PRACTICA FOUNDATION

Parking of the "Hippodrome" in Bamako

Online Emptying Services Comparator

Market centralization pilots aiming to improve pit emptying services in Antananarivo (Madagascar) and Bamako (Mali).

In most African towns, the fecal sludge removal sector is dominated by agreements among informal service providers. This situation hampers any improvement to the quality of these services. Due to a lack of precise information, households resort to the nearest sludge removal service provider without being in the position to choose among the ones that best meet their needs. In Antananarivo (Madagascar) and Bamako (Mali), Practica is developing comparators that orient users towards the better offers. These tools aim to improve the accessibility and quality of the services by catalyzing the introduction of true competition.

Challenge

In 2016, over 70% of the households in the Communes I and IV of Bamako found the price of sludge removal services excessive1. In Antananarivo, the price of sludge removal services can vary by a factor three (between 40 to 120 euros/m^3) for identical services.

Furthermore, abusive offers are noted to endure in these two towns, e.g. providers empty the pits only partially, they only remove the supernatant, do not follow basic hygiene rules or overcharge the services. Lastly, providers are extremely rare to advise users on the design and effective use of the pits (e.g. initial filling).

Antananarivo and Bamako are representative of the urban contexts where neither the rules set by the authorities nor the regulations of the informal market allow for the emergence of equitable, adequate and sustainable services. On the contrary, the quality of sludge removal services in those towns has stagnated at an extremely low level.

Regulation offer by introducing competition

The regulation of sludge removal by means of comparators orients the demand towards providers that are pre-selected based on quality criteria (equipment used, disposal site, etc.).

Partner sludge removal service providers are motivated by the prospect to increase the volume of their services. In Antananarivo, 60% of the preselected providers adhered to and accepted to pay a commission of 5 to 10% on the services sold via the comparator.

With every incoming order, the mechanism of competition between providers is activated according to algorithms matching the local context.

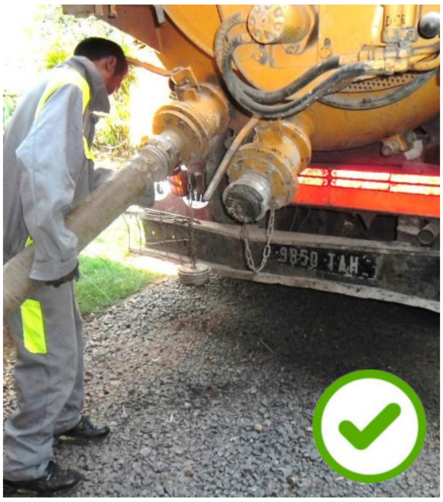

Fig.1 *Partner service provider in Antananarivo*

Fig.2 *Most of informal emptiers are not preselected*

(1) Etude d'analyse organisationnelle du marché et du financement des GIE et entrepreneurs vidangeurs à Bamako, Protos Mali, 2016

The following criteria are used to orient clients towards a particular provider:

- **The distance** between the sludge removal service provider and the client, which impacts on the waiting time and cost of transport
- **The access to the user's pit** sorts the list of compatible providers based on their vehicle (truck, van, mini tractor, tricycle). It also impacts on the cost of sludge extraction
- **The type of services requested**, some providers are equipped to unclog/ pump thick sludge, some are not
- **The availability of the providers**, based on their schedules and order book.

Centralizing the market

During the start-up phase, comparators should centralize sufficient suppliers and buyers andturn prospective clients into actual ones.

This positioning works well in the emptying market in Madagascar and Mali, where the promotion of sludge removal services was limited so far. Apart from highlighting the condition of the trucks on the roads, no commercial argument such as rate, range, or quality of the service used to be provided.

In order to capture the demand, comparators can use different modes of promotion: radio spots, local press, public posters, Facebook pages, etc.

The marketing aspects that users appreciate most vary for different contexts: In Bamako the capacity to efficiently empty traditional pits ranked highest; whereas in Antananarivo users expected services mostly to be affordable and clean.

***Fig.3** Screenshot of the Facebook interface of the Antananarivo comparator. It allows for requesting a service or any advice.*

Funding and management

There are various options to facilitate a comparator service such as a call center, website interface or SMS consult service. The choice for this depends on the local context.

The comparators developed so far function like a call center that can be reached by telephone and internet. The enquiries are directly assessed using geo-referencing software, and clients are linked to providers proposing services suited to their needs.

Depending on the volume and characteristics of the particular market, the operation of the comparator service could be more or less automated.

A semi-automated comparator service requires an initial investment of approximately 5,000 euros and monthly expenses in the range of 400 Euros/month (including promotion activities).

Considering the impact in terms of regulation, comparators could be set up by public authorities themselves or private operators.

In Bamako, the center will be accommodated by Commune I whose collaboration starts with the preselection of service providers integrated in the catalogue. The latter will adhere to the service on a voluntary basis, against the payment of a commission per removal to cover service costs.

***Fig.4** Operator of the call center in Antananarivo*

For further information, please contact **Xavier Gras** at xavier.gras@practica.org