

THE ORACLE OF MOKATTAM MOUNTAIN

'... we contribute to the city's economy and support through our labour the very people who want us to move.... why then are we pursued so persistently?'

- *Zabbaleen Woman Facing Relocation*

1. BACKGROUND

Human degradation of the environment is compelling us to rethink the way we deal with waste. At the same time it is recognised that poverty eradication will not be possible if resource consumption by the rich is sustained by the unmet needs of the urban poor and ecologically unsustainable approaches towards energy, water use and waste management continues unabated.

This two points lead to the understanding that environmentally sound resource use and waste management and poverty eradication are inextricably linked. On the one hand all sectors of society, but especially the industrial sector and the rich, are called on to reduce waste in the course of the production and distribution of resources. On the other hand it becomes eminently sensible to enable the poor to play a central role in the enhancement of re-use and recycling of waste.

To some extent these principles are being translated into practice in the "North" through government regulation, stakeholder co-operation and citizens' initiatives. In most "Southern" cities attention is still focused on improving the conventional engineering systems (essentially, the collection, transportation and disposal of solid wastes) in ways that exclude or fail to recognise the contributions of the poor.

However, there is growing acknowledgement that these conventional approaches are failing, not simply for lack of money, machines, and public cooperation but also because they cannot address the root causes of solid waste problems or confront the relation of solid wastes to poverty in cities.

While middle class citizens in Western countries have led the way in pressing for comprehensive waste management, in African cities environmental and social movements have only recently begun to show an interest in this issue. Most city cleansing departments still tend to look to higher technology and privatization for solutions to the environmental problems of uncollected and unsafely dumped wastes. Consequently, the few examples of alternative thinking are especially important for assessing ways to make solid waste management more people-centred and more effective in developing countries.

2. CONTEXT

Every medium and large city in the South has to contend with problems that relate to the generation of thousands of tons of solid waste every day. The first problem is the inadequate or non-existent collection of garbage. Between 30 to 50% of solid wastes generated within urban centres remain uncollected. Of course it is the poorer neighbourhoods in the cities that have the most inadequate garbage collection services. The second problem is that the waste that is collected gets dumped in toxic landfills that contaminate ground water, and use land negatively and inefficiently. The third problem is that often the very governments that neglect to collect and dispose of waste effectively, make it difficult, if not impossible, for poor people to play a mainstream role in garbage collection, recycling and disposal.

These environmental problems must be seen as political problems. They arise not from some particular shortage of environmental resources or from a lack of community capacity, but from economic or political factors that prevent poorer groups from obtaining access to resources (even garbage!) and from organizing themselves so that this situation might change.

Dr. Laila Iskandar from Cairo, Egypt has said: "Waste management has traditionally been perceived by town planners, waste management specialists and engineers as a technology, management and engineering issue. They view it as a challenge to keep towns clean, rather than as an opportunity to employ thousands of rural migrants and unemployed and unskilled workers who flock to urban centres on a daily basis. They spend millions of dollars to introduce capital intensive, culturally unsuited technologies transferred from countries of the North to the South. Few officials perceive it to be a people-centred issue. The reality of cities in the South points to the opposite: waste management is a highly people-centred issue and requires a second look from planners, officials, and decision makers."¹

This applies as much in Cape Town and Nairobi as it does in Cairo. In some ways these three African cities are worse off than other cities in the continent. This is not because other cities are more people-friendly. In fact the opposite generally applies. Many African cities are anti-poor, or at best indifferent to the needs of the urban poor –

¹ Laila Iskandar: Urban Waste Managers In Cairo: Waste Collectors, Traders And Recyclers (2005)

Bogota: Around half the 1,5 million tons of garbage generated every year is collected and disposed of by local authorities. Every day some 2,500 tons is left uncollected. Some of this is recycled informally.

Bangkok: One quarter of all solid waste is dumped on vacant land or in canals or in rivers.

Dar es Salaam: Less than one quarter of daily refuse is collected by the city authorities.

Jakarta: About 30% of garbage is not collected and ends up in canals and rivers and along the roadside where it clogs drainage channels and causes extensive flooding during the rainy season.

Karachi: About one-third of the solid waste that is produced by the city is being removed.

Sao Paulo: Over 25% of the population is living in areas without any service to collect solid waste.

Source: Squatter Citizen by Hardoy and Satterthwaite.

in direct contrast to the usual platitudes of a hollow African unity. Unlike Nairobi, Cape Town and Cairo, most local governments in Africa simply do not have the regulatory or technological capacity to use rules, specialists and professionals to make it difficult for poor people to turn waste into a significant source of livelihood.

Snapshot 1: Cairo, Egypt

About 100 years ago, a group of migrants from the Dakhla oasis in western Egypt settled in Cairo in an area known as Bab El Bahr. Bab El Bahr is located between Ataba and Ramses squares, in the very heart of Cairo. This group, which became known as the *wahiya* (people of the oasis), assumed sole responsibility for the collection and disposal of Cairo's household waste by working under contract with owners of buildings. Initially, the *wahiya* paid the owner a small sum for the right to collect garbage, and then collected monthly fees from the tenants who benefited from their services.

Later the *wahiya* collaborated with another group of migrants who came to Cairo in the 1930s and 1940s, in search of work. Pushed by economic hardship, these landless peasants from the El Badary district in Assiut in the South of Egypt, purchased the waste from the *wahiya* for use as fodder for their pigs. They settled in makeshift settlements on the agricultural land at the western and northern fringes of the Cairo metropolitan region.

Cairo's 15 million inhabitants generate an average of 9000 tons of household solid waste every day, and everyday thousands of residents of Cairo, known as the Zabbaleen (Arabic for 'garbage collectors'), collect about one third of this waste. They undertake the daily tasks of door-to-door collection, transport, sorting, recovery, trading and re-manufacturing, using household waste from a major section of Cairo.

Their waste sorting space is adjacent to their living space. They operate a recycling micro enterprise industry that has generated jobs and incomes for an estimated 40,000 people. All this activity is in the informal sector. They have elevated the level of recycling by producing hangers and manhole covers from plastic and handmade crafts from rags and paper. Over the course of five decades the Zabbaleen have created a very efficient resource recovery system, recycling and trading some 80% of what they collect.²

But this way of life is under threat. The Cairo Municipality began in 2002 to privatize solid waste management in the city and seeks to make the Zabbaleen into employees or sub-contractors to the private companies. At the same time many of them face the threat of relocation to the periphery of the city, because their houses, used for the recycling of waste, are regarded as unsanitary.

Snapshot 2: Nairobi, Kenya

After independence in 1963, there was a landslide of rural-urban migration in Kenya. Once the colonial "pass", which had regulated urbanisation, was removed, the government was unable to match the flow of people, and without a clear housing policy, the inevitable happened: people erected semi-permanent structures in the government trust lands.

This resulted in the emergence of Nairobi's slums, including Korogocho, the third largest in the city. The name is derived from the Kikuyu word *Kurugucu* – which means "worthless" or "Scrap".

The derogatory connotation has relevance, at least in regard to the fact that the residents of Korogocho do not receive any waste collection services from either the City Council or from the 60 plus private companies engaged in the industry. Many of Nairobi's poor engage in waste collection and recycling as a means of income generation. Scavengers are estimated to collect 30 tons of the

² Source Jorge Anzorena's Selavip Newsletter quoting Dr. Laila Iskandar.

approximately 300 tons collected daily in Nairobi. A further 1200 tons go uncollected every day.

Community organisation around solid waste management is beginning to develop a strong institutional base – although far less advanced than the Zabbaleen in Egypt. One important initiative is The “*Taka ni Pato*” (Trash is Cash) programme, a collaborative endeavour initially agreed upon by four large community-based organizations operating in Nairobi slums. These CBOs operate in different parts of the city and therefore can collaborate in order to maximize the spread of the project. The objective of *Taka ni Pato* is to build the capacity for effective, environmentally friendly, and profitable community-managed solid waste management systems in selected informal settlements in Nairobi.

Snapshot 3: Cape Town, South Africa.

Cape Town generates a total of 2 billion tons of waste per annum, or nearly 6000 tons per day. Residential waste accounts for nearly half of this, at 895 000 tons per year of which only 6,5% is recycled. This is very low by international standards.

In contrast Cape Town has relatively good Government run waste collection services, although with the usual bias in favour of middle income and wealthy neighbourhoods. Efficient waste collection creates its own problems. First, the bulk of this non-recycled waste goes to landfills located on the Cape Flats where toxins leaching these landfills are polluting the aquifers located below them. In addition, these landfills will be filled up within five years and the City Council is struggling to find alternative sites that are close enough not to push the transportation costs up too high. Second the system does not do enough to enable a viable people-centred alternative to emerge.

Contemporary urban development in South Africa, riding on the energies of a negotiated settlement between two highly centralized bureaucracies, has been preoccupied with economic growth and delivery. Whilst there is a welcome emphasis on the need for greater social equity in the search for urban integration, there is little attention given to the enormous challenges of environmental, economic and social sustainability.³

³ Source: Mark Swilling: Rethinking the Sustainability of the African City (2004)

What South Africa lacks in terms of community organization around recycling and waste management, is compensated somewhat by a long history of social and political mobilization of the urban poor. The Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDUP) is the dominant actor in a long line of grassroots networks engaged in the mobilization of urban poor communities around their rights and their needs as citizens of modern cities.

In recent years FEDUP has begun to make links with small groups of the urban poor who sustain themselves through basic forms of waste recycling. These include groups of women in Atlantis outside Cape Town who collect garbage from council flats in the area and groups of scrap metal recyclers who live in Freedom Farm and whose cart-horses are a familiar sight in the lower-middle income neighbourhoods in the north-eastern suburbs of Cape Town.

3. AN INTERNATIONAL HORIZON

Until 2005 these three community-based initiatives in three of Africa's major cities had never seen or heard of one another. One year later and they have visited one another's countries, shared experiences and become the foundation for a continent-wide, if not global network of community-based rag-pickers, recyclers and managers of solid wastes.

One of the *positive* outcomes of globalization has been the explosion of this kind of trans-national communication. Fuelled by the emergence of internet and email as revolutionary tools for information transfer and by the dramatic growth in relatively affordable (and environmentally disastrous) international air-travel, most trans-national communication is strictly elitist and middle class. This includes trans-national advocacy networks involved in global struggles over gender issues, environment, human rights, child labour, indigenous cultures and others.

The underlying question for many of these movements is: how can they organize trans-nationally without sacrificing or distorting their local projects; and when they do build trans-national networks, what are their greatest assets and their greatest handicaps? At a deeper political level, can there be a new design for global governance, which empowers social movements and mediates the speed of capital and the powers of states?

For more than a decade now there has been one rather unique trans-national network that has focused exclusively on the needs and priorities of Slum Dwellers. This network, known as Shack/Slum Dwellers International and currently active in twenty-four countries in the South, is concerned primarily with “horizontal learning” and promotes trans-national communication and alliance building between the most marginalised social classes in our urban centres.

Key to this horizontal learning are visits by groups of slum or shack dwellers to each others’ settlements in other countries, to share in on-going local projects, to get and give advice and reactions, to share in social and life experiences and to exchange tactics and plans. The model of exchange is based on the idea of “seeing and hearing” rather than teaching and learning, of sharing experiences and knowledge rather than seeking to impose standard practices. Visits by small groups from one city to another either in their own region or to another region, usually involve immediate immersion in the ongoing projects of the host community, such as women’s savings activities in South Africa, housing exhibitions in India, community-based enumerations in Brazil, sewer-digging in Pakistan, or waste management in Egypt.

By visiting and hosting other activists and grassroots leaders concerned with similar problems, communities gain a comparative perspective and provide a measure of external legitimation for local efforts. Thus activist-leaders who may still be struggling for recognition and space in their own localities may find themselves able to gain state and media attention for local struggles in other countries and towns, where their very presence as visitors carries a certain significance.

Second, the horizontal visits arranged by the Shack Dwellers International increasingly carry the endorsement of powerful international organizations and funders, such as the World Bank, state development ministries and private charities from Europe and the USA, and increasingly include political leaders and officials from other countries and cities as well. These visits become signs to local politicians that the poor themselves have cosmopolitan links, which increases their capital in local political negotiations.

Finally, the occasions that these exchanges provide for face-to-face meetings between key leaders in, for example, Cairo, Cape Town and Nairobi, actually allow them to progress rapidly in making more long-term strategic plans for alliance building, learning, resource

management and scaling-up. Having mastered how to do certain things on a small scale in a given city or even a given slum, they are eager to find ways of making a dent on the vast numerical scope of the problem of slum-dwellers in different cities throughout the South. In parallel, they are also deeply interested in "speeding up", by which they mean shortening the times involved in putting strategies into practice in different national and urban locations.⁴

4. SHACK DWELLERS INTERNATIONAL (SDI), FORD FOUNDATION AND CORC.

SDI has been facilitating this international horizontal learning for ten years now. The umbrella organisation that started in the early 1990's with exchange programmes between South African slum dwellers and Indian pavement dwellers has now spread to 24 countries in the South.

In the late 1990's the SDI initiative began to receive support from Ford Foundation's Peace and Social Justice Programme. The relationship includes a third partner, the British based research agency, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

The relationship between Ford, IIED and SDI has gone beyond the simple financial interactions of grant-maker and grantee. Ford has maintained a keen interest in the programme and has scaled up the relationship to include direct partnerships with several SDI affiliates⁵.

The relationship between Ford's South Africa office and Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC) the SDI affiliate in South Africa has immediate relevance to the three way horizontal exchange between community-based waste managers in Cape Town, Nairobi and Cairo.

CORC has had a long association with networks of the urban poor. Its global links through SDI have equipped it with rich experience in terms of poverty eradication. In particular it has been exposed to and

⁴ Source: Arjun Appadurai: Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality And The Horizon Of Politics (2000)

⁵ Sparc in India; CORC in South Africa and Pamoja Trust in Kenya.

replicated successful strategies in regard to tenure security, housing delivery and the provision of basic services.⁶

CORC's grassroots partner organizations that have come together to form the Coalition of the Urban Poor (CUP) have given voice and opportunities for learning and development to more than 200 communities or community networks in the country.

On the international stage CORC has represented its umbrella organization, SDI, in the Advisory Board to UN Habitat's *Slum Upgrading Facility (SUF)* and its working group on land tenure *The Advisory Group on Forced Evictions*. CORC has also had representation on the *Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Task Force* that deals with the improvement of the lives of slum dwellers.

CORC also serves as Secretariat for SDI and in this capacity has enabled the emergence of Federations of the Urban Poor in 11 other African countries⁷ as well as 7 in Asia⁸ and 2 in Latin America⁹

While these achievements have earned CORC a well-deserved reputation for community mobilization and development, the work of the agency has lacked a strong focus on environmental sustainability.

Several important developments have pushed CORC to firstly embrace environmental principles and in recent months to give it equal status to other important objectives such as mobilization of the poor through savings, the central participation of women, and a commitment to engagement rather than confrontation with institutions of the state.

What were these important developments?

The most pressing developments came from within. The Coalition of the Urban Poor (CUP) began in 2000 as a network of community organizations in South Africa's five major urban areas: greater Johannesburg, City of Cape Town, Ethekewini Metro, Nelson Mandela

⁶ Its achievements include the pioneering of partnerships between networks of the urban poor and formal stakeholders in urban development, especially the city authorities in several South African cities and towns. CORC has also brokered a close working relationship between the National Ministry of Housing in South Africa and the Federation of the Urban Poor (FEDUP). Another important intervention has been the facilitation of a formal engagement between landless communities and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Tangible outcomes in the past year (2005) include security of tenure for over 2000 formerly landless families, the construction of more than 500 formal houses and 150 transit housing units.

⁷ Angola, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

⁸ Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, India, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand.

⁹ Brasil, Colombia

Metro and Mangaung. The network quickly spread to smaller towns and from there into rural areas, demonstrating the deep links, in an urbanizing world, between city, town and village. Some of the rural groups owned land (or were involved in land claims) in protected areas or in areas that abutted national parks. It soon became clear that whilst poverty was a universal challenge for urban, rural and deep rural communities, there were several contextual differences, especially in terms of land tenure and access to housing. These differences were significant enough to create a parallel coalition of the rural poor, that came to be known as CoConnected (Community Organisation Through Conservation, Eco-Tourism and Development).

The rural and urban networks maintained separate identities but interacted regularly through exchange programme activities. It was not long before the younger rural networks were beginning to influence the older and larger urban networks in subtle but significant ways. Those rural communities that had not been decimated by apartheid were able to expose urban groups to cultures and practices that were rooted in the environment and in the collective. It was not long before collective responses in the urban context were being strengthened and before environmental issues began to be raised by communities of the urban poor.

This led to the launch of an independent support programme in the CORC – an Urban Environment Programme, with its own dedicated support staff and with its own vertical linkages to technicians, professionals and officials, and horizontal links to slum dweller organizations with identified needs that could be regarded as either “green” or “brown”.

At about the same time another CORC affiliate – People’s Environmental Planning (PEP) – was designing and manufacturing transit housing units that were affordable, easy to manufacture, transport and construct. When a massive fire destroyed thousands of shacks in Cape Town in the summer of 2004/5, PEP was approached to design an emergency product that was based on their original transit housing unit but was also fire resistant. In the end, the technology was appropriated by large private companies, but PEP had joined the Urban Environment Programme and Co-Connected in nudging CORC towards a more definitive environmental agenda.

But it was not CORC’s environmental programmes that first came to the attention of the Ford Foundation office in South Africa. One of CORC’s oldest programmes is a micro-saving programme for

communities of the urban poor. Known as Community-Micro-Finance Network it has been a Ford grantee since 2000.

These sequences of inter-linkage and coincidence made CORC an obvious candidate for the facilitation of Ford's Environment and Development Affinity Group (EDAG) workshop in 2005.

Ford's website describes EDAG as follows:

"The Environment and Development Affinity Group is an association of Ford Foundation program staff whose mission is to promote global learning and mobilize change in the field of environment and development. It promotes a theory and practice of development worldwide that is compatible with the sustainable and equitable use of environmental assets, including the protection, restoration, and enhancement of environmental quality, and respect for diverse cultural values and vitality. Members of the EDAG support research, convening, peer learning, advocacy, and networking to improve the effectiveness of the Foundation's grantmaking in the environment and development field."¹⁰

When the Urban Environment Programme in CORC began to work with CUP affiliates around recycling and waste management in several Cape Town slums all the pieces fell into place. With Ford's assistance, CORC's Urban Environment Programme developed an inter-Africa focus. Within the framework of EDAG and its commitment to "*peer learning, advocacy, and networking to improve the effectiveness of the Foundation's grantmaking in the environment and development field*", CORC reached out to the Zabbaleen and other groups in Egypt and to emerging networks of community recyclers in Kenya.

5. HOW SOUTH AFRICAN SHACK DWELLERS AND AN ARGENTINIAN PRIEST FOUND THE PYRAMIDS OF GIZA AND.....THE MOUNTAIN OF MOKATTAM.

In December 2004 two members of the CORC were accompanied by Fr. Jorge Anzorena, a great source of inspiration for the SDI network, on an exposure visit to Cairo, Egypt. Their task was to identify suitable partner organisations for a series of horizontal exchanges with community groups in South Africa and Kenya that were involved with issues relating to solid waste management.

¹⁰ www.fordfound.org/elibrary/documents/515/011.cfm

Similar identification exercises were not necessary in South Africa and Kenya, since CORC itself was based in South Africa and worked closely with its fellow SDI affiliate, Pamoja Trust in Kenya. Pamoja Trust was working with youth groups involved in recycling in the slums of Kibera, Korogocho, Mathare and Ahti River in Nairobi. At the time of the exposure trip to Cairo, CORC had just started working with six groups of recyclers in the Greater Cape Town area.

However, knowledge transfer around the social and technical elements related to people-centred solid waste management was only one focus of the exchange programme. It was clear that as much as the Egyptians had to offer their community-based counterparts in Nairobi and Cape Town, the East and Southern Africans had a lot to share in terms of network building, lobbying and advocacy and sustainable mass mobilisation through savings and loans.

The community-based organisations involved in waste management in Cairo had a clear need to learn some of these skills and capacities since their tenure and their earning opportunities were severely at risk.

Purity Ngozi, one of the members of the CORC delegation kept a diary of the trip. Excerpts are reproduced in this report in order to provide direct reference to the experience.

Sunday 5 December

After having arrived and rested we were taken to Ford Foundation's Offices where we were welcomed by Sharry Lapp, had lunch and introduced ourselves.

We then proceeded to Community in Development (CID) office, in Zamalek.

CID is a consulting firm that designs and implements integrated programs and monitors their sustainability in communities. Their focus is around communication and institutional development. They help communities, especially the Zabbaleen achieve social, economic and environmental sustainability through the creation of public private partnerships using a multi-disciplinary approach to development. We were given a presentation by their Director, Dr. Laila Iskander, who has been involved for many years with the Zabbaleen, supporting their initiatives through advocacy and research...

We then departed for Helwan for a meeting with Centre for Trade Union and Workers Services. Here we basically shared different ways of organising communities. They told us about the serious political constraints that they are facing and we shared our SA experiences during the apartheid regime. We shared with them how in the new South Africa, the trade unions have moved from fighting to get rights to brokering deals. We recognised that the context in Egypt was very different.

Monday 6 December.

On Monday we had a site visit to garbage recycling communities in Tora & Qattamiya. In Tora we spoke to some community member looking at their previous history on collecting garbage. These poor people came to the city in search of better living conditions but never found jobs so they did what they knew best. They farmed animals. For them to get food for their animals they had to get it in the garbage bins. They then did garbage collection on behalf of the Wahiya who are the middlemen in Cairo's garbage collection industry. They would pay collection rates to the Wahiya to enable them to collect waste which they then sorted in their homes. This continued for some time until the government challenged them on health risk issues and eventually forced them to be relocated about 30kms out of the city.

They moved their animals and garbage to this place called Qattamiya, where they separate organic and inorganic waste. Organic feeds the pigs and they use the pigs dung for composting. The organic waste gets separated into different valuables - clean and dirty waste - and the clean waste gets recycled. Plastics are recycled to form other products like hangers, shoe hills, plastic bags and many more different plastic products. Glass is resold.

We were hosted at Tora and Qattamiya and also had a chance to talk to the community members about their feelings about having had to adapt to living more than 30kms away from the place where they do their work of sorting garbage and looking after their animals.

We then departed for site visit to Mokattam Mountain. This is also a Zabbaleen (garbage collector) community. They do rag recycling and plastic recycling. We met with Mokattam Youth Association and with Mokattam Community Development Association. We learnt a lot from them about adding value to waste collection and about ways in which to use funds generated by waste management to improve the

conditions of the community – eg schools and literacy classes for adults.

The most important thing in this community is the fact that they still collect, sort and process from their homes through small “factories”. But because of the health issues and the privatisation of garbage collection they also now face the same risk of relocation like the people from Torah.

Tuesday, 7 December

Tuesday morning we took some time off to visit the Pyramids ... What the Zabbaleen do with garbage is almost as amazing as the way their ancestors built these pyramids. Quite a sight..

‘ When the carts and trucks return to (Mokattam) each day, the garbage is dumped directly into the center of the family home. Family members quickly make crude divisions, sorting out recyclables, separating out paper, glass, clothes and bones. This is an overwhelmingly arduous and unpleasant task that for the most part belongs to women and girls who spend many hours every day separating garbage. Animal bones are set aside to be collected by middlemen who use them to make glue. Organic material is fed to the pigs which many families still keep’

- Marie Assaad and Nadra Garras

Source: Wael Sala Fahmi - Urban Sustainability and Poverty Alleviation Initiatives Of Garbage Collectors Community: A Stakeholder Analysis Of the Muqattam ‘Zabaleen’ Settlement in Cairo. 2004

6. MOKATTAM AND THE ZABBALEEN

In Mokattam, the Zabbaleen’s principal enclave, about 700 families own garbage collection enterprises, another 200 own and operate small and medium scale recycling enterprises, and 120 own trading enterprises. There are also scores of maintenance workshops and community- based service businesses. These micro-entrepreneurs have invested millions of Egyptian pounds in trucks, plastic granulators, paper compactors, cloth grinders, aluminium smelters, and tin processors. Their methods for handling plastics, paper, cardboard, glass, metal, fabrics are constantly being revised as they upgrade and diversify their recycling know-how.

The Zabbaleen have also established community-based organizations and improved the infrastructure of Mokattam settlement. The

environmental benefits of the Zabbaleen waste recovery system has contributed to uncontaminated organics being sorted for the production of a higher grade compost. Eighty percent of the materials that are collected by the Zabbaleen from Cairo's residents are recycled on site. In contrast the international companies competing with the Zabbaleen, and backed by the Government, are required only to recycle 20% of the waste that they collect. The Zabbaleen recycling system, therefore, prevents land from being used as unsanitary landfills and protects the air from the uncontrolled burning of garbage.

The downside is that there are obviously poor and unsanitary conditions in their settlements. This health risk to the Zabbaleen and to their immediate neighbours is the reason cited by the state for its intention to move the Zabbaleen from Mokattam to the desert on the outskirts of the city. It is much the same logic as proposing amputation to an able-bodied person because his feet smell bad.

Relocation will increase the Zabbaleen's travelling distance and cost of services delivered to residential and commercial properties. Because the authorities will not compensate them for these changes, many Zabbaleen will be forced out of the business, while others will reduce their services. Some will be forced to discard non-recyclable materials as they head to distant new locations. Authorities will then step in, as they have when other Zabbaleen communities have been relocated, and contend that the entire sector is operating inefficiently, and put up for bid the right to service entire neighbourhoods. This creates opportunities for private-sector companies or multinational firms to win the bidding work, threatening the socio-economic sustainability of the Zabbaleen community.

It is not only the technologies of waste management that can be transferred through horizontal exchanges and the creation of trans-national networks; so too can community responses to the politics that govern it.

7. SYNOPSIS OF EGYPT EXPOSURE VISIT – DECEMBER 2004

CORC'S one week visit to Cairo gave the delegates a great deal to think about. Not only did they have to assimilate a completely new experience, they had to make an assessment of several programmes that they visited and decide on an appropriate partner for more in depth exchanges to and from Egypt. They had to gauge what benefits

could be derived by slum dwellers in Cape Town and Nairobi from exposure to Cairo and how Egyptian communities could benefit from the learning opportunities in South and East Africa.

During the mission, CORC representatives had the opportunity to meet a wide selection of organisations committed to social justice and development for the urban poor in Egypt, ranging from the workers' movement (Centre for Trade Unions and Workers Services in Helwan) to the first *gam'eya* (association) created by and for the *Zabbaleen*. They also met the Housing and Land Rights Network, some development consultants and other non-profit centres committed to provide development services to the communities.

It had also been possible to meet some community members, including fishermen from the coastline settlements and adults and children working in the quarries. Their stories and their fascinating perspective on their preference for non-technical, more social support helped the South African delegation determine suitable partners.

The group felt that the most relevant NGO for international learning in regard to the technology of waste management would be the *Association for the Protection of the Environment* (APE), since it has sound professional standards, deep knowledge of the social and technical aspects of the garbage collection and recycling activities, as well as a long history of partnering the communities involved.

However the feeling was that the technical and engineering oriented aspects of APE's work could be learned by groups from Kenya and South Africa on their visits to Egypt, but that primary partners needed to be community based initiatives that relied on people-centred responses to a broader range of aspects affecting communities involved in waste management. The group felt that the *Spirit of the Youth*, based in Mokattam was the group with the most potential to learn and to share through international exchange programmes. They also seemed most likely to draw on SDI rituals to strengthen them to engage the state around the challenges that faced their community.

Since SDI's footprint in Africa is rather recent and since it is developing a culture of innovation and exploration the CORC team felt themselves attracted to the spontaneity of a young and youthful initiative that was still moulding its own "personality", and was definitively open to learning.

In April 2005 two of the most influential and active members of *Spirit of the Youth* were selected to participate in the exchange programmes: They were a young man, Medhat Fayeq, a waste operator and a teacher in the School for Garbage Collectors in Mokattam, and a young woman, Amal Nabil, the only female in Mokattam to run her own small business, and an activist around garbage sorting at source. They were to be accompanied on the visits to Kenya and South Africa by Marwa Sharaf El-Din, an NGO development worker who was to act as translator.

8. WELCOME TO NAIROBI WHERE TRASH IS CASH

On the 11th of May 2005 a group of eight people met in Kenya Nairobi. They had come from the extreme ends of the African continent to meet at its heart.

Three Egyptians were joined by five South Africans. The South Africans were an eclectic group comprising three slum dwellers from three different settlements, one support professional from CORC and a videographer. The diversity in the South African team was a reflection of the infancy of CORC's waste management programme. Not only were the three South African slum dwellers from different communities, they came from three separate and very small CBO's and were involved at different entry-points in the waste management chain. Jason Bruce was selected because he runs a small recycling plant in a Cape Town slum. Maria Beukes was chosen by her group of garbage collectors in a relocated area about 50kms from Cape Town. Fabien Brieses was the third member of the team, chosen because he is a cart-horse operator who is very strong in showing his community the way to new income opportunities in the informal recycling industry, as well as stimulating improvements in their living conditions.

The eight African visitors were hosted by Pamoja Trust and Muungano Wa Wanavijiji, Pamoja's partner grassroots organisation in Nairobi's slums. Pamoja Trust works with community groups involved in waste management in several low-income neighbourhoods including the city's three largest slums: Kibera, Mathare, Korogocho.

Whilst the process in Nairobi has not reached the scale of the work of the Zabbaleen in Cairo in terms of environment and livelihood there are several very important elements already emerging in the Kenyan

context. The issue of garbage and waste management is more deeply connected to broader social issues and to community mobilisation. In the case of Cairo these connections are generally made by NGOs (or by CBOs copying NGO stratagems) and invariably take the form of projects related to upliftment, health, education and the training of slum dwellers by professionals and external experts. In Nairobi the role of Pamoja Trust is designed to spark community based activities in such a way that they create autonomous community initiatives. By networking these initiatives between slums, Pamoja facilitates a process that links environment, livelihood and learning (all highly developed in Egypt) to building a critical mass of self aware and self reliant networks of the urban poor ready to engage state institutions around issues of poverty (almost non-existent in Egypt).

As far as issues that relate to the technologies and the local economies of waste management are concerned the Kenyans are beginning to move beyond basic rag picking, garbage collection and simple recycling. Since they have already started along this road they are ready to learn from the more developed systems and stratagems of the Zabbaleen.

Once again the best way to give a more immediate articulation to the South Africa/Egypt exchange to Kenya is to quote from notes taken by one of the participants. Here then are some of the impressions of Kenya from the perspective of Medhat Kayeq and Amal Nabil from Mokattam, Cairo.

We also visited a team of (15) youths at a place called Tuff Gong, who were working in collecting garbage as a means of living. They knew the value of garbage and how to use it. They thought of manufacturing organic fertilizers from the garbage, so they started collecting it from the airport and companies. They manufactured fertilizers from garbage manually by piling it and mixing it with chemical substances. Then they screened it manually to be ready for sale. They used to send a sample of the fertilizers to the research centre to analyze it and report on the benefits of fertilizers and the kind of soil in which they could be used.

We explained the idea of how to manufacture fertilizers by using machinery and the stages of using the organic substances to turn garbage into fertilizers. The team admired the garbage project in Cairo and wished that they had machines to make fertilizers like us.

Next day (13th May) we visited an informal settlement in Kenya called "Kibera" where a million people live. Among their activities, they recycle the paper and turn it into cards, drawing boards and ceiling boards. They make all this manually. We visited also the place where they make fertilizers at Kibera settlement. They face a problem there; the government moves them from one place to another. The fertilizers they produce are stolen from them.

We met a group of youth recyclers. The group provides the services to local communities and they charge a basic tariff for each household. After collecting the waste using wheelbarrows they take it to a temporary sorting site where they do sorting. The sorted items are inorganic and organic; inorganic being plastic, glass, steel and bones. This is taken to their storage facility where it is cleaned and packed for reselling. The organic waste is taken to a composting site where it is processed for a period of 6 to 8 weeks. After the processing is complete it is sold on the market. The most pressing challenge for this group was separation at source; this would lesson the risk of contamination as well as speeding up the cycle of sorting.

The last day of exploring Kenya took us to Korogocho a slum where an integrated community based waste management was being launched. A group of young soccer players that are interested in providing a service, keeping their community clean, and at the same time earning money, launched their waste management programmes on 14th May 2005. The necessary community mobilization around waste collection had been done and the launch day kicked off by collecting from the households that have paid their tariffs for the week. The SA and Egyptians participated in this experience. The group is well known by the dwellers as they rush from shack to shack, collecting bins from each household and rushing to load onto the moving human cart. The collection in each section takes approximately an hour, and as they move through household they tick those that they are finished with.

We also visited the garbage dumping area. We helped the team in collecting garbage from houses and in cleaning the streets. At the end of the day, we had a meeting with all the youths who work in recycling, collecting garbage or making fertilizers. We got acquainted with their activities. We also briefed them on the activities of our Association and made a demonstration using the projector to explain the small projects that we have and the different phases of these projects. We also explained the project of sorting the garbage at the source. After we finished the demonstration, discussions were held and

questions were raised about the small projects. They were highly impressed and wanted to make partnership with the Association.

Finally we visited the money-saving teams. They make registers for each team. Each member of the team gives to the treasurer the amount of money he has saved from his pocket money. The treasurer then would deposit the money in the bank. There are two kinds of saving: daily and weekly. When a person reaches a certain amount of money and wants to start a project or build a house he can withdraw his deposits and use them.

9. PAMOJA TRUST AND TAKI NI PATO

The *Taki ni Pato* ("Trash is Cash") programme is a collaborative endeavor initially agreed upon by four non-government organizations operating in Nairobi slums. These NGOs collaborate with grassroots groups that operate in different slums in different parts of the city. This collaboration ensures that the issues and the process are greater than the sum of the projects that are its parts. The objective of *Taka ni Pato* is to build the capacity for effective, environmentally-friendly, and profitable community-managed solid waste management systems in selected informal settlements in Nairobi. The organisations and settlements involved are:

- Pamoja Trust, supporting community groups in Korogocho, Dagoretti, Huruma, Mathari, Tuff Gong;
- Carolina For Kibera, active in Kiyanda and Makina;
- *Maji na Ufanisi*, active in Kangime, Kiyambi, Lindi, Lagenesaba;
- Rerota Environmental Group, active in Rerota & Kawangari.

One of the groups in the Taki Ni Pato programme is the Kibera Youth Self Help Group, a savings collective linked to the Federation called Muungano Wa Wanavijiji that works with Pamoja Trust. This group was started in 2001 as a youth group with just 3 members, to deal with unemployment poverty and drug abuse in this section of Kibera.

Initially they only provided a service to the local community by collecting garbage from households. They continue with this service to the neighbouring formal estate as well as to the poorer slum. They collect fees on a monthly basis, and charge KSh100/m to the households in the estate and KSh10/m to the poorer slum households, which are smaller and lack drainage, water, and sanitation.

Since 2001 this group has established an office and expanded their activities to include:

- A car wash
- A carpet cleaning service
- Waste sorting and sale for recycling
- Compost production
- An upholstery service
- An Environmental-education drama group, which sometimes charges for performances and at other times offer free entertainment which they see as a community service and a marketing exercise for their waste collection operation.

They now provide employment and income to 30 members.

There was a critical moment during the visit of the South Africans and Egyptians to this dynamic group.

The Kenyans complained to their guests that they struggled with the stigma associated with garbage collection. "The girls mock us for our dirty business. They do not want to be with us because they say we smell bad."

The Egyptians listened in dismay. "In our community it is exactly the opposite. If a girl does not involve herself in garbage, she will not find a husband at all."¹¹

The general public in Cairo may still harbour negative associations with the Zabbaleen, but in the Zabbaleen community there is an acceptance, even a pride, in their own identity. Much like the South African slum dwellers, whom the Kenyans and Egyptians were about to visit, the Egyptians had taken the first step towards emancipation. They had emancipated themselves from the negative stereotype imposed upon them by others, and turned ridicule and disdain into acceptance and even pride in an identity that was distinctly theirs and that graphically demonstrated the inequality, the "rotteness" of the

¹¹ Exchange programmes are characterised by continuous informal discussions that are profound and revelatory for both the visiting and hosting groups precisely because they are unstructured and able to follow the tapestry of everyday life. A seemingly insignificant issue is taken up and in the course of its deconstruction the participants from different corners of the continent simultaneously learn from one another and *federate* beyond the boundaries of their own slums, their own cities and their own countries. This is the essence of horizontal learning. It enables communities to federate, because they have spoken face to face and discovered common bonds, not because their leaders have signed agreements on their behalf.

society that oppressed them. In South Africa they would see how self-pride and the recognition of inequality *had the potential* to transform the oppressed into their own liberators.

10. ATLANTIS, DAILY SAVINGS AND THE HORSES OF FREEDOM FARM.

Three Kenyans joined the Egyptians and the South Africans on the next leg of the exchange – a visit to Cape Town.

The Kenyan team comprised two members of Pamoja Trust - Medinah Adan, a youth development officer and Joseph Kimani, a field worker involved with youth groups. They were accompanied by Stephen Muthondo, one of the youth recyclers from Kibera.

The exposure to South Africa had three primary objectives:

1. to help and advise the new waste management groups linked to CORC who had only recently embarked on this avenue of income generation and community mobilization;
2. to expose the Egyptians to the much larger South African Federation's model of community organisation through savings and through mobilization around land, infrastructure and housing;
3. to demonstrate how networks of people's organisations are able to extract concessions and make deals with formal institutions – especially the state.

Again it is useful to quote at length from the notes of the participants; in this case to get the message straight from the horse-cart operator's mouth.

The first day was dedicated to visiting the different community groups that use savings as a mobilizing tool. The first group visited was one of the local affiliates of the Federation of the Urban Poor (FEDUP). This group started saving towards land and housing. This helped them have a major say in how their houses were built. Women mostly organize these saving schemes. They don't only help with housing but also assist them by allowing loans and withdrawals for everyday needs.

The group also learned about the way FEDUP uses social surveys or enumerations to gather information about their community in order to use this for negotiation and also to mobilize people. The Kenyans were

familiar with these tools, but it was all new for the Egyptians and it will take time and more exposure before these activities are adapted to the situation in Cairo.

Later that day we visited a women's group in Khayelitsha called Poor Peoples Movement. This is another social movement that belongs in a coalition with FEDUP and has borrowed many of their tools and rituals. They have just started improving their livelihood through recycling. Mainly they recycle glass and tins. The Egyptians and Kenyans explained to them how to sift the waste at source and use the organic waste as food for animals to turn into fertilizer.

Then we drove a long way to visit Atlantis. This is where Maria lives. (She came with us to Kenya). This group has also just started this year. They go around to the highrise flats to collect garbage that they sort and prepare for resale. Their problem is that they do not have a suitable place to store the inorganic waste.

Amongst the people that attended our meeting were officials from the local government. They pledged their support. The Egyptians and Kenyans emphasized the need to understand market or value chain for the products. Because this group has only just started on recycling activities it was suggested looking both at composting and selling inorganic recyclables.

It was also strongly recommended that when they start with recycling to explore the possibility of separation from source. This then enhances the recycling potential by looking at the waste available as organic or inorganic - the inorganic waste can then immediately go into the value chain after being sorted.

We wrapped the day by visiting the Freedom Farm shack settlement where we met the carthorse operators. They shared with us an ideal working day and the part they occupy in the waste management chain. Their day starts about 6 am. They go around door to door in the neighbourhoods of Kuils River, Belhar, Ravensmead and Parow requesting unwanted items made out of metal. The collection usually takes a good eight hours and what they bring back is dependant on their luck. They have been in the business for the past 10 years. The communities know them and this helps them because when they get to some households there are always recyclables waiting for them. They usually resell the metal on a weekly or fortnightly basis. But they live hand to mouth and survival is very tough.

The Egyptians wanted to know why the Freedom Farm carthorse operators only collected metal. They suggested they should also collect plastics since the market is demanding this resource in increasing quantities. The South Africans were keen to look into this.

We have to pay R70 a day to rent our horses. We hardly ever make more than R100 a day, often less. We often come home with pockets empty after a hard day's work. When you see the hungry look on the faces of your children, sometimes you are almost tempted to steal.

- recycler Freedom Farm.

On the last day we had a meeting with the city officials. This was to look at the opportunities that were available through the local government for poor communities. We also spoke about challenges that the city has around waste and the possibility of partnership between the Waste Management Directorate and poor communities. There were presentations by city officials on programmes around waste minimization and recycling that the city is involved with in different communities. The major concern by the city was that a lot of waste is generated and very little recycled. Most of it ends up in landfills. Currently there are different recycling strategies that are used by the City Council to minimize waste and these open opportunities to communities. These are:

- *Recycling through salvaging on landfills*
- *Separation at source*
- *Schools, institutions and communities*
- *Public awareness*

There was a general interest in partnering one another and it was agreed that the terms of a partnership would be discussed in the near future.

11. A CORC AND A CUP – BASIC INGREDIENTS FOR SOCIAL MOBILIZATION THROUGH WASTE MANAGEMENT.

In May 2004 the City of Cape Town appointed a team of United States consultants to produce an Integrated Waste Management Plan for the city¹². They came up with a 100+ page Assessment Report that included a chapter on Waste Collection and a chapter on Waste

¹² See www.capetown.gov.za/iwmg/

Minimisation. The Waste Collection chapter makes absolutely no reference to urban poor groups who are involved in waste collection in the city. The twenty-one pages on Waste Minimisation devotes a single paragraph to the role communities can and should play in recycling of solid wastes:

“There are seen to be various creative opportunities for more formal engagement of those from the City’s poorer community’s who currently scavenge and segregate wastes from household bins on an informal basis; such persons could form part of an initiative aimed at promoting and facilitating domestic waste segregation by formally involving them in collecting, (if necessary sorting) and delivering wastes to local satellite collections points for which a small fee (or other form of non-financial benefit) is provided.”¹³

The juxtaposition with Egypt is striking and demonstrates that even though apartheid alone did not create poverty in South Africa, it deliberately structured it into the country’s economy, consciousness and geography in a supremely destructive way. The Zabbaleen face the enormous challenge of holding onto their 30% chunk of Cairo’s waste management economy. The urban poor in Cape Town are perceived, even by a pro-poor authority, as making a tiny contribution, now and in the future, and only at the lowest end of the value chain. Even in the current South African context this value is translated into “non-financial benefit” without the blink of a professional eye.

The Zabbaleen also face the enormous threat of relocation to the peripheries of their city. The urban poor in Cape Town got thrown out of the inner city over a generation ago and their struggle is to regain a residential toehold there.

These juxtapositions alone carry enormous lessons for the urban poor, the planners and the politicians of both countries. Let the Egyptians see what happens when you exclude the poor from the inner city. Let them see what happens when you exclude them from waste management. Let the South Africans see how poor people make a significant contribution to the economy, the cleansing and the culture of one of the greatest cities on earth.

CORC’s initiative, together with its grassroots partner, CUP, is very much in its infancy, but with support and solidarity from the slum dwellers of Nairobi and the Zabbaleen of Cairo they may well be

¹³ *ibid.*

pointing the city of Cape Town in a brighter direction, not only for the urban poor, but for all its citizens.

12. ZABBALEEN REVISITED

The return visit to Cairo took place in October 2005. The Kenyans could not arrange visas in time and the South Africans, who went on their own again, decided to choose three new delegates, thereby sacrificing continuity in the learning process to the imperatives of local accountability.

The Atlantis community nominated Ms. Gwen Baartman, who is leader of two women's groups. One is a waste management cooperative and the other is a resident's committee. The Freedom Farm community nominated Mr. John Phooko, who had been selected to head up a transport operation for CUP affiliates involved in recycling. A third community, De Noon, nominated Nozuko Nxasana, who not only organises a group collecting glass, plastic, cardboard and other items for recycling and resale, but also is an acknowledged artist/craftswoman who can produce crafts out of recycled materials (animals out of folded plastic bags, newspaper dolls, lamps out of glass bottles and old metallic wires, jewellery out of magazines glossy paper, etc.)

This time round the South Africans were hosted by members of the "Spirit of the Youth". They were assisted by Mr. Ezzat Guindy their Board Chairman and by Dr. Laila Iskander who helped to frame and focus the discussion and the exchange on the major issues at stake for the Zabbaleen.

The focal area for the exchange was Mokattam. Although the South Africans were to spend a great deal of time talking about and learning about the political conditions that affected the Zabbaleen (threats of relocation and pressure from the private sector) their main focus was on learning technical and social organisation skills in regard to waste management from the Zabbaleen.

In Mokattam the team paid visits to several key projects where dialogue and participation was extensive. They visited:

- The Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE) community school for girls,
- the School (*madrassa*) of Recycling for boys,
- the headquarters of Spirit of the Youth,

- a number of small family-run businesses which, at different technology intensities, are part of the waste management value chain and successfully cover many phases of the material recycling process, thus leading the way out of poverty,
- the monastery where this Christian community gathers and celebrates its identity around the Sunday Mass.

They also re-visited the recycling plant in Qattamaya, about 20kms from the outskirts of Cairo, where APE works with the Tora community. They spent a day in the Basous area where they witnessed highly labour intensive recycling workshops, with staggering outputs, run under management style systems that would certainly fall foul of South Africa's labour legislation. Finally they spent the afternoon in the Zawia suburb, where they visited the premises of the Italian waste management multi-national "AMA Arab Environment Co.". This large private company effectively competes with the Zabbaleen for the city's waste but like all pragmatic profit-making ventures also manages to partner the Spirit of the Youth in a campaign that encourages an attitude change towards separation of garbage at source by the households themselves.

A professional who works with the SDI Secretariat accompanied the South African delegation. Here are his observations on the exchange.

The most impressive element for the South African representatives when arriving at Mokattam, is that several "habitat" problems have been overcome. In fact the delegates found it hard to believe that Mokattam is one of the poorest and most neglected neighbourhoods in the city. The entire community is housed in brick multi-storey buildings, with sanitation and running water. The worst built environmental aspects of a slum belong to the past and this is clearly what strikes other slum dwellers who might reasonably hope to get out of the shacks by earning a reasonable livelihood through waste management. By the same token, however, the team could not escape the fact that life in Mokattam had its drawbacks, especially in terms of health related issues. Mokattam is permeated with the overwhelming stench of rotting garbage. But overall they could see, especially from the vantage point of the monastery on top of the hill, a vibrant community, living in decent permanent houses, and productive in all aspects of solid waste management.

On an entirely different note, the South Africans were struck by the fact that their two hosts represented very different dimensions of the waste management process. Much like the differences between

support NGO and Federation in the SDI context, APE and the Spirit of the Youth were a combination of professional and grassroots organisations that had found a way to work together – although the partnership was different from the relationships that characterise most SDI partnerships. APE is very professional, with brilliant technical development initiatives. On the other hand there is energy and appetite for learning and experimentation in the youth organisation, still young and taking its first independent steps. Added to this was the direct learning to be had from the various small businesses that were visited. The community part of the exposure was less “clean” and less project-like. Yet, if anything could have been brought away and transmitted back to their communities by the South Africans, it was more on this side, of the authentic people driven solutions, devised and refined over time by the residents of Mokattam.

It would be up to the professionals to learn from the APE’s original actions and approaches, in order to keep CORC and the SDI network up-to-date. APE’s technical capacity is certainly a resource that SDI can offer to all its affiliates, either by direct exposure to Mokattam or by derivative learning based on the experiences of the South Africans. But the real partner for the Federations in SDI must be the Spirit of the Youth.

The visit to the desert plants of APE in Qattamaya left the group with conflicting opinions. Qattamaya is a recycling operation that has been relocated there from Tora, which is near Mokattam.

The plant produces compost (with the organic waste separated on site from the other materials) for about 70 family-run micro-enterprises.

These 70 household owned firms collect and sort waste before selling the various materials to the different departments at the Qattamaya plant, including the plastic residues, because a new machine can use residual material for building blocks or other construction parts (e.g. connecting metal rods.), or street sewerage lids even street manholes.

The machinery introduced for composting is state-of-the-art in the industry, and produces good quality compost that is sold to all agricultural spots in the country with a constant waiting list of orders.

Qualified engineers run the department and people from the beneficiary community are trained to run the machines. The factory features conveyors, injection machines, shredders, crushers and other

plastic-moulding machines. A training centre for machine operators is active.

A staggering 98% of the input from the micro-businesses is transformed into value added items so that the loads to the landfill are minimal.

The economy of the plant is mixed. The association provides water to the micro-businesses, especially as drinking water for the pigs that are fed the organic waste. There is also a downstream enterprise that provides transportation to and from the residential neighbourhood in Tora. By contrast the transportation of the garbage from the city to Qattamaya, on the contrary, is autonomously organised by the family enterprises.

The prices of the sorted materials are fixed and the purchase is guaranteed (provided the sorting meets minimal standards).

Since APE is a non profit organisation, profits are redistributed to benefit the community: the nursery for the children was entirely financed by the net gains of the compost sector and housing loans were granted to the (few) families who could not afford to start their own construction because their business was not thriving.

13. MOVING MOUNTAINS

As the South Africans began to learn more about the Zabbaleen, they noticed that even though they had succeeded in dramatically improving their living conditions through community-based waste management, they remained a marginalised community whose livelihoods and living spaces were under threat.

After years of relocation, the Zabbaleen have enjoyed a few decades of relative stability. They have become established in their neighbourhoods and now form a ring of 5 garbage settlements around Cairo. But recently there is talk of resettlement once again. The authorities seek to move them closer to designated landfill sites of multinationals. These are 65 km from where they now live. No measures are being considered to compensate them for the increased cost in terms of time, labour, transport, devaluation of trucks or hardship to continue the regular, daily, door-to-door service. Many are likely to be forced out of the business.

Laila Iskander comments pointedly: “Forced evictions and resettlement plans are a common aspect of the lives of waste pickers, scavengers and recyclers worldwide. A new look has to be taken at this practice – one which seeks to upgrade these neighborhoods rather than move the ‘eye-sore’ further out of the city limits.”¹⁴

This is a reality that SDI affiliated shack dwellers in 24 countries understand from their own direct experience. Over time it is expected that SDI’s wealth of experience around alternatives to evictions and forced relocations can be shared with the Zabbaleen, just as the Zabbaleen share their expertise with regard to solid waste management.

Another set of activities in Cairo that resonated with SDI’s experience in many other countries was the impact of privatisation on the lives and livelihoods of the poor.

In 2002, Cairo Municipality contracted international waste companies to take over the full, integrated waste management system of the city. The aim was to improve waste services, introduce advanced technologies, and protect the health of citizens.

As always the authorities did not take into account several impacts that the scheme was going to have on the poor. How was this arrangement going to affect 40,000 poor families whose livelihoods depended on waste collection and recycling? What was going to happen to the skills and expertise in waste management that the Zabbaleen had built up over more than half a century? What impact would it have on the overall poverty situation in the city and finally what did it mean in terms of the capacities and regulatory abilities of the local government?

“The Cairo governor announced that Zabbaleen could bid on the contract for the Southern sector of the city, and is encouraging foreign companies to hire them as garbage collectors, terminating their recycling projects and social programmes. Whilst the Zabaleen have previously recycled some 80 percent of the waste collected, foreign companies are required to recycle only 20 percent with the rest going into a new landfill. In CCBA’s vision, the Zabaleen would continue collecting garbage, but they would be working under foreign companies – FCC and Urbaser, Enser (Spanish), AMA (Italian) – which will also be responsible for street sweeping and the placement of garbage bins. According to CCBA, foreign bidders were chosen for the contract because of their ‘superior know-how.’ “

-source: Laila Iskander: Urban Waste Managers In Cairo: Waste Collectors, Traders And Recyclers

¹⁴ Laila Iskander: Urban Waste Managers In Cairo: Waste Collectors, Traders And Recyclers - 2005

Some lessons may be derived from the experiences of the 8000 people in the Tora community whose recycling centre was relocated to Qattamaya.

The recycling centre was moved on the grounds that waste separation in the households created an extremely unhealthy environment for the recyclers and for the neighbouring communities. By forcing the Tora community to relocate their recycling industry to the outskirts of town the City authorities created the space for several improvements in the living conditions of the people. Through the mediation of APE the community was able to negotiate a deal whereby technical assistance and some bridging finance was provided for the upgrading of the housing stock in the settlement. The result is that the 2000 families have remained in their residential neighbourhood, a short ten minutes from the banks of the River Nile, and that neighbourhood has been transformed from a shantytown to a formal housing estate.

But there have been negative implications as well. Only 70 families out of a total of about 700 who were involved in garbage collection and recycling in their own homes have been able to relocate their enterprises to Qattamaya. Some families continue to collect inorganic wastes and store them in their houses in Tora, but as the neighbourhood gentrifies and new families move in, this will probably be phased out.

The city authorities have argued that the Zabbaleen should become collection crews employed by the private international companies. This fails to recognise that this simultaneously deprives them of their main source of income that is recycling and will lead to a decline in their entrepreneurial capacities that they have built up over two generations.

The residents of Cairo who used to receive a service from the people of Tora are not too happy either. They are accustomed to receiving daily, door-to-door service from the Zabbaleen and are displeased with the new system of waste pooling sites, as this represents a reduction in service levels. Furthermore residents are asked to pay more for this reduced service than previously paid to the Zabbaleen.

These new agreements are not very good for the environment either. International companies are contractually obligated to sort and recycle only 20 percent of the waste they collect . This means that the

remaining 80 percent ends up in landfills. This falls far short of the 80-85 percent that the Zabbaleen recycle.¹⁵

14. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We are living in an increasingly interconnected world. Choices taken by one nation can impact profoundly on other nations. Yet while governments and politicians, private companies and international agencies talk to one another, we as citizens, especially the marginalized and the poor, seldom share concerns, views or strategies.

CORC is part of a global network, known as Shack/Slum Dwellers International that believes that unless communities of the poor and their partners share processes with other people in other countries, they will always *react* to what is done to them. It will remain almost impossible for them to be *initiators* of change.

There are many interesting examples of solid waste management by shack dwellers in the SDI network. The Indian Federation facilitates the collection and recycling of waste by 3000 families in Mumbai. The Filipino Federation was founded in Payatas, a huge garbage dump on the outskirts of Quezon City. The Kenyans, as we have already seen, have been involved in community-based waste collection and recycling in several slums in Nairobi. But Egypt was identified as the lynchpin for these exchanges because the Zabbaleen have achieved significant scale and have been involved in waste management at every level of the value chain, including manufacturing and production of recycled products.

But exchanges work best when all participants are simultaneously learners and teachers. Egypt was a logical focus for these exchanges because the Zabbaleen find themselves in a tenuous predicament with hard earned gains in terms of livelihood and tenure seriously at risk.

It is true that there are specific historical, social and cultural reasons why the Zabbaleen evolved as central actors in waste management in Cairo. It is true that these are not likely to be replicated in other contexts.

¹⁵ Information on the impacts of the new policy on waste management is derived from Laila Iskander: Urban Waste Managers In Cairo: Waste Collectors, Traders And Recyclers - 2005

By the same token the strategies around securing rights through building relationships with state institutions may work in relatively open societies such as India, South Africa or even Kenya. Can they be adapted to authoritarian environments such as Egypt?

As valid as these questions are, they are extremely reductionist. The power of horizontal exchange, especially exchange programmes between communities with different skills and capacities, is that they are based on an automatic understanding that learning is an osmotic process that differs from person to person and from context to context. There is nothing formulaic about these exchange programmes. They are built around the lived experience of the poor. This lived experience reinforces, day after day, a deep-seated realisation that there is no formula for the resolution of need or for the fulfilment of basic rights. The endless obstacles between poor people and their needs and entitlements demand that they constantly devise different strategies or apply the same strategies in different ways.

Certainly the exchanges between waste collectors and recyclers in Egypt, Kenya and South Africa have resulted in the direct transfer of specific forms of knowledge from one context to the other. For example:

The Kenyans and the South Africans have learnt from the Egyptians that there is much more value to be derived from waste management than simply selling labour at ultra-cheap prices to the private sector or collecting waste at a low fee for the public sector.

The Kenyans and South Africans have seen ways in which the Egyptians are able to occupy many levels of the waste management value chain, from collecting, to separating, to recycling to developing the knowledge and the technology to create marketable products, such as plastic recycled into manhole covers, compost from organic waste and even energy.

The Egyptians learnt from the South Africans and Kenyans that there is a crying need to strengthen the capacity of low-income groups to negotiate with local authorities and to reach agreement on partnerships between community organizations, local NGOs and municipalities to address problems of poverty.

They also saw that an important step in this regard is to link communities together to generate a critical mass and to move towards

the situation where the poor are united and able to talk and act in unison.

The variety of information and skills that are disseminated and transferred through these exchanges has been immense. Firstly there are the technical details of how to sort garbage at source, how to manufacture value-added products, how to design, develop and manage appropriate technologies. Secondly, the exchanges have acted as a means to demonstrate the power of poor people's organisations, not only to generate livelihoods from garbage, but also to organise and link poor communities around the main issues that affect them. Thirdly, the exchanges demonstrated how these issues are interconnected at the local and at the global level. The problem of insecure livelihoods is linked to the absence of secure land tenure. It is linked to the problems of accessing basic amenities in slums; to the ineffectiveness of governmental programmes in dealing with poor people's problems; to the negative attitudes towards the poor by government; by other classes and by the poor themselves.

These exchange programmes have offered an alternative paradigm where communities are centre-stage and where they can begin to devise and share practical solutions to their mutual problems.

PARTICIPANTS

Exchange 1, South Africa to Egypt: Fr. Jorge Anzorena, Purity Ngozi, Gershwin Kohler.

Exchange 2, Egypt and South Africa to Kenya: Fabian Brieses, Jason Bruce, Maria Beukes, Purity Ngozi and Jeremy Bean (SA). Medhat Fayeque, Amal Nabil, and Marwa Sharaf El-Din (Egypt).

Exchange 3, Kenya and Egypt to South Africa: Medhat Fayeque, Amal Nabil, and Marwa Sharaf El-Din (Egypt). Stephen Muthondo, Medinah Adan and Joseph Kimani (Kenya).

Exchange 4, South Africa to Egypt: Jeremy Bean, Purity Ngozi, Stefano Marmorato, John Phooko, Gwen Baartman, Nozuko Nxasana.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APE	Association for the Protection of the Environment
CID	Community In Development
CORC	Community Organisation Resource Centre
CUP	Coalition of the Urban Poor
EDAG	Environment and Development Affinity Group
FEDUP	Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
SPARC	Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres
SUF	Slum Upgrading Facility