

GSD at Habitat II Conference, Istanbul, June 3-14, 96

At the United Nations' Habitat II Conference held in Istanbul June 3-14, 1996, two cities with whom the Unit for Housing and Urbanization at the GSD has worked over the past few years received Global Best Practices Awards for "excellence in improving the living environment." They are Lublin, Poland and the Adjame district in Abidjan, the capital of Cote d'Ivoire. The Unit also organized a special training program for a third recipient, the ANHI housing agency of Morocco. Nicolas You, coordinator for Best Practices and Local Leadership Program at Habitat explained that the object of the Awards is to highlight particularly successful actions that improve the human environment. The secretary general of the United Nations, Dr. Boutros - Ghali, presented the awards to the recipients in plenary session.

Habitat II was the largest global conference on urban issues since 1976, when Habitat I was held in Vancouver. It attracted over 20,000 participants who debated critical issues, discussed the policy agenda and set directions for the coming decades. Mona Serageldin, Professor of Urban Planning and Associate Director of the Unit participated on panels discussing "Best Practices and Good Governance," "Cities in the South, Preparing for the Next Millennium," "Building Capacity for Better Cities," and "The Dialogue on Land Policy."

Robert Geddes, Kenan Professor of Architecture Emeritus at Princeton University, and Phyllis Lambert, Director of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, two members of the GSD Visiting Committee were delegates at the conference. Members of the Alumni Council: Mina Marefat(need to check with members who attended Habitat II) also participated in the conference.

Secretary General of Habitat, Dr. Wally N'Dow stated: "The collection and dissemination of Best Practices will be an important and lasting heritage of Habitat II." The Initiative will establish a database accessible on the Internet and a video library documenting these outstanding experiences in order to encourage transfer of knowledge, experience, and expertise. The Unit will participate in this interactive mode of exchange of ideas and learning.

The 17 member Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) on which the Unit had 2 representatives -- Professor Mona Serageldin, and Research Fellow, Janne Corneil -- reviewed some 600 submissions. It selected 100 Good Practices and 43 Best Practices. An independent 11 member jury selected 12 initiatives to be given official recognition and receive the Tokyo and Dubai awards for excellence.

In making their selection, TAC and the jury took note of the criteria established by the Preparatory Committee for Habitat II. These included: "tangible impact on improving people's living environments; partnerships between two or more key actors;

sustainability; innovativeness; transferability; and gender concerns.” The jury’s report stated that members “were unanimous in the selection of the award winners” and that “the selected practices represent excellent examples of processes and practices that will help cities and communities to meet the challenges facing them in the 21st century.”

Lublin, Poland is the only Best Practices Award winner from Eastern Europe and the CIS region. The Unit has worked closely with the city to institutionalize a participatory planning process in order to engage residents in the rehabilitation of their neighborhoods. USAID is funding technical assistance and training in support of Lublin’s local initiative program.

The program was launched in two lower income districts with a total population of 6,000. Both districts consist of a 19th century core of multi-family housing, originally designed for workers employed in adjacent factories, along with good quality single-family housing, and illegally built housing. Because the districts were designated as urban redevelopment sites, residents had been denied access to infrastructure and permits to improve their houses for over 30 years on the grounds that all existing housing was “temporary,” pending demolition.

Lublin’s community planning process has required an extensive outreach effort over a two-year period. The Act for Support of Local Investment, adopted in January 1994, commits the city to stimulate local initiatives in infrastructure development through the

sharing of investment costs. Today residents have become aware of the role they play in shaping the future of their neighborhoods and are actively involved in renovating their houses and upgrading their living environment.

The actual impacts of these initiatives have exceeded initial expectations. In a short span of two years, 137 houses have been renovated in two pilot areas and 50 new buildings have been constructed. Only six shops existed in the neighborhoods before the program was initiated. Today, 55 shops have been opened in the rehabilitated buildings and 18 buildings have been entirely converted to commercial use. Close to 120 people are working in these microenterprises. Residents have contracted private services for solid waste collection in the unpaved zones and are participating with the Lublin Foundation for Environmental Protection in cleaning up and landscaping the river front.

The other city that has been chosen for the Best Practices Award is Adjame in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. In the face of seemingly overwhelming obstacles, the district of Adjamé, has managed to initiate and institutionalize a sustainable community based development process. The effectiveness of the program rests on defining a new role for the municipality as catalyst and enabler; institutionalizing and nurturing community-based structures (CDQs) that foster empowerment and accountability at the neighborhood level and marshall the higher efficiency of independent microentrepreneurs to manage and deliver urban services.

Responding to severe budget constraints in a period of structural adjustment by judicious investment and leveraging of public resources, the initiative managed to expand rather than curtail urban services to the poor. Long term economic viability and sound financial management are critical concerns for the municipality. Sustainability is ensured by providing the CDQs with seed capital for new initiatives but requiring that all activities be operated on a self supporting basis. Except for the start up transfers, CDQs do not receive operating subsidies, thereby ensuring that the services provided respond to real community needs and are affordable to residents.

Having to rely on the resources they generate, the CDQs derive revenue from user fees for services delivered, such as security, sanitation and garbage collection and income from commercial leases. The success of the CDQ concept has enabled the launching of more initiatives each with its own CDQ style administrative structure. The most ambitious is the health initiative, which offers area residents access to primary care at an affordable cost. The municipality has paid for renovation of an existing building, medical equipment, rent and supplies for the first six months of operation following which the health center has to be financially self-supporting. The first center opened in May 1995 and is now successfully operating independently of the municipality.

The total seed capital granted to the CDQs by the municipality since 1988 when the initiative was launched is about \$50,000 (20 million CFA). Through the CDQs structure the municipality has achieved an impressive leverage ratio of six or higher on the public

resources invested. Labor intensive CDQs activities have generated full and part time employment for an estimated 2,000 workers alleviating hardships and youth unemployment during a decade long recession in an area where 60 percent of the population is between the ages of 18 and 35. Urgently needed services and development initiatives have been provided through empowerment, accountability and self-reliance at the community level. USAID has funded in part the documentation of this outstanding program.

The Unit is actively involved in the development of frameworks for participation and empowerment that structure a constructive interface between the city and the community and promote public / private partnerships. These frameworks also shape sustainable operational strategies that integrate economic revitalization and upgrading of the built environment at community level. As in the cases of Lublin and Adjame, the Unit provides capacity building and technical assistance to public agencies, NGOs, and private sector entities involved in urban development, regeneration of distressed neighborhoods and management of growth. The global trend toward reduced government spending as well as diminishing levels of international assistance have compounded the social, economic, and environmental problems in human settlements. Finding effective strategies that address these issues is a central concern for developed as well as developing countries. To respond to this challenge the Unit has developed a multi-tiered approach to management and development of urban areas that highlights strategic links between economic objectives and spatial planning; stresses participation and partnership

as the cornerstone of sustainable strategies; and integrates community based initiatives as a critical component of the development process.