

lems would be in their own backyards. But it is time to look homeward, to put an end to our childishness, to put away our sense of shame and to conduct ourselves as men. Our national strength is being eroded by our self-reproach and it is the Caribbean artist who can restore our self respect by bringing us to a knowledge of ourselves, by showing us the reflection of our faces, our landscape, our history and our strength.

The Caribbean artist has not in general been encouraged to play his full part in the nation-building exercise. His work is often regarded as being of interest to only a few and his potential contribution remains undemanded at the same time as the importance of that contribution increases. V.S. Naipaul, the Trinidad writer, has made the point that, more than most, the West Indian needs his writers to tell him who he is.

A striking anomaly of the present situation is that at the same time as the need for the development of a national consciousness is being stressed, the bombardment continues of the popular mind, the most plastic minds in the community, by advertising and entertainment designed for foreign appetites and life styles. It is therefore in the area of media communications, television, radio and the popular press, that the need for corrective work is most urgent. It is here, that the particular talents of the artist need to be exercised. Caribbean people need to see themselves and their lives treated with sympathy and understanding and intelligence in the media. The serial stories and features produced for North American and European audiences exert an influence on the Caribbean mind which their total irrelevance should have forbidden.

Caribbean art and the Caribbean artist have the capacity to record and interpret the Caribbean personality to itself. If they are encouraged to do so, they can not only produce the distillate from which the people can extract their meaning and so ensure their strength, but also contribute to the repair of the centuries-old fragmentation and separation of these island communities. The continuing reluctance to make use of the creative energy of Caribbean artists to fortify the will and spirit of the Caribbean turns out to be a waste of a valuable national resource. The two Caribbean Festivals of Creative Arts (Carifesta) held so far (Guyana, 1972 and Jamaica, 1976) are indications that the message is beginning to get through the static. That message is that real development aims at the creation of a Caribbean personality that carries no edge of apology nor trace of bombast but only the simple assurance of its own uniqueness and importance to itself. The efficient mobilization of the national energy towards this end requires the use of artistic skills and perceptions which are readily available. All that is lacking is the will to use them. □

## rural-

For the last one hundred years coffee has dominated the economy of tiny El Salvador, the second smallest country in Latin America. Coffee's supremacy has been challenged only since the 1950s by cotton, which is now established as a second major export commodity. The pre-eminence of these two crops has literally transformed the country — and the social consequences for the landless poor have been little short of disastrous.

The introduction of cotton served only to reinforce an already export-oriented agrarian structure, and, in the name of efficiency, brought about a further concentration of land in the hands of a few wealthy landowners. For the mass of landless peasant farmers living in the central highlands and the coastal plains, where the great coffee and cotton estates are located, there was no choice but to leave. Shutout of land ownership, they migrated in their thousands to the major coastal cities — San Salvador, Santa Ana, San Miguel, Usulután and Sonsonate.

In the cities they fared little better. Lacking money, they could not afford to buy housing built primarily with the upper and middle income groups in mind. Lacking land, they could not build homes to suit their own needs. Some simply became transients. Others found their way into already overcrowded slums, where they could afford the rent if they could find work. Still others reacted bitterly by seizing any open land on the city perimeter and establishing squatter communities, with homes built of scrap materials and no basic services such as clean water supply and sewers.

Today almost two-thirds of El Salvador's urban population is made up of slum dwellers — the majority of whom have at one time been driven off the land by force of economic circumstances.

The scenario is not new. It is not unique to El Salvador, nor indeed to Latin America. It is a depressingly familiar story that is repeated, with only minor variations in plot, throughout most

of the developing world. Often it is a legacy left by a departed colonial administration interested only in cash crops. Sometimes it is simply one of the unforeseen by-products of a natural desire to develop maximum production for the export markets.

The story of El Salvador is related in a report drawn up by a team of researchers from the El Salvador Foundation for Development and Minimal Housing over the past two years. Along with researchers in six other Latin American countries they have been studying the root causes of urban housing problems, evaluating such housing policies as already exist and preparing recommendations for the implementation of the most effective means of dealing with the problems.

The study, which was coordinated by the Inter-American Planning Society (Sociedad Interamericana de Planificación, SIAP) with the help of a research grant from the IDRC, was completed in April. The next stage, already under way, is the publication and dissemination of the researchers' findings in a series of reports, the first dealing with comparisons of housing situations in different countries (from which the El Salvador example is taken), the second with policies and the third with agrarian and urban reforms.

Although El Salvador, because of its size and density of population (second only to Haiti in the region at 177 inhabitants per square kilometre) differs from some of the other countries participating in the study, its urban housing situation is in many ways typical. Paraguay, for example, a landlocked country 20 times the size of El Salvador, yet with a smaller population, faces essentially the same problems in its capital city of Asunción, according to the report prepared by the Paraguayan Center for Sociological Study.

Perhaps because it is not blessed with El Salvador's rich volcanic soil, Paraguay has a somewhat more diversified agricultural economy, but the land is still

# New approaches to urban migration

Susana Amaya

concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy landowners. A series of serious internal conflicts between the late nineteenth century and the early 1950s intensified the problem, as thousands of migrants flooded into Asuncion, often en route for neighbouring Argentina. The growth of the capital has been, as a result, chaotic and unplanned.

Various attempts were made to instigate new agrarian and urban policies, but these had little or no effect, in spite of a new constitution that emphasized the social role of property and recognized the function of government in the direction of housing services. The small amount of new housing available was priced beyond the reach of two-thirds of the people. As a result, the report states, there is a need for the construction of more than 10,000 new housing units per year simply in order to keep up with the growth of population and to replace existing deteriorated property.

These and the reports of the other participating national institutions will be published and disseminated early in 1977. But what will be the result? They are, after all, only studies. They contain many recommendations for improvements, but these are binding on no-one. The optimistic answer is to be found in Asia, where the Centre supported an earlier, similar study involving collaborating institutions in eight countries.

That study was completed in 1975 (see *IDRC Reports* Vol. 4 No. 4) amid enthusiastic responses from the participants. They spoke of a "solidarity and esprit de corps" that would be useful for future cooperation. The exchange of experiences, they said, had been extremely beneficial, and the contacts made would last beyond the lifetime of the project. In Hong Kong that country's study promptly became basic reading for the University of Hong Kong's housing management course, and was adopted as a background manual for the newly formed Housing Department.

Recently there has also been recognition that the problems of the urban poor,



*Older housing in many cities is overcrowded, sub-standard and even in danger of collapse...*

*...but new modern buildings are not always the solution, even if the poor can afford to live in them.*



particularly squatter communities, are not going to be solved by conventional means. There is a growing trend to attempt to upgrade slum areas and squatter sites as an alternative to relocation or other more draconian measures. Such schemes involve the provision of basic services to existing communities and new home sites — services such as drinking water, sewers, electricity and transportation — and assisting the inhabitants to improve or build their own houses. Attempts are also made to locate new sites near factories and other job sources. A variety of such sites-and-services "packages" are now being funded by the World Bank in eight developing countries — including El Salvador.

In order to gauge the impact of these approaches, the Centre is cooperating with the Bank and UNICEF in support of an evaluation of three of the projects, in El Salvador (where the work is being carried out by the same team that prepared the low-cost housing study in that country), in Senegal and in Zambia. The extent to which the goals of the programs are being met will be determined in each country through surveys, observation and case studies, involving both the people living on the sites and those in neighbouring communities affected by the innovations.

More studies, more reports, more talk. But all are necessary steps if the past mistakes of unplanned cities are to be rectified and repetition avoided. At the recent United Nations conference on human settlements in Vancouver many of the delegates called for city planning on a more human scale, and favoured an emphasis on self-help building technologies. Such studies, and the networks of planners they create, bring such ideals a little closer to realization. □

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