

"This is one of these experiences that made me feel human. Wherever people come from, we are all humans and we share the same humanity. And I am going to be so selfish in a way, but I am going to take this experience back home and put more energy into working with people." (Shatha Safi, participant)

Local Housing Movement Program, Minia, Egypt

World Habitat Award Winning Project 2010

Study visit 04 - 09 February 2012



Hosted by BLACD



In collaboration with HIC-MENA



Supported by BSHF



Participants:

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Nasha'at Tahboub, Palestinian Housing Council, **Palestine**

Shatha Safi, RIWAQ, **Palestine**

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Benedict Balderrama, Partnership of Philippine Support Service Agencies, **Philippines**

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In 2010, the **Local Housing Movement Program** in Minia, Egypt, won a World Habitat Award.

Two **World Habitat Awards** are given each year by the **Building and Social Housing Foundation** (BSHF) to projects that provide practical and innovative solutions to current housing needs and problems.

Projects are awarded based on their **innovation, sustainability** and **transferability**.

As well as rewarding good practice in housing, the awards are designed to raise awareness of these practices so that they can be **shared** with people around the world and transferred to different contexts.

As part of this good practice sharing, **study visits** take place each year to the two winning projects from the previous year.

Between February 4th and 9th 2012, 11 individuals from 9 countries came together in Minia to **learn from the experience** of and **to give feedback** on the work of the Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development (BLACD), the organisation responsible for the Local Housing Movement Program. They also looked at **land and housing rights in Cairo**, through activities supported by the Habitat International Coalition MENA.

This report is designed to give a brief overview of what the group learnt and of suggestions they made about the project visited. It also provides the basis for further exchanges and discussions.

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All pictures courtesy of Ahmed Soliman, Janset Shawash, BSHF and BLACD.



An empowering approach

Local Housing Movement Program, Minia, Egypt

"BLACD is committed to trying to facilitate the lives of communities without giving them everything; teaching them, instead of giving."

(Marie Bailloux, participant)

"Today, when we visited Shoshan Village, we saw a debate between our friend Ahmed and community members; it was a very good sign. It means that BLACD's awareness activities have been successful, that the people know their rights."

(Abu Rayhan Al-Beeronee, participant)

"In our society, in Pakistan, they just build the houses and that's it."

(Almas Shakoor, participant)

"One of the highlights of the visit is hearing people speaking about their situations and about the impact of the project."

(Benedict Balderrama, participant)



(Elements of context)

- BLACD mainly works with significantly marginalised communities on the eastern bank of the Nile.
- Most community members work as quarry labour, fishermen or small-scale farmers, earning precarious incomes and suffering from harsh living conditions.
- Women are particularly excluded from decision-making processes.

- BLACD strengthens community members' knowledge and skills via training around health, environment, livelihoods, literacy, project management and monitoring.

- Affordable loans and social and technical support allow community members to become active agents in transforming their housing conditions.

- Traditional gender roles are transforming as BLACD supports women's organization and empowerment.

(Building community capacity)

(Participatory governance)

- BLACD supports communities in their negotiations with utility providers and local municipalities, transforming broader governance processes.

- BLACD successfully enhances community members' sense of citizenship, as evidenced in their self-confidence during our meetings.

- In Cairo, we learnt that strengthening community participation and inclusive governance in the urban context is crucial.

We learnt that...

We suggested that...

- There would be value in linking the communities that BLACD works with, so that they can exchange their experiences and learn from each other.

- BLACD builds greater linkages with government in order to achieve greater impact and transform governance processes further.

- BLACD builds on its training activities to improve education opportunities for the youth.

A comprehensive approach

Local Housing Movement Program, Minia, Egypt

"I find that BLACD is doing a very complete, extremely global work for the communities, not only focusing on one or two or three aspect of their lives, but on many different aspects."

(Marie Bailloux, participant)

"Our goal is to improve the **quality of life** of 80% of the population of poor communities, for them to have a better life in health and safe houses that they own."

(Mina Mokbel, BLACD)

"I really appreciate the work of BLACD towards women's empowerment."

(Ahmadi Alamgul, participant)

"What I find interesting in the work of BLACD is how they integrate the values, strategies and approaches for community development: housing, microfinance, access to community services... and, integrated in all that, the community empowerment component."

(Benedict Balderrama, participant)



(An integrated approach...)

We learnt that...

BLACD implements an **integrated approach to development**, encompassing: physical improvements, access to services, land tenure, environmental issues, social development including health, literacy and gender, and livelihoods.

- The Local Housing Movement Program has both a **tangible and an intangible** impact on people's lives, especially women's, with an increased sense of self-esteem and dignity.

- Its focus on behavioural change - in terms of health and hygiene, gender, environment management - ensures a **long-term** impact.

(...with a holistic impact)

(Urban integrated development)

- In **Cairo**, TAKWEEN also seeks to promote and foster integrated community development, with a focus on the comprehensive and inclusive rehabilitation of historic areas.

- The **Al-Darb Al Ahmar** revitalization project is an important example of integrated urban intervention, focusing on physical improvements, micro-credit, livelihoods and social services.

We suggested that...

- Building partnerships with actors holding specialized forms of expertise is crucial in order to implement integrated approaches.

- Beyond meeting basic needs, it is possible to build more pleasant places by adding greenery, colours and wall plastering, without spending too much money.

- Paying attention to cultural heritage contributes to the pride and identity of places.

A rights-based approach

Local Housing Movement Program, Minia, Egypt

"We aim at teaching community members what their rights are and how they can claim these rights."

(Mina Mokbel, BLACD)

"Decent housing is about more than loans or building materials, it is about human rights and power."

(Building and Social Housing Foundation)

"Land disputes and land issues are part of the Arab uprising."

(Joseph Schechla, Habitat International Coalition MENA)



(The land and housing issue)

We learnt that...

- Only 5% of the surface of Egypt is inhabited and there is an acute shortage of suitable land for human settlement.
- The lack of a long-term vision from decision-makers and the lack of planning frameworks add to the difficulty in accessing suitable, well-located land.
- In Minia, 30% of homeowners do not own their land, but pay rent on a yearly basis to government bodies.

- The right to adequate housing is broader than the right to access a house or a piece of land. It is linked to other, sometimes intangible rights such as the right to safety and dignity.
- It is enshrined in international legislation, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966).
- A rights-based approach considers populations as citizens vs beneficiaries or users.

(The rights-based approach)

(BLACD and the right to land and housing)

- BLACD provides vulnerable communities with legal support in the case of land disputes.
- BLACD strengthens community members' awareness of their rights through community meetings and information posters.
- Organized communities have been participating in demonstrations and rallies, claiming their rights in front of government actors.

We suggested that...

- Particular attention is paid to women's rights to inheritance.
- BLACD builds greater linkages with government agencies in order to influence land policy and planning.