REALITIES OF POVERTY
the struggle for adequate housing
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Unbound is an international nonprofit founded by lay Catholics grounded in the Gospel call to put the needs of the marginalized and vulnerable first.
We build relationships of mutual respect and support that bridge cultural, religious and economic divides. We invite all people of goodwill to join us.
According to the 2016 United Nations Human Development Report, “more than 1 billion people live in housing that is below minimum standards of comfort and sanitation.” That’s more than 13 percent of the Earth’s population.
With this issue of Living Unbound, we begin to explore the realities of poverty, with a particular focus on housing. We’ll see how shelter, a universal human need, is affected by lack of choices, and the profound difference that makes in the quality of a person’s life. Access to work, school, markets, hospitals, water, sanitation and nearly everything else important in the life of a human being is impacted by where they live.

In our first story we meet An-An and her family. They’re squatters living in an urban slum in the Philippines and, like millions of others, they’re held hostage by their circumstances. An-An’s family knows what all who live in poverty know: With no safety net, it’s hard to take risks to bring about change. Through the support of sponsors, Unbound is helping them weave that net.

Sometimes a safety net comes in the form of bricks and mortar, as we learn in our second story from Tanzania, where the father of sponsored child Aggy is slowly turning a dream into reality for his family.

Issues surrounding housing and the challenges that come with it, such as what it takes to get to and from work and school, are realities families participating in Unbound deal with every day of their lives. We believe it’s important to understand these realities because awareness is the first step in making any situation better.
“Through telling the stories of our families, the world will put a face to poverty. Through the stories, we will live and walk in the shoes of the marginalized. We will walk into the homes of the poor and have a glimpse of what life looks like through their eyes.”

— Regina Mburu, communications liaison for Unbound in Africa
Eleven-year-old Stephanie and her mom, Joy, cross the Almacen River every day to go to school and work. Located in the Bataan province in the Philippines, the Almacen is typically 18 to 25 feet deep, but in heavy rains can overflow its banks and flood nearby homes. The boat ride takes 10 to 15 minutes, and Stephanie walks another 10 minutes to school. While she and her mom have grown accustomed to the boat ride, the risks of this mode of travel remain.
TOGETHER A LIVING

Maria, 68, and her husband José, 66, make school uniforms in their community in El Salvador. The seasonal work doesn’t provide enough income to get them through the year, so the food and personal care items Maria receives as an Unbound sponsored elder provide needed support. The couple live in a small town.

A HARSH HILL TO LIVE ON

As of 2015, 20 percent of Peru’s population lived below the national poverty line, according to the World Bank. For residents of the Manchay community, located about two hours southeast of Lima, it means living in slum housing on a dusty hill, in an area that sees little rain and little development. Residents eke out a living as best they can in this arid environment with scant access to public services, such as water and road maintenance.
Mbogo, Elizabeth’s name in the Kikuyu language, means “buffalo” in English. She’s known as the Buffalo Kid in her community near Nairobi, Kenya. She’s also known for taking passengers to and from school and work on her bicycle. Men usually do this physically demanding work, but Elizabeth is strong and determined. She wants her daughter, Mary, 16, to continue her education. “I would not want her to live the life I have lived,” Elizabeth said.
A SECURE DWELLING

The home of sponsored youth Angelica, 20, lies outside Zamboanga City in the southern Philippines. It was repaired with sponsorship funds the family set aside for that purpose. Rotting floorboards and flimsy walls were replaced with durable materials that help keep Angelica and her family safe and secure. The refurbished home has also become a comfort-able gathering place for the local Unbound parents group.

A KITCHEN OF HER OWN

This kitchen in a rental home in Santa Ana, El Salvador, is where Roxana, who works as a cook in a corporate cafeteria, makes meals for her family. A propane tank, partially in view right of the stove, provides fuel for cooking. The sink is outside. Roxana’s youngest son, Jose, 17, is sponsored through Unbound. Jose wants to become a mechanic and buy his mom a house, so she’ll have the stability of home ownership and won’t ever have to worry about moving again.
our house with the wind
The United Nations estimates that at least one in eight people living on Earth today resides in a slum. A high percentage of those are squatters, dwelling without permission or legal protection on land they don’t own. Some erect makeshift housing on public properties, some occupy abandoned buildings and some inhabit any space they can find. Most live in extreme poverty and are, for all practical purposes, ignored by their local governments.

Calvary Hill is a street that winds along the banks of the fetid Ermitaño Creek in the heart of metropolitan Manila, Philippines. This is a squatter village and, as the name suggests, it’s a place of hardship. A row of ramshackle dwellings stacked two, three and sometimes four or more stories high stretches around the creek bend and out of view, like a house of cards made from a thousand crumpled, mismatched decks.
Alliannah, who’s 12 years old and likes to be called An-An, lives with her parents and three siblings in the squatter village. She became sponsored through Unbound in 2015.

An-An’s family lives in a fourth-floor annex of a building that, until they arrived, had only three floors. The small apartment, barely large enough for the family of six to sleep in, was built by her father, Ryan, with the help of neighbors. Ironically, because it matches no other structure in sight, it fits right in with the surroundings.

Stacking new dwellings on top of old ones is common in the flood-prone Philippines, especially in communities built as close to water as Calvary Hill. As with most decisions the poor are forced to make, the choice to live higher up is a tradeoff. While it offers protection from the rising waters brought on by the typhoons that perpetually threaten the islands, it also makes those who live there more vulnerable to the accompanying winds.

“BECAUSE THE WIND IS STRONG, OUR HOUSE DANCES WITH THE WIND,” SAID ELY, AN-AN’S MOTHER. “MY CHILDREN GO DOWN IMMEDIATELY BECAUSE THEY ARE AFRAID THAT OUR HOUSE MIGHT BE DESTROYED. WE DON’T GO UPSTAIRS ANYMORE [DURING A STORM]. THE FOUNDATION OF OUR HOUSE IS REALLY WEAK. ... THAT’S WHY WE ARE AFRAID IF THE WIND IS STRONG.”

When the storms are especially intense, the family evacuates, along with others in the area, to a nearby church. After the danger has passed they go through the frightening, familiar routine of discovering whether or not they still have a home and, if so, whether or not their belongings are still there. Such is the reality of the transient poor.

The Philippine government offers relocation services for some squatters but, again, there are tradeoffs. The relocation sites are generally far away from the urban core where most
Sponsored child An-An (left, behind her father) shares a moment with her family in their small home. The others are, from left, Aaron, Ryan (father), Aria, Ely (mother) and Arianne. Their gray fourth-floor annex apartment is shown below, near the treetop. It was tacked on to the existing structure when they moved to the Calvary Hill neighborhood.

of Manila’s working poor, including Ryan and Ely, earn their livings. (He’s a chauffeur and she takes in laundry.) Transportation back and forth would be expensive, not only in terms of money but also in precious work time. Moving would give them no choice but to try to find new employment in a less populous area with fewer opportunities. But for the working poor, a job in hand isn’t easily surrendered.

“It’d be really hard to live [in a relocation site], far from what we need and to start all over again,” Ely said. “We know our area already, near the hospital, the market and
Life in a squatter village moves at its own pace. In a typical Calvary Hill scene, the kind An-An might view from her fourth-floor window, men play a pick-up basketball game while an elderly woman, left, sweeps the ground in front of her shop. A small boy, far left, eats a treat he likely bought there.

the school. I feel afraid [about] what would be our situation there, a totally new environment, and it is also far from the work of my husband. That’s why I really feel afraid.”

Moving would also mean pulling the children from the school they now attend to start again in an unknown environment. Ely, who had to drop out of school as a teenager in order to help support her family, is reluctant to make such a disruption in their lives.

“My dream for them is to finish their studies,” she said. “It’s hard if they grow up without it, most especially if I’m already gone in this world. They cannot find a good job with a big salary if they don’t have education, like me. I want them to finish their studies while I’m still here.”

Ely is grateful to the Unbound community and to An-An’s sponsors for easing the family’s financial burden.

“I am really thankful … because you really help us a lot,” she said. “I cannot afford to buy their things in school. I have four children and they all need to buy school supplies. My
husband’s salary is too small, which is not enough even for us in a week. ... If I didn’t have a chance to be part of this organization, I would not have the opportunity to attend meetings and trainings and for my child to have an annual physical examination.”

The meetings she refers to are those of the local Unbound mothers group. Such groups have become a cornerstone of the sponsorship program in each of the countries where Unbound works, and a valuable source of support and encouragement for families striving to lift themselves out of poverty.

“I really see a big change in our lives,” Ely said. “Before, my husband and I always argue for something specifically about financial aspects and the children’s need to have something. But now, because of Unbound, if I need money, I just withdraw from our savings. So thank you so much for your help.”

For a family living the tenuous life of squatters in a house-of-cards village built on a floodplain, belonging to the Unbound community is a precious commodity. It’s also one of the few things in life they can rely on. ✴
Agness sits inside her family’s new, partially finished house in a Dar es Salaam neighborhood, looking through a school workbook. There’s plenty of natural light for reading, and a breeze blowing in from a large window provides cool comfort from the tropical heat.

The window gives 11-year-old “Aggy” an expansive view of her neighborhood, with its exotic trees and plants, dirt roads and tin roofs. A mud house where she’s lived with her family for the last four years sits just yards away. The juxtaposition of the bright, airy brick structure and the dark, dank mud home offers a glimpse into what it means for a family to build a dream, one brick at a time.
Aggy and her parents, Saimoni and Anna, stand outside their home of mud and corrugated tin. In the background, their new brick home awaits completion. Saimoni works on it with the builder every chance he gets.
“I wanted to try hard and take a step in life. My wife and I had a vision. We had a plan to make our lives better.”

— SAIMONI, father of sponsored child Aggy

“I wanted to try hard and take a step in life,” Aggy’s father, Saimoni, said. “My wife and I had a vision. We had a plan to make our lives better.”

For years, Saimoni and his wife, Anna, saved every Tanzanian shilling they could from his earnings as a night watchman and her income packaging and selling laundry soap. It wasn’t enough to get ahead, and they found themselves in debt.

“We had so many problems,” Saimoni said. “We lived in a small rental house. I was still a watchman, and the money I was earning was minimal. By the 10th or 15th of every month, I had no money with me. We would get food stuffs and promise to pay later. We were always in debt.”

Living conditions were crowded, with Aggy, two siblings and her parents all living in one room. Things became easier once Aggy got a sponsor through Unbound.

“Nutrition was provided,” Anna said. “It was such a great relief for us.”
The help from Aggy’s sponsorship gave the family the cushion they needed to put their dream in motion.

“We could now save a little and buy land,” Saimoni said. “We bought this piece of land as it was going for a cheaper price. Once I bought the land, I began saving for building materials.”

Saimoni built a mud house on the property and put an iron-sheet roof on it. Since he and Anna had no rent and spent less on food and education costs with Aggy’s sponsorship, they could save for a brick home, which they started building last year. They also budgeted part of the sponsorship benefits for construction.

Saimoni works nights and picked up extra work at construction sites during the day, which gave him ideas for how he wanted to design his house. He’s put sweat equity into the home, too, saving on labor costs by helping the builder. The home will have a living room, two bedrooms and a kitchen, with a latrine and shower outside the main structure.

An influx of people into urban areas of Tanzania in recent years has made access to affordable, well-constructed housing a critical need. About a third of the country’s population lives in cities, and the rate of urbanization is growing at about 5 percent a year, according to The World Factbook.

Tanzania is the largest and most populous country in East Africa. It’s below the equator, with Kenya and Uganda on its northern border. Dar es Salaam is on the coast of the Indian Ocean and is Tanzania’s largest city, with a population of more than 5 million.
Catherine Materu, a staff member with the Dar es Salaam program, said the family shows what’s possible with hard work, planning and a solid support network, which for them includes the local Unbound mothers group, staff and Aggy’s sponsors, Ted and Suzanne in Oklahoma.

“They have big visions,” Catherine said. “They see their future.”

Mothers groups in Unbound provide a way for parents to encourage and support each other, and many include savings and micro-loan programs. Anna took out a loan from her group to expand her soap business, and she’s already repaid it. Someday she’d like to open a small shop.
Aggy has a dream for her future, too.

“I want to be a doctor,” she said. “I want to cure sick people.”

For the immediate future, the family looks forward to enjoying life in their new home with a secure, comfortable space to rest, eat, study and dream.

“It used to feel bad living in the mud house,” Saimoni said. “Now, we feel like we have all we ever wanted in life.” 𐆀
Poverty limits the creation of dreams, blocks visualization of goals and buries hopes. But poverty isn’t something everybody experiences in the same way. It’s an individual, personal and intricate problem.

Some people face a lack of decent housing, while others have a hard time getting to school or just can’t pay for their next meal. The time and energy they spend on finding ways to solve their daily struggles takes away from the time, vision and resources they need to build a better future.

Sandra, 23, always dreamed of attending college. Her father, a coffee farmworker, and her mother, who works as a cook, barely earn enough to cover the needs of their family of five, and providing a college education for Sandra wasn’t a possibility.

Being sponsored and receiving a scholarship from Unbound, in addition to working as a waitress on weekends, opened a door for Sandra to attend college. The flexibility to use her Unbound benefits directly toward achieving educational goals gave her the chance to stop worrying about “How can I do it?” and focus on “I am doing it!”

Waking up at 3:30 a.m., leaving home by 4:30 a.m., and walking for 30 minutes through the coffee plantations and dirt roads to the closest bus stop are just the first steps on her daily journey to education. After almost two hours on three buses, and spending $1.50 just to go one way, she arrives at school by 6:45 a.m.

Sandra is working toward a degree in literature. She has no Internet at home and no proper place to study. So, on top of the grueling travel, after leaving school she spends a few more hours at an Internet cafe in town.

The rural location of her home, a lack of transportation nearby and the unavailability of basic technological tools make her education much more difficult. Despite the difficulties, Sandra remains determined to reach her goal.

“I can’t have what the other students have, nice clothes and shoes,” Sandra said. “But that is OK. I am focused on getting my education.”

Thousands of young people in Unbound, like Sandra, have the ability to decide how to best use their sponsorship or scholarship funds to overcome their reality of poverty. It’s an opportunity for them to look up and think about the future. ✨
Sometimes getting there is the hardest part

Young people around the world know the importance of education in overcoming poverty. They want to go to school. But what happens when they can’t get there because there’s no money for a pedicab, jeepney or bus?

Unbound scholarships help students pay for transportation, tuition and other needs.

To donate or learn more, visit unbound.org/helpascholar.

Sandra, a sponsored youth and Unbound scholar in El Salvador, logs many miles in her pursuit of an education. Her tenacity is serving her well as she makes steady progress toward a degree in English literature.