

EARTHEN BUILDINGS IN SEISMIC AREAS

Thoughts on the Occasion of the Albuquerque Workshop
May 24-28, 1981

Otto H. Koenigsberger

THE LOW INVESTMENT/HIGH MAINTENANCE (LI/HM) SYSTEM

- 1 The problems of earthen buildings are as much social and economical as they are technical.
- 2 The use of earth as a building material was invented by peasants and perfected for the needs of peasant societies.
- 3 It forms an integral part of rural economies and is designed to fit the life style of peasant communities.
- 4 Its main characteristics are minimal initial investments of cash and maximal subsequent investment of labour and time in maintenance.
- 5 In traditional peasant societies, every farmer is also a house builder. He learns the necessary skills in childhood while helping friends and relatives to build their houses. His tasks as an adult farmer leaves him time to apply these skills to the maintenance of his own house. Agricultural work is heavy, but not evenly distributed throughout the year. Many peasant societies have definite periods each year when everybody is busy house-building or house-repairing.
- 6 Rural communities are usually small. Homesteads, hamlets and villages are scattered and sufficiently separated from each other to permit the gathering of suitable material for earth building and home repairs without causing ecological damage and often even without the need to fill in borrow pits.