

“Benazir” Dream House for the Poor

**By
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When dreams come true

Imagine living below the poverty line in a remote coastal area in Sindh. Imagine resigning to this fate and then being told that you will be a proud owner of a house; disaster resistant, enabled by solar energy, with adequate ventilation, a proper kitchen and a solid structure that will last for decades.

This is to soon become a reality for 500 such families in the coastal areas of Badin, Thatta and Karachi with the help of UNDP’s ‘Energy Efficient Housing Project’. This project is being implemented under Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Program. UNDP has been supporting NGOs and building services to do research on these houses for several years. The first houses of this kind were built in the rural areas of Thatta and Badin. Recognizing the immense value of this initiative, the Sindh Government requested UNDP to upscale the project to build 500 more. In a country where 30% of the urban population lives in informal settlements occupying public lands or ecologically unsafe areas located in city fringes, provision of low cost houses comes as a God sent opportunity for many. The houses will be built in the most under-developed region with 86% of the population living below the poverty line.

Built through local NGO’s, these energy-efficient houses will be disaster resistant (cyclones and earthquakes are common to this area). More than 50% women household owners are among the recipients and this will create livelihoods for 1000 persons by training them with energy efficient low-cost housing technologies. The communities will enjoy the added benefit of using of energy efficient stoves and solar lights in these houses.

A house owner rejoices

Suleman Taheri from Thirk, Thattha District was jubilant when asked how he felt after learning that a house was being built for his family. “Torrential rain and occasional cyclones used to erase our houses but thanks to UNDP we will now have solid houses which not only look good but also provide adequate space for guests, storage, cooking and many other needs ’ he adds in excitement . ‘We are not like rich people who inherit property from their forefathers. I would have never built a home for my kids with my modest earning through fishing but now I feel proud to have my very own home”, he continued.



[A unique initiative](#)

Low Cost Housing Project is a unique initiative with a direct tangible impact on the lives of communities. Started off in January 2009, first phase of the Program will be providing free of cost 500 houses (200 each in Badin and Thatta and 100 in Karachi's Rerrhi/Ibrahim Hyderi and Kakapir, Sandspit villages in the coastal areas).

Over the years, numerous government poverty alleviation programs have proven inadequate, particularly lacking the ability to provide low cost housing with the participation of the poor.

Besides its new approach for doing something concrete for human settlement, a commendable feature of the program is the national ownership demonstrated by the Government of Sindh which has provided cost sharing contributions to UNDP Supported project. Low cost houses are basically meant to cater for shelter needs of the poorest communities living near the coastal areas within the project's scope.

[Benazir-an unparalleled approach to house building](#)

The Funding of the program comes from multiple sources, including cost sharing agreement between UNDP and the Government of Sindh to the tune of US \$ 2.3 million. This support has been committed by the Government of Sindh to construct low cost, energy efficient and earthquake-resistant model houses. These houses have been named '*Benazir*' to exemplify its unparallel house building approach.

A specific criterion was designed to identify the villages. Among these were that the village situated in a disaster prone area and the village or house not be situated on land owned by some private party other than the beneficiary. Villages where houses were in deplorable conditions and had been damaged due to natural disasters were a priority.

The Excitement and joy of communities selected for entitlement of houses knows no bounds. Ms. Sarbai is a house wife from Thirk, Thatta. She says she is feeling happy as her life long dream has come true. Describing her feelings, she says, 'I still cannot believe that one day my children will be playing in their own home'. Similar expressions of joy were shared by 60-year old Mr. Basra who is a father of 8. Hailing from Khijer Lake area of Thatta District, he has already outlined plans for traditional cultural activities to distribute sweets and arrange a traditional Sindhi folk dance "Sera" to celebrate the ownership of a house.



The selected houses that will be replaced © UNDP Pakistan

[Recognizing the value of this intervention](#)

Each house costs approximately 250,000 PKR. Apart from a decent accommodation, these houses have solar energy facility and are resistant to water salinity, earthquake and cyclones. Due to its upfront role in

reducing conditions of poverty for many coastal communities in Sindh, the project has received significant media coverage and attracted development experts from across Pakistan. Development practitioners are of the view that provision of low cost housing should be scaled up. Mr. Abdul Qadir, Programme Specialist, Energy and Environment Unit UNDP Pakistan says, ‘One of the failures of development interventions has been the inability of projects to secure effective buy-in. Unless people enjoy tangible benefits they will not come forward and own the development projects. Low Cost Housing Project has lot of potential to promote sustainable community uplift programmes.’

“Project houses are socially acceptable and economically feasible”, Masood Lohar, Project Coordinator remarks while adding that “ Houses are being constructed with compressed earth block keeping in view the energy-efficient and earthquake resistant technology”. This concern arises from the fact that poor communities inhabiting coastal areas often saw their shanty houses ravaged by cyclones, earthquakes etc. In the near future, all efforts shall be made to further expand on this successful initiative’, he adds.