

BEST PRACTICE REPORTING

1. a) Name of the practice

Area Plan for the First of May Neighbourhood

b) City/Town

Mexico City

c) Country

Mexico

d) Region

Latin America

e) Has this initiative been submitted previously?

No

2. Address of the best Practice

Name of the organization:

Casa y Ciudad, AC

Street

Calzada de Tlalpan n. 1025, colonia Americas Unidas, delegación Benito Juarez

P.O. Box

113-129 Mexico 03301

City/Town, Postal Code

Mexico City, 03610

Country

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Telephone Country code City code number

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Fax Country code City code number

52 55 -55 39 20 87

Email address of contact person

casayciudad@prodigy.net.mx

3. Contact Person

Fernando Alfaro Gonzalez

4. Type of Organisation

Non-governmental organisation

5. The Nominating Organisation (only if different from above)

a) Name of the organisation:

Comite de Defensa del Barrio Romero Rubio-Asamblea de Barrios Vanguardia Ciudadana (Defence Committee for the Romero Rubio Neighbourhood – Neighbourhood Assembly Citizen Vanguard).

b) Street

Calle Pekin n. 49, colonia Romero Rubio, delegacion Venustiano Carranza

P.O. Box

N/A

City/Town, Postal Code

Mexico City, 15400

Country

Mexico

Telephone Country code City code number

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Fax Country code City code number

N/A

Email address of contact person

lazarocardenas35@yahoo.com.mx

c) Contact Person

Sra. Martha Romero

d) Type of Organisation

Community-Based Organisation

6. The Partners

Partner 1

a) Name of the organisation:

Defence Committee for the Romero Rubio Neighbourhood – Neighbourhood Assembly Citizen Vanguard. (Comite de Defensa del Barrio Romero Rubio-Asamblea de Barrios Vanguardia Ciudadana).

b) Street

Calle Pekin n. 49, Colonia Romero Rubio, delegacion Venustiano Carranza

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N/A

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Fax Country code City code number
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Email address of contact person
lazarocardenas35@yahoo.com.mx

c) Contact Person
Sra. Martha Romero

d) Type of Organisation
Community-Based Organisation

e) Type of Support
Political Support

Partner 2

a) Name of the organisation:
Residents of the First of May Neighbourhood (Vecinos de la Colonia Primero de Mayo)

b) Street
Calle Emiliano Zapata n. 57, olonia Primero de Mayo

P.O. Box
N/A

City/Town, Postal Code
Mexico City, 15440

Country
Mexico

Telephone Country code City code number
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Fax Country code City code number
N/A

Email address of contact person
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c) Contact Person
Isabel Aguilar Rodríguez

d) Type of Organisation
Community Organisation

e) Type of Support
Administrative Support

Partner 3

a) Name of the organization:
Casa y Ciudad, AC

b) Street
Calzada de Tlalpan n. 1025, colonia Americas Unidas, delegacion Benito Juarez

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113-129 Mexico 03301

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52 55 -55 39 20 87

Email address of contact person
casayciudad prodigy.net.mx

c) Contact Person
Fernando Alfaro González

d) Type of Organisation
Non-Governmental Organisation

e) Type of Support
Technical Support

Partner 4

a) Name of the organization:
Secretaria de Desarrollo Social del Distrito Federal

b) Street
Plaza de la Constitución n. 1, Colonia Centro, delegacion Cuauhtemoc

P.O. Box
N/A

City/Town, Postal Code
Mexico City, 06068

Country
Mexico

Telephone Country code City code number
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Email address of contact person
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c) Contact Person
C. Alberto Martinez Flores

d) Type of Organisation
City Government

e) Type of Support
Financial Support

7. Financial Profile

<i>Partner</i>	<i>Year 2007</i>	<i>Year 2008</i>	<i>Total "Mexican pesos"</i>
<i>Partner 1</i> Defence Committee for the Romero Rubio Neighbourhood – Neighbourhood Assembly Citizen Vanguard	7,707.13 *	7,707.13 *	15,414.26 *
<i>Partner 2</i> Residents of the First of May Neighbourhood	4,816.96 **	4,816.96 **	9,633.91 **
<i>Partner 3</i> Casa y Ciudad, AC	12,524.08 ***	12,524.08 ***	25,048.17 ***
<i>Partner 4</i> Mexico City Social Development Ministry	240,847.78	144,508.67	385,356.45

<i>Total Budget (US\$)</i>	265,895.95	169,556.84	435,452.79
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* The voluntary work of the members of the community-based organisation has not been included, nor have their in kind contributions

** The voluntary work of the 6 members of the Committees is not included neither is the voluntary work of the neighbours that participated in the process, or the in kind contributions.

*** The value of the education process is not included or the in kind contributions

8. Category of the Best Practice

Social Services

Health and welfare

Crime reduction and prevention

Equal access to social services (especially by women)

Recreation

Environmental Management

Pollution reduction

Environmental health

Resource management

Urban greening

Environmental remediation

Civic Engagement and Cultural Vitality

Community participation

9. Level of Activity

Neighbourhood

10. Eco System

High Plateau

11. Summary

The experience is for the improvement of the quality of life in a central area of the Mexico City metropolis. The area has a population of 3,000 inhabitants and is characterised by its social problems, and registers intermediate levels of marginality. The experience seeks to rescue an under utilised public space that has undergone progressive deterioration. The experience has transformed an area of seven thousand five hundred square metres, which are now used by the residents for recreational, cultural and sporting activities, as well as converting them into a much needed green spaces. This was achieved through the marked increase in the participation of the residents in several aspects of the experience including the following: the definition of priorities for their attention, and the development, promotion and implementation of the Area Plan for the First of May Neighbourhood through the election of responsible people, and the appropriate organisation of the activities. The local grass-roots organisation (CBO) was involved and active at all stages in the process, and formulated contingency plans and initiated and supported the

administrative aspects of the plan throughout its period of execution. They were also directly involved in the administration of resources for the Plan and supervised the renovation works. The non-governmental organisation (NGO) provided technical assistance and advice about methodology. The local government elaborated the design for the area with the participation of the local residents and in the terms laid down in the Plan. The Plan was entered for, and won, a competition convoked by the Mexico City Government, for neighbourhood upgrading and this provided the financial resources for its implementation.

12. Key Dates

Publication of the Competition: 12 June 2007

Plan accepted and approved: 21 July 2007

Application and assignation of resources: 31 August 2007

Administrative cycle for finishing works: 29 February 2008

Inauguration of the Neighbourhood Park called "La Semilla" 5 April 2008

13. Narrative

SITUATION BEFORE THE INITIATIVE BEGAN

Green spaces, sporting areas and safe places for children were deficient. Delinquency and drug abuse among youth were common, and there weren't areas for the elderly, (a growing sector of the population). The area was a private car park and a dump for household rubbish and building waste.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PRIORITIES

Priorities were defined in neighbourhood meetings where the situation was collectively analysed. Questionnaires were applied and orderly debate was encouraged. The need for green areas for recreation, for sport and common areas for community and family enjoyment were identified, as well as safe areas for small children. The participation of women was notable, and men who are household heads. The elderly also participated and particularly residents applying for housing or housing improvements.

A participative model for diagnosis was used based on a neighbourhood improvement Plan that was elaborated in 1998 by the NGO and the residents of five neighbourhoods (more than 20,000 residents), including the First of May neighbourhood. This Plan was not implemented.

FORMULATION OF OBJETIVES AND STRATEGIES

The context of the experience is found in a public programme that was elaborated in the framework of dialogue between the Mexico City government (partner 4), representatives from civil society (partner 3, along with others) and grass-roots community organizations. This programme seeks to improve housing conditions for the poor and is now looking to improve public spaces in conflictive neighbourhoods that register high levels of social and economic marginality. The programme seeks to involve residents in decision-making processes with respect to their neighbourhood, the administration of financial resources, and in the evaluation of local socially oriented public policies.

MOBILISATION OF RESOURCES

The resources came from a new Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement (established in 2007), by the Mexico City government, and financed through taxes. The technical resources were provided by the non-governmental organisation, and include: the elaboration of the architectural project; the budget; works supervision (together with the community); the design of the educational aspects of the experience; and, organising events while the works were being carried out. Additionally, the NGO maintained its involvement during the handing-over process, and after the works were finished, to help form a Neighbourhood Board for the care and maintenance of the rescued public space, and to help achieve other improvements in services that were partly financed by the same Programme and partly financed by international cooperation.

Many tasks were achieved by voluntary efforts, including: publicity for the adoption of the Plan to collectively rescue a public space, undertaking the necessary bureaucratic tasks with the local and city authorities; selecting and contracting a company to undertake the works; informing the community about progress, organising neighbourhood activities; being responsible for the neighbourhood committees that are composed of five women and one man; the administration of financial resources; participating in works supervision; and, evaluating performance and the Plan.

PROCESS

The political context is important due to the struggle between two currents of the same left wing party, the PRD, where the Mexico City government represents one current and the local government another.

The main problems that derived from this complex relation were that the local government publicly announced the initiative as its own. The neighbourhood Committees had to act carefully and continually negotiate on behalf of the community to avoid conflicts, and even a situation where the Plan would not be authorised.

The traditional political culture of CBO's is for small groups of residents to achieve very limited goals. This was a problem until the NGO suggested the replacement of this concept of power for an alliance with all the sectors that are present in the community, even if they represent different political interests. A period of reflection followed and it became clear that the Plan would be jeopardised unless the value of other contributions were recognised and rivalries were overcome to achieving its sustainability.

There are still political problems to resolve, as the climate of political struggle for votes is often decisive for the implementation of improvement projects. The procedures for public administration are still not in line with the simple dynamic of neighbourhood organisations, or their timing or programming, or fiscal mechanisms. These organisations don't have trained personnel that are aware of the wider problems, and all these factors have a negative impact on projects, and can mean that only a few residents benefit in the name of the common good.

Since 1996, the CBO, with the technical guidance from the NGO, had elaborated and followed-up urban development proposals for the eastern area of the city. In 2006 the NGO participated in the technical process to promote an upgrading programme for poor neighbourhoods, and in 2007 it contributed in a round table with the city government for its precise formulation.

Under the present Programme the NGO and the CBO promoted the wider participation of the whole community to compete for resources that they would exercise for the common good. When the Plan won the competition, the members of the CBO and the wider

community formed Committees that were responsible for the implementation of the Plan. They were guided by the NGO, which encouraged more residents to participate because, among other things, that ensured the sustainability of the Plan. After a year the experience was evaluated by them in a report elaborated in coordination with the NGO and includes the application of public funds, the objectives, results and goals of the alliance between CBO, NGO and the city government, with the aim of achieving a second stage of the neighbourhood upgrading process.

RESULTS ARCHIEVED

The experience overcame the deficit of green areas and areas for sporting activities. This enabled a change in the visual perception of the environment, which has a positive impact on neighbourhood identity. A second stage to the improvement process was approved (29/05/08) for 52% of the budget approved for the 2007 Plan. The approval for continuing the project is largely owing to the efficient use of resources during 2007.

Many community relations have developed and been consolidated and this helps increase security in the neighbourhood. The residents are more confident about the process of appropriating ill-defined spaces in their area, and as a result are more able to control abuses.

The Plan raised questions about the relationship between public spaces and the principle of the government as provider, non-discrimination and social inclusion, and the prevalence of a culture where residents seek privileges through “informal” administrative mechanisms. The responsibility of the city government to protect social and cultural rights of the residents was affirmed, as was the responsibility of the organised population to find solutions to the problems of delinquency and drug abuse among youth in coordination with the authorities. An Upgrading Board is planned for the neighbourhood that has a representative for every street, and it is at this micro level that women participate most. Finally, a proposal has been presented to several sectors for the progressive upgrading of many deteriorated areas that have common problems.

SUSTAINABILITY

The search for resources in kind from the trans national sports companies has begun in order to absorb some maintenance costs, and also to promote the practice of sport. The application for the second stage of the Plan has also been presented to the city government. This includes better use of available spaces and also the definition of a management and coordination programme with the local authorities. Other areas are environmental education, sport and culture, some public services for the community, and awareness raising activities for primary and secondary school students about community work and responsibilities, and the care and maintenance of their neighbourhood. The Plan also includes public notices and a mural.

Many women have volunteered to take responsibility for their street, and the process has maintained an attitude of social and political inclusion, particularly with reference to the local government, and this contributes to forming attitudes based on respect and tolerance. The care of spaces is included in the regulations, as is the elaboration and diffusion of the annual report, including a financial statement, to all the residents of the neighbourhood.

The Plan also includes the restoration of the hermitage, which is an important religious reference point for the population, the civic plaza and the restoration of sporting events. The rescue of existing green areas and the formation of new ones is important to improve

the deteriorated micro climate, and particularly in the area affected by the aggressive closing in of the city's waste water canal –once a river-, and the recycling of the existing buildings, in order to control waste emissions to the environment.

Administrative efficiency contributed to the legal designation of budget resources for 2008 for the Programme, and the challenge to repeat the gains so that the Programme becomes part of public policy in the local context that includes a social policy for the evaluation, for which a Committee has been expressly created.

LESSONS LEARNED

The critical attitudes that were expressed about the innovative process and the unsolicited publication about its progress, that were promoted by sectors that did not want the project to happen, has led the Committee members to reflect on the scarce opportunities to collaborate in this type of project, where all the residents participate and not just a few. The dynamic that results from joint efforts has been proven as beneficial for achieving concrete gains for the physical upgrading of the neighbourhood, and also to confront external impositions on the common good, and even local traditions.

With these lessons the project embarks on its second stage, with the ratification of the organisational structure the challenge will be greater and more complex because this time they include the definition of public works carried out by self-administration methods.

The dimension of the works, which is more than seven thousand square metres, has led the CBO to revise its strategy of alliances, and the residents understand the importance of the project. They seek better treatment than they have received traditionally for their efforts to effect changes. These changes are being communicated to the neighbouring communities and new forms of coordination are arising.

The NGO has also learnt that the larger scale of activities provides the opportunity for new methodologies, and particularly in relation to education and training, and new areas of expertise, such as the environment, and these are elements that the organisation should develop in the future.

The city government has officially recognised the positive results of the Plan and its execution by community participation methods, and sees this as playing an increased role for future initiatives. Here it is necessary to emphasise the need to maintain the quality of the projects and their implementation, and affirm that this type of project requires more and better information, more follow-up and transparency, and the systematic reporting of the use of resources.

TRANSFERS

The Plan learnt from the experience of neighbourhood upgrading in Latin American countries, and particularly South America since the 1980's, where the local organised population undertook the management, design and construction processes for services and infrastructure. This has also occurred in Mexico where improvements to poor neighbourhoods on the city periphery have commonly involved organised residents.

The experience has emphasised the importance of the transparent use of public resources under community control, and the public justification for their use, as in the case of initiatives taken in Brazil. At the theoretical level the most important contributions come for European urban programmes, and particularly Spain.

The Mexican central government is implementing a similar programme in the whole country, with resources from the Interamerican Development Bank, and this could be a

forum to replicate the experience. The advantages of citizen participation in the use of public resources, based on education rather than individual interests, reinforces the value of citizenship, and contributes to the consolidation of community identity through public spaces as an arena where differences are manifested and resolved.

On 29 May the official results for the selection of Neighbourhood Improvement Plans for 2008 were announced. There had been 260 applications of which 98 were approved, and 58 of those were new projects. One of these is the plan for upgrading public spaces in an area called Damian Carmona, which is next to the neighbourhood of our own project. Some of the members of the Committee, other residents and the NGO had already visited Damian Carmona to share their experience. On 20 June ten of these participants were elected onto the Committee to assist in the coordination of the Damian Carmona neighbourhood project. The meetings to establish priorities are advancing, and include methods of communication and transparency. They also include the participation of opposing factions in open and continual debates that result in collective decision-making and shared information.

RELATED POLICY/IES OR LEGISLATION

The Mexico City Legislative Assembly has approved the budget for the Programme for 2008, and the Mexico City government has announced an increase of 62% in comparison to 2007. Some local governments have declared that they will contribute to specific projects in the area of their jurisdiction, however such participation is not generalised to all local areas. There is still not a proposal to include the Programme in the urban and social policies for the city, however the local social development law promotes the right to the city, and the 2007-2012 social development programme establishes the recuperation of public spaces by citizen groups in its general lines. This programme is still not included in the law for citizen participation, or the current civil procedures, which frequently fall behind new developments.

In order to increase the scale of intervention, it is proposed that the mechanisms applied by the city government are more flexible, and that they support citizen participation particularly in the setting up of neighbourhood organisations that can be authorised to execute the care, maintenance and preservation of public spaces, and who will participate in the evaluation of compliance of the regulations and norms that they themselves have promoted.

The national (central) government has made resources available for “improving the urban environment,” which could complement city government resources for neighbourhood upgrading, however the mechanisms to access them are complex and rigid.

14. References

Title of Article	Author	Publication Title	Volume /Number	Date	Page Number
www.sds.df.gob.mx		Website of the Mexico City Social Development Ministry		May 2008	http://www.sds.df.gob.mx/archivo/2008/documentos/Resultados_MB_08.pdf
“Projets selected for Community Neighbourhood Improvement Programm. 2008”	Mexican city government	Official Mexico City Government Gazette	No. 344	29 may 2008	17
“Ecological corridor propose for Gran Canal”	Sara Pantoja	Newspaper El Universal		12 August, 2007	
“Rules, for the Operation of the Community Neighbourhood Improvement Programm. Fiscal year 2007”	Mexican city government	Official Mexico City Government Gazette	No. 102	12 june, 2007	2
“Mexican city government will finance neighbourhood improvement projets”		Newspaper La Jornada		10 june, 2007	

15. Supporting Materials

Area Plan for the First of May Neighbourhood, Mexico City.

File with photographs before, during and after the initiative. Annex sent to bestpractices@unhabitat.org