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Around the Task Groups and Working Commissions

TG40 – Informal Settlements

Report on the 5th Meeting of TG40 on Informal Settlements

By

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Introduction

Informal settlements play a crucial social and economic role in many Third World cities. Following on from its previous practice of locating its meetings in places where informal settlements dominate the urban landscape, TG40 on informal settlements convened its fifth meeting in Surabaya, Indonesia, between 10th and 13th of October 2002. The meeting was held alongside an international conference on "Sustainable Livelihoods in the Integration of Informal Settlements in Asia, Latin America and Africa". Both the conference and the task group meeting were hosted by the Department of Architecture, Institute of Technology, Ten November (ITS), Surabaya.

The aim of the TG40 meeting and conference was twofold. Firstly, to identify and compare the different sustainable livelihoods, specially those that have relation with some response from organized comminatory groups before disasters. This would not exclude other kind of sustainable livelihood, when they represent real example to improve the living and working conditions. The second aim of the meeting derived from the fact that the group had reached the end of its two-year period as a task group and therefore a decision about its future status needed to be reached. The CIB Developing Country Fund had sponsored TG40 members to research the interface between sustainable livelihoods, environmental

hazards and informal settlements, a project that has been running for two years. Last year, intermediate findings summing up the situation on three continents were presented at the fourth meeting in Santo Domingo. This year more detailed case studies from the three continents were presented, along with detailed case studies by the ITS students.

Conference

The conference was a success with about 75 participants who included students and academics in architecture, planning, landscape, and environmental management, government officials, community groups and environmental/social activists, all of whom shared an interest in the issues of living in informal settlements. There was also a handful of TG40 members, including Prof. Liana de Bustillos from Venezuela, Dr Mark Napier from South Africa, Prof Dr Happy Santosa from Indonesia, and the Secretary General of CIB, Dr Wim Bakens. After registering for the conference on the evening of the 10th of October and enjoying a sumptuous spread of local foods, the task group met briefly to discuss what needed to be achieved in the following days.





First and second from the left: Liana de Bustillos and Mark Napier, joint TG40 Coordinators.
Second from the right: Happy Santosa, recently appointed third joint TG40 Coordinator. (See separate article)

On the morning of Friday the 11th, the conference delegates embarked on a field trip to a number of informal settlements, or 'Kampongs'. At the first settlement, a coastal fishing village close to the ITS campus, a comprehensive Kampong Improvement Programme (KIP) intervention had a great impact on the upgrading of roads and drainage in the settlement. Some students had done a study of livelihoods and hazards experienced by the residents of the area and thus knew much of the details on how people had been affected by KIP. Livelihoods in the settlement were closely bound up in the use of fish and shellfish, which were dried and packed, or made into a kind of seafood crisp, and sold. There was also an attempt, supported by government, to attract tourists to the area, with the building of a seaside market and a system of piers out into the sea. Houses along the main road have built shops selling stoneware and toys/ornaments made from shells.



Visit to an upgraded informal settlement near Surabaya.

We then visited a second settlement, Nginden Jangkungang, closer to the city centre, which had also been improved through the comprehensive KIP. Levels of government funding to individual settlements are fairly limited, but are successful in mobilising community investment of time and labour to develop roads and drains. Some 75% of the improvement budget was raised by residents themselves.

This settlement was located in amongst a wealthier set of neighbourhoods which were fenced and had controlled access points. The Kampong itself had a form of access control with some roads being closed off by booms after 11pm. Many of the houses were being added to, with some now being double storey. The TG40 members visiting the settlements were impressed by the orderly layout of the settlements, the equality and uniformity of the informally sub-divided land, the permanence and design quality of the houses, and the positive impact of the KIP investment in the public realm.



Nginden Jangkungan photos

The field trip successfully set the scene for the main conference on Saturday the 12th of October. In his opening comments, Dr Wim Bakens placed the conference theme and the local realities that had been observed the day before in perspective when he said, "We are celebrating the strength of the human spirit". In another speech, the Director General of Human Settlements and Housing for Indonesia gave detailed background to KIP and other government human settlement programmes.

Papers were then presented, covering topics such as:

- Informal settlements and disaster prevention;
- Best practices and eco-solutions in legal and illegal settlements;
- Design aids and the selection of appropriate construction materials and methods to mitigate disasters in informal settlements; and
- Participation of people in the creation of sustainable settlements and livelihoods.

The papers presented by TG40 members were products of the CIB-funded research project. What was notable was that in some regions (e.g. Latin America)

it was possible to present 'best practice' reports because the variety of situations and the advancement of responses from authorities were such that better practices had emerged and therefore could be documented. Despite this, governments are still failing to provide adequate land and housing in safe places. Their interventions after disasters usually have only temporary impacts, leaving inhabitants abandoned to their destiny and facing the same vulnerability conditions they experienced prior to disastrous events. The case studies from southern Africa represented not best practice, but simply crisis responses by authorities, although as experience was accumulated there was evidence of the beginnings of a more considered and coordinated state response to disasters.



CIB Secretary General and the now three Joint TG40 Coordinators at the Conference

Some of the Asian examples, because of the frequency of disasters such as flooding, were cases of how people living in poverty had evolved their own ways of coping using traditional construction and siting techniques.

An unexpected outcome of the CIB-funded research project was that the conceptual framework that had been developed during the first phase of the project had been used by academics at ITS to structure student projects. A great richness and diversity of case study material had emerged as project teams had documented the ways that communities had coped with the impacts of disasters on their often fragile livelihoods. This was captured in the proceedings for the conference [cross-refer to earlier circular about being able to get the conference proceedings from ITS].

The work of TG40 on informal settlements tends to have a greater social and cultural dimension than is typical of other focus areas in CIB. This is as a result of the fact that informal settlements are created by communities to address their own basic needs and any discussion of interventions to improve livelihoods in such settlements needs to have communities at the centre of activities.



Conference photograph

Towards the end of the conference there were discussions about the possibility of initiating a student chapter of the CIB in Surabaya.

The Task Group Meeting

As often happens, the task group had scheduled specific times to reach decisions, but in reality the substantive discussions took place over meals, in taxi's and while walking around informal settlements!

It was agreed that the research project had been a very valuable exercise that had led to material of publishable quality. It had taken the first year to reach a common understanding and a shared approach to the project, but once this was attained, the analysis of case studies had yielded a new way of understanding informal settlements. For this reason, we should seek a broader audience for the results of the study.

Secondly, it was agreed that despite the success of the project the scale of activities and the size of the active membership of the group were too small to warrant its upgrading to a full working commission. However, the value of what had been established to date should also not be lost by winding up the group. It was therefore agreed that the group should request from CIB a continuation of its status as a task group leading up to the world CIB Conference in Toronto in 2004. Because of the regional division of the work being done and the sizeable contribution to the work of the group by Prof. Happy Santosa, it was agreed that she should be invited to represent Asia as the third joint coordinator.

Next Meeting

Finally, it was agreed that the next meeting of the group would be in Merida-Jucatan, Mexico as part of the CONPAT activities to be held in October 2003.

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