

Housing co-operatives: People first!

Housing co-operatives around the world take many forms: rental, ownership and co-ownership, for example. They can also vary in type from high rise buildings to single family homes, from urban to rural locations. Housing co-operatives also use differing financial mechanisms in accordance with the economic and political realities that surround them. But above all, they share one fundamental element: the members collectively own the housing co-operative. It is not just another place to stay; it is home.

Collective ownership means:

- **Affordability** – Fair, decent and viable rents are the goal, the motive being to provide service to the members rather than to generate pure profit for an external third party. Without fear of having to move for economical reasons, they have security of tenure.
- **Decent place to live** – As owners, members balance their priorities and the cooperative's budget. They can tailor their needs with their wants and search for long lasting results. Modern properties, units with enough space, communal space for social activities and appropriate landscaping allowing children and adults to play; these are things that people can better achieve in a co-operative environment.
- **Security** – Knowing your neighbors and pursuing the same goals make for safer communities. The management structure of cooperatives gives members the possibility to address security issues and implement solutions for the benefit of all.
- **Transparency in management** – Members control and decide over the affairs of the co-operative. Elected leaders and staff must report to the members regularly. Major decisions must receive the approval of the members, a good way to ensure efficient and proper management.
- **Commitment towards social goals** – Accomplishment of the surrounding community's projects is made easier. Through the cooperative, members become aware of social issues and decide together to act. Individual actions can be difficult but housing co-operatives have proved numerous times that together projects can be accomplished for the well being of the community.
- **Personal growth** – Housing co-operative members must deal with finances, buildings and people. It requires knowledge and skills. Training can be offered to members and networking and information sharing bring new learning opportunities to co-operative members. Development of individuals benefits the whole community.

To show the wide diversity and breadth of housing co-operatives, we will share with you on regular basis successful stories of housing co-operatives around the world. These will seek to reaffirm what can be accomplished when people work together towards a common goal and the best practices used to bring this about.