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CHAPTER TWO

SUSTAINABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT.

For a sustainable housing development, there should be a clear identification on notions of the housing problems, How important they are and how to deal with them, within the existing housing situation.

2.1. Housing and Housing Crisis

Many professionals such as architects and planners had given interpretations to the housing and housing crisis in relation to their various point of views.

“The concept of housing is more than merely a physical shell. Housing encompasses all the auxiliary services and community facilities which are necessary to human well being” (UN 1976 ; 1)

Turner (1972 ; 151) states that “The word housing can be used as a noun or verb, when used as a noun, housing describes a commodity or activity of housing. While the idea of housing as a collective noun is obviously associated with housing activities.” The word itself does not generally indicate this fact.

From a more complex point of view, housing is a product of various interrelated aspects having social, cultural, economic, political and organizational dimensions. (Angle, 1986) Housing as a manifestation of cultural process relates to specific values, attitudes, customs and beliefs of the society. Housing in relation to social process associates with the aspects like human behavior, human settlements, social groupings, social status as well as some symbolic meanings. (Perera, 1989)

In contrast to these recurrent interpretations, Michelson (1980;138) argues “that additional, sometimes crucial, aspects of housing satisfactions revolve around the dynamics of attitude management overtime within the minds and lines of individual persons and families, Moreover one must recognize the diversity of

evaluation criteria potentially mastered, some of which reflect orientations towards the future and which in any case go well beyond the status quo residential environment”.

The contradiction between the housing and the human satisfaction on their needs is a complex problem, Michelson (1980;49) argues on that, “ As applied to housing with its greater contextual implications, my argument suggests that people are indeed capable of maintaining different and often mutually exclusive wants. They can manage these without dissonance because housing is a product which people typically change several or many times during their life time. A family can look forward to different types of housing, each fulfilling rather different wants, over the course of many years, provided that family economics, the housing market, and other circumstances make this appear feasible”. He also gives four specific points under his arguments.

1. Housing choice at any point in time may not necessarily reflect ultimate aspirations. Immediate goals to be served may be long or short term, though less valid, housing which is preferably satisfactory during a brief period of occupancy can be replaced without the need for a “push” by other housing, reflecting quite different short-or long term desires.
2. People’s satisfaction with their current housing is in part a function of their expectations for the future, apart from the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction engendered by the objective characteristics of present surroundings.
3. The basis on which people judge their housing is therefore a function of conditions that may or not support holding conflicting thoughts applicable to present and future time periods.
4. Human behavior observed in any particular residential setting is not necessarily characteristics of the individual or family doing it, nor the most deeply seated attitudes or values they hold. It reflects the

environmental opportunity available there, and is consistent with the normative criteria people apply to given residential settings while there. In short residential behavior is highly situational, though not necessarily determined by environmental factors”.

Within these concerns, the vernacular traditions, cultural continuity and psychological satisfaction are almost absent in present day mass housing.

Before the industrialization, housing did not create much problems. But with the industrialization, population density has increased in urban areas, the demand for housing also increased. But the quality of housing has decreased. Most of the people who migrate from rural to urban environment do not have any capital to invest on housing or even a proper job. They need only lodging to spend the night and to do odd jobs. This situation creates a series of problems in urban areas: the slums and shanties.

Most of the countries worldwide have failed to overcome this situation, therefore haphazard development has taken place. As result the problems such as overcrowding on existing housing, overload on infrastructure facilities unhealthy, unlivable environment, environmental pollution, disasters and social problems have arisen. In relation to this, human values also have lost and every thing is valued on a monetary basis. As such interrelationship within the community also has been destroyed.

“Since the mid-nineteenth century, architects, housing reformers, politicians and the public have become increasingly concerned about problems of physical and moral well-being that were commonly linked to insanitary and over crowded conditions in residential quarters of expanding industrial towns”. (Lowrence ; 1987:9)

It is true that housing strategies sometimes take environmental concerns such as neighborhood conditions, infrastructure facilities, environmental services, standards of living, quality of the built-environment etc., into account. But, these strategies do not show any drastic development in housing.

“..... the first point we notice about mass housing is its universal application, so universal indeed that housing generally and mass housing are regarded as almost synonymous concepts. If anyone, therefore puts forward his notion about housing it is automatically assumed that he is speaking about the way in which he wishes to apply mass housing. Any proposal for the solution of the housing problem is expected to mean yet another way of doing the same thing.” (Habraken, 1972 ; 6,7)

Therefore housing should reform its notions at the initial stage of the housing policy planning and investment level.

2.2. Housing Policy and Investment on Housing.

The magnitude of the housing problem in developing nations has generated a great deal of interest on the part of governments for a comprehensive set of housing policy guidelines. However, there appears to be no general consensus on the meaning of the term “housing” for that reason.

The improvement of the quality of life is the most important goal of human settlement policies. This goal and its resulting objectives however are common to every sector of economic and social life. As a result human settlements ought to be considered both as an instrument and an object of development designed to facilitate the continuous improvement in the quality of life. An optimum relationship between human settlement policy and economic development policy can lead to increasing satisfaction of human needs and is a necessary means towards raising, the quality of life while contributing to an equitable distribution of benefits among all people.

In the global context housing is a not only political issue, but also related mainly to development planning in the third world countries. Many nations have realized the gravity of their housing problems in order to achieve the targeted goals of development.

The investment for development of new or renovated housing creates economic stimuli to employment, production and savings in a variety of areas, such as; the following,

1. Investment in new housing construction is an important concept of the process of capital formation of a country.
2. In developing nations, the construction of housing is in itself an important economic activity providing substantial and direct employment opportunities which is provide training more than the other employment generating sectors of the economy.
3. A strong housing sector helps to promote the development of an efficient construction industry and commerce, given that in the early stages of industrialization, 50% to 60% of capital investment typically is channeled into construction.
4. Housing construction, even in relatively poor countries, has multiplier effects on industries manufacturing consumer durable goods for the home. Many of these are labour-intensive, and some are produced in small workshops in lower-income neighborhoods.
5. Finally, the desire for a better dwelling. It is clear that housing provides a focus and an incentive for personal saving, in developing countries as well as in industrialized countries. Financial institutions that can mobilize these savings are motivated to expand their operations once they perceive that a potential demand for their service exists. (UN 1978)

Within these concerns, sustainable housing development requires holistic policies incorporating continuance of socio-cultural traditions, generating livelihoods, psychological satisfaction and overall harmony with the ecosystem. This would mean the reconsideration of the key issues which are absent in housing policy formulation today. (Perera, 1996)

2.3. Housing as a part of Human Development.

As a base for providing satisfaction to human needs housing could be considered as a tool for human development.

“..... when searching for the essence of an important aspect of our civilization we should not only consider what is being done. But above all who does it, and why, did sense it is, as will appear, much more important to understand how a dwelling comes about than what it looks like, Mass housing takes away a man’s act, and presents him with a form; it seeks to provide a comfortable form to be used by people who do not have to lift a finger to influence it. Does this not place mass housing, however skillful it may be, beyond our civilization ? Following this line of thought, it is therefore justified to direct attention to the initiative and activities of the individual. In order to regain control over our housing we must rediscover what has been lost through a long preoccupation with mass housing and regard it with a fresh eye” (Habracken, 1972 ; 11,12)



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Good housing however is defined as an essential place among development goals, therefore housing is integrated into the national development planning process.

According to the United Nations “Good housing is essential for human dignity and self fulfillment. It provides “the physical framework in which man’s human, social, economic and cultural resources are released, enriched and integrated” (UN; 63:1)

Therefore housing is not providing merely shelter for living. It should be able to sustain the living condition of the occupants.

Even further, good housing creates the social climate necessary for the orderly development of society. This is necessary for socio-economic development. An adequate housing with good sanitary facilities contributes directly to individual health and productivity, which are important for national economic growth and improved standard of living. Therefore to sustain the living condition of the people, housing also should be sustainable.

2.4. Sustainability of Housing.

Sustainability is an ideology which cannot be achieved by 100%, because of restrictions and limitations on every subject. But sustainability can be achieved to a certain extent. As an example in relation to housing, housing should be able to sustain the living condition of the occupants, at the same time housing should have a flexibility for changing needs of the future while responding to all other aspects.

Therefore it is a difficult task to respond to each and every aspect of housing, it can not be done as well. In this case priority should be given to more critical and vital aspects of the particular housing projects, others must be considered as much as possible within the framework of sustainability.

Even, when we consider housing with natural environmental aspects, “shelter of housing is a basic need of all humans and also for some animals, but here we can notice a difference. The structures built by animals are identified as natural, but the structures constructed by humans are not considered as natural. The natural structures are a part of a sustainable system. But most of the human settlements do not positively contribute to a sustainable growth pattern.” (Chandrasekara, 1996;13)

Our traditional architecture posed the sustainability of the past. It echoes the environmental harmony with built and unbuilt. Unconsciously our ancestors adhered to sustainable life style. (fig : 02, & 03)

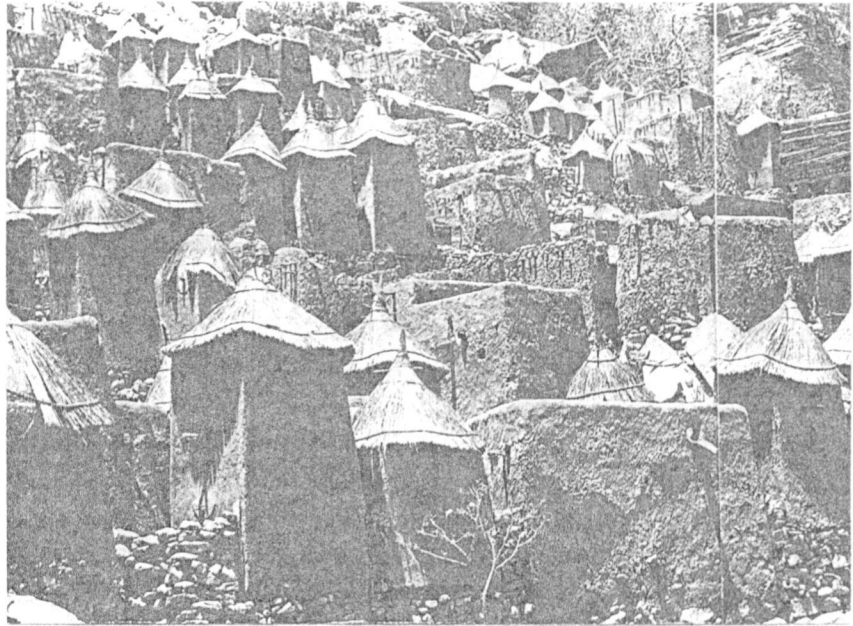


Fig : 02. Indigenous human settlement which close to the nature.



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(Source : Pearson, 1991)

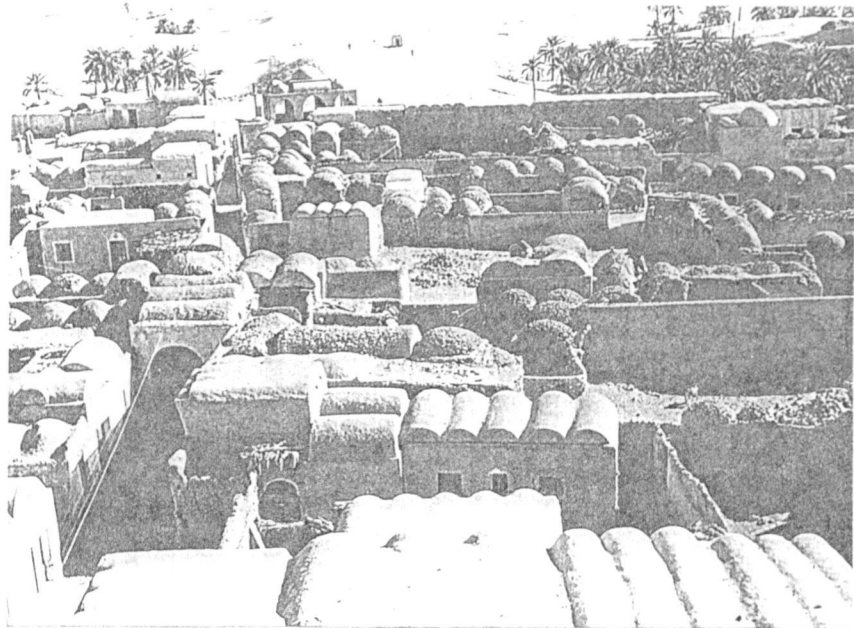


Fig : 03. Architect designed settlement for indigenous people.

(Source : Pearson, 1991)

The implications of sustainable development paradigm on housing development add more concerns to the existing housing policies. In other words, the term sustainable development brings together three strands of thought about housing which are conspicuous by their absence in policy formulation today. i.e., the broader concerns on environment, economic structure and social system. (Perera, 1996;51). (fig : 04)

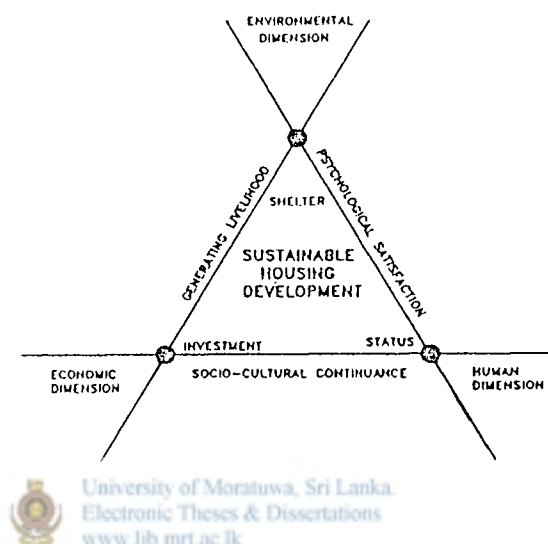


Fig : 04. Concept of sustainable Housing Development
(Source - Perera 1996;51)

Therefore, it is always better to take ‘preventive’ policy actions, which are difficult to adapt but holistic wherein housing is a potential tool for attaining sustainable development. (Cuncha,1988;16) This would mean the consideration of the key imperatives that are conspicuous by their not so strong presence in policy formulation today. In other words, the sustainable housing development process requires a transformation of the house from a typified physical entity to a total entity which satisfies ;

1. The physical need for shelter ; Protection from the natural elements.
2. The economic need for investment ; Resources utilization within the activity cycle and facilitating a livelihood.

3. The psychological need for personalisation ; Psychological satisfaction in a personalized territory.
4. The social need for cultural continuity ; passing on traditions with vital indigenous additions.
5. The spiritual need for consonance ; harmony and peace with the ecosystem.

(fig : 05).

Satisfying these needs are a prerequisite for a long term sustainable solution to the housing problem that meet the housing needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own housing needs. In other words, satisfying these needs in facility has a long term dimension unlike the short term dimension in schemes such as public built housing or developer built housing. Moreover, such a process enables to make a home out of a house and a residential community out of a group of people living in a group of dwellings. (Perera, 1996 ; 52)

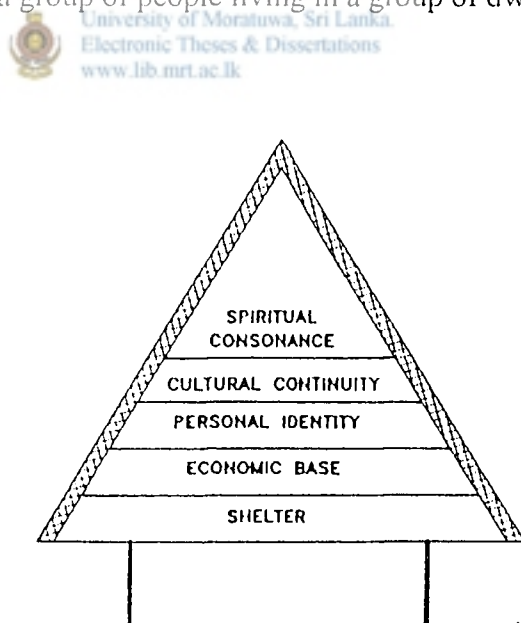


Fig : 05. Holistic framework of Housing (Source - Perera, 1996;12)

Finally the housing development should be able to be more environmentally sound, both socio-economically and physically to achieve sustainability.