

Third Party Evaluator's Opinión on Improvement of the Hygienic Environment of the Reconquista River Basin

Alieto Aldo Guadagni
Instituto Di Tella / Argentina

Efficiency. The scope for this project is comprised of: (1) upgrading of rivers; (2) the improvement of drainage; and (3) hygienic projects. The works and actions planned were oriented to improve the conditions of life of more than 2.5 million people, 84% of which lack sewerage services. To correct this deficiency the program planned the construction of hygienic projects. Nevertheless not one of the sewage treatment plants initially planned was constructed. The province of Buenos Aires has been seriously affected by the economic and political crisis that affected Argentina in 2001. The years 2001/2002 were particularly difficult. Current fiscal revenues fell due to the sustained economic recession and depressed domestic demand. The World Bank stated that: "The economic collapse in Argentina culminating in 2002 was dramatic, resulting in the deepest political and economic crisis in generations. Few countries have experienced such economically catastrophic events". The Buenos Aires deficit was financed largely by the emission of quasi-money. Total provincial debt sky-rocketed, reached more than 300% of current revenues in 2002. The JBIC halt new disbursements in 2002 and the sewage treatment plants were not constructed as planned. The works planned to improve of drainage were not executed as planned.

Effectiveness. There is wide consensus that since the year 2001 flood damages have been mitigated due to the project. Respecting the quality of water, evidences show that today is better than in the 90's.

People with no access to piped water tend to obtain their water through wells, generally extracting underground water. The poorest population groups only reach the water table, given that it is nearest to the surface and therefore less expensive to exploit. The water table is completely contaminated throughout the entire region. The underground water is contaminated by the existence of a large number of septic systems and pits, which are constructed in a precarious way, affecting the quality of the underground water. Since the cleaning up of those septic tanks is expensive there is illegal dumping to streets, surface water bodies, the ground or storm-water sewers.

The sewage treatment plants that were planned at four locations were not constructed. As a result, the project could not achieve positive results in terms of effectiveness. The National Government is constructing these plants. But the design of these projects is worse than the original one made by UNIREC-JBIC designed to treat not only liquid of the networks but liquid brought by the atmospheric trucks, a system that today is utilized by the $\frac{3}{4}$ parts of the people that live in the Reconquista Basin. Effectiveness in the sewage treatment of these plants will be limited as long as domiciliary networks are not built in the near future. The other big issue is the setup of an effective pollution control over Reconquista River. As long as there is no such program, there will be no real improvements in the state of an urban river of these dimensions. Such pollution control program, in addition to a domiciliary sewerage to provide for the aforementioned plants, could be taken into consideration for future JBIC cooperation. These are highly important to assure the effectiveness of this project.