Interview: Byron Ruiz Romero – Managing Director, Development Bank of Ecuador (Banco de Desarollo del Ecuador)



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Dr. Byron Ruiz Romero of the Banco de Desarrollo del Ecuador discusses the role of the organization within Ecuador and the major public health issues currently facing the country.

The Development Bank changed its name from 'Banco de Estado' to 'Banco de Desarollo' in 2015. How does this reflect the role that you play in Ecuador today?

The Development Bank of Ecuador has the aim of promoting, according to state policies, sustainable development with social and regional equity, promoting territorial competitiveness, through the offer of financial solutions and technical assistance services, and improving the quality of life of the population. Our mission is to consolidate ourselves as the reference bank of excellence in the financing of public investment for our clients, who are autonomous decentralized governments. The change of name is a mere legal procedure according to Executive Decree No. 867 of December 30, 2015.

What are your main ongoing projects that you would like to highlight?

There are several initiatives that the Development Bank of Ecuador is actively working on. One of the most impactful is probably 'agua y saneamiento para todos' (water and sanitation for all). In

the framework of the first stage of the “Water and Sanitation for All” mission, the National Government, together with the Development Bank of Ecuador, the Water Secretariat, and the Secretariat of Planning and Development who were chosen to carry out this initiative, signed a letter of commitment of financing for a total amount of USD 275 million, which will benefit more than 1.6 million inhabitants of 55 cantons nationwide this 2018.

Moreno’s government has put health as a priority for Ecuadorians. What is your assessment of the importance of public health in Ecuador?

The first and foremost objective of the Ecuadorian government is to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of the population. One of the structural causes of poor health is lack of good quality basic services in the country which has negative repercussions on the health of the people. Lack of drinkable water, impacts above all the most vulnerable and poor segment of the Ecuadorian population. In most cases, this results in chronic diseases and when they are not directly linked to poor quality of water, the reason is often malnutrition. This is and must be the government’s first goal. To this purpose, the government of Ecuador has set up a social program called ‘menos pobreza, más desarollo’ (less poverty, more development) which will benefit more than 74,000 families living in extreme poverty.

Can you talk us through some of the projects that you are currently carrying out in the field of health?

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Most of our health-related initiatives are linked to the abovementioned project ‘agua y saneamiento para todos’. However, we are currently also financing two other projects. One project is aimed at improving the regional system of drinking water in the region of Esmeraldas and its surrounding areas. It is safe to say that it is the most important health intervention in the country over the last 20 years. The project will benefit the cantons of Rioverde, Atacames and Esmeraldas. The improvement of the regional water system was possible thanks to an investment of the National Government of USD 130 million, with additional resources coming from the Inter-American Development Bank. This project, which began in April 2016, will have been accomplished by April 2018 and will forever change the lifestyle of the population of Esmeraldas.

The second is called ‘Regional Drinkable Water Project Pesillo – Imbabura’. The Undersecretariat of Drinking Water and Sanitation Services of Ecuador has designed the Regional Drinkable Water Project Pesillo to meet the high demand of rural communities in the sector and achieve continuous water services of adequate quality for human consumption that improve health conditions life of

the population. This project contemplates the rehabilitation of 52 potable water systems that benefit more than 150 communities located in the provinces of Imbabura and Pichincha.

Ecuador has made considerable progress with economic, social and human development in the past decade, but persistent challenges remain to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. How does the Development Bank keep track of its activities to reach the sustainable goals?

We have technical supervisors that monitor the projects and ensure that everything is carried out to the highest possible standards. For the Development Bank of Ecuador is extremely important that all the procedures comply with national laws, in order to guarantee transparency, competitiveness as well as quality and efficiency. These technical teams work from the six branches that we have opened up in six different cities.

Clean water leads to better health which, in turn, leads to a more sustainable healthcare system. How does the 'programa agua y saneamiento para todos' contirbute to a more sustainable healthcare?

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At the Development Bank of Ecuador we truly believe in preventive health which, as I mentioned earlier, is mostly caused by poor services. The state allocates more than USD 310 million a year to treat water-related diseases. With our project we are alleviating that state's work and its purse.

What are the challenges that you would like the current government to address to make the Ecuadorian economy even stronger?

For us it is fundamental that the trust and the confidence that the current political structure is conveying will lead to more foreign direct investment not only in the field of development, but we would also like to see more foreign companies coming here and set up shop in Ecuador. At the moment we have a dollarized economy, which ultimately makes Ecuador a stable place to come and invest. This is a good moment for Ecuador and I truly believe we are moving in the right direction.

How advanced is the Ecuadorian public's understanding of the role of the Development Bank and the concept of 'development' and 'sustainable goals'?

The Development Bank of Ecuador is in the position and has the power to finance all types of projects – from small to big. Moreover, the Development Bank of Ecuador is a solution provider to

the Ecuadorian population and for this reason the perception of its engagement and commitment to the country is very positive. We finance not only water-related projects, but also we greatly contribute in the amelioration of rural areas and urban structures – such markets and so on. The range of our activity is as diverse as our client portfolio.

Some describe Ecuador as a ‘jewel to be discovered’. How do you communicate, or plan to communicate, ‘Brand Ecuador’ to the world?

Our country truly is a place worth visiting. Thanks to its compact size, within hours you can travel from beaches (Costa), to mountains (Sierra), to tropical forests (Oriente) and, of course, the well-known Galapagos Islands. Because of its immense geographical diversity, Ecuador has been described as a microcosm of South America. Everyone who comes here runs the risk of staying.

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