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ComHabitat workshop develops consensus on approaches to post-disaster reconstruction

On 23rd November 2005, ComHabitat held a workshop entitled "Vulnerability, Disasters and Development - learning from recent experience" at the Commonwealth Peoples Forum. Participants agreed that post disaster reconstruction is more successful when affected communities are able to play a key role in planning and implementing recovery programmes. It was also recognised that professionals could play a valuable role provided they respected community knowledge and priorities.

The meeting was attended by civil society organisations and built environment professionals from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Europe. Three speakers outlined post-disaster recovery and reconstruction processes, linking these to wider issues of poverty and vulnerability.

Carmen Griffiths from the Construction Resource & Development Centre, Jamaica spoke about poor communities' vulnerability to disasters, particularly in relation to hurricanes, and the importance of using communities knowledge and building their resilience.

In a video presentation, Arif Hasan from the Urban Resource Centre in Pakistan outlined the scale and impact of the recent earthquake and the challenge of reconstruction. He emphasised that housing can be rebuilt using local materials by local people, with appropriate technical support.

Tony Lloyd-Jones from the Tsunami Recovery Network steering group emphasised the need for core principles in post-disaster recovery - including poor communities right to return - and for transparency in monitoring donor assistance. He stressed the benefits of international networking and knowledge exchange within and between communities, governments, donors, civil society, local government, and professionals.

The workshop developed 3 recommendations, which were submitted to the plenary of the Commonwealth People's Forum:

1. The Commonwealth Secretariat and Foundation should support international networks, such as ComHabitat, to facilitate knowledge exchange and practical partnerships between Commonwealth Governments, donors, civil society, local government, professionals and scientists seeking to reduce the vulnerability of people living in low income and informal settlements.
2. Commonwealth professional associations should explore how partnerships with the poor can be developed in a manner that optimises the contributions and knowledge that both have to offer.
3. Governments, local government and donors should ensure that their responses to disasters do not result in forced evictions and should ensure that analysis of vulnerability to natural and man made hazards is incorporated into Poverty Reduction Strategies.

If you would like more information about the workshop, or about ComHabitat more generally, please contact Kim Mullard - +44 7771 884489.

Notes to the Editor:**What is ComHabitat?**

ComHabitat is a partnership of the intergovernmental Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) and agencies from government, local government, civil society and the private sector. ComHabitat aims to promote and monitor the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the Commonwealth Goal and associated Millennium Development Goals within and between Commonwealth countries. It focuses on networking and sharing practical examples of progress in implementation. More information is available at www.comhabitat.org (please note that the website is currently being developed).

What is CCGHS?

The Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) established by the Commonwealth Secretary-General in 1998. The CCGHS is an intergovernmental group made up of Ministers who are responsible for implementing the Habitat Agenda in their own countries. At its first meeting the CCGHS adopted a Commonwealth goal of: "Demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015".

What is the Habitat Agenda?

The Habitat Agenda is the main document that came out of the United Nations' 1996 Conference on Human Settlements in Istanbul. It has been adopted by all members of the Commonwealth. The Habitat Agenda contains commitments on adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements in an urbanising world.