

Civil Society Policy Impact Research Award 2020

We are pleased to highlight one of the award winners (Ines Pousadela) and five outstanding submissions for the inaugural award. Each of these research projects document effective civil society action resulting in a demonstrable public policy change.

How to Change the World: The Experience of the Uruguayan Women’s Rights Movement

Inés M. Pousadela, CIVICUS and Universidad ORT Uruguay

“The feminist movement has carried out the most important and least bloody revolution of the past 200 years,” a long-time Uruguayan women’s rights activist and academic said. As a result of this revolution, eyes were opened, minds were changed and the unseen – be it abortion, femicide or unpaid work – became visible. For many decades, however, the tireless but often quiet work deployed to recast women as fully human – by reconceptualizing women’s rights as human rights and turning their attainment into a legitimate object of public policy – remained restricted to very small groups of highly committed activists. Only recently did the situation begin to change.

A key battle within this long-term cultural war was recently won in Uruguay, as the prohibition that made abortion illegal and exposed poor women to unsafe practices that compromised their health and lives was finally lifted in 2012.

This was achieved as a result of a dense and aptly articulated repertoire of actions that included broad alliances; a constant back-and-forth between the domestic and the global, often through regional intermediation; human rights advocacy; online and offline campaigning; research and dissemination; the lobbying of elected representatives; the provision of input for legislative debate and policymaking; gender mainstreaming and public policy monitoring; and, last but not least, street protest.

The legalization of abortion was under debate in Uruguay for over a quarter of a century, starting not long after democracy was restored and as soon as it became apparent that the transition to democracy would not by itself imply any dramatic leap forward regarding the situation of women – not even in terms of political representation, as revealed by the fact that not a single



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female legislator was voted into office in the 1984 elections.

Alongside political representation, equal pay and unpaid work, and gender-based violence, legal abortion came to be seen as one of the most blatant debts of democracy with women. Approximately a dozen decriminalization bills were drafted over the years, but only a few were ever discussed in congressional committees, much less in the plenary of the House or Senate.

Up until the late 1980s, legal abortion was demanded almost exclusively by feminist organizations, which were not in a position to set the public agenda. The salience of the issue increased in the early 1990s, when the 5th Feminist Encounter of Latin America and the Caribbean (EFLAC) declared September 28 International Day for the Decriminalization of Abortion. As a result, the topic eventually captured the attention of actors beyond the feminist movement, such as the Medical Union of Uruguay (SMU).

Public debate intensified in the early 2000s, as an economic crisis steeply increased the number of high-risk

clandestine abortions, which became a major cause of maternal mortality in the country's main public maternity hospital. In this context, two perspectives converged: on the one hand, the classic feminist discourse emphasizing women's right to make decisions regarding their own bodies, placing abortion within the realm of civil rights; and on the other hand, the leftist discourse underscoring social inequalities conditioning access to safe abortions, placing it within the framework of social rights. The pro-legalization movement synthesized both perspectives by asserting the right of all women, including poor women, to autonomy in making their own decisions, as well as the state's obligation to ensure effective access to this right. Success in bringing forward this argument resulted in a broad coalition that came to include the labor movement.

Formed in 2002, the National Coordination of Organizations for the Defense of Reproductive Health encompassed women's organizations and trade unions, as well as neighborhood, professional, human rights, youth and sexual diversity organizations, Afro-Uruguayan advocacy groups, and even some faith-based organizations such as Catholics for Choice (*Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir*). Later that year, for the first time ever, the House debated and passed a legalization bill – which, although backed by a majority of public opinion, the Senate rejected a year and a half later, in the midst of a presidential election campaign marked by an intense counter-campaign led by the Catholic hierarchy.

The climate of optimism created by the 2004 presidential victory of the left leaning Frente Amplio did not last long: even before taking office, president-elect Tabaré Vázquez announced that, due to his personal convictions as a Catholic and a medical doctor, he would veto any law decriminalizing abortion. Nevertheless, in mid-2006, Frente Amplio senators introduced a new decriminalization initiative, which was passed by the Senate in late 2007 and by the House one year later. However, even intense activism by the women's movement was unable to impede, or later overturn, the presidential veto of the bill's articles legalizing abortion.

A similar bill was reintroduced in September 2010, this time under a new Frente Amplio administration led

by José Mujica, who had promised not to exercise his veto power against it. The process was extremely slow, but the Senate eventually passed this bill in December 2011. Once in the House, however, the Frente Amplio was unable to gather enough votes to turn it into law, leading to negotiations with other parties, and eventually to the replacement of the legalization bill with an alternative, milder decriminalization initiative, which was eventually passed.

Despite the efforts of the women's movement to enshrine abortion as a right linked to the recognition of women's autonomy and sovereignty over their own bodies,

the new law imposed a number of conditions, which activists deemed excessive, on women who (within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy) chose to have an abortion, including the obligation to attend a consultation with an interdisciplinary team of specialists, followed by a compulsory five-day "reflection period." It also included a conscientious objection clause for health professionals and an exemption from performing the

procedure for institutions founded on ideas contrary to it. Moreover, it only made the procedure available to Uruguayan citizens or legal residents.

Even before the president promulgated it, this watered-down version of the social movement's demand was met with revocation initiatives, which were strongly resisted and eventually failed. However, more obstinate foci of resistance emerged around its implementation. Over the past few years, women's rights organizations have closely monitored sexual and reproductive health services and pushed for effective access to abortion rights across the national territory, and particularly in conservative departments of the interior where a majority of providers and practitioners claimed to object to the procedure. As pointed out by the Director of MYSU (*Mujer y Salud en Uruguay*), an active civil society monitor, implementation is less epic and does not in itself require any street mobilization; however, keeping up the movement remains important because the current abortion law "does not make us proud, and sooner or later it will have to be changed." If history is any indication, this will only happen as a result of irrepressible street pressure.



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Supporting Unintentional Defaulters of the National Health Insurance Service: with a Focus on Policy Enhancement

By The Beautiful Foundation, Seoul, Korea

The Issue

The South Korean health insurance system is renowned throughout the world as exemplary, but social blind spots nevertheless exist.

In 2015, 1.4 million households were local subscribers to the National Health Insurance (NHI), and the amount of arrears totaled KRW 2.45 trillion. People with arrears due to no fault but having little or no income are referred to as 'unintentional defaulters.' Without a formal definition, this project defined them as "low-income households with monthly health insurance premiums of KRW 50,000 or less." Among the NHI subscribers in 2015, 940,000 households were unintentional defaulters.

The NHI Service (NHIS) has a support mechanism for defaulters, but the defaulter must first make an application. In reality, however, most defaulters have no knowledge of this support. Moreover, as the government's given stance is to emphasize sanctions, defaulters of more than six months have limited access to health services and are levied taxes and payments for services during the overdue period. Penalties such as seizure of property and joint liabilities further hinder them from economic independence and employment, resulting in a vicious cycle.

This project tried to bring changes to the related policies, with the view that health insurance is a social insurance that must be guaranteed to everyone as part of universal health coverage.

Key Stakeholders

The main stakeholders were the unintentional defaulters, who were the beneficiaries, and two organizations that specially partnered for this project: The Beautiful Foundation that raised and analyzed the issue and provided the grant, and Health Right Network, a network of civil society organizations promoting health rights.

The Action

The project began with an in-depth study of the conditions and policies related to the arrears. Findings showed the arrears size to be larger than the known figure of 1.4 million households, reaching 2.16 million households, and that 57% of them were unintentional defaulters. The study also revealed that 4,000 minors and 42,000 young people had

joint liability with their parents, and that the more chronic the arrears were, the harder it was to end and clear them. The following actions were guided by these outcomes.

The project held two National Assembly (NA) discussions on improving the law and system, and distributed questions to NA members to raise their awareness. Witnesses were made at the NA for cases of damages caused by arrears, and amendments were proposed for the NHI contribution system. During the presidential election period in 2017, policy requests were distributed to each camp, and after the president's inauguration, measures for policy improvement were submitted to the relevant committee at Cheongwadae. The project also monitored NHIS sanctions and deficit-handling, requested the NHIS's disclosure of information, and submitted a statement to the UN CESCR.

In 2018, the project requested the Ministry of Health and Welfare to abolish wage restrictions, held a joint civil society press conference, and made a collective civil petition to the National Human Rights Commission of Korea. Moreover, press releases calling for an improvement of the NHI Act and system were sent to the media. Lastly, a guidebook was published for nationwide training of social workers in assisting defaulters.

Achievements

In December 2016, the NHIS standards for deferment of bank account seizure expanded from local subscribers with monthly premiums of KRW 30,000 or less to KRW 50,000 or less. That same month, relevant forms were edited to include the information that small assets can be lifted under the National Tax Collection Act. In March 2018, Article 81 of the NHI Act was revised to strengthen this 'duty to inform.'

A central achievement was the policy changes related to minors. In September 2016, the government decided to suspend notices to minors with joint liability who had no ability to pay. In April 2017, Article 77(2) of the NHI Act was revised to exempt minors with no income or property from joint liability, and retro-active exemptions were made for arrears imposed when the child was under-aged.

Another achievement was the disposal of deficits. In February 2017, the government announced it would dispose of deficits for defaulters of more than 10 years. Carried out in phases, the plan will eventually dispose 870,000 households of approximately KRW 120 billion. In October

2017, the disposal was expanded to those with 'no property and annual income of less than KRW 1 million.'

Project's Approach and Contribution

This project was carried out through participatory project planning that included all parties concerned. The accounts of more than 1,700 defaulters were received and reflected at every stage, and some defaulters were involved from beginning to end. The stakeholders' sense of ownership enabled delving into the heart of the issue, ultimately leading to the project's success. As a long-term project, the logical framework strategy was used to stay true to the end-goal. The project was monitored and evaluated through a proper index setting, and data collection and analysis for measuring indicators were planned for efficiency.

This project's impact is definable in its creation of social value. It highlighted a blind spot in the Korean social security system, and rather than addressing temporary concerns, identified the underlying problems. Striving for sustainable support, it has left lasting social implications.

A Methodological Contribution to Frame Civic Space Research: The Advocacy Case for the National Early Childhood Strategy in Mexico

By José Manuel Malvido Escobedo, Independent Consultant for Third Sector Organizations, Master in Public Administration and Policy by the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (CIDE), and in Administration and Social Entrepreneurship by the ORT University Mexico.

The National Early Childhood Care Strategy (ENAPI) approved by the Mexican government is one of the most recent early childhood care services packages approved by a Latin American government (The Dialogue, 2020). Although this policy is still in development and design phase, its origin is based on a consensus and work of more than six years in which national and international civil society organizations (CSOs) have participated, together with the public administration and international organizations.

My research has used Erhard Friedberg's (1997) theory of organized action, and tools of qualitative and quantitative analysis to explore the influence of CSOs in institutional spaces for citizen participation, at the federal level in Mexico, between 2013 and 2019: the Early Childhood

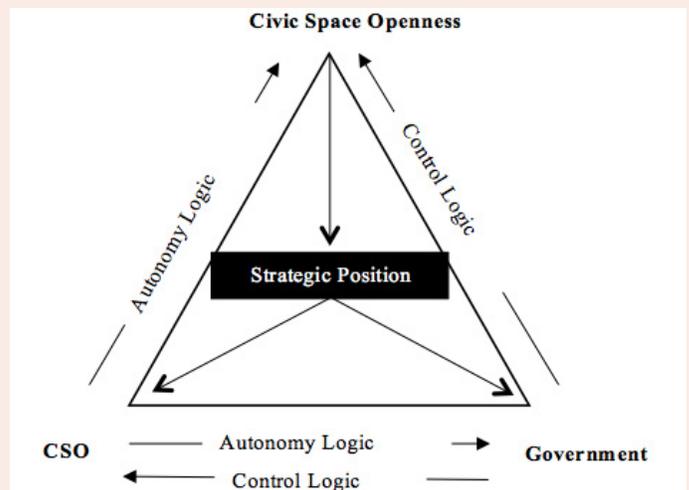
Commission (CPI) and the Executive Secretariat of the National System for the Integral Protection of Children and Adolescents (SESIPINNA).

The research paper frames the political interaction between CSOs and governmental organizations, within the participatory bodies of the Mexican public administration, in a game of strategic relations in which the actors play organized dynamics of autonomy and control. This analysis allows the documenting of cooperative and competitive relationships between actors, who use different strategic resources to promote and establish an advocacy agenda, enlarging the public sphere in policy issues.

The study's methodology has identified the following concrete actions undertaken by three comparable CSOs to influence, from a position of autonomy, Mexico's national early childhood policy: high-impact media campaigns; diagnostics leadership for policy design and evaluation; creation of advocacy coalition of 440 civil organizations to influence the sub-national level; and the holding of national forums with decision-makers for early childhood policy governance.

The logic of CSOs actions are understood in the research as an autonomous and systemically organized behavior, in the context of the struggle for the opening of the civic space in Mexico. This logic interacts with the State, who holds the bureaucratic logic of governmental organizations that reduces uncertainty with formal and informal measures of administrative control.

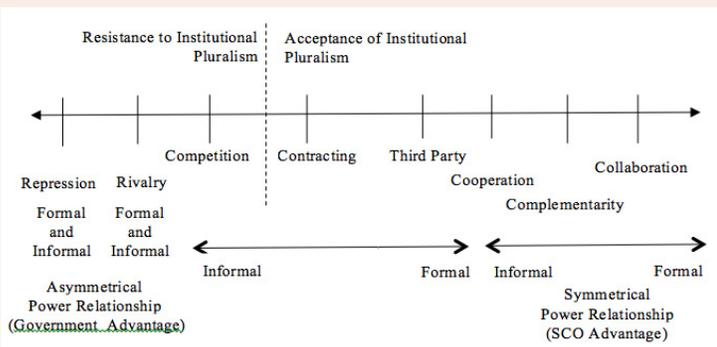
CSO - Government Strategic Game Logics



Source: Own Elaboration

By documenting the organized games of autonomy and control among the actors that structure the advocacy processes, the research broadens the view on the process dynamics of the openness of the public sphere in closed, or restrictive civic spaces, and enriches the study of behaviors and concrete actions for the construction of an enabling environment for the work of CSOs.

My research work recalls the contribution of Jennifer Coston (1998), who has suggested four variables to analyze the interfaces that structure the relations between CSOs and government: formality of power relations; openness towards institutional pluralism; intensity or frequency of power relations; and symmetry in power relations. Using semi-structured interviews and an instrument published by the Laboratory for Research on Social Practices and Policies of the University of Quebec at Montréal (LAR-EPPS-UQAM, 2005), the research applies mixed methods to analyze and document organized actions in line with the typology of the interfaces of power relations proposed by Jennifer Coston:



Source: Coston, 1998, 363

Typology of Government – Third Sector Relationships

The work of the Mexican academy in the last fifteen years has very well documented the situation of civic space in Mexico (Sánchez y Cabrera, 2018). These efforts have been replicated in the literature of several authors and international organizations that analyze the working environment of CSOs around the world. A very recent example in the international analysis can be the tracking of the CIVICUS Civic Space Index, which projects a restricted global environment for organized civil society in practically all continents. These conditions underline the importance of CSOs advocacy strategies in public policy as instruments for a supportive change in the civic space.

Research in the field of the openness of civic space needs to take a closer look at the complex processes of in-

teraction, taking place between government organizations and CSOs. Jennifer Coston's typology of government-third sector relations exposes the diversity of organized interactions that can occur in the participatory struggle of organized civil society. By analyzing the actions that structure relations between organized citizens and the government, it is possible to identify strategies that strengthen enabling dynamics for civil society's impact on public policies and the openness of the civic space.

In the context of a restrictive civic space such as Mexico's (CIVICUS, 2020), CSOs have built a strategic position based on organized actions that today influence the design, implementation, and evaluation of the National Early Childhood Strategy. An enabling environment for the impact of CSOs on early childhood development must feature supportive conditions to ensure the continuity of CSO autonomy. The case study in my research work provides a theoretical perspective on the effect of the interaction between CSOs and governmental organizations in the openness of civic space.

The research conducted on the impact of civil society on public policy could identify and analyze the concrete actions that promote the construction of an enabling environment for the work of CSOs. Achieving this involves examining advocacy processes and identifying the organized behaviors that favor the autonomy of civil organizations within the participatory environments regulated by the administrative control of government organizations.

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Searching for Impact

Willem Elbers, Radboud University

How do you create real-world impact with academic research on policy influencing and advocacy? I will try to shed light on this question from my experience as the principal investigator of the 'Breaking Down Barriers' project. This project (2015-2019) was a research partnership between the Dutch non-profit organization Liliane Foundation and the African Studies Centre (Leiden University).

According to estimates from the World Health Organization, globally roughly 150-200 million children under the age of 18 have a disability. These children are particularly vulnerable given their dependence on their family and caretakers. They often face severe forms of discrimination and stereotyping, typically based on prejudices, a lack of knowledge and prevailing cultural beliefs. Difficulties in accessing services in the areas of education, employment, healthcare and social and legal support further contribute to their marginalization.

The Netherlands-based Liliane Foundation works towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in the global South. To achieve its goals, it works with a range of disability groups in Asia, Africa and Latin America. While Liliane Foundation and its partners work hard to promote inclusive policies through advocacy, evidence initially did not play a role in their advocacy work.

The Breaking down Barriers project was developed in response to this. It aimed to generate knowledge of the conditions under which advocacy for children with disabilities can be most effective and enable Liliane Foundation and its partners to use evidence as basis for decision-making.

In the period 2015-2019, the project examined a wide range of advocacy interventions in Zambia, Sierra Leone and Cameroon. In these countries, the project worked with local academics and Liliane Foundation's partner organisations. In 2019 the project won the 'Impact Challenge Award' as a successful example of an initiative using evidence to enhance non-profit effectiveness. The success of the project led to the decision to continue with a second phase which is expected to start coming October.

In the project I learned a lot about the cooperation between academia and civil society and the role of academia in producing real-world impact. I have picked three lessons which I hope might be of interest to my ISTR colleagues:

Lesson 1: Ensure practitioner ownership of the research. An original, and in hindsight probably somewhat naïve, project assumption was that if you make relevant information on advocacy available to practitioners, they will use this knowledge to improve their practices. In 'Breaking Down Barriers', however, research uptake in many cases either occurred in an ad hoc manner, in ways not originally envisioned or not at all. Over time, I came to realize that practitioner ownership was insufficiently captured in the project-design. As principal investigator, I was basically the driving force behind all aspects of the research such as the formulation of research questions or selection of cases. Consequently, the intended 'users' of the knowledge were insufficiently part of the process of producing knowledge and as such felt little ownership for research findings. This was a clearly a missed opportunity and in the second phase I will ensure that practitioners will be involved from the very start of the research.

Lessons 2: Research is only part of the story. In the course of the project it became increasingly clear that producing new knowledge is just one of the ways in which academics can be impactful. Looking back, I think (hope) I have been impactful in several ways, including playing the role of a 'critical friend': a safe person who listens, asks critical (and sometimes uncomfortable) questions and prompts reflection. Another role is that of making existing academic knowledge available and accessible for practitioners. This role is particularly important for practitioners who often have no time to read, don't have access to literature or don't know where to look. Finally, academics can play a role in offering academic education to bridge the gap between science and practice. In the second phase of the project, we will develop a 'professional' course on inclusive development on the basis of the research. This course, which targets professionals, will be offered at universities in Zambia and Sierra Leone.

Lesson 3: Embrace the unexpected. In teasing out the conditions under which advocacy for children with disabilities can be effective, I first focused on questions with (at least for me) a familiar focus such as the role of organizational resources, alliances or the political environment. These were also the type of questions the original project-proposal mentioned. Over time, however, the findings pointed to directions which I had not foreseen. A key example is the importance of intersectionality, which is a concept from



gender studies I was previously unfamiliar with. Advocacy strategies are rooted in an understanding of what drives exclusion. Persons with disabilities have multiple, overlapping and interrelated identities. They are not only marginalized because they have a disability, but also because of other identities like their gender, age, sexual orientation or ethnicity. For example, girls with disabilities may not only be marginalized because of their disability, but also because of their gender and age. Addressing the root causes of these girls' marginalization therefore requires accounting for their overlapping multiple marginalized identities. The importance of intersectionality was by far the biggest eye opener for Liliane Foundation and even became the central theme of the project's final conference. We would have never found this if I would not have had the flexibility from Liliane Foundation to pursue 'leads' outside the original project-scope.

More information on Breaking down Barriers:
www.barriersfree.org

I recently wrote a blog with Duncan Green (Oxfam GB) on 'the helpful academic': <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/in-search-of-the-helpful-academic-10-ways-they-can-support-practitioners/>.

Tackling Governance of Risk Management: Civil Society Impact in Mexico City

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On September 19, 2017, a 7.1-magnitude earthquake struck Mexico City, killing over 200 people and causing the collapse of buildings and widespread structural damage. Despite having experienced a disastrous earthquake 32 years earlier, the city was not well prepared to prevent damage, respond in the immediate aftermath, or undertake reconstruction.

Many citizens and nonprofits helped with emergency relief in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. Several organizations—Ruta Cívica, CartoCrítica and others—along with grassroots groups, risk experts and citizens, were working toward a longer-term goal: improved governance of the risk management system in the city. Overall, they pushed for an approach that moved away from the traditional focus on disasters as relating only to

natural hazards and emergency response, toward a more comprehensive view of risk (and resilience) as a combination of natural, social, and human conditions. In line with their understanding of risk and resilience, as well as with their missions as civil society organizations (CSOs), they advocated for more citizen involvement and more accountability of government to citizens.

The CSOs identified inaccessibility of critical information on risk and vulnerability as a central problem underlying inadequate coordination, inclusiveness, and accountability. They collectively led three major advocacy efforts: 1) a push to make the Mexico City Risk Atlas—with data on natural hazards, social vulnerabilities, and resources—public and usable by citizens; 2) an Open Data campaign focusing on relevant government information, especially on damage to and structural integrity of individual buildings; and 3) pressure for simplification, better coordination, and more transparency of Mexico City government's reconstruction processes.

The main partners

Ruta Cívica is a small backbone organization that carries out campaigns on various issues of importance for Mexico City, including anti-corruption and citizen participation in urban sustainable planning. It advocates for improved governance by talking with people in government, conducting communication campaigns, and bringing public pressure on government. CartoCrítica uses Mexico's transparency and Access to Information legal framework to produce openly available maps of energy, natural resources, government permits and urban planning. Its stated purpose is to support integrated management of Mexican territory, protection of cultural and biological diversity, and protection of human rights. CIUDADanía19s, formed within weeks of the 2017 earthquake, became the coalition under which Ruta Cívica, CartoCrítica, and other actors campaigned in favor of risk management and reconstruction that included civil society participation, access to justice and respect for human rights, anti-corruption, and environmental justice.

The approach

The coalition carried out a wide variety of activities across the three efforts. Communication campaigns in social and traditional media mobilized citizen support through #AtlasdeRiesgosYA (#RiskAtlasNOW), interviews and press conferences, and posters and signs in neighborhoods. They lobbied government directly, holding meetings and discussions with elected representatives and government officials. They called upon the international commitments



made by the Mexican government as a member of the Open Government Partnership. They utilized the Access to Information law, filing requests to local governments, appealing to the National Transparency Agency (INAI) to uphold those requests, and making an Amicus Curiae filing to INAI. They worked to hold government accountable by reviewing reconstruction performance data. They wrote and published reports and papers.

The partners went beyond putting pressure on government and have contributed more directly to the tools available to citizens and even to government. Ruta Cívica produced a manual detailing the steps a citizen had to take to get government assistance for reconstruction and explaining how to identify and reduce risk in their own and neighbors' properties. It was designed as a practical manual—not just the official rules but what had to be done in practice. In addition, Ruta Cívica and CartoCrítica launched a citizen-science geographical platform, with information on urban development, water management, environmental conservation and risk. CIUDADanía19s carried out extensive neighborhood education through workshops and festivals to help people know how to use the Risk Atlas and other tools.

The impact

CIUDADanía19s has had significant impact on Mexico City's risk management and reconstruction policies and implementation. It has helped ensure the public availability of information that citizens need for recovering from earthquake damage and that all stakeholders need for planning for resilience and increasing accountability.

A major success came in getting Mexico City to make the Risk Atlas public. The Atlas maps multiple levels of data, from natural hazards to demographic information to social services and location of organizations. All the data, including the shape files, are downloadable, enabling others—whether civil society organizations, the private sector, or individuals—to produce maps or other tools that are directly useful for their own communities. Along with the Risk Atlas, the city's Open Data Portal and the Ruta Cívica-CartoCrítica open portal on urban planning data have greatly expanded the tools that citizens and civil society can access.

On reconstruction, the newly elected Mexico City administration centralized the various procedures under the Reconstruction Commission and streamlined the property title accreditation process required to start construction. The Commission now posts its performance data on building reconstruction or repair, beneficiaries, and

funding allocation on the Open Data portal, and Ruta Cívica reviews and advises on the data and presentation as part of a scientific and transparency steering committee.

Ongoing challenges

Along with the successes, there are ongoing challenges. There are still limits to the data that are openly available. Although a new risk management law, with some mechanisms for civil society and private sector representation, was recently approved by the Mexico City Congress, it has not yet been implemented. Many decisions are made behind closed doors, and access for CSOs to key decision-makers is difficult.

There are also challenges with regard to citizen utilization of the information. In low-income neighborhoods, most people do not have access to technology so need intermediaries who can translate the information into usable tools, such as creating paper maps that bring together different types of information relevant for the community. Efforts towards relocating vulnerable groups to safer areas is yet to come. Even more significant is a strong distrust of government, based on having received little or disappointing assistance from government in the first two years after the earthquake, questions about fairness of who does receive aid, and doubts about the fit of government approaches to the needs of the communities.

Conclusion

The experience of Ruta Cívica, CartoCrítica, and Ciudadanía19s is a story of CSOs working collectively to strengthen policy implementation and governance, with an emphasis on openness to citizen involvement and accountability to citizens. It demonstrates the effectiveness of a multifaceted advocacy strategy of working closely with government officials and agencies, on one hand, and organizing public campaigns of civil society organizations, experts, and citizens to put pressure on government from the outside. In addition, it shows the potential role of policy advocacy CSOs in serving as intermediaries between government and citizens, or communities.

These efforts also underline the importance of information for citizen empowerment in disaster recovery and risk management, as well as enabling an evolution of approaches toward prevention. They demonstrate how civil society organizations can play a central role in helping to create an environment of information openness that supports more effective disaster response and greater urban resilience in the long run.