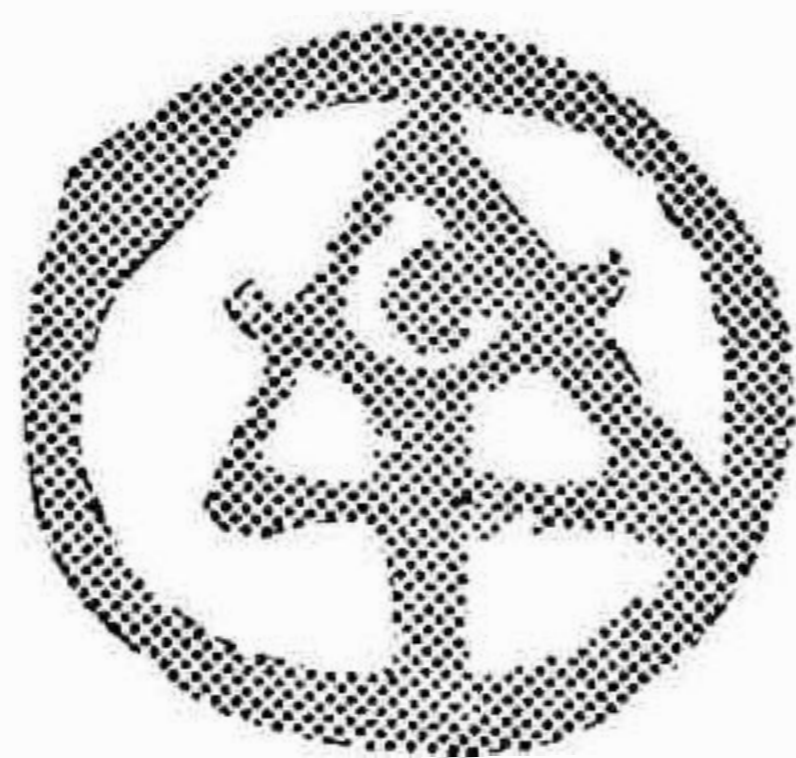


MAURITIUS

Country Report

Habitat

**United Nations Conference on Human Settlements
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HABITAT

U.N. CONFERENCE ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

COUNTRY REPORT:

MAURITIUS

General

1.01 Mauritius is a pear-shaped island of volcanic origin having an area of 720 square miles. It is situated in the South West Indian Ocean just within the Tropic of Capricorn, between latitudes 19° 50' and 20° 51' South and longitude 57° 18' and 57° 48' East. It lies within about 500 miles of the east coast of Madagascar and 1,250 miles off the nearest point of the African Coast.

1.02 One third of the total land area of Mauritius is mountainous or otherwise unsuited for either agricultural or urban development. Just under half of its total area is cultivated, 90 per cent is planted to sugar cane.

1.03 Lying, as it does, far from any large land mass, Mauritius has an equable maritime climate, tropical during the austral summer and sub-tropical in winter. During the great part of the year, trade winds blow from the south east; they are steadier from May to October. In summer, they die away and lighter winds occur, periodically interrupted by cyclonic disturbances. The maximum day and minimum night temperatures during the hottest months average 31° and 24° C., in Winter they average 25° and 20° C.

2. Economy

2.01 Traditionally Mauritius has been a classic example of monocrop economy. Sugarcane was grown and milled on a large scale, and the proceeds were used to import a very high proportion of merchandise required for the local economy.

2.02 By the middle of the 1960's the amount of land under sugarcane cultivation reached its physical limit, and since growth in sugar production, which is required to increase long-term export earning potential of the country to keep pace with rising import needs, could only come from improved yields. In an already efficient industry, the response to the problem was to diversify the economy through the development of manufacturing and tourist sectors. Provision to this effect was made in the Development Plan (1971 - 75) which aims to reduce the share of sugar in total commodity production from 60 to 40 per cent by the end of the decade and aims to achieve the objectives of creating full employment, steady and viable economic growth and a more equitable distribution of income. Development of relatively new sectors like manufacturing and tourism is expected to provide bulk of the employment, both to mop up the backlog of unemployment and to absorb the new entrants to the labour force, besides boosting the export earning capacity of the country.

2.03 Since the launching of the Four Year Plan (1971 - 75) in July 1971, the Mauritian economy has undergone significant transformation and has witnessed a number of economic gains. The Gross National Product at factor cost (that is the total value of output of goods and services valued before any addition of their cost is made by indirect taxes, or any reduction is made by subsidies), which fluctuated around

Rs 860 million/

Rs 860 million in the late sixties, rose to 1,002 million in 1971, registering an increase of 16 per cent above the annual average for the previous four years. In 1972 GNP reached Rs 1,238 million recording an increase of 24 per cent over the year 1971. Simultaneously the per capita GNP rose by 23 per cent from Rs 1,218 in 1971 to Rs 1,498 in 1972 and by a further 28 per cent to Rs 1,923 in 1973. So far as Gross Domestic Fixed Capital Formation is concerned, it increased from an annual average of Rs 144 million for the period 1967 - 70 to Rs 184 million and Rs 229 million in the years 1971 and 1972 respectively.

2.04 Sugar still accounts for over 30 per cent of domestic exports. In 1972, of the total exports valued at Rs 566 million, the earnings of sugar exports amounted to Rs 522 million which was 63 per cent higher than that of 1971. The exports of manufactured goods, other than bags and sacks, have also been increasing in the recent years. They increased from Rs 4 million in 1970 to Rs 9 million in 1971 and to Rs 18 million in 1972. Similarly, there has been a rise in imports into the country. In 1970, total imports were of the order of Rs 420 million. By 1972 they had increased by 38 per cent to Rs 636 million.

2.05 The balance of payments has been in surplus since 1968 except in 1971 when the normal trade was disrupted by prolonged dock strikes. In 1972 the surplus reached a record level of Rs 124 million. The surplus in balance of trade (f.o.b) which stood at Rs 53 million in 1972 was 89 per cent higher than that of 1970.

2.06 Government recurrent and capital revenues have increased from Rs 294 million and Rs 131 million in 1971 - 72 to Rs 377 million and Rs 156 million in 1972 - 73 respectively. Recurrent and capital expenditures have likewise increased. Recurrent expenditure increased from Rs 253 million in 1971 - 72 to Rs 326 million in 1972 - 73. Of the latter figure, expenditure on social services (education, health, labour and social security) amounted to Rs 112 million or 34 per cent of total recurrent expenditure. The increase in the capital expenditure over the period 1971 - 72 to 1972 - 73 was of the order of Rs 27 million.

3. Population

3.01 Mauritius is amongst the most populated agricultural areas in the world, with an average density of about 1,190 persons per square mile. During the two decades preceding the 1962 - 72 period the population increased fairly rapidly. The rate of natural increase, which had fluctuated to about 7 per thousand immediately after the outbreak of the Second World War, rose to 16.3 in 1944 and to 35.8 in 1950. The unusually high rate of natural increase was mainly due to a sharp drop in adult as well as child and infant mortality. Consequently, the population of Mauritius, which had remained fairly static at below 400,000 for about ninety years, doubled between 1944 and 1969 - in about 25 years. In fact, over the

past decades.....

past decades the population increased at an annual rate of 2.7 per cent and reached a peak of 3.5 per cent in 1960. In recent years, however, the rate has declined to less than 2.0 per cent as a result of a concerted family planning campaign.

3.02 According to the figures available on 31st December, 1973, the population was estimated at 843,000, an increase of 8,900 over the December 1972 figure. The rate of population growth for the same period was 1.7 per cent.

Population distribution

3.03 The uneven distribution of population throughout the island is a cause for concern. Whereas the population density is very high in towns and overgrown villages, some areas are virtually unpopulated (especially the South West). More pressure is exercised for residential development in areas of good agricultural land than in areas of poor quality. This is understandable, since the majority of the active population is employed in agriculture, and tend to settle near the place of work. At present 55% of the population live in rural areas.

3.04 An analysis of the evolution of population between the two censuses of 1962 and 1972 within the various geographical areas shows that while the inner areas of Port Louis, the Capital City, suffered a net loss in population of 5,000 (5.5%) in 10 years, the outer areas increased by 19,000 (61.2%).

3.05 The geographical analysis of population trends reveals two main factors with regard to the problem of human settlements namely;

(a) In the urban areas, growth is taking place in the periphery of the towns, owing to the job opportunities created and to the level of services provided by the urban areas. However, residential development is haphazard and cannot accommodate this new increase in population, which consists mainly of the lower income group, very often incapable of paying economic rents.

(b) In the rural areas, there has been very little or no increase in population except in the coastal villages where hotel development is taking place and in tea villages. It would therefore seem that, like everywhere else in the world, growth on human settlements is closely correlated with job opportunities. Government policy is to create industrial estates in the rural areas, and this will then be able to provide a satisfactory level of services.

Land use.....

4. LAND USE

4.01 According to a Land and Water Resources Survey carried out in 1968 by the Food and Agricultural Organisation, 55.5 per cent of the island's 460,000 acres were under intensive cultivation, 6.0 per cent under forests, 26.0 per cent scrub, 6.5 per cent built up areas (including industrial use) and 6.0 per cent of other uses (including swamps, reservoirs, savannah, roads and so on).

4.02 Built up areas, including industrial land, occupy approximately 30,000 acres of which 50 per cent is under residential development. Single-floor construction characterises both urban and rural housing, reflecting the traditional way of life of the people and their aspirations to individual detached houses. In view of the already large and increasing population in relation to the physical and utility limitations on land supply, it is evident that such aspirations constitute a luxury which the small island cannot continue to afford.

4.03 With regard to transport and communication, Mauritius is served with an extensive road network, with a density of 0.85 mile of bitumen surfaced road per square mile (340 miles of main roads and 260 miles of rural roads). With the new industrial development, commuting is becoming a feature of every day life, and public transport is a new problem of human settlements that will need to be tackled.

4.04 Government policy is to encourage industrial development in both urban and rural areas. To avoid competing land uses to be located haphazardly, a National Physical Plan is under preparation, and it is hoped that such a plan will spell out long-term policies with regards to the preservation of first grade agricultural land, provision of industrial estates, residential development and redevelopment and provision of services and amenities.

5. LEGAL & ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONTROL

Legal aspects:

5.01 Physical planning law was enacted in 1954 when the Town and Country Planning Ordinance, was passed to "make provision for the orderly and progressive development of land, towns and other areas, whether urban and rural."

5.02 On matters of Outline Schemes the Ordinance provides for:-

(a) Roads: provision for the reservation of land for the construction of new roads, improvement of existing

roads and.....

roads and control over all works incidental to the making or improvement of any roads including street furniture and road landscaping.

(b) Building and other structures: regulation and control of: the size, height, spacing and building line of buildings; advertisements affixed to buildings; the location of buildings; the curtilage, uses, design and external appearance of buildings.

Also, provision is made under this heading for the zoning of various land uses in a declared planning area, the regulation of density of development, the removal, demolition and alteration of unwanted development; the reservation of sites for industrial and housing estates; and slum clearance schemes in specified areas.

(c) Amenities: provision for the reservation of land as open spaces, whether public or private; control over unsightly development and preservation of natural beauty spots and buildings of architectural or historic interest.

(d) Public Utility Services: provision of the necessary conditions to facilitate the construction of works in relation to lighting, water supply, sewerage, drainage, sewage and refuse disposal or other public utilities.

(e) Transport & Communication: creation of the required conditions to allow the establishment, extension and improvement of all forms of transport and communication.

(f) Miscellaneous: provision, for, inter alia, the control of land subdivision; the prevention of pollution of water course, lagoons, lakes and harbours.

5.03

To date, all the urban areas are regulated by zoning schemes drawn up by the Town & Country Planning Board in collaboration with the urban authorities. With regard to rural areas, physical planning control has been extended to them by the declaration of the whole Island as a Planning Area.

The Administrative Set-up

5.04

From the legal aspects the Town and Country Planning Ordinance operates at both central and local government levels.

The Town and Country Planning Ordinance is administered by the Town and Country Planning Board which is a corporate body with the administrative head of the Ministry of Housing, Lands, and Town & Country Planning as President, and consisting of the Principal Town and Country Planning Officer, a representative each of the urban Authorities, the District Councils, the general public, the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministries of Finance, Works, Local Government, Agriculture, and Health.

Existing Planning....

Existing Planning Organisation

National Level

- 5.05 The office responsible for planning at national level is the Town and Country Planning Division of the Ministry of Housing, Lands, and Town & Country Planning. This division is advisory to the Town and Country Planning Board and the various Local Authorities responsible for their respective areas.

Legal and Administrative Processing of Outline Schemes

- 5.06 Once an Outline Scheme is prepared by the Town and Country Planning Office on behalf of the Board, and in consultation with the Local Authority concerned, the Town and Country Planning Board publishes the Scheme to allow public representation, if any, to be made within three months of the publication date. After that interval, the Board may modify their original scheme and submit the modified version to the Governor-General who then approves the scheme with or without further modification. The scheme is deemed from then on to have legal force and "no authority shall pass or approve any plans for building or development that contravene the provisions of the scheme."

Local Level

- 5.07 Once an Outline Scheme has been approved and is legally in force, the Local Planning Authority (Urban or District Council) enforces the provisions of the Scheme. Any decision of the Planning Committee may, on appeal, be reversed or modified by the Town and Country Planning Board or by a Court of Law.

6. HOUSING

- 6.01 Whilst the emphasis is laid on further economic development, higher national production and income levels by the public authorities, there is nonetheless an awareness of the housing problem and the need to find a solution to that problem.

- 6.02 In the urban areas, housing is virtually totally in the form of ground-floor development and is therefore largely spread out horizontally. It is important to note that this kind of development is most uneconomical in terms of land values, especially in and around the centres of urban areas. Furthermore, the indiscriminate mixture of the various urban land uses in the past has resulted in many predominantly residential areas being adversely affected by noise and fumes of industries, as well as vehicular traffic hazards, especially for school children. Again, excessive fragmentation of pieces of land, mostly among heirs, has given rise to incongruous building plots.

In the suburbs.....

6.03 In the suburbs large extents of land, which some years back were open spaces, have gradually been taken up by uncontrolled settlements.

6.04 Rural development is characterised mainly by small settlements serving the sugar industry. Other settlements are fishing villages and those where the basic activity is market-gardening. Until the 1950s living units in the rural areas were entirely huts with a thatched roof, wattle and daub walls and beaten earth flooring. While this type of dwelling still exists, other types flourish alongside, e.g. thatched roofing on low stone walls, corrugated iron sheet roofing fixed to timber trusses and walls of corrugated iron sheets fixed to wooden posts. In the early 1950s the sugar estates started to build houses for their permanent labourers. Later, the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund (S.I.L.W.F) took over that function and built some greatly improved architect - designed housing estates for sugar workers and dockers.

6.05 The houses built by Sugar estates are made either of reinforced concrete roofs on block walls, or stone walls and C.I.S. roof. Health and sanitary conditions are satisfactory and some organised recreational facilities, such as community centres or village halls and football grounds are also provided. The overall visual effect is one of a satisfactorily landscaped and compactly planned estate with the basic amenities.

6.06 In 1959 the Ministry of Housing, Lands, and Town & Country Planning was set up and a Central Housing Authority (C.H.A) instituted "to promote the better housing of the people of Mauritius". The Cyclones of 1960 forced the C.H.A to concentrate on the emergency rehousing of Cyclone victims.

6.07 It was initially decided to build 25,000 houses, mostly on land owned by individuals but in the light of registrations, it was found that most of the victims were not land-owners. Consequently, the Scheme had to be revised to provide more houses on housing estates. This alternative involved purchase of land and provision of services, the cost of which in relation to available resources caused the initially planned total number of houses to be reduced to some 15,000. The necessity to provide more basic facilities such as electrical wiring to houses, improved water supply and better road access, led to a further reduction to 14,000 houses.

6.08 Limited resources, aggravated by the urgent nature of the Cyclone housing problem, brought about some difficulties as far as site selection for housing estates was concerned. In fact, good potential sites had often to be discarded in favour of Government-owned land which, leased on a 99-year basis to individuals, substantially removed the land-cost element of reconstruction. Some of the land were in isolated locations, with lack of proper access, services and amenities, with the result that houses built on such sites remained unoccupied for a long time. Another constraint was the necessity to select sites according to location and geographical-breakdown of cyclone-victims, obviously for employment-base and social reasons.

Implementation.....

6.09 Implementation of the Schemé started at the end of 1961 and was completed in June 1970. In all, 13,983 houses had been built, as under:-

5,911	on estates in urban areas	}	together with amenities
2,725	on estates in rural areas		
549	in Tea Villages		
4,303	on private sites		
495	sub standard houses		

Total 13,983

6.10 HOUSING AGENCIES

The main agencies involved in housing are:

- (i) the Central Housing Authority, which, as an agent of Government, has mainly dealt with the provision of low cost housing for cyclone victims.
- (ii) the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund (S.I.L.W.F) which builds housing estates for sugar and dock workers and also lends money to such individual workers for private house building.
- (iii) the Mauritius Housing Corporation which caters mainly for middle and upper class housing needs.
- (iv) the urban authorities who have built a few housing estates.

6.11 The Central Housing Authority (C.H.A)

The C.H.A is currently engaged in the construction of low-cost houses under the Government 4 year plan 1971 - 75.

6.12 The Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund (S.I.L.W.F)

This agency has been promoting house construction for sugar and dock workers since the 1950s. It has built to date 21 small housing estates (ranging from 30 to 100 dwelling units each); blocks of flats, comprising 198 units, for dockers in the capital city; and it has financed the construction of 2,500 houses on individual sites owned by sugar and dock workers. In general, the various housing schemes have been successful in that from the location point of view, the land, being freely made available to the fund by the sugar estates, is appropriately sited in relation to work and basic amenities, and the houses are of sound construction. In effect, units built since 1960 are entirely in concrete.

6.13 The Mauritius Housing Corporation (M.H.C)

Drawing its funds partly from the Commonwealth Development Corporation and partly from the Mauritius

Government.....

Government, the M.H.C has been promoting middle-class home ownership throughout the island since 1963. Its mortgage policy applied at the beginning only to owners of suitable residential plots to whom loans were granted (up to 95% of the properly mortgaged as security) at 8% interest per annum. The plot ownership criterion has later been relaxed, though the prospective house owner still has to provide the initial 5% minimum to be eligible for a loan repayable over 30 years.

6.14

With its limited funds, the M.H.C is having to face a growing demand from the middle-class range. In its endeavour to satisfy as many applicants as possible, it had to resort to and obtained in 1968/9 loans from private and institutional local sources. Since its establishment, the M.H.C has helped in the construction of a number of individual houses, financed the erection of 20 blocks of flats by private enterprise, owns itself two blocks of flats (25 units) and two small housing estates with 18 and 25 houses on each. M.H.C has now embarked on the construction of apartments for owner occupiers on hire purchase terms. In 1972 it launched an Encouraging Savings Scheme which, when combined with a M.H.C loan to buy or build a house, entitles the Saver to an interest and bonus equivalent in most cases to 12% per annum.

6.15

Urban Authority Housing

The Urban Authorities (U.A) started their building activities only in the post-war years in response to population growth, increasing migration from rural to urban areas and the mass return of the Pioneer Corps Volunteers from overseas. In all they have put up 2,000 houses and consequently the impact of U.A housing on the overall island's housing stock has been very minimal.

7.01

POLICIES FOR PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Mauritius, like all developing countries, is faced with the task of promoting economic and social development in all its aspects. With limited resources, at its disposal it must ensure an orderly development process, whereby priorities are established and alternative policies considered so as to fulfil the short-term and long-term objectives.

7.02

The need to formulate long-term physical strategies was recognised in the first Four-Year Plan for Social and Economic Development (1971 - 1975):

"just as an economic plan is required to fulfil the development objectives, it is extremely important to have a physical plan for the development of the island as a whole, the physical plan will set out the framework and criteria for rational land use, for urbanisation and industrialisation and other physical activities."

A team of French.....

7.03 A team of French Town Planners, are at present formulating a national physical strategy for the whole of Mauritius. The team who started in 1973, has already carried out various studies including urban and rural population, the proposed inter-national airport and its access routes, tourism, industry, employment/unemployment, and traffic and transportation.

7.04 Various projects are proposed for the next five years (1976 - 1980). The National Physical Strategy will set up the main guidelines for major future physical development at national level. At the local level of physical planning, studies to be undertaken include physical development plans for the urban areas as well as for major rural settlements. It is also proposed to prepare detailed physical plans for the town centre and suburbs of the capital city, to formulate landscape plans for various public beaches and inland natural sites. Legislation dealing with town and country planning will be revised in order to facilitate the implementation of schemes and the control of development.

7.05 In the field of housing, it was recognised in the 1971 - 75 Development Plan that "it would be political and economic folly to pursue an economic development path of creating employment and incomes for the labour force and then compel that labour force and their families to live in squalor because the investment decisions to meet their demand for housing have not been taken in time." However, the basic strategy for the housing sector was inclined towards meeting the demand of those who can reasonably afford to pay for their houses. In the period 1971 - 75 there has been a rapid rise in investment in residential buildings, owing to the increase in income as a result of higher output and better prices for sugar.

7.06 The 1971 - 75 Development Plan did, nonetheless, recognise that there was a need for an element of subsidy at the lower margin of the housing programme in order to meet the demand, especially in urban areas, of those whose income did not allow them to afford paying economic rents. Consequently, the Plan provided for soft loans to be made available to the Central Housing Authority and the Mauritius Housing Corporation for their Housing Schemes and for the creation of the six tea villages.

7.07 Several factors have been indentified which have hampered the housing programmes, public and private: lack of infrastructure; rising cost of residential land; land ownership in the urban areas, where land is subdivided into incongruous small plots; shortage and rising costs of building materials of which about 90% is imported; deployment of skilled labour.

7.08 For the next five years (1975 - 80), the strategy of the public housing sector will lay emphasis on the provision of low-cost housing for the working class.

8. CONCLUSION

8.01 Mauritius, although a very small country has, like other developing countries, its own problems of human settlements. With the rapid growth of population and the new trends towards

fast industrialisation and its impact on the habitat, the typical problems of such fast growth, as experienced in both developed and developing countries, are gradually emerging. These problems are rendered more acute by the frequent visits of violent cyclones which can overnight turn thousands of people homeless, damage our agricultural economy and destroy a great deal of our essential infrastructure. It is the hope of Mauritius that the Habitat Conference will enlighten the Country's policy - makers with regards to solutions to the problems of human settlements.
