



Issue 3: Summer 2007

Affordable, Hazard-Resistant Homes Worldwide

Update:

Well, it has been a while since our last newsletter, which is mainly down to me. The Group has metamorphosed, with more senior members moving on to quieter lives and younger ones going out to exciting adventures in Latin America to apply H&H principles, leaving a lot for the coordinator to get on top of!

Our Bangladeshi colleagues have also been on the move, with Dr Iftekhar spending the past two years in Bangkok and Dr Salek moving to Canada with his family. So it has been all change....

However, some things stay the same and there is good news to report too. I have just returned from a visit to Bangladesh and have been very pleasantly surprised to find that, while our backs were turned, the seeds we have planted were developing into nice bright green shoots.

Further construction work

This photo shows the happy children of Sundarban's Pre-school number seven in their mud-concrete school building. This was the third to be built and is now two years old. The pointed windows provide additional resistance against the unsightly cracking that often develops near windows due to minor settlements, as well as forming an attractive architectural feature.



I'm happy to report that the other mud-concrete houses have survived well, too. They seem to perform quite as well as similar brick ones.

New members coming along in Dhaka

It was in Dhaka that I found the most exciting changes in the past 3 years. When I was last there, BRAC University was planning to implement modules in rural architecture. Now their first cohort of 15 or so students is about to graduate. This, it seems to me is the real output of the H&H link: students Kabir and Yasmin, who were introduced to the subject at BUET by Dr Iftekhar, are now passing on their knowledge and experience to other architects and are developing a reservoir of enthusiasm for the subject.



The students have been on several rural residential courses with Kabir, Yasmin, Ajit and other old friends. I was fortunate to be able to talk with some



of them (see photos) and we had a lively discussion that ranged across many aspects of rural homes in Bangladesh. However, their big question was 'how can we get involved?'. I have no ready answer to this. It is a matter for Bangladeshis to work out in Bangladesh - but we in H&H must be ready to play our part when someone does come up with an answer!



Greenery in Sundarban

As you who have been there will know, Sundarban in northern Bangladesh, where the first H&H projects were done, is a very green and verdant place. Now, thanks to Ajit and Kabir, it is even greener. They have set up the 'Shelter and Biodiversity' Centre, Shamparka. Through this, they encourage landowners to establish biodiversity along the road banks of rural Bangladesh. Shamparka's first scheme involves the 12 neighbours of a 1.5km length of road in Sundarban, which is now nearly entirely planted with native trees that will provide fruit, nuts, shelter for birds and an attractive view for everyone. Naturally, I had to be part of this and to plant 'my' tree!

Plans for the future - Bangladesh

There are several interesting developments in Bangladesh to support, as outlined above. However, there is another pressing matter. H&H has the aim of developing awareness of the parameters of poor housing among audiences at all levels, not just the grass-roots.

We have been part of the network of the International University of Business, Agriculture and Technology for eleven years now. IUBAT, one of Bangladesh's first private universities, has been supportive of our efforts and we have helped their students with our experience and hard-won knowledge wherever possible. This trip, I presented a lecture to a disaster management seminar at IUBAT. IUBAT has developed a series of policy papers that are intended to help form opinions and strategies at government level. For several years we have been planning to consolidate the H&H experiences into such a IUBAT policy paper and this, I think, should be our next move.

It would help both the BRAC students to answer their own question and Housing and Hazards Group to shape our own future activities.

Plans for the future - UK

We will, of course, continue to promote H&H principles wherever we can. We contribute where possible to discussions, proceedings and seminars but there are still far too few people actively thinking about the built environment of the world's poorest people. There is a lot of talk about sustainable livelihoods and other buzz-phrases. All of these are important but the home each of us lives in is a far more tangible expression of the sustainability of our existences.

We need to keep actively pursuing the fundamentals, dare I say foundations, of sustainable living and to find ways of supporting Ajit and promoting others like him to carry on the work. This takes time and commitment.

Please get in touch if you have either to spare. Catherine, who set up the website has moved on and Lily who did our last Newsletter is now in El Salvador building houses. Rumana, who studied with Yasmin and Kabir, is at present in Pakistan, also building houses post earthquake. I have been flitting around, including a spell in Sri Lanka after the tsunami so the work of H&H is bearing fruit and we will always welcome more Group members...

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Thank you!

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