

Annex 4B.6

## Promotion of Recycling in Brazil - A Case Study

Urban Management Programme  
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

UMP/SDC Collaborative Programme on MSWM  
in Low-income Countries

**CASE STUDY**

EDUCATIONAL KIT  
FOR THE  
PROMOTION OF RECYCLING COOPERATIVES  
IN BRAZIL

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## Educational kit for recycling co-ops

### **Cempre: history and mission**

Cempre, a non-profit association, was founded in March 1992 by a group of multinational and major Brazilian corporations committed to promoting recycling principally of packaging. (Cempre in Portuguese stands for *Compromissa Empresarial para Reciclagem* and in English it is known as the Brazilian Recycling Commitment.) Cempre has a staff of four, including the executive director, and an annual budget of US\$500,000, funded entirely by its 13 member companies, which believe that they have an important role to play in promoting recycling and MSWM in Brazil.

Cempre's member companies are: Brahma (beverages sector), Coca-Cola, Enterpa (waste management), Lover Bros., Mercedes-Benz, Nestlé, Pepsi-Cola, Procter & Gamble, Rhone-Poulenc (chemicals), Souza Cruz (tobacco), Suzano (paper), Tetra Pak (packaging), Vega Sopave (waste management).

Cempre's initial projects focused on building a database on the rapidly-growing number of municipal recycling programs in the country as well as putting out publications aimed at helping decision-makers, such as mayors, business executives, school directors, etc., implement programs.

During the research carried out on the municipal programs, it became evident that there is a large amount of informal recycling going on in Brazil via scavengers (catadores in Portuguese). In 1993, Cempre started work on creating a mechanism for increasing the efficiency and income of this underprivileged sector of society. This mechanism materialized in 1994 in the form of an educational kit to help catadores form micro-enterprises. The details of this kit are explained in the following sections.

Due to the tremendous demand for information about solid waste in Brazil, Cempre has seen its mission broaden in two ways: (1) beyond recycling of packaging to include organics and other materials, and (2) beyond recycling to encompass integrated waste management. The culmination of this wider vision was the launching, in 1995, of Brazil's first manual on integrated waste management, created in partnership with the country's foremost research institute, IPT. The first 7,000 manuals were distributed free of charge to Brazil's roughly 5,000 mayors and to universities, state environmental protection agencies and 1400s. The manual is now in its second printing.

In addition to these two main projects, Cempre has put out a dozen other publications, as well as a free bi-monthly newsletter. Cempre has an information hotline that receives about 200 calls per month about recycling, including the latest prices for recyclables all around the country. There is also a databank on solid waste, called EcoData, containing over 5,000 titles, managed by a foundation that is supported by Cempre.

Today, Cempre is the premier center of information on solid waste in Brazil and is one of the most important environmental associations in the country. It is consulted on draft

legislation and was appointed to represent the country at ISO 14000 negotiations.

This ends the background section on Cempre. The following sections deal exclusively with the recycling cooperative project

## **Kit Content**

Cempre has created an educational kit to help non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or city governments give a course on the first steps towards setting up recycling cooperatives.

The kit, dubbed *Coop erar Reciclano Reciclar Coop erando*, is designed as a do-it-yourself or stand-alone course - Cempre does not have the staff nor the resources to execute or even supervise all of the counts that are being administered. One theme of the course is to make scavengers aware that their work is a professional activity that generates wealth and that they should be entitled to greater income generation.

At the heart of the kit is an instructor's manual written for the person who will actually execute a seven-part course to mostly illiterate scavengers on how to make the first steps towards forming a cooperative. This manual explains about the reality in which these people live, about recycling and, most important, gives the step-by-step procedures for conducting each class.

The kit also includes a series of flip charts (with a rigid stand), comic book-style leaflets (for the participants to take home and remember what was discussed in class), a videotape (containing ten videos) and, finally, degree certificates to be given out at the end of the course.

The kit provides practical tips: how to set up a co-op, how recycling and urban cleaning programs function, advice on worker safety and hygiene, highlighting the importance of not dirtying the streets during collection and the need to maintain good relations with the rest of society.

## **Creation of kit**

The educational material was produced in conjunction with the Fraternal Assistance Organization (OAF), a Catholic foundation that set up a successful scavenger co-op in Sao Paulo, called Coopamare. The design for the course structure was carried out by the National Commercial Apprenticeship Service (Senac), which runs Brazil's foremost commercial training schools. The cost of the first 200 kits, around \$30,000, was entirely funded by Cempre.

With this kit, Cempre has created a mechanism for replicating success within Brazil. Cempre did not invent the notion of recycling co-ops. It is a concept that began to be put into practice in the late eighties in several Brazilian cities and earlier in Colombia.

## **Coopamare, model of successful recycling co-op**

Coopamare was founded in Sao Paulo in 1989 with the help of OAF. One of the first test courses using the kit was conducted at Coopamare prior to its nationwide launch in September 1994. Coopamare, with 53 members, is one of Brazil's most successful co-ops. It alone collects 100 tons a month of recyclables, a volume equivalent to half of what the entire official Sao Paulo city recycling program is able to pick up - at much greater cost. (Cempre's study of the Sao Paulo curbside recycling program showed that it cost over \$400 per ton of recyclables collection, compared with \$25 for regular waste collection by trucks. The nationwide average for curbside collection in Brazil is \$262! ton expensive by any standard.)

The co-op members are able to earn an average of \$300 a month (or more, in many cases) from the recyclables that they collect. This is twice the minimum wage in Brazil, and places them in a privileged position considering that half of the country's labor force that earns less than \$150 a month. They are able to achieve these above-average earnings in part because of the wealth of high-grade packaging and newsprint materials found in Sao Paulo's middle-class waste, and because they are able to sell directly to large scrap brokers.

At least 7 other recycling co-ops have sprung up in the more developed Southern region of Brazil, also with handsome boosts in income levels. Some are geared towards street collectors while others are made up of scavengers who operate at dumpsites, picking out the recyclable elements before the rest of the waste is buried. Cempre's kit, though primarily geared toward street collection, can be used for scavengers who used to live at dumpsites that have been closed by government action.

## **Distribution of kit within Brazil**

The kit was officially launched at a ceremony in Rio, with great media coverage. The Brazilian Environment Minister made a point of appearing at the event to give a presentation, though he had not been invited as a speaker, to highlight the importance of this work and, in a unique moment, to hear the presentations from several recycling co-op members (scavengers).

Since the launch in 1994, Cempre has distributed most of the 200 kits to a wide range of organizations. Cempre has determined the profile of those entities eligible to receive the material and execute the course:

- (1) Pxfenmcc is given to NGOs and religious organizations that carry out work with scavengers or with the homeless.
- (2) Approval is also given to those city governments that already have support programs for scavengers and the homeless.
- (3) Consideration is given to those city cleaning departments that seek to improve their services by organizing scavengers. Also important is application of the kit for scavengers that have been removed from open dumps that have been closed for sanitary reasons.

- (4) Rarely as the kit passed on to private-sector firms, especially scrap dealers, as these companies will seek to further exploit these workers.

Through the use of this ca-op kit, Cempre has fostered the creation of roughly two dozen associations (the first step prior to a cooperative) in Brazil. The most successful experiences have been those where there has been strong material support from the municipal government and a local NOOS Cempre maintains contact with those entities that have received the kit and keeps a file on the progress (or lack of such) of each organization in setting up an association.

In addition, kits have been sent to Argentina, Colombia, India, Puerto Rico (U.S.) and Uruguay.

### **Problems addressed by Cempre's Kit**

Cempre's kit helps mitigate some of the scavengers' problems:

- (1) **Unemployment** - Scavenging is proliferating in both developing and developed nations as a result of two trends: the rising tide of unemployment and the "enrichment" of municipal solid waste (more aluminum, paper, plastic, glass, etc.). As long as both trendlines continue upward, there will be an ever-growing number of scavengers.  
Recycling co-ops provide employment opportunities in developing countries as a whole. The kit helps provide a greater source of income for the recyclables that scavengers collect
- (2) **Rising cost of sanitation services** - Linked to the growth in solid waste generation is the necessity for more comprehensive, and more expensive, city cleaning services. While Cempre considers that more sophisticated sanitation services are a sign of maturity, increased cost do not always mean better services. This is especially true when attempting to stimulate recycling. *Curbside* collection programs, when run exclusively by city governments, tend to have high costs. Organized scavengers have proved to be a cost-saver in recycling initiatives in Brazil reducing the need for expensive collection and separation equipment.
- (3) **Low Incomes** - In Brazil, co-ops have improved the average incomes of participating scavengers by at least 50%.

The current structure of the traditional scrap industry in developing countries presupposes the exploitation of scavengers by a long chain of intermediaries who earn the real profits from the recycling industry. While scavengers can often earn incomes that are above those of the majority of the population (to the surprise of many), they have not fully realized their potential income.

- (4) Social development - By forming cooperatives, scavengers make a major step in reintegrating themselves with the rest of society. This kit provides the first step towards such integration and eventual political awareness. The course does not intend to encourage individuals to take up scavenging as a permanent source of income, but rather it seeks to offer a better *way* of life for both co-op members and their children.
- (5) Poor self-perception - Scavengers have poor self-perception. They do not realize the great benefit that they are bringing to the environment. Because of their lack of self-esteem, and their negative public image, they have little respect for the rest of society as well. This translates into carelessness in opening trash bags on the curbside, not respecting traffic regulations, among other practices that entail sanitary and safety problems. Lack of self-esteem also hinders their ability to fight for their rights as productive workers, a condition fostered by the small-time scrap dealers who buy from them.

The kit, as part of Cempre's overall strategy to boost recycling, focuses on the environmental benefits of their work.

- (6) Dump closings - In certain countries, such as Brazil, the trend is for cities to close dumps and send the waste to new sanitary landfills that have the proper controls to handle the flow of leachate and gases. In Recife, Brazil, for example, more than 1,000 scavengers live off of a major dump. The closing of any given dump, on which hundreds of scavengers may earn a living, has catastrophic consequences on the communities that live around them. The kit is being used in Brazil to help train these people so that they may be able to form co-ops that can separate specific recyclable portions of the previously-collected waste.