

## Urban programming case study: Honduras

### Habitat Condominiums of Cordillera

*Model of intervention: Diversifying Housing Tenure for Affordability*

#### Country Overview of Urban Housing

Honduras has experienced rapid urban growth, with 55.8% of the population now in cities and an annual growth rate of 3.6%. The country faces a housing deficit of 1.5 million units, with 9.4% of households living in overcrowded conditions. Over 60% of the urban population lives below the poverty line, making adequate housing unaffordable for many. Urban areas also lack basic services, with 30% lacking safe water access and 40% without proper sewage systems. Insecurity and violence further discourage housing investment.

To address overcrowding, low-income housing is shifting to vertical condominiums, optimizing land use and reducing sprawl. Our Habitat Condominiums of Cordillera Project is an urban project which represents Habitat for Humanity's first vertical housing initiative. Despite initial challenges, the project provides a sustainable model for future developments, helping to tackle Honduras' housing crisis and improve urban living conditions.

#### Detailed Overview of Project Area/Problem

The Habitat Condominiums of Cordillera Project is located in San Pedro Sula, a major commercial and industrial center in northwest Honduras. With a population of over one million, the city has seen rapid urbanization, drawing migrants from across the country in search of better opportunities. However, the lack of proper urban planning and its geographic vulnerability increase the risk of disasters, which severely damage infrastructure and disrupt residents' lives. Rapid urban growth has also exacerbated issues such as gang violence, organized crime, and a significant housing crisis fueled by complex land use challenges, real estate speculation, and social inequality. Basic services like potable water, sewage, and electricity are inadequate in many areas, while poor waste management worsens environmental and health conditions. San Pedro Sula's infrastructure struggles to meet the demands of its expanding population, leading to a housing shortage and the proliferation of informal settlements.

#### Project Intervention

The Habitat Condominium is the first vertical social housing project in Honduras, addressing the housing deficit in San Pedro Sula and nearby municipalities. The development spans 18,281.95 m<sup>2</sup> and consists of 10 buildings in three stages, with 228 total units. Each stage includes security systems, street access, a community hall, paved streets, parking for each unit, and 27.31% of the area dedicated to green spaces and recreation. The complex provides essential services, including drinking water, sewage, underground electricity, and rainwater drainage, ensuring a high quality of life for residents.

The first stage, benefiting 54 families, is fully completed and occupied. Designed to foster social coexistence, this includes spaces for family integration and community interaction, while a rigorous family selection process was implemented, using psychological and sociological assessments and social skills training for condominium living. We also address legal challenges related to vertical tenure, to combat the uncertainty of governmental procedures.

## Effect on Target Groups/Communities

As the first vertical social housing project in the country serves middle- to low-income populations in the metropolitan area of the Sula Valley, Habitat Condominium addresses the growing challenge of housing access for working-class and professional groups. Its impact extends beyond shelter, significantly improving various social and economic indicators within the community.

Health has improved due to the project's sanitation standards and proximity to medical care, offering families better living conditions and easier access to healthcare. Additionally, a monitored security system fosters internal control and enhances social cohesion, promoting peaceful coexistence among residents. The construction of a safe, unified community has been central to this initiative. Education is another key focus. The project's integration with nearby educational facilities allows residents of all ages to maintain consistent access to education, which has been a significant factor in families choosing to live in the condominium. Economically, the Habitat Condominium is strategically located to offer easy access to job opportunities in the metropolitan area, also reducing transportation costs and long commutes, allowing residents to spend more time with their families.

Overall, the project offers an improved quality of life by providing essential urban and social services close to the city center, 8 kilometers away. Access to health, education, employment, and markets ensures that this housing development is fully integrated, benefiting its targeted communities.

## Project Innovation

The Habitat Condominium project introduced several innovative aspects which broke barriers in national and municipal regulations, facilitating the approval of vertical social housing projects by streamlining construction permits and changing land use restrictions. This success paves the way for similar future projects.

Strategically, the project attracted interest from trade organizations, academia, and public and private sectors, forming an Advisory Council that engages experts in addressing the housing shortage. A unique lease agreement with an option to buy was implemented, allowing families to secure property ownership within 25 years, offering flexibility in credit management. In terms of social management, the project launched the "Towards a Coexisting and Peaceful Culture" initiative, focusing on building a culture of peaceful living in high-rise condominiums. Urban design emphasizes peaceful coexistence and environmental integration, with over 32% of the land dedicated to green spaces.

The project faces challenges in fostering community coexistence, establishing norms for condominium living, and creating a model for condominium management. To address these, the Plan of Accompaniment focuses on three components: coexistence, promoting a culture of peace, and strengthening social and community capital through a participatory action research approach that empowers residents.

## Global relevance of community-level impact

**SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being:** The project integrates well-designed spaces for recreation and health activities, alongside improved access to medical and educational services, fostering a healthier living environment.

**SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy:** Vertical housing incorporates energy-efficient technologies, such as solar panels and energy-saving systems, reducing energy consumption and emissions.

**SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure:** The project drives innovation in construction design and technology, promoting modern and efficient urban infrastructure.

**SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities:** By offering affordable vertical housing, the project provides housing options for diverse socioeconomic groups, particularly in areas with high urban demand.

**SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities:** The vertical design optimizes land use, reduces uncontrolled urban sprawl, and promotes sustainable densification. This enhances urban service efficiency and alleviates pressure on rural ecosystems.

## Moving Forward

The Habitat Condominium project faces several challenges as it progresses into its second and third phases. One major obstacle is the high cost of land and the limited availability of urban space, which often leads to developments catering to middle- or upper-class housing. Habitat for Humanity Honduras has strategically located land for these upcoming phases, but funding is still needed to move forward. A key priority is developing a collaboration model that

ensures government involvement, particularly in providing access to basic services and streamlining legal and bureaucratic processes. The project has demonstrated that multidisciplinary approaches are crucial to integrate technical feasibility with social and cultural considerations. Vertical housing must incorporate norms and regulations that foster multicultural coexistence and facilitate constructive dialogue among residents. In addition, a strong Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) system is essential for tracking progress, measuring impact, and adapting strategies as needed. Habitat for Humanity Honduras is currently exploring cost effective construction technologies such as load-bearing walls and formwork to address the limited supply of high-rise construction expertise in the country.

**Visual Documentation**

