

## "Is Rio's Tough Love Strategy Against Violence Working?"

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Three years after the first Pacifying Police Unit (UPP) took control in the favela Dona Marta in Rio de Janeiro, after expelled drug dealers that ran the place for years, a comprehensive survey examined the impact of the government strategy to reduce crime and violence and bring peace and services to the affected areas. The findings were presented on December 13, 2011 at a seminar hosted by the Brazil Institute. Conducted by Maurício Moura, visiting scholar at the George Washington University, the survey's purpose

was the gauge the opinion of the people supposed to benefit from the government intervention. The study confirmed the overall positive reaction the UPPs have generated among the affected population, but also shed light on the challenges that the residents of these communities face, from lack of public services to employment, which must be overcome to secure its sustainability in the long run

From August 22 to September 2, 2011, Moura and his team interviewed 3,816 residents from 17 communities where UPPs were established. The purpose of the survey, commissioned by the Secretary of Labor and Employment, was to draw a picture of the communities, to be used as a tool for public policy decision-making. The study covered not only safety and demographic issues but also poverty, inequality, entrepreneurship, financial services, community problems, social programs, education, individual resources, and more.

### **Safety**

The main goal of the UPPs, according to a promotional film by the government of Rio de Janeiro presented at the beginning of the session, was for favela inhabitants to be free to come and go, which was virtually impossible under the rule of drug traffickers and private militias made of former and off-duty police officers. With an average of 150 police officers in each community, do the UPPs make residents feel safer? For the majority of the inhabitants, 66.8

percent, safety indeed improved after the UPPs, as opposed to 24.4 percent who believe there were no changes and 4.7 percent who think that it worsened.

Moura pointed out that there are differences among the communities. In general, the longer the UPPs are in a community, the safer people feel. Of the top five communities with the most positive responses regarding security improvement (Batam, 89.6 percent, Chapéu-Mangureira, 83.5 percent, Andaraí, 83 percent, Cidade de Deus, 80.3 percent, and Dona Marta, 78.4 percent), the last two had the UPPs in place the longest. Moura pointed out that the community of Batam expressed great relief with the implementation of the UPPs most likely because private militias instead of drug dealers controlled the area. He explained that militias are more violent on the communities because they are usually from outside, unlike drug dealers who live amongst the residents.



A key factor for people's safety is sufficient and reliable police force. The majority of respondents agreed that the number of police officers is adequate, 54.5 percent, or entirely adequate, 9 percent. Moura observed that communities that experienced more struggles and attempts by drug dealers to regain control were less satisfied with the number of police officers.

Another positive finding was the public's perception of police corruption. For 72.4 percent of interviewees, the UPPs have no involvement with corruption; in fact, only 6.9 percent said they believe the pacifying police to be corrupt – marking a stark break from past perceptions. This shows that the preparation UPP officers go through to deal with community issues has been effective, as training changes with lessons learned overtime. For example, in the beginning most of the officers were male, but after feedback from the community, more women were added to the force.

## Challenges

If drug dealers easily spread their dominance over the favelas because of the absence of formal institutions, then simply removing their control will not solve the problem. "The UPPs were one of the points of departure for change, but there is still a lot to be done," the government acknowledged in the promotional film. "Other institutions and services - schools, banks, commerce, culture, sports, leisure, and tourism - are also essential for the development of the communities." Along with this premise, the survey covered a range of subjects to provide an in-depth diagnosis of the communities and to find out what the needs are and how they should be addressed.

Several indicators point to issues linked to poverty, which is critical. "Anyone who has been to these communities are terrified by the living conditions," Moura said, adding that many families of five or more settle in cramped houses. A significant number of households, 6.5 to 24 percent, live on less than the Brazilian minimum wage about US\$300 per month, and the overall monthly income falls below Brazil's national average. Despite the need, a high number of people, 71.6 to 86.5 percent, said they do not participate in social programs. The exception to

this is the federal conditional cash-transfer program, *Bolsa Família*, whose number of recipients is above the average, at about 20 percent in six out of 17 communities.

Other related areas of concern, such as employment and literacy, are below the country's average. But, most interestingly, the study revealed clear variations among the communities. For instance, employment is higher in communities close to the upper middle-class neighborhoods. In those that are far from Rio urban centers, such as Cidade de Deus – which became famous internationally after the movie “City of God” – head of family unemployment is at a whopping 33.7 percent, despite a comparable low head of family illiteracy rate of 4.35 percent. Moura explained that proximity to the economic center is a stronger factor for employment than literacy.

The study also points to a scarcity of basic services. The top five problems in the UPPs communities, according to the residents, are: lack of water treatment and sanitation, 32.1 percent; lack of health clinics, 29.6 percent; not enough physicians and medicine at health clinics, 25.2 percent; lack of social programs, 20.9 percent; and lack of public lighting, 13.4 percent. These are all areas of concern where the state can work -- especially water and sanitation, which should be a priority, Moura underlined.

## Opportunities



Entrepreneurship became a key part of the survey because it is seen as a great policy tool to be used during a power vacuum as a way to provide employment, said Amisha Miller, research and policy manager at Endeavor, an NGO whose focus is high-growth businesses. Looking at favelas was challenging for Endeavor, given that a large proportion of businesses in these communities is small and informal – such as street vendors and home businesses. Yet, from the nonprofit's experience, high-growth businesses come from all backgrounds, including favelas.

According to the survey, there is a strong will for business creation in the communities. A high number of residents, 64.2 percent, said they would like to have their own business if they could. “This begins to show us already that this [entrepreneurship] is not something that people would be forced to do,” Miller said. In fact, about 30 percent of respondents believe that it is very probable they will start a business in the next five years -- which is also a really high number, she stressed, noting that the rate for China and the United States is at about 15 percent. This means these communities offer an enormous potential, which should be taken into consideration and be a priority for the government as well. What kind of strategy would work? Since the majority of respondents, 55.7 percent, answered they want to start their own business to earn more money, long-term returns are not expected. “Anything we implement in the communities, as an entrepreneurship program, also has to very quickly turn over money,” she remarked.

Although 40 percent of Brazil's GDP is produced by the informal sector, and only 53.7 percent in the favelas residents are formally employed, the takeaway from the survey is that there is reason for optimism. People in these communities are seeing opportunities for growth. Their

attitudes and beliefs are not too different from the ones seen in other surveys carried by Endeavor around the world. They value independence and creativity, and their biggest obstacle to entrepreneurship is lack of resources, followed by lack of skills. These are all areas where social programs can make a difference: whether by showing people how they can get money, access microfinancing, or improve skills through capacity training. However, bureaucracy -- an obstacle only mentioned by 5 percent of respondents -- pertains to a different realm of problems and can be challenging for Brazilian entrepreneurs.

The survey also helps identify where to start pilot programs. Communities, such as Cidade de Deus, where security seemed to have improved the most, also have a higher percentage of potential entrepreneurs. "I think this gives credence to the hypothesis that in a time of power vacuum, in a time of increased security when things seem to be getting better, entrepreneurship becomes a pillar for development," Miller concluded.

### Concerns

For political scientist Janice Perlman, founder and president of Mega-Cities Project, it is true that a lot has improved in the communities after the introduction of the UPPs. People now have the freedom to come and go without worrying about being killed. Another positive side is UPPs may lessen the stigma linked with living in a favela, a common problem Perlman witnessed during her research. The author of *Favela: Four Decades of Living on the Edge in Rio de Janeiro*, she is also cautiously optimistic that maybe UPP favelas will have better schools, better teachers and more days of teaching, improving the overall education of their residents.



Perlman pointed out, however, that drug trafficking and sales persist in these communities – though in a reduced scale. The difference after the UPPs is that “they don’t have people, civilians, walking around with arms,” she explained. And with UPPs also comes the other side of the formalization: a crack down in informal businesses, which may hinder entrepreneurship; a rise in the cost of living since more people will start paying for water and electricity, as well as taxes; and, finally, gentrification because some people may not be able to afford living in pacified communities where rent is likely to appreciate in value, which is an inevitable consequence.

Moreover, Perlman is concerned that the strategy will not be sustainable if the social programs do not begin right away and the people who neither work nor study are not offered an alternative to integrate into society. Other potential problems have to do with the duration and the magnitude of the strategy. People do not know how long the UPPs will last and “the word on the street is that as soon as the Olympics are over, the UPPs will leave, and the drug dealers will return,” she stated, with little conviction in the success of the program in the long run.

Whether the UPPs will solve the deep-rooted problems of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro, it is hard to tell. At the very least, it represents the first government concerted effort to address a social crisis that has been ignored for years. “It was obvious that the police had to enter the

favelas,” Moura said. But that was just the beginning. The real challenge now is the social component of the program, as the survey shows.

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