven ability to promote participatory urban policy-making through the ‘City Consultations Programme.’ Sevenatha served as the Local Partner Institution (LPI) in the UMP-CC, Colombo initiative, which was part of the UMP-Asia Phase 3, 1997-2001. In its capacity as LPI, Sevenatha undertook the following:

- prepared a profile of Colombo;
- conducted a study on revenue enhancement and financial management of the Colombo Metropolitan Council; and
- completed a study on the role of Community Development Councils (CDCs).<sup>20</sup>

The institutional framework for implementing the Colombo City Consultation programme significantly overlapped with the Sustainable Colombo Core Area Project that was simultaneously ongoing in the city as well as two proximate municipalities under the aegis of the UN-HABITAT. Sevenatha and a steering committee under the chairmanship of the Mayor were at the helm of the programme and other donor-supported projects in the CMC area.

*Major Activities:* From January to December 1999, the UMP-City Consultation programme in Colombo initiated several activities to acquaint local stakeholders in the urban policy field with, and hone their skills in, urban management. The emphasis was on revenue mobilization, financial management, and urban service delivery systems. The activities included organizing

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18 Pieterse (2000)

19 UN-HABITAT (2002)

20 UN-HABITAT (2002: 32)

and offering management training in a variety of forums such as: workshops, focus group meetings, one- and multi-day-long seminars, and brainstorming sessions. Table 1 shows the various participants that were involved in this process. One peculiarity of these activities in particular and the UMP-City Consultation initiatives in general is the fact that they actively encouraged input from all participants especially members of the proverbial silent majority crowd—ordinary citizens. A major highlight of these initiatives was the preparation by representatives of Sevanatha, CMC, UMP and the British Department for International Development (DFID) of a proposal for a full-fledged urban poverty reduction programme in December 1999. This gave birth to the “Urban Poverty Reduction through Community Empowerment in Colombo,” which was funded by the DFID. This is one of the city’s best-known pro-poor programmes to date.

*Accomplishments:* The major accomplishments of the UMP-CC in Colombo are summarized in Box 2. The city consultation programme is a relatively new paradigm, which differs markedly from conventional approaches to urban governance.<sup>21</sup> While the traditional approaches concentrate exclusively on ‘physical’ urban planning, city consultation seeks to promote a participatory approach to urban management. In Colombo, the city consultation initiative under the UMP succeeded in creating a forum for municipal authorities and their collaborators in other sectors, whether national or international, to identify, ferret and prioritize the city’s problems. Also, it provided a framework for the stakeholders to hatch out possible solutions or remedies to their identified and prioritized problems. This resulted in ameliorating urban management by encouraging all stakeholders to participate in the problem or priority definition and solution or remedy implementation processes. Finally, it succeeded in facilitating dialogue between municipal authorities and other stakeholders, and encouraging partnerships among key players in the urban policy arena.

**Table 1: Principal Partners in the UMP City Consultation Initiative**

<b>International</b>	<b>National</b>
Cities Alliance	Colombo Metropolitan Council
DFID	Sevanatha
UN-HABITAT	National Housing Development Authority
UNDP	Community Development Councils
USAID	Community Leaders
World Bank	Representatives of poor communities
	District Community Management Forum

*Source: Compiled from various reports on UMP-City Consultation, Colombo*

21 Urbanews (2004)

## Slum Upgrading

*The Problem:* Until 1973, Sri Lankan housing policies have been informed by the orthodox planning model. In practice this led to treating the human settlement development process as a legal and technocratic endeavour. The state assumed an elitist posture and exhibited a bias against informal processes in the housing sector. This orientation was at the root of policies that viewed slums and informal settlements as ‘eye-sores’ and recommended their demolition. As elsewhere in the global South, the government’s elitist anti-slum and anti-informal settlement policies aggravated Sri Lanka’s urban housing problem.

### **Box 2: Major Accomplishments of UMP City Consultation in Colombo**

Before the end of the UMPC-CC Phase 3, authorities in Colombo were already implementing their vision for a Sustainable City and realising benefits, which from 1998 – 2000 included the following:

- Prepared three background studies in areas of: municipal revenue enhancement; financial management with an action plan for implementation; community participation and strengthening Community Development Councils (CDCs); and Municipal service delivery systems and service delivery to low-income settlements;
- Organized community-level and city-wide consultation meetings with diverse stakeholders;
- Established steering committee;
- Created ‘District Community Management Forum’ (DCMF) in two districts in Colombo;
- Completed Action Plans in: 1) revenue mobilisation and 2) decentralization and strengthening CDCs for service delivery;
- Contributed to the development of a number of diverse partnerships and linkages in projects relating to: poverty alleviation through community empowerment (funded by DFID);
- City Development Strategies, in cooperation with Cities Alliance; urban infrastructure in low-income settlements;
- Technical assistance in the development of projects in cooperation with USAID and ‘Making Cities Work’ programme; and World Bank assistance in the development of ‘good governance’ thematic follow-up project activities.

*Source: Summarized from UNDP/UNCHS/World Bank (Online)*

## Upgrading slum and informal settlements

Since 1976 the Sri Lankan state has been gradually abandoning its anti-slum/informal settlement stance and increasingly promulgating policies designed to ameliorate living conditions in such settlements. These efforts were initially given institutional meaning in the Urban Development Authority (UDA) Law of 1976, which provided for upgrading slums and shanties. In concert with the move towards supplanting Western planning principles with

more context-relevant varieties, the efforts have largely been participatory in nature. A major effort to ameliorate conditions in slums and informal settlements occurred in the late-1970s with the establishment of the Urban Basic Services Improvement Programme (UBSIP), 1978 to 1986. This was a UNICEF-sponsored programme implemented under the auspices of the Ministry of Local Government Housing and Construction with the collaboration of the CMC and the Common Amenities Board (CAB). A major participation-related accomplishment of the programme was the involvement of the Community Development Councils (CDCs). The CDCs were active participants in the decision-making and implementation of UBSIP programme activities.

Another programme worthy of note here is the Slums and Shanty Improvement Programme (SSIP), 1978 – 1984. A highlight of the SSIP is the creation of a pilot programme for improving urban settlements in Colombo under the Urban Development Authority (UDA). Yet another notable initiative under the SSIP is the comprehensive slum and shanty improvement programme, which drew up the first comprehensive qualitative inventory of slums and shanties in Colombo and initiated the upgrading of low-income settlements, site-and-services projects, and the improvement of amenities.

*Accomplishments:* Prominent among the accomplishments of this programme is the creation of the following facilities which were not available prior to its existence:

- Common toilets;
- Water sealed common toilets designed to replace bucket latrines;
- Street water taps;
- Common bathing places;
- Storm water drains; and
- Community centres.

Two accomplishments of the SSIP are worth noting. The first is the fact that SSIP was able to persuade the state to relax conventional building regulations and to label selected low-income settlements as ‘special project areas.’ This permitted non-conventional housing development processes such as incremental building and the use of non-conventional building materials. The second is SSIP’s success in creating a strong bond between government officials and slum/informal settlement dwellers.

*Problems:* Some within the power structure harboured pseudo-Western concepts of environmental standards and continued to view informal housing and slum settlements with disdain. This meant, among other things that initiatives designed to improve such settlements did not receive unanimous support from all societal elements.

## **Formal Housing Supply through Unorthodox Channels**

The “Million Houses Programme” (MHP) (1983 – 1989) and subsequently, the “1.5 Million Houses Programme” (1989 – 1994) exemplify the Sri Lankan government’s effort to deviate from conventional planning models. These twin programmes were designed to essentially provide building loans to low-income families. The loans were aimed at helping these families construct their own homes and procure or develop related facilities such as latrines and basic utility services. Rather than play the role of provider as is customary in conventional housing delivery programmes, the state, through the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA), assumed the role of enabler or facilitator with the intended programme beneficiaries—that is, the poor—occupying a central place in decisions and activities relating to their own housing development process. Within the framework of this

programme, people are treated not as objects or mere beneficiaries of the development process but as the main ingredients or resources of the process.

Responsibility for implementing the million housing programme in urban areas, that is, the urban component of MHP, rested on the shoulders of the Urban Housing Division of NHDA. Planning and programming were the responsibilities of a standing committee, the Housing and Community Development Committee (HCDC). The HCDC was an inter-sectoral and inter-agency committee chaired by the Mayor of the municipal council area in which it operated. The agency was charged with the responsibility of overseeing the MHP, coordinating the actions of the different agencies involved, allocating resources and monitoring the programme.<sup>22</sup>

Efforts to institutionalize the MHP in low-income settlements entailed empowering communities to create community-based organizations (CBOs) or self-help groups under the rubric of the UHSP.<sup>23</sup> Also noteworthy in this connection is the fact that authorities adopted as part of the UHSP, a participatory planning and management methodology, namely the Community Action Planning and Management (CAP) whose main purpose was to ensure maximum citizen participation at all stages of the housing delivery process. Treated as a tool as well as a methodology for building community capacity and improving efficiency in the housing delivery process, CAP employed the community workshop as a strategy for promoting awareness in the target communities. In practice, field officers of the NHDA who participated in the MHP held a series of structured workshops at the community level.

*Accomplishments:* The MHP was highly successful both in relative and absolute terms. For one thing, it registered more positive results than any previous state-led effort to combat the country's housing problem. For another thing, it benefited as much as 70 percent of Colombo's low-income households.<sup>24</sup> One factor accounting for this resounding success rate is the fact that the programme capitalized on one strength of traditional Sri Lankan society—the Sri Lankans' custom of building their own houses. Also, subsequent to the adoption of the CAP methodology a significant number of poor households in urban areas were able to satisfy their housing needs in a shorter time-span than would have been possible otherwise. Furthermore, as the NHDA noted, more than 18,000 households in 72 communities in Colombo alone and 13 other urban local authority areas have benefited from initiatives employing the CAP methodology.<sup>25</sup> Also, from 1985 to 1990, the Urban Housing Division of the NHDA regularized and allocated land for 63 percent of the shanty dwellers in Colombo City with the help of the same methodology.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the CAP methodology, an important component of the "Million Houses Programme," enabled as many as 300 peri-urban communities in the Colombo Metro-Area to secure the financial and technical assistance necessary to develop or upgrade public amenities such as latrines, stand posts for water, drainage facilities, and access roads.<sup>27</sup>

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22 Best Practices (Online)

23 Dayaratne & Samarawickrama (2003); Best Practices (Online)

24 Van Horen (2002: 225)

25 Best Practices (Online)

26 Best Practices (Online)

27 Dayaratne & Samarawickrama (2003)

## Lessons Learned

The following are some of the many lessons that can be gleaned from this case study:

- Planning models are not universal and must therefore be adapted to host conditions;
- Good leadership, strong support from local government officials, and citizen participation are necessary for successful participatory planning;
- Involving citizens and other stakeholders is a viable cost-saving strategy in planning;
- Community participation facilitates the implementation action plans for service delivery;
- Performance-based standards are preferable to prescriptive standards especially when resources are limited;
- Ordinary people possess far more wisdom and abilities than they are often given credit for.
- The participatory, bottom-up approach to urban policy administration cannot be successful without institutional support.

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