



Human Settlements Working Paper Series

Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas - 29

**Assessing the scale and nature of urban poverty in
Buenos Aires**

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February 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to the women who kindly shared their time and stories: Susana Carlino, Elizabeth Covelli, Adriana Guardia, Zonia Julcamanyan, Susana L. Mansilla, Claudia Mercado, Rosa Montoya, Graciela Osuna and Claudia Zelaya. The authors thank Silvina Alegre and Ana Alvarez, Cecilia Monti and Silvia Gomez, who contributed with background papers, and Guadalupe Sierra, Andrea Tammarazio and Gustavo Pandiella of IIED–América Latina, who collaborated with interviews and background information. This work was made possible through the financial support of the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DANIDA) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

This is one of a series of papers that consider and question the validity of poverty lines when applied to urban contexts and used to design strategies for poverty reduction; the other papers (on Pune, Cairo, and India's urban population are listed at the end of this report; a paper on urban areas in Zambia will be published in March 2011).

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ISBN: 978-1-84369-808-1

This paper can be downloaded free of charge from <http://pubs.iied.org/10591IIED.html>. A printed version of this paper is also available from Earthprint for USD20 (www.earthprint.com)

Disclaimer: The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed here do not represent the views of any organisations that have provided institutional, organisational or financial support for the preparation of this paper.

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Assessing the scale and nature of urban poverty in Buenos Aires

SUMMARY

This paper reviews the extent to which the indicators used to measure poverty in Greater Buenos Aires provide an accurate portrayal of poverty and inform policies to reduce it. It highlights three points.

1. The official poverty line and extreme poverty line are set at income levels that are unrealistically low in relation to the costs of food and non-food needs in Buenos Aires. A large proportion of the city's population lives in poverty, facing multiple deprivations, yet according to these two poverty lines is not poor.
2. The index of unsatisfied basic needs that was developed as a complement to the poverty lines has been useful in highlighting aspects of deprivation other than inadequate incomes (and confirming how most such deprivations are associated with low incomes). However, the index does not provide a sufficient information base for a local government intent on addressing unsatisfied basic needs.
3. There are many aspects of deprivation that are not measured in official poverty statistics and this helps to explain some of the inadequacies in policy responses to poverty.

The paper reviews eight aspects of deprivation and the extent to which official statistics on poverty help identify who faces these. This draws on the field experience of the authors who have been working with the residents of informal settlements in Buenos Aires over the last 20 years. Most of this work centres on improving housing and living conditions, provision for infrastructure and services and obtaining secure land titles. This paper also draws on interviews with nine women who live in informal settlements about their incomes and household circumstances and the deprivations they face. The interviewees were chosen from among the population of a range of informal settlements. The authors chose from among women that they knew well from their work in these women's neighbourhoods (barrios) and of whom they felt that they could ask sensitive questions.

1: Inadequate and often unstable incomes: Only one of the nine women calculated that her household income was below the official poverty line. None of the women are from households that fall below the extreme poverty line and none are poor if the international poverty lines of the equivalent of US\$1 or US\$2 per person per day are used. Yet all live in informal settlements and most in settlements where their tenure of the house site is insecure. Most had built their houses with second-hand materials and many houses were far from finished. Most had struggled for years to get services – and most had difficulties affording the costs of keeping their children at school. Most talked about the difficulties they face in putting sufficient food on their family's table each day, and report buying food in small quantities locally because they have enough money only once or twice a month to be able to go to large supermarkets and benefit from lower unit costs with bulk purchases.

2: Poor-quality and often insecure, hazardous and overcrowded housing: Around 30% of the population of Greater Buenos Aires live in informal settlements – although this proportion varies a lot by municipality and is 50% in the municipality of Moreno. Many of the informal settlements are on sites that are at risk of flooding or unstable (for instance on compacted solid wastes) or contaminated by industrial waste. Over time, households in informal settlements generally improve the size and quality of the housing, many house structures are still overcrowded and unsafe and extensions are often made without adequate foundations.

3: Inadequate provision of public infrastructure: Compared to most of those who live in informal settlements worldwide, conditions in many of the informal settlements where the

authors work are not so bad. Over the last two decades, infrastructure provision has improved considerably – although there are still municipalities within Greater Buenos Aires where most of the inhabitants still lack piped water and connection to sewers. Among the women interviewed, most have official provision for piped water and half have official provision for sanitation, gas and electricity. At present, most of the women live in settlements where they are not charged the full rate for infrastructure – for instance, provision is subsidized or cheaper because of illegal connections, or there are no charges during the regularization process. All the interviewed households will face problems affording charges and taxes when their settlement is regularized.

4: *Inadequate provision of basic services:* One of the most important issues in urban poverty reduction in Argentina (and other nations in Latin America) is the quality and extent of provision for social services – especially for schools (covering pre-school, primary and secondary education) and health care (from accessible neighbourhood health centres through different levels of hospitals). In Argentina, in theory, there is universal provision for education and health care but the quality of these is poor in many low-income municipalities. Ten times more teenagers (13–17 years old) drop out of school from the lowest-income quartile compared to the highest income quartile. Several of the women interviewed highlighted the high costs of keeping their children at school – for instance getting to and from school and the costs of snacks, clothes and books. Most of the women interviewed highlighted the difficulties in accessing health care – and the need to get up as early as five o'clock in the morning, queuing for a number to get a doctor's appointment. If they work or go to school it means a lost day of work or classes. Many services were absent in informal settlements – including regular collection of household waste and policing.

5: *Inadequate, unstable or risky asset base:* All low-income groups remain vulnerable to job losses, inflation, economic crises and health problems as they have no savings on which to draw. They are also more vulnerable to having their livelihoods disrupted and assets (including homes) lost or damaged from external shocks including accidental fires or robberies.

There is no tradition of savings groups among Argentineans although some of the migrant communities have savings groups. Among the nine women interviewed, six are repaying different kinds of credits and most have more than one credit. The repayments include very high interest payments and constitute a significant proportion of total household income. In some informal settlements, credit with low interest rates is available for building or improving housing but generally credit for goods purchases are from local retail stores at high rates of interest.

Regarding social capital, several of the women interviewed are active in community initiatives, partly because they perceive close links between their future prospects and improvement of the neighbourhood. But they also noted how such roles need time that is often not compatible with work and household tasks. It is clear from the interviews that women often help or are helped by neighbours – for instance keeping an eye on other people's children when they have to go to work or to the doctor. One woman commented that, "during hard times no one gives a hand", although there are community measures to help those in greatest need, for instance through organizing soup kitchens or raffles.

6: *Limited or no safety net:* Generally, low-income families have little chance of saving individually. The interviews show how households stretch their money each month to cover their daily basic needs. Any unexpected need is a jolt to the family's economy. Health problems can severely affect a family's subsistence capacity. It is very rare for low-income households to have insurance against risks such as floods, fires or robbery, even though they regularly face these kinds of shocks. Although the monetary value of the items lost can be insignificant in official statistics, for poor households they are often items that are hard to replace.

7: Inadequate protection of poorer groups' rights through the operation of the law: The interviewees reported that mugging has become increasingly common, with no policing to help counter this, and that young people get detained without charge when it is difficult to get them released. There are also areas in some neighbourhoods which interviewees will not enter. The inhabitants have little faith in the police. They are also often at a disadvantage when they apply for a job because of the stigma of living in an informal settlement.

8: Voicelessness and powerlessness: Local governments tend to fear that community consultations and participation will generate demands that they cannot fulfil, and raise issues about the effectiveness and coverage of local programmes. For instance, the National Government announces major programmes for poverty reduction and seeks to take all credit for these but it is the local government that has to implement, and deal with the delays and problems of project implementation. Funding comes as a package designed by higher levels of government, with little possibility of making modifications according to local conditions.

In the authors' work with different local governments, there are important differences in how they interface and dialogue with community representatives and NGOs. Often there is co-option of community representatives by political brokers and there is a permanent tension in differentiating their role as community referents from that of party-political brokers.

Another factor that continuously undermines participatory processes is the tradition of charity programmes, and paternalistic and clientelistic approaches. Residents are more inclined to wait for hand-outs, and receive monetary benefits from participating, than to get actively involved in projects that directly affect them but have no certain outcome. Community leaders are squeezed between local governments that want their allegiance and the residents who wonder what benefits they are receiving – and may blame them when local programmes that are beyond their control do not deliver or are delayed. The perseverance and strength of community leaders, and their time voluntarily given, are usually less appreciated.

A pioneering approach to poverty reduction

The small and relatively poor municipality of San Fernando on the periphery of Buenos Aires has around 14% of its population with unsatisfied basic needs. The municipal authorities have a range of programmes to address poverty and meet unsatisfied basic needs, most supported by federal government. The municipality does use poverty line and unsatisfied basic needs data to identify vulnerable households and informal settlements in need of investment. However, in each of the neighbourhoods identified, the authorities implement their own censuses and surveys to get the information needed to shape interventions.

Two funds have been developed by the Municipal Unit of Urban Planning and Land Reorganization, IIED–America Latina and community organizations, and implemented in a few of the municipality's low income neighborhoods.

1. A solidarity fund, into which households benefitting from a well-resourced upgrading programme (Promeba) pay a monthly instalment used for community initiatives including those in areas not benefitting from this programme. This is managed by a Commission formed of neighbourhood representatives, local institutions and the local government.
2. A housing fund that buys houses from households benefitting from the upgrading programme but for different reasons need to move. (Otherwise it is "illegal" to sell in terms of the barrios codes, both because of the complications of securing tenure and completing the upgrading process when ownership changes, and to reduce speculation in property values.) This allows these houses to be sold to local households in need of housing, thus benefitting local residents instead of outsiders and with the possibility of repayment by instalments to the fund.

Despite some problems and mixed results, both of these programmes demonstrate community organizations, local governments, institutions and NGOs working together in creative ways, trying to add value to national programmes that would otherwise generate social conflicts within the communities they intend to benefit. They show alternative paths to community participation, and are helping to change how one local government plans and operates.

Assessing the scale and nature of urban poverty in Buenos Aires

1. Introduction

Recent studies of poverty recognize its multidimensional character, and the multiple sources of deprivation.¹ Although there have been efforts to introduce different indicators that encompass these, poverty statistics still rely heavily on issues of income and consumption. The dominant approach to the measurement of poverty continues to be the use of a poverty line as a basis for classifying households (or individuals) as being either poor or non-poor.² Yet poverty involves a broad spectrum of variables concerning access to health care, education, secure and adequate-quality housing, opportunities, economic and social security and “voice”.

How poverty is understood and measured has direct implications for the choice of policies aimed at addressing poverty. So how it is measured influences where efforts and resources are focused, as well as influencing the evaluation of the impacts of these policies and efforts.³ All too often, data capturing only a small part of the reality of poverty can misinform both policy makers and wider society in general. Gathering data on poverty is complex and often difficult. Even data on income levels (one indicator of poverty) are difficult to standardize and measure. It is much harder to collect and analyze information on the other aspects of poverty, considering that they change over time and place. But poverty statistics are presented – and programmes designed according to these limited and partial statistics – as if they showed a true picture of reality.

Data produced by government and international agencies often underestimate levels of poverty. Family income has to allow for enough food, secure and decent housing with provision of water, sanitation, electricity and other services needed in urban centres, costs of transport, clothes, maintaining children in school, access to good health services and treatment for the sick, plus something left for spending in social gatherings or family outings. In most urban areas in Latin America, and many other regions, the income needed for all these is far above that established by official poverty lines. It is also far above the US\$1 per person per day used by the World Bank to estimate levels of poverty globally. In many instances, it is also well above the US\$2 per person per day poverty line. This is even the case in countries where education and health care are theoretically provided by the State (at no direct cost to low-income households).

In poverty statistics, a large portion of households’ asset bases go unregistered – for instance, social networks and reciprocity. The availability or not of services is also important – for instance, access to credit on reasonable terms, good-quality education and health services. Poverty statistics do not capture many aspects of vulnerability, including those related to political and power relations and discrimination.

Even if the focus is only on income levels, there is a lack of studies that examine how much income would be needed in particular locations to allow an individual or household to avoid poverty.⁴ This paper aims to address this gap by analyzing different aspects of poverty and how they are experienced and “lived” by families in the Buenos Aires metropolitan region (BAMR). It seeks to untangle the underlying dynamics of different aspects of deprivation in an effort to help broaden the understanding of poverty and the basis for its measurement. It also highlights the gap between

¹ See, for instance, the editorials in *Environment and Urbanization* Vol. 7, Nos 1 and 2, 1995; also Wratten, Ellen (1995), “Conceptualizing urban poverty”, *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pages 11–36; Chambers, Robert (1995), “Poverty and livelihoods; whose reality counts?”, *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pages 173–204.

² See Bapat, Meera (2009) *Poverty Lines and the Lives of the Poor. Underestimation of Urban Poverty: The case of India*. Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas Series: Working Paper No. 20, IIED, London.

³ See Sabry, Sarah (2009) *Poverty Lines in Greater Cairo: Underestimating and misrepresenting poverty*. Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas Series: Working Paper No. 21, IIED, London.

⁴ See Satterthwaite, David (2004) *The Under-estimation of Urban Poverty in Low- and Middle- income Nations*. Poverty Reduction in Urban Areas Series: Working Paper No. 14, IIED, London, 69 pages.

poverty lines (including extreme poverty line thresholds) and what families really spend and need for a living.

The income levels at which poverty lines are set are often too low to cover the food and non-food needs of a family. They often do not make enough allowance for transport, housing costs, or meeting children's needs.⁵ And extreme poverty lines (at least in the case of BAMR) do not even cover food needs alone.

In addition, conventional national measurements of poverty (poverty lines), or other measures of deprivation such as measures of Unsatisfied Basic Needs, lack the required detail and periodicity to inform appropriate local action. Local programmes and policies need to be based on local knowledge of the area, assessing and balancing needs, and distributing benefits within the territory. They also need this information updated or adjusted regularly so that they can inform policy on how the situation is changing. This paper includes a discussion of poverty in one municipality of Buenos Aires, the Municipality of San Fernando, demonstrating the use of poverty statistics in an effort to target vulnerable populations (including the "poor") and distribute the benefits of public policies.

Following this introductory section, Section 2 gives a brief review of poverty measurements and analyses the methodologies used in a few Latin American countries. Section 3 focuses on the Argentinean case and explains the main poverty measurements used. Based on the idea that poverty data portray poverty inaccurately, this concentrates on aspects of deprivation and what they mean for different people living within the BAMR. Eight aspects of deprivation are considered (after Satterthwaite, 2004) in Section 4:

1. inadequate and often unstable income
2. poor-quality and often insecure, hazardous and overcrowded housing
3. inadequate provision of "public" infrastructure
4. inadequate provision of basic services
5. inadequate, unstable or risky asset base
6. limited or no safety net
7. inadequate protection of poorer groups' rights through the operation of law
8. voicelessness and powerlessness within political systems and bureaucratic structures.

Section 5 considers how poverty lines and other measures of poverty are used to influence policies in the case of the Municipality of San Fernando. It explains how the Unit of Urban Planning and Land Reorganization makes use of poverty statistics and prepares its own data to identify target populations and needs, and implement programmes, in the process of trying to mitigate and reduce the multiple aspects of poverty. Finally, Section 6 includes some reflections and questions that could guide further enquiries on poverty in terms of how it is "lived" by low-income urban dwellers.

1.1 Linking poverty measurements with reality

Historically, poverty measurements have usually been based on household levels of income or consumption; those whose income or consumption falls below some set threshold are defined as poor. Another lower threshold may be used to define who is 'extremely poor'. But the setting of these thresholds has long been controversial – for instance in regard to how to set an allowance for food and for "non-food" necessities and what is included in non-food necessities. There is also no agreement on how to include indirect incomes from private and public sources. In the 1890s, studies began to look at the cost of the calories needed by individuals and to define poverty based on minimum food intakes (the food basket). The definition of primary poverty reached at the time is that of "insufficient earnings to obtain minimum necessities".⁶

⁵ Satterthwaite (2004) op. cit.

⁶ Rowntree, Seebohm (1901) *Poverty, a Study of Town Life* (republished by Policy Press in 2001). Cited in a background paper prepared by Silvina Alegre (2009) *Análisis de la medición de la pobreza urbana*.

Although the shortcoming of definitions based solely on food needs has long been recognized, this method of defining poverty is still widely used. In the 1970s, in some nations, the definition of poverty moved beyond considering only income or consumption subsistence levels and incorporated variables such as access to housing, basic infrastructure, health and education – for example the work on measuring Unsatisfied Basic Needs, although the emphasis remains on deprivation in relation to certain goods and services. However, poverty defined by income or consumption levels or by access to basic needs is just one dimension of the deprivation faced by millions of urban households. For instance, poverty can be related to lack of capacity to access certain key goods and resources, with this capacity unable to develop due to a lack of opportunities, education and vehicles for participation and institutional representation. But this is not assessed by conventional poverty measures.

Over the last two decades, the definition of poverty has broadened to include other dimensions, including lack of capabilities and freedom,⁷ and addressing the multiple sources of deprivation that poor households experience.⁸ There is interest in how different types of assets (human, social, physical, financial and natural) allow low-income households to improve wellbeing and limit or avoid deprivation.⁹ There is also interest in understanding vulnerability, including that associated with limited or irregular income. This includes consideration of which assets enable households to take advantage of and use the range of opportunities offered by the market, the State or society.¹⁰ Poverty and vulnerability are often related to increasingly insecure employment (for instance declines in wages, unsafe working conditions, lack of employment security and little or no access to social security). But they are also linked to institutional precariousness (weakness of institutions such as community-based organizations, unions and State welfare agencies) and to the instability of family, community and social networks, that together translate into social exclusion processes.

While there have been important advances in poverty studies, poverty measurements continue to use the same conventional methods of poverty lines, unsatisfied basic needs, and the threshold of US\$1 per person per day. There may be some modifications and improvements – for instance, recognizing regional variations in food costs and greater recognition of the costs of non-food needs. However, these fail to consider vulnerability and process of social exclusion¹¹ and are insufficient to understand the increasing heterogeneity of the social dimension.¹² These shortcomings directly affect the quality and relevance of policies targeted to vulnerable sectors.

One method most widely used to measure poverty is poverty lines based on the cost of a minimum 'food basket' and calculating what proportion of the population has incomes or consumption levels below this. This measure alone has proved greatly to underestimate poverty levels. Most countries have advanced to include an additional allowance for individuals or households to pay for non-food needs – for instance housing, services, health care, keeping children at school and the cost of travelling to and from work – although the accuracy of the measures taken to calculate this are usually in doubt. So, despite these efforts to include these other needs, the method and approach based on data gathered from censuses and from household surveys continues to fail to record many aspects of poverty.

⁷ See Sen, Amartya (1999) *Development as Freedom*, Anchor Books, New York.

⁸ Satterthwaite (2004) op. cit.

⁹ See Rakodi, C. and T. Lloyd-Jones, Eds (2002) *Urban Livelihoods: A people-centred approach to reducing poverty*, Earthscan Publications, London; Moser, C.O.N. (1998) "The asset vulnerability framework: Reassessing urban poverty reduction strategies", *World Development* Vol. 26, No. 1, pages 1–19. Both cited in Sabry (2009) op. cit.

¹⁰ Katzman, Ruben (2000) *Notas sobre la medición de la vulnerabilidad social*, CEPAL, Santiago de Chile (www.eclac.cl/deype/mecovi/docs/TALLER5/24.pdf).

¹¹ See Andino, Gustavo (2001) *Pobreza, vulnerabilidad y exclusión social. Aspectos conceptuales y metodológicos*. Discussion material, course Sociology, Catedra Pablo Martinez Sameck, Ciclo Básico Común (CBC), University of Buenos Aires (UBA), mimeo, 29 pages.

¹² Katzman (2000) op. cit.

Another measure commonly used, and developed by the World Bank in looking for ways to compare levels of poverty between countries (especially those with little census information), is the poverty threshold of US\$1 per person per day. This is also used as a measure of progress on poverty reduction within Millennium Development Goal No. 1.¹³ This narrow focus on income has encouraged policy makers and State leaders to concentrate on ways to increase the poor's incomes¹⁴ and therefore to show advances in meeting MDG 1 in the international sphere, while using it at home to show the success of social and economic policies implemented.

But there are at least two problems with this. First, the costs of avoiding deprivation are far higher than this poverty line, especially in cities and other locations where non-food needs are particularly high. Second, if poverty is considered to encompass all those who have difficulties affording basic needs, who are either homeless or live in poor-quality, overcrowded and often illegal accommodation, that lack protection from the most common life- and health-threatening diseases and injuries, who lack access to schools (from pre-school to secondary education), health care, safe and secure incomes, safety nets and social ties and the means to express their needs, then poverty is greatly underestimated. The poverty line of US\$1 per person per day applied in Latin America suggests that a small proportion of the urban population in most nations is poor,¹⁵ whereas other measures can suggest that 50% or more of the urban population are poor.¹⁶ Between complete social inclusion/integration and complete exclusion, there is a broad spectrum of situations with varying degrees of social disintegration, which characterize different manifestations of poverty and lack of wellbeing.¹⁷

2. Poverty in Latin America

2.1 Characterization and heterogeneity

A significant proportion of the region's population remains very poor. Estimates for 2006 indicated that 36.5% of the region's population (194 million people) were living in poverty, with 13.4% (71 million people) in extreme poverty.¹⁸ In 2008, the estimates suggested 33% (180 million people) living in poverty and 12.9% (70.4 million people) in extreme poverty. Figures indicate a slow-down in poverty reduction and in the case of extreme poverty a reversal of what had been declining levels since 2002, mainly due to increasing food prices and therefore in the cost of the basic food basket (the exceptions being Brazil, Paraguay and Peru).¹⁹

¹³ MDG1: to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/#>).

¹⁴ Sabry (2009) op. cit.

¹⁵ For all of Latin America and the Caribbean, this poverty line suggests that fewer than 8% of the urban population were poor in 1993, with 9.5% poor in 2002; see Ravallion, Martin, Shaohua Chen and Prem Sangraula (2007) *New Evidence on the Urbanization of Global Poverty*, WPS4199, World Bank, Washington DC, 48 pages.

¹⁶ see Dodman, David, Jorgelina Hardoy and David Satterthwaite (2009) *Urban Development and Intensive and Extensive Risk. A contribution to the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction*, ISDR, Geneva.

¹⁷ Minujin, A. (1995) Comentarios al tema: Necesidades Básicas Insatisfechas. Aspectos conceptuales y metodológicos. In Seminario: Información sobre Población y Pobreza para Programas Sociales. INEI, 4–7 July, Perú (<http://www1.inei.gob.pe/biblioineipub/bancopub/Est/Lib0070/2-4.htm>, accessed February 2009).

¹⁸ Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL) (2007) *Panorama Social de América Latina 2007*. CEPAL, Santiago de Chile.

¹⁹ Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL) (2008) *Social Panorama of Latin America*, CEPAL, Santiago de Chile.

Most national governments have been unable to reduce absolute poverty levels or the very high disparities in income distribution, which have increased particularly since the 1970s.²⁰ Countries that were partial exceptions to the pattern (Argentina and Chile) have greatly increased poverty and inequality despite higher economic growth rates.²¹ In most Latin American countries, the economic crisis of the 1980s and the structural adjustment programmes of the 1990s aiming to counteract economic recession brought a greater number of people into poverty. Poverty has become more complex as it includes those who have always been poor, those who had managed to get out of poverty but then fell back (“ex-structural” poor) and the “new poor” (middle-class sectors whose incomes fell sufficiently for them to go below the poverty line).²²

In terms of income distribution, recent figures show improvements with respect to those available for the year 2000, with the exceptions of Colombia, Dominican Republic and Guatemala where income concentration has increased in the last few years. But, despite some progress, income-concentration levels in Latin America are among the highest in the world. Certain statistics show that within Latin America, the wealthiest 10% of the population concentrates between 40% and 47% of a nation’s income while the poorest 20% participates with only between 2% and 4%.²³

Throughout the region, social indicators such as literacy, infant mortality and life expectancy have improved. However, in countries that have developed some measure of welfare state (Chile, Argentina, Brazil) the access to and quality of various social services has deteriorated.²⁴ Increasingly, when available, services such as health care, public education and pensions have deteriorated and are overwhelmed by demand. Formal welfare systems in Latin America have historically relied on the existence of social insurance policies associated with paid benefits to formal employees. As the informal economy grew and labour conditions became more precarious, increasingly large portions of the population were left out of these formal insurance transfers and any formal social protection coverage. Coupled with limited social-assistance interventions, this gave rise to what has been termed a “truncated” welfare state.²⁵

Increasingly, individuals have to pay for services that were previously State provided and widely accessed. The end of the 20th century was characterized by increasing economic concentration, the contraction in the role of the State as a provider (and redistributor) of benefits. This led to lack of social services, “informality” in employment or sources of income, low and precarious incomes and sub-employment and unemployment.²⁶ There was a general lack of confidence in the State and individuals focused more on their own welfare and needs and this affected social networks and community life.²⁷

²⁰ See O’Donnell, G. (1996) *Poverty and Inequality in Latin America: Some political reflections*. Working Paper No. 225, Hellen Kellogg Institute of International Studies, University of Notre Dame, 26 pages.

²¹ See O’Donnell (1996) op. cit.

²² Minujin, A. (1997) “En la Rodada. Transformaciones en la estructura social argentina”, in Minujin, A., L. Beccaria, E. Bustelo et al., *Cuesta abajo. Los nuevos pobres: efecto de la crisis en la sociedad Argentina* (ed. Losada) UNICEF, 4th edition (pages 15–44), Buenos Aires. See also in the same volume: Bustelo, E. (1997) “La producción del Estado de Malestar. Ajuste y Política Social en América Latina” (pages 121–142).

²³ Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente (2006). *El cambio climático en América Latina y el Caribe*. PNUMA – SEMARNAT.

²⁴ Minujin explains that, for example, in Argentina, a welfare state was implemented partially, leaving important social sectors and population groups without assistance. The public sector had an inefficient, dis-articulated, bureaucratic role (Minujin (1997) op. cit., page 20).

²⁵ See Bastagli, Francesca (2009) *From Social Safety Net to Social Policy? The role of conditional cash transfers in welfare state development in Latin America*, Policy International, Centre for Inclusive Growth, Working Paper No. 60, December, Brazil.

²⁶ Minujin (1997) op. cit.

²⁷ See Bustelo (1997) op. cit.

The State not only stopped investing in the provision or expansion of services, it also cut funding for operations, maintenance and management that led to hospitals without equipment and materials, and collapsed services. During the 1990s, the “solution” was often to decentralize responsibilities for service provision to lower levels of government (but often without the needed resources) and to privatize services. Countries learned what it meant to have a weak, or absent state²⁸ with difficulties in assuming essential responsibilities and incapable of responding to citizens’ needs.²⁹ More recently, a new trend of “welfare” states and “populist” governments has emerged, taking back social functions and centralizing the decision-making process, sometimes at the expense of transparent participation from citizens and other levels of government. The working of autonomous congresses, independent judicial systems, unions and other organizations should have enabled effective controls over the executive, but this has not happened.

Several countries across the region have adopted conditional cash transfers (CCTs) as central elements of their poverty reduction strategies. These are an innovative mix of poverty-reduction and human-development policy.³⁰ The different CCTs have three components in common: a cash transfer (as opposed to in-kind provision), a targeting mechanism (for poor households, vulnerable groups), and conditionality (for instance regular school attendance by children from families receiving the cash transfer and attendance at regular health checks). Thus, a cash transfer is paid to the identified beneficiaries provided they follow a pre-specified course of action. Examples exist in Brazil (Bolsa Família, aiming at over 12.9 million households or 25% of the total population), Chile (Programa Puente – 225,000 households or 5.7% of the total population), Mexico (formerly Progreso, now Oportunidades – 5 million households, 20% of the total population), Nicaragua (Red de Protección Social – 30,000 households, 3% of the total population) Honduras (Asignación Familiar – 47,000 households, 15% of the total population), Colombia (Familias en Acción – 515,000 households, 5% of the total population) and Argentina (Programa Familias – 695,177 families, including 2,433,199 children).

The Bolsa Família programme in Brazil was created in 2003 with the merger of four national cash-transfer schemes. Some of the positive effects are that the programme is responsible for some 21% of the recent fall in inequality and extreme poverty, and improved education outcomes, without having a negative impact on labour-force participation. It also led to the consolidation of a single registry of potential beneficiaries and of incentives to municipalities to improve the quality of their information on which the policies draw. Some of the programme’s shortfalls are associated with constraints on the supply side for healthcare and schools to enable families to comply with the conditions of the programme, and therefore the programme’s capacity to enforce these conditions.³¹

Another aspect of concern is the persistence of poverty and vulnerability tied to demographic characteristics, particularly age, gender and ethnicity. For example, poverty among children under the age of 15 is on average 1.7 times higher than poverty among adults. Women in all

²⁸ Fernandez, Alberto (2007) “Jefe de gabinete. Lecturas sobre el Estado y las políticas públicas: retomando el debate de ayer para fortalecer el actual” in Carlos H. Acuña (compiler) Proyecto de Modernización del Estado, Jefatura de Gabinete de Ministros de la Nación, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

²⁹ 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” in Carlos H. Acuña (compiler) Proyecto de Modernización del Estado, Jefatura de Gabinete de Ministros de la Nación, Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

³⁰ Veras Soares, Fabio (2009) *The Long View: South America’s conditional cash transfer experience* (<http://www.ipc-undp.org/pressroom/pdf/IPCPressroom200.pdf>).

³¹ Veras Soares (2009) op. cit.

countries of the region are more exposed than men to poverty, and figures would show a wider gap if the methods used to measure poverty also considered intra-house resource allocations.³²

2.2 Measuring poverty³³

2.2.1 Poverty lines

Latin American governments use absolute poverty indicators.³⁴ A household is considered poor when its incomes or expenditures are below the cost of a defined basket of goods and services. Extreme poverty lines give a measure of when a household manages to meet basic food needs while poverty lines cover food needs plus certain non-food needs such as housing, clothes, transport, health, education, services, and recreation. Both measurements are based on household income and expenditure surveys. For this purpose, there is a minimum food basket (canasta básica de alimentos – CBA) and a total basket (canasta básica total – CBT) which includes the CBA plus other non-food goods and services (clothes, transport, education, health, etc.).

The idea behind this method is to establish a monetary threshold above which a household can access minimum food and non-food needs for their wellbeing. It uses one indicator – income – but requires information on consumer patterns and prices. Surveys are carried out by the different National Statistical divisions of each country. The minimum food basket (CBA) is set based on an established daily caloric and protein intake. As it is more difficult to calculate how much non-food essentials are consumed, this is measured indirectly. A reference group is identified (a group considered able to satisfy its food needs) on which the relation between food expenditures and total expenditures is established as parameter. This coefficient (the Engel coefficient) is then applied to establish the cost of a total basket (CBT). For the reference group, the coefficient is approximately 0.5, as half of the household incomes of this group are used to meet food needs. To arrive at a monetary value: $\$CBT = \$CBA * 1/\text{Engel coefficient}$.

This methodology is used in most Latin American countries. Perhaps the largest differences come from each country's ability to obtain information and produce relevant data disaggregated by region, or for each city, or for rural and urban areas, therefore acknowledging the differences between locations in food and non-food costs. The more disaggregated the data and information, the more focused the poverty-reduction policies can be and so respond better to real needs and problems.

In 1996, the Grupo de Expertos en Estadísticas sobre Pobreza (Grupo Rio)³⁵ was created under the direction of the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia y Estadísticas³⁶ and The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). The aim was to analyze poverty data used in different countries and improve indicators to reach some form of standardization for comparisons. The participating countries were Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay. Of these, five have been selected here for comparison: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico and Peru.

How poverty is measured in these countries does not vary substantially. In all the countries except Mexico, measurements distinguish extreme poverty or indigence from poverty, differentiating between those that cannot afford a minimum CBA and those that cannot afford a CBT. In Mexico, three lines are used: extreme poverty (cannot afford the CBA) and poverty which is subdivided into poverty due to a lack of capacities (insufficient incomes to cover the cost of CBA plus costs of education and health) and poverty due to a lack of

³² Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL) (2007) op. cit.

³³ This section is based on background paper: Alegre Silvina (2009) Análisis de la medición de la pobreza urbana. Buenos Aires, pp. 1 - 29.

³⁴ Absolute poverty means that there is a core of absolute privation; not meeting these needs reveals a condition of extreme poverty in any context. This is the most common and widely used method in countries such as Chile, México, Uruguay or USA.

³⁵ Group of Experts on Poverty Statistics (Group of Rio).

³⁶ Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.

“patrimonio”³⁷ (insufficient incomes to cover the cost of CBA plus cost of health and education, plus cost of housing, clothing, and transport). Other variations are related to elements as follows.

Information sources

The main source of information used to determine consumption patterns and therefore the CBA are consumers and expenditure surveys. The most recent ones used were in 1997 for Peru, followed by Mexico in 1992, Bolivia in 1990, Brazil in 1987/88 and Argentina in 1985/86.³⁸ To establish the CBT, income surveys are used, which are implemented twice a year in Argentina, four times a year in Peru, and once a year in the other countries, with the exception of Brazil where an official poverty line is not produced although the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatísticas (IBGE) produces the necessary information to construct the poverty line.³⁹ The prices of the goods within the CBA are taken from the national consumers price index.

Equivalent unit

Because different people have different caloric and protein needs, the method most widely used to find an average considers that needs vary with gender and age. The kilo-caloric and protein needs of a male adult between 30 and 59 years of age, doing moderate activity, is used as referent unit (the adult equivalent unit) and a reference table is built. The only country that doesn't use the adult equivalent unit to adjust kilo-caloric intakes is Bolivia, where the family unit is used instead. This equivalent unit consists of an adult couple with three children of ages 10–14, 5–9 and under 5 years.

Caloric requirements

For Argentina, 2700kcal/day is the adult equivalent, which is the highest of the five countries considered. In Brazil, according to IBGE studies in different regions, the caloric needs in the northeast are estimated to be around 2144 kcal/day; as this would have a high incidence on poverty levels, they use the ECLAC recommendation of 1750 kcal/day. In Mexico and Peru the values used are 2220 and 2318 kcal/day, respectively.

Geographic coverage

In Argentina and Brazil, surveys cover only urban areas. In Mexico, Bolivia and Peru, they separate urban from rural, and in the last two countries they differentiate by region. In Bolivia they use *altiplano*, *valle* and *llano*,⁴⁰ based on the information from three main urban areas (La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz). In Peru, they separate between *costa*, *sierra* and *selva*,⁴¹ and for some of the information they separate Metropolitan Lima. But household surveys in Bolivia do not capture incomes in rural areas, so rural poverty is constructed from surveys of urban incomes crossed with surveys of rural consumption.

Reference group

A reference group is needed to identify when food and non-food needs are covered. To establish this, the procedure includes: a) grouping households according to incomes, b) identifying households with income just above the value of the CBA to be the centre of the reference group. In Argentina, that group is composed of households of percentiles 21–40; in Bolivia, households of deciles 4 and 5; in Brazil deciles 4–6; and in Peru, percentiles 11–40 on the coast, 27–56 in the jungle and 42–71 in the mountains.

³⁷ Patrimonio refers to the sum of all personal and real entitlements belonging to a person that is a guarantee of access to benefits based on established rights or legislation. Mostly it refers to capital assets such as a house, shop, workshop or vehicle.

³⁸ Argentina has surveys every 10 years but the CBA is still based on the 1985/86 consumer's survey.

³⁹ See Alegre (2009) op. cit., page 15.

⁴⁰ Altiplano, valley and plains.

⁴¹ Coast, mountain and jungle.

Composition of the food basket

There are no significant differences in the groups of foods considered. There are some variations in quantity between regions in those countries that disaggregate the information by region.

Non-food items

In all cases, the estimation of the costs of non-food items is indirect. This means that non-food items are included through the application of the inverse of the Engel coefficient, though in the case of Mexico they also differentiate costs of health and education from housing, transportation and clothing. A reference group is identified (of a group considered able to satisfy its food needs) on which the relation between food expenditure and total expenditure is established.

2.2.2 Unsatisfied basic needs

In the late 1970s the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) developed and promoted the concept of unsatisfied basic needs (UBN) as indicators of poverty for the region.⁴² In Latin America, where in most nations census information is considered reliable, the method has been used by several countries since the 1980s, and has used information supplied by the 1990 and 2000 census rounds. UBN is a direct measure of some aspects of poverty, as it uses census data that require little or no interpretation (Table 1). It is based on the measurement of certain household needs associated with wellbeing: housing conditions, access to sanitary services, access to education and household economic capacity. It could include other basic needs such as health and nutrition, but data on these are not registered in censuses.⁴³

One of the main advantages of UBN is that it yields geographically disaggregated data for areas as small as the census agency is willing to report. In addition, the data on which it is based are stable over relatively long periods, since many of the indicators do not change over short periods. It gives an idea of the scale and depth of structural problems and a composite measure of basic needs but covers only a particular set of basic needs. For instance, measures of unsatisfied basic needs do not show changes in income and consumption. In addition, since it is a composite measure, any unmet need of a household is enough to indicate that the household has UBN although often without indicating which basic need is unmet.

Table 1: The basic needs and related variables found in censuses

Basic needs	Dimensions	Census variables
Housing conditions	a) quality of shelter b) size of house in relation to number of people living there	• Construction materials used in the floor, walls and roof • Number of persons in the household; number of rooms in the household
Access to sanitary services	a) availability of potable water b) system for disposal of human wastes	• Water source in the household • System for disposal of human wastes
Access to education	Enrolment of school-age children in school	• Age of household members • School attendance

⁴² Feres, Juan Carlos and Mancero Xavier (2001) *El método de las necesidades básicas insatisfechas y sus aplicaciones en América Latina*. Serie Estudios Estadísticos y Prospectivos. División de Estadística y Proyecciones Económicas. CEPAL-ECLAC: Santiago de Chile. Cited in Poverty maps from unsatisfied basic needs indicators in Latin America (<http://sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/povmap/downloads/methods/NBI.pdf>).

⁴³ Quintana, E. (2008) *Medición de la Pobreza: Enfoques Multidimensionales*. Escuela Virtual.

Economic capacity	Probability of income sufficiency of household	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age of household members • Highest educational level reached • Number of persons in the household • Condition of economic activity of head of household
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Source: Feres, Juan Carlos and Mancero Xavier (2001) *El método de las necesidades básicas insatisfechas y sus aplicaciones en América Latina*. Serie Estudios Estadísticos y Prospectivos. División de Estadística y Proyecciones Económicas. CEPAL-ECLAC: Santiago de Chile.

2.2.3 Integrated method

The methods of measuring poverty using poverty lines (PL) and unsatisfied basic needs (UBN) respond to different conceptual frameworks. Therefore, they are not alternative methods of measuring the same thing. PL (the indirect method) uses income level to establish a household's consumption capacity, while UBN (the direct method) uses observable indicators that give a measure of unmet basic needs, much more related to a household's socio-cultural profile and its past capacity to accumulate assets or wealth.⁴⁴ Poverty measured by UBN captures "structural" poverty that is harder to modify in the short or medium term, while poverty measured by PL captures "occasional" poverty that fluctuates along with the income levels of the population.⁴⁵

The "integrated method" combines both PL and UBN, thereby identifying, quantifying and characterizing different forms of poverty. It classifies the population into four main groups while showing the heterogeneity of absolute poverty (Table 2). Chronic poverty characterizes a group of households that have UBN and incomes below the poverty line. They are often referred to as the historical poor, and include both the extreme poor and the poor measured by PLs. Inertial poverty includes households with UBN but incomes above PL. They are in better conditions to improve wellbeing and experience social advance, as they have managed to improve their incomes, but when faced with stresses or shocks, they are at risk of falling again below the PL. Both of these groups integrate what is called structural poverty as they still have basic needs unmet. The socio-cultural transformation needed to move them out of poverty is greater and more "structural".

Table 2: Integrated method

PL \ UBN	Incomes below PL	Incomes above PL
Presence of at least one need	Chronic poverty	Inertial poverty
Absence of needs	New poor	Non-poor

The "new poor" represents a group of households that have been able to meet the UBN but whose current incomes are below PL. As with the chronic poor, they have insufficient incomes but share with the non-poor certain socio-cultural aspects such as access to higher education levels and

⁴⁴ Andino (2001) op. cit; also Feres, Juan Carlos (1995) Medición de la pobreza según el método de ingreso. Notas de discusión. In Seminario: Información sobre Población y Pobreza para Programas Sociales. INEI, 4–7 July, Perú (<http://www1.inei.gov.pe/biblioineipub/bancopub/Est/Lib0070/3-1.htm>, accessed February 2009).

⁴⁵ Fidel, Carlos, Raúl Di Tomasso and Cristina Farías (2008) Territorio, Condiciones de Vida y Exclusión: El Partido de Quilmes (Provincia de Buenos Aires). FLACSO, Buenos Aires.

household characteristics such as number of children per household. The growth in the “new poor” explains much of the increase in the numbers of the poor during the 1980s.⁴⁶

However, this analysis of poverty is still based on methods that entail contradictions and problems. Poverty measured by PL can increase while UBN levels are stable or even declining, as was the case in Argentina during the hyperinflation crisis of 1989, or during the socio-economic crisis of 2001/02 when incomes of large sections of the population dropped dramatically (due to inflation and loss of jobs) while more structural indicators such as access to education, infrastructure or ‘adequate’ housing did not change much.

3. Measuring poverty in Argentina

In Argentina, poverty is measured using both PL and UBN methods, as described above. The UBN incorporates a set of indicators (housing conditions, access to sanitary services, education and stable employment) that are recorded by the National Housing and Population Census (Censo Nacional de Población, Hogares y Viviendas – CNPyV) every 10 years. For the National Institute of Statistics and Census (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de Argentina – INDEC),⁴⁷ a household is poor by UBN⁴⁸ if it is experiencing at least one of the following:

- critical overcrowding – more than three persons per room
- inadequate housing, defined as “pieza de inquilinato” (tenant rooms), precarious constructions or other
- the absence of latrines or non-water flush latrines
- school-age children not attending school (at least one child 6–12 years old that does not go to school)
- subsistence capacity: four or more persons per economically active person, and a household head with low education levels (not reached third grade).

The number of variables included in the census permits the collection of information on social, demographic and housing characteristics of the population. The census also covers the whole country, and provides information disaggregated for areas as small as the census agency is willing to report on (census district). Census districts are defined to ensure equal population size, so there are larger census districts in low-density areas. Census information can be aggregated according to different geographical scales: province, department, municipality, locality, neighbourhood and census district. The last census, in 2001, established that Argentina had a population of 35.9 million, of which 17.7 % had UBN, while in 1991 it was 19.9% and 27.7% in 1980. These aggregate percentages mask important differences. While in the City of Buenos Aires (formerly known as the Federal District) the percentage of population with UBN in 2001 was 7.8%, in the provinces of La Pampa it was 10.3%, in Santa Cruz 10.4% (Patagonia) and in the province of Buenos Aires 15.8%.⁴⁹ The highest rates of UBN were in two provinces in the Northeast: Chaco (33.0%) and Formosa (33.6%).

Significant differences also existed between provinces in the censuses of 1980 and 1991, though with higher percentages of population with UBN. While the City of Buenos Aires in 1980 had 8.3% of the population with UBN, the province of Chaco had 52% and Formosa 54.4%.⁵⁰ In terms of

⁴⁶ See Andino (2001) op. cit.

⁴⁷ El Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC) is a public, technical office. Created in 1970, its responsibilities include designing the methodology, organizing and carrying out censuses and surveys and assuring compatibility of all the information. It has to prepare basic social and economic indicators and produce other basic statistics.

⁴⁸ INDEC; Censos de Población, 1980, 1991 y 2001; Situación y Evolución Social (Síntesis N°4); Consudec N° 843 – 1998.

⁴⁹ The Province of Buenos Aires includes all the municipalities that make up the province except for the city of Buenos Aires.

⁵⁰ INDEC: Censo Nacional de Poblacion y Vivienda 1980, 1991 y 2001, Buenos Aires.

households, the trend repeats itself: of a total of 10,075,814 households in 2001, 14.3% had UBN. The city of Buenos Aires had 7.1% of its households with UBN, while Formosa had 28.0 % and Chaco 27.6%.⁵¹ There were similar differences between municipalities of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Zone. While the better-off Municipality of Vicente Lopez had 4.3% of households with UBN, the municipality of Florencia Varela had 26.7%.⁵²

To establish a Poverty Line (PL) and Extreme Poverty Line (EPL), CBA and CBT are calculated based on two sets of information: incomes gathered through the Permanent Household Survey (Encuesta Permanente de Hogares – EPH)⁵³ carried out twice a year, and a survey of prices in order to actualize a Consumers Price Index (Indice del Precio al Consumidor – IPC). The reference group used to establish the relation between food and non-food needs (Engel coefficient) is the second quintile; this group is considered able to satisfy its food needs. Additionally, a Consumers Survey (Encuesta de Gastos e Ingresos de los Hogares – ENGH) is done every 10 years to update consumption patterns, looking in detail at household expenses, asking about the type, quantity and cost of all acquired services and goods. All surveys are carried out by INDEC.

Despite having ENGH's in 1996/97 and in 2001/05, consumption patterns are still based on data from ENGH 1985/86, which takes consumption patterns of the population of the Greater Buenos Aires. There is no convincing answer to why this "older" ENGH is used. It could be that the complications derived from adjusting the methodology outweigh the probable change in consumption patterns, which in 20 years may not be substantial. The newer versions of ENGH include a sample of households in different urban centres of Argentina, and the information is aggregated in six statistical regions, as for the EPH. Also, more precise data are gathered for some indicators – such as rent expenditures. Still, other data continue to be missing: for example, the survey considers the market price of goods and services but in the case of purchases with credit does not consider the extra cost finally paid due to interest charges.

The EPH gathers information in 31 urban agglomerations, and is therefore an urban indicator. The survey is done twice a year, in the months of May and October. It is applied to a group, and 25% of the households surveyed are changed each time (so households remain in the sample for four surveys – two years). The 31 urban agglomerations are aggregated into six statistical regions: Greater Buenos Aires (GBA), Northwest (NW), Northeast (NE), Cuyo, Pampa and Patagonia.

The process to establish the amount and type of food that goes into the CBA and its price is as follows.

1. Based on international recommendations, a minimum caloric, nutritional and protein intake is established, adjusted by gender, age and intensity of labour conditions. In Argentina it is established that an average adult male (of between 30 and 59 years) doing moderate activity needs 2700 kcal/day. Based on the intakes of the average male adult, a table of equivalencies is built; the method is known as the "adult equivalent" and produces consumer units.
2. Based on the consumption habits of a reference group (second quintile), a basic food basket is estimated.
3. Based on the Consumers Price Index (IPC), a value is given to the CBA and subsequently adjusted.
4. Depending on the household's consumer units, the cost of the CBA and CBT, and therefore the incomes needed to avoid poverty (above PL) are established.

⁵¹ INDEC: Censo Nacional de Poblacion y Vivienda 2001.

⁵² INDEC: Censo Nacional de Poblacion y Vivienda 2001.

⁵³ The EPH is a relatively simple survey that collects income information and certain socioeconomic characteristics of the household and individual.

This is a normative concept in the sense that food intakes and the relation to non-food needs is established by a norm. The income is that of the total of the household: the aggregate of what each member earns. INDEC regularly produces information comparing incomes of households sampled in the EPH with the value of PL, taking into account household differences such as number of individuals, their age and gender. One difficulty regarding the collection of data on income levels is that not all households report their total income.

In January 2007, INDEC's independence was compromised by the government. Different social and academic sectors question government actions, for example the modification of the price index,⁵⁴ and the lack of transparency in managing data. Many long-serving technicians left the institute, uncomfortable with the government's manipulation of price indices in an effort to hide real inflation rates. Therefore, the latest PL and EPL values are considered to be unreliable.

In 2004 a group of specialists concerned with regional differences in consumption patterns started reviewing the traditional methodology. Findings are still being discussed and adjusted,⁵⁵ but a proposed, revised methodology adjusts and incorporates variables such as the following.

- Total household income (declared) minus rent cost – to adjust and compare incomes of owners and renters
- Definition of a reference group for each region in the country (using information from ENGH 1996/97), and making these comparable by reflecting the consumer's profile of households with similar levels of income
- Adjustment of price indices between regions with the help of provincial offices – it was possible to establish relations between prices of different goods and the cost of regional CBA and CBT; a parity coefficient relates regional variations with prices in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region
- The methodology used for estimating CBA is similar⁵⁶ but based on the information of ENGH 1996/97, which resulted in an adjustment of average adult male caloric intake to 2750 kcal
- The study showed that diet is similar throughout the country: a group of 32 foods common to the six regions concentrated 85% of all consumption
- Non-food expenditures are also estimated based on the relation with food expenditures of the reference group but disaggregated between several components and type of household
- Non-food items were classified in four groups: (i) expenditures with economies of scale (items that do not directly increase with the number of individuals in the household, e.g. rent or services associated with the house); (ii) expenditures with specific equivalencies and not affected by economies of scale (such as clothing, transport and education, disaggregated according to age); (iii) health costs; (iv) rent (a rent cost is estimated for all households and adjusted according to number of members).

⁵⁴ INDEC modified the methodology used to establish the consumer price index as it changed the number of products included and the variables used to determine prices, without explaining why or giving information on the changes.

⁵⁵ Presentado en el 13º Taller Regional: La Construcción de Líneas de Pobreza en América Latina. Metodología y Práctica. Lima, Perú, 7–9 de julio de 2004. Actualización de la metodología oficial de cálculo de las Líneas de Pobreza (Documento en discusión). Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC), Argentina.

⁵⁶ Andueza, E. (1988) Canasta Básica de Alimentos, Gran Buenos Aires; documento nro. 3, Proyecto IPA-INDEC, Buenos Aires.

Table 3: Purchasing power by region in comparison to the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region

	Region				
	Pampean	Northwest	Northeast	Cuyo	South
General level	0.904	0.865	0.886	0.872	0.949

The main difference between the proposed and traditional methodology is that PL is not calculated by multiplying CBA by a fixed coefficient and the number of adult equivalents. The new approach uses EPL and adds to it the cost of non-food variables (clothing, transportation, education, health and rent) independently. These allow for more precise PLs adjusted to the needs of individual households in terms of size and composition as well as tenure status.

Nutrition is often assumed to be unproblematic in middle-income countries such as Argentina. In the 1990s, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization established five conditions for guaranteed food security: adequate amounts of food, equity in access, stability in terms of food production, sustainability in the use of the resources, and autonomy from external markets. Argentina meets only four of these, not guaranteeing equal access to a culturally accepted balanced and nutritious diet.⁵⁷

Poverty is unequally distributed within Argentina. Besides the disparities recorded through the application of census data and the register of UBN, the EPH carried out twice a year in urban agglomerations indicates that, in the second half of 2006,⁵⁸ 19.2% of the households were below the poverty line with 16.3% below the line of indigence or extreme poverty. But while the city of Buenos Aires had 6.4% and 2.1% of its population living in poverty and extreme poverty respectively, municipalities within the RMBA had on average 22.9% living in poverty and 9.7% in extreme poverty, with the highest extremes in municipalities on the periphery. There are also major differences between urban centres of different regions within Argentina; the Northeastern and Northwestern regions had 30% or more of their population living in poverty,⁵⁹ repeating the trend seen through the census and analysis of UBN.

Insecure land tenure and irregular urban layouts are closely associated with poverty and undermine (at least in theory) the official provision for water and sanitation in low-income neighbourhoods. Data are imprecise but estimates from the Sub secretariat of Land and Urbanism of the Province of Buenos Aires suggest that in the Greater Buenos Region in 2007, approximately 5 million people were living in 1500 informal settlements.⁶⁰ Roughly 30% of the population living in the municipalities of the GBA have “irregular tenure”, and are therefore without proper formal tenure and have problems associated with irregular urban layouts. However, according to the National Housing and Population Census of 2001, only 15.7% of the population living in the municipalities of the GBA had irregular tenure.⁶¹ In a Municipality like Moreno, the percentage is as high as 50%.⁶²

⁵⁷ Aguirre, P. (2005) *Estrategias de Consumo: Qué comen los que comen* in Miño y Davila Editores, Buenos Aires.

⁵⁸ Since January 2007, the Consumers Index price set by INDEC is being questioned by academics and social actors on the grounds that it does not reflect real inflation, therefore influencing poverty measurements.

⁵⁹ Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, INDEC, Encuesta permanente de hogares (EPH) (2006).

⁶⁰ Informe de prensa (<http://www.fam-online.com.ar/Ultimas-Noticias/Regularizacion-dominial-acuerdo-entre-el-Consejo-Profesional-de-Agrimensura-y-la-Provincia.html>).

⁶¹ INDEC: Censo Nacional de Poblacion y Vivienda 2001.

⁶² These are estimates and based on data from the Dirección de Tierras de la Provincia de Buenos Aires (Land office of the Province of Buenos Aires).

Irregular layout hinders the installation of formal networks of, for instance, piped water and sewers. By law, water and sewage mains need to go on public land (under streets or sidewalks). In the case of blocks of land that are not subdivided, not formally urbanized and with irregular tenure, the only possibility is to negotiate case by case with individual landowners (whether private or public). In some cases, the lack of clear or secure tenure undermines the willingness of residents to invest in securing water and sanitation. However, in many other instances, securing water and sanitation helps informal residents to increase their tenure security and start actions to obtain formal land tenure.⁶³

Despite advances and the development of more precise methods for measuring poverty, both PLs and UBN continue to entail contradictions and problems. For example, in surveys, incomes are usually under-declared, partly due to difficulties in recalling variable incomes, informal payments and the precise incomes of all household members, and partly due to the difficulty of defining a monetary value of barter products and of goods produced and consumed within the household. In addition, the “normative” food basket is not necessarily the same as the “real” food basket. It is valued at relatively low prices and is applied homogeneously to all households within a region. Also, the relation between CBA and CBT is constant, no matter what the household composition, and regardless of the varying availability of and access to public goods such as education, health and security.⁶⁴

4. Aspects of deprivation

4.1 The different aspects of deprivation

One of the aims of this paper is to broaden the understanding and measurement of poverty and so to consider different aspects of deprivation, especially how these are “lived” by members of low-income households. Here we consider eight aspects of deprivation, as follows.⁶⁵

1. Inadequate and often unstable income (thus inadequate consumption of necessities, problems of indebtedness, and incapacity to afford rising prices).
2. Poor-quality and often insecure, hazardous and overcrowded housing.
3. Inadequate provision of “public” infrastructure (including piped water, sanitation, drainage, roads and footpaths, waste collection).
4. Inadequate provision of basic services (health care, emergency services, schools, training, transportation and communication, law enforcement).
5. Inadequate, unstable or risky asset base (material and non-material assets constantly eroded or put under pressure: education and health, short-term survival, capacity to save, no collateral to access credits, limits to community reciprocity).
6. Limited or no safety net (no insurance for assets, or to cover health care, or to guarantee survival if an income source is lost).
7. Inadequate protection of poorer groups’ rights through the operation of law (discrimination, exploitation, protection from violence and crime, occupational and environmental risks).
8. Voicelessness and powerlessness within political systems and bureaucratic structures (little or no possibility of being able to organize and place demands, get fair response and of receiving support to develop initiatives; lack of accountability from governments, aid agencies, public agencies, NGOs and private utilities).

These eight aspects of deprivation reinforce each other, sometimes in ways that are difficult to grasp from the outside, and especially when considering only poverty statistics. Mainly, this is because deprivation is related to everyday living, with its limited opportunities and choices.

⁶³ See Almansi, F., A. Hardoy and J. Hardoy (2010) *Improving Water and Sanitation Provision in Buenos Aires: What can a research oriented NGO do?* Human Settlements Working Paper No. 22, Water, IIED,

⁶⁴ Fidel, Di Tomasso and Farías (2008) op. cit.

⁶⁵ Drawn from Satterthwaite (2004) op. cit.

4.2 Application: interviews with women in informal settlements

Taking advantage of the work we have done in informal settlements during the last 20 years within the BAMR, especially in the municipality of San Fernando,⁶⁶ providing first-hand knowledge of the local context, we selected a group of nine women to interview. This section of this paper draws on the interviews to gain insight into the different aspects of deprivation, also showing when possible how these aspects interact and reinforce each other. We hope that this contributes to a better understanding of details related to certain aspects of income, household expenditures and costs associated with (for instance) transport, health care, education and recreation. We are aware that this is a very small sample – even for the particular neighbourhoods where these women live. It is not our intention to suggest that the findings presented here are representative. The interview reports are used to picture current living conditions and go into more depth about experiences with deprivation. We also draw on our long-time knowledge of these barrios and their people, so this supports our observations.

The interviews were semi-structured and carried out during March 2009 by three IIED–AL team members. The interviews were with women, although in instance the husband was present and collaborated in responding to some of the questions. We knew all the women selected and had worked with them for many years; this allowed for a better understanding of their history, and a relationship based on trust which allows for more openness in the answers and for questions on sensitive topics. The choice of who to interview was also influenced by a desire to get responses from women in different situations in terms of number of children, education levels, employment and household incomes (including pensions and social benefits), tenure over house and/or land, marital status and migration status.

We chose to interview women because women in these settlements take on most of the responsibilities for household management and caring for children and so have better knowledge and control of daily household dynamics and expenditures. This includes extensive experience of what it means to monitor prices, queue in hospitals and support children's education. Perhaps it would have been useful to interview their husbands or partners too, but we felt this would have been invasive – several of the issues discussed in the interviews are not easily addressed by men. (For example, for men it might be more difficult to express openly that with what they earn they cannot afford two decent meals for the family, or that they have young pregnant daughters or children who are abusing drugs.) Even when a man was present in the house, not asking questions of him directly gave him the option to respond or comment on issues of his choosing. The interviews were done while children were at school, during the morning or early afternoon, when these women could spare some time.

The women interviewed all live in low-income neighbourhoods and many would characterize themselves as being “poor” in terms of low income levels and unstable employment, overcrowding, inadequate access to infrastructure and basic services, poor house quality, insecure tenure, inadequate access to credit, lack of savings and voice. However none of them are below the country's EPL, and only one is below the PL, even though they may not afford more than one meal a day and barely have extra money for the “unexpected”, e.g. to repair the refrigerator. Within this group, some perceive themselves as having better conditions than the others (they are owners; they live in more consolidated neighbourhoods that received urban services and infrastructure some time ago). However, they all face aspects of deprivation and their capacity to cope with stresses and future individual, family or national crises is in doubt. Table 4 presents information from all nine interviews. Tables 5 to 8 give more detailed, individual information on four of the cases reviewed.

⁶⁶ IIED–AL has been working for the last 23 years alongside communities and local governments in upgrading low-income neighbourhoods.

Table 4: Household incomes, expenditures and details (per month)

Incomes and expenditures per month (Argentine pesos \$)	Susana C.	Elizabeth	Rosa	Graciela	Claudia M.	Claudia Z.	Adriana	Zonia	Susana M.
Income - direct (\$)	2500 - 3000	1200	700	1317 (her sons may contribute some: 400)	1800 (+ up to 600 extras)	4000	2800	2020 - 3000	1400
Income - indirect	600 (disability)			60			190		
Food	1200	700		1800	1800	820	1500	940	
Housing (taxes/ improve)				12* / 125	13*	150	47 / 150		200 (rent)
Education (snacks, cooperadora) (books, materials + other)	42 (for snacks)	30 (cooperadora)		Public / 25 for snack 13 (1 child)	public 116		Public/ 80 for snack 140 (support teacher + books)	–	
Health care	Social security	Social security part of the family	Social security (pension)	Public health care	Social security 35	40	Public health care 30	Social security (her); the rest public health care	Social security (her alone); rest public health care
Transport	250	100		100	369		200	400	30
Electricity	0	0	0	50	30		100	116	
Water and Sanitation	10	10		20	20		30		
Telephone	60	30		35 (mobile)			110	50	120 (mobile)
Other services	20 (gas)	27 (TV)		35 (gas)	35 gas		80 (gas/TV)	25 (gas)	
Credit repayment	800		550		400	800	610	200	
Other				43 (clothe one child)	150 (clothes)		300	Savings group - 200	Sends 500 to children
How they make ends meet (incomes – expenditures)	+ 718 or + 1218	+ 303	+ 150	- 881 or - 481	- 1168 or - 568	+ 2990	- 84	+ 89 or + 1069	+ 550
How much they need per month for family group to be above extreme poverty line	\$ 1162	\$ 316	\$ 91	\$ 974	\$ 725	\$ 209	\$ 505	\$ 642	
How much they need per month for family group to be above poverty line	\$ 2607	\$ 709	\$ 205	\$ 2184	\$ 1626	\$ 468	\$ 1132	\$ 1440	
* paid to the solidarity fund organized under the PROMEBA.									

	Susana C.	Elizabeth	Rosa	Graciela	Claudia M.	Claudia Z.	Adriana	Zonia	Susana M.
Household composition	1 couple, 7 children (ages 4–20), 1 baby grandchildren, 1 relative	Herself and 2 children (10 and 21), expecting grandchildren	Herself	1 couple, 5 children (ages 13–23), a grandson age 3.	1 couple and 4 children (ages 9, 12, 12 and 16)	1 couple	1 couple, 2 children (ages 11 and 14)	1 couple, 3 children (ages 6–20). They migrated from Peru	Herself. She moved from another province to work. Back home she has 3 children (8, 11 and 13)
Housing	Owner without papers	Owner without papers	Owner without papers	Owner without papers	Owner without papers	Owner with papers	Owner with papers	Owner without papers	Contributes to pay rent, but lives where she works
Services	Water and alternative sanitation system. No gas, electricity informally	Water and alternative sanitation system. No gas, electricity informally	Water and alternative sanitation system. No gas, electricity informally	All services	All services	All services	All services	Community water network connected illegally. No gas. Formal electricity service	No formal services
Health problems	1 child and 1 relative with different capacities					Both hypertensive		1 child with different capacities	Had children with health problems. Now solved.
Community participation	President of barrio co-op. Manages credit system	Treasurer of barrio co-op	Member of barrio co-op	Helps at local church	Manages credit system	Manages credit system	Manages credit system	Collaborates on neighbourhood activities	Does not participate actively in neighbourhood activities
Political participation	She is politically active but separates her community role from her political work	Has political contacts				She is a political referent in her barrio. Improvements are related to this.			

4.3 Inadequate and often-unstable income

Income and consumption are the variables most often measured to assess poverty. The labour market to which the “poor” have access is characterized by unstable employment: informal employment with no social security or pension, and formal employment with low wages and unhealthy conditions. Income levels directly affect household consumption, which in poor households is inadequate by any standard. Low incomes often bring indebtedness (through requiring the purchase on credit of goods for daily needs) and a need to rely on other mechanisms to secure consumption, such as social assistance (from government, charities or NGOs) and community networks. These dependencies curtail the decision-making power of families, as discussed further below.

However, the income threshold used to define who is poor has little to do with reality, at least in BAMR. As shown in Table 4, only one of the women interviewed declared income below the poverty line according to the number, sex and ages of household members. Even if the interview reports contain some inaccuracies in ascertaining income levels (e.g. through difficulties in adding all monetary incomes such as extra hours, or calculating the contribution of adult children still living in the house), these households are certainly poor. Most live in neighbourhoods that are still negotiating formal tenure. They have built their houses over the years, mostly with second-hand materials, and many are far from finished. They have struggled for years to get services such as water, sanitation, and gas; they have low education levels and have difficulties keeping their children at school. They are extremely vulnerable to job losses, inflation, economic crisis, health problems and environmental risks.

All the women interviewed are in households that are above the extreme poverty line and this should mean that they can afford a basic food basket (and thus sufficient food for their families). But the women interviewed report that putting a plate of food on the family table every day is difficult, so how can this be? Evidently, at the time of the interviews, inflation rates in Argentina were affecting food prices, which directly affected low-income households. However, these families’ needs go beyond basic food and the different surveys used to gather data and the methods of measuring poverty need improvement, especially if they are to be used as basic data for implementing and targeting social policies.

The interviews show how difficult it is to specify a household’s monthly income that includes basic salaries plus extra hours, tips, monetary and in-kind benefits from social and employment programmes, school grants and pensions. Several of the women had difficulties in estimating all sources of income and all expenditures. They would know their supermarket shopping list in detail but did not necessarily have a clear idea of the proportions of their income going to food, savings, interest payments for credit, or the daily cash allowance given to children in school and used to buy low-quality food.

Not surprisingly, food is the major expense. Table 4 shows that food expenses can account for 75% of total income, and in some cases perhaps more. Getting sufficient food is also a major daily preoccupation for these households. Usually, those with formal employment make the larger food purchases. Once or twice a month, depending on when salaries are paid, they buy basic staples and fresh products such as meat, bread or milk. Those with informal employment and irregular incomes paid daily have far less scope for the kinds of cost savings that bulk purchases in supermarkets can provide.

Much of the usual diet is based on stews prepared with some meat (meat is always included), onions and tomatoes and lots of potatoes or pasta, accompanied by bread to soak in the sauce – “comida rendidora”.⁶⁷ Rarely do meals include other vegetables or fruit. This is partly related to cultural habits but also due to the cost of certain food items. Fruit is eaten on special

⁶⁷ Food that fills and is satisfying.

occasions, when extra incomes are generated. As food quantities are not enough, they are complemented with bread and mate⁶⁸ prepared with lots of sugar to satiate hunger. In one of the interviews, it emerged that one family (with many members) was consuming a kilo of sugar per day. The adverse impact of this on teeth and general physical condition is considerable. There is a tendency for poor people to be overweight, which is related to the poor quality of the diet, rich in saturated fats and sugar, and low in vitamins, iron and calcium.⁶⁹ This can translate into general weakness, sleepiness, attention problems and health risks.

With low levels of purchasing power, low-income populations usually search for the lowest prices and often low-quality foodstuffs. They make compromises between environmental-health risk, food quality and price.⁷⁰ Despite their limited purchasing options, the women interviewed have developed a realistic buying strategy according to available time and money, and most bought goods from three types of store. They mentioned going once or twice a month to a large chain supermarket (by bus), using smaller local supermarkets some 10 blocks away for other needs, and local stores in their barrio. If they have sufficient money, they will buy in bulk in big supermarkets with better prices and choosing goods on sale, buy fresh items as needed in local stores outside the neighbourhood, and use neighbourhood stores in an emergency. If they don't have enough money for bulk purchases, they buy daily in nearby local stores outside the neighbourhood or in neighbourhood stores. Here they pay much higher prices but they can buy on credit, using just their name.

Many personal needs go unrecorded in official surveys and we were not able to assign a monetary value to them in our interviews. Cigarettes, alcohol, cosmetics, personal hygiene, and alternative (traditional) medical treatments are examples of these. Money spent on drugs and gambling is also hard to measure. In low-income households, young people between 14 and 25 years old commonly live with their parents; some are unemployed, but often those that work do not share their income with the whole household. In some households covered by interviews, young people who were working contributed a small amount of money to help with food needs and kept the rest of their earnings for their personal needs (clothing, transportation, communication and recreation). Sometimes they even improve living quarters for themselves in their parents' home, and some of them have children of their own, living with them or with the other parent in a different house, to whom they try to give monetary support.

4.4 Poor-quality and often insecure, hazardous and overcrowded housing

In most Latin American cities, including the BAMR, there are large concentrations of low-income households living on unsuitable land sites – for instance contaminated land, land prone to flooding or on unstable landfills. In these cities, when the land available for housing is scarce and/or unaffordable for low-income groups, the choices for location are limited. Low-income groups tend to occupy dangerous sites. Usually, these areas were left vacant (and low-income households allowed to build on them) because of the environmental conditions that make them so hazardous and because of their lack of infrastructure and services.

In most cases, low-income groups have no formal tenure of the land and face not only environmental risks but also the risk of eviction. Individuals and households make choices that reflect priorities and trade-offs – for instance regarding location/accessibility, availability, type of ownership (private or State owned), security (i.e. the likelihood of eviction), possibilities of service provision and regularization and cost. Left with no alternative, low-income groups inhabit overcrowded houses in neighbourhoods with high population densities, although, in many cases, informal settlements have managed to develop with layouts that include provisions for road networks that would allow service installation and neighbourhood

⁶⁸ A popular local tea/infusion.

⁶⁹ Aguirre (2005) op. cit.

⁷⁰ Aguirre (2005) op. cit.

regularization in future. In these neighbourhoods, houses are usually built with inadequate materials, making them damp and cold in winter and very hot in summer. In some cases, land is occupied by organizations of dwellers that select a piece of land and prepare an urban plan with plots and streets; once settled, they start negotiating the needed infrastructure and tenure regularization.⁷¹

In informal settlements, houses are usually built incrementally over a number of years with materials of diverse origin and quality, and not always following accepted techniques. These houses rarely comply with official safety standards and there are no controls in place. Most buildings are used intensively – with high levels of overcrowding and a mix of living and working spaces. This is often combined with a lack of maintenance and with environmental conditions (e.g. humidity from proximity to riversides), which can cause rapid deterioration. Houses need to keep “growing” as the family expands. If they can, families add another floor on top or more rooms on the side, compromising the ventilation that is so much needed in damp sites and spaces. Extensions to the house are often made even though the foundations are not strong enough.

Houses are fragile and poorly insulated, and are often built on inadequate foundations (many on landfills or unstable land). Parts of houses by rivers and streams often just collapse as the land below them subsides. In low-lying areas of BAMR, it is common for each resident to contract trucks to bring rubble to their piece of land, and later compact it as best as they can. There is no coordination between neighbours so plots end up at different levels; when it rains, some are flooded more than others. As informal settlements develop, sites filled and houses built or extended, the natural drainage of the whole site is modified – but without incorporating the needed drainage infrastructure. In these conditions, whatever is invested in the house deteriorates more quickly, while at the same time it is difficult to save extra money to spend on house improvement.⁷²

Most houses have obvious deficiencies in terms of living conditions. For example, kitchens are usually precarious, which is not only a problem in terms of risk of fire or gas leak, it also makes food preparation more difficult and reduces cooking options, affecting the household’s diet. Also, because household equipment is often damaged or not working properly, low-income households seldom have the capacity to freeze and store food safely.

4.5 Inadequate provision of “public” infrastructure

In Latin America, sanitation has improved; however in 2004, 125 million people (14% of the urban population) still lacked a basic sanitation system.⁷³ In Argentina, 78.4% of the population have water provision within their household and 42.5% have a sewerage connection. National averages, however, hide important disparities – the City of Buenos Aires has 100% coverage of water and sanitation, compared to municipalities within the BAMR with levels of provision of 12–15% for water (for instance, Ituzaingo and Jose C. Paz) and 8–15% for sanitation (such as Jose C. Paz, Ituzaingo and Tigre).⁷⁴

Many of the urban neighbourhoods on hazardous sites are made even more vulnerable by the lack of infrastructure and services and by physical changes to the site or its surrounds. The Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires has a large deficit in the infrastructure needed to reduce risks from everyday hazards and extreme weather – including provision for water, sanitation and drainage – although with large disparities between wealthier and low-income municipalities in the quality and extent of provision. As well as decreasing health risks, basic services and

⁷¹ Hardoy, J. and G. Pandiella (2009) “Urban poverty and vulnerability to climate change in Latin America”, *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pages 203–224.

⁷² Extracted from Hardoy and Pandiella (2009) op. cit.

⁷³ Noticias de Latinoamérica. Boletín de Agua y Saneamiento, No. 20, julio 2007.

⁷⁴ INDEC: CNPyV 2001, op. cit.

infrastructure such as water and sanitation and proper waste collection and disposal allow excess water to drain more easily, and prevent cesspits overflowing and wastes clogging drains and channels. Again, significant difference is evident in infrastructure provision between low-, middle- and high-income neighbourhoods.

Low-income neighbourhoods are usually left out of infrastructure expansion plans due to causes such as informal tenure, irregular plots and urban layout and residents' incapacity to pay for the cost of infrastructure and services. However, the literature is full of case studies where all these problems have been overcome and good-quality infrastructure provided in low-income neighbourhoods. Although most experiences are sustained on community work, this is much helped by a local government willing to be more flexible in terms of regulations and technical specifications (e.g. accepting reduced plot sizes and lane widths). Many of the integral urban improvement programmes implemented in Argentina in recent years have begun to include some aspects of this much-needed flexibility.⁷⁵

In neighbourhoods where the interviewees live, payment for infrastructure services such as water, sewerage and electricity is subsidized. Some residents have a social tariff, for some the fees are paid in bulk by the local government, and some are connected illegally (with the risks this carries); others are not being charged while the neighbourhood undergoes regularization. The situation is similar for municipal and provincial taxes. However, as regularization advances and a neighbourhood becomes part of the formal city, residents will have to start to pay for all services and taxes, although the cost may be moderated by social tariffs. This has proved problematic in some instances, as it is hard to modify cultural patterns. Residents are accustomed to not paying and having a deficient service, and in many cases cannot afford the cost of becoming "formal". Some interviewees mentioned costs they paid for, such as mobile phones or cable TV, but they paid very little or nothing for water, sewerage or electricity because of the "informality" of the neighbourhood and because costs were being met by local government. Informal or illegal connections to the network affect the quality and safety of the service. Gas is different in the sense that the gas network has expanded much less than other services, and illegal connections are less common.

Besides the infrastructure that needs to be in place, there is a lot of work to be done on developing understanding of good environmental practice. Many trunk services operate deficiently because of improper use. For example, sewers and drains often get clogged with waste, and within the pipes it is common for maintenance crews to find disposable diapers, plastic bags and even bigger items such as mattresses.

4.6 Inadequate provision of basic services

Access to basic services such as health, education, day care, law enforcement and emergency services depends greatly on how well national and local governments manage and support these services. They depend more on the application of progressive social policies that distribute benefits than on economic growth.⁷⁶ Governments should guarantee access and quality. In Argentina, health and education are both publicly provided. In fact, migrants from other Latin American countries come to Argentina to be treated free of charge or to access the public university system. This apparent benefit compared to other Latin American countries masks the long-term deterioration of the whole health and education system.

The quality and availability of both health care and education varies greatly according to geographic location. The quality and commitment of teachers from one school to another varies, as does the student environment. Exclusion and inequality in terms of access and

⁷⁵ Almansi, Florencia (2009) "Regularizing land tenure within upgrading programmes in Argentina; the cases of Promeba and Rosario Hábitat", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol. 21, No. 2 pages 389–413.

⁷⁶ Kliksberg, B. (2004) *Mas Etica, Mas Desarrollo*. Editorial Temas, Buenos Aires.

education quality is increasing. Experts in education highlight poor education levels, and cite the high proportion of students that have to repeat a year, or that drop out, as one of the main social problems, and show how it correlates with poverty.⁷⁷ A youth between 13 and 17 years of age living within the poorest quartile of the population is ten times more likely to stop attending school than a youth of the same age living within the wealthiest quartile. Some 40% of the those aged 18-25 have not completed high school, and half of these come from families in the lowest quintile of income levels.⁷⁸

In almost all the interviews reported here, there is a common pattern of young people dropping out of school, with parents unable to explain why. Sometimes they express it as being because of the “bad influence” of other young people. Also common is the lack of guidance or influence parents have over the lives of young people. Without education, they have little chance of getting a reasonably paid and stable job. At best, they will find a formal job that needs no qualifications and manage to form a stable life. Others become parents very young; they come and go from different odd jobs, and they continuously change the place where they live (with their parents, in a rented or borrowed room, or moving in with their partner). At worst, they hang out in the barrios with no future and become involved with crime, violence and drugs. In Argentina, 22% of those aged 15–29 do not study or work. People under the age of 30 represent 60% of the total unemployed.⁷⁹ Of young women aged 18 and 19, 32.5% have more than one child, and 6.6% have more than three.⁸⁰ In the San Fernando area, 15% of young women aged 15–19 have at least one child.⁸¹

Young children from low-income neighbourhoods reach school age already in a disadvantaged position in terms of learning and language development due to their social background. These differences are accepted uncritically and perpetuated through the education system.⁸² Those who attend school have to face the deterioration of the public school system: degraded buildings and infrastructure, teachers who are ill-prepared and poorly motivated, constant strikes and lost school days, and a non-stimulating environment. Attending school is much easier for children of middle- and high-income groups. Simple routines such as taking a child to school can be complicated for a low-income family. They may have other children, and need to take them along, or take the chance and leave them alone in the house (with the risks this has); or they may have sick children (quite likely in low-income families with many children) and need to take them to the health centre and therefore cannot take the rest to school. In this way, children lose school days and risk failing course requirements. At an early age, children sometimes start going by themselves to school, but as there is little communication between schools and parents, sometimes children just don't go in and make excuses to their parents as to why there weren't any classes. As children get older, pressures such as needing to work, lack of support from parents who have limited educational background and peer pressure from friends all compete in tempting them away from school. Parents see that not even high-school credentials guarantee a first job, so they no longer encourage young people to remain in

⁷⁷ Paragraph extracted from Hardoy, J., G. Sierra and A. Tammarazio et al. (2010) “Learning from young people and our own experiences in Barrio San Jorge”, *Environment and Urbanization* Vol. 22, No. 2.

⁷⁸ La Nación (2009) Aumentan la exclusión y la desigualdad escolar. Sábado 30 de Mayo, page 14.

⁷⁹ PNUD (2009) “Informe sobre desarrollo humano para Mercosur 2009–2010: novar para incluir: jóvenes y desarrollo humano” (<http://www.juventudydesarrollohumano.org/index.html>).

⁸⁰ INDEC (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos) (2005), Sistema de Indicadores Sociodemográficos (SESD), based on data from Encuesta Permanente de Hogares (EPH), second semester of 2005.

⁸¹ Unidad Municipal de Estadísticas y Censos (UMEC), Municipalidad de San Fernando (2009), La Población de San Fernando. Estadísticas Sociodemográficas 2005, 2006 y 2007, Chapter 4, “Health” by Silvia Mario.

⁸² Baratta, A. (2004) El Sistema Penal y la reproducción de la realidad social, in *Criminología crítica y crítica del derecho penal. Introducción a la sociología jurídico - penal*. Chapter 13, pages 179–192. Siglo XXI Editores. Buenos Aires.

school.⁸³ All these issues came up in the interviews; so too did the costs that households face in having children in school.

School attendance may be free, but children need clothing, books, money for transport (not necessarily for the student ticket but for the accompanying parent), and snacks. It is not uncommon to find children missing school classes or delaying going to school because their parents could not afford to buy the school apron and books at the beginning of the school year, or do not have money for the bus. In the interviews, we were surprised by the amount of money allocated to school snacks – \$1–2 per day per child – which is used to buy low-quality food and candies in school kiosks at much higher prices than in a supermarket (Tables 5 to 8). It could be that these families are living in the present – when they have the money they spend it, not thinking in how much it is per month – or they are copying the consumer habits of higher-income groups.

⁸³ Aguirre (2005) op. cit.

Table 5: Food and non-food costs for the household of Susana C

Seven children between 4 and 20, one with a disability, a baby granddaughter and one adult disabled brother living in Barrio San Jorge in 2009. Five of the children go to school.

Income: \$3100–3600 per month: formal employment plus “changas” (extras), including \$500 assistance for a disabled child and \$100 from Plan Mas Vida.

Item	Notes on costs	Costs (\$) per month
Food costs	They have one meal a day	1,200
Housing	They are informal owners During the last year they have not been able to make any improvements or repairs	125
Education	Transport to and from school – with company of mother School bag, books Clothes Money for food (\$2 per 2 students per day)	100 ? ? 84
Health care	They have health care from work, also discount for medicines. Son goes to public hospital in down-town Buenos Aires (pays transport, assuming the mother goes every 6 months, 2 persons at \$10 each per trip)	40
Transport	Assuming one working adult using public transport to go to and from work.	150
Electricity	They don't pay	0
Water + sanitation		10
Gas		20 bottled
Telephone	2 mobile phones	60
Digital TV		0
Credit obligations*		800
Other		
		2,589

She explains that they can no longer afford any type of recreation activities with their children; the monthly outing is a visit to the supermarket. She visits her son during weekdays to take advantage of the subsidized transportation tariffs for children at school.

* She has taken two credits from local moneylenders. For one credit of \$3,000 that they did not pay, they now have to pay \$5,000 in 10 quotas of \$500. For another of \$1,000 they are paying 8 quotas of \$300 (a total of \$2400).

Table 6: Food and non-food costs for the household of Graciela

A family of eight with three adult children working (but collaborating little), another that has just dropped out of school, one in secondary school and a grandson going to kindergarten. Living in Barrio Hardoy in 2009.

She has a monthly income of \$1317 plus a social plan of \$60 per month. She asks her adult working sons and daughters for money for food, some \$400 extra.

Item	Notes on costs	Costs (\$) per month
Food costs	Calculates \$32 per one complete meal	1,800
Housing	They are owners of the house – in the process of getting papers, and will need to start paying taxes once the process is finished. Fee for receiving Promeba benefits to a solidarity fund. Improvements/ expansion of the house	12 125
Education	Transport to and from school – walks School bag, books (averaged over year, 150 per student) Clothing (\$515 for one student) Money for food (\$1 per student per day)	0 13 43 25
Health care	They go to the health unit near the barrio. So they pay only the indirect cost of waiting. For medicines they go to pharmacies with discounts	
Transport	Assuming one working adult using public transport to go to and from work (\$5 per adult per day).	100
Electricity		50
Water + sanitation		20
Gas		35
Telephone	Mobile phone	35
Digital TV		
Credit obligations	None at the time of interview. She manages with salary advances that then are deducted in instalments	
Other		
		2,258

Table 7: Food and non-food costs for the household of Claudia M.

A family of five with one child in primary school and three in secondary school, living in Barrio Hardoy in 2009.

Monthly estimated income: \$1,800, plus to \$600 for extra hours, so total of \$1,800–2,400.

Item	Notes on costs	Costs (\$) per month
Food costs		1,800
Housing	They are owners of the house with legal paper in progress; they pay a fee for receiving Promeba benefits to a solidarity fund	13
Education	Transport to and from school (public transport with student tariff of \$0.10 + private school bus at \$100) Shoes, school bag, books	125 116
Health care	Difficult to estimate any figure. Husband has formal employment with health care (for example, son receives psychological treatment and pays a bonus of \$35 per 5 visits, the rest is covered by health insurance)	35
Transport	Assuming two adults using public transport to go to and from work and school. (M: \$2.10 per day, W: \$3.85 per day)	244
Clothes	Hard to estimate. They go to a fair one hour away. Buy mostly for the kids (in a year they estimate a minimum of \$1,800)	150
Electricity		30
Water + sanitation		20
Gas		35
Telephone	They have 4 mobile phones	?
Digital TV		
Credit obligations	They are paying for a computer, a desk and a fan	400
Other		
		2,968

Table 8: Food and non-food costs for the household of Adriana

A family of four with one child in primary school and one in secondary school, living in Villa del Carmen in 2009.

Monthly estimated income: \$2,000 salaries, plus \$190 employment plan, plus \$800 business = \$2,990

Item	Notes on costs	Costs (\$) per month
Food costs		1,500
Housing	They are owners of the house (inherited) and pay taxes Improvements	47 150
Education	Cost of extra classes Transport to and from school (public transport with student tariff of 0.10) Shoes, school bag, books (averaged over year, 150 per student) Money for food (2 per student per day)	115 4 25 80
Health care	Difficult to estimate any figure. They use the public health centre of the area, on average waiting 2 hours. They receive most medicines free (e.g. contraceptive pills). For more complex cases they go to the municipal public hospital. Medicine for thyroids	30
Transport	Assuming two adults using public transport to go to and from work (5 per adult per day)	200
Clothes	Hard to estimate. They go to a fair one hour away, buying only for the children: 1 jeans, 1 t-shirt, 1 brief per child every 6 months	40
Electricity		100
Water + sanitation		30
Gas		20
Telephone	They have a fixed line and 4 mobile phones	110
Digital TV		60
Credit obligations	They are paying for a refrigerator, a freezer, a digital camera, a bicycle plus credits to buy materials and improve the house*	610
Other	Football classes, recreation/holidays	260
		3,381

* For example: a normal refrigerator paid for in cash costs \$1,489; paid in 12 instalments, the cost ranges from \$1,935 to \$2,328 depending on the type of credit card used.

Urban poverty has a direct effect on human health and wellbeing, including infant and child survival, nutrition and life expectancy. In most low-income and many middle-income nations, infant and child mortality rates in urban areas are five to twenty times what they should be if the urban populations had adequate nutrition, good environmental health and a competent health care service.⁸⁴ The quality of primary health centres and hospitals varies enormously. Within the BAMR, the best public hospitals are within the city of Buenos Aires – but this is a two-hour bus journey away from San Fernando Municipality. San Fernando residents therefore use the city hospitals only rarely and generally for complex treatments. Though hospitals within Buenos Aires city offer better medical care, in terms of trained staff and equipment, they share similar problems with the municipal hospitals: overburdened and underpaid staff, equipment that is not properly maintained, run-down buildings and overcrowded premises.

Generally, low-income populations rely on the nearer municipal hospitals of poorer quality and capacity, or on decentralized health centres. They have to deal with long waits and poor diagnosis and treatments. Most of the women interviewed mentioned that they have to get up very early in the morning, sometimes 5 o'clock, to queue for a number to get an appointment; if they work or go to school it means a lost day of work or classes.

Quite often, poor people leave the doctor's office without really understanding the diagnosis and the recommended treatment. Overworked doctors do not often treat them with patience and respect. The women interviewed had experienced the frustration of getting up early, travelling, queuing, waiting, and then either not being seen by a doctor or being treated badly, or without the emotional support needed to cope with difficult health problems. Without understanding their condition, or that of a family member, and the treatment recommended, the chance of not completing the treatment is high and therefore so is the likelihood of getting ill again. Further, poor living conditions (damp, cold, badly ventilated and overcrowded) increase the likelihood of health problems and hinder recuperation. In many cases among the urban poor, relatively simple medical conditions (e.g. pneumonia) require hospitalization. The same condition would present minimal risk to otherwise healthy people receiving proper care.

Any chronic medical situation that needs continuous treatment needs special authorizations and requires lots of paper work and visits to different offices day after day. Usually these are complex and frustrating bureaucratic procedures. Women (i.e. mothers) are usually the last to take seriously any symptom that they may have: there is just no time, money or energy left to try to see a doctor. They will go when they feel very sick; they seldom take preventive measures, not realizing how much they compromise the functioning of the family if they are sick.

There are no statistics on the proportion of the urban population with access to a good-quality fire service, emergency health service, police service or waste collection, but the inadequacy or complete absence of these is quite evident in low-income neighbourhoods. It is common to hear that the police never go into these neighbourhoods, and⁸⁵ that ambulances, if they come, stay outside these barrios afraid to go in and that no one ever sees a fire engine. This is partly because of the layout of the barrios, with their narrow lanes and unpaved roads, but more to do with their reputation. It is also linked to government neglect of these settlements, and their inhabitants being unable to exercise the necessary pressures and controls to guarantee all citizens the same rights. Of course, this is also related to the capacity of the residents to organize and make visible their needs. People living in high- and middle-income neighbourhoods take for granted their support and protection by a web of institutions, infrastructure, services and regulations provided by government or accessed privately.

⁸⁴ Montgomery, M.R., R. Stren, B. Cohen and H.E. Reed (Eds) (2003) *Cities Transformed; Demographic change and its implications in the developing world*, The National Academy Press/Earthscan, Washington DC.

⁸⁵ See below: inadequate protection through the operation of the law.

Waste collection is a complex issue in low-income neighbourhoods. Waste-collection trucks sometimes have problems of access, and workers seldom walk in to collect bags on narrow lanes. In the sectors they do go into, they seldom comply with the schedule (days and timetable), and municipal governments exert little control over them. At the same time, residents have little idea of how to dispose of wastes properly, how the service should operate or where to call to denounce poor service. Often, it is much easier just to throw the bag into a stream or drain, or where there is a pile of other uncollected waste. It is common for dogs and horses to break the bags and for neighbours to set the garbage on fire, after which no waste truck will collect it.

Uncollected waste is one of the most serious environmental problems in poor urban neighbourhoods. Waste clogs drains and local streams, increasing the risk of floods. Uncollected waste degrades the quality of the environment (and especially of open and public space) and encourages disease transmission (for instance by rats and mosquitoes). Dengue, once a very localized problem, has again spread throughout most Latin American countries. Argentina had been free of dengue for many years (with only very localized cases near the frontier with Paraguay and Brazil); now there are many cases of dengue spread over many provinces. As far as we know, most government response has concentrated on fumigation (but generally in parks and open spaces where more affluent citizens go), distributing insect repellents and preparing media campaigns. There are sporadic efforts to clean degraded open spaces and work with communities in campaigns to clean their own plots and immediate surroundings, and to subsidize the installation of mosquito screens in doors and windows and lids on water tanks. However, there is no long-term and consistent effort to keep low-income areas clean, and to counter the conditions in which mosquitoes proliferate.

4.7 Inadequate, unstable or risky asset base

The important role that different assets have in helping low-income groups cope with stresses or shocks and avoiding poverty is now well known.⁸⁶ But there is still little or no documentation on how external stresses or shocks disrupt poor people's livelihoods – for instance, how floods destroy or damage homes and assets, the lost opportunities or what it takes to recover a situation that was already disadvantaged beforehand. Most losses may be small in monetary terms, yet devastating to the lives of low-income people. In addition, many losses are qualitative and hard to measure – for instance the work and school days lost, and the disruption to informal income-earning activities.⁸⁷ Low-income households' income and asset base may be so fragile that any unforeseen problem or unexpected expense can bring the household into a critical state.

Women have a key role in taking care of the household's asset base, and many see that by improving the conditions of the whole neighbourhood they will guarantee the protection of their individual assets. Interviews with women managing credit funds highlighted how they participate in community activities because they know that their future is tied to the improvement of the entire neighbourhood.⁸⁸ These women take on the responsibility of participating in community activities, negotiating with different actors, and going door-to-door in order to make their needs heard and thus assume leadership roles within their communities

⁸⁶ Moser, Caroline O.N. and David Satterthwaite (2008) *Towards Pro-poor Adaptation to Climate Change in the Urban Centres of Low- and Middle-income Countries*. Climate Change and Cities Discussion Paper No. 3, Human Settlements Discussion Paper Series, IIED, London.

⁸⁷ Hardoy and Pandiella (2009) op. cit.; Bartlett, Sheridan (2008), *Climate Change and Urban Children: Implications for adaptation in low and middle income countries*, IIED Working Paper, IIED, London.

⁸⁸ See: *El Agua era un sueño*. Short film produced by IIED-AL within the framework of the IIED-coordinated project, Improving urban water and sanitation provision globally, through information and action driven locally, financed by Danida, Sida and Dfid (www.iied-al.org.ar). See also interviews for this paper (Table 4 above).

They also learn to negotiate programmes of support with the government and other stakeholders, and in the process they grow in self-esteem and respect. However, active participation requires a considerable time commitment, possible only for those women who do not work. Often, community work is incompatible with both having a paid job and doing household work. Getting a job risks depleting women's capacity for community participation.

In Argentina, it is often assumed that there are no solidarity networks operating between kin and neighbours, but this is not always the case. It depends very much on the characteristics of each neighbourhood and the particular context. Sometimes a mother relies on a neighbour or family member to keep an eye on her children while she goes to work or elsewhere such as to the doctor. These day-to-day informal arrangements are not recorded. One of the women interviewed commented that "*during hard times no one gives a hand*", meaning that when there is a crisis that puts incomes at risk, people in low-income neighbourhoods tend to look to their own. The comment is discouraging, highlighting that during economic crisis some people focus most on their own needs while others reach out to help other members of the community, for example by organizing soup kitchens or raffles to raise money for those in greatest need.

4.8 Limited or no safety net

Generally, low-income families have little chance of saving individually. The interviews show how households stretch their money each month to cover their daily basic needs. Any unexpected need is a jolt to the family's economy. Health problems can severely affect a family's subsistence capacity. More often than not, to repair a refrigerator, a TV or the oven can take months due to lack of funds.

Building and undertaking maintenance and improvements to the house is a never-ending process, done little by little. These families generally use some of the following options to get some extra money, buy construction materials, pay for the work of others (e.g. a builder or technician) or equip the house and family (such as by purchasing furniture, a bicycle or a TV).

1. Access and participation in savings groups between kin, family or close neighbours. This is not common for people born in or living for long periods in BAMR. This is probably related to cultural backgrounds and traditions in which savings have not been important, and a lack of trust and strong community ties, but we found no detailed comparative study on this. The residents we know are implementing community savings funds are immigrants from other Latin American countries (Box 1).
2. Access to credit funds, with an initial seed fund donated by government, aid agency or institution and managed by an NGO, a group of women or a CBO. Typically, these have no or very low interest rates and are used for specific purposes, such as house building or improvement/connection to the water network.⁸⁹
3. Access to credit lines provided by local retail stores such as large chain supermarkets. Many people in formal employment (and with a credit or debit card) can buy items such as food, electronic goods, furniture and home supplies on credit from these shops. One of the women interviewed mentioned that these stores have no sales or good deals available on the days of the month when people are paid. So, they try to wait for the sales but this is difficult and they often need to shop before the sales start. They are captive consumers of the retail store.

⁸⁹ One example is the credit fund managed by IIED-AL, which is now decentralized and managed by a group of women. This fund allows neighbours in several barrios in San Fernando to obtain housing-construction materials with interest-free credit. For more on this see: Almansi, F. and A. Tammarazio (2008) "Mobilizing projects in community organizations with long-term perspective: neighbourhood credit funds in Buenos Aires", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol. 20 No. 1, pages 121-147.

4. Credits provided by banks. For those with pensions, these are usually paid through certain banks, which offer credit to pensioners and deduct it from their monthly allowance. Pensioners constantly see their allowances diminished by the quota and interest rates they are paying to the bank, and the cycle keeps pushing them into greater debts (see Table 4, the case of Rosa).
5. Money borrowed from moneylenders at very high interest rates, and used to meet different needs when incomes are insufficient.

The first two options can be an incentive to save and help to improve living conditions. But the last three options are not. Although they can be used for the purchase of goods that are needed or give some measure of comfort to the family, they put the families into debt. Borrowers pay high interest rates and this often pushes the family further away from any possibility of meeting needs at the end of the month as they have to allocate a significant proportion of their income to debt repayments.

Of the nine women interviewed, six are repaying different kinds of credits (see Tables 4 to 8) and usually more than one credit. In several cases, this represents a substantial proportion of their declared monthly income, often as much as 20%. Others mentioned having to pay credits in the past but mostly to the IIED–America Latina credit fund for the purchase of construction materials for housing.

Buying goods on credit substantially increases the price paid. The Consumers Survey (Encuesta de Gastos e Ingresos de los Hogares – ENGH) looks in detail at household expenses asking about the type, quantity and cost of all acquired services and goods. This is used to set the CBA and CBT and therefore poverty levels. But the survey price of an acquired good such as a TV is the cash price, not the real price paid when brought with credit. Yet, most families have to purchase consumer durables through credit, paying a higher price for the good than if paid in cash. In official surveys, this goes unregistered but in real life can account for a significant proportion of household income.

It is very rare for low-income households to have insurance against risks such as floods, fires or robbery, even though they regularly face these kinds of shocks. Although the monetary value of the items lost can be insignificant in official statistics, for poor households they are often items that are hard to replace. More often than not, families are aware of the risks but cannot afford the insurance premiums. It would be one more thing to pay, so they take chances. Besides, it is also unlikely that a formal insurance company would offer insurance coverage for housing and personal possessions to those who live in informal settlements. Community savings schemes are rare in low-income settlements in Argentina, although migrants from Peru have established small-scale savings projects (Box 1).

None of the interviewees had life insurance or any type of insurance that helps cover health costs or income lost from injuries or accidents at home. Only those in formal employment have insurance against accidents at work, and also health insurance for their family. The rest just lose work days and lose income if they are sick or injured; sometimes they may even lose their job. In the case of severe accidents, this compromises future work possibilities. Even for those with formal jobs and insurance, this probably will not cover the cost of all work days lost. They will receive a lump sum of money as compensation that will be spent in quite a short time, and they will have to start relying on other strategies for survival, like those who never had insurance – for instance, relying on the incomes of other household members such as partners and older children or those who receive a state pension.

Box 1: A migrant community develops saving strategies

A migrant community from Peru living in a low-income settlement in the municipality of Tigre, BAMR, has developed two saving schemes based on trust and transparency. Both schemes capitalize on communal roots.

La Junta (savings group)

This community has many juntas in operating, each consisting of 10 members (friends or family). Each junta stipulates how much money per month will be collected (for instance 100 or 200 pesos), and one member is the organizer. Numbers are allocated by a raffle between members with the exception of the organizer who gets number 1. The numbers indicate the order of members' turns in receiving the money. For example, in a junta that saves 200 pesos per month, someone who gets number 4 in the raffle will receive 2000 pesos in the fourth month. People can participate in more than one junta at a time, or share a place with another person. The system operates on trust; if one junta member introduces a friend, the introducing member is responsible for the new member. Using this system, members manage to save and improve their houses, build second floors, organize baptisms or special birthdays or the local celebration of the Virgin of Santa Rosa, patron of Lima.

El Banquito (the little bank)

Several neighbours who want to save (and have some extra money) decide on how much money per month each one will contribute. The savings group organizes festivities, football matches or other recreational activities that will bring neighbours together and leave some profits for those who put in the money and organized the activity. At the end of the year, the leaders of the banquito explain the accounts to members and distribute the profits (5%) according to the money given each month. The system obliges those who participate to save each month, with the benefit of obtaining some profits at the end of the year. However, the activities proposed and implemented are for the whole community, helping to build community ties and a sense of neighbourhood.

Source: Based on an interview with a women participating in a Junta.

There are few family and institutional mechanisms to support young people and act as a safety net. Without support from families and neighbours, or adequate institutional capacity to design and manage programmes and interventions suited to their needs and aspirations, young people are particularly vulnerable and can get caught in a loop of unfulfilled aspirations.⁹⁰ Seldom do programmes and interventions respond in the ways young people need, and their opinions and ideas are rarely taken into account. Their capacity to develop as full individuals and citizens is seriously undermined.⁹¹ As mentioned above, it is common for young people in informal settlements to drop out of school and to find only low-paid, intermittent work requiring few qualifications.

Many interviewees raised their concern about the challenges of bringing up young people in the face of school drop-out, drug abuse, crime, violence, unemployment and early parenthood. Parents rarely have the tools to contend with these threats. Instead of integrating young people into family and community life, educational and penal systems reproduce exclusion and marginalization. Most youth programmes are very narrow in their scope; they address only one or two issues in isolation. Seldom do you find programmes working with young people as active stakeholders, engaging them on processes that are important for them. As time passes, it becomes more difficult to engage with those excluded, and to reach some level of commitment to and participation in community life. Therefore, the chances diminish of integrating young people as active participants within their families, neighbourhoods and wider society.

⁹⁰ Hardoy, Sierra and Tammarazio et al. (2010) op. cit.

⁹¹ Hardoy, Sierra and Tammarazio et al. (2010) op. cit.

In recent years, a range of national social and employment programmes have provided some forms of assistance. Low-income groups have become increasingly reliant on these for subsistence. During the very serious socioeconomic crisis of 2001/02, an emergency programme was implemented for heads of household (Plan Jefes y Jefas de Hogar). This consisted of a small amount of money intended for the population most exposed to the crisis. Government agencies decided who was to receive the benefit in a process with no transparency, using political brokers working at community level. In 2004, another social programme (Programa Familias por la Inclusión Social), targeted to protect vulnerable families (adults with children) incorporated many who had formerly benefitted from Jefes y Jefas de Hogar as well as new beneficiaries (Table 9). This plan provides a small monetary allocation for each child, plus health controls, education support and training. Families with two children below 19 years of age receive 185 Argentinean pesos/month; with six or more children, the amount reaches \$305. In theory, to receive this, parents must not be employed or receive other pensions or assistance programmes.

Table 9: Evolution of the Programa Familias in terms of targeted families

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Targeted families	243,449	330,754	497,793	574,876	695,177
Children covered by programme	852,071	1,157,639	1,742,275	2,012,066	2,433,119
Migration from Jefes y Jefas de Hogar	9,736	129,064	300,050	375,438	398,927

Source: Ministry of Social Work. Programa Familias por la Inclusión Social (<http://www.desarrollosocial.gov.ar/Planes/PF/surgimiento.asp>)

Management of the plan is similar to that of Jefes y Jefas de Hogar, and of many assistance programmes, including monthly food support and education grants. The rules on who will or will not receive the benefits are never transparent and this gives the official ruling party a large advantage. From the information included in Table 4 above, and the individual interviews summarized in Tables 5 to 8, it is clear that a family of 7 or 8 cannot live on only \$305/month. One of the women interviewed commented, *“I wonder, what can a family do with \$185? I see shoes in fashion magazines that cost \$750; with luck, I can buy a pair of shoes at \$20 for Christmas and my husband has a good job.”*

4.9 Inadequate protection of poorer groups’ rights through the operation of law

Crime in low-income neighbourhoods is increasingly recognized as one of the biggest burdens facing residents. In the informal settlements in which we work, crime is often related to increasing drug consumption. It is now common for low-income households in BAMR to get robbed, and for people to be mugged while waiting at a bus stop. Victims are robbed of money, cellular phones, a jacket or tennis shoes. Street violence and shootings can happen any time. These neighbourhoods are known as “liberated zones” because the police seldom visit them. Residents tired of living surrounded by crime are told by the police, the Church or municipal authorities that they have to identify those engaged in drug trafficking, robberies, or the dismantling of stolen cars. But people in these barrios know that there can be reprisals against them and their families if they do so.

One of the women interviewed recounted how a young Peruvian man had helped a family in the barrio where he lived in the municipality of Tigre to avoid being robbed and had caught the muggers. But the family of the muggers started to look for him, so he had to go in hiding and eventually returned to Peru. Other stories gathered from the interviews tell of how people from their community mug them but they are unable to denounce them because they fear reprisals. They tell of how the police can get into a house of a neighbour, put everything upside down, detain the woman owner of the house, beat her, leave her all night wet and cold, and the next

day let her out with no explanation; apparently, it was a “case of mistaken identity” but nobody involved is answerable. Another reported incident concerned a youth of 18 detained because he was riding on a motorbike with a friend. The motorbike had been stolen, and his friend was a minor so he was held responsible. He was almost a week in detention; he was found not guilty but his police record now says he had been detained. During that week, his mother was unable to go to work as she tried to find ways of helping her son; she then lost her job. For the women interviewed, and for most people living in low-income settlements, these kinds of problems are not unusual.

Interviewees also mentioned frequent violent fights between neighbours, often escalating as the whole extended family gets involved. Hardly anyone seeks peaceful ways to resolve conflicts. There is always a group of “difficult” people ready to attack those they think might be *soplón*,⁹² or because they don’t like their associates or employers. Many residents describe how they cannot walk freely in their own barrios and cannot go to meetings in areas within the “territory” of these difficult people. Recently an urban upgrading programme was launched in Barrio San Jorge that will improve infrastructure, roads, public spaces, open “pasillos”,⁹³ build a new health centre, relocate some families and give formal tenure. The meetings to explain the programme had to be held in two different locations because people from one sector could not go the other. And, in the meetings, some people asked about the possibility of opening a new road to avoid the place where “difficult” people gather. Some families moved to other barrios, or asked to move to another plot or house due to problems of violent neighbours.

The police avoid going into low-income settlements – unless they are involved in the illegal activities there (mostly drugs and dismantling of stolen cars). The level of corruption is high and residents have lost faith in the operation of the law. The judicial system is overburdened and the penitentiary system has collapsed. Detention centres are overcrowded with people who have not been tried and sentenced. Many others just walk in and out of detention centres even when they have committed crimes and there is proof of it. Staff working in municipal institutions dealing with people released from the justice system, mention that they mostly see men from low-income neighbourhoods (accounting for perhaps 90% of cases). These people come to the institution once they have had a sentence that may or may not involve time under arrest and they have to present themselves once a month.⁹⁴ They often arrive with no idea of the status of their case or of what they have to do. Sometimes they even have no idea why they were arrested. Most often, they have only an overworked State lawyer dealing with many cases a month who cannot make a proper defence, and does not explain the legal jargon and large amounts of paper work.

Members of lower-income groups tend to receive much more severe detention penalties than those from middle- and higher -income groups. Once someone has a detention record, it is very difficult to get this removed. Often, when low-income inhabitants are placed under arrest, the police treat them with brutality. Detention centres do not support rehabilitation, and there are no programmes targeted to at-risk population sectors. Many go in and out of youth institutions that only reinforce their penal condition, and it is very difficult for those with penal records to get a job. With so few options, it is easy to turn to crime, violence and drug abuse, and the cycle keeps reproducing itself. This is especially difficult for low-income families who usually cannot offer appropriate emotional and professional support to children and young people.

Low-income neighbourhoods usually have the stigma of being violent places, and residents are widely regarded as people who don’t want to work and easily turn to crime. Even neighbourhoods just slightly more consolidated look down on low-income neighbourhoods. When looking for a job, it is a disadvantage to live in these neighbourhoods, and not having a

⁹² An informer.

⁹³ Narrow lanes.

⁹⁴ Personal communication from a social worker in one of these institutions in the Municipality of San Fernando.

proper address directly connotes living in an informal settlement. Several of the women interviewed who live in barrios with no formal tenure mention the disadvantages they face when they or their children apply for a job because of their address. This same point was made in workshops with residents of nearby settlements.⁹⁵

4.10 Voicelessness and powerlessness within political systems and bureaucratic structures

The lack of studies and information available to give an accurate idea of the burdens of what it means to live in poverty, and of studies that include low-income people's priorities and capacities and their own perceptions of their situation, has to do with the invisibility of most aspects of their lives. It indicates their relative lack of voice and power as they seek to express their needs, claim their basic rights and contribute to decisions affecting their lives. In a participatory mapping exercise in a municipality of BAMR, an issue raised was the need for a process "to make visible the invisible". The mapping process allowed neighbours to record everyday situations of their neighbourhoods that were totally ignored by the authorities and the rest of the population. These included the need for new settlements, roads that were officially said to be paved but were now unpaved (because they were so broken down that the upper asphalt cover had long been lost), and water supply networks that were never built.

There are many examples of communities engaged in mapping and information gathering that also help to build relations with local governments.⁹⁶ But, at least in the Argentinean context, this is hindered by the co-option of community representatives by political brokers, and the paternalistic and clientelistic mechanisms that are so extended and rooted within Argentine society that any transparent, participatory mechanisms are constantly eroded.

Traditionally, the perception is that local governments "know best" and have the right to make decisions; "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 co-option 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. In these circumstances it is hard (but not impossible) to build transparent participatory mechanisms. One resident noted:

"we also thought that if we did not help each other and fought 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 goodwill, work, participation in the meetings, and listen to proposals and choose what is best and possible for the barrio".⁹⁷

In our work with different local governments of the BAMR, we observe important differences in how they interface and dialogue with community representatives and NGOs, although many are inclined to use the traditional Argentinean way of doing politics by operating through "punteros"

⁹⁵ Hardoy, Sierra and Tammarazio et al. (2010) op. cit.

⁹⁶ The journal *Environment and Urbanization* has published many examples of this – see for instance Patel, Sheela, Celine d’Cruz and Sundar Burra (2002) "Beyond evictions in a global city: people-managed resettlement in Mumbai", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol. 14, No. 1, pages 159–172; Weru, Jane (2004) "Community federations and city upgrading: the work of Pamoja Trust and Muungano in Kenya", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pages 47–62; and Karanja, Irene (2010) "An enumeration and mapping of informal settlements in Kisumu, Kenya, implemented by their inhabitants", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pages 217–239.

⁹⁷ Almansi, Hardoy and Hardoy (2010) op. cit.

or political brokers.⁹⁸ In some cases, local governments control how these brokers operate, with whom they meet and what they say, and press them to align behind local government's decisions.⁹⁹ This approach clashes with a participatory, collaborative and democratic approach. There is a permanent tension in the role of community representatives; they are continuously challenged by their neighbours, NGOs and local government. They often act as intermediaries between government programmes and the neighbourhood so they receive constant criticism from neighbours because the programme is not evolving as anticipated. They are also usually targets of suspicions (i.e. that they have individually benefited from their role – which can happen) and they are not credited for their role, their perseverance and strength.

Often enough, local leaders manage negotiations and deliver benefits to the whole neighbourhood, as they can be in a good position to negotiate with the local government improvements for their neighbourhood. But, in reality, political parties need these people and they try to co-opt them as local political brokers, especially if they have a good rapport with neighbours and are not confrontational with government. It is easy to tempt and co-opt community leaders with social or infrastructure programmes if incomes are not enough to cover food needs and other essentials, or if the neighbourhood is lacking all the needed infrastructure. Community representatives who are conscious of their role and respond to those they represent constantly need to seek their strength in community values.

For the local government, it is much easier if community members do not participate and do what they are told; this is controlled through the local political brokers. On the other hand, local governments share a fear of generating demands that they cannot fulfil. In meetings with municipal employees, it is common to hear that it is the local government that is the recipient of local demands and has to respond to them. They will do everything possible to avoid being placed in this situation, keeping the levels of demand as low as possible. In many cases, this fear is justified. Even when the national government announces major programmes and takes credit for them, in the end it is local government that has to deal with the delays and problems of project implementation. These include the fact that the external support comes as a package designed by higher levels of government, with little scope for making modifications to suit local realities.

Another factor continuously undermining participatory processes is the tradition of charity programmes implemented alongside party political interests (that pay representatives to attend meetings). Community members are generally more inclined to wait for handouts and receive monetary benefits from participating in political meetings than to get actively involved in projects that directly affect them but have no certain outcome.

5. Poverty reduction in the Municipality of San Fernando¹⁰⁰

Poverty lines and measurements of unsatisfied basic needs are meant to guide social and infrastructure policies and programmes. None of the public social and infrastructure programmes that we know in the different municipalities in Greater Buenos Aires use the poverty lines to determine target populations and intervention areas. Housing and infrastructure programmes implemented at the local level may draw initially on UBN and later become more refined through the application of a local diagnosis. In recent years, national programmes (including housing, infrastructure and social programmes), although financed through national or provincial

⁹⁸ This usually means operating through political brokers within political parties that address the needs of the area in exchange for votes.

⁹⁹ This way of operating is evident not only in local governments; it comes down from national and provincial levels of government, and depends much on the style of each elected president. The current administration is characterized by strict control and pressure applied to all sectors and groups, and is hard and even vengeful towards those who oppose it.

¹⁰⁰ Based on the background paper: Gomez, Silvia, Ana Alvarez and Cecilia Monti (2009), *Mirada sobre la Pobreza en el marco de Intervenciones Integrales: Estudio de caso del Municipio de San Fernando*.

governments, have been implemented by local governments. In theory, local governments have a better knowledge of local characteristics, can identify target population and priorities, and are best placed to shape (within limits) the programme to address their local needs.

We selected the Municipality of San Fernando to examine how a Unit of Urban Planning and Land Reorganization makes use of official poverty statistics, identifies local target populations and needs, and implements programmes in the process of trying to mitigate and reduce the multiple aspects of poverty. We chose San Fernando because we have been working in this municipality for over 20 years and thus have a knowledge of local context and the links with local government officials that help us get the needed information.

5.1 Background information on San Fernando

San Fernando is a small municipality towards the northeast of BAMR, with a continental section of 23 square kilometres inhabited by 160,000 people, and a large portion of delta islands with some 3000 inhabitants. The continental area can be divided into three, roughly parallel sections. Physical barriers create these divisions but they coincide with particular socioeconomic characteristics:

Section 1: from the Lujan River to the railway line between Tigre and Retiro (downtown Buenos Aires)

Section 2: from the railway line to the highway (connecting Tigre to downtown Buenos Aires)

Section 3: from the highway to the Reconquista River.

Moving from Sections 1 to 3, there is a progressive decline in family incomes, services, infrastructure and “formality”. In 2007, households with UBN represented 13.8% of the total households overall, but the proportions of households with UBN by section were 3.5% in Section 1, 12.9% in Section 2 and 30.2% in Section 3. The corresponding values disaggregated between households living in informal neighbourhoods and the rest of the households in the district are 54.4% and 9.4%, respectively.¹⁰¹

According to the Unit of Urban Planning and Land Reorganization, its key challenge is to address the following critical problems:

- multiple inequalities, in terms of income and access to services and infrastructure
- breaks and barriers in the urban layout and scarce available free space (informal settlements and “villas” often cause urban barriers by occupying spaces needed to open roads to connect to the rest of the urban area, and many houses are accessed by narrow lanes not appropriate in the “formal” city)
- breaks in the social layout
- a crisis of ideals and values, in terms of solidarity, responsibility, identity and cooperation.

The Unit responds to these challenges by finding ways to integrate informal neighbourhoods into the formal city, using different strategies associated with the construction of neighbourhood infrastructure, new housing and housing improvements, re-organization of the urban layout and integration to the urban landscape and recovery and/ or creation of local public spaces. This includes the formation of working committees, and the generation of community projects to complement the overall neighbourhood improvement projects.

In this approach, the planners recognize that, to improve living conditions, they have to deal with many aspects – social, land tenure, hydraulic/water management, and urban – and this is a real challenge as most existing social, housing and infrastructure programmes present serious

¹⁰¹ Unidad Municipal de Estadísticas y Censos (UMEC). Estadísticas Socio demográficas 2005 – 2006 – 2007. Municipalidad de San Fernando.

constraints related to the scope of the analysis, the integration of areas and problems, and financing procedures. They need to adjust these programmes to respond to the overall municipal goal of integrating different urban areas, reducing inequalities and improving social equity.

5.2 Criteria used to identify target populations and neighbourhoods

The Unit of Urban Planning and Land Reorganization is well aware that the poverty line and UBN indicators are insufficient to understand the complexity of the territory in which they intervene. The planners therefore look at social, economic, environmental and legal vulnerability, not poverty measured by income alone. They have established certain criteria to guide decision-making and prioritize interventions. Monetary resources and operational and management capacity are not enough to deal with all the different needs at the same time, so they need to prioritize and distribute different urban benefits. The analysis considers the combined effect of:

- infrastructure deficiencies
- environmental conditions
- UBN indicators (including overcrowding)
- housing conditions
- neighbourhood layout (for instance, the amount of narrow lanes, size of plots and relocation needs)
- tenure status and feasibility of obtaining formal tenure, depending on ownership of the land upon which the neighbourhood is settled, hydraulic restrictions (for instance being on a flood plain or close to a river), cadastral situation and land use approved in the area
- community organization and predisposition to participate in neighbourhood improvement programmes.

The Unit's initial approach to addressing vulnerability is based on official indicators, both PLs and UBNs but mostly the latter, based on the National Housing and Population Census, and refined by the Municipalities Statistics office.¹⁰² But, the Unit planners recognize that these indicators are insufficient to understand the complexity of the needs in the district. So, they rely on their particular knowledge of the place to develop integral development policies that address social and environmental aspects, tenure, hydraulic restrictions, urban layout, housing, and so on, all of which make up the complex reality of low- and lower-middle- income neighbourhoods. In each of the neighbourhoods identified as potential areas of intervention, surveys and censuses are carried out to improve knowledge of family composition, employment and income, education access, health needs, tenure status and housing conditions. At later stages, a second round of censuses is carried out to obtain more detailed information on family composition, plot sizes, house layout, construction conditions and services. In this way, better knowledge is collected about the needs of particular households and household transformations. In these neighbourhoods, it is common to see rapid changes in household composition, for example when extended family members come and go such as when young people become parents.

5.3 National programmes implemented within integrated local urban policies

An initial step is to identify breaks in the urban layout – which correspond quite well with areas with high PL and UBN. Primary and secondary information produced by different municipal offices is also included: a local population census (implemented in each low-income neighbourhood), information from primary health care centres and social programmes. Yet, even this combination of data is not enough, as the links between precariousness, vulnerability and poverty are not that clear. And there are no clear dividing lines between being poor or non-poor, vulnerable or non-vulnerable – a household will not cease to be poor and vulnerable once its income is just above the poverty line. So, the final

¹⁰² In 2004 the Municipality of San Fernando created the Municipal Statistics and Census Unit (Unidad Municipal de Estadísticas y Censos – UMEC). The creation of these municipal units is not common in Argentina.

details for the application of urban social transformation and the integration of municipal policies are based on the on-the-ground knowledge of local conditions, drawing on data collected by social workers working locally and from neighbourhood censuses.

The municipality's mid-term policy regarding urban integration and social transformation is focused around three programmes:

- housing programmes (Programa Federal de Vivienda, Programa Federal de Emergencia Habitacional, Subprograma Federal de Urbanización de Villas y Asentamientos Precarios, Plan Solidaridad)
- the Housing Improvement Programme (Mejor Vivir)
- the Neighbourhood Improvement Programme (Promeba).¹⁰³

These are national programmes but tailored (as much as possible) to local needs. They aim to reduce social and urban inequality in the areas of intervention within an integral urban development strategy. Rarely do local governments in Argentina have enough monetary resources to implement these kinds of programmes. Most commonly, housing and infrastructure programmes are financed by loans from the Inter-American Development Bank to the national government.

Of the three types of programmes, the Promeba neighbourhood improvement programme is perhaps the most important tool used to integrate the urban layout and remove barriers between formal and informal areas. This programme is mostly geared towards installing complete urban infrastructure and services (piped gas, electricity, piped water, sanitation, drainage, waste collection, public spaces, and communal spaces) and seeks to provide formal tenure to residents. The urban transformation goes hand in hand with social community work, and therefore the long-term social transformation of what it means to be part of the formal city – for instance, rights and responsibilities regarding services, taxes, participation and channels of communication. This is done by working with the community in weekly neighbourhood committees, workshops and other means.

Given that unoccupied and undeveloped land in the district is limited, most of the work focuses on upgrading existing housing. New housing is mostly provided for families that need to be relocated because they impede the implementation of neighbourhood improvement programmes. In order to implement these improvement programmes, and transform informal settlements into sections of the formal city, roads need to be opened and narrow lanes eliminated to allow for infrastructure, compliance with minimum safety standards regarding distance from river banks or above sea level, and minimum plot sizes to reduce overcrowding. This means that certain families have to be relocated and therefore new housing is constructed.

The Housing Improvement Programme (Mejor Vivir), is used to address two different needs. The first is helping residents to connect to the infrastructure installed by the neighbourhood improvement programmes and to improve kitchens and bathrooms in order to comply with minimum technical conditions to connect to the trunk services being built. It would make no sense to install piped water, sewers or gas pipes if the families do not have the means to connect their houses to the new trunk infrastructure. The second need is to improve housing conditions in lower-middle-income neighbourhoods for households who otherwise would have little chances of doing it by themselves, as their savings capacity is almost none and they have no chance of accessing the private credit sector. These neighbourhoods are located on the borders of the informal settlements. Because of their relatively better conditions (including regular urban layout, trunk services and semi-formal

¹⁰³ Promeba I was implemented in Barrios Hardoy and La Paz between 2003 and 2006; in early 2010 residents finally received their formal tenure papers. Promeba transition is being implemented in Villa Jardín and Guemes. Promeba II is being implemented in Barrios San Jorge and Presidente Perón, and will soon start in San Martín. The municipal government, with the financial support of another national program though less ambitious in scope, is stretching its resources and implementing a similar neighbourhood up-grading process in Barrio Santa Rosa and will soon start in Barrio Alvear.

tenure), households here do not receive benefits from other programmes. However, surveys by the local Unit of Urban Planning and Land Reorganization have identified many cases of households here that cannot afford the costs of connecting to trunk services or various situations of substandard housing and irregularities in tenure papers. The implementation of this programme in lower-middle-income neighbourhoods is also a way of redistributing benefits towards a population in need and unable to use its own means or loans to improve conditions.

5.4 Innovative by-products of the programmes

Two programmes, the Fondo Equitativo Solidario (Solidarity Fund) and Fondo de Casas (Housing Fund) have emerged as a result of the long-term coordinated work of the Secretariat of Urban Planning and Land Reorganization, IIED–America Latina and the community organizations working in three adjacent barrios: San Jorge, Hardoy and La Paz.

The first is a response to perceived injustices and some unintended consequences of the intervention of Promeba I in Barrios Hardoy and La Paz, and the impossibility of incorporating Barrio San Jorge in the first round. The neighbourhood improvement programme Promeba allowed many households to receive basic infrastructure (paved roads and sidewalks, gas, electricity and improvements in water and sanitation) for free. In many cases, households also got a house for free. Before this programme, however, many families in Barrio Hardoy had built their own houses and contributed to installing the neighbourhood water and sanitation network. In the case of La Paz, in order to regularize the urban layout (and therefore permit the incorporation of the neighbourhood within Promeba), families occupying land needed for streets had to relocate to a housing plan that required the payment of monthly instalments. Because it is close to a river, Barrio San Jorge could not be incorporated in Promeba. This generated tension because of the historic ties between Barrios Hardoy and San Jorge (many of Hardoy's inhabitants were formerly residents of San Jorge).¹⁰⁴

The Solidarity Fund was created, to which each household benefiting from Promeba contributed with small monthly instalments over two years. The amount contributed was in proportion to the benefits received (either just public infrastructure and tenure, or also improvements within the house or a new house). The resources collected were used for community actions – for instance, in San Jorge, the maintenance of an alternative sewerage system built some years previously. In La Paz, these resources were used to help those who had moved to the Housing project and needed to pay long-term monetary instalments. Neighbourhood representatives, local institutions and the local government created a commission to manage the fund.

The second programme, the Housing Fund, was created to serve two purposes. First, it sought to help households within San Jorge in need of a house. Second, it sought to control informal house sales during the period between the last neighbourhood population census and the finalization of the Promeba II¹⁰⁵ when residents of San Jorge would receive formal tenure. One of the conditions established when the Promeba was announced was that there could be no buying and selling of houses (because this makes it impossible to complete formal tenure files) and any special cases should be referred to the local community organization. The fund is managed by the community organization of Barrio San Jorge, the local government and IIED–America Latina.

If anyone needs to sell, the housing fund buys the house (based on the price of the construction, not the land because they are not owners yet) and sells it in instalments to another family of San Jorge. With the money recovered, a new house can be bought. A list of families with housing needs is

¹⁰⁴ See Hardoy, A. and R. Schusterman (1997), "Reconstructing social capital in a poor urban settlement: the Integral Improvement Programme in Barrio San Jorge", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol. 9, No. 1, pages 91–119. Also Hardoy, A. and Jorge Hardoy, with collaboration of Ricardo Schusterman (1991) "Building community organization: the history of a squatter settlement and its own organizations in Buenos Aires", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol. 3, No. 2, pages 104–120; and Almansi, Hardoy and Hardoy (2010), op. cit.

¹⁰⁵ Eventually, San Jorge was incorporated in a second round of Promeba.

prepared according to criteria established by the management commission and discussed with the neighbours. These criteria include issues of family composition, housing needs and economic vulnerability, as well as receipt of benefits from other housing programmes, community participation levels and commitment to paying for obligations. In this way, the Housing Fund helps to assure that the benefits of the neighbourhood upgrading programme reach the people of San Jorge and not newcomers. It also helps families with housing needs to buy a house with a social credit, and helps those wanting to leave to find a reliable buyer.

Despite their problems and mixed results, both these programmes show community organizations, local governments, institutions and NGOs working together in creative ways trying to add value to national programmes that would otherwise generate social conflicts within the communities they intend to benefit. They show an alternative path to community participation and are helping to transform how a local government plans and operates.

6. Conclusion

How poverty is understood and measured influences the choice of policies aimed at addressing or reducing it, yet the dominant approach in Argentina and most other countries is still to rely on narrowly focused indicators of income and consumption. In the international arena, a country's performance is often measured against how much it manages to reduce indicators of poverty and how well targeted are its poverty eradication or social policies. Similarly, internationally funded social programmes are assessed for their impact on poverty alleviation – based on narrowly focused poverty statistics. There have been efforts to measure other aspects of deprivation such as lack of access to health care and education, overcrowding, or homes without infrastructure – and thus to go beyond poverty measures that relate only to consumption or income levels. More recently, specialists have tested alternative ways of gaining access to data that can show the extent of access to certain material and social assets that illustrate other dimensions of poverty. Yet, this is still not enough. There are sensitive issues relating to aspects of deprivation that are not easily recorded in statistics that will continue to define and shape the lives of people in low-income neighbourhoods.

A deep knowledge and understanding of local realities allows the State to develop better policies for improving living conditions, especially for those who are most vulnerable. However, it is clear that how poverty is defined and measured in Argentina is quite detached from these local realities. Poverty involves a broad set of variables related to access to good-quality education, health care, a safe environment, adequate housing, opportunities, economic and social security, and “voice”. In this paper, we have sought to consider these different aspects of deprivation using the life stories of women living in informal settlements in Greater Buenos Aires. This shows the extent to which the indicators used to measure poverty in Greater Buenos Aires actually fail to provide an adequate portrayal of reality.

All the women interviewed are in households that are above the extreme poverty line and so they are assumed to be able to afford a basic food basket for their families, even though most reported difficulties in feeding their families, let alone providing them with a balanced diet. Only one of the nine women reported an income level that was below the poverty line, which means that, according to the official definition of poverty, the others could afford extra money for transport, clothing, house maintenance, recreation, and so on. But this is not true. The women interviewed can barely make ends meet. They can scarcely afford the non-food items included in the basic basket used as the threshold between being or not being poor. Much less can they cope with other aspects of deprivation such as not having access to a good education and health care or to infrastructure, services and legal tenure. Also, they suffer from having no official address, no protection of their rights and no “voice” to allow them to shape a different future for themselves and their families.

School may be a public service in Argentina but of course the public schools to which these women's children go do not offer the same possibilities to their students as to those in wealthier areas in terms of infrastructure and trained and experienced teachers. The health care system is public, but the quality of provision varies so much. And, as the interviews brought out, much time and income is lost from the hours of queuing needed to get to see a doctor or the time and the long distances travelled to get treatment in a better-quality medical service because local hospitals are understaffed with staff that are under trained and underpaid and rarely have the equipment needed to diagnose and treat the patient. Residents of informal settlements also face discrimination in getting jobs or services because of the reputation of their neighbourhood and because they have no formal postal address. How can these aspects of deprivation be recognized officially and recorded?

We don't have definitive answers; we are not experts in statistics and in their use in analyses of poverty. But we work daily in the informal settlements that house so much of the low-income population in Buenos Aires, and we work with people who try to cope with the different aspects of deprivation analyzed in this paper. The response needed from government and international agencies requires more support to local or municipal statistical units that can provide a better understanding of local conditions combined with surveys better adapted to record these different aspects of deprivation, and ways of engaging people in voicing their needs. Unless there is a significant change in their scope, policies and programmes of poverty alleviation will rarely address the multi-dimensional character of poverty. Therefore, the chances of really making a difference on this issue will remain small. Statistics will continue to present figures totally detached from reality.

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