

## **Participatory Housing: The CLIFF-Philippines Experience**

Reall's partner LinkBuild in the Philippines, is part of the Philippines Alliance, a group of five institutions, each with specialised functions to support low-income housing including the Homeless People's Federation Philippines. Inc. (HPFPI), who deliver community development. LinkBuild and the Philippine Alliance's participatory approach creates opportunities for communities to be actively involved in all aspects of their own transformation and the development of sustainable settlements from pre-construction and throughout the construction process.

CLIFF projects are currently implemented in varying community contexts and situations, e.g. (a) organized and long-established communities who have already acquired their own land – either onsite or offsite; (b) unorganized informal settler families from different parts of the city who come together to a new resettlement site and (c) organized and established community organizations who have been moved to a government relocation site.

The participatory approach begins with community savings led primarily by the HPFPI, as an entry point and backbone to community organisation. The approach mobilises people around collective action, building leadership and management skills (e.g. managing finances) and shows communities can pool their own resources, all of which are essential in implementing community development activities in a sustainable way.

Participatory housing design and site planning processes are initiated through a series of workshops with target housing participants, with four main objectives: to determine housing design needs and space-use preferences of future home-owners; increase technical and cost awareness, thereby increasing acceptability of both design and technology; enable target families to visualise the design and strengthen the community and build confidence amongst those involved.

The third stage is the community-managed construction process which was undertaken in most of the earlier CLIFF projects. A collective group of community members were trained in construction management skills such as procurement, warehousing, safeguarding of construction materials and assisting in monitoring construction. These areas were undertaken voluntarily with groups or members taking scheduled turns in specific tasks.

The practice of contributing collective voluntary labour (following the Filipino tradition of mutual help called "Bayanihan"), has been implemented in various projects, with the intention of lowering project cost and making housing more affordable. Cash equity or down payment is usually required to access finance. If a family does not have enough cash, they have the option of contributing either skilled or unskilled labour throughout the construction period until the equivalent cash equity amount is matched.

In recent projects, communities have largely been involved in project development activities such as land due diligence, market studies, site assessments and aspects of feasibility study development. They have also been involved in activities and surveys to determine affordability. Most importantly, the communities and the HPFPI are in the forefront of engaging local government and have proven to be most effective in championing and leveraging support for projects.

## **Lessons and Challenges**

While there was much to be gained and learned from previous participatory processes, on review they have proven to be unsustainably costly and time-consuming for LinkBuild/ the Philippine

Alliance and the communities involved. LinkBuild and the Philippine Alliance still believe community participation is fundamental to building sustainable communities so are reviewing and streamlining their processes to reduce costs and time, whilst ensuring those aspects are retained which have a longer-term impact and whose benefits outweighs cost.

Community organising and community savings are crucial elements not only during project preparation but throughout the entire process of housing implementation, especially as families occupy their houses and live together as one community. Similarly, the role of the community in engaging government and other stakeholders is another aspect of participation that is very important to retain. Housing design and site planning processes are considered essential to the overall acceptability of design and technology, and subsequently to marketability so a new set of processes are being developed based on prior learning e.g., outputs of previous housing design workshops could be recycled and readjusted to suit community preferences.

Whilst community-management during construction contributed to community strengthening and provided skills for those who had been involved, it is not entirely evident whether these skills were used beyond the project and whether they opened opportunities for livelihood and employment. Community participation in day-to-day construction management has also proven difficult to sustain due to the significant time (and indirectly finances) required. This has impacted construction quality and pace. Hence, the nature of participation in the construction process will be reviewed and modified to ensure communities can still make informed decisions about self-governance without the same level of involvement.

LinkBuild/ the Philippine Alliance are also aiming to build experience in post-construction participation processes to ensure communities can initiate and continue community development activities beyond housing. The aim is to transform housing projects into harmonious and sustainable communities.