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Newsletter 1 : Delhi

February 2004

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

Delhi: A city of 14 millions inhabitants, 3 millions of which live in 1190 slums (National Institute of Urban Affairs, NIUA, 2001). The unbelievable increase in population of the city of Delhi and the absence of response of the public authorities to the housing problem have obliged new migrants to settle down illegally on pieces of land that do not belong to them. Because of this real estate insecurity, these migrants have not invested in necessary collective equipments so as to have access to basic services (such as sanitation) that municipal authorities will not deliver to these unauthorized colonies.

Phil, a young French engineer working for an NGO comes back from a mission in Delhi. He gives his first impressions on slums sanitation to Bernard, a more experienced colleague.

B: I am listening to you... What did you find there?

Ph: First, concerning institutions, the competences' sharing out is imprecise. It seems that the Delhi Water

waste and street cleaning. Even if, since 2000, MCD is in charge of the policies of services supply to slums, the lack of coordination between these administrative agencies reduces their efficiency on the field.

B: And on the field precisely, what is the situation in the slums?

Ph: Concerning wastewater, slum dwellers dispose it into open drains if there are any, but most of them dispose their wastewater on the ground!

Anyway, the large number of clogged sewers and the lack of treatment plants in the city are the causes of serious environmental damages since almost half of the waste water is disposed as it is into the Yamuna River. Concerning the excreta, more than half of the slum dwellers are obliged to defecate in the open air! Currently, NGOs and authorities mostly try to develop public toilets.

B: OK... OK... Who funds, builds and manages these toilets?

Ph: Development agencies such as JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) fund them - 1200 public toilets in the case of JICA -, MCD builds most of them and they are managed by local NGOs.

B: I see. How do these toilets work, technically speaking?

Ph: Public toilets are linked to the sewers, at least theoretically... But what is terrible is that a highly unsanitary practice still exists: scavenging. In India, 400,000 scavengers still collect and transport human excreta in buckets daily!!

B: Are any actions taken in order to stop this?

Ph: MCD subsidizes technology transfer from traditional bucket latrines to flush toilets. Sulabh, an Indian NGO, has been fighting to put a stop to this practices since 1968. It promotes low cost technologies such as private 2-pit latrines and "pay-and-use" public toilet complexes (based on a hygiene/health/liquid waste treatment integrated approach). Results are convincing: there have been 1.2 millions of latrines sold and 5,500 complexes built.

B: Indians would then be ready to pay for their sanitation?

In India, 400,000 scavengers still collect and transport human excreta in buckets daily !



Board (DWB) is in charge of water supply, wastewater and drains while the MCD essentially deals with solid

Ph: Although there have been initial reluctances, the system is now functioning well in rural areas and passage areas - like stations, markets, ... Nevertheless, Sulabh's approach, too commercial, does not seem to be sustainable in slums because slum dwellers cannot always pay a systematic entry fee and comply with difficulty to the idea of a subscription for a system they are not involved in.

B: Do you think that getting the community involved would have the toilets managed in a better way?

Ph: The number of projects based on a community approach is quickly increasing and planners tend to take these new actors into account. The Community Based Information System project (CBIS), run by NIUA, looks very interesting to me: using educational tools, NIUA has had natural leaders - mostly women - emerge from the community. The priorities of local populations have also been determined this way. Sanitation has been pointed out as the main problem in two slums, one of which I have visited. Actions have taken place there: information campaigns for families, slum cleaning twice a year, development of the household dustbins and above all, (re)opening of the dialog with the local MCD office!

B: And what are the results?

Ph: On the one hand, slum dwellers have pointed their municipal rights out and have had their sanitary situation improved; on the other hand, the successive steps of the project have allowed the collection and the digitalization of geographical data on the slum sanitation: drains network, household dustbins, etc...

B: But this information evolves quickly, doesn't it?

Ph: It is theoretically updated every six months. One can yet wonder whether such a project is feasible at the city

and thus allow MCD to make a 20% saving in this domain - nor by the inhabitants whose waste they collect. NGOs have gathered them and integrated them in the local communities, thus giving them a status and a social recognition: they are then named "waste collectors".

B: But how is this operation profitable?

Ph: There is a large - and mostly informal - recycling sector in India: waste goes from the rag pickers to the recycling factories through small, medium and large waste dealers - they are 10,000 in Delhi. Added to the households' fees for door-to-door waste collection, the segregated waste sale allows the waste collectors to get a salary.

B: OK... And what about the municipal authorities?

Ph: MCD is responsible for the collection of solid waste from the collecting points. Delhi produces 6,500 tons of waste every day, 50% of which comes from the slums. There is little waste recycling and composting - although 50% of the solid waste are organics and another 15 to 40% are recyclable - and thus the three landfill sites fill up very fast. Nevertheless, I have noticed - and this is a good point - that MCD agrees on numerous negotiations with NGOs and slum communities in order to provide the latter with basic services.

B: Good... This is a large amount of information. Allow yourself some time to think about it. By the way, don't forget about your next mission in Hanoi, Vietnam. Good luck.

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scale, scaling up from 1 to 1190 settlements. If this works out, and negotiations are on the way, this information would be a powerful planification tool based on the real needs of the urban poor.

B: Indians thus have great hopes in their communities...

Ph: Actually, other projects are going on at a community level, for example concerning the "rag pickers" rehabilitation. These rag pickers - they are 100,000 in Delhi - collect recyclable waste from the households or from collecting points. They are illegal workers and are recognized neither by the municipal authorities - despite the fact that they collect 10 to 15% of Delhi solid waste

Electronic Resources :

National Institute of Urban Affairs : www.niua.org

Toxics Link : www.toxicslink.org

Sulabh : www.sulabhinternational.org.

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