Case Reflections Brief

ELLA Area: Environmental Management
ELLA Theme: Urban Environmental Governance

ELLA
Evidence and lessons
from Latin America

Three case studies from cities in Peru, Bolivia and Argentina show how urban environmental governance can become more effective by including residents, researchers and local governments in diagnosing problems and developing responses.

FOCUS CITIES PROGRAMME: MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN CITY GOVERNANCE

SUMMARY

Cities are challenged by a variety of environmental problems, most of which are associated with failures in the way urban growth is planned and managed. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) set up the Focus Cities Research Initiative to address these urban management challenges. It was unusual in that it supported both research and action, and used multi-stakeholder teams to employ action-research and work in partnership with local government and civil society to identify solutions to environmental problems affecting urban dwellers, to implement them and to monitor the results. This brief focuses on the three Latin American Focus Cities (FC) initiatives: Lima, Peru; Cochabamba, Bolivia; and Moreno, Argentina.

CHALLENGE OF IMPROVING URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS FOR THE POOR

Latin American cities face serious environmental constraints such as contaminated water, open and unmanaged garbage sites, limited sewage services and families forced to live in unsuitable areas prone to disaster risk. The rapid growth of cities has exacerbated these problems, and the urban poor suffer most.

According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN–HABITAT), 23.5% of the population in Latin America are slum dwellers who live in deficient environmental conditions; the figure rises to 35% in South Asia and 61.7% in Sub-Saharan Africa. [1]

National and local governments in Latin America have embarked on programmes to improve urban conditions in poor neighbourhoods and slums, but many fail to achieve their goals or prove to be unsustainable. For example, in the city of Moreno, parks created by the government have not been well received and

KEY
LESSONS LEARNED

Community participation in all stages of the projects facilitated a holistic approach to addressing urban environmental problems, one that ultimately increased commitment and sustainability.

To strengthen participation and governance, all stakeholders have to be involved in the collection of data and production of information that then forms the basis for decisions about priorities. Integrating data from various sources, including from residents and community organizations, was important in building a complete diagnosis.

Agreeing at the outset to a clear set of rules guided participation and built strong relationships between stakeholders, helping to avoid conflicts and to resolve them when they arose.

[1] UN-HABITAT. 2010. State of the World's Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide. UN-Habitat, Earthscan, London.

have fallen into disrepair, whereas improvements from the Focus Cities (FC) Initiative - brought about in the same city but using participatory methods - are well used, respected and maintained.

FOCUS CITIES INITIATIVE: AN OVERVIEW

The FC initiative supported the implementation of eight poverty-related, urban environmental projects around the world. Each used participatory action research to support improved environmental services and reduce vulnerability to environmental hazards. Local research teams were set up, as were Working Teams composed of NGOs, local government officials and community members, organised into diverse Working Teams. The Working Teams collected information, diagnosed problems and planned projects for which specific funds were allocated. The projects implemented were thus a test of the validity of the multi-stakeholder approach to diagnosing problems and planning solutions.

This approach created long-term collaboration between stakeholders and provided space for even the most deprived groups to contribute. Involving multiple stakeholders had the advantage of pooling the distinct knowledge, expertise and influence that each stakeholder brings; different stakeholders perceive problems differently and involving them often means a more useful and diverse set of solutions.

By involving multi-stakeholder groups in drawing together relevant information about environmental burdens from a wide range of sources, this information base could be integrated into decision making processes, helping to identify risks and mitigatory measures. Of particular value was the input from local inhabitants, who have practical and detailed knowledge of the problems they face and a clear understanding of what could work in their communities. In most Latin American cities, there is an inadequate information base for good environmental governance. There is little or no attempt to draw on the knowledge and insights of low-income communities, and where academic research produces relevant information, it is often too late to be used by local governments.

To ensure the continued interest and participation of stakeholders, the FC initiatives supported concrete actions with tangible results. The projects identified by multi-stakeholder discussions were implemented and monitored by local community teams, with constant levels of participation and communication, and careful documentation. Part of the budget was allocated to communications and publications in the hope that others may replicate these successes. [2]

> **Multi-stakeholder governance groups** include democratic participation of all social groups affected by urban management policies and projects: **local governments, NGOs, research institutes, local citizens, public-private service enterprises, community organizations and civil society in general.**

FOCUS CITIES IN LATIN AMERICA

The Three City Cases in Latin America

Although the three initiatives worked on different scales, from a single neighbourhood to a whole municipality, and on diverse environmental challenges, they all shared the same goals:

- Create or improve channels for dialogue and collaborative work between different stakeholders
- Make inhabitants aware of environmental issues
- Strengthen community organisations and their relationship with local governments
- Influence local policy

In Lima, the initiative sought to improve conditions for low-income recycling workers; in Cochabamba, waste management was the focus; and in Moreno, they addressed infrastructure such as water provision, waste management and the recovery of degraded areas.

Figure 1: Busy Street in Focus Cities Neighbourhood
Source: Focus Cities Lima

[2] Publications and communications materials can be found at the Focus Cities' websites for Lima, Cochabamba and Moreno.

FC Initiative in Latin America: Scale, Context and Projects Implemented

City	Location	Population Reached	Socioeconomic and Environmental Context	Projects Implemented
Lima, Peru	District close to the city centre of metropolitan Lima	Lima has 8 million inhabitants; 80,301 directly reached by FC	Metropolitan Lima has highest concentration of poor in the country; 1/3 of inhabitants vulnerable to natural disasters	• Reduce vulnerability through structural housing improvements • Improve local environmental conditions by removing open garbage and solid waste dumps • Improve health conditions for waste collectors and capacity building for management
Cochabamba Bolivia	District 10 km from city centre	Cochabamba has 850,000 inhabitants; Garbage separators around municipal garbage dump and in city centre were direct	55.6% of municipal GDP comes from services; Management of Solid Urban waste is deficient; Poor living and working conditions of people working in city dump	• Design system for recuperation and valorisation of urban solid waste • Design integral management plan for urban waste • Annual plan for training and environmental awareness
Moreno, Argentina	Peri-urban municipality in Greater Buenos Aires, 37km from downtown Buenos Aires	Moreno has 380,530 inhabitants; FC involved the whole city	26% of population has unsatisfied basic needs; low coverage of piped water and sanitation services, deficient waste collection; flood risks	• Environmental education programme • Waste collection, compression and storage plant • Optimise water network (700 homes) • Improve and recover public spaces along streams and rivers • Transform degraded site into environment-themed square

FC Process and Strategies

Participatory Diagnosis ➤ Participatory Planning ➤ Participatory Implementation

The organisations that led these initiatives had previous experience of collaborating with the local government and communities. This prior experience of working with community leaders and municipal staff members, with their knowledge of the local area, helped to ensure a good understanding of the interests and needs of the participants. This also helped build trust among the stakeholders and facilitate collaborative work between partners.

The three FC initiatives used different strategies to involve stakeholders and make best use of their particular skills. These differences can be attributed to the institutions that were leading the projects that had very different backgrounds. When working with groups of stakeholders with very different viewpoints, levels of power and preferred approaches, conflicts are inevitable. To reduce conflicts and efficiently address those that did arise, where different stakeholders

had incompatible views, space for their participation was organized at different times. They also agreed to a manual of procedures at the outset, which defined the variables used to score and thus prioritise concerns and responses. For example, in Moreno, stakeholders selected the projects to be funded using criteria discussed and previously agreed to within the inter-zonal committee. Agreements were made by consensus.

Lima:

The team worked in a district near the city centre, located on the left bank of the River Rimac where a poor and vulnerable community had illegally settled. This area was selected because it had similar conditions to many other vulnerable areas of the city, such as high risk of flooding, open solid waste dumpsite, poor quality housing conditions and low income. Two research organisations coordinated the initiative: the Metropolitan Institute of Planning (*Instituto Metropolitano de Planificación* - IMP), a public agency, and the Urban Development Institute (*Instituto de Desarrollo Urbano* - CENCA), an NGO. A group of researchers and local residents trained as community researchers took part in the diagnosis phase. Through interviews and focus group discussions, researchers compiled information and designed an action plan. They held workshops with waste separators and recycling organisations in order to prepare the Activity Plan for the Waste Separator Association (*Asociación de Segregadores* – ATIARRES).

Cochabamba:

The initiative emerged from a detailed study by the local university on urban waste generation. FC formed a committee of academics, a representative of the enterprise responsible for waste collection, municipal authorities and the research team in charge of coordinating the project. They established agreements with public and private associations and community organisations to implement an integral urban solid waste management plan (USW). The plan included design of a municipal environmental regulation policy for solid waste management and an education campaign to address environmental problems and promote the recycling plan.

Moreno:

The initiative encompassed the entire municipality, which was divided into four working zones according to neighbourhood. Being a district-wide project meant having to organise participation with a large number of stakeholders, which was one of the FC's main challenges. Working with the government was made possible through a collaborative agreement whereby municipal staff made up part of the

Figure 2: Overflowing Garbage, Cochabamba
Source: Focus Cities Cochabamba

working team. To involve and build awareness amongst local inhabitants, workshops were organized to introduce them to the project. The participants identified the main problems of each zone using zone mapping that integrated municipal data. Committees were established in each zone, consisting of representatives, nominated by the community; these were complemented by local government and NGO representatives. An inter-zonal supervisory committee was created to find solutions to the problems identified and choose consultants to design the projects and enterprises to complete the work. Once implementation began, each zone engaged in continuous participative monitoring to assess progress made and identify areas for improvement.

Successes

First launched in 2006, to date the FC initiatives have achieved positive results and generated valuable lessons. Each of the three urban projects achieved its goals to use participatory diagnosis, integrate information from different sources, and engage stakeholders to create plans and undertake projects. Each initiative also sought to maintain collaborative-participative relationships and to develop and test the tools that supported this; also to create spaces for collaboration and build capacity among the participants of the project.

Funding from IDRC is no longer being provided, yet projects are progressing well under the responsibility of the community. Various services and organisations were created under the FCs which are now self-sustaining, such as the organisation in charge of water provision, distribution and maintenance in Barrio Alem, Moreno. Future initiatives are expected to include capacity building for governments and citizen collaboration in other projects that address community concerns.

A few contextual factors seem to underpin FC's success in Latin America. One is the democratic set-up in the selected

cities, as well as the extent of decentralization, which transferred autonomy to local government units as well as facilitated the multi-stakeholder participation. These initiatives were all carried out on a local scale, making participative agreements, direct relations between citizens and local governments and the engagement of the different stakeholders all relatively easy to achieve. It is unlikely that similar programmes implemented on a national scale would have the same success rate.

Local research teams and NGOs with experience of working both with communities and with local governments contributed to the implementation of these initiatives. They acted as intermediaries between local governments and communities, supporting a better balance of power and resources between stakeholders.

Figure 3: Mapping Environmental Problems
Source: Focus Cities Moreno

LESSONS LEARNED

1 Working with local NGOs and research teams with a proven track-record of collaboration with the government and local citizens, and with previous relationships of trust, facilitated the implementation of these projects.

2 The information produced from participatory discussions and diagnosis complemented local government data, and the collaborative relationship between stakeholders allowed for a more precise definition of problems and solutions. The stakeholders' capacity to take on different roles, recognising different agendas and interests, helped to find creative solutions during different stages of the process. Including all stakeholders in an open and collective dialogue created transparency, with residents reacting positively to this.

3 Setting norms and rules for these participatory discussions proved to be a good strategy to avoid conflicts when having to select projects, make decisions about budget allocation and use resources. As a result, agreements were more easily reached and projects were implemented successfully.

4 The multi-stakeholder environmental management structure proved able to generate commitment and increase the sustainability of projects. The hope is that the local governments involved were inspired by this participatory approach and its many benefits, and may employ this same method in other environmental projects.