

PO Box 6812, Boroko,
Papua New Guinea
Phone 675 3257663
e-mail tusitala@datec.nct.pg



19 September 2009

The Chief Executive Officer
Independent Consumer and Competition Commission
PO Box 6394,
Boroko, NCD

Attn: Mr Thomas Abe

Dear Mr Abe,

**SUBJECT: COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS FROM A REGISTERED
ARCHITECT FOR IMPROVING THE HOUSING INDUSTRY IN PAPUA NEW
GUINEA**

Thank you for inviting the public to make comments on this issue.

New Zealand's Experience:

I am a New Zealander brought up in the 1950s and 60's in an egalitarian society where socialist principles adopted by various governments following the Great Depression had ensured that every New Zealander lived in decent and affordable housing and enjoyed free health and dental care.

Prior to the 1930's, the situation was very much like it is in PNG at the moment, with a large rural population, rapid urbanization and urban poor living in squalid conditions. (My education was virtually free, compulsory and secular as has been the education for all New Zealanders for the last 120 years. Even at Tertiary Level fees then were affordable by poor families for their bright children.)

This dramatic change in New Zealand's housing situation had been achieved by the government boldly borrowing vast sums from UK, engaging the best Architects to design functional compact family homes; organizing the building industry, arranging 30 year mortgages through an organization similar to the Housing Commission and setting rentals based on about 20% of average family incomes.

During the 1970's Government Policies in NZ encouraged more private sector initiatives as the gulf between rich and poor rapidly increased. At present the poor still have the benefit of a reasonable welfare state safety net, and the rich are paying for this through the taxation system.

My PNG Experience:

I was a contracted Works Department Senior Architect for 8 years from 1983-90. Independence was not that long before, the economy was buoyant from the income from Bougainville and the Department of Works and Housing Commission were reasonably functional.

During those years I helped develop the existing range of government staff housing designs including the L-40 (1983) and the H-56 (1989). Hundreds of these light timber framed houses were built throughout all provinces of PNG mainly as 'institutional housing' for public servants.

Successes of National Housing Commission:

During the late 1980's and early 1990's the National Housing Commission obtained ADB loans of some K100m and carried out an effective rationalization of 'squatter settlements' on vacant government land at Gordons Ridge, Erima and 9-mile. This included the surveying of the settlements into allotments, providing access roads, power supplies and water supplies. Toilets relied on septic tanks and pit latrines and still do so to this day.

Our Attitude Towards Squatters:

The above three suburbs of NCD demonstrated what can be positively achieved in giving LAND TITLES to Papua New Guineans who had taken the initiative of finding vacant government land and putting up their own shelter. I wonder WHY ARE WE VICTIMISING SUCH SQUATTERS TODAY? They are our cousins and wantoks who have the same aspirations as us to improve their lives. It is the city and the nation that has failed to mobilize land, provide infrastructure and assist people to get a land title and begin to live in dignity and also pay a fair share for the water, power and services they consume.

Cheaper Houses?

85% of Papua New Guineans build themselves a comfortable and dignified (bush materials) house every 5 or 10 years. But these houses are not 'free'. About 1000 hours of hard labour goes in to build a 50 square metre family house.

Think of the village bush materials for the house- about 75% of the sweat takes place in cutting and lugging the hardwood posts, black palm flooring, light round pole framing and kunai or sago roof thatch. Only 25% of the hard work is in assembling the house.

Using 'western technology' for 'permanent housing' then what you pay for is what you get. Generally purchasing the 'western materials' cost 75% of the cost of the building, and the local semi-skilled labour with a bit of skilled supervision costs 25%. The materials are manufactured in factories in Australia or China. Even the cement is manufactured overseas (although PNG has rich supplies of all the raw materials needed to manufacture its own cement- energy (gas or oil or solar) limestone, gypsum and clay.

Classy residential units on Touaguba, with expat. Supervision, better tradesmen and healthy profit margins- the percentages become about 65%/35%.

Architects or builders cannot magically make timber, concrete and steel cheaper. The only way is to make houses smaller or subsidise building materials, or to facilitate the home builder 'do-it-yourself' (DIY!) as shown in hundreds of examples of solid concrete houses built with advice from Housing For Humanity during the 1990s. Families wanting to build a house have to put in a lot of the labour themselves. A small capital loan (~K3-4000 per house) is made that must be then paid back to the lender.

RECOMMENDATION: Officially endorse and provide funding for "Housing for Humanity" as the trusted organization to carry out improved value housing throughout PNG's urban settlements by up-skilling grass roots people to build their own homes. Government Agencies to be charged with mobilizing land required. Encourage the formation of similar self-help housing initiatives nationwide.

Secure Land Title- the first step:

All we need to do is provide SECURE TITLE to a family and over one or two generations they will gradually improve their shelter from being a bit of canvas, to being a re-cycled material shack, to eventually being a dignified and comfortable home.

Making affordable loans available for gradual extensions and improvements will accelerate the above process -from taking several decades to just a few years.

RECOMMENDATION: Replicate the Gordons Ridge Programme IMMEDIATELY to be completed within 5 years for ALL VACANT GOVERNMENT LAND that currently has squatters on it.

If NCD Strategic Planning is under-resourced to carry out the required technical and political initiatives, engage experts who CAN deliver in a timely manner.

Mobilising Customary Land:

Naturally the Baruni Land Owners who got K60000 for 'giving Gerehu to the Government' during the 1960's are rather annoyed that the Department of Lands is creaming off about K4m per annum from Gerehu, while they (the original landowners) still live in their shacks on the fringes of Gerehu.

The June Valley Pilot project being managed by NCD and currently underway should have a rocket put under it. Why is it taking so many years??

Obviously the State has to provide GUARANTEED FAIR LONG TERM LEASE RENTALS to the traditional land owners that are based on the rising value of the land being mobilized.

RECOMMENDATION:

That 0.9% percent of the current value of all mobilized Customary Residential Land be put back in the pockets of the Registered Traditional Land Owners as the Guaranteed Annual Rental. Let the Department of Lands continue to collect the present 1% (5% for commercially utilized properties) and keep 10% for their collection fees.

Empowering our Physical (Town) Planners:

The current generation of planners, in my opinion have been indoctrinated in the art of 'colouring the map' that unfortunately dominated the 20th Century and has created awful cities around the world. These cities are dominated by automobiles, and are very unfriendly to pedestrians. Residential suburbs, 'like Gerehu' are placed many kilometers from where people have to go to work and school.

Present rules restrict the use of road reserves for safe parking, whereas world-wide in cities such public utility space may be used by residents for spill-over and visitor parking.

RECOMMENDATION:

That NCD Physical Planning be instructed to develop new Planning Regulations for Port Moresby, new Residential Densities with rules encouraging design and development of a compact high density model suburb allowing 3-4 storey walk-up tropical style urban town-house living, to gradually replace the 1960's garden suburb concept of the present Boroko.

Such new mixed residential/light commercial developments should be encouraged to include 'restaurants'; 'Home Office' and 'Home Workshop' accommodation so that a higher percentage of people can operate business without the need for commuting. In this way, another few 'Gerehus' will NOT be needed, but another million people will be able to be accommodated satisfactorily within the current footprint of urban development.

Encouraging Our Civil Engineers:

Look at Port Moresby. There is NO FOOTPATH for pedestrians to walk from Badili to Boroko along the Hubert Murray Highway, yet we find K100m to build an engineering marvel- the Poroporena Freeway that slices through a 500m high mountain.

Watch the shoppers crossing the busy roundabout from TST Boroko to get the buses traveling north to Waigani. What have we done? There are pedestrians killed daily all around our Capital City because of the lack of infrastructure to protect them and facilitate their safe walking.

Competent Engineers set out the infrastructure for Boroko in the 1950's and 1960s and the roading, water system and sewerage systems have managed to cope with only minor upgrading for the last half century.

The next generation of our Civil Engineers will be needed to put in place all the infrastructure that a million new houses and flats will require.

Getting Central Province connected by road to the market opportunities of all other provinces will be another challenge!

RECOMMENDATION:

That the PNG Institution of Engineers be challenged to hold a 'Pedestrian-Friendly Port Moresby' engineering design ideas competition.

The Role of Architects:

Unfortunately the ICCD Discussion Paper hardly mentioned Architects. Perhaps they are seen to the agents of the wealth elite, which is largely true.

Perhaps they have failed to market their skills to the wider community?

Perhaps they have been simply depressed through two decades of a near stagnant building industry?

But their training and experience makes them experts in building technology and building contract administration. They could and probably should be challenged to play an active role in the next drive to provide decent permanent housing for all Papua New Guineans who choose to live in town.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the PNG Institute of Architects be challenged to assist the dialogue and hold a design competition on the subject of 'New Patterns of Higher Density Tropical Urban Living for PNG.

Yours faithfully,



M.B.E.

Derek Smith B. Arch; FPNGIA

Copy to:
The President
PNG Institute of Architects
Port Moresby

"Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined only to your own selves"