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' A HOUSING STRATEGY FOR THE URBAN POOR '

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF TOWN AND COUNTRY  
PLANNING, UNIVERSITY OF MORATUWA, SRI LANKA FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING.

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## THE OBJECTIVES AND PROCESS OF THE STUDY

The argument of this work is based on the hypothesis that there is a certain group of people in our society who have been over looked by all housing procedures, programmes and legislation. In other words this group of people who account for more than 50% of the urban population have become 'invisibles' to the formal framework of housing. Due to constraints imposed through procedures, standards and legislation and also due to the lack of accessibility to resources, these people suffer from great hardship and do not have the freedom to improvise shelter that is within their means.



This dissertation attempts at answering three fundamental questions arising from the hypothesis: WHO are these invisible people? WHY are they invisible? and HOW can we take measures to recognise and improve people's efforts to house themselves. Part one of this dissertation tries to identify these people in terms of their economic and housing condition. In the analysis of the economic condition in Chapter 1 the urban poor are identified in terms of their employment which is a direct function of the economic dualism. Chapter 2 discusses the fallacy of applying physical standards to measure good housing and good housing is judged in terms of its usefulness to the users. However in order to assess the magnitude of the problem conventional quantitative methods of stating the housing problem is also used in this chapter.

The analysis of WHY this earlier said group of people are invisible to the formal framework is dealt with in part two.

This is analysed in terms of accessibility to housing finance, houses constructed by public authorities, land and how official standards and legislation inhibit people from seeking solutions to their own personal housing problem.

In the analysis of Housing Finance in chapter 3 the difficulty of arriving at a fixed figure as the households' ability to pay is discussed and concludes that the housing process should be such that the households have the freedom to decide on how much they are going to pay for housing. Examining the loan systems it has been observed that the procedure involved in getting a housing loan restricts its accessibility to a limited group of people in the society. Household's ability to compete in the officially recognised



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The contribution of the public authority housing to the housing stock and its accessibility to the poor is discussed in chapter 4. It shows that unauthorised form of building has surpassed all official forms of construction. To compare and contrast two types of housing delivery the case studies of Nadiwela Aided Self Help Housing Scheme and the middle income group flats scheme at Ratmalana are taken into consideration in this chapter. From these case studies it was evident that the freedom given to people to decide on the way they should be housed, gives greater satisfaction and pride in the housing process.

Chapter 5 deals with land for housing. The question of whether market values are more important than human values is discussed here. It also states the necessity of a better land distribution policy.

The gap between what ought to be achieved and what can be achieved in terms of housing standards is discussed in chapter 6. It emphasises the need for performance standards than the conventional method of saying how it can be achieved. It also states how administrative procedures have overlooked the poor and the ignorant.

In the analysis of how effective the housing legislation has been, chapter 7 concludes that the impact of them has not been felt by the poor. Although in theory the legislation seemed good it has not been possible to implement them to the best intended purposes. The need for an act that promotes building is also stressed in this chapter.

The most crucial of the three questions attempted to answer is HOW to alliev the problem. which in fact is the title of this dissertation. A Strategy has been developed which recognises people's initiative and freedom of decision making in the housing process. Reforms needed in the administrative structure and allocation of resources to implement the proposed strategy are outlined here. The essence of this strategy is depicted in the Multiple Choice Housing Process Chart. It has to be noted that the strategy has been evolved from positive conclusions made in the analysis stage. The conclusions made in each chapter are given in the underlined statements. The Strategy is essentially one that is in keeping with the economic conditions of the country, in that it does not call for a massive investment. This has been possible because the emphasis has been on the improving of the housing process than on the end product - the houses.

Incidentally this Strategy conforms to two main resolutions passed at the United Nations Habitat Conference on Human Settlements. One is that, in planning settlement emphasis has to be made on development of the poorest sectors of



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the society and the other is that governments should make the necessary institutional framework to help people to house themselves.

The floor diagram indicates the process of the study and the method in which the problem has been tackled. In writing this thesis a chapter has been dedicated to each cage of the floor diagram. For the purpose of clarity part 1 of the dissertation is typed on white paper, part 11 in cream and part three in yellow paper.

In the analysis, various parameters have been discussed in relation to identified systems of delivering shelter. System 1 is free-hold dwellings constructed by own resources. System 11 is free-hold dwellings constructed by borrowed resources. System 3 is rented houses constructed by private individuals. System 4 is free-hold dwellings constructed by public authorities. System 5 is squatting in public and private land and System 6 is squatting in public buildings. In the text reference is made to the same numerical to identify the delivery system.

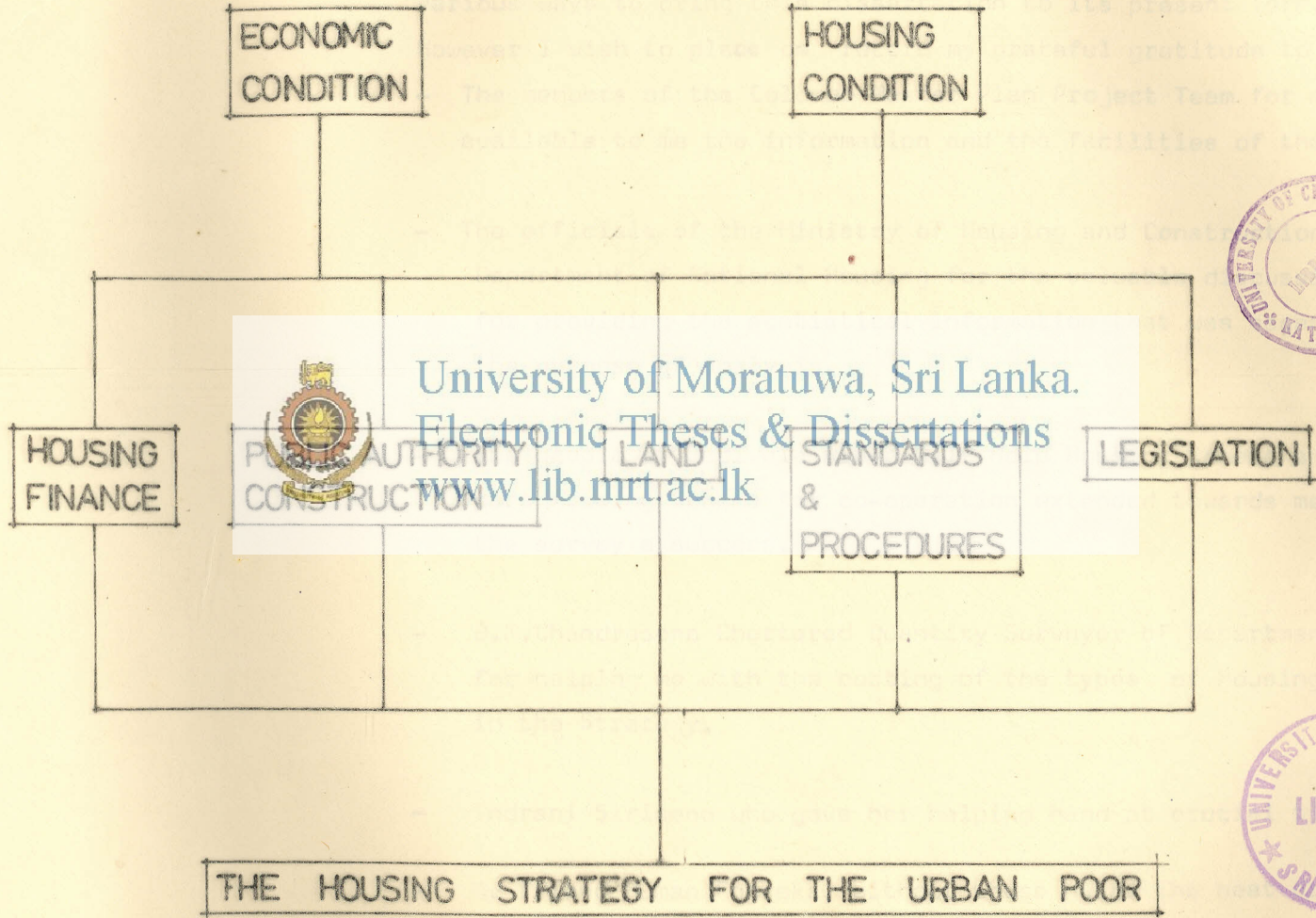
Although this study refers generally to urban areas of Sri Lanka, the main concern has been the urban areas of the Colombo Metropolitan Region and in particular to the city of Colombo. The Colombo Metropolitan Region considered coincides with the Colombo Metropolitan Region defined by the Colombo Master plan project, which is given in map No. 2. This restriction of the physical area of the study was mainly because of the familiarity of the area and the easy access to statistical information. However the Strategy developed can be applied to all urban areas of Sri Lanka with only a modification to the land allocation.

# THE PROCESS

PROBLEM DEFINITION  
& MAGNITUDE

ANALYSIS

STRATEGY



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WHO suffer from  
poor housing?

WHY are they  
invisible?

HOW to alleviate  
the problem?





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Grateful acknowledgement is made to many people mostly involved in housing whose anonymity has to be preserved, for assisting me in various ways to bring this dissertation to its present form.

However I wish to place on record my grateful gratitude to :

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  - The officials of the Ministry of Housing and Construction and the Department of National Housing for the valuable discussions and for providing the statistical information that was essential for the purpose of analysis.
- University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka.  
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- The people of Madiwela Aided Self Help Housing Scheme and De Soysapura Housing Scheme for co-operation extended towards me to make the survey a success.

- D.M.Chandrasena Chartered Quantity Surveyor of Department of Buildings for helping me with the costing of the types of housing that is used in the Strategy.
- Indrani Sirisena who gave her helping hand at crucial times.
- My friend Human Fonseka, without whose pains the neat drawings in this thesis would have not been possible. His contribution to the presentation of this thesis is gratefully appreciated.

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- Geetha who made me realise the need for a housing strategy for the urban poor and for being a constant source of ideas during the course of the study.
- My supervisor Micheal Slingsby without whose guidance, supervision and help this dissertation would have not been a reality. To him I owe a great debt of gratitude especially for cultivating the enthusiasm on the arguments that I developed in the study.
- My cousin Dayanthi Dhanapala who burnt the midnight oil to type this thesis so expertly and expeditiously in the very short time allocated to her.



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