Programa Mananciais

Submitted By: Municipality of São Paulo - Executive Secretariat of the Mananciais Program

Organization Profile

Organization Name: Municipality of São Paulo - Executive Secretariat of the Mananciais Program

Organization Type: Subnational government

Website: https://prefeitura.sp.gov.br/web/secretaria_executiva_do_programa_mananciais

Practice Details

Country(ies): Brazil

City(ies): São Paulo

Start Year: 2021 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:



Relevant SDGs:



UN-HABITAT

Problem & Context

São Paulo, the largest metropolis in the Southern Hemisphere, concentrates over 11.4 million inhabitants and 10% of Brazil's GDP, yet faces severe social inequality, unregulated urban expansion, and growing pressure on natural resources. Water catchment areas (mananciais), essential for metropolitan water supply, have long been occupied by informal settlements lacking infrastructure, sanitation, and legal tenure. This process has caused deforestation, water pollution, health risks, and climate vulnerability, while exposing residents to eviction threats. Policy gaps—such as fragmented governance, limited affordable housing supply, and reactive approaches—have deepened the problem. The Mananciais Program emerged to integrate housing, infrastructure, and environmental recovery, addressing both urban inequality and the protection of vital ecosystems.

Solution Developed

The Mananciais Program was designed to address the critical challenges of informal settlements in São Paulo's water catchment areas by integrating housing, infrastructure, and environmental recovery. It directly targeted vulnerable families living in precarious conditions, at risk of eviction or climate hazards, while also safeguarding the city's water supply. The main objectives were: to provide adequate housing through relocation or upgrading of settlements; to improve living conditions with sanitation, drainage, and urban infrastructure; to restore degraded ecosystems and protect reservoirs; and to strengthen tenure security and social inclusion.

What makes the program unique is its innovative cross-sectoral approach, moving beyond fragmented policies to combine housing rights with environmental sustainability. Institutional innovations included coordination between municipal, state, and community actors; social innovations emphasized community participation in planning and implementation; and environmental innovations focused on reforestation and climate resilience. This integrated practice enabled both improved quality of life and long-term ecological protection.

Implementation

The Mananciais Program integrates housing, infrastructure, and environmental recovery to address informal settlements in São Paulo's water catchment areas. Actions include upgrading neighborhoods with sanitation, drainage, and roads; relocating families from high-risk areas into new social housing; restoring ecosystems through reforestation and stream protection; and introducing tenure regularization. The Executive Secretariat coordinates implementation with more than 18 municipal secretariats, while the State Government and the sanitation company support infrastructure works. Continuous collaboration with NGOs and civil society ensures social participation and solutions tailored to community needs. The timeline starts with a socio-environmental diagnosis of each micro-basin, followed by identification of priority demands, which guide the urban plan and execution. Participation is institutionalized through ZEIS

Councils, composed of civil society and municipal representatives with deliberative power to approve plans, oversee works, and monitor public facilities, in line with Brazil's City Statute. Funding comes mainly from municipal urbanization and sanitation funds, complemented by state transfers. The program is also seeking international partnerships, including with C40 and CFF, to strengthen future implementation.

Enablers & Obstacles

The Mananciais Program was enabled by strong political commitment and the creation in 2021 of a dedicated Executive Secretariat, strengthening public policy for protecting São Paulo's water sources. Integration with over 18 municipal secretariats ensured cross-sectoral action, while frameworks such as the City Statute and the Water Source Protection Law provided institutional support. Municipal investments and multi-year budgeting secured continuity. Community engagement through ZEIS Councils and participatory diagnostics aligned actions with local needs. Partnerships with the State sanitation company supported infrastructure and water management, while Nature-Based Solutions introduced innovation. Obstacles included the complexity of fragile, densely occupied territories, risks of displacement, and bureaucracy, addressed through social monitoring, resettlement preserving community ties, environmental licensing, and ongoing dialogue with residents.

Results & Impact

2021–2024 the program mobilized R$3.53 bn, delivered 1,664 housing units (6,636 in pipeline), and directly benefited ~40,000 families, alongside urban upgrading (sewerage, drainage, risk removal, roads). Impacts on low-income and marginalized households include dignified, near-origin resettlement with tenure security and alternatives that preserve community ties.

Participation via ZEIS Management Councils improves legitimacy, plan approval and oversight of works and facilities.

Public amenities and environmental gains include three new parks (the largest linear park on Billings), a health unit and a daycare, plus the first Nature-Based Solutions in precarious settlements (sustainable drainage, stream recovery).

Longer-term, rebuilt basic infrastructure, improved water quality and strengthened hydric governance increase resilience in strategic catchments.

Replication & Scale Up

The Mananciais Program is replicable as it integrates housing, infrastructure, and environmental recovery in vulnerable areas. Core elements—cross-sectoral coordination, socio-environmental diagnostics, and community participation—can be adapted elsewhere. Critical factors for replication include strong political commitment, a dedicated institutional body, legal frameworks

for housing and environmental protection, sustainable financing, and mechanisms that respect community ties while restoring ecosystem.

The Mananciais Program can be scaled up by expanding cross-sectoral integration, securing long-term financing, and strengthening partnerships with state, federal, and international actors. Scaling requires extending socio-environmental diagnostics to more basins, replicating ZEIS participatory councils, and applying Nature-Based Solutions widely. Combining housing provision, upgrading, and environmental recovery at metropolitan scale ensures broader impact on vulnerable communities and water security.

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 Mananciais Program is institutionalized by Decree No. 60.775/2021, which created the Executive Secretariat of the Mananciais Program within São Paulo's City Hall. This gave the initiative legal and administrative status, ensuring continuity and cross-sectoral integration with 18 municipal secretariats. Backed by the City Statute, ZEIS governance, and multi-year municipal investment, the program is implemented at scale with strong institutional support and alignment to housing and environmental policies.

Lessons & Takeaways

In hindsight, the Mananciais Program shows the need to streamline bureaucratic procedures to accelerate project delivery and reduce delays. Strengthening coordination among municipal, state, and federal levels could improve efficiency. Expanding communication and engagement with residents earlier in the process would help reduce conflicts around resettlement. Finally, diversifying financing, including international partnerships, would enhance sustainability and scale.