

The case of Havana, Cuba

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I INTRODUCTION: THE CITY

A. THE URBAN CONTEXT

1. National Overview¹

At the time of its 1959 revolution, Cuba shared with most other developing nations a highly distorted, export-oriented and import-dependent economy.² Three-quarters of what little industry it had was concentrated in Havana, the capital. Living conditions in rural areas were not unlike those in most other Latin American societies. But at the same time, Cuba had some attributes of a developed country. More than half the country's population lived in urban areas; the majority of its urban and rural labour force were wage earners, most of whom were unionised; and the standard of living in its largest cities was relatively high compared with other developing nations at the time. Nevertheless, there were vast differences between the city and countryside and between downtown areas and urban peripheries.

Unlike other governments that emerged following world wars, extensive rebellions, or natural disasters, the Cuban revolutionary government took over a country whose economic and residential infrastructures remained largely intact. While Cuba faced continuing military, economic, political, and psychological aggression from the United States – including a protracted economic embargo – it suffered less physical damage and loss of life than did many other countries. Moreover,

Cuba was relatively homogeneous in terms of race, ethnicity, language, climate, and geography.

The revolutionary government's early policies included the agrarian and urban reform laws and the nationalisation of the educational system, banks and many industries. The early housing and urban land policies included sweeping housing legislation affecting nearly all urban residents, distribution of vacant units, innovative construction programmes reaching a small number of urban and rural households, and assistance to private builders.

2. Urban and Regional Policies

The basic urban and regional policies enunciated in the early 1960s were largely followed for the next quarter century (INV, 2001b; PNC, 1996). These policies were designed to:

- 1) promote balanced regional growth by directing resources to areas other than Havana, including designated growth poles,
- 2) diminish urban-rural differences and stabilise the agricultural labour force by improving living conditions in the countryside and concentrating the rural population in small settlements,

3) foster the development of a network of urban and rural settlements of different sizes and functions, and

4) assure rational land use through comprehensive urban planning. The government hoped to accomplish these goals by co-ordinating economic and social development with physical planning.

At least until the early 1990s, these policies were largely successful, although with contradictions and problems in achieving rational land use and stabilising the rural labour force.

Despite fleeting anti-urban rhetoric in the late 1960s, Cuba sought to increase the proportion of its population living in urban areas, reaching 75 per cent by 2000 (ONE, 2001). But its annual rate of urban growth has been one of the lowest in Latin America, and, unlike other countries in the region, urban growth occurred primarily outside the capital. Havana's share of the country's economic activity and social and educational institutions declined significantly. The capital's share of non-sugar industry dropped from 70 per cent in 1959 to 34 per cent in 1988. During the same period its share of doctors decreased from 63 per cent to 41 per cent, hospital beds from 61 per cent to 36 per cent, and university students from 80 per cent to 23 per cent (PNC, 1996).

The decline in Havana's importance was matched by a shift in migration patterns and urban growth rates. During the 1970s small towns and cities grew at an annual rate of 2.3–3.4 per cent a year, in contrast to 0.7 per cent in Havana, and 1.1 per cent in the country as a whole. In the 1980s, Havana's growth rate was only 1.0 per cent a year. This shift took place in the absence of *direct* migration control measures until the late 1990s, making Cuba one of the few developing nations to contain the growth of its largest city (CEDEM, 1996).

Except for high-priority development zones and projects, the national government left responsibility for housing to local governments, whose resources rarely equalled demand. Moreover, Havana received even lower priority for housing and community services to discourage migration and because it started at a much higher level than the rest of the country. The result was that since 1959 at least two-thirds of all housing units created nationally – by new construction, addition, subdivision or conversion from non-residential uses – were self-built rather than state-built, although many were produced in the informal sector and are only counted in the census and through other estimates (Hamberg, 1994, 2001).

3. The 1990s Economic Crisis

The fall of the Socialist Bloc in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe starting in 1989 had devastating consequences for Cuba. Cuba's participation in COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance – the Eastern European common market) had made long-range plan-

ning possible. Moreover, Cuba had depended heavily on those countries for oil, equipment and spare parts and suffered extraordinary hardships as these became more difficult to obtain. In addition, the island had enjoyed assured markets for imports and exports at favourable prices and soft credits. In late 1990 the government declared an economic state of emergency called the "special period in peacetime". Cuba aggressively pursued joint ventures with foreign companies, and the tourist and biotechnology industries grew rapidly, but GDP still contracted by more than a third between 1989 and 1993, energy availability by half and import capacity dropped by 75 per cent (CEPAL, 2000; INV, 1999).

The economic crisis created widespread dislocations in the labour market. By the mid-1990s, out of 4.6 million employed people in the state, farm co-operative and private sectors, hundreds of thousands were under-employed, earning their regular salaries for working at only 40 or 50 per cent capacity. By 1996, Cuba's official unemployment peaked at nearly 8 per cent (Togores González, 2002) but eventually dropped to 4.1 in 2001 (Tejera Díaz, 2002). Self-employment, partially re-legalised in the late 1970s, was considerably expanded, in part to absorb the growing number of jobless. A series of other measures decentralised parts of the economy and government, and economic planning, banking and fiscal regulations were overhauled (Ferriol Muruaga et al., 1998).

Other measures to address the crisis included the legalisation of the use of dollars, creating a dual currency situation (not "dollarisation"). Some markets accept both pesos and dollars, some only dollars, but only pesos are accepted for most essential goods and services, such as rationed goods, transportation, rent or housing loan payments.

The nominal exchange rate of Cuban pesos to dollars remains unchanged since 1959 at one to one, but government foreign exchange stores charge the going "street" rate. It peaked at nearly 150 pesos per dollar in 1994 (Ferriol Muruaga et al, 1998), but in response to measures to revive the economy and absorb excess liquidity in the economy, it soon descended to around 20 pesos per dollar – although by 2002 it had risen to 26 pesos per dollar. Prices of rationed food and other goods, transportation, medicine (although sometimes scarce) and many other essential goods and services remained largely unchanged and charged in pesos. But shortages in the low-cost peso shops meant Cubans were often forced to resort to government-run dollar stores, free-market agricultural outlets and the informal and black markets to supplement their diets, with prices beyond the reach of most Cubans. Pensions and salaries inched up but were insufficient to cover increased costs. On the other hand, education and health care continued to be provided free and housing was low-cost or free for most households. For this reason, dollar equivalents of peso prices do not accurately reflect true costs or income, and

therefore will not be used here. Indeed, comparative reports by international agencies omit income figures for Cuba, report Cuban pesos, or use estimates based on other sources (Cid Sands, 1999; UNDP, 2002)

4. Havana: Its History and Geography

The city of Havana was founded on its present site on Cuba's north-western coast in 1519.³ More than two hundred years ago it was already the most important city in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Basin. Because of its strategic location, Havana served as a springboard for the Spanish conquest of the continent, and it also was the final meeting point for all Spanish ships before sailing back to Spain carrying the riches taken from the Americas. The role as supplier to and guardian of the fleet stamped Havana with an early tertiary character. With a population of some 4,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the 17th century, the city sometimes supported up to 10,000 soldiers and sailors. The small native population was promptly eliminated, leaving few traces in the built environment, archaeological record or culture.

The late 1700s shift to a buoyant export-oriented slave-based plantation economy was quickly reflected in the built environment with elaborate public buildings, private mansions and public spaces. This urban grandeur increased in the early 1800s as Cuba became one of the two remaining Spanish colonies in America. Formal independence from Spain in 1902, after three decades of harsh wars, considerably strengthened the political and economic influence of the United States. By 1920, Havana and Buenos Aires were the two leading Latin American cities, in part because of their urban image, which was still very European.

Havana has almost thirty kilometres of coastline that include attractive beaches to the east. The bay, covering five square kilometres, has a narrow neck and then widens like a large bag, protected by a cliff and the most impressive system of colonial fortresses built by Europeans in the Americas, including the oldest and the largest.

Old Havana had an irregular grid of narrow streets and small city blocks with buildings sharing party walls, so ventilation was mainly through inner courtyards. This very compact pattern supported a coherent urban fabric where squares and

churches were dominant features. By the mid-1700s the population had reached more than 60,000 in an urbanised area of 151 hectares. The defensive walls were slowly built between 1674 and 1797, so the city already had outgrown them before they were finished. The poor, including freed slaves, lived mostly in the southern tip of the walled city and south-west of the walls. The finger-like urban expansion followed the roads connecting with the rural hinterland that supplied the city (see **Figure 1**). These roads were gradually urbanised and became the typical calzadas: wide streets with tall porticoed pedestrian corridors opening into stores and dwellings above. Around the first third of the 19th century the Creole patrician families – the sugar aristocracy – began to settle to the south-west along the Calzada del Cerro. Detached neoclassical villas, the casas quintas, replaced the typical 1700s baroque palaces of the compact walled city. In 1859 a well-planned western suburb close to the coast presented a better alternative, with trees for the first time forming part of the regular street layout. This huge district, known under the general name of El Vedado, boomed shortly after independence.

The old core of 143 hectares within the walls, plus a 19th century extension and the full colonial defensive system, was designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1982. But Havana's historically valuable buildings actually cover a much larger area – more than 2,000 hectares – that exhibit almost all the Western architectural styles seen in the New World. During the first third of the 20th century there was an impressive construction boom. Havana accumulated a very large

Figure 1. Historic Development of Havana 1519-1958



stock of eclectic architecture that included public buildings and dwellings built for all social strata.

In the 1920's a new upscale subdivision, Miramar, was started close to the waterfront to the west of Vedado, separated by the Almendares River. It still followed the grid pattern, but with larger lots and even more green space than El Vedado. Miramar deliberately lacked stores and other amenities to discourage the less affluent. Fifth Avenue, its elegant, tree-lined boulevard, served as the area's backbone, and continued further to the west to the ultimate upper-class district, Country Club, now Cubanacán, where the Spanish-American grid changed into a winding, City Beautiful-like Anglo-Saxon pattern. After the Second World War there was another construction boom of Modern Movement architecture that extended into the late 1960's.

Havana was different from most other major Latin American cities for several reasons. Being under colonial rule for almost eighty years longer than the continental colonies, and closer to the United States, Havana had much more Spanish and later U.S. influence. Since it grew mainly by addition rather than replacement, the different layers of its rich built heritage were basically spared. The street layout, a typical Spanish-American grid creating regular city blocks with small lots and low-rise buildings, gave Havana a special skyline, texture, rhythm, urban character and scale. But despite the substantial number of buildings from the colonial period, most structures in Havana are less than one hundred years old. All this contributes to a rich mixture of periods, styles and streetscapes. Even if it has a definite urban character, Havana is relatively flat, and its lower density provides a special quality of life that is missing in other cities that have undergone over-development.

The typical social pattern that stamped most other major Latin American cities – basically a few very wealthy families against an unending backdrop of urban poor – was not found in Havana. There were more than a few wealthy families, and their presence in the city fabric was more evident since they left a trail of fine mansions in their constant quest for better and classier places. Those mansions were turned into stores or subdivided as tenements, but the buildings were not erased by speculation and the population was not displaced by gentrification.

The very poor were relatively invisible. They were masked in inner city tenements behind classical facades, scattered in shantytowns at the periphery, or even tucked away in squatter settlements in the midst of wealthy areas. But what really shaped Havana was the existence of a very sizeable lower-middle class who lived in dwellings with a reasonably high quality of design and construction, creating a well-defined urban fabric that covers large sections of the city.

The January 1, 1959 Cuban revolution found a capital city housing one-fifth of the country's 6 million people. The new government stopped land speculation,

something that was already beginning to distort residential neighbourhoods like El Vedado. Looking for a more balanced national distribution of wealth and population, construction was oriented mainly to hundreds of small new rural villages and a network of provincial capitals and intermediate cities, while new shapeless housing developments in Havana were built mainly on the outskirts. Thus, a sharp distinction rose between the traditional city and the new housing tracts where hundreds of thousands found bedroom communities with few urban amenities and services. This policy indirectly preserved the inner city. Nevertheless, the 1990's crisis started to leave an impact in the city. The search for foreign currency pushed the construction of stores, offices, hotels and other tourist services in residential neighbourhoods to the west along the coast.

5. Havana's Population

By the end of the 20th century, Havana's population was nearly 2.19 million – around one-fifth of the country – in an urbanised area of 360 square kilometres (ONE, 2001). The last nation-wide Population and Housing Census was conducted in 1981 (CEE-ONC, 1984). The next one was held in September 2002, but the results will not be available for some time afterward, so most population data is based on estimates.

The city's population grew slowly as a result of balanced development policies, Havana's low birth rate, its relatively high rate of emigration abroad, and its low rate of domestic migration. Ironically, the city's housing shortage also contributed to slow growth. But net domestic migration to Havana spiked in the mid-1990s in response to the economic crisis. A 1997 law regulating migration to Havana and to some areas within Havana based on housing adequacy stabilised the population. According to official statistics (ONE, 2001), it has even decreased slightly in recent years, but the 2002 Census may reveal a larger than expected number of inhabitants.

A little over half of Havana's residents are female. Because of the city's – and country's – low birth rate and high life expectancy, its age structure is similar to a developed country, with Havana having an even higher proportion of elderly than the country as a whole (MINSAP, 2000). In 1981, over three-fifths of the population identified as white, one-fifth as black, one-sixth as mestizo (more popularly referred to as mulatto), and 0.2 per cent as Asian, reflecting immigration from China in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (CEE-ONC, 1984).

6. Havana's Economy

Havana has a diversified economy, with traditional sectors, such as manufacturing, construction, transportation and communications, and new or revived ones such as biotechnology and tourism. Havana is also the

country's administrative, cultural and educational centre, although not nearly as much as before 1959.

In 2000, nearly 89 per cent of Havana's officially recorded labour force worked for government-run agencies, institutions or enterprises, according to a study by Omar Pérez Villanueva (2002). Before the 1990s economic crisis, Cuba had a virtually full employment economy, albeit with somewhat inefficient and over-staffed workplaces. By 1994, Havana's official unemployment rate peaked at 8.8 per cent, but by 2000 it had dropped to a more respectable 4.7 per cent, though still higher than the low of 3.0 per cent in 1990. Almost 2 per cent of the labour force were employed by joint-venture companies, and over 9 per cent – or 71,000 – were in the non-state sector. Of these, some 25,000 were legally self-employed, down from nearly 50,000 in 1994 because of greater availability of jobs, growing competition among the self-employed and steep fines, taxes and fees. This figure doesn't include 4,500 who provide private transportation services – such as carting and taxis – and 3,600 who legally rent out rooms. An additional unknown number of people work in the informal sector, ranging from unlicensed and untaxed – but otherwise legal – self-employment to outright black market activities, often involving sale of stolen goods, money changing and prostitution (Pérez Villanueva, 2002). Women represent 44.3 per cent of Havana's labour force, somewhat higher than their proportion at the national level (37.6 per cent) (ONE, 2001).

Havana, on average, has the country's highest incomes and human development indicators (CIEM, 2000), but it also is one of the areas where growing inequality is felt most because of a higher concentration of access to foreign exchange, foreign investment, families receiving remittances from relatives abroad and tourism (Espina Prieto et al, 2000).

7. Governance

After the 1959 revolution, local Havana government was administered under a succession of different names and structures during the 1960s and early 1970s.⁴ Finally, as part of the 1970's "institutionalisation process", the county's political and administrative structures were reorganised, a new Constitution promulgated, and a system of local, provincial and national government, known as People's Power (*Poder Popular*) established. Cuba's six provinces were divided into 14 provinces plus a "special municipality". Havana became a separate province named "City of Havana" to distinguish it from the surrounding "Province of Havana" – although in this report "Havana" is used to refer to the city itself. The newly minted "city-province", which was in turn divided into 15 municipalities, encompassed Havana's central city, its suburbs and even land on the outskirts still used for agriculture (see **Figure 2**).

Voters elect delegates to Municipal Assemblies in competitive elections. There is only one political party – the Communist Party – but since there must be a minimum of two candidates, members of the Communist Party often run against each other. Candidates are not required to be members of the party. They are nominated directly by citizens in open meetings within each election district. Municipal Assembly delegates in turn elect members of the Provincial Assembly, which in Havana serves roughly as the City Council; its president functions as the Mayor. There are direct elections for deputies to the National Assembly based on slates, and a portion of the candidates is nominated at the local level.

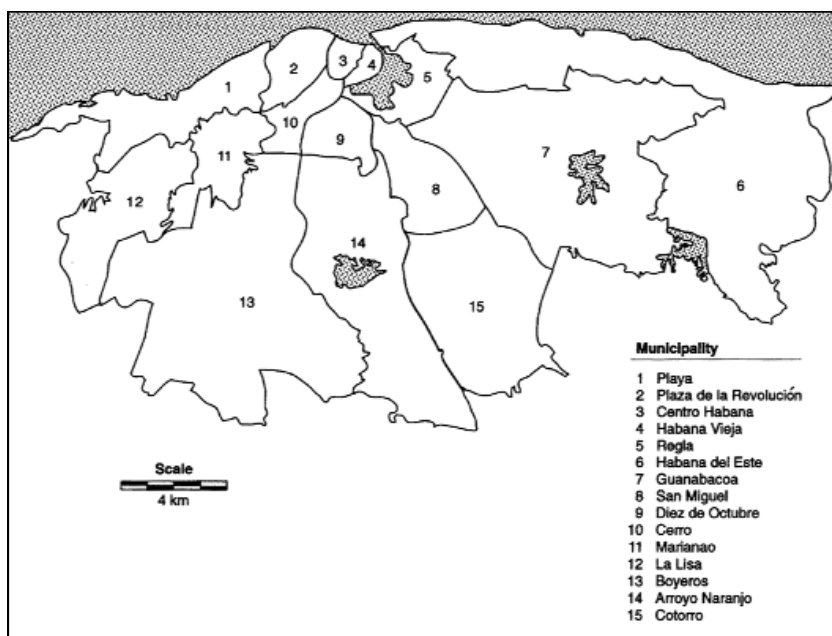


Figure 2:
Havana's 15 Municipalities

Most members of the Municipal and Provincial Assemblies keep their regular jobs, but some become full-time members of an Administrative Council which is responsible for overseeing the work of government-run agencies and enterprises. Municipal delegates hold biannual “accountability” meetings to hear complaints and suggestions from their constituents and report on progress regarding complaints from the previous meeting.

Because of large distances (in rural areas) or large populations (in urban areas) an even more local structure was created first in small rural towns in the late 1980s and then in Havana in 1990. It was extended to the entire country in 1992. These new People’s Councils (*Consejos Populares*) consist of local municipal delegates who elect a full-time representative to preside over the body. In addition, there is participation from “mass organisations” (discussed below) and representatives of local government agencies, industries and services. The 105 People’s Councils in Havana cover an average of 20,000 residents.

Like most other Latin American city governments, Havana has little autonomy and depends on the central government for its budget, which is rarely adequate to address the city’s most pressing problems, especially during the 1990s economic troubles. The most important issues confronting the capital include housing, food supply, transportation and deteriorated infrastructure, including water mains, streets, and educational and health facilities (Lee, 2001).

II. SLUMS AND THE AT RISK POPULATION

In market economies most of the poor live in slums and most slum-dwellers are poor. However, in Cuba this is much less the case because of relative tenure security, generally low-cost or free housing, and restricted legal housing and land markets (despite the growth in the informal sector). Moreover, people living in substandard housing have access to the same education, health care, job opportunities and social security as those who live in formerly privileged neighbourhoods. As we discuss later, these opportunities are nevertheless sometimes limited in practice because of the subtle persistence of racial and social prejudices. But compared to other countries, Cuban slums are quite socially diverse, and “poverty” is relatively dispersed.

Although slum-dwellers were “fixed” in place when the 1960 Urban Reform Law granted them long-term leases to their dwelling units, many other policies and informal practices favoured increased geographic heterogeneity (Oliveras and Núñez, 2001). For instance, in the early years after the revolution, many vacant units in “good”

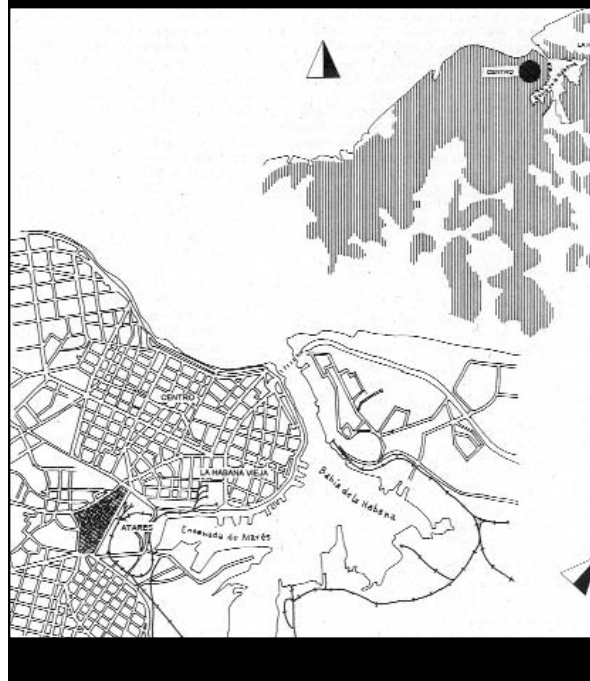
neighbourhoods were turned over to low-income residents or migrants to Havana or they simply squatted in vacant units. Also new state-built housing has a mix of residents since units are assigned to a range of employees of workplaces as well as those living in shelters or seriously deteriorated dwellings. However, in the 1990s there were early signs of a modest “re-segregation” as a result of growing income inequality.

In terms of the poor, Cuban researchers argue that “poverty” in most commonly accepted meanings does not really exist in Cuba, but rather that there is a sector of the population that can be described as “at risk” or “vulnerable” (Ferriol Muruaga et al., 1998). These terms will be used in this report.

B. TYPES OF SLUMS, THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND THEIR PEOPLE

Although the generic term “slum” (or *tugurio* in Spanish) is seldom used in Cuba, there are several ways that substandard housing is described: housing type, housing conditions, building materials, and settlement type. Most slum units are concentrated in the inner-city municipalities of Old Havana (La Habana Vieja) and Centro Habana, as well as such neighbourhoods as Atarés (see **Figure 3**).

Figure 3: Inner-City Slums are Concentrated in Old Havana (La Habana Vieja), Centro Habana, and Neighbourhoods such as Atarés, some of which Border on Havana Bay (Bahía de La Habana)



Shantytowns are scattered throughout the city except for in a few central areas (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 4. Location of Havana Shantytown Areas



1. Housing Types

The Cuban government regards three housing types as inherently substandard – tenements, rural thatched-roof *bohíos* and improvised units:

1.1 Tenements

The typical inner city slum dwelling unit is a room in a tenement, known by the terms *ciudadela*, *cuartería*, *casa de vecindad*, *pasaje* or *solar* (Mathéy, 1994; Ortega Morales, 1996). It is usually a single room with shared bathing and sanitary facilities in a common courtyard or passageway, although such rooms are often upgraded and expanded to include indoor plumbing – indeed, according to the 1981 census, 44 per cent of tenements had water inside the unit and that number continued to increase in the following two decades. Nevertheless, such additions are mostly done at the expense of scarce open space, natural light and ventilation. *Ciudadelas* consist of a single or double row of rooms built along a long, narrow courtyard. They began as weekday housing for poor single men from rural areas who worked at Havana’s big markets. A *cuartería* is a large mansion or older hotel or boarding house subdivided into rooms, sometimes with over 60 families, while a *casa de vecindad* is a smaller subdivided house, generally with 12 rooms or less. *Pasajes* are a double row of small dwellings (similar to efficiencies) consisting of a living-dining room, kitchenette, one bedroom, bathroom and a small service courtyard, set along a long, narrow alley usually open to streets at both ends. A *solar* is the popular term to refer to all forms of buildings subdivided into single-room units, usually with shared services. (see **Photos 1, 2, 3** and **Figure 5**)

The great majority of these single-room units are located in older multifamily buildings in central areas of

Havana. But individual, stand-alone rooms are also found in the backyards of inner-city blocks and in shantytowns. A “hybrid” between tenement and a small shantytown appears when additions to a former mansion subdivided into rooms extend out into the backyard until they become individual units detached from the original building. Census reports and the National Housing Institute (*Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda*, INV) generically refer to all such single room units as “*cuarterías*” or “rooms in *cuarterías*” – which is translated in this report as “tenement”. In 2001, there were 60,754 tenement units in 6,932 buildings in Havana, representing nearly three-quarters of all such units in Cuba (INV, 2001a)

About half of the residents of tenements and also of full apartments in older buildings with high ceilings have built *barbacoas*, a native word for a rustic hut or platform, but also extended to mean grill or barbecue (Arranz González, 1998; Plan Maestro, 1996). These are makeshift mezzanines or loft-like structures that create an extra floor, nearly doubling the floor space of the unit (**Figure 6**). Although they are a creative way to stretch space, they are also often unsafe, poorly ventilated and their bricked up windows deform building facades. Moreover, *barbacoas* – together with their furniture and appliances – add considerable weight to load-bearing walls, already weakened by leaks, often leading to partial or complete building collapses. As more households improve their economic situations, wooden *barbacoas* are often replaced with more solid



Photo 1: Typical Tenement in Atarés with Barbacoas in First Floor Units

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concrete structures, which improves safety but leaves facades permanently disfigured. Nevertheless, some *barbacoas* are initially well built, ingeniously achieve greater privacy and fit well into the fabric of the inner city.

Another source of extra residential space, as well as extra building weight, are *casetas en azoteas* – literally “shacks on roofs” – which are usually wooden structures built on top of multifamily buildings. There are also well-designed and well-built units on roofs of single and multifamily structures.

1.2 Bohíos

Almost non-existent in Havana, *bohíos* are thatched-roof shacks that were once common in rural areas. In 1996, 6 per cent of all units in Cuba were *bohíos* (Bauzá, 1997).

1.3 Improved Housing

Dwelling units built mostly of scrap materials are considered “improvised”. Only about a hundred units in Havana were categorised as “improvised” in the 1981 census (CEE-ONC, 1984). In 1996, there were 3,574 units located in shantytowns categorised as “improvised” (ONE-OTEC, 1997). At the end of 2001, Havana was one of five provinces that had virtually eliminated dirt floors (INV, 2001a).

1.4 Other Types

Although the vast majority of dwelling units were built originally for housing, a small but significant number of occupied units were converted from non-residential uses, such as stores, garages, and warehouses (**Photo 5**). Moreover, with the drop in tourism in the first decades of the revolutionary period, most of the smaller inexpensive hotels and boarding houses also became permanent dwellings. In 1981, some 34,000 units – or 6.5 per cent of the total – had been adapted from non-residential uses (CEE-ONC, 1984). Of these, two-fifths became “houses”, nearly a third became tenements, and the rest became apartments. Three-quarters of these converted units had full plumbing.

2. Housing Conditions

Another common measure of housing adequacy in Cuba is housing conditions based on the degree of deterioration and need for repairs. Three categories are used: good, fair and poor. According to official figures, in 2001, 64 per cent of Havana’s 586,768 units were considered in “good” condition, up from 50 per cent in 1990 (See **Figure 7**) (INV, 1990; INV, 2002a). Some 20 per cent were in “fair” condition and 16 per cent in “poor” condition. About 60,000 needed to be replaced (Lee, 1997). Partial or total building collapses are not uncommon, although the number had been cut in half by the end of the 1990s as the worst units disappeared and others were repaired. (see **Photo 6**) The National Housing Institute estimates

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Photo 2. Residents Chatting in an Atarés Tenement

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Photo 3. Atarés Tenements where Residents have Expanded their Units into the Narrow Courtyard. The Leaking Roof is being Repaired with Roof Tiles Produced on Site with Low-cost Technology

that 4,064 units – 0.7 per cent of the total – were lost from the city’s housing stock in 2000 (INV, 2000). Buildings in Old Havana and Centro Habana are especially exposed to the elements: high humidity, the corrosive effects of salt spray from proximity to the coast, and occasional flooding.

In 1999, some 26,000 Havana households with 88,000 people (Lee, 1997) were designated as “albergados”, that is, that their current or former dwellings were so deteriorated or damaged by a



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Figure 5: Housing Types and their Location in Atarés

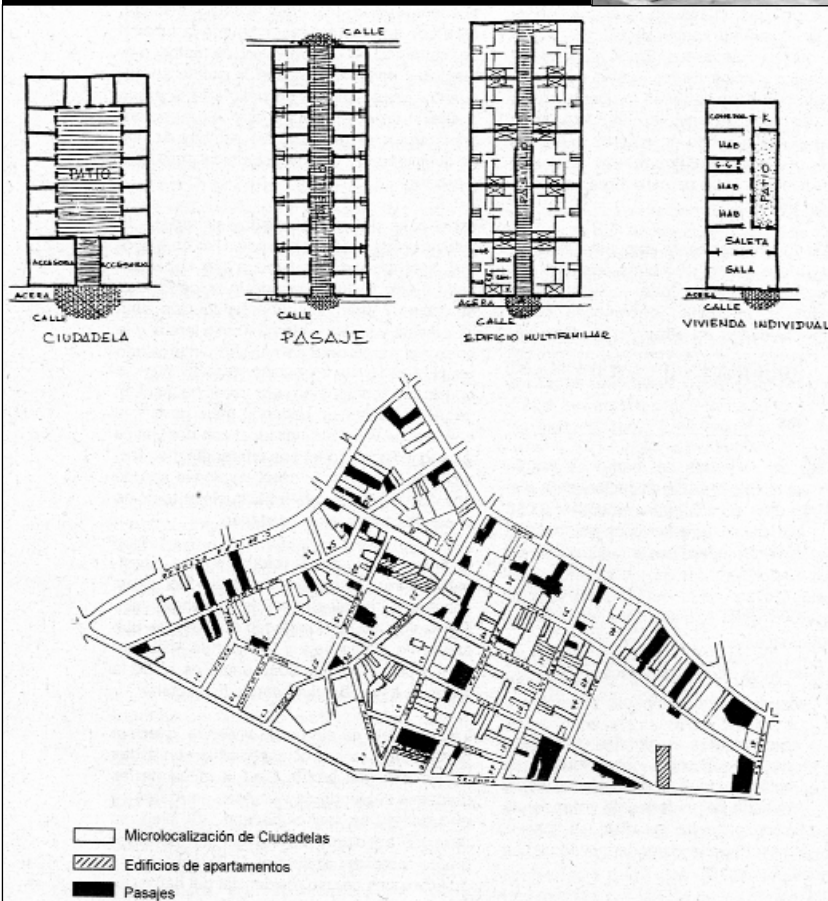


Photo 4: An Example of a Caseta En Azotea – a Shack on a Roof – in Old Havana

3. Building Materials

Government housing and data-gathering agencies have created a series of categories for measuring housing quality according to the type of materials used in their construction. The National Housing Institute uses a five-category system for new state-built construction to determine sales prices as well as track the quality of new housing. In 2000, 94 per cent of new state-built units in Cuba – and all in Havana – were in the three highest quality categories (INV, 2000). Of all units in Havana’s housing stock, 78 per cent were categorised as Type I (the best) in 2001 (INV, 2002a).

The 1981 Census used four categories, which includes a broader range of quality than INV’s categories, since *bohios* and other clearly substandard dwellings are also included (CEE-ONC, 1984). The census of self-built housing 1981-1983 used seven categories, which provided much more detail on the lower quality categories than the 1981 census (these two sets of categories are compared in Zschaebitz and Lesta, 1988).

storm or partial building collapse, that they are on a special list for replacement housing. Most either still lived in less dangerous dwellings or temporarily resided with friends or family. But in 1997 about a tenth of albergado households actually resided in transitional homeless shelters (Reinosa Espinosa and Vilariño Delgado, 1998) (discussed below).

4. Settlement Type

4.1 Shantytowns

At the time of the revolution, 6 per cent of Havana residents lived in squatter settlements, a relatively low proportion compared with other Latin American capitals at the time (Hamberg, 1994). They were known as *barrios de indigentes* – or literally “neighbourhoods of

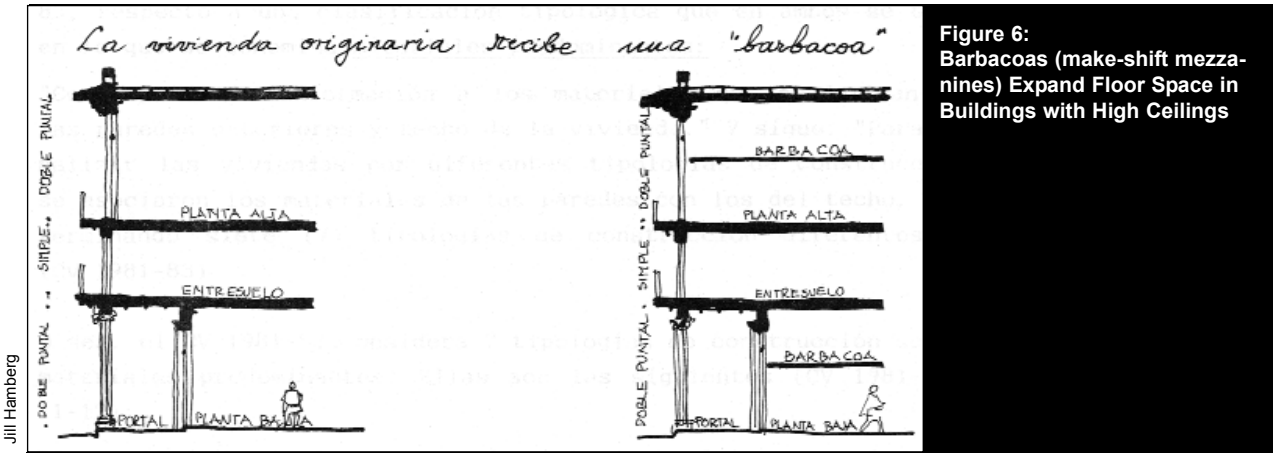
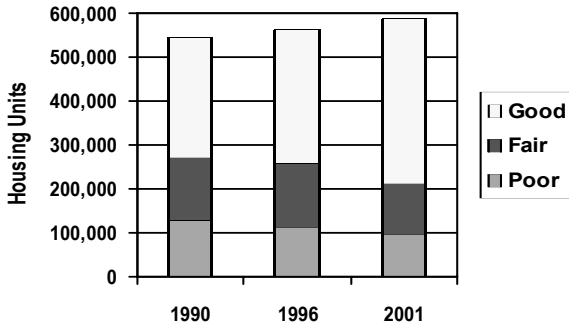


Figure 6:
Barbacoas (make-shift mezzanines) Expand Floor Space in Buildings with High Ceilings

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Figure 7: Havana Housing Condition 1990-2001



the poor (or indigent or destitute)". Although standard makeshift housing has always grown up on the city's outskirts, the forced concentration of peasants around major Cuban cities ordered in 1896 by the infamous Spanish Governor Valeriano Weyler to cut their aid to Cuban patriots can be considered the birth of contemporary squatter settlements. These settlements

grew throughout the first half-century after Cuba's formal independence from Spain in 1902.

During 1960 and 1961, the largest and worst of these shantytowns were demolished; their residents built replacement housing through the Self-Help and Mutual Aid Programme. The remaining shantytowns were renamed "*barrios insalubres*" – "unhealthy neighbourhoods", to make clear that the issue was the quality of the housing and settlements, not the economic status of their residents. A second small wave of shantytown clearance and replacement occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of the creation of the "Havana Green Belt". But aside from those efforts, shantytowns were largely ignored in the belief that a rapid rate of new construction would make it possible to relocate their residents.

But many shantytowns continued to grow and some new settlements were formed. The official policy was to "freeze" them: no new dwellings were allowed and repairs could only be made using the same type of materials as the existing dwelling. This was based on the belief that these settlements should be cleared, and the housing problem could only be addressed through government-sponsored new construction.



Photo 5:
Commercial Spaces
Converted to Residential Use,
with Barbacoas

Jill Hamberg

Nevertheless, residents upgraded their dwellings, sometimes using such strategies as building new masonry walls inside the old wood or scrap-metal structures. When the new house was finished, they just dropped the old walls like a snake changing skin. Other residents made small, incremental improvements (see **photo 7**). For instance, in Playa municipality, which has some of the oldest shantytowns, some two-fifths of the units are already considered “houses”, ranging from a third to two-thirds in individual settlements (ONE-OTECH, 1997). The government provided schools and health clinics, and transportation routes were extended where necessary. At the same time, existing residents were able to legalise their situations as rent-free leaseholders. Government policy gradually changed and now improvements and upgrading are permitted. Therefore, the terms “shantytown” and “squatter settlement” don’t accurately describe these settlements.

After censuses of these settlements in 1978, 1985 and 1987, a number of such shantytowns were sufficiently upgraded that they fully or partially attained the status of regular neighbourhoods. An important definition of the minimal housing standard for change of status was “vivienda adecuada” (adequate or standard housing), requiring at least 25 square meters and three separate rooms. Building type had to be I, II or III in order to be considered “adequate”. This meant that thatched roofs, scrap materials and the like would automatically not qualify. As for the neighbourhood, there were dangerous situations that would automatically imply an “insalubre” condition such as flood plains and under high-voltage power lines. The neighbourhood was required to have a street layout with electricity and water supply, and acceptable treatment of wastewater.

By 1987, Havana had 15,975 units in shantytowns (the larger *barrios* and smaller *focos*, which have fewer than 50 units), representing less than 3 per cent of all Havana dwellings (ONE-OTECH, 1997). But by 2001, the city had 60 *barrios* and 114 *focos insalubres* with a total of 21,552 units, representing a little more than quarter of such units nationally (INV 2001a). This 50 per cent growth was seen as the result of an increase in net migration to Havana, especially from the less devel-

oped eastern provinces, and led to the 1997 migration law. The term shantytowns will be used here to refer to both the larger *barrios* and smaller *focos*.

4.2 Transitional Homeless Shelters

People who have lost their dwellings or are endangered by serious structural or health conditions where they live – *albergados* – receive an official form sending them to a government-run albergue or shelter for the homeless, officially called *comunidades de tránsito* (transitional communities). But only about 10 per cent of *albergados* actually live in these homeless shelters. They were originally considered temporary, until



Photo 6: The Hotel Pasaje, a Century-Old Hotel Turned Ciudadela Housing 240 People Facing the Capitol Building in Downtown Havana, Collapsed in 1982

Mei Rosenthal

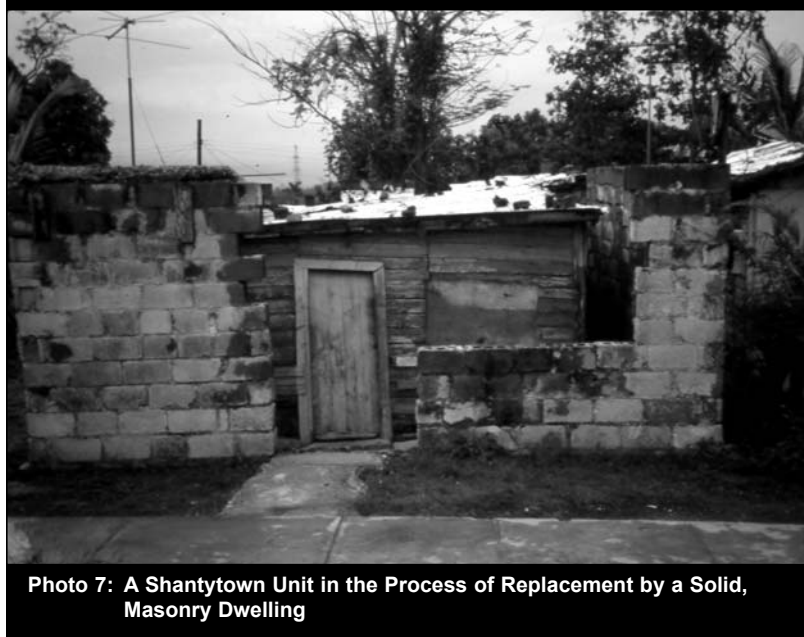


Photo 7: A Shantytown Unit in the Process of Replacement by a Solid, Masonry Dwelling

Jill Hamberg

adequate dwellings could be provided (Reinosa Espinosa and Vilariño Delgado, 1998). A group of shelters was first established in 1969-73; most of their residents were relocated to permanent housing, especially in the 1980s with the upsurge in residential buildings in Havana. But when it became clear that the stock of new dwellings would not meet all the accumulated needs, a new form of shelter was created in buildings with individual cubicles for each family and shared bathroom, cooking and dining facilities. With the virtual halt to new building in the early 1990s, these shelters took on a semi-permanent character. By the mid-1990s almost all had been upgraded to contain bathroom and cooking facilities in each cubicle. In 1997, there were 76 transitional shelters lodging 2,758 households with a total population of 9,178 (Reinosa Espinosa and Vilariño Delgado, 1998), but by the end of the decade, the number of shelter residents had declined by about a fifth.

C. OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL DEFINITIONS

The National Housing Institute considers units in tenements and shantytowns to be the “precarious housing stock” and tracks their number. The Institute also reports annually on the number of units in fair or poor condition along with the number rehabilitated, replaced, and lost to the stock through depreciation, and the net change in units considered in fair and poor condition (INV, 2001a).

Residents of tenements most often say they live in a *solar*, while those living in shantytowns usually refer to the name of the settlement where they live, some of which are quite colourful like “Isla del Polvo” (Dust Island), “Loma del Tanque” (Tank Hill), “La Corbata” (The Necktie) or “El Fanguito” (The Little Mud). Even some older solares have similar names, like “Africa Ruge” (Africa Roars, a clear allusion to its mostly Afro-Cuban population) or “Los Muñequitos” (the Comics).

1. Location and Age of Slum Housing

As to be expected, the population living in tenements is concentrated in inner-city municipalities (see **Figure 8**).⁵ In the early to mid-1990’s, tenements represented some 40-50 per cent of all units in Old Havana’s historic district, Cayo Hueso, and Atarés (Ortega Morales, 1996; Padrón Lotti, 1998; Plan Maestro, 1996). The 1981 census only reported on the year of construction for “houses” and “apartments” but not tenements. However, smaller studies indicate that 80 per cent of all units in inner-city areas are more than 80 years old and the other 20 per cent between 40 and 80 years (Padrón Lotti, 1998). In the Centro Habana neighbourhood of Cayo Hueso, 70 per cent of its buildings are more than 60 years old (Díaz Gutiérrez, 2001).

Shantytowns are virtually absent from central areas, but are dispersed in most outlying areas (see **Figures 4** and **9**). Most settlements are fairly small; only four are larger than 1,000 units (ONE-OTECH, 1997). Nearly half the residents of such settlements live in just two municipalities – Mariano and Arroyo Naranjo – where they represent about 10 per cent of the areas’ inhabitants.

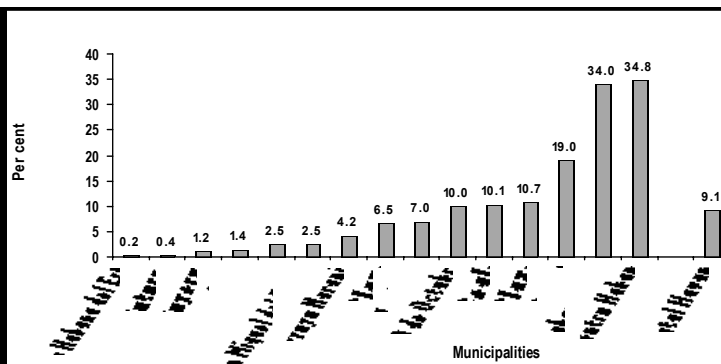


Figure 8: Population of Tenements by Municipality 1996

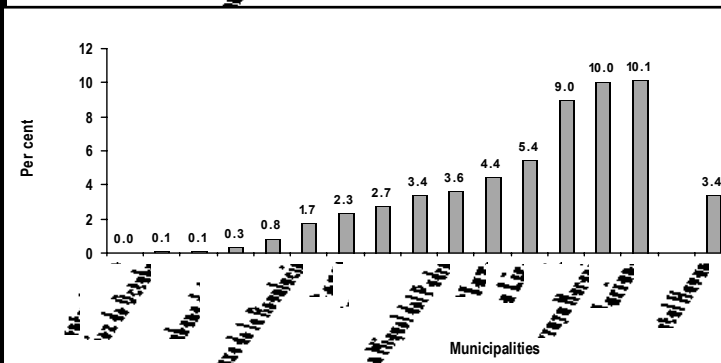


Figure 9: Population of Shantytowns by Municipality 1996

Most settlements date from before 1959 and the largest ones were eliminated in the early 1960s, but others were founded or grew during that period as a result of the arrival of members of the new Rebel Army, most of whom were former peasants, to Havana. A second period of growth was in the early 1980s, after the wave of emigration abroad through the port of Mariel, when vacated dwellings were quickly filled. The most recent shantytown growth occurred in the 1990s to absorb some of the growing number of new migrants to the city.

Transitional homeless shelters are located in all 15 municipalities; most are 15-20 years old (Reinosa Espinosa and Vilaríño Delgado, 1998).

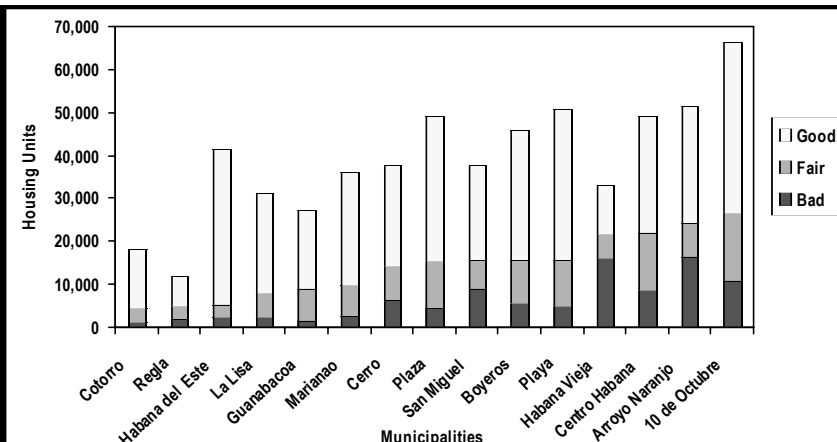
The greatest concentration of the worst housing conditions is found in five municipalities – Old Havana, Arroyo Naranjo, Centro Habana, San Miguel del Padrón and 10 de Octubre – which together have two-thirds of all units in poor condition (see Figure 10). These municipalities (plus Regla) also have the highest proportions of units in fair and poor condition, with Old Havana having two-thirds and the others with 40-47 per cent.

Except for the 1996 census of shantytowns (ONE-OTECH, 1997), there are few published studies of the characteristics of residents of specifically “slum” housing. Even the 1981 national population and housing census did not publish demographic characteristics by type of residence. Therefore, case studies conducted in the 1990s of neighbourhoods or municipalities with a high concentration of tenements and deteriorated housing will be used here to approximate the attributes of residents of inner-city slums: the municipalities of Old Havana and Centro Habana and the neighbourhood of Atarés (see Figure 3). Because different information was collected or published for each area, generalisations from trends are presented here when consistent data are not available.

2.1 Gender⁶

Most slum areas have roughly the same per cent of women as in Havana as a whole: 52.5 per cent. Indeed, some of these neighbourhoods and shantytowns have a

Figure 10:
Housing Condition
by Municipality 2001



2. Population Size and Characteristics

Table 1 provides an estimate of the population of each major type of slum housing and its proportion of the total population. But since some units in shantytowns are categorised as “tenement units” there would be double counting if the population of the various types of slums were totalled. For instance, nearly two-fifths of the units in shantytowns in Playa municipality are tenements (ONE-OTECH, 1997). Over 9 per cent of Havana’s population live in tenements, 3.3 per cent in shantytowns, and 0.3 per cent in shelters. This does not include an estimate of the number of people living in housing in “fair” or “poor” condition because in many cases these units do not necessarily constitute slum housing but rather are basically sound dwellings needing repairs. However, the 60,000 units that are so deteriorated that they cannot be repaired should be considered, although many are already in the other categories (Lee, 1997).

Table 1. Housing Units and Population of Havana Slums

Housing Type	Year	Units	Population	% of Total Pop.
Tenements	2001	60,754	206,564	9.4
Shantytowns	2001	21,552	72,986	3.3
Shelters	1997	2,758	9,178	0.4

Sources: INV (2001a), Reinosa Espinosa and Vilaríño Delgado (1998). (a) Assumes average household size is the same as in 1996 for shantytowns (González Rego, Rúa de Cabo, and Blanco Sánchez, 2000) and 3.4 for tenements, an estimate based on case studies in central areas in the mid-1990s.

slightly higher proportion of men than the city as a whole, especially areas such as Atarés that historically housed a large number of single working men.

2.2 Age⁷

The average age in Havana is higher than the country as a whole. Indeed, 15.4 per cent of Havana residents were over 60 years old in 2000 in contrast to 12.9 per cent for Cuba. In part because of tenure security, Havana's inner-city slum areas have a generally older population than the city, with their population over 60 years averaging 14-17 per cent. In contrast, the elderly are under-represented in shantytowns. For instance, in shantytowns in Playa municipality, the population over 65 was only 5.6 per cent in contrast to 11.9 per cent for the municipality as a whole.

2.3 Race / Skin Colour

The Cuban census and similar studies use the term "skin colour" instead of "race" (CEE-ONC, 1984). The 1981 census indicates that Havana's slum neighbourhoods are racially diverse, although there is a slightly lower proportion of whites and higher proportion of blacks and *mestizos* in municipalities with the highest

Table 2. Skin Colour by Selected Municipalities, 1981

Municipality	White	Black	Mestizo	Asian	
Havana	63.4	16.4	20.4	0.2	
Highest % living in tenements	Old Havana	55.9	18.6	25.2	0.3
	Centro Havana	53.3	19.1	27.1	0.5
Highest % living in shantytowns	Marianao	56.1	21.1	22.7	0.1
	Arroyo Naranjo	58.0	19.8	22.1	0.1

Source: CEE-ONC (1984).

concentration of slum housing (see **Table 2**). Havana's Chinatown is located in Centro Havana. A 1995 census of Old Havana (Plan Maestro, 1996) and a 2001 survey of two Centro Habana neighbourhoods (Spiegel et al., 2003) indicate a similar racial distribution to that of 1981.

D. DATA ON HAVANA'S SLUMS

1. Permanent structures

The great majority of all structures in inner-city slums are "permanent" in that they are built of masonry or good quality wood. However, in some cases their "permanency" is challenged by severe deterioration that could lead to building collapses. There is more variety in shantytowns.

2. Access to water, electricity and sanitation

Virtually all residents of Havana have access to electricity (CIEM, 2000). In some cases, residents have illegally tapped into nearby power lines, but they do have electricity – indeed, as noted below the vast majority of slum dwellers have an array of electric appliances.

Water and sanitation are almost universally available, although not always inside the dwelling unit (CIEM, 2000). In shantytowns, 17.5 per cent lack water in the unit, and 25.6 per cent do not have their own sanitary facilities, although shared sources are available (ONE-OTECH, 1997). In Old Havana municipality 7 per cent lack water in the unit, but 30-40 per cent have to manually carry water to their dwellings because of problems with water tanks, pumps, etc. (Collado, Mauri, and Coipel, 1998; PDHL, 2000.) More than a fourth of units lack exclusive use of a bath or shower in their units; 6.0 per cent have no toilets and 15 per cent use toilets that are shared or outside their units. In Atarés, 83.8 per cent have water inside their units and nearly as many have exclusive use of a toilet, most of which are inside the unit (Ortega Morales, 1996).

The economic crisis led to frequent blackouts during the early 1990s. While much reduced by the end of the decade, power outages are not uncommon although no longer regularly scheduled. Because Old Havana and Centro Habana are at the end of water supply and sewer networks, they get less water and have more trouble disposing wastewater into already full pipes. Half the city is beyond the reach of the sewer system; most of these residents use septic tanks. Moreover, extensive water loss through leaks means water is only available several hours a day or even every other day leading families to install cisterns and water tanks for storage. Water has to be pumped up from the cisterns to the tanks. Leaks and cisterns contribute to deteriorated water quality, and some residents boil water, putting further pressure on energy supplies.

3. Transportation and Delivery

Inner-city slum areas all have paved streets and the great majority of shantytowns either have paved streets or passable dirt roads. But maintenance is deficient, and most streets are potholed, except for main transportation routes. This is compounded by the impact of heavy truck and bus traffic.

4. Health Care, and Infant and Child Mortality Rates

All Havana residents have free access to health care in hospitals, local clinics, and neighbourhood family doctors who serve on average 120 families each. For instance, in Old Havana municipality in the late 1990s, there were 227 residents per doctor and 203 per nurse (PDHL, 2000). Despite their possibly illegal status, new

residents of shantytowns are added to the roster of local health clinics and family doctors offices. However, the health system has suffered from shortages of supplies, equipment and medications. Nevertheless, Cuba's infant mortality rate in 2001 was 6.2 per 1,000 live births – in Havana 6.7 – lower than many developed nations (De la Osa, 2002). Differences among Havana municipalities were minimal (ONE, 2001). The mortality rate for children under five for Cuba in 2000 was 9.1 per 1,000 live births and for Havana, 9.5 (MINSAP, 2000). Virtually all births take place in hospitals.

5. Education

All Cuban children have access to free public education (see **photo 8**). The per cent of Havana's children aged 6-14 in school in 2000 was 98.0 per cent (ONE, 2001). School enrolment in Old Havana for children 6-14 years was 100 per cent and for 15-16 year olds, 97.5 per cent. (PDHL, 2000)

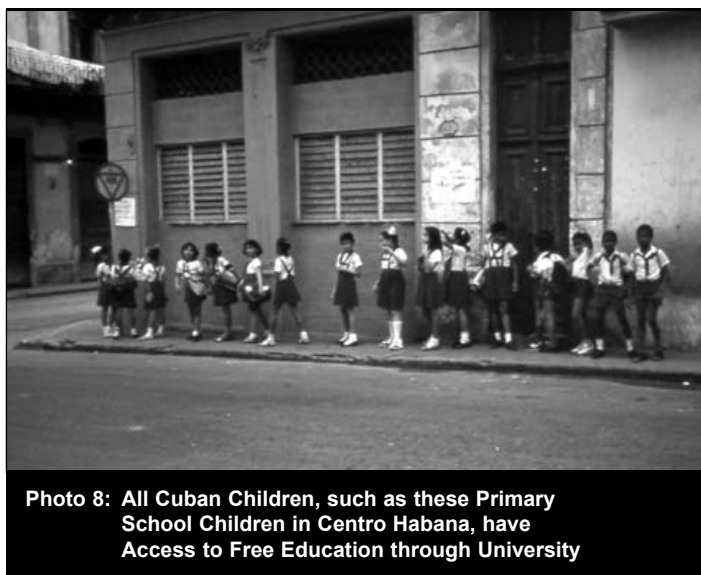


Photo 8: All Cuban Children, such as these Primary School Children in Centro Habana, have Access to Free Education through University

E. “POVERTY” OR AT “RISK POPULATION”?

The Cuban government does not have an official definition of poverty. Indeed, it does not publicly report household income figures in the Census or in its Statistical Yearbook.⁹ However, Cuban social scientists have attempted to estimate what they term the “at risk” or “vulnerable” population using internationally accepted measures. Their reasoning will be clear once the main features of Cuban macroeconomic and social policy are briefly sketched out.

Three basic principles have guided Cuban government policies: universality, equitable access and government control (Regueiro, and Alonso, 2001; Rodríguez and Carrizo Moreno, 1987). Rather than targeting the poor alone, universal policies were designed to benefit the vast majority of the population. Soon after the revolution, policies were instituted and developed over the next three decades to increase income, especially at the bottom; reduce wage inequality to about 4.5 to 1; lower prices on goods and services; assure equal access to low-cost essential food and consumer goods through rationing; and extend the social security system to the entire population. Close to full employment was achieved, albeit with some degree of overstaffing. Indeed, Cuba has had a chronic labour shortage in less attractive fields such as agriculture and construction. Quality health care and education at all levels are provided free. As noted above, housing for most families is low-cost or free, although often in need of repair and in short supply. Where goods were insufficient to reach everyone, targeting is based on social need (e.g., milk for young children, pregnant women and the elderly) or development needs (e.g., new housing built to stabilise or attract a workforce in a remote area). Sports and cultural activities were offered free or at low cost. Prices were set by the government and relatively insulated from the world market.

By the mid-1980s, Cuba had virtually eradicated severe poverty and more moderate forms were limited to a small sector. But the suddenness and severity of the 1990s economic crisis presented a serious challenge. The first and most important impact was on food consumption. The quantity and availability of rationed goods dropped precipitously. Food intake fell from 2,845 calories daily in 1989 to 1,863 in 1993, with even more severe declines in protein (from 77 to 46 grams) and fats (72 to 26 grams) (Ferriol Muruaga, 1998). This was way below the minimum “food basket” of 2,218 calories, 48 grams of protein and 52 grams of fat. Weight loss among the adult population averaged 20 pounds and affected almost all strata of the population (Uriarte,

6. Density⁸

The two densest municipalities are the ones with the highest proportion of tenements. In 2000, Centro Habana had 43,965 inhabitants per square kilometre. Old Havana's density was 21,222 inhabitants/km² but that includes extensive rail yards and many cultural, recreation and port facilities. This contrasts with Havana's overall density of 3,019 inhabitants/km², a very low figure because Havana contains large stretches of open space, often used for agriculture. Moreover, 44 per cent of the housing stock consists of single-family houses, most of which are one-storey, detached units (INV, 2002a). In Havana's historic district there is a net density in residential areas of 330 inhabitants per hectare (PDHL, 2000). Density reaches 1,000 inhabitants per hectare in some parts of Centro Habana (Padrón Lotti, 1998).

2002). The per cent of low-birth-weight babies and nutritional deficiencies among young children increased and an epidemic of vitamin-deficiency-related neuropathy appeared (PAHO, 1999). Even during the 1997-99 period, when the economy had begun to revive, 17 per cent of the population was still undernourished according to the 2002 United Nations Human Development Report (UNDP, 2002).

Although wages, unemployment benefits and pensions were still paid, the real value of incomes dropped precipitously (Togores González, 2002). The most economically challenged sectors before the Special Period were the elderly and disabled living alone and single mothers without other sources of income. Most received relatively limited pensions and social assistance (a form of cash income maintenance for low-income families and individuals), but could avoid malnutrition and other symptoms of poverty through a sufficient supply of heavily subsidised rationed food, low-cost lunches at schools or work places and other free or low-cost goods and services. In the 1990s the number of vulnerable households among the elderly and single mothers grew and was joined by the unemployed and many of the families that depended only on income from jobs in the state sector (Uriarte, 2002; Zabala Argüelles, 1999).

Cuban researchers distinguish between “structural” poverty that exists in market economies, in which a segment of the population cannot satisfy all of its needs, from the situation in Cuba in which an “at risk” or “vulnerable” sector cannot adequately meet some of its needs (Ferriol Muruaga et al., 1998). Given this difference, researchers use basically two complementary methods to measure Cuban “poverty”.

The first looks at household income and expenditures. For instance, to estimate the proportion of the population considered “at risk”, Cuban researchers (Ferriol Muruaga et al., 1998) first estimated the cost of rationed food and food sold at free-market prices needed to maintain a basic level of nutrition. In 1996 rationed food at low prices and free or low-cost meals at schools, workplace, hospitals, etc. was estimated to cover 63 per cent of basic nutritional needs. To this they added the costs of non-food items, including the value of free or low-cost goods and services. This was compared to incomes. The result is that between 1988 and 1996 the proportion of Cuba’s urban population “at risk” more than doubled from 6.3 per cent to 14.7 per cent. In Havana it increased from 4.3 per cent to 11.5 per cent. At the height of the economic crisis, it was undoubtedly much higher – indeed, in 1995, Havana had 20.1 per cent below the “at risk” level. The sharp decline between 1995 and 1996 was largely due to the increase in the real value of income as the dollar/peso exchange rate and free-market prices dropped sharply as the result of economic reforms.

The highest “at risk” rates in 1996 in Cuba’s urban population were found among certain sectors (Ferriol

Muruaga et al., 1998). Women had only a slight higher rate (15.8 per cent) than men (13.5). Large households were more vulnerable than smaller ones – 17.2 per cent with more than 6 members, compared with 11.7 for those with 1-2 members. (In 1999, of Havana households with 1-2 people, 9.9 per cent had per capita monthly incomes of less than 50 pesos in contrast to 19.0 per cent for those with 6 or more members). Those who had up to a 9th grade education had rates near 17 per cent, while those with higher levels of education had less than half that (7.6 per cent). The unemployed had an “at risk” rate of 28.4 per cent, in contrast to 6.4 among the employed. Of those working, urban state workers – who represent 90 per cent of the total – had twice the “at risk” rate as those employed in other sectors (8.0 per cent compared with 4.0 per cent). Families with only one wage earner had higher rates.

Access to dollars leads to sharp differences in living standards, and the main direct sources – remittances and working in the tourist sector and joint venture companies – disproportionately benefit more well-off sectors. Nevertheless, dollars spread out to slum dwellers supplying private services paid in dollars, such as masons, mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and others. One study estimated that 59.3 per cent of Havana residents had access to hard currency in 2000 (Pérez Villanueva, 2002).

The second method focuses on human development indicators. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) calculates a Human Poverty Index for developing nations based on four indicators: probability at birth of not surviving to age 40, adult illiteracy rate, population not using improved water sources, and underweight children under age five. (UNDP also calculates another Human Poverty and Income index that includes an income measure.) The 2002 Human Development Report placed Cuba fourth among the 88 developing nations included in the ranking with an index of 4.1 per cent, only slightly behind Uruguay, Costa Rica, and Chile (UNDP, 2002).

Cuban researchers have applied this approach within Cuba by developing a Geographic Index of Human Development and Equity that compares provinces on eight indicators (CIEM, 2000).¹⁰ Havana is ranked first over all, although its housing is worse than other heavily urban provinces.

Other than crumbling housing, in Havana there is a virtual absence of visual signs of poverty often found in other developing nations such as street orphans, shoeless children, and people sleeping in the streets. The recent appearance of a small number of children begging in Old Havana and other areas frequented by tourists is a reflection of the economic crisis and opportunity. But it has diminished somewhat in recent years as the economy revived and after-school programmes for children expanded.

III. SLUMS: THE PEOPLE

F. HOUSEHOLD INDICATORS

1. Household types

Cuba has a tradition of extended families, and because of its ongoing housing shortage, Havana has an even greater proportion. In the mid-1990s, nearly half of Havana's households were either "extended" (with relatives other than unmarried children) or "composite" (that include at least one person unrelated to the household head) (Benítez Pérez, 1999). (see **Table 3**) In the inner-city neighbourhood of Atarés, 53 per cent of households were in those categories (Ortega Morales, 1996). Some extended households include people officially listed as residents for ID card, rationing or inheritance reasons but who really live elsewhere at least some of the time – for instance, with a companion or to be closer to their workplace. On the other hand, divorced couples sometimes have to continue to reside in the same dwellings.

Table 3. Family Structure: Cuba, Havana, Atarés

	Single Person	Nuclear	Extended	Composites	Total
Cuba	10.6	50.9	31.5	7.0	100.0
Havana	10.9	41.7	40.5	6.9	100.0
Atarés	10.1	36.9	53.0		100.0

Sources: For Cuba and Havana (1995 data): Benítez Pérez (1999); for Atarés (1992 data): Ortega Morales (1996).

As in the rest of the world, Cuba has experienced an increase in female-headed households, and shares with many other Caribbean islands the highest rate in Latin America. Female-headed households in 1995 represented 36 per cent of Cuban households and 51.5 of those in Havana (Benítez Pérez, 1999). A high proportion of female-headed households is often thought to be associated with the "feminisation of poverty", but in Cuba it has a somewhat different meaning – the social advances of women and their relative economic independence (Benítez Pérez, 1999; Pérez Izquierdo, 1998a).

Cuba has a high divorce rate due to women having high educational levels and relative economic independence, the greater societal acceptance of divorce, young age of first union, state assistance in maintaining and educating children, and family conflicts due to living with in-laws because of the housing shortage (Díaz Tenorio, 2000a). Like the rest of the Caribbean and Central America, Cuba has a high rate of couples who live together in consensual unions rather than marriage.

In 1995, 42.2 per cent of Cuban household heads were married and 24.6 per cent were in consensual unions, with the number of unions equal to marriages in small towns and rural areas but the opposite in Havana (11.0 per cent unions and 47.6 per cent marriages) (Benítez Pérez, 1999). In 1998, 63 per cent of all births in Cuba were to mothers in consensual unions, but the number of single mothers not married or in a consensual union was relatively low (Díaz Tenorio, 2000b).

Cuba is unique in that 41.4 per cent of female heads of household in 1995 were married or in consensual unions, with an even higher proportion of those in child-bearing ages, and nearly half were in the labour force (Benítez Pérez, 1999, Pedroso Zuleta, 1999). This means that even with the presence of a spouse, many Cuban women have taken a greater role in family decision-making and economic support. Female household heads also had higher average education levels than male heads. Two-fifths of female household heads were homemakers, but of these more than half had at least one breadwinner in the home (Benítez Pérez, 1999; Pérez Izquierdo, 1998a). There is a recent trend for

Cuban women to maintain or take on the role of household head after divorce, even if they remarry (Pedroso Zuleta, 1999). Single mothers tend to live with their parents. One problem in classifying households is that surveys and censuses require that one person be selected for household head, but in-depth interviews indicate that in Cuba, the role is often shared (Pedroso Zuleta, 1999).

2. Household Size and Occupancy Ratios

By comparison with the situation in slums in most developing nations, Cuba's household size is small and overcrowding moderate. Average household size in inner-city areas in the mid-1990s ranged from 2.9 (Centro Habana, Cayo Hueso), 3.3 (Old Havana's historic district), 3.6 (Malecón-San Isidro), to 3.9 (Atarés). In shantytowns, the average was 3.4.¹¹ Around three-fifths of the units consisted of 1-3 occupants. In 1995 average household size for Havana was 3.43 (Benítez Pérez, 1999). The average floor space in tenements per person is 10 m² and per unit is 39 m² (ranging from a low of 20 m² to a high of 60 m², depending on the presence of *barbacoas* and other expansions) (García Fernández, 1998; Ortega Morales, 1996).

Measures of overcrowding in shantytowns are based on household size and number of rooms (González Rego, Rúa de Cabo, and Blanco Sánchez, 2000). One-seventh of units have only one room, and of these, 18.2

per cent consist of more than three occupants, representing 3.6 per cent of all shantytown residents. If having more than two people per bedroom is considered overcrowding, then 32.8 per cent of the units and 45.7 per cent of residents are overcrowded. There are 1.64 bedrooms per unit in shantytowns (in 1996), smaller than the average for Havana as a whole in 1981 (1.95).

3. Birth and Fertility Rates

Cuba has among the lowest birth and fertility rates in Latin America. In 2000, Cuba's birth rate (per 1,000 population) was 12.8; Havana had the lowest rate of any province at 11.5 (MINSAP, 2000). Cuba's general fertility rate dropped from 66.1 per 1,000 women in 1985 to 47.3 in 2000, far below that needed to replace the population. As early as the 1980s, fertility rates among women of different social and educational levels and geographic areas were fairly similar (Díaz Tenorio, 2000a). Birth rates in Havana's municipalities with the highest concentration of slums were only slightly higher than the city average and still somewhat below those in the eastern provinces (ONE, 2001).

4. Types of Tenure and Home Ownership¹²

Within three months after the 1959 revolution, evictions were stopped, most rents reduced by 30 to 50 per cent, and potential homeowners aided by a Vacant Lot Law designed to stimulate construction and eliminate land speculation. Most land was not nationalised, but the government confiscated land and dwellings owned by those leaving Cuba as emigrants and others.¹³ The October 1960 Urban Reform Law established the concept of housing as a public service, with the stated goal of eventually making housing free. The law established two basic tenure forms: home ownership and long-term leaseholding (*usufructo*) in government-owned units. Individuals were permitted to own no more than one permanent and one vacation home. The law prohibited almost all private renting. Most tenants became homeowners, amortising the price of units with their rents. Except for slumlords, all but the largest former landlords received compensation in instalments and lifetime annuities or pensions. Residents of slum housing remained as long-term leaseholders but by the mid-1960s no longer paid rent. Beginning in May 1961, residents in housing built or distributed by the government were given lifetime leases at rents equal to or less than 10 per cent of family income. Individuals

Individuals could buy and sell dwellings and land, but only at government set prices. Moreover, the state had first option to buy. Although little legal private buying and selling of land and dwellings occurred for the next two decades, informal sales of land for self-building were common. Housing exchanges were the way most

households moved to another dwelling. Homeowners' heirs were entitled to receive their share of a dwelling's official price. However, the right to remain in and acquire the property – by amortising the share due other heirs – was restricted to people that lived in a unit at the time of the owner's death. Similarly, when a leaseholder passed away, existing residents could remain.

The 1984 and 1988 Housing Laws transformed most leaseholders of units built or distributed by the government into homeowners, with residents amortising the building cost at a subsidised rate. In addition, the hundreds of thousands of self-builders in ambiguous legal situations were also made homeowners. The only groups not converted into homeowners were residents of tenements and shantytowns, who remained rent-free leaseholders, and units directly "linked" to workplaces.

Moreover, these laws legalised private renting of rooms in private houses (and even entire dwelling units) at free-market rents, but at that time few Havana homeowners opened their dwellings to tenants since few felt any economic pressure to do so, especially given their concern they wouldn't be able to evict tenants if things didn't work out. But all that changed in the 1990s with the increase in foreign tourism and migration to Havana, and the need for households to increase their incomes. Private renting became more widespread. In central areas, good money in dollars could be earned from foreign tourists, but elsewhere households rented rooms or even just beds in pesos to Cubans. A 1997 law imposed stiff monthly fees and income taxes on private renting. Fees depend on location and whether guests are charged in dollars or pesos. They are fixed, whether the room is rented or not, so only those owners with a consistent flow of tenants remain in business. Some risk not paying the fee at all, and others pay just for one room while renting two or more. These private tenants have no legal tenure security. By the late 1990s, more than 85 per cent of Cuban households were homeowners, paying little or nothing for their units except for maintenance, repair and utilities. An additional number were rent-free leaseholders, mostly those living in dwellings rated "inadequate". There are no mortgages or land or property taxes. Financing for purchases of units or repair materials is considered a loan, not a mortgage, and therefore dwellings are not used as collateral. Non-payment of rents or loans is addressed by garnishing wages or bank accounts, not through eviction.

Within this overall system of substantial tenure security, there are, nevertheless, potential challenges facing residents. The most likely sources of displacement are:

- Public actions, such as historic preservation, tourist development, etc. Residents are assured relocation housing, but not always where they want to go (homeowners have more bargaining power).

■ Ongoing building collapses – Old Havana averages about two partial collapses every three days (PDHL, 2000) – or sudden disasters such as devastating hurricanes and frequent coastal flooding. In these cases, residents are usually assigned to emergency or existing transitional shelters but are often reluctant to go there.

■ Designation as an “illegal” occupant, which could be for a myriad of infractions ranging from minor to serious. In most cases, it is failure to complete some paperwork (e.g., when the leaseholder of record or homeowner dies) or failure to get a building permit or certificate of occupancy. But squatting in condemned buildings or on vacant land, or building with materials that were stolen or purchased on the black market are sometimes taken more seriously. However, even in these cases, evictions or confiscation of property are rare unless the violation is exceptionally blatant or the neighbours agree. In most of the serious cases, the property is confiscated but the residents allowed to stay and amortise the unit’s value to the government. Enforcement has mostly concentrated on legal aspects, such as the source of financing and building materials, especially going after gross overbuilding of luxury residences – not an issue in slum areas. They are also cracking down on housing exchanges that are really disguised sales with substantial sums changing hands under the table – one of the major sources of the slow, creeping social “resegregation” (Oliveras and Núñez, 2001). There has been little enforcement since the early 1990s of actions that are otherwise “legal” but violate the building and zoning regulations.

■ An eviction order sought by the homeowner or leaseholder of record. Residents are generally free to have friends or relatives stay in their homes. The law protects the elderly, women with children, and other vulnerable groups, but others can be evicted after a long legal process and returned to the place they previously lived.

The legal status of residents of two inner-city areas can be found in **Table 4**.

5. Literacy Rates and Educational Levels

Cuba’s adult literacy rate is 96.7 per cent and virtually 100 per cent of those of primary school age (CIEM, 2000; UNDP, 2002). In 1997, UNESCO conducted a major comparative study of language and math achievement in 3rd and 4th grade pupils in 13 Latin America countries (Casassus et al., 2000). Cuba’s children scored considerably above both public and private school students in all other countries. Moreover, unlike other countries, there were minimal gender or rural-urban differences.

Nevertheless, children in Havana started falling somewhat behind other areas in Cuba. According to President Castro (2002), as of 2000 the situation of primary education in Havana was quite deficient: average class size was 37 and the schools were in serious disrepair after a decade of neglect. A crash programme was soon instituted to train and recruit more teachers, repair and build schools and lower class size.

Adult educational levels of Havana slum-dwellers are relatively high, averaging around 10th-11th grade. Indeed, some 10-12 per cent in Cayo Hueso and Old Havana have completed university degrees, although in Atarés, it was only 3 per cent.¹⁴

6. Length of Residency¹⁵

Roughly three-fifths to two-thirds of residents of slum housing were born in Havana, in many cases in the same neighbourhoods as they currently live, although in some areas the proportion is somewhat lower. Most of the domestic migrants come from Cuba’s eastern provinces, and most of these have been in Havana for more than 20 years. Nearly a fifth of the current shantytown household heads lived in their current location since before 1959, and roughly a fifth arrived in each of the following periods: the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1991-96. More recent migrants are found in the more outlying areas, while those who arrived before or just after the revolution are concentrated in the more central, consolidated settlements. In some cases, migrants from the same towns and provinces cluster together in shantytowns.

Table 4. Legal Status of Households (%)

Area	Home-owner	Rent-paying lease holder	Rent-free lease holder	Illegal	Other	Vacant
Old Havana	41.1	9.7	44.6	-	4.6	-
Malecón-San Isidro	27.4	12.6	45.0	13.8	-	1.2

Source: García Fernández (1998), Plan Maestro (1996).

G. COSTS OF LIVING IN SLUMS

1. Commuting to work

Bus transportation is inexpensive (20 or 40 cents of a peso per ride), but bus services severely deteriorated during the 1990s as the result of the sharp drop in imports of fuel and spare parts. Cuba's solution, especially in Havana, was a quick switch to bicycles. By 1995 there were 1 million bicycles in Havana from a mere 70,000 three years earlier (González Sedeño, 1997). Bicycling is difficult because of the heat, scarcity of tires and spare parts, potholes, dim street lighting, lack of helmets and bicycle lights, and erratic driving by both motorists and bicyclists. The lack of spare bus parts spurred the creation of the novel *camellos* (camels), which are double-humped buses composed of a truck cab and chassis attached to bus bodies carrying more than 200 passengers. By the early 2000's Havana's bus service had improved to some degree, with new buses replacing the worst ones, but there was still only a quarter of the number of buses as in the late 1980s.

Hitchhiking is common, and government vehicles are required by inspectors at important crossings to give free rides to passengers going their way. State-run taxis and the funny-looking *cocotaxis* (a scooter with a bright yellow round plastic body) charge in dollars, but *almen-drones* – privately owned 1950s American cars run along main routes at a fixed 10-peso rate. Private trucks equipped with steep steps, hard benches and canvas covers also carry passengers. At the other end, *bicitaxis* (bicycle taxis) take 1-2 passengers on shorter trips.

2. Price of Water and Other Services

Electricity is moderately inexpensive – although it can run to 10 per cent of income in some cases – and often residents of shantytowns do not pay for electricity, illegally hooking their dwellings up to the city's power grid. Water is free or low cost (where metered). There are no sewer fees. Cooking gas – although in short supply – costs a fixed low per capita monthly fee. Traditionally, families in slums cook with kerosene stoves, which are dangerous, unhealthy and more costly than gas. The government has started a programme to eliminate kerosene in Havana and increase gas use.

3. Rental Rates

As noted above, there is only limited renting in Cuba. Rent-paying leaseholders and the relatively few residents in Havana of state-owned housing "linked" to workplaces pay low rents based on a per cent of income or a calculation of the value of the units based on floor area, location and depreciation. According to one estimate, monthly rental costs range from a low of

10 pesos to a high of 60 pesos (Cid Sands, 1999). Private tenants, on the other hand, pay market rates.

4. Housing Finance¹⁶

Households assigned dwelling units built by government agencies or agricultural co-operatives are granted loans with no down payment. Rather than collateral, borrowers guarantee the loan with solvent co-signers. Repayment rates average 97-99 per cent. Interest rates are 2-3 per cent and loans are amortised over a period of 15 years for single-family dwellings and apartments in low-rise buildings, and 20 years in high-rises. For self-building, borrowers can get up to 90 per cent financing, and can amortise the loan up to 10 years. Loan terms for repairs are similar. Sales prices of units are subsidised by an average of 51 per cent below building costs. There is a 10 per cent discount if some form of sweat-equity was involved. Average monthly payments are estimated at 25 pesos. If monthly payments would exceed 10 per cent of household income, the term is extended to keep payments low. Bank financing for self-building and major repairs is conditioned on having legal access to building materials and building permits.

5. Health Problems

Cuba's health indicators are similar to those of developed countries: most deaths are from chronic non-communicable diseases, such as heart disease and cancer, rather than infectious and parasitic disease as is more common in developing nations (PAHO, 1999). Cuba also has among the lowest incidence of HIV/AIDS in the world due to aggressive treatment and prevention strategies (PAHO, 1999). Nevertheless, the 1990s economic crisis did lead to a short-lived increase in rates of some communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis and hepatitis. For instance, the mortality rate from acute diarrhoeal disease had reached the low rate of 2.7 per 100,000 in 1989, but almost tripled to 6.6 in 1993. By 2000, it had fallen again to 2.3 and only represented 0.3 per cent of all deaths. Havana's rate is only slightly higher at 2.8 (MINSAP, 2000).

There was a rapid response to the major health problems related to the sharp drop in real income and food supplies. Epidemic neuropathy was treated and combated by nutritional supplements and vitamins to targeted groups (PAHO, 1999). An extensive stepped-up maternal and child programme reduced the percentage of low-birth weight babies to from 9.0 per cent in 1993 to 6.1 per cent by 2000; Havana's percentage was the same (MINSAP, 2000).

Despite the relatively even coverage of the Cuban health system, death rates for both communicable and chronic non-communicable diseases are slightly higher in such slum areas as Centro Habana (Yassi et al.,

1999). The spread of some infectious water-borne diseases like hepatitis is sometimes the result of leaks in water mains and sewers. Kerosene stoves, high humidity, dust and air pollution in central areas contribute to asthma and other respiratory diseases (CSV, 2000; Spiegel et al., 2003). Cuban researchers have linked overcrowding and noise – such as very loud music and car horn honking – to anxiety and stress. The noise problem is exacerbated by living with open windows due to heat. Another housing-related health threat is the mosquito-borne dengue virus, which in one of its versions can be fatal. After a serious bout of dengue in the early 1980s, Cuba has successfully kept the virus in check – including during a new outbreak of the disease in 2002 – by fumigating all buildings and an aggressive campaign to prevent households and workplaces from allowing stagnant water to create breeding grounds for mosquito larvae. Havana municipalities with the highest concentration of substandard housing had the highest rates of sexually transmitted disease (Espina Prieto et al., 2000).

6. Victimisation, Insecurity and Psychological Trauma

Compared with other countries in the hemisphere, Cuba has one of the lowest rates of crime and violence. Its homicide death rate was a low 3.2 per 100,000 in 1981; it climbed to 7.3 in 1993 (the rate in the Americas in 1994 was 18.4), and then dropped to 5.3 in 2000 (PAHO, 1998; MINSAP, 2000). Havana's rate in that year was only slightly higher at 5.7. Before the 1990s, Cuba had little street crime, in part due to an effective neighbourhood block-watch system (discussed below in "Social Capital"). The economic crisis led to an increase in burglary and robberies, although still quite low by international standards. In Old Havana and Centro Havana, foreign tourists often became the targets of such petty crimes. Various measures, including an increased street police presence in central areas, decreased Havana's crime rate by the end of the decade. Nevertheless, fear of burglaries has led to the spread of high fences and iron grates on doors, windows and porches.

As noted above, individual evictions are rare and mass evictions unknown in Cuba since 1959. One of the main sources of insecurity in the early-mid 1990s – aside from the ongoing threat of building collapses in older areas and the drama of dealing with food scarcities – were the frequent blackouts, usually 4-5 hours a day on a planned cycle but also unexpected and lengthy ones lasting a day or two. Such blackouts meant not only silent electric fans, televisions and radios, but also spoiled food and often no water (because water pumps could not function). The summers of 1993 and 1994 were particularly stressful, especially for residents of inner-city areas living in small, overcrowded dwellings.

As the economy revived, the number of blackouts declined substantially.

7. Discrimination

Legal forms of racial discrimination and segregation were eliminated by measures soon after the revolution, and structural policies favouring disadvantaged sectors substantially improved the economic and social circumstances of slum-dwellers and low and moderate-income Cubans in general (de la Fuente, 1998). Opportunities for social and economic mobility, although never racially targeted, disproportionately benefited Cubans of African descent. By the mid-to-late 1980s, blacks and mulattos had attained parity on many measures, such as educational attainment and health status, and while some disparities still existed in the labour force and in top leadership positions, advances had been substantial and reflected far less inequality than in other countries, such as Brazil and the United States (de la Fuente, 1998).

Despite these considerable achievements, they weren't sufficient to overcome centuries of disadvantage or erase racially prejudiced stereotypes, attitudes and behaviour. Blacks and mulattos are also more affected by poor living conditions that impose restraints on upward social mobility. Moreover, the 1990s economic crisis *and* the reforms to address it appear to have had a disproportionately negative effect on blacks and mulattos (Espina Prieto et al., 2000). For instance, they are underrepresented in emerging sectors of the economy such as tourism and joint ventures and are far less likely to receive remittances because proportionately fewer blacks and mulattos emigrated. After having attained parity, the proportion of black and mulatto university students declined substantially, partially as a result of university enrolment being cut nearly in half in the early 1990s since graduates are assured jobs and few were to be had (Uriarte, 2002). At the same time they were over-represented in the prison population. These trends have become a public concern of top leadership and the subject of intense research by Cuban social scientists.

Women have attained extraordinary achievements in employment. They represent two-thirds of the technical and professional labour force, and nearly one-third of managers, and these proportions have not been affected by the economic crisis or reforms (Espina Prieto et al., 2000). Nearly three-fifths of university students are women, with an even higher proportion at the University of Havana where they constitute more than two-thirds of the students in most fields of study. Nevertheless, women are slightly over-represented among the "at risk" population, and women in paid employment still have to contend with the "double day" of domestic labour. That situation and continuing stereotypes about women contribute to their under-representation among management and political leadership.

Finally, despite great advances in making education at all levels available to all social strata, in the 1990s there was a much greater representation among university students of children of college-educated parents, leaving fewer openings for applicants from less advantaged homes, another outcome of the sharp drop in university admissions (Espina Prieto et al., 2000). This problem is compounded by the loss of perceived and real economic advantages in possessing a college degree for youth seeking rapid individual upward mobility.

8. Financial Expenditures

There are few reliable published statistics on household expenditures of slum-dwellers in Havana. But a sense of family budgets comes from the calculations by Ferriol Muruaga et al. (1998) based on a 1996 household survey. Expenditures in each category reflect, on the one hand, extremely cheap or free goods and services, and on the other, the drastic increase in the price of food other than rationed goods and the scarcity of many other products. Food accounted for 62.2 per cent of outlays, and another 14.7 per cent was spent on cigarettes, cigars, and alcoholic and soft beverages (reflecting increased prices on non-essential consumer goods such as alcohol and tobacco products). Cleaning supplies, personal hygiene products, perfume and cosmetics took 5.9 per cent. That left 2.7 per cent for clothing and shoes, 3.3 per cent for transportation and communication, a meagre 0.7 per cent for housing payments, and 10.4 per cent for all other costs.

H. ASSETS AVAILABLE TO SLUM DWELLERS

Cuba – and Havana – have been able to weather the hardships of the economic crisis largely because of the extraordinary assets built up over many decades.

1. Social Capital

Since 1959, Cuba has had extensive forms of participation.¹⁷ The most frequent and well known are the mass mobilisations of citizens in agricultural and construction work, national defence, local block watches, and literacy and vaccination campaigns. In addition, Cubans nominate candidates for local office and have numerous ways to express their opinions and complaints to elected representatives and in workplaces. Citizens are also often consulted about major policy issues. However, local grassroots initiatives – although increasingly widespread in the late 1980s and 1990s – are less common.

The two major national “mass organisations” with a community presence are the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (*Comités de Defensa de la*

Revolución, CDR) and the Federation of Cuban Women (*Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*, FMC). The CDRs are all-purpose block clubs that run block watches, run blood drives, and engage in clean-up, infrastructure and beautification activities – when resources are available. The block and neighbourhood-level FMC involves women in local activities, and among other things, takes some responsibility for child welfare and juvenile delinquency prevention. At times formal mutual aid is organised through these groups – for instance, helping a neighbour with emergency home repairs. There is also a strong tradition of informal family and neighbour mutual aid. On the one hand, the economic crisis took a toll on these forms of organisation and assistance since families had fewer resources to help others and, moreover, had to devote more time to basic survival, getting to work, and so on. On the other, the culture of community organisation and participation helped in local efforts to address the crisis, such as initiating community vegetable gardens (Fernández Soriano, Dilla Alfonso, and Castro Flores, 1999).

Elected and informal leaders and the local family doctor often play important roles in the community. Although Cuba is a decidedly secular state – and until 1991 religious believers were barred from Communist Party membership – Catholic, Protestant and Afro-Cuban religious traditions have persisted and grown stronger and much more public in the last decade (Aguilar Tamayo, 1998; Barbón Díaz, 2000). Inner-city areas have also been the cradle of several well-known popular musicians and some specific music trends as son, filin (for feeling), rumba de cajón and Afro-Cuban jazz. Some religiously based groups, such as the NGO Martin Luther King Memorial Centre, located in the Havana municipality of Marianao and directed by a Baptist minister, actively engage in community development with assistance from foreign religious groups and NGOs. In addition, such inner-city slum areas as Cayo Hueso and Atarés have a history of supporting national and working-class struggles.

2. Financial Capital

Slum dwellers don't tend to have formal savings accounts, and those who did, probably drained their accounts in the early and mid-1990s in response to the sharp drop in real income (Togores González, 2002). However, as noted above, low-interest loans are available for home repairs – but only if residents build in the formal sector – and durable consumer goods purchases. There is some degree of informal lending among family members, and family members are often the co-signers for bank loans. As in much of Latin America and the Caribbean, households with family members abroad receive assistance through remittances, although less common for slum dwellers than other sectors of the population.

3. Human Capital

As already noted, Cuba enjoys one of the highest levels of education and health status in the developing world, and this extends to slum dwellers, despite some housing and neighbourhood conditions that contribute to slightly higher disease rates.

There is no child labour in Cuba, but the educational system does include work experiences as part of the curriculum, ranging from caring for school gardens in elementary school to attending high schools in the countryside involving some agricultural labour as well as regular studies.

The higher the number of working adults in each household the less chance of becoming vulnerable (Pérez Izquierdo, 1998a). For instance, in the early 1990s in Atarés, the average number of working adults in each household was 1.6 (Ortega Morales, 1996).

4. Physical Capital

Havana residents generally enjoy secure tenure and basic services supply. There is widespread ownership of home appliances. A 2000 survey estimated that 90.1 per cent of Havana households owned electric fans and 87.5 per cent, refrigerators (Pérez Villanueva, 2002). In the slum neighbourhood of Atarés, it was estimated that in 1987 on average virtually all households had radios, televisions and refrigerators and electric fans, and nearly half had washing machines (Ortega Morales, 1996). (see **photo 9**) But given the 1990s shortage of spare parts, not all these appliances were necessarily working.

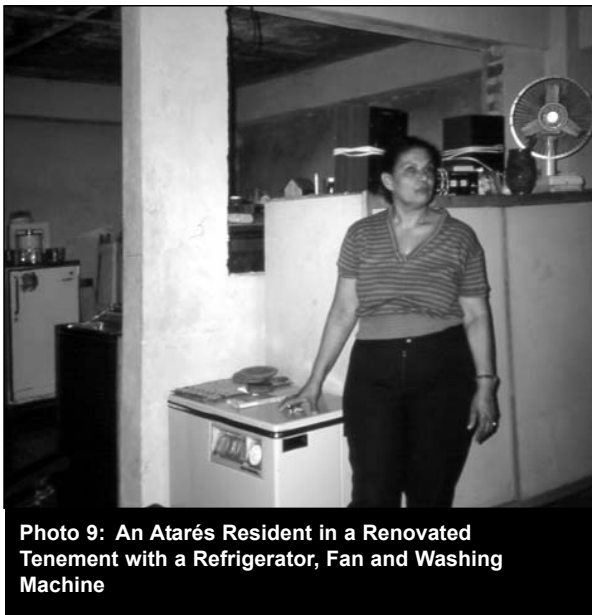


Photo 9: An Atarés Resident in a Renovated Tenement with a Refrigerator, Fan and Washing Machine

Jill Hamberg

Inner-city slums have the great advantage of centrality and accessibility (Díaz Gutiérrez, 2001). There is vibrant street life, and close living quarters – while limiting privacy – enhance co-operation among neighbours.

More outlying slums enjoy less air pollution and residents have more space – vertical or horizontal – to expand their units.

Finally, residents of Old Havana live in one of the largest and most important historic districts in Latin America, and slum-dwellers inhabit other areas of architectural or historic significance as well. Despite some displacement to reduce overcrowding and devote buildings to other uses, most residents remain living in restored and rehabilitated dwellings.

5. Supportive Public Policy

As discussed elsewhere, the Cuban government has been notable, even during a time of economic distress, for its commitment to devoting a disproportionate share of its scarce resources to social needs, such as social security, education and health care, and to equitable distribution and universal access (Uriarte, 2002). Moreover, long-standing policies targeting more vulnerable populations have been expanded during the “special period”. These policies have mitigated the effects of the crisis, but have not been able to completely counteract centuries of inherited deficiencies and inequalities. Moreover, some researchers argue that economic reform policies that helped revive the economy also contributed to making life more difficult for at-risk sectors (Espina Prieto et al., 2000).

IV. SLUMS AND THE AT-RISK POPULATION: THE POLICIES

The three pillars of Cuban social and economic policy – universality, equitable access and government control – have been responsible for most of the island’s greatest achievements, but at the same time have produced some of its most thorny dilemmas and contradictions. For example:

- The principle of equitable access meant that rural areas and the eastern provinces received priority for economic and social development. However, for several decades it led to the neglect of Havana, which had a higher standard of living, but also the largest stock of old, deteriorated housing and crumbling infrastructure.

- The tenet that the state would work toward decent housing for all embodied in Cuba’s Constitution (Vega Vega, 1986) has led to policies based on the belief that housing should be heavily subsidised to insure affordability, that the government is in a better position to set priorities on use of construction resources, and that high-tech prefabricated technologies are the most effi-

cient and cost-effective way to rapidly provide new dwellings. But this has also made it more difficult for residents to take initiative to address their own or their community's housing problems that fall outside of national priorities.

■ Strong government control has for the most part encouraged greater equality and balanced growth by directing investment and distribution of scarce goods and services to priority areas and populations, but it has also tended to minimise initiatives at the local level, whether public or private. Similarly, centralised control of resources has made it difficult for decentralised bodies such as the People's Councils and community development groups to implement plans, increasingly elaborated with community input and participation. Moreover, planning tends to occur vertically within each ministry, making it more difficult to co-ordinate development strategies at the community level.

■ Investment priorities have emphasised "productive investment" over "non-productive" as an economic development strategy, and among "non-productive investments", fields such as education and health care took the lion's share. Until the 1980s, housing was relatively neglected, except for a brief period in the early 1970s. Even in the 1980s, when housing received greater priority, resources earmarked for housing were often redirected to socially beneficial building that could potentially help a greater number of people, such as family doctor home-offices, child care centres, and special education schools.

■ Universality and equal access have fostered policies of providing heavily subsidised low-cost essential goods and services to everyone, whether or not they needed them, an approach now under cautious debate.

I. THE 1990s: DECENTRALISATION AND PARTICIPATION

Even before the economic crisis hit, new forms of decentralised, comprehensive and co-ordinated community initiatives were underway. The first attempt to bring government closer to the neighbourhood level was the People's Councils. These community-based entities, composed of local elected officials and representatives of organisations and workplaces, do not directly control any resources. However, their very existence makes it more possible to achieve some degree of local horizontal collaboration among entities that usually function within their own sectors and are vertically integrated (Uriarte, 2002).

The Neighbourhood Transformation Workshops (*Talleres de Transformación Integral del Barrio – TTIB*) were created in 1988 by the Group for the

Comprehensive Development of the Capital (*Grupo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Capital – GDIC*). The GDIC is a blue-ribbon planning agency established in 1987 at the suggestion of Fidel Castro that advises the city government on urban policy (Coyula, Oliveras, and Cabrera, 1998; Uriarte, 2002). TTIBs are small teams of architects, planners, sociologists and social workers that work and usually live in the target neighbourhood and advocate for alternative, participatory, bottom-up planning. The original three workshops grew to 20 by mid-2002. They have developed Strategic Plans for each neighbourhood and work closely with the People's Councils. The 20 Havana TTIBs together cover a population of nearly 500,000. Part of their job is to improve local living conditions. Since TTIBs do not have special budgets – the City government only pays their salaries – the GDIC has promoted collaboration projects with foreign NGOs, mostly addressed to neighbourhood improvement. Some of those projects paid for the repair or rehabilitation of deteriorated dwellings, including the creation of small workshops to produce local building materials and recycle rubble. But the total output of these housing projects has been small, and most of the TTIBs' projects have instead focused on neighbourhood-based social, educational and cultural activities that require fewer material resources and, in some cases, target vulnerable populations.

The 1990s witnessed a veritable explosion in community-based organisations and activities (Fernández Soriano, Dilla Alfonso, and Castro Flores, 1999). An estimated 70 community development projects are sponsored by Havana's People's Councils. Miren Uriarte (2002) describes five key features of this new experience for Cuba:

- A focus on small geographically defined areas (as opposed to the much larger municipal or provincial level) and the use of strategic planning.
- A comprehensive and more integrated view of needs and solutions across sectors.
- The increased use of participatory planning methodologies, despite resistance in some quarters.
- The ability to garner resources from a variety of sources, such as international NGOs and semi-autonomous Cuban programmes with their own funding sources.
- Capacity building through training, including the "Cubanisation" of popular education materials and methods from other parts of Latin America (Habitat-Cuba, 2000).

These characteristics have been further reinforced by a 2000 law regulating People's Councils that requires

local citizen participation in determining problems and solutions, as well as in planning and monitoring (Uriarte, 2002).

J. SLUM UPGRADING AND ERADICATION

In addition to the broader dilemmas of Cuban social and economic policy, housing brings its own issues. For example, there has been a continual tug of war between new construction, on the one hand, and repair and rehabilitation, on the other – for both government agencies and individual households – with new construction usually winning. In addition, the best-laid plans can easily be thrown awry by emergencies. For instance, Hurricane Michelle in 2001 devastated a wide swath of west-central Cuba, and therefore, in 2002 almost all housing efforts were directed to repairing or replacing the 160,000 units damaged in that storm as well as 25,000 other units seriously affected by other recent storms (Lee, 2002). Most are roof repair or replacement, but about 12,500 units were destroyed by Michelle and another 21,000 partially collapsed.

1. The 1997 Migration Law as Housing Policy

The 1997 migration law regulates migration to Havana and within the city to the four densest and most deteriorated municipalities based on the availability of adequate housing for the potential migrant. The law was designed to stem the new wave of growth in shantytowns and continued population pressure on overcrowded inner-city slums and the city's inadequate infrastructure, such as water, electricity and transportation (Hamberg, 2001).

2. Official Policies Regarding Slums

Two documents enunciate official policies regarding Havana's deteriorated housing, and both have been approved by the city's government. The *Esquema de Ordenamiento Territorial y Urbanismo* (Guidelines for Zoning and Urban Planning) developed by the provincial urban planning department, serves as a mini-comprehensive plan for the city (DPPF, 2000; Alfonso Pérez and García Padrón, 2001). It notes the growing deterioration of housing and the built environment, drop in new housing construction, increase in conversion from non-residential uses to dwellings, continued overcrowding, 289,000 people living in shantytowns and tenements, and poorly built new social housing on the outskirts. The document recommends containing the deterioration in residential areas and giving priority to comprehensive rehabilitation strategies (at least at the block level rather than individual buildings). It urges

maintaining the same size population in the densest central areas, increasing the number of residents in intermediate zones, but refraining from building on the outskirts.

The Strategic Plan prepared by the GDIC (Coyula Cowley, 2002) also urges a comprehensive policy for rehabilitation and repairs and gives priority to addressing conditions in shelters, shantytowns and tenements. But it also recommends greater user participation and resident self-help efforts in repair, rehabilitation, and new construction.

In addition to formal policies, the GDIC sponsored a series of seminars on housing policies in 1992, 1996 and 1999; they provide an interesting window on debates among staff of local and national government housing agencies, international NGOs and others. Participants in the first seminar recommended greater decentralisation and participation of local governments, grassroots organisations and citizens, as well as the use of local resources and alternative technologies. They also suggested that top priority should go to housing developments oriented to stabilising the labour force and addressing the needs of shelter residents. Two national programmes dealing with alternative building technologies and local production of alternative building materials were an outcome of this seminar. The second meeting emphasised the need for quality in construction, even at the expense of quantity, prioritising maintenance and repair of the existing stock over new building, and providing technical assistance and resources for self-building. The third seminar focused on such issues as inadequate accounting of building costs; the need to improve design guidelines, including adapting buildings better to the climate; the lag in providing infrastructure for new housing developments; and the failure to convert obsolete heavy concrete panel plants to produce lighter and more flexible elements (Coyula Cowley, 2000).

K. HOUSING PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES

1. Early Years

During the first half of the 20th century little was done to improve slums. New social housing developments were clearly insufficient and built mainly for political effect, with a populist "worker's neighbourhood" approach. The 1959 revolution quickly began housing programmes throughout the country. In Havana, Habana del Este (1959-61) was built by a new agency, INAV (*Instituto Nacional de Ahorro y Vivienda*, National Savings and Housing Institute) and financed through the lottery. It had 1,306 apartments, full infrastructure and community facilities, and achieved a very high standard of design and construction. INAV also built several

other housing complexes in Havana and smaller cities. Other early 1960s housing programmes included clearing the worst shantytowns by the short-lived Ministry of Social Welfare and rehabilitating tenements sponsored by the Ministry of Public Works. But soon priority in new construction was switched to areas outside of Havana.

2. New Construction

2.1 Microbrigades¹⁸

The creation of microbrigades in 1970 offered a way, unprecedented in Latin America, for popular participation in housing programmes with strong government support. It provided an alternative using conventional building technologies to heavy concrete prefabricated panels. In 1973 – its peak year – microbrigades built 65 per cent of all new dwellings in Cuba. The microbrigades marked a turning point, giving priority again to Havana, but almost always on the outskirts, where 70 per cent of all such dwellings were concentrated. Cuba's largest new development, Alamar, provided apartments for nearly 100,000 people in eastern Havana, but the site planning, urban design and construction quality were poor (see **photo 10**). A severe shortage of community facilities and infrastructure helped to create a negative image, reflected in newspaper advertisements for housing swaps that often specified "not in a Micro building"!

The basic principle of the microbrigades was to make it possible for those needing housing to directly address that need themselves. A group of 33 workers from a government-run workplace would leave their regular jobs and instead build apartments for a two to three year period. Once finished, the workers who participated in the building brigade were usually assigned a unit, but other workers with housing needs, who might not have

been able to join the microbrigade, could also receive an apartment. Decisions on who received units were made in public meetings by the workers themselves. A certain percentage of microbrigade-built units – varying from 20 to 50 per cent – were turned over to local government to assign to other households who didn't have access to microbrigade units – such as families living in shelters, the elderly and the disabled. Those assigned units became homeowners and their amortisation payments were reduced for "sweat equity" if they had participated in the construction.

Microbrigade members had an incentive to build as well as possible, since no one knew which apartment will be his or hers. But they seldom had previous building skills and had to learn on the job. By the time they had acquired some skills, the building was finished, workers moved in, and a new microbrigade was created with unskilled workers, starting all over again.

Microbrigades were gradually phased out from 1978 on, but they were revived in the late 1980s during a short-lived construction boom, this time with an additional variant: the social microbrigade, which worked on in-fill and rehabilitation projects. Rather than employees of a workplace, the labour force was drawn from local residents. In some cases, tenements received a second floor, turning the old substandard dwellings into small duplex apartments, with greater privacy and ventilation. Social microbrigades were also started in several shantytowns, such as La Güinera (see below).

In the 1990s, construction was practically stopped, except for programmes like building hotels and condominiums for foreigners that would bring some desperately needed dollars into the country. Once construction picked up again in the mid-1990s, social housing was limited to programmes for workers of key industries or agencies, with priority going to finishing buildings that had been halted in the early 1990s and to meeting the

Photo 10. Five-Storey Walk-Ups are Typical of Microbrigade Housing in Alamar



needs of people living in shelters. But in 2001 Havana still had a low rate of housing completions and the greatest number of units under construction paralysed, representing 55.2 per cent of the country's total in that situation (INV, 2001a).

2.2 Technology and Design

In the 1990s the government sponsored a programme called *vivienda económica* or *vivienda de bajo consumo* – literally “low consumption” housing that minimises the use of imported energy-intensive materials (INV, 1999). The purpose was to cut costs by using local and recycled building materials, trying to link sustainability with feasibility. But at times the quality of construction, especially finishing work, suffered. Smaller living spaces and fewer windows and doors often forced residents to spend more on electricity (light bulbs on during daytime, electric fans) than what had been saved in building materials (González Couret, 1997). Moreover, some of the units were unattractively designed, and these low-rise, low-density dwellings consumed valuable land. The programme was soon largely stopped in high and medium-density areas of Havana, but has been much more successful, and often has much better design, in lower-density parts of Havana and Cuba with good access to local building materials.

Changes forced by the economic crisis reached housing. Heavy-concrete panel prefabricated plants were halted. The building of high-rises, once seen as a symbol of development, was stopped. Construction with local materials called for a smaller, more sensitive, contextual housing design having a more respectful relationship with the social and built environment and making possible greater participation of users-to-be. But as the economy started a modest recovery in the late 1990s, there was growing interest by government agencies in utilising installed capacity for prefabricated building once again.

3. Rehabilitation and Repairs

In the 1960s housing repairs were mostly targeted to slums and conducted through a rehabilitation enterprise under the local Havana government. But the pace of repairs soon fell behind need. Shoring up buildings, initially seen as temporary until the rehabilitation could be carried out, gradually became permanent. A demolition agency was created that also dealt with collapsing buildings. Functioning under different names over time, the *Plan con las Masas* (Plan with the Masses) hoped to find a parallel way to increase maintenance and repairs by giving free technical assistance and providing free or low-cost building materials to tenement residents to make minor repairs. But many of these materials were instead used for additions or to build new units, which helps explain why a study found that at least twice as many self-built units were created in the 1981-83 period

as government-built ones nationally. In Havana 40 per cent were self-built (Zschaebitz and Lesta, 1988).

In 2000, more than 23,000 units were rehabilitated and nearly 500 replaced in Havana, reducing the number of units in fair and poor condition that year by 8.3 per cent (after taking loss to the stock into account) (INV, 2000).

3.1 Cayo Hueso.¹⁹

Two experiences in the 1990s with rehabilitation and repair in inner-city slum areas illustrate several dilemmas in housing and social policy.

Cayo Hueso is a working-class neighbourhood in the heart of Centro Habana. Housing is a major problem, combining substandard building types, decades of neglect, overcrowding, and the effects of weather. One attempt to address this problem in the early 1970s was a major urban renewal project of the whole area, which was to be replaced by prefabricated walk-ups and high-rise apartment buildings (see **photo 11**). The project was never completed because of materials and labour shortages.



Photo 11: A Neoclassical Façade in Cayo Hueso, Shored Up after the Partial Collapse and then Demolition of the rest of the Building. Behind is a 20-Storey Prefab Apartment Building from the 1970's Urban Renewal Project

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One of the first Neighbourhood Transformation Workshops (TTIBs) was created in Cayo Hueso in 1988. The TTIB did a thorough inventory of all the buildings, infrastructure, green spaces and amenities, and identified social, economic and environmental issues, including those related to housing, education, health care, food supply and pollution. They mobilised local resources and assistance projects from international NGOs and organisations such as OXFAM-Canada, UNICEF and ONG-SUR, to improve living conditions and reinforce self-esteem and a sense of local identity. This aid was used to finance the repair of several tenements and create a small plant to recycle rubble into mortar blocks.

In 1995-1996 the neighbourhood received strong assistance from many national ministries in what became known as the “Cayo Hueso Plan”. Residents were offered building materials at affordable prices, while government agencies were responsible for neighbourhood infrastructure improvements, structural repairs and facades. Differences from previous efforts were (1) the targeting of an entire neighbourhood for rehabilitation rather than a few tenements; (2) focusing on upgraded community facilities and neighbourhood infrastructure as well as housing repair and rehabilitation; and (3) the “adopting” of specific streets or blocks by individual ministries, which provided technical assistance, specialised construction labour, tools, machinery and materials. But the strong involvement of the national agencies gradually resulted in some of them assuming most of the work, which moreover was often cosmetic. Nevertheless, around 10,000 units were repaired, eight schools and 15 health facilities were improved and street lighting, waste disposal, streets and sidewalks were upgraded (Díaz Gutiérrez, 2001). A before-and-after study comparing Cayo Hueso and Colon, another Centro Habana area that had not received a similar programme, indicates its relative effectiveness (Spiegel et al., 2003). Compared with Colon, Cayo Hueso had fewer serious housing problems, greater improvement in neighbourhood conditions, less need for housing repairs, and fewer perceived new community needs. Moreover, self-reported health status of certain vulnerable sub-populations such as women over 60 improved dramatically in Cayo Hueso compared with Colon.

In 1999 the programme was extended to central areas of some other provincial capitals and to some other Havana neighbourhoods. According to the National Housing Institute, in 2000 the programme was functioning in 75 People’s Council areas nationally, and had reached 125,000 dwellings (INV, 2001b).

The effort reflected the coexistence of two approaches: one seeking more active partici-

pation of residents and local governments, and the other, based on assistance from national agencies with other goals, thus forcing them to shift scarce resources to local housing repairs. These agencies had resources not available to local governments. Their involvement was considered “assistance”, making it difficult to reject shoddy work and inhibiting the role of local government.

3.2 Old Havana and San Isidro ²⁰

A contrasting model is represented by the restoration of the historic parts of Old Havana and the rehabilitation of its most deteriorated area, San Isidro. The difference is local access to and control of resources. After becoming a World Historic Heritage site in 1982, restoration of historic buildings grew slowly. Finally, in 1993 Havana’s Historian’s Office was granted the right to run its own profit-making companies in the real estate, building, retail and tourism fields, and to use part of its earnings – as well as taxes from other workplaces – to plough back into restoring the historic district. In addition, it could devote a portion of its own resources to financing community facilities and social programmes for local residents and to repair and rehabilitate dwellings, even in non-historic areas. More than a third of the programme’s budget is spent on such activities (Mas, 2001; Peters, 2001).

Gentrification of the sort seen in most other historic areas has been largely avoided since housing for local residents is included in the upper floors of most restored buildings (see **photos 12, 13, 14, 15**). Most residents get to stay in the area, but some are displaced to apartments built and financed by the Historian’s Office in Alamar. Some welcome the more spacious, well-equipped new dwellings, but others find commuting extremely difficult. Temporary relocation housing is sometimes provided in Old Havana itself while rehabilitation is under way.



Photo 12. Tenements in Old Havana’s Plaza Vieja

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Photo 13:
Inside of Renovated
Tenement on the
Plaza Vieja



Photo 14: A Family Doctor Home-Office is
Included in the Renovated Building on the
Plaza Vieja

Local economic development includes residents receiving training and jobs as skilled construction workers for the restoration process, incentives to produce crafts for sale to tourists, and employment in the tourist industry – although hiring preferences for local residents are not always honoured in practice (Robainas Barcia, 1999). Of the 10,000 jobs created up to the end of 2000, half went to residents of Old Havana, Centro Habana and Regla – all municipalities with a high per cent of tenements – and a third went to women (Mas, 2001). Community facilities and social programmes include a rehabilitation centre for disabled children, a maternity home for women with problem pregnancies, facilities for the elderly, special equipment for schools, and a programme of holding primary school classes in museums. In addition, the UN Programme for Local Human Development (PHDL, 2000) has sponsored dozens of social projects throughout Old Havana promoting local economic development, job creation, protection of vulnerable groups, and upgrading of the environment and public services, including education and health care (PHDL, 2000).

Once the Historian's Office had sufficient revenues in 1995 it started financing the "Comprehensive Revitalisation Programme" in San Isidro, located at the southern tip of the historic district. (see **photos 16, 17**) Modelled to some degree after the Neighbourhood Transformation Workshops it has a multi-disciplinary staff that deals with social, cultural and education activities as well as residential, commercial and infrastruc-

ture upgrading. It was not until the Programme became an official part of the Historian's Office that it fully controlled the use of its resources in an autonomous and decentralised way (Coipel Díaz and Collado Reyes, 2000; Mayoral, 2001). As in the Cayo Hueso Plan, residents were sold materials for repair and rehabilitation at affordable prices, but starting in mid-2000, building enterprises with specialised skills were brought in to tackle the complexities of major work on such old, deteriorated and often historic buildings (Mayoral, 2001). In addition, aggressive emergency repairs have helped prevent building collapses. No other community-based project in Cuba has this degree of autonomy and stable resources.

4. Self-Building

Aside from special projects such as those in Old Havana and Cayo Hueso, official figures indicate that Havana residents were active in repairing, rehabilitating and, in some cases, building their own units. In 2001, 96,696 repair and rehabilitation jobs were completed in Havana – 43.2 per cent by residents themselves – representing two-fifths of all those in the country (INV, 2001a). In contrast, legal self-building of new units in the capital has been almost impossible since the early 1990s, and only 366 new dwellings were officially completed in 2001, just 2.5 per cent of the nation's total, and of these, a little over two-thirds were replacement units (INV, 2001a).



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Photo 16: Rehabilitated Buildings in the Old Havana Neighbourhood of San Isidro. Some Include Units Specially Designed for the Elderly Who Live Alone

Photo 15: (left) In-Fill Construction of a Family Doctor Home-Office in Old Havana

4.1 New Regulations

In an effort to direct low-cost building materials to those with the greatest need (rather than those with the most money), complete the 135,000 self-built units under construction (INV, 2001a), and prevent the development of shantytowns, a series of new regulations were issued in 2000-2001. One establishes neighbourhood-based committees to allocate to households the right to obtain a building permit and buy low-cost materials based on need. It also sharply reduces permits for new construction – which had been the policy in Havana for more than a decade – in the belief that units already begun should be finished first (Resolución No. 500/00, 2000). Another set of regulations drastically increases fines and penalties for any building activity that violates the law and is undertaken without proper permits (Decreto No. 272, 2001). Since the middle of 2001, the CDRs and the National Housing Institute have been on a campaign to detect illegal sales, building and renting (Lee, 2002). Enforcement has been greatest in Havana, especially in areas close to tourist and real estate investment, and the emphasis has been on legal issues rather than violations of building or zoning regulations.

4.2 Community Architect Programme

Self-builders have been aided by the Community Architect Programme, started in 1994 by the Cuban NGO Habitat-Cuba and based on the participatory design method of Argentinean architect Rodolfo

Livingston (Garcilaso de la Vega, 2000; Livingston, 1995). Through the programme, which in 2000 became part of the National Housing Institute, architects run group practices in which they are hired by private clients (and even sometimes government agencies) seeking technical assistance and construction blueprints for major repairs, rehabilitation, remodelling, subdivisions, additions, and new construction. The architects also provide oversight of construction work. The Community Architect Programme was selected to receive one of the 40 top awards in the Dubai International Award for Best Practices leading up to the 1996 Habitat II Istanbul conference. By the end of 2001, there were 155 municipal offices throughout the country and 642 community architects (CSV, 2002). With the decrease in availability of building materials, strict limits on issuing building permits and greater demand for housing-related legal documents for exchanges, inheritance, and migration (especially in Havana), community architects' offices have started devoting more time to these administrative matters and less to participatory design with clients.

4.3 Shantytowns

La Güinera is an example of a shantytown – indeed, three next to each other, including the most populous in Havana (ONE-OTECH, 1997) – that mobilised to respond to community needs.²¹ Located on the outskirts of Havana, these shantytowns have a combined population of nearly 9,000 with 2,500 housing units. In 1987 a group of women from the community initiated partici-



Photo 17.: One-Storey Rehabilitated Buildings in San Isidro. Bicycles Became a Major Form of Transportation in Response to the Scarcity of Fuel and Bus Spare Parts

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photos 18, 19 and 20). Other activities were also undertaken, such as local economic development and building a community centre. La Güinera was one of 50 communities in the world to be recognised by the Friends of the United Nations in 1995.

5. Addressing the At-Risk Population

In contrast to structural adjustment programmes imposed on other developing nations in recent years – that is, slashing public spending for basic needs – Cuba has mitigated rather than exacerbated the effects of the economic crisis. The 1992 per capita internal product was 76.9 per cent of what it had been in 1989, but household consumption was only at 84.9 per cent (Ferriol Muruaga et al., 1998). Macroeconomic policies designed to cushion the effect of the downturn included provision of unemployment benefits to laid off workers,



Photo 18. La Güinera Residents with Josefina “Fifi” Bocourt Díaz (in Red), One of a Group of Women who Founded and Led the Social Microbrigade

pation in the newly formed social microbrigades, and a year later the Neighbourhood Transformation Workshop of La Güinera was founded (see **photos 18, 19, 20**). Streets were paved, sidewalks built and work begun on five-storey walk-up apartments similar to the standard designs of those built elsewhere in Havana. The microbrigade was directed by a woman and 70 per cent of its members were female as well.

By 1997, 270 units in nine buildings had been completed, with another several hundred units in buildings under construction halted since 1990. The buildings were criticised by some experts as ugly, monotonous, inappropriate for the area, and very dependent on materials, equipment and energy, often from abroad. The community turned to alternative technologies, establishing a Materials Production Shop that makes soil-cement blocks using soil found locally and a donated manually operated block-making machine. By 1997, 36 units had been built using this method (see

an increase in pensions to the elderly and disabled, steady wage hikes, legalisation of self-employment, and maintenance – and even an increase – of social spending as a per cent of GDP (Ferriol Muruaga et al., 1998; CEPAL, 2000; Uriarte, 2002).

But, as noted above, these and other measures were not sufficient to prevent the growth of the at-risk population, and special programmes were soon established to address some of the most obvious needs. For instance, the programme to combat the increase in low-birth-weight babies with special food allotments and meals and expanded prenatal services for pregnant women soon brought the rate to under that of 1990 (MINSAP, 2000, Uriarte, 2002). Similarly, a special meals programme at workplaces started helping feed the vulnerable elderly; children in Old Havana participated in a breakfast programme.

Youth are an “at risk” group presenting special challenges. Before 1990, teens and young adults had been

virtually guaranteed a job and most could participate in some form of post-high school education. Upward mobility through education was a realistic aspiration for many. But the economic crisis increased unemployment, especially among youth, and decreased university admissions. As important, the dual currency situation and the emerging tourist economy meant that a bartender or bellhop could make more in one day in tips than a neurosurgeon could in one month or a school teacher in several. Indeed, a growing number of trained and experienced teachers, doctors and other professionals left their jobs to work in menial ones in tourism. Even substantial wage hikes for professionals were insufficient to stem the tide because of the unfavourable peso-dollar exchange rate. These trends were not lost on youth. School dropouts increased as did the number of youth that were neither studying nor working. A small but growing sector resorted to juvenile delinquency,

one of its major goals was “ideological work” with youth. A new school for social workers was founded and the Sociology Department at the University of Havana took responsibility for curriculum development and teaching in the initial six-month course. The term of study was later extended to eight months. Around 1,000 students have already graduated from the first course in Havana, and there is a second group of some 2,000 enrolled, mostly from the capital but also from nearby provinces. The programme has been extended to the rest of the country in response to an estimated a nation-wide need for 30,000 social workers. There are hundreds of thousands of elderly in Havana, with 32,000 over 60 living alone, 48,000 people with disabilities and about 400,000 children under 15 (CAAEF, 2002; Rassi and Núñez, 2001).

Students were initially drawn from among jobless high school graduates who could not enter college because of low grades, but more have been recruited



Photo 19. Manual Block-Making Machine Operated in La Güinera, with Five-Storey Standard Semi-Prefabricated Buildings in the Background



Photo 20. Before and After in La Güinera: Shantytown Housing with New Buildings Behind

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petty crime, prostitution and black marketing. And like many in the rest of Latin America, others sought to emigrate abroad, whether illegally or legally through a special lottery for visas to the United States established for Cuban citizens.

5.1 New Social Work Programme

The social work programme,²² initiated in 2000, addresses “social problems” among the at-risk population. But it also serves as a way to find useful jobs as social workers for thousands of youth who are neither studying nor working. Targeted vulnerable groups include the elderly, persons with disabilities, low-income single mothers, pregnant teenagers, families of prisoners and ex-prisoners, people with difficult living conditions, children and teens, and especially unemployed youth with a strong emphasis on delinquency prevention.

The task was assigned to the Union of Young Communists (*Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas*, UJC) and

from among UJC members. Students are assigned to work in various municipalities under UJC supervision, although lately there is the beginnings of co-ordination with local government. The programme could potentially build on earlier work in Havana with the “at-risk population” through FMC social workers, the TTIBs and cultural programmes co-ordinated by the Writers and Artists Union in tenements and shantytowns. Students have good conditions at school, receive a stipend and, once graduated as paraprofessionals, receive higher salaries than college graduates with several years of work experience. They are also guaranteed admission to college in any of eight majors with normally highly selective admissions criteria.

The approach is mainly addressed to providing relief for individuals in need, such as securing extra food for undernourished children, a higher pension for the elderly living alone, or even at times supplying shoes, toys or TV sets to those unable to buy them. This

approach reflects a return to the notion of a benevolent state taking care of people's needs, an approach challenged by the harsh reality of the 1990s. And this is under way at a time when the Cuban economy seems to be facing another difficult period.

5.2 Other Programmes Targeted to Social Needs, Especially Youth

These include the crash programme to lower primary school classroom size to 20; repair, build and equip hundreds of schools in Havana; recruit and train new teachers, and develop computer skills in schoolchildren (Castro, 2002). After a period of contraction, university admissions greatly expanded, and training for nurses was stepped up, with new schools being built. Tens of thousands of unemployed youth have been enrolled in refresher courses – and receive a stipend at the same time – which may enable them to enter university. Finally, “massification of culture” programmes – not to be confused with mass culture – are bringing culture to the community level.

5.3 Universality Versus Targeting

Although consensus has grown around the need to provide extra goods and services to vulnerable populations, there is a cautious debate about whether the state's scarce resources should continue to be used to heavily subsidise, for instance, the price of rice and milk for households with sufficient income to spend on luxuries.²³ Some argue that people in need should be subsidised rather than goods. But the tradition of strongly egalitarian policies makes such a move difficult. Among other issues, there are practical problems in determining who really needs assistance, in part because of unreported income generated through the informal sector.

6. Role of Non-Governmental Organisations

Beyond the officially recognised Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs), the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC), and other officially recognised “mass organisations”, Cuba also has many private fraternal, cultural, sports and religious organisations, ranging from the Masons to bird-watching societies. But it wasn't until the late 1980s and early 1990s that a new type of non-governmental organisation (NGO) came into existence, and at the same time, international NGOs began to provide community development assistance.²⁴

Some Cuban NGO's are independent organisations that are legally recognised and registered as such and are linked to a ministry or other government agency related to their area of work. In addition, a number of governmental entities, such as the Group for the Comprehensive Development of the Capital (GDIC) and its Neighbourhood Transformation Workshops (TTIBs),

as well as university and research institutions, have a relative degree of autonomy and are often the Cuban counterparts for international NGO assistance. In response to the economic crisis, there was an upsurge in the creation of Cuban NGOs in the mid-1990s, but thereafter their number stabilised or even declined. Some organisations went out of existence, some shifted their focus, and few if any new ones in the community development field have attained official NGO recognition in recent years.

International NGOs offering community development assistance are largely European or Canadian. Also providing significant assistance are several UN agencies, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Food Programme and especially the Local Human Development Programme (*Programa de Desarrollo Humano Local*, PDHL) which is part of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and in Cuba is largely funded by Italian municipalities with growing participation by Spanish and Swiss agencies.

According to international donors (Habitat-Cuba, 2000), Cuba offers many advantages compared with other developing nations. International assistance has a greater impact because of the strong commitment, professionalism and capabilities of Cuban counterpart organisations and the similarity of goals between foreign NGOs and the Cuban government. Indeed, in most other countries, aid activities are implemented against the policies of the government, without it, or replacing it. In Cuba, government agencies are involved in every assistance project, even if they are not the formal counterparts – which has its advantages and disadvantages. Donors find that funds go much further in Cuba than elsewhere, because of lower overheads, the favourable exchange rate, transparency in the use of aid, and donor contributions often being smaller than the Cuban share. There has been a slow, but growing legitimacy of international NGO assistance, although with ups and downs, especially because of the proclaimed intentions and concrete attempts by the United States to use international and Cuban NGOs to undermine the Cuban government. Moreover, unlike many countries, Cuba has a strong tradition of local organisation and participation (albeit mostly mobilisation), relative political and social cohesion, and basic needs – such as education and health care – largely met.

But Cuba poses some challenges as well. International donors sometimes find it difficult to determine appropriate counterparts given the reduced number of Cuban community development NGOs, which, moreover, may lack the capacity to take on additional projects. Indeed, Habitat-Cuba, one of the most active housing groups that pioneered pilot projects in alternative technologies and participatory design and planning, ceased to exist as an NGO in 2001. Its resources and projects were absorbed by the National Housing Institute. Since approaches and styles of work

differ between an NGO and a government agency, it is unclear to what extent Habitat-Cuba's more participatory and comprehensive approach will be continued.

Other problems include long delays, largely the result of administrative problems and difficulties in securing building materials. Projects that are included in local government building plans (and therefore have materials assigned) or have backing at the highest levels (such as UN-sponsored programmes) are the most likely to succeed. And all projects, whatever the source of financing, can be affected by the shifting of materials to address urgent needs, such as the post-Hurricane Michelle reconstruction and massive school construction and repair. For this reason, both Cuban and foreign NGOs have increasingly focused on educational, cultural, social and environmental activities.

International community development NGOs have concentrated their activities in Cuba's less developed eastern provinces, but many have a presence in Havana. These include Norwegian People's Aid; Canadian International Development Agency; ONG-Sur (Madrid); ACSUR-Las Segovias; Bread for the World; Fraternité des Hommes; OXFAM from various countries; Paz y Tercer Mundo (Peace and Third World), Architects without Borders; Movimiento por la Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad (Movement for Peace, Disarmament and Freedom); Pastors for Peace and Habana Ecopolis (sponsored by several Italian entities). Community development work has included rehabilitating inner-city tenements, assisting shantytown upgrading, local economic development, work in transitional homeless shelters, urban agriculture, popular education, support for local cultural groups, and building and equipping a health clinic and centre for the elderly. In addition, groups such as the Catholic charity Caritas have contributed clothing and medicine.

Cuban NGOs routinely evaluate, monitor and report results and update their Strategic Plans. International NGOs donors also periodically provide feedback and monitoring to their parent organisations, their Cuban counterparts and government agencies that oversee international assistance.

L. CONCLUSION

Cuba is almost unique among nations in its capacity to maintain, restore or even extend most of its social safety net to its citizens despite a severe economic crisis. Cuba has the political framework and the mobilisation capacity needed to face this challenge, and Cubans have more than once demonstrated their ingenuity in finding alternative solutions to major problems with few resources. But the challenge will be combining the advantages of central planning with decentralised, sustainable development based on broad citizen participation. ■

ENDNOTES

¹The authors are especially grateful to Carlos García Pleyán for his insights and suggestions on different drafts, and his collaboration in gathering information. We also want to thank Miren Uriarte, Yolanda Prieto and Juan Luis Martín for their comments on previous drafts, as well Roberto Dávalos, Orestes Díaz, Salvador Gomila, René González Rego, Rosa Oliveras, Mayda Pérez, Pedro Vázquez and Marta Garcilaso de la Vega for assistance with obtaining information.

² Unless otherwise noted, the National Overview section is based on Hamberg (1994, 2001).

³ Unless otherwise noted, Havana's history and geography is based on Coyula (2002) and Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula (2002).

⁴ For more on People's Power, especially at the municipal and People's Council level, see Dilla, González and Vincentelli (1993), García Brigos (2001), Roman (1999), and Uriarte (2002). For Havana's local government see Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula (2002).

⁵ It is likely that there has been a decrease in the number of units in tenements in central areas since the early 1990s, because of building collapses, demolitions and upgrading to full apartments, and an increase in other areas, including shantytowns.

⁶ Centro Habana, including Cayo Hueso and the San Isidro-Malecón area: Arranz González (1998) (53.6 per cent women), García Fernández, et al. (1998) (51 per cent women); Old Havana, including the San Isidro area (all 52-53 per cent women): Collado, Mauri, and Coipel (1998), PDHL (2000), Plan Maestro (1996), Rodríguez Alomá (1996); Atarés: Ortega Morales (1996) (52 per cent women); shantytowns: González Rego (2000a); González Rego, Rúa de Cabo, and Blanco Sánchez (2000) (higher proportion of men in shantytowns than in surrounding municipality).

⁷ For information on ages in Cuba and Havana as a whole, see MINSAP (2000). For ages in inner-city slum areas see Collado, Mauri, and Coipel (1998), García Fernández, et al. (1998), PDHL (2000), Plan Maestro (1996), and Spiegel et al. (2003). For shantytowns, see González Rego (2000a) and González Rego, Rúa de Cabo, and Blanco Sánchez (2000), and ONE-OTTECH (1997).

⁸ Density by municipality for 2000 is based on the 2000 population and square kilometres from the 1981 census (ONE, 2001; CEE-ONC, 1984).

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, information for the section on definitions and data on poverty come from CEPAL (2000), CIEM (2000), Díaz Tenorio (2000a), Espina Prieto et al. (2000), Ferriol Muruaga et al., (1998), Pérez Izquierdo (1998a, 1998b), Pérez Villanueva (2002), Regueiro and Alonso (2001), Rodríguez and Carrizo Moreno (1987), Togores González (2002), UNDP (2002), Uriarte (2002), and Zabala Argüelles (1999).

¹⁰ The eight indicators are: economic development (per capita investment), personal consumption (value of per capita retail trade), educational level (6-14 year olds in school), health (life expectancy at birth), access to basic services (access to clean water), access to energy (access to electricity), housing quality (per cent in good condition), political participation (per cent voting in last elections).

¹¹ Centro Habana and Cayo Hueso: Arranz González (1998), Vázquez Penelas and Cantero Zayas (1998); Old Havana: Rodríguez Alomá (1996); Malecón: García Fernández (1998); Atarés: Ortega Morales (1996).

¹² Except as otherwise noted, the information in the section on “types of tenure and homeownership” is based on Hamberg (1994, 2001) and Vega Vega (1986).

¹³ A few subdivisions were taken over under a law recovering “ill-gotten gains” acquired during the rule of the former government. But the vast majority of tracts coming into government hands was the result of a 1961 law mandating confiscation of property (land, houses, etc.) of emigrants who left Cuban permanently (Vega Vega, 1986).

¹⁴ Atarés (1992): residents 10-49 years old completed average of 9.6 years; 3 per cent completed university (Ortega Morales, 1996). Old Havana historic district (1995): residents 6-49 years old, 9.8 per cent completed university, 1.9 per cent teachers college, 17.0 per cent, technical school, 24.7 per cent academic high school, 1.4 per cent vocational high school, 27.5 per cent junior high school, and 16.8 per cent primary school (of course, the children hadn't yet completed primary or junior high school yet) (Plan Maestro, 1996). Cayo Hueso: in 2001, average adult educational level of slightly more than 11 years (and around 10.5 years in nearby Colon neighbourhood) (Spiegel et al., 2003); in 1997, around a third with 9th and 12th grade educations respectively and 12.7 per cent with university degrees (Vázquez Penelas and Cantero Zayas, 1998).

¹⁵ For inner city slums: Arranz González (1998), Collado, Mauri, and Coipel (1998), Ortega Morales (1996), Plan Maestro (1996), Rodríguez Alomá (1996); for shantytowns: ONE-OTTECH (1997),

¹⁶ Information on housing finance is from Bauzá (1997), Cid Sands (1999) and INV (2001b).

¹⁷ For more on participation in Cuba see Dilla, González and Vincentelli (1993), Fernández Soriano, Dilla Alfonso, and Castro Flores (1999) and Uriarte (2002). In Dilla (1996), see especially the articles by Carlos García Pleyán on participation and decentralisation in urban planning, Armando Fernández Soriano and Rubén Otazo Conde on the environment and community participation and self-management, and Juan Valdés Paz on local government and participation.

¹⁸ Unless otherwise noted, information on microbrigades is from Hamberg (1994) and Mathéy (1997).

¹⁹ Information on the Cayo Hueso Plan is based on Díaz Gutiérrez (2001), Spiegel et al. (2003), Vázquez Penelas and Cantero Zayas (1998), and Yassi et al. (1999).

²⁰ Information in the paragraphs on Old Havana and San Isidro is based on Coipel Díaz and Collado Reyes (2000), Collado et al. (1998), Mayoral (2001), Peters (2001), and Robainas Barcia (1999).

²¹ Unless otherwise noted, information on La Güinera is based on Fernández (1997) and Pérez Callejas (1997).

²² Information and data on the new social work programme are from CAAEF (2002), Rassi and Núñez (2002), and Uriarte (2002).

²³ Perspectives on the debate are from Uriarte (2002) and observations to the authors by Carlos García Pleyán.

²⁴ These paragraphs on the development, successes and challenges of Cuban and foreign NGOs operating in Cuba are based on Habitat-Cuba (2000), especially the articles by José Murillo, Néstor Napal, Esther Pérez and Luuk Laurens Zonneveld.

GLOSSARY

Albergados: Literally “sheltered”. Current or former residents of housing so deteriorated that they registered on special list for replacement housing.

Albergues: Transitional homeless shelters.

Almendrones: Privately owned 1950s American cars that provide group taxi service along fixed routes with a standard fare.

Barbacoa: Makeshift mezzanines or loft-like structures that create an extra floor.

Barrio de indigentes: Literally “neighbourhood of indigents”. Term for shantytown before the 1959 revolution.

Barrio insalubre: Literally “unhealthy neighbourhood”. Term for shantytown after the 1959 revolution.

Bicitaxis: Bicycle taxis carrying up to two passengers.

Bohío: Thatched-roof shacks that were once common in rural areas.

Calzadas: Wide streets with tall porticoed pedestrian corridors.

Camellos: “Camel”, double-humped buses composed of a truck cab and chassis and bus bodies carrying up to 220 passengers.

Casas quintas: Detached neo-classical villas.

Casa de vecindad: Type of tenement: Smaller subdivided house, generally with 12 rooms or less.

Casetas en azoteas: Makeshift structures built on top of multifamily buildings.

Ciudadela: Type of tenement: consists of a single or double row of rooms built along a long, narrow courtyard.

Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR): Committees for the Defence of the Revolution.

Comunidad de tránsito: Transitional homeless shelter.

Cocotaxis: A taxi-scooter with a bright yellow round plastic body carrying up to two passengers.

Cuartería: Type of tenement: large mansion or older hotel or boarding house subdivided into rooms.

Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC): Federation of Cuban Women.

Foco insalubre: Small shantytown (less than 50 units).

Grupo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Capital, GDIC: Group for the Comprehensive Development of the Capital.

Instituto Nacional de Ahorro y Vivienda, INAV: National Savings and Housing Institute (1959-1962).

Instituto Nacional de Vivienda, INV: National Housing Institute (begun in 1985)

Instituto Nacional de Vivienda, INV: National Housing Institute (begun in 1985).

Pasaje: Double row of small dwellings (similar to efficiencies) consisting of living-dining, kitchenette, one bedroom, bathroom and a small service courtyard, set along a long, narrow alley usually open to streets at both ends.

Plan con las Masas: Plan with the Masses (1960s maintenance and repair programme) involving residents, with State supplying technical assistance, equipment and low-priced building materials.

Programa de Desarrollo Human Local, PDHL: Local Human Development Programme of UNDP (United National Development Programme).

Poder Popular: People's Power, name of Cuban government structure.

Solar: Popular term to refer to all forms of buildings subdivided into single-room units, usually with shared services.

Talleres de Transformación Integral del Barrio, TTIB Neighbourhood Transformation Workshops.

Tugurio: Slum.

Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas, UJC: Union of Young Communists.

Usufructo: Usufruct (long-term leaseholding).

Vivienda adecuada: "Adequate" (standard) housing for change of legal status of tenements or shantytown units.

Vivienda de bajo consumo, vivienda económica: "Low consumption" housing that minimises the use of imported energy-intensive materials.

PDHL Programa de Desarrollo Human Local, Local Human Development Programme of UNDP (United National Development Programme)

TTIB Taller de Transformación Integral del Barrio, Neighbourhood Transformation Workshop

UJC Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas, Union of Young Communists

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ABBREVIATIONS

CDR Comités de Defensa de la Revolución
Committees for the Defence of the Revolution

FMC Federación de Mujeres Cubanas,
Federation of Cuban Women

GDIC Grupo para el Desarrollo Integral de la Capital,
Group for the Comprehensive Development of
the Capital

INAV Instituto Nacional de Ahorro y Vivienda,
National Savings and Housing Institute

INV Instituto Nacional de la Vivienda,
National Housing Institute

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* Note: Dates on all internet references are June or July 2002