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## Broadening the reach of Habitat's programs through Resource Centers

Each year, the Philippines needs 300,000 housing units to accommodate the growing population of nearly 88 million (July 2005 estimate), and the population is expected to double in another 30 years. With its average record of more than 580 houses built, Habitat for Humanity Philippines is aware that its contribution to housing output is a drop in the ocean.

### Habitat Resource Centers

Though it has built more than 10,000 houses since 1988, HFH Philippines wants to serve more families at a significantly lower cost. The solution lay in setting up a Habitat Resource Center (HRC) in 2004 to provide the local population with construction skills training, thus enabling them to build and repair their own houses. The HRC also develops new building technologies and manufactures durable, cost-



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effective, environmentally friendly building materials.

The key objectives of the Filipino HRC are to build more affordable and durable houses using more efficient construction technology. To this end, the HRC has developed Concrete Interlocking Block (CIB) technology, which saves approximately one-fifth on the cost of cement used in an average house build.

Unlike hollow concrete blocks, leveling is not required to set these concrete interlocking blocks in place. Instead, they are joined by steel rebar with concrete poured through holes inside the blocks.

This cost-efficient, innovative technology has been used successfully to build 2,000 low-cost homes in the Philippines as well as 10 three-story buildings. To date, thanks to the HRC resources, more than 3,600 houses have been built and more than 100 people have been trained in construction skills and site/project management.

And the Filipinos are not the only beneficiaries. The CIB technology has been exported to the Pacific island of Vanuatu, where it will be part of the solution to poverty housing there.

### **Additional Partnerships Help Communities**

In addition to constructing houses, the Filipino HRC emphasizes the building of ties with partner organizations. Its collaborations include those with other nongovernmental organizations, local government units, corporations and volunteers on building projects.

In the second quarter of 2004, the HRC teamed up with the local government in Manila and the Center for Community Transformation (CCT) to build homes with victims of the January 2004 fire in BASECO. The fire, which razed the shantytown in the former BASECO shipyard in Manila, destroyed more than 2,000 houses and left more than 20,000 families without a place to live. The HRC undertook the project of building 1,000 houses, while CCT is responsible for community development such as organizing the home partners into savings groups under the Save & Build model.

The soft ground at BASECO paved the way for the HRC to adopt another new construction technology from New Zealand: light-weight steel frames bolted onto one-piece concrete slabs that serve as the houses' foundations. Walls are made of fire-proof cement-fiber boards, while the galvanized aluminum roof keeps the occupants cool even under the intense tropical sun.

The Habitat houses at BASECO do not use inexpensive technology. However, with proper management, the HRC is able to build them with direct costs of 40,000 pesos per unit (about US\$785). The HRC's cost-conscious efforts boil down to its philosophy: "It's unjust to let our home partner bear the burden of additional costs because of inefficiency."

Of the 1,000 houses targeted, 600 have been built with another 40 under construction. The HRC is set to build another 1,000 houses after the first batch has been constructed.



### **HRC Helps With Disaster Response**

The HRC is also a key component in disaster response programs. When the tsunami struck Indonesia in December 2004, staff from the Filipino HRC lent their expertise to help in the construction of temporary housing units. A transfer of the HRC's construction technology to Indonesia also enabled 2,000 houses to be built in record time.

The following year, in 2005, when deadly landslides hit the southern Luzon provinces in the Philippines, the HRC was instrumental in helping partners GMA Kapuso Foundation and SC Johnson & Son rebuild schools that had been destroyed. The partnerships led to 30 classrooms being built as well as a teachers' dormitory in the town of Maria Aurora in Aurora province.

Through its initiatives and projects, the Filipino HRC has demonstrated its commitment to increase the reach of Habitat's programs through innovative technology and effective training of home partners.

#### **Contact**

Peter Witton, Director of Communications, Asia-Pacific  
[pwitton@habitat.org](mailto:pwitton@habitat.org)

