



Feminism makes community a benchmark for self-construction of affordable housing in Venezuela

By Lucas Salum. Source: Brasil de Fato.

2025/05/09

In Antímáno, a suburb of Caracas, the Venezuelan capital, a community has found the formula to become a benchmark in civil self-construction: popular organisation and feminism. This was the key that enabled 54 families to build a low-income housing block literally from scratch. Self-construction is when future residents build their own homes.

Started in 2015, the Jorge Rodríguez Padre project is the result of a public policy by the then president, Hugo Chávez, to guarantee housing for families. "We started by bringing together families with different needs. These are families who live in rented or overcrowded homes. And because of this need, our commander Chávez came here with a suitcase full of dreams and told us to organise ourselves as a people," explains Ircedia Boada, the site's stock manager.



The Gran Misión Vivienda Venezuela low-income housing project was created after heavy rains hit Venezuela in 2010, leaving thousands of families homeless. Five years later, the community won the land, with construction actually starting in 2017. Both the trade embargo imposed on Venezuela and the pandemic have delayed the work, which is due to be finalised in 2023.

The choice to do a self-build project was influenced by the community itself, as construction assistant Ursalina Guaramato says: "The importance of all this is the feeling of belonging. Both us adults and our children, who realise the effort we are making to have decent housing, that's the great importance," says Guaramato.



Yugleidi Ruiz arrived at the project without knowing anything about building work, and today she is one of the 'doers'. Photo: Lucas Weber for Brasil de Fato.

The funding comes from the Venezuelan government itself, which pays for the building materials as well as the daily rate for the person responsible for leading the work every day. Apart from that, the work is voluntary and divided evenly throughout the week. And at the weekend, there is a collective meeting between everyone involved in the work.



Ayari Rojas explains that Saturdays are when the whole team meets "and allows for integration". "This socialisation of information with people who only work on Monday and then they can see the people who work on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. This is the big family, as we call it. A dysfunctional family, but a family." The manager emphasises that one of the work site's concerns is the good coexistence of the group, which means combating all forms of discrimination. "In Venezuela, we don't escape issues like feminicide, gender violence, we don't escape this reality. But right now we're doing a lot of work on the fact that dressing one way is not a reason to be attacked, or that gender diversity is not a reason to be attacked either."



The work is a reference and receives visits from different organisations and countries. Photo: Lucas Weber for Brasil de Fato.

Yugleidi Ruiz says that she arrived knowing nothing, and over the years has learnt about "plumbing, wall textures, I know the right amount of sand and cement, I've learnt about ceramic tiles," she explains. "We're 89 per cent empowered women here. And our motto is that whenever a woman moves forward, no man moves backward. Women always reinvent themselves," Ruiz concludes.



Republished from Brasil de Fato / Original language: Portuguese. Translated to English by ROOTS/
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