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Social Housing and Early Childhood

Submitted By: Estudio+1



Organization Profile

Organization Name: Instituto PIPA - Primeira Infância Plantar Amor

Organization Type: Civil society

Website: www.infanciapipa.com

Practice Details

Country(ies): Brazil

City(ies): Cities in the North and Northeast states of Brazil

Start Year: 2024 **Ongoing:** Yes **End Year:** N/A

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing, Land & Spatial Planning
- Housing Policy, Legislation & Governance

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

Brazil faces a housing deficit of over 6 million homes, with nearly 1 in 10 children living in inadequate conditions, lacking sanitation, water, safe spaces, and opportunities for learning and play. Housing projects generally prioritize quantity over quality and often fail to provide urban spaces that foster community activities, social bonds, and child development. This overlooks the critical role of early childhood and caregiving needs, despite evidence that the first years of life are decisive for physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional growth. The policy gap lies in not integrating early childhood and community-oriented design into housing strategies, missing the opportunity to transform these projects into drivers of equity, health, and inclusive urban development.

Solution Developed

The practice addresses the challenge by placing early childhood at the core of social housing, turning developments into protective, healthy, and inclusive territories. It targets low-income families in federal programs, focusing on children aged 0–6 and their caregivers. Its goals are to create a design guideline for housing projects, hold training sessions with companies and developers, insert child-sensitive parameters in state tenders in Brazil's North and Northeast, and integrate early childhood criteria into Selo Azul de Sustentabilidade, Caixa Econômica Federal's housing certification. The practice is structured around five dimensions: community life, safe paths and proximity, child–nature interaction, cultural identity, and care bonds. Its innovation is a cross-cutting approach: designing from a child's eye level (95 cm), integrating nature-based solutions, promoting mixed land use, safe routes, naturalized play, and participatory methods with communities, government, and builders. This transforms housing and public spaces into drivers of health, equity, and integral development.

Implementation

The practice has been carried out by the Urban95 Coalition, formed by Estúdio+1, Tempo Junto, FNNIC, CECIP, Instituto Pipa, Fundação Van Leer, and private developers such as Viana & Moura. Instituto Pipa and Van Leer provided financial resources, while technical partners developed content, training, and consultancy. Actions included: (i) creation of a catalogue of design guidelines; (ii) training workshops with construction companies in Pernambuco's Morar Bem program, financed by FAR/MCMV; (iii) consultancy for the Laranjeiras housing project by Viana & Moura, directly benefiting 500 units with potential to scale to 3,000; (iv) drafting early childhood guidelines for state tenders in Pernambuco and Sergipe; (v) collaboration with Caixa Econômica Federal to integrate parameters into the Selo Azul de Sustentabilidade; (vi) participation in sector events across North and Northeast Brazil to raise awareness among developers and governments. The process began in 2024 with guideline drafting and pilot workshops in Pernambuco, followed in 2025 by the implementation of the Laranjeiras project in Caruaru, PE. Governance is multisectoral: funders finance and define strategies with public

actors; technical partners provide consultancy and training; construction companies apply solutions in housing; and communities validate spaces through involvement and experimentation.

Enablers & Obstacles

Implementation was enabled by strong technical engagement, the commitment of construction companies to integrate early childhood solutions into FAR housing projects, institutional support from Caixa Econômica Federal and FNNIC, and the availability of consolidated technical guidelines such as Urban95 catalogues and training workshops. An additional driver was the use of nature-based solutions, adding innovation and attractiveness to the process. Obstacles included initial resistance from developers to change standard designs, financial and regulatory constraints that prioritized unit cost over urban quality, and weak cross-sectoral integration between housing, health, and social services. These challenges were addressed through technical consultancy, awareness-building workshops, strengthening of multisectoral partnerships, and the use of economic evidence, such as Heckman's studies, which demonstrate the high social and financial returns of investing in early childhood.

Results & Impact

The housing practice has already produced concrete results, including the creation of national guidelines for early childhood–sensitive housing and their inclusion in two ongoing public tenders in Pernambuco and Sergipe. Regional workshops were carried out with construction companies; in Pernambuco, 15 developers participated (link). Pilot implementation was achieved in the Laranjeiras residential project, with 500 units already built (link), and more than 3,000 units currently under construction. The initiative is expected to expand further as partnerships with additional states advance. For low-income households, particularly families with children under six, the practice delivers direct improvements in housing quality, access to safe play and community spaces, and integration with nature, reducing vulnerabilities linked to inadequate housing. Marginalized groups benefit from safer environments, improved health conditions, and stronger community ties. Qualitatively, the practice promotes cultural identity, strengthens social cohesion, and integrates green and community areas that broaden children's access to healthier, safer, and more stimulating environments. Indirectly, it strengthens public policy, influences housing market standards, and enhances urban resilience to climate change. In the long term, it contributes to breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion, fostering health, integral child development, and social equity.

Replication & Scale Up

The first housing project built with the guidelines was Laranjeiras, with 500 units in Caruaru, Pernambuco, Brazil, now being replicated in over 3,000 additional units in the same city. Expansion is underway with other developers in Pernambuco and Sergipe and is expected to

reach further states in the coming semester. Key enablers of successful replication include strong stakeholder engagement, political coordination, awareness raised through sector events, partnerships with private developers, and adaptable design guidelines responsive to local realities.

To expand its scope, the practice can be scaled up by institutionalizing the guidelines within national housing programs such as Minha Casa Minha Vida, ensuring that early childhood criteria become part of federal standards. Strengthening incentives like Caixa's Selo Azul, broadening the reach of regional training workshops, and consolidating a national repository of best practices are also key. These measures would enable wider adoption, promote policy integration, and ensure long-term impact across diverse territories.

Policy Uptake

This housing practice has informed or been partially integrated into policy discussions, strategies, or pilot-level policy instruments.

The link between housing and early childhood is partially integrated into policy, with a model housing complex built in Caruaru, inclusion in two FAR/MCMV tenders (Pernambuco and Sergipe), and progress toward adoption within Caixa's Selo Azul. In 2025, Brazil established the National Integrated Policy for Early Childhood (PNIPI), which coordinates services for children aged 0–6 supported by a digital registry. This broader policy framework strengthens the potential for nationwide integration of early childhood–sensitive housing.

Lessons & Takeaways

In hindsight, the practice showed the importance of engaging both developers and communities from the very beginning to ensure ownership and long-term sustainability, especially through actions that integrate technical design with social components in the territory. It also became clear that some technical instruments should be simplified to increase private sector adoption, while financing mechanisms need to be strengthened to prioritize housing quality rather than merely the quantity of units delivered.