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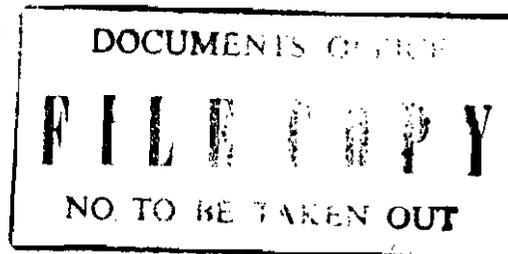
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AIDED SELF-HELP AS A FACTOR IN LOW-COST HOUSING

**INTRODUCTION:**

Today the term low-cost housing has come to mean all things to all men and too often, particularly in developing areas, it is readily identified with badly designed, ill ventilated buildings constructed of shoddy materials and generally not fit for human habitation.

Driven by sheer necessity many governments in the Third World, burdened with finding satisfactory housing accommodation for the masses of their people, and at costs within their reach, now recognize that new approaches, perhaps even unconventional ones, geared to meet the conditions and circumstances peculiar to their areas must be applied in order to effectively treat with the problem.

Hence, pressured with the demands for more and better housing, yet strapped for funds to meet these demands while being further bedeviled by the attendant factors of lack of skilled personnel, shortage of readily available local materials and high building costs, many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have been successfully pursuing techniques which emphasize the early involvement and participation of the people themselves in the attempted solutions. This method of housing construction is known as aided self-help housing.

**THE HOW:**

The approach calls for plans drawn up to ensure the mobilization of local effort as a prime means of overtaking the target. Then by designing a house particularly suited to the needs of the people while directing such skills as they possess and combining their slender resources with that of Government's assistance in the way of expertise and loaned building materials the project is undertaken.

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Document presented by Mr. A.A. Carney, Regional Adviser, Co-operative and Self-Help Housing

THE RESULT:

When completed it has the effect of securing for the sponsoring body almost twice as many houses for the same financial outlay as would be required in a regular housing project built by contract. Or put another way, the houses, when built in this fashion, cost the participants some 40-50 per cent less in money than would otherwise be the case.

An additional advantage, often overlooked but certainly of no less importance when considering the problem of housing low income persons on an economically feasible basis, is that it creates a new type of citizen who is not only capable of properly maintaining his own home but is qualified to undertake such extensions as may be required to meet his family demands.

Here, therefore, is a really effective solution to the problem which automatically ensures that houses produced on this basis are really low in cost yet high in design, construction standards, quality of construction materials and all the other factors that make for good housing.

TACKLING THE PROBLEM:

When approaching the problem of constructing low-cost housing on an aided self-help basis a frontal attack is carried out on the two major items of cost, i.e. labour and building products. Every attempt is made to reduce these factors to the lowest figure consistent with good quality both in labour performance and product properties.

The design of the house is made to conform with the needs and desires of the future owners. It is simple, functional and lends itself to easy construction and extension by persons of limited skills. This ensures that construction and other labour cash costs are reduced to the minimum as the future owners undertake as much of this aspect of the work as possible.

MASS PRODUCTION:

Further, wherever possible mass production of those items, difficult for the layman to undertake without wastage and loss, are carried out. For instance, doors, windows and roofing elements of wood are produced en masse and the workers need only to assemble them. The cheapest wood available is used for this purpose, but given the necessary chemical treatment to render it impervious to termites and generally increase the life span.

OWNER CONTRIBUTION:

If the houses are to be constructed of cement blocks, bricks or other local materials these are manufactured or processed by the owners themselves with the resultant saving in cost. Added to this, future owners are expected to provide such building materials as may be obtained locally. Hence, whatever rocks, sand, gravel, clay, lime, timber, etc., are in local supply will be introduced into the programme thus eliminating imported materials for which foreign currency is needed.

SOME SAVINGS:

Additional savings in cost are usually arrived at by the bulk purchase of building materials, the construction of a large number of units of a design satisfactory to the future owners, the processing, transporting and assembling of building materials by the participants themselves, and the grouping of the units in a manner calculated to effect full economy in water and sewer installations.

SUPERVISION:

While the supervision is close it is carried out on a team basis with capable leaders following up the construction practice of each member of the group while he learns by doing. Healthy competition between groups

is encouraged and simple awards are presented for the best performance of various building operations, speed of completion of the units and other tasks carried out on an individual as well as group basis.

#### PLANNING WITH PEOPLE:

Because planning is undertaken at the outset with the future owners and the design and good living qualities of the house are tested by the construction of a prototype in which a family chosen from the community lives before the total building operation is set in motion, all the likely foreseeable obstacles to the implementing of the project are overcome. When the final stage is reached for active construction of the total project all the ingredients for successful operation are already in place. Thus with a large army of happy and enthusiastic workers, ready, willing and able to give of their best in the construction of their future homes, only good can come of the effort.

The result is a new community containing the maximum number of houses and built at lowest possible cost by their proud owners.

#### SUMMARY:

Serious attempts to meet the problem of low cost housing in developing countries can be most effectively applied by observing the following steps:

1. Socio-economic survey to indicate the size and complexity of the problem to be tackled including such details as: a) number of families to be housed, b) their income position, c) percentage of income they can set aside for housing accommodation, d) their ability to assist in giving the types of self-help required;
2. Careful planning of the layout of the new community and the inclusion of necessary community services; designing of the house in collaboration

- with the families and the securing of their acceptance of the design of the house and the programme planned;
3. Mobilization of their resources of : i) cash, ii) local materials and iii) labour to augment the aid provided by government in the form of planning, technical direction, supervision and such additional building materials as may be required to complete the project.
  4. Construction of the houses by the future owner-occupiers working in teams under the direction of qualified officers and their own elected group leaders.
  5. The creation of a new community inhabited by people willing and able to meet their obligations to government for the assistance provided them in securing satisfactory housing accommodation (good houses at low cost) and ready to take such steps as will further advance their interests on their march towards higher living standards.

GENERAL:

The success of low-income housing programmes in developing areas will in the main depend on the ability of government to "build" the people by encouraging new attitudes and improved outlook in relation to the housing of themselves and their families; especially since it is now recognized that housing is made for man and not the other way around. The acceptance of this policy by government will go a long way in introducing successful programmes for the housing of the masses.

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For information on Aided Self-Help Housing see:

- Manual on Self-Help Housing, United Nations.
- Self-Help Housing Guide, Pan American Union, Dept. of Social Affairs.