



STEFFAN HACKER

Empowering women worldwide

By involving women in building homes and communities, Habitat for Humanity's Women Build program provides an opportunity for women around the world to not only learn construction skills but to help build their communities, earn income for their families and gain more respect and empowerment in their families.

How the Program Began

In 1991, a group of women in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA, completed the first women-built Habitat for Humanity house. With this, the seeds for Habitat for Humanity's Women Build program were planted.

Then in 1997, as part of the Jimmy Carter Work Project, U.S. first lady Hillary Clinton, Kentucky state first lady Libby Jones, and Oklahoma state first lady Cathy Keating par-

ticipated in a Women Build. There the idea for First Ladies Build was born, and in May 1998, Habitat for Humanity International officially formed the Women Build department.

In May of 2001, Women Build launched its second program, Women Building a Legacy, through which state first ladies, celebrities and women from all walks of life swung hammers to actively raise awareness about the problem of children in poverty. In combination with these programs and individual affiliate sponsored builds, between 1991 and 2003, women crews built more than 350 Habitat houses in the United States.

How the Program Works

Women Build works through Habitat for Humanity affiliates to recruit and train women construction volunteers. Thanks to the high-quality training and hands-on construction experience offered by the Women Build program, Women Build volunteers often become long-term committed affiliate volunteers.

The Women Build department is guided in its efforts by a Women Build Steering Council made up of 18 women who are leaders in their local and national communities. In 2005, Women Build formed an affiliate task force to provide input

regarding the strengths and needs of affiliates of all sizes.

The program has more than doubled in size since 2003, in large part due to the support of our national underwriter, Lowe's and major sponsor Home Interiors and Gifts, Inc. To date, nearly 800 Habitat houses have been built by women crews in 14 countries around the world. This number is growing by 150 homes or more each year as affiliates, donors and sponsors recognize the impact of these new women volunteers and the resources they bring. As the program grows across international borders, it empowers women everywhere to address the problem of poverty housing for themselves, their families and their communities.



MIKEL FLANN

Empowering Women Around the World

The Women Build program is expanding internationally with women crews building houses in Australia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ghana, Kenya, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, the Philippines, Portugal, South Africa, South Korea, Tanzania, Thailand and Uganda.

With this expansion across borders, the opportunity to build Habitat houses extends to women in many countries where women's empowerment is just beginning to evolve.

The Habitat affiliate in Los Tuxtlas, Veracruz, Mexico, exemplifies the contribution women are making to Habitat's home-building mission. The affiliate has made a conscious effort to include women in its projects and, as a result, has drawn a group of dedicated women volunteers. "The first regional committees were made up of women, trained by the Committee for Education and Integral Development of Women," said Jose Guillermo Montoya, a member of the affiliate's advisory board. "Without doubt I can attest that the most important actions in the affiliate have been led by women."

Women are empowered by Habitat homeownership, as well, gaining more independence and strength in their families and communities. Habitat homeowner Geta Heredea has worked with HFH Romania not only to better the lives of her own family, but also those in her village of Mizies. Heredea was recently honored by the prestigious international Women's World Summit Foundation. She was the recipient of the "Prize for Women's Creativity in Rural Life," which was

awarded on the United Nations' World Rural Women's Day on Oct. 15, 2005.

In some countries, women are finding empowerment within communities where they have traditionally been marginalized. In October 2003, during the week of the Kenneth Kaunda Work Project in Lusaka, Zambia, volunteers came together to build 20 houses. Six of these houses were constructed solely by and for women. Several Zambian women made a seven-hour journey from Kaoma, a northwestern province of Zambia, to Lusaka to help build houses with women in the area.

"I have brought all my women friends from Kaoma here today to show them what we are capable of. When they go back they are going to change. Things will be a little different," Margaret Mundia said.

Margaret Mundia is a Habitat homeowner in Lusaka. She lives with eight children and three grandchildren in her home. Since all but one of Margaret's sisters have passed away, Margaret has become the sole caretaker of her seven nieces and nephews. She earns a small income from growing crops, making and selling crafts, and doing occasional odd jobs.

"Men count us to be slaves. Today we are showing men we can do anything," said Margaret Mundia.

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