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COMMUNITY PROGRAMME FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD IMPROVEMENT (PCMB), MEXICO

WINNER, WORLD HABITAT AWARD

This resource introduces the award-winning work of the PCMB, highlighting some of the key aspects of this participatory neighbourhood improvement programme. You will also find additional information regarding the peer exchange activities carried out by the Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) and the Social Development Secretariat (SDS) to promote the exchange of knowledge and transfer of good practice.

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A word from the Award winners

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A word from the Award winners *Alberto Martínez Flores¹*

In 2007, the Government of Mexico City put in motion the Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement (PCMB²), the purpose of which was to carry out small-scale urban interventions throughout the city, through a highly participatory process that could reverse the process of deterioration of the urban infrastructure in many *colonias*, communities and neighbourhoods, and which could help to counteract processes of socio-spatial segregation.

Without a doubt, one of the main lessons learned for the Government of Mexico City is how to form a new type of relationship with its citizens, in which responsibilities are shared and officials listen first-hand to the ideas coming from the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the city. In a reciprocal experience, both citizens and the government acquire obligations and rights in habitat improvement at the neighbourhood scale, triggering a process of mutual learning that fosters a greater and more effective form of government action.

In six years of work in Mexico City, 981 projects have been carried out, which were proposed, managed and built by the communities, with a contribution by the city government of more than \$700 million pesos (US\$ 55 million).

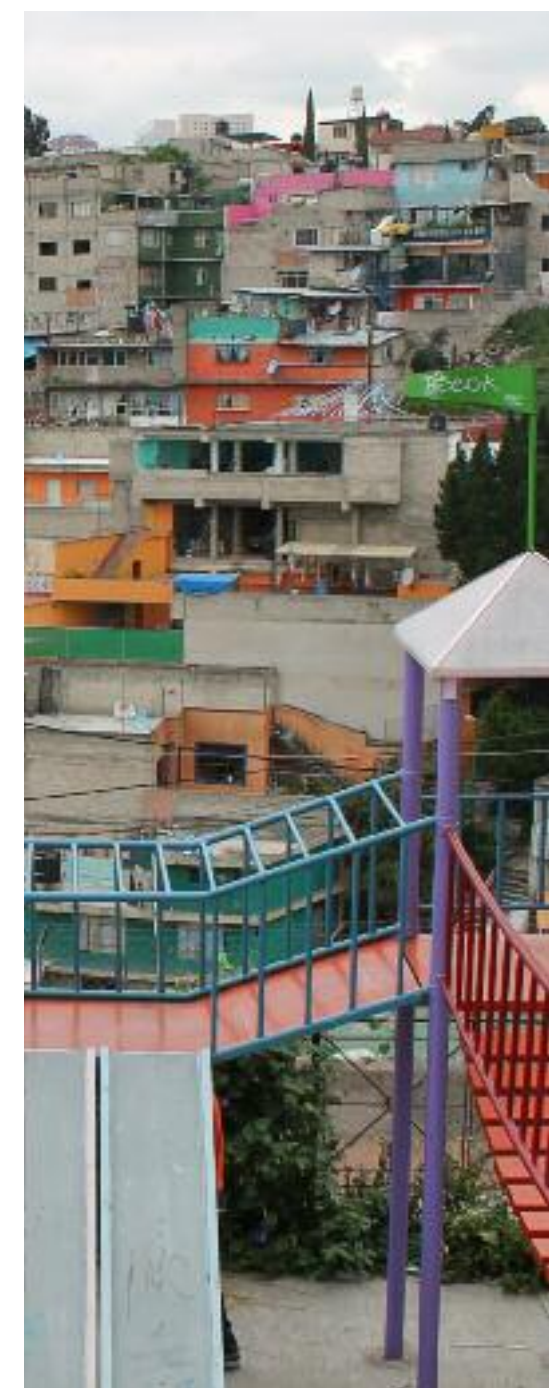
The operation of the PCMB, through the Administration and Supervision Committees, has demonstrated results that have been highly valued by the residents of the participating neighbourhoods. The most significant result has been an improvement in the quality of life of residents through the development of projects that are based on the real needs of the community.

The work carried out by the PCMB in one area is often noticed by nearby residents, who spread the word and in turn develop their own proposals taking into account the context and specific needs of their own communities.

In those cases where projects have been supported to attend to low-income groups (particularly older persons), such as the installation of community kitchens and milk supply units, communities have reported a reduction in food expenses that has been achieved for residents.

¹ Coordinator of the Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement – Social Development Secretariat, government of Mexico City.

² In Spanish: Programa Comunitario de Mejoramiento Barrial (PCMB).



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The construction, improvement or rehabilitation of public spaces in the beneficiary neighbourhoods and *colonias* today offers the residents the opportunity to carry out collective activities in a safe environment, where the children learn to play together and acquire new values of co-existence, in addition to respecting and looking after the infrastructure in their communities. These are spaces that seek to be inclusive of all groups within the community, for instance by inviting young people with drug and alcohol dependency problems to participate in the sports and cultural activities that take place in these spaces.

The collective management of these communal spaces provides an opportunity to encourage grassroots initiatives and to give the community the certainty that they can collectively find solutions to local problems. This is expressed in the pride with which the younger generations are being taught to contribute to the improvement of their neighbourhoods. The social organisation of the neighbourhood is also strengthened, as increasing numbers of residents begin to get involved, make proposals and commit to maintaining the rehabilitated or built spaces.

The Administration and Supervision Committees, in most cases, have become points of reference in their neighbourhoods and in the surrounding areas. Today, in the beneficiary communities, there is trust in the commitment of the Central Government to addressing the needs of the most marginalised areas of the city, and to fostering participatory democracy, by allowing the residents themselves to decide how public resources should be invested in their communities.

In this context, the '*Movimiento Urbano Popular*' (Urban Popular Movement) plays a fundamental role, since thanks to its initiative and drive, the government of the city gave an institutional shape to a very clear and specific demand: improving the urban environment is an indispensable part of the place where one lives. And therefore, neighbourhood upgrading was a necessity.

The PCMB has engaged 35,760 men and women in 2,604 committees, in efforts to rehabilitate public spaces, with proposals that involve the community. Eighty per cent belong to communities that are categorised as having very high, high and medium levels of marginalisation, and of these communities, 70 per cent are women and 30 per cent are men.

The wealth of the PCMB must be analysed and shared, and we therefore believe that it is fundamental to open this experience both at national level and internationally.



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To this end, the 2012 International Study Visit organised in Mexico by the Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF), represented an opportunity for the PCMB to examine its design, implementation and its results, with a view to enriching its operations with inputs from experts from academia, government and international civil society. Based on the international experiences presented, efforts were made to establish the necessary areas of work to convert the PCMB into public policy for Mexico City, whilst identifying its strengths, weaknesses and challenges ahead.

The international study visit also sought to explore the possibility of sharing and transferring the PCMB experience to other countries, where through a constant flow of information, along with in-person and virtual meetings, we will be able to develop and take forward this difficult task of improving our surroundings together with the people.

Finally, the event was an effective tool for establishing linkages with the academic sectors of the countries present, generating an exchange of methodologies, administrative processes and concepts. One important aspect was that in addition to meeting with specialists from around the world, the Programme was able to strengthen relationships with specialists and academics in Mexico.

For these reasons, the international study visit represented a milestone in the history of social programmes in Mexico City: it enabled us to submit our work to analysis and critique from multiple points of view, based on years of experience in the public sector and civil society at global level, taking into consideration the fact that we are engaged in a process of continuous learning, in which the task of the government is first to listen, and to then be effective in using public resources to improve the habitat of its citizens.



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The World Habitat Award for innovative and sustainable housing solutions was presented to the Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement (PCMB) at the United Nations global celebration of World Habitat Day in Aguascalientes, Mexico, on Monday 3rd October 2011.

This inspiring neighbourhood improvement programme, established in 2007 by the Social Development Secretariat (SDS) of the Federal District government of Mexico City in response to urban social movements' increasing demands for decent and safe neighbourhoods, has led to improved public spaces and community facilities in informal settlements and low income neighbourhoods across Mexico City, through a participatory, community-driven approach.

The evaluation committee, including members of the World Habitat Awards Advisory Group as well as the international judges at the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations University, was enthusiastic in the endorsement of the PCMB as a worthy winner of the World Habitat Award, recognising its significant achievements in terms of improving living conditions and the urban environment as well as its potential to inspire others working in the fields of settlement upgrading and participatory governance.

Aspects of the programme that can be highlighted in particular include the direct distribution of funds to communities for settlement upgrading, the strong levels of active community participation and empowerment, and the development of strategic partnerships with a wide range of actors including civil society organizations, social movements, government agencies and academic institutions. Its capacity to engage in critical reflection is another key strength of the programme, enabling a process of continuous learning and improvement.

Further details of the Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement can be found in this report, as well as a list of the key factors identified by the SDS that have been critical to the success of the participatory process, reflections by Pablo Yanes, Head of the Social Development Unit of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – Mexico and Georgina Sandoval of Mexican NGO Casa y Ciudad A.C., and links to a range of additional reports and resources.



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As part of the follow-up work carried out by BSHF with World Habitat Award winning projects to promote the exchange of knowledge and transfer of good practice, an international study visit was carried out to the PCMB in August 2012, bringing together a wide range of practitioners involved in settlement upgrading and participatory governance processes, representing local and national governments, international agencies, NGOs, social movements and academic institutions from 13 different countries. The intensive, week-long visit provided an opportunity for participants to share knowledge, expertise and experience on issues relating to participatory settlement upgrading, as well as meeting with residents, the SDS and representatives of the many organisations that have contributed to the success of the programme. Further details of the peer exchange activities, as well as the analysis of the participants, can be found in the 'Peer exchange and analysis' section of this document.

BSHF would like to congratulate the SDS and all those involved in the PCMB on their outstanding work and wish them every success in the collective efforts to promote citizen participation and the continuous improvement of living conditions in Mexico City.



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The Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement (PCMB) is a community-driven neighbourhood improvement programme that was established in 2007 in Mexico City. It uses a participatory approach to improving public spaces in informal settlements and low-income neighbourhoods, particularly those with high levels of social conflict, marginalisation and/or urban decay. The programme aims at developing a participatory process of improvement and recovery of public spaces in Mexico City. It also aims at reversing the current process of socio-spatial segregation and improving urban living conditions in the city's most marginal areas.

Proposals are sought from communities which are then considered by a Citizen's Committee and the government for funding. All interested parties are invited to present projects to the judging panel to improve their neighbourhood's urban infrastructure, but only projects approved by neighbourhood assemblies can be submitted. Projects are designed by the communities; the PCMB does not design or propose any kind of initiative. Projects developed through the programme include illumination and paving of streets, provision of recreational, community and sports facilities, drainage systems and small parks, as well as rainwater collection, community centres, theatres, museums and multi-use rooms.

For the selected projects, the funds are distributed directly to the communities, who are given full responsibility for delivering the projects selected, after being trained in financial and project management and with the support of the city government. Communities elect their own administration, supervision and community development committees and make all decisions as to how the funds should be allocated. These committees oversee the construction process and are responsible for receiving and accounting for the public funds; ensuring that the proposed works are executed properly. They are also responsible for the follow-up work post implementation.

The focus of the programme is on promoting genuine citizen participation in the design, execution and evaluation of Mexico City's urban development policy and the construction, rehabilitation and adaptation of public spaces. Community members have organised themselves into committees, working together on the design and implementation of the projects. The construction work is accompanied by social projects to improve the organisation and social cohesion of the community, for example, activities such as film screening, dance, music, theatre, clubs for older persons and sporting activities.



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Context

There are 8.7 million people (one in six Mexican citizens) living in the Federal District of Mexico, which is divided into 16 districts. The wider metropolitan area has a population of over 21 million, and the Federal District has faced, historically, the problems of uncontrolled urban expansion and environmental degradation.

Mexico Federal District is the capital of the country and seat of the federal powers of the Mexican Union. It is the largest urban centre in Mexico, along with being the principal political, academic, financial, business and cultural hub in the country, and one of the most influential in the Americas. With a GDP of \$470.000 million (US Dollars), it is the eighth richest city in the world. At the international level, it is one of the fastest growing cities, with an economy expected to triple by 2020. However, a large proportion of the population survives on very low income levels living in conditions of poverty and marginalisation characterised by diverse forms of economic and social vulnerability.



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The emergence of the PCMB

There is a long history of community mobilisation and social organisation in Mexico City, with strong social movements, grassroots organisations and of course the 'Movimiento Urbano Popular' (Urban Popular Movement), which gives voice to the demands of the most vulnerable, and works to defend the right to the city. These organisations have worked in low-income neighbourhoods and informal settlements for years, building capacity and strengthening leaders, which has been crucial in the development of the PCMB.

The existence of precedents in regards to participatory experiences in Mexico City has laid the groundwork for the development of the PCMB. The programme is based on the numerous participatory experiences that have taken place in previous years, both by government (for example, the 'Programme for the Rehabilitation of Social Housing Units' implemented in 2001) as well as civil society.

It was in part these demands and initiatives of civil society organisations that lead to the establishment of the PCMB. A strong and organised civil society has been the key to the establishment of the programme, and communities have been actively involved from the beginning – from the start of the programme to the selection of the community projects as part of the Joint Technical Committee.

In 2007, the head of government of the Federal District established the PCMB as a response to the increasing demands of urban social movements for decent and safe neighbourhoods. In this respect, the programme involves the upgrading of public spaces, urban infrastructure and community facilities in informal settlements through a participatory budgeting process and self-management of resources, carried out through a partnership between the community and the city government.

The programme was designed by urban social movements and other civil society organisations working together with government officials. All of these sectors continue to participate through the PCMB Advisory Council, which comprises 26 representatives of civil society and nine representatives of different branches of the Government of Mexico City. This entity was established to act as an advisory/consultative body in the process and to liaise between the government and civil society.



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Funding

The programme is funded in its entirety by the Government of Mexico City. The programme budget depends on the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District. However, the PCMB is also open to donations from private enterprises, international organisations and other local and federal government funds. For example, two of the 16 city districts have signed a cooperation agreement with the PCMB to contribute additional resources to assist with the construction process and five of the 16 city districts have also given additional resources to specific projects.

The PCMB budget has increased from US\$6 million in 2007 to US\$7 million in 2011, peaking at US\$14.5 million in 2009. The budget was reduced from 2009 to 2010 due to both economic and political constraints (i.e. the economic crisis and the fact that policymakers wished to give local districts direct control over public funding rather than the communities). Each project approved by the Joint Technical Committee can be assigned resources ranging from US\$40,000 to US\$400,000 per project, according to the needs of the community and the type of project to be implemented.



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Actors involved

The main beneficiaries of the programme are the inhabitants of the communities and community organisations in areas with high levels of social and urban degradation and marginalisation, who present projects and initiatives for the recovery of public space in their communities. This does not leave out those residents of the non-marginalised areas, who nonetheless experience the decay of the social or urban infrastructure.

The Social Development Secretariat (SDS) is the city government body responsible for programme operation. In January of each year, the SDS calls residents, civil society organisations, communities and academic institutions to promote/recommend projects to improve their neighbourhoods.

However, the PCMB has been developed through collaboration between the Government of Mexico City, the local districts (*delegaciones*), and civil society organisations. The government and a range of academic institutions, NGOs and other civil and social organisations provide technical and social assistance to the community projects, by taking part in the Joint Technical Committee.

Participating organisations include:

- Academic sector: National Autonomous University of Mexico, through the Architecture School, the School of Social Work and the Programme for City Studies; the Metropolitan Autonomous University, Ibero-American University, the University of Mexico City and the Monterrey Institute for higher studies
- NGOs: COPEVI (Operational Centre for Housing and Human Settlements); Casa y Ciudad civil society organisation and DICIAC (Comprehensive Community Development)
- Social organisations: 'Frente Popular Francisco Villa'; 'Asamblea de Barrios'; 'Unión V. Guerrero'; 'Unión Popular Revolucionaria E. Zapata'; 'Central Unida de Trabajadores'; 'Patria Nueva'; 'Unión de Colonias Populares'; 'Casa del Pueblo'

Additionally, the programme is continuously evaluated through an annual exercise that has maintained constant two-way communication between the SDS and the collective of social organisations, civil organisations and technical advisers of the PCMB.



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The participatory neighbourhood improvement process

Many of the innovations of the PCMB relate to its participatory methodology, with active community participation at various levels and at various times. The neighbourhood improvement process begins with a call for proposals by the SDS, asking the communities to propose projects within their districts. Communities put forward their proposals in a neighbourhood assembly, which, once approved, are then sent to the judging panel of the SDS. For the selected projects, the funds are distributed directly to the communities, who elect their own administration, supervision and community development committees and make all decisions as to how the funds should be allocated. All interested parties are invited to present projects to the judging panel to improve their neighbourhood's urban infrastructure, but only projects approved by neighbourhood assemblies can be submitted. Projects are designed by the communities; the PCMB does not design or propose any kind of initiative.

An extract of a research project carried out in 2012 at BSHF by Professor Viviana Fernández Prajoux is included below, with details of the participatory process carried out by the PCMB:

- The members of the community establish the social and spatial boundaries of their community, identify the problems and challenges that they face, and propose the projects that they would like to develop accordingly.
- A neighbourhood assembly is held, at which residents select the project which best meets the needs of the community; they carry out the design of the project with technical support from outside advisors – professionals who individually, through an NGO or in representation of a major Mexican university provide advice to the communities on the technical aspects of the proposal.
- The selected projects are submitted and approved by the Joint Technical Committee, comprised of representatives from the local government and civil society organisations.
- Once the projects are approved, in another neighbourhood assembly, the members of the Administration and Supervision Committees are elected.
- The financial resources are channelled directly to the community. The Administration and Supervision Committees are in charge of receiving the public funds, and are accountable both to the community and to the government.



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- The physical construction work can be carried out by the community itself, by external contractors or by a mixture of both. In all cases, the Supervision Committee supervises the work and makes sure that it is being done properly.
- In most cases, the physical improvements are accompanied by social projects to improve the organisation and social cohesion of the community, for example, activities such as film screening, dance, music, theatre, clubs for older persons and sporting activities.
- The community is responsible for overall maintenance.

In short, it can be said that through the PCMB, communities decide on the type of project, on the physical space where it will be implemented, they carry out the physical intervention, administer the funds, account for all spending to the community and the government and, finally, monitor, operate and maintain the rehabilitated spaces.

Methodologies

- 1.- **Submission of proposals:** the communities are asked to do a self-assessment of their own public spaces, and to describe the key social, economic and security problems faced in the area.
- 2.- **Proposal design:** the communities, based on their self-assessment, develop a design or sketch of a proposed physical intervention in the space, which preferably attends to the most vulnerable sectors or the largest number of residents in the area.
- 3.- **Costs and financing:** with support from a technical advisor from the community, or based on their own self-help construction experiences, they submit a proposed budget for the space to receive the intervention, according to the government pricing schedule.
- 4.- **Mediation committees:** throughout the entire process, there is a working group in place to help mediate among the residents. Many times, the neighbours disagree about the form or type of intervention to carry out. The programme coordinators are present to help mediate conflicts and to help come up with a proposal that is satisfactory for all. If the community cannot reach an agreement, the programme does not carry out the project.



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Impact of the programme

The number of proposals presented by the communities has increased each year, from 139 community proposals in 2007 to 780 community proposals in 2012, with a total of 3,238 proposals received between 2007 and 2012. The number of citizens that have participated in the PCMB's neighbourhood assemblies is significant: between 2007 and 2012, 182,525 people participated in the assemblies to endorse the projects; in a second stage 60,693 have participated in neighbourhood assemblies to elect the administration, supervision and community development committees, which constitute a total of 13,020 citizens in 2,604 committees.

A communication network has been established nationally with many social organisations in order to pressure local governments to create a similar mechanism in their districts. For example, in Michoacán, forums were organised for the possible transfer of the PCMB approach.

Impact on the communities: The number of participants involved in the neighbourhood assemblies for the selection of local committee members has significantly increased over the past years. By becoming active participants, citizens are empowered to have an active role in society and in the development and improvement of their own city. The collective management of the neighbourhood is valued as an opportunity to develop local initiatives and strengthen social networks. Teaching the younger generations to work for their neighbourhood increases the long-term impact of the projects.

Impact on the neighbourhoods: Improvements in public spaces and neighbourhood facilities result in healthier and safer living environments, thus enhancing the quality of life of residents and impacting on the inhabitants of the wider city who benefit from safer and improved urban spaces. Public space is recovered as a key resource for the improvement of social integration and as a focus for further development and investment. In addition, a reduction in inequalities has been achieved through the redistribution of resources to poorer communities and the associated improvement in the physical and social environment.

Impact on governance processes: The programme also has a strong impact with regards to governance and regulatory frameworks. The increased knowledge of the community's problems by public servants has led to more efficient conflict resolution. There is a new understanding of the organisational processes of communities and the methodology used by civil society organisations. By voicing their demands, the social movements and civil organisations have effectively influenced public policies for land use development, resulting in the government creating a policy that recognises the significance of community participation in neighbourhood improvements.



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Joint work with the universities and students: The PCMB has generated an unusual level of interest within the dynamics of academia. In its second year of operation, various universities began to study the design, implementation and the impacts generated by the programme.

A constant feature in the operation of the programme is its continuous evaluation and revision; in order to achieve this, a network of academics has been built, who at different stages are invited to gatherings to reflect upon and analyse the programme. Amongst the most active institutions is the Programme for City Studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, an institution that has provided specific monitoring to this programme and with whom two publications have been developed. A number of advanced and postgraduate students have also undertaken research into specific cases as well as the programme as a whole.



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Key achievements and lessons learned

One of the key innovative aspects of the PCMB is that it is a large-scale, community-led neighbourhood upgrading programme. City residents are not passive subjects as is traditionally the case with social programmes. Residents instead become active participants who diagnose their own problems, set priorities, design plans, receive funding, carry out construction work, hire service providers and are held accountable to the community and the SDS. Funds are distributed directly to the community, which enables real participation to take place as well as contributing to the strengthening of participatory democracy and to the creation of mechanisms through which communities can directly influence public policy.

Important lessons can be learned from the PCMB's participatory process. The projects that are carried out serve as catalysts for other community initiatives, as confidence returns that collective solutions can be found to neighbourhood problems. In addition, allowing community members themselves to decide where public resources are invested in their communities helps to strengthen local organisation and better targets the use of public resources. Community organisation can lead to a more cost effective use of resources, as evidenced by the fact that 96 per cent of all projects have shorter construction times and lower costs compared to traditional government projects.



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Challenges faced

In the political sphere, one of the challenges faced has been the lack of coordination with other branches of government and cooperation between the political parties that make up the city government. In order to overcome this barrier, working groups have been set up comprising representatives from the different branches of the government and local neighbourhoods to ensure a more integral cooperation. Two neighbourhoods have signed cooperation agreements with the PCMB.

In the same way, political continuity represents another challenge to the sustainability of the programme, as its continuity will depend on the decision of future government leaders. It is difficult to guarantee that the PCMB resources will remain stable during the coming years, as it depends on the budget assigned each year by the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District. However, the SDS has proposed legislation to the Legislative Assembly seeking to guarantee, by law, permanent resources for the project, although the decision in respect of this proposal of this is still pending.

In terms of logistics, the lack of publicity and dissemination of the PCMB has prevented a greater number of communities from participating. Financial constraints have limited the amount of funding that can be dedicated to dissemination and this challenge has not yet been overcome.

Regarding the implementation of projects in the communities, a potential challenge is in the management of community conflicts over projects that have been already approved, and the risk that they will become politicised. This has been avoided (and overcome in the few cases in which it has occurred) by holding informative assemblies open to all community members and interested parties. In the five years that the programme has been running only two projects could not be developed due to problems within the community. Potential difficulties also exist in the distribution and utilisation of resources in the communities. However, only two projects have made incorrect use of funds (corresponding to 0.3 per cent of resources invested in all the years of the programme); they are now involved in a lawsuit with the SDS and isolated examples such as these do not represent a substantial threat to the proper functioning of the PCMB.



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Critical success factors

Key factors identified by the SDS that have been critical to the success of the participatory process:

- The PCMB was designed together with civil society and social movements. It could be said that this is a bottom-up programme created by the grassroots, which provides a great sense of belonging and ownership.
- Direct decision-making by the communities regarding the type of intervention to be carried out.
- Direct administration of resources by communities.
- Community responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the recovered spaces.
- Rules and regulations designed and developed in conjunction with the communities and organised civil society.
- No bureaucratisation of work, with an effective and efficient approach by government towards the administration of the programme.
- As a community-driven programme, it seeks to transform the communities as well as physically transform their neighbourhoods, developing abilities, skills, knowledge and above all building confidence.
- The process of self-help construction practiced by the community is valued and recognised by the city.
- The PCMB, by supporting and encouraging the communities to participate with other actors in the programme, contributes to better participatory governance and generates a sense of shared responsibility.
- The existence of social processes of self-organisation and the social production of habitat.



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Pre-conditions for the transfer of the approach

Pre-conditions identified by the SDS for transferring the programme to other contexts:

- Minimum operational structure within the local government.
- Minimum budget to support small-scale interventions.
- Presence of neighbourhood organisations or groups, not necessarily within a formal legal body.
- Working with the academic sector as a reference for the development of the programme.
- Existence of an administrative area of participatory planning within the government.
- Existence of legal regulation or norms in terms of citizen participation.
- Political will.



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The Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement: toward a virtuous cycle of ends and means *Pablo Yanes*³

It is no coincidence that the Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement of Mexico City has received various international accolades in its six years of existence. It earned the Best Practices in Citizen Participation Award from the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy, based in Barcelona; three of its projects won first prize in a contest organised by Deutsche Bank for urban upgrading initiatives in the Mexico City metropolitan area, and finally, in 2011, the programme received the World Habitat Award from the Building and Social Housing Foundation.

It could be said that the attention that the programme has received - as evidenced by the number of different studies underway and the various graduate students who have selected it as a case study for their thesis or dissertation - is to a large extent due not to the nature of the work being done (neighbourhood upgrading), but rather the originality of its approach. And part of this uniqueness is that the PCMB originated as a bottom-up initiative of various grassroots organisations and urban popular movements along with architects and planners committed to an inclusive and socially just urban development. The Government of Mexico City was charged with finding the best institutional format for taking the initiative forward and obtaining the necessary financial resources for its implementation.

Unlike most neighbourhood improvement programmes that are in place in different Latin American countries and cities, in which top-down planning and management styles tend to prevail, the PCMB emerged as an exercise in participatory democracy, in which the residents themselves organised into assemblies could detect their own priorities and propose solutions for their surroundings, within a perspective of the social construction of habitat. Within these dynamics, the technical advisors play, or should play, the role of following the projects, subject to the decision of the communities.

While the majority of community development programmes begin with the definition of limited options that residents can choose from (benches, streetlights, gardens, etc.), the PCMB embraced the democratic principle that for citizens, anything that is not prohibited is permitted. With few exceptions (paving or the purchase of properties, for example), the programme attempted to unleash the imagination and creativity of citizens on initiatives to intervene in public spaces, or better yet, their own public space.

³Head of the Social Development Unit of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) - Mexico. Note: the opinions expressed here are not necessarily the opinions of the United Nations.



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A review of the full set of projects approved over the years is indicative of this social creativity put into practice. There are projects such as the construction of closed theatres, as well as open air auditoriums, the renovation of community centres, the restoration of the last mural produced by José Clemente Orozco, signposting on benches for blind people, the beautification of community squares, installation of fountains, painting of façades, creation of sports facilities, reforestation along riverbanks, construction of centres for older persons and ecological museums, among others. It is unlikely that this diversity of initiatives could have emerged from a vertical planning exercise.

Nevertheless, what is most original about the approach of this programme is the incorporation of the idea of self-delimitation of territories and the direct transfer of resources to residents for the implementation of the projects.

In contrast to many settlement upgrading/neighbourhood improvement programmes, which define a priori the areas for intervention based on criteria usually related to poverty, the PCMB did not frame its field of activity within initiatives to combat poverty, but rather as an exercise in social inclusion. As such, it proposed improving the quality of life in urban environments, whilst reducing socio-spatial inequality. Within this perspective, no areas or neighbourhoods were pre-selected or pre-excluded.

The initiative was designed to be universal in scope, whilst still prioritising what the city classified as territories having very high, high and medium levels of marginalisation. Still, the target area was ultimately decided upon by the communities themselves, under the principle of territorial self-definition and self-identification, beyond the poverty maps and existing political-administrative divisions. The idea is of a living territory, understood as a social relationship in which subjectivity, history and culture play a fundamental role. Thus, territories divided by large public infrastructure works or administrative modifications can again become historic spaces for social integration and cohesion, within the common purpose of improving the neighbourhood.

The other innovative element of the PCMB, which is possibly what has attracted the most attention, is not that it is an exercise in participatory democracy in which the people express their opinion and others do the work, but rather that people decide on the project and receive the resources to execute it directly. The idea is not only to give people decision-making powers, but also the material means to carry out those decisions.

From the point of view of efficiency and effectiveness, the programme has been a success, with 981 neighbourhood improvement projects carried out throughout the city over the last five years. Many of these were initiatives that the communities had been proposing to the local authorities for a long time, and which had never come to fruition. It has been one of Mexico City's most intense programmes for the implementation of community projects in recent times.



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The above point is important to mention, because it is not uncommon to hear the assertion that citizen and community participation complicates the implementation of programmes, makes the processes slower and can get in the way of efficient operations. The case of the PCMB in Mexico City appears to offer a different perspective, by demonstrating that high levels of participation are perfectly compatible with high levels of efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, participation emerges not only as a basic instrument for planning (enhancing the creativity of proposed projects), but also for execution (the amount and quality of projects completed in limited time frames).

This also underscores the importance of acknowledging that in social policy, results are not the only thing that matters; in fact, the process itself is just as important, if not more so, because in the case of neighbourhood upgrading, it helps to create social agency, build community capacities and enhance ownership of the projects.

The same upgrading work could probably be done through a traditional management mechanism rather than a participatory approach, but the outcome would not be the same, even if the physical work is the same. In social terms, process matters, and matters a lot.

The outcomes of this participatory process are significant in terms of social cohesion, creating a sense of place, the care given to the project and the infrastructure, the organisational capacity, administrative learning, territorial planning, conflict resolution, the use of public resources and public accountability.

Finally, another virtue of the PCMB has been its capacity for critical reflection. The self-evaluation exercises conducted to date are evidence of this. One of the conclusions of these reflections is that the PCMB is a programme in development, which needs to deepen its strengths and work on its weaknesses, particularly with regards to the progress that still needs to be made to ensure a more comprehensive territorial intervention and collectively engage all of the public sector institutions that have a responsibility for improving the local quality of life.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this has been an innovative and successful experience that has strongly put forward the issue of urban development as a horizontal, bottom-up process, involving the construction of a social and territorial fabric, in which the social construction of habitat and the right to the city, as an emerging human right, go hand in hand.



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Looking to the future of the PCMB

Georgina Sandoval⁴

The idea of the Programme

The process is simple: a public contest is announced; a project is presented – part of a larger programme – along with benchmarks for self-assessment; an initial budget is provided; and a neighbourhood assembly is held to approve the project. All of this takes place in areas of the city that can be identified, preferably, as places with some degree of marginalisation.

In other words, the idea is to address a need identified by the community itself, which at the same time says what it wants to do. This is the primary characteristic of this “bottom-up” programme.

Assumptions

Throughout the past six years, the communities, whether organised or not, have demonstrated that people do participate and organise themselves around their own ideas; they have generated an experience which has converted their idea – their dream – into reality; and in turn have organised a series of activities with a vision of the future that unites different stakeholders around a territory that they identify with. That idea, its implementation and its future projection could become a collective exercise, with many communities linked together, for the benefit of the entire city; this would be the idea for the future. It is about having imagination to modify the quality of life, beyond the individual space, of community spaces.

It is definitely a programme which calls upon people to enjoy the public spaces within their neighbourhoods and communities, spaces where different stakeholders interact with different interests and which demonstrate equality and integration. This results in a complex programme, in which each of the over 650 projects are different and are looked at from different perspectives – thus, the academics study the socio-territorial phenomena; the urban planners seek to add together each of these “cells” into the organism of the city that can be planned; civil society organisations help to create instruments to strengthen the community; the technical advisors have to innovate participatory practices; even politicians and parties will see opportunities.

⁴ Research Department, Division of Design Arts and Sciences – CyAD – Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Azcapotzalco/ Casa y Ciudad A.C.



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After the practice, re-thinking the experience

When introducing the programme, various affirmations were made about it, and moreover, different qualities were ascribed to it, which must be conceptually recognised in order to be upheld.

1. We are dealing with a programme that is an exercise in participatory budgeting. Has the budget already been defined and not increased?
2. The practice of the programme suggests that it is an exercise in citizen participation: in some cases has this been promoted by the government itself?
3. The programme is an exercise that has modified small public spaces through physical interventions, *an exercise in building public works*. How can we know if the physical interventions were good? Where the “comprehensive, sustained and participatory process” is relative.

Recommendation for assessing impact

According to the programme documents, its goal is to “facilitate the capacity of citizens to join together and organise themselves in order to exercise direct influence on improving the public spaces in their communities.” Given the fact that the programme does not identify the dimensions and conditions of the problem that it seeks to resolve, and did not have preset programme achievements or targets – except for the annual budget – the achievements and lessons learned for the city and the community groups must be identified. Three different perspectives must be acknowledged: the public administration, the implementers (including technical advisors), and the end users.



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Challenges

- Developing a new political culture that strengthens the innovations and interventions of the PCMB; above all in its organisational character.
- Moving beyond reproducing the traditional mechanisms of clientelism, replacing them with the notion of “community decision-making”.
- Overcoming mistrust and the limitations of bureaucracy with regard to social and citizen initiatives.
- Raising the quality of design and technical supervision. This implies recognising the role of the technical advisors (from a variety of disciplines) working with the community.
- Building real capacities within the communities for territorial planning and management, “from public works to comprehensive neighbourhood upgrading”.
- Putting instruments in place to assess achievements and progress.
- Taking advantage of the potential of the PCMB to develop comprehensive public policies that link together the efforts of different government departments to support neighbourhood upgrading, from the perspective of the social production of habitat.
- Achieving institutional recognition for the programme, including legal and administrative support.



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- **Miravalle**
- El Arbol

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Miravalle – Iztapalapa District

The story of the Miravalle *colonia* begins nearly three decades ago, with the occupation of the area by settlers and the subsequent regularisation of land tenure. The growth of the *colonia* in recent years has brought with it problems related to family breakdown and a lack of security, which seriously impacts upon different population groups, particularly children and youth. Its history is also marked by a range of different civil society organisations driving projects for the community, and social movements that have been active from the beginning. The existence of a culture and history of years of participation and strong civil networks in Miravalle has facilitated and supported the processes of formulating, designing and implementing community projects through the PCMB. Pre-existing social and civil society networks collaborated in the creation of a highly participatory process, culminating in initiatives with significant social impact.

This *colonia* has been one of the beneficiaries of the PCMB. Between 2007 and 2012, the neighbourhood has received funding in the amount of US\$ 510,000, which has been used to build a Community Centre and a pavilion, to create green spaces and finish the library area, among others; improvements which have benefited approximately 8,716 people.

Improvements carried out

The lack of common spaces was a problem for the community, and therefore in 2007, the residents launched a project to rehabilitate a square, build retaining walls and install street lighting. The project was promoted by a group of civil society organisations (*Culti-VAMOS-Juntos*), which recognised that improving and recovering public spaces helps to re-integrate the community and enhance the quality of life of local residents. Neighbours and local workers participated in solidarity with the project, and this led to positive changes in certain behaviours and ways of working. It also generated new development possibilities, as the residents of the *colonia* report. The local district government also contributed towards the project by providing heavy machinery.

Results

In addition to the urban improvements in the area, the renovated space has also become an important meeting point, adding significant value to the functioning of the community. As the work progressed, this space began to be occupied by young people and adults attending the various workshops and activities. The following projects have been carried out by residents between 2007 and 2012: construction of a kiosk, library and play centre; creation of green spaces; construction of a building to foster culture, education, sports and recreation; a community kitchen and a multiple-use room; a roofed pavilion and skating rink; a corridor for graffiti, and a garden with medicinal plants. An educational centre for young people was also built, named "Calmecac", where graphic arts workshops are offered, and a small square with community toilets.

This community has received a large number of visitors interested in learning from its experience and collaborating with the residents, including local students and foreign visual artists, among others. These visits have inspired many others to embark upon similar initiatives and to implement resident-driven community projects.



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El Arbol – Alvaro Obregón District

The community of Santa Fe is located among numerous streams and ravines, which have formed a part of the natural descent of water currents and various rivers fed by rain and spring waters from the mountains. During the revolutionary era, the town lost much of its population; with the process of urbanisation beginning in the 1960s, however, and the need for new residential and commercial space, multiple informal settlements emerged on hillsides and streambeds, causing the deterioration of significant natural resources. The El Arbol *colonia* and its surroundings are a product of this urbanisation, and the ravine of the Becerra River, which cuts through the *colonia*, has for years served as a means of subsistence, with a large number of inhabitants obtaining stone and sand from it to sell or to use to build their houses.

The Tequio Santa Fe organisation decided to propose a project to the PCMB in 2008, to rehabilitate open spaces and improve the urban landscape, by building two small squares in deteriorated urban areas and some pedestrian stairways, as well as levelling roads, painting façades and installing street lighting in selected roads. The local district government has contributed by providing the lamp-posts as well as landscaping. Family, community and cultural activities take place in the square: film screenings are put on for young people and there are table games and workshops for women and children, fostering a sense of community among residents of the neighbourhood and surrounding area.

In the planning and development of the project, residents learn how to manage goods and services, and to have a better working relationship with the authorities. According to those involved, the project helps to bring neighbours closer together, which helps to raise overall awareness about the need to care for public spaces. Residents meet daily to go over the details of the work, and receive advice from the Ibero-American University. Members of nearby colonias are now also benefiting from the improved spaces and recreational activities, and approach the community to learn more about the project and experience. In the future, the community plans to work on painting additional façades and to build a clinic and a School of Arts and Trades, with support from various institutions and universities, where workshops can be offered. The project received, between 2008 and 2010, approximately US\$260,000, which has been used for the construction of two squares, one of which with a pavilion; the construction of stairways and refurbished sidewalks; the installation of street lighting and an open-air gymnasium.



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Colonia San José Buenavista, delegación Iztapalapa



Painting of façades, colonia San José Buenavista, delegación Iztapalapa



Public space in colonia La Mexicana, delegación Álvaro Obregón



300 community kitchens have been opened to date



Residents of colonia San José Buenavista, delegación Iztapalapa



Preparing food in the community kitchen, colonia San José Buenavista

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Public space in colonia Miravalle, delegación Iztapalapa



Colonia Miravalle, delegación Iztapalapa



Open air theatre in colonia Miravalle, delegación Iztapalapa



Singing in the open air theatre, colonia Miravalle, delegación Iztapalapa



Colonia La Mexicana, delegación Álvaro Obregón



Centre for Older Persons, colonia Piloto Culhuacán

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About the study visit

The Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement (PCMB) was awarded the World Habitat Award in 2011, recognising its potential to inspire other housing practitioners to implement or strengthen participatory settlement upgrading processes. In this respect, an international study visit to the PCMB took place between 5th-11th August 2012, bringing together 21 practitioners from 13 different countries working in the field of settlement upgrading and participatory governance. Participants included representatives of local and national governments, practitioners involved in civil society organisations and NGOs, academics and researchers, as well as representatives of international agencies.

The international study visit provided participants with an opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience, become part of a community of practice, and gain an in-depth understanding of the key aspects of the award-winning neighbourhood improvement programme, including participatory governance processes, physical upgrading and self-management of resources. It allowed participants and actors involved in the PCMB to discuss broader issues related to settlement upgrading based on their experiences, as well as equipping participants with methodologies, tools and ideas to adapt and adopt in the context of their own work.

The five days of the international study visit were divided between participants' presentations of their own work, an introduction of the PCMB, as well as intensive field visits. Meetings and panel discussions were held with representatives of the Government of Mexico City, academics involved in the programme, as well as civil society organisations and social movements. These allowed for an in-depth discussion of the PCMB from a variety of viewpoints, highlighting its key elements of success and as well as tools and methodologies. Field visits provided participants with the opportunity to meet residents of six neighbourhoods or *colonias* in Mexico City in which projects had been implemented through the PCMB: Colonia San Jose Buenavista, Colonia Miravalle, Colonia Consciencia Proletaria, Colonia La Mexicana/2a Ampliación La Mexicana, Valle de Anahuac and Colonia Piloto Culhuacán.



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International Study Visit to the Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement
5- 11 August 2012

DAY 1

Presentation of the Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement
Presentation of participants' work and sharing of experiences

DAY 2

Field visits to projects in Colonia San José Buenavista (1) and Colonia Miravalle (2)
Meeting with local authorities

DAY 3

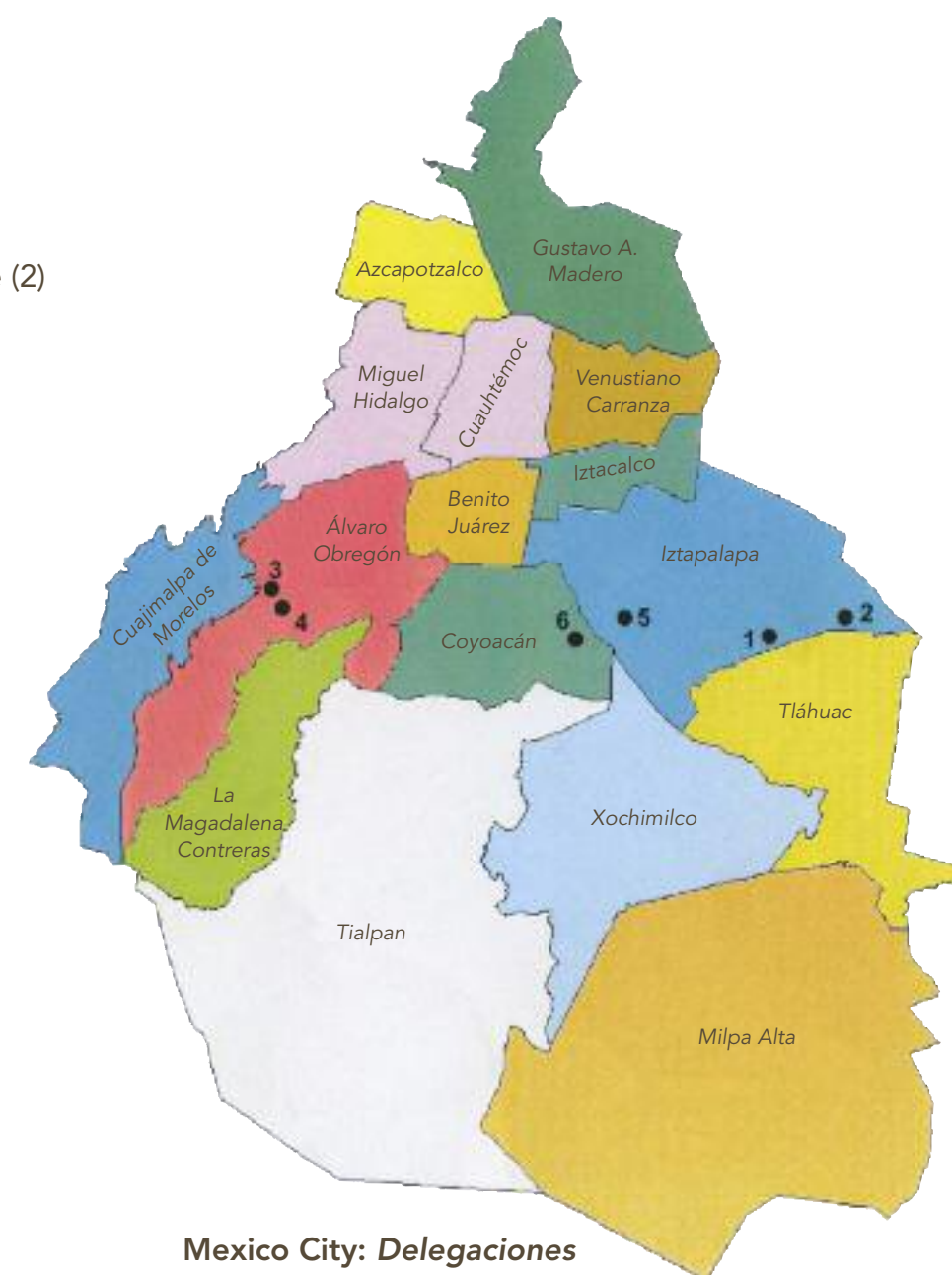
Discussions around the PCMB
Meeting with academics involved in the programme

DAY 4

Field visits to projects in Colonia Conciencia Proletaria (3)
and Colonia La Mexicana and 2a. Ampliación la Mexicana (4)
Meeting with civil society organisations and social movements

DAY 5

Field visits to project in Valle de Anahuac (5) and the Community Centre
for Comprehensive Care of the Elderly in Colonia Piloto Culhuacán (6)
Feedback session: learning from the PCMB



Mexico City: Delegaciones

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Participants' perspectives on the PCMB

The international study visit provided a space for participants as well as a range of actors involved in the PCMB to exchange perspectives on the award-winning approach, highlighting key achievements and current challenges. It also allowed participants to learn from tools, processes and elements of the programme that are relevant to and can be applied in their own work.



On community empowerment

"In the Federal District, participatory policies, when accompanied by a devolution of resources to communities (and therefore of rights and responsibilities), lead to the formation of citizens that are involved in their communities. **The promotion of participatory policies builds communities.**"

Ricard Faura, Spain/Haiti

"We have seen that the PCMB has a high social impact, as it has succeeded in the **strengthening of social networks** which maintain themselves over time. (...) Another key aspect of the PCMB neighbourhood improvement model is that residents calculate the budget needed for the projects that they put forward, and then manage the funds whilst working with the contractors. (...) These responsibilities become a means but also an end in themselves as they contribute to the empowerment of citizens and to moving away from a logic of assistencialism."

Monica Bustos Peñafiel, Chile

"The transfer of resources and responsibilities (...) represents a very significant exercise of trust which involves a **redistribution of power** for the benefit of local communities."

Jorge Larenas, Chile



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**On community ownership**

"Community participation in the definition of their own spaces provides, in itself, important conditions to confer legitimacy on the intervention by representing a bottom-up strategy and, at the same time, **conveying a notion of a shared project** (...) which represents favourable conditions for the sustainability of the intervention."

Jorge Larenas, Chile

"During the field visits we observed that the PCMB mobilises significant groups of activists in low-income neighbourhoods through the elaboration of projects that are submitted for funding. The activists with whom we spoke work in a voluntary capacity to maintain the facilities and infrastructure that have been implemented through the programme, and bring life to them through social and cultural activities. The active involvement of community groups creates a **strong identification with the work** being carried out and contributes to its long-term maintenance."

Klaus Teschner, Germany

**On physical upgrading**

"The regeneration of public spaces works as a **catalyst for neighbourhood improvement**. Whilst the Rosario Habitat Programme in Argentina includes public space improvements, these are limited as compared to the broader intervention. (...) The PCMB demonstrates an important impact with a limited budget."

Adriana Salomón, Argentina

"(The programme) leads to significant improvements to public spaces, making them **liveable** and in many cases **safer**."

Facundo Di Filippo, Argentina

"The PCMB is also about the **appropriation of public space** by residents of low-income neighbourhoods. It is important to emphasise that, as compared to other public projects, the works carried out through the PCMB with an equivalent budget are larger and built to a higher standard, with strong attention to detail."

Klaus Teschner, Germany

"From what I have observed, the programme lacks a real focus on **urban planning at neighbourhood scale**, as far as developing a master plan. In this respect, physical interventions appear as autonomous elements which are not part of a comprehensive urban regeneration process that prioritises those investments most felt by the community."

Monica Bustos Peñafiel, Chile



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**On the role of civil society organisations and social movements**

"Knowing the context and background of the PCMB, I am very pleased to see what has been achieved. The **Urban Popular Movement, grassroots organisations and NGOs** have fought for these for decades, and I congratulate them."

Antje Wemhöner, Germany/Haiti

"The most important positive aspect is that this programme has been created as an **innovative citizens' initiative**, as a result of the efforts of the social movements."

Facundo Di Filippo, Argentina

"The PCMB is a neighbourhood improvement programme that came about through the **initiative of various actors from civil society, including the various social organisations and NGOs**. (...) This represents a significant factor in its sustainability, as it represents a response to the social demand for decent neighbourhoods."

Silvia de los Rios Bernardini, Peru

**On collaborative governance**

"I strongly believe that the success of the PCMB can be attributed (...) collectively, to the coming together of all of the key players – community leaders and organisations, residents, academia, private sector and the city government, creating what can be considered a **concrete example of synergy**."

Marie Sherissa Yoro Ursua, Philippines

"The PCMB highlights the importance of the **City's role as a real partner** in funding community-driven infrastructure upgrading. This relationship in Johannesburg is erratic: the projects are often selected and designed by the city and appointed planners, the implementation is poor and cooperative management to sustain capital investment is not in place."

Josie Adler, South Africa

"The **involvement of other stakeholders** also plays an important part in the success [of the PCMB]. The academia and local NGOs contribute towards the technical and social aspects of the project."

Bob Eko Kurniawan, Indonesia

"Trusting in people's capacity, no matter where they come from, is an act of bravery which, for those who possess it, can lead to significant benefits. **The Federal District government has shown such bravery** by devolving power to the citizens."

Ricard Faura, Spain/Haiti



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"Another aspect that is important to take into account is the **permanent relationship between the PCMB and the local authorities** (delegaciones). Their active presence, with equal responsibilities and levels of participation, is crucial to the management and maintenance of public spaces. From my perspective, it is the delegaciones which, by law, should be responsible for taking care of public goods and infrastructure."
Monica Bustos Peñafiel, Chile

"I am on the side of civil society – I work in an NGO, whilst a lot of the other participants work in government. It is crucial to **provide spaces** for dialogue in which we do not compete, in order to share points of view in a transparent manner. I am leaving with a lot of ideas of what I can do in my country."
Ramiro Garcia, Peru



On reaching the most vulnerable

"It worries me slightly that the projects that are approved could be concentrated in neighbourhoods with **high pre-existing levels of organisation**. (...) How can we make sure that those who always lose, the most excluded and most vulnerable, do not lose once again through the bidding process of the PCMB?"
Klaus Teschner, Germany

"The government should not rely on the representatives of social organisations; it should guarantee (...) that its actions effectively **reach all citizens**. It should furthermore adapt its mode of intervention in order to make sure that the programme **reaches those neighbourhoods which lack social organisation**, in order to ensure inclusive policies."
Adriana Salomón, Argentina



On the sustainability of the programme

"The programme has laid the foundations for a **public policy** which needs to be sustained."
Oscar Montoya Gonzalez, Colombia

"Through the field visits and discussions with members of urban social movements and academics, it appears that the PCMB is not yet a public policy (...) but it **has all the conditions to become one**, thereby ensuring its reach and impact."
Silvia de los Rios Bernardini, Peru

"One question in my mind is what to do to ensure the sustainability of the programme. I think that its **economic sustainability** requires a form of economic self-sufficiency through mechanisms and structures that allow colonias to be less reliant on subsidies."
Antje Wemhöner, Germany/Haiti



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"It appeared from our discussions and conversations (with government officials, academics and NGOs) that there are **differing views regarding whether the PCMB's operations should become policy**. While the politics involved in such a development will determine the outcome of this, I wonder whether the same spirit (and charisma) which is evident in the PCMB leadership and staff and its work and relationships can be sustained in a more bureaucratised framework."

Josie Adler, South Africa

On key lessons and possibilities for transfer

"The most important thing that I am taking home with me is that **neighbourhood improvement is more about the people**; it is more about individuals and organisation, than about the buildings."

Gerald Thomas, United States of America

"**I have the duty and responsibility to report** (...) Each time I go out of the country there are high expectations from my organisation because of the situation we are all subjected to. And we are still very far, we still have to fight to be recognised as human beings, we have to fight for human rights."

Sibusiso Zikode, South Africa

"The reality in the majority of large African cities and the informal settlements where I work, is very far from a situation where one can develop policies such as that of Mexico City, which are the result of many years of struggle. In almost all of Africa, we need to fight first against mass evictions and for basic services such as water, drainage and roads. **However, there are elements [of the PCMB] which can be applied in projects in various parts of Africa.** (...) The PCMB as a whole can be presented as an example in various countries – although it is rooted in a specific reality – demonstrating that the government can have another, much more respectful attitude towards low income settlements."

Klaus Teschner, Germany

"**The population, some politicians and public servants as well as NGOs and other organisations in Haiti can learn a lot from the example of the PCMB.** Many reconstruction projects (...) are based on similar ideas (...) but we are still lacking the experience and tradition with regards to participatory processes."

Antje Wemhöner, Germany/Haiti

"I have gained hands-on experience in **community participatory planning** from an advanced participatory planning country such as Mexico as well as from other participating countries."

Bob Eko Kurniawan, Indonesia



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Participants from 13 countries joined the international study visit to the PCMB



Presentation by SDS on the Community Programme for Neighbourhood Improvement



Meeting with local authorities



Field visit to colonia San José Buenavista, delegación Iztapalapa



Field visit to colonia Miravalle, delegación Iztapalapa



Open air theatre in colonia Miravalle, delegación Iztapalapa

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Colonia Miravalle, delegación Iztapalapa



Roundtable discussion with leading academics



Field visit to Colonia La Mexicana, delegación Álvaro Obregón



Field visit to a community greenhouse



Roundtable discussion with civil society organisations and social movements



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About the World Habitat Awards

The World Habitat Awards is an annual international competition that recognises innovative and sustainable solutions to key housing challenges in the global South as well as the North.

The Awards were established in 1985 by the Building and Social Housing Foundation as part of its contribution to the United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

Every year an award of £10,000 is presented to each of the two winners at the annual United Nations global celebration of World Habitat Day. In addition to the prize and international recognition, peer exchange activities are carried out with each of the winners to promote the international transfer of the approach.

Further information about the Awards, including related peer exchange activities and assessment procedures can be found by visiting www.worldhabitatawards.org.



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About BSHF

The Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) is an independent research organisation that promotes sustainable development and innovation in housing through collaborative research and knowledge transfer.

Established in 1976, BSHF works both in the UK and internationally to identify innovative housing solutions and to foster the exchange of information and good practice.

BSHF believes that everyone should have access to decent housing and is committed to promoting housing policy and practice that is people centred and environmentally responsible.

Further information on the research, publications and other activities of the Building and Social Housing Foundation are available at www.bshf.org.



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About the SDS

The Social Development Secretariat (SDS) of the Government of Mexico City is a department of the Public Administration of the Federal District which is responsible for the areas of social development, food and nutrition, the promotion of equity, recreation, social information and community social services.

In addition, the SDS works in the formulation, promotion and implementation of policies and general programmes for social development with citizen participation, which contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of the population, as well as establishing guidelines and coordinating specific programmes developed by the local districts (delegaciones).

For further information on the work of the SDS please visit www.sds.df.gob.mx

