

**"Peru and the World
at the Dawn of 2012"
Report of a Listening Post
held in January**



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives', that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1.

1. Reiterative corruption and violence

Participants were concerned about how corruption and violence are currently on display on a day to day basis and it's at risk of becoming something normal for us. As one of the participants mentioned: "I turn on the TV and everything I see is how corruption is a reiterative subject, this congressman did this, these other people are killing a man in their hometown...it's unbelievable". Other participants joined in the frustration, mentioning that even though the years pass, society tends to stay the same towards this issue. "We see how our own congress is a circus, and this so-called 'parliamentary immunity' is the best way for corrupt people to become politicians and get away with whatever they want, there is no real desire of exercising politics for a greater good".

The use of violence was another topic explored in relation to corruption, because both seem to be 'normal' nowadays, and the concern of how others might see us: "What kind of image are we giving the world as Peruvians? All they see in the news about us probably has to do with people burning airports and blocking roads like they did in Cajamarca¹, with that and much more we definitely keep sending the image of a third world country, and there's not much we can do about it".

The conversation went around on how 'others don't have any respect', how 'they try to take advantage of situations for their own benefit', hurt people and damage and destroy private or public property.

2. Social (in)difference

The second theme had to do with participants concern on social difference, which later on started transforming into social indifference.

Participants were concerned with the huge differences present on different topics: education, access to healthcare, information, among others.

This was the 'hot' topic, because it raised different perceptions of people towards Peruvian society. One of the participants mentioned, "I don't even know how we end up with people who can't even speak Spanish in the congress, we have people with no education nor capacities to lead juggling with our country, we have poor people who are ignorant and uneducated and are not willing to go out of their condition". This comment raised a response by other participants, who claimed that the 'ignorance' and 'uneducation' of others are the result of our own attitudes towards other people who are not like 'us' and to start exploring in a deeper layer that has to do with discrimination: "The truth is they probably didn't have the same luck you and I had growing up, being poor is not a condition of a person is the condition of their context, and living in Lima is probably the best context we can have within Peru, it's easy to label people from lower social classes as ignorants". Lima was later on referred as 'the bubble', and the 'Lima bubble' is often use to refer that people who live in the capital and are not able to see beyond their direct context, and usually tend to forget that the reality of Peru goes beyond Lima. One of the participants mentioned the 'Lima mentality' as a fact to be taken into account: "The 'Lima mentality' has to do with me thinking about myself within my own city context, has to do with middle and upper class getting a chance to access schools, healthcare, and general information which is harder to get in other places. It is well known that smaller cities have less options than we do, or at least that's what we think". This phrase also made space for discussion to whether we're being capable of seeing beyond Lima, and what does it mean to 'look' at 'other realities' and comprehend that more than half of Peru's population is still struggling to make ends meet (if they make it).

They also talked about healthcare in Peru, and how places far away from the big cities have limited access. One of the participants mentioned: "It is very common to see a lot of medical negligence going on in rural hospitals and it goes unnoticed, here at least people complain or go to the press to get attention. And as we don't see what goes on there, it's like it does not happen".

3. The emergence of social change

The third topic recognized by the group had to do with the steps that are being taken towards initiatives of social change: "There are many different organizations emerging in order to promote social change and to make a difference, a good difference but they still need to be known". Two organizations were mentioned, both of them coming from civil society's initiatives: *Enseña Peru* (an organization that teaches kids from different cities around Peru, the people in charge are graduate students of diverse disciplines) and *Un techo para mi país* (an organization that builds wood houses for people with limited resources). They mentioned a third initiative, which comes from a municipality: "Miraflores² has started their own educational program on the streets, they teach drivers to respect the people who walk on the street, and not to honk all the time, they use mimes in the traffic lights with signs and we actually do pay attention to what they have to show".

These three initiatives mentioned are different approaches towards generating social changes whether it's through education or through building a better place for people to live in they are clear examples of the necessity of some members of society to act. Three of the participants acknowledge that it was "nice" to hear positive comments about initiatives going on around us, and how it's always easier to point out the bad and the ugly: "We have the capacity to name things that are going wrong very fast and very forward, but we're not used to saying the good things as easy". Another participant added, "This makes me hope that we can actually *do* better".

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and, developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world, their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

Analysis and Hypothesis 1

Analysis: The group found it easy to point out and blame congressmen and government authorities of corrupt acts, without reflecting much on why we as citizens keep choosing over and over again people who reinforce this tendency. Governments and congressmen may come and go, but we keep allowing the system to transit within the 'jungle law' path, violent acts are starting to be perceived as ways of negotiation instead of finding possibilities for dialogue. Etymology shows a clear link between 'corruption' (to destroy, spoil) and 'violence' (force to inflict injury or damage).

Hypothesis: The 'jungle law' has become not only a common concept, but also a common modus operandi within Peruvian society, where anyone can do anything without taking any responsibility. Within this context, we tend to blame government, authorities and others of corrupt and violent acts that are repetitively presented by the media, which results in a collective compulsion of a sense of helplessness, resignation and frustration towards the reality we face.

Analysis and Hypothesis 2

Analysis: The lack of capacity to truly name issues of social differences and acknowledging them makes it harder of us as a society to really work on them. The idea of the 'Lima bubble' is the very first layer of many complex dynamics regarding social (in)difference: there is the location difference (whether you live in the coast, the highlands or the jungle), the social class difference (lower, middle, upper class) and levels of access to services such as education and healthcare. With this situation, we do have some initiatives that still need to be more widespread in order to get people's attention and become stronger.

Hypothesis: Members of society recognize the existence of a social barrier ('Lima bubble') that splits Lima from the 'other cities/towns' which leads people to think of Lima as a parallel reality that only considers middle and upper class as 'educated' and 'important', reinforcing the belief that 'being poor is a condition you'll have to live with'. As a result, we suffer from social negligence, that leads us directly to a state characterized by a strong sense of not caring/daring to face the wider reality. However,

society is taking 'babysteps' towards creating awareness of this negligence but also awareness of the capacity to act through different initiatives in order to start a path for real and sustainable social change.

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1. The past months there have been a lot of riots in mining areas in Peru, specially in Cajamarca, the government imposed a state of emergency there to try and stop the ongoing violence.
2. Miraflores is a district in Lima.