Collective and Participatory Strategic Planning of the Department of Tolima in Colombia

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ABSTRACT

The following document describes the participative and democratic process that took place in the department of Tolima Colombia, to make the strategic planning for the period 2012-2015. In the exercise the main public investments were defined thanks to the usage of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). According to Colombia's regulatory framework, the development of the exercise of planning is mandatory for territorial entities. The regulatory framework seeks to strengthen the mechanisms that prevent, investigate and punish acts of corruption and strengthen the effectiveness of public management (Anticorruption Law 1474 of 2011; "Estatuto Anticorrupción Ley 1474 de 2011"). Also, the regulatory framework gives guidelines to implement and embrace strategies that consolidate social control as the main source for monitoring and supervise the public administration, examples of this are E-Government (Decree 1151 of 2008) and Accountability (CONPES 3654 of 2010). The exercise was developed around the following phases: 1) open consultation, 2) targeted consultation and 3) coordination of the plan. All this was possible thanks to the support of academia, particularly to the "Peace And Regional Program" of the University of Ibague, located in the capital of the department, who were responsible for training citizens in the use of a web tool for this purpose.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.4.3 [**Organizational Impacts**]: Computer-supported collaborative work.

General Terms

Documentation

Keywords

Development Plan; Citizen Participation; Collective Construction; Social Control

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Constitution, the Republic of Colombia is decentralized and therefore it is divided into departments, districts, municipalities and indigenous territories. There are a total of 32 departments and 1.101 municipalities. The department

of Tolima has a population of 1.365.342 inhabitants and is divided in 47 municipalities; each of them issues a development plan as part of a government policy (Law 152 of 1994). The development plans (DPs) establish guidelines for the actions of policy makers and citizens as well as investment prioritization, resource optimization, care of the main needs of the region and current opportunities for the territory. Following a national proposal for strategic planning 2012-2015, Tolima's local government sought through citizen participation investment solutions and budget priorities to issues of great impact in order to improve its economy. On this context, the local government sought mechanisms that could collect views, interests and needs of different population groups. In this way the ICTs came as a secure, reliable and agile two-way mechanism for the collective construction and the promotion of the social control policy. Through them, an institutional modernization based on an efficient, optimized and open government will be achieved.

2. BACKGROUND

Thanks to Tolima's ICT policy and through the "Vive Digital" Plan, the local government had provided large benefits to its community. An example of this is the "Tolima Vive Digital Plan" (2011-2012); it includes projects related to Disaster Prevention and Assistance, e-government for municipalities, telemedicine and social inclusion and business strengthening. As a social inclusion project, a technologic platform known as "Tolima online democratic" was developed to incentive citizen participation for the collective construction of the municipality and department strategic planning.

3. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF THE CITIZENSHIP IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Tolima´s local government understood that it was necessary that groups of individuals with common interests imagine and build societies with the capacity to discover and solve problems effectively, societies that encourage creativity, seek solutions and alternatives, propose goals and fulfill those. Additional benefits of this collective construction would be institutional strengthening, perception of confidence in public administration and targeting the objectives and mission of the State. The local government of Tolima identified that the best way of achieving the above was using the DPs as a political, technical, prospective, democratic and participative instrument in which department and municipality governments could easily establish their decisions, actions, means and resources to execute the 4 year period. This initiative could integrate the public and private sectors, social classes and communities, which are the basis of economic and social transformation to recover the progress and achieve the required level of competitiveness in the region. To do this, the local

government established the 3 following participation phases using the ICT:

3.1 Phase 1

Open consultation where citizens thought about their needs: 104 Workshops were held in order to make the "DPs"; nearly 12.000 participants shared their opinions and expectations around the strategic planning. The academic training process was performed by the University of Ibague: presence workshops in 11 municipalities and online workshops in 36. The University was able to train and guide the community in the management of the web tool: www.planeaciontolima.gov.co and afterwards it unified the results. Additionally, there were held the following workshops: 13 presence workshops in 13 districts of the capital of Tolima, 8 workshops with children, adolescents and youth and 20 special workshops with social and economic sectors and with vulnerable population groups. This phase took place between February 1st and 28th of 2012.

3.2 Phase 2

Consultations focused on problem detection, solving and on thinking about new opportunities: To achieve this goal the platform allowed the participation of 25.000 people who contributed with 28.000 comments. All this ensures an effective training on the usage of ICT. This phase took place between March 1st and April 15th of 2012

3.3 Phase 3

Plan Consolidation, Citizens were able to prioritize the projects identified in the previous phase: This phase included the prioritization of projects, evaluations and consultation of them in order to develop the "DPs". 7.416 contributions were obtained through the tool. This phase took place between April 15th and May 15th of 2012.

4. MAIN REQUIREMENTS GIVEN AT THE MECHANISMS OF PARTICIPATION

The main need expressed by citizens was related to the status of secondary and tertiary roads (12.69% of participants), because most of them are in very bad condition and also because in some municipalities permanent closures took place because of bad weather. Roads with undesirable conditions hinder the economic and social development and the marketing of agricultural products. Secondly, it came to discussion the lack of water and sewage (9.09%), which is an indicator of the low level of development of the department. This has a huge impact on infant mortality. On third place, citizens requested support and investment on recreation and sports (7.74%). The purpose of this is making a better usage of children and adolescents free time, avoiding high indexes of drug consumption and violence. Finally, topics such as strengthening agriculture (5.4%), promotion of culture (5.13%) and improvement of educational infrastructure (4.95%) were prioritized by citizens.

5. ACHIEVEMENTS FROM A PARTICIPATIVE PLANNING

The web tool allowed processing statistics, analyzing and diagnosing Tolima's real social situation. An investment of USD 992 million for the 4 year period was projected for 1.365.342 inhabitants from 47 municipalities. Through the web tool "Tolima online democratic", the department DP "United for Tolima's grandeur 2012-2015" (*Unidos por la grandeza del Tolima 2012-2015*)" was finished. Also, the web tool allowed the making of 47 municipality DPs. In addition, trough the web tool some innovative

exercises could be held (open consultation with citizens) so the goals to strengthen social control and accountability were achieved. For sustainability and project maturity, there were held training strategies to promote the usage of ICT by citizens, the E-Government Strategy was included, the academic entrepreneurship was strengthened and the regional IT industry was supported. In the exercises local organizations, vulnerable societies and rural population were present.

6. FOLLOW-UP OF THE PERFORMANCE AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Due to the success of the project it was found that the implementation of "Phase 4" was necessary. To perform it, Tolima's local government developed an innovative instrument for the follow-up and the constant evaluation of DPs performance: (http://www.ejecutortolima.gov.co/). The purpose of this new tool is to guarantee the DPs accomplishment (department and municipality) though the follow-up, evaluation and monitoring, this, will allow the improvement of State's capacities to fiscal and administrative control and citizens' capacities to political and social control.

7. LESSONS LEARNED

At first, it is essential to characterize the type of population that will be performing the exercise and identify possible weaknesses. The training of the use of ICT to citizens' "digital literacy" is key for the success of the exercise. Cooperation between government and academia is desirable to implement participative projects with ICT. The usage of ICT to develop a multichannel strategy to communicate initiatives and invite to participate is vital.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Technology offers more and better channels to communicate citizenship with the State. In this sense, Tolima´s local government managed the implementation of a two-way mechanism for collective construction of policies, planning, regulation, social control and troubleshooting for decision-making.

9. ACKNOWLEDGES

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