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BRAZIL, PORTO ALEGRE

Unlocking Development Potential with People Participation

Porto Alegre is the administrative capital and largest city of the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul. The city has a population of 1.5 million inhabitants and is considered one of the cultural, political and economic centers of the country. Over past decades, the municipal administration has been faced with the challenge of population growth, struggling to find structural solutions and funding to address the growing issues associated with urbanisation.

The first Participatory Budgeting (PB) process was developed in Porto Alegre in 1989, as a part of innovative reform programme to address community participation in the decision making process as a benchmark of political change. Inequality PB is a dynamic process in which community members, by means of its representatives, have the right to decide how to allocate public resources, to be executed in works and services by municipal administration. The yearly performance of PB cycles is characterized by three phases: preparatory meetings, a 17 regional and 6 thematic meeting round, and a municipal general meeting. During preparatory meetings the administration delivers accountability and transparency related to last performance, and presents the Investment Plan for the next year.

Different municipal departments attend these meetings, clarifying process criteria and demand feasibility. At the regional and thematic meetings the population elects priorities, counsellors and define the number of city delegates to form specific forums and group discussions. All city investments are subject to the Participatory Budgeting meetings approval.

PB has contributed to social inclusion and cohesion, as well as to strengthen community groups in order to allow them mainstreaming their proposals. Lower income segments of the population have strongly engaged in meetings, and participation overall has grown steadily, starting at 628 people in 1990, to 17359 in 2014. These results demonstrate its effectiveness in stimulating citizen engagement, showing trust and investment in the process. Since most infrastructure works, such as road construction, street lighting, water and sewer improvements, are meant to improve the situation of people at risk, the ability to influence such projects through PB positively impacts the urban environment. Tangible benefits have also been produced in infrastructure projects, with improved accessibility to jobs and housing. Due to its ability to provide a lens on civil concerns and its success in improving basic services and quality of life, PB has been expanded to over 1500 cities across the world.