PROMOTION OF SMALL SCALE BUILDERS AND PRODUCERS OF INNOVATIVE BUILDING MATERIALS:
The Forgotten Sector of Jua Kali

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1. CONSTRUCTION SECTOR: A Case for Indigenous Construction Sector

1.1 Overview and State of the Art: A Global Perspective

Construction industry is an essential instrument of socio-economic development of any country. Indeed in every sector of the economy, there is a component of construction. For example in the health and education sectors, hospitals and schools are constructed; in transport sector, roads, railways, harbours and airports are built to move both people and goods; for various manufacturing and industrial establishments, factories and warehouses are erected. All these represent significant features in human settlements and support so many socio-economic activities that the construction sector can be described as the backbone of development (UNCHS, 1986: 3).

Investment in construction industry has substantial 'multiplier' effect, increasing output, income and employment throughout the rest of the economy mainly through the use of input from other sectors. The contribution of construction to gross economic growth is equally remarkable. The average for developing countries is between 3 to 8%. The average for Kenya was 3.8% for the period 1976-1982 while between 1979 and 1984, the industry accounted for between 4.8 and 6.5% of the country's gross domestic product (GoK, 1987: 4).

A summary of annual growth rates in GDP, construction and building materials production in selected developing countries is given in Annex 1. For majority of the developing countries, the annual growth in construction is higher than the growth of population and gross domestic product (GDP). Experience has shown that countries with large settlement development and shelter programme tend to have faster economic growth (UNCHS, 1986: 210).

It is however, regrettable that the majority of the third world countries are still importing significant amounts of building materials and components. The level of imports range from a low percentage of 5 to 10% for such countries as Greece and Mexico, through about 60% for Kenya and Ivory Coast, to even beyond 60% for Yemen Arab Republic (MCT, 1982: iv - 45).

A survey by Economic Commission for Africa has shown that in some African countries, over 90% of the value of building materials used in the 'modern' construction sector is accounted for by imports (ECA, 1983: 2).

It is estimated that building materials alone account for 5 to 8 percent of the total value of imports in Africa which represents an expenditure of about $ 2.5 billion (UNCHS, 1986: 73). A scrutiny of building materials used on a modest home ownership housing estate of Umoja II in Nairobi, revealed that at least 37% of the project cost demanded foreign currency for purchase of building materials, equipment and fuel (Agevi, 1988: 8).

The wish of third world countries to significantly reduce the unfavourable dependency on imported building materials, components, technologies and techniques is understandable, real and urgent. One way of achieving this goal would entail sincere promotion of cost effective, foreign exchange saving and labour intensive local building materials production using locally developed technologies which maximize the use of local human capabilities.

Despite this desire, and the great potential for small scale builders and producers of building materials to avail affordable buildings, not much support has been extended to the sector.