2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

COLLABORATE • LEARN • ADAPT

Case Title:

Fostering Transparent Public Dialogue in Colombia

Name:

Catalia Nossa - Erika Pareja

Organization:

DAI/Colombia - Partners for Transparency

Summary:

Partners for Transparency (PfT) is a five-year Activity (2020 – 2025) that leverages local stakeholders' expertise, engagement, and unique positions of influence to promote a culture of transparency and accountability in Colombia. PfT´s ultimate goal is to strengthen trust between citizens and the State in 15 municipalities and three districts from six Departments in Colombia. PfT has national and subnational partners who provide technical assistance to different actors in the transparency and anti-corruption ecosystem, including government authorities, journalists, academia, and civil society.

A key value proposition is "Fostering Transparent Public Dialogue in Colombia", which requires informed citizens and public officers, who are open and prepared to show the results of their administrations. Therefore, the technical team from DAI, Foro Nacional por Colombia and Transparencia por Colombia designed and implemented a value chain that includes four initiatives to create sustainable transformations, namely:

a. The Citizen School for Transparency and Anti-Corruption,
b. The Citizen Agendas for Transparency and Anti-Corruption,
c. The Citizen Oversight Initiatives; and,
d. The Public Administration Strategy to strengthen accountability in local administrations.

In summary, PfT has developed a value chain to strengthen civil society, involving diverse actors, promoting citizen participation, public advocacy, and social oversight to promote transparency in Colombia. On the other hand, working with the mayoral teams on how public information should be provided and how citizen participation should be promoted.

1. **WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) or opportunities prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?**

PfT is dedicated to promoting transparency, accountability, and the reduction of corruption in Colombia. It achieves this by supporting transparency and accountability initiatives at the national and local levels, fostering citizen participation, strengthening oversight entities, and cultivating a culture of transparency and accountability within civil society.

PfT collaborates with five national partners and three subnational partners to provide technical assistance across Colombia's transparency and anti-corruption ecosystem. The Activity beneficiaries include national and subnational government authorities in the prioritized regions, national oversight authorities, journalists, academia, civil society organizations, and citizens at large. Notable permanent national partners include Transparencia por Colombia (the National Chapter of Transparency International), Foro Nacional por Colombia (a leading NGO promoting citizen participation), the School of Government of the Universidad de Los Andes, La Silla Vacía (a digital platform for investigative journalism), and DAI. The 15 municipalities PfT works with are territories that have experienced armed conflict – called Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (PDET per its name in Spanish), due to their extreme vulnerability (four out of five people live in poverty) and weak institutional capacity. The remaining three municipalities are larger districts with extreme poverty conditions where fundamental rights are not guaranteed. For example, Cartagena increased from 34.3 percent of people living in poverty in 2019 to 47.8 percent in 2020, and extreme poverty increased from three to 12.6 percent. Similarly, in Cali the percentage of people living in poverty increased from 21.9 to 36.3 percent in the same period.
The Activity works in post-conflict regions where citizens do not trust the state due to many decades of neglect. For this reason, PfT's theory of change seeks to recover the relationship between the State and the citizens as a step to strengthen democracy. In Colombia the right to participate was guaranteed 30 years ago, however the country is still developing the methods to guarantee citizen participation in the context of serious security problems and armed conflict.

2. **What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

External Collaboration

Adaptive Management

3. **HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

PfT is working on the fourth question from the USAID Learning Agenda (2022-2026) "ANTI-CORRUPTION | How can USAID work with host countries, interagency colleagues, and other development actors to address systemic corruption through multisectoral approaches?".

Specifically, the value chain contains the following steps:
1. The identification of the organizations and leaders with the greatest impact on the promotion of transparency and citizen participation.
2. The selection of the participants for the School for Transparency and Anti-Corruption. Through the School, communities learn how to use legal instruments for territorial planning and select the issues they want to oversee.
3. The community also identified the problems that their municipalities face in promoting transparency and propose solutions. This becomes the Anti-Corruption Citizen Agenda. Citizen Agendas are presented to local administrations to voice their concerns. Mayors design their accountability processes based on the topics that are reflected in the Citizen Agendas.
4. Finally, the organizations created within the Citizen School selected projects for citizen oversight. Simultaneously, Citizen Agendas for Transparency and Anti-Corruption (ACTA) were developed as a tool for citizen advocacy towards public authorities. These agendas aim to identify issues related to corruption and lack of transparency, leading to the design of proposals and actions to address these problems collaboratively. PfT incorporated ACTA into the Citizen School, enabling the practical application of concepts associated with transparency, corruption, public administration, and social oversight. During this stage, PfT conducts assessments to identify the main issues affecting communities, and prioritize topics.

The assessments to identify issues facilitated the creation of the municipal Citizen Agendas, where the targeted regions prioritized topics to be monitored and promote dialogue with local authorities. The municipalities most affected by the armed conflict focused on monitoring the implementation of the Peace Agreement, while Districts emphasized differential approaches for women, youth, and indigenous populations. The objective of these Citizen Agendas is to generate transformations in municipalities, influence public decision-making, and ensure access to public information.

In addition to promoting citizen participation, ACTA materializes through exercises of social oversight to address the issues identified. This includes, recognizing the need for citizen training in the exercise of oversight, as it requires knowledge of various topics such as building infrastructure and handling of public finances. PfT has provided support to approximately 20 citizen oversight initiatives, aiming to train and empower citizens to effectively engage in an informed and impactful process.

Additionally, PfT uses the following CLA components to support the Transparent Public Dialogue:
Collaborating:
 PfT uses system maps to determine the most relevant actors to engage in the Transparent Public Dialogue value chain.
 PfT hosts internal and external collaboration sessions between the partners to streamline processes and reach consensus based on their needs.
Learning:
 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) is implemented through a MEL Committee that shares its indicator results and achievements each quarter. In this space, the team discusses critical assumptions and risks that endanger or enhance their performance.
 PfT has a knowledge management approach that is guided through a series of tools, including the way information should be managed and shared.
Adapting:
 PfT regularly implements the problem-based Political Economy Analyses (PEA) to provide a clear landscape to achieve Activity results.
 The Manager for Regional Transparency and Participation hosts technical committees with the different regions.

4. RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.

We know you may have answers in mind for both questions; However please choose one to highlight as part of this case story

A. DEVELOPM ENT RESULTS

During the first two years, PfT has trained over 500 individuals in a pedagogical strengthening process designed by civil society, for civil society. The objective is to enhance participation in the definition of institutional rules. Furthermore, we have ensured that the 15 municipalities and three districts PfT works with have a tool to prioritize specific follow-up topics while promoting dialogue with local authorities. For example,

- In Buenaventura, where despair was rampant, we managed to create a safe and trustworthy space through citizen agendas. This allowed people to participate, and reflect on what was happening without fear of being singled out.

- In Cartagena, for the first time, the local administration has characterized the needs, interests, and priorities of the Community Action Boards to strengthen their relationship with the State. This facilitates greater opportunities in procurement with these community organizations, while building their capacity to fulfill their constitutional and legal functions.

- In San Onofre, activities were identified to facilitate accountability through clear and inclusive language strategies. The accountability process was sensitized with a PDET approach focused on the management of programs and projects in rural areas.

- In Carmen de Bolivar, leaders from the mountain regions developed a cartographic analysis that allowed for the identification of ecosystem services and the projection of actions to improve dialogue and monitoring between civil society, territorial entities, and environmental authorities.

- In Tierralta, for the first time, the Municipal Mayor's Office held an accountability meeting between the government team and citizens. One leader stated "For the first time I truly feel the State is listening to our needs".

- In Miranda, local accountability was carried out by addressing each of the prioritized issues in the Citizens' Agenda.

- In Corinto, thanks to the actions of the citizen agenda, a public policy for animal protection was approved.

PfT has also provided support to approximately 40 citizen oversight initiatives, the majority of which have emerged from the process of building the Citizen Agendas. Our aim is for these initiatives to be effective, well-informed, and have a significant and sustainable impact.

5. **ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?**

 Working with different actors regarding the same issue is challenging, especially when it comes to a phenomenon such as corruption, which has traditionally been conceived as a problem exclusive to the public sector and whose solutions have traditionally been aimed at strengthening regulations and sanctions. Thus, the PfT partners' efforts to strengthen civil society are joint efforts rather than isolated interventions, which are expected to have a greater impact on building a relationship between the State and citizens based on trust.
 Acknowledge that each territory has its own dynamics and the same methodology may produce different results in different places.
 To achieve high participation in these spaces, it is necessary to have resources to support transportation and food costs for the rural population.
 There are regions where it’s not possible to talk about anti-corruption due to security problems. However, you can talk about the promotion of transparency as this is a popular goal for any public official.
 This is an intervention that needs time for the process to consolidate. Results do not happen in the short term. It is also necessary to budget for possible failures as part of the learning curve in each case.
 Citizen Agendas should prioritize the issues or problems they wish to oversee in order to achieve greater impact.