Sustainable Resettlement of Roca Sundy Community: Terra Prometida

Submitted By: UN-Habitat



Organization Profile

Organization Name: UN-Habitat

Organization Type: United Nations entity

Website: www.unhabitat.org

Practice Details

Country(ies): Sao Tome and Principe

City(ies): Terra Prometida

Start Year: 2017 **Ongoing:** No **End Year:** 2023

Main Adequate Housing Components:



Housing Thematic Areas:

- Social Housing
- Housing & Informality
- Housing Rights & Social Inclusion
- Housing, Land & Spatial Planning

Relevant SDGs:



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Problem & Context

Terra Prometida is a slum upgrading/social housing project benefitting 133 vulnerable families in the Island of Principe, which considered the voluntary resettlement of the families to new houses with proper basic services and ownership, in a well-planned new neighbourhood aiming at the socio-spatial integration of the community while minimising its environmental impact, thanks to an inclusive public-private-people partnership.

Since its independence in 1975, Sao Tome and Principe has been continually underfunded, with limited resources to fulfil the basic needs of its population. Housing has been in a constant crisis, as majority of the people lives in inadequate conditions in the dilapidated sanzalas, the former slave quarters of the old colonial plantation farms. There has never been a national social housing programme, or any significant initiatives. In 2012, year of the latest census, 60% of the households lacked proper sanitation, while 40% were overcrowded.

Solution Developed

The Terra Prometida community are the descendants of indentured workers brought in early 1900s to work in the Roça Sundy farm, and they lived for generations in the existing slave quarters since colonial times. These collapsing structures are unfit for habitation. A tourism company got the concession of the farm to transform it into a hotel, agreeing to offer the community better housing conditions.

Thus, the project objective was to improve the living conditions of the community through a participatory, inclusive and rights-based process with high respect for the environment. As the sanzalas made impossible any in situ improvement, the voluntary resettlement of the community to 133 new adequate houses was agreed as the best option.

Innovations: Partnership with the private sector for improving the housing conditions of low-income households; Participatory decision-making, design and implementation, especially involving the community, for project co-responsibility and sustainability; and, Environmental considerations, by not using sand in the construction, houses equipped with rainwater systems and elevated, to reduce impact. NB: Principe is UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve.

Implementation

The public-private-people partnership behind Terra Prometida worked committedly towards achieving the project objectives. Partners were: (1) Government of the Autonomous Region of Principe: provided individual title deeds and livelihood subsidies to each family, issued construction permits and carried out the final inspection of works; (2) Here Be Dragons Tourism Investments – HBD: financial partner, allocated the USD 7,5 million budget of the project, helped with logistics and administrative work, and made doors and windows for the houses; (3) Community of Terra Prometida: participated in decision-making, negotiated the conditions of

resettlement, and worked at the construction site; (4) National Government of Sao Tome and Principe: funded water & power supplies for USD 2 million; and, (5) UN-Habitat: in charge of the overall management and implementation of the project, from planning to its construction.

The project took 6 years, divided in 3 phases: first, a Mobilisation phase begun in 2017, in which a community survey was conducted and the participatory bodies of the project were created; second, a Participatory Design phase, during which the technical designs for the urban plan, houses and public buildings were done; and, finally, an Implementation phase, which entailed the construction of 133 houses, basic services, a community centre and a kindergarten. Construction started in late 2018 and lasted until December 2023, when houses were handed over and families moved in.

Enablers & Obstacles

Enablers: Terra Prometida's multi-stakeholder partnership succeeded in creating the necessary political buy-in and community engagement to achieve objectives and produce quality outputs. Open channels of communication, constructive deliberation, and problem and conflict solving characterised the relationship between partners, a conductive environment that allowed the building of trust among them and provided an official channel for disagreement.

Obstacles: The isolated condition of Principe and the country presented innumerable challenges, as were the limited availability of materials and experienced workers. The scale of the project, small in other contexts, was very demanding on Principe's capacities, and efforts to adapt and move forward were constantly required to overcome difficulties. Even when external contingencies, as the COVID-19 pandemic, made implementation difficult for long periods, collaboration and flexibility among partners allowed the continuity of activities.

Results & Impact

Terra Prometida is the biggest social housing initiative ever built in Sao Tome and Principe, and it has been hailed as a model for improving housing conditions in the country and for its sustainable development, promoting harmony between people and nature. Main results are:

- 133 families voluntarily resettled to adequate and fully serviced new houses
- 133 elevated houses built, without using sand and with rainwater harvesting systems, supplied with water, electricity, plus streetlights
- 133 families issued with title deeds
- 540 people living in adequate housing conditions (6% of the island population)
- 6-month livelihood subsidy for 133 families
- 2 public facilities built, kindergarten and community centre
- 10+ local businesses already functioning at Terra Prometida
- 50+ community members hired during implementation

- 40+ community members trained in construction work
- Partners fully engaged in project implementation
- Increased capacities built at the Government of Principe
- Preservation of beaches due to not using sand, for biodiversity conservation and tourism

Terra Prometida has contributed to the achievement of the SDGs in Sao Tome and Principe, in particular SDGs 11 and 17, and is the first experience of implementing the New Urban Agenda in the country. The project has gained the attention of national and international media, and it has been showcased internationally by both the National and Local Governments, who have expressed their will to replicate it.

Replication & Scale Up

The case of Terra Prometida is specific to the conditions of Sao Tome and Principe, which is a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). It could be replicated in other parts of the country and in other SIDS, but proper financing mechanisms ned to be identified. In this project, the investor, HBD, agreed to pay for improving the living conditions of the community living in its land concession. SIDS are often forgotten, while they played an important socio-economic function in human history.

By creating an interest around the key role certain SIDS played in human history, especially during slavery trade, and understanding that without such trade, a lot of the wealth in the world today would not exist. There is a cultural and historic value around these countries which could be positively exploited to create a certain type of cultural tourism. It is critical to restore dignity conditions in these countries, and starting with access to adequate housing is just a first step. Then there is a need to adopt a fully participatory approach so that all decisions are taken in consensus.

Policy Uptake

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

During the project the team supported the preparation of a Sustainable Development Plan for the Island of Principe aligned with the 2030 Agenda. The prerogatives, principles and approaches applied during the implementation of the Terra Prometida sustainable resettlement project were integrated in such a Plan, which was approved by the Regional Assembly of Principe.

Lessons & Takeaways

The main lesson was the low productivity of stone dust/aggregates to replace the use of sand beaches in this protected area. It is important to establish sustainable material production

mechanisms to ensure that projects can be delivered in reasonable times. It was estimated that the project was delayed by almost 3 years because of the lack of aggregates, also considering the isolation and difficult accessibility to Principe Island. For the rest, the project was a total success, despite all difficulties.