



ISMAILIYYA DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ISMAILIYYA, EGYPT

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Completed 1978, and ongoing.

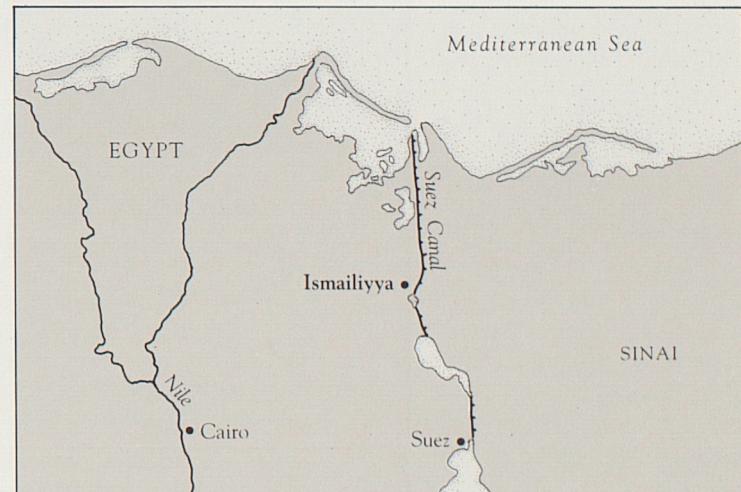
Client: The Governorate of Ismailiya.

Planners: Culpin Planning.

PROJECT BACKGROUND. The project demonstrates an alternative approach to deal with the problem of massive urban growth with its concomitant problems of inadequate shelter for the poor and the resulting unsanitary conditions. Rather than trying to build public housing which invariably proves too expensive and too small, this approach puts the emphasis on upgrading existing settlements, and on community self-help construction. The government is to provide the basic infrastructure and the access to land titles and credit. The result is not a project but a "process", that is making a real difference in the quality of the lives of the inhabitants. Not only is the environment upgraded, but the poor are now given some power to shape their own future and improve their lot. This increased self-reliance among the most economically vulnerable groups is as important an outcome as the improved sanitation systems.

The Ismailiya Master Plan begun in 1974 addressed major land reclamation, rural settlement and development, tourism, and housing. It argued for an alternative to the conventional public sector social housing programme, which although in-

Left: The Hai el-Salaam district shows the consolidation process which is taking place. This is evident (centre right) where a single storey dwelling is being extended upwards to create a three storey walkup unit. The pride of owners is exemplified by the fact that many have painted the façade of their individual dwelling.







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Left: Abu Atwa shows the same characteristic consolidation process from the simplest beginnings (foreground) to more elaborate, multi-storey structures in the background.

Above: The introduction of drainage is a key improvement and is at the heart of the success of this project.

tended for the poor could only be afforded by ten per cent of the population. An alternative use of the public subsidy was proposed to produce more social housing for the lowest income range. It would also encourage home ownership that has been prohibitively expensive except for the highest income families. An education programme was designed to train local administrators to implement the policies. Development was to be self-generative with gradual improvement of the service infrastructure, using income from land sales.

176 SITE. Ismailiyya is on the shores of Lake Timsah by the Suez Canal, about 135 kilometres from Cairo. Sweet water from the Nile is channeled into Ismailiyya through a canal that also irrigates mango and palms groves to the south and west. There is a dry, desert climate with hot summers, cool winters and only a few days of rain per year.

Hai el-Salaam is a northern extension of the city that had uncontrolled growth. Abu Atwa, formerly an agricultural settlement, is about four kilometres south of Ismailiyya. Both sites were planned and surveyed focusing on plot rationalisation. Existing settlers were given legal rights of occupation, frequently with adjusted plot boundaries. There were emergency relocations, where the owners of houses situated in road reserves or on sites needed for public purposes were given priority in the allocation of new plots. Public housing was provided for those who could not afford to build. Rules for allocation of new plots were drawn up and these were surveyed, demarcated and offered for sale.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND. Ismailiyya was founded in the second half of the last century. It was originally the headquarters of the Suez Canal Authority and then became mainly a service centre. During the Arab-Israeli conflict, from 1967 to 1973, the Suez Canal region became a war zone. Consequently, people were evacuated, and Ismailiyya, like the other canal cities, was damaged.

After the hostilities subsided, the government resolved to reconstruct the canal cities and to undertake redevelopment programmes. Financial assistance from the United Arab Emir-

ates went towards constructing 17,000 new apartments. Meanwhile, the government was funding 10 to 15 per cent of the housing units being built annually as public rental housing. Privileged Ismailiyyans, mainly government employees, had access to this housing. But many with low incomes were ineligible and could only get housing in the private rented sector or in squatter accommodation.

Almost half of the available housing was in "informal" areas mostly on government owned land near the desert. An annual *kehr* rent allowed use of the land, which in turn provided limited security of tenure.

LOCAL ARCHITECTURE CHARACTER. About 80 per cent of the Hai el-Salaam houses were individual homes built on plots averaging one hundred square metres. In "informal" areas, they are predominantly single storey, mud brick or rammed earth. In "formal" areas, they are baked brick, often with a reinforced concrete frame, allowing for future upward extension of the house.

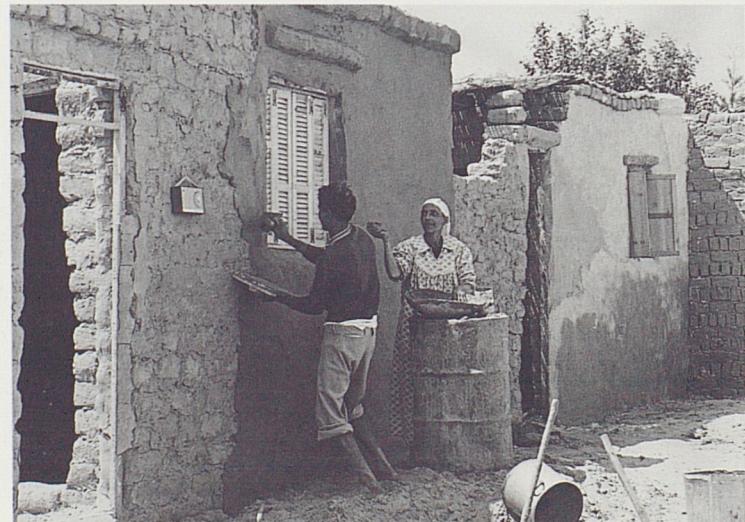
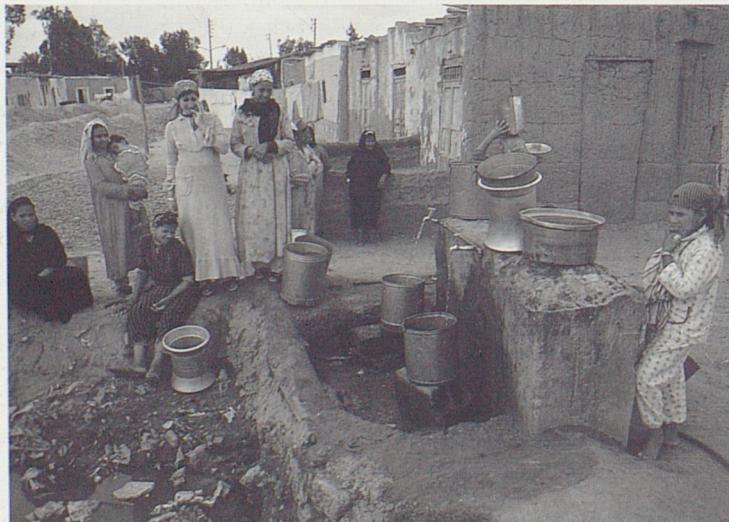
In Abu Atwa, construction mostly followed a traditional village style, using a different technique (rammed earth) than most buildings in Hai el-Salaam.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION. Security of tenure was the highest priority among households, followed by piped water, roads and sewage. Lack of security prohibited individual investment in buildings.

Those already living in the project areas were designated as the "target population" meaning that these income groups had to be able to afford access to the project. To upgrade areas, it was vital not to force out the population. In the new development, a mix of income groups were accommodated, giving low income groups at least their proportional share.

It was assumed that households would spend 20 per cent of their income on housing. It was concluded that full infrastruc-

Below left: Piped water makes the community standpipe a gathering place.
Below: Neighbours collaborate with small contractors to build the concrete and brick structures.



ture provision was not affordable and that initially only a minimum provision was possible without subsidy. Therefore, it was proposed that full provision be achieved incrementally, over a period corresponding to the population's ability to pay for this level of provision.

Residents preferred to negotiate block upgrading individually and not delegate important issues. Semi-independent project agencies with local officials were set up since the local government of Ismailiyya did not have administrative, financial or technical structures to manage the projects. These agencies were given the right to buy and sell land and to use the proceeds for infrastructure, management, and maintenance. They were responsible for the comprehensive planning of layouts and the survey, allocation and sale of plots. Negotiation with those agencies that provided the area's water, electricity and sewage was also their responsibility in addition to representing the people before authorities responsible for social facilities. Their further responsibilities included technical assistance to plot owners, landscaping and coordination with the city council. The agencies' staff received on-the-job training explaining detailed work procedures. In addition, seminars were held to explain why the works were being implemented.

The gradual improvements in the neighbourhood are reflected in the finished and painted façades.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS. Plot pricing varied to enable affordable payments at low incomes. Good commercial locations commanded higher prices and open market prices were charged through auctioning for key location concession plots. This allowed internal cross-subsidy favouring low priced plots. Over half are in this category which thus increased the number of affordable plots.

In upgraded areas, land prices were set low (Egyptian pounds 2.25 per square metre) with repayment over 30 years. It was proposed that income from selling land go towards basic infrastructure as well as administration, services, and maintenance. In new settlement areas, income from selling land was also expected to pay for basic infrastructure. This meant that initially, infrastructure would be restricted to surveyed plots.

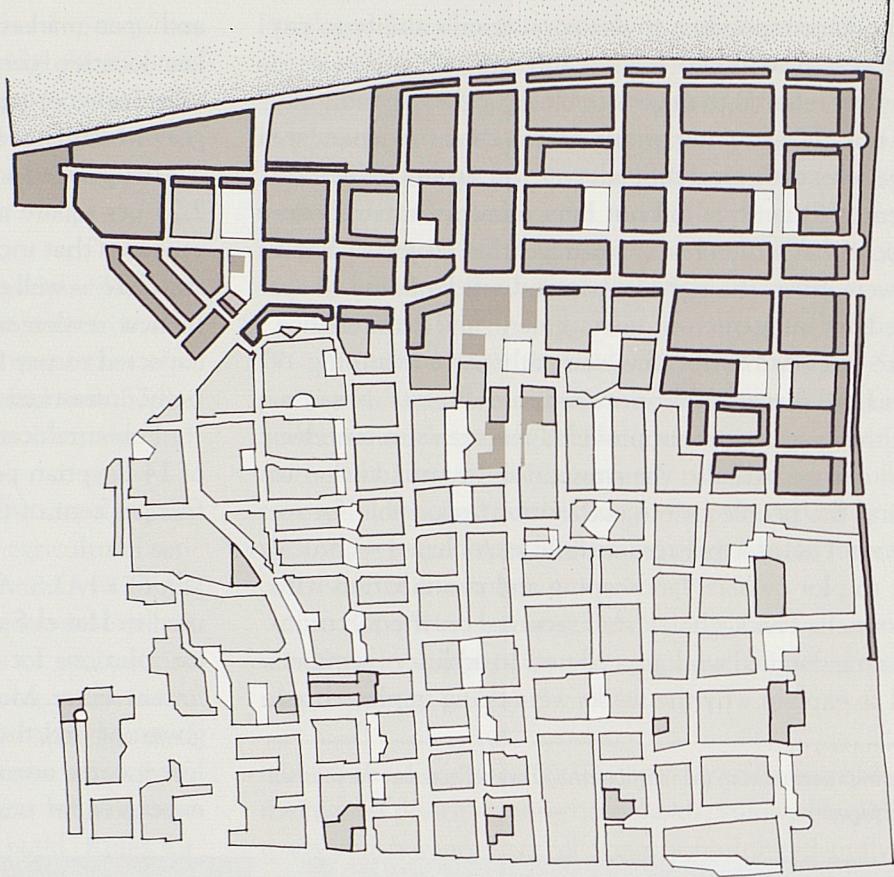
Public relocation housing was provided at a monthly rent of 14 Egyptian pounds per apartment and occupied by about five per cent of the population.

MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGY. Building materials used in Hai el-Salaam, and Abu Atwa range from the cheapest solutions for construction to the higher standards of the formal sector. Modern building materials were favoured by the governor and the settlers, but a slow rate of construction in low income areas suggests that modern materials may be too expensive for immediate use.

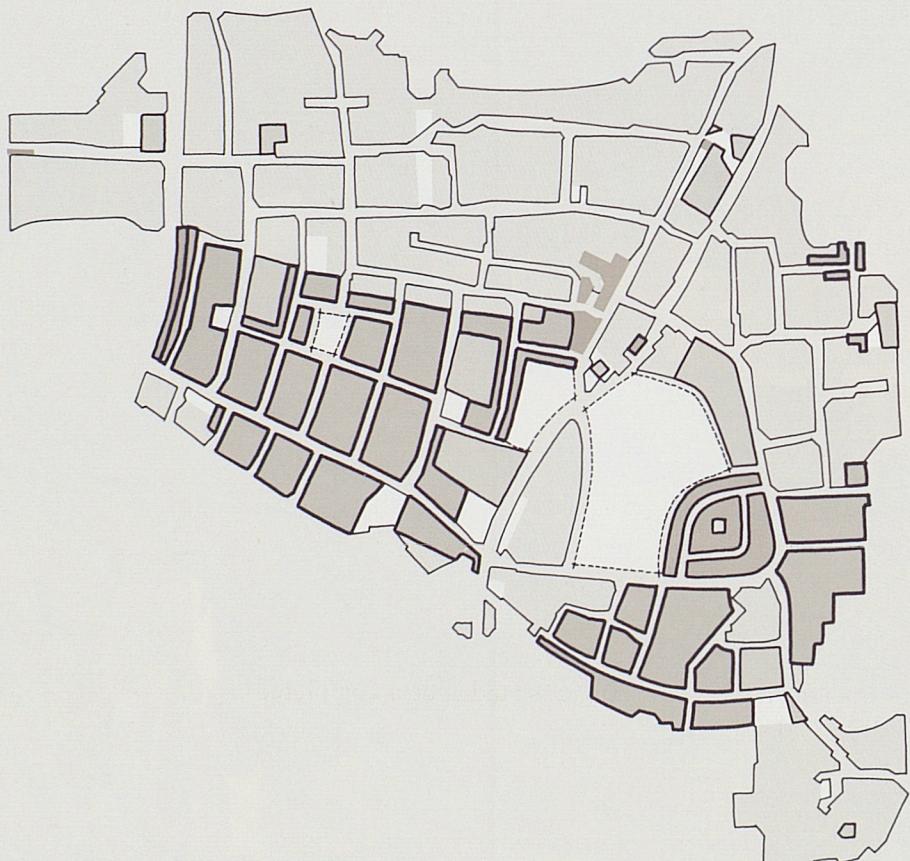


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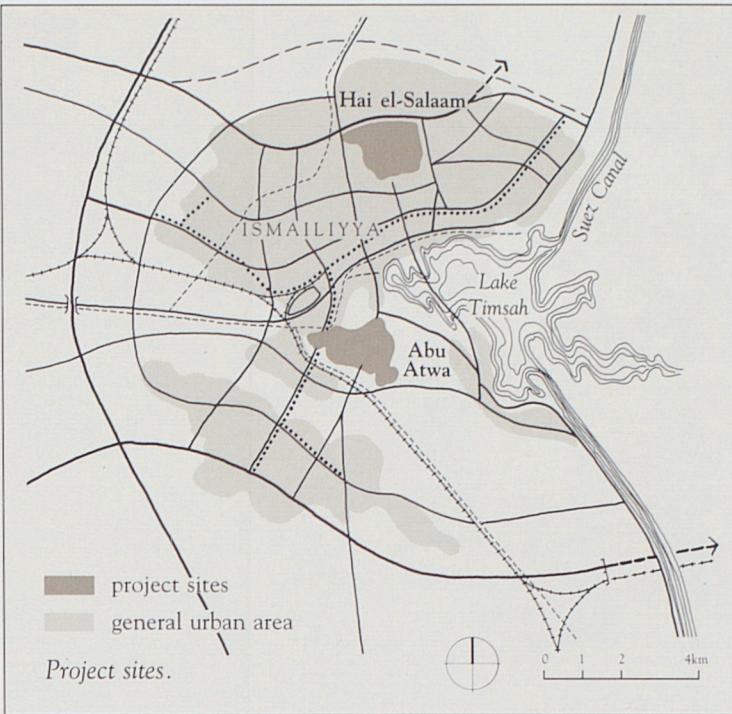
- [Solid dark grey square] main new commercial/
industrial area
- [Solid medium grey square] new concession areas
- [Solid light grey square] new low cost plot
- [Hatched square] social facilities
- [White square] existing development
- [White square with diagonal line] open space
- [Dashed square] special areas



Site plan, Hai-el-Salaam.



Site plan, Abu Atwa.



Baked brick production has been forbidden in Egypt, since it uses vegetal earth from agricultural land. Cement bricks have replaced them.

PLAN. The overall physical planning is a hierarchical arrangement of streets and avenues with a main centre and neighbourhood sub-centres. Shopping needs are met primarily by shops on housing plots except for a central market. Other centralised facilities include schools, community centres, a clinic, and a post office. Neighbourhoods tend to be defined by local mosques, as in the traditional Islamic urban pattern. The streets in the existing areas in each settlement being upgraded were adjusted to improve circulation and services, thus displacing some families to the new areas.

There are many advantages of combining upgrading with new development. It allows family relocation as near as possible to the original site. It allows improved social facilities which may not be possible in densely settled areas to be in the new area and to serve both. Utility networks can service the old and the new areas.

The Project Agency provided different house plans for families who could not afford to pay for professional assistance. Houses might be self-built or contracted to builders in the project. Control of lot types encouraged diversity of income level. For example, more expensive lots were allocated along the wider avenues and at intersections to ensure that the areas with strongest visual impact would appear completed early in the development.

CONCLUSION. Constructing the Hai el-Salaam extension of the city of Ismailiya in 1978 represented a critical departure in the development of low-income housing in Egypt. It was one of a handful of areas where this new approach was applied. It has channelled public housing subsidies towards

broadened local initiatives. For the first time in Egypt, physical and institutional guidelines for housing were established primarily to respond to the poor. In 1980, Abu Atwa commenced exploring the same strategy.

The Government donation of land was the largest single subsidy. A grant of 100,000 Sterling pounds from the British government provided the initial capital. Later, revenue to the agency amounted to almost 3,500,000 Egyptian pounds. This has been used for infrastructure and low income loans. So far, 90,000 people have been housed in Hai el-Salaam and Abu Atwa. They have achieved the security of titled ownership.

Hai el-Salaam and Abu Atwa housing is a personal endeavour controlled by local and personal decisions. The projects encouraged the input of thousands of families utilising their collective imagination, energy, time, and funds in order to create their own habitat.

Questions remain unanswered, related for example to the funding of the projects after income from land sales has ceased. There are reasons however, to be optimistic, and what has happened in Ismailiya, and a few other pilot projects is influencing national housing policy elsewhere in the country.

Community life manifests itself in the newly established nurseries and playgrounds (below) as well as by the appearance and consolidation of small business (bottom).

