

Planning for sustainable development in urban communities

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On behalf of CAP and the RTPI, I am delighted to welcome you all to Belfast and to this important gathering of the CAP. I would like to thank you all for coming, and I also need to thank the staff of the RTPI's "conference arm", Planning and Environmental Training, and the RTPI's International Affairs Officer, Judith Eversley, for their hard work in developing and managing the event. I also want to say a special "thank you" to the UK's Department for International Development for all their support. Their decision to provide financial support for the attendance of community planners from developing countries is greatly appreciated and is an important step in the building of networks amongst community planners. A further benefit is that the project supported by DfID has also brought together CAP and Homeless International, and through Homeless International, Shack Dwellers International. I would like to record the appreciation of the RTPI for the input that HI and SDI have already made. I hope that this innovative collaboration might be the start of a longer term sharing of ideas and experiences between professional planners and NGOs involved in the struggle against homelessness.

The theme of the day is "Planning for sustainable development in urban communities" and I want to develop some ideas on this topic. The UN Habitat II event in Istanbul in 1996, and the Habitat Agenda that was adopted there, actually said very little about planning. As a professional urban planner I was disappointed about this, but it I think it forces all of us to recognise two basic truths. Firstly, governments and NGOs engaged in managing the development of settlements do not see planning as presently practised as being of central relevance, and this is especially true in developing countries. Secondly, if planners are to have a role to play they must rethink their practices and learn new lessons. The Istanbul +5 Special session of the UN General Assembly in June 2001 will review and appraise the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. I hope that events like our meeting today and the continuing work of CAP can be fed into this process and help us to share experiences which can reinvigorate the planning profession in our different countries, and build new partnerships between planners and the communities that they exist to serve.

The Habitat Agenda

The message from Habitat II is that urban challenge matters globally. The prosperity of people, their democratic involvement, and the very survival of "Spaceship Earth" are fundamentally caught up with how we manage urban change. Urban population is expected to double over the next 25 years, by which time something like 2 in every 3 persons on the planet will be living in urban areas. That growth is going to put enormous pressure on land for shelter and for services, and on the natural environment. There will be deep conflicts. In both rich and poor countries urban planning has often existed to restrict the supply of land for new development. The risk is that such policies can create

Adequate shelter for all

- legal security of tenure and access to land for all people
- access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation
- access to appropriate housing financing
- implementing accessibility standards for disabled persons
- increasing the supply of affordable housing

Sustainable Human Settlements

- an enabling environment for economic and social development and environmental protection that will attract investment
- enhancing the potential of the informal and private sectors in job creation
- promoting upgrading of informal settlements and urban slums as appropriate
- improving access to work, goods and services through promotion of efficient, quiet and environmentally sound transportation systems
- eliminating as soon as possible the use of lead in petrol

Enablement and Participation

- promoting democratic rule and the exercise of public authority in ways that ensure accountable, just and effective governance of towns and cities
- decentralising authority and resources to the level where needs are most effectively addressed
- ensuring the availability of education for all

Gender equality

- integrating gender perspectives in human settlement legislation, policies and programmes
- strengthening policies and practices to promote the full and equal participation of women in human settlements planning and decision-making

Table 1: Some key commitments in the Habitat Agenda

additional barriers to opportunities for the urban poor and can increase the likelihood that urban squalor and degraded environments result.

Key Idea:

Many of the problems... arise from inadequate and inappropriate planning and provisioning for settlements. But the need for planning becomes ever more necessary in the light of the increased social, economic and environmental impacts of urbanization, growing consumption levels and renewed concerns for sustainable development since the adoption of Agenda 21. UNCHS, "An urbanising world: Global report on human settlements 1996", OUP for UNCHS, 1996, p.xxxi.

Table 1 summarises the messages from Habitat. Although "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements" are familiar themes for planners, the Agenda fragments and marginalises traditional planning concerns. In part the problem reflects what Michael Cohen in an article in the August 1996 issue of *The Urban Age* described as "sector-based discussion" which dominated in Istanbul, in which housing experts talked to housing experts, environmentalists to environmentalists and so on. In contrast planning has emphasised synthesis: fragmentation of urbanisation, into single-issue topics challenges the core of the claims of the profession. However, we also have to recognise that inherited self-perceptions of planning professional also exclude them from much of this agenda. Poverty alleviation is top priority in development strategies, and vital to the equity dimension of sustainable development, yet the more narrow, statutory limitations on official "town planning" have often been a barrier between professional planners and the needs of the urban poor. The forms of poverty, and of planners' professional straitjackets, vary between countries, but the basic problem is one we all need to address.

Urbanisation and international development agencies

Commonwealth organisations are especially well placed to engage with such global concerns, because they link North and South. The task for CAP must grasp and propagate the best international thinking and practice, while at the same time recognising that solutions need to be worked out and implemented locally. In particular, CAP has a duty to explore ways in which communities can be included in the process of planning and managing urban development. I hope today's meeting is a positive step in that direction.

There have been some encouraging signs that aid agencies are now recognising the importance of the urban dimension in development after a long period when it was underplayed. For example, DfID in its Annual Report 2000 says:

"Successful cities have an impact far beyond their boundaries. Creating the conditions in which cities can grow benefits both poor people who live in the cities and those who live in rural districts. Understanding the interaction between urban and rural areas, especially as towns grow, can be the key to more sustainable urban development and more sustainable livelihoods for the poor."

There are a number of recent multi-lateral aid programmes that are targeted at urban areas. These include:

- **The Habitat/UNDP/World Bank/ Multi-donor Urban Management Programme** which helps local governments to focus on meeting the needs of their citizens, especially the poorest.
- **The Habitat / World Bank / Multi-donor “Cities Alliance”** which seeks to improve urban governance and funds projects for City Development Strategies and up-grading of poor neighbourhoods.
- **The UNDP Public-Private Partnerships for the Urban Environment** which provides new opportunities for municipalities to involve the private sector in innovative and practical ways of building effective infrastructure and improving urban environments.

In the UK the DfID “*Strategy for meeting the urban challenge: inclusive development for poor people*” will focus on:

- Increasing the levels of security of tenure for poor people, which is seen as a pre-requisite to getting them to invest in improving their own shelter and services.
- Increasing the level of participation by the poor in decision-making.
- Increasing the capacity of urban local authorities and municipalities so that they can better manage urban environments to the benefit of all, but especially the poor.

DfID is also currently producing a Strategy Paper on *Environmental Sustainability and Eliminating Poverty*. It will seek to address the sustainable development target:

“The implementation of national strategies for sustainable development in all countries by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015.”

Again it is important to recognise that while global environmental changes affect us all, it is the poor who are the most vulnerable and the most common victims of natural disasters or the consequences of climate change. So environmental protection is not an alternative to poverty reduction but something that needs to be integrated into anti-poverty strategies. In contrast governments at all scales have tended to divide problems and policy responses into neat administrative boxes – environment, transport, health, housing, social welfare, education. Communities rarely see things that way, and so are often wiser than the professionals when it comes to defining the problems.

As a Commonwealth organisation we welcome the moves that the Commonwealth is making to put people-centred development and anti-poverty initiatives high on its agenda. The last CHOGM in Durban gave a high priority to these themes and they are being fed into Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. In future the Fund will focus on good governance, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, gender and the promotion of the interests of small states. Of course “town planning” is not in that list, but as a Commonwealth Association of Planners we have to ask ourselves where that leaves us. Planning should be about good governance and the rule of law, it needs to respect human rights and must be conscious of issues of gender both within the profession and the way gender impacts on the experience of urban development. The challenge is for us to make the connections and to take a step forward.

Communities and Planners

Table 2 schematically compares the Habitat Agenda with the orthodox ideas of town planning which developed in response to the urban problems of a different age, and in the colonialist countries.

Orthodox planning	Habitat Agenda
Regulation and control	Enabling development
Hierarchy of plans provides top-down, centralised framework for decision	Decentralised, bottom-up basis for decision
Presumes state has power and acts in the public interest	Weak states seek partnerships with NGOs and private sector
Design of detailed, long term land use plans	Governance and management
Professionals as experts with right answers	Professionals as enablers and partners in dialogues
Gender blind	Gender aware

Table 2: Contrasting assumptions in planning and the Habitat Agenda.

We can probe the roots and form of this colonialist planning legacy further, as Table 3 attempts to do.

Concepts	Functional efficiency and public health: wide, straight roads, provision of water and sewage systems, segregation of land uses, open space provision, garden suburbs, regulation of new development
Agencies	No comprehensive plan; piecemeal layout of areas by military engineers, public works boards, improvement trusts.
Skills	Civil and sanitation engineering
Comment	Transplant of nineteenth century British analysis of urban problems and remedies. Planning histories (e.g. Cherry 1986, Hall 1992) stress role of public health reform, by-laws to define minimum road widths etc, Improvement Trusts were a feature of 19th century urban renewal, the UK's Housing, Town Planning Etc. Act 1909 Act permitted (but did not require) Planning Schemes for suburban expansion in bigger towns and cities.

Table 3: The legacy of colonialist town planning

So town planning was essentially local, physical and restrictive, rooted in an engineering tradition, though also influenced (as in the UK) by architecture. It was reactive and practised sporadically, when or where the need arose and/or the people were there with the necessary skills.

In many countries a new planning agenda developed in the 1960s. The aim now was for comprehensive planning, at the city or city / region scale, though the detail and specificity was down to a local scale. The vehicle was typically overseas consultants producing a master plan. The features of this phase are summarised in the table below.

Concepts	Long range, detailed land use plan based on comprehensive survey of land; key role for public sector in carrying out development; urban containment and decentralisation; segregation of land uses; redevelopment of worst areas; road building.
Agencies	Master plan prepared by / with input from foreign consultants; Development Authority to implement it - key roles for public works and for public land acquisition; land use and building control by local councils.
Skills	Data collection and then plan making - architectural tradition, designing the future city like designing a building. The planner as expert.
Comments	Strong influences from British 1947 Act - 20 year Development Plans based on long detailed but rather static surveys; implementation mainly involves phasing of capital works for the public sector. Containment, dispersal and redevelopment were the basis of UK practice 1947-75.

Table 4 - Key influences and approaches 1960-1990

In situations of rapid growth and private sector led development, the norm in most countries today, this type of approach will come under enormous pressure. Plans will quickly be discredited because they have become outdated and the funds are not there to implement them.

We then come to the current situation which seems to me to be something like this:

Concepts	Private sector development; environmental protection; community involvement; empowerment of women; cost effective with limited resources; flexibility.
Agencies	International donors backing ad hoc, innovative demonstration projects.
Skills	Listening, networking, negotiating, management, monitoring, appraisal and impact assessment.
Comments	This negates key elements of the previous phases, notably comprehensiveness and control. The role is as an enabler, though the environmental dimension implies stronger technical skills from the natural sciences.

Table 5: The new agenda

The skills and attitudes required for this type of planning transcend national boundaries. Indeed planners in developed countries have much to learn from the innovative, community-based approaches which have been pioneered in low income communities in less developed countries, such as rapid community appraisal techniques.

If we are to integrate poverty reduction, sustainable development and planning then it is essential to invest in human resource development and the building of institutions. There is a growing body of academic literature, which points to the importance of institutions in shaping outcomes. By institutions I mean not only organisations, but also professional cultures, mindsets and practices. We need visions of sustainable urban development, but also realistic institutional mechanisms and structures to deliver that vision. In a world of weak states and global markets, civil society and local action becomes increasingly important. Similarly, the idea of negotiation is very helpful in thinking about relations between the state, the market and civil society. What spaces for negotiation are open to whom, and what alternative institutional models are available or can be invented which will strengthen the negotiating position of the poorest?

If we think of CAP in these terms, then a new role begins to open up for the organisation. As a body made up from member organisations in different Commonwealth countries, it can be both local and global, a forum where North and South can learn from each other. It is a part of civil society, one of the NGOs that can claim a stake in the Istanbul +5 process. It is a vehicle for reconstructing the mental models of professional planners in all the member countries, and through them reconstructing practice. Part of that process comes through forging partnerships with other NGOs. We have already done this, modestly but successfully, with some other professions through links with Built Environment Profession in the Commonwealth (BEPIC) where John Anderson has worked very hard. Similarly we have enjoyed positive partnerships with the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council. Today's event allows us to work with and learn from HI and SDI. As we look beyond today, and towards the next CHOGM in 2001, I hope that the CAP conference that will be held alongside the CHOGM in Australia will be able to forge further partnerships.

Summary

I have argued that:

- the growth of urban areas poses challenges which the global community is (belatedly) recognising;
- one of those challenges is to refashion urban planning into a practice that is decentralised, enabling, and gender aware;
- this means rethinking some mental models and practices that have become outdated;
- CAP can contribute to this process through being a learning organisation that develops partnerships with other parts of civil society.

Today's meeting can be an important step into the future. I look forward to the day, to the speakers and to the active involvement of all of you in the process.