The city, a development (f)actor
The increase in the world's population over the next few decades will be mainly fuelled by the expansion of cities in developing countries. Whilst this fast-moving and complex urbanisation will provide opportunities, it will also create major centres of poverty and inequality. As the fight against poverty is the main objective of development cooperation, it is only natural that development partners are paying special attention to support for sustainable urban development.

Development cooperation helps create conditions allowing vulnerable people to improve their own quality of life. That is harder to do in a city. Moreover, the causes of poverty are different from elsewhere. To be able to survive in a city, individuals need financial resources to cover their everyday needs. Problems have to be addressed by departments of the city authorities (management and administration, education, public health, environment, housing, etc.). Most of the time, existing systems cannot cope with demand. Infrastructure requires huge investments and costs a lot to use and maintain. Urban management requires a holistic approach, calling on multiple players (such as ministries, municipalities and citizens' committees), multiple sectors (e.g. transport, environment, water and housing) and multidisciplinary teams (for instance, architects, sociologists, planners and project managers).

Furthermore, building up the capacity of the institutions and services concerned is crucial. This mainly takes the form of changing institutions with a view to improving their performance on behalf of citizens. Of course that is a complex process that first involves finding a definition for the term 'capacity' that is shared by the international community. This entails three dimensions: the human dimension, the organisational dimension and - more broadly - the institutional dimension. Meanwhile principles are emerging to guide support for capacity building. Firstly a strategic, comprehensive and coordinated approach needs to be put in place. Then there must be an ongoing and inclusive assessment of the institutional situation to target needs as effectively as possible. Finally the traditional project approach in which results to be achieved and activities to be executed are static and set in advance must be abandoned. A flexible, iterative, long-term approach must be adopted.

The new approach tallies better with the needs expressed by the aid beneficiary countries. Partnership and dialogue are the basis for the good practices that govern international cooperation. The Paris Declaration of March 2005 defined the respective responsibilities of the development partners and the beneficiary countries. It is based on five principles:

- ownership: beneficiary countries themselves develop their policies;
- alignment: integration of aid into national strategies, authorities and procedures;
- harmonisation between the development partners;
- managing for results;
- mutual accountability.

These principles also apply to urban development. The challenge is not only to set up such projects in cities, but also to find an effective and efficient way of supporting integrated urban development in the aid beneficiary countries.

Belgian development cooperation activities have been going on in cities - whether capitals or other cities - for years now. This brochure looks at a number of BTC projects in cities in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Spanning Ho Chi Minh City, the Kinshasa municipalities of Kinsenko and Kimbanseke, and Quito, each of them makes its own distinctive contribution to urban development. If they support the plans of the city, they can enable a city to make real headway in improving living conditions for all.
In 2007 - for the first time in human history - there were more people living in the world's towns and cities than in the countryside. Today over three billion people live in cities or urban environments. The complex process that has led to this change is called urbanisation and has significant social, economic, environmental and cultural repercussions for society.

There are substantial disparities between regions in terms of the pace and scale of urbanisation and the domains where it is happening. According to UN-HABITAT, Latin America is the most urbanised continent, thanks to moderate but steady urban growth. However, the highest urban growth rates are to be found in sub-Saharan Africa (4.58%), followed by South-East Asia (3.82%), Eastern Asia (3.39%), Western Asia (2.96%), Southern Asia (2.89%) and Northern Africa (2.48%).

Asia and Africa will continue to have the highest rates of urban growth until 2030. Natural population growth (60%), migration (30%) and changes in terms of ‘borders’ and other administrative measures (10%) are reckoned to be the main drivers of urban growth in developing countries.

Although every city is different, urbanisation poses the same challenges across the world. It demonstrates the urgent need to find sustainable and innovative solutions to the growing problems of social inequality, deterioration of the environment, economic restructuring and transport congestion and the resulting increase in the vulnerability of poor people.
Urban vulnerability
All too often, cities are ill prepared for growth and unable to provide improved living conditions for their many residents. This ‘new urban revolution’ represents a major challenge for national and local authorities.

If urban growth is not planned, as is often the case in developing countries, it generally creates huge new areas with a low population density known as urban sprawls. Faced with the pace and scale of their growth, cities cannot provide basic infrastructure and services to those areas and do not have the resources to offer adequate housing.

Opportunities
At the same time, however, cities can be considered a long-term solution for poverty as they are drivers of economic growth. The major cities alone generate two-thirds of global gross domestic product (GDP), and cities account for 80% of forecast economic growth. Consequently, they offer huge opportunities for investment and employment. In a world where there is substantial interaction between urban and rural areas, such opportunities also help rural development.

Urban poverty
“We can no longer assume that the urban poor are better off than their rural counterparts, or that all urban dwellers are able to benefit from basic services by virtue of proximity.”

Dr Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-HABITAT.

Urban poverty and city-dwellers’ vulnerability are the most alarming effects of fast and uncontrolled urban growth. According to the UN, between 45% and 55% of the world’s urban population could be living in poverty by 2020. The survival mechanisms developed in rural areas cannot be transferred to cities. Cities’ economies are based on money, which people need to feed themselves and buy coal, water and construction materials. Furthermore, the cost of living is often higher than in the countryside. Moreover, solidarity mechanisms are often disjointed in urban communities because of cities’ heterogeneity. These communities only have limited physical resources and means of production and have little or no access to education, employment and healthcare, meaning that the needs of the poor in cities differ from those of other city-dwellers or rural residents.
In looking for sustainable solutions, it must also be borne in mind that most city people - and in particular the poorest ones - turn to the informal economy for their income, housing and other services. The informal economy accounts for about 50% to 70% of total jobs in developing countries. It is a major source of work and income for poor women in particular.

Moreover, cities around the world generate pollution and consume natural resources. To ensure sustainable development, attention needs to be paid to these patterns of generation and consumption. There is a complex relationship between poverty and the environment. It is wrong to think that poor people do the most harm to the environment. However, poverty does tend to force people to use resources in an unsustainable way.

Unfortunately the main people facing these multiple challenges rarely have an opportunity to make their voice heard. Programmes of city and national authorities that affect their lives are drawn up without taking into account the views of the people they are trying to help. Democratic models of urban governance and urban management, involving all social groups depending on the specific context, are essential for sustainable urban development and the fight against poverty.

**Urban challenges**

However, while cities are a source of economic opportunities, especially in the megapolises of the South, they fail to provide the local population with basic services. The unplanned nature of most new urban areas imposes physical constraints on the development of infrastructure, and that tends to increase the costs of investment in poor areas. At the same time, resources are limited and priority is not given to investments in these areas because there only seems to be a small return on such investments. The low population density means that in general the investment per capita is high while consumption is low.

Inadequate living conditions in cities directly affect the health of the most vulnerable, especially women and children. Similarly, city-dwellers are also disproportionately hard hit by HIV/AIDS. In certain parts of Africa, AIDS might even reduce urban growth.

Another problem in these new urban areas is the uncertain legal status of many homes. Very often the title deeds are not available and most people are reliant on the unauthorised property market, where speculation is rampant. This situation increases the poor’s vulnerability, makes planning difficult and does nothing to promote long-term investments.

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**Locus of change**

The accelerated urban growth of the last fifty years has made urbanisation characteristic of the 20th and 21st centuries. Urbanisation and its impact on society can no longer be ignored. Though considered a core issue, urban development has elicited mixed enthusiasm from international development partners. Agenda 21 of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, and the Habitat Agenda of the United Nations HABITAT II Conference (Istanbul 1996), adopted by over 160 countries, recognised urban planning and sustainability as global challenges. The two agendas provide the foundations for an integrated approach coordinated by local players.

Since 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have formed the basis for an international commitment to sustainable development. The goals are evidence that poverty reduction has become a major strategic challenge. Specifically, the MDGs aim to achieve “a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers” by 2020.
Although poverty is the problem, money is not necessarily the answer. The Paris Declaration (2005) encourages developed countries and development partners to increase the effectiveness of their activities by setting up more sophisticated partnerships and developing service provision into capacity-building for individuals, organisations and institutions.

However, the efforts made so far have not yet been enough to tackle the challenges and problems that cities face. Addressing them will require enormous commitment from all the players involved and will entail constantly reviewing and harmonising positions and roles. The aim is to provide approaches and support rather than supply solutions; to facilitate decisions rather than impose them; and - above all - to create and stimulate dialogue between all players.

1 UN-HABITAT, 2006
2 Idem
3 Montgomery, 2004
4 UN-HABITAT, 2006
5 Tannerfeldt en Ljung, 2006
6 Idem
HUMANITY AND LIFE IN THE CITIES

Are cities destroying social cohesion? Are the suburbs of huge megalopolises in the South pure chaos? We discussed the benefits and flaws of urban life, ‘the social condition of humanity’, with Eric Corijn, director of the COSMOPOLIS Institute for City, Culture and Society (VUB).

How would you define a city?
A city is a concentrated form of society: a concentration of people in a limited area, a concentration of activities and a concentration of economic added value derived from the surroundings. All this enables a division of labour and tasks and a range of activities - much more intensively than in the countryside.

How is globalisation changing the profile of these concentrations?
For the first time in the history of humanity, most of the world’s population is now living in towns and cities. In the most industrialised continents, three quarters, or even 80% of people live in urban areas. In other words, the ‘urban condition’ is the social condition of humanity. Globalisation equals urbanisation. It isn’t something that goes on over our heads. It is making inroads in cities - although not in every city and not affecting the same activities in every city at the same time. It is also increasing the connectivity between cities, and that connectivity enhances the importance of activities linked to interurban flows. As a result, a new geography is emerging: urban networks are being superimposed over the traditional map of a country. For a long time, cities were places in a country, but now they are becoming places in an international network.

What is the position of the cities of the South in that network?
Globalisation is driven by the rich countries, for they are the ones that generate international activity. Broadly speaking, there are two ways for cities in the South to get involved in globalisation. First, cities like Nairobi and Bangkok are becoming relay points for rich countries’ activities. They are serving as dispatching centres. Second, in developing economies, cities such as Shanghai, Beijing and the big cities in Brazil and India are in the vanguard of development and are connecting up to the world market in the strict sense of the term. Some depend on the activities of the North, while others are becoming international hubs in their own right. Those cities are benefiting from the emergence of a middle class with more purchasing power and a concentration of consumers. For instance, India has 300 million inhabitants with an income above the European average, making it a massive market. Change is happening on a scale and at a pace unknown in the West, and that produces cities of another kind. Every three years, an area the size of Brussels is added to Beijing.

Is that pace sustainable?
This poses major problems for planning, sustainable development and social inclusion. The issue of sustainability depends on what policies are followed. The aim needs to be an improved urban environment in terms of structures and infrastructures, roads, the sewage system, and electricity. Moreover, in general anything to do with social inclusion is generally badly handled by society. In the huge megalopolises of the South, self-organisation plays a very important role in neighbourhoods. Clearly, dictatorial or very authoritarian organisation is ‘anti-urban’ and doesn't allow urban areas to develop to their full potential. That's because a city isn't a country. A country is governed on the basis of the idea of a national community that gives legitimacy to the power structure, representation and identity-forming. That is the basis for a government’s authority. In a city, ‘difference’ is the foundation on which people live together. There is no community that can claim to form the backbone of urban society. A city always involves different communities interacting and, to
that extent, urban systems are always a coalition of different forces. Maintaining an urban system is based mainly on social co-production, on cooperation. A dictatorial style in running a city is completely counterproductive. The urban condition triggers debate on all issues pertaining to democracy and governance.

But does social cohesion have time to take root in cities that are growing exponentially? That depends on the forms of migration and integration. Often, migration is governed by the villages of origin, families or networks. It involves people being uprooted but that is partially compensated by re-establishing links - some real and some not. In other cases, integration takes place via the workplace. The labour movement, for example the Workers' Party in Brazil, plays a major role in social inclusion, taking new living conditions as its basis. Therefore, social cohesion depends very much on the opportunities in a city.

Don’t cities themselves lead to homogenisation and the elimination of differences between cultures? It’s true that there is a tendency towards a certain homogenisation. For example, major brands play a role here. But alongside or linked to that, there is a degree of ‘localisation’, with the city's typical components being maintained. They are both there. To attract people, a city must develop its existing heritage, as a city has its own particular heritage which can’t be found anywhere else.

Do the cities of the South maybe not have a case for protecting their heritage? Cities in developing countries are so big that they are made up of various ‘sub-cities’. In Beijing, the Forbidden City has been maintained and attracts a lot of visitors. So ‘Old Beijing’ continues to exist. Alongside it, though, new districts are spring up at a frenetic pace. The two go together. That is true for all cities of a certain age.

What about Africa? It’s less the case there. A lot of cities in Africa are the product of colonialism. The old concentrations were destroyed and new cities were built by the colonial powers. The same is true of Latin America, but there colonialisation happened a few centuries earlier, meaning that the cities there have a history stretching back 500 years.

So, these cities weren't carved out of living stone. Is that a weakness? Yes. Colonialism and neo-colonialism imposed structures in Africa that derailed organic growth. Just look at cities such as Kinshasa and Lubumbashi in Congo, where the colonial powers imposed themselves at administrative level. These cities evolved in two ways: from the top down and from the countryside. They do not have ‘weight’.

Weight? I mean a heritage that has developed gradually. A city with a long history and a clear structure can assimilate radical, large-scale changes more easily than cities without a centre of gravity. Paris and London are historic cities. Their image gives them great assimilatory power. Thousands of people come to London and become Londoners. It’s harder for cities in the South that have a shorter history and where the middle class and civil society are less strong and less organised. Those factors affect the opportunities for integration. Therefore, the risks of imbalance are greater.

Interview by Olivier Bailly

1 Vrije Universiteit Brussel
Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) is the largest city in Vietnam, ahead of Hanoi, the capital. As the country’s economic centre, this metropolis in southern Vietnam developed very fast and, like many megapolises in South-East Asia, is coping with a rampant rural exodus. The city has an official population of six million, but another two million people live there unofficially.

The gap between rich and poor is widening in Ho Chi Minh City. Although the average income per capita is three times the national average, urban poverty is on the increase, reflecting a country-wide trend. Urban poverty rose from 6.6% in 2002 to 10.8% by 2004.

Faced with an annual urbanisation rate of 4.2% (compared to the national average of 3%), Ho Chi Minh City is expanding in a haphazard, uncoordinated fashion. The city is divided into different areas by an impressive network of canals and rivers with a total length of almost 100 kilometres. For a time the canals provided a way for the city’s residents to get around. Today, they are a dump for sewage and waste. Taken as a whole, the city’s infrastructure is inadequate: an incomplete sewerage system, canals that have become open-air sewers, a waste collection system that serves less than half of households and utilities (electricity and running water) that cannot cope with demand. The quality of homes is no better than that of the public infrastructure. Some 118,000 homes surveyed by the local authorities in 2002 were in bad or very bad repair.
Waste contracts

“Whenever the area was flooded we had all kinds of waste and human and animal excrement floating everywhere. In the morning we would find rubbish sacks had appeared outside our homes out of nowhere. Everybody was on edge and arguments broke out easily... There was nothing but mistrust, hatred, insults and fighting…” says a resident of the neighbourhood.

At that time, a third of the families in District 6, next to the canal, threw their waste straight into the water. Every day the public services collected five tons of waste floating in the canal. The poorest residents refused to pay for waste collection and put their bins on the street.

As part of the project, a team of professional social workers was recruited starting in 1999 to act as mediators between the waste collectors, the population of District 6 and the authorities. The discussions led to a cooperative group of thirty collectors being set up. The reorganisation of the collectors’ routes meant shorter collection times, greater efficiency and increased incomes for waste collectors. The new system has meant that whereas previously 40 to 60% of residents had a waste collection contract with the collectors, the percentage is now over 92%.

Nowadays, once the waste has been collected, it is taken to the Bai Lai waste transfer station. Instead of the waste being put together and recycled in the street, with all the effects on hygiene that can be imagined (rats, odours, dust, etc.), the collectors drop off the waste in containers, housed in a specially modified hangar that can take up to 72 tons of waste per day. The containers are taken to a landfill site outside the city every night, which avoids further locking up the city’s (already overstretched) roads. There will soon be twenty-five stations of this type, built thanks to funding from the Asian Development Bank, that will be able to accommodate the waste of around 2,000,000 residents.

“(…) Now that the waste is collected, everything is clean. I’m so happy. We can even cook our soup, peel onions, clean vegetables and do our washing in the alleys.” However, as the best waste is no waste, an environmental education toolkit was also produced. It was targeted at the seventeen educational establishments in District 6 (about 600 students). The objective was to reduce the volume of waste and facilitate recycling. Now workshops on the environment are organised for students every year.

A better life along the canal

The Tan Hoa-Lo Gom canal is one of the most polluted in the metropolis. Around 700,000 people live along its banks - many of them in wretched conditions. The community is poor, the city’s infrastructure is far from adequate and there is massive pollution in the area.

Against this backdrop, for around ten years Belgian Development Cooperation, together with the neighbourhood’s residents and the People’s Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, has contributed to the project of canal sanitation and urban upgrading. A whole neighbourhood has been renewed with small low-cost homes. Families who used to live in unbearable conditions along the canal have moved away. Rubbish collection has been reorganised and a wastewater treatment plant has been built. The level of involvement, the development of socioeconomic activities, capacity-building and strengthening of institutions were key elements in the project’s success.
dents and listened to what they had to say. The team faced a series of obstacles. Previous experiences of involvement by residents of the neighbourhood had sapped their enthusiasm, and there was an atmosphere of mistrust. Therefore, the social workers’ job was to understand and fight these - sometimes irrational - attitudes. For example, one community leader was opposed to moving the residents because he had to transport six beautiful wooden chests and he was not sure he could manage it!

There was also the attitude of the municipal authorities. For them, offering improved living conditions to a community that was generally poor and to ‘illegal’ immigrants was tantamount to encouraging the illegal settlement of new families.

A number of types of housing were built and each household chose the option it thought was best for its individual situation: a plot of land for building a house eight kilometres from its previous home, an apartment near the canal or financial compensation for the expropriation. The work in the field done by the team of social workers meant that there were no forced evictions.

More than just another home

These families had to cope not only with a change in their surroundings, but also with a change in their status. They had to borrow money to renovate or buy an apartment, build a house or start a business. The Vietnamese do not like to run up debts, and do so only rarely. So families had to deal with this situation - with varying degrees of success. All of them had to cope with financial difficulties. Whereas poor Vietnamese city-dwellers spend 10 to 15% of their income on accommodation, the residents who opted for a plot of land are using 49% of their ‘wages’ on their homes, while those who chose an apartment are spending 21% on theirs.

Clear water lagoon

A wastewater treatment plant at Ho Chi Minh City was set up in 2006, with a maximum wastewater treatment capacity for 200,000 residents. With an area of thirty hectares in the Binh Hung Hoa neighbourhood, this plant provides a natural and environmentally friendly alternative for treating wastewater by using an open-air lagoon that does not cause excessive noise or odours. The residents have no complaints about their new neighbour. With the green spaces created around the plant (a rare commodity in Ho Chi Minh City), land prices are rising.

Resettlement options along the canal

Along the canal are unhygienic homes, often built from temporary materials. There is also a desperate lack of infrastructure and the banks of the canal are repeatedly hit by floods. Moreover, most families living there have no running water, electricity or sewers.

As part of the canal sanitation project, the homes of 166 families from one neighbourhood in District 6 were renovated, connected to water and electricity and registered. Sewers and street lighting were put in place and the alleys were paved. The families were able to enjoy low-interest loans to build individual septic tanks and renovate their homes. In addition, a saving and credit programme was developed to boost the spending power of these households.

The canal is also used for transporting foodstuffs from the Mekong delta. Widening had become a necessity so as to avoid the recurring floods that had become a feature of life there. The makeshift homes on the banks of the canal, which sometimes even encroached on the canal itself, had to be destroyed. But this left the questions of where to resettle the residents, who were often very poor and attached to the neighbourhood, and how to make use of this opportunity to enable them to improve their quality of life. To find answers, a team of social workers met the residents and listened to what they had to say. The team faced a series of obstacles. Previous experiences of involvement by residents of the neighbourhood had sapped their enthusiasm, and there was an atmosphere of mistrust. Therefore, the social workers’ job was to understand and fight these - sometimes irrational - attitudes. For example, one community leader was opposed to moving the residents because he had to transport six beautiful wooden chests and he was not sure he could manage it!

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Faced with this challenge of managing costs, the social workers played a crucial role in educating them and providing them with information and advice. Unfortunately, residents who chose the compensation option were not able to call on this service.

**Assessment**

By March 2006, 60 households had built a house on their plot of land, in a developed neighbourhood (i.e. one with roads and public services, including a primary school). They were given technical support for building their new homes, were provided with guidance in administrative procedures and were made eligible for loans. Since 2005, 72 families have been living in apartments in buildings specially suited to Vietnamese families, who spend a great deal of time outdoors. Wide corridors allow small traders to set up shop there. Near the buildings, there is a community house, motorcycle parking lots and a pontoon for boats. “The social life of the area is the same as before”, says Lam Viet Thang, aged 61, happily. And there is greater comfort now, with electricity, toilets and running water.

**A showcase project**

The project did run up against special interests and red tape. While the situation could certainly still be improved, residents’ involvement and the fact that they can call on a team of social workers are now inspiring other donors, such as the World Bank.

Overall, the social work has shown the importance of involving all the parties concerned by the project. The efforts made to consult, inform and share knowledge with the various institutions and residents boosted support for and consistency of the project. The awareness-raising campaign in primary schools, the involvement of the waste sector and the economic independence of groups of residents thanks to the credit scheme aim to improve the economic and ecological situation— all in the difficult context of relocating some 250 families as part of the project to upgrade the banks of the Tan Hoa-Lo Gom canal.
In 2007, the population of the world's slums has hit the one billion mark. 70% of dwellings in cities of the South are informal, consisting of popular homes, slums and squats. Popular homes are 'home-made homes' built by the people themselves. They may be informal, but they are not necessarily hazardous. Slums are typically in appallingly bad condition in terms of structure and facilities. Squats are land or buildings that were illegally occupied by the people living there. Following a period of unprecedented growth, slums came to be viewed as breeding grounds for violence and poverty, making them unfit for habitation. Various publications, including those by John Turner, helped to change this image by highlighting the socioeconomic qualities that slums offered. Since then, various policies - ranging from eviction to rehabilitation - have been tried in order to deal with slums.

Evictions are the result of market pressures or decisions by local authorities. While socially damaging, they are sometimes needed in order to revitalise the city and give it the space necessary for regeneration. Initial re-housing programmes aimed to provide basic conditions at the lowest possible cost by accommodating people in high-rise apartment blocks that met the safety and aesthetic standards of the dominant class. Soon, however, the target groups - unable to adapt to the lifestyle imposed on them or pay the relevant costs - went to live in other 'problem' neighbourhoods. In view of this failure, the approach shifted from rationalisation to involvement (although the term was often overused). Plots of improved land were then offered as an alternative, since it was realised that the people concerned were the best placed to plan their homes on the basis of their changing needs. This involved equipping sites with basic infrastructure, leaving the people involved to build their homes. This concept became widespread in the 1970s but few projects proved to be a conclusive success, as they were too far from urban centres and economic hubs of activity.

Then came the idea of rehabilitation, once the very existence of such neighbourhoods became tolerated. The strategy was to provide basic infrastructure and give the people living there responsibility for rehabilitating their accommodation.

Government involvement in the building of social housing changed during those years, as most governments went over from being developers to facilitators and left it up to the private sector to meet demand. These policies were sometimes accompanied by banking and administrative reform, as well as by the involvement of community associations. Over the last fifteen years, community associations - via networks of local NGO federations - have made a major contribution to improving living conditions in slums. This has happened in Pakistan and Thailand.

Many projects did not achieve the objectives they sought because there was a lack of security in the property sector and they were not integrated into an overall vision of urban redevelopment. However, these projects remain of interest, as they are economical and do not have adverse socioeconomic effects. Community involvement in design and implementation is essential to ensuring their continuity - as seen in the project to rehabilitate the banks of a canal in Ho Chi Minh City. The activities of social workers and other players was an important factor in the project's success. Indeed, involvement was a key aspect point of the project. After all, bricks and mortar are merely a facade for people's lives and desires.
Kampala examines Ho Chi Min City

A few months ago, members of Kampala City Council (KCC) had a look at the area around the Tan Hoa-Lo Gom canal in Ho Chi Minh City.

Why? Because, like its Vietnamese counterpart, Kampala wants to rehabilitate one of its slums with the support of BTC.

The two projects share many similarities: they both involve a partnership with Belgium, waste management, relocation of households and an environmental awareness-raising campaign. The Ugandan capital’s slums are home to 700,000 people - the same number of people who live along the canal in Ho Chi Minh City.

In June 2007, a meeting of these two BTC partner cities allowed those involved in the Tan Hoa-Lo Gom canal project to pass on the knowledge and practical lessons that have been learned. Ugandan policymakers learned a lot from the Vietnamese experience.

Specific lessons learned: the effectiveness of setting a fixed fee for collecting household waste and the beneficiaries’ sentimental attachment to their former neighbourhood (they come back to work there). More general lessons learned: the importance of urban policies that are clear to residents, the usefulness of the saving and credit system in helping the families concerned, and the provision of infrastructure (ranging from a telephone network to a road network) to motivate the beneficiaries.

The Ugandan delegation also met community leaders. These opinion-formers and involvement in general were key factors in the project’s success. This lesson was not lost on the Ugandans. The Kampala Integrated Environmental Planning and Management Project hopes for “local participation” “at all levels of the project” and will ask for “a significant investment in inter-community dialogue and awareness-raising […]”

The experience in Vietnam will now allow the Ugandan capital to have a more accurate and specific idea of what is at stake and the difficulties that it can expect. Moreover, Vietnam’s support will not be limited to the knowledge that it has shared up to now, but Ho Chi Minh City will continue to support KCC in future.

UN-HABITAT defines a slum household as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area who lack one or more of the following:

- Durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions.
- Sufficient living space, which means not more than three people sharing the same room.
- Easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price.
- Access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people.
- Security of tenure that prevents forced evictions.
Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is one of the largest cities in Africa. Like all megapoliases, the Congolese capital is feeling the full effects of the global phenomenon of urbanisation. Whereas in 1960 the city only had 500,000 residents, an estimated 8 million people live there today. That is about 12% of the country’s population on just 0.4% of its land. Moreover, this trend does not look as if it is about to be reversed: according to estimates, the number of inhabitants will climb to 10 million by 2015.

Inheriting disorganised systems, the public services cannot face this growth nor provide the basics that are vital for all Kinshasans: health, education (73% of the city’s adult population is illiterate) or basic infrastructure.

The city’s residents, 82% of whom live below the poverty line, cannot cope alone with the challenges posed by the city’s growth. Initiatives - private and public, national or international - have to be coordinated around the « Programme du gouvernement provincial de Kinshasa, 2007-2011 » (Kinshasa Provincial Government Programme 2007-2011). The plan, sketched out by the city authorities, sets out 7 priorities for the years to come, including: salubrity; access to drinking water and electricity; support for the education and health sectors; civil protection, civic education and reintegration; rehabilitation and construction of local infrastructure and decent homes; and good governance.
Since women have to do domestic tasks, they are most affected by water shortages. Mothers are responsible for collecting water, but they often delegate this task to their daughters, disrupting their schooling. During times of water shortage, and particularly as the dry season approaches, they wait patiently in front of the wells or go long distances if the closest well has dried up.

Malala Mutombo, a resident of Mpasa district (in the municipality of N'Sele) spends three hours each day collecting water. She says, "We’re forced to go deep into the ravines to find water. Everyone takes part - even three-year-old children - so we can be sure to have enough to keep us going. And that isn't without its risks." Accidents can happen on the paths or in the ravines. And women risk being attacked or raped when they go to collect water in the early hours of the morning while it is still dark.9

The water system
In the east of the city, the area most affected by the growth in Kinshasa's population, BTC - in partnership with the Congolese NGO Action pour le développement des infrastructures en milieu rural (ADIR: Action for Rural Infrastructure Development) - is setting up alternatives for the most disadvantaged members of society, who do not have access to the REGIDESO system.

BTC’s alternative involves over 400 standpipes and 20 mini water supply systems managed by the communities themselves. A mini-system comprises a borehole, water pipes, tanks (for storing the water) and standpipes (where the local people draw the water). They are set up in the suburbs of Kinshasa, which gives 400,000 people access to drinking water less than 250 metres from their homes. The service is provided at an affordable price (at most one Congolese franc, i.e. approximately €0.01, per litre). The systems are designed so that the communities concerned can manage them themselves. The residents are members of user associations and pay for the ‘water service’, including maintenance of the system.

Simple problems, involving repairing a tap or changing a section of pipe, are resolved by the neighbourhood’s residents themselves. Every standpipe is managed by two ‘water ladies’, who live in the neighbourhood - preferably in the street where the standpipe is located. Their duties include selling water, collecting payments and supervising the system. As such, they report any system malfunction to those in charge of operating the system.
Water = health

The local communities play a key role, since they guarantee access to water, the blue gold. To support the ‘water ladies’ in their tasks, the streets and roads have representatives on local development committees. The committees act as the General Meeting of shareholders for the water supply system. The General Meeting represents the people of the area being supplied by the system. Training courses ensure that skills are passed on, enabling these local bodies to manage and repair the equipment, keep the books and check water quality on a regular basis. This technical and social support is handled by local NGOs.

In addition, campaigns are run to educate residents about hygiene and how it applies to water use, water storage and sanitation. Two approaches are used to encourage them to get involved: PHAST and SARAR (see box).

The expected gains from this ground-breaking participatory project include not only access to drinking water and an improvement in the health of the local residents, but also a decrease in health problems, a reduction in women’s work burden and the chance for girls to devote more time to their schooling.

Outside Kinshasa, BTC is setting up mini drinking water systems in the suburbs of the cities of Mbuji-Mayi, Bukavu and Kindu. A total of around one million people are directly affected. This programme is the result of a joint multi-donor effort (Belgium/European Union/Great Britain) and is worth a total of €16,500,000 (of which 42% is being provided by Belgium). The scope of these actions may expand in the near future with a boost being given to the Belgian activities and additional support from the French development cooperation authorities, as required.

SARAR and PHAST

SARAR stands for ‘Self-Esteem, Associative strength, Resourcefulness, Action-planning and Responsibility’. This approach is based on participatory learning and on the populations’ capacity to understand and resolve their problems. SARAR builds on local knowledge, strengthens participants’ sense of worth and self-esteem, encourages associative prioritisation and planning for projects and gives everyone a sense of responsibility to the local community.

PHAST stands for ‘Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation’ and is a form of the SARAR, the objective of which is to improve the hygiene of water and to boost sanitation so as to prevent diarrhoeal diseases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drinking water supply for municipalities in the eastern suburbs of Kinshasa</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Partners</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
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Sharing democracy

On 18 December 2005, the vast majority of the Congolese population voted in favour of the constitution. This fundamental text establishes DRC as a unitary and highly decentralised state. The constitution organises DRC’s governmental system into 25 provinces plus the city of Kinshasa and into ‘decentralised territorial entities’ (DTEs), i.e. towns, municipalities, sectors and chieftoms. These structures, run by elected representatives, have administrative, political and financial autonomy. However, local authorities cannot govern by decree. Congo’s history, with its decades of authoritarian rule, clearly did not favour the emergence of local administrative and development skills. If powers are now to be transferred to the local authorities, then it is essential that citizens are involved as much as possible in local politics.

Consequently, a new system of government is being established. Local government staff, civil society, the private sector and residents all have a part to play in sharing democracy. Their involvement requires building up their capacities.

A better life in Kisenso

BTC set up the PAIDECO-KIN project in close collaboration with local authorities of Kinshasa.

The project was launched in 2000 in Kisenso, a dormitory suburb considered to be one of the poorest in Kinshasa. Life in Kinshasa is fraught with difficulties, but Kisenso (270,000 inhabitants) has the added disadvantage of being an enclave - and that undermines economic activity. The local population has come up with local development plans to end the isolation of this ‘dead end’ in Kinshasa and, even more importantly, to improve the quality of life in the area. It is the citizens, in cooperation with the local authorities, who decide what work most needs to be done in their district.

Some 250 micro-projects have been carried out so far. All of these projects - which include building markets, schools and health centres, collecting water from springs, repairing roads and taking measures to combat erosion - employed local workers, thus creating temporary jobs. Thanks to this approach, the project strengthens and stimulates local production capacities. Money is injected into the local economy while, at the same time, essential infrastructure (electricity, transport, roads, etc.) is built to make new private initiatives possible.

Improvements planned for Kimbanseke

In 2006, the project was extended to Kimbanseke, the most populous municipality in the Congo (approximately 700,000 inhabitants). Kimbanseke has a better position in the city - it is bordered by the boulevard leading to the airport, which generates some economic activity in the district. However, just like in Kisenso, there is a severe lack of basic social services. “The government has not built a hospital, a morgue or a market” in Kimbanseke, says Mayor Paul Kambombo Nzengisa. Local authorities do their work under mango trees, because they simply have no offices. PAIDECO, in conjunction with local residents, aims to change this situation by injecting funds into basic social and community infrastructure and boosting the local economy.

Once this project had been piloted in Kinshasa, it was extended to other cities such as Kananga, Kikwit, Kindu and Kisangani.
**Strengthening local stakeholders**

Local stakeholders’ ability to work together has a direct impact on improvements to living conditions. For local authorities, the key elements in the decentralisation and participation process are two structures representing the people: Municipal Development Committees (MDCs) and Local Development Committees (LDCs). These consultative bodies, comprised of stakeholders from the local area or community, decide how to use investments made in their area. “This contact between the local population and their elected representatives makes for wiser investments”, Abdul Razak, the mayor of Kinsenso, confirms, “these two systems allow the population to identify their needs”.

Now that it has established these areas where people can participate and become more involved in their new political and institutional framework, the PAIDECO project is expanding into institution building. Competent and efficient local government will both promote local development and act as an administrator for the area. Under the Congolese constitution, this type of support aims to give municipalities a key role in rebuilding the state and providing basic public services.

With this approach, BTC’s area of activity has expanded. Support no longer focuses so much on implementing initiatives (social projects, economic projects, etc) but on strengthening institutional players. This new approach is based on providing advice and support, financing projects, and training people in planning, managing local finances and promoting local economic development.

**Transparency through information**

For a project of this magnitude, it is crucially important to communicate with residents and keep them fully informed. The people are frustrated by all the empty promises, and their frustration has been fuelled by widespread mistrust of the government. It is therefore vital that they have a clear view of the decision-making process. That process may be slow, but it is essential for targeting needs properly. In such a climate, rumours are rife. Only transparency can silence them.

With PAIDECO, communication is emerging as a tool of good governance. It guarantees transparent information, unites stakeholders around a common vision and promotes the implementation of project activities. The fortnightly magazine Nzela ya Lobi (Paths for the Future), published for the first time in July 2007, explains PAIDECO’s activities.

Further communication tools have been identified at workshops with members of development committees. Some of these simply need to be consolidated (e.g. the mayor’s weekly meetings with churches and neighbourhood leaders) while others, such as a radio programme, have yet to be created.

**Support for community development in Kisenso and Kimbanseke**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partners</th>
<th>The municipality of Kinshasa and BTC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>€5.9 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Kimbanseke and Kisenso in Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td>2006-2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
<td>To bring about a sustainable improvement in the lives of the people in Kisenso and Kimbanseke by promoting good local governance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
De lokale organisaties versterken

De leefomstandigheden van de bevolking kun je pas verbeteren als de lokale organisaties in staat zijn om samen te werken. De basispijlers van dit decentralisatie- en participatieproces zijn, naast de gemeentelijke overheid, twee structuren die de bevolking vertegenwoordigen: de Gemeentelijke en Lokale Ontwikkelingscomités (respectievelijk CCD en CLD). Deze adviesstructuren zijn samengesteld uit plaatselijke betrokkenen (uit de wijk of gemeente) en beslissen over de investeringen op hun grondgebied. “Dit contact tussen de bevolking en de verkozenen maakt betere investeringen mogelijk,” zo benadrukt Abdul Razak, burgemeester van Kinsenso. “Via deze twee systemen kan de bevolking haar eigen behoeften bepalen.”

Na de oprichting van deze participatiefora richt het PAIDECO-project zich vandaag op de versterking van de lokale instellingen, om zich beter af te stemmen op de nieuwe politieke en institutionele context. Een competentie en doeltreffende administratie komt immers de lokale ontwikkeling en het bestuur van het grondgebied ten goede. Deze ondersteuning wil de gemeente een centrale rol geven bij de heropbouw van de staat en de levering van publieke basisvoorzieningen.
Over the last twenty years, the way in which people are governed has been profoundly affected by the change in the role of the State; decentralisation; privatisation; and the growing involvement of citizens in public debate. Nowhere perhaps has this development been so much in evidence as in the cities.

The development of the role of the State from front-line service provider to facilitator is a key change. Until the 1980s, urban management was centred mainly on major construction projects. However, their impact on poverty proved very disappointing. In the light of mounting criticism and the Structural Adjustment Programmes, governments have gradually repositioned themselves as the party responsible for establishing a facilitation framework. They are no longer ‘development soloists’, but instead try to act as ‘conductors’, forging relationships with and adjusting the parts of other players, such as the private sector, NGOs and civil society. In practice, this ‘facilitation’ has often meant not only the State’s withdrawal from providing whole swathes of services, but also a lack of aid harmony. Against this backdrop, attention is no longer focused just on the government, but on governance, which pertains to all the relationships between civil society, the government and the private sector.

At the same time, many developing countries have established decentralised governance systems, with a view to combating poverty, increasing political involvement and contributing to the ‘accountability’ of public authorities. Although decentralisation still has a long way to go before it achieves the benefits that were anticipated, there is no doubt that the growing involvement of local people in public decision-making - in view of the democratic advances it has entailed - is the most positive change in urban development over the last thirty years. In some cases, these changes have led to innovative forms of urban management where local authorities are partners in a broad network made up of universities, trade unions, the private sector and communities, and where decision-making responsibility is shared out between these partners. As a result, these organisations are representative of local people, including the most disadvantaged sections of urban society. In this sense, local authorities have to also take charge of social cohesion, fairness, environmental protection, conflict resolution and the promotion of citizens’ rights.

It is obvious that urban governance today involves a range of players, interests and resources and requires coordination, negotiation and consensus-building. Its role is all the
more complex in the fields of development and the fight against poverty.

This development also demands changes in terms of the means of supporting technical and financial partners (TFPs). However, these partners devote scant attention to cities, and to urban poverty in particular - and, what’s more, for many years international aid to the urban sector has concentrated on infrastructure.

Belgium has been no exception to the rule. Strategies for reducing poverty in cities are generally less developed and less tried and tested than poverty reduction strategies in the countryside. Most programmes for reducing urban poverty are national, municipal and community programmes. International development agencies and development banks tend to focus on the first two, whilst NGOs concentrate on community initiatives. The three levels are rarely coordinated and linked up. Consequently, urban governance calls for radical changes in the means of supporting TFPs. As time goes on, attention will have to shift from housing, infrastructure and services to management and governance. The local authorities must be given greater powers so that they can perform their duties to the full.

Cities are complex, heterogeneous and multicultural places - and its constituent players are equally diverse. Fully grasp a city’s complexity entails pinpointing all the players involved in managing the city. The aim is to get everyone involved in developing programmes, for the benefit of everyone.
The workers thus have a dual interest in the activities, which increases their motivation to do a good job and acts as an additional guarantee that they will understand the importance of the work and ensure its continuation. This in turn means that a growing number of activities can be easily carried out while building up the partners' technical capacity. The Kinshasa city authorities have put together clean-up teams which are given institutional support so that they can get involved in specific activities.

After the work, the upgraded infrastructure must be regularly maintained and sustainable waste management solutions have to be found, in order to avoid the same situation from recurring in a few years.

**Waste recycling initiative**

BTC is providing support for an initiative launched in 2007 by the Congolese NGO Umoja développement durable (Umoja sustainable development) to recycle plastic bags collected by residents. The bags are compacted into homogeneous balls that can then be reused by the plastics industry to make bottles and bags. Sylvie Mayinga totted up the figures and decided to get her whole family involved in the work, for which she earns 100 Congolese francs (0.12€) per kilo. “Collecting the bags means I can pay my rent and support my family. With my earnings I also cover my other personal needs.” Sylvie has built up a network of about forty bag suppliers. She collects up to 300 kg of bags each week in the streets, markets and bus stops and then delivers them to Umoja. The initiative is proving such a success that plans are afoot to set up more collection centres in the months to come.

**Strength through unity**

Faced with the scale of the task and an increasing number of initiatives, BTC in association with SNV Netherlands Development Organisation launched a number of initiatives of its own in December 2006 to actively support the Kinshasa city authorities’ sanitation platform. BTC’s objective was to create a real synergy between the public authorities, civil society, NGOs, industrial players and donors in dealing with sanitation issues in Kinshasa.

### Rehabilitated neighbourhoods

Kinshasa’s lower town has a sophisticated rainwater drainage system, but it is completely blocked with sand and solid waste. The situation is more alarming, though, in the suburbs. There has been precious little urban planning as ‘newcomers’ have come to live on the hills surrounding Kinshasa, meaning that in these areas there is no sanitation system or, if there is one, it is not up to the task. The rainwater, having nowhere to drain away, turns into torrents of water that erode the soil and the sides of the hills. Not only does this have the potential to lead to landslides, traffic congestion and the abandonment of public facilities such as markets, but the municipalities at the bottom of the hills are flooded.

Belgian Development Cooperation is taking action in eight priority municipalities in Kinshasa to counter the deterioration of the drainage systems and the ground. It is performing rehabilitation work, building roads, unblocking gutters and carrying out anti-erosion and waste recycling activities, allowing residents to benefit from a rehabilitated environment and also improved living conditions and mobility. Where gutters have been built or unblocked, floods cause much less damage. And opening up these neighbourhoods fosters social and business relationships with the surrounding municipalities and the city centre.

### Workers with everything to gain

Rehabilitating the city’s road and drainage systems is only worthwhile if the residents take over maintenance of the upgrading or construction work. Therefore local residents will be consulted and targeted by awareness campaigns throughout the project.

Before work is started, the priority activities and the relevant budgets are determined together with the neighbourhood committees. For the work itself, most of the workers taken on are from the municipality and local SMEs and NGOs. They are generally also the ones who will enjoy the benefit of the facilities that are to be constructed.
The National Sanitation Programme was set up in 1981 and aims to plan and coordinate sanitation-related activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on behalf of the Ministry of the Environment.

Who is affected by sanitation issues in Kinshasa?
Everyone is affected. We are trying to develop partnerships with private entities, such as the pilot project set up with the Association des Conducteurs de Chariots du Congo (Congo Cart Drivers’ Association). We provide the drivers with carts to take away household waste from neighbourhoods that can’t be reached by refuse trucks.

How is waste recycling organised?
Waste collection in Kinshasa isn’t systematically organised, and the disposal of solid waste in particular is inefficient. However, 62% of the household waste that Kinshasa produces is biodegradable and can be processed into compost, which is then passed on to the city’s market gardeners. For the moment the percentage of material processed in relation to the amount produced is still very low. We don’t have facilities for managing wastewater or hospital waste, nor do we have appropriate landfill sites for storing the waste.

What are the top priorities in terms of sanitation?
First, immediate training of the workers in the field so as to fill the gaps that exist. In a second phase, a training programme for sanitation engineers and technicians will lead to creation of a pool of skilled workers. Finally, a public awareness campaign, involving ‘hygiene police’, is crucial to ensuring that people’s behaviour changes. In other words, we have a long haul ahead of us.

Interview: Lola Mukendi
All the cities of the South are facing serious problems in terms of public sanitation and deterioration of their environment as a result of the exponential growth of their population, the concentration of industries, and changes in consumption habits. The problems are mainly due to non-sustainable forms of production and consumption and deficiencies in urban management. They directly impact on the people who live in these cities, and especially the poorest residents.

Although urbanisation leads to many environmental problems, it also provides solutions. If environmental issues (e.g. construction of sewerage systems or supply of drinking water) are dealt with early enough in the planning stage, then services can be provided at a relatively lower cost in cities than elsewhere since they are more densely populated than other areas. Cities are typically home to initiatives organised by associations, interest groups and private players. In many neighbourhoods initiatives are springing up to improve people’s living environment, manage waste and organise recycling. Moreover, in cities it is often easier to levy taxes whose proceeds can be pumped into urban sanitation. Making use of these possibilities coupled with planning cities’ expansion remains a major challenge.

The example of waste management

The big cities are rapidly accumulating waste. The increasingly heterogeneous and complex nature of this waste demands appropriate forms of waste processing and, above all, the specific sites for collection, storage and processing that these cities are often lacking.

If there is nowhere to store and process it, waste is generally left in the streets or people move the waste as part of local initiatives that aim to make the streets cleaner and it ends up in poor, outlying neighbourhoods or remote natural locations (such as rivers, fields and woods).

Waste causes various types of nuisance. For a day visitor the most obvious type is the ugly sight of streets cluttered up with waste of all kinds, with plastic bags forming a blue and black sea of rubbish that is symbolic of the people’s poverty. For the residents the problems are more immediate. Accumulating waste leads to carriers of disease (insects, rodents, etc.) coming in, provides a breeding ground for epidemics and poses a risk of injury, in particular to children. The waste also blocks sewers and causes floods.

However, there are initiatives in place. Residents form associations and collect waste, clean the streets and organise awareness campaigns. Everything that can be recycled and found a new purpose is reused (plastic bottles, metals and sometimes organic matter). However, due to a lack of appropriate recycling facilities, products that are dangerous to humans and the environment, such as batteries or lubricating oil, continue to pile up.

Waste management on a city-wide scale does not necessarily involve extremely complex and expensive technology, but it does require considerable institutional and social organisation. There is a long waste management chain that starts with the everyday behaviour of consumers and goes on to organisation of waste in people’s homes, door-to-door collection of waste or individual dumping at transfer stations, and transportation of waste to its final destination (which in many cases does not have authorisation to be used for waste disposal). Throughout the process ad-hoc waste recovery and recycling networks remove some of the waste. Waste management is a public service which can only be provided if the urban community can secure sufficient financial resources, for example through collect-
ing taxes, to pay the maintenance staff, make investments and pay for the facilities.

Development cooperation projects need to focus on a number of issues: rapidly achieving tangible results in the drive to improve residents' living conditions; promoting and supporting local initiatives; and building up the capacity of local players (e.g. in terms of organisation and management).

¹ Kinshasa Provincial Government Programme 2007-2011
² Idem
³ Idem
⁴ www.christnet.ch
⁵ Nzela ya Lobi, Jeanne Mbanga, Approvisionnement en eau, une corvée pour la population, no. 1, July-August 2007.
⁶ The provinces have a wide range of powers under the constitution, as well as legislative power. The decentralised territorial entities manage issues pertaining to the local area. Decisions taken by the DTEs must be checked to ensure that they are lawful.
⁸ The city of São André in Brazil has developed an original concept involving universities which aims to put in place an innovative approach to urban management.
The city of Quito, perched 2,800 metres above sea-level on the edge of the Pinchincha volcano, stretches 20 km from north to south. Today the city is home to almost two million Ecuadorians, in a country where the majority of the population (over 60%) lives in towns and cities. The south of the city and the valleys at the edge of Quito are witnessing substantial growth in their populations.

The historic city centre with its old houses does not provide modern conveniences or comforts. Consequently, families with sufficient income to enhance their living conditions are moving to the edge of the city, whilst poor newcomers, mainly families from neighbouring provinces and countries, are now settling in the centre. However, some suburban neighbourhoods are no better off: property and housing have become too expensive for much of the population, meaning that increasing numbers of unauthorised neighbourhoods lacking any true basic infrastructure have sprung up over recent decades. The Quito city authorities estimate that 50% of new housing today is built without the correct procedures being followed.

Over 40% of Quito’s population lives in poverty. People in the suburbs and the homeless are particularly hard hit. The health risks facing the poorest neighbourhoods are growing all the time, due to overpopulation, promiscuity, unhygienic conditions and a lack of drinking water. The infant mortality rate in Quito’s slums is 30 times what it is in the rest of the city.
Inegalitarian healthcare systems

There are a lot of health centres in Quito, but there are also major inequalities in the city's healthcare system. For most people, the cost of healthcare is prohibitively high, and consequently people on low incomes do not have access to quality services. The poorest families spend 40% of their household budget on health. In many cases they do not have the money to buy medicines. If a family member falls seriously ill, the family's finances suffer, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. The poor coordination and lack of sympathy from health staff, as well as the completely disorganised private health sector that is not controlled by the government, mean that the quality of care is a lottery. Moreover, to make the bleak picture complete, the links between pharmacies, doctors and laboratories are ambiguous, if not downright cosy.

A good example of the impact of this situation can be seen in reproductive health. An ultrasound costs the healthcare facility very little, but a delightful experience for the prospective parents. As a result, up to 10 ultrasounds are carried out per baby, even though 2 are more than enough for a normal pregnancy.

Another example can be seen in the 20,000 births each year in public maternity hospitals in Quito, where the percentage of caesarean sections, in constant growth, reach 50% today. And yet the percentage of pregnant women actually requiring a caesarean section should not exceed 5-10%, and that figure takes all relevant medical conditions into account. But doctors prefer caesareans because they bring in more money and are finished in thirty minutes, whereas childbirth normally takes hours. Caesareans are thus a logical choice for doctors to make.

So, despite a solid concentration of infrastructure and health professionals, medical care is often driven by profit, not effectiveness. The result is a high infant mortality rate in Quito (20 per 1000), outstripping the national average.

A truly landmark national reform

Against this backdrop, Augusto Barrera, Chairman of the Health Committee of the Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito, explains: “The Health Insurance Programme establishes free access to quality healthcare”. As he reiterates, “In Quito, 8 out of 10 people don’t have any health insurance, although it is a right enshrined in the Constitution.”

Therefore, the Ecuadorian government has been trying for several years now to introduce a universal health insurance system in Ecuador to improve poor families’ access to health services and enhance the quality and effectiveness of the system. The Salud de Altura project is playing a role in this effort. It is helping to promote implementation of health insurance in Quito, in the hope that the rest of the country will follow the city’s example.

Obviously, good health is closely linked with other challenges facing society and demands a universal approach. “It is the result of a combination of social factors including access to water and a sewerage system; peaceful coexistence with others; security in people’s neighbourhoods; public spaces; education; and good nutrition” explains M. Augusto Barrera. (…) Good health is only possible if the local and national authorities take concerted action. Health insurance is just one element or link in a more extensive network of policies that aim to break the cycle of poverty.”

Therefore, establishing health insurance means reorganising the whole range of health-related activities: the separation of control and normative roles (which currently fall to the Ministry of Public Health), health insurance (with local corporations being closely involved), financing (from the Ministry of Finance and also local contributions) and provision of services (mainly supplied by public service providers). There is no doubt about it: this is the most significant reform of the sector in recent decades.
Protecting the health of the poorest people
The Health Insurance Programme targets the beneficiaries of the Bono de Desarrollo Humano: 300,000 of the poorest people in Quito, for whom the Ecuadorian government has made a fund available. Joining the health insurance programme is free. Presenting the membership ‘card’ provides access to medical consultations, dental treatment, medicines and laboratory analyses, and the Ministry of Health plans to extend the healthcare cover, to hospitalisation among others. Care providers are then paid by the Ministry of Finance. To date, 110,000 people have become members.

There are also other parallel bodies. For example, about 65,000 people have joined Seguro Metropolitano de Salud, which targets the middle class and is funded by voluntary contributions from its members.

Quality of care
Health insurance is pointless if healthcare services are not of a satisfactory quality. First and foremost, medical infrastructure and facilities must be built up. But other aspects are also involved that are much more difficult to take into account such as the quality of human relationships and the quality of medical diagnosis and medical procedures, as these demand that the players involved change their behaviour. The action is further complicated by the wide range of institutions (governmental, municipal, NGOs or completely private profit-making institutions).

Therefore, one of the aims of the project “Salud de Altura” is to boost the capacity of health staff, whether they are doctors, nurses or professionals, so that they can perform their duties more satisfactorily. To this end, the project organises training courses for the care-giving staff, draws up quality standards, devises strategies and reorganises clinical decision-making to guide diagnosis and treatment.

Sometimes simple actions - as opposed to sophisticated technology - can have a major effect. For example, filling in a childbirth follow-up form and giving the reasons for carrying out a caesarean can have a real dissuasive effect; at the moment of childbirth, waiting for three minutes before cutting the umbilical cord reduces the risk of anaemia in the new-born child to up to 50% and stimulates neurological development.

Well-informed and in good health
The Salud de Altura project sees to it that the service makes use of the most medically appropriate options available to prevent hospitalisations, medical/surgical procedures and prescriptions for medicines from being driven by profits. Drawing up standards is not enough to deal with this problem. The project also helps to establish an integrated information system, enabling the monitoring of certain indicators. These make it possible to assess the quality of care offered by the relevant services. The establishment of this integrated information system on a national scale allows healthcare players to improve coordination and share information.

However, the quality of care and services goes beyond technology. Quite often patients ask for medication or laboratory tests to show that their problem is really being dealt with. Therefore, Salud de Altura raises public awareness through Radio Quito, the daily press and the Internet. If they are well informed, the public will demand an adequate approach to care and good medical practices will gradually be adopted.

In order to improve the quality of care and ensure the best match between technological ‘supply’ and user ‘demand’, it was essential to establish a control body. In Quito, the Municipality has set up the Metropolitan Health Corporation to act as a local control body for the health insurance system at municipal level. Agreements on implementing universal health insurance and detailing the players’ roles together with responsibilities and funding have been signed, and will act as a foundation for restructuring the system. The agreements regulate the care sector and force the players (health professionals and users) to adhere to certain quality standards.
Bolstering public healthcare services in the Quito metropolitan district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partners</th>
<th>Municipality of Quito, Ministry of Public Health, BTC, municipal health services, NGOs, universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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<td>Duration</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>To implement a health insurance system in Quito and improve the quality of health services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rosa Díaz, Member of the Health Insurance Programme

Rosa Díaz and her husband have eight children. They work in agriculture and gardening, doing odd jobs. Generally, Rosa stays at home looking after the children. The family lives in an urban neighbourhood in south Quito. A few months ago, Rosa and her family joined the Health Insurance Programme.

Have you benefited yet from the medical insurance provided by the Health Insurance Programme?

Yes, I was treated for a stomach problem. The doctor told me that I needed to have an ultrasound done, but I haven’t had time for that yet because of my new job. I also sent my children for a dental check-up. For me it was a relief to go to a doctor and be treated without having to worry about how much it was going to cost.

How did the staff treat you?

The health centre reception staff were very welcoming and the doctor and the dentist took care of me without any problems. I didn’t have to pay anything.

What do you think of the Health Insurance Programme?

This free insurance is great, because it allows us to get treatment when we need it and have regular medical check-ups free of charge.

What are the benefits of health insurance?

The health insurance means that my family and I can now spend the money that we previously used to finance medical care on investing in our children’s upbringing.

Interview by Caroline Picard

Students at Quito’s Central University explain the benefits of health insurance and promote awareness of good dietary habits. © BTC/Caroline Picard

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1 Quentin, 2005
2 Salud de Altura, 2006
3 Delcourt, 2007
4 Davis, 2006
5 Criel and Maçq, 2006
6 The Bono de Desarrollo Humano (Human Development Voucher) is a monthly allowance of USD 30 that the government pays to the poorest people in Ecuador. It also gives access to various social programmes with regard to food, education and health.
The difficulties facing healthcare systems in most developing countries can be summed up by two closely linked problems: access (geographical, financial and cultural) to services and the quality of care (either curative or preventive) available. Providing healthcare in towns poses quite different challenges to providing that same care in rural areas. In urban areas, geographical accessibility poses few problems and there is often an over-abundance of public and private services. The infrastructure is in place, specialists live in the towns in question and supplies and medicines are readily available (or at least more readily available than in rural areas). However, the situation is not quite that straightforward. In recent years, many towns have found that they no longer enjoy these advantages: urban populations have become increasingly impoverished, towns have experienced significant demographic growth, the various components making up towns' general infrastructure have been unable to keep pace. New health centres would need to be built year on year to keep up with demand, a situation which frequently results in the existing infrastructure having to cope with a disproportionately large number of patients each day and where the service provided has necessarily become depersonalised.

Affordability is also a problem in urban areas since unregulated private services and corruption in public services pushes prices up for patients. Unregulated privatisation of medicine has countless negative knock-on effects that undermine the quality of care available and impoverish patients that much more. In countries such as Vietnam and Cambodia, for example, so-called catastrophic expenditure is the main cause of debt and new poverty in society.

Health insurance funds in urban areas

The quality of services available in urban areas differs from that provided in rural areas for several reasons. In urban areas, changes in lifestyle (diet, desk-bound work, stress, violence, prostitution) impact on individuals' health. For example, the generally higher number of people with AIDS in urban areas requires specialist healthcare services. In urban areas, more women want to give birth in maternity hospitals while in rural areas there is often no such demand. Another difference is that the demand for family planning services is higher in towns than in rural areas, particularly among young adolescents for whom very few services are available within healthcare systems. Finally, limited access to latrines in urban areas coupled with a high population density means that germs can be transmitted easily.

It is vital that all these parameters are borne in mind and healthcare services adapted accordingly.

In the absence of any state regulation (or any health insurance funds), the level of service provided by private facilities is no better than that offered through public ones. While health staff in public facilities often lack motivation due to low salaries, doctors in urban areas are often driven by a desire to maximise profit by providing medical care for patients and through excessive use of medicines and medical procedures.
Cities and municipalities can be very urban development partners

Ixelles and Kalamu (DRC), Huy and Natitingou (Benin), or Leuven and Nakuru (Kenya). Modern-day cities and municipalities have developed a new vision of development cooperation. This new approach of theirs complements the mechanisms underlying conventional twinning partnerships, which are geared more towards cultural exchanges and reciprocal visits, and it entails becoming truly involved in actions of international solidarity. This shift towards opening up to the wider world (chiefly the developing world) is mainly reflected either by the appointment of councillors or aldermen who are specifically responsible for North-South solidarity or by the development of technical projects run directly by the respective municipalities in the North and South.

To support this trend, the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGDC) is offering Belgian municipalities a chance to become involved in the fight against poverty by helping to enhance the capabilities of the relevant municipal institutions in least developed countries. Between 2001 and 2004, no fewer than 109 local governments received funds out of the International Municipal Cooperation (IMC) programme.

At the same time, BTC has reviewed its role in local governance sectors and in decentralisation in the broad sense of the term. It is now clear that if BTC is to become even more effective in these domains, it must find out which skills are available in these areas here in Belgium. Of course, cities and municipalities have soon been considered as essential actors, and some of their expertise is directly channelled into governance and decentralisation, in areas such as regional planning, local taxation, the workings of local councils, land registry, and how best to manage the records kept on local populations. Municipalities may have developed specific techniques for providing services like these that bring them into very close contact with citizens (like simply receiving someone at a counter and recording what they want). And whereas every effort must be made to avoid the pitfall of trying to apply a model developed in one place somewhere else, where the reality may be very different, these techniques can nonetheless provide inspiration for other municipalities, especially in the South.

Accordingly, by teaming up with the Belgian Unions of Cities and Municipalities, BTC hopes to pinpoint the skills existing at municipal level and ultimately draw on them to boost the promotion of local expertise in the context of development programmes. In parallel to all the structures that are already in place, such a partnership would facilitate the coordination of the aid provided by Belgium in the affected regions.

Naturally, cities and municipalities are not homogeneous actors. Some cities are already developing close partnerships, whilst others lack the resources to do so even though they would like to ‘do their bit’ for international solidarity. For them, BTC could serve as a framework for activities (apart from existing federal and regional programmes) for which it would look for specialist expertise. For example, an official in charge of public works in a small municipality could pass on their experience in managing contracts, calls for tender or staff.

With the same objective, namely ensuring greater consistency in synergies in local governance and decentralisation, the regional associations of cities and municipalities involved in these domains have already set up working groups. These bring together the local authorities involved in the federal programme of international cooperation so that they can share their experiences and develop proper synergies in countries where they are active. A broader Belgian platform for the actors involved in local governance and decentralisation could also be set up and mandated to provide information on different projects implemented in a single region, pass on requests for highly specific expertise, or even coordinate activities within the framework of an integrated development programme.

We have not reached that point yet, for a great deal of bridges still need to be built between activities implemented by municipal authorities and BTC. But constructing them will enable us to move even closer to our goal of putting development projects back in the hands of those they will benefit.
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