



Promoting Innovation in Urban Upgrading in São Paulo

At the turn of this century, Brazil's national census revealed a disturbing trend. While the population living in the central area of its largest city, São Paulo, was declining, the number of people living in precarious locations on its fringes – with scarce access to basic services and infrastructure – had jumped from 6 per cent in 1994 to 12 per cent in 1998. There were indications that efforts to reduce poverty and inequality in the nation's wealthiest city were having a limited impact and required attention.

In 2001, the newly elected government of São Paulo made a landmark decision to champion integrated urban upgrading and land tenure regularisation for people living in informal settlements. This was an important shift from previously fragmented urban policies to a comprehensive approach that incorporated measures to end the physical and socio-economic exclusion of poor communities.

In 2002, the City of São Paulo Department of Housing and Urban Development (SEHAB) approached the Cities Alliance for technical assistance with its *Bairro Legal* or “Nice Neighbourhood” Programme. The Programme aimed to provide tenure security and improve the living conditions of low-income families in some of the most violent and socially excluded areas of the city.

Ana Claudia Rossbach, SEHAB's budget and administration coordinator when *Bairro Legal* was conceived, explains, “The programme was based on a philosophy that slums should remain where they are and that a cross-sectoral, participatory approach would help sustain upgrading efforts. It was a path-breaking concept at the time.”

Adopting a Comprehensive Approach

A key innovation of the *Bairro Legal Technical Assistance (TA) Project* is its comprehensive and progressive approach to urban upgrading. It focused on low-income area residents facing social exclusion and living in areas characterised by high levels of crime and violence.

Project: *Bairro Legal* Technical Assistance Project

Partners: Cities Alliance, the World Bank, City of São Paulo Department of Housing and Urban Development (SEHAB)

Duration: 2001 - 2004

Cities Alliance Financing: USD 300,000

The Cities Alliance was involved in preparing a general methodology for the programme, including a diagnosis, establishment of objectives and definition of strategies. Urban upgrading and land tenure regularisation initiatives were used as an entry point to implement a range of social actions. For instance, the project's first phase targeted low-income areas with the highest violence and crime levels: Jardim Ângela, Brasilândia and Cidade Tiradentes. Comprehensive action plans were prepared for these areas. Within SEHAB, a data management unit was also created to serve as a resource for geo-referenced data on informal settlements, land use and zoning.

The process of land tenure regularisation adopted a three-pronged approach: First, a negotiations process was established to avoid the eviction of families living in informal settlements. The conflict mediation strategy prevented the eviction of approximately 13,000 such families. Second, legislation was introduced to enable land tenure regularisation of some 160 slums occupying public land, which benefitted around 45,000 families. Third, illegal land subdivisions in existence prior to April 2000 were regularised by means of the new legislation.

An Innovation that Leaves a Lasting Impact

Bairro Legal marks a paradigm shift in São Paulo's approach to improving the living conditions of its poor and marginalised residents. The programme put an end to the pattern of fragmented and poorly integrated strategies that characterised its earlier urban development projects.

Over time, the city adopted a holistic approach to urban policy-making that was sensitive to the needs of its low-income population.

By recognising the people's right to stay in their homes instead of forcibly evicting them, the *Bairro Legal* programme put an end to the culture of conflict that these evictions symbolised. Most repossession lawsuits regarding squatter settlements on public land were dropped, while land disputes among private parties were resolved through mediation. In 2004, SEHAB received the Housing Rights Award from the Swiss NGO Centre for Housing Rights against Evictions (COHRE). COHRE lauded SEHAB's contribution to informal settlement regularisation, which benefitted over 400,000 people.

Bairro Legal is also credited with promoting a high level of participation from within poor and marginalised communities in São Paulo. For instance, in drawing up the Cidade Tiradentes Action Plan, residents were invited to reflect on challenges facing their community and identify possible solutions. Youth outreach activities were also organised. This proved beneficial for both SEHAB and the residents, fostering mutual trust and cooperation. Also, for SEHAB's technical team, community participation contributed to the design of the action plans. In turn, community members took more interest and participated actively in the upgrading process. Over time, crime and violence in the area were reduced.

Lessons Learned from the *Bairro Legal* Experience

Since the successful completion of the *Bairro Legal* programme, São Paulo's urban landscape has undergone many changes. For instance, the municipality has more financial and technical resources than it did before; the political leadership has changed as well. However, the impact of the *Bairro Legal* project is still felt by many whose lives it changed. In the process, a few lessons were learned that can benefit urban upgrading and housing projects elsewhere.



The Bairro Legal Programme's conflict mediation strategy saved 13,000 families from eviction in São Paulo

SEHAB's land regularisation policies were supported by a broad legal framework at the federal and municipal level. Several stakeholders – such as the state government, judiciary, private landowners and informal settlers – were involved in the process. The programme's success largely rested on SEHAB's ability to foster dialogue and collaboration among a varied group of stakeholders with different interests and viewpoints.

In particular, working with socially excluded communities required time and special effort. As part of the land tenure regularisation process and development of district action plans, active stakeholder participation and negotiation was encouraged – and this was time-consuming. Rossbach explains, "We had the political will to bring change to our city but it was an effort to consolidate the culture among public and private stakeholders that slums should stay where they are."

Bairro Legal marks the beginning of a long and fruitful partnership between the Cities Alliance and City of São Paulo. Following the completion of the *Bairro Legal* project, the Cities Alliance has supported other projects to expand and consolidate the municipality's housing policy. The success of these subsequent projects highlights the importance of sustained partnerships in the urban development arena.

* For a detailed analysis of the policies, actions and results of the *Bairro Legal* Programme, please refer to our website (www.citiesalliance.org) for the Cities Alliance publication titled *Integrating the Poor, Urban Upgrading and Land Tenure Regularisation in the City of São Paulo*

The *Bairro Legal* project contributes to the objectives of the Cities Alliance by:

- Introducing an integrated approach to settlement upgrading in São Paulo
- Brokering effective partnerships among slum dwellers and other city stakeholders such as land-owners and city authorities
- Introducing pro-poor legislation and policies to curb the forced eviction of people living in informal settlements