MAR: Expenditures on items that are not effective in guaranteeing rights

The Seven Towers, Belfast, N. Ireland

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No heating system in damp riddled flat shared by mum and her 19 year old daughter

‘A bad mix’ in damp flats

THE RIGHT TO HOUSING


Participation and the Practice of Rights
OUR APPROACH

Using a participative rights based model to enable vulnerable groups to identify human rights issues for themselves.

If human rights are to be real, there has to be evidence of change on the ground.
“Adequate housing must be habitable, in terms of providing the inhabitants with adequate space and protecting them from cold, damp ...or other threats to health”

UNCESCR General Comment 4, Paragraph 8(d)

**Dampness**
- No problems with damp: 55%
- Problems with damp: 45%

**Heating**
- Unhappy with heating system: 89%
- Happy with heating system: 11%
CLADDING PROPOSAL

...Assessing government proposals for expenditure revealed their priorities were not effective in guaranteeing rights
What we knew = the cladding was not about progressing the housing rights of the Seven Towers residents – it was about protecting the building.

What we needed to find out = how much it would cost to make an investment that would produce not only the right outcome, but ‘rights based’ outcomes.

89% of residents unhappy with heating.

Cost of converting to a more efficient and effective heating system: £5,204 (US$7,900)

Monetary savings resulting from this change: £193 (US$293)

Estimated total cost of investment in Seven Towers: £1,998,336 (approx US$3 million)

Estimated total savings for residents: £74,112 (US$112,600)
Minister rejected residents’ alternative; “half a loaf”

However,

1. Agenda had changed; resident identified rights issues were now the litmus test against which government proposals were being assessed

2. Residents forced a review of the plans which were reissued to include improvements such as insulation which were directly linked to rights obligations

3. Altered the ‘veto power’ of government response—residents could challenge their economic arguments

THE RIGHT TO HOUSING
“Across the island of Ireland, indeed across the globe, people are increasingly demanding healthy democratic participation within the state. This is not some abstract political concept; it is about ensuring public decisions are taken on the basis of transparency, accountability and participation.

It applies to 'big' questions like national taxation policies as much as it does, for example, to 'narrow' issues faced in the daily lives of residents from the Seven Towers here in Belfast asserting their right to adequate housing.

This type of ‘healthy’ relationship with the state is the basis for a sustainable democratic and economic fabric tomorrow. Its absence today is the promise that yesterday’s failures will be repeated tomorrow.”
KEY POINTS

Our experience in testing the effectiveness of government expenditure in realising people’s ESC rights:

1. **Involve the right people**: the most qualified people to tell you if their rights are being progressed are the affected group – their participation is essential

2. **Measure the right issues**: develop an evidence base to identify the extent of the ESC rights failing and use it as the litmus test

3. **Keep it simple**: we use budget analysis as a tool in a campaign for change, keeping it simple gives it added impact

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