
TWO CITIZEN EXPERIENCES FROM THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT IN GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY MATTERS

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I INTRODUCTION

This document presents two citizen experiences over the right of access to information and transparency matters. The first one, promoted by the “Heriberto Jara” Municipal Service Center, A.C. (CESEM Veracruz, acronym in Spanish), is related to a pedagogic, organizational and legal process through mobilizations and forums performed by different civil, academic and political bodies to debate the initiative of the Access to Information Law presented to the Congress of Veracruz by the State Executive to create alternatives that are closer to citizen’s interests in this matter.

The second experience deals with the application of a government transparency program named “Citizens for Transparent Municipalities” (CIMTRA, acronym in Spanish), where CESEM together with other civil organizations (Internacional City County Management Association, Alianza Cívica, Locallis and Vertebra) aims to create processes to help citizens and local governments in the promotion and institutionalization of a transparency culture and access to information.

INITIATIVE BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN VERACRUZ FOR GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY

CITIZEN ACTION BACKGROUND

Out of the three government levels that currently exist in our country, it is the municipal the one that requires the deepest modifications and the one that has the most direct impact over the ways and quality of life of citizenship. The way in which the budget is executed and investigated, in which salaries are assigned to officers and in which municipal development priorities are determined are not only far from being transparent, but it also blocks citizens' participation in fundamental areas and processes for their lives.

In some municipalities of our country, both in Veracruz as in other entities, successful civil experiences have been generated, in which citizens have succeeded to participate with city councils in decision-making processes. Municipal parliaments, as well as Councils chambers and government councils, have demonstrated to be co-responsibility spaces between governments and people for the implementation of long reach policies in benefit of the population.

Given that the Veracruz juridical framework does not guarantee full recognition or permanence of these government institutions, it is essential for many Veracruz civil organizations to promote spaces and paths for citizen participation in those environments, where important decisions for municipal life are made.

Furthermore, it is necessary to transform municipal regulations to create mechanisms that allow citizens to participate and supervise budgetary matters.

The indispensable legal instruments for the control of the budgetary appropriation to cover the salaries of popular representatives and public servants do not exist in Veracruz. They enjoy exorbitant salaries, considering the economic reality of the country. It is clear that it is necessary to establish transparent and fair tabulators, capable of setting public servants salaries at all government levels, to allow a balanced percentage between payroll expense and City Hall social and operational expense.

Municipal life is not limited to the budgetary topic. The civil organization members that present this work witnessed that in many cases popular representatives and public servants are not properly trained to execute their positions correctly,

resulting in a very low quality in municipal public service. Therefore, it becomes necessary to establish an obligation for those individuals that run for election offices at a municipal level so that they have enough education and training for such office and to create a permanent professional program that considers the application of sanctions in case of non compliance. It is evident that the current situation makes it also necessary to establish the mandatory career civil service, including the official registration of municipal public servants in order to ensure permanence and promotion of personnel, which will eventually allow a higher professional level and public administration consistency.

CITIZEN RESPONSE: THE MUNICIPALITY PLATFORM

Before the necessity to generate substantial changes in the municipal government organization, in the CESEM we started in May 13, 2003, the construction of a local citizen platform and made a call by which we gathered a group of citizens from the municipality of Veracruz, with different social tendencies and from several civil organizations, with the idea of creating a document which would include a series of items for a municipal change, given that we had the idea that the political reality of our municipalities can change and come closer to a more democratic reality.

The final document was named Municipality Platform. Initially, the intention was to publish this document and strive so that it would be considered and discussed by the candidates to Congress before the Congress of the Union and by the legislators of the State Congress. Numerous mayors, syndics, councilmen, and municipal deputies, ex mayors, members of social organizations endorsed the Municipal Platform: indigenous, partisans, men and women.

THE BASIC PROPOSALS OF SUCH PLATFORM ARE:

1. Juridical recognition of citizen participation bodies in decision-making processes;
2. Stringency and transparency in municipal finances;
3. Municipal public service training and professionalism;
4. Recognition to the inherent government execution of Indigenous People;
5. Incorporation of a perspective of equity and gender in municipal life, and
6. Guarantee a municipal autonomy.

Ten days after the publication of the Municipality Platform (June 2, 2003), the Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Government Public Information (LFTAIPG) came into force, a Law that allows to reduce corruption, to improve government efficiency and the accountability systems from officers to citizens. While becoming familiar with the Law, we found important coincidences with its contents and became aware that the state and local approval and application of legislation with such features would result in a drive for democratic transformation in Veracruz.

CIVIL ACTIONS BEFORE THE “LEY ALEMAN” INITIATIVE

Political situation in Veracruz is complex, as the force correlation within government bodies is inclined towards a unique party. Governor Miguel Aleman comes from the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI), which has an absolute majority (29 of 45 benches) in the state Congress.

Accountability and transparency in the management of public resources is absent in the entity. Information in the hands of the state, and local Governments, and general public bodies, and is systematically denied to the requesters and, whenever published, the disclosure is partial or limited.

One example shall suffice: by disposition of Congress of the Union, state governments are compelled to provide information regarding the destination of Cluster 033 resources under local management. During the office of Patricio Chirinos (1992-1998), the local Executive detailed in his annual state report about the use of such amount, applied by the local governments. Therefore, any abnormality or deviation of such resources by the mayors could be detected, as the information regarding budgets, works, communities, and number of beneficiaries as well as the progress level in the construction of public works, became transparent.

This practice did not continue during the office of Miguel Aleman: now, such data does not appear in the annual reports. The Government opacity is such that the state Executive has refused to publish his patrimonial statement, claiming that he does not want to show off his assets.

There is a public resources higher supervision body in Veracruz, which does not have recognition by opposing political forces as a result of a lack of trust due to the way in which such resources supervision over different government bodies is performed. Its activity has been characterized as costly and applied under political and group criteria.

It was within this context that Governor Miguel Aleman submitted a law initiative on transparency and access to information to the state Congress; separately, PAN, PRD and PT parliamentary fractions submitted their own initiatives over the same topic.

Most certainly several members of Municipal organizations felt in need of knowing about these proposals and to submit our opinion. On August 7, members of the CESEM met in Xalapa; the sixth councilman of Xalapa; the syndics from Puente Nacional and Naolinco, the Radio Teocelo Director, members of the municipality school, representatives of the Frente Regional Popular del Sureste del Estado de Veracruz – MAIZ, and the Organización Campesina Independiente de la Sierra Zongolica, amongst other peers.

During this event, we analyzed the Law of Access to Information initiative that the Executive had submitted to the state Congress, as such initiative would be the topic to be discussed by the parliamentary fractions with the purposes of, eventually, passing a Law.

From our first analysis, some concerns emerged, as we identified severe limitations, among which we can stress the following:

- It does not include public office transparency, the promotion of accountability and the contribution for the democratization of Veracruz society as specific objectives, and only proposes, in its 4 article:
 - I. To guarantee the right to public information by simple and expedite procedures;
 - II. To allow citizens to analyze State performance;
 - III. To promote awareness of public office to allow the promotion of an appreciation culture of Public Bodies, and
 - IV. To optimize the characterization, organization, handling and filing of public documents.
- It restrains the right to information when considering “any information that could disturb or endanger social order or compromises the State patrimony” as reserved information, thereby opening clearly discretionary margins for its application (Article 8).
- It does not envision that government and city hall bodies disclose - in a detailed and precise manner - public servants salaries, including compensations; assigned and applied budgets for each agency; audits

results; design, execution, allotted amounts and access criteria to subsidy programs; social programs beneficiary listings; or government agencies grants and contracts.

- It does not propose the creation of a citizen body with operational, budgetary and decision autonomy in charge of promoting and broadcasting the right of access to information exercise. This task is delegated to information committees within each public agency or city hall, which weakens the right of access to government public information exercise.

REGIONAL ENCOUNTERS

Considering the above, we agreed to call for four regional Encounters in different cities within the state with the purpose of holding a State Encounter to influence the legislators' decision regarding this law initiative.

205 individuals attended the Encounters¹, 30% were women. The participants are members of 44 social, government, political, communication media, and academic institutions. Particularly, mayors Hugo Bernal Fernández and Darío Aburto Perdomo, from Cordoba and Cosoleacaque respectively, were the hosts, as well as Eduardo Pérez Roque, sixth councilman of Xalapa and the journalist Victor Cantu, conductor of a well-known radio news program from Poza Rica. Blanca Cobos, Syndic from Puente Nacional, Veracruz, and Lina Valadez, representative of the municipal platform of the Cordoba, Veracruz, region, played a major role in promoting and supporting such activities.

With the purpose of informing citizens about the projected process, we decided to build a web site where we included a description of the organizational and pedagogical process that we were initiating².

¹ September 25, 2003, in Cordoba, October 4 in Xalapa, October 11 in Poza Rica and October 25 in Cosoleacaque.

² www.encuentropublico.net, virtual forum for the debate around the right of access to information in Veracruz.

During the encounters, we had the cooperation of the Federal Institute of Access to Public Information (IFAI, acronym in Spanish), who sponsored a training process regarding the right of access to information; same that was useful for the participating bodies to guide the contents of their requests and to file information requests³.

As a result of this regional Encounters, we were able to go deeper in the comparative study and analysis of the different proposals for the state law of access to information. Based on the resolutions of the mentioned encounters, we created a citizen proposal stating the basic elements that the Law of access to information for Veracruz must have, according to our judgment:

1. To specifically include the objectives of transparency, efficiency and democratization of Veracruz society;
2. To establish the obligation for state and local governments and for other type of public bodies (Electoral Institute of Veracruz, Human Rights Commission of the State of Veracruz, Environmental Protection State Council, etc.) to permanently inform about their organic structure and operation, about the execution of their programs and the management of material and economic resources.
3. To create the Veracruz Institute of Access to Information to guarantee this right, with autonomy, that does not impact public finances, and capable of issuing mandatory recommendations and imposing sanctions, to be under the responsibility of non-partisan citizens.
4. To characterize reserved or confidential information so that only the one that endangers the state security and the individual right to privacy and dignity can be classified.
5. To include a sanction chapter for the non – compliant public servants.
6. To disclose the information in hands of city halls, namely: a) ordinary and extraordinary city hall session minutes; b) government yearly report; c) arbitration plans; d) expenses budget and municipal public account monthly reports, and
7. To establish information request and information delivery modules where citizens receive orientation regarding right of access to government public information.

³ During the Xalapa encounter, the Chiltoyac community representatives requested from SEMARNAT the Environmental Impact Study for the installation of the sanitary filling in their region.

From our decision to drive these Encounters, the state Legislature called for Public Hearings to discuss the Law initiatives at a state level. In fact, the commissions in charge of creating the Congress resolution, called for 5 hearings in Tuxpan, Huatusco, Veracruz, Minatitlán and Xalapa. These were held after our own encounters and decided to participate with lectures, which reflected the resolutions thereby made. In all hearings a dissent was expressed against the “Governor’s Law” and several stand points that agreed on the need of having a local Law of access to information with essential features comparable to those of LFTAIPG were publicized.

THE STATE ENCOUNTER

On November 14, 2003, in “Los Lagos” Cultural Center in the city of Xalapa, and after holding the Regional Encounters and gathering the several citizens’ proposals and opinions regarding the minimum contents of the Law of access to information for Veracruz, the State Encounter was held.

Its main objectives were:

- a) To recognize information as a public good;
- b) To declare the importance of the right of access to information in order to guarantee transparency in public office execution and to make accountability from officers to citizens, a reality.
- c) To recognize the progress made in legislation matters in our country and in other states and municipalities.
- d) To compile concerns from the attendance to the regional and state encounters regarding the enormous work necessary so that the citizens really do exercise the right of access to information, and
- e) To compile the proposals received during all the Encounters to present an initiative or a citizen legislative platform before the State Congress.

The History Research Institute of the University of Veracruz, the Center for Social Anthropology Research and Higher Studies and Knowledge Management of the Gulf, A.C. joined to the organization of this state Encounter; and local communication media workers also attended. Olivia Dominguez, Director of the State General Archives, Representatives Jazmin Copete and Claudia Serapio of PRD and PT respectively, and the President of the Government and Constitutional Points Commission, Miguel Angel Diaz Pedroza, from PRI, were also present in this event.

The speakers were: Dario Aburto Perdomo, Cosoleacaque mayor, Doctor Maria Marván Laborde, IFAI President Commissioner and Horacio Aguilar Alvarez, Counselor Commissioner of the same Institute.

Amongst the very numerous opinions and standpoints discussed during the encounter works, the following considerations were outstanding:

- The appraisal of accountability as a fundamental principle of the government office is a social need;
- Social organizations play a critical role in the publicizing of the right of access to information, transparency and accountability, as well as the relationship of this right with other laws, for example, the Law of Indigenous Rights, and
- It is indispensable to foster accountability at municipal level through the execution and defense of the right of access to public information.

The participants of this encounter established several commitments:

- To create a committee to present the Encounter resolutions before the state legislature;
- To broadcast in our municipalities the Federal Law of Access to Government Public Information and to promote the right of access to public information by means of a permanent campaign;
- To agree upon the mechanisms to broadcast and work for the right of information from organizations and communities;
- To publicize the right of access to information through television, radio, and printed media, as well as by the publication of brochures with an accessible language, highlighting the usefulness of access to information; in other words, its relationship with the different demands made by the people;
- To establish a social coordination mechanism for the defense of the right to information, inviting multiple social sectors;
- To drive communication campaign oriented to children and young students;
- To promote, together with the IFAI, a training program on the right of access to information, and
- To create a participant address book with the purpose to establishing links that could be useful for common actions and projects.

Within the Encounter framework, the need to translate the Law language and the real meaning of access to information into easily understandable terms for rural communities and particularly for indigenous communities was also mentioned: What kind of information? For which matters? For what kind of needs? Those are issues to be solved, so that civil organizations can act as beam-leds for others to become familiar with the base organizations and community needs.

Regarding organizations and municipalities, the need to respond to the following questions was outlined: How to link this right with the community communication paths and organization? How to use the Internet to solve communication problems between the people and the organizations, and between government and people? In this same sense: How to use community and commercial radio, television, newspaper and other media? What mechanisms and forms must be used to turn municipalities into actual transparency role models? How does this struggle for transparency relate to the necessary municipal reform? The conclusions derived from this exercise is that a culture that favors the right to know and to gather information demand permanent education, training and communication efforts in all the sectors of social and daily life, as well as the necessary knowledge to use similar laws. Finally, after a long civil organization and participation process, the law initiatives presented before the State Congress were submitted to public consultation, allowing us to refine our proposals over the contents of the Law of Transparency for Veracruz, same that were officially presented to the representatives in charge of resolving the initiatives related to transparency for their discussion during the Legislature Plenum.

Today, we can affirm that we have created a public opinion stream that favors transparency; nevertheless, the task of creating the large strategic lines to make a reality out of this right in Veracruz is still ahead.

“CITIZENS FOR TRANSPARENT MUNICIPALITIES - CIMTRA” PROGRAM. A TOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY IN CITIZEN AND LOCAL SPHERES

The right of access to public government information and transparency are two basic factors to secure the country’s democratization process and to strengthen Institutions and the State of Right. For this, it is necessary to have responsible citizens and authorities in the public affairs sphere. One thing that is clear for the citizens is that political alternation is not enough to obtain government

transparency: it is indispensable to have innovative processes that support the linkage between citizens and local authorities over this matter

Access to information is a double pathway: it is a citizen right that must be exercised and a government obligation that must be supervised. This means that mechanisms and strategies must be designed to allow that access to government information is applied, promoted, and invigorated from the civil sphere. We citizens must clearly be aware that government transparency processes do not exist only through the legal framework; this means that we citizens have to realize that the laws and challenges that were created to foster transparency are not enough, but rather that such culture must be promoted among society. This is why it is necessary to implement pedagogical processes that allow the construction of a democratic management, a citizen exercise to recognize and enforce their right to be informed and to access government information; and, on the other hand, that local governments learn to perform transparently by means of the exploration of the institutionalized pathways and the creation of new ways for citizen interaction.

Local government is the main actor in the country's democratic life. It is closer to the people and, thus, is where social aims can be realized; among them, the service of efficient and democratic governments.

Government transparency is closely related to public servants and authorities' ethics, responsibility, and efficiency so their existence cannot be visualized as a mere *charity* from them towards the citizens, or as an electoral banner. Transparency and access to information are keys to a face-to-face relationship between officers and citizens that include and create spaces and mechanisms designed for civil participation (for instance, citizen comptrollerships). This means to move from the yearly state report culture, to one in which the government submits information to citizens as a basic gesture of responsibility. We are within a historical process in which government transparency must turn into a bridge of interactivity between society and authorities.

“CITIZENS FOR TRANSPARENT MUNICIPALITIES” (CIMTRA) PROGRAM

Confrontation and distancing between government and citizen spheres has unfortunately turned into something natural in our political – social system. It is necessary to work for a State of Right that allows opening possibilities for social interests and to access justice, through the defense and enforcement of citizen rights.

The lack of a transparency culture in local governments is a complex circumstance that makes it necessary to stimulate the construction of an aware society, together with sensitive governments committed with the improvement of people's quality of life. In this country, we are undergoing an interesting period in transparency matters, as it is necessary to foster the right of access to information through the creation of tools that are capable of providing support and viability from the constructive and pedagogical view points.

In order to offer a constructive tool from the citizens' perspective regarding municipal and district governments' transparency and accountability, the CESEM has undertaken, together with Vertebra, ICMA, Alianza Civica and Locallis, a Program called "Citizens for Transparent Municipalities, CIMTRA". The Program was born by mid 2002 with two objectives: identification of local governments' transparency levels and the construction of citizen mechanisms that allow their transparency and accountability. The idea is that such methodological tools are retaken and applied by other civil and citizen bodies interested in the ethical and responsible performance of their local governments.

The substantial elements of this program are:

1. The elaboration and application of questionnaires by civil bodies or groups to their local governments in order to identify:
 - a) The transparency mechanisms available to local governments in their operation, and
 - b) Their transparency level in multiple political and administrative fields.
2. Training of civil and citizen bodies through enforcements and rating manuals so that they know about the contents and scope of the right of access to information and the way to use and apply said questionnaire.

Citizens for Transparent Municipalities (CIMTRA) does not aim to detect corruption, to endorse or prosecute governments, but rather to identify those aspects that are significant enough to be recognized as transparency actions and mechanisms and to turn the local environment into a proper space for a democratic life. It aims to a positive experience exchange through the promoting group, gathering experience academic, entrepreneurial and civil bodies.

The Program envisions the citizen as co-responsible of Government actions, with the purpose of invigorating interaction and participation mechanisms between society and local government. The idea is to create processes both for citizens

and local governments that participate in the questionnaire application and to provide follow up to such processes and actions from the surveyed governments.

Citizens for Transparent Municipalities is not aiming to the mere accomplishment of a rating, but to the possibility that the numerous elements contained in such questionnaire (as indicators) are undertaken by local authorities and officers as practices within the political – bureaucratic apparatus. The intention is to activate positive processes to institutionalize government actions in transparency and accountability matters, as opposed to pointing out non compliances and obstacles present in these local government environments.

The way in which the CIMTRA survey was applied was agreed upon both by authorities and civil organizations, in such a way that it allows to foster communication and transformation in the government sphere.

CIMTRA PROGRAM METHODOLOGICAL ELEMENTS

The CIMTRA questionnaire presents 31 questions around three specific fields ⁴ :

1. **Citizen information:** Aspects like information availability over suppliers, municipal income and expense, public debt, city hall members and officers' salaries are included in this area. In other words, what is it that the local Government is reporting to the citizens?
2. **Citizen Service;** Municipal services user's manuals and mechanisms, as well as the available tools for user's services are evaluated in this field. In other words: How is municipal / district government addressing citizens?
3. **Government-Society Communication Spaces:** Municipality – Delegation Councils / Committees democratization, operation and regulations, as well as City Hall's openness to society are evaluated. They indicate the citizen participation form and mechanisms with the local government.

The questions have several ratings according to their relevance (2, 3 and 5 points), adding up to 100 points. For this year, after application experiences, the program and the teaching material have been adjusted. The group and organizations that promote the CIMTRA program are in charge of validating the applications according to predetermined methodological mechanisms.

⁴ The information is available in Internet (<http://www.cesemheribertojara.org.mx>) for whoever desires to implement the Program.

Given this is a citizen instrument, CIMTRA Program does not respond to any political party, local government or entrepreneurial group interests. It has been created and applied by social organizations (or by a group of citizens). This means that CIMTRA is not a tool by which governments can obtain a self evaluation. It does not score based on “subjective” appreciations, but rather does it based on specific government actions and practices.

CIMTRA ACHIEVEMENTS

The CIMTRA Program questionnaire was applied in 24 Municipalities of seven states:

Chihuahua, Veracruz, Nuevo León, Zacatecas, Morelos, Estado de México and Jalisco, plus two districts in the Federal District (see Table)⁵. This mainly deals with local governments that are characterized as urban. Local governments are within a population spectrum that rates from one million inhabitants to municipalities of 20,000 to 30,000 inhabitants.

⁵ En el Cuadro se incluyen los resultados de la primera y segunda aplicación del cuestionario para el caso de Chihuahua.

TABLE

CIMTRA RATINGS (To April, 2004)				
Municipality/Delegation*	State	Round	Application Date	Score
Chihuahua	Chihuahua	2 nd	August 2003	85.53
San Nicolás de los Garza	Nuevo León	1 st	October 2002	68.46
Guadalajara	Jalisco	1 st	December 2003	65.30
Delicias	Chihuahua	1 st	January 2004	65.18
Tlalpan	Federal District	1 st	March 2003	65.06
San Pedro Garza García	Nuevo León	1 st	October 2002	60.68
Linares	Nuevo León	1 st	November 2002	48.23
Montemorelos	Nuevo León	1 st	November 2002	45.96
Ciudad Juárez	Chihuahua	1 st	January 2004	43.80
Monterrey	Nuevo León	1 st	October 2002	43.36
Cuernavaca	Morelos	1 st	April 2002	41.90
Magdalena Contreras	Federal District	1 st	April 2003	39.00
Cuatla	Morelos	1 st	April 2003	37.80
Chihuahua	Chihuahua	1 st	November 2002	37.13
Escobedo	Nuevo León	1 st	October 2002	34.55
Santa Catarina	Nuevo León	1 st	October 2002	33.88
Tepoztlán	Morelos	1 st	April 2003	32.10
Guadalupe	Zacatecas	1 st	March 2003	30.50
Apodaca	Nuevo León	1 st	October 2002	29.64
Amacueca	Jalisco	1 st	October 2003	28.57
Guadalupe	Nuevo León	1 st	October 2002	24.63
Allende	Nuevo León	1 st	November 2002	23.88
Xalapa	Veracruz	1 st	April 2002	21.80
Tlalnepantla de Baz	State of Mexico	1 st	November 2003	21.50
García	Nuevo León	1 st	October 2002	19.06
Sayula	Jalisco	1 st	November 2003	7.66
Juárez	Nuevo León	1 st	October 2002	4.83
Scale runs from 0 to 100 * Districts ratings are obtained by simple rule of three.				GENERAL AVERAGE: 39.26

There are five surveyed state capital cities: Chihuahua, Monterrey, Guadalajara Xalapa and Cuernavaca. Additionally, there are metropolitan municipalities: Guadalupe, in Zacatecas; San Pedro and San Nicolás, in Nuevo León, Tlalnepantla de Baz in the State of Mexico. Some of those municipalities have show low marginalization levels and stand out because of their high level of life.

Of the 24 surveyed local governments, only 6 obtained a passing score (Chihuahua; San Nicolás de los Garza; Tlalpan; Delicias; Guadalajara and San Pedro Garza García) and only two of the five surveyed capital cities got a positive score (Chihuahua and Guadalajara).

It is worth to point out that from the stand point of those who applied this instrument, there are many aspects that can be improved from simple actions and with no significant financial cost. Many times, the authorities are not responsive only because of their lack of knowledge. CIMTRA collaborators submit a series of

suggestions and proposals to the authorities in order to improve their weaknesses and strengthen their most positive aspects.

The possibilities for governments to improve their transparency mechanisms are broad if we consider that many of the elements contained in the questionnaire need, for their implementation, only political will as they can perfectly adhere to the legal framework. Thus, it has been observed that there are always two opposing forces within local administrations: those actors that consider that government transparency is a key element and those actors that are not unwilling to embrace government and social changes.

Undoubtedly, as a general average, the surveyed local governments show that there is a significant amount of work to do. It has been important for the participating governments to know about other local governments positive actions regarding this matter, with the purpose of exchanging experiences and information to motivate creative initiatives.

The Program has also been undertaken by several civil, academic and entrepreneurial organizations like ITESO, Coparmex Chihuahua, Poder Ciudadano or Comparmex Jalisco, thus allowing an expansion of efforts towards other regions of the country, where the surveillance of the results has been incorporated with the purpose of identifying the changes shown by the entities.

To the closure of this edition, the questionnaire application in the municipalities of Nuevo León has been initiated. It is worth to mention that in the case of Chihuahua, where the questionnaire has been applied twice, significant effects are shown by the score improvement, which passed from 37.1 to 85.5 points.

CONCLUSIONS

To this moment, after the first application of the questionnaire, we have a general average of 39.26 points (over 100), which suggests that there is still a long journey towards local government transparency improvement. This is a figure that clearly describes the magnitude of the work ahead of the Program collaborating organizations.

If each one of the indicators is examined in detail, it is possible to identify where the most repeated actions in transparency matters are, where the omissions are and where those aspects that can represent opportunities are.

In this sense, just to mention some examples, we can say that one of the weaknesses is the fact that 80% of the surveyed local governments do not publicize or disclose the names of their service suppliers; in the same proportion, they do not publicize or disclose their social communication expenses.

As opposed to it, there are more transparent aspects, as 80% do publicize and disclose the works of the current year and of the two previous years; 70% do disclose and publicize self generated income and contribution and participation income.

One of the most critical aspects is the one related to the articulation mechanisms between citizens and Government, as 80% of the committees or counsels that belong to the municipalities or delegations do not make a public call for their integration.

One of the opportunity areas is the disclosure and broadcasting of salaries and benefits for the mayor, the delegation deputy, counselors, and first level work staff, as only 60% of them disclose and broadcast salary information, but only 15% show a breakdown of salaries and benefits. The same happens with the disclosure and broadcasting of representation expenses, item covered by 45% of the local governments.

The resulting data does not indicate that co-responsibility necessarily exists between the size and relevance of the local government with their transparency level and rating. Transparency and accountability are not related to political parties; as opposed to it, those are issues that have not been sufficiently promoted by such instances.

Government transparency promotion mechanisms do not have to be costly; many of them only need political will, imagination and a systematic and permanent effort.

Laws are transparency instruments, though not an objective per se; the purpose is that people is timely and precisely informed about the execution of financial resources and about the decisions made by the government to enable them to take the pertinent measures.

Transparency and access to information is a processes for which citizen participation represent the foundation to create local governments vis-à-vis with society. The role of society, as entitled to receive information, is part of the current local government challenges.

Transparency mechanisms must be institutionalized as permanent government activities so that they become a part of the daily chores of public servants. The good will of authorities and officers is not enough. Local governments must promote a *transparency teaching process* to make the information supplied to the citizens available and understandable.

It is clear for the CIMTRA Program participant organizations that we must outreach towards more municipalities and delegations in the country and to promote the participation of more citizen and civil bodies in this effort, in such a way that the effort for government transparency attains a national sense.