Seismic Retrofitting in the eye of Build Change

Around the country, new buildings must meet the seismic resistant code. But what happens with informally built housing, often vulnerable and at risk?

The U.S. organization Build Change recently presented the "Seismic Evaluation and Retrofit for Vulnerability Reduction in Housing Manual", the importance of which is heightened after the recent earthquake in Ecuador, shining light on the increasing need to be prepared in Colombia.

The manual dates to 2014, when Build Change, headquartered in Denver, Colorado, submitted the proposal to the Permanent Advisory Commission for the Regime of Seismic Resistant Constructions of Colombia.

According to Caballero, Director of Programs and Partnerships for Latin America, "one of our goals is to save lives in earthquakes and windstorms; for

sismorresistente. Pero, ¿qué pasa con las viviendas desarrolladas informalmente, vulnerables y en riesgo?

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En el país la nueva arquitectura debe cumplir la norma

that, we rely in training people from emerging nations where we seek to mitigate the risk and to improve housing which has largely been developed informally".

The Manual could be an alternative methodology to complement the Seismic Resistant Law (NSR-10). Especially now that the "Safe Houses" draft law is being evaluated by the National Congress and sponsored by the government, it is important to highlight some of its points.

For the Vice Minister of Housing, Guillermo Herrera, "its application (The manual) in consolidated sectors would be viable, but it is also necessary to express it in a way that territorial entities can implement it, since it is not a secret that 40% of the housing in the country was built informally".

The architect Ricardo Ramirez, who has supported the process alongside Swisscontact, agrees with Herrera and adds that the situation is even more worrying. "Of the more than 1,000 municipalities in the country, only 10 have adopted serious plans to improve and retrofit (existing housing)".

For this reason, after the required evaluations, the idea is that the Manual can be applied throughout the country, although the first interventions are focused on cities like Bogotá, Medellin, and Cali.

The application of the handbook

To implement the Manual it is necessary to perform assessments and take into account the social impact it can have, as in many cases the houses were built by families with a lot of effort over many years. One of the virtues of the initiative is that the work can be done with local inputs; additionally, it is more flexible regarding the reality of actual buildings and even permits expanding buildings by adding more floors, if done with technical assessment led by a qualified professional.

The intervention of the authorities in charge of urban permit expedition (Curadurias) would be very important and, with this, the decentralization of their operations, with the objective of reaching the neighborhoods with a technical offer of retrofitting.

This highlights the fact that work is being done to allocate subsidies to improve housing that few people use.

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