



CASE STUDY

Climate-Resilient Housing in Buenos Aires

Built Environment

Climate Ready City

Climate Issue: Informal Settlements

- Informal settlements, such as Rodrigo Bueno in Buenos Aires, Argentina, can be disconnected from the rest of the city. This worsens urban inequalities and social disparities.
- For decades, residents of Rodrigo Bueno have lived in crowded conditions with safety hazards. They have lacked access to clean water, waste disposal, electricity, and emergency vehicles.
- Marginalization and a lack of resources made residents vulnerable to climate change events and public health crises.
- The neighborhood has faced flooding vulnerability due to population density, poor infrastructure, and lack of greenery.

Political, Social and Institutional Triggers

- Rodrigo Bueno residents mistrusted authorities due to a history of broken promises alongside extensive legal battles attempting to evict residents and demolish the settlement.
- Many community members have a strong attachment to Rodrigo Bueno. They feared that any integration process would result in their displacement.
- However, unsafe housing conditions, unstable energy supply, disconnected urban fabric and vulnerability to climate change all made the status quo untenable.
- To improve living conditions and connectivity to the rest of the city, the Housing Institute of Buenos Aires developed a new initiative for integration in 2016.

The Housing Institute of Buenos Aires launched a participatory initiative to socially, economically, and physically integrate Rodrigo Bueno.

This project constructed 611 new energy-efficient homes and 57 commercial spaces. More than 2,600 residents have benefited from new and improved houses.

The Rodrigo Bueno climate-resilient housing project demonstrates that participatory, resilience-focused development can integrate housing security, economic opportunity, and ecological preservation.

Including the Excluded

Aware of longstanding resident distrust, the Housing Institute created a Territorial Team for community engagement. The Team helped establish a robust participatory process to capture residents' needs and to co-design the Rodrigo Bueno integration process.

- In 2017, the city formally recognized residents' land and home ownership (N° 5798). This laid the foundation for many households' voluntary relocation to new housing.
- Over time, the Territorial Team built trust with residents and, through deep listening, was able to incorporate neighborhood-specific needs into the integration plan.
- The Territorial Team hosted regular workshops and individual dialogues to involve all residents in key decisions over new street layouts and apartment construction.
- New housing has improved residents' quality of life through improved connection to city services and infrastructure.

Enabling Factors

The success of Rodrigo Bueno's integration was dependent on the approach of a new city government. Starting in 2016, this administration worked with residents to shape all aspects of integration, ensuring long-term climate resilience, economic opportunity, and neighborhood autonomy.

- Municipal programs provided initial funding and technical expertise for the Housing Institute's community engagement efforts, as well as new construction.
- Since 2019, the Housing Institute has worked with residents to relocate to new apartments. The implementation of affordable subsidized mortgages has ensured the project's financial sustainability and scaling.
- In 2020, the Social Economy Law was passed (N° 6376) for economic integration. With resident input, it provided new commercial spaces and resources for entrepreneurs.
- Workshops and training in financial management have also empowered residents with economic self-sufficiency.
- Public-private partnerships have provided funding to support locally-driven and owned initiatives. New spaces in Rodrigo Bueno include an organic nursery and a food court.

The Rodrigo Bueno integration project was a 2023-2024 finalist for the WRI Ross Center Prize for Cities, a global award celebrating and spotlighting transformative urban change. Information was self-reported by finalists. Learn more at buenosaires.gov.ar/institutodevivienda/integracion-de-los-barrios/barrio-rodrigo-bueno, prizeforcities.org and wri.org/cities.



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Ongoing Barriers to Success

Funding Gaps

- Sustaining long-term funding for ongoing and future projects is a challenge. The initiative relies on funding from the government and international organizations.
- The government has continued to pursue private sector investment and corporate sponsorships to fill funding gaps. The hope is that these private-public partnerships can ensure long-term project sustainability.

Cultural and behavioral norms

- The physical and social isolation of Rodrigo Bueno has made seamless integration difficult.
- Past broken promises made residents initially distrustful of the project's legitimacy. To build confidence, the Housing Institute has maintained constant presence and compliance with agreed-upon schedules.
- Since many residents relied on informal economic activities for their livelihoods, they were reluctant to make significant lifestyle changes without promises of stability. The Social Economy Law has achieved progress toward building residents' long-term financial security.
- Socioeconomic differences between Rodrigo Bueno and nearby areas caused tension. Integration efforts have sometimes been perceived as benefiting wealthier areas over Rodrigo Bueno.
- To ease residents' concerns, the Housing Institute has prioritized long-term trust-building efforts.

Sustaining & Scaling Up:

The participatory integration process in Rodrigo Bueno has grown into a transformative housing program impacting thousands of residents across Buenos Aires. The project scope has been sustained and scaled up by:

Gaining public buy-in

- Acknowledging historical mistrust and demonstrating commitment to a more inclusive relationship.
- Involving residents in the integration process through open and clear communication.
- Employing a slow, deliberate pace of change to guard against feelings of alienation that can accompany many housing upgrade projects.

Withstanding administrative turnover

- Codifying resident protections and support structures into law to ensure accountability across administrations.
- Integrating the project into long-term urban planning.
- Encouraging continuous and active participation from residents to maintain neighborhood autonomy.

Scaling up, out, and across

- Hosting educational programs and workshops to teach residents new skills for upward mobility.
- Organizing cultural celebrations to instill community pride.
- Innovating a participatory approach that is now used in informal settlement upgrade projects throughout the city.

IN A NUTSHELL

- Integrating informal settlements into a city's urban fabric can improve living conditions and climate resilience, if done right.
- Voluntary relocation, as well as economic and social support, encourage residents to participate in the integration process.
- Residents' active participation can ensure that the relocation process meets local needs and fosters social cohesion.

WHAT CAN YOUR CITY DO?

INTEGRATE informal settlements into the city's urban planning through participatory approaches.

PROVIDE residents with secure, energy-efficient housing and access to essential services.

INVEST in infrastructure improvements to increase resilience against climate risks.

SUPPORT local businesses to build economic self-sufficiency.

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