Newsletter 2 : Hanoi

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www.experians.net

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.

Hanoi *is a city under important State control concerning all its human activities. Urban sanitation is no exception. The city, geographically constrained until 2000/2001, has not expanded until this date and thus has not had any slum issue like in the South of Vietnam. Nevertheless, density has increased dramatically, reducing the living space down to 3 m2 per person in some areas and for a few years now, illegal housing outgrowths have appeared throughout the city. Since 2000/2001, the government has initiated an urban development plan that will take place until 2020 and that aims to increase the real estate availability.*

Fac-simile - April 2004
From: Phil
To: Bernard
Object: Study in Hanoi

Bernard,

Despite the difficulties I have encountered in order to meet officials (a systematic introduction is necessary to obtain appointments), here are the first elements of my study in Hanoi.

Poverty has two faces here: on the one hand, many temporary workers coming from rural areas with no residential permit settle down precariously along the Red River. Regularly chased away by the government or floods, they are not recognized by the authorities and do not have access to any public service. This problem is due to the increasing rural exodus and to the non-recognition of this people by the State which thus does not assist them directly and forbids NGOs to do so. On the other hand, there is in Hanoi a "scattered" poverty. Historically, all social classes of an administration (from the driver to the minister) were grouped together in a single neighbourhood. Thus, the poorest populations benefit from the same public service as their rich neighbours. Even if there still exists a scattered poverty, slowly evicted by the real estate price increase, pockets of poverty have appeared in some places, mostly in industrial areas. These pockets are often small.

The problem of sanitation for poor populations must thus be dealt with at a city scale before being dealt with locally as poverty is relatively uniformly distributed.

All social classes live in the same areas in Hanoi and poorest populations thus benefit from the same public service as their rich neighbours.

The city slopes from North West to South East and the city wastewaters flow towards the South in open-air canals or rivers without being treated. The hygiene conditions and mosquitoes are thus major concerns in the southern areas. Even if the City's priority today is urban transportation, an increasing interest for these sanitation problems can be felt within the public authorities and the partners for development. The Japanese and Danish cooperation agencies are already working with public authorities and with the Department of Urban Planning. Many actions are taking place like the concreting of lakes and canals shores. Unfortunately, the Vietnamese State does not know much about transversality. Every department works independently from each other and does not care about the others' actions. Some city dwellers told me they had seen their road tarmacked one day to be destroyed the very next week in order to improve the drainage, with no cooperation at all! It can be noticed that even if the major part of funding is exterior nowadays, there is a "sewage tax" included in the water bill that funds only 18 to 20% of the network maintenance.

At local level, one discovers a very hierarchic organization. Each ward (which is the smallest of the four territorial administrative levels in Vietnam) has three decentralized offices respectively in charge of combined sewers, water and solid waste. These three offices are totally and voluntarily disconnected. Each building

staircase, building, block of building and ward have respectively an elected representative linked to the local people's committee. Moreover, the Women Union and the Youth have representative in each neighbourhood.
By getting these different actors together and having them discuss a theme, collective actions of common space upgrading can be managed successfully. This is how the Danish organization OVE initiated a project on the theme of environment in Than Xuan Bac, a modest neighbourhood in the South of town. The project has led to the cleaning of a park which was used as a dumpsite, to the upgrading of public spaces, to a greater citizenship concerning the dumping of garbage and the rehabilitating and cleaning of all septic tanks of the area. By the way, during my visit in Than Xuan Bac, although the project was over for more than a year, the inhabitants had clubbed together in order to build a small drain in their street.
The indirect and negative effect of this project is the price increase of the real estate (due to the environment upgrading). This obliges poor people to leave if they do not have the resources to buy their apartment. OVE should be starting a second phase project in a poor neighbourhood.
Nevertheless, the large funding of the project and the problems solving using the existing administrative structures also have disadvantages. Once the funding is over, what does remain from the "community"? It seems that it still exists but becomes fragile. The NGO ENDA has also conducted two similar projects in Hanoi and I expect to have their conclusions very soon.

Concerning the toilets, the coverage of the city is theoretically excellent because of a controlled urbanization. Each type of legal housing possesses a sanitation system such as private, common or public toilets. When several families are concerned, the toilet cleaning is taken care of on an alternating basis. However, in every case, the toilets, built decades ago (some before 1954), have never been maintained nor dislodged, leading to an ecological catastrophe! The ground waters are only a few meters below city level!

Some toilets, built decades ago (some before 1954), have never been maintained nor dislodged.

Nowadays, the dislodging is modernizing: URENCO, the city department in charge of it has been equipped by JICA (Japanese International Cooperation Agency) but the socialization (i.e.: privatisation) of the sector and the private competition have turned this service into a paying one, which becomes a problem for city dwellers.

URENCO is also in charge of the management and disposal of solid waste. I have though observed the same principle as in India: there is a real economic and private sector of recycling, with wards taking care of a specific waste (paper, glass, plastic and metal essentially). The city is now trying to have people make a civic segregation (in addition to the economic segregation operated by the "junk buyers") through the separation of organic and inorganic wastes. As for now, the only composting plant of the town deals only with 1% of the waste produced by the city and there only exists pilot wards for this civic segregation. However, even if the City is not planning to invest in new composting infrastructures, its master plan indicates that this could be managed under international funding. The number of waste segregating wards will for sure be increased.

Another "waste recycling practice" takes place in Hanoi: dumped directly into the lakes, solid wastes reduce the lakes areas and allows people to gain building land over water (a land that costs a lot). Fortunately, the current concreting of the shores is putting a stop to this kind of practices.
The real estate pressure is also the reason to the fact that there are no transfer points between pre-collection and collection of garbage. URENCO's trucks load in the street the garbage disposed there by small door-to-door collectors on a very precise schedule. This system is well known to the families who know the schedule of the collector and give him their garbage!

I would like to conclude with the specificity of Vietnam that is a country in full economic increase. Every city dweller has the hope of seeing his living conditions upgraded. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation gives visible results. Vietnam is a country that wants to develop: perspectives are good even if a lot is still to be done. Here are the first elements of my study in Hanoi. I am leaving to Phnom Penh that seems to be a very different city...

Phil.

Electronic Resources :
OVE : www.greenhanoi.org.vn, CEEITA (Centre for Environmental Engineering of Towns and Industrial Areas): www.santrain.com (under construction), ENDA Vietnam: www.endavn.org.vn , Water and Sanitation Program: www.wsp.org , IMV (Institute of City's Jobs): www.imv-hanoi.com, French Embassy in Hanoi: www.ambafrance-vn.org
Contacts Experians : celia.de-lavergne@m4x.org, julien.gabert@m4x.org, www.experians.net