The people’s struggle for affordable living space. The role of (assisted) self-help housing from 1950 – 2010 and beyond

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Introduction to the Research: ‘The Power of Self-help Housing 2009’
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Abstract

The housing conditions in developing countries are determined strongly by self-help initiatives and the most vital actors in the shelter delivery are the households themselves. Very many families are busy with self-help, in one way or another, mostly because other options are out of reach. Early ‘aided self-help housing projects’ were built-up since the 1950s, as sites-and-services combined with (some) additional assistance for self-builders. In many countries housing delivery was mainly provided through self-help. In some countries, such as Peru, Nicaragua and Bolivia, self-help housing, around and after the 1970s, was seen as the most suitable form of housing and (simultaneous) urban growth. Self-help housing is still a common practice in many countries. But formal attention such as integrated land development and neighbourhood improvement became more popular within a broadened habitat approach, while institutional housing came up in several countries with Mexico as prime example. In national housing plans, self-help is only slightly present, while the focus is moving towards decent housing programmes, benefitting the middle- and lower middle-classes. The most actual question is how to overcome the world’s housing deadlock; herewith well organized large scale solutions might be needed while self-help housing will remain a basic activity. If mutual aid within a family or group is possible, a self-building process can run easily. Other families are practicing a more advanced form of self help housing, contracting out works and becoming building principals.

Members of the housing cooperative Juntando Manos, León, Nicaragua (September, 2008)
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1 The people’s struggle for affordable living space; an introduction

1.1 Affordable housing: the gap between the offer and the demand

The gap between the offer and demand of reasonably priced housing in developing countries is huge. The urban demand for houses is being influenced by the well-known urbanization trends caused by rural-urban migration, and more recently, by autonomous urban population growth. Besides the immense urban growth, the poverty of large parts of the (urban) populations is of vital significance. In order to determine the realistic housing demand in a country, the housing products (the ‘offer’) must be coupled with the affordability, a path that probably will lead toward a ‘housing differentiation’. Affordable housing for all social target groups reckons on a wide range of housing forms, from simple ‘sites provision’ with some services (no house) to complex forms of ‘public housing’. Being aware of the national and local housing markets is essential, while the key question is to create a realistic offer, knowing that families have mostly (fluctuating) low incomes. The nature of self-help housing is individual and private but supporting it means public involvement. Other interventions in a housing market - to support social target groups concern e.g. the building of (subsidized) rental dwellings and owner occupied houses by housing institutions or NGOs, individual or in the form of apartment complexes, core-houses at private plots, etc. Institutional housing delivery systems (‘public housing’) for low- and middle-income families are essential in some countries and emerging in other ones. While attending the housing needs of the poor, self-help should be a central element of a housing policy, national or local, but never the only solution. Institutional house production will eventually appear, but there are great differences in policies and practices of nations. The quest for affordable housing in a country shows a enormous demand and because of that the housing debate might attend the next questions: how to increase the production of modest and reasonably priced houses?; how to discuss the qualities of houses for low-income families?; and how to improve housing finance for the poor? The latter is being broadened in some countries and, as a consequence, new finance systems emerged, such as the A-B-C-system in some Latin-American countries (see e.g. Klaufus, 2010). Current UN-Habitat viewpoints demonstrate new attention for pro-poor housing policies, e.g. through the question: ‘how to achieve access to adequate housing for the rapidly growing urban population of the developing countries’. This subject is also a Habitat statement with the new phrase: ‘Equal access to shelter’, presented after around two decades of gross neglect of the world’s housing problem (to be discussed during the 5th World Urban Forum, March 2010). This statement makes the ‘affordable housing question’ very actual.

1.2 Self-help housing related main issues

The ‘self-help housing’ that has been described by a range of authors (1960 – 1992) is linked with low-income families having only their own hands and skills for the building of their shelter. ‘Aided’ - or ‘assisted self-help housing’ as public housing instrument, got very much attention in literature (see e.g.

1 A-B-C housing finance is mixed finance: Savings (A), Subsidy (B) and Credit (C)
Harris’ historical overviews, 1998, 1999, 2003). The phrase ‘aided self-help housing’ was used often and the aid or assistance means among other things: land for construction, urban services, knowledge-development and the option to construct a house step by step (the latter is also called ‘incremental’). The people’s power to construct the house, with or without ‘assistance’, happens almost everywhere in the countries of the South. In due course, the scarcity of land and the increasing land prices make sites-and-services projects quite hard to develop. For example: where to find appropriate and enough land to be divided into parcels and to be sold for self-help housing and/or public housing? Another issue is how to improve individual houses and even whole neighbourhoods with constraints? Ultimately, there will be a need for making urban neighbourhoods more dense, in order to prevent the (uncontrolled) sprawl. Moreover, the growing demand for new urban land is causing financial and organizational difficulties for local governments. In the past, aided self-help housing was more or less the same as sites-and-services. Momentarily, self-help is a very important element of the improvement of the existing housing stock and this will be the case in the future, while sites-and-services plans will be required as part of urban growth. Urban planning, public land policy, building control and the definition of ‘housing products’ are important issues of (future) municipal planning; self-help is linked with all of these.

1.3 Self-help housing is normally linked with informality

While looking at the dilemma of houses for low-income people, one can find mostly: 1) the need for the betterment of living and housing circumstances in the ‘slums’, and 2) the need for preparing new land for housing as a result of the expectancies related to the population growth and the growth of cities. Realizing a mass public housing system in a country is difficult and will cost time, because of the lack of land and public managerial skills and financial means. All the millions not having enough financial income for the purchase of a plot or a house might rely on a public housing sector with reasonably priced rental units, however, this is mostly not available although people might rent some private space, mostly in overcrowded situations. The customary housing sector mostly cannot provide enough dwellings for low-income families; as a consequence of this, the people have to resort to the informal housing market where the self-help principle is a significant feature. To what extent self-help occurs depend on the available time, knowledge, skills and earnings of the households. Self-help is often connected to poverty and the housing quality can be very low. Contracting out specific parts of a building process to professional builders is an upcoming phenomenon.

Moreover, self-help housing is present almost everywhere, in formal as well as in informal land developments, except in countries that have shown a strong economic development and where was chosen for large scale and/or industrial solutions such as in Singapore and in Hong Kong and more recently in China. It is estimated that 70 per cent of all investments in housing in the majority of the countries of the South was done by households, making ‘progressive housing’ or ‘incremental shelter’ (UN-Habitat, 2005, p.xLi). In Latin-America less than 30 per cent of dwellings are produced by the formal housing market (UN-Habitat, 2005, p. xxxviii). The Table below reveals the presence of self-help housing in four countries.
The estimated percentages of housing realized through self-help can be linked with the Gross national incomes per capita.

Table 1 Percentages of housing realized through self-help, compared to Gross national incomes per capita.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimated percentage of housing realized through self-help</th>
<th>Gross national income per capita (PPP international $) (UN data, WHO, 2006)</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>85 %</td>
<td>2720</td>
<td>Nicaragua government, (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>90 – 95 %</td>
<td>3310</td>
<td>UN-Habitat/Indonesia (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>70 %</td>
<td>6490</td>
<td>De Soto (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>11990</td>
<td>Potter and Lloyd-Evans (1991)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4 The pro’s and con’s of self-help housing

Self-help housing is being practiced by low-income as well as high-income groups. Nonetheless, many poor households construct their dwellings unlawfully on land without titles and without building permits. Where this happens in areas seen as unlawful, there are plural illegalities: the land occupation is illegal and so are the dwellings and the neighbourhood. The step by step building practice delivers at first mostly a temporary shelter; in a later phase the use of durable materials is at stake and ultimately horizontal expansions or even storeys can be expected. But not all families build at the same pace. The value of the property will increase gradually and the house can become the family’s money box particularly if the family possesses a property title (or another practical right to use the plot for private housing). Even though a house can have a certain market value, the basic value of the house is the protection it offers for the residents and the prospect to start a small business there or to rent out parts of the house in order to gain extra income. A feature of self-help is the freedom a shelter offers; if it was built without using loans, the obligation to pay-off every month is restricted or even zero, which is the best for poor families.

Self-help housing had its advocates and opponents. Early advocates of self-help such as Crane, Abrams, Mangin and Turner mostly had optimistic views on the families’ power to build the house through self-help. Turner (1967) stressed that the squatter settlement (and self-help) provided the household with a medium of upward mobility and he influenced with his important work the academic debate (as a matter of fact: he initiated the debate) and the commitment of the United Nations, the World Bank, government organizations and NGOs. Opponents stipulated the difficulties of the very poor finding ways to repay the costs of the plot or/and the house. Ward (1982) stressed that self-help failed to become a noteworthy housing solution in most countries of the South. Burgess (1982) mentioned six constraints of self-help housing and Marcuse (1992) even ten. In due course, it became clear that the creativeness and the power of self-help cannot be over-valuated. On the other hand, public housing programmes and strategies to meet the need of low-income groups are lacking or dysfunctioning at many places. Other opponents wrote that the process of learning with self-help would be ineffective and that most families can only master the process,
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when they have almost completed the house (UN-Habitat, 2005\(^2\), p 23). But, families having some experience with initial self-help housing, have almost certainly better potential to manage contracting out of works to artisans. (See also: Section 2.4 ‘The academic debate on aided self-help housing in the 1980s and 1990s’).

In real life self-help housing is present: it happens at a large scale and is inevitable for many, despite the described problems and constraints. As a consequence of the worldwide housing demand, the powerful factor of self-help housing should be better attended by governments and housing institutions, which does not mean that self-help is the only alternative for the poor. It is clear that the disabled, single-parent households and elderly people cannot participate, unless they get help from others. Good conditions for success are there if people with the same attitude take the initiative and additional help from the government or aid organizations can be obtained.

UN-Habitat (2005, p 166) writes that assisted self-help housing is the most affordable and intelligent way of providing sustainable shelter. As it is based on minimum standards and incorporates a substantive amount of sweat equity it can be cost-reducing. It can be useful because individuals and communities engaged in it acquire precious skills, and it can be practical because it responds to people’s needs and levels of affordability. It can be flexible because dwelling units are often designed to expand over time. This underlines the new attention of UN-Habitat for the significance of assisted self-help housing, which even can be seen as a renaissance of a positive attitude concerning the phenomenon.

1.5 The different levels of self-help housing

Self-help housing can be practiced at different levels. Firstly the level can be determined by the people if having savings and abilities to construct an own house (or having built one). Families able to manage help from family members and friends can realize their construction activities better (managerial ability). Secondly, the ultimate quality level of the house depends on the assistance the households (can) obtain from the government or aid organizations. Table 2 overviews the various levels of self-help housing and estimations of costs. The aid can be ‘basic’, providing a plot – with water and electricity- that is prepared for the construction of a house (with formal land title). This could be called ‘primary assistance for the purchase of a plot’ (level ‘P.1’); but many families cannot buy the plot with their savings, so the next assistance to a family can be: ‘providing a loan with a pay-off arrangement’ (level ‘P.2’). A following level could be the provision of a sewerage system, e.g. a septic-tank through an extra loan (level ‘P.3’). Every extra assistance raises the quality level of the plot. If one can get help with the house construction (levels with an ‘H’) one can think of: assistance related to a construction plan and the gaining of a building permit (level ‘H.1’), then: assistance with the purchase of building materials (level ‘H.2’); assistance with the construction (supervision) (level ‘H.3’), assistance through the deliverance of a core house (level ‘H. 4’), etc. Every higher level of quality means also higher costs. The estimated costs are derived from experiences with very modest housing products in Nicaragua and Peru. Costs can vary from country to country and

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from region to region; prices of plots are normally higher in metropolitan areas, such as Mexico City. In many cases low-income families can obtain subsidies or donations and as a consequence of that the costs for the family can be lower than the indicated amounts (see also Bredenoord and Van Lindert, 2010).

Table 2: Scheme of quality levels and housing types related to self-help housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels as described in the text above</th>
<th>Description of the housing products</th>
<th>Estimated costs of housing product in US$</th>
<th>Estimated costs of total package in US$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P 1</td>
<td>Plot with basic services (water, land title)</td>
<td>1,000 – 1,500</td>
<td>1,000 – 1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P 2</td>
<td>Plot with basic services and a loan</td>
<td>Cask value will be converted to a monthly payment depending on the interest rate, and the duration of the loan (e.g. 5 years)</td>
<td>(monthly payment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P 3</td>
<td>Plot with basic services, a septic tank and an (extra) loan</td>
<td>Extra costs of a septic tank 500</td>
<td>1,500 – 2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P) + H 1</td>
<td>Plot with basic services, services, septic tank, technical assistance (construction plan and permit)</td>
<td>Extra costs of construction plan and permit 500</td>
<td>2,000 – 2,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P) + H 2</td>
<td>As (P) = H 1 and extra: purchase building materials and loan</td>
<td>500 – 1,000</td>
<td>2,500 – 3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P) + H 3</td>
<td>As (P) + H 2 and extra: purchase of building materials + technical supervision</td>
<td>1,000 - 1,500</td>
<td>3,000 – 4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(P) + H 4</td>
<td>As (P) + H 2 and extra: purchase of building materials + core house</td>
<td>3,500 – 5,000</td>
<td>6,000 – 8,500 or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Combinations of cash payments and loans with profitable pay-off arrangements are possible).

1.6 The phases of self-help housing

The interpretations of the research on self-help housing in Lima, Peru (Bredenoord, 2002/2003; Bredenoord and Veldkamp, 2004) reveal a comprehensive practice of self-help housing in this metropolitan area. The self-help housing process in its initial phase is mostly purely self-help, while during a later phase self-management emerges. The following phases of self-help housing were found in Lima and match globally with Turner’s findings.

1 Initial Phase: first try-out

The first phase is the basic self-help housing, within an urban land development, illegal or legal, with some kind of help from the state or a municipality (on services and infrastructure). When a temporary shelter was realized, the households build the houses bit by bit with help from family members and friends. At the beginning a house can be very modest.

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3 The three phases of self-help housing, as described, are based on the author’s observations and dozens of interviews with families and professionals during 2000-2003 in Villa el Salvador, Huaycán (Ate), Villa Maria el Triunfo, and Nuevo Pachacútec (Ventanilla) in and around Metropolitan Lima, Peru.
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2 Stabilizing Phase: getting hope

During the second phase, when families have settled and have more or less regular incomes, they might get access to credit from an NGO or the BANMAT\(^4\) for the obtaining of building materials, which was possible in Peru in the 1990s. A family can contract a supervisor or a foreman for technical assistance. Families prefer working with people they know, such as relatives. Many families have chosen for a building process without formal credit from banks or NGOs; they prefer saving the money first, or are borrowing from family members and friends. Finally there is a need for access to external finance.

3 Consolidating Phase: feeling secure

During this phase, the basic house is already available and the family can involve professional workers with the expansion of the house or with a first or second storey. Specialized support is needed but the family must be able to control the construction costs, while building standards must be controlled by the municipality. The structure of the house must be built durably at all times. This phase does not exclude the participation of a family member’s own labor force in order to lower the costs, but trained artisans are contracted more often. This phase can be flourishing if the households have developed some economic power and obtained know-how with foregoing small building processes.

\(^4\) The BANMAT was established in Peru as the national Building Materials Bank in the 1980s, the bank still exists, but the tasks have changed: it is now a mortgage bank and executes a variety of housing programs initiated by the government. At the moment (2009) the BANMAT acts differently from the past (see e.g. Fernandez-Maldonado and Bredenoord, 2010).
The three described phases of self-help expansion, can also be seen as different levels of development. Greene and Rojas (2008) distinguish three (different) phases of incremental housing construction: 1) access to land for residential use, 2) the construction of a basic, habitable nucleus, and 3) the incremental improvement of the dwelling. In each of these three phases, there are opportunities for public intervention to create a more efficient and equitable process, each with its own characteristics.

Self-help housing can be improved by mutual self-help and governments and aid-organizations could support that by giving extra incentives (e.g. concerning the formation of save- and building groups and technical and financial assistance). As a result, self-help housing can be ‘a vehicle of upward social mobility’ and the described phases are expressions of that. In the third phase families showed to be able to act as small building principles.

1.1 Conclusion
The people’s struggle for affordable living space is at stake in most countries of the South. The housing shortages in a particular country must be coupled with the housing products and the current income levels. This might lead to a housing typology and the calculation of the number of housing products to be produced for the various population groups. But problems between desire and possibility will appear: if a cheap housing product (e.g. ‘P + H.2’ in Table 2) is being offered to low-income families, many people cannot pay the relatively low costs (in this example US$ 2,500 – 3,500). Nonetheless, these exercises should be done in every country.

The prospects for adequate housing for most social target groups are mainly negative in many countries, while the population growth and the pressure on cities will increase. Professional housing institutes with sufficient structural funding, which is e.g. the case with Mexico’s housing institutes INFONAVIT and FOVESSSTE (see Bredenoord and Verkoren, 2010), are mainly not available although institutional housing has been established in some countries, e.g. in South Africa (see Landman and Napier, 2010) and the mixed-finance systems in Chili and Ecuador (see Klaufus, 2010). Another question is about the provision of rental houses, necessary in big cities. As private investors do normally not invest in modest houses for low-income families, this will be a matter of government attention.

This article describes successively: the historical backgrounds of self-help housing (Section 2), the international focus on self-help related issues (Section 3), and finally the future perspectives for aided self-help housing (Section 4).
2 Historical backgrounds of self-help housing

2.1 Early aided self-help housing experiences

Early experiences with aided self-help housing took place particularly in Western countries and were based on the idea that governments might help families to build their own dwellings. These were done for the first time in Sweden in 1904 when the government created a programme for self-help with public housing finance (loans to owner-builders). Later, a variety of self-help programmes during the 1920s were offered all through Western Europe and the Soviet Union. Only some of these survived such as the housing programmes in Stockholm and Vienna (1926). In the following decade some countries implemented self-help within their policies, with the aim to provide affordable housing for low-income households as was done in France, Germany, Greece and Finland (Harris, 1998). Self-help housing in Western Europe was mostly used in times of economic crisis after the Wars; especially in Germany there was a significant self-help housing practice (Harms, 1982). The self-help housing in the United States supporting low-income families is still present in rural areas with a mutual self-help housing program (United States Department of Agriculture5). Self-help housing was practiced in Canada quite successfully (Schulist and Harris, 2002). This overview reveals that self-help housing was initially, to a certain extent, more a matter of the West (including its visions in the latter days of the colonial period) than a matter of the South. Currently, the phenomenon is hardly of any importance in western countries, except for the United States and Canada.

2.2 Aided self-help housing in the 1940s and 1950s

Aided self-help housing -as meant in this article- in the Americas commenced in 1939, when the Housing Authority of Ponce, Puerto Rico started an early edition of ‘sites and services’, implicating public purchase of land and subdivision of it for individual families, and the giving of some form of aid in the construction of low-income shelter (Abrams, 1964; Harris, 1998). Aided self-help housing was implemented by other countries too, in order to combat housing problems at minimum costs. After 1945 aided self-help housing was propagated by agencies of the United States, in the first place by Jacob Crane and later by the United Nations and the British colonial office. Crane used the expression ‘aided self-help’ for the first time in 1945, and linked it at first with rural projects and equal to ‘minimum urbanization’. In both cases housing authorities used public finance to offer varying levels of services, finance and technical assistance to owner-builders. These self-help experiences were followed in the early 1950s by other Caribbean countries (e.g. in Barbados and Jamaica) and by some countries in Latin-American. In 1952, a wide-ranging study by the forerunner of the World Bank recommended aided self-help being: ‘... the principal solution to Jamaica’s housing problems6. Aided self-help housing was above all liberal, having a social component, but mainly seen in contrast to public housing. Understandably so, self-help housing and neighbourhood

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5 USDA (Department of Agriculture) promotes mutual self-help housing through loans and technical assistance.
6 The forerunner of the World Bank was the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the document was entitled ‘The Economic Development of Jamaica’ (1952). Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
improvement would value the dwelling so much that the people would look after it well and care for the neighbourhood and its services.

By the late 1940s more than a few schemes, being ‘open developed plots’, sites without building regulations and minimal services, were common in Madras, India, and around 1950 Delhi had laid out about 2,500 plots (Housing of Urban Displaced Persons in Capital, 1950). In a mixture of forms, assisted self-help was in fact well-known in India then. Aided self-help housing was practiced in South Africa even earlier; before World War I a site-and-service scheme with plots and services was developed at Pimville in existing Soweto near Johannesburg. The ‘sites and services approach’ was revitalized after World War II in this country. Extensive land invasions and squatting during the 1940s obliged the city of Johannesburg to convert many into ‘controlled site and service camps’ (Harris, 1998). The early experiences show above all a late colonial attitude of the initiators on self-help housing.

2.3 Aided self-help housing in the 1960s and 1970s

Before the 1960s self-help housing was frequently seen as a social problem and an expression of urban poverty. In the 1960s the American anthropologist William Mangin and the British architect John Turner, both working in Peru, drew attention to self-help housing and they described it as a positive phenomenon with respect to social housing, especially in the slums in Peru (Driant, 1991, Fernandez-Maldonado, 2007). Owner-building was widespread all through Latin America, but aided self-help was not in general a major part of national policies. The circumstances in Colombia and Peru were different. In Colombia, some form of assisted self-help was realized by the early 1940s, prepared by a mutual organization which sold building materials at cost price (Harris, 1998). Self-help housing in Peru became a main issue since 1956 and quite a lot of self-help housing projects were started. The implementation of the Peruvian ‘housing’ Law 1961 depended on assistance from the Inter-American Development Bank which provided much assistance to Peru. At that time, John Turner was the most productive author on self-help housing issues, and through his work the ‘Peru experiences’ and the ones in some other Latin American countries, became well-known. The most crucial outcome of his work was that slum dwellers, if not being helped by governments or institutions, still would improve gradually low income neighbourhoods, especially on the base of the de facto economic land ownership. The rural–urban invasions of large groups of residents to the barriadas in Peru were at that time seen as constructive social-emancipative actions of poor people. But critics were always present and underlined e.g. the need to avoid political and civilian conflicts around urban invasions. At the moment, illegal land occupancy is not popular anymore in Peru and is even forbidden by law.

As a consequence of the work of Mangin and Turner (see also Bromley, 2003) the World Bank started in the early 1970s to finance urban expansion plans concerning land and shelter provision for low-income households. Loans with low interest rates were offered, and moreover: guaranteed loans, subsidies and plans for standard houses, guides/manuals for construction, etc. In this episode pilots such as sites-and-services schemes were stimulated and the idea was to replicate them later at a large scale. Replication

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7 In 1961, a law was passed in Peru, regularizing existing informal settlements and systematically promoted self-help for new construction.
required a cost recovery, but there was eventually only a little success with the paying-off, the beneficiaries were not persuaded to do so and the political will to remove the families with arrears was generally not there. Sooner or later, the replication rates became too limited causing the limited impact of the World Bank investments with self-help. Another difficulty was the lack of municipal commitment with these projects, realized with external staff and finance. Some of the projects in the early 1970s with World Bank finance were executed in Botswana, El Salvador and Senegal, mostly sites-and-services with minimal core-houses and infrastructure on ‘greenfield’ sites. Other early World Bank commitments were in Indonesia, Burkina Faso and Zambia, and focused on slum-upgrading as substitute for demolition followed by new construction. World Bank’s analyses showed that the projects generated a larger investment in housing than was estimated: in Senegal for instance residents invested 8 times as much as the project’s costs and the informal construction business benefitted hereof (UN-Habitat, 2005, pp. 21/22). During the 1970s two well-documented suburban development plans (both initially ‘sites-and-services’) were started and got impulses by governmental investments and urban planning: 1) Villa el Salvador -or ‘VES’- as part of metropolitan Lima, Peru (see e.g. Fernandez-Maldonado and Bredenoord, 2010) and 2) Nezahualcóyotl as part of metropolitan Mexico City (see e.g. Bredenoord and Verkoren, 2010). Mentioned suburban development areas are nowadays integrated parts of a great metropolis and can be seen as more or less consolidated. Similar suburban expansion plans were started in the same decade in Peru as well as in Mexico, and some in other Latin American countries too.

2.4 The academic debate on aided self-help housing in the 1980s and 1990s

The optimistic approach on aided self-help housing changed in the 1980s after many years of practice and academic debates. In the first place, the gaining of land for housing purposes in urban expansion plans was not always easy, compared to the early Peru case of Villa el Salvador (the government was the owner of the desert-like land there and could easily give it away to self-builders; this situation was not available in most other countries). Furthermore, huge pre-investments are required for urban land development, while housing for low-income families is a weak (economic) function. With the book Self-help Housing A Critique (Ward, 1982) a number of key questions related to self-help housing was discussed and a more sensible view on self-help emerged. Until that time self-help housing had become a favorite formula for urban development and many projects were executed. It became clear that self-help housing, with sites-and-services, core housing - and slum upgrading plans, was not the only solution to all housing problems (Mathéy, 1992). Because the providing of houses by the state is not a realistic option in many countries; but the governmental input could be different, such as to provide technical expertise on site, and to purchase land for urban use, by either land banking or land pooling. ‘Land access has to be seen as a major factor in Third World housing’ (Potter and Lloyd-Evans, 1998). The opponents of self-help housing might be right in arguing that the socio-economic state of affairs of many people ‘…may not be exploited twice’, but good alternatives for new strategies were not accessible. A problem of aided self-help housing is that the initial target group is not always fully serviced, since aided self-help housing became more and more exclusive,
seen all added qualities in the course of time. In some cases the families without regular income were passed with the granting of loans and in other cases the beneficiaries sold the property to other families because of economic reasons.

After 1992 it was quiet around self-help housing: researchers found other themes while the international agenda focused on the broader ‘habitat’; and the city-wide approach. In the 1990s the global privatization trends influenced also the visions of governments, and housing was normally seen as ‘private’, a matter of the families. In some countries public housing policies were completely absent. In general the international attention for self-help housing declined in and after the 1980s, while the attention for the broadened city approach emerged. In Africa the situation was the same, but there exceptions such as in Egypt and South Africa; while the housing policy in other countries in the continent was diverse. Housing delivery in Egypt is closely linked with the state planning system, initiated decades ago. Forced by the vast urban development of Cairo, a series of new towns was planned outside the central city and within main development corridors of the Greater Cairo Region. These corridors are located outside the fertile delta, and consequently in the desert like areas. (see e.g. Amato, 1985) This could only be done through strong urban planning, infrastructure development and governmental housing delivery. The post-apartheid housing delivery system of South Africa encountered a shelter crisis in 1994 and self-help housing gained prominence as a solution. For a large part, and as a consequence of poverty, the government at first started with a sites-and-services’ policy providing plots and small core houses with basic services. Households had to expand and improve the house by themselves (see e.g. Landman and Napier, 2010).

2.5 Conclusion

The aided self-help housing and more in general the low-cost shelter provision for the poor, has got very much attention in the global ambience. The liberal approach on self-help housing is often criticized by socialist views of opponents of self-help. In spite of the academic controversy of the 1970s and 1980s, the practice of self-help housing went on, with or without help from governments and aid organizations. In general, the idea emerged that self-help housing ‘was not the only solution to all housing problems’, which of course is realistic. The international agenda – headed by UN-Habitat and the World Bank - shifted from the housing approach towards an city-wide or urban development approach, but the residents depending on low-income housing were sometimes left out in the cold. For example, the ‘habitat approach’ focusing on new themes, such as the Kampong Improvement Programme in Indonesia, did not attend the housing question; and all low-income families built their houses by self-help (see Tunas and Peresthu, 2010). So, Turner’s vision evaluated from a central provisions to local enablement (Turner, 1983) and ‘...a recognition of the fact that only small proportions of the rapidly growing low-income populations can be housed by low-income governments’. Meanwhile, the self-help practice, sometimes supported, sometimes neglected, went on and on and in many cases without subsidies and corresponding research.
3 The international focus on self-help housing related issues

3.1 The UN-Habitat and World Bank positions

In the mid 1980s changes in the thoughts about self-help came up, steering from a housing sector approach towards a broader habitat approach. It was clear that individual sites-and-services and slum upgrading projects could not affect the growing housing need sufficiently. A well operating finance method for housing was needed and new urban land should be part of a city and be managed by municipalities and not by external staff and management, as was done earlier by World Bank interventions. As a consequence of experiences and new visions, the World Bank changed its policy and focused on integrated territorial development with the main stakeholders.

In the meantime, the urban debate came up and during some UN conferences new directions were set out for meeting the urban problems. During the first Habitat(-I) conference in Vancouver in 1976 the accent lie on ‘habitat’, but still in a limited sense of housing and living conditions. The second UN meeting was the Earth Summit in 1992 (Rio de Janeiro) that focused mainly on sustainable development. The later Local Agenda 21 determined that local governments should start city-wide consultations, to take up the joint vision of the inhabitants on the city’s future. Habitat-2, the City Summit in Istanbul, 1996, integrated the values of the Local Agenda 21 into the habitat Agenda. This Agenda focuses on enabling strategies, whereby national and local governments should create better circumstances for residents and entrepreneurs, in order to make the local living and production environments better.

At that time it was clear that the governments, seen the great number of poor families and the limitations of public finance, should not support housing directly, but leaving actual production to the market, ‘… in which all actors from large formal-sector developers through artisans and individual households, to voluntary community organizations, involve themselves at their most effective level in the production process’ (UN-Habitat, 2005, p. 25). Afterwards, one must say that the private developers and the building industry have not proven to be interested in providing housing for the poor. Voluntary community organizations neither housing NGOs can do that because of the lack of finance. Only (groups of) families, organized and supported well can do that, so assistance and encouragement are necessary. New insight came up after the 1980s regarding government responsibilities for the making of good conditions for the urban habitat, later called: ‘enabling approach’. Moreover, a new vision on the commitment of local government was set-up, in order to support initiatives from (groups of) households and civil and private sectors. The leading idea was that self-help housing by families and communities should be encouraged by governmental pro-actively. Besides national legislation the state’s role was focused on land registration, facilitation of municipal governments and this provision of financial incentives. Local governments should be better prepared for urban planning and land provision, and moreover, the search for private initiatives at district level. Many municipalities were not able to execute these new tasks immediately, and because of that the municipality’s role should be improved. As a consequence, the ‘Urban Management Program’
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(1986) was set up, a joint idea of the United Nations Development Program, Un-Habitat and the World Bank. After three decades of systematizing public urban interventions, it is accepted that development strategies should contain: ‘sustainable urban development’ with urban planning, participation of residents and entrepreneurs within an indicated area, the striving for strategic alliances, etc.

Since 2005, UN-Habitat is looking back again at the advantages of assisted self-building of houses. (UN-Habitat, 2005) (Financing Urban Shelter). Current UN-Habitat’s (2010) arrangements for the 8th session of the World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro, March 2010, show among other things that there is a need for new approaches for the ‘exploding cities of the South’ demanding a new urban agenda - ‘the right to the city’ - and ‘equal access to shelter’.

3.2 The world’s population growth and millennium goal

Around 1950 approximately 730 million people lived in cities (29 per cent worldwide). In 2008 there are 3.3 billion urban residents worldwide, a little more than 50 % of the total. UN predictions indicate for the year 2030 that approximately 5 billion people will live in cities, around 60% of the world’s population. The urban growth, particular in and near cities in the countries of the South will continue to grow. The housing demand worldwide is huge and at least millions of houses must be built every year, in the coming decades. According to UN calculations, the number of earthlings will be about 8 billion in 2030 - 2 millions more than in 2008; in addition, urban population will grow to 4.9 billion in 2030 (UNFPA, 2007). The number of residents not having an adequate house, all together 2,825 million people by 2030 require housing and urban services. The demand for housing –just to accommodate the increase in the number of households over de next 25 years – is estimated to be 877 million housing units. This means that - with an average 5 persons per household-, roughly 30-35 million housing units must be built or improved each year (UN-Habitat, 2005). The number of people in slum areas in the year 2020 will be 1.4 billion people (UNFPA, 2007). The Millennium Goal 7, target 11, takes for granted the improvement of housing and living conditions of at least 100 million slum-dwellers in 2020. But 100 million slum dwellers is only 7 per cent of the calculated number of slum dwellers in the year 2020.

3.3 The world’s cities and its slums

Originally a slum was an existing/old urban area, sometimes adjacent to the inner-city, with all kind of constraints, such as bad housing quality, strong overcrowdings and the lack of adequate services. The current definition of ‘slum’ is different from the past. A ‘slum area’ is a new understanding used by UN-Habitat and mostly they mean squatter settlements in and near the cities. The State of the World’s Cities Report 2006/7 reveals how inequity in access to services, housing, land, education, health care and employment, will lead to rising violence, environmental degradation and underemployment. Because not

9 ‘State of the world’s cities, 2006/7’, UN-Habitat.
10 Source: ‘State of the World Population, 2007. With the same assumption of an average 5 persons per dwelling, the world’s housing shortage will be 250 million or more, and this indicates that every year at least 20-25 million housing units must be produced or structurally improved and provided with the necessary services and infrastructure.
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all slum dwellers are poor and not all the poor live in slums and indicators are not always measured on the same way, the definition of slums is not always clear. The growth of slums in the world was without precedents during the past 15 years\textsuperscript{11}. In 1990 the world counted with almost 715 million slum dwellers and the number grew until 912 million in the year 2000. In the year 2007 the world counted with more than 1 million slum dwellers. UN-Habitat estimates that the number of slum dwellers will be 1.4 million in the year 2020. Some slums are less visible than others and more or less integrated in the urban system. Other slums are permanent or even deteriorating. Overcrowding, noise, air pollution, and lack of green spaces and parks, are associated with increased stress-levels among city residents highly-dense high-rises in Indian and Egyptian cities. For low-income residents, living in high-rise apartments is linked with social isolation and lack of access to amenities that aid well-being (UN-Habitat\textsuperscript{12}, 2008, p. 128). This latter observations mean that living qualities are far more complicated than a focus on the house and its direct surroundings.

The development of a monitoring instrument for the housing situation of all countries is necessary and UN-Habitat presented five shelter deprivation indicators, connected to the house:
1) lack of durable housing,
2) lack of sufficient living space,
3) lack of access to improved drinking water,
4) lack of access to improved sanitation and
5) lack of secure tenure.

The lack of durable housing is strongly connected to the quality of housing stock. It is estimated that 133 million people in developing countries do not possess durable houses. This number seems to be very low, seen the corresponding number of slum-dwellers and the global housing shortage. The reason is that the definition is inadequate and only related with permanent floor materials. Durable housing is underestimated, because durability is primarily based on the presence of individual constructions and not on a location and not complied with building codes. Concerning housing quality, mainly the qualities of floor materials are taken into consideration, because information on the materials of roofs and walls were absent. Overcrowding is a manifestation of inequity and can contain also a hidden form of homelessness. In 2003, about 20 per cent of the world’s urban population, 401 million people lived in dwellings with a shortage of living space (with approximately 3-4 persons sharing a bedroom). This aspect on housing does not reveal the most crucial elements of overcrowding, namely the number of residents per dwelling and the floor space of an average dwelling. Overcrowding is something to be monitored on a better way and the available floor-space of houses and the average house occupancy should be taken into consideration.

The other mentioned deprivation factors, (lack of access to improved drinking water, to improved sanitation, and the lack of secure tenure) are of equal importance. Monitoring the overall housing situation should be an vital issue in many countries; however, this must be strongly stimulated while research (new) methods and housing standards must be discussed.

\textsuperscript{11} See the data collected in the years 1990 and 2005: The State of the World’s Slums 2006/7, Overview.

\textsuperscript{12} The State of the World’s Cities 2000/2009 report is called: Harmonious Cities
3.4 Land use in urban areas and the issue of the densities

The land use concerning human settlements in rural areas differs from urban land use as described previously; larger plots are more common in rural areas, and the density and land prices are still relatively low. The plots can be 200 - 500 square meters, necessary if the yard is used for growing crops. Families can sell the products of small scale gardening at the market. The use of a yard in a city for growing crops is not common because the plots are mostly too small. The plots in urban expansion plans in Peru are for example 90 square meters in the suburb of Lima, Villa el Salvador, while the plots in Nezahualcóyotl, suburb of Mexico City measure 150 square meters. Seen the need to optimize the urban land use, the dimensions of the plot should be a subject of discussion. If the plot measures e.g. 200 square meters or more, optimum urban land use is becoming beyond range. In the urban context the optimization of land use only can be found between 80 square meters – 200 square meters. Further densification with plots less than 80-90 square meters might not be current and one might chose for multi-storey apartment buildings, where self-help housing is hardly possible. But self-help activities are still possible if contractors/developers deliver a frame or core house and the residents could finish the apartment in order to diminish the building costs. The optimum plots-size depend on urban factors, linked with e.g. the plot’s location, the sizes, the land prices and costs of making the land accessible for construction (see e.g. Bredenoord and van Lindert, 2010). The idea of the ‘compact city’ could be used as part of urban and housing policies. Sites-and-services plans might be made more dense through splitting the plots and/or by building storeys. Seen the shortage of plots and rising prices of urban land, higher urban densities are necessary On plots of 90 square meters it is possible to build 1 or 2 storeys, but the foundation and the construction must be prepared for that, which increases the construction costs. The possibilities to build incrementally on plots smaller than 60 square meters are limited (see e.g. Bredenoord and Verkoren, 2010). Increasing housing densities is mostly difficult, because building processes are always individual and some families cannot finish the house within a period of 5 years. This is why the self-help housing is not always suitable in situations where a quick urban development process is foreseen (see Bredenoord, 2002/2003).
3.5 Housing qualities and the need for research

The qualities of houses can differ significantly. This is why a ‘housing differentiation’ as a tool of housing policy should be introduced. As low-income families have dissimilar financial means, it is desirable to describe the ‘housing products’ with the corresponding costs for the residents. Factors of importance are: the costs of the land, the costs of the house (building materials, labour, architect, building permit, etc.) and the subsidies and subsidized loans that could be acquired. In general, every housing segment has its own housing products, which can differ from country to country. In Table 2 a preliminary housing differentiation is presented; taken from the Municipality of León, Nicaragua (2007/2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Housing Typology</th>
<th>Living space (initial)</th>
<th>Housing finance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Social middle-high</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>Private sector housing</td>
<td>No limitations</td>
<td>Private and mortgage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Social middle</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>Decent house plus all services</td>
<td>From 60 m²</td>
<td>Special loans, family savings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Social middle-low</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>Decent house; all services</td>
<td>From 50 m²</td>
<td>Special loans and subsidies, family’s savings, collective savings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>Minimum house with possibility to enlarge it; and most basic services.</td>
<td>From 36 m²</td>
<td>Subsidies and donations, and small credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Extreme poverty</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>Basic module and modest sanitary solution</td>
<td>From 18 m²</td>
<td>Subsidies¹³/donations¹⁴ for home enlargements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information derived from Municipal Housing Policy document León (Nicaragua) 2007-2008

The table shows a preliminary housing differentiation for the municipality of León; 47.5 per cent of the households are in the segments D and E, Poverty and Extreme poverty, respectively. The housing products are modest, with costs between US$ 3,500 and US$ 5,000. Many poor families cannot afford that, or pay the corresponding monthly costs of the house, while a realistic housing offer is hardly available. This is why self-help housing is still present everywhere in León (and Nicaragua) as a consequence of the bad economic circumstances. Looking at building costs, a difference must be made between direct costs (costs of land and construction costs, minus subsidy) and indirect costs: costs of septic tanks or another sewerage system. The latter is mostly not included in the price of the package but the costs of connecting the house to the public (drinking) water and electricity delivery are.

More in general, a point of departure must be that every household has its own economical possibilities and limitations. A preliminary ‘model’ for the determining of housing qualities for the poor should contain the following elements:

- The possibility of services, such as drinking water, electricity and sanitation
- The surface area of the plot between 80 -120 square meters

¹³ Some form of mortgage was suggested: a long term loan (10-20 years), low interest rates; through the private banks (national and international) or micro finance.
¹⁴ Subsidy: Funds provided by state programmes.
¹⁵ Donation: Funds provided by international cooperation.
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- The (core) house that can be small to modest, determining the initial built up living space that can vary from 20 – 60 square meters
- The subsidy from the state, or donations from others. The subsidy must be equal to every household, once in a life time and will normally be small.
- The price of the package for the families; this can vary from US$ 1,000 until around US$ 12,000

It is needed to decide for all social target groups the housing quality corresponding with the household’s incomes, self finance and self-help possibilities, subsidies and donations. The housing typology is a result of the research to be executed before the housing policy (on the local level) can be established.

Monitoring the quality of the housing stock of municipalities and nations will be very necessary, in order to be able to make adequate housing policies at the mentioned levels. Monitoring aspects concern the realistic demand of housing products, the affordability (knowledge about the income situations of households), and the realistic housing offer (house production and housing costs). The quality aspect concerns besides information on housing plots, living space, and the construction costs also the technical quality of the structures, the average number of residents per dwelling, etc.

3.6 Conclusion
When self-help housing is in the initial phase, the quality of the houses is often bad and in many cases one cannot even speak of a house. Many families build their shelter with bad building materials like cardboard, pieces of plastic or rush mats, on land obtained by illegal land occupation. In case of illegal land occupation one cannot expect that the residents will invest in a durable house, but if the household possesses a plot with an official land title, the circumstances are unlike. An initial shelter can look very miserable, but what counts is the power of the family improving the housing and living situation through the years. The environment of the houses is in many cases a slum area and normally these do not offer sufficient public services, healthy environments and public security. The official attention for the support of self-help housing fluctuated in the course of time (and seen from perspectives of the international debates on housing and the shift to the habitat-approach). No matter what the arguments are/were, the official attention for self-help can differ significantly from country to country. Meanwhile, international attention for the support of self-building is coming back (Un-Habitat, 2005), but self-building methods of individual families or groups still do not have significant positions in most national and municipal policies momentarily.
4 Future perspectives for aided self help housing

4.1 Aided self-help housing and the search for best practices

In many cases ordinary people practicing self-help housing do not have the appropriate knowledge of building techniques and other aspects of durability, sometimes with low quality as a consequence. Being ‘earthquake resistance’ is a needed feature in earthquake areas and any investment in a house should contribute to a safe and durable construction. Because self-help housing is the only option for many, the governments might develop (better) strategies for the provision of technical assistance, building control and access to small loans. Technical help can be delivered by NGOs or aid organizations but there is also a task for the government and the education sector; e.g. technical schools might provide technical training and courses, to groups of self-builders. UN-Habitat (UN, 2006/7) states on self-help housing and land development: “Accordingly, sites would be identified and reserved for sustainable shelter development, furnished with essential basic infrastructure and services, and used as a “building platform” for minimal, low-cost housing solutions to be developed according to the principles of assisted self-help housing”.

As a consequence, public housing policy of nations should offer support for: a) aided self-help housing and technical support and control, b) housing organized through mutual self-help groups, c) the establishment of housing cooperatives, d) the participation of the private building business with aspects of self-help housing. At local level municipalities and NGO must be involved with all of this. Moreover and additionally, the housing markets especially in big cities have also a rental segment. For example, the very poor in Sub-Saharan Africa are mainly renters. Rental houses in the built-up areas are required, to present housing facilities for temporary workers and families searching for work and housing. Self-help is normally not at stake with rental houses. Consequently so, the rental market should be investigated better, a matter of public concern.

In spite of the risks of individual self-help housing, self-help activities are going on far and wide, which makes public commitment necessary, but the government housing policies should not be based on self-help housing alone. In general each government must have insight in its own housing delivery system and the executable measures to be considered in the particular country.

Integrated slum/neighborhood improvement is a certain form of aided self-help habitat. The main goal herewith is to combat poverty by improving basic infrastructure and services, but it did normally not deliver completed shelter units. The ‘kampung programmes’ improved the quality of life of Indonesian urban areas at a low cost of investment (World Bank, 1996). Over five and a half million people in Jakarta have been the beneficiaries of the programme, making it perhaps the largest urban programme in the world (UN-Habitat, 2005). Nonetheless, the programme did not support the house-construction for the many low-income families, living in these kampongs, and normally house-construction was mostly self-help (see also Tunas and Peresthu, 2010).

The participation of the private sectors in house-construction might be considered too. One can think of the involvement of financial institutes and the building business. Hopeful experiences are to be
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mentioned e.g. in El Salvador where around 200 building companies are involved in modest land development and core houses.

For poor families, having adequate plots on which they can construct their homes and improve their lives, is crucial. Providing it requires a new and practical approach (UNFPA, 2007). Making all this feasible is mainly a task for municipal organizations. The search for new land for urban development is necessary, but with limitations. A private developing corporation ARGOZ in El Salvador shaped "progressive social development subdivisions" to poor families, showing that private land developers have a certain potential to confront the housing shortage of the urban poor (World Bank, 2009). Land development by the government with the involvement of private organizations is possible too. A current plan for land development can be found in León, Nicaragua where 6,000 plots are being developed and sold to families for (mutual) self-help housing and housing projects. Main features of this project land banking, subdivision of land and selling plots to individual families or cooperatives and a cost recovery ‘land exploitation’ within the municipal organization (Bredenoord, 2005).

4.2 Mutual aid concerning self-help housing

Self-help housing in mutual form is even better than the individual one. Self-help housing if combined with mutual power, can give good opportunities such as knowledge transference, more quality through specialization and chiefly by more discipline. Besides that, mutual power leads toward better collaboration with local government and other actors such as NGOs, public utilities and financial institutes. Mutual self-help housing has good potential, but the members must take time to know each other well, while leadership is vital. The size of the group –not too small and not too extended- should be subject of future research. Governments could motivate the establishment of small housing cooperatives by giving specific incentives. Well doing local/regional pilot projects with mutual aid are to be found e.g. in Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina. The project San Esteban in San Salvador is a small-scale example of cooperative housing; the members of the housing cooperative built their project with the help of the NGO Fundasal that offered assistance: e.g. training, technical aid and the finding of outside finance (See box 1). A comparable move ahead was realized in Nicaragua, promoted by the NGO Ceprodel (See box 2). It is important to search for possibilities for replication of those likely experiences at a large scale and with the use of finance from the country itself.
Box 1

**FUNDASAL’s work in El Salvador**

The housing cooperative ‘ACOVICHSS’ built a Housing Project, called *San Esteban*, in the historic centre of San Salvador, El Salvador. The housing cooperative was supported by FUNDASAL, an experienced NGO working for low-income families in El Salvador. House construction has been promoted by mutual help, which means that the construction’s costs were minimized, through the use of the members’ own labour. Every member/future resident has to contribute with its own hands (a replacement by a family’s member is possible) 24 hours per week for the duration of the construction work and as a consequence the building costs could be lowered with 40 per cent. Fundasal offers training, technical assistance and help with the making of the design and the management and the acquisition of housing finance, that came eventually from aid organizations from western countries. Apart from Fundasal, the municipality of San Salvador promotes the project within the framework of the programme “Bringing back the housing functions in the historic centre of San Salvador”. Housing finance came from: Spanish International Cooperation Agency (AECI), Swedish Cooperation Centre (SCC), MISEREOR (Germany) y Cordaid (Netherlands).

(Information from: Lic. Ana Silvia Menjívar de Síntigo, FUNDASAL, El Salvador)

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Photos 3 and 4

Female members of the housing cooperative are working at the housing project *San Esteban*, El Salvador, 2008.
Box 2

CEPRODEL’s work in Nicaragua

The housing NGO CEPRODEL (Centre for the promotion of local development) in Nicaragua has helped with the establishment of small housing cooperatives using mutual help, namely ‘Juntando Manos’ (León) and "Lomas de Pochocuape” Managua, with 36 and 30 built dwellings, respectively. The concept can be used for the construction of new houses as well as for home renovations, both were done in León. The construction model is comparable to the above described model of FUNDASAL, El Salvador. The members have to contribute with their own hands for the duration of the construction work. The NGO Ceprodel offers training, technical assistance and help with the making of the design and the management and the acquisition of housing finance. CEPRODEL established alliances with the Swedish Cooperation Centre, Habitat for Humanity, and DIGH in order to make Ceprodel’s Mutual Cooperative Model work. Ceprodel used the experiences of mutual self-help from Uruguay, the country having over 30 years of experience with mutual self-help (Ceprodel, 2006). A replication of this model is foreseen in several other Nicaraguan municipalities.

(Information from Mr. Miguel Gonzales, director of Ceprodel, Nicaragua) and (Mrs. Desiree van de Ven, Municipality of Utrecht, the Netherlands)

4.3 Towards the strengthening municipal management

As stated earlier, the municipal role had to be improved and the UN-Urban Management Programme 1986-2006 was executed; this programme is taken over by 4 regional networks in Africa, the Near East and North Africa, Asia Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. Other UN programmes such as the Cities Alliance are also active.

Main municipal tasks are (in general): (a) strategic planning by making Municipal Development Plans, (b) the making of by-laws and regulations regarding land use, (c) the making of sector policy on housing and (d) the involvement of all significant actors. The municipal planning has two levels: (1) the city level with participative budgeting, and (2) the territorial level linking all actors, public and private and

16 DIGH (Dutch International Guarantees for Housing) helps creating affordable housing to low-income families in developing countries. DIGH-loans can be realized through the cooperation with housing-corporations in The Netherlands and the Bank for Municipalities (BNG) in The Netherlands.
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including families and self-help groups. In the first place a municipality can play a crucial role concerning public housing and supporting self-help, by developing an active municipal land policy system (see Box 3). Moreover, a municipality can promote self-help housing by giving technical assistance to the builders, for example by the establishment of a building materials bank and/or municipal building offices in the neighborhoods for the making of drawings and the granting of building permits. Eventually the municipal task is controlling the buildings in order to secure the safety of the structures and the inhabitants

**Box 3**

*Towards Municipal Land Policy*

Active municipal land policy, is focused on the purchase and development of land for urban purposes, especially for economic activities and housing for social target groups. Unfortunately there are mostly no funds available neither for the purchase of land nor for the urban development benefitting social target groups. The lack of municipal development strategies regarding urban land development stimulates the illegal land occupation at the outskirts of cities. In order to initiate municipal land development, a fund for land development is necessary and with this fund the land can be purchased and developed and divided into parcels for the selling to households for the building of houses and to small entrepreneurs. By selling and not donating the land to the households the fund can be used as a revolving fund. This is the preferable situation, but many families cannot afford the price of the plot and one should choose for pay off arrangements. In fact one can speak of a municipal land bank for the production of plots for the self-help housing. The payments of the households are necessary in order to maintain Closed Land Exploitation. This system can be realized by a municipality or a public-private development corporation. NGOs with social housing programs could also be active as developer. The principle is that the user of the land pays for it, with the consequence that the poorest families mostly cannot benefit from the system; they simply cannot afford the price or the pay-off terms.

Information derived from The León Southeast plots Programme 1999-2011, León, Nicaragua: Bredenoord, 2005; and UN-Habitat (2007)

4.4 Discussions and conclusions

Seen the world’s housing demand, the production of modest and reasonable priced houses for low-income families and credit for home improvements must increase strongly. Herewith, the future role of assisted self-help housing should be taken into consideration, especially because good urban development with self-help housing can lead towards consolidated neighborhoods, as was the case in several Latin American
countries. However, this does not mean that the same will happen in e.g. Sub-Sahara Africa and Asia; each (world) region has its specific economic and cultural features, but the urban growth to be expected in some regions will ask for large-scale housing solutions too. The urban growth to be expected in some countries will be very large, meaning that large scale housing production is necessary. Without the help of the national government and the private sector (e.g. the construction industry) the solving of the housing question is difficult, which is a reality in very poor countries. One can think of industrial production of building materials and the introduction of public housing delivering systems; Mexico’s housing delivery system can be an example, knowing that the Mexican level of development is high compared to other nations (see Bredenoord and Verkoren, 2010).

The feature of aided self-help housing is ‘public’ (regarding the infrastructure and services) as well as ‘private’ (regarding the housing), which underlines the need for a better positioning of self-help housing (by the levels of government). However, there are limitations such as the duration of the self-building processes and the very low incomes of large parts of society. Public housing should include the building of social rental homes too, principally in the larger cities. Allocation of finance will be needed in proportion to the demand in the various segments and the housing products that can be offered. A competence between self-help housing and other forms of public housing must be avoided.

It is estimated (UN-Habitat, 2006/2007) that the lack of security of tenure is between 30 and 50 per cent of all urban inhabitants is the developing countries. In Peru the government established COFOPRI17 for the legalization of (informal) land property which is being executed at a large scale. Other governments can duplicate this significant experience (Fernandez-Maldonado, 2007).

Analyses of local and regional markets must determine the segments of the housing market. Some main issues for future discussions and investigations:

- The role and position of self-help housing as part of public (social) housing.
- The search for affordable land for urban purposes such as sites-and-services schemes.
- The stimulation of home improvement programmes in urban renewal areas.
- The stimulation of effective mutual aid connected with self-help housing.
- The development of a monitor concerning the housing stock and housing markets.
- The implementation of technical training for self-builders.

Self-help housing still is a phenomenon of great importance in many countries. Households chose mainly for self-help housing because of economic reasons and because other options are completely beyond range. A ‘conventional housing sector’, is a western concept which is not transferrable immediately to developing countries, where the self-help principle is the most important characteristic. Once, aided self-help housing was promoted strongly by (some) architects/researchers and international organizations. Some governments implemented sites-and-services schemes successfully, but there was only a little success with the paying off and eventually the replication rates were limited, which limited the impact of the early World Bank self-help projects. Land access and secure tenure are to be seen as main factors limiting urban

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17 COFOPRI (Organization for the Formalization of Informal Property) Government of Peru.
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development plans, in contrast to the early decades of aided self-help housing when the purchase of land for public use was rather easy. Current policies on housing themes tend towards integrated slum improvement, a habitat-wide and a city-wide approach. This means a long term development and the poor people do not want to wait that long. Housing policies of states must be executed at the local level and there is still too little experience with that, in order to facilitate and stimulate self-help housing effectively. Self-help housing, inclusive its mutual forms, should be better ‘aided’ by (local) governments and housing institutions, so it can become a main tool in the combat against housing shortages and bad housing qualities.

It must be stated that self-help housing processes do not always run quickly as a consequence of its individual character and the poverty of the self-builders. Some families are not able to finish a house at all and others do not use optimally the physical (spatial) possibilities of the plot. Observations in Villa el Salvador, Lima, Peru, have shown that an urban densification process, through individual self-help, lasts quite a period, although some families have made good examples. Observations in León Southeast, Nicaragua show that an urban densification process has not even started, although this sites-and-services project was started in 1999; in the neighbourhood ‘Mariana Sansón’ (where the plots for housing were granted in 2003) the number of plots without a house is only around 50 % (Municipality of León, 2007). With these examples one can conclude that quick urbanization processes with the aim to create high density housing neighbourhoods are not reachable, leaving the self-help solutions mainly to sub-urban locations.

Finally, the current land for housing questions should be better monitored; because the access to urban land for low-income families is mostly very difficulty. The national governments and the municipalities should develop strategies for the (public) purchase of land for housing and the subdivision of it and the selling of individual plots to families, or a cluster to a small housing cooperative. Public involvement, or public land reserves, seems to be very necessary, but we have seen that a private corporation (in El Salvador) was able to develop land for low-income families too. Replication of the latter model is, however, not found. A municipal land policy model can be developed further with the ‘Closed Land Exploitation’ system (see Box 3).
REFERENCES


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