

PREFACE

Welcome to the Millennium Housing and Hazards International Conference, *Village Infrastructure to cope with the Environment*. This conference is the third to come out of the BUET-University of Exeter link and it brings up to date our knowledge and experiences of international Building for Safety activities. It is the first of our conferences to take place in two venues, Dhaka and Exeter, to bring together and to help inform participants in two continents of the exciting work on community building programmes now underway in SE Asia.

Previous Housing and Hazards Seminars have been very important in helping to shape the development of our work together and we are very grateful to all who have contributed since 1996. We are confident that this conference and your participation will give our partnership another push in the right direction towards achieving our goal of hazard-resistant homes for all in rural Bangladesh.

Unlike our previous Seminar proceedings, the papers presented here have been preprinted. We have done this so that participants in both venues can share discussion of all the presentations. However, it means that we are unable to include any reports on the formal and informal discussions we know will enlighten and enliven us all. Be assured that we will be noting all discussions and your comments will influence our future work!

The BUET-Exeter link partnership believes that adequate housing is a fundamental human need that must be available to all. Much work on 'low-cost' housing has been done by many people over many years but the numbers of sub-standard kutchas in Bangladesh continues to rise (see, for example, Malcolm Chisholm's contribution to the 1999 Seminar). Comparison of the papers presented in this volume with those of the previous seminars shows how far we have come to understanding some of the reasons for that and in proposing some solutions. Robert Hodgson's presentation suggests one way forward and we are open to others. In 1996 we embarked on a long term programme; this conference comes at an exciting time as we start moving into a phase of implementing the lessons learned from our field studies.

We are sure that the papers included in this volume will provoke discussion and thought. They cover a range of topics from the technically complex matters investigated by Professor Seraj and others in BUET to the practical aspects of disseminating good practice messages. Land-use planning and ecological matters will be found side by side herein. Some concerns are both raised and addressed; for example, Professor Islam and his colleagues

draw attention to the degradation of the natural environment brought about by over-development while Imtiaj Rasul suggests ways of improving bamboo cultivation to get more from a plot and reduce exploitation.

We have contributions concerning most of the major hazards present in Bangladesh and India, including wind, floods and earthquakes and many contributors draw attention to the importance of indigenous knowledge in combatting those hazards. Sociological factors influence housing design and must be taken into account as Zahirul Islam et al note.

Truly, our subject is wide-ranging and complicated, as these contributions show. We look forward to a well-informed debate during the conference. Following that, the BUET-Exeter partnership will continue to work with all concerned individuals and organisations and will welcome contributions from any reader at any time because secure housing is a basic requirement for most of Bangladesh's citizens and one that must be addressed now.

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