



Case study of the Improvement of Federal Infrastructure for Sustainable Development Project in Argentina

UNOPS impact for vulnerable people |
15 April 2024

In the restated strategic plan, UNOPS commits to deliver impact for the most vulnerable people. We present this case study to the Executive Board to illustrate the UNOPS contributions.

Executive summary

1. In Argentina, UNOPS contributes to alleviating the housing and social infrastructure deficit, which primarily impacts vulnerable people and communities across 13 provinces. Between October 2016 and March 2024 the Project helped the Government improve the lives of over 975,000 people living in small and medium sized communities of Argentina, and reaching 6 million indirectly. Notable outcomes included new or upgraded housing for more than 400 families, improved water and sanitation services for over 4,000 families and enhanced management capacities of 143 civil society organizations. UNOPS directly contributed to Goal 6 'clean water and sanitation' and Goal 11 'sustainable cities and communities', while indirectly supporting Goal 1 'zero hunger', Goal 5 'gender equality' and Goal 8 'decent work and economic growth', as evidenced in the reported contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework in Argentina.

Funded by Argentina
US\$ 356 million

Main service line
**Project Management
Procurement
Infrastructure**



Context and project outline

2. Argentina's housing and social infrastructure deficit disproportionately affects vulnerable people. In 2016, the housing deficit affected approximately 3.8 million homes, with 7.5 million homes lacking secure water supply and 21 million homes lacking sewage services. Traditional approaches fell short, prompting collaboration with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to leverage local knowledge and inclusive public works. The Argentine government sought UNOPS expertise for comprehensive social infrastructure support.
3. This collaboration aimed at transparency, efficiency and construction quality to address the complex housing and service deficits. In addition, a comprehensive diagnosis exposed broader challenges: limited access to employment for women and traditionally disadvantaged groups; deficient access to urban infrastructure affecting access to health and education services; gender based violence; economic limitations; inadequate participation of youth and children, and sustainability concerns related to past infrastructure investments, among others.
4. To address these multifaceted issues, the Project developed a strategy treating housing, services and urbanization infrastructure as a catalyst for broader development objectives. UNOPS implemented initiatives to address construction scarcity and quality issues, while providing crucial social support to families and communities. Simultaneously, UNOPS directed efforts at empowering social organizations, amplifying the Project's impact on sustainable development.

Project Objective

Improvement, renovation, reconstruction and/or enhancement of public spaces and urban infrastructure of neglected municipalities.

Theory of change

5. The theory of change outlines how a tailored set of activities can deliver outputs targeting root causes and needs. These activities are expected to drive outcomes and impact. The theory of change for this case study was developed retrospectively.
6. The main challenge is that a **deficit in housing, basic services, and public spaces**, significantly impact the quality of life for vulnerable populations and small communities across the country. Simultaneously, there is a **significant opportunity for improvement in the quality, completion, and transparency of projects** implemented in collaboration with social organizations. This results in limited access to decent housing, basic

services and quality public spaces for lower-income and vulnerable populations, as well as limited economic development opportunities, employment and capacity building within the social economy sector.

7. The Project actively addressed the main challenges through **three key areas of activities**. Firstly, in the area of **grants management** UNOPS oversaw agreements with grassroots organizations, conducted comprehensive social and construction/infrastructure diagnostics, provided technical assistance, and reviewed project designs. Secondly, via **inclusive infrastructure activities**, a Social accompaniment plan has been put in place for families, involving workshops on gender, diversity, worksite safety, and community participation. Lastly, **capacity building activities** focused on strengthening social organizations through working groups and workshops aimed at growth in management, accountability, health, safety, security, and Environment (HSSE), gender, diversity, and sustainability skills.

8. **The Project operates based on certain assumptions to ensure its success.** It relies on the stability of the national economy, enabling resource allocation and the formulation of strategies to manage inflation in Project costs. It requires that there are tolerable levels of security in the areas where the works are carried out, allowing for their adequate development. The Project also assumes that there are social organizations with necessary capacity and availability to deliver required services on time and with good quality. Additionally, the Project depends on the availability and capacity of suppliers to provide relevant services and goods. The commitment of municipalities, social organizations and other relevant stakeholders to the Social Approach Plan is crucial, as is the predisposition and participation of communities, social organizations and local stakeholders in the different stages of the process. These assumptions collectively form the foundation for the Project's successful execution.

	CAUSE 1	CAUSE 2	CAUSE 3	CAUSE 4	CAUSE 5
PROBLEM STATEMENT, ROOT CAUSE AND ITS EFFECT ON COMMUNITIES	Growth of informal urbanization	Deficits in housing and basic services for lower-income groups	Lack of public spaces and urban infrastructure in small communities nationwide	Lack of employment and opportunities for workers in the social and solidarity economy	Deficiencies in the implementation of public works projects through social organizations
	MAIN PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY				
	Deficit in housing, basic services, and public spaces, significantly impacting the quality of life for vulnerable populations and small communities across the country. Simultaneously, there is an opportunity for improvement in the quality, completion, and transparency of projects implemented in collaboration with social organizations.				
	EFFECT 1		EFFECT 2		
	Lower-income and vulnerable populations with limited access to the rights of decent housing, basic services, and quality public spaces.		Social economy sector with limited access to economic development opportunities, employment, and capacity building.		
	ACTIVITY 1	ACTIVITY 2, 3, 4		ACTIVITY 5	ACTIVITY 6
ACTIVITIES	Grants management - overseeing grant agreements with grassroots organizations; infrastructure and social diagnostics.	Infrastructure technical assistance activities - review and enhancement of infrastructure projects/designs, provide support, supervision, and certification, along with the design of prototypes for scalability.		Inclusive infrastructure activities - implementing a Social Accompaniment Plan, and conducting workshops on gender and diversity perspectives, worksite safety, proper service use, community participation, and project sustainability.	Capacity building activities - implementing working groups and workshops to enhance the management, accountability, HSSE, gender and diversity, and sustainability skills of Social Organisations.
OUTPUTS	Lives of vulnerable populations improved, community sustainability and well-being reinforced.				
OUTCOMES	Living conditions for over 15,000 individuals across 13 provinces improved; well-being, ownership, empowerment, and community cohesion in vulnerable neighbourhoods enhanced; interventions in urban and public spaces benefitted over 950,000 people.				
IMPACT	Improving living conditions and quality of life for the target population, while creating employment opportunities and enhancing the capacities of social organizations and municipalities.				

Contributions

Outputs

9. As a result of the implemented activities and technical assistance, the Project has delivered a range of outputs through its **three key components** - improvement and/or construction of houses, investments in the development of sustainable urbanization, and intradomiciliary water and sanitation connections. This includes successful administration of **212 grants** in collaboration with **143 social organizations**, resulting in the enhancement of **330 houses** and the construction of **79 new houses**. Additionally, UNOPS provided safe water and sanitation services to **4,352 families**, created or renovated **125 public spaces** and improved urbanization in city areas.
10. The Project also played a role in strengthening **266 municipalities** by supplying construction materials for urban renovations. UNOPS successfully constructed a wastewater treatment plant and established **75 water reservoirs** for indigenous communities in the northern region of the country. As part of the social accompaniment plan that reached **15,351 people**, the Project conducted **732 social and constructive diagnoses** and held **366 workshops with family members**. Furthermore, the Project facilitated **661 workshops with civil society organizations** to enhance their capacities and developed **850 sustainability agreements with municipalities** to ensure ongoing maintenance of public spaces. Through urbanization projects, a population of over 900.000 people benefited from improvements of their habitat.
11. By integrating social housing and essential services, UNOPS anticipates a substantial enhancement in living conditions for over **15,000 individuals across 11 provinces**, particularly within vulnerable neighbourhoods. The participatory nature of the Project, involving stakeholders in decision-making has fostered a sense of ownership, pride and empowerment, which might lead to increased community cohesion and social capital. Participants of the Project have reported improved housing contributing to enhanced well-being, reduced illnesses - especially respiratory conditions in children - and improved family dynamics, school participation and social life.
12. Public space improvements (curbs, sidewalks, playgrounds, bike paths, sports fields, etc.) **implemented in 7 provinces**, increased access to recreational activities, cultural events and community gatherings. These improvements prioritize inclusion by ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities, elderly individuals and diverse demographic groups. Illuminated sidewalks and bike paths have not only increased the safety of community members, but also improved overall mobility. The construction of water reservoirs for and by indigenous communities is expected to improve the living conditions, health, nutrition and women’s time spent on caregiving and household tasks for more than **75 families**. Finally, UNOPS’ efforts have strengthened management, administration and accountability capacities in social economy organizations, achieving transparency and traceability in the execution of public funds.

Project Impact Overview

Enhanced living conditions: 15,000+ individuals across 11 provinces

Improved water access: 75+ indigenous families

Enhanced public spaces by accessible recreational areas and improved mobility

Community Empowerment through fostered ownership and community cohesion

Likely contribution to impact: Improving living conditions and enhancing quality of life in Argentina

Likely contributions to impact

13. Through the implementation of three key components, the Project has generated significant impact on the target population, notably improving living conditions and enhancing quality of life. Furthermore, it has played a pivotal role in creating employment opportunities for women and disadvantaged groups, while simultaneously bolstering the capacities of social organizations and municipalities. The Project’s direct contributions align with specific UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These include **Goal 6** ‘clean water and sanitation’, addressing Target 6.1 for safe and affordable drinking water and Target 6.2 to end open defecation and provide access to sanitation and hygiene, and the corresponding indicators (6.1.1 and 6.2.1). Additionally, the Project

aligns with **Goal 11** 'sustainable cities and communities', focusing on Target 11.1 for safe and affordable housing and its associated Indicator 11.1.1 - measuring the proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing.

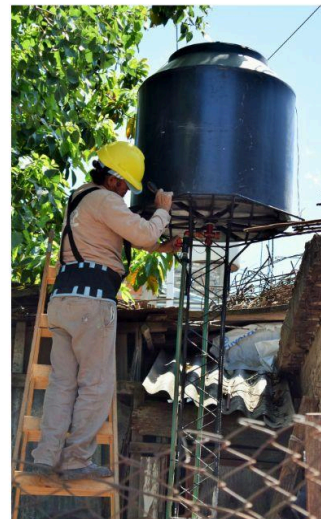
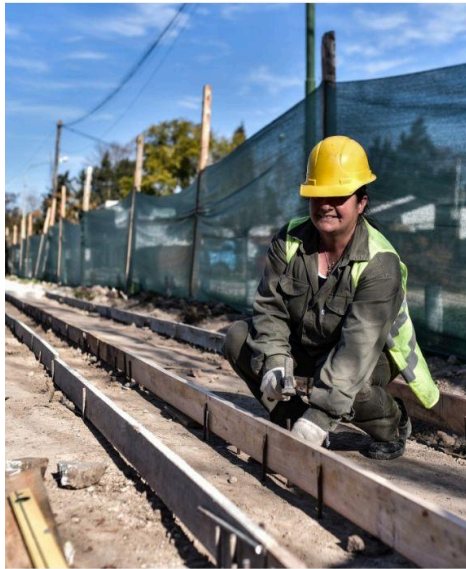
Sustainability considerations

14. Aligned with a rights-based approach, the Project adopted a **systematic approach for active participation of stakeholders** in infrastructure projects. This approach aimed to: 1. Ensure access to relevant information for the beneficiaries, 2. Engage traditionally disadvantaged groups and minorities (women, youth and people with disabilities), 3. Ensure that social organizations provide decent employment and comply with HSSE standards, 4. Promote local hiring and gender equality (i.e. 30% of positions in the construction workforce were reserved for women and/or LGBTIQ+), 5. Incorporate community consultations in urban projects, and 6. Comply with UNOPS sustainable infrastructure quality standards. Additionally, it emphasized community ownership of the projects and the establishment of sustainability agreements with municipalities to ensure maintenance of investments.
15. The Project is notable for **prioritizing informed consultation and women's involvement** throughout the entire Project cycle. It played a pivotal role in advancing public policy on gender equality by raising awareness among partners and stakeholders, leading to a transformation of initial attitudes of resistance. The Project achieved **positive outcomes in terms of gender equality** through tailored solutions for families, creating employment opportunities for women and alleviating caregiving responsibilities, among others.

Lessons learned

16. We gained invaluable insights from our collaboration with over 100 local social organizations, a choice grounded in their proven track record in supporting government initiatives, robust territorial presence and influence, and capacity to generate employment for vulnerable populations in marginalized sectors. Despite the diversity in knowledge and challenges in implementation, the Project showcased innovative solutions through integral diagnosis covering both social and infrastructure dimensions, design prototypes ensuring the quality and community needs were considered, working sessions with civil society organizations, and efficient monitoring dashboards. These innovations optimized collaboration and established effective practices for future projects.
17. Throughout the implementation phase with civil society organizations, we identified and replicated the additional best practices:
 - a. **Early institutional strengthening of organizations** played a pivotal role in aligning expectations and needs, providing crucial support in areas where capacity was lacking.
 - b. In urbanization projects, **strengthening local authorities** in identifying needs and aligning interventions with comprehensive plans or programmes is essential for success.
 - c. Interventions should prioritize **equitable coverage in areas/neighbourhoods** and avoid fragmented or discretionary targeting to prevent inequities and community discomfort.

Snapshots



Social housing, water and sanitation, urbanization and public spaces were built along with social organizations under UNOPS supervision and with participation of communities. ©UNOPS