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**Housing: A process, not an end.  
The case of TECHO model: participatory processes and capacity  
building with housing provision in Chile**

By Sandra Moye-Holz and Constanza Gonzalez-Mathiesen

Housing: A process, not an end.

## The case of TECHO model: participatory processes and capacity building with housing provision in Chile

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### 1. Introduction

For communities living in extreme poverty, a new housing project represents a life changing opportunity that can have larger positive impacts on their living conditions than just ameliorating their shelter. Further building on this idea, the process of housing provision in itself has great potential for targeting other social issues when approached in a participatory manner as an instrument for change. This approach can have larger and long lasting impacts on communities' lifestyles, increasing their social capital and opportunities to overcome poverty.

In the context of Chilean housing policies and issues, this paper elaborates on the approach and methodology used by the youth-led NGO TECHO for housing provision, as their case illustrates the potential of housing provision participatory process for capacity building in an applied context when approached as a mean to attract and involve communities for targeting other social issues, largely and positively increasing the impacts on low-income communities' lives.

This paper first describes the context around housing in Chile, supporting that the opportunity to tackle other social outcomes through the housing provision process is often not fully being taken upon. Secondly, TECHO's approach to housing provision process is revised as an effective practice for capacity building, showing applied ways of using it as a mean for greater social impact. Finally, a description of some of the outcomes and challenges of TECHO's approach is given.

### 2. Housing Provision in Chile: Housing as an end

Following the increasing urbanization trends in Latin America, Chile is a highly urbanised country, with a population of over 17 million, with almost 90% of its population living in cities (OECD 2013; UN-HABITAT 2011). Chile was the first South American country to join the OECD as it is one of Latin America's fastest growing economies and has consolidated macroeconomic stability and a strong, reliable institutional framework (World Bank 2013). Although in recent decades the country has made tremendous economic progress, as well as in poverty reduction and housing provision, Chile still ranks low in

several topics of OECD's Better Live Index (OECD 2013), particularly regarding housing issues and inequality.

With the aim of reducing informal settlements and reduce the accumulated housing deficit, during the 80s Chile's social housing subsidy system was restructured as a market-based provision approach through Public Financing Mechanisms (UN-HABITAT 2011; Posner 2012). From 1980 to 2006 massive production of social housing took place through the well-known tri-partite strategy (comprised by one-time subsidy, mandatory savings, and optional loan) effectively reducing housing deficit (UN-HABITAT 2011; Rodriguez, 2011; Posner 2012). However, the housing policies were too focused on volume, neglecting important aspects that are critical for housing long-term sustainability (OECD 2013). Some of the deficiencies include physical issues such as low quality, poor design and inappropriate location, that lead to dissatisfaction among beneficiaries; and social issues such as insecurity, lack of space, marginalization and intensified social stratification, and discouraged collective action and unity (Rodriguez 2011; Posner 2012; OECD 2013).

Given that the housing problem was no longer a quantitative issue but a qualitative one instead, in 2006 (and later in 2011) the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism (Ministerio de Vivienda y Urbanismo, MINVU) launched important changes to the housing policy shifting the emphasis to the 20% poorest population, who were mostly unable to access the previous programs (UN-HABITAT 2011). In addition, the Housing Solidary Funds program (Fondo Solidario de Eleccion de la Vivienda), allowed social and private organizations (facilitator entities, EGIS or EPs) to work together with municipalities to provide housing, as well as to develop solutions for other neighbourhood social issues (Burgos 2011).

This program has a multipurpose character to contribute overcoming poverty that considers: (1) reduce the housing deficit, (2) provide with a quality product; (3) ensure the adequate information to target projects design for to each community through participatory instances; (4) and consolidate the participatory management of the public system (Guernica Consultores, 2012). Nevertheless, housing provision is still predominantly seen as an end, overlooking the advantages of participatory processes involved in the housing provision, and its potential value for capacity building in the lowest-income sectors of the country.

### 3. TECHO and the value of the housing process for capacity building

TECHO (Un Techo para Chile) is a youth led non-profit organization created in 1997, now established in 19 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. TECHO started working together with families living in extreme poverty and volunteers to overcome slums' poverty and produce concrete solutions to their specific problematic.

TECHO's community intervention model is organised in three phases: (1) insertion into the slums and development of a diagnostic of the families' needs; (2) implementation of

solutions related to liveability, education, labour, or other that may address the identified existing problems; (3) implementation of lasting and sustainable housing solutions, such as basic services, regulations of property, infrastructure provision, or new housing projects, articulating the families with government institutions (TECHO 2013).

### 3.1. TECHO's housing process: effective practice for capacity building

As the central aspect of the third phase of their intervention model, TECHO works as a housing facilitator entity (EGIS/EP) and provides technical and social assistance for families to access government subsidies and develop permanent housing solutions through a robust participatory approach. Following this approach, they delivered 3,981 housing units between 2006 and 2012 (TECHO 2012). The housing provision process is seen as an instrument to engage with the large community to target other social issues that can positively impact on communities' lives and, if not addressed, can detriment the overall result of the housing project potential.

TECHO's participatory model consolidates the community's self-management through four areas of intervention: (1) community organisation; (2) education; (3) employment; (4) habitability. This participation model can take place during all the stages of their intervention model, but is intensified during the implementation of lasting and sustainable housing solutions.

The following are some of the innovative approaches that TECHO has taken in the different areas of intervention:

#### *a) Community organisation*

Activities are developed for the families to get organised and create a sense community, ownership, and responsibility of their way to overcome poverty. In addition, empowering local leaders is a key focus of TECHO's participatory approach, ensuring that the community leaders have the tools and resources to stand for the best interests of the people they represent (TECHO 2012). The specific tasks and challenges of a housing project present great opportunities for communities and leaders to learn how to arrive to a consensus, to look for the collective good, to relate with the existing support network provided by the government, to get empowered and become change promoters and key actors for their community and even extended society.

#### *b) Education*

The general objective of this area of intervention is to tackle the educational disparities that exist in the country, creating learning spaces for the integral development of communities, focusing on different target groups, such as school children that get tutorials to support their formal studies; and adults that assist to workshops to develop employment working/trade skills (TECHO 2012). Engaging families in educational programs during the housing project can certainly increase the social impact of a housing project on the long term, improving their knowledge as well as their tools for the working environment.

### c) *Employment*

Training initiatives are developed to potentiate communities' employability, as well as to support and increase entrepreneurship in the communities. Given the fact that a 30% of households in slums work independently TECHO encourages innovation and the creation of new employment sources within the communities they work with, according to the capacities and context of each entrepreneur or community (TECHO 2012).

This approach builds on the clear connection between housing and income generation (Onyebueke 2001). Home-based enterprises (HBEs) are of great relevance for income generation, in particular for low-income communities and women, increasing their employment opportunities (Tipple 2004). They also can contribute to the provision of skills to the young (Ezeadichie 2012); bring services and goods closer to people (Tipple 2004); help to finance the dwelling and its maintenance and improvements (Strassmann 1987); and increase the neighbourhood integration with its surrounding communities.

### d) *Habitability*

TECHO supports the families in their process of looking for sustainable, lasting, dignified housing options (TECHO 2012). The process of housing design not only considers families' preferences and inputs, but allows TECHO to provide them with a general understanding of their housing rights, subsidy possibilities and common social housing issues for them to take into account during the following participation instances.

More recently, considering the current energy insecurity situation in Chile (high prices and scarce resources) and the future repercussions of climate change, TECHO has implemented energy efficiency features in some of its projects. The housing complexes of Lo Espejo and Cumbres Kilimanjaro, for example, have been fitted with panel SIP, a versatile technology which has good thermal and structural qualities, is resistant to fire and insects, and reduce labour costs. In addition the community of Lo Espejo obtained a subsidy for hot water solar systems and fundraised for energy saving light bulbs (Mazzone 2011; TECHO 2013b).

Nowadays, TECHO's architects are working closely with the Chilean Energy Efficiency Agency (*Agencia Chilena de Eficiencia Energetica, Achee*) on the design of additional energy efficient features that could be incorporated to the housing projects. Additionally a new pilot programme will be run by Achee in some of TECHO's projects involving energy use workshops for the community (TECHO 2013b).

## 4. Outcomes, Challenges and Lessons Learnt

TECHO's community engagement approach has proven to be an effective way to build capacity and overcome some housing issues such as house abandonment and dissatisfaction. It has also empowered communities and encouraged their leaders to become change agents allowing for the development of permanent solutions for their immediate problems with a long lasting impact.

The improvement in their quality of life is the most important result for the families. Although not great economic improvement happens within the community, employment up-skilling and capacity building from TECHO's process allows families transitioning from slums to housing developments, to cope with the increased living costs, such as paying bills that usually they did not paid before. Furthermore, it allows them to integrate and access a broader range of city networks, institutions and services, and families are encouraged to take responsibility of their own development.

Regarding the physical aspect of housing, apart from the everyday challenges such as budget constraints and community cooperation for maintenance, TECHO's Habitat Development Team face the challenge of closing the loop of their process by carrying out a post-project evaluation, specifically regarding how the families are modifying their houses and how this knowledge could be incorporated to the design phase.

Modifications and extensions, which families are making to their homes, influence the functionality of the house. Two cases can be mentioned: modifications for carrying out commercial activities, and spatial modifications and how do they affect energy use.

In terms of the modifications for carrying out commercial activities (home based businesses), although home based businesses provide a range of benefits, stated before; their possible detrimental effects on the community also need to be considered. Drawbacks include negative impacts on the residential environment, decreasing residential quality or dwelling's value; creation of hazardous waste management; and inappropriate working conditions; among others (Tipple, 1993, p.532).

Moreover, spatial modifications if done improperly and with low quality materials, can affect the efficiency of the energy saving features (if any). For instance, leaving cracks and draughts or blocking sunlight affect the thermal insulation and result in a colder and less comfortable home. Rather than condemning the modifications carried out by the families, these should be regarded as issues to deal with during the participatory design process of housing projects to achieve the optimal integration of business and extension opportunities, avoiding detrimental alterations of the built environment.

By carrying out a post-project/post-occupancy evaluation TECHO could incorporate knowledge of how families are actually modifying their homes into the design phase to further prepare/designate the space for expansion or modification. For example, designating space for local businesses and storage facilities in the community areas could allow families to work outside their homes, yet within their own community, which means they could still take care of their relatives (children or elderly), and would not have to modify their houses and allow that space for family activities. Furthermore, the smart designation of areas for modification and expansion could allow families save in energy bills while having comfort and the flexibility of using the spaces as needed.

## 5. Conclusion

Chile's strong economy, reliable institutions and competitive housing policies have allowed private and non-for-profit organizations to be involved in housing provision. TECHO has not only taken up the challenge but sees housing provision as a sustainable way to overcome poverty and engage low-income families in creating permanent solutions for their immediate problems.

TECHO's innovative community participatory intervention model creates the opportunity for effective capacity building. Community organisation, through leadership, involvement and empowerment, and education are the most immediate and tangible aspects of the model. The improvement of their employment opportunities and a design that works towards habitability create longer lasting impact in the lifestyles of the communities.

Nonetheless, the transition of slum-dwellers to housing complex present design challenges for TECHO, particularly regarding modifications and extensions which influence the functionality of the house. A post-project evaluation would allow TECHO to develop designs that allow for expansion and modification of the premises in accordance to the family's needs, while avoiding detrimental effects on the community, discomfort and energy poverty.

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Sandra is a Project Coordinator and Research Officer with the Global Compact Cities Programme and she has been with the Programme since January 2013. She holds a Master of Environment degree from Melbourne University, focused on Climate Change and Sustainable Community Development, and a Carbon Accounting accreditation from Swinburne University. Sandra's current research is focused on developing in energy efficiency measures for low income housing with the Chilean NGO TECHO. She is working with Professor Ralph Horne. They secured COALAR funding to collaborate with TECHO and present findings internationally, at the [World Urban Forum](#) and a seminar on [Sustainable Urban Housing in Chile](#). Sandra is leading the 2014 Global Compact Cities Programme survey of participant cities. She is also involved in reasearch on natural disasters in Australia in RMIT University.

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Constanza has held a research project of the Global Compact Cities Programme since August 2013. She is being supported to conduct research related to the evolution and impacts of housing projects for slum dwellers developed by Chilean NGO Techo.

Constanza is an accredited architect and holds a Master of Urban Planning degree from Melbourne University, specialising in International Development planning. Costanza is from Chile; she is a native Spanish speaker, and is a fluent speaker of both French and English. She has worked with slums dwellers and victims of the 2010 disaster in Concepcion, Chile, in her role as a project coordinator for TECHO. She has also conducted research on land-use planning potential for developing disaster resilience.

Constanza's research interests include: slum upgrading and social housing; community development; urban and planning theory and policy; sustainable and resilient land-use planning; and design.

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