



SERIES: ADVOCACY PRACTICES AND PUBLIC POLICIES
LESSONS LEARNED

Booklet 1: HFH Honduras and COHVISOLES
(Honduran Councils of Cooperative Housing)
advocate in five municipal policies for access to adequate housing

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
FIRST SECTION	
How was the advocacy initiative born?.....	4
What frameworks guided the advocacy initiative?.....	5
What was the expected outcome?.....	6
What was the strategy used?.....	6
Who were the participating stakeholders in the advocacy initiative?.....	7
SECOND SECTION	
What happened during each phase of the initiative?.....	8
THIRD SECTION	
What was accomplished in one year?.....	10
What were the lessons learned?.....	11
What steps could be taken to improve the advocacy process and outcomes?.....	12



Hábitat para la Humanidad América Latina y el Caribe, Apartado Postal Local 1513-1200 Pavas, Costa Rica; Tel +506 22968120; Fax +506 22917475; e-mail lac@habitat.org; www.habitatlatino.org

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is an instrument that promotes reflection and learning based on an advocacy initiative on municipal policies to promote access to adequate housing. The initiative took place between July 2008 and July 2009 in five municipalities in the northern part of Honduras. It was directed to families with income equal to or less than three minimum wages.

This initiative was systematized by students from the Duke Center for International Development of Duke University which has an alliance with Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI). The purpose of the systematization was to analyze the experience and identify lessons learned to strengthen advocacy efforts in the region.

This booklet is divided in three sections:

- The first section presents the most relevant characteristics of the initiative.
- The second section reconstructs the steps taken during the initiative.
- The third section offers an analysis of the initiative, highlighting key aspects that could guide future adequate housing advocacy efforts.

This booklet is intended for:

- Leaders of communities without access to adequate housing
- Civil society organizations: grassroots organizations that make up the Honduran Councils of Cooperative Housing (COHVISOLES)
- Non-governmental organizations: Habitat for Humanity Honduras, Habitat for Humanity International and its partners in the region
- City councils

FIRST SECTION

HOW WAS THE ADVOCACY INITIATIVE BORN?

HFH Honduras recognized that its rate of housing construction was insufficient to alleviate the inadequate housing problem in the country.

Anchored in its social commitment, and from its position of influence with several stakeholders in Honduran society, HFH Honduras analyzed the context of the housing sector. It discerned a great challenge and several opportunities.

HFH Honduras aligned its action with one of the mission principles of Habitat for Humanity:

“To advocate in favor of those in need of adequate housing.”

Challenge from the context:

- The housing deficit in Honduras is 1.15 million houses (General Division of Urban Affairs of Honduras).
- The qualitative deficit accounts for 65% of the total housing deficit. These are houses that are in precarious conditions; the walls, floors and roofs are severely deteriorated or made of unstable materials. There is overcrowding and no basic services.
- The quantitative deficit increases each year by 25,000 houses. To date, the demand is approximately 400 thousand new houses (General Division of Urban Affairs of Honduras).

Opportunities in the context:

- Organizations in Honduran civil society, representative of the low income population, have been forming territorial alliances at the local, regional, and national level on the issue of the right to adequate housing.
- The result is the Honduran Councils of Cooperative Housing (COHVISOLES), active since 2005.
- The municipalities have relative autonomy on the issue of housing. This is a product of the country’s decentralization.
- Among their competencies are channeling resources (their own, of the central government, and of international organizations) for housing. They also plan the territory and establish construction and land use norms. In addition, they have the mandate to provide basic services (safe water, electricity, sanitation).
- At the local level, the inhabitants are closer to their authorities. This closeness facilitates processes of interaction, dialogue, pressure and negotiation.

In summary, HFH Honduras decided to focus its advocacy efforts at the municipal level to achieve the approval of housing policies (non-existent until then). In this way, it took advantage of the opportunities in the context and a greater viability of concrete results in the short term.

HFH Honduras took on the challenge to act with local stakeholders to ensure that housing public policies serve low income groups.

To achieve this, HFH Honduras took on the challenge of accompanying civil society organized groups in an interaction with authorities of municipal governments to ensure that housing policies serve low income groups.

WHAT FRAMEWORKS GUIDED THE ADVOCACY INITIATIVE?

Adequate housing as a human right:

- Adequate housing positively impacts health, education, and security for the whole family. To guarantee the right to housing guarantees other rights.
- Not only is the interior of the house inhabited but also the neighborhood and city. Thus, advocacy and policy transcend the individual.
- National, regional, local governments and public organizations must be guarantors of the human right to adequate housing through policies and instruments that benefit the population excluded from that right.

Strengthening of citizen participation:

Citizen participation empowers social agents as subjects of rights.

- Guarantees good local and national government performance.
- Advocates for political will of government representatives.
- Generates spaces for dialogue, negotiation and lobbying.

Advocacy from and with the social agent:

- Advocacy is a deliberate and planned practice that requires human and financial resources.
- Advocacy strengthens, and is vitalized by, social action.
- Advocacy is a results-oriented process that requires knowledge and institutional and political legitimacy.
- Advocacy promotes transparency and responsibility in the solution of social and economic problems.

Right to adequate housing

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights establishes the following as basic components of adequate housing:

1. *Legal security of tenure: including legal protection against eviction and other threats.*
 2. *Availability of services and necessary infrastructure: safe water, electricity, sanitation.*
 3. *Affordability: housing costs should not prevent the provision of other basic necessities.*
 4. *Accessibility: housing must be physically accessible to all people; disadvantaged social groups have priority (disabled, elderly, children, disaster victims).*
 5. *Habitability: including protection against the cold, humidity, wind, heat and rain.*
 6. *Location: isolated from pollution sources and with easy access to employment, education, cultural, health and recreation options.*
 7. *Cultural adequacy: housing must respond to the cultural identity of its inhabitants.*
-

WHAT WAS THE EXPECTED OUTCOME?

To close the gap between the identified lack of access to housing of low income groups and what is stipulated in the right to adequate housing through an advocacy initiative that sought:

- **The approval of social housing policies to improve life conditions of families with income equal to or less than three minimum wages in five municipalities of the northern region of Honduras.**

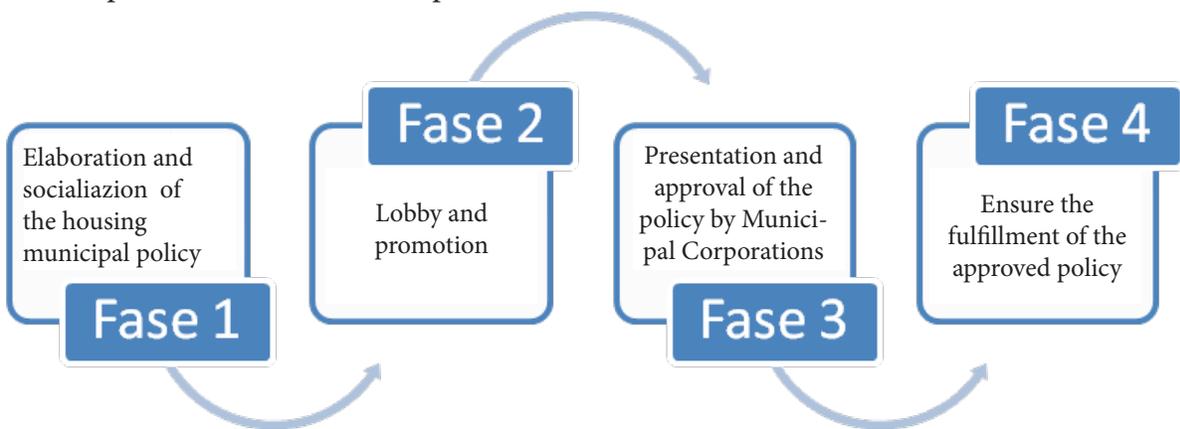
WHAT WAS THE STRATEGY USED?

HFH Honduras incorporated three key components in four phases.

The key components are:

1. Alliances and mobilization
2. Relationships with Municipal Corporation decision-makers
3. Leadership development of HFH Honduras and civil society organizations

The advocacy strategy was implemented in four phases (see graph below). This systematic process allowed the initiative to be replicated in several municipalities.



To design and implement the advocacy strategy, HFH Honduras:

- invested in staff,
- analyzed the context,
- recognized opportunities and potential allies,
- collected data,
- planned and identified expected outcomes,
- designed its advocacy strategy.

WHO WERE THE PARTICIPATING STAKEHOLDERS IN THE ADVOCACY INITIATIVE?

1. HFH Honduras as both the developer of the municipal social housing policy, and the facilitator of the contextualization and appropriation by internal and external networks.

Its interest was to continue to strengthen its role in the country on the issue of social housing and to achieve scale in its action.

2. COHVISOLES as representatives of the people in search of solutions to improve access to housing and as promoters of the municipal social housing policy. The COHVISOLES are organized at the municipal, regional, and national levels.

Their interest was to consolidate alliances with the municipalities to secure basic services and to demand the right to adequate housing.

3. Municipal Corporations of five city councils (Choloma, La Ceiba, Santa Cruz de Yojoa, San Pedro de Sula, Puerto Cortez) as the maximum authority of the municipality and in charge of creating, reforming, and abolishing normative instruments and of approving the annual budget. In addition, they channel resources from different sources for housing.

Their interest was in obtaining results during their government period.

“What we are doing right now is to put into practice what we already know...to awaken that which was dormant.”

*Luis Alberto Castro,
Member of Choloma’s COHVISOL*

Second Section

WHAT HAPPENED DURING EACH PHASE OF THE INITIATIVE?

Phase 1: Elaboration and socialization of the adequate housing municipal policy

HFH Honduras decided that the project be replicable and have scale. Thus, it prioritized five municipalities as pilot projects.

For the selection of the first five municipalities, HFH Honduras generated the following criteria:

- High housing deficit, especially for low income groups.
- High population concentration with high poverty levels.
- Good previous work trajectory of HFH Honduras.
- Good relationships with the different governmental authorities of the municipality.

For the initiative to be effective it needs to identify both a territory and realm of action, as well, prioritization criteria.

Housing situation in the selected municipalities:

- *Lack of accessible credit*
 - *Low income levels*
 - *High cost of urbanized land*
 - *Conflicts due to land occupations*
 - *Lack of property regulation*
-

HFH Honduras created a framework document that served as a base for discussion to adjust the policy to the reality in each of the municipalities.

HFH Honduras leveraged its position as a well-known organization on the issue of housing to socialize, gather feedback, and focus the municipal policy proposal with local and regional committees of HFH Honduras, COHVISOLES and selected city councils.

The COHVISOLES were reactivated and they appropriated the public policy proposal.

HFH Honduras found that some of the COHVISOLES had been inactive for more than a year. It decided to contact the national COHVISOL and support it in reactivating and restructuring the COHVISOLES in the five selected municipalities.

They became key protagonists in the following phases of the strategy.

The new COHVISOLES boards appropriated the public policy proposal and took it on as a good cause to fight for.

Phase 2: HFH Honduras and the COHVISOLES lobby to gain allies and to present the policy, with the support of several stakeholders, to the Municipal Corporation

Direct lobby with friendly councilors was the prioritized strategy. The policy was presented to them in an individual and informal manner.

Collaboration is central to the strategy.

COHVISOLES encompass a wide range of representatives from the social sector. As such, they were considered to be the best vehicle to promote the articulation of key stakeholders.

Phase 3: Presentation to and approval of the policy by the Municipal Corporation

With the collaboration of the councilors convened during the lobbying phase, meetings were organized to present the housing policy to the Municipal Corporation.

HFH Honduras acted as advisor to the COHVISOLES who were responsible for presenting the policy.

The Municipal Corporation generated several mechanisms for discussing the policy proposal:

- Created a commission formed by councilors.
- Created a commission formed by the municipal attorney and the planning director.

Members of the COHVISOLES, accompanied by HFH Honduras, negotiated with the named commissions the content and terms of the commitments that the Municipal Corporation institutionalized with the approval of the social housing policy.

Is important to understand the different housing access needs women and men have.

The presence of women in the discussions made evident their inclusion in the process and recognized their contributions.

The ratification and final minutes, with the agreed changes, of the new municipal social housing policy by four city councils.

Phase 4: Ensure the fulfillment of the approved policy

The policy had been recently approved at the time that the systematization was done. This phase will be implemented in the near future.

Third Section

WHAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED IN ONE YEAR?

Greater organizational capability

- HFH Honduras strengthened its advocacy capacity by involving its internal network of regional offices.
- HFH Honduras vitalized local leadership through local volunteer advocacy committees.
- HFH Honduras gained greater visibility.

A validated advocacy strategy

- Four city councils approved a municipal social housing policy.
- A reference for municipal housing policies.

Social stakeholders strengthened and with advocacy capability

- Four municipal COHVISOLES were reactivated and restructured.
- The COHVISOLES participated actively in the revision of policies.
- The COHVISOLES gained knowledge on their situation.
- The presence of women social representatives in the discussions with the Municipal Corporations made evident a female leadership.

Greater political will to incorporate the issue of housing in the municipal agenda

- The local government gained leadership and was legitimated.
- The Municipal Corporations formed commissions with councilors and other officials to discuss the policy proposals.
- The municipal authorities were made aware and learned about the issue.

Strengthened Alliances

- COHVISOLES and HFH Honduras complemented their roles for advocacy.
- COHVISOLES and local governments will allow future discussions relating to basic services, tenure, among others.

“We believe that we have gone beyond what we had thought... we have seen how citizen participation was mobilized in the negotiation process...”

We have gone beyond what was planned which was the outcome of five housing policies.”

*Alberto Benítez,
HFH Honduras
Executive Director*

Final expected outcome:

Five housing policies approved by the Municipal Corporations

- Four municipal housing policies approved.
- Budget allocations for housing agreed upon.

The process continues. In the near future:

- The approved policies will promote advancement on more specific aspects of the housing issue such as secure tenure and housing finance.
- The approved policies will serve as instruments that facilitate greater citizen participation.
- The approved policies could benefit 300 thousand families that live in inadequate housing. This represents 53% of the households in the participating municipalities.

WHAT WERE THE LESSONS LEARNED?

On advocacy planning

- To plan the process in phases, with specific strategies and objectives that facilitate the implementation and repeatability of the initiative.
- To document, monitor, and evaluate the experience from the beginning increases effectiveness and contributes to learning.

Public policy is an end of advocacy. It is a tool to promote citizen participation and to bring together stakeholders.

On strategy

- To take advantage of the social capital of the stakeholders gathered by the COHVISOLES and HFH Honduras volunteers facilitates the inclusion of the policy in the municipal agenda.
- The lack of political will of the mayor and Municipal Corporation and the lack of involvement by the COHVISOL impedes the achievement of expected outcomes. This was the case in San Pedro Sula.

The strategy is a thought out path, it has a structure with diverse components: context, stakeholders, processes, and decisions.

It is not a sum of activities.

On the participatory process for the elaboration of the policy proposal

- Discussion with allies in the community enriches the proposal.
- The process creates capabilities, trust, and legitimacy among the participating stakeholders.
- To gather information and create knowledge at the community level on the issue of housing requires a greater investment of time in the policy proposal elaboration phase. It also ensures community participation.

On the negotiation process with public authorities

- A record of the process and results is necessary. To neglect this can cause delays and complications in the process.
- Better time and agenda management in the coordination with several stakeholders increases efficiency in the advocacy process.

WHAT STEPS COULD BE TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE ADVOCACY PROCESS AND OUTCOMES?

1. Identify priority vulnerable groups to better focus the municipal policy

In Honduras, the vulnerable groups are diverse. It is necessary to know better the profile and housing conditions of priority vulnerable groups to ensure that their right to adequate housing be secured.

2. Generate information at the community level as a participatory process

This information is to be used in the policy proposals and for advocacy and accountability. The involved stakeholders need to develop abilities to listen, analyze, and report key information.

*The vulnerable groups
in Honduras are:*

3. Formulate and implement instruments of the approved policies paying attention to the priorities of the local stakeholders

These instruments must use local information and give priority to the issues that local stakeholders have identified. These issues are:

- Access to land
- Access to secure tenure
- Access to financing, credit and subsidy sources for low income groups.

- *Poor women heads of households with children*
 - *At-risk children and teenagers*
 - *Elderly without social protection*
 - *Persons with physical and mental disability marginalized in the labor market*
 - *Indigenous population*
 - *Afro-Honduran population*
 - *People living in at risk geographic areas*
 - *Families with incomes equal to or less than three minimum wages*
-

To address these issues requires advocacy for changes at the national level; this raises new and different challenges.

4. Emphasize the right to adequate housing and its components in the municipal policy

The focus on adequate housing provides a framework that establishes the necessary conditions and pertinent norms to implement this right.

5. Strengthen the inclusion and leadership of women in the COHVISOLES

Achieving diverse participation in the process assures that the different experiences and contributions of women and men enhance the adequate housing advocacy efforts.

6. Reinforce participatory monitoring and evaluation of advocacy and public policy processes

These practices guarantee that the involved stakeholders record the advances, recognize the lessons learned, and define areas of improvement.

7. Find public or private, national or international sources for resources to invest in advocacy and participatory public policy processes.

Advocacy is a practice that needs financial resources to carry out its actions.

8. Continue the advocacy process at the national level.

HFH Honduras, the COHVISOLES and other key stakeholders in the country have identified that a National Policy of Credit and Subsidy for Social Housing is necessary to assure access to the most vulnerable families.

The steps that have been taking place have done so in a new national political context. One in which the issue of adequate housing could be weakened.

The political situation in Honduras at the end of the first stage of the initiative, after the exit of the then-president Manuel Zelaya, generated uncertainty and political crisis. Political differences and rivalries deepened.

After the last municipal elections, only one mayor of the participating municipalities in the advocacy initiative was re-elected. This challenges the institutionalization of the municipal social housing policies approved while seeking to extend the advocacy project to other ten urban centers.

The new national government has announced the economic panorama of the country as “truly somber” and a possible “heritage of a country in bankruptcy.” It has also stated that it will promote “dialogue and national reconciliation.” The National Congress approved a “Vision for the Country 2010-2038” and a “National Plan 2010-2022” without a prior citizen consultation. The emphasis of the new government is on planning and a modern and efficient state.

Challenge:

To consolidate the institutionalization of the approved municipal housing policies while at the same time expanding the initiative to ten other urban centers.

This current national situation points to the following future advocacy processes to:

- Prioritize the housing sector in the new National Plan.
- Fight for the permanence of the national Program of Citizen Housing and Social Credit (PROVICCSOL) which was an achievement of the COHVISOLES and other non-governmental organizations, including HFH Honduras.
- Reform the institutional framework that regulates the housing sector, and its corresponding institutions characterized by great fragmentation and little coordination among them.
- Assign public resources to the housing sector.
- Contribute to the overcoming of inequality and poverty in Honduras.

CREDITS

Booklet created by:

Flora Calderón-Steck

Consultant

Habitat for Humanity Latin American and the Caribbean

Lina María Obando

Organizational Learning Manager

Habitat for Humanity Latin American and the Caribbean

María Luisa Zanelli

Advocacy/Outreach Partnership Manager

Habitat for Humanity Latin American and the Caribbean

Based on the systematization done by:

Francisco Duque y Gema Stratico

Supervised by Rosemary Fernholz

Duke Center for International Development, Duke University

With the collaboration of Habitat for Humanity Honduras

Graphic Design

Diana Rodríguez

Marketing and Publications Coordinator

Habitat for Humanity Latin American and the Caribbean

First Printing

Printed in Costa Rica, March 2010



Hábitat para la Humanidad América Latina y el Caribe, Apartado Postal Local 1513-1200 Pavas, Costa Rica; Tel +506 22968120; Fax +506 22917475; e-mail lac@habitat.org; www.habitatlatino.org