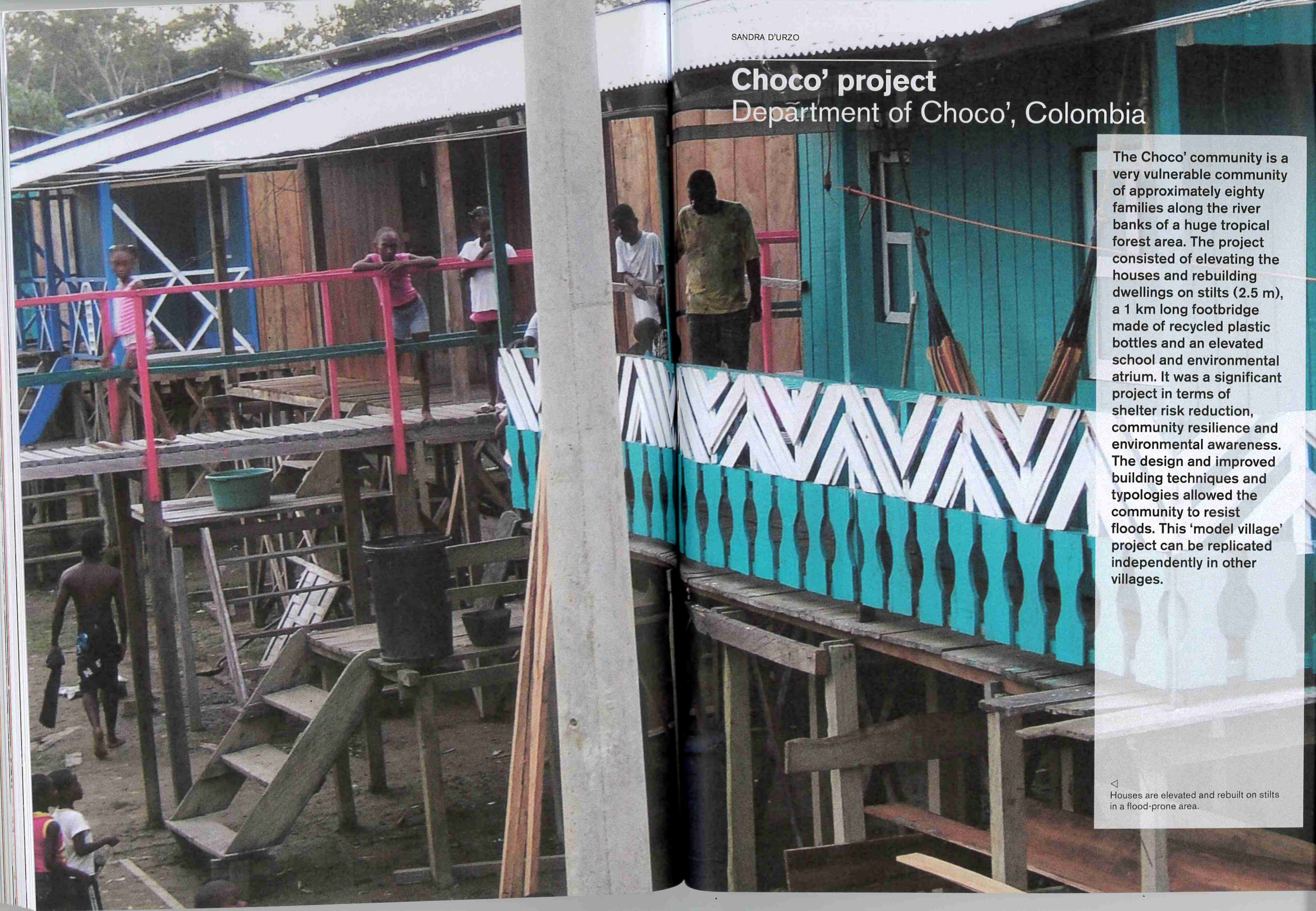


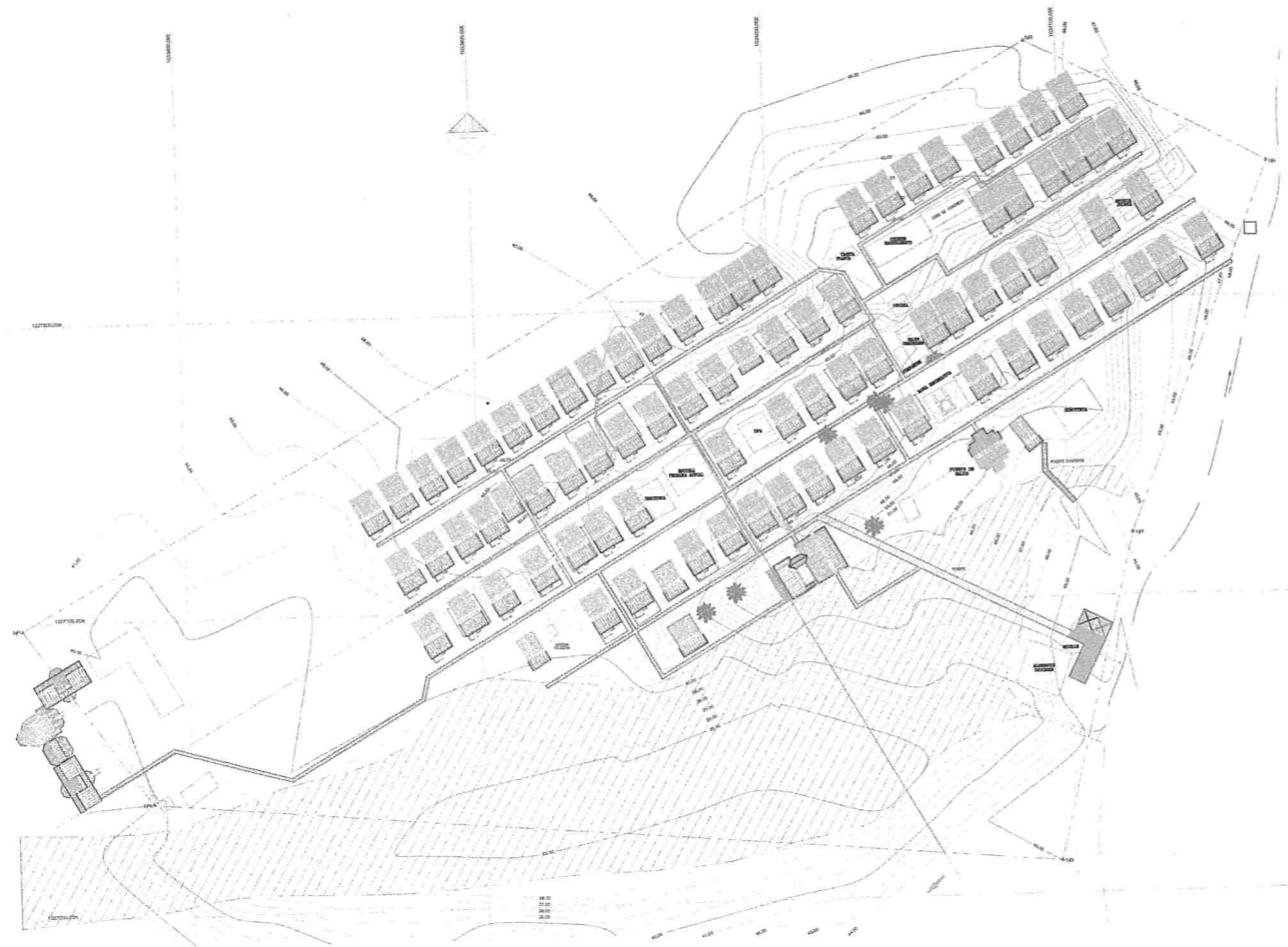
SANDRA D'URZO

Choco' project Department of Choco', Colombia

The Choco' community is a very vulnerable community of approximately eighty families along the river banks of a huge tropical forest area. The project consisted of elevating the houses and rebuilding dwellings on stilts (2.5 m), a 1 km long footbridge made of recycled plastic bottles and an elevated school and environmental atrium. It was a significant project in terms of shelter risk reduction, community resilience and environmental awareness. The design and improved building techniques and typologies allowed the community to resist floods. This 'model village' project can be replicated independently in other villages.

◀ Houses are elevated and rebuilt on stilts in a flood-prone area.





△ The Choco' project used community participation to improve the overall living conditions of eighty families who were struggling to survive following flooding. It supported a total of 5,527 people in surrounding villages with disaster risk reduction activities. Stilt construction was used to build eighty new houses and a 2.5 m high, 1.1 km long footbridge. Disaster preparedness activities, first aid, hygiene promotion and safe construction training were also provided. The project is now an example, both at regional and national level, of what can be done to support riverside communities to mitigate the effects of recurrent floods.



BRETT MOORE

SHELTER AND INFRASTRUCTURE ADVISOR
WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL
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Brett Moore

is an architect who works in the field of humanitarian aid and development. He has more than fifteen years' experience with the private sector, UN agencies and non-government organizations. Brett is now based in Australia with World Vision International as Shelter and Infrastructure Advisor. Brett's project experience covers several locations in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, both in the development contexts of housing, health, education and judicial infrastructure and in post-disaster and post-conflict humanitarian relief through emergency shelter and infrastructure planning, design and implementation. Most recently, he has been working on a transitional shelter programme for drought- and conflict-affected refugees in Somalia.

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BRETT MOORE

WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL

Brett, please tell me about your original architecture studies and whether or not you felt it prepared you at all for the kind of disaster work that you are involved in now? ▶ My original design studies, on the surface, didn't prepare me that well. It was also a factor of age and experience. When I studied architecture at the University of Melbourne in Australia, it was much more geared to working in corporate Victoria, particularly Melbourne. I think it takes some real soul searching for people to find their own path after that sort of socialization.

Was there any discussion of architects' involvement with communities in need or society at large in your degree? Were any of those issues raised in your degree? ▶ In the degree, the parts that were most pertinent were really looking at modernism and Bauhaus and the idea of architecture for, or architecture around, habitation – human issues. I don't think the degree gave us the tools to work closely in communities, but it did give us tools for inquiry. I also think some

of the electives I chose were very enlightening and it was good for me to have that balance during those academic years, looking at issues of state and culture and power and gender, especially around Third World development issues. That got me very interested in the plight of developing countries.

Tell me about your current work in the shelter field. And whether you use any skills from your original architecture degree? ▶ My title is Shelter and Infrastructure Advisor. Although my office is in Australia, I work for World Vision International; so I have a global role. I am now less engaged at the project management level than I have been in previous years. My role now is dealing with policy issues and process. I act as a facilitator of conversations around shelter and reconstruction issues in a multidisciplinary sense.

I am working in a dedicated global emergency response team of about thirty-two people. Each of us has a technical discipline to work within, and we are

deployable post-emergency for up to three months for what World Vision refers to as a 'Category 3' emergency. These are the big emergencies, like Haiti, or a tsunami or the equivalent of a Pakistan flood. So we travel to such locations to assess the situation and design a response in an integrated fashion with other agencies, organizations and sectors.

I believe you worked in publishing after you finished your architecture degree. Did that inspire you to get into the development field?

▶ Studying architecture was an all-encompassing experience. The intensity of the course means that nearly all your friends are architects; your peers are architects; you're constantly thinking, living, breathing architecture – and one day I woke up and realized that there are a lot of other things out there that I might like, or I might be good at, but I'd never given myself a chance. Even though it was a sideways step out of architecture to work in publishing, it used some of the technical skills of architecture. You know ... AutoCAD and some of our design and mapping skills, but also the idea of looking at architecture as a reflection of a culture and what architecture is historically. My publishing experience looked a lot at the architectural history of certain countries and the broad significance of that in tourism.

Would you say that you are now working in humanitarian architecture? Does this phrase mean anything to you? ▶ It might be if you are looking at the macro-level of things. We do architecture for



△ Construction of community infrastructure, including a fish market (shown here).

people-in-need in a very real sense, and not architecture as a field of high-design, which is how it is emphasized if you're within the Australian context. Our concern is to look out for the 99 per cent of people around the globe, specifically in developing countries, who would never be able to afford the services of

an architect in the Australian or high-design sense. What is their need for architecture, habitation and housing? How can we, who are educated in a very Western design-oriented sense, contribute to the very big global needs around issues of poverty, urbanization and habitation?



△ Potpathy (Sri Lanka) community reconstruction showing typical transitional shelters before permanent reconstruction phase.

Are you saying that there is an intersection of architecture with human rights and politics? ▶ I think that there is a necessary overlap for all of them. I think that some of the skills that architects have, not just in design, but of being a facilitator, an organizer, an analyser, these skills are very important in the emergency field. These are not skills that human rights lawyers and others who have had a humanitarian education necessarily have. Architects are one of the few professional groups that are educated in how

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to manage projects, to look at a problem and think of a succinct, rational solution with budget, materials, people involved, that also addresses a human rights issue – in this case, the right to safe and dignified shelter.

So, are you saying that shelter and housing is a human rights issue? ▶ Architecture in emergencies is very much about people's basic survival needs and you need to be highly accountable. You need to measure your impact and show results. It's about getting people shelter. It's life saving, and we have to be accountable to that as opposed to a design process in an abstract or affluent environment. We are not dealing with a computer; we are out in the field with materials, with people who need shelter, either because of a disaster or a war and displacements of various sorts. You have to produce something and it has to work and there's no other option.

That is a big responsibility. How has that played out in the field for you? ▶ In two ways. On the micro-level, architects have to be producers. In a sense we are one of the professions that deal with emergencies where a tangible outcome has to be the result. We have to produce something that is suitable for habitation. That's the micro-level output, but the macro-level is also important. This is where we are pulling back and looking at the political issues in a country, such as what groups do you work with? Do you work with the ethnic minorities? Do you work with the government? And what about the military? If you work *through* government, how do you work *with* the government? Do you partner with agencies?



△ The Potpathy community in Sri Lanka participate in road reconstruction efforts.

So we are dealing with these stakeholder issues at the national or regional level at the same time as producing a detailed product.

In this macro-context, I believe you've worked quite a bit on jails in the post-disaster context. Tell me about that. ▶ My first prison projects were with the United Nations Office for Project Services [UNOPS]. We were providing design services for the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP]. It was part of the law and justice sector strengthening projects that they do in many countries, particularly those they call 'fragile states'. My first experience on such a project was in what is now South Sudan. I was leading a design team on the hardware side of things, so we were designing and building prisons, police stations, court houses and police training colleges throughout South Sudan. I didn't know if I

wanted to be working on a prison project; I didn't even know if the UN should be funding prison projects. However, in the end, they ended up being great projects. In countries like South Sudan, which are desperately poor, even the health and education sectors are shockingly underfunded, let alone the prisons. Imagine what they're like – overcrowded, lacking water, sanitation and every other kind of facilities that we would see as the minimum requirement for human respect, let alone rehabilitation. So bringing these facilities up to a minimum humanitarian standard was a really worthwhile thing to do. And it was a life-changing experience for me to meet the incarcerated, hear their stories and see the conditions that so many people live in. I repeated these kinds of assessments and design projects in the Palestinian Territories, Sri Lanka, East Timor and Haiti.

Many people find they come to work such as this because of the influence of their parents. Was this the case for you? ▶ I grew up in a very small town called Yarram in rural Australia. My father was – and is – a dairy farmer and my mother's an art teacher. I always feel that she has been the creative influence on my life, and from my father we learnt about hard work and that we had a responsibility to put something back into the world. This was not just an ethical aspect, but also a respect for others and the hardship that others face.

The other influence in my life is my aunt, who is a nun. When I was young, she was constantly overseas working with the poorest of the poor. Unlike working with the UN or other organizations where there is a project lifespan, budget and an outcome, when you're working with faith

communities there is no end. Her life was about accompanying people on a journey, and she would be with certain communities for years and years, bearing witness, serving and advocating. I think her experiences influenced my intellectual development and, even though I grew up in a small and isolated rural Victorian community, I had a curiosity about the world. I wanted to see it and I wanted to be part of it in a meaningful sense, to live and work and understand what life struggles were like for other people.

So you ended up working in Pakistan after major floods!

▶ Yes. The Pakistan floods were really, as they say, a 'slow-moving tsunami'. The extent of the damage was becoming more and more apparent on a day-by-day basis as more areas became inundated. My role there was damage assessment in the far north near

to Peshawar, in a series of villages in an area called Charsaddah. I was looking at how to quantify the damage, get an appreciation of its extent and help prepare some ways for getting the community involved in the reconstruction process through rebuilding their own dwellings.

And you also have worked in northern Sri Lanka? ▶ This was one situation where I was personally not as prepared as I should have been. Maybe no one can be prepared to enter a conflict zone really, especially when none of us knew that it was about to happen.

I had gone there to help in post-tsunami reconstruction and then, after a couple of years, it was very clear that previous conflicts that hadn't really ended were emerging yet again. And that meant that our work stopped being post-disaster reconstruction and 'morphed' into emergency response. Certain towns and villages became battle zones. That meant large numbers of the population began moving and spontaneous refugee camps were being set up. We went from working in a development sense to working in an emergency sense without a clear transition and without adequate training and preparedness.

Why is it that there are not more architects like you? ▶ It could be as simple as not knowing humanitarian architecture exists and how to get into it. And from the other end, most international agencies and NGOs don't know the value of architects. Architects are probably poor at broadcasting or promoting their particular strengths. Many other professions, such as nursing and



△ Classes in a temporary school during the reconstruction period, post-tsunami (Sri Lanka).

medicine, have more obviously applicable skills for working in development or in an emergency than architects. However, a lot of people don't really know the full spectrum of things that architects can do and how they could be used in these situations.

This is changing now, isn't it? ▶ I think the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 was really important in the Australian context because it was essentially on our doorstep and the Australian government and individuals and organizations were major donors. Also, the tsunami reconstruction process involved a very definite and permanent reconstruction phase. This allowed the skills of the architect to be more overtly employed in contact with some of the major disasters that never get to the permanent reconstruction phase. For so many sad reasons, the international and national response to these disasters often ends up finishing after the emergency response or transitional housing stage.

What are the main characteristics of good practice in the shelter field and how do you effectively move between those emergency and transitional long-term recovery phases? ▶ The emergency shelter process isn't really architectural. The primary skill you need to have is good, clear communication with other individuals and agencies. You also need to be very ... humble. No, that's not the right word. You have to be assertive about what needs to be done but cautious because you're dealing with chaos – and traditional ideas of project management or project planning often don't work. You

have to be highly intuitive and use your previous experience. You have to listen and work well with communities and be able to elicit answers and information from people who are often traumatized and unclear about what their shelter needs are. We have to be very careful about listening to that and asking the right questions at the right time in order to take action. Imposing an external solution will never work.

Different skills are involved in moving from emergency through to permanent reconstruction. Moving to a permanent reconstruction is inevitably more expensive because we're dealing with buildings of more complicated materials, construction, longevity, and you have to have a lot more professionals involved. So there's a wider stakeholder group. You're dealing more with local government and other agencies. When you're dealing with emergency response you have an understanding that the intervention you're doing will have a lifespan probably no longer than six months. Issues around land use, allocation, land ownership don't really need to be dealt with in the same way at that first phase. However, when you're doing permanent housing work, all the complex issues of land ownership need to be dealt with and that can take a long time and a lot of negotiation. Also, you need to develop a lot of understanding of things that we're not familiar with in the Western world, such as customary ownership and clan relationships.

Other people I have interviewed have told me that architecture students and even some experienced architects have

come to them with designs and plans for prefab housing, for example, in Haiti, Sri Lanka and New Orleans – and there's an almost modernist tendency to see architecture as about providing a universally applicable solution. What's been your experience in this regard? ▶ All my experience in the humanitarian sector has taught me that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach. This could be as simple as an economic imperative: what's cheap in one place won't be cheap in another. There is also a strong cultural imperative: what any individual or family feels comfortable with in one place certainly won't be the same in another. Architects the world over know this but, for some reason, if it's a disaster situation or an emergency response, we throw those rules away and say that we can still have a one-size-fits-all approach.

I'm not saying that this won't work in some certain circumstances. In some situations, it has to work. Like when you have to have the ability to fly in tents for people in those huge disasters where there are hundreds of thousands displaced. However, if you're looking at transitional shelter or something permanent, it has to be about local communities, local materials and local construction techniques.

The other important thing about shelter projects is that the provision of a shelter is only one of the products. You need wider community infrastructure, schools, shops, clinics and, yes, police stations and jails. There is an economic benefit in getting people involved in the construction of their own shelters and employed

in rebuilding their local community. If you fly in a prefab solution, you are actually bypassing this very critical element – and you'll still have people who have no money and are unemployed. In many ways, and for many reasons, the employment and retraining aspects of providing shelter are just as important as the product is itself.

How do we best educate young architects who want to get involved in the emergency or humanitarian field? At what point of undergraduate design education could we begin to learn the necessary skills, given there are more and more disasters? ▶

With climate change, and through urbanization, people are being pushed to more and more marginal land. So the need for emergency response will increase. Architecture faculties are not dealing with these issues yet. It's being dealt with in project management and environmental engineering. These are the courses training people for shelter projects post-disaster and to make sure of good water supplies in developing countries.

I think that skills for post-disaster shelter work could be easily introduced into architecture. There are simple steps such as guest lectures. And design studios could get students thinking from their formative years about the housing needs of the poor around the world and about rural development issues and slum upgrading. Such studios would invite students to think about housing and infrastructure outside the discourses of high-design for the Western urban context.

You have mentioned that 'the space architects can occupy in the aid world is limitless but comes at a cost'. What do you mean by that? ▶ In order for architects to be able to work in the development context they need to understand it in all its depth and ramifications. And to do that is more than just a three-week project. Ideally, we need a couple of years in a foreign context to get enough first-hand practical experience to be a good

it is hard for some of our students to really comprehend what life is like in the Global South. What does it mean to be an urban slum dweller in Mumbai or in the kinds of peri-urban tracts that are exploding around cities like Manila and Jakarta? What does the lack of land ownership really mean in relation to producing shelter? And it means a lot, of course, but to really explore all that and how it might be manifested in design is a big project and a very interesting one. In the Western context we build for owners. We rarely build for people who don't own the land and don't have house. However, we often have to do that in the emergency response context. So even the whole definition of the client and participation in decision making is very different from what they encounter here.

Most international agencies and NGOs don't know the value of architects. Architects are probably poor at broadcasting or promoting their particular strengths.

practitioner. We need to go to an isolated area where there might be some insecurity and there will certainly be a lack of resources and maybe a fair bit of discomfort. We have to experience to really understand the people and the contexts that we want to design with.

Why did you choose the tsunami reconstruction programme in Sri Lanka to illustrate some of the principles you consider to be important in post-disaster design practice? ▶ I have chosen to profile a tsunami reconstruction programme in Sri Lanka as it was an integrated multi-sectoral programme including health, water and sanitation, education, livelihood, child protection, peace building and a range of community engagement and development activities. It is as close as I have come to 'complete' community reconstruction, requiring more than just design and construction knowledge, and appreciating how vitally and inextricably linked are other human needs to basic housing – a very humanitarian approach. I learnt how reconstructing houses can be a central action from which many other needs can be connected, operating in unison, to rebuild lives and communities.