Implementing a Community-Based Monitoring System in Argentina

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Introduction

The Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) Pilot Project in Argentina was implemented in two places with different geographical settings. One is in Urundel, a rural town in one of the country’s poorest provinces, and a poor neighborhood in the city of Tandil, a middle-income urban area. These two places reflect the heterogeneity of Argentina, thus the CBMS survey questionnaire was adapted to their specific contexts. The census was implemented in both places in September 2011, with the collaboration of the local authorities (municipal government). Enumerators were selected from within the community.

The CBMS methodology, as proposed in the paper by Reyes and Due (2009), was followed. Two censuses were conducted. In the case of Urundel, it was a census of the entire area while in the case of Tandil, a census was undertaken in a selected area that represents approximately 10 percent of the city’s total population. The survey instruments were adapted to the reality of each area.

For example, Urundel is a rural area in one of the poorest provinces of Argentina, with aboriginal roots and a per capita income that is almost one-fourth only of the national average. Hence, modules in the questionnaire regarding agriculture production and ethnicity were included. A module on crimes committed was included instead.

Both censuses were done with the cooperation of their local governments. The coordination with the local government was established very early in the process. In the case of Tandil, the selection of the zone was done jointly with the municipal government, as well as the strategy to select and train enumerators. Early involvement was a positive aspect of the experience, but on the other hand, it tended to delay the implementation as decision making in local governments is usually slow. Enumerators and data encoders were selected from the local communities.

Results

Demography

In Northern Tandil (referred to as just Tandil from here onward), the survey found 7,171 individuals in 2,083 households, which resulted in an average household size of 3.44. In Urundel, the population surveyed reached 2,865 individuals in 663 households, or an average size of 4.32 per household. In Urundel, the gender composition was slightly male-biased with 51 percent of the individuals being males. In Tandil, the gender composition was slightly female-biased at 51 percent.
51.30 percent, which is more similar to the national average of 51.33 percent being females.

**Migration**
A look at the migration rates reveals a more dynamic pattern in Tandil since 70 percent of the population lived always in the same city compared to 85 percent of the population in Urundel. In the last two years (2010-2011), 1.7 percent of the population surveyed had just migrated to Tandil, and 8.2 percent in the last decade. For Urundel, these figures are much smaller at 0.8 percent and 4.5 percent, respectively.

**Child nutrition**
Body Mass Index (BMI) indicators for children were computed and based on these indicators, the children were classified following the Pan American Health Organization’s (PAHO) classification.

For both survey areas, results show that the main problems in Tandil and Urundel are overweight and obesity (48% and 28%, respectively) more than emaciation.

**Education**
Retention rate is surprisingly high in Urundel, considering that according to the Ministry of Education, retention rates are higher in the province of Buenos Aires than in the province of Salta. This could show heterogeneity within provinces, especially in Salta—between the capital city and the little towns. For the province of Buenos Aires, repetition rate is measured separately in big and small cities.

On illiteracy, both Tandil and Urundel are slightly below the national average for the adult population, which is 1.9 percent according to the last census in 2001.

**Mortality rate in children and pregnant women**
In Tandil, the mortality rate of children in the last 5 years was 0.27 percent, with 4 cases of deaths (2 of sudden death, 1 due to imperfect osmosis, and 1 of unknown cause) among children aged 0–5 years old. Survey data showed 1,465 children among the population.

In Urundel, the proportion reached 0.87 percent, with 6 cases of children’s death (2 died of cancer, 2 of pneumonia, 1 of heart problems, and 1 of appendicitis). Survey data showed 690 children among the population.

In terms of mortality among pregnant women, no such case was found in Tandil from among the 1,822 mothers surveyed. However, one case was found in Urundel, which has a total of 529 mothers as listed in the survey.

**Housing conditions**
Another dimension of poverty is the status or lack of housing facilities. Households living in makeshift houses, or in squatter surroundings also lead to restricted access to proper sanitary toilet facilities, among others.

“Makeshift housing” is defined as those houses with walls built with light and/or improvised materials, and roofs built with improvised materials. These housing conditions were collected by the CBMS enumerators during the survey.

“Squatter households” are defined as those that occupy the lot or the house they live in without the consent of the owner. The figures were based on the survey as willingly reported by the occupants themselves; however, if the occupants did not report their “squatter” situation, the figure might be underestimated.

On geographical distribution, makeshift housing and squatter households in Tandil do not seem to follow a specific pattern, while zones where there is lack of access to proper sanitary toilet facilities are more clearly identifiable (Maps 1-6).

**Unemployment**
This set of indicators presented the highest disparity between...
the two surveyed areas. While Tandil’s unemployment reached 12.9 percent, in Urundel, this figure is more than double at 26.3 percent (Maps 7-8).

Another disparity found was between genders. In Tandil, while the unemployment rate for men is only 5.1 percent, for women it is 22.6 percent. In Urundel, the unemployment rate for women is 41.7 percent, while for men, it is only 17 percent.

Social assistance
In general, the core indicators show that social assistance is common and very frequent in the areas covered by the census (Map 9-10). There are different types of social assistance programs. A substantial one is the Asignación Universal por Hijo (Universal Subsidy per Child or USpC), which is a lump sum subsidy per child for families with income below a given threshold introduced in 2009. The subsidy per child is ARS270 (almost US$43 at the exchange rate of ARS6.3 per US$1) or ARS1,080 for a handicapped child. Before 2009, there was a Subsidy-per-Child benefit for formal workers with income below a given threshold. The problem with this program (financed with labor contributions) was that most poor households were excluded. In 2009, the subsidy was expanded to cover every family—not only those with a formal worker in the family—hence, covering all the unemployed, self-employed, and informal workers.

The most common program in Urundel is the Provincial Feeding Program, whose beneficiaries are almost 30 percent of the households. This program consists of providing a food package, vitamins and iron sulfate to families with children and to pregnant mothers, aimed to prevent malnourishment in children aged 0-6 years old.

The “Homemade Bread” Program consists of providing flour to groups of five mothers to make bread. According to the results, these two main feeding programs cover almost 40 percent of the households in Urundel.

Analysis of Survey Results

Work and business
On the labor structure, non-skilled workers are among the most important groups of workers in both places under study. While the big number of salesmen-servants in Tandil tend to show a city more focused on services, the bigger number of people dedicated to agriculture/cattle farming, reveal an economy that is more into primary activities.

In Tandil, the most important economic activities are services (23%), construction (17%), and wholesale-retail sales (12%), while in Urundel, these are agriculture/livestock (42%) and services (13%).

In Tandil, the three leading jobs in terms of proportion are (i) salesmen-servant in the services, (ii) wholesale-retail sales in the industries, and (iii) non-skilled work in construction.

Besides following the global/national tendency, the high relevance of services could be the consequence of the growth of tourism in the last decade. Since the devaluation of the Argentine peso, Argentinians started looking for alternatives to spend their vacations, and Tandil became, for people from Buenos Aires City, a significant spot to visit within the country, especially for long weekends. Tourism activity represents around 10 percent of GDP. It is useful to mention that the proportion of workers in hotels and restaurants comprise 2 percent of the total number of workers.

As for the large proportion of construction workers, this could be explained by the growth of the city and particular macro-economic conditions that make real estate a safe investment (such as inflation, high prices of soy, mistrust in financial institutions, and the government), that caused the
Research Results

Although the following three—services, construction, and wholesale-retail sales—generate most of the jobs, it can be understood from their composition that most of these jobs are non-skilled.

While Tandil shows a more diversified productive structure, in Urundel, the agriculture/livestock industry dominates with 21 percent of the workers called themselves farmers, while 18 percent are non-skilled workers within the agriculture and livestock industry. It is reasonable to assume that the so-called farmers cultivate their own land, while the non-skilled workers perform their activity for others in exchange for a salary.

The difference between Tandil (4%) and Urundel (42%) in terms of agriculture/livestock activities probably happens because this primary activity in the Pampeana region has, in the last decades, incorporated a great deal of machinery (along with technological packages that includes genetically modified seeds, chemicals, and fertilizers), while in Urundel, the production method shows more participation of labor.

Health

In Tandil, there are three public hospitals and 16 basic assistance centers—which are places that operate with scarce medical equipment—attending to basic needs and carrying out periodical consultations for people in different neighborhoods. In Urundel, there were four of these basic assistance centers and just one general hospital for the whole town.

On health insurance, 36 percent of the households in Tandil and 33 percent in Urundel are not covered. Health insurances for households in Tandil with a health plan are provided by the government for public workers, and another from a union (which belongs to a group of unionized workers). In Urundel, the most common health plan is provided by the private sector.

In both Tandil and Urundel, the public hospital is the most frequent place to go when a health problem occurs (at 38% and 71%, respectively).

Education

In Urundel, only a few of the population surveyed stated that they have finished secondary school, but there was a high proportion of undetermined answers (that is, they said they do not go to school, but did not specify at all their educational status). Such a situation could possibly increase the proportion of people who have finished secondary school.

These undetermined answers were due to problems in training enumerators (it was wrongly interpreted that those people who were not in school did not have to answer any other questions of education). To present the data as it was actually answered, assumptions were made, instead of making assumptions during data cleaning.

For those that dropped out, the maximum educational level achieved by people in Tandil, which is the most common situation, was primary school (51%). In Urundel, it is hard to extract conclusions because of the enumerator problems mentioned earlier in this section.

Self-perceived situation, expectations, and needs

On their self-perceived socioeconomic level and social mobility, respondents from both Tandil and Urundel were optimistic when comparing the economic situation that their parents lived to theirs. In Tandil, most of the respondents think that this is due to external causes (“the opportunities offered by the country”) while in Urundel, the main cause mentioned is internal (“own ability and initiative”).

The data generated from Tandil show that the majority of household members surveyed see themselves as middle class, while in Urundel, most of the respondents consider their households as poor (Figure 1).

In general, the population in Urundel, and especially in Tandil, considers that the health and education services their families receive are of good quality.

Also, their expectations about the economic opportunities that their children will enjoy are mostly optimistic.

In Tandil, the population did not show much interest in this last topic, probably because of census fatigue of the people due to the national census, a few problems arising from inadequate enumerator training plus the fact that these questions comprise the last batch of queries and respondents tend to show fatigue in the final minutes of the interview. However, some clear conclusions can be obtained: if the answers are grouped in categories, the housing problems appeared as the main topic (21%), followed by job/income problems (10%), infrastructure deficiencies (7%), and public safety (1%).

In Urundel, the main problem was also about housing (39%), followed by job/income problems (29%), lack of bathrooms as related to sanitation (5%), and public safety (1%).

The lack of bathrooms appears as very significant to the population in Urundel although they have the highest access to proper sanitary toilet facilities (see section...
on housing conditions). To shed some light on this issue, it is necessary to see the way the core indicator was built. A household was considered with proper sanitary toilet facilities when connected to the public mains (sewer) or when it had a septic tank and a cesspool, but when the answer is either “Only a cesspool,” “In the open,” or “No toilet facilities” was given, it was considered as a household without sanitary toilet facilities. Then if the indicators obtained are disaggregated, the proportion that comes out is that more households in Urundel have no sanitary toilet facility at all than in Tandil.

At any rate, since the households that specified bathroom as their main need account for 5 percent of total households, those that claimed to have no toilet facilities are only 1.21 percent. Hence, it is probable that it is not so much an infrastructure problem, but rather a housing problem.

Finally, when asked to specify issues that are of special interest, most of them gave a higher mark (from 0 to 10) to infrastructure issues above social problems.

The other issues mentioned by respondents in Tandil that stood out were crime (2.5%), education (0.5%), and “streets” (0.5%). In Urundel, safety stood out (2.7%), and then work (4.4%) and Universal Subsidy per Child) for their condition of being unemployed.

Respondents in both places feel that stronger and firmer policy actions are needed to resolve infrastructure issues, more than social problems, such as drugs, alcohol, and family violence. During the validation meeting with local leaders in Urundel, the leaders explained that many people tend to see the latter as “personal” problems rather than social problems that can be addressed by a government policy. On the other hand, people recognize that it is the government’s obligation to provide infrastructure (including social infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals).

During the validation meeting in Tandil, the relatively low level of unemployment, combined with the high rates of informal jobs and the widespread social assistance, appears to confirm the impressions left by some of the community leaders of a lack of incentive to promote legal or formal work. In fact, a sort of collusion exists between employers and informal workers, in order to allow the latter to continue receiving social assistance (especially the Universal Subsidy per Child) for their condition of being “unemployed.”

In some topics, the areas surveyed also showed similarities in their problems: education and some indicators of poverty, such as illiteracy, hunger, and housing problems.

In Urundel, the housing needs expressed by the respondents are higher, even though housing conditions are better than in Tandil. They also cited job problems, which matched with the harsh conditions in their particular labor market. This difference appears to correspond with the two very different economic situations: Tandil is a growing city and attracting migrants, Urundel is a small rural town, where emigration in the past has had repercussions on the local economy.

**Policy Recommendations**

Argentina has relatively high levels of poverty even after 10 years of strong economic growth. Income distribution is very unequal. Poverty is related to the fortunes of the labor market, since most of Argentine population lives in urban areas. In terms of income distribution, some of the most important factors that could explain this are education and the quality of education. The distribution of public goods and services is also very unequal.

The study reveals that people complain more about the access and quality of public services and public goods than on issues regarding education, health, or the labor market. Nevertheless, the situations vary and what people demand are different in each case. In Tandil, 50 percent of the population had chosen infrastructure-related problems as the most important problem in their neighborhood. Some of these problems are lack of paved street, lack of water and sewerage services, poor electricity, loose animals (dogs and horses), and lack of cleaning and rats (or sanitation issues).

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It is also interesting to note how the perception of individuals might show a different analysis. For instance, Argentina has a clear problem with the access and quality of public services and public goods than on issues regarding education, health, or the labor market. Nevertheless, the situations vary and what people demand are different in each case. In Tandil, 50 percent of the population had chosen infrastructure-related problems as the most important problem in their neighborhood. Some of these problems are lack of paved street, lack of water and sewerage services, poor electricity, loose animals (dogs and horses), and lack of cleaning and rats (or sanitation issues).

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More than 30 participants from Nsukka, Igboeze, Uzo Uwani and other local government areas (LGAs) in Enugu State attended the CBMS National Conference held on September 28, 2012 at the Main Hall of the Nsukka Local Government Headquarters. All the traditional rulers of various communities in Nsukka LGA were present, including the vice chairperson and counselors of Nsukka LGA, and other dignitaries from two neighboring LGAs. Mr. Tony Ugwu, the chairperson of Nsukka LGA, chaired the conference.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Ugwu thanked the CBMS Network for using his LGA to showcase this methodology in Nigeria. He went further to list the positive influences of the community-based monitoring system (CBMS) methodology on policymaking. Citing the influence of the CBMS methodology, he said that some policies of his administration had direct impacts on every individual and household in Edem, the CBMS focal community. He also encouraged other LGA chairpersons to use CBMS methodology to benefit from smoother governance. He also requested the CBMS-Nigeria Team to assist him in mobilizing support from donor agencies to scale up the use of CBMS methodology in other communities in his LGA so that these areas could also benefit.

During the conference, two papers were presented by the CBMS team leader, Dr. Anthonia Achike and her co-researcher, Dr. H.E Ichoku. The “Overview of Results of CBMS Survey of Edem in Nsukka LGA” was presented by Dr. Achike while “CBMS Data Collection and Analysis Process” was presented by Dr. Ichoku.

Other speakers included Mr. Offoribike Igwebuene, secretary to the Nsukka LGA; Mr. Tony Enyi, the leader of the enumerators for the CBMS-Nigeria surveys; and Ms. Faith Chibuike, the leader of the coders for the CBMS-Nigeria survey.

Many of the traditional rulers who graced the occasion gave their views on the CBMS methodology. Mr. Igwe Ugwoke, the traditional ruler of Akpa-Edem, said that for the first time in his community, every household was visited and their views sought for governance. He said that when the team came to his palace to seek his permission and cooperation to interview households in his community, he had his doubts. But because they had a local government official with them who assured him that the local government is aware and is supporting this activity, he gave them his permission with a lot of doubt in his mind on the ability of this team to be different from other groups that have come and gone without leaving any positive influence. However, when the team interviewed his households and sought information on many neglected welfare issues, and the effort to find out the effects of the global financial crises, he wondered that this might be different, after all. Then when the team invited him later to participate in the sharing of findings of their survey with Nsukka LGA Council, he was pleasantly surprised to see the LGA chairperson and his team noting the findings of the survey as policy guide and later implementing them. It became obvious to him that his community has participated in the policymaking and implementation strategy of their LGA. He also noted that his community had appointed a CBMS team led by their sons in the CBMS–Nigeria survey. Each village head now has a register of households in their respective villages, which they must update as households continue to expand, and which the community CBMS team uses to collect information in line with the CBMS guideline. He said he hoped that the privilege of his community as the CBMS project site be extended to other communities, so that in the long run everyone could benefit and will enhance the inclusive governance policy of the present local government administration.

Ways Forward
The general consensus of the conference participants was that CBMS methodology should be extended to other communities in Nsukka LGA before the end of 2013. Also, that the chairperson of the Nsukka LGA should lead a delegation to the governor of Enugu state and brief him on the need to adopt CBMS methodology as a policy tool of the state. They believe that the governor be given hands-on information on the efficacy of CBMS methodology. The delegation should comprise the Nsukka LGA chairperson, as the convener, to be accompanied by the chairpersons of other LGAs, counselors, the traditional rulers who attended the 2012 CBMS conference, and by the CBMS-Nigeria team leader. The representative of the House of Assembly would also be briefed on the urgency of the proposed CBMS methodology bill to be passed at the Federal House. The CBMS–Nigeria team leader was therefore asked to follow up on the promise and to liaise with the director of the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics on the need to adopt the CBMS methodology.
CBMS Team introduces CBMS methodology to local government body in South Africa

Dr. Grace Oloo, CBMS-South Africa team leader, presented a paper titled “Improving Local Governance through a Community-Based Monitoring Tool” during the Knowledge Management, Innovation and Communication Conference held on March 22-24, 2012 at the Karibu Resort Hotel in Tzaneen City, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The conference, which was held under the theme “Towards Innovation Excellence: Unlocking your Municipalities’ Innovation Ability,” was attended by 160 delegates composed of local and national government officials, members of the academe, and private stakeholders.

Dr. Oloo’s paper demonstrates that South Africa needs a monitoring system at the local government level that can provide up-to-date baseline and timely information for policymaking, policy reviews, planning, budgeting, service delivery, programs prioritization, and implementation. In particular, the paper demonstrates that the community-based monitoring system (CBMS) has the capacity to fill the information gaps in diagnosing the extent of poverty pockets at the wards and village levels. The paper cited the case of the Mutale Local Municipality where the CBMS methodology was pilot-tested.

The objectives of the three-day conference were sevenfold: (i) to ensure that key municipal projects, and messages emanating from the Integrated Development Plan are disseminated accordingly to all relevant stakeholders; (ii) to harness the expertise and experiences of credible, former municipal leaders, governance specialists, and the private sector; (iii) to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and information to communities; (iv) to integrate the latest media techniques and tools into a comprehensive planning strategy; (v) to provide competitive advantage and learn the best practice; (vi) to add value to the processes and operations of the municipality; and (vii) to leverage knowledge strategy to municipalities to accelerate services and innovation.

The conference was organized by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), an autonomous association of municipalities whose mandate is derived from the 2006 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. This mandate defines SALGA as the voice and sole representative of local government. SALGA interfaces with the Parliament, the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), the Cabinet, as well as provincial legislatures. The association is a unitary body with a membership of 278 municipalities, with its national office based in Pretoria and offices in all nine provinces of the country.

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for International Student Assessment (PISA), it obtained an average score quite below the expected number according to income level, and it is the country with the highest inequality in the quality of education in the world (Auguste et al. 2008). But when respondents were asked to rate the quality of education of their schools—on a scale of 0 to 10—the average rating was 9.05 in Tandil and 8.05 in Urundel (with a standard deviation of 2.42 and 1.42, respectively). Interestingly, when ratings were compared between respondents who are not currently in school and those who are currently enrolled to capture the trend in education, the study found no significant difference. This perception goes against the finding in Auguste et al. (2008) that said the quality of education in Argentina has deteriorated a lot in the last 40 years.

This study revealed that people in Urundel perceive themselves as poorer than those in Tandil. In Urundel, 54 percent of the people consider their own family as poor, but in Tandil, 61 percent consider their own family as middle class. Nevertheless, the housing and nutrition is better in Urundel although their labor market conditions are much poorer, with very high unemployment rate.

This brief analysis provides direction as to what would be the main policy actions, and how different this could be across cities. In Urundel, the main problem is lack of dynamism in the labor market, in a small rural town whose population is being drained by emigration. In Tandil, on the other hand, a poor neighborhood of a small size city was the object of this study, which has been growing very fast and attracting migrants. The problems in this area are mostly related to the lack of infrastructure and not with employment.

In this sense, the policies in Urundel would point more to those that can hasten development, entrepreneurship, and productivity, whereas in Tandil, providing infrastructure gains more importance. The poverty maps, done through the CBMS, show very precisely the division of geographical areas where access to infrastructure is limited, from those areas with proper access. These maps can be used by municipal authorities to check whether their plans and policy actions are accurate, and especially, to bring to their immediate attention certain problems or situations that were previously assumed as normal due to lack of credible data.

Footnotes:
9th CBMS Philippines National Conference to be held in SMX Convention Center

Around 600 delegates, consisting of local and national partners and stakeholders in the country, are set to converge once again in January 22–24, 2013 for the 9th Community Based Monitoring System (CBMS)-Philippines National Conference at the SMX Convention Center, Pasay City to discuss and share latest developments and emerging issues in the implementation and uses of the community-based monitoring system. This event will be conducted less than a year after the 8th successful convention held last March 2012.

This conference will feature presentations from local government units (LGUs), policymakers, and development partners on the actual applications of CBMS for poverty monitoring, local planning and budgeting, program impact monitoring and analysis, meeting the millennium development goals (MDGs), and disaster risk reduction management and climate change adaptation. Among the highlights of the conference will be the awarding of outstanding LGUs for their best practices in CBMS implementation, and the launching of the latest CBMS publication titled “The Many Faces of Poverty: Volume 4.” Aside from 3 full-days of plenary sessions on featured topics, the conference will also feature an exhibit of photos, videos, and publications on CBMS.

Interested LGUs from the Philippines are encouraged to submit proposals for papers to be presented during the conference. Proposed papers should be able to document and discuss the actual uses and applications of the CBMS in any (and/or combination) of the following: local planning and budgeting, meeting the MDGs, national and/local program impact monitoring and analysis, disaster risk reduction management, climate change adaptation, and poverty mapping and analysis.

The 2nd CBMS Special Awards, which recognizes LGU innovators on the following categories, is also open: Best CBMS Advocacy Video, Best CBMS Photo, Best CBMS Enumerator’s Uniform, Best CBMS Household Sticker, and Best Documentation of the Use of CBMS. The deadline for submission of entries is on December 31, 2012.

For more information on the forthcoming conference, interested participants may visit the following link: http://www.pep-net.org/events/event/article/9th_cbms_philippines_national_conference/