

UN-HABITAT

THE CHALLENGE OF SLUMS



Participatory Relocation in Samambaia, Brazil

At a distance of 25 kilometers from Brasilia, the Samambaia Administrative Region occupies the southwestern region of the Federal District, covering a total of 104 square kilometres. The urban area of 26 square kilometres had only 5549 inhabitants in 1989 but grew to a population of approximately 163,000 inhabitants in 2000.

The residents of Samambaia are resettled squatters from Brasilia. Confronted with squatting on the extensive public open spaces and gardens that characterize the planned capital, Central Brasilia, the city authorities entered into a dialogue with the squatters. The authorities offered to resettle them in the Samambaia suburb, provided the squatting families agreed that land titles would be given in the name of wives rather than husbands. This was to safeguard against the sale of plots by men. Reportedly, ten years later, few, if any, families had sold their plots. The relocated squatters were assisted to move, sites and services were provided, but they had to build their houses themselves. In order to guarantee easy access to the city and employment, a subway has been constructed.

The consolidation of the city through government assisted settlement programmes spurred the transformation of the wooden shanties of the early phases into brick and mortar houses, now constituting 85% of the housing stock. The community structures and networks were kept as much as possible intact during the resettlement process. The city of Samambaia now has a high quality life, a vibrant local economy, a well established network of schools and a centre for professional skills training. It has ample public open spaces and sports facilities, is well endowed with health facilities and has a good public transportation network.

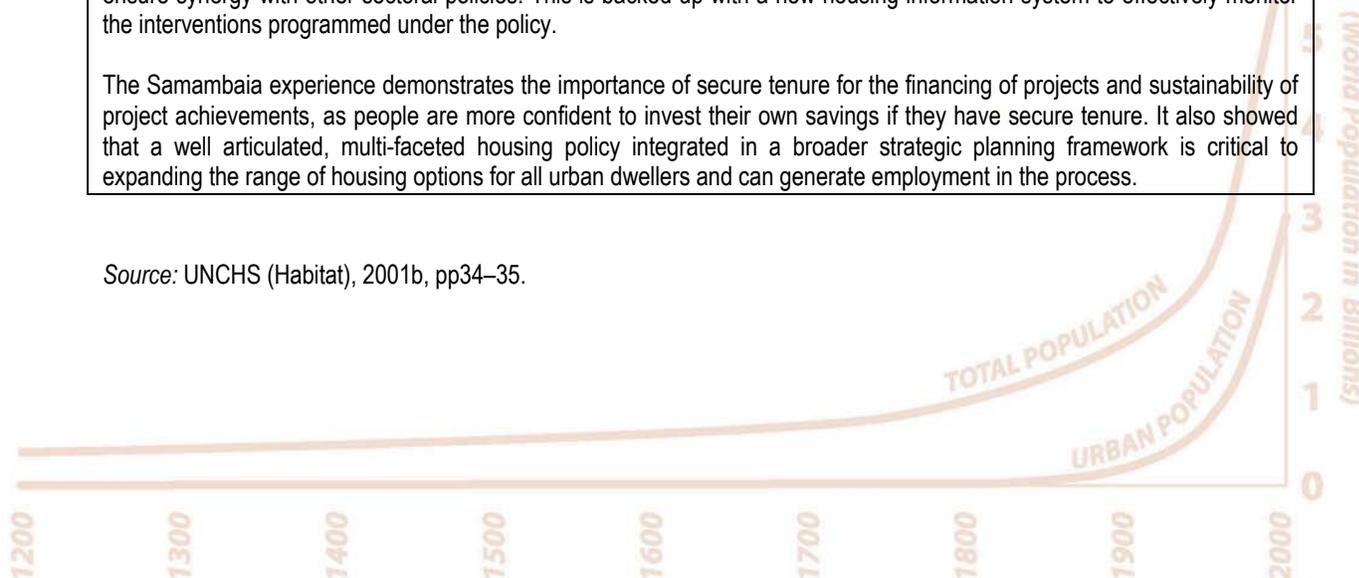
With the approval of the Samambaia Local Structure Plan in 2001, a range of new initiatives are being executed by the Regional Administration of Samambaia. One of these innovative projects is the 'Linhão de Samambaia', which makes efficient use of

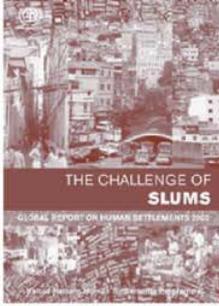
a strip of land previously reserved for a power transmission line to accommodate approximately 68,000 additional urban residents. Another example is the 'Arrendar' project, consisting of 1350 units with rental housing contracts offering future purchase options, implemented in partnership between the Federal Government and the Government of the Federal District.

These projects are part of a new multi-faceted housing policy of the Federal District, designed to promote better use of existing urban land, to decentralize government action in the field of housing, to optimize employment generation and to ensure synergy with other sectoral policies. This is backed up with a new housing information system to effectively monitor the interventions programmed under the policy.

The Samambaia experience demonstrates the importance of secure tenure for the financing of projects and sustainability of project achievements, as people are more confident to invest their own savings if they have secure tenure. It also showed that a well articulated, multi-faceted housing policy integrated in a broader strategic planning framework is critical to expanding the range of housing options for all urban dwellers and can generate employment in the process.

Source: UNCHS (Habitat), 2001b, pp34-35.





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South Africa's right-based housing policies and demand-side subsidies

South Africa is one of some 30 countries that have included the right to housing in their constitutions. Its housing policy is also based on *The Habitat Agenda*. Section 26 of the constitution, adopted in 1996, states that all South Africans have the right to 'access to adequate housing'. A recent court ruling in South Africa, however, stressed that it is not an unqualified obligation on the state to provide free housing on demand, as the constitution states that 'The State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve a progressive realization of [Section 26: the right to have access to adequate housing]'. Moreover, the court ruled that there 'is an express recognition that the right to housing cannot be effected immediately'.

The South African government has taken a wide range of steps within the framework of a progressive realization of housing rights since the introduction of a democratic government. A wide range of legislation has been adopted to improve the housing conditions of the average citizen, in general, and of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, in particular. Moreover, and in line with paragraph 61 of *The Habitat Agenda*, the legislation (the Housing Act) calls for monitoring and evaluation of the situation with regard to homelessness and inadequate housing. The South African Human Rights Commission is a major instrument in this context. It carries out and publishes an annual report on the realization of the rights enshrined in the constitution, including the right to adequate housing.

The main practical mechanism for implementing the new housing policy of South Africa is the use of a wide range of targeted subsidies. All households with incomes below certain minimum levels qualify for such subsidies. In fact, since the first democratic elections in 1994, the government – in collaboration with a wide range of civil society actors – has provided subsidies to more than 1,334,200 households for the poorest among the poor in rural as well as urban areas. By 2001, a total of 1,155,300 houses had been constructed, housing close to 5,776,300 people, in a country with some 40 million people – a remarkable achievement in so short a time.

The People's Housing Process is a major initiative addressing the shelter needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. It makes a particular effort at involving women in decision-making and draws on their special skills and roles in the communities. The scheme contributes to the empowerment of communities and to a transfer of skills. This housing delivery approach relies on subsidies from the government and technical, financial, logistical and administrative assistance from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and support organizations. The issue of quality control versus the quantity of units produced was being addressed in South Africa through the establishment of a National Home Builders Registration Council. Moreover, and rather importantly, it was recognized that a gradual approach to standards was necessary.

A number of lessons can be drawn from the South African experience with regard to the operationalization of the right to adequate housing. Among these are the need for national consensus on the definition of adequacy; the need to identify additional financial resources; and the need to improve the capacity of, and the efficiency among, all stakeholders in the housing delivery process. Moreover, there is a clear need to identify new and additional options in the housing markets in terms of quality of dwellings, as well as innovative tenure options that meet the requirements of the poorest groups.

Another, very significant, lesson from the South African experience is that a revision of national legislation is not a sufficient condition for creating the desired impact. Considerable financial commitment from government has proved to be necessary for a successful and significant impact, particularly in terms of alleviating the inadequate housing conditions of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

GRHS/03/Box3

