2.0 Response

2.1 Introduction

Habitat for Humanity (HFH) is an international, non-profit housing organisation. Our mission is to eliminate poverty housing from the world, and to make adequate, affordable shelter a matter of conscience and action.

Since 1976 HFH has worked with more than 500,000 families to construct, rehabilitate or preserve homes; to advocate for fair and just housing policies; and to provide training and access to resources to help families improve their shelter conditions.

HFH Ireland was founded in 2002 and since then it has sent almost 2,000 volunteers overseas to build houses in partnership with local communities. These volunteers return home as advocates for HFH and continue to fundraise and create awareness of the poverty issues they witnessed. In Ireland, HFH has built or renovated 10 homes in Dublin and partnered with three other non-profits to renovate their housing facilities for their service users. More than 2,000 people have volunteered on these projects in Ireland.

In preparation for this response HFH Ireland consulted with our colleagues in the Advocacy and International Housing Programme Departments of HFH International. The recommendations made are based on our 35 years' experience working with families, communities, partners and governments in more than 90 countries around the world.

We are members of Dochas, Idea and the Volunteer Working Group and support the responses submitted by them.

2.2 Progress Made

Since 2006, notable progress has been made in many of the areas as outlined in the Consultation Paper. Irish Aid programmes are highly regarded internationally, with the OECD recently commending Irish Aid for having a 'cutting edge' aid programme.

It is regrettable that ODA has decreased since 2008 and there has been a lack of progress towards the target of spending 0.7 percent of GNI on Overseas Development Assistance.

2.3 Changing Context

Poverty is constantly changing and becoming more complex. Rapid urbanisation is challenging our understanding of poverty and our interventions to alleviate it. More than half of the world's population are now living in cities. Over the next two decades, 95 percent of the world's urban growth will be in developing countries. By 2030, cities in the developing world will be home to

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almost four billion people, or 80 percent of the world's urban dwellers.[1] Cities are unprepared to accommodate this growth resulting in slums swelling. This response recommends that addressing this rapidly growing housing need in cities is a key a component of any poverty reduction strategy.

2.4 Key Issues

Housing

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that *"everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including . . . housing . . . ."* Habitat for Humanity views housing as a catalyst to breaking the poverty cycle. Aside from the obvious benefits of having a safe, warm, dry place to live, a proper housing environment also contributes significantly to other social outcomes. These include a reduction in poverty, improvement in well-being of women and children, and the provision of safe, decent community environments. Essentially, **what housing can deliver is as important as what housing is.**

1. Prioritise the provision of safe, decent shelter through a range of housing solutions which enable communities to take control and improve their own shelter needs.

Each community has specific housing needs for which the contributory factors need to be addressed as part of a solution. The following discusses some of these issues and gives recommendations on how they should be addressed based on HFH's experience.

Land tenure

Accessing land, asserting land rights and protecting vulnerable groups from property grabbing play a key role in improving housing conditions for the poor. We recommend that Irish Aid:

1. Prioritise improving the **security of tenure for the most vulnerable populations**—the urban poor, women and children, and those affected by disasters.
2. Support **education, advocacy and awareness** of individual rights at a community level as a key element of improving tenure security for the poor, especially for the above populations most at risk.
3. Encourage governments to implement, and civil society to campaign for, national and local laws that create a **framework for granting tenure security**, including an accessible, transparent and accountable land administration system to combat corruption and inefficiency in government.

For more information see HFH International's 2008 Shelter Report available at www.habitatireland.ie/publications.

Health

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[1] UN Habitat. —State of the World's Cities – 2006/7⸱
http://www.unhabitat.org/pmss/listItemDetails.aspx?publicationID=2101 (accessed April 2012)

Living in substandard conditions has a serious negative impact on families' and communities' health. Risks include the spread of infectious diseases, poor public health access, tainted water supplies and inadequate sanitation. We recommend that:

1. Efforts to address global health must reach beyond the typical health-related expenditures to address the **core issues** that cause health problems to arise in the first place.
2. **Education efforts** should be developed to help individuals and local and national governments understand the effect of unhealthy homes on a community's health. This should include more research and funding to further investigate housing costs, the health benefits of improved housing, and the effectiveness of improved housing in making neighbourhoods more sustainable and stable.
3. **Coordinate** holistic health and housing approaches in developing countries as well as in those hit by natural disasters.

For more information see HFH International's 2011 Shelter Report available at www.habitatireland.ie/publications.

Disaster

Over the past five years, more than 14.1 million people have lost their homes to disaster. Adequate housing plays a pivotal role after a disaster and is a family's most important asset. Not only does it provide shelter from hazards, but it also is a place to maintain social networks, access city services such as water and sanitation, raise children, and often to conduct business.

When planning to respond to disasters, we recommend:

1. **Look beyond the emergency stage.** Too often, humanitarian assistance for shelter stops at relief. The design of emergency solutions should be tied to that of permanent solutions. Humanitarian shelter assistance should incorporate efforts into long-term strategies, and donors that provide funding should keep long-term recovery in mind.

2. Tenure security also is important to **rehabilitation and reconstruction after a disaster** and should be a top priority in disaster response. A lack of land ownership records or an unclear legal framework for land transfers can delay or prevent assistance to the poorest displaced residents. Solutions to unclear land tenure should be identified and implemented at the beginning of the reconstruction process. If land tenure problems exist before a disaster, flexible approaches such as community enumeration should be used to establish ownership before rebuilding.

For more information see HFH International's 2012 Shelter Report available at www.habitatireland.ie/publications.

2.5 Ways of working

Innovation

It is estimated that 21 million new housing units are needed each year. As the causes of the need change, solutions must be adapted to meet this.

1. Searching and supporting new and **imaginative ways** to address the global housing crisis.

Partnership/Collaboration

We cannot build 21 million new housing units each year alone. We need to work together with families, communities, partners and governments to do this.

1. **Promote and engage in communications across sectors.** This is particularly vital when responding to disasters in urban areas as it is more complex than in rural areas because of higher population density. As a result, greater coordination is required among sectors. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Cluster System coordinates NGO activity within specific sectors, but coordination between sectors needs improvement.

Engaging with the Irish Public

Irish people have a long history of solidarity with poor and vulnerable communities around the world and showing compassion and empathy with those less fortunate at home. We are proud to be part of this tradition and believe, that even in the difficult times the country is facing, this work will continue. Irish people have a right to know and understand how their tax money is transforming lives overseas and Irish Aid and their partner organisations have a responsibility to ensure this happens.

1. Support the establishment of a **Volunteer Corp**, as recommended by the Volunteer Working Group, which promotes good practice and learning across the sector and encourages volunteer continuous engagement.
2. Support volunteering as **Development Education** initiatives which seek to provide volunteers with the opportunity to genuinely engage with the issues they witness in country.

2.6 Other comments

In recent years HFH's work, particularly in Africa and the Middle East and Asia, has moved toward urban renewal programmes. Below is a case study of this work in Madagascar.

In Madagascar 93 percent of the population lives in overcrowded, unsanitary slums. People struggle to survive on less than US$1 per day. The poorest families crowd into structures no larger than 25.4

square meters (273 square feet). In Toliara, a city southwest of the capital, Antananarivo, a mere 10.8 percent of people have running water in their homes. Only two public water points serve an estimated 1,300 families.

In this country, the first Habitat slum upgrade project was based in the city of Moramanga, east of Antananarivo. This project included three water points, 1,000 meters of paved walkways, 3,160 meters of drainage channel, one laundry point, two rubbish collection points and three sanitation blocks, in addition to 79 homes.

The second slum upgrade project was in Toliara. In the first year work was completed on 49 new and 27 renovated houses, three public latrines, six water points, 1,000 meters of paved pathways, 1,000 meters of drainage channel and one laundry point.

These projects have a major impact on the families' daily lives. Rickshaw carriers can access the pathways, and new shops have opened along the larger and cleaner pathways. In Toliara, floodwater brought by a cyclone in 2010 dried in a few hours because of the drainage channels installed, and children can now use the walkways to get to school.