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Newsletter 5 :

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Experians is a French non-profit organization created by two young graduates from Paris Ecole Polytechnique. Its objective is to study the solutions developed for sanitation problems in urban poor settlements within developing countries. Based on the experiences of six cities – New Delhi, Hanoi, Phnom Penh, Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires and Antananarivo – the organization wants to bring a new view on these problems and a transverse analysis.

Interview with Antonio, social worker in a municipality of the Buenos Aires urban area:

Phil: Good morning. How does your municipality deal with the problem of slums and access to sanitation?

Antonio: We work according to the demands of the communities and to the priorities of the municipality. Most often, a “villa” (i.e.: a slum) where a community is organized and a leader (the “portero”) has been designated, makes a demand to the municipality in order to get access to a service. If the project appears to be strong enough, we get involved in order to get to a solution together.

Phil: Do you fund the projects?

Antonio: Rarely: the municipality has very little funds. If the demand is in agreement with a state program, we get funding from the government. Else, we often try to find other funding.



Phil: For example?

Antonio: I am thinking about the project in Villa Besada. Its inhabitants have organized in order to become the owners of

their land by buying the sport fields of the neighbourhoods and by sharing the building land. They now build their own solid house. This real estate security gives them a new credibility. We have thus decided to help them to get connected to the water supply network and the sanitation network when they asked for them in 2001 and 2003. With the help of Aguas Argentinas, which is the

concessionary company, the Participative Management Model was applied there: the company supplies the pipes and teaches the members of the community how to lay them, the inhabitants are the manpower and we follow the evolution and possibly supply the necessary machinery.

Phil: Very interesting. The inhabitants have thus built their own sanitation network?

Antonio: Exactly. This kind of project is very promising for the water supply network system because it works by pressure. Nevertheless, the laying of sanitation pipes is much more difficult from a technical point of view: the waste water draining takes place by gravity and the pipes must then be laid very precisely in order to be usable. This experience in Villa Besada stands as an exception until now concerning waste water.

Phil: Concerning solid waste, I have heard that many families live on its collection...

Antonio: Since the 1998 crisis, the solid waste represents resources for many “cartoneros”: 14,000 families would be living on waste collection and recovery. A municipal program tries to make a census of these “recuperadores” and to organize them in order to allow them to increase the value of the collected waste through cooperatives, with safer working methods. Nevertheless, the waste collection companies lobby stands against such initiatives.

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Interview with Mr Moli, independent consultant for the Argentine government:

Phil: Good afternoon. I have read that Argentina, after a period of large wealth, has developed many social and economic problems and that today, the country has a poverty rate of about 60%. How could you explain this? Is it only due to the 1998 crisis?

Sr. Moli: This situation is the result of long periods of poor governmental management since the 1980's and of the generalized corruption of the 1990's. Poverty is not only due to the crisis but this crisis has impoverished a lot the poor and middle classes of the population. This is a new phenomenon.

Phil: Is it evolving towards a better situation?

Sr. Moli: Argentina is rebuilding slowly and the current government acts in order to strengthen the State and to make it more transparent. Argentines still have a great confidence in their president. Nevertheless, poverty is not always taken care of as it should be.

Phil: What do you mean exactly?

Sr. Moli: The government programs are not always appropriate to the real situation of the country. Let me explain... There is only one program which is accessible to every one in the population. It was created during the crisis and is named "Jefes y jefas de familia". The unemployed heads of families receive 150 pesos monthly for a few hours of community work. This salary allows them to survive, even if it is small. The other programs, often focused on a specific sector – water supply for instance – only concerns a few families while it is a large-scale problem: 60% of the population are concerned!!!

Phil: Why aren't these projects dealt with at a larger scale?

Argentina has kept the reactions of a developed country and invests what it can in definitive network solutions.

Sr. Moli: First, there are not enough funds to deal with a problem that concerns more than half of the people of my country. The economic growth must first return and the current

government acts in that way. Moreover, these programs come from European models: for example, as you are interested in sanitation, the PROMEBA program, which aims at infrastructure improvement in poor neighbourhoods, supplies free access to all

urban services such as water, sanitation and drainage. This operation offers a definitive solution to those lucky enough to have been selected by their municipality, but it is very expansive and deals with a few thousands of families in the whole Buenos Aires urban area... Not only is the cost disproportionate with the total figure of concerned but these families are too poor to then pay the services they are supplied with...

Phil: Why aren't there any public toilets or latrines systems, more adapted to the income of these families?

Sr. Moli: Argentina has kept the reactions of a developed country because of its past wealth. The country invests what it can in definitive network solutions for a few poor, even if the others stay with no services at all...

Phil: What are the prospects concerning sanitation?

Sr. Moli: Waste water will depend on the current renegotiation of the concession contract of this sector in the Buenos Aires urban area. Solid waste lacks an integral waste management plan: waste segregation and recovering are still anecdotal and waste collection companies are still paid for the weight of collected waste: this does not favour a decrease of the produced quantity.



Electronic Resources:

Buenos Aires City Hall: www.buenosaires.gov.ar

French Embassy Economic Mission:

www.dree.org/argentine

Centro (Social and Environmental Studies):

www.riadel.cl/centro

Aguas Argentinas: www.aguasargentinas.com

PROMEBA: www.promeba.org.ar

IIED – America Latina: www.iied-al.org.ar

CEAMSE: www.ceamse.gov.ar

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