



# The Forum

promoting dialogue among Habitat for Humanity's worldwide partners

## Why measure impact?

By Mike Carscaddon

Having just turned the corner to start 2013, I suspect most of us have established a set of New Year's resolutions. Like many, I start the year with the best of intentions, but within a few weeks or months I often find those resolutions fading in my rearview mirror. Why is it so hard to stick to aspirations?

Meeting goals is every bit as daunting for organizations as it is for individuals. Most businesses, government agencies and nonprofit organizations conduct some form of planning: articulating their goals, developing strategies to achieve them, marshaling the necessary resources, etc. But many organizations fail to meet their long-term goals. According to Daryl Conner of Conner Partners, "Nearly 70 percent of all organizations fail to achieve the goals they set for themselves."

Habitat for Humanity's track record of setting and achieving goals is actually quite impressive. Over the years, we have set targets and timelines for the number of homes we would build, the number of countries in which we would operate, the amount of funding we would raise. This is encouraging as we launch the new 2014-18 Strategic Plan.

And there is more urgency than

ever to make sure we have the capacity to achieve our goals. The board of directors challenged us to develop a strategic plan with the most ambitious goals we have ever adopted. After worldwide input and discussion, we developed a plan with four broad and ambitious goals:

- Build community impact.
- Build sector impact.
- Build societal impact.
- Build a sustainable organization.

Now that this plan has been endorsed by the board of directors, how can we increase the likelihood of achieving these goals? Is there something specific we can learn from our past success that will help ensure continued success in meeting our aspirations?

One important element of the strategic plan is a specific initiative titled "Defining, Measuring and Communicating Impact." Over the past few years, Habitat has updated and expanded our theory of change to acknowledge that creating shelter solutions can improve household health and well-being as well as contribute to stable and cohesive communities<sup>1</sup>. The impact initiative arose from this theory of change and from Habitat's efforts to capture the range of benefits resulting from

people having decent shelter, which we believe ultimately leads to breaking the cycle of poverty.

For example, Habitat's rehabilitation work often improves the water quality and sanitation of a household. As a result, we may expect that household's incidents of waterborne illnesses to decrease. With fewer illnesses, it is more likely that parents will maintain employment and therefore be better positioned to pay the fees to send their healthy children to school to complete their education. The family experiences

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# The Forum

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#### Mission statement

The Forum exists to connect the  
worldwide partners of Habitat for  
Humanity International and provide  
a link to other organizations and  
individuals concerned with the effects  
of poverty by providing a means to:

- Explore issues related to housing  
and poverty.
- Describe the work that Habitat for  
Humanity is doing around the world  
to address housing and poverty  
issues.
- Present success factors and in-depth  
analysis of innovative and signature  
Habitat programs.



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distribution list.

## Why measure impact?

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greater physical, social and psychological health.

All of the things that Habitat does can be measured. The resulting changes can be attributed to Habitat and our partners, and this will help us establish our contribution to improving the lives and communities of those we serve.

The items we measure are referred to as the core metrics. When the core metrics that will make up the Impact Initiative were being selected, a collection of indicators were chosen that will:

- Clearly articulate the results (outcomes) arising from Habitat's programs and services (outputs) to increase transparency and accountability, and to foster learning and continuous improvement in the work we do.
- Develop a comprehensive and integrated knowledge management capacity.
- Enhance the effectiveness of our communications to all audiences, reporting on outcomes achieved and tailoring our messaging to different audiences.

To achieve these organizational benefits, we need to adapt and evolve. Just as any shelter that we build is created with a strong base, our program development and implementation processes will need to be developed on a solid foundation that includes the following:

- Evidence of what works for a planned project.
- Knowledge of the sociocultural and political environment where the program will be implemented.
- Community input on and endorsement of the proposed project.

- A strong monitoring and evaluation plan.
- Funding to properly carry out the program, including monitoring and evaluation.

And of these five elements, program monitoring and evaluation — that is, keeping track of whether our programs are producing the results we originally intended — is increasingly critical if we are to ensure the achievement of the goals of the strategic plan.

If the results of our program monitoring and evaluations indicate we are at risk of not meeting our goals, we will make the necessary adjustments. This enables us to be good stewards of our donor funds and, ultimately, to achieve our mission more efficiently and effectively.

Being able to describe in more depth and more detail the outcomes and impact of our programs will help us tell the public our story and increase public support for improved and decent housing for all.

Developing a common strategy to define, measure and communicate impact will not only help ensure that we are accomplishing our goals, it will also build momentum, capacity and community empowerment by demonstrating — with the certainty of data — that our work is changing lives, families, communities and systems. 🏠

*Mike Carscaddon is executive vice president of international programs for Habitat for Humanity International.*

<sup>1</sup> Taken from a Habitat for Humanity board of directors' impact presentation by Stephen Seidel, senior director, global programs design and implementation.



# Defining impact

By Stephen Seidel and Mari Stephens

*Woven throughout the new strategic plan for fiscal years 2014-17 are terms like “outputs,” “outcomes,” “indicators” and “impact.” Indeed, the theme of the entire strategic plan is “Building Impact.”*

Granted, these are not wholly unfamiliar terms to those of us who have been involved in development work for a while. But what do these terms mean in the context of Habitat and this new strategic plan?

In the for-profit world, businesses manage their affairs to achieve one overarching result: profitability. In the not-for-profit world, we manage our programs to achieve results that are somewhat more diverse and challenging to measure: improved quality of life, health, educational achievement, empowerment, social and economic inclusion, etc. For many years, development professionals have adopted results-based management approaches that call for us to articulate how we intend to achieve these results, how we will keep track of our progress, and how we will continually improve over time.

Among donors and development professionals, there is general agreement on the basic concepts that underlie results-based management. Yet the terminology and precise definitions vary. In fact, there are a number of different definitions for the terms “outputs,” “outcomes”

and “impact,” fostered by smart and experienced development professionals, academics and funders. Because major donors will each require proposals, plans and reports using their own terminology, it’s essential that we embrace and understand the concepts while remaining flexible and forgiving with the terminology.

For instance, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Logic Model Development Guide describes outcomes as specific changes in program participants’ behavior, knowledge, skills, status and level of functioning. Only changes to organizations, communities or systems as a result of program activities within seven to 10 years are described as impacts.

For its part, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s definition of impact is “the positive and negative, intended and unintended, direct and indirect, primary and secondary effects produced by an intervention.”

Drawing upon these and other sources, we have finalized the following definitions for the key terms we are using in Habitat’s Impact Initiative:

- **Outputs:** What the organization directly does or produces to help intended beneficiaries (for example: homes we build or rehab, community training events we conduct, community planning we facilitate).
- **Outcomes:** Observed effects of the outputs on the

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Habitat’s development approach is a continuing cycle of offering shelter solutions based on our principles, assessing results and refining methodologies to maximize long-term impact.





# ‘What gets measured gets managed’

By Stephen Seidel

The increased emphasis on outcomes and impact requires a system that can collect and analyze additional metrics.

A central deliverable of the Impact Initiative is the development of a new Impact Data Tracking Tool. This tool, which will be ready for rollout by all national organizations on July 1, 2013, is designed to collect data on the outputs and outcomes being generated by national organizations that align with the objectives of Habitat for Humanity International’s strategic plan. These data will then form the basis for how we establish the longer-term impact of our work.

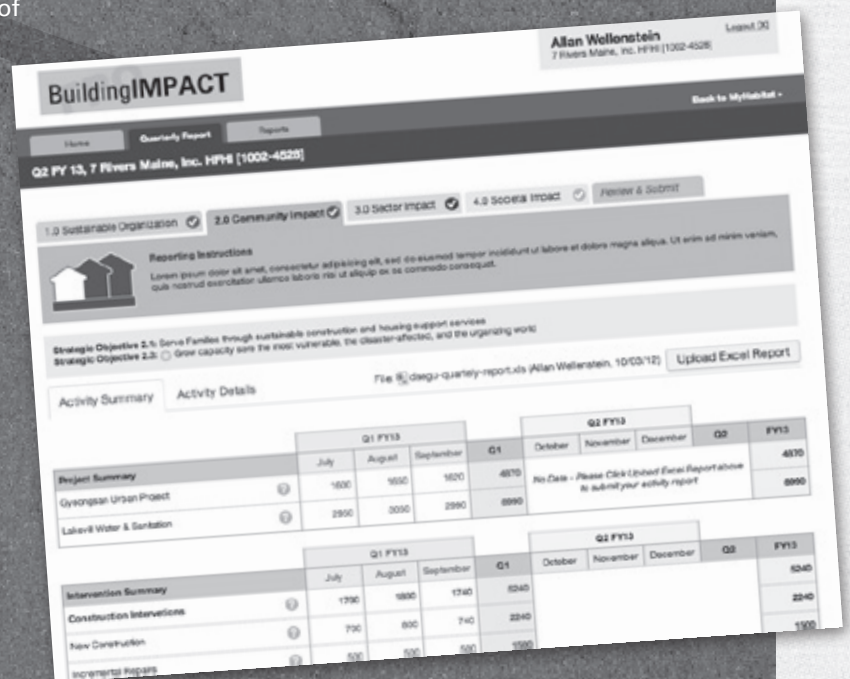
For example, at right is a screen shot of the tool, which will be organized around the four goals of the strategic plan.

All national organizations will be expected to use this new tool to report on activities on a quarterly basis, just as the numbers of families served are currently reported. However, this new tool will have helpful links to My.Habitat and other materials that provide users with clear explanations of the terms and definitions used. Area offices will be able to tabulate the results submitted by the national organizations in their regions, and Habitat for Humanity International headquarters staff will roll up the reports into a comprehensive global package. This will enable the senior leadership team and the board of directors to track the progress we are making on the strategic plan.

The tool, currently in development, will be tested by a collection of national organizations and all the area offices in March and April 2013. It will then be revised as needed and distributed to all national organizations for use. Training will be provided as the tool is rolled out.

The alignment of our strategic objectives with output and outcome metrics, with support from a user-friendly data-tracking tool, will help us all better measure our effectiveness, which in turn will help us manage, celebrate and improve upon the important work we are doing around the world. 🏠

*Stephen Seidel is senior director of global program design and implementation for Habitat for Humanity International.*





## Defining impact

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intended beneficiaries (including short-, medium- and longer-term outcomes).

- **Impact:** The degree to which the organization is able to show that the outcomes attributable to the organization's efforts lead to a lasting, beneficial state for the beneficiaries.
- **Indicators:** Measurable evidence of the achievement of outputs, outcomes and impact.
- **Attribution:** The ability to point to a direct, sufficient, causal link between the organization's outputs and the resulting outcomes.
- **Contribution:** The ability to point to the organization's outputs as being at least partially responsible for the resulting outcomes.

Over the years, Habitat has done an excellent job of tracking our outputs: the homes we build, the loans we make, the water points we install. Moving from tracking outputs to tracking outcomes and impact will be an organizational shift that will take time. To do this, we need to design and then implement the mechanisms necessary for tracking our results and providing training to ensure everyone is clear on the processes and systems. Through this we will determine the kinds of outcomes we are producing and, eventually, the level of impact we are achieving.

By making this shift toward outcomes and impact, not only will we be able to demonstrate that Habitat is improving housing conditions for families every year, but also we will begin to demonstrate the change that our work has made in their lives and in the communities we serve. We will be able to demonstrate how our housing interventions are making a profound difference in breaking the cycle of poverty all over the world. 🏠

*Stephen Seidel is senior director of global program design and implementation for Habitat for Humanity International. Mari Stephens is director of program design, monitoring and evaluation for Habitat for Humanity International.*

### Recommended for further reading:

#### **W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Logic Model Development Guide:**

[wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide.aspx](http://wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide.aspx)

#### **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management:**

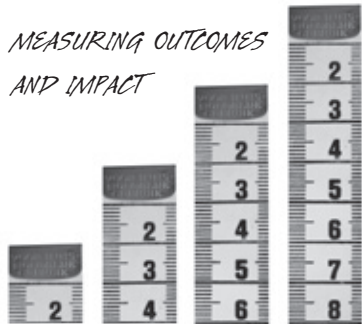
[oecd.org/dac/evaluationofdevelopmentprogrammes/glossaryofkeytermsinevaluationandresultsbasedmanagement.htm](http://oecd.org/dac/evaluationofdevelopmentprogrammes/glossaryofkeytermsinevaluationandresultsbasedmanagement.htm)

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AN EXTERNAL VIEW

**What do donors think about impact?**

*As we look at the importance of measuring impact within Habitat, it is helpful to see how other organizations approach this topic. We therefore invited Habitat’s area offices to ask local and regional donors and partners for their perspective on measuring outcomes and impact. Following are the responses from the Republic Bank Ltd. of Trinidad and Tobago, or RBL.*

**Q: As a donor organization, why do you think it is important for organizations like Habitat to document the outcomes and impact — not just outputs — of the projects you support?**

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MOVING BEYOND THE DEFINITIONS

**What does impact mean to me?**

By Steve Campbell

If you mention the word “impact” casually and there happen to be any proofreaders or bona fide wordsmiths nearby, they might remind you that having an impact on something is a drastic thing. They might even tell you that impact is a violent word: Meteors have an impact, car crashes have an impact, and a punch in the nose has an impact. They might advise you to use a more neutral term such as “effect” or a positive term such as “benefit.” I think there is wisdom in being mindful of this word “impact.”

So, what does impact mean at Habitat? How will our work flex to embrace the notion of understanding, measuring and communicating impact? I offer a few thoughts drawn from my own experience.

I remember very clearly the day a Habitat homeowner walked into my office in 2008. It was winter, and a fresh covering of snow had fallen

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SO, WHAT DOES IMPACT MEAN AT HABITAT? HOW WILL OUR WORK FLEX TO EMBRACE THE NOTION OF UNDERSTANDING, MEASURING AND COMMUNICATING IMPACT?

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overnight. The first thing I noticed was the look of near panic in her eyes. “My car won’t start,” she said in a way that told me there was more to come. “I need to drop my daughter at school, and then get downtown to my job. And if I am late again, I’ll lose my job.”

My first thought, which I am now embarrassed to admit, was “How is this my issue?” As executive director of the Oakland County Habitat affiliate in Pontiac, Michigan, USA, I was well trained and doing my job — and doing it well, if I do say so myself. But I wasn’t prepared for this type of homeowner interaction.

The homeowner went on: “You guys didn’t really help me understand that all it would take was something like this and it all comes tumbling down.” She meant that the house alone — the beautiful, tear-invoking-at-the-dedication, durable, decent, affordable house — was not enough to make her quality of life a thing of perfect beauty. She meant we probably should have talked about things like her social network, her safety net of friends and family who would help her with a ride to work in times like today. Losing her job would mean money would get real tight, real fast. And that would mean choices between mortgage payments, utilities, food and maybe medicine for her daughter, if she were to get sick. So, now, how can we link a truly wonderful Habitat home — the thing we used to primarily

count — to things like long-term health benefits?

I woke up a little that day. Was the work we did at our local affiliate diminished? Absolutely not. Were we going to pay more attention to “the rest of the story” as it relates to what makes a livelihood sustainable? Absolutely. Even though these were not things that Habitat does or even should do, we were going to pay attention. We were going to find partners who could help with the other stuff.

Moreover, we were going to begin to work with partner families as truer partners. We would advise them of what we were learning and learn from them along the way, so we could advise future partners in the best way possible. This would mean we would need to measure new stuff; count more than the houses we built or families we served; remind ourselves that a beautiful new home, alone, doesn't help get you to your job or find one. We would remind ourselves that our partner families, whom we come to care deeply about, need self-reliance and resilience along with the partner they find in Habitat.

And we would begin to measure and count additional things, to deepen our understanding of our homeowners, and the community in which they live. We'd be willing to do these things in a way in which our partner families could say, “We have done it ourselves.”

That's a tall order. It also sounds, at least to me, like the difference between a positive long-term benefit and a punch in the nose. Impactful, eh? 🏠

*Steve Campbell is director of operational partnerships for Habitat for Humanity International in Atlanta.*



**Q & A: What do donors think about impact?**

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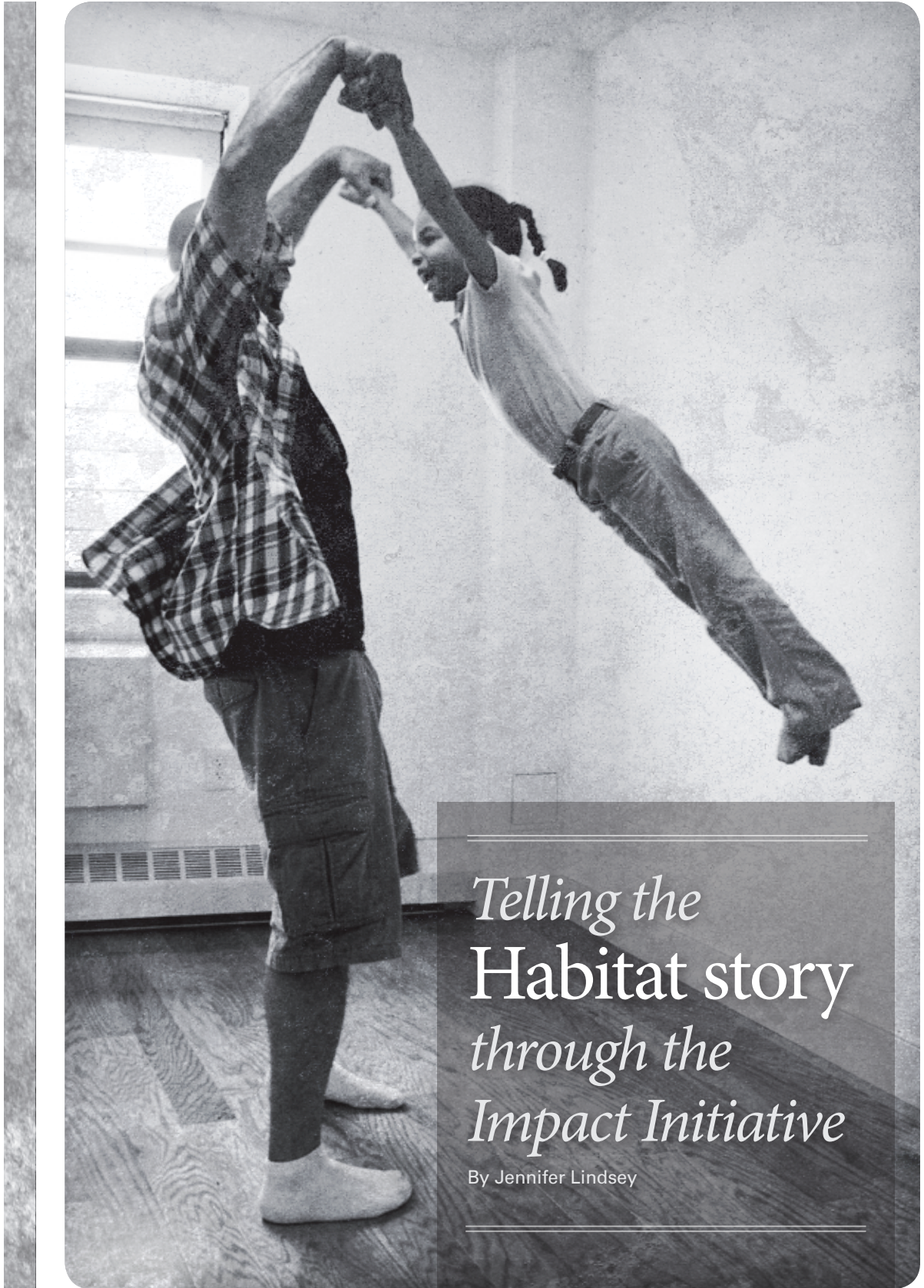
**RBL:** Particularly as a financial institution, we must be able to account for all the funding that is utilized for any corporate social responsibility initiative. To continue to have funds allocated for our programme, though, we must show the impact from each initiative — not just the numbers but the intangibles. Such as in Habitat's case, the improved living conditions to better health to improved school and work success to increased economic and social stability.

**Q: How do you reconcile the desire to measure qualitative, long-term impact with the urgency to reach scale? Are these two notions (scale and impact) compatible, and how is your agency's funding decisions advancing either — or both?**

**RBL:** Our programme takes into consideration both the long-term impact and the scale of the projects. Admittedly, funding is not usually forthcoming for projects that benefit individuals or a small group of persons. We try to align ourselves with the national objectives (i.e., literacy, crime, gender equality, drugs, poverty alleviation, etc.), so I think the projects address both long-term impact and scale to some extent.

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*Telling the  
Habitat story  
through the  
Impact Initiative*

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By Jennifer Lindsey

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY/VEZRA MILLSTEIN



The significance of communications in Habitat's ministry dates back to Koinonia Partnership Ministries, the concept that grew into Habitat for Humanity. The founding documents of Koinonia highlight three prongs: communications, instruction and application.

When Habitat for Humanity was founded in 1976, the articles of incorporation included communications in one of the "official purposes" of the organization: "Exemplifying the gospel of Jesus Christ through loving acts and the spoken word."

Later, the "ultimate goal" for Habitat for Humanity included the declaration that "all our words and actions are for the ultimate purpose of putting shelter on the hearts and minds of people in such a powerful way that poverty housing and homelessness become socially, politically and religiously unacceptable in our nations and world."

This sentiment was reinforced in our recently refreshed mission principle to advocate for affordable housing:

*In response to the prophet Micah's call to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God, we promote decent, affordable housing for all, and we support the global community's commitment to housing as a basic human right. We will advocate for just and fair housing policy to eliminate the constraints that contribute to poverty housing. And, in all of our work, we will seek to put shelter on hearts and minds in such powerful ways that poverty housing becomes socially, politically and religiously unacceptable.*

So it is clear that communicating the need for shelter and the benefits of a safe, adequate home has been an integral part of Habitat's mission since Habitat's founding in 1976. But I doubt the first communicators could have imagined 37 years ago how technology would enhance our ability to tell the Habitat story. Initially, the communication was likely word of mouth, public speaking and printed publications — including the many inspiring books written by Habitat co-founder Millard Fuller and distributed by mail or by hand.

Today, nearly every household has at least one computer, camera and cell phone to capture images. We also

have the ability to send stories and images around the world instantly, to post stories online for anyone to see, and to allow our volunteers and supporters to share their own stories of Habitat's activities through social media.

But computer technology and social media are not the only advancements that have enhanced our communications. We also have more to say. Consider this standard Habitat for Humanity International boilerplate from 2006:

*Habitat for Humanity International is an ecumenical Christian ministry that welcomes to its work all people dedicated to the cause of eliminating poverty housing. Since its founding in Americus, Ga., in 1976, Habitat has built more than 200,000 houses in nearly 100 countries, providing simple, decent and affordable shelter for more than one million people.*

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**One way Habitat for Humanity puts shelter on hearts and minds is to tell the real stories of the people we serve and the long-term benefits they experience from living in safe, decent shelter. The Impact Initiative will help us make those stories even stronger.**

Visit Habitat's "Why we build" page.

**Q & A: What do donors think about impact?**

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**Q: What would you define as a positive long-term impact of the Habitat programs you support? And what do you think is the best way to track that?**

**RBL:** The long-term impacts of partnering with Habitat are many. For example, the obvious benefit is that a greater number of persons who previously would have been unable to afford homes now do. This puts less strain on the government in the long run to provide housing for these individuals; not to mention eradicate the scourge of squatting that exists. These individuals are now in a better position to contribute positively to the upliftment of their families and, by extension, the country. The training sessions also should encourage

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THE LONG-TERM  
IMPACTS OF  
PARTNERING WITH  
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positive financial management habits in the various families. Additionally, the planning and organizational skills learnt can be applied to each aspect of their life, not just in finances.

To track this, though, I believe that we would need to have some families in a case study. We would need to identify all the areas, such as emotional well-being, finances, etc., at the start of the intervention and would then need to look at them at various stages. 🏠

VISION 2020

# A look back from the future to assess the importance of our work today

*Note to readers: Please join us for a moment in taking a step forward to the year 2020. We are offering the following letter from a future chair of the Habitat for Humanity International board of directors to envision what we might look like as an organization seven years from now.*

Happy New Year, everyone — and welcome to the year 2020! Coming to the end of this second decade of the third millennium, we should all be grateful for the fact that we have endured profound challenges and prevailed in our critical mission.

It started out mighty rough, didn't it? The worldwide economic crisis at the start of this decade was a daunting challenge for us all. Housing was especially troubled then. In the developed world, the hangover from the mortgage foreclosure meltdown, which started in the previous decade, created a powerful drag on economic growth, leading to persistently high unemployment. In the developing world, we crossed the threshold of more people living in urban areas than in rural areas — and that movement has continued to this day.

These conditions presented special and considerable challenges to Habitat for Humanity. Back in 2012, the leadership of the organization took on a central question: How would a global organization, inspired by God's love for all people, respond to the ever increasing need for adequate housing, and do so at a time when financial resources were more constrained than at any time in the previous two generations?

Inspired by prayerful commitment to our mission, the board and senior leadership of HFHI, with the input of thousands of Habitat partners and supporters around the world, developed a strategic plan to answer this question head-on. This plan, covering the period from 2014 to 2018, provided the organization with a clear direction to make a material reduction in global poverty housing. The goal was to position Habitat increasingly as a catalyst, provider and partner of choice in addressing the world's pressing shelter needs. The plan envisioned a future where adequate





At left: Elisa Langa and her family have a new Habitat home in Xai Xai, Mozambique. The impact of moving out of their old home (below) is better health, more security, and a safe space for the children to grow.



PHOTOS: PHIL LAMPSON

housing is recognized around the globe as essential to reducing poverty and improving communities. To do this, Habitat transformed what we do and how we do it in recognition of the fact that such transformation takes time, flexibility and a steadfast commitment to the challenging work that lies ahead.

And the results? Our traditional model of direct

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HABITAT HAS BEEN ABLE TO INSPIRE SCORES OF PRIVATE-SECTOR ENTITIES TO COMMIT THEIR TALENT AND RESOURCES TO ADDRESS THE HOUSING NEEDS OF THE POOR.

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family and community engagement has directly benefited hundreds of thousands of families in thousands of local communities and in the

housing sector and society at large, driving fundamental change on a global scale. Habitat has been able to inspire scores of private-sector entities to commit their talent and resources to address the housing needs of the poor. More governments, organizations and individuals have chosen to dedicate their attention, energy and capacity to the eradication of substandard housing.

In dozens of countries, we have made a significant

dent in the housing deficit faced by millions of families. We have laid the groundwork for a viable housing finance industry that provides capital at fair and affordable terms to hundreds of thousands of households that had previously been denied access to such services. We have worked with our colleagues to help homeowners establish irrevocable rights to the land on which their housing is located. And we have created a network of technical housing experts around the world that provide high-quality guidance to families who seek to improve their own housing conditions.

Furthermore, we have demonstrated irrefutably how access to adequate housing is an indispensable ingredient in breaking the otherwise intractable cycle of poverty. And, inspired by this evidence and the stories we have shared about our successes, we have doubled the number of volunteers, from all walks of life in all parts of the world, who have joined us in our work, putting their own values of care and concern for others on powerful display.

In the process, we have created an organization that is more capable than ever of pursuing our divinely inspired mission. We have transformed our

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## Vision 2020

Continued from page 11

operations to ensure adequate resources to support our work and to pursue new and innovative initiatives. We have been able to attract and retain the finest and most committed housing professionals in the world. And we conduct our work in ways that honor and safeguard the trust of those who invest their resources with us.

We have made great progress over this past decade, but we know our work is far from complete. Here in 2020, there are still far too many families who lack decent shelter, for whom the housing situation is a burden rather than a blessing that helps them to grow into all that God intends for them. The good news — for them and for communities across the globe — is that Habitat for Humanity is stronger than ever, and more committed than ever, to pursue our mission of bringing people together to build homes, communities and hope. For this, we must take a moment to commend the vision and commitment of our leaders in 2012, who took our mission seriously enough to design such an ambitious and effective plan. The legacy of this vision can be seen in the millions of families whose housing conditions have dramatically improved — and in those whom Habitat and our partners will serve in the years to come. 🏠

## Telling the Habitat story through the Impact Initiative

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Today, our press release boilerplate looks like this:

*Habitat for Humanity International is a global nonprofit Christian housing organization that seeks to put God's love into action by bringing people together to build homes, communities and hope. Since 1976, Habitat has served more than 600,000 families by welcoming people of all races, religions and nationalities to construct, rehabilitate or preserve homes; by advocating for fair and just housing policies; and by providing training and access to resources to help families improve their shelter conditions.*

See the difference? Not only have we changed our focus from counting houses to counting families served, but we also have already begun expanding the description of what we do to truly reflect the diversity of programs in the field to fulfill our mission. This is true in all our communications – from press releases to videos, from annual reports to websites, and from donor project reports to direct mail letters.

When the Impact Initiative was conceived in 2011 during the initial phases of the 2014-18 strategic plan, it was recognized that the communications team should play a significant role in the initiative's development and execution. It

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... IT WAS RECOGNIZED THAT THE COMMUNICATIONS TEAM SHOULD PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE INITIATIVE'S DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTION.

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wasn't just about how we defined outputs, outcomes and impact. And it wasn't just about how we would track them. We recognized that what we did with the information we were tracking — when

communicating both internally and, most importantly, externally — could enhance our ability to “put shelter on the hearts and minds of people in such a powerful way that poverty housing and homelessness become socially, politically and religiously unacceptable.”

How will the Impact Initiative do this? It will enable us to use hard data to illustrate the connection between a new or improved home and better health for a family, improved school performance for children, a safer community and more stable incomes. And when we illustrate these connections through information we gather along with validated third-party data, we can truly illustrate that housing is a critical foundation for breaking the cycle of poverty. And we will inspire others to join us in our mission.

The Habitat for Humanity International communications team looks forward to working with the entire Habitat for Humanity family over the next several months and years to develop unique messages for our diverse audiences that reflect the work you're doing, using the metrics you'll be collecting, to illustrate the outcomes and impact of the work we do. 🏠

*Jennifer Lindsey is Habitat for Humanity International's senior director for international communications.*