



City consultations with poor people in Belem, Brazil

Belem on Brazil's north coast is the largest city in the Brazilian Amazon with a working population of 600,000 inhabitants. However, 70 percent of the population live in conditions of poverty with 10 percent living on an income less than US\$ 50 per month.

The city is faced with the problem of urban growth, and land occupation in unplanned settlements. Most of the immigrants live in shacks, and 50 percent of the population is without sewage systems, basic infrastructure, and hygiene. From a crime point of view, they live in a constant state of insecurity.

In 1997 the municipality institutionalized a Participatory Budget for the city and between 1997-1998 the topics considered were those related to the problems of basic sanitation and living conditions. Many people had set up shacks along river banks.

A UMP city consultation started in January 1998 to develop a pilot project aimed at the design and management of a river conservation system that would improve the living conditions of families settled in the Mata Fome basin.

The consultation helped local partners devise a participatory action plan. It included a housing credit programme for the poorest people. But the process ran into some problems like a lack of resources, and difficulty in identifying a management and coordination unit. Some government organs did not show an increased sense of responsibility.

The action plan provided for road improvement in Mata Fome district, better water and sanitation access, and a "better living" programme giving preference to women. The plan was replicated in other parts of the city under a participatory method that supports community participation through seminars, research and other methods. The credit fund formed with resources from the municipality, NGOs and the community was in 2000 expanded to 300 families.

Although the city consultation helped raise public awareness of some of the problems, lessons learned showed that the local government was predisposed against the development of participatory management in the city. It also showed that the Urban Management Programme had to be very well understood by all involved so as not to raise false hopes. Another lesson was that the presence of a local partner such as the UMP-LAC and the existence of a municipal government receptive to popular participation enabled the exchange of experiences with other cities.

