PERMANENT POST-DISASTER HOUSING AFTER TWELVE YEARS

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On September 18, 1974 hurricane Fifi swept across the north coast of Honduras killing several thousand residents and leaving more than 100,000 homeless. This was the fourth such storm this century, but the residents were not prepared and the loss was extensive. Most of the loss of life and housing destruction was in the small villages along rivers and on steep hillsides.

Many international relief organizations as well as governments responded to the disaster. After the immediate period of relief and clean up, the task of constructing permanent housing was undertaken. The authors of this article received a grant from one participating agency which enabled them to evaluate the housing over three years after the construction. In 1987 we returned to one of the three sites we had evaluated in the 70's and did an extensive follow up, again measuring resident satisfaction. This paper reports on changes in resident satisfaction at this one site after twelve years.

THE HOUSING AT SAN JOSE': The agency which funded our research built 350 houses in three separate sites. The one on which we are reporting is San Jose' de las Laureles and contains 121 houses. It is located near the city of Chaloma on the major highway between San Pedro Sula, the second largest city in Honduras, and the north coast. A few of the houses were built of steel reinforced concrete, but the majority were built of cement block and had concrete floors and tin (lamina or zinc) roofs. The houses contain approximately 25 square meters of floor space and cost $658 (U.S.) for the material. They were constructed by volunteers and future residents. The latter receiving food for their work.

HOUSING RECIPIENTS: The families that received the San Jose' housing were from a small village of the same name which was devastated by the storm. Over 80% of them had lived in champas (houses constructed by the owners and made of indigenous materials such as thatch, bamboo, and mud plaster), only one in three had hard floors, less than two percent had electricity, four percent had baths, and ten percent had piped water into the houses. The average number of persons per household was 5.7, the average formal educational level of the household heads was less than two years, and most of them were employed in the primary sector (agriculture).1

THE RESEARCH: We decided very early in this research that the housing recipients were the experts with reference to knowing how successful these housing projects were and subsequently we utilized