

**Un Techo Para Mi País
(A Roof for my Country)
(1997-2009)**

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In Uruguay, a settlement where Un Techo Para Mi País has been working to expand upon its development of temporary housing by promoting self-help programs, they came up with ideas for projects to improve their situation. Alicia, one of the women who live there, suggests that they build new roads. She has a son who has seizures and the ambulances cannot enter into the settlement. This idea was well received and plans are underway to begin the project. She says that little by little the people of that settlement are opening up and that things are beginning to change.

Celina, one of the best cooks in the settlement, put together a cooking group. She taught the women in the group how to cook “specialties” such as salsas, soups, stews, a variety of other meals, and vegetables. She also taught other tricks for the kitchen, and when the course was completed, the women all got a diploma as well as new expectations from their families. One woman in the group related that her sons expected her to be a good cook because she had studied with an expert. Celina’s group is a favorite among the women.

Alicia and Celina reflect the industriousness of the people in their settlement. Each new successful project gives the people of the settlement renewed pride and faith in themselves.

INTRODUCTION

Un Techo Para Mi País (UTPMP) is a Latin American based, international non-profit organization, founded in 1997 in Chile. The mission is to improve the quality of life of impoverished families through transitional houses and social inclusion programs in a joint effort between university volunteers and the communities. In addition to denouncing the precarious reality of the slums where millions of people live, the mission also includes involving the entire society in the task of constructing a Latin America that is more united and inclusive, without the injustice of poverty. In 2001, the organization expanded into the surrounding countries and is currently operating in 15 Latin American countries. It is run by university students and young professionals that work in areas of extreme poverty, building transitional homes, conducting social inclusion programs, and working towards creating sustainable communities.

The organization mainly provides service to those in extreme poverty, living in slums, with no shelter or inadequate shelter. Slums, as defined by UTPMP, are settlements of eight or more families illegally occupying land and lacking at least one of three basic services: water, electricity or sewage. Since 1997, approximately 42,000 transitional houses have been built across the different countries, benefiting 180,000 people through the help of 200,000 volunteers. In addition, 51,000 people in 8 countries are benefiting from social inclusion programs, staffed by 5,000 permanent volunteers. More than 20,000 university students participate annually, along with more than 300 hired individuals (most of which started out as volunteers in their respective countries).

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Un Techo Para Mi País was founded in 1997 by a group of students and the Jesuit priest Felipe Berrios S.J. After an initial project (building a chapel in Curanilahue, Chile) was completed, the group felt the need to denounce the conditions of extreme poverty throughout Latin America, where millions of people were living in shantytowns. They did this through the construction of basic transitional homes, and the implementation of social inclusion programs. During the process, the group realized the need to involve the society at large because the lack of opportunity and the conditions in which over 200 million Latin Americans were living, represented a society without justice that affected everyone.

During the first year of the organization (1997), they built 200 emergency homes in the cities of Curanilahue and Lebu. They then set the goal of 2000 homes by the year 2000. This goal was reached in August of 1999. In the year 2000 the project went national and volunteer groups were formed from Arica (in the north) to Puerto Mont (in the south) and the name Un Techo Para Chile (A Roof for Chile) was created. In 2001 Un Techo Para Chile became the official name of the organization, and it also officially became a nonprofit organization. This led to the creation of Un Techo Para Mi País, as the organization expanded from Chile into other countries in the same year.

Today, the organization is active in the following 15 countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay. The thousands of youth volunteers and community members fighting for social justice are the uniting force across the countries. A central office in Chile coordinates the efforts of the local offices by sharing basic goals and methods while adapting the projects to the particular challenges of poverty in each country.

PROGRAMS AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The implementation framework used by UTPMP includes the following core elements:

Relief and development: In the first phase, the top priority is relief in the form of constructing transitional housing in the form of shelters to address urgent needs

such as inclement weather, health hazards, and insecurity. the second priority is development in the form of social inclusion programs that are designed to develop the abilities of residents to permanently break out of the cycle of poverty.

Individuals in charge of their own development: The aim of all programs is personal empowerment of the individual, the members within the family unit, and/or the members of the community.

Links with formal networks: UTPMP recognizes that an important aspect of breaking the cycle of poverty is reinserting slum dwellers into formal networks and programs offered by other community organizations and local governments. They connect the millions of individuals who live in poverty to networks of employment, healthcare, education, and legal aid.

Volunteer – settler encounter: The volunteer university students and those who are living in conditions of extreme poverty have the opportunity to meet and learn from each other. By working hand in hand, and through simple conversation, both begin to share an inclusive and humanistic worldview, breaking down social barriers, stereotypes, and divisions that have historically led to polarization and inequity.

Holistic approach: Programs are designed for the individual at all age levels, families as a unit, and the community as a whole.

Multidimensional approach: UTPMP concentrates on five areas of programming are crucial to escaping poverty. These areas are education, economic development, recreation and culture, legal aid, and health care.

UTPMP uses the following three-stage method to achieve long-term, sustainable change in the social structure:

- Phase I: Construction
- Phase II: Social Inclusion
- Phase III: Sustainable communities

Initially, UTPMP began with only constructing shelters for those in need, but realized that without social inclusion and sustainability, eradication of poverty will be difficult and led to two additional phases.

Phase I – Construction

Large-scale construction of transitional houses provide bridges between slum dwellers and the rest of society. During the construction, the families and the volunteers working together often leads to more permanent collaborations in the future. The transitional houses are built of wood or aluminum and are designed to be low-cost, easy to construct, and mobile. They are pre-fabricated modular houses, with wood floors and sides and a zinc roof. A typical house is a little less than 200 square feet (6m x 3m), and costs around US \$1,500, of which the beneficiary family contributes 10 percent. It is built in two days

by a team of eight to ten volunteers working alongside the family. This initial construction phase allows the poorest people to acquire private and decent shelter that protects against rain, cold, and infestations, as well as providing security and a defense against crime.

The selection of eligible households for this initial stage is done through an evaluation and monitoring process. The volunteers collect the basic socio-economic information through a housing characteristics survey after presenting the project to the interested resident. The following criteria are used to identify the neediest families in terms of housing conditions, income, family size and composition, health condition, and access to social networks. A final interview completes the selection process.

Phase II – Social Inclusion Programs

During this phase, the skills of individuals are developed through social inclusion programs in education, healthcare, economic development, microfinance, vocational training, legal aid, and culture and recreation. These programs are designed to decrease the individual's social vulnerability, empower the community and provide tools to help them overcome their difficulties. Assistance is provided to the communities to organize, elect leaders and discuss the issues of the community. The process involves participatory approach.

Phase III – Forming Sustainable Communities

During this phase, UTPMP helps families living in slums develop their own sustainable community with strong social capital, bonds between neighbors, and links to external networks. The goal is for residents to unify and work together for the common good by organizing and participating directly, as well as democratically electing representatives to lead the process. The community sets its own priorities, examines problems, brainstorms solutions and develops concrete goals and methods to achieve them. Because sustainable communities stem from the ideas of the residents in each location, this phase varies between countries.

In some countries, UTPMP has developed a social housing development organization that acts as an intermediary between the processes of providing permanent housing to the families and those living in the transitional homes. This involves coordination among different stakeholders involved in the projects including the technical organizations (architects, engineers), the government agencies, community agencies, and legal areas of operation.

In countries where there are no specific public policies addressing housing needs, UTPMP plays a fundamental role in shaping future policy. As governmental programs are developed, UTPMP continues to reinforce their social inclusion programs to achieve a sustainable neighborhood by enhancing economic opportunities and connecting the families to formal social and economic networks.

FINANCES

Most of the funding for UTPMP comes through partnerships with businesses, international nonprofit foundations, and individuals. Special campaigns and events are also organized. The beneficiary family also contributes approximately ten percent of the total value of the house.

Most of the funds are utilized for the programs and UTPMP tries to keep administrative costs below ten percent of the total budget. To ensure strict compliance with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and the promotion of transparency, UTPMP utilizes Deloitte audits to assure all the funding partners.

UTPMP's major international supporters include: the Inter-American Development Bank/Multilateral Investment Fund, Banco Santander, LAN Airlines, Chevron, Arauco, Dakar, and Young and Rubicam. The Development Bank works in conjunction with UTPMP to promote development and facilitate economic and social integration of poor populations in Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay. Chevron supports UTPMP in Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic by committing a percentage of the money collected per each gallon of gas purchased at Texaco stations. LAN Airlines has contributed by supporting programs in the slum "Los Aromos" in Chile and by facilitating travel to the different countries in which UTPMP works. It also contributes to development programs in Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Chile. Deloitte, on the other hand, provides pro-bono annual audits of the financial department at UTPMP.

In addition, each local or country office is developing partnerships with private corporations, governments, other NGOs, universities, individuals and grant-making institutions that provide funding for similar and complementary projects. In addition to fundraising and the donation of construction materials, some companies also contribute pro bono services. Since its inception, UTPMP has spent over \$40 million and the annual budget for 2009 was \$15 million.

EVALUATION

In the twelve years since its inception, UTPMP has grown into a successful international organization, attracting worldwide attention, as evidenced by the awards (listed in the appendix) that have been received.

To evaluate the effectiveness of its programs, UTPMP is collaborating with the University of California, Berkeley Haas School of Business and the World Bank to design and implement an experimental impact evaluation of the transitional houses (Gertler, 2009). The study, entitled "Building a Brighter Future: A Randomized Experiment of Slum-Housing Upgrading," seeks to evaluate the effect of transitional houses on the health and welfare of the target population, as well as potential spillover effects on the slum community at large. It is funded through a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council. The evaluation is taking place in three separate countries:

El Salvador, Peru and Uruguay. To date, the baseline data and housing construction has been completed in El Salvador and Uruguay, and preliminary results will be available by January of 2010.

In 2009, another organization has also taken interest in UTPMP. This organization is the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), a center within the Economics Department of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology whose aim is to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is based on scientific evidence. In late 2009, J-PAL established a Latin American Center in Chile, and one of their projects is to conduct a randomized study of UTPMP.

FUTURE VISION

To date, more than 40,000 families have already benefited from the UTPMP programs. A projection for 2010 is to build more than 50,000 emergency homes in all of Latin America. UTPMP programs in various countries are at different stages of implementation, depending up on the challenges and issues that are particular to each country. The specific goal for Chile (where the organization began) is to eradicate all slums by the end of 2010 (this case was completed before the devastating earthquake of 2010).

In the process of achieving the goal of 50,000 emergency homes, the number of challenges stem primarily from differences among the countries in terms of the varied landscape of poverty in Latin America, the differences in volunteer culture, government regulations and housing policies, and the differences in climate. In spite of these obstacles, UTPMP continues to adapt to the particular needs of each country.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What might be some of the complications in implementing programs in different countries?
2. Given the number of American corporate donors, how might other housing-related programs partner with UTPMP?
3. Would a program that is similar to UTPMP work in the US? Why or why not?

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Appendix

Awards

- 2008: Best Social Project, Premios 100% Colombiano, for UTPMP Colombia.
- 2008: Recognized as a “Programa asistencia integral contra la pobreza” (Program of integral help against poverty) by Distinciones RSC (Social Communicative Responsibility) Argentina, for UTPMP Argentina.
- 2008: Recognized by the Ministry of Education, the President of the Republic and the United Nations as one of the largest volunteer organizations in the launching of Peru’s National Volunteer Plan. 2008, Medal of Honor, City of Chincha, for UTPMP Peru’s reconstruction work in areas affected by the 2007 earthquake.
- 2008: One of “100 Best Practices,” UN-Habitat Dubai International Award for Best Practices, for UTPMP Uruguay.
- 2007: Recognized by the United Nations as one of the best NGOs for association with the private sector, and chosen to participate in the “Business Guide to Partnering with NGO’s and the UN” ranking, created by Global Compact, Dalberg and Financial Times.
- 2007: “MTV change agent,” MTV and Inter-American Development Bank, for UTPMP Argentina’s contributions in promoting the youth role in the development process in Latin America.
- 2007: Bicentennial Seal, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, for UTPMP’s contributions to building a more equal society.
- 2007: “Ayudando a quienes Ayudan” (Helping Those who Help) Award, Gloria de Kriete Foundation, for UTPMP El Salvador.
- 2007: Excellence Award, América Economía magazine, for UTPMP’s contributions to Latin American development.
- 2006: Youth Award, Inter-American Development Bank.
- 2006: “Hermandad Argentina Chilena 2006” (Chile-Argentina Fraternity Award), by Argentine-Chilean Chamber of Commerce, for UTPMP Argentina.
- 2006: Best Non-traditional Social Export, Association of Manufacturing and Service Exporters.
- 2006: Social Responsibility Example, in the Second Summit of Social Business Responsibility organized by the National Association of Colombian Industry.
- 2005: Social Entrepreneur Award, Schwab Foundation.