

GOLD VI

**Case-Based Contribution
to Chapter 4: Commoning**
*GOLD VI Report on Pathways
to urban and territorial equality*

Slum Upgrading

in Latin America

In partnership with:

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Global Platform for the Right to the City
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With the collaboration of:



Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums



Habitat International Coalition
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Slum Upgrading in Latin America

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ORGANISATION NAME

Global Platform for the Right to the City.
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CITIES/COUNTRIES IT COVERS

Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador and Mexico

CHAPTER

4: Commoning

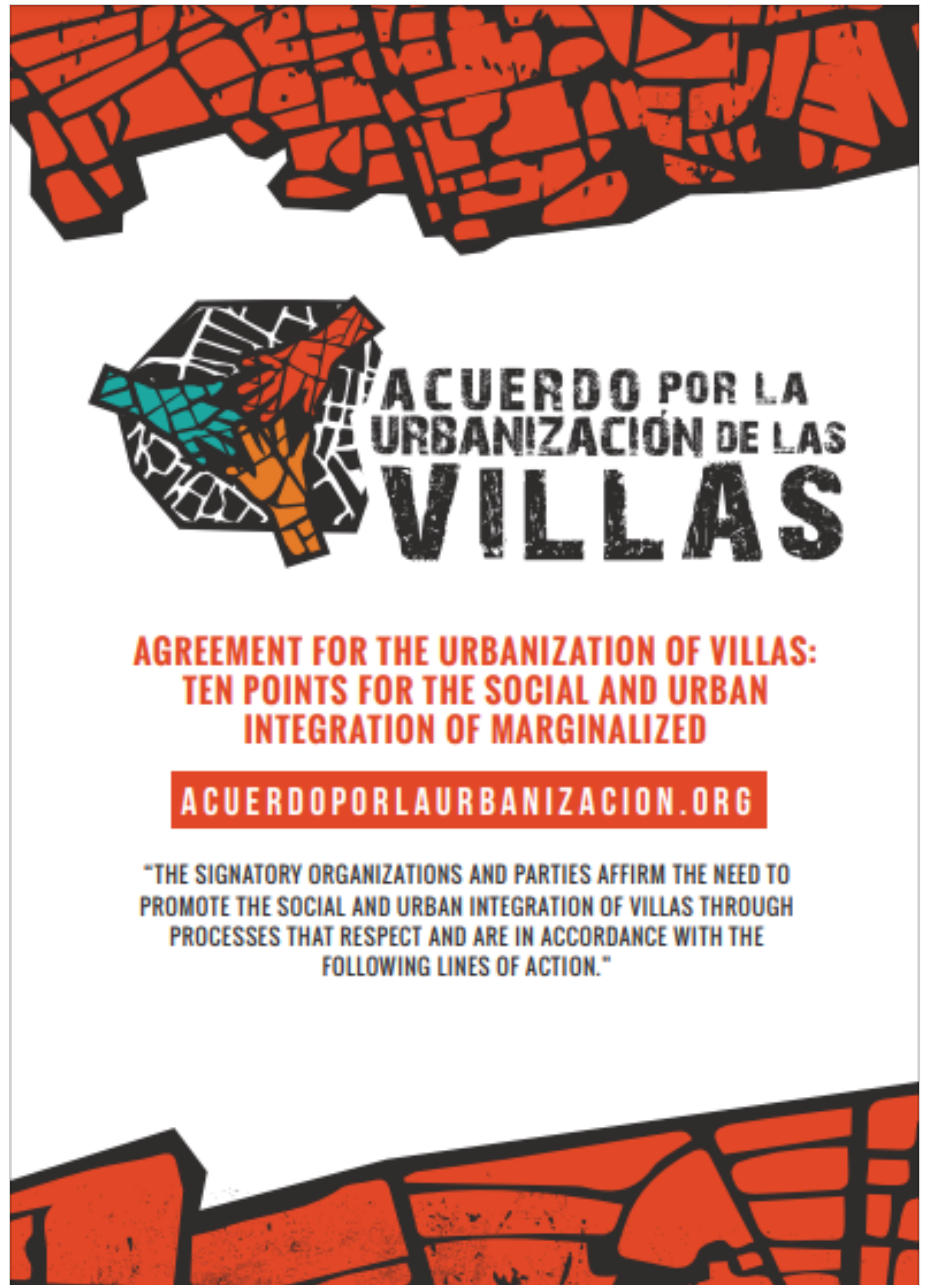
SUMMARY

The context of precarious settlements is a reality in most Latin American urban centres. In that way, urban interventions and improvement initiatives have been implemented in degraded areas over the past decades, but, generally, without undertaking a human rights-based approach. Responding to that, the region's civil society organizations are mobilizing slum upgrading initiatives through the right to the city perspective, advocating and cooperating with local governments to properly integrate vulnerable communities to the city itself. By a participatory and community-centred approach, it is possible to effectively address local inequalities and provide decent livelihood conditions to urban dwellers. Finally, this contribution aims at demonstrating how the right to the city approach can strengthen commoning practices.

Slum upgrading practices in Latin America have been taking place over the last five decades, with internationally acknowledged experiences aiming at improving living conditions in urban precarious settlements. **Mobilizing the right to the city in slum upgrading practices means that citizens should be considered as protagonists and agents in the production of the city, cooperating with local governments in a participatory and human rights-based process.** This demands that human settlements fulfil their social functions by ensuring the access to adequate housing, public infrastructure and services, and economic opportunities that generate sufficient income for maintaining a proper livelihood, especially to vulnerable social groups. **This right to the city lens is aligned with the commoning perspective in what concerns the centrality of the collective aspect and the conjoint efforts between civil society and local governments in building more inclusive cities.**

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic only deepened the need for a more effective and collaborative action in slum upgrading, that should address not only one-off physical interventions but holistic and coordinated ones. In that way, **civil society organizations have been playing a central role in advocating that those upgrading projects are community-centred and community-empowering, pursuing the guarantee of the right to the city.**

In that sense, a coalition with international organizations, research centres and relevant urban social movements, such as Habitat International Coalition (HIC) and Cities Alliance, among others,¹ has recently launched the **“Decalogue for Participatory Slum Upgrading – Roadmap for Latin America and the Caribbean”**,² an important human rights-based policy instrument to guide long-term slum upgrad-



ing projects in the post-pandemic recovery context. Under the framework of “Synergies for Solidarity”, the decalogue emphasises the collective efforts required for the slum upgrading process by considering the components of the right to the city in the definition of its guidelines. Social diversity, territorial governance, political recognition, inclusive economy, climate justice and infrastructure provision are among the key topics listed in the instrument.

Another guidance instrument for human rights-based slum upgrading can be found in a more specific context. For instance, in Buenos

Agreement for the urbanization of villas signed by various organizations of Buenos Aires

Source: ACIJ

1. Besides the University College London (DPU/UCL), Habitat International Coalition (HIC) and Cities Alliance, the coalition is also formed by UN-Habitat, Techo, UCLG’s Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights Commission, Colvite, Red de Investigadores en Vivienda y Hábitat en las Américas (RIVHA), Habitat for Humanity and Urban Housing Practitioners Hub (UHPH).

2. More information available here: <https://www.right2city.org/decalogue-for-participatory-slum-upgrading-programs-in-pandemic-times/>.

Aires (Argentina), the **“Agreement for the Urbanization of the Villas”**,³ is a commitment signed by different local social movements and research centres around ten points for social and urban integration of marginalized groups and settlements. It includes: housing rights, land tenure, social, cultural, and economic integration, protection of vulnerable groups, etc. One of the organizations leading this initiative is the Civil Association for Equality and Justice (ACIJ), which has been working with advocacy and legal support of vulnerable communities in marginalized settlements. It has also created the platform “Caminos de la Villa” (Neighbourhood’s Pathways),⁴ to strengthen citizens’ local mobilization and participation towards neighbourhood upgrading processes, allowing them to obtain useful and reliable information to monitor all the ongoing upgrading projects and to participate in meetings with the public sector. In the context of this initiative, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACIJ also launched a georeferenced and social collaborative platform to map, monitor and inform local governments and citizens about the main impacts of the pandemic in slums and vulnerable neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires.⁵ **This Argentinian project empowers local citizens by providing tools to inform them about their citizenship rights, also allowing them to monitor and report the needs in their slums.** This can open an important dialogue with local authorities and be a guidance resource to where the public policy must be delivered. It is thus a collaborative instrument, intending to reduce urban inequalities by properly integrating the “villas” into the city.

Reinforcing the aspect of community empowerment, FUNDASAL⁶ is working in El Salvador’s vulnerable urban communities, championing that **slum upgrading is a long-term process, based on the integral pro-**

motion of popular sectors, and aiming at creating city and citizenship, with citizens as protagonists. The project has benefited more than two thousand families⁷ as it helps improve public spaces quality and reduce physical risks. It also provides socio-educational grassroots work focusing on youth and women-specific needs, guaranteeing that its approach considers community diversity. As a direct result of its work, it is also worth mentioning the creation of the Association of Residents of Communities and Urban Neighbourhoods of El Salvador (MAPUS), articulating grassroots leaders from upgraded communities, strengthening their relationship with the municipalities and improving its residents’ housing conditions. In that sense, FUNDASAL’s work also acknowledges the importance of interinstitutional and governmental cooperation, connecting public authorities with local leaders and reinforcing the consolidation of urban governance mechanisms, which can also be considered as a commoning example.

For instance, the **“Integral Habitat Transformation of Villa Venecia Community”** in San Salvador (Ecuador)⁸ can be mentioned as a recent project developed with the technical support of FUNDASAL cooperating directly with this community – that was formed mainly because of a process of forced eviction. It provided basic services to its 32 families, such as a drinking water system, electricity as well as quality public and cultural spaces. By strengthening community self-management and participatory design and cooperation with other local and international organizations⁹ (including for financial support), this is also an example of a commoning practice, since it was a result of a collective and joint effort for habitat social production and upgrading.

3. “Villas” are considered as slums in Buenos Aires. More information available here: <https://acuerdoporlaurbanizacion.org/>.

4. More information [available in Spanish] here: <https://caminosdelavilla.org/>.

5. More information [available in Spanish] here: <https://covid19.caminosdelavilla.org/barrios>.

6. More information available in Fundasal’s report (in Spanish) in the drive folder: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1af0PyJtT9r3WdUA8Er0J3IE2xUK5j6o4/view?usp=sharing>.

7. More information available in: <https://fundasal.org.sv/programas-institucionales/programa-mejoramiento-barrios/>.

8. More information [available in Spanish] in: <https://www.uhph.org/en/contest/winners/comunidad-villa-venecia>.

9. Notably Techo El Salvador, Habitat-Cité, Fondation Abbé Pierre and the German Consulate.

Enhancing social participation in territorial interventions and legitimizing local residents' demands, are some of the elements for a slum upgrading process that considers the right to the city.

Slum upgrading projects should be a collective, multi-stakeholder process, based on political commitment. In that sense, the **Rocinha's Socio-Spatial Master Plan**,¹⁰ for example, was an initiative demanded by local residents' associations that resulted in the engagement of Rio de Janeiro's state government (Brasil)¹¹, which launched a public notice to fund a participatory slum upgrading project. In addition to an intense information sharing effort to mobilize the local community – using the local radio, organizing local workshops and meetings, cultural events, etc. – the selected architecture firm responsible for elaborating the plan established an *in loco* office in the favela. This approach facilitated the local community's access to the technical support team as well as partnerships with the residents' associations,¹² which lasted for two years (2006-2008) and were fundamental for the community's engagement in the project. Another key approach was the training and incorporation of community youth representatives to the field team, to help develop the territorial mapping, considering their unparalleled knowledge of their territory. According to the firm that worked on the project, the residents of the Rocinha communities listed some demands to be considered in the master plan: sanitation infrastructure, land tenure, accessibility, and coordination between municipal and state governments in the provision of services to the population.¹³

Another initiative which was the result of a collective civil society mobilization that was able to engage the local government, is the **community neighbourhood upgrading program (PCMB)** in Mexico City (Mexico),¹⁵ created



in 2007. The advocacy of several organizations and grassroots social movements – such as the Popular Urban Movement (MUP), Habitat International Coalition (HIC-AL), the Housing and Population Operational Center (COPEVI), among others¹⁶ – succeeded in engaging the public sector towards a human rights-based neighbourhood upgrading program. **It is considered an innovative program because it is a comprehensive participatory co-designed upgrading project, where local associations, with the technical support from academics from acknowledged Mexican universities, could decide how and where the public funds would be spent in their neighbourhoods' interventions, directly monitoring and contributing to its entire implementation.**

As an example, it is possible to mention the case where COPEVI technically supported the project of the Pántitlan Community – in the district of Iztalco, in the outskirts of Mexico City – for three years (2008-2010), collectively developing the upgrading of green areas, improvement of lighting infrastructure, installation of common areas and public bathrooms. The initiative benefited around 25 thousand people, with a public budget

Fundasal's staff in a meeting with the Comunidad Villa Venecia (2021)
Source: Georgina Rodriguez / Fundasal's Page on Facebook (@fundasalsv). Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/fundasalsv>. Accessed on: 23 June 2021.

10. More information (available in Portuguese) in: <http://casadeestudosurbanos.com.br/folhetim.html>.

11. The state government in Brazil is the intermediary administrative level between the municipality and the national government. In this project, more specifically, were involved the State Secretariat for Public Works and the State Company for Public Works.

12. Notably Pro-Improvement Union for Residents of Rocinha (UPMMR) and Barcelos Neighborhood Residents and Friends Association (AMABB).

13. More information available in presentation produced by the architecture firm of Luiz Carlos Toledo (in Portuguese) in the drive folder: <https://www.rio.rj.gov.br/dlstatic/10112/6165511/4162122/RocinhaPrefeitura03.pdf>.

14. Although it is essentially a neighbourhood- and not a slum - upgrading program, it can be considered a relevant commoning experience in view of its innovative participatory operation, also collaborating with very vulnerable communities in Mexico City.

15. More information (available in Spanish) in: <https://www.world-habitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Informe-PCMB-WEB-ES-3MB3.pdf>.

16. Notably Casa y Ciudad, Fomento Solidario de la Vivienda A.C. (FOSOV) and Unión Popular Emiliano Zapata (Uprez).

of 1.250.000 MXN¹⁷ (equivalent to USD 100.000).¹⁸ The PCMB could, in that way, articulate civil society, local government and academia, resulting in the approval of a local law institutionalizing the program in 2018. Both the Mexican initiative and the Brazilian pilot project were collective and multi-stakeholder efforts, with an integral participatory approach, aiming at reducing inequalities in the livelihoods of vulnerable urban populations and, in that way, also employing commoning practices.

In conclusion, mobilizing the right to the city in slum upgrading processes means undertaking a human-rights based approach, with integral, multi-stakeholder and holistic strategies, that must always be inclusive and community-centred, which directly converges with commoning approaches. A human-rights upgrading approach should be fully participatory and must consider different social demands and vulnerabilities from different local groups, and in that sense, **civil society organizations play a central role by elaborating guidelines, policy instruments, and collaborative projects with local authorities.**

17. More information in Spanish here: https://www.puec.unam.mx/pdf/publicaciones_digitales/mejoramiento_barrial_2007-2012.pdf.

18. Currency conversion taking into account the US dollar on 31 december 2010. Source of exchange rate: oanda.com.

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In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 4 on “Commoning”, which focuses on the trends and pathways in relation to the governance, planning and provision of access to housing, land and basic services. The chapter explores how local and regional governments can promote approaches focused on collective action that contribute to urban equality.

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