basin–South Asia

Regional Knowledge Platform

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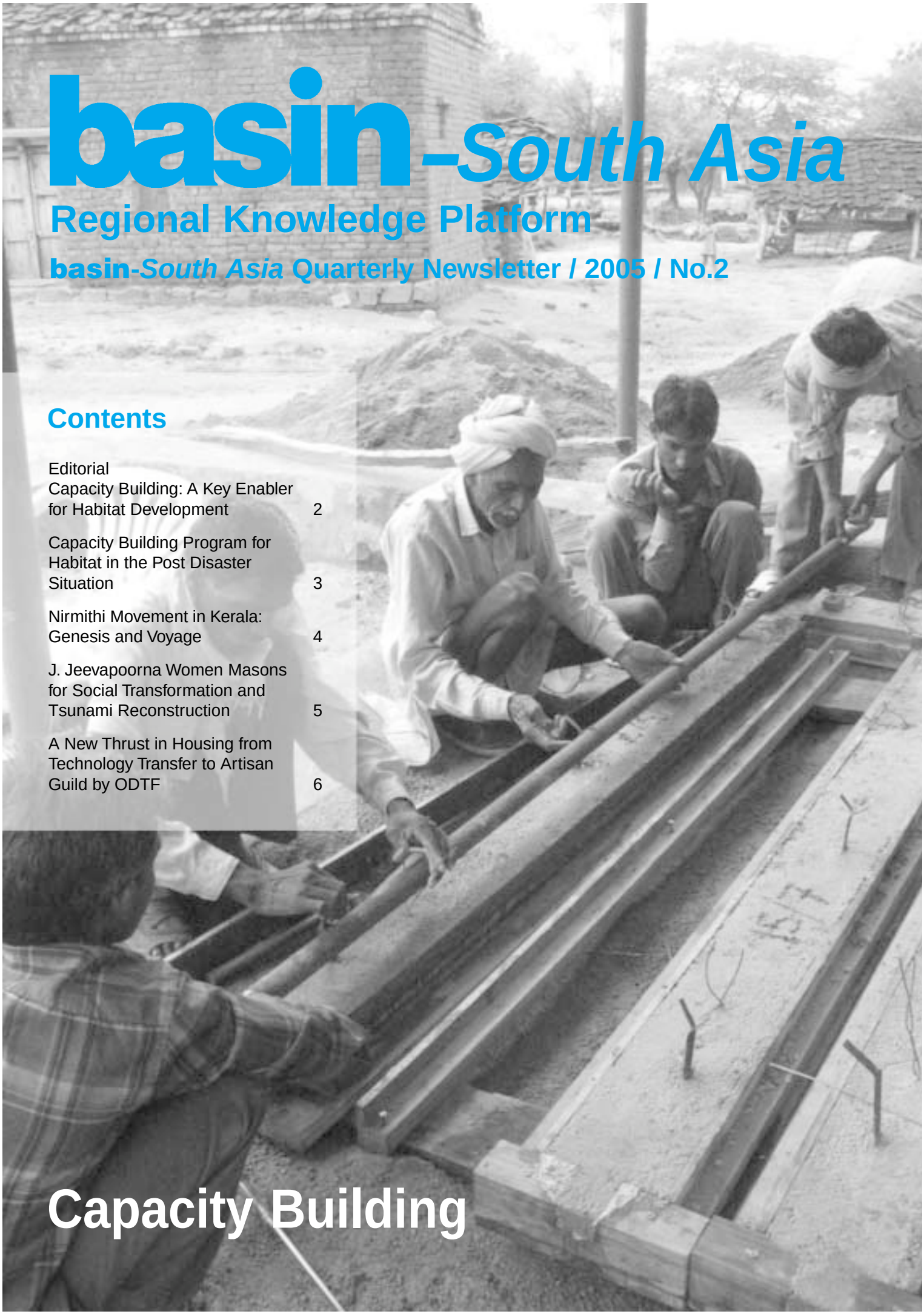

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Editorial

Capacity Building: A Key Enabler for Habitat Development

If adequate habitat for all is to become a reality, then one of the key players who must be attended to is the artisan delivering habitat services. Rural populations building their homes depend on this key person not only for the skills he/she possesses but also for advice, guidance regarding selection of materials, technologies, balancing construction budgets and also design.

With increased emphasis on "Sustainable Building Technologies" and Disaster Resistant Safe Construction practices, the value of quality of workmanship cannot be ignored. Meeting the growing habitat demand in rural areas requires large number of habitat service delivery providers who can reach the doorstep of house-owners in a decentralized and cost-effective manner. The sudden increase in demand for skilled artisans in post disaster response situations is another area where skill development at a large scale is required.

This issue of the **basin**-*South Asia* newsletter brings to you some work of organizations and individuals in the area of skill development of artisans in the rural building sector.

Rajendra and Rupal Desai describe a people centered approach of the National Centre for People's Action in Disaster Preparedness (NCPDP) towards capacity building for long-term disaster preparedness in Gujarat, India. They emphasize the need to empower the mason as well as address 'people's ignorance' about safe construction.

The Nirmithi Movement in India in the mid 1980's has resulted in the training of hundreds of thousands of building artisans in Kerala and rest of India. The movement has influenced many countries outside India and has had considerable success in the dissemination of appropriate construction methods through trained professionals as well as masons. It is now influencing curriculum development in professional institution and also supporting local village governments in their habitat programmes in Kerala.

The success of including women in the hitherto "all male" profession of masonry is dissented by the work of Jeevapoorna Women Masons Society. Not only does this initiative provide an alternative livelihood to women, it also enhances their social status and value by empowering them.

The ODTF experience of training and organizing professionals to respond to rural habitat needs in a viable manner is described in their journey from the Super Cyclone of 1999 till date. Their role model of training and organizing artisan groups with emphasis on women artisans is an example of reviving the ancient "guilds" within a contemporary context.

The stories and cases described in this issue are only a drop in the ocean. We will continue to bring you experiences and case studies in this thematic area.

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RCC door-frame production in rural Bundelkhand, facilitated by Tara Nirman Kendra, India

Focus

Capacity Building Program for Habitat in the Post Disaster Situation

Mason Training of Concrete Block Wall

Mason Training of Stone Masonry Wall

Background

Earthquakes, cyclones and floods result in huge losses, deaths and injury mainly on account of the fact that people at large, including building artisans, are ignorant about the ways to construct affordable disaster resistant houses. In a country like India where majority of houses are non-engineered this is highly worrisome. The ignorance also results in self-inflicted losses since people follow unscientific myths that prevail after the disasters. After Latur Earthquake people saw no future in their perfectly good houses, built of stone, wood and mud or those with foundation built on soil instead of rock. As a result thousands of houses were lost since people got them dismantled and the salvaged material were sold at a throw away price. In Uttaranchal many dismantled the upper story out of fear after Chamoli Earthquake. This resulted in a huge permanent loss to the community.

Disaster Rehabilitation & Peoples' Ignorance can also create major bottlenecks in the implementation of post disaster rehabilitation programs that are designed to be people driven. The Latur Earthquake rehabilitation program was the first such program. People were given funds in installments to either repair and retrofit their existing house or build a new one. Almost 98% beneficiaries opted for new construction of a 100 sqft. house rather than opting to retrofit up to five times larger area of an existing house. The program had inadequate component of information dissemination and technology transfer. It was observed that:

- Much confusion prevailed about the technologies for reconstruction, repair and retrofitting as suggested in the government guidelines because of inadequacy in information dissemination, too many experts and myths in circulation.
- In new construction too many different technologies were used creating much confusion for the people. If people had to spend money from their own pockets these new options were not affordable to most.
- The government engineers posted in the field had little or no knowledge of the disaster resistant technologies specified in the government guidelines
- Masons had no knowledge of relevant disaster resistant building technologies.
- People followed mason's advice rather than that of the engineers connected to the rehabilitation program.
- Several mason training programs were conducted by various agencies but without any standardization (there was no felt need among masons for training since the training was not mandatory).
- Critical materials & equipment were not available in the villages.

These limitations resulted in the following problems:

- Major bottlenecks cropped up during the program since beneficiaries did not understand the program including their entitlement and obligations, time constraints, modalities of payment, role of govt. engineers etc.
- Engineers lacked confidence in vernacular building technology and retrofitting measures and hence, dissuaded people from retrofitting their houses and instead promoted dismantling of vernacular houses and reconstruction of smaller houses.
- Masons kept following their old erroneous practice of construction.
- The violations of official norms in reconstruction were common.
- Materials for retrofitting were not available in market, thus making it difficult for people to opt for retrofitting.

In short the community at large could not get the most out of such a comprehensive and costly rehabilitation program, its state of vulnerability saw limited improvement, and it learnt very little about vulnerability reduction for future use.

Kutchch Earthquake Rehabilitation program of the state government used many lessons from Latur. As a result, following a rapid dissemination of information on vulnerability reduction technologies and the training of government engineers, a unique people focused program of Capacity Building for Long-term Disaster Preparedness was taken up with the financial support from the World Bank and the Government of India, which was carried out by National Centre for Peoples'-Action in Disaster Preparedness (NCPDP).

Goals and objectives of the program

1. To facilitate the effective implementation of government rehabilitation program in the selected villages.
2. To build peoples' capacity to face future disasters through the affordable, viable and sustainable disaster resistant building technologies, by the way of:

- Increasing effectiveness of government engineers through intensive on-site training;
- Sensitizing government personnel about the rehabilitation issues;
- Raising awareness of people about the dangers of future disasters and ways to face them and Building peoples' confidence to create a felt-need for disaster resistant technologies, through:
  - o Meetings, discussions, video shows, poster exhibition, wall slogans, pamphlet distribution, rally by school children etc.;
  - o Full size demonstration of affordable and sustainable disaster resistant building construction technology as well as retrofitting of an existing public building in every target village.

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Report

Nirmithi Movement in Kerala: Genesis and Voyage

The Genesis

The story of genesis of the Nirmithi movement dates back to 1985, from a tiny district in Kerala, "Quilon". During mid 1980s, the coast of Quilon was hit by a massive flood; scores of houses were washed away leaving several people houseless. Understanding the severity of the situation and inability of the government infrastructure to provide the needed support, the District Administration decided to bring in alternate technologies which were lying idle in the shelves of various building research institutions across the land. This led to a much used phrase called "lab to land" and gave birth to the "Nirmithi Movement", and scores of Nirmithi Kendras, institutions developing, practising and propagating Cost Effective and Environment Friendly (CEEF) technologies. While the movement gained acceptance and acceleration, several issues arose, such as lack of trained manpower, non - availability of products, dearth in managerial capacities etc. To address the short fall, the movement focussed on giving appropriate training in the construction sector, setting up production centres, training engineers etc. This resulted in setting up of the Kerala State Nirmithi Kendra (KESNIK), to co ordinate and monitor the activities of Nirmithi Kendras in Kerala. Simultaneously KESNIK had also started Rural / Regional Building Centres titled "Housing Guidance Centres" to address the issues of thousands of people desiring a house of their own.

The Recognition

This movement has gained an unparalleled recognition by the Central Government and various State Governments of the country. The relevance and effectiveness of the Nirmithi movement was also internationally recognised at the 14th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Settlements (UNCHS) held at Nairobi, Kenya in 1993. In continuation to this, Nirmithi was selected as a "Global Best Practice" by the United Nations during Habitat II, the UN Conference on Human Settlements, held at Istanbul for significant initiative in the field of sustainable human settlements development.

The Contribution

Nirmithi Kendra has been focussing on manpower development since 1986. It functions as a training house to impart skills to local workmen in innovative housing techniques and to create a cadre of trained workers in each revenue block of a district. It has also set up "Nirmithi Institute of Habitat Management" and "Applied Technology and Training Centre" for imparting training to the managers and artisans respectively. The capacity development activities of KESNIK are well accepted. HUDCO recognized KESNIK as its Regional Training centre, under which, engineers working in Nirman Kendras (Building Centres) and other government agencies of various states were given training.

Recognising the increased demand for housing and escalating costs of construction, the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) also joined hands with KESNIK to improve the accessibility and availability of cost effective, energy efficient and environment friendly building materials. The programme was implemented through Village Panchayats in Kerala. This project devised several activities to ascertain the reality such as awareness of CEEF amongst people, Mobile *Vahini* (Exhibition of CEEF on wheels), workshops for all levels of people including elected representatives, setting up of information centres, production centres, capacity building programmes for managers, artisans, entrepreneurs, linking with R & D institutes, financial institutions, local NGOs, information dissemination through video films, leaflets etc. The KESNIK-SDC tie up shifted its policy to "Rural Housing for Poor" emphasizing the provision of shelters to the homeless. Special emphasis is given to supply of CEEF building materials to five families belonging to below poverty line in each Panchayat, selected by the Panchayat for constructing a house of their own to provide a model to other beneficiaries. In this project capacity building of beneficiaries is emphasized, especially, women and rural youth to equip the unemployed and encourage self-help.

KESNIK has also actively participated in the rehabilitation works in Latur (Maharashtra) and Bhuj (Gujarat) and of late in the tsunami affected areas of Kerala. In a project sponsored by OXFAM (GB) for rehabilitation, KESNIK has given special emphasis to bring the shattered minds of the victims to normalcy by giving them solace and energy to revive themselves with the help of specially trained personnel.

To overcome the situation of droughts in Kerala, Government has initiated rain water harvesting in the state. In response to this venture, Nirmithi has been chosen by the Government as a nodal agency for implementing the "Rain Water Harvesting Programme". KESNIK has already set up model harvesting units of different types in the Campus and a Rain Centre with equipment to measure rainfall and other educational apparatus related to Rain Water Harvesting is proposed. Educational and awareness programmes are also in the pipeline.

Furthermore, under the decentralization effort of the Kerala Government, Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) and KESNIK have joined hands to impart training to the technical staff deployed to the Panchayats, on CEEF and construction of buildings using locally available materials. It is expected that with this training the answer to the issues related to the Rural Housing could gain fast momentum. The shift of the programme is within the frame work of decentralization and the voyage still goes on...

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Report

J. Jeevapoorna Women Masons for Social Transformation and Tsunami Reconstruction

Devastation in Tsunami Disaster

Train Masons of Jeevapoorna Women Masons Society

The tsunami waves of December 26th, 2004 have washed away the coastal belt panchayats of Kerala. Thousands of people in the villages of Alappadu, Quilon district, and Arattupuzha, Alappuzha district of Kerala State, have lost everything – family members, houses, belongings and even the land where they lived.

Alappadu panchayat is a narrow strip of land in Quilon district of Kerala State which is 17.5 kms long and 150 m wide, measuring 7.38 sq. kms area. It has a population of 25000 with a density of 3332 per sq. km. There are 12500 male and 12400 female populations in the panchayat. The peculiar situation of this panchayat is that on one side there is the Arabian sea and on the other is theT.S.Canal. The width of the panchayat at certain point is less than 300 meters. The famous "azhimukham" [the meeting point of the lake in the sea] is at the end of this panchayat. The residents of this area have been vulnerable to natural disasters. The government has invested huge amounts to provide sea walls in most part of this Panchayat. But some parts were left out and the waves made their vicious attack heavily on these areas. 176 valuable human lives were lost in the tragedy. Out of a total of 7000 families, 4000 houses were partially damaged and 3000 houses were fully destroyed and wiped away by the sea waves.

Thus, there rose a need of skilled masons in large numbers to undertake the massive task of rebuilding. With good male masons gravitating to the Gulf for better pay, the time was opportune to induct women into the masonry since the construction sector was booming and masons were short in supply.

Women as masons [skilled construction workers]

The process of skill upgrading as part of sanitation programme of Socio-Economic Units of Kerala fortunately stood in good stead to support the reconstruction task. As part of this sanitation program of the state, began in 1988, 82 women were given training in masonry and the construction of twin pit latrines. The law to introduce women into the skilled masonry is the result of a successful experiment done under the leadership of Ms.Thresiamma Mathew in 1989 in Thrissur district of Kerala*. Her initiative to follow an inner urge to bring women in to the fore front at par with men in this non-traditional job during the implementation of a sanitation project was met with jeers in the beginning, but the resulting empowerment and gender equality and justice that this courageous venture affected caught the attention of many development agencies. Although it was a cultural shock at that time [and even now] national, international and bilateral governments working especially in water and sanitation have accepted the inclusion of women in all skill trainings arising as part of a project. Thus Kerala government has made it a rule to give training to women in all water and sanitation projects. Eighty two women got the chance to become masons and construct more than 2000 latrines in Alappadu Panchayat. They had already stepped on the path of transformation 5 years ago. These women hail from different parts of the Panchayat and are very poor. The tsunami has left them with a deep scar of loss especially of one of their own company of women masons.

Women masons for disaster management and social transformation

At first, the women masons of Alappadu gathered together to shed tears over their beloved ones who had been snatched away by the tsunami waves. It was a time to pour out the feelings fear and adventures they went through during the traumatic event. It was also an occasion to tighten their bonds and to make a new start with renewed courage under the leadership of Ms. Thresiamma Mathew. Jyothi Jeevapoorna Trust – Archana Women's Center took up the challenge. Together they decided to undergo higher training in house construction and 3 weeks of expert training was imparted to these tsunami affected women. Engineers, architects and sociologists contributed to make the training exceptionally good quality. 42 women underwent the nitty-gritty of this very complicated training of constructing a 430 sq.ft. house with very specific directives of the government. The agency has undertaken the construction of 10 houses and the houses have been constructed with accuracy and perfection in a township offered by the government of Kerala.

The Jyothi Jeevapoorna Trust has trained women in Kottayam too and they are well advanced in construction of different types of houses. They know the low cost technologies propagated by the Nirmithi Kendra well versed in ferrocement technologies too. These women masons from Kottayam were given a chance to visit the tsunami affected area and the house construction site. They were extremely moved by the pathetic situation of their sisters and they wanted to express their solidarity with these women. They offered to construct at least one house and establish a model of women's solidarity. Though these women had plenty of work near to their homes, they took up the challenge of leaving their homes and spend the days less comfortably at the worksite. With order, precision and team spirit they completed one house winning the appreciation of the local women masons and the public. This was a powerful expression of the "TRANSFORMATION" the women masons themselves are undergoing through the socio cultural training they receive.

Thresiamma Mathew is the founder of Jeevapoorna Women Masons Society with its head office at Thrissur district. She retired from the Socio Economic Unit Foundation where she was Director – Gender and Development and established the Jyothi Jeevapoorna Trust under which the present tsunami programs are taken up.

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* This experiment of Thresiamma Matters has been documented in a book: Menon, Leela (2003). *Building Walls of Confidence, Jeevapoorna Women Masons Program-Kerala*, Seuf-Gad-Jeewoms, Thrissur District, Kerala.

A New Thrust in Housing from Technology Transfer to Artisan Guild by ODTF

Introduction

A group of young professional Architects, Engineers, Physical Planners and Social Scientists came together to participate in a movement to house the rural poor of Orissa and blend the basic minimum needs to promote a sound habitat system. They have combined under a newly constituted society, the ODTF (Orissa Development Technocrats' Forum). The genesis of this team is the endeavour of UNDP-SDC programme launched soon after the super cyclone of Orissa in 1999 where million lives and properties were lost. To reconstruct the habitats, with houses (the minimum shelter) and restore livelihoods, looked very simple at planning stage but this team members

A TDU in progress and completed in Puri district

as UN Volunteers entering the field felt that they were fighting a losing battle. No building material at site or nearby areas, no skilled or semi-skilled man power available, with little or no money. Most of the NGO facilitated houses were contractor-driven with little or no involvement of the end-users. The IAY (*Indira Avaas Yojana* – a Government of India Rural Housing Programme) beneficiaries had no idea how to materialise their houses with so little money (INR 22,000/- per dwelling unit). But everyone felt that a *pucca* (permanent) disaster resistant house is the panacea against future calamities, therefore the houses that they are going to build must be *pucca*.

Role of the Team of Young Professionals

The young professionals took the challenge of first becoming a part of the village community. They lived, moved along with their men, women and children to know their needs. Their gospel was not to rebuild the disaster in the future construction. Community centres uniquely designed by each village community got constructed technically facilitated by these team members to become the TDU (Technology Demonstration Unit) as the eye opener for the villagers where cost-effective disaster-resistant features were introduced and local manpower was trained in good masonry practices.

Thrust on Capacity Building Issues

It is the people who will spend the money for the houses and shall live in the houses; therefore they must be involved in deciding about the construction of the houses – the process became more important than the product. With sound rationale, the process revolved around the Capacity Building theme focusing on the following issues:

a) Promotion of local building materials and technologies;

b) Development of self-supporting system/ institutions in an entrepreneurship mode;

c) Improving capacity of community to access safer house building options;

d) Capacity building of local institutions and community towards building disaster-proof safer habitat.

Capacity Building of Masons/ Construction Artisans

In all the above mentioned items capacity building of the community was felt absolutely necessary. Many lessons were learnt after staying with people and partnering with them in the reconstruction exercise. It was realised how simple awareness generation can help to build capacity in the community, eg. how to select good bricks and stack them properly, soaking them adequately in water before using them; *Many were not even aware that foundation is needed for a kutcha (temporary)house!*

On-site training of Masons

It is obvious that one cannot reach every house owner to convey the art and science of house building. Therefore the mason group was the key change agent who could be empowered so that the high quality and safe shelter can be achieved. A number of masons were trained in construction and skill was built in many. The training process for capacity building of all the stakeholders was taken up simultaneously. A single objective of improving Rural Housing, focusing on the central theme of Capacity Building was taken up.

To fulfil the objective of training the masons belonging to the informal sector, a sound course curriculum was developed in vernacular to impart hands-on and class room training. The model was well accepted by Panchayati Raj Institutions, NGOs and the Government of Orissa.

OPEPA (Orissa Primary Education Programme Authority), OCHC (Orissa Cooperative Housing Corporation), ORHDC (Orissa Rural Housing Development Corporation), and SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) exposed many of their engineers and masons before adopting cost-effective alternative technologies in the buildings to be constructed by them.

Women in Construction

Training women in construction works has had far reaching consequences. It has been long realized that with the farm sector being seasonal/ mechanized and requiring less labour, the construction sector does provide vast scope for employment where women can take a positive role in local areas while men having wider mobility can go to serve the entire catchment area beyond the Gram Panchayat. Imparting trainings has been found to be one of the most effective paths that lead to women's empowerment – this has also been realised by many in the Government as well as NGO sectors after seeing many such successful training programmes conducted by ODTF in the field.

Training of women construction labourers – the slum dwellers of Bhubaneswar

Building Movement

The masons trained have proved to be a good catalyst for carrying forward the building movement in appropriate technologies and giving fresh filip to the construction industry by adoption of a number of good construction practices.

Sustainability of the project

The movement needs to be sustained even after the supports end. Therefore self sustained "groups" to carry forward the movement were thought of and given shape which resulted in the creation of various institutions from grass-root level to the state level.

The grass root tier is the most important in the milieu represented by the trained masons from ASHG (Artisan Self Help Group). The groups are constituted at Gram Panchayat level but block is their area of operation. The rationale for grouping the trained masons with artisans like plumbers, carpenters, electricians, etc was to build capacity of the group as better performer and promote them into an entrepreneurial mode besides facilitating the access of the community to a skilled group that could offer house-building solutions in a comprehensive manner.

The Canvas

The ODTF, a synergetic group, having had the chance to meet and perform on a common platform since the aftermath of Super Cyclone of Orissa 1999, did not like to come to an end with the closure of the housing project. Capacity Building has become a continuous process for the team at ODTF. The team has all along been trained, oriented and exposed to exemplary works in habitat, earthquake/ other disaster-resistant technologies, the art and science of community mobilisation/ PRA techniques, etc. Organisation Development has also added to the capacity of this team of development/ social technocrats.

It was a realisation that Orissa is not only the poorest state in the country, but disasters of all types particularly cyclones, floods and droughts occur in a periodic manner. The tribal pockets are still considered to be "lock-jams" of the disadvantaged. Whether there is disaster or no disaster housing and habitat condition is in disarray. Besides the progressive reforms in many other sectors, housing, if made accessible to the common mass will not only help in sheltering people alone but it can also give access to livelihood options.

A modest study indicates that the additional housing requirement per year in the state is 2.24 million. The 2001 census reveals that more than 70% of the total housing stock in rural Orissa is unserviceable *kutchha*. Further, access to clean drinking water, proper waste disposal, and overall sanitation is a distant dream for many.

Conclusion

In the above scenario cost-effective building system is not enough. The delivery methods needs an innovative approach suitable for rural entrepreneur group, self help programme with the help of capacitated manpower from every sphere is the need of the hour.

To spearhead such a movement hardly succour from government sector can be expected – a forum like ODTF is perhaps the right instrument to intervene and act upon. And perhaps this is the reason behind ODTF team winning recognition and being called upon as professionals to help in the capacity building of local artisans in technical and social aspects beyond the state of Orissa in various states of Uttaranchal, Bihar, Karnataka, tsunami-affected Tamil Nadu and Nicobar Islands.

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Capacity Building Program...

- Helping evolve delivery mechanism through on-site, hands-on skill up-gradation of local masons at the demonstration sites in each village;
- Training in roof rain-water harvesting system through full size demonstration;
- Leaving behind in each village a Disaster Preparedness Brigade that is concerned about preparing for future disasters and a Disaster Preparedness Centre.

The program covered 478 most severely affected villages in 15 blocks of 5 districts in the State of Gujarat, covering a population of nearly a million people spread over 24,000 sq. km. area. It trained over 6000 untrained village masons. All in all, the program was able to achieve most of its objectives inspite of constraints at all levels. Constraints included (i) required speed of response; (ii) dependence on more than one government departments, (iii) post disaster psyche of people, (iv) overloaded masons finding it difficult to spare time for training etc.

Lessons for future disasters

Many lessons were learnt from the program. A similar program with appropriate changes should form the first step in future disaster rehabilitation programs to ensure much greater effectiveness. For the program to be successful (a) it must be given a top priority from the highest level in the government; (b) a positive bureaucrat that understands fully the relevance of the program must lead the program from beginning to end; (c) it should cover every community/village/town that is going to be covered under the rehabilitation program, thus making the people suitably aware and getting all local masons suitably trained; (d) every engineer that is going to man the rehabilitation program must participate in it, and finally; (e) the rehabilitation activities are taken up only in the communities where this program has been carried out; (f) one set of standards/guidelines and technology must be followed. The outcome of such a program could be listed as follows:

- Every field engineer and his superior will know what to expect in the field and how to tackle it using the relevant disaster resistant technologies including the retrofitting for the vulnerable existing buildings.
- Trained masons will speak the same language of disaster resistant building technologies, as the engineers, thus being mutually supportive.
- Adequately informed beneficiaries who will make the best of the opportunity on hand, and thus making the rehabilitation program effective in bringing the long-term security against future disaster in true sense.
- Bring full size technology demonstrations for new construction as well as retrofitting of existing structures in every settlement that can be referred to when in doubt during the rehabilitation program and after.
- Bring printed materials and videos about the technologies for use during rehabilitation program and after.
- Bring simple tools and equipment for proper execution of the task in rehabilitation program and after.
- Disaster Brigades that would monitor the rehabilitation program activities and also prepare to face the future disasters.

Disaster Preparedness Centre & Villagers

Since the effective information dissemination on affordable housing technologies is the key to vulnerability reduction, top priority must be placed on this issue in any disaster preparedness program.

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South Asia

Auroville Earth Institute aims to research, develop, promote and transfer earth-based technologies which are cost and energy effective. These technologies are disseminated through training courses, seminars, workshops, publications and consultancy within and outside India.

Coastal Area Disaster Mitigation Efforts is a network of twenty voluntary organizations working for the uplift and disaster preparedness of Fishing Communities in India.

Exnora works as a catalyst in bringing about local initiative and community participation in overall improvement in quality of life. It aims at developing civic and environmental consciousness among citizens through self-help, enactment of suitable legislation and environmental protection initiatives.

Grambangla Unnayan Committee, Bangladesh is a non-profit, non-governmental voluntary development organization working over the last 12 years for people whose lives are dominated by extreme poverty, exclusion, deprivation, illiteracy, disease and handicaps.

Orissa Development Technocrats' Forum is a registered society working to facilitate an effective rural housing delivery system in Orissa through formalizing the rural construction sector and the "Promotion of Appropriate Construction Technologies and Opportunities for Sustainable Livelihoods."

Society of Environmental Journalists, Nepal is a national level media organization working in the sector of environment. Their mission is to build up public awareness on environmental issues by enhancing capacities of local journalists for improved quality, accuracy and visibility in environmental reporting.

Trust for Village Self Governance is a charitable trust focusing on local self governance in villages using panchayat as a tool. Their focus is on creating sustainable employment and providing opportunities in habitat development.

Aga Khan Planning and Building Services, Pakistan works to improve the built environment, particularly housing design and construction, village planning, natural hazard mitigation, environmental sanitation, water supply, and other living conditions. These goals are achieved through the provision of material and technical assistance and construction management services.

Development Alternatives is a not-for-profit sustainable development enterprise that designs and promotes programmes and products which, through the use of alternative technology, contribute to the enrichment of human life.

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is Switzerland's international cooperation agency within the Swiss Foreign Ministry. The Rural Housing Project (RHP) supported by the SDC focuses on providing choices and access to poor rural families for improved housing, especially for affordable, energy and resource-efficient and environment-friendly building material and technologies.

basin-*South Asia* Regional Knowledge Platform (basin-*SA*) is committed to *"developing knowledge systems and promoting collaborative action within South Asia to enable access by the poor to sustainable habitat and livelihoods."*

The South Asian node of the global '**basin'** network was set up in 2004 to enable knowledge development and sharing. It seeks to promote collaborative action in the area of habitat and livelihoods for poverty reduction. The parent Network has successfully provided relevant and timely knowledge and resource links to governemnt agencies, financiers, builders and developers, architects, planners and producers of building materials. It houses an intensive knowledge base and supports the regional node in quality management of its products and services.