



**UCLG**  
Committee

Social Inclusion  
Participatory Democracy  
and Human Rights

**Inclusive Cities  
Observatory**

## « VILLA VIVA – AGLOMERADO DA SERRA »

Belo Horizonte, Brazil

*Period of implementation: 2005 | Study case written in 2007*

The main objective of the 'Villa Viva' social policy in Belo Horizonte is to foster social inclusion and to improve the quality of life of the families living in critical social and environmental areas in the Agglomerado (favela) da Serra. The programme includes various activities: drainage, rehousing of families in high risk areas, restructuring of the road network, provision of parks and facilities for sport and leisure, and construction of housing units. This situation led to the production of Specific Global Plans (SGPs), which are urban development tools involving intensive participation by the community in all phases of their implementation. The programme covers approximately 45,000 people, or around 13,000 families living in the settlements of Agglomerado (favela) da Serra. The city's Urban Development Company is the general coordinator of the Programme. Other bodies include departments of Belo Horizonte City Council, as well as cooperation received from the Federal Government's social policies. In cities where this type of social inclusion policy is to be implemented, the Villa Viva programme recommends carrying out integrated and multi-sector measures and encouraging the community's active participation.



The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** was launched in 2008 by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights with the aim of creating a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. The initiative was developed with the scientific support of Professor Yves Cabannes (University College of London) and the Centre for Social Studies (CES) from the University of Coimbra. At present, the Observatory contains more than sixty study cases mostly developed between 2008 and 2010. Even though many of these cases refer to policies that have already come to an end, they still have much to offer: from capitalizing on the learning acquired by other local authorities to discovering suggestive and alternative means to address social inclusion challenges from a local perspective.

## Context

Brazilian cities have experienced a demographic explosion and an increase in socio-spatial polarisation since the 1950s, with the latter factor being reinforced during the military dictatorship (1964-1985) and its model of centralised government that prevented any type of political participation. This situation contributed even further to the proliferation of shanty towns, especially in the large cities. During the 1980s, this process was reversed with the creation of new forums for democracy, social inclusion and participation in local development, and has gradually been reinforced as a result of the Federal Constitution of 1988.

### *City context*

Belo Horizonte is a specific example of this latter phenomenon: since 1993, the city has implemented experiences aimed at social participation in the management of government. A key factor has been the Participatory Budget (PB): its implementation in the first year of democratic government led to a profound transformation in the patterns of urban government. Various innovations in the PB have gradually been implemented, such as the adoption of the UQLI<sup>1</sup> in the distribution of resources and the SVI<sup>2</sup> to identify populations at greater social risk.

The Housing PB was established in 1996, during a structural crisis in national housing policies. Also in 2006, the City Council created the Digital PB, which enabled the population to select public works using the Internet, and ensured that premises were provided for public voting so that citizens without access to a computer could also participate. Today, there are more than 80 public participation channels, linked to territorial scales and thematic areas, with effective participation in planning and monitoring of public policy. However, of all the experiences that have been implemented, the one focusing on precarious settlements warrants special mention.

## Policy development

In Belo Horizonte, precarious settlements have been subject to very high growth and densification rates that are five times higher than those in settlements in the “formal” city. They currently account for 508,000 people (22% of the population) in a total of 209 high density settlements. In this context, the most important initiative in the Municipal Housing Policy, approved in 1994, has been the Structural Intervention for shanty towns, which included improvements to infrastructure and housing, resettlement, geotechnical consolidation, and the legalisation of land holdings. Subsequently the Master Plan and municipal urban planning legislation included the areas with informal occupancy – known as Special Social Interest Zones (SSIZ) – and the directives and schedules for carrying out the studies were established.

This led to the production of Specific Global Plans (SGPs), which are urban planning instruments with intense community participation in all phases, by means of Reference Groups consisting of democratically elected local representatives who participate from the beginning of the process to the execution of the initiatives. While a SGP is being prepared, the members of each Group receive training in order to plan, manage and implement the projects, thereby gaining autonomy in order to achieve a detailed understanding of the technical contents of the plan.

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<sup>1</sup> UQLI (Urban Quality of Life Index) applied to each Planning Unit in the municipal territory, based on 80 quality of life indicators, grouped in the areas of access, culture, education, sports, housing, urban infrastructure, environment, health, urban services and urban security.

<sup>2</sup> SVI (Social Vulnerability Index) shows the level of social risk of a given community.

These plans are based on three interrelated areas of action: a) Urban and environmental recovery: diagnoses and areas of action based on the conditions in each SSIZ (geology, sanitation, the road network, housing conditions, etc.); b) Property ownership legalisation strategies for the legalisation of land holdings based on assessments of the existing situation and research into ownership, while taking physical-legal issues into consideration; c) Socio-organisational development: proposals to improve conditions or reinforce efforts in the areas of healthcare, education, employment and income, and community organisation, among others.

The SGPs have now become a prerequisite for access to the resources in the Participatory Budget, and are also a powerful tool for obtaining external financial resources.

### *Background*

Urban conditions in this area are critical: more than 50,000 people live in an area of 150.93 hectares, with average monthly incomes ranging between 65 and 130 dollars. The occupancy along the most of the river's course is chaotic, with much of the population living in high risk areas and suffering from a range of problems (violence, poor education, environmental deterioration, insufficient basic infrastructure, poor housing, lack of access to public services and the inability to legalise their land), which creates a domino effect in the city as a whole.

The Villa Viva Programme is carrying out comprehensive work in the areas of urban development, social development and legalisation of property ownership in precarious settlements. The programme began in January 2005, includes investments in urban environment and territorial organisation, and emphasises public participation in all its phases.

### *Policy goals*

The objective of the programme is to foster social inclusion among families living in socially critical areas, ensuring their access to services of education, health, culture, sport, food supply, social welfare, citizens' right and productive inclusion; reducing risk factors and social vulnerability among families; and fostering relations of solidarity among members of the community. The Villa Viva Programme also includes measures for social promotion and community development, health and environmental education, and monitoring of displaced and resettled families; and generates alternatives for creating employment and income in the community. Legalisation of properties in the area begins immediately after completing the work, and deeds of ownership are given to the occupants of the plots.

From a territorial and environmental perspective, the programme envisaged the following measures: access to drinking water, sewer systems and refuse collection; improvement of road network and access to public transportation; treatment of non-channelled streams; preservation of green areas and creation of five linear parks along the main river beds. From a social perspective, the programme "Vila Viva" includes actions of social assistance and community development; health and environmental education; family resettlement assistance; and generation of alternatives fostering the creation of employment and income for the community.

### *Stakeholders, beneficiaries and participatory methodologies*

The implementation of the programme basically involves the municipal social policies service: The Municipal Sub-Departments for Social Welfare, Citizens' Rights and Sports and Utilities, the Municipal Foundation of Culture, the Municipal Health Department and the Municipal Education Department. It also involves the cooperation of the Municipal Urban Policies Department and the city's Urban Development Company (URBEL). Federal Government policies are also being implemented by the Ministry of Social Development and the Fight Against Hunger, by the

National Welfare Department's programmes for the implementation of Social Welfare Reference Centres, and by the National Income and Citizenship Department's "Family Grant." The State Government is collaborating with the implementation of the Social Welfare Reference Centres.

The city's Urban Development Company (URBEL) is the general coordinator of the Villa Viva Programme. An Executive Coordination body (CEX) has been established, and is responsible for managing this project. The CEX team consists of the general coordinator, and the projects, works, social work and property ownership legalisation supervisors. There are currently 13 highly qualified professionals – architects, engineers, social work experts and a lawyer – directly involved in supporting and supervising the Programme, as well as the team in the administrative department. Support for the execution of the planned initiatives, maintenance and handling of the systems is the responsibility of the URBEL and other municipal institutions (which have complementary tasks in the execution of the programme), under the general coordination of the Belo Horizonte Municipal Urban Policies Secretariat (SMURBE).

The population directly benefiting from this programme is approximately 46,000 residents, i.e., about 13,000 families living in the shanty towns of Aglomerado (favela) da Serra - Nossa Senhora de Fátima, Nossa Senhora de Aparecida, Nossa Senhora da Conceição, Marçola and Santana do Cafezal. These families are in a situation of extreme social vulnerability and thus need to have access to the measures implemented by the various municipal sectors. Part of the population of the neighbourhoods near this area (San Lucas, Santa Efigenia, Paraíso and Nuevo San Lucas) have also benefitted from the programme's implementation.

### *Institutionalization and financing*

The results of the Specific Global Plan (SGP) are being monitored by means of the following indicators: The Environmental Health Index (EHI), the Water Quality Index (WQI), the property's market value, the reduction in the number of families living in areas at geological-geotechnical risk, the percentage of green areas, the number of plots that have been legalised and which have received title deeds, the reduction in travelling time, and the volume of refuse collected.

The results obtained include:

1. *A fall in the number of homes at risk:* Since the implementation of the Villa Viva project, the number of homes at high and very high risk has fallen considerably. According to Jordana Flávia, an URBEL consultant, the company's diagnosis in 2009 said that in the "Aglomerado da Serra, where the programme has been executed since 2005, the number of high-risk homes has fallen by 74.5% during that period."
2. *Improved access to public services:* The opening of streets and street widening have given many families access to public services: Automobiles and bus traffic has increased, and refuse collection and the passage of ambulances has been facilitated.
3. *Improvement of habitability conditions:* The fall in population density and the construction of new housing units has also improved habitability and health conditions. With implementation of the drainage and channelling network, and with the treatment of water, residents are no longer exposed to water-borne diseases, and children and adults can already use some of the leisure and community facilities.

Most of the financing comes from Belo Horizonte City Council. The gradual expansion of the Programme will use resources from the National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES) and the Federal Economic Fund. The Federal Government also has participated in financing the programme since 2007. In 2006, the total expenditure in the programme was R\$ 3,108,696.52,

distributed as follows: The Local Authority: R\$ 2,648,978.12; the State Government: R\$ 60,000.00; the Federal Government: R\$ 399,718.40.

## Outcomes and reflections

### *Main obstacles faced*

The main obstacle has been the implementation of sectoral policies, with the consequent lack of planning in the various initiatives, which leads to problems in predatory programming and difficulties in assessing the results of the initiatives. Overcoming the sectoral culture became an everyday challenge. Other obstacles have included:

- High number of family resettlement;
- Deficiencies in the road network due to steep slopes, hindering supplies and logistics for the work, and making a large number of manual services and transport necessary;
- The large size of the area of action;
- Uneven occupancy, with a high population density on uneven land, hindering access to some areas and increasing the time necessary for each project; and
- A large number of residents, hampering the implementation of social projects inasmuch as they involve mobilising the population and coordinating its participation in various phases of the programme.

### *Replicability*

#### *Main prerequisites for similar interventions:*

The creation of a specific policy to produce social inclusion projects is essential for integrating the structural urban initiatives covering various types of action in the spatial, socio-economic and political spheres.

#### *Recommendations for cities wishing to formulate and implement social inclusion policies:*

The main recommendations refer to the need to work on an integrated and multi-sector basis, and the policy of public participation. The community's participation is perhaps the main factor responsible for the success obtained so far in the Villa Viva - Agglomerado da Serra Programme. Residents participate voluntarily in the planning and implementation of works and in the other proposed interventions by means of a Reference Group created and formed by social experts from Belo Horizonte City Council who accompany them throughout the entire process. It is also an opportunity to develop and expand the multi-sector working methodology and the transversal nature of municipal public policies. During this process, the community participates in various seminars to discuss issues such as the environment, waste treatment, health, drainage and the preservation of urban improvements. Educational modules have been created to be accessible by the entire community in a didactic manner and feature accessible language, as the subjects are also presented to children in the schools in the Agglomerado (favela). NGOs are also collaborating with this initiative. With the population, the Programme's social team is creating professional qualifications and skills programs, emphasising the humanitarian economy and urban agriculture. This means that it is necessary to provide urban facilities that concentrate activities for generating employment and income. The Villa Viva Programme is considered a pioneering experience by virtue of being a series of major urban planning, environmental, social and legal initiatives in areas with the lowest level of quality of life in the city.

## Further information

The narrative was written in 2007 by Ernesto Lopez, Paula Carvalho, Associated Municipal Secretary of International Relations, Metropolitan City Council of Belo Horizonte; and Marina Inês Pedrosa Nahas under the coordination and edition of Prof. Cabannes assisted by Yasar Adnan Adanali, at the Development Planning Unit, University College London, UK.

All narratives compiled in 2007 including this one were revised by a DPU editorial committee composed of Ernesto Jose Lopez Morales, Sonia Roitman, Michelle Pletsch, Steffen Lajoie, Luisa Dornelas, Iyad Issa and Pechladda Pechpakdee.

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