

The Implementation of HABITAT's Guidelines for Action No. 12: Human Settlements Education, Research and Information Dissemination at the Asian Institute of Technology¹

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INTRODUCTION

Guideline No. 12 of the *Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements, 1976*, refers to 'the need to promote and institute education programs and courses in the subject of "Human Settlements" by International and National Institutions' (A/Conf. 70/15, p. 8). Recommendation No. 28 in HABITAT's *Programmes for International Co-operation* further stresses the need to identify national and regional institutions which could provide services, training and assistance in research on human settlements. The discussion of this subject during the HABITAT Conference was based on the chapter dealing with education and training in the field of Human Settlements included in the background paper entitled *Programmes for International Co-operation*, Item 11 of the *Provisional Agenda for the Conference*.

The following statements defining the role of regional institutions, are of special interest here:

- (1) Regional training institutes provide some immediate training capacity at fairly modest cost, and serve as a useful device for countries individually too small to support the needed facilities. Services should, however, be provided on a temporary basis as the final responsibility will rest with national institutions (A/Conf. 70/6, p. 16);
- (2) It is proposed to establish regional research centres whose main task would be to provide policy makers and planners in the countries of the region with the knowledge required to fulfil developmental tasks (A/Conf. 70/6, p. 18);

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- (3) Regional centres for collection and dissemination of information on Human Settlements Development could also perform a crucial function of training the staff of national Human Settlements centres. (A/Conf. 70/6, p. 19);
- (4) Given the strong relationship between research, education and information exchange activities, it might be desirable and, in many cases, possible to bundle the various activities in one institution. (A/Conf. 70/6, pp. 19, 20).

Beginning in 1973, the activities suggested above were implemented at a modest scale in the Human Settlements Planning and Development Programme at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT). In the coming five years, education, research and information dissemination will be expanded with financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency.

In this paper we shall provide some details on different program activities in the field of Human Settlements at AIT. We shall also elaborate on the proposed expansion of the program during the coming five years, with the financial support from the Canadian government.

The main objective we have in mind, in presenting this paper to this conference, is to show in what limited ways the Human Settlements Planning and Development Programme at AIT can be utilized by national governments or international organizations in their efforts to implement the various strategies formulated at the HABITAT Conference.

THE PROBLEM AND THE TASKS

The future course for the developing nations of Asia must emphasize the implementation of a large number of effective policies, plans, programmes, and projects. For such implementation to be effective, it requires a balanced understanding and a systematic guidance of the whole process of development. Experience with development in the past two decades has shown us that neither a complete centralization of development planning, nor a segmented sectoral approach, can achieve the goal of effective implementation.

The human settlements approach to development abandons both extreme centralization, and over-emphasis on sectoral approaches, and focusses instead on the spatial units of society—its regions, cities, villages, and communities—as the appropriate units for the implementation of development. This approach requires a large number of policies, plans, programmes, and projects at different levels of spatial organization, and is therefore linked to a decentralized form of administrative and social organization.

By focussing on human settlements, we simplify the problem of implementation, while at the same time effectively linking together the knowledge accumulated in the various disciplines and professions engaged in the development process. We thus develop an integrated approach, an approach which gradually leads to a better understanding of the whole. A commitment to an approach can overcome the neglect associated with centralized approaches or sectoral approaches, through an emphasis on the entire ecological system—both natural and human—in which human settlements flourish. Ultimately, such a commitment aims at reaching all the people, particularly those that are now being neglected, and bringing them into the orbit of improvement and advancement.

The implementation of a human settlements approach to development is slowly taking place in many countries. To accelerate this process, several tasks can be delineated. First, it requires a large cadre of specially educated manpower in human settlements planning, development, management, and education. These professionals must be trained and committed to an integrated approach to development, familiar with all its aspects, and capable of putting together integrated and well thought out policies, plans, programmes, and projects.

The knowledge and the scientific information required for this task is sketchy and disorganized. It is partly transplanted from developed countries, and partly based on sectoral approaches. Reliable and relevant knowledge must be developed through original research and experimentation in the field of human settlements development in Asia. Many problems in Asia are unique and require special study. Thus, a considerable research effort in integrated development, which will be implementation-oriented, aiming at evaluating the efficacy of various policies plans, programmes, and projects, is the second task to be accomplished.

However, professional manpower and good action-oriented research will not be enough. A human settlements approach to development requires considerable changes in development policy. Such a change requires modification of attitudes and perceptions of a very large number of people. This modification cannot take place without communicating with many groups in society on human settlements problems, issues and approaches. This is the third task: disseminating information to a large number of target groups in the region. Changes in attitudes and perceptions cannot take place by publishing scientific papers alone. Specific target groups must be addressed with specially-designed communication packages, using a large variety of ways of transmitting information.

We conclude, therefore, that the effective implementation of a human settlements approach to development in the Asian Region requires action on three important tasks:

Task 1: Educating high quality manpower for human settlements planning, development, management and education;

Task 2: Research in human settlements in the Asian Region;

Task 3: Dissemination of information on human settlements.

THE HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME AT AIT

A significant attempt to fulfill these tasks was made with the creation of the HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME at the Asian Institute of Technology in 1973. The Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), chartered in Thailand and governed by an International Board of Trustees, is a unique educational institution that provides graduate (post bachelor's degree) training in technology and related fields to students from all the countries of Asia.

The characteristics which make AIT different from any other graduate school are: (i) its government by an international and independent Board of Trustees; (ii) its dependence on funding from a variety of sources in many countries, and the lack of any permanent grant source; (iii) its regionally-based student body (23 countries); (iv) its multi-national faculty (20 countries); (v) its research commitment to problems relevant to the region it serves; and (vi) its

success in giving high level training to graduates who, with few exceptions, remain and work in Asia (90.5%).

AIT has been gradually shifting from a strict commitment to infra-structure engineering, reflected in its early academic programmes, to a more comprehensive commitment to the development priorities of the Asian Region. Today, AIT has six academic divisions: Environmental Engineering, Community and Regional Development, Structural Engineering and Materials, Geotechnical Engineering, Water Resources, and Industrial Development and Management, and more than a dozen specialized fields of study.

The new Academic Development Programme aims at expanding AIT's efforts to new fields, which relate to the existing ones, and contribute directly to the process of national development. The Academic Senate of AIT has recently resolved that expansion of the academic programme should reflect the need to contribute directly toward progress within the following aspects of development: food production, resources management, rural development, industrial development, and urban development. Within this context, the Institute is in the process of incorporating programmes without a strong engineering base into its structure. The Human Settlements Planning and Development Programme is the thrust of this effort.

The Programme was introduced to AIT, in 1973, as a Field of Study. It is at present one of three fields of study within the Division of Community and Regional Development. The main Characteristics of the Human Settlements Planning and Development Programme are as follows:

- (1) Teaching and research is specifically tailored to the needs of less developed nations, with particular emphasis on the Asian Countries from which its students originate.
- (2) The programme is problem oriented with a focus on realistic plans and policies.
- (3) Problems addressed by the students in their thesis research have been aimed at redressing inequalities in the distribution of development resources.
- (4) Research has been comparative in nature, covering a number of countries in the Region.

It will be obvious that this orientation has consequences for the way in which courses are taught and research is undertaken. In teaching emphasis is put on the application of theories to efforts in finding solutions for practical problems in Human Settlements Development. Research topics are often selected on the basis of priorities as perceived by policy makers, governmental organizations or the general public. In general, the focus has been on low-income communities as target groups.

In the Human Settlements Planning and Development Programme we are experimenting with a multi disciplinary approach in the training of manpower. There is a framework which serves as a guiding principle.² Both students and faculty have a background in different disciplines: e.g. architecture, city and regional planning, engineering, social-political science, and geography.

During the course of his or her study the student, on average, has to take 10-12 different courses, in which he or she is exposed to different academic disciplines. Students gradually

²See Fig. 2 in J. H. de Goede "Impossibilities of Training Programmes for Improvement of Human Settlements: the AIT Experience". *Habitat Intl.*, Vol. 4, No. 1/2, p. 175, 1979.

start to use the different scientific languages. A civil engineer develops skills to conduct a social survey, while the social scientist develops the ability to frame physical designs for residential areas.³

In addition, the student is free to select a special emphasis in his training either within the programme, (e.g. social development) or outside the programme in other division of AIT (e.g. Water Resources Engineering). Value is attached to student thesis projects involving multi-disciplinary skills. Examples are socio-economic impact studies of various technical innovations, or research on the low-income housing delivery systems in the Asian region. In short the Human Settlements Programme aims at training specialists within a general, accepted conceptual framework based on the various related disciplines.

THE EXPANSION OF THE HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME

During the past few years, experience has taught us that training of high quality manpower in the field of Human Settlements is not enough. It became clear that research activities should be expanded in order to identify problems in the development of Human Settlements, and in order to establish priorities. In addition, there was a need to increase activities related to the collection and dissemination of Human Settlements information. This resulted in a proposal to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) for an expansion of the Human Settlements Programme which was approved, pending ministerial signature by June, 1977.

In order to meet the tasks educating manpower, Research in Human Settlements in the Asian Region and dissemination of Human Settlements Information we have formulated a number of key-targets and sub-targets.⁴ In the following paragraphs, we shall elaborate briefly on the different key targets and sub-targets needed in order to tackle these three main tasks.

Education

During the coming five years the Human Settlements Programme will increase its intake of students. At the same time the academic programme will be expanded along the lines indicated in the proposed framework for academic development.⁵ This, in its turn, will lead to an increase in the number of faculty who will come from a variety of disciplines related to Human Settlements Development. In order to cope with the need for training in the practicalities of the planning profession, the programme will initiate one to three projects per year involving demonstration and testing. Demonstration projects will generally be combined with course work in the three workshops offered in the programme in urban, rural and regional planning.

Research

Education in Human Settlements in the Asian region does not have the benefit of using good tested knowledge in the variety of fields that are related to their planning and development. Interest in this area of human knowledge has only arisen recently, and much of

³ See curriculum plan in Table 1 of de Goede *op. cit.*

⁴ See Fig. 1 in de Goede *op. cit.*

⁵ See Fig. 2 in de Goede *op. cit.*

the information is new, scarce and disorganized. The materials available in the West are helpful, but not entirely relevant. There is an urgent need for more research.

Research interest in the Human Settlements field in the Third World is growing, but suffers considerably from a disconnected research community, and the difficulty in obtaining the necessary financial support. It also suffers from lack of confidence and technical competence in modern research methods and strategy.

The research programme in Human Settlements at AIT sets out several tasks: To increase the number of creative and competent research personnel through training and education in research techniques, to increase original research material in the field, to aid planners and policy-makers in various countries by providing policy-oriented research to governments and decision-making agencies, to organize and codify tested knowledge in the field through publications and other forms of documentation, and to increase the effectiveness of links and exchanges within the Human Settlements research community in the region. More specifically, the programme will initiate approximately 20 *independent student research projects* in the different countries of the region annually.

The research capacity will enable the programme further to carry out *contract research* in order to provide good policy-oriented research to governments and decision making agencies, particularly where the required expertise does not exist in the private or public sectors. Similarly, it is aimed at fulfilling the research needs and priorities of various aid agencies and programmes. Furthermore, in order to explore new techniques and new research frontiers the programme will initiate *exploratory research* with the aim of expanding into new areas of research and accumulating expertise.

Dissemination of Human Settlements information

The most important task confronting those concerned with Human Settlements problems in the Asian region is the changing of perceptions and attitudes toward these problems, and the improvement of decision-making in this area through the dissemination of better quality information than is available at the present time.

An information dissemination centre will be established for a comprehensive collection and dissemination of materials on Human Settlements which is essential for supporting research and policy-making in the region. At the same time it will serve as a mechanism to increase contact and communication within the research and professional community in the region. The organization of conferences and workshops at AIT, as well as short-course training outside AIT, will further add to the establishment of a communication network on Human Settlements Development in the region.

Finally, dissemination of information on human settlements requires reaching a large number of non-academic and non-professional target groups involved in affecting important decisions in human settlements development.

No amount of educated manpower and research can achieve a change in perceptions and attitudes toward human settlements problems without a considerable effort in the communication field. This effort must focus more directly on the various decision-making groups in the different countries inside and outside the region. It must be more specifically tailored to the needs and perceptions of these groups to be successful. Thus, the task of

disseminating human settlements information must be accompanied with a communications strategy: the design of specific communication packages aimed at reaching specific target groups and achieving certain changes in the perception of problems or policies, for a limited expenditure of effort.

This approach moves research and education from a previously academic framework to a more public framework. Recent experience in communicating human settlements information directly to target groups and decision makers has convinced us that academics must play a more direct role in communication, and cut through the veil of misinterpretation and inaccurate reporting which usually characterizes newspaper and mass media channels. Since this effort must necessarily be experimental in nature, it can only evolve slowly. The Human Settlements Programme at AIT is currently engaged in several such experiments, and is planning to expand its activities in this important direction.

CONCLUSIONS

We have presented an overview of the various activities which are being carried out in the Human Settlements Planning and Development Programme at AIT. We have also indicated the planned activities for the coming five years, with the coming financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). We would like to conclude this paper by firstly recommending

That the Human Settlements Planning and development programme at AIT should be recognized as one of the regional institutions which could provide services, training and assistance in research on Human Settlements.

Secondly, we would like to request national governments and international organizations in the region to give assistance to the programme in serving as a human settlements centre for the region by:

- (1) Sending appropriate candidates to the Human Settlements Programme for a period of training.
- (2) Communicating priorities for research in the field of Human Settlements in the national or regional setting.
- (3) Identifying target groups for short courses on various subjects related to Human Settlements, and assisting in coordinating these short courses.
- (4) Cooperating on comparative studies and comparative demonstration projects on a variety of different human settlement problems.

We hope that in such a manner we can maximize the contribution of the Asian Institute of Technology to the planning and development of human settlements in the Asian region.