Suitable housing for the lowest income families

**FRENCH GUYANA – HOUSING – INCUBATION**

**Context:** exponential spread of “spontaneous” urbanization

French Guyana is lagging behind significantly in terms of housing construction, especially highly social housing, which is leading to incremental growth of housing settlements that are referred to as “spontaneous”, i.e. self-built housing with no deeds or rights, which generates major sanitary, social, economic and environmental consequences. The Department of the environment, planning and housing (Deal) in French Guyana supported exploration of innovative, less costly solutions to complement existing public policies, with a view to curbing and preventing “spontaneous” urbanization, especially in Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, where demographic growth is exceptionally high. (over 135,000 inhabitants forecast for 2030, compared to 38,000 in 2010).

**The solution:** A housing product suited to the lowest income families

In 2014, the group made up of GRET, Pact and Agir defined a pre-operational plan for the municipality of Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, aiming to provide a sustainable suitable solution to rehouse families from two spontaneous settlements located in the city centre, in or beside the Saint-Maurice business zone, one of the most significant current urban operations in French Guyana.

**Constructive system, type of housing and upgrading of plots**

The type of housing proposed repeats the same constructive process as existing housing, based on existing self-build practices and the use of “jobmans”. It combines construction by qualified companies of basic modules featuring constructive elements essential for hygiene, safety and durability of houses and supervised self-building for the rest of houses (without supply of corresponding materials, which must be provided by inhabitants).

The layout of housing in the plots and the size of plots are designed to minimize costs of connection to the water and electricity networks, to enable the gradual extension of the houses, exterior use of the housing (cooking, vegetable garden), or separate living on the plot.

**Administrative and financial package**

The financial package is based on the existing grant eligibility, with some minor adaptations and valuation of the self-build at company prices. This solution makes it possible to reduce the cost for the State by between 35% and 50%, according to type, while keeping prices accessible for targeted families and comparable to what they pay when they self-build. It does not require families to take out loans, thanks to the moderate costs it incurs for them, the possibility of finishing and improving houses gradually, and the possibility of separating land ownership and building ownership. Land occupation is secured via a “backwards” construction lease between each recipient and the municipality, including payment of rent and allocation of the property to lessees after several years.

**Social feasibility**
Participation of inhabitants was organised from the design phase to guarantee the acceptability and suitability of the solutions proposed in multiple forms: household surveys, individual interviews and collective workshops using building models.

**Forward vision**

The system includes the signing of an agreement for maintenance and management of the neighbourhood, as well as light but long-term support from the municipality, to avoid the rebuilding of a slum in the neighbourhood or its gentrification.

**Initial results produced in the field**

This proposition was materialised with the publication of a new prefectoral order on support for access to housing in French Guyana, published in July 2015: Order n° 2015 212_0004_DEAL of 31 July 2015, pertaining to special conditions for allocation of State aid for access to highly social housing in French Guyana.

The operation in the studies has not yet been implemented but this housing product is currently being tested as part of another operation conducted by the Public urban planning establishment of French Guyana (Epag) and PACT in Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni in 2016 on land owned by Epag.

**Challenges and questions**

Implementing the proposition requires strong political backing and clear determination to integrate inhabitants and “spontaneous” settlements into the town. It is based on:

- a dynamic detailed study of local know-how, ways of life and housing, which really involved and listened to inhabitants during the feasibility study and design phase;
- all the technical, administrative, financial and land innovations based on the in-depth study of regulations & standards and their adaptation.

It necessitates negotiation and construction of political, social and technical compromises with all parties concerned and requires appropriate social and technical support.

**Recommendations**

The majority of housing built in the world is the result of individual or collective initiatives by inhabitants. GRET recommends that States, local authorities and international cooperation players strongly support these social production processes by creating conditions that are conducive to their deployment: access to land, financial and technical support systems, social support, continuous vocational training and support to local building sectors contributing to endogenous development and relocation of the economy. The cost of inaction in social, sanitary, economic and environmental terms would be exorbitant. The implementation of ambitious public policies in this domain is a prerequisite for inclusive sustainable cities and for contributing to making cities for all a reality.

**More information**

Information available from GRET, DEAL, Pact in French Guyana and EPAG.

Read the article *Relever le défi de l’habitat spontané en Guyane - Une expérimentation à Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni*, R. Colombier, B. Deluc, V. Rachmuhl, C. Piantoni, on the GRET website: www.gret.org