

## URBAN NOTES

## THEMATIC GROUP ON SERVICES TO THE URBAN POOR



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## ***BARRIONET: An Urban Development Alternative***

BarrioNet's main objective is to interconnect electronically marginal communities that share common problems such as, lack of services, environmental degradation and violence by using information technology and communication strategies. In other words, it gives these communities a social use to benefit themselves and implement "telecentros", or automated centers, as knowledge-sharing tools to solve their problems and increase their living standards.

The BarrioNet project jointly with three urban slums of Ecuador is leading a pilot project that aims to begin a communitarian, social and personal development, and urban upgrading process. Later, this experience will be the main thrust to develop a project at the national level in the Latin America and the Caribbean region that will be distributed at the regional network.

The pilot project is coordinated and executed by the Chasquinet Foundation which has built automated centers in three marginal urban communities: *Itchimbía* and *Panecillo* in the city of Quito and *Guacharaca* in the city of Esmeraldas.

Each computerized center that uses Information and Communication Technologies daily has its own particular qualities and jointly shares the same mission: "a *telecentro* is the way that people in the community will increase their self-sufficiency and improve their quality of life".



**Itchimbía**

Through the automated centers, the BarrioNet project offers the opportunity to improve the levels of education, to gain abilities related to work and construct, and/or to fortify the individual and communitarian capabilities, simultaneously attending the main problems of low-income communities such as nutrition, health, shelter, and drinking water.

The spheres of action, activities and roles of the Information Technology and automated centers can be precisely defined based on daily activities and through the quotidian sharing of experience. We will now look at how an automated center supports and strengthens the activities of the community's development and how it creates a space to attend its problems and dynamics. The levels of self-help have increased in some of the following aspects:

**Health** - Through the use of a CD-ROM, the communities have access to education in health, illness prevention and specifically, to knowledge of issues such as nutrition, hygiene and sanitation. The information technology tools support this first phase of data base creation and speed

up the process for medical records. In BarrioNet communities, nutrition campaigns have been designed but unfortunately, they have been ignored before the implementation of the automated centers.

**Education** - The *telecentros* contribute, with the capacity building services of using a CD-ROM and multimedia encyclopedias, to the assistance of the basic reading and writing skills of children and young people in the community.

Elementary education is supported with special software programs- language, instruction, literature, geography, history, mathematics and sciences. BarrioNet uses educational software designed in other *telecentros* that are exchanged through *Red Latinoamericana y Caribeña, Somos Telecentros*: <http://www.tele-centros.org/>. One of these belongs to the material designed by *Joven Club* of Cuba, which has developed specific programs for pre-school children.

Six months ago, low-income children did not have access to this type of information and material. Capacity-building plans have been developed for children from different sectors where *telecentros* have been established.

**Capacity building** - In each of the *telecentros* a group of operators is trained. Each group is in a constant process of training, since they are in charge of working directly with children, young and adult people in the community.

**Working area** - The *telecentros* support the communities by converting, collaborating and strengthening the activities that the groups organize. The members of the community are trained in management and organizational principles as well as in technical skills such as carpentry, plumbing, manual work, etc.

**Urban up-grading** - The *telecentros* support community work and therefore the creation of joint projects and the seek funding to improve their work spaces. The IT tools help them develop campaigns directed to local and central governments. The communities use the *telecentros* to support security plans and to form community patrols.

### **What we've learned...**

In the past 6 months, there have been considerable changes in the communities. It can be stated, for example, that the levels of organization are higher than those that existed when the project started. Nowadays, the communities gather around the *telecentros* to develop their own activities destined to improve their quality of life.

### **Some lessons learned**

- It is important to structure a circle of learning, with internal links and local/regional networks to contribute in the effort of knowledge exchange and strengthen each *telecentros*.

- Each community responds to its own dynamic, therefore vertical implementation models cannot be imposed, even if these represent successful stories in other spaces. Each experience is different and from each experience lessons are learned of what is and is not supposed to be done. This represents “learn by doing.”
- Each community defines and decides, according to its needs, the use and support they’ll provide to its activities.
- The capacity building processes responds to the internal dynamics of each community. The process should be based on a holistic system, in other words, an integrated system that groups technical training, working capacity building and human development.
- The capacity building process will always be more than the diffusion of technical aspects. It should respond to strategies that involve people and motivate community work in the medium and long term.
- Communities need to be accompanied in the process, in order for the organism that supports the implementation of the telecentros to follow-up and monitor such process.
- To function as a facilitator, the intervening organism should earn the community’s trust and respect.
- The first step for the community to take over the project, is for the community to define and conceptualize what a telecentro is and how will it support its development.
- Strategic alliances with organizations related to community development will reinforce the works in progress and will prevent duplication of efforts, securing actions future actions.

Barrionet’s future will disseminate the materials in the articulation of the Latin American and Caribbean network that groups telecentros in the project to create a knowledge-sharing circle to strengthen each telecentro and help build up the community.

### What the people in the barrio evaluate the project so far....



#### **Paper recycling cooperative**

*Juan Carlos Guato*, a member of the paper recycling cooperative “we are using the internet to develop marketing strategies and sell our products”... *Itchimbia Barrio*.

### Educative Process

*Ivonne Montaña, Telecentre manager of the Guacharaca Barrio.*

“We educators have access to pedagogical materials to teach our children which we wouldn’t have otherwise. We hope to develop our own materials and share them with the schools in other barrios”.



### Interchange of experiences

*Zoila Caiza, Panecillo telecentre.*

“ I share experiences on the barrio problems that we are facing with other friend in Colombia and Peru. I am exchanging ideas with them in particular in the area of waste management and community gardens... It is good to solve problems together...”

### Strengthening the Barrio decision making process

*Eduardo Telecentre management in Itchimbia*

“In Itchimbia the basic training in ICTs brings together the families....”

“The telecentres is the focal point for the Barrio Assembly to make decisions....”



For further information on Barrionet, go to: <http://www.barrionet.org/>

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