

6. Public Health engineering in detention places

ICRC: Evaristo Oliveira

The living conditions in some detentions places in developing countries are extremely dangerous for the well-being of the people there.

Evaristo Oliveira discussed the importance of assistance to this group of people, and he stressed the fact that there are international agreements and guidelines which ensure dignity when living under these kinds of situations. The strategies presented were mainly related to the improvement of environmental health.

- *Highlighted points:*

- o The standards and norms for the environmental health in detention places are difficult to apply when there is no control of basic aspects such as the number of people living in the prison (i.e. overcrowding).
- o In many parts of the world, for instance, it is possible to find families living in the prison with the detainee, resulting in an even higher population density.
- o
- o Denunciation – key strategy but not realistic in practice, as it can make it difficult to have access to places (prisons) where help is needed.
- o The main source of disease is through the person – to – person contact, due to the over population in the place.
- o The health status of the people in prison can affect the public health of the surrounding population also – detention places can be the source of diseases.
- o
- o The over occupation in prison provokes emergency conditions with negative health consequences.
- o A strategy tool to reduce the problems mentioned before can be the creation of a guide-book for prison in parallel with discussions with the authorities in identifying the problems and possible solutions. It will cover all the aspects related to physical conditions for environmental health.

- *Discussion*

- o Premises Extension – It is not a good solution in the long term, after the extension is done, there are more people living there. The solution should be at human level (conscience, culture, habits)
- o One good strategy could be social pressure; by doing that the authorities in charge of the prison should take action regarding living conditions and overcrowding. N.B.: The ICRC keeps all aspects of discussions or negotiations with the authorities confidential.
- o Specific needs of categories of detainees are taken into consideration (e.g.: children with women) though the main infrastructures and WatSan services are similar for women and men
- o Gender – It was necessary to advocate for men well-being (in general, more space was available for women) as often the reality shows that overcrowding is most frequent in male prisons.