Izidora Sustainable Urbanization Program

Submitted By: Belo Horizonte City Hall | Deputy Secretary of Economic Development, Labour and International Relations



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Municipal Secretariat of Urban Policy

Organization Type: Subnational government

Website: https://prefeitura.pbh.gov.br/politica-urbana

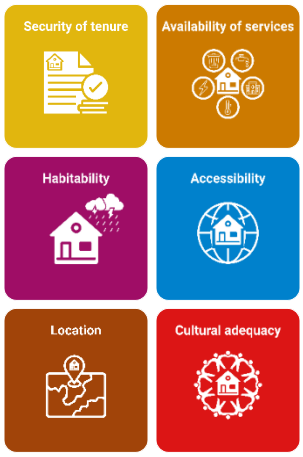
Practice Details

Country(ies): Brazil

City(ies): Belo Horizonte

Start Year: 2019 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:



Relevant SDGs:



UN-HABITAT

Problem & Context

The Izidora region is the last major urban expansion area of the city. With great environmental relevance, it is composed of an extensive water network, large massifs of vegetation with remnants of Atlantic Forest and Cerrado and diversity of fauna and flora. In 2011, part of the region began to be occupied informally, forming four occupations that total approximately 1.5 km² and house about 12,000 inhabitants in extreme poverty, without public infrastructure and services available in most of the territory.

In order to promote decent housing for the population, contain the expansion of informal occupation and at the same time ensure the environmental preservation of the region, Izidora's Sustainable Urbanization Program was created, with respect to environmental quality and human well-being. It is the first Program for precarious settlement that brings urban resilience as a central theme, guiding the urgency of demystifying the climate debate and reaching practical solutions.

Solution Developed

The Izidora Sustainable Urbanization Program is based on the principles of the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs. Specific sustainable urbanization plans were developed for the four urban settlements that comprise the Izidora region: Esperança, Vitória, Helena Greco, and Rosa Leão. An expansion control plan was also developed to limit the expansion of these settlements and improve the management of urban voids.

The interventions incorporate innovative solutions that define the unique nature of the projects, considered a pilot for other areas of the municipality. Examples include the development of a typology of housing units on steep slopes that, while stabilizing the slope, prevents informal reoccupation of the area. The buildings feature sustainability features such as solar heating and rainwater harvesting, and allow for adaptations to accommodate different family sizes, as well as accessibility standards based on demand. The adoption of nature-based solutions (NBS) in an area of social interest also places the Program in a pioneering position in the municipality and the country.

Implementation

The Program is managed by the Municipal Secretariat of Urban Policy and the Belo Horizonte Urbanization Company in partnership with the UN Office for Project Services, UN Habitat, and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC).

Initiated in 2019, the Urban Reference Center (CREURB) was established in the region, serving as a service channel for residents and structuring support for public policies on urban services, risk management, housing, and urbanization. From 2021 to 2023, Sustainable Urbanization Plans were developed, which, with urban resilience as a principle, defined guidelines for the

preservation of green spaces, adequate housing, reduction of geological risks, containment of informality, etc.

From 2023 to 2025, comprehensive urbanization projects were implemented, including road system interventions, traction, slope and risk area containment, environmental restoration, implementation of parks and squares, urban afforestation, and implementation of nature-based solutions. The construction of 405 housing units is also planned, some integrated into the hillside. Since 2024, electrical, water, and sewage networks have been installed in the settlements. Urbanization work is scheduled to begin in 2026, with funding from the Federal Government's PAC-Periferia Viva Program. Approximately R$24 million has already been invested in contracting the Plans and Projects, maintaining the CREURB program, and direct actions in the area. The estimated cost of the works is R$300 million.

Enablers & Obstacles

Izidora's settlements are disconnected from the urbanized area and lack direct access to basic services and public facilities. In this context, an important step was taken in 2019 with the implementation of a public service structure, the Urban Reference Center (CREURB), to listen to the community's demands, carry out emergency containment works, maintain the road system, and monitor new construction. The partnership with the UN, which provided a specialized technical team, was fundamental for the preparation of the Plans and Projects.

Among the challenges encountered, the rugged topography stands out, restricting occupation and creating situations of risk and difficulty of access. Actions to overcome these challenges include the removal of families from risk areas, placing them in housing subsidy programs, works to improve access, design solutions for slope containment, and proposals for housing types that prevent reoccupation.

Results & Impact

The Program encompasses direct actions in the four settlements, which together house approximately 3,800 families, according to the social registry compiled by the executive branch. The main benefits to the community include the promotion of decent housing:

- Access to public transportation and solid waste collection;
- Greater safety for pedestrians, especially for people with reduced mobility or disabilities, facilitating access to community facilities;
- Access to electricity, water, and sewage systems;
- Promotion of spaces for leisure, sports, contemplation, and rest;
- Interventions in areas at geological risk, safeguarding lives and preventing material losses;
- The dynamization and diversification of the local economy with a greater supply of commerce and services and, consequently, greater employment and income;

- Land regularization of the entire settlement and the improvement of unsanitary buildings.

Since 2020, the Program has reduced the risks associated with flooding, landslides, and accidents through emergency works carried out in the area. To date, 858 inspections have been carried out on buildings and 147 families have been removed from risk areas and are receiving a housing allowance until the resettlement works are completed.

Replication & Scale Up

The Program uses an integrated approach to social and environmental issues, with potential for replication in informal settlements. Noteworthy are the actions carried out by CREURB, participatory processes, urbanization proposals with solutions that reconcile environmental preservation and decent housing, and the use of NbS. One of the products is the Catalog of Innovative Solutions for Informal Settlements, which brings together innovative techniques and solutions based on practices identified in the Izidora occupations to create tools that enforce the right to a sustainable environment.

The interventions incorporate innovative solutions that make the projects pilots for other areas of the municipality. Of note is the development of a typology of housing units on steep slopes that, while stabilizing the slope, prevents informal reoccupation of the area. The buildings feature solar heating systems, rainwater harvesting, and can be adapted to accommodate different family sizes, as well as accessibility standards based on demand. The adoption of NBS in areas of social interest can also be replicated in other informal settlements.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has been fully adopted into formal policy frameworks and legislation, and is being implemented at scale with institutional support.

The program's entire planning system was developed based on the commitments made in the Master Plan, a document responsible for defining the fundamental rules of land use planning, which has included the commitment to implement NAU and the SDGs in the municipality. The Master Plan establishes the availability of resources for urbanization, requalification and prevention of informal settlements, with physical and environmental improvement strategies integrated with others that act in the social, cultural, and political dimensions and promote access to sustainable and affordable housing.

Lessons & Takeaways

The Izidora region is formed by an extensive vegetated area and an extensive water network, the preservation of which is important for the quality of the municipality as a whole. Informal occupations border these areas and controlling and impeding their advancement is quite difficult. Considering this context, it would be relevant to incorporate these areas as objects of

plans, projects and fundraising, involving on a local and participatory scale the awareness of the preservation of these spaces for the quality and well-being of the occupations and of the entire city.