

Chapter 18

The Contribution of Colombian Civil Society Organizations to E-Government for the Improvement of Transparency through the Use of Information and Communication Technologies

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the experience of civil society organizations in Colombia to improve the transparency of the municipalities' administrations through the project 'Internet for Accountability' developed by Colnodo in partnership with Corporation Transparency for Colombia. Within this initiative, a website for municipalities was developed and afterwards improved and expanded by the Territorial e-government Strategy (GELT) and implemented by the Connectivity Agenda of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies. The chapter begins by describing the current situation of the municipalities' websites and how they have been expanded with the support of the GELT strategy. Subsequently, presents the consultation carried out with the municipalities in order to find out the impact and usage of the websites on citizens' participation and accountability. Finally, presents the conclusions based on the experience of the organizations involved and the information gathered during the consultation.

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INTRODUCTION

Colnodo has witnessed successful stories of municipalities that are using their web sites to offer information about their local government and town. The municipality of San Vicente de Chucuri (www.sanvicentede-chucuri-santander.gov.co) is one of them. It won the award “Best Colombian Municipality Site”²² in 2006 and 2007. The cities of Tulua and La Palma are other examples. Tulua (www.tulua.gov.co) won the same prize in 2008 and La Palma (www.lapalma-cundinamarca.gov.co) in 2009.

Yet, there is a long way to go in a significant number of municipalities in Colombia, even though they have the same infrastructure, Information and Communication Technologies - ICT platforms and support from the national government (1063 of 1101 municipalities in Colombia use the same platform). This situation presents us with different scenarios to determine the best possible e-government solutions that could be easily adapted by a municipality and / or government organization. Likewise, we need to identify what prevents the use of these technologies by local governments and to understand, together with civil society organizations, whether these new technologies implemented through such initiatives have contributed in some way to improve transparency.

To find some answers to these questions, Colnodo developed a national consultation with all the municipalities using the websites developed based on the Internet for Accountability Platform in order to determine if there was a real positive change in their communities originated by the use of these ICT; especially in a country like Colombia where the Internet coverage is still low (about 44%³ of Colombians have Internet access). All the municipalities (1071) beneficiaries of the Territorial e-Government Strategy⁴ of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies⁵ were invited to participate. The consultation had the main objectives of identifying what the

impact was of the websites on accountability and participation and their usage by the population and civil servants.

This chapter presents the results of this consultation and recommendations for further research.

BACKGROUND

Colombia has made significant progress in the implementation of its e-government strategy in the last years. In fact, in the global e-government Survey for 2010 and published by the UN⁶, Colombia came first in Latin America and the Caribbean and 31st in the world.

This progress was in part due to the e-government strategy implemented by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies which aims to contribute to a more efficient, transparent and participatory State, providing better services to its citizens and businesses by making the most of ICTs (www.programa.gobiernoenlinea.gov.co/componentes.shtml). This is one of the strategic programs of the ICT National Plan⁷ -Plan TIC- and a guiding principle for the Law 1341 of 2009, also known as ICT Law⁸.

The Decree 1151 of 2008 and the Manual for the Implementation of the e-government Strategy⁹ established the procedures that the national and regional governmental institutions should follow, with 2012 as the deadline to complete the phases of the e-government:

- **Information Phase:** The institutions had to provide information on their main areas of interest. The deadline was the year 2008.
- **Interaction Phase:** in this phase the organizations began to interact with the public and the businesses by providing access to their databases and to their civil servants. The deadline was 2008 for the national organizations and 2009 for territorial organizations.

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