

MAKING COMMUNITIES MORE

DISASTER RESILIENT IN JAMAICA

BACKGROUND

Jamaica, in the Latin America and the Caribbean region, has a population of approximately 3 million, a quarter of whom live in over 700 informal and unplanned settlements. These settlements are particularly vulnerable to disasters because, in addition to their often-precarious locations and exposure to natural hazards, the homes often do not comply with construction and safety standards. In addition, 45% of the land in the country is unregistered, including much of the land within informal settlements. Without secure tenure, those living in informal settlements find it difficult to invest in disaster-resilient materials to secure their homes, and the government may be slower to assist those without land documentation.ⁱ

From 2015 to 2019, Habitat for Humanity implemented a disaster risk reduction pilot project called BRACED — Building Resilience and Capacities for Emerging Disasters — in the municipality of Portmore, Jamaica. The project focused on increasing the resilience of housing; improving access to water, hygiene, sanitation and waste management; building public-private partnerships; upgrading human settlements through redevelopment plans; and identifying critical infrastructure interventions.ⁱⁱ **In Jamaica, Habitat’s advocacy work started as one element of the BRACED project, after recognizing that securing land tenure may increase families’ interest in investing in their homes and would formalize their land as a marketable asset that could create access to credit, providing opportunity for wealth creation.**

ADVOCACY METHODOLOGIES AND TOOLS

In Jamaica, Habitat’s advocacy methodology included:

- **Strategic selection of communities to pilot the experience**, considering size and contexts that would shed light on the potential to replicate the experience in different areas of the country.
- **Engagement with government agencies and multiple stakeholders, including community leaders, through an advisory committee.** This was useful for facilitating project implementation, but also for advancing some political elements. For instance, Habitat requested that government agencies expand an existing program of land regularization that originally focused on rural areas to include urban settings, and asked that selected communities be declared special areas for tenure upgrades, which accelerates and reduces the cost of the regularization process. The aim was to bridge some of the gaps between the communities and government programs and resources.
- **Mobilizing and empowering communities through participatory methodologies and community-based hubs.** A series of technical trainings and advocacy activities were conducted. Community members were engaged in the enumeration and mapping, the preparation of the individual cases, and the inclusion of such cases in a common information platform connected to government databases. Engagement with communities also enabled a participatory approach for safe shelter awareness, known as PASSA, and participatory risk assessments and mapping in the selected subcommunities. Work at the community level also included training young people living in informal settlements through the Media for Social Change program, helping them acquire and improve photography and videography skills, from simple camera maintenance to on-set and post-production. These skills help them tell the stories of their communities; talk with community members, leaders and governments; and gather information and share it with the community.

- **Auditing the land where the selected informal settlements were located**, to identify the tenure status and ensure that the right stakeholders were involved.
- **Assessing the performance of the land tenure regularization system**, including process, institutions, regulations, barriers and bottlenecks, to highlight where there was room for policy improvement.
- **Exploring technological tools and systems to improve and speed up the regularization process, and to bring down the costs.** Drones were used to capture aerial imagery of the selected areas, replacing the need for expensive land surveys. A GIS information management platform called [Territorial Information Management System Platform](#) was created to share information among government agencies and to connect the government database with the community-based hubs.
- **Implementing a series of workshops and forums to train community members and government officials on secure tenure and disaster resilience measures.** This connected community leaders and municipal authorities to work together on improving policies and processes, particularly around complex and expensive land regularization processes.
- **Creating guides, redevelopment plans and fast-track documents** as references for community members and the project closeout handover agency — in this case, the municipal council — in addition to a **policy paper** with 11 recommendations to governments on improving disaster resilience.

SUCCESS, LESSONS AND IMPACT

The BRACED project has developed a fast-track, low-cost procedure for land regularization in Jamaica's informal urban settlements. This has a major impact on these communities, enabling them to better prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters, predictable or otherwise. These efforts have directly impacted over 6,000 people, and 65,000 more people are expected to benefit indirectly.

This regularization process, including engagement with communities and governments, supported by the use of technology, can be replicated across the country and can help document the nearly 50% of the territory that is still unregistered and out of the government databases. Different national and local government agencies have shown a tremendous interest and fully supported this experience. This also can be useful in other countries, especially in the Caribbean region, when focusing on disaster risk reduction, as it helps to overcome the unwillingness of families to improve their homes and communities in terms of disaster resilience.

At the community level, the formalization of community land improves access to infrastructure investments, as the government is now able to provide public services formerly denied to informal settlements, such as water piping, electricity and drainage. Community members were trained and empowered, and now have extended roles as community advocates. They are now able to record land conflict cases in the Territorial Information Management System Platform, mediate land disputes, and advocate for the rights of each resident to benefit from these mediation processes. Young people were generally involved in the project, but once technology came into the picture, such as the use of tablets for community enumeration and a videography training through the [BRACED Youth Media Team](#), they were a lot more willing to engage.

Technology was also a key element in scaling up the regularization process and bringing down its costs. The drones can be used for more than one community at a time. The government agencies are sharing a common information platform, which avoids duplicating efforts to collect similar information. This platform being connected to the community hubs means that government agencies have up-to-date information from the communities, and that community members don't have to make expensive trips to the city center to follow up on their cases, improving the information ecosystem and service provision in general.

The efforts in Jamaica also highlight that advocacy can and should be combined with the programmatic work of Habitat for Humanity. Advocacy does not have to be a standalone initiative; it can rather mutually support building strength, stability and self-reliance through shelter.

Further information on how Habitat for Humanity is making communities more disaster resilient in other countries is available in the [Disaster Resilience & Land Issue Brief](#).

i HFHI / Solid Ground. 2019. Issue Brief: Disaster Resilience & Land.

ii <http://solidgroundcampaign.org/blog/reducing-risk-disasters-securing-land-tenure-case-study-portmore-jamaica>



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