



From small communities in rural Mexico to urban metropolises in Brazil and Colombia, citizen participation initiatives have emerged to improve policies, laws and the public agenda to ultimately enhance accountability and social justice.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LATIN AMERICA: INNOVATIONS TO STRENGTHEN GOVERNANCE

SUMMARY

Boosted in part by the region's democratic transitions, citizen participation initiatives in Latin America have become increasingly common throughout the region. These initiatives, promoted both by governments and civil society, have sought to strengthen governance, enhance accountability and control, and improve social justice, ensuring that governments' funds and policies address relevant social issues and benefit socially excluded groups. Citizen observatories, social control mechanisms, social audits, citizen consultations, local citizen councils, citizen assessments of service delivery: these are just some of the mechanisms enabling citizens to actively participate in public life throughout Latin America. This Guide presents some of the key citizen participation initiatives in the region, including analysing their outcomes, lessons learned and the contextual factors enabling them, while also highlighting key publications and organisations to help connect readers with additional resources to learn more.



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AS A TOOL TO IMPROVE GOVERNANCE

The last three decades have seen a rise in citizen involvement in public affairs throughout the world, promoted both by governments and by organised groups of citizens interested in enforcing their rights or enriching the policy process and agenda. Three major arguments about the benefits of citizen participation have been behind the increase in these types of initiatives. First, by involving citizens in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies, it is argued that these policies will reflect better citizens' needs and will be seen as more legitimate, which will help to ensure their sustainability and effectiveness over time.¹ Participatory governance "improves the quality of state performance, educates and empowers citizens, and makes reasonably good use of scarce public resources".²

Second, as a result of the democratic transitions that many countries around the world experienced since the 1970s,³ there was a shift in the political paradigm, leading to a more mainstream acknowledgement that the decision making process and the political space are not an exclusive area of the government, underscoring the need to involve other actors, such as civil society and the private sector, in public affairs and the relevance of government accountability towards citizens. For example, it has been argued that "representative democracies combine an institutional framework or authorization of political power with

¹ Gilbreath Holdar, G., Zakharchenko, O. 2002. *Citizen Participation Handbook*. People's Voice Project, International Centre for Policy Studies, Kyvi.

² Wampler, B., McNulty, S. 2011. *Does Participatory Governance Matter? Exploring the Nature and Impact of Participatory Reforms*. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC.

³ Between 1974 and 1990, the world experienced a historical third wave of democratisation in which nearly 60 countries around the world transitioned to a democratic regime (Huntington, S. 1991. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. University of Oklahoma Press, Oklahoma City). Since 1991, the number of countries that experienced a democratic transition has increased considerably.



one oriented to ensure the responsiveness and accountability of those authorized agents.”⁴ Third, citizens’ involvement in oversight and monitoring activities of the government ensures greater control and strengthens accountability.⁵

Ensuring and promoting effective citizen participation seems even more relevant in developing regions like Latin America, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa as they face critical social and economic challenges such as poverty, inequality, poor provision of basic services, low accountability and high levels of corruption, among others. As Wampler and McNulty have highlighted, “many new participatory institutions are located in developing countries with weak states, broad and intense poverty levels, nascent civil societies, and low intensity democracies, which means that these institutions are being inserted into high stakes political environments in which the misallocation of resources, time, and authority can have devastating impacts on the lives of ordinary citizens.”⁶ In Latin America, citizen participation is playing a role in consolidating countries’ democratic transitions and in overcoming persistent challenges such as corruption, poverty and inequality. Great efforts have been made to cultivate a vibrant citizenry that can participate in the policy process and make decisions to improve their own lives.

This Guide presents and analyses different citizen participation mechanisms implemented in Latin America by governments and civil society, with an emphasis on their outcomes, the contextual factors that made them possible and the lessons learned that might be useful for other regions. To produce this Guide, the authors conducted a review of the existing literature on citizen participation initiatives in Latin America. The search included: journal articles; books; documents from international, regional and national organisations promoting, implementing or funding citizen participation; government websites; and documents and reports from civil society organisations (CSOs). Given the wide array of citizen participation experiences in the region, the authors prioritised those that: are acknowledged as Latin American innovations; have existed for a decade or more; and whose outcomes have been systematised and published.⁷

It is important to highlight that Latin American governments do not tend to assess in a systematic way the outcomes of participatory mechanisms or interventions. Governments tend to report more on implementation, such as the amount of funds spent on certain policies or number of meetings held, rather than on the impact of policies, such as a reduction in poverty levels as a result of a participatory programme or mechanism. Civil society tends to focus more on documenting outcomes, though most of the evidence they produce usually pertains to one or two case studies, and lack of research capacity and resources means their impact assessment efforts are often constrained. The lack of systematised evidence of Latin American citizen participation initiatives’ outcomes and impact is a major challenge to assessing and documenting what works in citizen participation initiatives in the region. In spite of this, an effort was made to present as much as possible the evidence that does exist, while also highlighting interesting initiatives that may not have rigorously documented impacts, but that are worth showcasing.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION INITIATIVES IN LATIN AMERICA

Modern democracies are often described as having two types of accountability mechanisms: horizontal and vertical.⁸ Horizontal accountability refers to the internal and formal controls established by the representative state, such as audit institutions, ombudsman offices or legislative oversight. These can also be seen as the formal checks and balances system. Vertical accountability mechanisms are independent oversight actions undertaken by organised and coordinated citizens to hold authorities accountable. These mechanisms are outside the formal internal mechanisms of democracy. Citizens in Latin America have engaged with both types of accountability mechanisms: they have collaborated within formal institutions and they have undertaken independent oversight activities outside the checks and balances system.⁹

Given the variety of citizen participation initiatives, one useful

⁴ E. Peruzzotti. 2007. *The Working of Social Accountability: Contexts and Conditions*. Paper prepared for workshop Generating Genuine Demand with Social Accountability Mechanisms, World Bank Office, Paris.

⁵ Gilbreath Holdar and Zakharchenko 2002, above n1.

⁶ Wampler and McNulty, above n2.

⁷ ELLA research draws on secondary sources, rather than conducting primary or fieldwork-based research.

⁸ See, for example: E. Peruzzotti. 2007, above n 4.

⁹ For a good discussion on the benefits of participatory mechanisms for democratic consolidation and accountability, see: Peruzzotti, E. 2012. *Broadening the Notion of Democratic Accountability: Participatory Innovation in Latin America*. *Polity* 44 (4) 625-642.



option for categorising them is through their main goal. So what has driven Latin America’s citizen participation experiences? The variety of initiatives can be categorised as aiming to achieve one or both of the following two goals: 1) improving the formulation and effectiveness of public policies by making them more responsive to citizens’ needs; and 2) enhancing oversight of public policies and government spending to reduce corruption and improve accountability. The following table presents these initiatives according to the goal they seek to address. Some of these initiatives, of course, seek both goals, though for the purposes of the Guide, we have placed each in the category that more directly reflects its purpose.

Goal	Citizen Participation Initiative
Improving the formulation and effectiveness of public policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen consultations • Participatory budgeting • Local citizen councils • Multi-actor dialogues
Enhancing control over public policies and government spending to reduce corruption and improve accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens collaborating with Supreme Audit Institutions in oversight of public spending • Participation in the procurement process • Citizen oversight of social programmes: the case of CCTs • Citizen assessment of service delivery • Social auditing • Citizen observatories • Public funds to finance and promote civil society’s activities

Source: Own elaboration

IMPROVING THE FORMULATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC POLICIES

Citizens in the region are engaging in policy decisions in a number of different ways. From deciding what policies should be implemented and how, to assessing development priorities, influencing questions of how natural resources are used and making decisions about budgets and public spending, citizen participation initiatives are facilitating the public’s involvement in a variety of policy questions.

Citizen Consultations

Citizen consultations are processes that, at the national or local level, allow the government to ask citizens for their opinion on a law, constitutional reform, administrative decision or large-scale development project before they are formulated or implemented. They are mechanisms for ensuring that policies or government projects respond to citizens’ needs. They adopt different names and forms throughout Latin America – referendums, plebiscites, popular consultations and *cabildos or cabildos abiertos*.¹⁰ The main difference between the referendum and the plebiscite is that the first seeks citizens’ opinion on legislative texts, such as constitutional reforms, to decide whether or not the text should be implemented.¹¹ The plebiscite, on the other hand, seeks citizens’ opinion on an administrative decision, to give it more legitimacy. In popular consultations, a president, governor or mayor poses a question to citizens, in order to assess their opinion on a general question of national or local interest.¹² The *cabildo abierto*, translated to mean ‘open town hall meeting’, is “a public meeting of district or municipal councils or of the local administrative reunions, in which inhabitants can directly participate in order to discuss issues that are of interest for the community”.¹³ The *cabildo abierto* differs from the local councils, discussed below, because the latter are institutionalised and occur regularly, whereas *cabildos* are implemented as and when they are needed.

Citizen consultations are considered a tool of direct or semi-direct participation, as they do not imply any intermediation through citizens’ representatives and can take the form of an individual vote of citizens or of assemblies, such as the *cabildos abiertos* of Central America, where local decisions are discussed with a gathering of citizens at the local level. Most Latin American countries’ constitutions include citizen consultations and several of these constitutions are complemented by secondary laws, which regulate consultations in specific sectors or at the local level. The following table shows some of these by country:

¹⁰Ziccardi, A. 1999. *Participación Ciudadana (Citizen Participation)*. Congreso: los Gobiernos Locales: el Futuro Político de México. IGLOM, Guadalajara.

¹¹ Though general definitions are presented here, even the definitions themselves may vary across country.

¹² All three of them are direct, universal and secret votes that differ from regular electoral processes in the fact that they are considered tools of direct participation. Indeed their objective is not to elect representatives, but rather to enable citizens to directly share their opinions on a specific law, reform or government decision.

¹³ [Colombian Law 134 of 1994](#) (author translation).

¹⁴ Nickson, A. 2011. *Where is Local Government Going in Latin America? A Comparative Perspective*. Working Paper No. 6. Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy, Visby.



Country	Legal Framework	Level	Direct Democracy Mechanisms			
			Referendum	Plebiscite	Popular Consultation	Cabildos
Bolivia	2009 Constitution	National	Yes		Mandatory when it deals with the exploitation of natural resources	Yes
Brazil	1988 Constitution		Yes	Yes		Yes
Colombia	1991 Constitution and its reforms up to 2009	National and Local	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	1994 Law 134	National and Local	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Costa Rica	1949 Constitution and its Reforms through 2003	National	Yes	Mandatory when a new province is created		
	Municipal Code 1998 Manual for the Realization of Popular Consultations at Cantonal and District Levels	Local			Yes	Yes
		Local	Yes	Yes		Yes
Mexico	States' Citizen Participation Laws ¹⁵	Local	In 27 states	In 26 states	Yes	
Nicaragua	1987 Constitution and its three reforms up to 2005	National and Local	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Peru	1993 Constitution and its Reforms through 2005	National	Yes		Yes	
	Organic Law of Municipal Governments	Local	Yes			Yes
	Law 29785	National			Right to prior consultation in case of large scale development projects on indigenous land	

Source: Own elaboration, based on a review of the legal frameworks of Latin American countries.

Citizen consultations have been used in Latin America in different ways:

- To gain citizens' approval for institutional or administrative reforms to be implemented in constitutions or by local governments¹⁶
- To allow citizens to participate in decision making that directly concerns their interests, especially at the local level¹⁷
- To decide how environmental decisions are made with regards to the exploitation of natural resources, construction of infrastructure, or implementation of an environmental policy, when these might alter citizens' environment, traditions or customs.

- To manage conflict, such as between extractive industries and indigenous communities¹⁸

Though these mechanisms offer great opportunities, creating options for 'intermediary-free' democracy, it is still challenging to implement them well:

- In several countries, although the mechanisms appear in the constitution or in the law, their implementation still strongly depends on political authorities' will to make use of them¹⁹
- When used, the laws do not always guarantee that the perspectives gathered during citizen consultations will have a real impact on the decision making process

¹⁵ Olvera, A.J. 2009. *Las Leyes de Participación Ciudadana en México: Proyectos Políticos, Estrategias Legislativas y Retos Estratégicos en la Democratización Futura* (Citizen Participation Laws in Mexico: Political Projects, Legislative Strategies and Strategic Challenges in Future Democratization). Instituto de Investigaciones Histórico-Sociales, Xalapa.

¹⁶ Ziccardi 1999, above n 5.

¹⁷ For instance, the Colombian Constitution includes the creation of consultative planning councils for indigenous territories. For more information, see Peruzzotti, E. 2012. *Broadening the Notion of Democratic Accountability: Participatory Innovation in Latin America*. *Polity* 44 (4) 625-642.

¹⁸ To learn more about managing conflict through consultation processes, see the [ELLA Brief: Managing Conflict Through Consultation: Latin America's Experience](#).

¹⁹ Nickson 2011, above n14.



Participatory Budgeting

Latin American countries pioneered participatory budgeting – an innovation to let citizens decide on what projects, services or priorities the government should fund with a percentage of

CITIZEN CONSULTATION IN LARGE-SCALE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Latin America’s economic growth in the last two decades means citizens have seen a rise in large-scale development projects being implemented in their communities. As these projects usually affect the livelihoods of the communities that live there, progress has been made to enforce the communities’ right to be informed and consulted about these projects. Thanks to strong social mobilisation, political will on the part of some governments, and progressive courts, there are rich experiences coming from Latin America on the right of citizens to participate and be consulted regarding development projects.

In the case of indigenous and tribal peoples, their right to prior and informed consultation is protected internationally by the International Labour Organisation’s Convention 169 (ILO Convention 169). Though many countries in the region have ratified ILO Convention 169 and include the right to prior consultation in their constitutions, only Peru has gone further, approving [Law 29785](#), which defines dialogue mechanisms to ensure indigenous and tribal peoples’ consultation rights. Other countries, such as Argentina, Colombia and Ecuador, have acknowledged this right through national courts’ rulings. To learn more about the development of the right to prior consultation of indigenous and tribal peoples in Latin America, see the [ELLA Brief: Defending Latin America’s Indigenous and Tribal Peoples’ Rights through Laws and the Courts](#).

Non-indigenous communities in the region are also enforcing and demanding their right to participate and be consulted in development projects by using international financial institutions’ (IFIs) own safeguard and accountability mechanisms. These mechanisms have been established to guarantee that the development projects that IFIs fund meet international environmental and social standards. Due to strong resistance from communities, Latin America has been acknowledged as a region which has made extensive use of these mechanisms. To learn about a successful case from Mexico in which informed citizen participation was a crucial factor facilitating accountability within an IFI-funded development project, read the [ELLA Brief: Community Participation in Development Projects Funded by International Financial Institutions: Latin America’s Experience](#) and the [ELLA Spotlight on Publications](#) on this theme.

the local budget. First launched in Brazil in 1989, participatory budgeting is now implemented in more than 2,500 local governments in 15 countries in the region. By ensuring citizen involvement in prioritising spending, participatory budgeting offers a potential solution for improving policy impact, while at the same time strengthening budget transparency, citizen participation in governance and overall accountability, all of which are key governance challenges faced in Latin America, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Participatory budgeting is also a powerful mechanism for ensuring that vulnerable citizens receive greater public funds and services and for deepening democracy. Some countries’ participatory budgeting arrangements also specifically require citizen oversight committees, whose role is to ensure that public funds are spent as they were intended.²⁰

Participatory budgeting comes in different forms in the region, but generally works as follows. Once per year, local or regional governments call for individuals or civil or community organisations to participate in a series of workshops or meetings. In those, individuals or civil or community organisations give their opinion or decide on what projects, services or priorities the government should fund with a certain percentage of the local budget.

Concrete impacts have already been attributed to the implementation of participatory budgeting in the region. For example, budget allocations in countries such as Brazil, Peru, or Uruguay have shifted to benefit poorer regions and more effectively address the needs of the poor. And a participatory culture is being developed among citizens in countries such as Peru and Brazil, with participatory budgeting creating a mass of citizens who increasingly become involved in the budget and policy process. To learn more about the development of participatory budgeting and the outcomes it has had in various Latin American countries, read the [ELLA Brief: Participatory Budgeting: Citizen Participation for Better Public Policies](#) and the [ELLA Spotlight on Publications](#) on this theme.

Local Citizen Councils

Citizen participation at the local level has long been recognised as an element that improves local governance and the quality and responsiveness of public policies. In spite of this, governance weaknesses at the local level in developing

²⁰In this sense, then, participatory budgeting could also be in the second category of initiatives that aim to facilitate citizen oversight of government policies and programmes.



regions mean citizens often have few opportunities to participate in designing the public policies that impact their daily lives. To generate such opportunities, countries in Latin America, as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, have created local citizen participation bodies - called here local citizen councils - as a mechanism to enable regular citizen participation in development programmes and policies at the municipal level.²¹

Beginning in the 1980s, and boosted by democratisation and decentralisation reforms, Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru have created local citizen councils. Although local councils take on different names and forms across the region, they do share common features. Generally, they gather actors from different sectors of civil society, such as academics, civil or community-based organisations and the private sector, bringing them together with local political authorities in a single body, where they collaboratively make public policies or design development programmes or plans. By involving citizens in the design of public policies, local citizen councils aim to strengthen democracy and improve the quality and responsiveness of public policies at the local level. By allowing greater participation of groups that were historically left out of decision making processes, such as women, young people and indigenous populations, these local councils have made local governance more inclusive and representative.

Although local councils are still evolving, some outcomes from Latin America are already being documented. In Brazil, Colombia, and Peru, marginalised and vulnerable groups are now becoming involved in public policies that concern them. Evaluations of local councils in Peru, for example, have shown they can lead to direct improvements in terms of service delivery and local development outcomes. To learn more about the development of local citizen councils and the concrete impacts they have had so far in Latin America, read the [ELLA Brief: Increasing Citizen Participation in Local Governance: Latin America's Local Citizen Councils](#).

Multi-stakeholder Dialogues

During the past twenty years, multi-stakeholder dialogues have increased in importance in Latin America as part of

the transition away from authoritarian rule and towards greater democratic processes. Multi-stakeholder dialogues are “inclusive processes that are open, sustained and flexible enough to adapt to changing contexts... (and) can be used to achieve consensus or prevent conflict - a complement to, not a replacement for, democratic institutions such as legislatures, political parties and government bodies.”²² These multi-actor or multi-stakeholder initiatives are often promoted by academic and non-academic research centres and include the participation of a wide array of actors with extensive knowledge in a given field.²³ Multi-stakeholder dialogues do not tend to be permanent spaces of deliberation nor mandated by law, as are local citizen councils. Instead, they seem to arise when a particular issue is in the public agenda and there is political will to open a space for discussions about it.

Multi-stakeholder dialogues typically aim to achieve one or more of the following objectives: develop and define new multi-stakeholder agendas; elaborate legislative reforms and establish mechanisms for citizen oversight; shift or expand the terms through which specific issues are being debated in the public sphere by incorporating new aspects into the agenda; incorporate non-partisan expert knowledge on the design and implementation of public policies; and strengthen formal mechanisms for institutional transparency and accountability.

Multi-stakeholder dialogues have played an important part in the consolidation of democratic processes in Latin America, particularly by promoting the inclusion of relevant social issues in the public agenda and by enhancing the formulation and implementation of public policies. To learn how these dialogues have worked in Latin America, read the [ELLA Brief: Multi-actor Dialogues for Better Public Policies: Lessons from Latin America](#), which presents and analyses three emblematic multi-actor dialogues coming from Argentina, Mexico and Peru, highlighting the contextual factors underpinning their implementation, lessons learned and outcomes achieved.

ENHANCING OVERSIGHT OF PUBLIC POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

Throughout Latin America, initiatives to use citizen participation in order to improve oversight of public policies

²¹ Although citizen councils or other similar participatory spaces also exist at the national level, here we refer only to local-level citizen councils.

²² Pruitt, B., Thomas, P. 2007. *Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners*. United Nations Development Programme, Washington, DC.

²³ For a discussion about the key objectives behind multi-actor dialogues, see: Communication for Governance and Accountability Programme (CGAP). *Multi Stakeholder Dialogue*. World Bank, Washington, DC.



and programmes have also emerged. Some of these experiences were created by governments who opened spaces and institutional mechanisms for citizens to perform monitoring and control activities. Other initiatives have come from groups of organised citizens seeking to enhance government accountability and reduce corruption. The first two initiatives described below - participation in supreme audit institutions and participation in procurement processes - have to do with overseeing government spending. The remaining initiatives focus on overseeing public performance in implementing specific policies and initiatives.

Citizen Collaboration with Supreme Audit Institutions

A Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) is the government body that monitors the spending of other government bodies. Typically an external agency with some autonomy from the rest of the government, it carries out yearly audits of some portion of spending, reports on its findings and, in some cases, imposes sanctions.

In the last few decades, Latin American countries have been strengthening their SAIs in order to improve oversight and control of public spending. One of the reforms that is relevant here is the creation of social control mechanisms that enable citizens to participate in SAIs' oversight activities. Since SAIs cannot audit all public spending, citizen oversight has been put forward as an effective way to improve the scope and quality of the control process, while at the same enhancing overall accountability.

SAIs in the Latin American region have involved and engaged citizens in oversight of public spending in three main ways. First, many have created phone lines, offices, email accounts and mailboxes to receive citizen complaints about public spending or government agencies' performance. Second, some SAIs have held meetings and hearings to formally consult civil society about the audits they should undertake. Third, some SAIs have directly involved citizens and CSOs in the auditing process itself.

These mechanisms have yielded some promising results. Evidence shows that citizens in various countries, such as

Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Paraguay are making use of the new input channels, providing SAIs with an interesting, new source of audit-related information. In Colombia, for example, the SAI has become aware of irregularities thanks to citizens' input. Finally, surveys show increasing citizen trust in SAIs as public institutions that are close to citizens and able to effectively monitor public spending.

To learn more about citizen participation in Latin America's SAIs and its impact, read the [ELLA Brief: The Latin American Approach to Improving Public Spending Oversight](#)²⁴ and the [ELLA Spotlight on Publications: Social Control Mechanisms in Supreme Audit Institutions](#).

Citizen Participation in the Procurement Process²⁵

Given that public procurement is so prone to corruption and that an important percentage of a country's Gross Domestic Product (on average around 15-30% in Latin America) goes into government purchases of goods and services, much effort has been focused on increasing and enabling citizen oversight in the procurement process.²⁶

On the government side, two different mechanisms have been implemented. First, countries such as Chile, Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama and Paraguay have increased transparency in the procurement process by creating e-procurement platforms that disclose government purchase information, such as calls for bids or tenders, the proposals submitted by suppliers and the outcomes of these calls. By making procurement information transparent and available, these platforms allow citizens to monitor the public procurement process.

Second, spaces for citizen participation in the procurement process have also been created in Argentina and Mexico. For example, in Mexico, citizens are invited by the Ministry of Public Management to participate in monitoring the procurement process and in making sure that it is fair and transparent. At the end of the process, these citizens, called Social Witnesses (*Testigos Sociales*), report on any irregularities they might have detected and generate a report that is published on

²⁴ The [ELLA Brief on SAIs](#) covers many design features of SAIs, not just initiatives to foster citizen participation. Similarly, readers interested in the region's SAIs more broadly might also be interested in the organisations presented in the [ELLA Spotlight on Organisations: Government Oversight and Supreme Audit Institutions](#).

²⁵ The information in this section was taken from the [ELLA Brief: Fighting Corruption by Improving Transparency and Access to Information](#). To learn more about public procurement and citizen participation, see also the [ELLA Spotlight on Publications: Public Procurement and Disclosure of Public Officials' Personal Assets](#).

²⁶ Bohórquez, E. *et al.* (eds.). 2012. [A New Role for Citizens in Public Procurement](#). Transparencia Mexicana, Mexico City.



the government's public procurement platform.²⁷

On the civil society side, organised groups of citizens in countries such as Argentina, Guatemala and Paraguay have undertaken independent assessments of the transparency, legality and efficiency of the procurement process. In Argentina, [Poder Ciudadano](#), the Argentinean chapter of Transparency International, through its Transparent Public Procurement Programme has assessed public procurement and has developed tools for its monitoring by citizens.²⁸ [Acción Ciudadana](#), the Transparency International chapter in Guatemala, also monitors government procurements and trains other CSOs to do so. In Paraguay, in 2005, the Transparency International chapter created an index to measure ministries' integrity in public contracting.²⁹

Citizen Oversight of Social Programmes:³⁰ Spotlight On Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs)

First developed in Latin America, CCTs are social programmes that provide financial assistance to low-income families that comply with certain criteria, such as attending medical visits and sending their children to school. Across the region, CCTs have become one of governments' main social development tools, with large amounts of public funds being allocated to them. Governments and citizens have thus become increasingly interested in protecting them from corruption and vote-catching behaviour; one strategy for achieving this has been involving citizens in oversight efforts.

Latin American countries have developed two types of citizen oversight mechanisms for CCTs. The first is creating mechanisms to allow individual citizens to make complaints or report irregularities. These mechanisms are highly dependent on the human and financial resources and

mandates of the public agencies that are responsible for collecting and processing the complaints. Also they do not necessarily generate significant changes in the design and implementation processes of CCTs; rather they focus on changes that impact the individual who made the complaint.

The second mechanism is collective and might have a more direct impact; it consists of bringing together civil society, in particular beneficiaries, with public sector representatives. These collective groups monitor that there are no mistakes in terms of inclusion and exclusion of beneficiaries, guarantee that the programme functions according to its initial objectives, and monitor that the cash transfers are not captured by elites or political interests, nor affected by corruption or vote-catching behaviour. These collective efforts often lead to collective complaints and recommendations, helping to improve implementation processes.

Of course, the region's citizen oversight mechanisms for CCTs face challenges, among which are gaining autonomy and influence over technical and political authorities and ensuring covering of the whole beneficiary population. That being said, some good experiences stand out in the region:

- In Peru, the [National Committee for Supervision and Transparency](#), which monitors the CCT Programme [Juntos](#) (meaning 'together'), is autonomous and composed of representatives of the executive branch, the Church, regional and local governments, the private sector and the [National Roundtable for the Fight Against Poverty](#).³¹ There are also 638 local committees which gather all the members of local Vigilance Committees (*Comités de Vigilancia*), such as local Social Programme or Participatory Budgeting Vigilance Committees, or representatives of local organisations. These committees

²⁷ To learn more about citizen participation in the procurement process in Mexico, read: Bohórquez, E. et al. (eds.). 2012. [A New Role for Citizens in Public Procurement](#). Transparencia Mexicana, Mexico City.

²⁸ To learn more, see this publication that presents the outcomes and achievements of this programme: Arenoso, F. 2006. [Manual de Transparencia y Control Social en las Contrataciones Públicas](#) (*Handbook on Transparency and Social Oversight in Public Procurement*). Fundación Poder Ciudadano, Buenos Aires.

²⁹ Transparencia Paraguay. 2005. [Índice de Desempeño e Integridad en Contrataciones Públicas 2004-2005](#) (*Performance and Integrity Index on Public Contracting 2004-2005*). Transparencia Paraguay, Asunción.

³⁰ Although this section focuses on the example of CCTs, given that these are a Latin American innovation, there are citizen oversight experiences being carried out for other types of public programmes as well. For example, to learn more about social audit mechanisms of some of Mexico's social programmes, see: Hevia de la Jara, F. 2007. Social Audit Mechanisms in Mexico. In: Fox, J. et al. (ed). [Mexico's Right to know Reforms: Civil Society Perspectives](#). Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, FUNDAR, Mexico City.

³¹ The National Roundtable for the Fight Against Poverty (*Mesa Nacional de Concertación para la Lucha Contra la Pobreza*) is itself an interesting citizen participation mechanism, mandated by law, that brings together public, private and civil society stakeholders to discuss and debate poverty policies. *Mesas* are established at the national and regional levels. To learn more, see this publication by Reuben and Belsky (2006), in particular the chart (p 259) documenting the distinct participation mechanisms in Peru. Reuben, W., Belsky, L. 2006. Voice in the Accountability of Social Policy. In: Cotlear, D. (ed). [A New Social Contract for Peru: An Agenda for Improving Education, Health Care, and the Social Safety Net](#). World Bank, Washington, DC.



identify implementation issues through surveys and complaints, and make recommendations to the Executive Council of the programme. In 2009, almost half of the complaints were resolved, and between 2006 and 2009, nine concrete recommendations for improvement were made to the programme’s Executive Council.³²

- In Brazil, 5500 local citizen groups have been created since 2005 to monitor the functioning of the *Bolsa Familia* (Family Allowance) CCT programme at the local level. They are composed of civil society and local government representatives and work to make sure that there are no mistakes regarding the inclusion or exclusion of beneficiaries and that there are sufficient and appropriate health and education services available to meet the additional incentivised demand.³³
- In Mexico, the Committees of Community Promotion benefit from the country’s “extensive and strong network of judicial and legal frameworks”³⁴ that regulates and oversees monitoring of the *Oportunidades* (Opportunities) CCT programme at all levels. These are spaces of constant innovation, which bring legitimacy and legality to their actions.³⁵ These committees are composed of the representatives of the beneficiaries and they receive information requests and complaints from beneficiaries themselves.
- To access additional research about citizen oversight of CCTs in Latin America, see the [ELLA Spotlight on Publications: Citizen Oversight of Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes](#).

Citizen Assessment of Service Delivery

Throughout Latin America, either at the initiative of the

government or of organised civil society groups, citizens are undertaking assessments of the quality and effectiveness of public services. These assessments provide valuable information to determine if public services meet citizens’ needs and are effective, while also shedding light on implementation problems and providing hints as to different ways to improve delivery. These assessments have been carried out generating citizen feedback on the quality and efficiency of services through surveys, focus groups with users, or mechanisms such as text messages, phone lines and internet platforms. In the Latin America region, citizen assessments are being carried out for a variety of different public services, such as justice, water, sanitation, health, education and housing.³⁶ Here we mention three noteworthy examples, assessing justice and health services and citizen satisfaction with public services in general.

[The Mexico City Citizen Council for Public Security and Justice Administration](#) (“the Council”) is a CSO that aims to create mechanisms for citizen assessment of public justice and security services in Mexico City. To gather citizen feedback, the Council created a system that allows citizens to highlight problems such as potholes, non-working street lights or crimes that happened without the police intervening. Citizens can report on these problems through text messages, phone calls or by filing [online](#) reports. The Council then sends these reports to the relevant government agencies, which try to address them.

Citizens have taken advantage of the opportunity these new mechanisms provide; in a two-year period, 51,000 text messages highlighting and identifying problems regarding public justice or security services were sent to the Council. More importantly, these reports were sent to the relevant government agencies, and so far, 50% have been resolved,

³² To learn more about the functioning of these committees, see: Cecchini, S., Madariaga, A. 2011. [Programas de Transferencias Condicionadas. Balance de la Experiencia Reciente en América Latina y el Caribe \(Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes. Evaluation of the Recent Latin American and Caribbean Experience\)](#). Cuadernos de la CEPAL, No. 95. Naciones Unidas, Santiago de Chile; National Committee of Supervision and Transparency. Definición de Funciones y Atribuciones, Comité Nacional de Supervisión y Transparencia (Definition of the Functions and Attributions of the National Committee of Supervision and Transparency). Programa Juntos, Lima; National Committee of Supervision and Transparency. 2009. [Comité Nacional de Supervisión y Transparencia, Experiencia Peruana 2005-2009 \(National Committee of Supervision and Transparency, Peruvian Experience 2005-2009\)](#). Programa Juntos, Guatemala City.

³³ Cecchini, S., Madariaga, A. 2011. [Programas de Transferencias Condicionadas. Balance de la Experiencia Reciente en América Latina y el Caribe \(Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes. Evaluation of the Recent Latin American and Caribbean Experience\)](#). Cuadernos de la CEPAL, No. 95. CEPAL, Santiago de Chile.

³⁴ Hevia de la Jara, F. 2009. Contraloría Social y Control Ciudadano en los Programas Sociales. In: Gómez-Alvarez, D. 2009. [Candados y Contrapesos. La Protección de los Programas, Políticas y Derechos Sociales en México y América Latina \(Safeguards and Counterweights. Protection of Programmes, Policies and Social Rights in Mexico and Latin America\)](#). ITESO, Guadalajara. (author translation)

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Three key sources to access additional information about citizen assessment of service delivery in Latin America are: a) the [World Bank Searchable Database of Latin American Social Accountability Initiatives](#); b) the [World Bank Demand for Good Governance Community of Practice Website](#), which also provides access to a range of case studies and tools from Latin America and other developing regions; and c) World Bank. 2003. [Voice, Eyes and Ears: Social Accountability in Latin America: Case Studies on Mechanisms of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation](#). World Bank, Washington, DC.



agencies have provided guidance and assistance on 26% , and they are in the process of addressing the 24% pending.³⁷ In sum, the Council is a good practice as it promotes joint CSO and government collaboration to assess and improve public services through citizen participation and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Another experience that stands out in the Latin American region is an index produced by the Peruvian CSO *Ciudadanos al Día* (CAD). Called [RankinCAD](#), the index conducts a bi-annual survey of citizen satisfaction with public agencies from different levels of government that provide public services to citizens. For example, the RankinCAD 2010 revealed that only 47% of citizens are satisfied with public agencies' service delivery. The index aims to generate citizen feedback that is useful for government agencies to improve the quality of their services. The index is also a tool that citizens can use to hold government to account. CAD works closely with the government to share the results of the index and also launches media and advocacy campaigns to demand concrete improvements that lead to better public services.³⁸

Social Auditing

Social audits are independent assessments of government policies and programmes, which aim to achieve one or all of the following goals: improve transparency of government performance and the use of public resources; enhance overall accountability; and ensure that public policies and programmes are advancing social justice and reducing inequalities. To gather the information and data needed to undertake social audits, CSOs in Latin America have made use of the right to information and transparency, which has been protected in various countries by Freedom of Information Acts, court rulings or formal constitutional acknowledgement.³⁹

By conducting these social audits, civil society in various countries has highlighted mismanagement and inefficiencies in public policies and, through advocacy and media campaigns, has pushed for reforms to ensure that policies benefit socially excluded groups and that public officials engaging in corruption are punished.

To learn more, the [ELLA Brief: Using Information for](#)

CITIZEN ASSESSMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES: CITIZEN REPORT CARDS IN LATIN AMERICA

As with other services, public health care is difficult to monitor because citizens often have limited knowledge of their rights and what standards of care they can demand. Throughout Latin America, governments and civil society groups are using report cards as a tool to gather citizen feedback on the quality and coverage of health services. Report cards were first created in 1993 by the [Public Affairs Centre](#) in Bangalore, India, as a technique for evaluating public services in the city by directly assessing citizens' and users' feedback on those services. Since then, report cards have grown to be seen as an effective instrument for promoting accountability and strengthening local-level citizen participation around the world. Report cards aim to generate concrete evidence about the quality and availability of public services and improve citizens' effective access to public services, including availability, quality, efficiency and coverage of services. These report cards have been useful in Latin America to identify problems citizens face in accessing quality health care, such as lack of medical supplies or personnel, or long waiting times to see a physician. By bringing these findings before public health agencies and the media, citizens have succeeded in achieving concrete improvements in both health care access and quality. To learn more about the use of citizen and community report cards to improve health services, read the [ELLA Brief: Citizen Participation in Evaluating Health Services: The Latin America Experience](#), which analyses three different report card experiences in Colombia, Mexico and El Salvador, with an emphasis on the outcomes these citizen assessments had in improving health service delivery. The [ELLA Spotlight on Publications](#) presents citizen assessment of health services experiences from four other countries in the region: Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay.

[Accountability and Justice: Lessons from Latin American Civil Society](#) presents three successful experiences of social auditing in Latin America: farm subsidy policy in Mexico; distribution of oil revenue among public agencies in Ecuador; and sustainable development policy in Costa Rica. To access key organisations undertaking social audits in various countries in

³⁷ Information available on the Mexico City Citizen Council for Public Security and Justice Administration's [website](#).

³⁸ Information available on *Ciudadanos al Día's* [website](#).

³⁹ To learn more about the legal frameworks governing transparency and access to information in Latin America, see the [ELLA Brief: Building the Legal Framework to Support Transparency and Access to Information in Latin America](#). The [ELLA Guide: The Latin American Approach to Transparency and Access to Information](#) covers a range of policies and initiatives related to transparency.



the region, consult the [ELLA Spotlight on Organisations: Key Civil Society Groups Using the Right to Information](#).

Citizen Observatories

A citizen observatory is a monitoring body formed by citizens or organisations to identify, highlight, assess and monitor relevant social issues, and to evaluate particular policies or programmes. Citizen observatories can, then, be mechanisms seeking to achieve both goals presented in this Guide: improving public policy formulation and effectiveness; and enhancing control over public policies and government action. Citizen observatories can improve policy design, for example, by identifying relevant social issues that the government is not addressing and that, consequently, are not included in the public agenda. Observatories that address the phenomenon of femicide are an example of this category, since most countries in the region have neither designed specific policies to address the issue nor acknowledged it as a relevant social problem. Citizen observatories can also be tools for monitoring existing public policies and programmes and for exacting greater accountability overall.

To undertake their monitoring activities, citizen observatories gather information and knowledge through the use of different tools, such as surveys, and various methods of analysis, such as tracking and assessing over time the number of people living under the poverty line and comparing it with the budget allocated to fight poverty.⁴⁰ Observatories have emerged covering a variety of social issues in Latin America.⁴¹ To provide just one example, in 2008, there were 95 citizen observatories in Mexico with three different profiles: created by CSOs; created by academic institutions; created by the government to promote civil society's participation in oversight of public issues. The three policy areas with the highest number of citizen observatories in Mexico are: urban and housing development (44 observatories); economic development (42) and environmental protection (41).⁴²

Citizen observatories have been launched at both the regional level and in individual countries. Some noteworthy regional examples of citizen observatories include:

[Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean](#): Created at the initiative of member states of the [Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (ECLAC) in 2007, the observatory analyses the fulfilment of international gender equality targets and goals, provides technical assistance to statistical agencies producing official gender data, and produces an annual report analysing inequalities and progress in gender equality.⁴³ The observatory has helped to create and improve indicators for measuring gender equality at the regional and country level. Its reports have also contributed to assessing regional progress as well as advances by individual countries.

[Inter-American Oversight Network for the Defence and Right to Water](#) (*Red de Vigilancia Interamericana para la Defensa y Derecho al Agua*): Created in 2003, this network aims to defend water as a public good and access to water as a fundamental human right. Among the network's main activities are: articulating regional and country level efforts to advance the right to water; improving and enforcing legal frameworks regulating the right to water; and condemning rights violations, among others. Currently the network has members in 17 Latin American countries.⁴⁴

[Latin American Observatory of Environmental Conflicts](#) (*Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales*): This observatory provides support to communities that are currently experiencing environmental conflicts; tracks environmental conflicts; develops tools for solving these conflicts; and conducts research on environmental protection, among other activities.⁴⁵

At the country-level, some examples are:

- Mexico - [Justices Observatory](#) (*Observatorio de las Justicias*): Formed by a group of CSOs, this observatory aims to contribute to the enforcement of human rights from a gender and legal pluralism⁴⁶ approach. By analysing concrete cases, the country's legal framework, allocations of public funds and information requests, the observatory seeks to assess the degree to which justice practices respect and guarantee indigenous peoples and women's rights.⁴⁷ The evidence gathered by the

⁴⁰ Fundación Este País. 2009. [Ejercer la Ciudadanía en la Práctica: Observatorios Ciudadanos \(Exercising Citizenship in Practice: Citizen Observatories\)](#). *Este País* 217 113-116.

⁴¹ This [website](#) lists 156 citizen observatories in Latin America (website in Spanish)

⁴² Fundación Este País 2009, above n40.

⁴³ Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean's [website](#).

⁴⁴ Inter-American Oversight Network for the Defence and Right to Water's [website](#)

⁴⁵ Latin American Observatory of Environmental Conflicts' [website](#).



observatory has been useful for conducting advocacy and for empowering citizens to demand their rights.⁴⁸

- Chile - [Public Health Observatory](#) (*Observatorio de Salud Pública*) of the Public Health School of the University of Chile: This observatory monitors and conducts analysis and reflection about the health situation of Chilean communities and territories and the institutional responses of state agencies in terms of policies and programmes. The analysis and outcomes of this observatory aim to support decision making at the local level and are shared with relevant stakeholders.
- Colombia - [Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Observatory](#) (*Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y de Derecho Internacional Humanitario*): Unlike the previous two national citizen observatories presented, this one was created in 1999 by the Colombian state, as the country was experiencing human rights challenges stemming from armed conflict within its borders. The observatory's objective is to develop useful analyses and information about human rights to inform and improve policymaking. The observatory has become a trustworthy source of information; its site hosts human rights databases and reports and has pushed for the adoption of human rights approaches to policymaking.⁴⁹

To learn more about the work and achievements of one particular citizen observatory in Mexico that monitors maternal mortality, read the [ELLA Brief: Maternal Mortality Observatory in Mexico](#).

Public Funds to Finance Civil Society's Activities

Some Latin American governments have begun to see it as in citizens and their own interest to promote, finance and facilitate the work of CSOs, as these may have better understanding of local realities and may be able to better respond to citizen's needs. These governments have developed innovative national programmes that support CSOs to conduct their activities, such as research and analysis of social issues, oversight of public policies, and training and empowerment of specific groups of people.

These activities usually support governance strengthening by promoting sustainable development, fighting poverty, promoting gender equality and preserving the environment. There is a growing common acknowledgement in the region that, far from being a factor contributing to the state's dismantling, financing these organisations helps in improving accountability, enhancing the quality and responsiveness of public policies, as well as expanding the government's scope for action.

In light of this, Latin American countries such as Argentina, Mexico and Uruguay have developed programmes to promote CSOs' activities, providing them with funding and organisational training. The following examples illustrate the diversity of CSO support programmes that can be found in Latin America:

- Argentina's [Coordination of Direct Assistance to Institutions programme](#) (CADII) provides subsidies and technical training to both governmental and non-governmental organisations to help them improve their administration, development and optimisation. It also supports projects to reinforce their work in productive activities, social and food assistance, community equipment and infrastructure.
- Mexico's [Social Co-Investment Programme](#) (*Coinversión Social*) aims to support and finance CSOs to conduct public policy analysis and oversight, and implement social development projects that focus on the needs of citizens in situations of poverty, exclusion, discrimination or vulnerability. From January to June of 2010, the programme granted a total of 240,458,600 Mexican Pesos (US\$ 16,873,281.24) to projects that benefitted almost one million citizens from vulnerable areas.⁵⁰
- The Uruguayan Junior Initiatives Fund is different from the other programmes, as any kind of group with a minimum of 5 young people and with a solidarity project in the country may be eligible. These groups do not have to form a CSO or have a legal status to apply for subsidies of 20,000 Uruguayan Pesos (US\$ 973.24) for local-level initiatives, or 1,600,000 Uruguayan Pesos (US\$ 77,858.88) if the project is of national scope.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Legal pluralism is a concept based on the possibility of having multiple legal systems within one country or region. Many countries in Latin America formally acknowledge legal pluralism by recognising indigenous justice systems.

⁴⁷ Observatory of Justice Systems' [website](#).

⁴⁸ In this publication, readers can find more examples of citizen observatories of the judiciary in Latin America: Herrero, A., López, G. 2010. [Access to Information and Transparency in the Judiciary: A Guide to Good Practices from Latin America](#). Working Paper. World Bank Institute, Asociación por los Derechos Civiles, Washington, DC.

⁴⁹ Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Observatory's [website](#).

⁵⁰ SEDESOL. 2010. *Cuarto Informe de Labores (Forth Report of Activities)*. SEDESOL, Mexico City.

⁵¹ To learn more about the Uruguayan Junior Initiatives, see the website of the Uruguayan [Ministry of Social Development](#). The [currency conversions](#) were made on 5 June 2012.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

ENABLING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION INITIATIVES IN LATIN AMERICA



Latin American countries' legal frameworks have in many ways set the foundation for citizen participation mechanisms. Many countries have acknowledged citizen consultations in their constitution, and several have complementary laws that strengthen them. Decentralisation reforms in Latin America also played a major role. Many of these not only decentralised public spending and government functions, but also mandated the development of participatory mechanisms at the local or municipal level. Financial and managerial decentralisation was also boosted by the political decentralisation that most countries experienced, leading not only to electoral transition, but also to the development of new forms of citizen participation.⁵²

The adoption of FOIAs by more than half of Latin American countries, and court decisions expanding and upholding transparency rights in countries without FOIAs, have ensured citizens' right to public information; this has been crucial for gathering the information needed for citizens to undertake social audits. Enacting and modifying laws about anticorruption, public ethics and government procurement has also provided a legal basis for engaging citizens in oversight activities.

As a result of the region's democratic transition in the last three decades, governments increasingly acknowledged that public management concerns society as a whole, thus, the need to allow citizens to participate in public decisions that go beyond elections. Governments have also increasingly recognised that their legitimacy comes from being accountable, and that it is strengthened by citizens participation in government oversight.

The emergence of a vibrant and organised civil society has also been fundamental. Civil society successfully pushed for creating many of the participatory initiatives discussed here. Dagnino has pointed out, for instance, that far from decreasing the importance of civil society, the democratic transition in Latin America "reinforced its centrality in the building and deepening of democracy both theoretically and practically."⁵³

Funding from donors and governments has been fundamental for supporting CSOs' oversight activities. Regional networks covering various themes have brought together civil society groups to conduct advocacy at the regional and national level and share citizen participation methodologies and strategies, such as the [Transparency, Participation and Accountability Network](#) or the [Latin American Extractive Industries Network](#) have helped in increasing citizen participation in the region overall.

Individual citizens were also willing to allocate time to participate in these initiatives, which is crucial given that participation implies some costs in terms of time and transportation.

International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the [World Bank](#) and [OECD](#) pushed governments to open spaces for citizen participation, as well as developing participatory methodologies and funding civil society's social auditing work. Regional organisations such as the [IDB](#) and [OAS](#)⁵⁴ have also supported and encouraged citizen participation to reduce corruption, advance rights and sustainable development, and improve government performance and efficiency.

⁵² Nickson 2011, above n14, 19.

⁵³ Dagnino E. 2010. Civil Society in Latin America: Participatory Citizens or Service Providers? In: Moksnes, H., Melin, M. [Power to the People? \(Con-\)tested Civil Society in Search of Democracy](#). Uppsala Universitet, Uppsala.

⁵⁴ For example, read here about the [Inter-American Strategy for the Promotion of Public Participation in Decision-Making for Sustainable Development](#).

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Legal frameworks favourable to citizen participation, such as provisions in constitutions as well as specific laws governing decentralisation, municipal management, public budgeting and citizen participation, are useful as the foundation for the design and implementation of specific citizen participation mechanisms. The Latin American experience underscores the importance of pushing for their enactment.
- 2 The Latin American experience also shows that government and public officials' political will is crucial for ensuring that these citizen participation mechanisms exist, are properly funded, and above all are effective, meaning that the citizen input is indeed used to improve policy design and implementation.
- 3 Likewise, as the existence of legal frameworks does not always translate into empowered citizen participation, it is often necessary for civil society to keep advocating for the implementation of effective citizen participation mechanisms to bend political resistance and to leverage public authorities into taking into account of civil society's voice in their decision making. Indeed, one of the key Latin American challenges has been making countries' strong legal framework work in practice.
- 4 Civil society advocacy, oversight and independent assessment work is fundamental, as it helps in reducing corruption, enhancing social justice and broadening the public agenda by highlighting relevant social issues. As the Latin American experience shows as well, civil society's efforts are also a source of innovation and dynamism for government bureaucratic structures.

CONCLUSION

Latin America, the region that gave birth to participatory budgeting, has a wealth of innovative experiences and lessons to share in engendering citizen participation. These citizen participation initiatives coming from the government or from civil society -CSOs as well as the academia and the private sector - can contribute to improving accountability and social justice. The evidence from a variety of participatory mechanisms and from a variety of Latin American countries indicates some clear areas of impact: citizen participation has contributed to enhancing the quality and responsiveness of public policies, particularly by ensuring that these target vulnerable groups; ensured that relevant issues make it onto the public agenda; and increased control and oversight of government spending and actions, reducing opportunities for corruption. The Latin American experience also indicates some clear contextual enabling factors: the importance of having legal frameworks favourable to citizen participation; political will to open spaces for citizen participation and to take citizen input into account; and an active and vibrant civil society capable of demanding its rights, conducting independent assessments, and willing and able to take part in the participatory spaces created by the government.

KNOWLEDGE PARTNERS

The following selection highlights some of the key organisations working on issues related to citizen participation in Latin America. To learn more about these and other organisations, see the [ELLA Spotlight on Organisations: Citizen Participation](#).

Regional and International Organisations and Networks

[Civicus World Alliance for Citizen Participation](#) is a network that brings together international, national and local organisations and actors such as civil society networks and organisations, trade-unions, professional associations and philanthropic foundations. It promotes the strengthening of citizen action and of civil society, and advocates for citizen participation as an essential component of good governance and democracy. In Latin America, Civicus conducts assessments of the status of civil society situation, such as through its [Índice de la Sociedad Civil: Herramienta para el Fortalecimiento de la Sociedad Civil en América Latina](#) (Civil Society Index: a Tool to Strengthen Latin American Civil Society).

The [Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability \(Citizenship DRC\)](#) is a research consortium founded to investigate how citizens hold institutions to account and push for human rights. It brings together researchers from both North and South, as well as policymakers, practitioners and activists. Though no longer conducting activities, its website houses the wealth of research it produced, including about 150 case studies - many of them on Latin American countries - that examine how citizen participation shapes states and societies.

The [Pan American Development Foundation](#), a strategic partner of the [Organization of American States \(OAS\)](#), sees the strengthening of civil society and of citizen participation in local governments and non-governmental organisations as a fundamental ingredient for healthy democracy and sustainable development. One of its key areas of work is its [Strengthen Communities and Civil Society programme](#), which seeks to develop and

strengthen community based groups, NGOs and municipalities, enhancing their capacity to serve their own communities.

The United Nations Development Programme's [Oslo Governance Centre](#) dedicates its work to [Democratic Governance](#), and particularly [Civic Engagement](#), which it considers a fundamental aspect of a democratic state. UNDP works with governments to create mechanisms for citizen involvement in decision making and policy processes, as well as with CSOs to promote civic engagement in all areas of democratic governance. For instance, it provides financial support to three Latin American countries, Chile, Mexico and Nicaragua, for the development of governance assessment projects.

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the [United Nations' Research Institute for Social Development](#) has developed several projects on [Social Policy and Development](#), Governance and [Civil Society and Social Movements](#), in which it advocates for citizen participation in policymaking to improve democracy and the effectiveness of public policies. To learn more about their work, particularly their research on Latin America, see their [publications page](#).

National Organisations

[Corporación Participación Ciudadana](#) is an Ecuadorian NGO formed in 2002 to participate in the strengthening of Ecuador's democracy and to promote greater participation and transparency in public life. It implements activities related to social control and citizen monitoring, promoting participation, strengthening civil society and encouraging dialogue between political and social actors.

[Transparencia por Colombia](#) is the Colombian chapter of Transparency International, whose main goal is to lead civil society's fight in support of transparency and against corruption, and to promote an active citizenry, strengthen institutions and consolidate democracy. Its key methods of action are citizen critique, monitoring, evaluation, social deliberation and sanctions.



[Ciudadanos al Día](#) is a CSO created in 2002 that produces relevant information on the quality of public services and policies, as part of its overall mission to strengthen the relationship between citizens and the state, improving the quality of public administration and citizen engagement. It has developed methodologies, research and reports that have become a reference for social auditing in Peru and in the Latin American region.

To learn more about these and other national-level CSOs using the right to information to undertake social audits of government performance, see the [ELLA Spotlight on Organisations: Key Civil Society Groups Using the Right to Information](#).

RECOMMENDED READING

Andersson, K., Van Laerhoven, F. 2007. [From Local Strongman to Facilitator: Institutional Incentives for Participatory Municipal Governance in Latin America](#). *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (9) 1085-1111.

Baiocchi, G. Braathen, E. Teixeira, A.C. 2012. [Transformation Institutionalized? Making Sense of Participatory Democracy in the Lula Era](#). In: Stokke, C. Thornquist, O. (eds). 2012. *Democratization in the Global South: The Importance of Transformative Politics*. Palgrave MacMillan, London.

Breuer, A. 2011. [Obstacles to Citizen Participation by Direct Democracy in Latin America: A Comparative Regional Analysis of Legal Frameworks and Evidence from the Costa Rican Case](#). *Democratization* 18 (1) 100-134.

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Schattan P. C., V. 2013. [What Did We Learn About Citizen Involvement in the Health Policy Process: Lessons from Brazil](#). *Journal of Public Deliberation* 9 (1) 1-17.

Selee, A. 23 May 2008. [Deliberative Approaches to Governance in Latin America](#). Deliberative-Democracy.net. Online publication.

Wampler, B., McNulty, S. 2011. [Does Participatory Governance Matter? Exploring the Nature and Impact of Participatory Reforms](#). Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC.

ELLA Spotlights on Publications

ELLA Spotlights offer more in-depth descriptions of key publications. The following Spotlights provide access to additional publications, focusing on particular citizen participation experiences:

[Methodologies of Latin American Report Cards on Health](#)

This Spotlight on Publications focuses on the use of report cards to assess quality and access in health care services, presenting four different approaches that have been implemented in Latin America.

[Participation in Development Projects Funded by International Financial Institutions](#)

The following selection of publications provides insights, cases, lessons learned and guidelines to help development practitioners, communities and CSOs, among other stakeholders, access tools to activate IFIs' accountability mechanisms and to actively participate in decision making about large-scale development projects in their communities.

[Citizen Oversight of Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes](#)

The following selected publications illustrate and analyse a variety of experiences in which citizen participation is improving oversight of CCT programmes in the Latin American context.

[Citizen Participation in Local Governance in Latin America](#)

Citizen participation in governance at the local level has long



been acknowledged as playing a role in improving public policies. The following publications analyse the experience of Latin American countries in implementing these participation mechanisms.

[Participatory Budgeting](#)

Latin American countries pioneered participatory budgeting, an innovative mechanism enabling citizens to decide how public funds will be spent. This selection highlights some of the latest and most relevant publications on the topic in Latin America, including country case studies, regional surveys and implementation guides.

[Social Control Mechanisms in Supreme Audit Institutions](#)

Increasingly, Latin American Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) are creating mechanisms to involve citizens in the oversight process. This selection highlights key publications about these social control mechanisms.

FIND OUT MORE FROM THE ELLA BRIEFS

The following ELLA Briefs present and analyse different citizen participation experiences in Latin America, showcasing their outcomes and lessons learned. These Briefs provide an opportunity to explore in more depth the design and practical implementation of these participatory experiences, offering valuable resources for readers interested in the development of citizen participation in the region.

[Citizen Participation in Evaluating Health Services: The Latin American Experience](#)

Citizen and community report cards are being used all over the world to benchmark public service delivery. So how are Latin American countries using the technique to improve health care?

[Increasing Citizen Participation in Local Governance: Latin America's Local Citizen Councils](#)

Since the 1980s, Latin American countries have used local

councils formed by citizens and public authorities as an effective mechanism to create citizen participation in designing local development policies and programmes.

[Multi-actor Dialogues for Better Public Policies: Lessons from Latin America](#)

The elaboration of public policy agendas and legislative initiatives through multi-actor dialogues is playing a fundamental role in strengthening democratic practices in Latin American countries. What are some of the key experiences in the region?

[Community Participation in IFI-Funded Development Projects: Latin America's Experience](#)

Throughout Latin America, citizens are using international financial institutions' own policies to demand greater participation and accountability in the large-scale development projects that affect their communities. Here is one such story from Mexico.

[Using Information for Accountability and Justice: Lessons from Latin American Civil Society](#)

Using the right to access public information, Latin American civil society groups are achieving concrete policy changes, as these case studies from Mexico, Ecuador and Costa Rica show.

[Participatory Budgeting: Citizen Participation for Better Public Policies](#)

Latin American countries pioneered participatory budgeting, an innovation to let citizens decide how public funds will be spent. First launched in Brazil in 1989, PB is now being implemented in more than 2,500 local governments in 15 countries in the region.

[The Latin American Approach to Improving Public Spending Oversight](#)

To enhance oversight of public spending, Latin American countries strengthened their Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs), including by involving citizens in their monitoring efforts. As a result, SAIs have recovered large sums of money and thousands of citizens now participate actively in the auditing process.

CONTACT [FUNDAR](#)

For more information about citizen participation initiatives in Latin America, contact the authors, Janet Oropeza Eng, ELLA Project Coordinator and Researcher at janet@fundar.org.mx, and Marine Perron, ELLA Researcher at marine@fundar.org.mx.

FIND OUT MORE FROM [ELLA](#)

To learn more about Latin America's experiences in promoting citizen participation, read the rest of the [ELLA knowledge materials](#) on this theme. To learn more about other development issues, browse other [ELLA Themes](#).