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Recovery of the housing complex at the Historical Center of San Salvador (CHSS) and its contribution to an equitable and sustainable city, stemming from the recognition of the right to adequate housing to the city, land and citizen participation

Partner	AECID (Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo)
Region	Latin America and the Caribbean
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Summary

Given the critical situation of habitat deterioration and abandonment in the old area of San Salvador, FUNDASAL implemented the project "Recovery of the Housing Purpose of the Historical Center", with four themes: social organization, advocacy, management of land and housing projects. The objectives are: search for collective solutions between citizens and institutions; return to the built city, avoiding the current expansive growth with its serious damages to the environment.

Background and Objective

Situation before the initiative began The Historical Center is deteriorated, abandoned by public institutions, and has become an open-air market. Municipal Government lack technical and financial resources, public policies and a legal framework; also lack coordination with relevant institutions and sectors, ignore low-income residents in poverty and social exclusion, with severe problems of habitability. Establishments of priorities Together with residents of the Historical Center, it was decided to give priority to families of 35 tenements[1], due to their serious housing plight and vulnerability of women heads of households, who suffered constant threats of eviction and other abuses by the owners and innkeepers. FUNDASAL's proposal was to encourage these dispersed families to organize and fight for the improvement of their habitat. The "Foro Permanente" agreed to work towards a comprehensive improvement of the "Historical Center", advance towards their legal status, open discussions regarding their problems and propose alternative solutions, especially the management of a Master Plan. Formulation of objectives and strategies The residents and sectors involved replaced FUNDASAL's goal of recovering the housing purpose of Historical Center with the search of their overall development, based on two specific goals: improving the habitat of impoverished residents, and the elaboration of development tools and an appropriate legal framework. The overall strategy is to build social organizations for the defense of the right to the city. The inhabitants, with a strong and purposeful cooperative movement, seek access to land for housing projects and the suspension of evictions. Stakeholders grouped in an inter agency body, should sensitize actors, investigate, discuss, propose laws, and promote the agreed upon development and implementation of the Master Plan. Mobilization of resources The resources from European agencies were managed and administered by FUNDASAL. Locally, support for human resources and logistics was targeted. CORDAID, MISEREOR and SCC, supported awareness-raising, publicity, training, social organization, interaction and exchange of cooperatives, national and international technical assistance and special studies for project formulation. The municipality symbolically sold ACOVICHSS the land where the San Esteban tenement was built and also supported the legal titling of Renacer and offered equipment and personnel to get rid of rubble. Also sponsored a design competition and built the San Esteban park. AECID approved financing for two buildings for ACOVICHSS and the cooperative provided mutual aid for the implementation of works and for directing and managing the construction process, with the help from women in 75%. FUNDASAL acquired 4 tenements, cooperatives offered self help for the self management and improvement of 3 of them. The "Ministerio de Obras Públicas(MOP)" awarded human resources, machinery and equipment to prepare the Safieland lot. The "Foro Permanente", supported students in social service, provided the meeting room and technical and computer resources. FUNDASAL offered human and technical resources for the triennial administration, technical support and organization of cooperatives; profiles of projects and funding management.

Actions and Implementation

The main problems faced were the following: Risks to the sustainability of the project, in face of the prevailing history of marginalization and social exclusion, low educational and social levels; conflictive relations in the settlements among the participant population, in addition to the attempts of political



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institutions to control and manipulate organizations and their leaders for partisan purposes, clientelism type offers that stressed the urgent needs of the population even more and their incipient development of a critical consciousness. The limited availability of land and its market abuse, the seismic condition of the soil, the deterioration of buildings and the constraints of regulating entities, all raise the cost of housing projects. There is no government financial support for housing projects in the Historical Center. Cooperating agencies do not always share the idea that habitat sustainability is achieved with the sustainability of social processes. Some demand concrete results in the short term, mainly in physical and construction terms. Social polarization due to political differences between the Central and Local Governments in the Congress. Deficiency of the institutions with jurisdiction, mainly due to the lack of resources and the appropriate legal framework to meet the diverse needs of actors, not to mention poor coordination. The alternative solutions proposed are: housing cooperatives as a tool for awareness, active participation and self-management, used to articulate the movement of inhabitants, under the leadership of organizational structures with the capacity for negotiation, management and impact, based on four axes: self-management, collective ownership, self help and technical assistance. COORCOVICHSS and the "Federación de Cooperativas de Vivienda", both in training, managed to establish partnerships with local organizations for the homeless, for the massive mobilization of bills to access land and financing, and the amendments to the General Law of Cooperative Associations. In implementing the ACOVICHSS project, the cooperative conducted the execution of works, developing management, monitoring, provisioning and self help activities. FUNDASAL (EAT)'s Technical Support team provided training, supervision and technical assistance in four areas: legal, administrative and accounting, social organizations and technical constructions. The EAT endorsed the 5 cooperatives from their onset to their legalization, formulation and project management processes and also in the execution of works and their regulated residence in the new settlements. It also accompanied the advocacy process of COORCOVICHSS. The recognized ability and suitability of the "Foro Permanente" members, led to the successful efforts to impact on the institutions that sought coordination for the management of the Historical Center, with suitable regulatory frameworks.

Outcomes and Impacts

The term "Historical Center", coined by the project, has entered the collective imagination and agenda of institutions and the mass media. The fact that CHSS exposed the plight of the impoverished inhabitants of these areas led to changes in public policies: the VMVDU included it in the metropolitan area planning following the participatory methodology proposed by the Foro Permanente. The municipality established a technical office, facilitated ACOVICHSS' access to land, which in turn facilitated the procedures at the AECID and built a park adjoining the new building. The "Juzgado de Inquilinato" suspended the eviction of the La Décima tenement, allowing negotiating its purchase. MOP is carrying out land preparation works for new cooperative housing project. The Congress unanimously approved the Decree of the Declaration as the Historical Center of San Salvador. FUNDASAL organized the land bank, enabling the security of its inhabitants, won support from the SCC for their temporary improvements, and offered technical assistance for the implementation of the ACOVICHSS project. ANEP (Asociación Nacional de la Empresa Privada), the most renowned Entrepreneurial Association, proposed the development of the CHSS as an "urban node". Resident Families used the cooperative organization, networks and social movements as a tool to exercise citizenship and a procedure to demand decent housing. ACOVICHSS' project, with 75% women heads of households, changed the urban image of the neighborhood, converting the unsanitary tenements into a modern apartment building with its adjoining park, where residents live in a regulated and orderly manner. The capacity of partners to seek employment as construction workers increased, ensuring improvements in the income levels and the stability of resident families.

Sustainability and Scalability

Ensuring access to housing for the residents of the tenements located in the Historical Center required a high degree of subsidies and soft loans. ACOVICHSS contracted loans with a recovery credit rate of up to 15 years with FUNDASAL, under the establishment of two sustainable funds: A Relief fund to support contingencies associated to the payment of member fees and another revolving fund for new ventures. Each new project increases the possibility of extending the fund. The cooperative legal framework governs for equal participation, regardless of gender, religious or political beliefs. It only requires the acceptance and implementation of collectivist principles and values. In the cooperative, members have the opportunity to be elected for management and project execution positions, and for administrative, construction and training tasks. People acquire skills to perform in the field of construction, thus improving the sustainability of their families. The organization of inhabitants allowed reconfiguring the social net, the reintegration into the urban structure as people with rights to the city, respecting the land use structure inherited. A capable and self-reliant cooperative movement, with a high potential for rebuilding the social net of the old neighborhoods and for actively and efficiently managing, replicating and multiplying their experiences. The project promotes the sustainable urban development in face of the irrational extensive growth, which requires heavy investments in the net of basic services infrastructure and social facilities, currently underutilized, and cost savings in mobilization, employment, schools and health centers for poor families forced to relocate in the periphery. Institutional sustainability is displayed in the Legislative Declaration as the "Historical Center", in the Partial Plan of the VMVDU by adopting a participatory methodology; creating the Municipality CHSS Technical Office, raising the interest and support of national sectors and external cooperation in the Historical Center de San Salvador and social housing. The firm will of the "Foro Permanente" to agree on a future vision, comprehensive strategies and tools for operational planning, through emphasizing integration and coordination.

Gender and Social Inclusivity



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The shared experience with CYTED, offered to FUNDASAL soundness and social technologies, to promote the recovery of the housing functions of the CHSS. The organizational model of the inhabitants and the concept of collective ownership, which ensures the sustainability of projects, was taken from the experience of FUCVAM, which assigned a senior adviser to train local technical staff. The publication of four books and 17 research magazines on urban issues has allowed the working model of FUNDASAL to be known and accepted by others. As an example, a cooperative agreement was established between FUNDASAL and the municipality of Suchitoto, an intermediate town in the central zone. The aim of this partnership is to support a training process and develop a Housing Program for the municipality. The technical and legal research of the first social housing project was developed with the organized participation of the inhabitants. The VMVDU took the participatory methodology proposed by the “Foro Permanente” to formulate the Special Plan of the “Historical Center”, after convening that body to participate in the planning process, through various workshops developed to define the consultancy and diagnosis terms. According to the work progress report, the consensus proposal stage is still pending. The universities participating in the Foro and another ones from all over the country have requested FUNDASAL to provide them CHSS themes to incorporate the min to the proposals for research, classroom, graduation works or support to social hours. Cooperatives are increasing. Upon learning about the achievements of the five cooperatives with legal status, 260 other residents of old neighborhoods of the CHSS area recognized the organizational model as a viable strategy to fight for the improvement of housing in their neighborhoods. These families have been fully incorporated into the process of mobilization and sensitization to organize information and housing cooperatives. [1] Old houses that were owned by the wealthy which are now subdivided into rooms to be rented to low income families.

Innovative Initiative

In the framework of the “Programa Iberoamericano de Ciencia y Tecnología para el Desarrollo (CYTED), and with FUNDASAL coordinating the Technology Sub program for Social Housing in the 90s, the diverse experiences of advanced countries and cities to develop historic centers were heard, taking the following lessons: Return to the built city and not contribute to the horizontal urban expansion of the city that damages the environment. The recovery of the Historical Center’s housing functionality contributes to the building of a city on top of another city and fight against the deepening of poverty, crime, violence, environmental degradation and extreme manifestations of life degradation such as begging, prostitution, drug abuse, street children and homeless people living in streets and doorways. It is important to enhance the social production of the habitat in central areas, adopt participatory planning tools for local management of the habitat, bearing in mind that housing in historic centers represents a technological and social challenge that must be undertaken. Seek the coordination among the various actors involved, given the complexity of the CHSS problem, hence the importance of the Foro Permanente, as an instance of coordination of actors, debate and proposals, promoting concerted urban planning. There is a need for a Legal framework to secure the human right to housing and the city, with a strong institutional framework, participatory mechanisms for resident organization in decision-making levels and structural funding for social housing. The experience of self help housing cooperatives was taken from the “Federación Uruguaya de Cooperativas de Vivienda por Ayuda Mutua” (FUCVAM), mainly because of their potential to strengthen self-management participation in a broad social movement of people who seek to improve their habitat, city management and solutions to national problems and the establishment of social nets and well structured, self-managed organizations with adequate technical assistance and financial support from international cooperation entities.

Conclusion

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