

## **INFORMATION BULLETIN**

- Representatives of federal and state agencies responsible for the design and implementation of housing policy hear of experiences in the social production of habitat
- The challenge: how to move from the isolated implementation of best practices to the institutionalization of best policies which meet the needs of the majority
- The way forward: strengthen and broaden spaces for joint dialogue and decision-making between government and society



A National Gathering on the Social Production and Management of Habitat took place on November 29 and 30 in Mexico City. The event brought together officials from various federal and state-level government agencies, academics and researchers, university students, and representatives from Mexican and international social and civil society organizations to debate and generate proposals to support the social production and management of habitat as part of the implementation of Mexico's new federal Housing Law, approved in June 2006.

Organized jointly by the National Housing Commission (CONAVI), the Iberoamericana University and Habitat International Coalition-Latin America Office (HIC-LA), the event included speakers from Argentina, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Paraguay, Uruguay and France working in housing cooperatives, technical support groups, and civil society organizations involved in the implementation of housing and neighbourhood improvement programmes. Along with speakers from Aguascalientes, Chihuahua, Jalisco, Veracruz and the Federal District within Mexico, presenters focused on one of the 6 thematic areas covered at the gathering.

An estimated 320 people from 11 Mexican states (Michoacán, Baja California, Oaxaca, Chihuahua, Jalisco, Chiapas, Aguascalientes, Veracruz, Guanajuato, State of México and the Federal District) attended the two-day event. Presentations and questions focused on a number of issues, such as: the place of the social production and management of habitat in national policies; financing support and local economic development; citizen participation and the development of community capacity in housing and habitat improvement programmes; the role of technical assistance; appropriate building technologies (including the use of traditional and ecological materials); social and spatial management in new settlement areas; and successful strategies for housing consolidation and improvement in existing urban areas.

As stated recently in several academic studies, 63% of Mexico's housing has been constructed by families themselves, while facing many kinds of obstacles and little support from the government. For the first time ever, these efforts are recognized in the new Housing Law. Now the challenge is to provide for the policy tools (legal, financial, administrative) necessary to implement the Housing Law in support of the social production and management of habitat processes at a broader scale and in a more effective manner.

Among other objectives, this national gathering served as another key step in the process of generating awareness of the contents of the new law (including the distribution of a poster at the event designed especially for this purpose by a number of civil society organizations), and at the same time, strengthen the conceptual framework of the social production and management of housing and habitat based on the sharing of best practices and the vast experience found among international and national organizations. During





the course of the gathering, the following point was consistently emphasized, to paraphrase: “It’s not simply about making houses, but about constructing liveable and sustainable cities, and promoting active and responsible citizens capable of participating in the democratic management of their communities.”

The event demonstrated the abundant accumulated experience among participants and highlighted that the next challenge is to convert this experience into solid policies capable of supporting the myriad of processes involved in the social production of habitat within a framework of the required institutional support for these processes.

As envisioned, the closing panel, moderated by the Technical Secretary of CONAVI, included representatives from the: National Funding Institute for Workers’ Housing (INFONAVIT), Federal Mortgage Society (SHF), Social Development Secretariat (SEDESOL), National Fund for Popular or Low-Income Housing (FONHAPO), Savings and Financial Services Bank (BANSEFI), Council of States Housing Agencies (CONOREVI), and the Housing Commission of Congress. Members of this panel reported on their current activities as well as their needed commitments to implement the new law for properly support the social production of habitat.

There is a great deal of resources channeled into housing in Mexico, but more than half of the population is not served by these market-oriented programmes which benefit a limited number of developers and real estate companies. Moreover, the current policy of focused housing subsidies is not likely to be effective if they follow existing guidelines.

To close, a representative of HIC-LA has been asked to record the recommendations and proposals emerging from the two days of presentations and debates at this national gathering in order to enable government authorities present to take note of the required next steps. These include several urgent tasks: the definition of an inclusive and comprehensive housing policy that includes a role for the state, that takes into account the needs of rural and urban residents, and that promotes institutional coordination in the housing sector (urban development, land, housing); the democratization, expansion and strengthening of participative spaces for interaction and decision-making among diverse actors in the housing sector; the development of a wide range of interventions (which seek to support and facilitate the existing diversity and flexibility in the social production of habitat, rather than promoting generic or “one-size-fits-all” solutions); the support for training and capacity-building among key social actors (especially for those occupying key public policy posts); and of course, the articulation of a land policy that meets the needs of the diverse forms of the social production of housing and habitat.

The representative from CONAVI demonstrated her commitment to continue working together along this path by offering to hold such a national gathering once per year on a regular basis.

To widen the dissemination of these issues and the agreements and proposals emerging from the national gathering, the organizers are preparing a compilation of the presentation and other kinds of written and audiovisual materials which will be made available in the next few weeks.

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For more information, please refer to:

[www.hic-al.org](http://www.hic-al.org)

[www.conavi.gob.mx](http://www.conavi.gob.mx)

[www.uia.mx](http://www.uia.mx)

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