

INTRODUCTION

When Wally N'Dow and Aliye P. Celik, on behalf of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), requested the Aga Khan Award for Architecture to hold a round-table discussion as part of the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, it seemed natural for us to share the experience of our eighteen-year journey with a larger audience, through a panel of experts who have now contributed to the Award for many years. The objective of the round-table meeting was to address the topics of housing and shelter as illustrated by Aga Khan Award-winning housing, community-building, and social development projects from all six cycles, from 1980 to 1995

We entitled the meeting, "Shelter: the Access to Hope" Our intention was to focus on the acquisition of land and the construction process for shelter and, therefore, to address the question of access to credit, as lack of funds is the principal obstacle for the poor in gaining access to decent housing. Instead, their only assets are human dignity, and a commitment to the well-being of their families, qualities that are not acceptable to lending agencies as collateral

The six cycles of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture have brought forward a wide range of alternatives to this worsening situation, which have all focused upon cultural values and a sense of community, neighbourhood, and family. They have demonstrated confidence in human dignity, and trust in the industry and rights of even the poorest families and individuals. And, they have shown innovation and originality in funding mechanisms as well as in architectural adaptation. Not any of the projects are full or final solutions but, by presenting them as successful examples of new directions, the Award seeks to share these ideas and mechanisms with the larger audience of concerned individuals committed to the right to shelter and housing, many of whom participated in the Habitat II meetings.

The meeting took the format of a half-day workshop, bringing together a group of architects, clients, and contributors representing some of the Award-winning projects with other participants in the Habitat II meeting. Case studies were accompanied by slide presentations.

Attendance was amongst the largest of similar sessions at the conference, and the level of enthusiasm and participation was extraordinary. The Aga Khan Award for Architecture thanks all its associates, as well as the participants, who contributed to this unforgettable event, and for the candour and sincerity in expressing their views which do not necessarily represent those of the Award or UNCHS (Habitat). We hope that the ideas and comments presented at the meeting will live on, and reach a wider audience.

This volume, therefore, is produced for limited but significantly wider distribution among people who are interested in the subject. It contains the proceedings of the workshop discussions, as well as later comments on these discussions. Local authorities, decision makers, and creditors, as well as community and neighbourhood groups, are the intended recipients. It is available for translation into other languages, and local editions are encouraged in order that it may have the widest impact possible.

Suha Özkan
Secretary General
The Aga Khan Award for Architecture