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MEXICO CITY – A Mexican marine escorts Jesús Alfredo Guzmán, right, and Kevin Daniel Beltrán as they are presented to the media in the nation's capital after being taken into custody on June 21. Guzmán allegedly is the son of cocaine kingpin Joaquín "Shorty" Guzmán, the country's most wanted man. (Henry Romero/Reuters)

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Rio+20: Public services in pacified favelas

Government actions in the wake of favela pacification are being discussed at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development.

By Flávia Ribeiro for Infosurhoy.com – 22/06/2012

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil – Twelve years ago, Antônio Guedes, a resident of Rio de Janeiro's Santa Marta favela, spent Christmas in the dark.



After security forces took over the slums of Complexo do Alemão and Complexo da Penha on Nov. 25, 2010, Rio's City Hall sent about 800 workers to clean the streets and re-establish essential services throughout the area. (Courtesy of Marcello Casal Jr/ABR)

He wasn't alone, as most of the favela's residents had a candlelit Christmas that year.

Nowadays, a similar problem would quickly be solved.

"We used to spend 24, 48 hours without electricity. Now, we call Light (Rio de Janeiro's electricity utility) and a half hour later, the technicians are here," says Guedes, the social and cultural director of the Santa Marta Residents Association.

Inconsistent garbage collection, lack of medical services, dozens of shacks erected on unstable terrain and open sewage in the alleys are part of the daily challenges for the roughly 5,000 residents of Santa Marta.

The quality of essential services provided to the community started improving in December 2008, when Santa Marta, a favela in the Southern Rio de Janeiro neighborhood of Botafogo, was occupied by Rio de Janeiro's first Pacifying Police Unit (UPP).

Three and a half years later, the official agenda of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which is taking place in Rio de Janeiro until June 22, includes a discussion of the government's action in the wake of the favela's police pacification.

The state's Environment and Public Safety ministers, Carlos Minc and José Mariano Beltrame; president of the Pereira Passos Institute and coordinator of the UPP Social Program, Ricardo Henriques; and the president of the Brazilian Business Committee for Sustainable Development (CEBDS), Marina Grossi, took part in the panel discussion "Sustainability and the Pacified Communities of Rio de Janeiro," on June 13 at Parque dos Atletas.

"We were facing a major obstacle – implementing public policies in high-conflict areas dominated by drug traffickers," Henriques says. "People talk about an absence of the state, but what really happened is that the services became precarious. Now, we're solving the infrastructure problems and investing in improving these services."

From 2009 to the end of 2012, which marks the end of Mayor Eduardo Paes' term in office, the city will have spent a total of R\$1 billion (US\$492 million) on pacified communities.

Most of it – R\$678 million (US\$333 million) – will have gone toward housing and urban infrastructure.

Santa Marta, for example, 60 families living in unstable areas were relocated to new buildings, with 70 families expected to be moved this year.

Those who weren't relocated benefitted from work done on the access roads, as well as receiving plaster and a fresh coat of paint on their homes. By 2014, all of the homes in the favela will be made of brick.

In addition, the UPPs have had an immediate effect on real estate prices in and around the favelas, says economist Marcelo Neri, head of the Social Policy Program at the Getulio Vargas Foundation.

"Rent in the pacified favelas rose 7.5% more than in the rest of the city. There's evidence that local businesses also have more customers," says Neri, who recently published the report "**UPP2 e a Economia da Rocinha e do Alemão: do Choque de Ordem ao de Progresso.**"

Neri, a resident of Copacabana near the Morro dos Cabritos favela that has a UPP, has seen the changes.

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"I could tell the garbage wasn't being picked up," he says. "But I went there this week and I could tell the difference in terms of cleanliness. Academic performance has also been affected. These also were once areas that Light couldn't reach, but now they have electricity."

Rights with responsibilities

The introduction of formal services following the arrival of the UPPs has brought new responsibilities for residents. Electricity bills, for example, must now be included in people's budgets, Guedes says.

"Prior to the pacification, 90% of the families in Santa Marta didn't pay for electricity because they had illegal connections," he says. "Nowadays, nonpayment levels are at 2%. With rights also came responsibilities. As a result, there are expenses for services that weren't included in the monthly budget."

But the Light Recycles program in Santa Marta, Morro da Babilônia and Chapéu Mangueira is seeking to reduce these costs, as residents can exchange recyclable materials for discounts on their power bill.



Garbage is piled high on the banks of Jacaré river at Complexo de Mangueiras in Rio de Janeiro. Sanitation still is a major challenge in the city, says Ricardo Henriques, coordinator of the UPP Social Program. (Ricardo Moraes/Reuters)

"People have signed on, as a lot of people are storing cardboard, cans and plastic bottles," Guedes says. "It helps the environment and checkbook. There are people who reduced their bills to zero with this. But it's still hard for most people. There are people paying up to R\$100 (US\$49) per month."

Different needs

Economist Sérgio Besserman, president of the Rio de Janeiro Chamber for Sustainable Development and the city's representative at Rio+20, points out the main focus of the UPPs is retaking areas that were once controlled by the drug trade.

"Public services were already being provided to these areas, but the criminals were interfering," he says. "They had a monopoly on the use of force. With the pacification, it's easier to deliver these services."

But the needs of the communities with UPPs vary from favela to favela, Besserman adds.

"Just as neighborhoods have different problems, so do favelas," he adds. "You can't say that they lack everything."

Besserman cites Complexo do Alemão, which has four UPPs, as an example.

"It's an extremely urbanized area, with a higher [Human Development Index] than China. The main problem there was the power of the weapons used by drug traffickers."

In most communities, the main obstacle to a better quality of life in the favelas is basic sanitation.

"Sanitation is a major challenge everywhere in the city," Henriques says. "In most of the favelas, except for places like Cidade de Deus and Batan, it's complicated by the fact that they were built into the steep slopes of the city's mountains."

Sanitation is the "worst of the services," where the least amount of progress has been made, Neri says, adding that other factors, such as rain and the city's widespread littering problem, complicate the provision of services.

In Santa Marta, Guedes wants the problem solved quickly.

"This is a five-star community. But we still have open sewage lines, which contribute to the proliferation of rats and insects," he says. "Skin disease and tuberculosis rates are on the rise."

Health and education

The city's Family Health program offered medical services to 38,000 people in 2009. Last year, the figure rose to nearly 185,000.

The program serves all of Batan, Chapéu Mangueira/Babilônia, Formiga, Pavão-Pavãozinho/Cantagalo, Santa Marta, São Carlos, Tabajaras/Cabritos, Complexo da Penha and Rocinha.

The program has cost R\$44,057,597 (US\$21,696,825), which includes the construction of health facilities such as the Family Clinics and Emergency Care Units.

To improve garbage collection, special vehicles, such as motorcycles and a small tractor, were developed to travel down the narrow streets of the favelas and dozens of collection points were established.

Borel, Formiga, Mangueira, Macacos, Pavão-Pavãozinho/Cantagalo, Salgueiro, São Carlos and São João have already benefited from the new garbage collection program.

Batan is next in line.

"There is an existing social debt, an urban debt and a civic debt to the residents of these communities," Henriques says. "The UPP Social program is a step toward providing more equal rights and opportunities."