

# Amazonian Sewage: A Step Beyond "Save the Rainforest!"

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Q: What are the obstacles impeding the implementation of systems of basic sanitation in the urban centers of Lesser Developed Countries (LDCs) and what are the means to overcome these obstacles?

A: The implementation of basic sanitation in LDC urban centers is impeded by limited domestic financial resources, inadequate physical structures of urban centers, technological and administrative weaknesses, and government corruption. The international environmental movement, by focusing on a limited definition of the global commons, has also failed to provide an incentive for the promotion of basic sanitation projects. Only by adopting a holistic approach in addressing environmental and social problems, both at the local and international levels, will the importance of basic sanitation be known and publicly recognized.

This thesis analyzes the obstacles to the implementation of basic sanitation in the urban centers of LDCs. Sanitation projects are ideal in furthering the goals of the new international environmental paradigm which requires the consideration socio-environmental factors. Basic sanitation systems contribute to the sustainable management of the natural environment, and also provide equitable development consistent with the recent concern over environmental justice.

The Brazilian Amazonian city of Belem is used as a case study, both because Belem houses many of the social and political conditions typical of LDC urban centers, and because the Amazon is an area which is currently the hub of intense international environmental concern regarding the preservation of tropical rainforests and biodiversity. Examining the *urban* environmental problems provides an enlightening contrast to the current international environmental movement's limited focus on primary forest and species preservation.

The traditional definitions of "development" and the "global commons" have been dominated by the values and interests of the Western Industrialized Nations. In order for the international environmental movement to escape the same "Tragedy of the Commons" cycle which it purports to amend, the inherent biases in the definitions must be recognized and modified. Basic sanitation is necessary for health reasons, environmental sustainability, and economic considerations. However, social, political, and economic inequities found throughout Brazil, and specifically within Belem, create an atmosphere that is not conducive to the implementation of integrated systems of sanitation. Obstacles which hamper the implementation of municipal sanitation services include problems of expense, the inadequate physical structure of urban centers, technical and administrative weaknesses, and government corruption.

Because it is the oldest, largest, and most influential lending institution of its type, the World Bank clearly has a role in promoting lending for sanitation systems. The Bank can facilitate in the implementation of an integrated system of sanitation by providing financial, administrative and technological assistance. However, I caution against relying on such foreign institutions as a panacea for the sanitation crisis. There is a need for a new paradigm for national development. This would necessitate simultaneous changes at both the grassroots and policy making levels within LDCs. These internal efforts should also be reinforced by redirecting and expanding the energies of the international environmental movement.