Habitat for Humanity in Fiji

Habitat for Humanity started working in Fiji in 1991. Since then, Habitat has helped over 28,600 people to build homes and hope through partnerships with governments, bilateral and non-profit organizations and international volunteers. Habitat’s work goes beyond the construction of homes. HFH Fiji works on a range of projects throughout the country including disaster response and recovery through repairs and temporary housing when needed, construction or improvement of water and sanitation systems in rural and remote areas, and disabled access housing projects. In the financial year ended June 30, 2015, HFH Fiji has helped more than 3,140 families through disaster response, over 1,300 families in more than 45 communities through water and sanitation improvements and built over 900 new houses.

The housing need in Fiji

An estimated 140,000 people currently live in substandard housing conditions in informal settlements, and the number has increased by 5 percent from 2007 to 2012. Poverty and inequality continue to be a challenge. According to official statistics, 31 percent of the population lives in poverty. The rising cost of living and disasters such as 2016’s Cyclone Winston increased the poor’s vulnerability. The poorest households also lack piped water, adequate sanitation, electricity or rubbish disposal.

How Habitat addresses the need in Fiji

Habitat for Humanity’s activities in Fiji range from new house construction to helping families rebuild after cyclones and other disasters to improving water and sanitation access in various communities. Habitat homes are typically built with a combination of locally supplied timber, concrete, and metal roofing. Low-income families contribute their own labor to build their new homes.

Global Village volunteers (in blue) working on a house together with HFH Fiji’s staff.

Country profile

FIJI

HABITAT FACTS

When Habitat started in Fiji
1991

Families served*
Over 5,000

Volunteers hosted**
About 1,500

*since 1991
**since 2005

Housing solutions
- Community water projects
- Decent homes for vulnerable groups
- Disaster response
- Engaging with volunteers

Source: World Factbook
Habitat for Humanity Fiji helps remote communities to gain access to reliable water supply with funding support from various bilateral donors such as the European Union, Japanese Embassy and Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and New Zealand Aid through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Since 2011, the Japanese government has donated more than 500,000 Fijian dollars (about US$242,000) to HFH Fiji for water, sanitation and hygiene projects. The European Union has donated more than 1 million Fijian dollars toward Habitat’s water projects which have helped more than 675 families in 27 rural communities. DFAT’s funding of over 450,000 Fijian dollars enabled more than 375 families to have reliable access to water. Through its Community Water Program, HFH Fiji trains communities to manage and conserve water resources as well as to maintain water systems that have been installed.

Bale Siteri, a widow, feels that she has finally settled down in life after moving into her Habitat for Humanity house in 2014. She lives in the resettlement community of Etatoko in Ba district, Viti Levu island. She shared a tent with her 16-year-old son Jone Waqanisau for two years after her house was destroyed by severe floods.

According to Bale, women bore the full brunt of living without adequate shelter and clean water. “We had more worries than the men like bathing and feeding the children, preparing children for school, washing clothes, cooking and cleaning the house. We used to travel more than a kilometer (on foot) to wash clothes and then carry it back after washing,” she said.

“It’s like I am living my dream now,” Bale said of her Habitat house. “Before, the biggest headache was access to clean water. I used to wake up in the middle of the night and stay up the whole night just to collect rainwater. Rainwater was our hope — for drinking, cooking and doing household chores.”

Not only does she have decent shelter, she also has running water. “It gave my family a new life,” Bale said. She can now focus fully on providing her son with a good education.

Her house was built with support from the New Zealand Aid Programme while her solar-powered water system connection was installed under Australian Aid’s Fiji Community Development Programme.