Catalyst for a Paradigm Shift: Homes for marginalized rural communities

Submitted By: Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB)



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB)

Organization Type: Civil society

Website: https://iab.org.bd

Practice Details

Country(ies): Bangladesh

City(ies): Kachua, Bhola, Melandaha

Start Year: 2023 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Affordability & Financing
- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing & Climate Mitigation
- Housing & Climate Adaptation

Relevant SDGs:



UN-HABITAT

Problem & Context

Bangladesh is among the world's most climate-vulnerable countries, with extreme weather driving poverty, displacement, and loss of livelihoods. Only 2% of rural houses are climate-resilient, while 61% of the 180 million people live in villages, many in unsafe housing. Despite the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guaranteeing adequate shelter, rural housing remains neglected. IAB launched an initiative to build 100 symbolic homes for marginalized families, aiming to inspire a movement to expand to thousands more. While urban elites enjoy resources, loans, and policies, the rural majority lacks dignified housing. With $1,200–1,650, a safe rural home could be built—yet no state support exists. Architects, molded to serve the privileged, often overlook that one luxury bathroom could build several rural homes. This initiative demands justice: to redirect skills, honor indigenous wisdom, and stand with marginalized communities for housing as a right, not a privilege.

Solution Developed

The 100 Homes project stands for justice in housing—selecting vulnerable rural families through fair, unbiased criteria. Widows, people with disabilities, and those at risk of homelessness are prioritized, as are communities facing climate and economic threats. Above all, empowering women is key—because giving a woman a home uplifts her family, secures children's futures, and builds a more equitable society.

The project is more than building shelter—it reclaims dignity on ancestral land, where roots run deep. It calls architects to cross boundaries, learn from vernacular wisdom, and stand with the rural poor. By turning villages into classrooms and communities into collaborators, it sparks a movement: housing as justice, architecture as service, and design as hope. The climate-resilient plinths of these houses, built with local bricks, sand, and mud, are stronger against floods and cyclones than fragile mud bases. Timber partitions replace hot CI sheets, lowering indoor heat by 4–6°C, while treated wood ensures durability. Inspired by indigenous wisdom—like perforated wooden ventilation and innovation combine to help communities build safer, cooler, and more resilient homes.

Implementation

Although the project is named 100 Homes, we have already been able to benefit more than 500 households through it. The initiative followed an eight-step process: 1) community-based survey, 2) survey data analysis, 3) beneficiary selection, 4) participatory house design and approval, 5) implementation budgeting, 6) fund raising, 7) capacity development of community, and 8) construction supervision. Surveys were conducted collaboratively by architects, local correspondents, and community members to gather demographic, climatic, and built-form data. Vulnerable households were selected through proper transparency. Participatory designs were developed by architects and house owner, integrating climate resilience, affordability, and

vernacular aesthetics. Budgets were prepared and funds mobilized through contributions from professionals, national institutions, and donors. Capacity-building workshops trained local builders to construct disaster resilient techniques like elevated plinth level, timber seasoning, and wind protective anchoring. Implementation method was participatory and community-led, with residents constructing homes under direct expert guidance, fostering ownership and skill transfer through participation. Government bodies and universities provided technical input; NGOs and local groups supported outreach and logistics. The timeline spanned two years, progressing through phased planning, design, fundraising, training, and construction.

Enablers & Obstacles

Key enablers included strong community engagement, local knowledge, and technical innovation led by IAB, particularly young architects. Consolidated funding, participatory design, and grassroots capacity-building fostered ownership, sustainability and resilience. Local anchors bridged gaps between architects, carpenters, and homeowners, streamlining communication and reducing costs. However, obstacles persisted: poor infrastructure, limited access to water and electricity, insecure land tenureship, and bureaucratic delays hindered work progress. Social exclusion and low awareness restricted participation. Environmental risks—floods, cyclones—amplified vulnerabilities, these were addressed through adaptive design, inclusive outreach, and phased implementation. Integrated planning and community leadership proved essential to overcoming barriers and ensuring sustainable impact.

Results & Impact

The "100 Homes" project of IAB has transformed the lives of low-income rural households. Till date 563 households benefited through funding and technical support for built up houses with social security, climate resiliency and healthy environment. Safe, resilient houses reduce fear of eviction, improve living conditions, and provide social security. Individual stories illustrate this impact: a girl ranked first in 5th grade after moving into her home; a husband reunited with his wife after four years of receiving a house, restoring their family.

For marginalized groups, dignified housing ensures social stability, better health, and financial relief by lowering repair and maintenance costs. Women gain stronger family roles and decision-making power, while children benefit from improved educational opportunities. The houses also protect families from cyclones, floods, heavy rains, breaking cycles of displacement and poverty and fostering long-term economic resilience.

The broader impacts include climate and community resilience. The climate-resilient plinths of these houses resist soil erosion and climatic stresses. Community engagement during design and construction builds ownership and transfers skills, ensuring sustainability by using local materials. By empowering communities, strengthening livelihoods, and protecting the

environment, the project demonstrates housing as a tool for justice, resilience, and social transformation.

Replication & Scale Up

The climate-resilient housing model of the 100 Homes Project is being replicated across Bangladesh's four climate-vulnerable zones—flood, cyclone, drought, and landslide-prone areas. Each zone adopts tailored housing solutions, empowering communities to self-replicate through local engagement. Initial success in coastal and flood-prone districts was enabled by community ownership, geographic targeting, and knowledge-sharing, fostering resilience and scalability.

Scaling up requires broader stakeholder's involvement for technical and financial support. Curriculum reformation in architecture schools to include rural housing can mobilize young professionals and future architects. Institutional banking policies must evolve to support low-income rural housing. Donor agencies—national and international—can catalyze expansion by funding community-led replication, enabling the 100 Homes model to reach more vulnerable populations nationwide.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice is a new or innovative practice that is not yet adequately or fully integrated into formal policy frameworks.

The 100 Homes Project by IAB is a voluntary initiative by Bangladeshi architects to support marginalized communities. Though impactful, it's not yet integrated into formal policy. According to "National Housing Policy 2016" clause 4.10 addresses distressed women headed family, but long-term planning and coordination among communities, professionals, and authorities are mostly needed. Recognizing housing as a basic right, the government could adopt and align the 100 Homes model within its regulatory framework.

Lessons & Takeaways

Community mobilization and capacity development need further strengthening. Introducing Community Action Plans (CAP) can help identify needs and resources, while training in budgeting empowers homeowners. A handbook development is ongoing to guide communities and builders on resilient design preparation and cost-effective construction using local materials. Technical solutions like wood treatment and material mixture ratios of plinth were taught to enhance durability and ensure sustainable replication.