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Habitat for Humanity: Implementing a Global Strategy Locally

Habitat gives us an opportunity which is very difficult to find: to reach out and work side by side with those who never have had a decent home – but work with them on a completely equal basis. It's not a big-shot, little-shot relationship. It's a sense of equality.

– Former President Jimmy Carter, 2008¹

Introduction

In late August 2010, Henry Smith stared absently past his laptop screen to the construction trucks outside his office window. It was the fifth anniversary of hurricane Katrina, the catastrophic storm that changed his life and his city forever. He had been the Executive Director of New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity for nearly twenty years, but his first year after the storm felt like a different lifetime. He reflected on the immediate aftermath of the storm, Habitat for Humanity's ongoing role in healing the city, and what the future might hold. The community was in desperate need of affordable housing and, more importantly, hope. Henry was the head of the non-profit organization most capable of delivering on that long-term need; New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity was the number one homebuilder in the Katrina affected Gulf Coast.² Despite building new affordable housing units for over twenty years, Henry's office was presented with a new paradigm: to begin leveraging their construction expertise on repair and rehabilitation projects and begin building environmentally sustainable homes.

The headquarters has strongly encouraged affiliates to begin implementing more environmentally conscious programs, and projects incorporating a marriage of sustainability and affordability certainly seemed to be attracting the most donor and foundation support lately. But could the New Orleans affiliate do both rehabilitation and environmental sustainability programs at once? If they failed to do so, would all media attention, volunteer and donor support refocus on a charity willing to do so? Finally, regardless of his choices, Henry had to decide how to inspire his team and facilitate these new strategies.

Habitat for Humanity: Core Principles and Activities

Habitat for Humanity was founded in 1976 with the goal of eliminating poverty housing conditions worldwide (see **Exhibit 1** for a brief history). The headquarters had been based in Georgia since the organization's founding, with offices split between its birthplace in Americus, and a more recent corporate

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