

THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN
LOW INCOME HOUSING PROVISION
IN THE CONTEXT OF OVERALL URBAN DEVELOPMENT
IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

AN ABSTRACT

This paper examines some aspects of housing provision for low income urban residents in Trinidad and Tobago, with a view to determining in what way the public sector should be involved. As a geographical study, it is limited mainly to the consideration of physical and spatial aspects of housing provision. This approach has seldom been used but this paper shows that it is indeed a valid and useful way of approaching the problem.

This study first discusses the nature of the housing shortage in the Third World. It shows that it has largely been a result of rapid rural to urban migration in the past thirty years, partly because of the concentration of investment and development in the larger towns. The pattern of urbanization in Trinidad and Tobago is discussed in some detail and it is clear that there is a marked primacy of the capital city and very uneven distribution of the population.

The housing efforts of selected Third World countries are discussed to provide a background for the study of the activity of the public housing sector in Trinidad and Tobago. This study concludes firstly that there was some contribution made to new housing construction but that this was not

significant in the light of overall housing need. Secondly, it demonstrates that locational considerations were seldom taken into account thus lessening the impact of the programmes especially as the needs of many areas varied. Thirdly, it shows that housing construction was directly linked with the provision of infrastructure and services and therefore, housing programmes should be integrated with other sectors. Fourthly, it suggests that the provision of housing could be a valuable locational tool as it could be used to draw some households away from the capital city.

The paper then formulates a regional approach to housing provision. Programmes are designed to cater to the needs of each area and to fit into the national plans for development.

In general, the public housing sector is seen as a catalyst of development. The location of new housing can be used to generate growth of the smaller urban centres and spread the benefits of the new provision of necessary urban facilities more evenly. The Public housing agency can also stimulate the expansion and renovation of existing households by providing technical and financial aid, security of tenure and services in planned regional programmes.

The paper discussed these proposals and applies the model developed to specific areas in Trinidad and Tobago. It concludes that the public sector using a regional approach, linked with the activities of the other sectors and part of the national plans for growth of the other urban centres, could increase and improve housing for low income urban residents and stimulate overall urban development.