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Integrated Community Development and Cultural Heritage Site Preservation in Asia/Pacific through Local Effort (LEAP)

Throughout the Asia-Pacific region there is growing recognition that the challenge of heritage preservation is not restricted to a limited number of sites of international tourist interest, but it is a general concern of national policy and part of the process of sustainable development, building upon each society's unique cultural and historic traditions. Unlike historic sites in many other areas of the world, most historic urban centers in Asia continue to be occupied by the descendants of the people who first built them. Either they are owners/occupants of traditional houses or they are communal inhabitants of religious or other public historic monuments who continue to use them for the original purpose for which they were built. National and local policy makers are recognizing the need for local community involvement in the conservation of their heritage cities.

Fortunately, many of the historic cities in Asia have survived throughout the centuries with their urban fabric intact and their traditional communities prosperous. However, the present rate of population growth, fueled by rural-urban migration, the consequent construction boom and demands for expanded infrastructure in cities throughout the region, the disregard for the preservation of the basic environmental prerequisites for life such as water and air, and the economic dependence on mass tourism of many historic towns, all give serious cause for alarm over the continued existence of these historic cities and the ways of life which have formed the basis of cultures of the region for the past many millennia.

In the past, it has too often been the response of officialdom to these factors affecting the conservation of heritage cities to put severe restriction on the use of the sites, even to the point of forcibly removing the population altogether. However, experience has shown that when local communities are removed from a site, a site dies, or, if preserved, is preserved only for foreign tourists. UNESCO's program in *integrated community development and cul-*

tural heritage preservation through local effort (LEAP) aims to make local communities themselves the custodians and protectors of their own communities and in doing so enable them to develop their ancient towns into modern cities with their heritage intact. This innovative program is financed by a funds-in-trust contribution for the Government of the Netherlands.

Empowering the local community is central to the program, so that the inhabitants of traditional historic towns can

- understand and advocate the long-term conservation of the historic buildings;
- play a leading role in the actual work of protecting, conserving, presenting and managing the historic areas; and
- benefit financially from the enhanced conservation of the historic urban areas while maintaining their social and spiritual traditions intact.

Project activities include

- identification and training of institutions and individuals engaged in maintenance of historic buildings;
- documentation of historic vernacular architecture and development of low-cost, appropriate techniques for building maintenance;
- community development training in conservation and maintenance;
- conservation curricula development for non-formal education;
- "door-to-door" outreach programs to engender "stewardship" ethic in the local population;
- promotion of supplementary income generation activities for poverty alleviation which complement maintenance and conservation activities (such as in traditional building trades); and
- establishment of community-managed credit schemes for conservation and maintenance of historic public buildings and private homes.

Initially, five pilot demonstration sites—historic towns (Hoi An, Vietnam; Kathmandu, Nepal; Luang Prabang, Laos; Vigan, Philippines; and Lijiang, China)—were selected for project implementation during 1996-97. The next phase will include cultural landscapes—(Cordilleras Rice terraces, Philippines; Lake Toba, Indonesia; Mustang, Nepal; Khar Bulgas, Mongolia; and Andaman, Thailand).

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