

CURRENT LIVING CONDITION IN URBAN RESIDENTIAL AREAS IN VIETNAM

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I. OVERVIEW OF URBAN HOUSING SITUATION IN VIETNAM:

1. Vietnam has the area of 330,991 square kilometers with the population of 76.3 million people. Vietnam has 650 cities and towns with the population of 18 million accounting for 23% of the nation's population, of which:
 - 4 central cities (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh city, Hai Phong, Da Nang)
 - 82 provincial towns
 - 564 district towns
2. Existing housing stock in urban areas mainly formulated by three sources:
 - Built by the people themselves
 - Built by the housing developers for sale and leasing
 - State-owned housing stock constructed before 1992 for leasing to civil servants and workers. Currently the Government is entitling the tenants to buy these houses.
3. In 10 years' time (from 1991 to the year 2000) housing area nation wide has been increased to 700 million square meters from 629 million square meters. In urban areas only, 50 million square meters of dwellings were built in which 75% built by individuals and 25% built by housing developers. On average annual growth rate is 5 million square meters.
4. According to the shelter survey in 1999, among 4,022,471 houses in urban areas:
 - 76.84% have their self-owned houses; 23.16% are tenants
 - 95.77% have electricity for lighting, 4.23% use other sources for lighting.
 - 46.88% have access to clean water and the rest 53.12% use water from wells.
 - 54.29% households have flushing toilets, the rest 45.71% use simple toilets
5. Popular types of houses in urban areas are as follows:
 - Street houses (Adjacent houses): type of houses constructed along 2 sides of streets and lanes with average height from 2 to 4 storeys often for 1 family. This type is popular in urban areas in Vietnam.
 - Villa: independent type of house with garden. Often the area is between 100 square meters and 1,000 square meters and average height of 2 to 3 storeys for 1 family.
 - High-rise buildings: with flats for households. High-rise buildings constructed in the period of subsidized economy have 4 to 5 storeys. High-rise buildings constructed recently normally have 9 to 21 storeys.

II. CURRET LIVING CONDITION IN URBAN RESIDENTIAL AREA IN VIETNAM:

Currently urbanization process is developing rapidly in most of cities and towns. The number of migrants from rural areas to big cities is larger while economic development growth rate is at low level leading to environmental problems in urban residential areas, particularly in state-owned high-rise buildings constructed in subsidized economy (before 1992), in ancient and old streets, in slums unplanned constructed in big cities especially in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city.

1. Housing quality and comfortability

1.1 Dwelling area and quality in urban areas in general is at low level.

According to data from shelter survey in 1999:

a. Housing quality

- Durable houses: 25.7%
- Semi-durable houses: 63.6%
- Simple houses: 10.7%

b. Dwelling area

- 28.45% of households have dwelling area more than 60 square meters
- 32.46% of households have dwelling area ranging from 37 square meters to 60 square meters
- 35.73% of households have dwelling area from 15 square meters to 36 square meters
- 3.36% of households have dwelling area less than 15 square meters

c. Average dwelling area per capita in urban areas reached approximately 7.5 square meters

1.2 From the captioned statistics, we can see that housing quality is low and there are a large number of simple houses and semi-durable houses. Dwelling area per household and per household and per capita is lower than rates of other regional countries. Many houses just only have 1 to 2 rooms. And many others don't have living rooms and separate rooms for children. High-rise buildings constructed in subsidized economy have apartments with shared kitchens, bathrooms and toilets.

1.3 Unregistered expansion of dwelling area is happening in most residential areas particularly in state-owned high-rise buildings. A large number of damaged houses and houses in unsafe situation are still in use.

2. Physical infrastructure in urban residential areas:

With regards to dwelling areas built before 1990: people just paid attention to housing

construction but did not care much about physical infrastructure (roads, electricity supply, water supply and drainage etc.) With respect to high-rise buildings physical infrastructure is developed well while in other areas this is not paid due attention. In ancient and old streets infrastructure has been degrading due to long-time using, unplanned expansion of dwelling area and dense population. In unplanned dwelling areas, in lanes of big cities, particularly in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city illegal construction of houses in public land causes road shrinking. In many small lanes only motorbikes can be used for transportation while cars cannot. Drainage system cannot afford raining water whenever there is raining causing flooding in many residential areas.

3. Living environment and sanitation:

As a result of low quality and comfortability and physical infrastructure, living environment and sanitation is also bad.

- In high-rise buildings constructed in subsidized system: unplanned expansion of dwelling area is popular. Irregular improvement and poor management of shared facilities namely drainage system, staircase and corridor cause degradation of the facilities and polluted living environment. Due to shortage of clean water most of households must construct their own water tank as reservoir leading to leakage. In old living quarters illegal occupation of public land is common. There seems to be no playground for children.
- In ancient and old streets: many households are still sharing latrines, even some are using bucket latrines. Many houses were previously designed for nuclear family. Now their children who grew up and got married but could not afford to buy a separate flat are still sharing the house with their parents. This has put an unmanageable burden on physical infrastructure. Front parts of houses are used as shops selling things leading to shrinking of dwelling areas. Ancient streets are trading centers with high population density and less green space causing environmental pollution and bad health condition.
- In urban slums: dwellers are mainly migrants from rural areas, illegally occupied public lands and constructed their own houses. Most of houses are simple ones without physical infrastructure. Water supply, sewerage water and storming water drainage, solid waste collection is not properly done at the time being. In general living environment is severely polluting.

III. SOME ACHIEVEMENTS IN IMPROVING LIVING CONDITION

1. Many housing projects new urban centers with physical and social infrastructure have been developed recently with various housing models in one project: villas, adjacent houses, and high-rise buildings (more than 9 storeys). All apartments are at least 60 square meters with separate rooms for each purpose (living room, kitchen, toilet, bathroom and at least 2 bedrooms)

For the period from 1991 to 1995 there were only 98 housing development projects nation wide (mainly in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city). From 1996 to 2000, there were totally 500 housing projects.

2. Entitling tenants to buy houses from state-owned housing stock has made them more actively involved in management, maintenance and restoration of houses which greatly contribute to improvement of living condition
3. Water distribution system for high-rise buildings has been improved over the past time and ensures water supply for households, therefore helps reduce the cases when dwellers construct their water tank on the roof or inside their houses. In Hanoi, there is an ongoing pilot project for expansion of dwelling area for state-owned blocks of flats with a view to helping dwellers to have more comfortability and limit hygienic conditions, polluted living environment and bad views.
4. In ancient and old streets, pavements and sanitation have been improved. 75% of simple toilets have been replaced with flushing toilets.
5. Clearance of slums on the banks of Nhieu Loc-Thi Nghe in Ho Chi Minh city has been implemented over the past 5 years. Several 5 storey buildings were built with flats for resettlement program. Together with that river banks were stabilized, surrounding paths were constructed and green trees were planted on the banks of rivers to make them more beautiful views. In 2001 some rivers in Hanoi have also been improved the same way in Ho Chi Minh city. Some slum areas in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city have also been cleared and dwellers are resettled in flats of housing projects with physical infrastructure.

IV. SOLUTIONS FOR THE YEARS TO COME:

1. To encourage planning and investment in housing development projects and new urban areas with standard physical infrastructure. Concentrations will be put on high-rise buildings with separate apartments to meet the demand for dwellings and resettlement for slum inhabitants.
2. For blocks of flats with acceptable quality, priority will be focused on renovation and refurbishment. If dwelling area is limited then expansion will be conducted. Poor quality and unsafe buildings will be abolished and reconstructed with more storey buildings and larger apartments.
3. To implement new construction projects in slum areas, dwelling areas on banks of canals and rivers with polluted living environment and bad views.
4. So as to reach those above-mentioned targets the Government should create “enabling” policy and priority towards housing developers (i.e. capital support, land use tax exemption) particularly housing projects for low-income and the

poor./.