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Ensuring access to public sanitation service: Social support and awareness raising experience in Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina

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Abstract

This paper presents the Social Support and Awareness Raising Program experience for public utility AySA's sewer expansion works in the western zone of Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina. This case contributes to reflecting upon the obstacles and potential for a higher access to water and sanitation services among lower middle class and low-income urban dwellers.

In 2012, AySA implemented the SSAR Program as soon as the sewer expansion works were started. The experience presented in this paper is the outcome of 18 months of implementation of the SSAR Program by IIED-AL (September 2012 to March 2014) in four municipalities in the west of Greater Buenos Aires with sanitation shortage (Ituzaingó, Morón, Hurlingham and Tres de Febrero). The works comprised 20,000 connections. These works did not include service installation to each household, as this task comes under the responsibility of households. IIED-AL's SSAR Program is a liaison between the works and the community. It is the first experience of this kind in works performed by companies contracted by AySA.

This paper analyses the SSAR program in its two main components: social intervention and research. In the first part, this paper describes the SSAR process focusing on methodology, tools and the activities implemented. The second part presents the findings of the research component. It focuses on the outcome of the survey regarding household connection level. This allowed us to gain a thorough knowledge of the main difficulties faced by households to connect to the service.

The following points are highlighted in this analysis: i. The need to take a flexible approach, based on awareness of the diversity of social conditions, the peculiarities of local government, and the different stages of the works, ii. The fact that technical experts usually ignore that the works have a social dimension, iii. The need to call into question the idea of 100 % Executed Work =

100 % Finished Work prevalent in the mind of technical experts (engineers, contractors, local governments teams, etc.), considering the fact that the results of our survey show that a very high percentage of households (more than 40%) fail to connect to the sewage service almost one year after the works were finished.

In conclusion, this paper presents achievements and challenges of the SSAR program, main lessons learnt and recommendations for action. It wishes to draw attention to the fact that social support and awareness raising programs, absent in most programs of public water and sanitation, are key tools for improving accessibility to services.

Introduction

Public utility *Aguas y Saneamientos Argentinos* (AYSA) was created as a result of the nationalization of private-owned utility *Aguas Argentinas* in 2006. Several studies attest to the scarce investment in expansion, particularly in areas where the said company obtained low or zero profit (Castro, 2008; Aspaizu et al 2004, Aspiazu, 2010). After its nationalization, AySA embarked on an infrastructure expansion plan aimed at providing water and sanitation to the Greater Buenos Aires areas with the greatest shortage of services (AySA, 2007).

AySA's area of operation comprises the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and 17 suburban municipalities, thus serving a territory of 1,752 km^2 and a population of 9,700,000 inhabitants, 6,700,000 of which reside in the Province of Buenos Aires. Until 2011, water and sewer coverage reached 84% and 59%, respectively (AySA, 2011).

According to AySA's Strategic Plan for 2011 -2020 (AySA, 2011), the company plans to bring the drinking water service to 1,500,000 inhabitants in 2015, reaching 100% water coverage, and the sewer drain service to 3,500,000 inhabitants in 2020, reaching 95% of sewer coverage. Regional and multilateral banks are the main external cooperation and financing sources in the sector. Since 2010, there is a major program in place aimed at upgrading the quality and coverage of services in its largest cities and suburban areas, with a conditional credit line for 710 million dollars. This credit line supplements two ongoing projects: the Water and Sanitation Program for localities of up to 50,000 inhabitants, and the Drinking Water and Sanitation Program for the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area and its Suburbs. Besides, the Buenos Aires Infrastructure Sustainable Investment Development Project is financed with approximately 550 million dollars (Rojas Ortuste, F., 2014).

In the case of Greater Buenos Aires, the western zone (which comprises the municipalities where the social support and awareness raising (SSAR) experience was developed in relation to the works) reports the largest shortage of water (33% of households) and the second worst-ranked area in terms of sanitation shortage, reaching 47% of households (Jaramillo, 2012).

Since 1990, the Latin American office of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED-AL) has been working on projects aimed at improving the access to basic urban services with a viewpoint based on collaboration and participation with several actors: neighborhood communities, civil society organizations, local governments, and utility companies, especially in informal settlements (IIED-AL, 2005; Almansi F. et al, 2010). In 2006, within the framework of the debate on the delayed expansion of the service and the nationalization, the IIED-AL prepared a document on the possibilities and challenges posed by the new scenario (Almansi, F. et al, 2006).

In 2012, AySA implemented the SSAR Program in relation to works. The experience presented in this paper is the outcome of 18 months of implementation of the SSAR Program by IIED-AL from September 2012 to March 2014 in four municipalities in the west of Greater Buenos Aires undergoing sanitation shortage: Ituzaingó, Morón, Hurlingham and Tres de Febrero, with a scope of work comprising 20,000 connections. These works do not include service installation to each household, as this task comes under the responsibility of every household. IIED-AL's SSAR Program is a liaison between the works and the community and it is the first experience of this kind in works performed by companies contracted by AySA.

This paper presents the SSAR experience for public utility AySA's sewer expansion works in the western zone of Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina, as a case that contributes to reflecting upon the obstacles and potential for a higher access to water and sanitation services, thus attaining not only millennium development goals —as stated by C. de Alburquerque (2012) — but universal coverage as well.

The questions underlying the SSAR Program design are the following: How does the SSAR Program enable a better knowledge of the demand to overcome obstacles and make good use of its potential? How can SSAR's approach to works promote the expansion process, not only during the performance of the works but, above all, for a higher effective connection rate of households as well as improving its quality? What are the difficulties faced by households at the time of undertaking the connection in each plot of land? What are the difficulties faced and the reasons given by households that cannot attain service connection and what strategies may be developed to accomplish such connection? What feasible actors and resources can be set into motion for an effective connection?

Faced with these questions, the SSAR Program brought two big components into action: the social intervention component, and the research component, which supplements and intersects the former. This paper is divided into three parts. In the first part, the social intervention component is introduced; in particular, it describes the SSAR process in sewer expansion works, undertaken by IIED-AL in the western zone of Greater Buenos Aires, focusing on the methodology, tools and activities implemented. In the second part, the findings of the research component are presented, that is, the outcome of the survey regarding household connection level, which allowed to gain a thorough knowledge of the main difficulties faced by households at the time of being connected to the service, and to make adjustments to the intervention activities and tools. The findings of the research further enabled the opening of a debate on the current allocation (and limits) of individual responsibility regarding connection and the main challenges to be overcome by public policies. The third part outlines the challenges and accomplishments of SSAR Program management in sewer expansion works. Lastly, by way of conclusion, the main lessons learnt and recommendations for action are highlighted.

1st Part - The intervention component in the SSAR process: its methodological approach

The execution of works in relation to household utilities is usually viewed by governments and utility companies as technical work, laying of pipelines, dumping, etc., ignoring the social perspective involved in any territorial intervention for the provision of public services. As the works involve people, homes, houses, neighborhoods, etc., it is essential to approach the works from their two dimensions: technical and social. From this perspective, IIED-AL's services were contracted by AySA to carry out the SSAR Program for the following purposes: to foster the normal technical development of the works and the adequate expansion of the services to new users in order to ensure the accomplishment of the social benefits of the investment in infrastructure.

As mentioned above, the SSAR was conducted in four municipalities in the west of Greater Buenos Aires, Argentina, for 18 months (from September 2013 to March 2014); as a result, more than 20,000 plots/houses in an area of 760 city blocks gained access to sewer service.

The SSAR Program was carried out in a process involving the public utility, users, neighborhood communities, intermediary organizations and governmental authorities. With participative management logic, the methodological strategy was structured through the three logical stages in the work execution process: before the technical execution of the works, during the execution and after the service of the works, as described below.

Map 1- Aysa´s operation service area

Source: Aysa, 2011 (colored municipalities of IIED`s work)

1 .1. Before (i.e. before the technical execution of works)

The execution of this stage was scheduled three months before the commencement of the works in order to gain insight of socio-territorial features of neighborhoods in the work zone concerned, social organizations and actors in order to plan and coordinate the activities to be developed through joint participation. These features are stated below, in accordance with the following components.

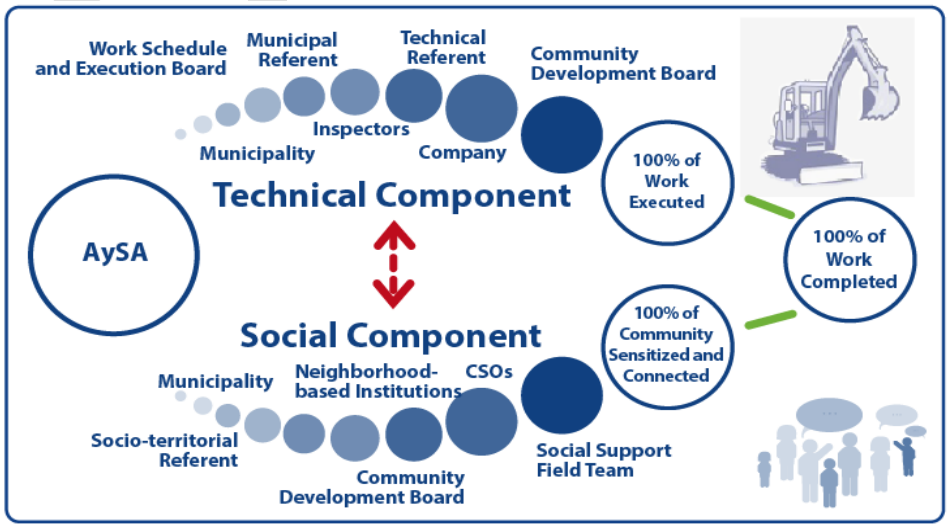
a. **Socio-territorial diagnosis.** As basic input before devising the territorial approach, field teams prepared a socio-territorial report at municipal level for each work zone. This enabled the definition of the most adequate devices according to the social and urban features of the neighborhoods subject to intervention, the local government's territorial management model, the framework of existing organizations and the progress of works. It was the first step to start knitting the network of actors with whom the SSAR work should be developed. It included visits to the work

zone, mapping of actors involved, photographical records, identification by means of transects, and census of urban and social features.

b. **Coordination with municipal referents of the works** (Public Works/Network Board). The different activities to be performed in the neighborhoods were planned by consensus with the local government in periodical meetings.
c. **Coordination with each municipality and AySA's respective press departments.** Work was conducted with several actors involved on the potential pieces of communication; information fliers, brochures, posters, panels, maps, etc. according to work progress needs.
d. **Coordination with civil society institutions and organizations** (Interviews, Consultation, Visits). Throughout the project a network of social organizations was built, which participated as neighborhood nodes in communicating the notice of call for the respective activities.
e. **Coordination with AySA** (Relations with the Community Board / Work Schedule and Execution Board / West Region Board / AySA's Work Inspectors in the Territory).
In this stage, coordination was made with AySA's different Boards, with whom consensus was reached on the planned work model. In the stage of work performance in the territory, coordination was made with work inspectors.

The following diagram summarizes the management model thus developed. The upper part shows the management of the technical dimension of the work, a model devised by AySA up to the execution of this SSAR Program. The lower part of the diagram shows the inclusion of the social dimension into the management, a model proposed and implemented by IIED-AL, including both logical patterns.

"SSAR's approach to works" management model proposed by IIED-AL



1.2. During (i.e. during technical execution of the works)

The objectives set by the SSAR team for this stage were the following: (i) to keep population informed of work progress, (ii) to sensitize the population about the benefits of the connection to sewer service, (iii) to sensitize population about the importance of refraining from connecting until the works have been fully completed.

The SSAR Program acted as a channel for queries, allowed to satisfy neighbors' need for information and to solve conflicts and/or difficulties related to the execution of works. The following activities were performed:

a. **Query centers.** Assistance centers were opened twice a week in the work zones concerned, in neighborhood-based institutions acknowledged by neighbors. Information panels were mounted with brochures and assistance forms at neighbors' disposal. The SSAR Program thus gained a territorial anchoring at the core of the works, providing information and assistance, and mapping complaints and queries. Within a year, 592 queries were addressed, of which 80% were related to the provision of information (progress of works, when and how to connect, if the neighbor would be a beneficiary or not of the works, etc.); 17% were related to technical complaints (breakage of sidewalks or pipes) and 7% were related to queries and complaints at municipal level (mainly waste-related issues).
b. **"*No te Conectes Todavía*" [Don't connect yet] Communication Campaign.** One of the problems identified during the execution of works through meetings held with AySA inspectors, civil organizations and neighbors was the connection to the system before work completion (which causes spills and hinders execution). Posters and information fliers were distributed to houses, shops and query centers, stressing the need not to connect beforehand. Over 7,000 information fliers and 300 posters were distributed.
c. **Information meetings about the progress of works.** Throughout the SSAR work, meetings were held to inform the commencement of work stages, the progress of works and the service availability of the completed work; these meetings were arranged by city blocks and street sections. These small meetings made it possible to keep households informed of what was to be expected in the course of work execution in their respective neighborhoods (road cuts, closure of parking lots, removal of sidewalks, mud, etc.) Around 40 meetings were held, with the attendance of over 300 neighbors. Furthermore, there was permanent communication with the network of community organizations, which provided further support by spreading the information among neighbors.

d. **Survey of neighbors' intention to connect.** A survey was conducted in the municipalities where the works were being perfomed, in order to become acquainted with neighbors' information needs, their view about the works and their intention to connect their households to the network. A door-to-door poll of 412 households was conducted (209 in the municipality of Hurlingham and 203 in Tres de Febrero). According to the survey findings, 80% of the households polled had undergone trouble due to cesspit/septic tank saturation. The average maintenance expense (septic truck) amounts to about ARS 1,200 per year. Around 90% of respondents expressed their interest in connecting their households to the sewer service. Neighbors' main causes for concern are the following: How to connect to the sewer; Whom to contact for the work; How to be certain that they are making the connection work properly; When to make the connection. These data allowed us to devise instruments in accordance with the neighbors' needs (See "Findings of the research component" below).

1.3. After (i.e. subsequent to the servicel availability of completed works)

This stage, many a time avoided in residential utility service expansion works, was crucial for the SSAR Program. It began upon completion of the works for a minimum period of three months. The objectives were the following: (i) to inform neighbors of the service availability and to sensitize them to service connection, (ii) to strengthen communication regarding the benefits of sewer service connection, the environmental impact, household health and hygiene, and (iii) to provide training on the proper connection and use of the service.

The fact of carrying out the SSAR Program throughout the execution of works, coupled with the findings of the research component regarding service connection, enabled the detection of neighbors' needs and demands. Many instruments devised during this stage had not been even conceived beforehand. This "bottom-up" approach to the devising of these instruments led to enhanced results from SSAR intervention. The following activities were performed:

a. Training Workshops

This activity was developed in reply to the neighbors' own demands. AySA is not in charge of connecting the municipal pipeline to each residential house indoors, leaving neighbors completely unknowledgeable about how to proceed. A video and a brochure were made about indoor service connection, which provided neighbors with basic tools by the time they made the connection. Forty-one (41) meetings/workshops were held, with the attendance of 612 neighbors. At these meetings and workshops a strong emphasis was placed on

the benefits of connecting to the service, blocking the cesspit and how to make a proper connection.

b. Door-to-door information and sensitization activity for connection and cesspit blocking

Intense door-to-door work was performed consisting in the exchange of information and sensitization to service connection in all zones affected by the works. This confirmed neighbors' need for information when these kinds of works are executed. Furthermore, it enabled us to detect the need for information about the importance of closing off cesspits.
In conversations with neighbors (subsequently corroborated in surveys), it was noted that neighbors did not consider cesspit blocking as part of the sanitation process. Many would not block the cesspit or would leave this task for a later time or would not do it "just in case". Consequently, a brochure was specifically issued on cesspit blocking and the importance of this task was repeatedly stressed in all activities. Visits were made to 9,760 households.

c. **Notice – Expeditious door-to-door survey with neighbors**

As part of the information process, the SSAR team gave door-to-door notice to neighbors of the availability of service connection. A survey conducted in El Palomar municipality (where AySA had mailed the pertinent notice of availability to neighbors by post) revealed that most households (almost 75%) had not received such notice (See "Connection Survey" further below). The notice had effectively been sent but there were no records of its receipt by households. This prompted the need to implement a posted notice system. At the same time, this tool enabled a quick diagnosis of the neighborhood situation (by means of an expeditious connection and cesspit blocking survey), thus being able to define future interventions. Accordingly, notice was given to 12,749 households and a sticker (similar to ones used in census procedures) was posted on the front door as a sign that notice has been duly given.

d. **Video on sanitary installations.** As the responsibility for connection lies with users, a video was released that teaches how to make a proper installation indoors. The main stages are introduced step by step, and reminders are provided for a proper connection and use of the service.

After-works is a component usually relegated by the main actors. The fact that residential connection should be made by users themselves is a way of limiting the responsibility and hinders further action by the local government and the utility company concerned, which —by law— has no intervention beyond laying the municipal line. It is true that reactivating after-work tasks entailed demands and statements of needs by households, some of which were difficult to solve (asking for a list of licensed plumbers, inspection by a public body, financing),

but it also paved the way for awareness-raising y training on proper connection, use of service, environmental impact, financing alternatives, etc.

1.4. Some observations regarding execution of the intervention component

With regard to the execution of this component, the following factors have influenced the development of this methodology:

Late arrival of the SSAR Program. When the SSAR Program was set into motion, many works were already in progress (Hurlingham, Tres de Febrero) while some others have already been completed (Ituzaingó and Morón). This meant that the stages foreseen in the SSAR Program (before, during and after) overlapped in some work zones. The “late” arrival to some municipalities where the works had been completed (Ituzaingó and part of Morón municipality) resulted in a lesser degree of involvement by the local government in SSAR activities. Furthermore, the research component with regard to the level of service connection was one of the first actions performed in these municipalities. In Hurlingham and Tres de Febrero, where IIED-AL arrived when the works were in progress, the degree of willingness and interest in carrying out a joint work was much higher.

Inclusion of the social dimension into the works. The execution of works is usually viewed by municipal areas and land inspectors solely from a technical dimension. This is manifest in the fact that the municipal areas in charge of the works are Public Works Departments in all cases, without allocating social personnel to their follow-up. As for AySA, territorial coordination with work inspectors was a gradual process built in the course of the months based on the understanding by each team of how the various functions were complemented. The support provided by the Relations with the Community Board (Social Area) and the Work Schedule and Execution Board (Technical Area) were undoubtedly key factors for the successful coordination of both Areas at territorial level.

Absence of regulations regarding the role of local governments. The works are fully performed and funded by AySA through contracting companies**.** There is no regulatory framework that ensures the joint work with local governments or a clear specification of the type of participation or functions to be carried out, as opposed to other nationwide programs (*Programa de Mejoramiento de Barrios* [Neighborhood Upgrading Program]). This entailed continuous work by SSAR teams to keep the coordination and collaboration of local teams going.

With regard to SSAR accomplishments and challenges, even though they will be described in further detail in the third part, it is noteworthy that throughout the 18 months of SSAR Program execution, we worked with almost 12,000

households seeking to raise their awareness on the benefits and effects of service connection, sensitization regarding the proper and complete connection procedure (connection in addition to cesspit blocking) and the adequate use of the service and on jointly reflecting upon strategies for a successful access to connection.

2nd Part – Research component: findings of the survey on household service connection levels and its challenges

The findings of one of the surveys on service connection level, conducted in the framework of SSAR, are stated below. Research in each work zone provided a clearer picture of demand features and enabled the design of instruments tailored to such particular features. The research component thus enabled further exploration of the different causes for the absence of connection and, hence, the devising of different strategies for a better impact on effective service connection. On the other hand, the shortage of household connection, despite AySA's due expansion and coverage of such service, poses trouble to the "executed work = completed work" concept prevailing in these types of works.

As stated by several authors (Adaszko, D. 2011, 2013; Jaramillo, 2012), the access to network services depends on three basic factors: (A) having a house (B) having the basic urban soil infrastructure, i.e. the laying of primary and secondary pipelines and (C) being in a financial position allowing to afford the cost of service connection and provision.

General statistics are a fundamental tool for sector planning, especially at macro levels. Now, when it proves necessary to reduce the degree of intervention to micro levels, the qualitative and quantitative information at local level becomes a necessary instrument to adjust the policy or programs to the actual reality of each municipality in particular (See Almansi et al, 2006).

Four service connection studies have been conducted in four completed work zones (2,108 cases). Two of these studies implemented a census modality (El Palomar: 635 cases / Castelar Norte: 967 cases), while the studies conducted in Ituzaingó (José Mará Paz, Mansilla-La Refalosa) adopted a sampling modality, by surveying 506 cases[1]. The data gathered in Ituzaingó are reproduced below.

The zones where sewer expansion works were performed in Ituzaingó correlate, according to AySA's typology, with medium-income non-deprived households and some medium-low income sectors. There is a wide prevalence of single-house plots (almost 90%) and only a 10% of 2-4 houses per plot. Half of these households consist of the typical 3 to 4-member configuration, 34% are

[1] Systematic random probability sampling was used. The sample represents 8.7% of all plots and a confidence interval of 95% for a sampling error of 0.045%.

single-member or two-member homes, and 16% of households are inhabited by more members (5 to 8 people).

2.1 Service coverage vs. Effective connection rate

At the time of surveying the effective connection rate, it was noted that 58.1% of the plots had effectively made the household connection. This revealed that there was a connection deficit in over 40% of households/plots.

Table 1: Sewer service connection rate of plots/houses – Ituzaingó

Indicators	**Connection rate of plots/houses**
Connected to the service	58.1%
Not connected to the service	41.3%
Respondent does not know/reply	0.2%

Source: IIED-AL Research, 2013

In a more in-depth analysis of the service connection rate, the following observations are noteworthy:

- **Houses register a higher connection rate than shops (59.4% vs. 44.4%).** The latter seem to be lesser motivated to undertake the connection. It is probable that these premises are rented and their owners are less interested in affording the expense.
- **Connection rate is significantly lower (almost 25% less) in single and two-member households than in three to four-member and five to eight-member households**.
  The motivation and interest in connecting to the service is more prevalent in households composed of three or more members. Even though the presence of minors in the household is unknown in this study, this might be the case in households composed by more than three members, who register the highest connection rate.
  In the case of single-member and two-member households, the decreased interest might be accounted for by the fact that many of these

homes are inhabited by senior citizens of over 65 years of age, who stated their economic impossibility of affording the connection cost with their monthly retirement income. This situation is coupled with a cultural fact or custom of “having lived without sewers for forty years”, which hinders the search for alternatives to have access to such connection.

- **The connection rate is 25% higher in own houses/plots than in rented houses and other tenure modalities (63.5% of owners are connected vs. 38.7% of tenants and 37.5% of other tenure modalities)**. This data confirms —again— an issue already highlighted in the specialized bibliography. The assurance provided by being the owner of the house/plot is reflected in the improvements made to the real property. Furthermore, tenants remain at the mercy of the landlord, who is the one to bear the cost of the connection work. The figures indicate that the landlord’s incentive to undertake the requisite works is rather low.

- **The longer the time elapsed from service availability, the higher level of service connection is expected**. Time is a factor to be considered in service connection rate. The Ituzaingó area where the service had been available over a year and a half before reported the highest connection rate (close to 70%).
- **The education level has no influence on service connection rate.** There was no significant difference or statistic correlation of the service connection rate with the education level of the head of household.

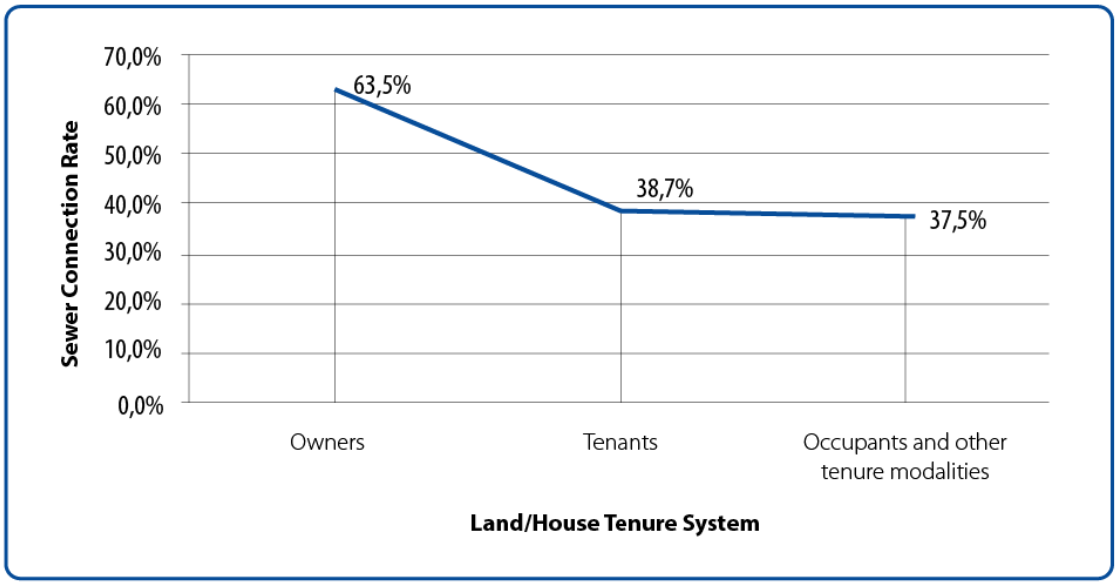
Tables and charts below provide a summary of the variables under analysis.

Table 2 – Service connection rate according to the Head of Household's education level – Works in Ituzaingó municipality

Indicators / Service connection rate according to Head of Household's education level	Primary school	Secondary school	College / University Level	Respondent does not know/reply
Connected / Connection under way	61.9%%	59.7%	57.9%	48.5%
Not connected	36.9%	39.9%	41.3%	51.5%
Respondent ignored the possibility of being connected to the service	-	0.4%	-	-
Other indicators	1.2%	-	-	-
Respondent does not know/reply	-	-	0.8%	-
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: IIED-AL Research, 2013

Chart 1 - Service connection rate according to the plot/house tenure system – Works in Ituzaingó municipality



Source: IIED-AL Research, 2013

Table 3 - Service connection rate according to number of household members - Works in Ituzaingó municipality

Service connection level according to the number of household members per Project	Number of household members				Total
	One-member household	2 members	3 - 4 members	5 - 8 members	
Connected / Connection under way	**39.0%**	**46.7%**	**66.8%**	**67.1%**	**57.3%**
Not connected	61.0%	51.7%	33.2%	31.6%	40.1%
Other indicators	-	0.8%	-	-	0.2%
Respondent ignored the possibility of being connected	-	0.8%	-	-	0.2%
Respondent does not know/reply	-	-	-	1.3%	0.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: IIED-AL Research, 2013

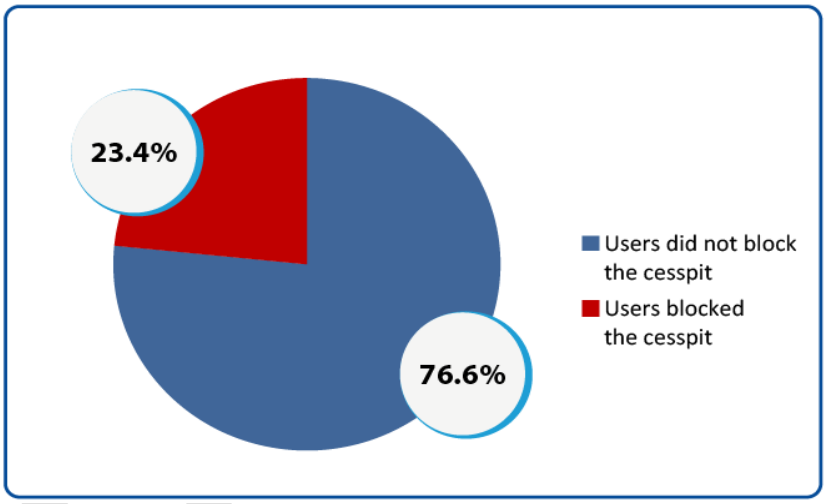
These data show a 40% gap to be bridged between AySA's 100% service coverage (works already performed) and 100% actual service connection.

2.2 Cesspit blocking: a problem to be addressed with households already connected to the service

At the time of the survey, 23.4% of users already connected to the service had not blocked the cesspits yet. The main reason for this failure was the economic cost, followed by lack of time and technical building difficulties. A smaller number of households kept the cesspit as an alternative or ignored they had to undertake the blocking procedure.

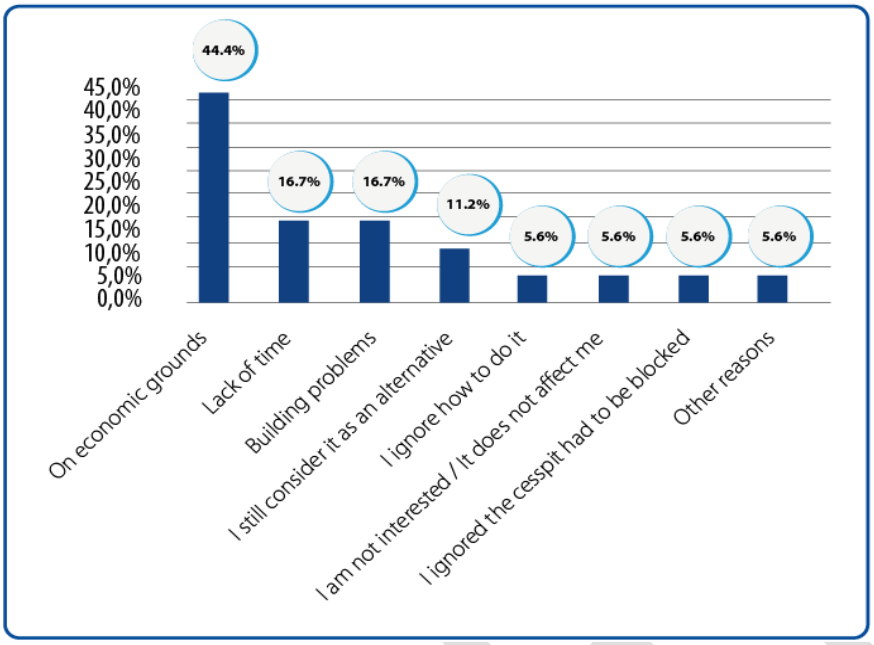
The data gathered in the study revealed that, for many neighbors, sewer service connection does not necessary imply blocking the cesspit. This is an activity that is usually deferred in time or not performed altogether. Several neighbors had not considered the environmental and health impact resulting from this failure. Based on this diagnosis, the SSAR Program decided to emphasize in all messages to the community that cesspit blocking is an essential component in the service connection process.

Chart 2 – Users connected to the service – Cesspit blocking level – Works in Ituzaingó municipality



Source: IIED-AL Research, 2013

Chart 3 – Users connected to the service – Reasons for failure to block the cesspit – Works in Ituzaingó municipality

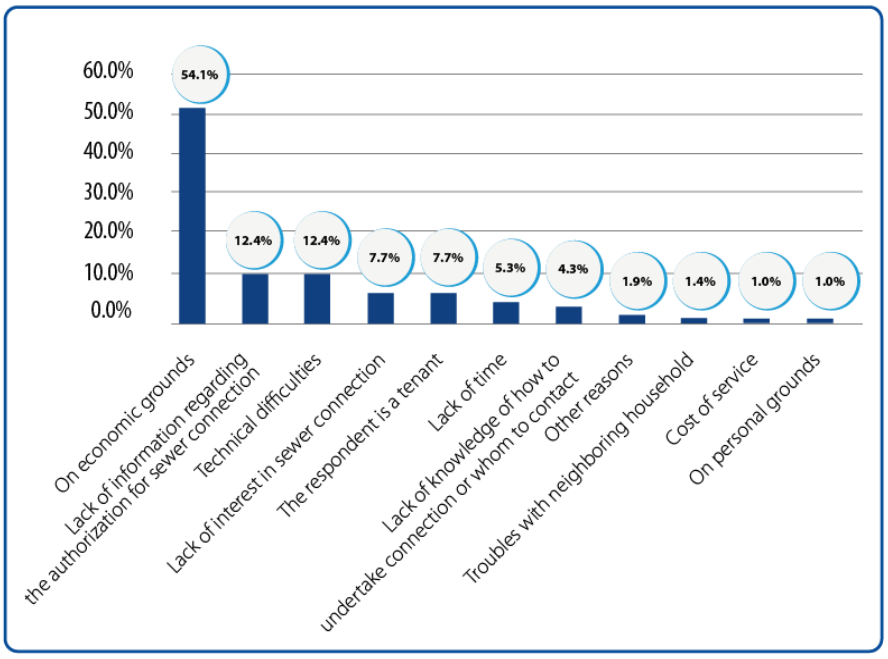


Source: IIED-AL Research, 2013

2.3 Difficulties witnessed in the sewer service connection indoors. Challenges

On exploring connection difficulties, it was noted that several factors influence the absence of service connection. Even though it is true that in most neighborhoods the most prevalent difficulty is of economic nature (50% of non-connected households), the remainder 50% is related to several factors, such as lack of information, house tenure status, lack of time or motivation. (See Chart 4).

Chart 4 – Plots/houses without connection – Main reasons for the absence of connection – Ituzaingó



Source: IIED-AL Research, 2013

2.4 Challenges for a higher service connection rate

In the analysis of the reasons for the absence of service connection in households, four kind of problems were identified: those related to the economic cost of the connection; those related to the cost but also resulting from technical uncertainty; those caused by the lack of information and sensitization and, lastly and intersecting the previous three, the lack of legal resources (regulations) to ensure a proper and expeditious connection procedure, especially for leased houses/shops and for households without any interest in being connected to the service. With this diagnosis, the SSAR team devised and implemented different activities.

With regard to the economic factor as a limitation for connection, it is noteworthy that AySA's performance of sewer expansion works reaches up to the municipal line, not inside the plot of land. The municipality does not interfere at residential level, either. Then, the responsibility of service connection to the network lies with the households. In this respect, household members' economic position to afford the cost is crucial. This circumstance has a direct influence on the expected final impact, which is the improvement of sanitary and environmental conditions for the population. The SSAR team started researching coordination alternatives with other actors (municipality, banks, civil society entities, cooperatives, technical and professional associations, national and provincial programs, etc.) to develop instruments (credit lines, microcredit programs, subsidies, etc.) that enable service connection for households with

economic restraints. The IIED-AL is devising a pilot microcredit program run by neighborhood organizations in poor zones in Tres de Febrero without the requisite financial capacity or access to formal banking to enable their access to sanitation.

Another factor related to the economic difficulties is the technical certainty of a proper service connection which, as explained in the previous paragraph, is not provided by any public body. The lack of licensed personnel coupled with the absence of specific information leaves households in a state of uncertainty about the work to be undertaken. In this regard, the SSAR team devised Training workshops on “Service availability of household utilities and installations - Connection tools”, a video on indoor installations, brochures about basic connection and cesspit blocking concepts, all of which were distributed to all households.

With regard to the lack of information, the need to incorporate communication devices to encourage service connection is evident. The excessive issuance of brochures, printed advertisements, etc. found every day in each private mailbox certainly discourages their reading. Many a time the notices of availability fall into this “junk mail” category. Household members find it easier to recall personally given notices and the door-to-door delivery of material (whether by AySA, the municipality or other neighbors). The SSAR team held informative meetings in neighborhoods, embarked on door-to-door sensitization, prioritizing direct contact with neighbors. In fact, these activities had not been pre-designed; they were gradually developed in accordance with the special features of each neighborhood and their specific needs. The service connection sticker arose from the need to change the conventional communication modality.

As for the legal aspect, at present there are no regulations encouraging service connection or penalizing its absence, especially in the case of leased houses, and households unaffected by the presence of a cesspit and without any interest in being connected to the sewer service.
In both cases, municipalities would be well advised to evaluate neighbor-approach measures and tax burden measures for landlords reluctant to carry out the works because, according to all studies conducted, the mere availability of the sewer service increases property value.

Thus, the findings of the service connection survey enabled us to gain a deeper knowledge of the different difficulties undergone by households and to implement specific tools developed in the intervention component, for a higher rate and quality of service connection. Furthermore, they made it possible to put forward the “100% executed work = 100% completed work” concept for discussion, and to start considering, in collaboration with the state-owned utility company, the local government and social organizations, different strategies to

bridge the gap of service connection shortage in order to reach a 100% connection rate as a target for work completion.

3rd Part – Accomplishments and challenges of SSAR management in relation to expansion works

Below there is a statement of the conclusions, which summarize the accomplishments and difficulties witnessed in IIED-AL experience in the SSAR process carried out in the west of Greater Buenos Aires in the past 18 months. We consider these aspects to be an important input to continue reflecting upon how to improve the public policies for the sector.

With regard to the methodology used:

- **The flexibility in the design of tools and devices implemented throughout the SSAR experience.** The devising of "bottom-up" activities based on neighbors' needs and demands enabled SSAR to have a better impact on households. The SSAR team adopted the participatory work model as its methodological principle, taking into consideration the necessary social approach diversity in each zone, according to the social features of the population, the social framework, the dynamics of the municipal management of the territory, and work progress. Not all sectors were identical in nature, as pointed out above, and in medium-income sectors with lesser community participation it was central to have incorporated the door-to-door contact and work with the families.

- **The work in stages, planned as tasks Before, During and After the execution of works.** The logic of viewing SSAR as a process with separate and distinct stages and, hence, different information needs for households enabled a design of the activities with clear and precise communication axes. After-works is many a time a component avoided in this type of works. Nonetheless, it was a key work component for SSAR to attain the desired goals.

- **Service connection studies at local level.** The availability of local-scale information proved to be a key tool for the devising of specific instruments, tailored to local needs, thus attaining a better outcome from the intervention.

- **Assistance centers in the work zone itself.** This enabled the SSAR team to gain a territorial anchoring, where the different strategies and activities might be implemented and neighbors' demand for information and complaints be channeled, serving as an interface between the works and the community. The SSAR team addressed 592 queries in a single year, most of them related to the need for information. The fact of having gained a foothold in neighborhood-based institutions enabled and encouraged the participation of community organizations, which took an

active role in disseminating the information and promoting service connection.

With regard to SSAR's objectives:

- **The SSAR managed to effect households' access to information**. The SSAR managed to inform the population not only about the progress of works but, in particular, about the benefits of connecting to the sewer service, its impact on the environment and households; the proper connection and use of the service; and the environmental importance of blocking cesspits. Through its manifold activities, the SSAR Program reached 12,000 households. Thus, the service connection study reveals that in zones where there had been no SSAR during and after the execution of the works, the percentage of households that ignored that the works were ready for service connection was 35% in El Palomar, 12.4% in Ituzaingó, as opposed to 2.4% in Castelar Norte, where the SSAR Program was actually carried out.

- **The SSAR generated spaces for coordination among the municipality, the utility company, organizations and neighbors.** In particular, the existing participatory social framework in some municipalities paved the way for the joint work with community organizations. In the case of Tres de Febrero and Hurlingham municipalities, the support of social organizations in transmitting the information on the progress of works, responding to queries, summoning for meetings and workshops was central.
  It allowed and encouraged the participation of community organizations, who took an active role in disseminating the information and promoting service connection.

- **The utility company's technical work benefited from SSAR's assistance,** as the SSAR team supplemented such technical work with some specific activities in socially perilous zones. The SSAR team also contributed to the implementation of awareness raising campaigns, causing neighbors to refrain from connecting their households to the service before the right time; this equally benefited the neighbors, as the risk of fluid spills was thus averted.

- **The number of conflicts and complaints related to the technical work diminished.** The neighbors' access to information, with visible assistance centers where complaints and/or queries could be channeled, managed to direct eventual conflicts on the right track. For example, with the aid of the SSAR team, neighbors residing along two blocks (who had

originally been left out of the works in Tres de Febrero) could successfully put forward a project for their inclusion in such works.

With regard to SSAR' incidence on public policies:

- **Complementation between the technical and social area.** In its 18 months of execution, the SSAR Program accomplished an effective coordination with the technical area in charge of the works. Even though in the first months the joint work of the on-site technical teams and the SSAR teams proved rather difficult, little by little a more coordinated work modality was implemented. Nonetheless, this was always as requested by the social team. When it comes to the utility company's managing boards, an auspicious fact in this regard is the participation, for the first time after the SSAR process has been implemented, of the utility company's Social Area (Relations with the Community) in the preliminary meetings held by the technical team before work execution.

- **Replication of the experience.** The Social Area of this state-owned public utility has started replicating the SSAR experience in the new works performed by the company.

- **Discussing the "100% executed work = 100% completed work" concept.** The findings of the household service connection study (according to which a high percentage of households fail to connect to the service after completion of the sewer works) posed the need to bring up for discussion the 100% effective service connection as work target. Furthermore, the study revealed that the difficulties for actual connection are related to several factors (economic grounds, lack of information, technical uncertainty, legal issues) and that there are multiple actors involved (municipal and provincial governments, the National Government, the utility company, social organizations) to attain the intended effect.

Challenges

Even though the implementation of the SSAR Program provided evidence of the complementation between the technical and social dimensions of the work, this is just the beginning and there is a long road ahead. Furthermore, unless there is a formal inclusion of social teams (from local governments, the utility company, etc.), there is the risk that the work be reconceived altogether and executed solely from a technical viewpoint.

The challenge to attain higher involvement from local governments. The local government is an essential actor in addressing the demand and ensuring the

materialization of urban benefits within its territory. It would be desirable for AySA to regulate a joint management framework with a clear specification of the functions to be performed by local governments.

With regard to effective service connection, the biggest challenge is to implement the articulation of public policies capable of ensuring the effective access by households currently precluded from making the sewer service connection for economic reasons; this might be accomplished by means of subsidies and/or the granting of credit lines.

Recommendations:

Based on our lessons learnt from this experience, the emphasis of the recommendations is placed on the following:

- **Planning works from a comprehensive approach**. This means fostering the composition of mixed teams (technical and social teams) that participate in the planning and execution of residential network expansion works. Acknowledging both the technical and social dimensions of the work would result in a greater effective access to the service.

- **Specific local research.** Relying on local information is essential for intervention work aimed at enhancing effective access to the service. Building up "bottom-up" information about shortages, difficulties and demands at local level would enable the adjustment of programs and/or intervention work according to the specific needs of each location.

- **Coordination of actors and resources.** Affording the opportunity to devise a joint management framework with the participation of key actors, such as the local government and social organizations. The active participation of these actors would promote the articulation of different policies and programs aimed at improving access to the service. Given the diversity of local conditions, it is impossible to generalize by proposing a single and unique model; therefore, it proves necessary to conceive a **flexible** intervention framework and model that provides for the diversity and complexity of current demand.

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