



Improving water and sanitation provision in Buenos Aires

What can a research-oriented NGO do?

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Aguas Argentinas
ABSA	Aguas Bonaerense SA
AGBA	Aguas del Gran Buenos Aires
AySA	Agua y Saneamientos Argentinos SA
BAMR	Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region
BPD	Business Partners for Development
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IDUAR	Instituto de Desarrollo Urbano, Regional y Ambiental (Institute for Urban, Regional and Environmental Development)
IIED-AL	Instituto Internacional de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo-América Latina (International Institute for Environment and Development-America Latina)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSN	Obras Sanitarias de la Nación (National Water Board)
PAGV	Programa de Atención a Grupos Vulnerables (Attention to Vulnerable Groups Programme)
PROMEBA	Programa Nacional de Mejoramiento Barrial (National neighbourhood upgrading programme)
RMBA	Región Metropolitana de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region)
SIGA	Sistema Integral de Gestión Ambiental [Integrated Environmental Management System]
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ZOPP	Zielorientierte Projektplanung (Goal Oriented Project Planning)

Improving water and sanitation provision in Buenos Aires

What can a research-oriented NGO do?

PREFACE

Gordon McGranahan

In the international development arena, attention is grabbed by the latest global concerns and the most visible responses, some of which are quickly defined as ‘best practices’ and promoted internationally. These practices and the principles they are based on are soon forgotten as new challenges appear on the horizon. This working paper goes against the tendency to focus on innovations to address newly emerging. It focuses on one of the oldest challenges of urbanization – how to help the poorer segments of urban society to secure adequate water and sanitation to meet their basic needs. And it focuses on the work of a research NGO (IIED-America Latina) that first engaged with water and sanitation efforts more than twenty years ago, and was identified with “best practices” back in the 1990s. The paper has been written by the current team, and provides a long term overview of a programme of work that has changed radically over the years, while striving to stay true to a core set of principles that they believe underlies their success.

This is one of a series of four studies taking a long term view of the work of civil society initiatives that have ended up influencing national practices and international thinking about urban water and sanitation provision. The other long term initiatives being documented were led by the Development Workshop in Angola, the Orangi Pilot Project Research and Training Institute in Pakistan and The Society for the Promotion of Area Resources Centre and Mahila Milan in India. (A more recent initiative in Ghana, involving People’s Dialogue, has also documented to provide a contrast.) To some degree, they have all been influenced by changing attitudes towards non-governmental organizations, which were themselves seen as a brightest new hope for development in the 1980s, but have since lost much of their attraction. There is, however, much to learn from the dogged tenacity and continuing innovations that have allowed these efforts to keep on track for decades, often against what have seemed to be overwhelming odds.

The initiatives have all been successful and path-breaking. They have a surprising number of other characteristics in common. Perhaps most obvious, they all originated outside the water and sanitation sector, emerging from broader efforts to address the shelter needs of groups of people whose position in their own cities were socially and physically precarious, and not just for economic reasons. They also all involved NGOs with an intimate working knowledge of the communities and a strong commitment to the principles of participation. Moreover, while all the NGOs claim a primary allegiance to the communities, they have all taken the strategic decision to collaborate with local government. None have simply made demands on behalf of low-income communities, on the grounds that the public sector must provide basic water and sanitation services. Alternatively, none have simply tried to help deprived communities to provide their own water and sanitation. In every case there have been periods when groups of residents have taken on responsibilities conventionally associated with public providers, and periods when the principal focus has been on changing the practices public utilities or authorities themselves. Some of the biggest challenges have been to improve the quality of collaboration: 1) among local residents; and 2) between local residents and the public agencies that they must engage with. This has typically involved redefining responsibilities for water and sanitation provision, not on the basis of abstract principles, but to accommodate practical realities.

Despite these similarities, in every case a closer look demonstrates that success depended on adapting to local specificities: political, economic, cultural, social, geographical and so on.

This is evident in the detail, but also in the broad outlines of the approaches taken. To take the most obvious example, the comparative affluence of the Argentina clearly had a major influence on the strategy of IIED-AL. This can be seen in terms of three of the principal themes that have informed the case studies, namely the approaches taken to: 1) financing the improvements; 2) collaboration amongst different actors involved in water or sanitation provision; 3) achieving scale.

Financing

In terms of financing, IIED-America Latina's success has been less dependent than in the other case studies on finding more affordable technologies, and avoiding unit subsidies. In Karachi, the success of the Orangi Pilot Project relied on working with a simplified sewer system that, initially, was not considered to be of a high enough standard to be acceptable to local authorities and service providers. In Mumbai and Pune, success centred on working to improve the design and management of communal toilets, at a time when most international experts in the water and sanitation sector were inclined to treat all communal toilets as substandard. The Development Workshop in Angola achieved success building on low cost locally driven initiatives, including those of informal water vendors. In each of these cases, the low cost technologies remain central to their current successes. In Buenos Aires, on the other hand, the low cost innovations initially adopted at the community level, including small bore sewers and piping brackish water to homes, were soon supplanted by more centrally-managed water and sanitation networks. The principal challenge has been to get these more centralized systems extended to low income settlements. Similarly, while efforts to develop the capacity to handle finance within the community was central in the other cities, in Buenos Aires the key issues have centred more on government finance and conventional service tariffs.

Collaboration

The fact that extending conventional networked water and sanitation services is central to improving water and sanitation to the currently deprived parts of Buenos Aires also helps to explain the somewhat different forms of collaboration that evolved with IIED-AL in Buenos Aires. As with the NGOs in the other countries, working with community organizations has always been central to IIED-AL's strategy. Like the other NGOs, success has also depended on developing constructive and collaborative relations with local government and with large water and sanitation utilities. In Karachi the division between 'internal' and 'external' infrastructure, with lane residents responsible for the former, is central to the model of collaboration. In Mumbai and Pune, the community organizing around the toilets and their management was critical to their success, and one of the challenges of increasing government support has been to maintain this feature. In Angola, strengthening the role of the informal sector, and improving collaboration between formal and informal providers has been key. In Buenos Aires, while collaboration amongst a similar set of actors has also been central, far more of this collaboration has focussed on engaging community groups and IIED-AL to help ensure that the local government and the utilities can deliver water and sanitation services more widely, fairly and effectively. The early projects where IIED-AL staff were working with community members to help construct and manage the systems soon gave way to initiatives where they were working to convince the water utility and local authorities to agree to extend the piped network, and even some projects where IIED-AL's role was to advise the utility or a local authority.

Achieving scale

The different emphasis with respect to finance and collaborative arrangements are reflected in quite different strategies for scaling up the water and sanitation improvements. The form community-level engagement took with IIED-AL was never realistically going to be replicated

on a large-scale. For reasons already indicated the key to achieving water and sanitation improvements in Buenos Aires lies in extending the formal water and sanitation system. In the other locations, the challenge was to find and extend alternatives to the formal system. Thus, the key strategy for scaling up in Karachi involved replicating the lane-based sewer management system, in Pune and Mumbai it involved replicating the community toilets and their management systems, while in Angola it involved supporting the expansion of the informal providers. For IIED-AL the challenge was not to replicate a newly created model of water or sanitation provision, but to change the operating procedures of the utilities and local authorities involved in such provision. When a private utility had the concession for providing water and sanitation in Buenos Aires, one of the principal means through which IIED-AL helped bring its community-level collaboration to scale involved creating a precedent wherein the utility extended services to the informal settlement, in collaboration with both local authorities and community organizations. This approach was then adapted by the utility to extend services to other informal settlements. As the emphasis on private participation declined, and the formal opportunities for extending water and sanitation services to informal settlements shifted to national government programmes, IIED-AL's strategy changed its focus accordingly. Again, however, while the practices and partnerships changed, the core principles did not, including the critical importance of both understanding and engaging with informal communities when extending services.

Improving water and sanitation provision in Buenos Aires

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1. Introduction

Providing water and sanitation services to low-income communities is a key development challenge in urban areas. In Buenos Aires, the delivery of services to these neighbourhoods has historically been undermined by changing combinations of political clientelism, poorly coordinated government programmes, inappropriate and eventually rescinded privatization schemes and a lack participation by local people. In this changing context the Instituto Internacional de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo's (IIED-America Latina's)¹ has been working with communities, local authorities and utilities to secure access to water and sanitation for unserved communities. This experience demonstrates both how important action within local communities can be when public service delivery is inadequate, and how important an understanding of the situation in local communities can be when service providers are attempting to extend their delivery to informal and unserved settlements.

This paper traces the different stages of IIED-AL's work, explaining the challenges encountered and the strategies used to overcome them. It also examines some key determinants of success:

- working in collaboration;
- using information as a driver for change;
- finance mechanisms; and
- scaling up.

Over the years, working in collaboration has been absolutely central to IIED-AL's strategy. Throughout, we have worked (with various degrees of success) with different stakeholders, involving the community, local authorities, private utility companies and others. Our belief is that long-term changes are only possible and sustainable when different stakeholders work together.

Generating information and providing financial mechanisms have been the main tools for leveraging change in the community and encouraging different stakeholders to work together. For example, the processes of carrying out participatory mapping and planning integrated environmental management systems (SIGA-Sistema Integral de Gestión Ambiental) were more important than the actual outcomes. By working together during these exercises, community and local government representatives had to bring together their different perspectives and information, making visible the invisible (see Box 4, Section 5.4). The actual information contained in the maps was of secondary importance. It was the process of making them that led to changes in the power dynamics among stakeholders enabling them to reach agreements, and to get into the habit of working together.

In addition, rather than trying to scale up our work by replicating it in more and more communities, we chose to scale up by sticking to a set of principles (see Box 2, Section 2) and using our community experience to engage with larger scale providers. Our goal was to convince those in powerful positions of the validity of our approach and in this way have a

¹ IIED-AL in Buenos Aires is the sister organization of the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). It was established in Argentina in 1979 as the Latin American office for IIED and became an independent Argentine registered non-profit organization in 1988. At present it has a staff of 14 professionals divided in two teams, Community Action and Urban Poverty. It runs three programmes: Urban Management; Local Development and Institutional Capacity-building; and Sustainable Development. In addition, there are two associated programmes: Urban History and Wet-net. IIED-América Latina publishes the twice-yearly journal, *Medio Ambiente y Urbanización*.

larger impact. This approach is appropriate in the Argentinean context, where government and utility companies deliver services, and have done so successfully in some areas but not in low-income communities. In this case, several factors came together which enabled us to scale up our impact through collaboration at different levels. Soon after IIED-AL, together with local residents developed an alternative water and sanitation model in one part of Buenos Aires, both private utility companies and local government agencies contacted us to seek out ways to adopt this approach and implement it elsewhere.

This research study was carried out using qualitative methods including a review of all IIED-AL's published and unpublished material² produced over the last 20 years. Focus groups made up of community representatives who had worked with IIED-AL at different times, and semi-structured interviews with community leaders and local government representatives were also used. In addition, we produced a short film which traces the urban upgrading process in three low-income neighbourhoods in the municipality of San Fernando³.

The paper begins by outlining IIED-AL's action-research strategy for community development in low-income urban areas. It then describes the Argentinean water sector and the context of urban poverty. The paper goes on to explore the challenges of providing water and sanitation in these communities, highlighting the strategies used. Historical periods based on the different stages of IIED-AL's work are then discussed. Each section ends with a summary which highlights context, working in collaboration, finance mechanisms, scaling up, and information that drives action. A timeline has been prepared to outline the main obstacles faced and key achievements within this ever changing context (see Annexe 1). The final section of the paper highlights remaining challenges not only for IIED-AL's future work but also for all those engaged in implementing collaborative projects.

Throughout the paper our intention has been to incorporate the perceptions of community groups and municipal staff who have been directly involved in the projects described here or who have been touched by them in some way. While we have made every effort to correctly represent the opinions of others, it must be recognized that this paper was written by IIED-AL alone and has not been reviewed by other stakeholders.

2. IIED-AL's action research strategy

Established in 1979, the Instituto Internacional de Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo (IIED-AL) began as a research centre. Initially work focussed on urban issues which fell outside the current agenda such as environment, poverty, gender, children and cities, health and historical city centres. We also brought together southern research experiences through workshops, seminars and a prolific publishing programme.

A shift from more conventional research to action-research began in 1989, when IIED-AL started to work directly with informal settlements in Barrio San Jorge in the San Fernando municipality of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region (BAMR). Our objective was to improve housing conditions, basic services and overall environmental conditions, as well as to support the development of grassroots organizations. The change in approach came about because we believed that working on the ground with communities was essential for

² The idea was to review material prepared by IIED-AL to provide an idea of context, needs, and strategies used at different times. The material reflected our own work, and we used this to analyze our efforts in light of current experience. Support for this kind of analysis and dissemination is uncommon.

³ URL for the film on the Water Channel TV:

http://www.thewaterchannel.tv/index.php?option=com_hwdvideoshare&task=viewvideo&Itemid=53&video_id=500 or on IIED website: <http://www.iied.org/human-settlements/key-issues/urban-environment/video-water-was-dream-part-1-4>

understanding what local residents needed and for supporting them over the long-term to strengthen local capacities enabling them to fulfil their needs. Too much knowledge produced by researchers was based on secondary sources. Our work would, therefore, be enriched by combining research with action and gaining that first hand experience. Field work was crucial for understanding which public policy changes were needed, whether at the local, provincial or national level.

In 2002, IIED-AL began a long-term programme of activities in the municipality of Moreno (also located within the BAMR), employing similar methodologies to those used in San Fernando⁴ i.e. balancing activities to strengthen actors' capacities with direct project implementation. IIED-AL's Community Action team researched and promoted alliances for development and citizen participation in two key areas: i. access to urban services (in particular water supply and sanitation) together with integrated environmental management in informal settlements; and ii. neighbourhood improvement and micro-credit funds.

IIED-AL's work in low-income settlements combines research with action, focusing on sustaining long-term development processes in collaboration with community organizations and local governments. Community development work is a continuous process that both builds and fosters synergies between projects, leading to an integrated approach to addressing urban environmental problems. Collaboration with the various actors who contribute to policy-making and opening up spaces for the participation of all social groups in decision making processes are key. These spaces must be neutral and open, not dominated by one particular group, where each participant can freely express their views and opinions. Since 1989, our experience has shown that to be effective a development strategy for informal settlements must guarantee continuity on the ground, by working in association with community organizations and local government and by consolidating and disseminating experiences. Through building on past experience IIED-AL is able to provide policy recommendations for poverty reduction using knowledge that is informed by direct community action as well as by theoretical analysis.

Box 1: IIED-AL's work stands on three pillars

- a) *action* through direct intervention in low-income or marginalised communities, developing work in conjunction with local organizations and government;
- b) *research* or case studies to acquire knowledge, often in association with researchers or research centres outside Argentina; and
- c) *dissemination* of IIED-AL's work and outputs, as an advocacy strategy and to influence other actors who participate in policy decisions or who support social projects in urban contexts.

Box 2: IIED-AL's principles

IIED-AL is also guided by a set of principles, some of which have underpinned our work from the outset and others which have emerged as a result of experience:

- a) promoting long-term engagement by supporting the same barrios and municipalities through merging different projects;
- b) considering the overall implications of our initiatives, and not addressing different needs in isolation;

⁴ Hardoy, Ana, Jorgelina Hardoy, Gustavo Pandiella and Gastón Urquiza (2005), "Governance for water and sanitation services in low-income settlements: experiences with partnership-based management in Moreno, Buenos Aires", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pages 183-200.

c) sticking to agreements made with the community (e.g. not providing water without sewage, or not allowing outsiders to occupy land assigned to residents of a particular barrio in spite of external pressure);

d) constantly building space for participation and mechanisms to assure transparency and accountability;

e) working “with” not “for” community groups, local governments, utilities, etc.

Our biggest asset, however, is that we are recognized as “neutral”, brokers of relations between the different actors involved in improving the living conditions in low-income settlements. We are seen as guarantors, ensuring that agreements are maintained and that the strongest actors will not take advantage of the weakest. Our strategies and approach have adapted in line with changing contexts. It should be remembered that our working environment is largely shaped by the State. Its policies and approach affect government agencies’ capacity to build relations with other actors (CBOs, NGOs, public and private utilities, etc), the players involved and the spaces open for participation. Other factors which influence context include natural learning processes and the particular characteristics of each barrio and community group.

IIED-AL’s approach has evolved over time and with experience, starting from its beginnings as a research institute in 1979, moving to combining research with action in 1989 and to long-term engagement in 2002. As a result the institute has developed a set of principles (see Box 2) to guide its work and has learned that neutrality is an important quality when dealing with partners as diverse as local communities, government and utility companies. The next section of this paper provides a brief overview of the context within which IIED-AL works.

3. A brief overview of the water sector in Argentina and Buenos Aires

The Argentinean water and sanitation sector is heterogeneous and fragmented. This is a result of its history, current regulatory framework, the number and type of providers and the particular characteristics of the place. Services have to be provided to areas which differ greatly in terms of size, population density, nature of water resources and socioeconomic profile. Historically the water sector in Argentina was managed by one national body, *Obras Sanitarias de la Nación* (OSN) which provided services for the whole country. The OSN was created in 1912 and during its operation Argentina was second in Latin America in terms of household provision of water and sanitation. However, between 1950 and 1970, the sector began to experience financial problems and had to reduce its expansion plans. Finally, during the 1970s, responsibility for water and sanitation was decentralized to provincial governments. Most of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region came under the responsibility of one official body, as if it were a province.

Each province created separate, specific offices to plan, manage, regulate and allocate resources to the water sector and each implemented slightly different policies. The result was the creation of very heterogeneous legal and institutional frameworks. The provinces also had the right to delegate responsibility for water and sanitation to municipalities, although only some did so. Between 1980 and 1993, no significant investments were made in the sector and the service was in a “state of emergency”.⁵

In the early 1990s another process of decentralization was implemented in Argentina, transferring more responsibilities and functions from the federal government to the

⁵ Rey O. (2000) *El Saneamiento en el Area Metropolitana: Desde el Virreynato a 1993*. Aguas Argentinas.

provinces. However, this was not matched by a transfer of resources.⁶ Argentina embarked on public service reforms by restructuring and privatizing those that were failing. Having little experience with the privatization of water and sanitation, central government chose to allocate concession contracts for up to 30 years⁷ covering service provision as well as the maintenance of infrastructure which had been previously supplied by the State.⁸

The decade was characterized by a shift in relations between the public and private sectors, in line with the neoliberal model of a pared down state and strict controls on public expenditure. Following initial successes by some water companies in the international sphere, most of the provinces, including the BAMR, opted to privatize their water and sanitation service. Despite the differences within and among the areas covered by concessions, the contracts were based on the implicit assumption that all areas were homogenous, even with regard to population density and socioeconomic profile.⁹ This inevitably created difficulties when it came to providing services. Low density, low-income areas pose particular problems, since fewer people per square kilometre increases the cost per connection, and service provision in low-income communities is sometimes associated with a high incidence of non-payment.

Three concession contracts were awarded for water supply and sanitation services covering most of the province of Buenos Aires (including the city itself). All three contracts stipulated that the companies who won the contracts would be responsible for the operation and maintenance of the network, investment in further expansion, billing and collection of user charges. However, no goal was set for improving services to low-income households.¹⁰ Two of the shortcomings in the contracts were that: a) there was no obligation to extend services to residents living in settlements without clear land tenure, and b) connection fees were set at about US\$600 for water and US\$1,000 for sewerage for which households would be liable whether or not they used the service.¹¹

The three companies that won the bids were Aguas Argentinas (AA) in 1993, and Azurix and Aguas del Gran Buenos Aires (AGBA) in 1999. Although the concessions used almost identical contract models, the areas served varied significantly in terms of population density, socioeconomic profile, water resources, general infrastructure, and government capacities. None of the companies understood the layout of the infrastructure, the state of the network and systems, and the actual population that they were meant to serve.

Argentina's economic crisis in late 2001, and the accompanying political and social turmoil, led to sharp increases in poverty and inequality. After a decade of neoliberal policies, with the Argentinean peso artificially pegged to the US dollar, the country experienced the consequences of having a weak, unresponsive State¹² incapable of meeting essential

⁶ Clemente A. y Smulovitz, C. (2004) *Descentralización, políticas sociales y participación democrática en Argentina*, Buenos Aires.

⁷ Ley 11.820/96 Congress authorizes the President to give concessions for service provision through public bidding.

⁸ Hardoy A *et al* (2005) Governance for water and sanitation services in low-income settlements; experiences with partnership-based management in Moreno, Buenos Aires, *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol 17, No 1, pp. 183 – 189.

⁹ Mazzucchelli, Sergio, Martín Rodríguez and Margarita González (2001), Private sector participation in water supply and sanitation: realizing social and environmental objectives in Buenos Aires in Johnstone, Nick and Libby Wood (eds) *Private Firms and Public Water: Realizing Social and Environmental Objectives in Developing Countries*. Edward Elgar, London, pages 55 - 62.

¹⁰ See Shusterman *et al*. (2002) *Experiences with water provision in four low-income barrios in Buenos Aires. Public – Private Partnerships and the Poor Series*, WEDC, Loughborough, for an in-depth analysis of the cases described here.

¹¹ At the time the salary of an average low-income family of 4 was around US\$400 a month. Aguas Argentinas' contract was later renegotiated and in 1997 connection fees were replaced with a charge to all consumers and a much smaller connection fee that could be paid spread out over 5 years.

¹² Alberto Fernandez (2007). Jefe de gabinete. *Lecturas sobre el Estado y las políticas públicas: retomando el*

responsibilities and unable to respond to citizens' needs.¹³ There was a total lack of confidence in the State.¹⁴ The crisis, and in particular the devaluation of the Argentine currency, the government's cap on service costs to users, and the US dollar loans taken out by the utilities, caused the water companies in Buenos Aires to suspend their plans to expand the infrastructure.¹⁵ This forced the State to change its position and to intervene in the provision of privatized public services. Despite resistance from water companies and from international financial institutions, in 2003 the newly elected government began to renegotiate all existing private contracts. A strong welfare state re-emerged, taking on social functions and re-centralizing decision-making processes, sometimes at the expense of transparent participation from citizens and other levels of government.

Azurix was forced to withdraw its services from Buenos Aires Province due to difficulties in reaching agreement on the fulfilment of the terms of the contract.¹⁶ Following the withdrawal of Azurix, the provincial government of Buenos Aires drew up a decree in 2003¹⁷ introducing a number of changes to release the State from some restrictions imposed by previous agreements with water companies.

This decree gave the public sector the flexibility to renegotiate existing contracts and allowed national, provincial and municipal governments to implement different programmes, such as investment in treatment plants and trunk pipes to enable network expansion. Expansion in low-income neighbourhoods is now being implemented through the Aguas + Trabajo (water and work) programme which sets up cooperatives to expand water provision and generate employment. Although other national programmes such as the neighbourhood upgrading programme (Programa Nacional de Mejoramiento Barrial, or PROMEBA) the programme for improving the quality of life (Mejor Vivir) and the programme on addressing informal settlements (Villas y Asentamientos) all focus on land regularization and housing, they also work on water and sanitation. In some cases contractors used local labour to stimulate the creation of community cooperatives.

The individual results of these programmes have been mixed. The combined result is that utilities are no longer the most critical actors in extending water and sanitation networks to poor un-served neighbourhoods. Instead, the key role is being played by the local governments that negotiate these programmes with national government. These programmes are geared towards providing and up-grading services to low income settlements. However their financing strongly depends on how national government distributes resources to provinces and municipalities and on how, in turn, municipalities pass them on.

Today, two companies provide services in the BAMR: Agua y Saneamientos Argentinos SA (AySA), which took over the AA Concession, and Aguas Bonaerense SA (ABSA) which supplies the area for which Azurix and AGBA formerly held concessions. Both are public capital companies, the former working on a national level and the latter on a provincial one.¹⁸

debate de ayer para fortalecer el actual.

¹³ Asinelli C H. (2007). Director Nacional Alterno, Modernización del Estado, Lecturas sobre el Estado y las políticas públicas: retomando el debate de ayer para fortalecer el actual.

¹⁴ Asinelli C H (2007) op cit 20.

¹⁵ De Vido, Minister of Public Works said: "Aguas Argentinas did not fail because of its management, but for the lack of investments and high debts" Diario Página 12. Editor's note: part of the problem was that Government fixed (froze) tariffs.

¹⁶ The problems in the concession contract with Azurix began prior the 2001 crisis, and were related to contract compliance conflicts. For example the provincial government did not provide the cadastre showing the square meters for each household on which the tariff calculation was meant to be based,

¹⁷ Provincial Decree 878.

¹⁸ There are very divergent opinions regarding the legitimacy of creating public capital companies using the Decree of Needs and Emergency (Decreto de necesidad y urgencia – DNU), see J. R: Vanossi "Sociedad del Estado o el gobierno empresarial?" Academia Nacional de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales de Cordoba.

These companies have similar contracts to their predecessors, the difference being that they do not need to report profits to shareholders and that the State is their guarantor. It may seem that these differences put them in a better position to expand services to low-income areas. In practice, however, and perhaps because the government is not effectively regulating these utilities, they are suffering from serious inefficiencies, and are not meeting their service and expansion goals. The public sector (and the public at large) is paying for this hidden inefficiency.

4. The challenges of service provision: A context of urban poverty

Throughout Argentina, water and sanitation are provided by a wide variety of public and private utilities, of different sizes and operating on different scales. The utilities are subject to varying controls, norms and conditions. National figures indicate that 78.4% of the population has access to water within their home and 42.5% are connected to a sewer. However, overall national averages mask important disparities. For example, in the City of Buenos Aires all of the population (100%) is connected to the water and sanitation network, but for some municipalities in the wider BAMR this figure drops to 12% and 15% for access to water (Ituzaingo and Jose C. Paz) and 8% to 15% for sanitation (Jose C. Paz, Ituzaingo and Tigre).¹⁹

Poverty is also unevenly distributed. Household surveys carried out twice a year in urban agglomerations indicate that in the second half of 2006,²⁰ 19.2% of households were below the poverty line, and another 16.3% were living in extreme poverty. However, while 6.4% and 2.1% of the population of THE CITY OF Buenos Aires were living in poverty and in extreme poverty respectively, for municipalities within the BAMR these figures increase to 22.9% living in poverty and 9.7% in extreme poverty, with greater extremes found in municipalities located within the periphery of BAMR. There are also major differences between the urban centres of different regions within Argentina, especially the North-eastern and North-western regions in which over 30% of people live in poverty.²¹ Informal land tenure and irregular urban layouts are strongly connected to poverty and (at least in theory) undermine the provision of water and sanitation. It is estimated that 30% of urban land in the BAMR is made up of informal settlements. In the municipality of Moreno, this figure is as high as 50%.²² Irregular urban layouts hinder the construction of water and sanitation networks since, by law, water and sewage mains must be located on public land (under streets or sidewalks). In the case of undivided allotments which have not been formally 'urbanized' (i.e. formally accepted within the urban regulatory system) and which have irregular land tenure arrangements, the location of the network must be negotiated on a case by case basis with the land owner (private or state). In some cases lack of formal land tenure means that residents are less willing to invest in water and sanitation infrastructure and services. In other cases, securing water and sanitation improves land tenure security and aids efforts to formalize tenure thereby increasing residents' incentive to secure these services.

Faced with increasingly complex problems and in line with the process of decentralization initiated in the 1990s, local governments have gradually taken more responsibility for improving the living conditions of their citizens. They have become more active in designing

<http://www.acader.unc.edu.ar> accessed January 8, 2009.

¹⁹ INDEC (2001) National Population and Housing Census.

²⁰ Since January 2007 academics and civil society have been questioning the Consumer Price Index set by INDEC on the grounds that it does not reflect real inflation and therefore influences the measurement of poverty.

²¹ Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, INDEC, Encuesta permanente de hogares (EPH) (2006).

²² These estimates are based on data from the Dirección de Tierras de la Provincia de Buenos Aires (The Province of Buenos Aires Land Office).

and implementing social and economic policies and programmes related to health, housing, land regularization, education, income generation, etc. This new set of functions has been assumed with varying degrees of success and is tied to a changing national political context. This shift marks local governments as the key promoters of development, since they make the decisions about how best to distribute urban services and benefits. Historically Argentina has had a strong State, with a tradition of political movements and a “delegative” democracy (see Box 3). In practice there is no autonomous Congress, no independent judicial system, and no unions that can provide an effective counterbalance to the executive branch of government. As described by Botana,²³ “the country survives between the virtual regime of the Constitution with its checks and controls, and the real regime of power that acts without taking into account those controls”. In fact there is a constant struggle to elude, controls, or to neutralize existing ones.²⁴ The emergence of an active, independent, citizenship has been hindered by this tradition.

Box 3: Opinions about party politics in Argentina

Guillermo O’Donnell²⁵ says that “in some countries, Argentina being one of them, there is a long history of a delegative vision of power. This started with the second government of Irigoyen²⁶ and was clearly followed by Peron²⁷ and the Peronist movement. The idea is that as the President is elected by the majority or first minority, he has the possibility, even obligation to govern as he thinks best, with no limitations, assuming that he is doing what is best for the well being of the people. This is a conception of political power and political authority that in Argentina has a long history and is well expressed in the Peronist ideology. This is so much so, that in Argentina, when someone is referring to government he is only referring to the Executive while in many countries government would include Congress or Parliament. To synthesize, although perhaps excessively, Argentina has moved to a “political democracy” where the voters are the central actor, there is still a long way to go to achieve a “citizen democracy”.

Auyero²⁸ says that with economic re-structuring and adjustment processes, the generalization of poverty, growing inequality and absence of the State, political clientelism has re-emerged as the main concern of politicians and academics in Argentina and of the rest of Latin America. And in reference to unions, Neri²⁹ says that “still pending is the democratization of the life of the unions, so that workers stop being held hostages of a vertical (top – down) and rigid structure.”

5. Stages in IIED-AL’s work

5.1. Stage 1 - Getting started: working at micro-scale “the barrio” (1987 - 1995)

IIED–AL’s involvement in action-research and direct interventions in communities began in 1990. Work started in Barrio San Jorge a low-income neighbourhood in the municipality of San Fernando within the BAMR. IIED incorporated a project for the construction of a mother and child centre in the Barrio, initiated by Caritas (1987 – 1990) and supported by two volunteers, into one of its own programmes.

²³ See: Diario La Nación, Otra aventura plebiscitaria, Sección Notas. 19 de Marzo de 2009.

²⁴ See: Diario Page 12, Diálogos sobre los tipos y calidades de Democracia. Entrevista a Guillermo O’Donnell por Jose Natanson. Lunes 27 de Febrero de 2006. And Diario La Nación, El gran error de eludir las instituciones: Guillermo O’Donnell analiza la concepción del poder en el país. Miércoles 10 de diciembre 2008, also comments by Hermes Binner, Governor of the Province of Santa Fe in La Nación 26 de junio 2008. p. 6, political section.

²⁵ Jose Natanson (2006) Sobre los Tipos y Calidades de Democracia, in Página 12, www.pagina12.com.ar/imprimir/diario/dialogos/21-63632-2006-02-27.html, accessed 15/12/2008

²⁶ President from 1928 to 1930

²⁷ President from 1944 to 1945, from 1946 to 1952, from 1952 to 1955, and from 1973 to 1974.

²⁸ Auyero, Javier (comp) (1998) “Favores por votos”. Editorial Losada. Argentina.

²⁹ See: Neri Aldo (2009) Lo que no hizo Alfonsín, Diario La Nación, 21 abril 2009, p. 15.

Figure 1: Map showing the location of San Fernando within BAMR



Barrio San Jorge was first established in 1961 as a resettlement site for 60 families that had been living in areas prone to flooding. These families were subsequently moved to the barrio into houses made of corrugated iron sheets. The settlement extended over low-lying vacant land, with minimal risk of eviction. In 1979, families evicted by the municipal authorities from land where public works were being undertaken, also settled in the area. This riverside section of the Barrio was levelled by the municipality and sub-divided into lots. The old section of Barrio San Jorge is known as “Barrio Viejo” (Old neighbourhood) and the newer section is called “Barrio Nuevo” (New neighbourhood).

During the three decades prior to IIED-AL’s involvement, Barrio San Jorge had experienced many different water initiatives driven by the State, a local priest, a nearby factory and the army. These efforts involved water trucks, public tanks, taps and even a network that never functioned. The lack of success of these previous initiatives generated mistrust among local people. The efforts had failed because they did not involve the community, they originated from programmes that had no continuity and at the time there was no secure and accessible water source.³⁰ Meanwhile residents, mostly women and children, had to carry buckets to fill household containers and had to adapt their housekeeping chores and hygiene to what was available. Women recall carrying 20 litre buckets, even while they were pregnant, and queuing in the early morning to wait for the water truck to fill 200 litre containers. One resident even remembers getting on a bus to fetch water when she was young. In talks with young people gender issues also came up: in addition to helping their mothers, girls were always the last to use water. They had to use the residual water left by the men of the house for their own personal hygiene.

Barrio San Jorge lacked all basic services, including water and sanitation, had poor housing, insecure land tenure (it occupied land that was partly private and partly state-owned) and had no form of community organisation. Relationships between residents and outsiders were typically paternalistic and clientelistic. The environmental and housing conditions were

³⁰ Infrastructure works were needed in order to source water from the Río de la Plata.

very precarious in 1990 when IIED-AL started to work in the barrio.³¹ A continuous process of development and learning (with ups and downs) began for the residents of San Jorge, as well as for IIED-AL's team and the local authorities.

Our initial engagement in the barrio can be divided into three periods.³² The first period was from 1987 to 1989, when several small initiatives were carried out, such as the mother and child centre, the purchase of the "House of the Barrio",³³ a programme for children and youth that included sports and recreational activities, a women's sewing group and the formation of the volunteer support team (which included representatives of the local health centre, the local church, the mother and child centre, school support, and IIED - AL). All these activities were coordinated by a small team working from outside IIED-AL, but with strong ties to the institute.

During the second period, 1990 to 1992, the external team became part of IIED-AL and the Institute started collaborating formally with residents to improve living conditions in Barrio San Jorge. A multi-institutional programme for the integrated development of the barrio was launched. A cooperation agreement was signed by the province, the municipality and IIED-AL, on the condition that an organization representing the community would also be included. The first elections to appoint a neighbourhood commission were held and this body subsequently became the "Cooperativa Nuestra Tierra" (the Co-op). This was the barrio's first formal neighbourhood organization. Local residents recall how they nominated candidates by sectors or streets (in the case of Barrio Viejo and Nuevo) and voted for delegates to represent them in order to obtain improvements for their community (garbage collection, public phones, electricity etc).

In 1992, 7 ha of land was donated by the municipality of San Fernando to San Jorge's residents, who through their cooperative, organized themselves in order to move some families to this nearby area and reduce the population density, as many people were living in overcrowded conditions. Some households were also relocated because they were on land subject to flooding, on privately owned land, or on spaces needed to widen streets or to start the "formalization" of the barrio. These 7 ha became a planned settlement, which the residents named Barrio Jorge Hardoy after the founder of IIED-AL.

A few representatives from the newly created neighbourhood commission together with staff from the provincial and municipal government, IIED-AL and other institutions working in the barrio took part in a week long workshop on participatory neighbourhood development. The workshop was run by GTZ (a German development agency) and used the ZOPP (Goal Oriented Project Planning) methodology to create an integrated development plan for the barrio. Many goals were identified, but priority was given to basic infrastructure and services, environmental improvement, and the transfer of land tenure from the government to residents.

³¹ Common characteristics: occupancy with no title, plots without services and infrastructure and houses built with recovered materials.

³² See time-line (Annexe 1).

³³ The House of the Barrio is a meeting place for the community, not tied to any particular group or project.

Figure 2: Map showing Barrio San Jorge and Barrio Jorge Hardoy



The third period ran from 1993 to 1995³⁴ when funds were obtained for a pilot project to provide water and sanitation for 25 families.³⁵ The project used non-conventional technologies in response to the local economic and physical context. The water network consisted of a dual system: two water lines, one providing scarce potable water provided by a nearby meat-packing plant, and another providing unlimited salt water pumped up from underground. A shallow, alternative sewage system was used, that combined the use of septic tanks to retain solids and a small-bore sewage pipe network that drained into the river

³⁴ See Shusterman *et al.* (2002) *Experiences with water provision in four low-income barrios in Buenos Aires. Public – Private Partnerships and the Poor Series*, edited by M. Sohail, WEDC, for an in-depth analysis of the cases described here.

³⁵ The initiative was part of the project “Habitat and health in Latin America” in 1993 funded by the International Development Research Centre. The project was approved after the cholera outbreak in Latin America.

after primary treatment. Given the lack of solids, pipe diameters and gradients could be reduced, which together with savings from trench construction decreased investment costs. This system was also suited to the very high water table.

While there was general consensus around the installation of the water network, the need for sewers was somewhat contentious. Historically only small quantities of water had been used and as a result the use of cesspits, latrines and the accumulation of effluent in the streets had not (yet) become a problem. The use of brackish water was also controversial as many viewed it as much inferior to potable water although they had used saltwater sources for many years. However when interviewed some women stated that after the system began to function many residents who were not part of the network started to fetch brackish water from neighbours who were connected.

A year later, funds were obtained for the environmental improvement of Barrio San Jorge and a decision was made to expand the water and sanitation service to cover the entire neighbourhood (325 families). Of these, some 100 families were located on private land. The funder was reluctant to support the installation of infrastructure on private land, and it was decided not to provide infrastructure but to focus instead on relocation for these 100 families. In order to secure funds for the provision of services to all residents (including the families which were to be relocated) a payment of US\$110 in cash or US\$150³⁶ in instalments was requested from every household. Payments were collected by the street representative (or delegate) who passed these on to IIED-AL, the fund administrator.

In 1994 while IIED-AL was finishing the technical design for the project, an unrelated private contractor appeared in the barrio and started to install a water network, a cistern and a tank. Four months later, the contractor stopped working³⁷ and once again works were left unfinished in the barrio. Neither residents, members of the Co-op nor staff from IIED-AL had been informed about this work, although construction was financed by national and provincial authorities, with the support of the local government. Viewing this as evidence that there was no possibility to work collaboratively with local government, IIED-AL withdrew from the cooperation agreement signed back in 1990.

After this setback, construction of the network was re-launched by IIED-AL and the Co-op. The idea was to use parts of the unfinished network which had been left by the contractor (in the end only the tank could be used, as the pipes were never installed). The work was organized and divided into common sections, completed by a hired contractor who installed the main network and street sections that were the resident's responsibility to complete. Before starting work on the street sections it was agreed that 60% of residents had to sign and pay the first instalment. Residents also had to choose delegates to lead and coordinate the work in their section. The Co-op acted as an intermediary and organized the delegates' work. IIED-AL provided the technical design, planning, and building materials. Everybody worked; women remember learning to connect pipes and children helping by lifting buckets.

Two important events occurred during the start of the project. One was that the local mayor and his cabinet resigned after allegations of corruption, and the interim mayor gave his support to the development of the water network by IIED-AL and the community. The second was that Aguas Argentinas began expanding the water network to a formal area some 400 meters away. Though initially the private utility did not want to take over the new network in Barrio San Jorge, the local government together with community leaders and IIED-AL were able to change their minds.³⁸ Forthcoming elections were crucial in motivating local

³⁶ Compare this to the price of connection fee presented by Aguas Argentinas (US\$600 for water and US\$1,000 for sewage) as mentioned on page 5.

³⁷ The reason for work stopping was not clear but was probably linked to a lack of funds at national level.

³⁸ Aguas Argentinas would gain 1,750 (400 families) customers at no cost as the network was already built. It also enabled them to incorporate two large customers (a meat packing plant and a wholesale vegetable and fruit

politicians and facilitating these agreements. Construction was finished in 1995 and the utility took over the maintenance and operation of the water network, providing potable water to the whole barrio. Having the private utility take over responsibility for the network guaranteed the water quality and the maintenance of the infrastructure. At the same time the utility began to learn about providing services to poor settlements and working in partnership with other actors.

The small-bore sewerage system was not taken over by the utility because it did not meet the standards set out in their concession contract. This system also used pipes of a different diameter which would have meant extra maintenance costs. After more than 10 years residents continue to be responsible for the maintenance of this system.

According to some women community members and leaders, this project was the best that they had worked with; they learned how to organize themselves, they gained confidence in their work, in addition to obtaining better living conditions and corresponding improvements in other areas such as house construction, free time, better hygiene and health.

5.1.1. The urbanization of land: Barrio Hardoy

Barrio Hardoy is an unusual case. It faced challenges different from those in Barrio San Jorge. Barrio Hardoy is a planned settlement with access to water and sanitation right from the outset. The 1990 census of Barrio San Jorge identified the families that needed to be relocated to Barrio Hardoy. In addition to the census data, the request for a plot had to be accompanied by testimonies from 3 neighbours. Once the families were chosen, plots were assigned through a lottery draw overseen by public notary. A table of needs/priorities/possibilities was also developed to identify other settlers that needed or wished to move.³⁹ However, the families could not move quickly as they could not afford the construction costs for their new houses.

The approval of a project by Homeless International for the creation of a Building Materials Bank provided a great help in overcoming this problem. This building yard was located in Barrio Hardoy to make construction materials easily available within the settlement at low prices. It was open during weekends and holidays, i.e. the days when families were able to work on housing improvements. In addition to materials, technical assistance was also provided. During 1993-4, IIED-AL initiated the first phase of a micro-credit programme to allow families to obtain construction materials. This credit was in the form of materials, not money, and repayments were related to how much each family could pay. Families could store the materials in the building yard and take them out as needed, keeping them dry and secure.

Another challenge was that most of Barrio Hardoy was below road level. When it rained it often turned into a lagoon. When the first families moved, filling in and levelling the land and constructing the water and sanitation network were being discussed, work had not yet begun. These were difficult times for the new settlers. Many recall the feelings they had when they were told they had to move from San Jorge. They just saw a lagoon, and felt anxious about the requirement to build a new house given that they did not have the means to do so. But a woman leader said that she could either cross her arms and wait or start doing something, she decided to do the latter. She is still active in the community today and is a member of the working group that coordinates the micro-credit fund. A sub-committee

market), and would curtail clandestine connections by informal dwellers as they expanded water connections to nearby urban areas.

³⁹ Although this land had been donated to the Co-op and through it to San Jorge's neighbours, this donation had to be renewed every two years on the condition that the land was settled. The Co-op decided to use funds meant for a building materials bank in Barrio San Jorge to set up this facility on the donated land, as there was no free space within San Jorge. In this way it was possible to guarantee the physical presence of the residents on the land.

of Land was created within the Co-op to coordinate all the community work needed to settle Barrio Hardoy.

Towards the end of 1994 the first six families moved in, partly to prevent the illegal occupation of the land by settlers who were not part of the Integrated Improvement Project of San Jorge and partly to formalize the donation process which had been initiated by the establishment of the building yard. This proved to be a good strategy. The 7 ha were available for settlement during all the many years it took to build the houses and consolidate the barrio. Later in 1996, another 46 families moved in. After that certain rules were agreed between the municipality and the Co-op: no one was allowed to settle unless they built a solid house⁴⁰ (this was to avoid the building of shacks which did not meet the municipality's legal standards) and agreed to pay US\$110 toward the costs of water and sanitation. Residents saw water and sanitation as part of the deal they were being offered along with the plots.

Since 1994, the Building Materials Bank has contributed to the improvement of houses in San Jorge and the building of new houses in Barrio Hardoy. Access to water was a major turning point in housing improvement, not only because it facilitated the construction process, but also because it assured residents that they were not going to be evicted.

5.1.2. Expansion of water and sanitation networks

Experience from San Jorge served as a model for the provision of water and sanitation services for other settlements in the municipality of San Fernando (Barrio Hardoy, La Paz, San Martín and Presidente Perón), and influenced much of IIED-AL's subsequent action research. It also had an impact on Aguas Argentinas, and their efforts to provide services to the urban poor. IIED-AL's engagement with the community put it in a strategic position. It was working with local people and understood the challenges in a way that neither senior local government officials nor utility planners could. IIED-AL also understood where the officials and planners were coming from and could draw insights from the experiences gained in Barrios San Jorge and Hardoy to inform the work of Aguas Argentinas and the local authorities. It was able to do this while at the same time assisting residents in their negotiations.

Progress in water and sanitation provision also depended on the ability to seize opportunities as they arose. For example, Aguas Argentinas needed to have municipal approval to build a waste treatment plant serving the northern region of their concession. The municipality took advantage of this by requesting that the sewerage network be expanded into the district, in return for permission to locate the treatment plant in the area.⁴¹ This coincided with the local government's decision to develop the west of the district.⁴²

Barrios Hardoy, La Paz, San Martín, and Presidente Perón were inspired by what was happening in San Jorge. As a result they started their own process of negotiating and constructing a water network. This included the installation of sewers in Barrio Hardoy and for some households on the peripheral streets of La Paz.⁴³ In Barrio Hardoy, IIED-AL continued to drive the process and to some degree the Institute's work helped to stop

⁴⁰ Just to build the appropriate concrete foundations suitable for an area with land fill, for a house of approximately 40 m² cost US\$1,000.

⁴¹ From an interview with Gustavo Aguilera, Sub-secretary of Planning and Housing in the Municipality of San Fernando, December 2007. Today 100% of the district's population has water and 75 % sewerage, while only 10 years ago 30% of the population living in the west of the municipality received water from water cisterns, see Aguilera G *et al* (2008) Presentación del Municipio de San Fernando. In Barten F *et al* (comp) *La inequidad en la Salud: hacia un abordaje integral*. ALCHUEH, IIED – AL,, pp. 247 – 260.

⁴² See Aguilera G. *et al.* (2008) *op cit* 44

⁴³ It was not possible to construct sewers inside the barrio because of its urban layout. Sewers were finally completed with the PROMEBA programme, see below.

political clientelism, permitting more open negotiations.⁴⁴ In San Martín, La Paz and Presidente Perón, the relationship between community leaders and the mayoral candidate (and later mayor) was the basis for collaboration between Aguas Argentinas, the local government and the community to build the network. In these barrios, traditional party politics were a key component of decision-making, and in each barrio the leaders developed particular strategies (some more and others less confrontational). However, in the end the way in which collaborative work was carried out was much more a function of forthcoming elections, and attempts to gain party-political advantage.

In 1998, Aguas Argentinas finally took on responsibility for the maintenance of the water system in all five barrios and for the sewerage networks in Barrio Hardoy and sections of La Paz. Support from local government was fundamental; without it, the utility would never have provided services to informal settlements as they could have been vulnerable to a lawsuit from private or public land owners for having provided these services without their consent.⁴⁵

The whole process was a learning experience. It involved working with different stakeholders and the use of alternative technologies in order to provide services to low-income groups who were usually overlooked when public services were extended. The work required community participation and raised complex issues related to service expansion into settlements without formal tenure, to populations who could not afford connection costs and had difficulties in paying monthly service charges (this was particularly true in settlements which had a tradition of non-payment for services). Though community participation was not perfect, previously none of the stakeholders had worked with local people in order to install infrastructure, carry out surveys, or make decisions. The current president of the local legislative body who has been directly involved in all the initial stages of the work in San Jorge and Hardoy, was a key player in facilitating the donation of the 7 ha of land. He said that *“it was all a new experience, it was not common to see the State working alongside an NGO... but when you find an NGO who shares an ideology - not political ideology - shares a vision of the transformations needed in society, then these kind of projects are possible”*. Today 100% of the population in San Fernando has water connections and 75% sewerage; much was achieved through local governments, the water utility, local residents, and in some cases an NGO such as IIED-AL, working in collaboration.⁴⁶

Box 4: Summary of Stage 1 - Getting started: working at the micro-scale “the barrio” (1987-1995)

Context

- Services were decentralized but almost collapsing. The World Bank, IMF and other bilateral and multilateral organizations advocated privatization, promoting it as the best model for service provision, and pushed national governments to follow the trend. In 1993, the first concession contract was signed with Aguas Argentinas, a consortium led by Lyonesse des Eaux – Dumez.
- At the provincial level, the Secretariat of Housing and Urban Affairs instigated 14 programmes to improve living conditions in low-income settlements, focusing on tenure regularization and basic infrastructure.

Cont over

⁴⁴ Negotiations centred on how to prioritize beneficiaries and generate lists, whether machinery was needed and how to get it, and whether doing voluntary work exempted people from certain payments, etc.

⁴⁵ The Municipal government took on the responsibility for approving the works.

⁴⁶ Idem 44.

Working in collaboration

- Map of stakeholders: An agreement was signed between the Provincial Secretariat of Housing and Urban Affairs, the Municipal Government, Cooperativa Nuestra Tierra and IIED-AL.
- Levels of participation: All stakeholders participated using the ZOPP methodology.⁴⁷ The province withdrew its participation and local government's participation was very weak. There was strong collaborative work between the community and IIED-AL.
- Characteristics of the participation: The community, through its representatives, was consulted over the projects and the infrastructure works needed (options were presented). They did not, however, have a voice in defining the system used nor in the selection of contractors. IIED-AL who was responsible for the project, hired contractors and supervised work.
- Organization: Weekly meetings were held throughout the process, this helped to inform, build trust and empower community members, in addition to providing constant feedback for technical teams through working groups and round tables.

Finance mechanisms:

- External: The pilot network for the first 25 households was funded by IDRC.⁴⁸ The extension of the network to all of Barrio San Jorge was funded by a subsidy from Misereor.⁴⁹
- Community: The installation of the secondary pipes and connections to individual households were completed by a community labour force. A firm was hired to install the mains pipes. Housing improvement was facilitated by access to micro-credit.
- Utility: In San Jorge there was no collaboration from the utility except for the later connection of the network to their operation system. In Barrios Hardoy, la Paz, San Martin and Perón the utility provided technical direction and connections to the main network.
- Municipality: The municipal government did not collaborate in the installation of the network in Barrio San Jorge. It did, however, provide all the materials in the construction of the network in barrios La Paz, San Martín and Perón.

Scaling up:

- The initial pilot project covered 25 households and was extended to cover 325 households in Barrio San Jorge. It also provided an alternative sanitation system. The water provision experiment was replicated in three other barrios in San Fernando providing approximately 4,500 residents with water and 2,400 with sewerage.⁵⁰ Barrio San Jorge was the first case of an informal settlement gaining access to a formal water network.

Information that drives action:

Tools used:

- Implementation of the ZOPP methodology; Barrio Census.
- Publications; Capacity building workshops for all stakeholders.
- Bi-monthly bulletin produced with the participation of community organizations and neighbours.

⁴⁷ Participatory planning by GTZ (German cooperation). A participatory methodology used to identify and build a tree of problems, translate them into goals and build a matrix for project implementation.

⁴⁸ IDRC donated US\$10,000.

⁴⁹ Misereor donated US\$150,000 which covered materials, qualified labour and honoraria for the IIED-AL support team. As explained families paid between US\$100 in cash or US\$150 in instalments to provide the US\$20,000 required for the water project in Barrio Hardoy.

⁵⁰ In Barrios San Jorge and Hardoy, where IIED-AL was directly involved, every household was connected to water and sewage. This was not the case in the other barrios where IIED-AL had no direct involvement and where the layout of the barrios complicated service provision. Only the periphery of La Paz was provided with sewage.

5.2. Stage 2: The increasing involvement of large-scale partners (1996 - 2000)

5.2.1. Completion of the water and sanitation network in Barrio Hardoy

In October 1996 an agreement was signed with the National Secretary of Social Development, Department of Housing (Programme 17⁵¹), for a credit programme to help the resettlement of the families from Barrio San Jorge to Barrio Hardoy, and the construction of the water and sanitation network.

From the start the local government, the private utility (Aguas Argentinas) and, as in San Jorge, the Co-op and IIED-AL were involved in the construction of the water and sanitation network. The subsidy from Programme 17 covered 70% of the cost of materials and technical assistance for the supply of water and sanitation to 252 houses. Funding was complemented by the money raised from families in San Jorge who had paid a small fee to be connected to the water and sanitation network, plus the amount each family in Barrio Hardoy had to pay for the installation of their network. The community also supplied their labour to dig trenches, lay pipes and build the inspection chambers. Aguas Argentinas carried out training and technical supervision and the municipality was responsible for filling in the land. This last task was a problem because it took much longer and was far more costly than the municipality had anticipated. After several long debates, an agreement was reached in which the municipality waived a debt to a building enterprise in return for them filling in the land. IIED-AL would pay the salaries of their workers using donor finance and money recovered from community instalments.

A multi-stakeholder team formed by the sub-committee of land of the Cooperativa Nuestra Tierra, the municipal government and IIED-AL) was set up to coordinate the work. The idea was to replicate the project from Barrio San Jorge in Barrio Hardoy. However, this proved to be difficult as few families had settled in Barrio Hardoy and it was hard to interest those still living in Barrio San Jorge and not yet relocated in Barrio Hardoy. Not everything moved smoothly. There was confusion over the US\$110 contribution and what it covered. There was mistrust between local government and residents. Local government did not want people to move without services, and to install services people had to provide unpaid labour. But people did not want to give their labour unless there was some guarantee that they would obtain a plot; in their eyes permission to move would provide this guarantee. An opportunity came in the form of a national labour programme ("Plan Trabajar"). As a result of this initiative 45 people (18 women and 27 men) were hired to build the network. Women were responsible for the preparation of the metallic frames, for building the lids for the sewer inspection chambers, for the daily care and distribution of tools to the work sites. Men dug trenches and laid pipes. This was the theory but many women remember digging and struggling with debris that had gone into the landfill, including car chassis and blocks of concrete. Half of the settlement's network, reaching some 80 households, was installed in this way; the rest had to wait as the land in these plots needed to be filled in. Finally as mentioned above, the municipality, together with IIED-AL managed to channel the resources necessary to fill in the land and a private contractor finished the installation of the network. Evaluations of the project showed that the community's work was superior to that of the contractor's, and the residents still stand by this today. Since 1998 the whole neighbourhood has had a water supply.

⁵¹ Programa 17 was a National programme run by the Secretary of Social Work that gave funds to Argentinean NGO's for the creation of micro-credit funds.

5.2.2. Micro-credit scheme⁵²

In 1996 new funds from a national government programme and an Argentine business corporation were channelled to the credit scheme.⁵³ The scheme was extended to other nearby neighbourhoods (Barrios La Paz, San Martín and Perón) to widen access, foster linkages between different groups and secure the financial sustainability of the fund. During the 2001-2002 crisis, the ability to repay loans fell considerably and the granting of new loans had to be restricted. The Housing Materials Bank also closed. The credit fund had to take into account these difficult circumstances, and the programme refocused on the original barrios (Barrios Hardoy and San Jorge) with Barrio La Paz being re-incorporated later.

5.2.3. Influence on other partnerships and networks

Aguas Argentinas

After the work in Barrio San Jorge, Aguas Argentinas asked IIED-AL to work with them to provide services to other low-income settlements. The utility company had no experience in working in these communities, “we can lay kilometres of pipes but the people of these barrios won’t get connected.”⁵⁴ They did not understand the challenges, and none of their personnel were trained in working with low-income groups. They were also completely ignorant of the number of illegal settlers living within their concession. This information was absent from all the official documentation contained in the concession contract. Moreover, the property register did not provide Aguas Argentinas with the square meters of the dwellings built on each plot. This information is essential for determining tariffs.

Initially, IIED-AL worked with Aguas Argentinas to carry out a rapid appraisal of low-income settlements in the 17 municipalities that form their concession area. Later, capacity-building and awareness-raising workshops on how to collaborate with low-income communities were carried out for the directors and employees of the utility. A Department of Low-Income Settlements was created within Aguas Argentinas, and an agreement was signed between the utility and IIED-AL, to the effect that a member of IIED-AL’s staff would be the Head of the newly created department. This structure fostered the development of strategies tailor made for low-income settlements, acknowledging the differences between serving high or middle income and low-income groups, and between serving formal and informal areas. The interaction with the private utility helped to develop alternatives for serving and bringing infrastructure to the urban poor.

However, on looking back it is clear that IIED-AL was put in a difficult position and that this was not well addressed. On the one hand, the opportunity of having a member of IIED-AL working within the utility was a wonderful chance to improve their approach to servicing the poor. On the other hand this team member was being paid by the company and had to respond to it, thus losing their independence and creating tensions. Unfortunately these difficulties finally ended the collaboration. It would probably have been better for IIED-AL to maintain an independent advisory position vis à vis Aguas Argentinas. We should also have recognized that when staff are working for the utility they cannot continue to play the role IIED-AL had come to play in relation to local authorities and the community.

World Bank

On various occasions the World Bank requested IIED-AL’s participation in discussions on processes private utilities need to follow when providing services to the poor. The World Bank stated that the work done in Barrio San Jorge (i.e. the alternative sewage system) was one of the eight “best practices” they had analyzed. As a result of this and of the

⁵² For this section see Almansi F. and Andrea Tammarazio (2008) Mobilizing projects in community organizations with long – term perspective: neighbourhood credit funds in Buenos Aires, Argentina. *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol 20 (1): 121 – 147.

⁵³ Now renamed Programa 27 of the National Department of Housing (the same programme previously named Programa 17 (see note 56) and from the Fate – Aluar Group.

⁵⁴ Quote from the then CEO of Aguas Argentinas SA CEO.

collaborative experience with Aguas Argentinas⁵⁵ IIED-AL was asked to join the Business Partners for Development (BPD) network, which the World Bank had helped to set up.

In November 1997, two members of IIED-AL were hired by the World Bank to analyze and make recommendations on how to provide water to low-income groups in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador. The study was included in the call for tenders for the provision of this service. Part of the work included the design of several possible models which were presented and discussed with officials at the World Bank and published as part of several different articles.⁵⁶ This process developed IIED-AL's ideas on the provision of these services. The starting point was that access to water and sanitation is a human right. The models were grounded in the principal that success requires the participation of local community and the accountability of the utility to the populations they serve. The goal was to guarantee affordable and sustainable access to functioning water and sanitation services.

From Business Partners to Building Partnerships for Development (BPD)

As mentioned above, in 1998, the World Bank started a programme to discuss strategic partnerships among business, government and civil society. The Water and Sanitation Cluster, one of four within the BPD framework, aimed to improve access to safe water and effective sanitation for the urban poor in developing countries. This was to be achieved through focus projects, which would be studied and whose lessons would be shared. Eight focus projects were selected based on the specific demands and conditions of the communities they served. One of the projects chosen was San Jorge's water and sanitation project, and the partnership implemented with Aguas Argentinas and the community.

In 2002, there was a change in the BPD program. The World Bank retained an advisory role and a new programme started, Building Partnerships for Development, maintaining the BPD acronym. The Board was constituted by members from the three sectors (4 from government, 4 from utilities and 4 from NGOs) and one independent member. IIED-AL was elected for a period of two years as one of the NGO members and was later re-elected for two more terms.⁵⁷ We saw the BPD as a space for dialogue and networking with other international actors involved in providing services to the urban poor. It allowed us to understand better the working rationality of other NGOs, utilities and governments through their regulators and departments of public works and infrastructure.

Azurix

Also as a result of the work in Barrio San Jorge, Azurix, another of the private water utilities which was awarded a concession contract in 1999, asked IIED-AL to prepare workshops for their Area Directors to explain how we had worked in collaboration with low-income groups. Almost immediately after the workshops, they started a pilot project within their concession. In collaboration with Azurix and a neighbourhood organisation, we implemented a project to install a water network in Villa Zelmira. This barrio, in the suburbs of the city of La Plata, was subdivided into 254 plots. At the beginning of the pilot project 400 families lived here. The neighbourhood organization prepared a formal written request for water provision and sent it to Azurix, with the support of a local politician. An agreement was reached whereby Azurix would provide all the materials while the residents would provide labour. IIED-AL's role was to coordinate the work of the different partners. Azurix estimated that installation would take up to 90 days, but the residents wanted the water so badly that they completed the work in only 20.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Its collaborative work was promoted by the utility as it gave them good publicity and arguments to bid for other concessions.

⁵⁶ For example: Hardoy A *et al* (2002) Aportes para el mejoramiento barrial. *Medio Ambiente y Urbanización*, No. 57 pp. 13 – 30, IIED – AL,

⁵⁷ See Komives K and Linda S. Prokopy (2000) Research and Surveys Series: Cost Recovery in Partnerships: Results, Attitudes, Lessons and Strategies. London. See also BPD - www.bpd.org.

⁵⁸ Almansi et al (2003) Everyday Water Struggles in Buenos Aires: the Problem of Land Tenure in the Expansion

Box 5: Summary of Stage 2 - The increasing involvement of large-scale partners (1996 – 2000)

<p>Context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The water utility Aguas Argentinas was committed to searching for ways to provide services to low-income settlements; others, like Azurix, soon followed. Public – private partnerships develop, involving different actors.
<p>Working in collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map of stakeholders: Work continued with Aguas Argentinas, communities and local government of San Fernando. New stakeholders get involved representing different sectors: other local governments; community organizations from other neighbourhoods such as Villa Zelmira; the World Bank (International Agency); BPD and Azurix (private utility). • Characteristics of the participation: The key issues were transparency, participation and access to information by all stakeholders.
<p>Finance mechanisms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External: support for the Building Materials Bank and the micro-credit scheme was given by Homeless International and other organizations supported the dissemination of these experiences (World Bank, WaterAid).⁵⁹ • Utilities: materials, technical assistance and connections to the main network. • Community: community labour force and in some cases monetary payments. Micro-credit for housing. • Municipal government: channelled work in exchange for cancellation of debt repayment⁶⁰ • National Government: A subsidy for part of the water and sanitation network and the micro-credit scheme.⁶¹
<p>Scaling up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IIED-AL continued to work in barrios in San Fernando, and began to work with Azurix in Barrio Zelmira. • Aguas Argentinas built on the experience, and staff, of IIED-AL to extend connections to other informal settlements (by 2004 they had 50 ongoing projects benefiting 100,000 inhabitants). Aguas Argentinas created a special department within its structure to work in informal settlements. • IIED-AL's work in water and sanitation began to be disseminated internationally, through the World Bank, BPB and IIED-AL and IIED-London's own publications.
<p>Information that drives action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools mostly designed to guide action: Matrix of feasibility and needs; Neighbourhood classification and prioritization; methods to prioritize interventions, models for service provision to low-income settlements. • Publications geared towards national and international audiences to raise questions regarding the possibilities and challenges of working in collaboration and expanding services and improving low income settlements. • Capacity-building workshops for directors and personnel of the private utilities (Aguas Argentinas and Azurix).

of Potable Water and Sanitation Service to Informal Settlements. New Rules, New Roles: Does PSP Benefit the Poor? WaterAid, Tearfund.

⁵⁹ Homeless International donated US\$ 80,000. With regard to publications, Water Aid provided US\$18,000 for a research team to evaluate the collaborative work and water expansion in four low-income settlements of San Fernando.

⁶⁰ This accounted for US\$80,000.

⁶¹ The subsidy was of US\$196,000 and was used to develop a micro-enterprise, the expansion of the buildings materials bank, for the water and sanitation network and to establish a micro-credit fund.

5.3. Stage 3: Expanding the work (2001-2005)

5.3.1. Water related research projects

In 2000, with funds from WaterAid, IIED-AL undertook research and activities to promote joint actions in water and sanitation for low-income settlements. The objective was to share experiences and train community organizations. Research also focused on linking land tenure to water access in the post-privatization context. These engagements contributed to our goal of bringing about the necessary changes amongst the actors involved in providing services and in enabling low-income groups to achieve the same urban benefits as the rest of the population.

Also in 2000, IIED-AL was invited to prepare a case study for a project on *Private Partnerships and the Poor in Water and Sanitation* led by the Water, Engineering and Development Centre at Loughborough University. The aim was to determine workable processes whereby the needs of the poor are met through strategies which encourage public-private partnerships in the provision of water supply and sanitation services. The cases of barrios San Jorge, La Paz, San Martin and Hardoy were analyzed. This research process included a literature review, focus group interviews with residents, semi-structured interviews with community leaders. A workshop including government agencies, private enterprise and civil society organizations validated the results of the study.

5.3.2. Social and local urban management programmes

In addition to direct action-research on water and sanitation, the opportunity arose for IIED-AL to become involved in other programmes to improve local level management and promote the importance of working with vulnerable groups. Some of these programmes were funded by World Bank and Interamerican Development Bank and required the involvement of an NGO for transparency. This enabled us to become involved in a broader set of urban problems and to engage with new stakeholders at the municipal level. Some of the key programmes were:

- **Programa de Fortalecimiento de la Gestión Municipal (Programme for Strengthening Municipal Management):** a capacity building programme for municipalities. IIED-AL's role was to design and implement training modules, which consisted of rapid environmental and social appraisal tools, identifying problems and solutions, preparing a matrix of feasibility and need and prioritizing solutions. These modules were used in the municipalities of Gualaguaychú, Reconquista, Cañuelas and Jujuy. The first two municipalities prioritized water and sanitation and worked to upgrade existing networks and also to expand provision to low-income settlements, they planned to expand services to approximately 200 households in each municipality.
- **Programa de Atención a Grupos Vulnerables (PAGV) - (Focus on Vulnerable Groups Programme):** IIED-AL took charge of the programme in two municipalities of the BAMR: San Fernando and Moreno. This was a national programme which was implemented through local government. IIED-AL's invitation to play this role came as a result of the trust developed during our past work with the municipality of San Fernando. Like most State programmes it was prescribed with very little scope for modification. More positively, it was implemented by NGOs.⁶² The programme involved participatory planning, identification of the community's main problems and the development and implementation of project proposals.

This was a milestone in IIED-AL's work. For the first time we worked on participatory planning on a municipal scale,⁶³ involving local government and community participation.

⁶² The NGO's working with CBOs managed the budget.

⁶³ For example in Barrio San Jorge and Hardoy we worked with approximately 700 families while with the PAGV

Also for the first time, IIED-AL negotiated the possibility of hiring municipal staff to work for the program in Moreno and be actively involved in project implementation. The twin objectives for hiring new staff were to add local knowledge to the team and build capacities within municipality. A community member, who participated in the programme and continues to participate in programmes with IIED-AL and local government, says that *“for the first time we had the chance to show that we could implement projects, manage money, and work with others”*. She also remembers the training sessions they received, where they learnt, among other things, how to keep books, manage accounts and hold assemblies. She adds, *“Information was powdered gold for us”*. However her husband also says that the community had to fight (politically) against the local government, who managed the programme locally, and who thought they could influence the community leaders. He explained that their community did not let the local authorities decide for them or tell them what to do and how, *“once you do things right nobody forgets.”*

- **Rosario - Habitat:** This project analyzed the living conditions in low-income, lower-middle income and middle-income families in the city of Rosario. A set of recommendations were prepared to stimulate and facilitate solutions, particularly those related to the formation and consolidation of informal settlements. This study was valuable for the development of strategies and tools that, together with our previous work, enabled the identification of goals and of obstacles. The process also included the formulation of recommendations for each problem identified in three different scenarios: short, middle and long-term.

5.3.3. Participatory management of water and sanitation

IIED-AL's previous experience provided the basis for an integrated approach to water and sanitation. In 2001, the Institute received financial assistance⁶⁴ to set up a partnership-based management unit in the Municipality of Moreno (see the location of Moreno on the BAMR map). The objective was to build the capacity of relevant actors (the utility Aguas del Gran Buenos Aires (AGBA), local municipal government, and community organizations) to work together in a partnership-based management model for the provision of water and sanitation to low-income neighbourhoods. The project focused on the development of a management unit, not the construction of a water network nor the installation of a new water well or tank.

We started with two key activities: a detailed assessment of the water and sanitation situation in the municipality, creating a “water map”; and the identification of local actors who were invited to join the partnership. As work progressed, different stakeholders validated the “water map” and a forum for dialogue was created. We worked particularly closely with groups that managed independent water and/or sanitation systems. These are systems created by a social housing programme or developed with the help of an NGO or a cooperative and managed by a community organization in the barrio. With the help of these knowledgeable providers a bulletin was published to raise awareness amongst residents on water and sanitation issues and management problems such as tariffs and the maintenance and sustainability of the system, the key challenges.

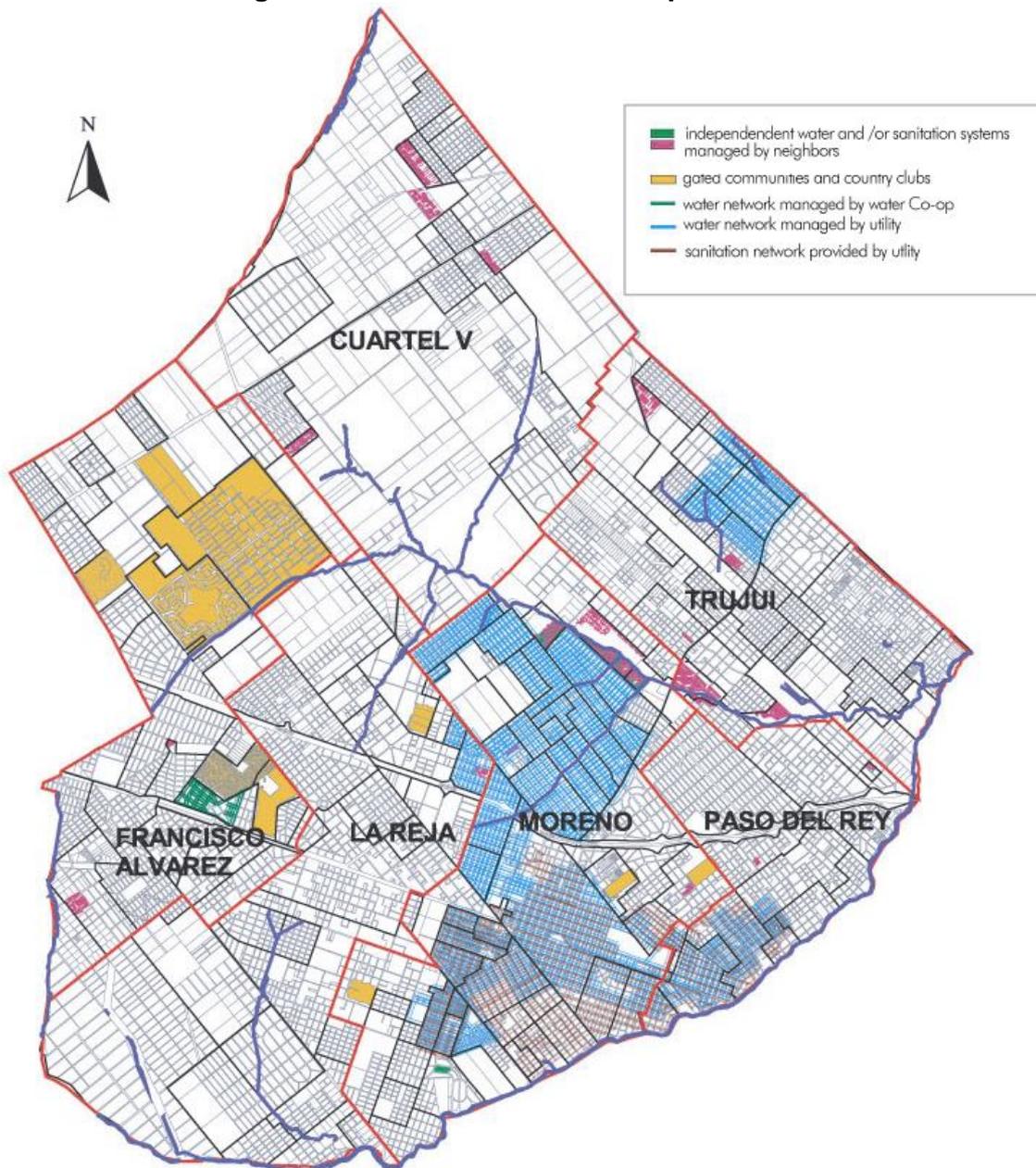
The project continued until 2005. During the initial phase our main counterpart was the Instituto de Desarrollo Urbano, Regional y Ambiental (IDUAR - a decentralized planning unit) and little work was done with the other secretariats. However, the second phase of the project involved representatives from other key secretariats, such as Public Works, Social Work and Health. During phase two a health campaign related to water and sanitation was launched. The utility, AGBA, initially signed a collaboration agreement with the project and appointed a representative but in the end they did not share information nor did they

we worked with over 15,000 families, and managed programme funds of US\$7,200,000.

⁶⁴ From the Public – Private – Partnership for Urban Environment of United Nations Development Programme (PPPUE – UNDP).

participate actively in the workshops. In part, this could be related to internal company problems (changes in management, conflicts between partners), external problems (the collapse of the privatization model, lack of need for investment in or for expanding networks) and those related to the project (lack of concern or understanding of how to get the most out of the project).

Figure 3: Water and sanitation map of Moreno



Though not formerly institutionalized, the process established mechanisms for working in partnership with the community, local government and IIED-AL. Community stakeholders who mainly represented independent water and/or sanitation (systems) highlighted two positive aspects when asked about the programme. 1) Meeting other neighbours and community organizations facing similar problems regarding the management of community water and sanitation networks opened their eyes. 2) The participatory process of preparing the bulletin and its distribution within each barrio. The bulletins helped raise awareness, gave their role more legitimacy and even helped to reduce non-payment among their users.

However they also felt the programme ended too quickly as several proposals to actually invest money in projects, were not implemented.⁶⁵

5.3.4. National neighbourhood upgrading programme (Programa Nacional de Mejoramiento de Barrios – PROMEBA)

Urban upgrading and neighbourhood development initiatives regularized the layout of some barrios. Previous work meant that these settlements had regular blocks, plot sizes, street width or reduced density, etc which made it possible for the PROMEBA to finish the process of formalization and of regularizing land tenure. Barrios Hardoy and La Paz were eligible for the PROMEBA initiative.⁶⁶ It legalized land tenure in these barrios⁶⁷ and indirectly generated urban improvements in Barrio San Jorge.⁶⁸ The programme's requirements meant that the barrios benefited to different degrees. San Jorge could not directly participate in the programme due to geographic restrictions and tenure problems which have now been resolved.⁶⁹ In order to implement the programme in Barrio La Paz, the population density had to be reduced. Several families were relocated receiving houses from a national housing programme. But 20 plots were still needed and the only free space available in the area was in Barrio Hardoy. To solve this problem the Co-op agreed to hand over the required plots. In turn it received an allocation of 20 quotas for houses in a future housing project. Programme restrictions also meant that benefits would be distributed unevenly within the barrios. PROMEBA focussed on the construction of new houses and improvements, but not for all of the barrio's residents as many had already built their houses with their own efforts. An agreement was reached and formalized in a municipal decree to create a "Solidarity Fund" to compensate residents of San Jorge. This fund was to be used for improvements in the barrio and for helping out families in La Paz moving who had to pay for houses.⁷⁰ The fund is managed by a mixed commission constituted by representatives of the three barrios, local government and IIED-AL.⁷¹

The amount that each family had to pay to the fund depended on what they had received from PROMEBA (whether a new house, improvements to a bathroom or kitchen, or tenure papers or general barrio improvements).⁷² The results have been mixed. Not all families have paid into the fund. Many confuse payment into the fund with actual payment for improvements, or for the house they received, or for municipal taxes. Each barrio decides what to invest in. In San Jorge, for example, young people were trained to repair and maintain the sewage network

5.3.5. Continuity of the micro-credit fund

In 2004 the micro-credit programme entered a new phase. The loan fund started to fill the gaps left by PROMEBA, while opening spaces for organization and participation enabling a new kind of management. Working groups (managed by women) were formed in each of

⁶⁵ The Focus Cities initiative explained below incorporates several of these proposals as draft pilot projects.

⁶⁶ A national programme that builds new housing units on empty plots, improves existing housing, installs infrastructure networks and roads.

⁶⁷ Residents received tenure papers in March 2010.

⁶⁸ The programme allowed families who previously could not afford to build houses using their own means to move to Barrio Hardoy and receive a new house.

⁶⁹ It was less than 4.20 meters above sea level, the acceptable limit for flood risk, and the plot still had tenure problems which were not easily solved in the short term.

⁷⁰ Families moving into these houses had to repay the costs of the houses through a loan agreement, they were not free like the PROMEBA houses.

⁷¹ In 2009 the PROMEBA II started in Barrios San Jorge, San Martín and Perón. The programme provides main infrastructure to the door of each house, the opening of roads, public spaces, the relocation of some families into housing programmes to increase the width of narrow lanes and formal tenure. In this phase the programme does not intervene in new housing or improvements. This is expected to come from other national programmes.

⁷² For example if they received a new bathroom they were meant to pay US\$8 a month for 24 months. If they received a new house they had to pay US\$15 for 24 months, and if they just received tenure papers and benefited from general improvements in the barrio, they paid US\$5 for 24 months. In many cases, people thought that they were paying the full cost of the improvements.

the barrios and the loan fund was divided into smaller funds, each one defining and managing loan allocation criteria and pursuing repayment defaulters.

One of the coordinators of the credit scheme made the importance of repayment very clear. “There is a waiting list, many neighbours are waiting for the funds, so the quicker people pay back the faster the next person can get their turn, and if you get a loan, pay it back so that the next person in line can also obtain a loan”. With the support of this fund people can continue to build, improve and expand their houses.⁷³

In 2007 a subsidy was given to IIED-AL from the National “Mejor Vivir por Entidades” programme for improving houses in Barrios San Gines and Villa del Carmen (both in the municipality of San Fernando). The programme is flexible in terms of repayment and the use of collected funds. In order to establish a loan fund in these barrios IIED-AL proposed a subsidy of half of the cost of improvements collecting back the other half in repayments. This was presented to the community and local government and an agreement was reached in 2008. All those that benefited from housing improvements would pay 50% of what they had received in small instalments without interest. This would take between 2 and 10 years to pay depending on the amount of money involved. The money recovered would go to a micro-credit fund managed by a group of women to provide materials to improve or expand houses.

Box 6: Summary of Stage 3 - Expanding the work (2001-2005)

Context

- Targeted social assistance programmes were implemented prior to the 2001 crisis. After the crisis, amidst social turmoil, different forms of citizen participation emerged, some in the form of protests, such as piquetes,⁷⁴ and cacerolazos⁷⁵; and others aiming to establish dialogue between government and civil society. For instance: Social dialogue in which the church, UN, Caritas, other NGOs and social advisers and politicians participated, or public assemblies.
- After Government elections in 2003 there was a change in government: from a weak state to a developmental state with grand ambitions. Direct social assistance programmes were reinstated.

Working in collaboration

- Map of stakeholders: Community representatives, local governments (and different offices within local governments), and IIED-AL. The water utility slowly withdrew. Community and local government assumed responsibility for searching for solutions to the improvement of water and sanitation issues.
- Levels of participation: The community participated much more in the design and implementation of projects. Local governments became more involved and open to community participation.
- Characteristics of participation: Participation was enclosed within specific projects or programmes. Agreements were reached and formalized.

Finance mechanisms

- External: UNDP funded project, and research organizations collaborate in dissemination of experiences (WaterAid, WEDC, etc).
- National government: Targeted integrated programmes. IDB and WB fund national social programmes and municipal urban management programmes.
- Community: The community committed time to participate in workshops and raise awareness within their barrios. There was no community labour force involved in the establishment of networks. Micro-credit for housing.
- Utility: The water utility initially allocated personnel to participate in the project.

⁷³ For more details see Almansi F and A Tammarazio (2008) op cit 58.

⁷⁴ Protests that lead to blocked roads and access to buildings.

⁷⁵ People in the streets banging pots and pans in the streets to protest.

- Local Government: Staff were allocated and for the first time some of the staff were hired by the project.

Scaling up

- For the first time IIED-AL implemented a water and sanitation participatory management model for a whole municipality. IIED-AL is recognised as a reference point by different stakeholders and the organization balances the work on the micro-level (the barrio) with that on the local level (the municipality).
- Participation of neighbours in the management of the micro-credit fund.
- Integrated programmes across the municipality.

Information that drives action

- Tools: Charts of problems with assigned improvement goals, barriers, and recommendations; a Social Stratification Index; a Water Map validated by different stakeholders; Bulletins; Awareness-raising campaigns.
- Publications: IIED-AL continued to publish and present work in different international and national contexts.
- Capacity-Building: Workshops were designed and implemented for municipal staff (mostly health and social workers), and community representatives. The issues covered were: analysis of water problems and prioritization, validation of water maps; working in partnership and water and sanitation provision (Moreno, Gualeguaychú and Reconquista).

5.4. Stage 4: Integrated environmental management on a municipal scale (2006 to the present)

After the experience of developing a multi-stakeholder approach for water and sanitation in Moreno, IIED - AL sought to extend and adapt this approach to other priority areas, including solid waste management and flood risk. Some important steps had been taken: research and dialogue helped to provide a diagnosis of the problems and create a water map; strategic partnerships had been developed, and there had been discussions about adopting the multi-stakeholder approach more formally and integrating it into local planning processes and institutions. The challenge was to build on this experience, applying it to other prioritized environmental issues.

5.4.1. The Focus City Research Initiative

The Focus City Research Initiative (FC) of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) selected Moreno as a case study site. This selection was based on the fact that a) IDRC had previously funded IIED-AL's first pilot project in San Jorge and an evaluation of the impact of participatory work in San Fernando, b) the FC drew upon and overlapped with many of IIED-AL and IIED's working methods and goals in terms of participation and integrated management of the urban environment, and c) they had two NGOs which could team up and lead the work.

The goal of this ongoing project, which started in 2006, is to reduce the environmental burdens that afflict residents of Moreno and other similar municipalities – burdens which fall especially heavily on vulnerable groups and exacerbate their poverty. The underlying approach consists of identifying and analyzing problems, creating partnerships, designing solutions, and institutionalizing change. What makes the project different is that it is based on associative work. In addition to a diagnosis it includes practical proposals (pilot projects) for implementation. This enables partners to put into practice what they have discussed theoretically, not only in terms of diagnosing problems and designing solutions but also in terms of the monitoring and evaluation by all actors of the process. Some of the initial actions undertaken were: participatory mapping; development of an integrated environmental management system (Sistema Integral de Gestión Ambiental – SIGA, see Box 4); problem identification, compilation of a portfolio of projects; prioritisation and project

implementation.

As the focus expands to other environmental problems, the partnerships base also grows. During the process, representatives of various community organizations and local government (staff and directors of key municipal offices) have shown a commitment to working in partnership. For practical reasons the territory of Moreno was subdivided into 4 zones. In each zone regular meetings are held and zonal round table discussions with representatives of the three partners (community, local government and IIED-AL) articulate what actions should be taken. Partners are responsible for communicating activities and generating awareness within their barrios. Representatives from each zonal round table also participate in an inter-neighbourhood committee. Meetings and workshops have been run over the last two years, during which over 100 have been held involving more than 240 households and community leaders and 40 municipal staff members. The zonal round tables and the inter-neighbourhood committees continue to function, with varying levels of motivation and participation.

Box 7: Mapping environmental problems

A central activity of the project was the identification and mapping of environmental problems and the development of an integrated environmental management system (Sistema Integral de Gestión Ambiental - SIGA). We held a series of workshops with community members and local government representatives. The process helped to engage the community and get them to start looking for solutions to these problems. It was an exercise in negotiation and in reaching agreements between the different stakeholders. During the exercise, technicians collected municipal information scattered in different offices, including the short and medium term municipal action plans. The aim was to solve local environmental needs, produce several municipal maps, and integrate this information with that produced during the workshops. This is how the initial phase of the SIGA for Moreno began. The information gathered was used to help draft pilot project proposals. It also generated a dynamic of producing information in a more participative way that could be shared with the community and with different government departments.

The whole process had several interesting aspects: it generated a lot of support in the community, it helped to raise expectations, it presented a new working dynamic which was uncommon in the district, and it involved the community in a different way as they discussed issues not often open to them. However, it did not fulfil all expectations. It was impossible to continuously update the information and create a team that could lead and integrate community mapping with municipal mapping within the local government. The SIGA for Moreno was never updated. It became clear that local government was reticent to share information with the community and with different municipal offices as they felt that some information was too sensitive. IIED-AL was not able to make them see the benefits of producing and sharing information, “to make visible the invisible” as stated by a municipal technician participating in the process.

Two city wide projects were selected, a solid urban waste classifying plant and an environmental education programme. Four local projects have also been selected: two projects for upgrading streams; the expansion and upgrading of a water network and the provision of drinking water for 650 families; and an environmental theme park. The environmental programme includes the training of environmental promoters (45 community members and some 50 municipal employees) and training sessions in the neighbourhoods where the pilot projects are being implemented. Stakeholders have participated in the design and budgeting of the selected projects and have signed agreements with different contractors in order to start implementation. An unprecedented level of participation and collaborative work has been reached. The participatory mapping process, the development of project proposals, the prioritization of projects, the hiring of consultants and the design of

final projects, have all been transparent, open and inclusive. The financial resources to be allocated to the different projects have also been discussed by all stakeholders.

But the challenges are also immense. Municipal projections of project completion rarely coincide with local wishes, resulting in tensions between actors. For the first time, the municipality is discussing local environmental management with the community and consensus is needed to implement environmental activities within the project framework. Actions cut deep into what has traditionally been municipal “territory”⁷⁶. Where and when the project money is spent is discussed by all stakeholders and decisions are not made by the municipality alone. Tensions continually arise, some related to delays in the process, others because traditionally the perception is that “local governments know best”. Sometimes “participation” is used more as a buzzword than as a way of designing and implementing actions at the local level. On more than one occasion, community participation has masked the cooption of community representatives by local government as they distribute subsidies to residents and offer financial support to some of these organizations, several of whom are politically affiliated to the governing party. However, there have also been several instances in which the communities have taken a stance and actively opposed government suggestions and decisions.

Community representatives recall a few of the moments when they resisted domination by the municipality. In one instance community members opposed a project proposal designed by the municipality because it was presented outside the timeframe and it involved actions and activities not previously prioritized. In another example, they opposed the allocation of grants for government staff to participate in the environmental training sessions for promoters as the grants were meant to be solely for community members. In the beginning community leaders only worked with individuals they already knew, but over time they learned to work with everyone as a group, challenging the decisions of both the municipality and IIED-AL. Many of the participants are party political brokers working in the barrios, and they have received instructions to accept and push forward local government proposals. But more than one has been willing to circumvent these directives, absenting themselves from meetings where they felt they were being required to decide between the interests of government and those of their community.

Box 8: Summary of Stage 4 - Integrated environmental management on a municipal scale (2006 to the present)

Context

- There has been political continuity at the national level and in most provinces and municipalities. The economic situation is generally stable and the national government allocates resources to social, housing and infrastructure programmes.
- A clientelistic attitude from both national and local governments is (again) increasingly present.
- We are in a process of re-nationalization of many services (water and sanitation, gas, electricity, flag carrier (airline), social security, etc).

Working in collaboration

- Map of stakeholders: Community representatives, local government and IIED-AL.
- Levels of participation: The community has a voice in project design, budgeting and implementation, and they influence results, in spite of local government’s efforts to force decisions through political brokers in exchange for special favours. Representatives from different barrios learn from each other and realize that they share common problems. Local government engages in discussions. IIED-AL builds consensus between stakeholders and balances the different needs of the community,

⁷⁶ In Argentina we use the term “territorio” as the mayor’s domain, and actions that cut deep in the territory mean that they touch particularly sensitive local planning issues that are traditionally decided with no stakeholder participation.

the local government and the project. Equality in the process of making decisions: one vote for each partner (community, local government, IIED-AL).⁷⁷

- Characteristics of participation: We have reached the stage where community representatives can put aside the needs of their own organization and support the needs of others. There are clear project rules but there is also room for improvement in areas such as how representatives are selected, project prioritisation, budget and time allocation and transparency.

Financial mechanisms

- External: Focus city initiative funded by IDRC.
- Community: Representatives contribute committing time to the project.
- Local Government: Staff time and resources are contributed, although reticently. More than once the programme has paid for activities or studies which should have been done by municipal staff.⁷⁸

Scaling up

- Environmental issues have been taken on board at a municipal scale, building upon former water and sanitation experiences. We have moved from working with a few barrios to trying to engage representatives from many different barrios across a whole municipality.

Information that drives action

- Tools: Participatory mapping, SIGA, record books of meetings, videos, base lines, miniature models of parks, and information flyers.
- Publications: We continue to publish and present our work in different international and national contexts. Bulletins to provide updates on project progress
- Capacity-building: A great deal of effort is made to inform stakeholders of different environmental issues (water, sanitation, waste management, flood risk, etc.) and on working in collaboration. Community representatives design drafts of pilot projects with the aid of an external consultant, and produce a portfolio of potential environmental projects. After a prioritization process, 6 have been selected and are being designed and implemented in a participatory way. Community leaders are part of the Administrative Commission (one representative from each zone) which is responsible for reviewing payments according to contracts signed for the implementation of each of the pilot projects.

6. Some thoughts on process: Highlights and challenges

Before analyzing the process and its challenges a note of caution is necessary. The culture and idiosyncrasies of each region, province and district differ across Argentina. These differences are the result of past political, economic, social and cultural factors that have shaped the present and explain, in part, the existence of a sense of solidarity and the development of strong community networks. The low-income communities where we have worked are very different from neighbourhoods of similar incomes in other regions of the country and also different from those in other municipalities within Greater Buenos Aires. Therefore our analysis is bounded by our experience, mainly in the municipalities of San Fernando and Moreno.

⁷⁷ For example: for the selection of consultants hired to design pilot projects, three proposals were requested and the bidding was presented in an open meeting. Representatives of the community, the local government and IIED-AL voted for the proposal which was selected.

⁷⁸ The FC has a budget to pay for some municipal staff time as they are underpaid and the project demands more time and effort from them. In reciprocity the municipality has to dedicate more staff and resources to the project. In practice, staff collaboration has not been great. They are not giving extra time to the project, and activities that could be done by municipal staff have had to be out-sourced by the programme to avoid further unjustified delays.

From the beginning, IIED-AL adopted an integrated approach to urban issues that affect low-income communities and embraced a long-term commitment to the neighbourhoods and municipalities in which it works. In this way, the organization has continued to be active in Barrio San Jorge and Barrio Hardoy and has incorporated new barrios such as La Paz and San Martin and whole municipalities, such as Moreno in its work. IIED-AL staff are always searching for ways to sustain actions and integrate views across different projects. Even when funding was not forthcoming, the organization continued to support the key activities which it thought worthwhile. Our publications have helped us to reflect on the process and to disseminate our knowledge, as well as that of our partners.

During the last 20 years or so, and throughout changing contexts, IIED-AL's main priority has been to work in collaboration with civil society, local government and the private sector to improve the living environments in low-income settlements. Any one stakeholder alone cannot take on the complex task of urban development and poverty reduction. Our premise is that despite having different rationales and motivations each stakeholder's goals overlap sufficiently to justify working in collaboration. Furthermore, when water and sanitation provision fails to improve this is often because the different stakeholders are working at cross-purposes.

During these years IIED-AL staff, together with other actors have managed to achieve substantial results in the way we work together and implement projects. By working with the private water utility company, it was possible to influence approaches to service provision for the poor and trigger the expansion of networks towards and within low-income neighbourhoods. San Jorge was the first informal settlement in the BAMR to receive water from a water company. IIED-AL collaborated with local government in the adoption of integrated approaches to urban problems, and more specifically it facilitated community participation in the implementation of local projects and programmes. Within communities, IIED-AL has collaborated in the development, growth and maturation of new organizations. We have also worked together to strengthen the relations within each community organization, between groups in different areas and with other stakeholders such as local or provincial governments or water utilities.

More generally, IIED-AL has participated in meetings with bilateral and multilateral agencies and in different national and international networks to advocate for better housing and infrastructure for low-income groups. The Institute continues to contribute to debate on how to provide services to the urban poor, plan and implement the upgrading of settlements and on how to work in collaboration with different stakeholders.

6.1. The challenges

The picture is not at all simple. These kinds of participatory processes pose enormous challenges. Though we promote and believe in a collaborative working model, we are also aware that the approach needs to be further developed, and improved. For this approach to be effective a series of unresolved difficult and complex issues must be addressed.

- In terms of stakeholders:

Working with civil society poses particular challenges around increasing representation, inclusion, commitment and continuity in participation. Going beyond the participation of the same people and organizations when broader involvement is needed is difficult as is the renewal and rejuvenation of leadership to ensure that new voices are heard. Engaging a wide cross section of society, for example, children, young people and other excluded groups, requires different approaches and ways of working. Finally, in the face of uneven power dynamics and the importance of the stakes at play the risk of co-option is ever present. The separation of politics from community and project work is a constant battle.

In our experience local government has difficulty in articulating and integrating knowledge, information and resources among offices to enable horizontal decision making. Making information available to municipal staff and its constituency in a context where information is tightly controlled is problematic. And reconciling local government's need to spend time in consultation with the community's expectations so that both parties take into account each others' perceptions and knowledge, is a real challenge. The community's expectations are often raised beyond the government's ability to fulfil them. Finally, overcoming years of political patronage will take much more work at the community and government level.⁷⁹

There is a fine line between ensuring an NGO's independence, and thus its ability to resist clientelism and political manipulation, and the need to recognize legitimate governmental concerns, and the pressures government agencies are under. NGO's also struggle to maintain a focus on process and participation when most funders prioritize products and results. Within this context gaining and justifying the trust of community representatives is a constant challenge.

- In terms of project implementation

How can you set a pace for a project that satisfies different stakeholders, and matches the rhythms of the different partners? Community representatives usually want to implement actions immediately and show their commitment. Local government must deal with many pressing needs and often does not wish to be rushed. In addition, sometimes the community's priorities do not coincide with those of the local government and instead of saying so; they just delay the process with different excuses. Meanwhile, donors always want to see results; how many meters of pipes have been laid, how many houses improved or how many workshops held. They tend to lose sight of the fine details that these urban environmental processes entail. IIED-AL struggles to reconcile these different institutional priorities.

How can consensus be reached when there is money allocated for projects? Even though the resources involved in the programmes are not large, the lack of alternative municipal resources means that staff and politicians want to control them to help them reach their own goals and to secure votes. In addition, local government is concerned with the distribution of the benefits among different neighbourhoods, not just from the project in question but from other government projects. This complicates project selection and location. Other challenges include guaranteeing a space for participation where all stakeholders have an equal voice when knowledge, power and resources are unequally distributed between the partners, and establishing an institutional arrangement which holds stakeholders to their agreed position so that common goals can be realised.

- In terms of scale

How can the risks associated with working on a larger scale (both in terms of increased geographical coverage and in terms of the number of stakeholders) be managed when the territory "is the mayor's domain" (as expressed in interviews) and there are embedded power struggles between municipal government and party political brokers? One interviewee argued that it was a little too ambitious to try to deal with a whole municipality, involving many different barrios, community groups and different government agencies. She suggested that a focus on a few neighbourhoods would allow the process to evolve with more freedom.

To understand some of these challenges we must differentiate between the projects implemented in the barrios of San Fernando from those carried out in Moreno. There are

⁷⁹ Over the last 80 years or so, governments have used a clientelistic model to manage responsibilities (handing out food, houses, and other subsidies, etc.). Over the last few years and particularly since the crisis of 2001, the State has increased its presence, and has become more populist and centralized in its decision-making.

important variances in the way these local governments work and on how they relate to community representatives and NGOs. Both local governments belong to the same political party (Partido Justicialista) and have been in office for at least 3 or 4 terms. Both are used to the traditional Argentinean way of doing politics through political brokers.⁸⁰ In Moreno, however, there is a tighter grip on how these brokers work, with whom they meet and what they say, and there is pressure on them to align themselves with local government decisions.⁸¹ Politicians and technicians working in other municipalities recognize (with a mix of envy and sarcasm) that in Moreno they have the *“territorio bien peinado”* (the territory well combed or covered) meaning the network of brokers extends throughout the area and responds to high level local politicians. This way of operating clashes with a more participatory, collaborative and democratic approach, and therefore with the approach adopted by the Focus Cities project.

On the other hand these municipalities share a fear of generating demands that they cannot fulfil. In meetings with municipal staff it is common to hear that it is local government that has to respond local demands. To avoid being placed in this situation, it tries to keep the levels of expectation as low as possible. In many cases this fear is justified. When national government announces “BIG” programmes and takes credit for it, it is the local administration that has to deal with the delays and problems of project implementation.⁸² This is often exacerbated by the fact that these projects come as a package designed by higher levels of government with little scope for adapting them to suit to local reality.⁸³ Another factor that continuously undermines participatory processes is the tradition of charity programmes which pay party political brokers to attend meetings. As a result of this practice, the community is generally more inclined to wait for hand outs and receive money for participating than to get actively involved in projects that directly affect them but that do not have a certain outcome.

For local government it is much easier if the community members do not actively participate but just do what they are told. A professional with a great deal of experience in working in the BAMR said that *“its possible and desirable to generate multi-stakeholder processes recognizing common interests and the operation of power struggles, however in the municipalities of Greater Buenos Aires, it seems that thinking differently is dangerous, especially if it comes from traditional allies”*. Despite all these years of working with stakeholders they continue the practice of setting up meetings with only one of the groups or just a few members of the community, in this way they find it easier to convince, co-opt, and avoid being placed in a position which they cannot manage. Community members noted *“we felt uncomfortable when we went to meetings and things had already been discussed and sometimes decided (e.g. the grant issue and more recently the re-scheduling of the environmental education training sessions)”*.⁸⁴ IIED-AL has to be constantly stopping decisions; and we are also often left out of discussions.⁸⁵

It would have been impossible to implement a project like Focus Cities if the municipality had not been willing to get involved. It would also have been impossible to have reached this

⁸⁰ The custom is to work through party political brokers to address the needs of the area in exchange for votes.

⁸¹ This way of operating is not restricted to local governments. It also comes down from national and provincial levels, and much depends on the President’s approach. The present administration exercises strict control, puts pressure on all sectors and groups, and is severe, even vengeful, toward any opposition.

⁸² Delays of over 2 years are not uncommon between the announcement of a programme (such as PROMESA) and its actual implementation.

⁸³ Idem.

⁸⁴ The environmental education training sessions had two timetables, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. Without any consultation, municipal staff participating in the course were given priority in the morning classes because this was during working hours, a top-down decision. Community members had to attend classes in the afternoon, they had no option.

⁸⁵ For example, the municipality believed the design of an education campaign was part of a government policy. Therefore, they designed it directly with the trainers without involving the community or IIED-AL.

level of success in improving the living conditions in Barrios San Jorge or Hardoy if the local government had not collaborated. The levels of commitment required from community representatives are hard to maintain. In focus groups, representatives constantly refer to the time needed for community work and the little recognition they receive from their neighbours, or how they are criticized in their work. Despite it all, they keep on.

All these different problems and difficulties at the community and government level make working in collaboration a real challenge. With these challenges in mind we continue to think that working together is the best way to build long term processes and bring about real change. There have been some real highlights and achievements which have come about as a result of our efforts.

6.2. Highlights

Throughout these years we have developed processes that include long-term commitment, that bring together perspectives, build spaces for participation that are neutral with no one claiming ownership or the right to decide unilaterally on who participates and how, that honour agreements and that develop mechanisms to assure transparency and accountability.

Community members and representatives of the local government see overcoming mistrust as an important achievement. *“When the community sees an NGO that can actually work alongside the State, then distrust is lessened,”* said the president of the Legislature. A neighbour explained that *“at first we thought: it’s the same old song, but ...we also thought that if we did not help each other and fight for something we all needed, nobody was going to come from outside and give us something. Do it, contribute something yourself, it won’t be money but it can be good will, work, participation in the meetings. Listen to proposals and choose what is best and possible for the barrio.”*

The growth in the practice of citizenship is also notable. A committed neighbour and active but non-confrontational local political leader comments that *“pressure from the local government to attend a meeting where project issues were being discussed and to support the government’s position leaves me in an uncomfortable position so I preferred to be absent and not be a traitor (to any side)”*. Another said *“in the beginning we worked individually, only with those we knew, but along the process we learned to work as a group, even confronting the municipality and IIED-AL. For example, we stopped part of the grants going to municipal employees.”*

Sometimes particular projects involve training sessions that are highly appreciated by the community. More importantly these processes have helped the community to build identity and citizenship, to grow as individuals and as groups, to open their eyes to what they are capable of. Comments gathered at different meetings and focus groups highlight this:

“I have learned a lot; today I am 35 years old and I have started high school because I want to keep on learning. I grew as a person and I want to continue growing so I will keep on participating” – a community member of Barrio Hardoy involved in the management of the micro credit fund.

And from different community members participating in projects in Moreno:

“It opened our eyes. We realized the importance of the work we had been doing, we value ourselves more now. We managed to get the pilot projects going.”

“We have learned to respect different opinions and reach agreements.”

We have “learned to stand and stick to our beliefs.”

We have “learned to fight, go to the front, reach people, reach agreements with other community members, discovered our potential to do things without waiting for national programmes to come down.”

“I grew as an individual and as institution. I don’t feel I am told what to do, I have learned to stand and stick to my beliefs. With Focus Cities I have learned to analyze budgets, work together with many different members of the community and reach agreements.”

These processes have also shown the potential of working in collaboration, *“by itself the State cannot provide the needed improvements in the quality of life in the barrios, and when you find an NGO that shares a vision of the improvements needed, then actions are carried out. You may have many different opinions and ways of doing things, but you share a goal and work towards it, you learn to respect the other’s opinion”* explains the President of the Local Legislature of the Municipality of San Fernando.

IIED-AL’s main role has been to guarantee that these spaces of working in collaboration are maintained and that what has been agreed is carried out. A resident of Moreno stated that, *“I liked the idea of working with an independent institution that could control the participatory process (instead of the municipality deciding everything); day to day I see that the work is being carried out as promised”*. Community members feel they have learned to organize themselves and make a stand as a group when things are not going as planned. They all agree that they are capable of confronting the municipality, and in some cases IIED-AL. They are also able to handle their roles as party political brokers and community representatives in spite of outside pressures. Sometimes they made a stand, other times they have felt they did not push hard enough for their interests to be acknowledged or were caught with “their guard down” (e.g. when they were persuaded to agree to things that they did not support, for example, when the recycling plant pilot project was pushed forward.⁸⁶)

These are important achievements for all stakeholders and our experience of working in collaboration with partners while sticking to a set of principles shows what can be done. Through long-term engagement and by fostering the participation of low-income communities in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, IIED-AL has been able to play an important role in securing water and sanitation services for these previously overlooked areas. In addition, this process has inspired others to learn from our experience and follow suit. While many challenges remain, these case studies demonstrate what is possible.

⁸⁶ The idea for this project came from the many pilot project proposals that the community had developed on recycling and waste management and from local government’s need for an integrated solid waste management policy. In the end, however, the project was totally designed and managed by the local government without any participation from the other partners in the project (neither the community nor IIED-AL).

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