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Local Housing Movement Program, Egypt

WINNER, WORLD HABITAT AWARD

This resource introduces the Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development and their award-winning work, highlighting some of the key aspects of their Local Housing Movement Program.

The Program won the World Habitat Award in 2010 and BSHF funded a study visit hosted by Better Life in 2012.

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A word from the Building and Social Housing Foundation

A word from the Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development

Mina Mokbel, Manager, Local Housing Movement Program, Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development

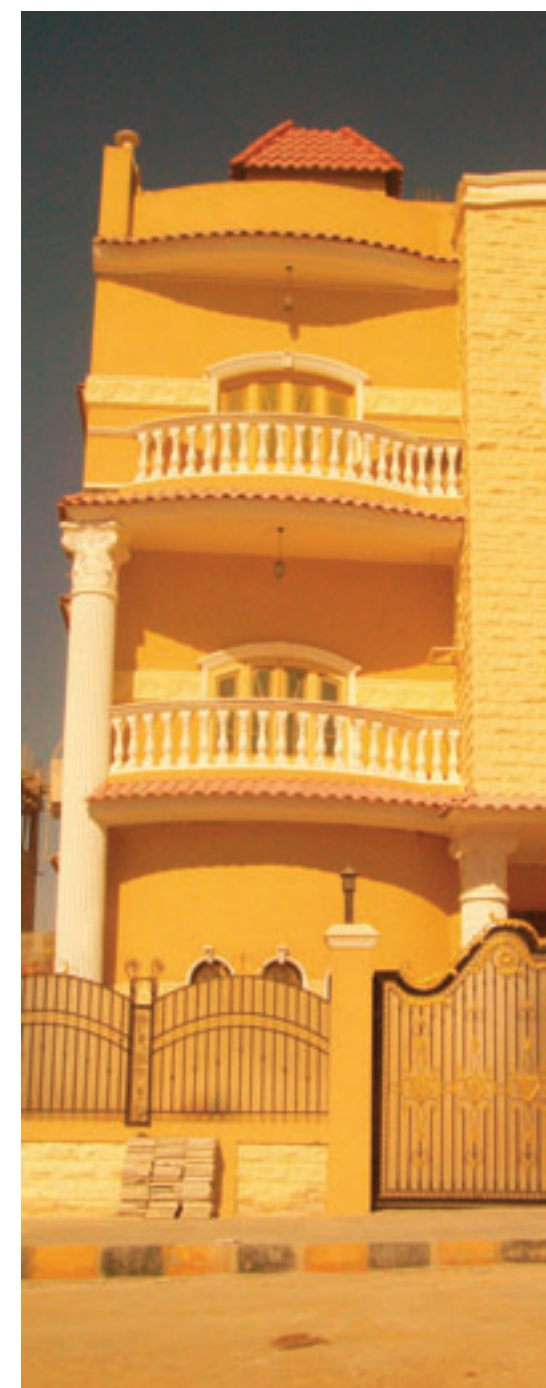
Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development is a non-governmental and not-for-profit organisation established in May 1995 in Minia governorate, Upper Egypt. We work with poor and marginalised communities on the east and west banks of the river Nile.

Better Life has a rights-based approach and uses an integrated methodology aimed at achieving positive change in the lives of people within the targeted communities. We aim to improve the quality of life of the local population through improving housing conditions, providing livelihood opportunities and supporting access to electricity and clean water. Community participation is at the core of our values and our work is delivered with the support of 100 volunteers and local leaders. We work in partnership with communities for both the planning and implementation of projects.

The Association has developed a range of programs focusing on housing, health and education, as well as investing in livelihoods through skills training. We have a long history of improving housing and supplying potable water and sanitation through our revolving loan fund. This has helped thousands of people to have access to decent housing and safe utilities.

Better Life has built strong networks and developed relationships with organisations concerned with the right to suitable housing at local, regional, national and international levels. We work with private organisations, foundations, NGOs and government bodies to further our common aims; sharing the practices we have developed and learning from others wherever possible.

The BSHF study visit had a great impact in strengthening these networks both inside and outside Egypt. We were also able to benefit from the expertise of participants and this has been reflected positively in the Local Housing Movement Program. We look forward to continued engagement with BSHF and appreciate the opportunity to share our knowledge and learn from others in the process.



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The World Habitat Award (WHA) for innovative and sustainable housing solutions was presented to the Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development (BLACD) at the United Nations global celebration of World Habitat Day in Shanghai, People's Republic of China, on Monday 4th October 2010.

Established in 1995, BLACD works to improve the quality of life for poor and marginalised people in the Minia region of Egypt. A rights-based, participatory approach is used to work with local communities to improve and develop higher quality housing, basic services, training and livelihood opportunities and raise awareness of their legal rights.

The evaluation committee, including members of the WHA Advisory Group, as well as the international judges at the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations University, were enthusiastic in their endorsement of the work of BLACD as a worthy winner of the World Habitat Award. The committee recognised its significant achievements in terms of improving living conditions for the most marginalised and dispossessed households, as well as its work in sharing its knowledge and expertise with other national and international organisations.

Aspects of BLACD's work which are highlighted in this report include the integrated development approach which involves the improvement of physical living conditions along with the provision of legal help to secure land rights; raising awareness of health, social and environmental issues; and the development of partnerships with the private sector to fund the implementation of water, sanitation and improved housing projects. The training of construction workers in environmentally sustainable construction techniques and building the capacity of local community-based organisations also helps to build long-term sustainable futures for the communities involved.



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Further details of BLACD's Local Housing Movement Program, as well as its wider body of work, can be found in this report, along with a detailed analysis of key achievements, and links to a range of additional reports and resources.

In February 2012, an international study visit to BLACD's Local Housing Movement Program was undertaken as part of the follow-up work carried out by BSHF with WHA winning projects. The visit brought together a wide range of practitioners involved in urban upgrading and community development processes representing local and national governments, international agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social movements and academic institutions from ten different countries. The aims of the trip were to promote the exchange of knowledge and the transfer of good practice. The intensive, five-day visit provided an opportunity for participants to share knowledge, expertise and experience on issues relating to improving housing, health and building social capacity in marginalised communities, as well as meeting with residents and representatives of the organisations that have contributed to the success of the Program. Further details of the peer exchange activities, as well as feedback from the participants, can be found here.

BSHF would like to congratulate BLACD and all those involved in the Local Housing Movement Program on their outstanding work and wish them every success in the collective efforts to encourage and support local communities as they improve their living conditions.



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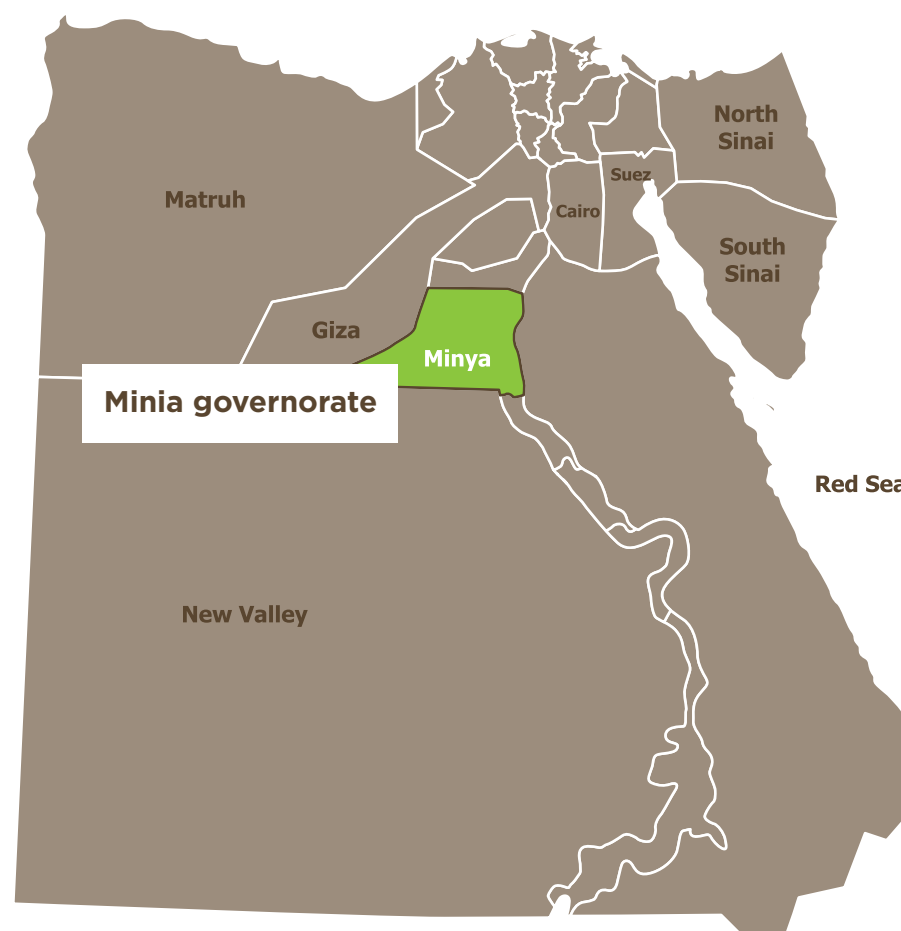
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Initiated in 1997 by Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development (BLACD), the Local Housing Movement Program (LHMP) works with local communities to improve and develop their housing and access to basic services, secure tenure rights, and provide construction skills and training opportunities. Community members are given access to affordable loans and sociotechnical support and are active agents in transforming their housing conditions. The organisation works with quarry workers, fishermen, low-income farmers and female-headed households in Minia. To date 500 new houses have been built and approximately 1,000 houses have been improved. The Program has also seen over 7,000 households gain potable drinking water and latrines in their homes.

Figure 1:
Map identifying
Minia governorate,
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Local construction workers are trained to design and build environmentally appropriate, safe, healthy houses using locally available materials that reduce the total cost for construction. They carry out the repair and construction work with the assistance of home-owners and their neighbours, in line with the social solidarity principle, whereby family, friends and neighbours all make an active contribution in the building process. This reduces labour costs and fosters solidarity and cooperation within communities. A revolving fund has been established from which beneficiaries can apply for a loan to improve their house. Administrative costs are kept to a minimum in order to reduce the burden on borrowers and maintain the capital for future users. The maximum size of the loan is EGP6,000 (approximately US\$1,000), payable in two stages of EGP3,000, with the amount being determined on the cost of the repairs needed. While repayment normally takes between one and three years, there is sufficient flexibility to help families cope with any short-term difficulties.

Improvements often made to houses include a separation between stables and houses, the use of plaster, the construction of ceilings and the fitting of doors and windows. Electricity and safe drinking water are also installed. Communities are provided with the information and skills to maintain their properties and surrounding streets, and two manuals have been issued to facilitate transfer: the first outlines local building practices and promotes the use of low-cost, environmentally sustainable building materials; and the second is a guide for the design of safe and healthy rural housing. They are the first manuals of their kind to be produced by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Egypt.

The Program also works to increase awareness amongst local people of the legal right to own their homes and land. Better Life provides legal assistance to families in cases of land tenure dispute and has prepared a widely distributed poster on legal rights with regards to housing. Better Life organises meetings where beneficiaries can ask questions about various legal issues, and local community groups have emerged that advocate for their rights to housing and land. The most common disputes relating to land ownership involve targeted communities and either private landlords or the various governmental bodies holding land. In the absence of a robust regulatory authority arbitrary rent rises are also a common concern for community members. So far BLACD has supported more than 2,000 families to tackle legal issues in five different communities. While around half of these cases have been successful all families have an understanding of their legal rights and how to access support and group together to resolve their legal concerns.

The Program trains local volunteers and active community leaders to manage the project in their respective villages. They also promote the empowerment of women in a number of different ways, such as supporting women to become volunteers and manage projects. In addition women are encouraged to exercise their health and social rights; as a result women have organised marches against the practice of female genital mutilation.



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Context

BLACD is an Egyptian non-governmental, non-profit organisation established in 1995. Better Life seeks to improve the quality of life for the low-income and marginalised in the Minia governorate, through a rights-based approach. Minia, a governorate 250km south of Cairo, is one of the poorest areas in Egypt, with a high unemployment rate. Better Life works in villages which are home to quarry labourers, fishermen and subsistence farmers. The organisation's activities aim to empower local communities by improving livelihoods and health, reducing pollution, and encouraging and supporting them to organise around their own needs and rights, including land tenure rights. The organisation established innovative financing mechanisms to support this work. BLACD works in three main villages (Bani Khaled, Nazlet Hussein and Bani Hasan) and several small affiliated villages, bordered by the River Nile on the west and the Eastern Desert on the east.

Housing in the villages is inadequate. Built from mud over 50 years ago, the houses do not provide suitable protection from the cold in winter and the heat in summer. The region is susceptible to flooding and inhabitants often suffer from waterborne diseases. Many households are without electricity or potable water, and there are also disputes over land ownership. A needs-assessment carried out by Better Life in 1997 found that over 3,000 families were without latrines and drinking water. While implementing a project in response to these findings, it became clear that for many families their housing conditions were unsafe and unhealthy. To date, housing has been improved for 1,500 families and potable water and latrines provided for 7,000 families.

Women are often particularly affected by inadequate housing. They are responsible for the arduous task of collecting water from communal hand pumps (up to four trips a day) and have to wait until after dark to relieve themselves (due to the lack of sanitation facilities), which in turn affects their health and increases their vulnerability to violence. Moreover, the practice of female genital mutilation remains prevalent.



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The project works with the most marginalised and dispossessed groups in the region. The process begins with a number of public meetings within a targeted area. BLACD introduces the project and explains its goals. Members of the community are then encouraged to make an application for funding to build a home, or renovate their existing home. A joint committee of Better Life staff and local residents then assess the applications against a set of criteria. Families benefiting from the project are prioritised to ensure that the most vulnerable are reached. Assessment considers local residency, the number of beneficiaries in a home, the need of the family to build or finish a house and (if applicable) legal ownership documents for a property. Applicants come from low-income households (earning below US\$100 per month) but with the capacity to repay the loan. Families headed by women are given priority.

Since early 2011 the political situation in Egypt has resulted in instability at a number of different levels. This has impacted on the delivery and evaluation work of BLACD, as well as fund-raising efforts. In particular changes to legislation have resulted in tighter financial controls for NGOs, especially those working in the field of human rights. Several grants and projects have been suspended due to non-approval by the administrative body for funding. The organisation continues to work within the changing political situation and to mitigate against any disruption.



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Funding

The LHMP funds its housing improvement work through a combination of grants and loans that have become a revolving fund from which the participating households borrow. The Program was initiated using an Oxfam Novib grant (US\$60,000) and a loan from Habitat for Humanity (US\$68,500), which was repaid in five years. Other funding has been received to facilitate subsequent phases of the Program, as it has increased in scale and geographical scope. Grant funding is also used for training and for the provision of potable water and latrines for those unable to afford a loan.

Loans to home-owners are paid back with a charge of twelve per cent. The charge goes some way to covering inflation (currently 10 per cent to 12 per cent per annum), administration costs and bad debt allowance. The loans are not, therefore, able to completely retain their value. The repayment rate on the loans is 98 per cent. Subsequently Better Life has introduced a new loan to encourage young people to create of green businesses. The interest rate is also set at twelve percent and the scheme includes training in business management and a feasibility study of their proposed project. In addition BLACD are encouraging homeowners to install renewable energy sources. To support this goal homeowners can apply for a loan for solar-powered heaters. The interest rate is set at eight per cent to attract interest in this technology.



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Actors involved and resident participation

Community participation is a very important aspect of the Program with local communities contributing the majority of person hours to a project. This equates to around 50 per cent of the total cost of home improvements.

A network of local community-based organisations, as well as the local (non-governmental) people's council in three of the main areas, have been involved at the design, planning and implementation stages of the Program. The Program has been developed and carried out by the communities themselves, involving local leaders and volunteers and a water company. Managed by volunteers, the project works together with residents and 16 grassroots organisations in the area to increase participation, reinforce social networks and establish a housing movement to defend their human rights. BLACD currently coordinates 100 local volunteers throughout the targeted communities.

As well as supporting those who are directly involved in its Program, Better Life has developed strong networks with a range of organisations and helps to strengthen the institutional capacity of other local community-based organisations to ensure sustainability. For example, it has assisted the Wadi El-Nil Association for Protection of Quarry Workers and the Hope Association for Women's Development through the provision of training, technical and financial support.

Furthermore, Better Life is the first NGO in Egypt to formally advocate and work on behalf of quarry workers, fishermen, low-income farmers and their children.



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Impact

The Program has enabled marginalised households to significantly improve their housing conditions, reducing the prevalence of diseases and achieving a sense of stability.

In a region of the world where privacy and dignity are fundamental considerations, the provision of running water and latrines has had an immeasurable impact. The provision of adequate infrastructure and services helps to maintain human dignity, peace and security. This is particularly true for women, who spoke of the shame and embarrassment of having to ask for water from their neighbours or wait until nightfall to relieve themselves outdoors, risking their personal safety, as well as health.

The capacity of local civil society has been greatly increased such that organised movements made up of local residents now exist to advocate a range of issues including the right to adequate housing and land. For example, residents have organised themselves and publicly demonstrated against unfair taxation laws imposed on the poor. BLACD supports communities in their negotiations with service providers and decision-makers, transforming broader governance processes.

Whilst the government has not had involvement in the project, the effectiveness of the approach has led to a change in local government practices thanks to a shift in the perception of the community's capacity to improve their living environment. Local authorities have stopped preventing the installation of electricity and potable water in villages and informal settlements where previously they had done so and are now taking seriously the need to improve slum housing. The Minia governorate has begun, in some villages, to provide potable water for those who can't afford it. In addition, some local government taxation policies have been abolished, exempting the poor from paying arbitrary taxes and fees.



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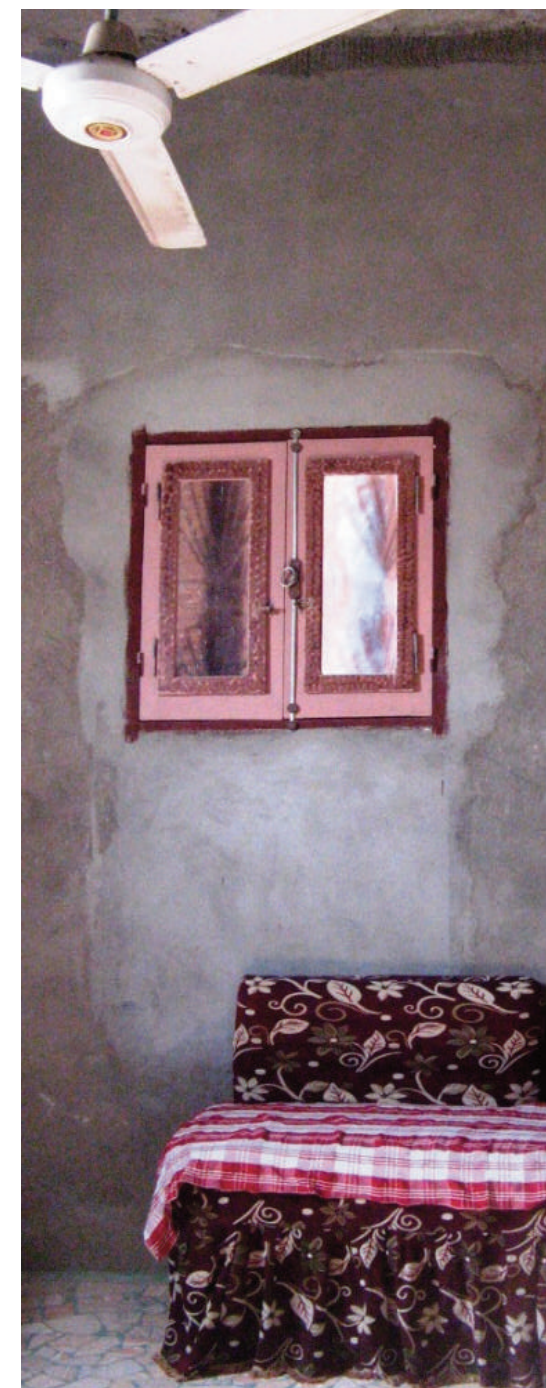


Key achievements

The Program uses an integrated development approach involving the improvement of physical living conditions, providing legal advice and raising awareness of health, social and environmental issues. The project's key achievements can be grouped into three main areas. These are social, environmental and financial sustainability.

The **social sustainability** of the Program is evidenced by the thorough involvement, participation and sense of ownership felt by low-income households. This is an innovative feature of the work of BLACD, particularly within the context of the region.

- The Program is dedicated to training local leaders and volunteers in construction, management, evaluation and budgeting skills. This increases the skills of residents and supports jobs in the local area. In addition to increasing practical skills, the organisation raises awareness of the rights of those in the communities particularly relating to access to land and housing, the environment and health. In this way the project has built the capacity of local leaders to raise environmental and health awareness in their communities.
- Better Life also provides legal assistance to residents, litigating on behalf of families under threat of eviction, working to ensure their rights and negotiating with authorities in cases where residents have been jailed due to inability to pay land-rent increases. They work directly with marginalised groups to raise awareness of their legal rights and enable them to claim their own land and housing. Supporting marginalised and low-income groups to access their rights through the provision of legal aid helps to reduce corruption and manipulation.
- Traditional gender roles have restricted the rights of women, who rarely took part in activities outside the home. Better Life, however, is keen to promote and support the social and health rights of women and girls within the communities. To this end, 70 per cent of volunteers are women. They have been trained to increase awareness and support the realisation of women's rights in the area. Residents have organised themselves and publicly demonstrated against the practice of female genital mutilation which, despite being prohibited by law, remains widespread.
- On a practical level, women and girls have benefited greatly from the project and have been empowered to manage projects and make decisions affecting their communities. For example, they no longer need to struggle to collect water several times a day to take to their homes, and women-based community associations have been developed. In addition, feedback from the communities has identified a decrease in incidences of domestic violence, which is attributed to the increased stability and improved access to adequate housing and living conditions.



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Key achievements

- The project is sensitive to local needs and provides in situ home upgrading and reconstruction to ensure the continuity of social relations and cultural practices. The project carries out social activities with men, women, children and young people to facilitate integration and crosses religious sectarian lines, with Christians and Muslims working together in cooperation to build each other's houses.
- The organisation has also instigated a number of larger-scale projects to support education and health. They have established four low-cost schools (primary and secondary level) in its target communities. These schools were built from local and environmentally-friendly materials. This has dramatically improved educational services in a remote, isolated area, as it has given thousands of inhabitants the opportunity to attend school. On top of this, many children now have a clean, healthy place in which to study, thanks to the home improvements.
- Better Life supported one of its communities called "El-matahra" to establish a local health unit, in order to offer different primary health services. This has saved inhabitants time and money because prior to this the nearest hospital was approximately 60 km away from their village.



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Key achievements

There are a range of **environmental** aspects which have been incorporated into the Program and illustrate the holistic and long-term approach of the organisation.

- Building and improvements are constructed with locally-sourced materials, such as limestone, lime mortar and sand. Not only does this have positive environmental implications but it also supports the local markets and quarries where many residents work. Local workers are provided with training on how materials can be gathered in a way that minimises degradation of the surrounding agricultural land and the wider environment. In addition, the use of these materials, along with improved drainage systems, has played a part in reducing the risk of flooding.
- Attention has been paid to the design of the homes with the aim of creating better living spaces and conserving the use of resources. Homes are designed to encourage more natural ventilation and daylight into the buildings in comparison to existing housing and health problems associated with inadequate ventilation, such as respiratory conditions, have decreased. Some families have built a separation wall between their own living space and that of their livestock, reducing the risk of disease. At the same time, livestock is now kept securely, minimising the chance of attacks by wild animals.
- The project has given residents access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation. Local doctors have noted that diarrhoea, dehydration, and digestive system diseases, particularly among children, have noticeably decreased. The provision of latrines has led to a reduction in the contamination of water supplies and agricultural land with human waste.
- Previously the organisation has worked to improve traditional stoves in the villages through the use of technology. This project reduced the amount of smoke and gas produced creating a healthier environment within the home.
- BLACD has also trialled the use of solar energy. In one village solar energy is now being used to heat water (41 heaters) and there are plans to extend this to other villages. Raising awareness of the benefits of such clean and renewable energy is an important component of future work Programs.
- The Program helps to educate fishermen on environmental protection laws and how to limit the pollution of the Nile.



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Key achievements

The **financial sustainability** of the project is fundamental and has allowed the project to provide housing improvement within the communities for over 15 years.

- Houses are built or improved using loans provided by Better Life and taken out by the households themselves. The use of loans, which need to be repaid, has helped to embed a sustainable approach throughout the organisation from the beginning. The home is then owned outright by the household. Improving or constructing houses has not previously been affordable to those families working with Better Life. This Program provides access to credit through the revolving fund, and reduces costs wherever possible. Participants have noted that because the revolving loan fund provided them with cash they could purchase materials at lower prices rather than buying through instalments. The loans are offered without the required collateral of freehold title and the twelve per cent interest rate is low in comparison with other credit providers.
- The Program employs labourers from the local communities to carry out the construction work with families and uses local suppliers and transporters of raw materials and quarry blocks, helping to stimulate the local economy. Twenty-five construction workers have been trained by Better Life to date in the use of locally available materials. The use of locally available building materials and labour not only creates employment opportunities, it is also more affordable for the participating households. Current plans will see an additional 30 construction workers, along with 30 apprentice construction workers, trained in the technical methods needed to build environmentally sustainable, safe and healthy homes.
- The Program also encourages a mutual self-help approach within the community to reduce labour and material costs and improve community relations.
- The organisation was originally financed through a loan from Habitat for Humanity (this has now been repaid). Better Life has proved successful at gaining grant funding from a range of international donor agencies, and has been successful in developing funding relationships with the private sector.
- BLACD has developed additional funding streams to support their work and the development of new projects. The organisation is also proactive in developing partnerships with the private sector to fund the implementation of water, sanitation and improved housing.
- Better Life has developed a long-term strategy for financial sustainability and is establishing a fund to cover costs in case of difficulties in securing funding. This fund is generated by Better Life's Minia-based training centre, with rooms hired out to other groups and NGOs, generating an annual income of approximately US\$45,000. Cash deposits also generate revenue to cover some costs.
- The organisation is also establishing a fund-raising unit to target donors within the private sector.



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Challenges

Better Life has found sourcing funds for improving housing conditions to be highly challenging, particularly in the current global economic climate. Despite this, however, BLACD has managed to obtain funding from a range of donors and was able to persuade the EFG-Hermes private sector financial group to invest in infrastructure for the project.

In order to address the unwillingness of banks to lend to low-income groups, Better Life has taken loans in its own name to pass on via a revolving fund, which has been set up for families. Better Life works with banks in order to change their policies and allow loans to low-income groups and individuals.

As a result there are now a number of banks working with low-income groups to provide loans for home improvements.



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Success factors

The organisation identifies a number of factors which have contributed to the success of the Program.

- Large numbers of beneficiaries have applied to the Program confirming the need for such services
- People from low-income groups are able to effectively plan, implement and build their own homes whilst repaying loans
- The use of local construction materials contributes to reducing costs and countering negative environmental factors
- The training of local construction workers on designing healthy and environmentally suitable houses helps to spread the concept of healthy houses, saves local materials and provides a simplified work methodology
- Helping neighbours and supporting other community members reduces costs and helps to achieve a sense of social solidarity



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Scaling-up and transfer

- The Program began in 1997, working on improving conditions for 350 families. The project has since been extended and to date housing has been improved for 1,500 families and potable water and latrines provided for 7,000 families. The Program now works in 27 communities on the east and west bank of the river Nile and a wider housing movement has been formed and is gaining momentum.
- Better Life produced construction manuals, the first of their kind in Egypt, which have been shared with a number of NGOs, both locally and in other parts of the country. The manuals have been widely adopted by a range of professionals and are well-regarded for the wealth of information and practical knowledge contained.
- The production of the manuals has allowed other households within the communities to construct their own houses and improve existing housing conditions using their own funds and locally produced materials, with very little external training.
- Three community-based organisations in Nazlet Faragallah (Minia governorate) and Abou Gharir (Bani Swief governorate) have adopted the Better Life approach to improving housing conditions.
- The approach has been disseminated internationally through various networks including the Habitat International Coalition and the International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Exchanges have also been carried out with communities from Tanzania, South Africa and the Philippines. These have been organised and supported by the Ford Foundation.



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Joseph Schechla, Coordinator, Housing and Land Rights Network, Habitat International Coalition

"The Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) was happy to endorse the "Local Housing Movement Program" of the Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development for the World Habitat Award. As a member of Habitat International Coalition (HIC) through HLRN, BLACD's work has provided a shining example of relevance and innovation to introduce - and realize - the human right to adequate housing in our region. The Program is developing all the ingredients of a true local housing "movement," as its title implies, by bringing communities and other parties together to make significant and durable improvements in the living conditions of those who need them most.

HIC-HLRN was equally pleased to participate in the subsequent study visit, which served as an eminently appropriate lesson in the local elements of the wider national movement for Egyptians' rights and dignity that toppled a dictator in 2011. One year after those historic events, the long-planned study visit participants benefitted from BSHF prescience in recognizing and proffering this local mobilization of ideas and stakeholders in ways that promise to have "upstream" (i.e. policy-level) impacts, where authorities and decision makers have an aptitude to learn and apply lessons.

The Better Life Program's design and implementation align closely to the constituent elements of the human right to housing, as defined in international law instruments. It addresses the beneficiaries not only as persons and households in need, but also as deserving subjects of development, in the sense that they are imbued with the same dignity and human rights as other citizens and residents in their country. However, the beneficiaries are among those citizens consistently marginalized and subject to various forms of discrimination on the basis of their impoverishment, type of work and rural placement in a rigidly stratified society. Therefore, the material and changes resulting from the Local Housing Movement Program have far-reaching implications in their demand for fair and equal treatment of citizens.



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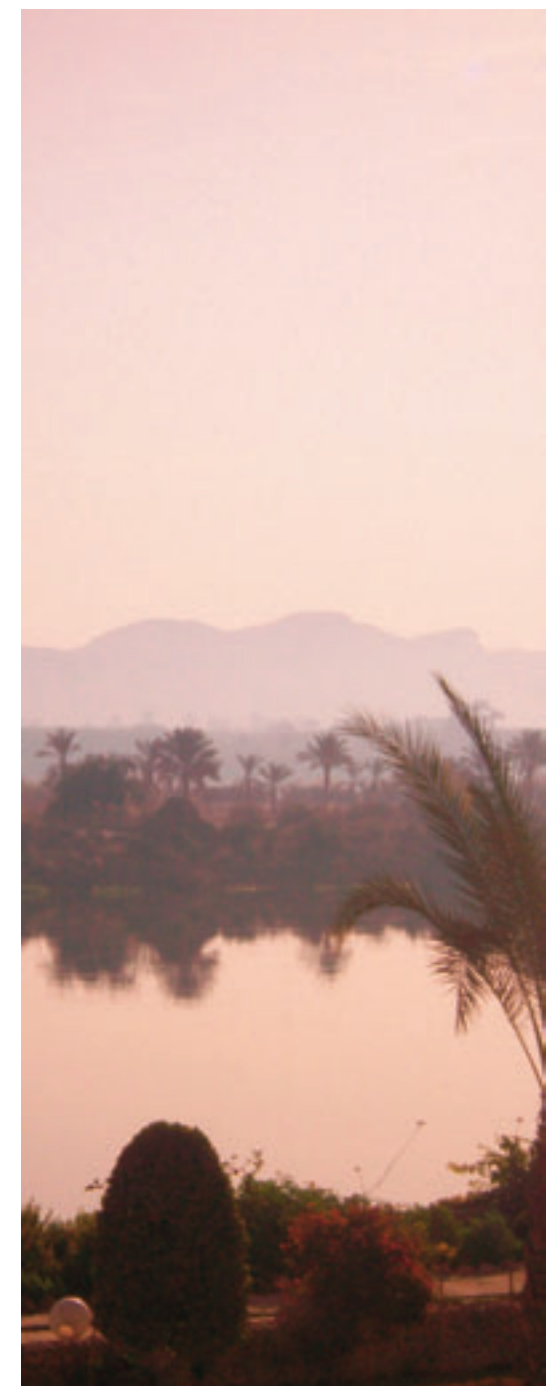
Contribution from Joseph Schechla

Joseph Schechla, Coordinator, Housing and Land Rights Network, Habitat International Coalition

Better Life acknowledges that the human right to adequate housing is realized through more than just four walls or a home-improvement loan, but through a complex of productive relationships and actions that achieve well-being linked to a bundle of other rights and development as a social entity called Egypt. Therefore, as a matter of philosophy and strategy, housing rights fit organically in Better Life's approach to "comprehensive development." Thus, the BLACD Program bears national dimensions, but begins in the Upper Egypt governorate of al-Minya, especially realizing housing rights of rural inhabitants.

From the housing rights perspective, the BLACD program addressed all of the criteria defined as elements and congruent human rights that ensure adequate housing, including:

- Security of tenure, freedom from dispossession
- Public goods & services
- Environmental natural resources (land & water)
- Affordability
- Physical accessibility
- Habitability and soundness of construction
- Suitable location
- Cultural appropriateness
- Participation, self-expression, association and peaceful assembly
- Education, information, capability and capacity building, and
- Privacy and security of person, including the end to domestic violence.



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On an evaluation field visit, our own meetings with beneficiaries of the Program demonstrated its positive impact on their personal, family and community well-being. The individual and collective sense of gratitude - and assertion of rights - were palpable. To the extent that the Program has sought and achieved greater levels of psycho-social stability through environmental, economic and material development by operationalizing the human right to adequate housing, certain Program outcomes remain difficult to quantify, but are not less remarkable.

On the 2012 study visit, participants also caught a glimpse of the urban dimensions of Egypt's housing movement at Cairo. There, they joined activists and civil organizations, including HIC-HLRN, **Takween** and **ADAPT**, and local communities for an orientation into the currents and innovations of social movements in Egypt's capital megacity.

The study visit, covering both rural and urban dimensions of the emerging Egypt-wide housing rights movement, enabled participants to cut through the myopia of customary media reports about the region. Namely, while much contention and nonlinear progress characterize the reconstitution of central government institutions and leaderships, the real change in the region is taking place in remote locations and in under-reported communities. The BSHF study visit demonstrated that, with so much uncertainty, instability, polarization and regression to report at the political level, local people's processes are far more encouraging, indeed enlightening, toward a more-equitable future."



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Rights-based approach

BLACD is the first NGO to work with quarry workers and fishermen. Using a participatory empowerment approach the organisation focuses on groups who are experiencing discrimination and provides education and training on social, health and economic rights. Housing is acknowledged as a human right and forms the basis for a range of different development opportunities. The range of improvements, such as access to water, latrines, electricity, and safer, cleaner, larger and properly ventilated homes has an impact on individuals, families, and the wider community.

BLACD aims to spread awareness of rights and link community members with decision-makers including relevant officials and local authorities. Project beneficiaries are involved in each aspect of the project including planning, implementation and monitoring. This ownership of the project is vital for the long-term sustainability of the Program. The project has engendered a 'housing for the poor' movement which supports beneficiaries to claim their right to housing.

Better Life has successfully helped to organise and train a number of community development organisations (CDOs) to advocate for various rights as well as hold government authorities accountable. These groups have been successful in communicating with government stakeholders in order to change policies to support marginalised groups.

"Before I didn't know how to get in touch with Government officials but now I know how to meet them and how talk to them about our problems." A fisherman in one of the rural Fishermen's Associations.



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Empowering women

The organisation pays particular attention to integrating gender into its development approach. Traditional gender roles often limit women's participation in community and household decision-making. As a result, women are generally unable to participate in social or professional roles outside the home.

The situation of women in the target villages and communities is particularly important when it comes to issues of water and sanitation. Research from BLACD shows that women are responsible for providing their families with drinking water as well as water for cleaning and waste disposal. This could result in four separate trips each day and prevented women from carrying out other roles. The custom of throwing human waste into the canal was commonplace and clothes and dishes were often washed in water contaminated with sewage. These practices have a negative impact on health with the most common preventable illnesses, such as diarrhoea and kidney disease, associated with a lack of potable water and poor sanitation practices. To tackle these issues, and support the empowerment of women, the organisation strengthened gender-mainstreaming initiatives through the development of a health visitor model which trains women as village health visitors. Health visitors campaign on issues around access to water and sanitation activities as well as provided basic health training.

The project provides an effective model for implementing gender-sensitive water and sanitation programs. Given the key role of women in the provision and maintenance of water, sanitation and hygiene at the household level, the inclusion of women in the planning and delivery of the Program is vital.

"My father used to make me feel like I was less than my brothers but now he boasts about me to other people in the village." A woman in one of the rural Women's Movements.



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Building social solidarity

It is possible for homeowners to reduce the costs of construction by encouraging family members, along with friends and neighbours, to make an active contribution to the building process. This process also creates solidarity and cooperation between neighbours and establishes new values and principles within communities.

Volunteers

There are 100 male and female volunteers from a range of different faiths, including Christians and Muslims involved in the Program. Volunteers gain a range of skills including interpersonal and consultancy skills. This includes assessing the condition of homes and developing appropriate budgets. Value for money and cost-efficiency are important to the project and volunteers are tasked with monitoring these aspects.



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Additional resources - Arabic with English subtitles

Together for Better Life

BLACD - 2012

This video explores the impact of BLACD's work within communities. Members of the communities and staff contribute to the video providing personal insights on the impact of the organisation's work.

Legitimate Right

BLACD - 2012

A video featuring a workshop with representatives of the Better Life communities identifying the housing support required. The video also considers some of the most pressing issues for the communities including the ownership land and access to water.

Ordinary Dreams

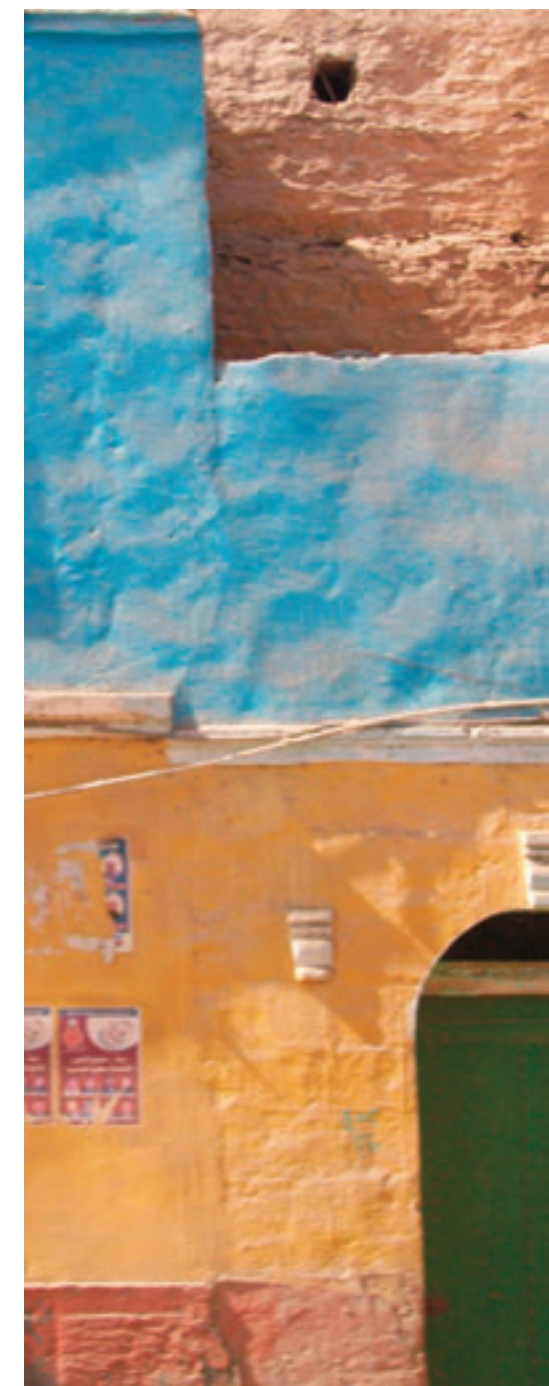
BLACD - 2011

A video including individuals from the targeted communities detailing how the home improvements and access to clean and safe utilities have improved their quality of life.

World Habitat Award 2010

BLACD - 2011

A video featuring Local Housing Movement Program beneficiaries explaining how Better Life has supported them improve their housing conditions and the impact on their lives.



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Presentation of the World Habitat Awards 2010

BSHF - 2010

A commemorative publication of the global celebration of World Habitat Day 2010 in Shanghai, China, including detailed descriptions of the World Habitat Award winning projects in Egypt and Sweden.

Local Housing Movement Program

Urban Inform - 2010

A video explaining the context for the Local Housing Movement Program, as well as the main aims and achievements of the project.

Additional resources - Arabic

Media Reportage on Local Housing Movement Program

Dream Channel

(uploaded by BLACD) - 2010

A video introducing the work of the Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development and featuring interviews with BLACD's Director and other staff members. The video focuses on the housing programme and the winning of the World Habitat Award.

Achievements of Better life Association for Comprehensive Development Relating to Housing

ONtv - 2010

Video featuring a media interview with Mr. Maher Boshra, Executive Director of Better Life Association, regarding the achievements of the Local Housing Movement Program and being awarded the World Habitat Award.



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Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development in Minia wins the World Habitat Award

Watani - 2011

*Article on the achievements of the Local Housing Movement Program and BLACD being awarded the World Habitat Award.***BLACD Guidance Manual for Construction Work in Minia**

BLACD - 2006

*Guidance manual describing how to implement the different building stages, technical construction criteria and the advantages of using environmental materials in building. It is intended for specialists in housing and construction, as well as local building workers.***BLACD Guidance Manual for Design Criteria and Approach**

BLACD - 2006

*Publication describing the design criteria followed when building houses in villages and how to make suitable designs for rural communities.***BLACD Training Manual on Rights-Based Development**

BLACD - 2008

*Manual designed to 'train the trainers' on applying a rights-based approach to different programmes. The document covers the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as well as looking at child labour and labour rights.***Attachments to the Training Manual**

BLACD - 2008

Attachments relating to the BLACD training manual on Rights Based Development.

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The Local Housing Movement Program (LHMP) from Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development (BLACD) was awarded the World Habitat Award in 2010 in recognition of its work in improving the quality of life for poor and marginalised people and communities.

With the aim of further promoting the project the Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) co-ordinated and funded an international peer exchange to Minia in February 2012. This provided an opportunity for Better Life to demonstrate its model of integrated development. Participants were able to share knowledge, expertise and experience on environmentally and socially sustainable housing practices as well as on securing land and tenure rights, and to gain an in-depth understanding of the key aspects of this award-winning Program. The visit brought together 13 participants from ten countries, including representatives from national government, academic institutions, NGOs and civil society organisations, as well as practitioners involved in affordable housing.

The study visit took place from 4 - 10 February with participants meeting in Cairo and travelling on to Minia together. The format of the three-day visit to Minia comprised a series of presentations, from the hosts and participants alike, as well as field visits to villages involved in the Program. Workshops and presentations were held at BLACD's El-Shorafa training centre. Study visit participants were given the opportunity to meet project beneficiaries, both volunteers and those living in homes improved through the work of the Program. This provided participants with a unique perspective on the LHMP and as well as the key achievements and challenges specific to its work.



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The study visit aimed to facilitate discussions on the key achievements and particular challenges of the Program and of the work of Better Life. It also created a space for participants to reflect on their experiences and learning over the course of the visit, exchanging information and ideas with peers to consider how best the lessons can be transferred or adapted to different contexts. This process generated a range of comments and suggestions, including those listed below.

Rights-based approach

"Today, when we visited Shoshan Village, we saw a debate between our friend Ahmed and community members; it was a very good sign. It means that BLACD's awareness activities have been successful, that the people know their rights." Abu Rayhan Al-Beeronee, Bangladesh

"The work of BLACD is amazing in terms of community empowerment and development, and in terms of giving locals [the] tools to seek their needs and look for their rights and purchase them. Getting this close with the community and working with them and for them is an unlimited learning method which I personally think BLACD managed to get through and be creative at." Study visit participant

"What BLACD [has] done is the real job of an NGO, to work with community and within the community to support, develop the poor and marginalised people of the society as well as bring up the living standards of the community through provision of low cost houses and sanitation facilities..." Study visit participant

"Decent housing is about more than loans or building materials, it is about human rights and power." Building and Social Housing Foundation



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Integrated approach

"What I find interesting in the work of BLACD is how they integrate the values, strategies and approaches for community development: housing, microfinance, access to community services... and, integrated in all that, the community empowerment component." Benedict Balderrama, Philippines

"I find that BLACD is doing a very complete, extremely global work for the communities, not only focusing on one or two or three aspect of their lives, but on many different aspects." Marie Bailloux, Chile

Program impact

"Our goal is to improve the quality of life of 80 per cent of the population of poor communities, for them to have a better life in healthy and safe houses that they own." Mina Mokbel, Egypt

"The families ... impressed [me with] their satisfaction of their life improvement especially the access to water, sanitation, hous[ing] maintenance and construction, and gender income generation." Study visit participant



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Local Housing Movement Program, Minia, Egypt

BSHF and study visit participants - 2012
A brochure produced following the study visit summarising the Program's approach and providing a brief overview of what the group learnt and of suggestions relating to the project.



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The World Habitat Awards is an annual international competition that recognises innovative and sustainable solutions to key housing challenges in the global South as well as the North.

The Awards were established in 1985 by the Building and Social Housing Foundation as part of its contribution to the United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

Every year an award of £10,000 is presented to each of the two winners. This takes place at the World Urban Forum (even years) and UN-Habitat Governing Council (odd years). In addition to the prize and international recognition, study visit activities are carried out with each of the winners to promote the international transfer of the approach.

Further information about the Awards, including related study visit activities and assessment procedures can be found by visiting www.worldhabitatawards.org.



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The Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) is an independent research organisation that promotes sustainable development and innovation in housing through collaborative research and knowledge transfer.

Established in 1976, BSHF works both in the UK and internationally to identify innovative housing solutions and to foster the exchange of information and good practice.

BSHF believes that everyone should have access to decent housing and is committed to promoting housing policy and practice that is people centred and environmentally responsible.

Further information on the research, publications and other activities of the Building and Social Housing Foundation are available at www.bshf.org.



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The Better Life Association for Comprehensive Development (BLACD) is an Egyptian non-governmental, non-profit organisation working to improve the quality of life of poor and deprived people in Upper Egypt. The association was established in the governorate of Minia in 1995 and registered as an NGO with the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs in 2003. BLACD is directed by a board of five trustees, including both men and women, with extensive experience in the development sector. Currently more than 30 full time employees manage and coordinate projects which are implemented with the support of 100 local volunteers from the target villages. They work in five main areas of development: housing, democracy and human rights, health, education and economic empowerment.

BLACD follows a rights-based, integrated approach to development and works to improve the conditions of houses in poor villages including the installation of water and sanitation infrastructure, as well as supporting democracy at the village level and building the capacity of community-based organisations. The organisation works with fishermen and quarry workers to improve their livelihood and situation. The rights of women and girls are strongly promoted and BLACD supports the empowerment of women and girls through the exercising of their health and social rights.

For more information please visit www.betterlife-egypt.org.

