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**High-Density High-Rise Vertical Living:  
An Appropriate Housing Solution for Low-Income People  
in Colombo, Sri Lanka?**

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Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

Presented By

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Thushara Samaratunga  
Gold Coast, Queensland  
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07 March 2012

## ABSTRACT

A house is a basic and fundamental human need. In a literal sense, a house provides warmth, shelter and security. Beyond its physical nature, the concept of 'house' is deeply ingrained in human civilisation as the space where the institution of family is nurtured. It is a place that reflects a person's identity, living condition, human values, aspirations, future expectations and one's social and cultural identity. However, despite the global recognition of its importance, many millions of people in the world live either without safe habitable housing or without any housing at all. This situation is common in developing countries, especially in urban areas. The thesis is motivated by a sincere effort to practically address the problems of housing in the city of Colombo, in particular the scarcity of sustainable habitable housing for low-income people. The Colombo City Development Plan (UDA 2008) revealed that there were 66,000 households within the city of Colombo living in under-served settlements considered unfit for human habitation. This figure represents 51 per cent of the city's population (UDA 2008). Since gaining independence in 1948, the Sri Lankan Government has devoted much attention to finding a solution to this situation and has introduced a number of policies, programs and projects to address the issue of under-served settlements with varying degrees of success.

High-rise housing for low-income people is one option that has been chosen by the current Sri Lankan government in the hope of re-housing those who currently live in under-served settlements in Colombo in sustainable, safe and affordable housing. At the time of writing this thesis (2012), the construction of nearly 12,000 high rise housing units has commenced with the aim of constructing 35,000 high rise dwellings within the next three years (UDA 2011). However, the appropriateness of high-rise housing for low-income people is a very controversial topic. Some countries have rejected high-rises as an option for low-income housing due to significant failures in the past while other countries have been very successful



using high-rise housing for low-income people as a way to upgrade the living conditions of the people who live in slums and shanties. Very little research has been done in this sector, especially in Sri Lanka, and this thesis attempts to fill the knowledge gap about the low-income housing sector in Colombo, discussing the research contribution of the theory, the contribution to the Sri Lankan research and the contribution to the profession. A qualitative research approach was chosen as the most appropriate method for investigating the research problem in depth. This research uses both secondary and primary data collection methods to enhance the quality of the research. Literature review, documentary research, Internet references, case study analysis, observation and key informant interviews are the main data collection strategies which have been used throughout the research. Twelve key informant interviews were conducted with officials in various government ministries, private-sector investors and professionals who are engaged in the housing sector in Colombo city. All participants are senior critical decision-makers and well-known government and private sector experts in the housing field in Sri Lanka. The data and information collected from the key informant interviews, case studies and other sources were scrutinised, edited, coded and analysed using qualitative data-analysing methods. The quality standards of this study take into account construct validity, internal validity, external validity and the study's reliability.

Finally, this research makes recommendations to the professionals and policy-makers who work with high-rise low-income housing on how to minimise the risk associated with high-rise low-income housing in Colombo and open a way of thinking about high-rise low-income housing.

## PUBLICATIONS

During the course of this project, two refereed conference papers have been presented based on the work undertaken in this thesis. They are listed here for reference.

1. Samaratunga, T. (2009). Rapid Population Growth and Affordable Housing in Colombo city. PIA International Planning Conference Darwin Australia, Planning Institute of Australia
2. Samaratunga, T. (2011). Planning for Quality Urban Living and Sustainable Community. PIA International Planning Conference Hobart Australia, Planning Institute of Australia

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

### **ABBREVIATIONS USED WITHIN THIS DOCUMENT**

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>AUD</b>	Australian Dollars
<b>BOI</b>	Board of Investment
<b>BUREC</b>	Bond University Research Ethics Committee
<b>COC</b>	Certificate of Conformity
<b>CAP</b>	community action planning'
<b>CMRSP</b>	Colombo Metropolitan Region Structural Plan
<b>CMC</b>	Colombo Municipal Council
<b>CTBUH</b>	Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat
<b>CBD</b>	Central Business District
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>GLA</b>	Greater London Authority
<b>GBCA</b>	Green Building Council of Australia
<b>HLB</b>	Housing Loans Board
<b>MHP</b>	Million Houses Program
<b>NHDA</b>	National Housing Development Authority
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organisations
<b>PIA</b>	Planning Institute of Australia
<b>PTFHUD</b>	Presidential Task Force on Housing and Urban Development
<b>REEL</b>	Real Estate Exchange Limited
<b>STP</b>	Sustainable Township Programme
<b>UDA</b>	Urban Development Authority
<b>UN</b>	United Nation
<b>US</b>	United State
<b>URDA</b>	Urban Re Development Authority
<b>UNP</b>	United National Party
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UHDA</b>	Urban Housing Development Authority



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