



Children and young people build participatory democracy in Latin American cities

YVES CABANNES

Yves Cabannes is a lecturer in Urban Planning at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, and an economist, planner and urban specialist. Until December 2003, he was the Regional Coordinator of the UN Habitat/UNDP Urban Management Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean. He has particular experience and interest in participatory planning, municipal public policies, low-cost housing, participatory budgeting, community-based microcredit systems and appropriate technologies for local development. He is currently the convener for the UN Advisory Group on Forced Evictions, and senior advisor to the International Centre for Urban Management (CIGU) in Quito and also to the municipality of Porto Alegre in Brazil for the international network on participatory budgeting.

Address: 3 Linnean Street,
33, 02138 Cambridge MA,
USA; tel: +1 617 945 0513;
e-mail: ycabannes@mac.com

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ABSTRACT This paper presents case studies from four cities in Latin America – Cotacachi in Ecuador, Barra Mansa and Icapuí in Brazil, and Ciudad Guyana in Venezuela – all of which involved initiatives to foster the active participation of children and young people in the governance of their cities. The paper describes the larger context in each case, the range of methods used to involve young people in each city, the process as it evolved over time, the challenges experienced and the impact of the initiatives. To some extent, all four projects involved the adaptation of participatory budgeting as an approach to participation for young people. The paper concludes with a discussion of the lessons drawn from these cases.

KEYWORDS children and young people / local governance / participatory budgeting

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents four case studies from Latin America, all of them focused on efforts over a period of several years, starting in the late 1990s, to assert the right of children and young people to an active role in their cities. The cities in question are Cotacachi (Ecuador), Barra Mansa and Icapuí (Brazil), and Ciudad Guyana (Venezuela). These cities vary considerably in terms of their size and other characteristics, but they shared in common the willingness to foster the active participation of young people.

The case studies all focus on “urban consultations”, the cornerstone of interventions supported by the Urban Management Programme (UMP) for Latin America and the Caribbean.⁽¹⁾ These UMP consultations aimed to facilitate dialogue between urban administrations and other sectors of the community – in this case, children and young people – with an interest in resolving the community’s most pressing problems, and in strengthening the capacity of local participants to support these improvements.

The experiences described in these four case studies all attempted, to a greater or lesser degree, to extend or adapt the phenomenon of participatory budgeting to include young people. Since 1989, participatory budgeting has become an important tool and area of innovation for the promotion of citizenship, democracy and local development in many Brazilian municipalities, and increasingly also in other South American countries and in Europe. The common thread in these participatory

budgeting experiences is the involvement of local residents in decisions about the allocation of some part of the municipal budget. Every experience is unique, however, and there are variations with regard to the level of influence exercised by local citizens, the percentage of the total municipal budget involved, the extent of citizen involvement in the control and management of work after the budget has been approved, and the degree of formality or flexibility in the process.⁽²⁾

While these variations are evident in these four case studies involving young people, what they share is perhaps more important. All of them indicate the need, and provide the opportunity, to identify and address the priorities of young people, to provide a space within which they can function as citizens, and to consider the ways in which power can be shared at the local level with these young citizens.

II. COTACACHI, ECUADOR: A MUNICIPALITY "BUILT ON CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH"

a. Context

The canton of Santa Ana of Cotacachi, in the north of Ecuador, is geographically, ethnically and culturally diverse. Its three zones, the urban area, the sub-tropical zone and the Andean zone, range from 1,600 to 4,939 metres above sea level. The population of 37,250 consists of *mestizos*, blacks and indigenous people, the latter representing around 60 per cent. Children and young people aged between six and 24 years make up 40 per cent of the population.

Livelihoods revolve around agricultural production, handicrafts, tourism and some hotel industry. Limited access to land and the continuous division of family holdings has meant a sharp increase in rural impoverishment, resulting in considerable out-migration. The population growth rate in the canton, both urban and rural, is lower than the national rate.

Most local inhabitants lived below the poverty line in 1995–53 per cent in the urban area and 91 per cent in the rural area. The infant mortality rate – 79 per thousand in the rural area and 48 per thousand in the urban area – is alarming, and levels of malnutrition are high. Children suffer from respiratory and infectious illness, especially in the sub-tropical zone, due mainly to poor water quality, inadequate infrastructure and the lack of permanent health workers. Primary school enrolment, although high in the urban area, is only 77 per cent in the rural sector. Secondary school enrolment, about 50 per cent in the urban area, is scarcely 12 per cent in the countryside. Children and youth work in agriculture to help their families, and in the Andean area there is a growing problem of juvenile migration.

Since 1996, the municipal administration has implemented a policy of civic participation through the Assembly of Cantonal Unity, an independent and largely informal forum that is composed of 16 elected members. The assembly meets every year (usually with several hundred people attending) and evaluates the administration and the limitations of cantonal policies. Its objectives are to energize and train citizens in the exercise of their rights and responsibilities; to support self-determination and self-management among all groups, promoting co-existence; and to

(Cotacachi); Emly de Andrade Costa, Sandra Magalhães and Eliana Guerra (Icapui and Barra Mansa); and Lucy Guerrero (Ciudad Guayana); Fiorella Mackliff produced a synthesis and compiled the cases in Quito.

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1. These "urban consultations" were a UNDP/UN–Habitat programme focused on strengthening municipal governance, which ended in March 2003. The UMP closed down in March 2005 because of the withdrawal of support on the part of UNDP/UN–Habitat and international donors. This was despite tremendous demand by grassroots and local governments in the region, which were overwhelmed by the management demands placed on them by decentralization and limited resources. However, part of the programme's work has carried on independently under the aegis of CIGU (the International Center for Urban Management), which continues to provide limited (due to

financial constraints) support for progressive, democratic urban governance in the region. CIGU was founded in 2004, during a meeting in Quito that gathered more than 100 local governments, NGOs, grassroots and academic institutions that had been UMP partners since 1997.

2. For more information on participatory budgeting, see Cabannes, Yves (2004), "Participatory budgeting: a significant contribution to participatory democracy" *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 16, No 1, April, pages 27–46.

support the municipal town council in improving the quality of life. The working arm of the assembly is an elected council of 16 members.

During the second cantonal assembly in 1997, the limited participation of young people was identified as a significant weakness in the development plan, and since 1998, there has been a move to increasingly involve children and youth in local management committees, groups and work commissions. The very fact that children and young people in Cotacachi are commonly part of the productive work force made it perhaps easier from the beginning for adults to see the legitimacy of mainstreaming their participation as an extension of the adult process. An urban consultation was undertaken to recognize the rights and responsibilities of young people, to strengthen their social participation, and to respond to the multiple cultures of the canton in order to promote fair development. Broad local involvement was critical to this process, which depended on the enthusiasm and active support of the authorities, local institutions and NGOs, children and youth, teachers and citizens in general.

b. The process

There were three main stages to the process.

The urban consultation (1999–2000). This was a stage of awareness building and diagnosis. In preparation, radio, television and print media were used to mobilize interest, as well as camps, games and painting competitions organized by the municipality and the assembly. But these were short-lived and seen as being "led by the adults". A strategy was therefore adopted that the young people themselves would programme the activities.

In February and March 2000, 11 diagnostic workshops took place: one in the urban zone, six in the Andean zone and four in the sub-tropical zone, in each case through local groups. Teams had been trained in advance to handle diverse geographical and ethnic groups. In the Andean area, for instance, workshops were conducted in the local languages. Themes for the diagnosis were survival (health and nutrition, housing), protection, development (including education and recreation) and participation (in the home, the school, the community and the canton). At their request, the young people were divided into two groups, one for children up to the sixth grade and another for youth up to 28 years old. There were 1,394 participants, 750 children and 644 youths. With the children, interactive techniques emphasized recreation and the children's customs, history, culture and art. With the youth, debate was the primary activity, both oral and written. A gender perspective was stressed throughout the process, along with tolerance and respect for different groups. Adults were surprised by the quality of involvement on the part of the young people.

From March to June 2000, delegates elected by their peers participated in congresses in each of the three zones of Cotacachi, one for children and one for youth in each place. (These congresses were repeated in August 2002.) In June 2000, the Cantonal Congress of Children and Youth brought together democratically elected representatives from the zonal congresses, as well as some children invited from various educational establishments. Again, separate congresses took place for children and for youth. This cantonal meeting was an opportunity to

build consensus, to reach compromise on priorities and to coordinate activities.

The children and young people expressed concerns in a range of areas, both with regard to specific provisions for their own age group (recreational facilities, access to information on scholarships, more opportunities for their opinions to be heard) as well as more general community needs (such as the improvement of local roads, water quality, electricity and training for mothers on better nutrition). They pointed to the need for sources of work in order to avoid migration, good maintenance for recreational areas, improvements in the infrastructure for health care, and improved literacy. They also pointed to social and emotional concerns, including the lack of respect of adults towards children, absent fathers, abandonment by parents, alcoholism, inadequate diet and housing, ethnic tensions, and the loss of customs, language and traditions of the community. In the urban area, young people were especially concerned about the quality of services and housing, the creation of laws for their protection, promotion of their rights with regard to sexual orientation, and the creation of a youth office in the city.

Many of the improvements proposed by the young people were striking in their simplicity and concreteness. They wanted trash receptacles placed in plazas, for instance, and then they proceeded to remind adults to use them. Children in some of the high Andean areas wanted broken windows in their schools to be fixed. In locations 4,000 metres high, it can be very cold; nonetheless, adults had not realized how important this minor repair might be to the children. Even though the maintenance of schools is technically a central government responsibility, the local government decided to repair the windows.

The plan of action (2000). Plans in which the local government would play a key role were specified, and the mayor, along with the board of the cantonal assembly, legalized the process by signing the Great Plan of Childhood and Youth (Gran Acuerdo de la Niñez y Juventud), which focused on the following:

- the inclusion of the young people's proposals in the development plan of the canton;
- setting aside a percentage of the annual municipal budget for these proposals;
- fulfilling the agreements proposed by the young people in the First Cantonal Congress; and
- continued control of the situation by the children and youth, exercising their citizenship.

This act of political commitment on the part of the mayor was considered key to guaranteeing the execution of the proposals. With the signing of the Great Plan of Childhood and Youth, the mayor handed over to the young people a signed letter promising his resignation if he failed to fulfill his pledges to them.

The programme of priority actions (2001–2002). This phase involved defining specific actions and projects and extending the experience and its achievements by, for instance, channelling resources. Actions included:

- setting in place a participatory municipal budget for 2001 that protected the sectoral interests of children and youth;

- assigning to children and youth a participatory budget of US\$ 6,372 in 2002. In addition to these earmarked resources that funded small specific youth requests, many projects were included within regular sector programmes funded through a variety of sources (international and national in particular). The local government acted as a “broker” between the requests of the youth and the potential sources of funding. This money was spent primarily on ensuring that existing funded projects in the area included a component for young people. The municipality granted a ten-year contract for the administration of the Yana-yacu eco-tourist complex to the Maquimañachi. This project continues to thrive and includes, among other things, a swimming pool at 3,000 metres, heated by a solar heater, and run by young people as a source of income generation. The solar heating system was funded through a central government programme, the funds of which were channeled to Cotacachi and based on the youth request; and
- a programme for student scholarships in coordination with the Cuban Embassy, so that seven young people could study in La Havana.

c. Impacts and challenges

The opportunity to relate to people from the same age group but from different cultures, strata and sectors enriched the experience of young people in Cotacachi, allowing them, on the one hand, to learn more about the realities of their area, and on the other to support proposals taking into account both their specific needs and their collective well-being.

These young people learned how to articulate their ideas and negotiate for their rights. They learned about the inherent difficulties in any participatory and collaborative process and recognized the importance of exchanging experiences. Throughout the course of the consultation, the youth leaders demonstrated a great ability for management and self-management, and for coordinating and executing the projects. They continue in their commitment to the proposals made in the zonal consultations. Among the achievements accomplished were improvements to the local environment with regard to parks and repaired streets.

Aside from encouraging the development of a new generation of leaders, there were other positive impacts. The consultation was an important contribution to the larger participatory process of Cotacachi, especially in terms of the better understanding that developed with regard to responding to local ethnic diversity. The dialogues with young people also expanded the perspective of the adults. Identifying problems that affect children and youth and outlining and implementing solutions encouraged the authorities, the institutions and the citizens in general to understand the importance of investment in the development of the human being. It is noteworthy, for instance, that in this area, which formally had a high level of illiteracy, all young people and adults are now literate. It also became more clearly understood that it is children and young people who will ultimately take responsibility for achieving a participatory democracy.

III. BARRA MANSA, BRAZIL: INNOVATIVE EXPERIENCES IN CITIZENSHIP

a. Context

Barra Mansa, a municipality in the southeast region of Brazil, lies between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro on the main economic axis of Brazil. Its economy revolves around iron and steel, chemical and food industries as well as trade, services and agricultural activity. Barra Mansa has a population of 170,503, over one-quarter of whom are under the age of 14. The Mayor's Office has promoted policies directed at young children with regard to health, education, social advancement and citizenship. An example is a municipal programme of school scholarships, introduced in 1998, which benefits families earning less than half of the monthly minimum wage. The Mayor's Office has also invested in the improvement of living conditions, sanitation and water supply. Thus the urban consultation, which began in 1998 in Barra Mansa, took place in a favourable context with regard to the programmes aimed at the young.

b. Objectives of the consultation

The consultation leading to OP Mirim (literally, the participatory council for children) had its roots in 1997. Barra Mansa's new mayor liked the idea of introducing real opportunities for child and youth participation in local government. Young people had been actively involved in her electoral campaign, and she wanted to give them a place within her government. Through the UMP, she learned of municipal experiences with children in France. This same year, following the example of other progressive municipal governments, Barra Mansa adopted participatory budgeting. This administrative mechanism, until then dedicated exclusively to adults, became the basis for establishing OP Mirim and later OP Joven (the council for adolescents).

The objective of the initiative was to raise awareness in children and adolescents of their civic duties, to awaken a feeling of ownership towards the community; to provide opportunities for discussion and decision-making; and, through the formation of a council, to apply part of the municipal budget to carrying out projects and services based on the priorities set by children that participated in neighbourhood and district meetings.

The planning and support for this process involved the Mayor's Office and the Secretary of Education, along with a local NGO, Encomen (Encontro de Meninos e Meninas de Barra Mansa), public and private schools and church representatives, as well as the UMP and several consultants. A committee to support the project included representatives from the adults' participatory budget council, the local government, the school system, a parent and a member of the existing children and adolescents' councils. This committee met weekly to prepare the project, to guide practical questions, to define the operation of the assemblies, to resolve consequent problems and to evaluate the different stages.

c. The process

First phase (1997–1998): awareness. A number of activities took place in the first year to raise general awareness among children and adults. The department of education held a writing and drawing competition in the municipal schools and the winners went on to become the first children's secretariat in the municipality. In all the schools there were two weeks of activities, focused on the life and the work of Betinho and Paulo Freire, great teachers and activists for human rights and democracy. A parade took place on 7 September to commemorate Brazil's independence, with the presentation of work carried out in the schools. The topic of the national budget was included in the school curriculum, starting at the fourth level, with the intent of showing children how public money is collected and utilized. There was also a campaign to make children and their families aware of consumer rights and the importance of tax collection for municipal income.

In June 1998, the now ex-mayor, along with three of the child secretaries, the Secretary of Education and the coordinator of the OP Mirim project, undertook an exchange visit to France. This motivated the group, awakening in all of them the desire to move forward on the participation of children in the government of Barra Mansa.

The first phase concluded with the formalization of the partnership between the local government, Encomen and the UMP, which facilitated the production of teaching materials and the mobilization within schools, neighbourhoods, associations and other entities in Barra Mansa

Second phase (1998–2000): preparation of teaching tools and implementation of the project. In 1998, the municipal team introduced the OP Mirim project through strategically placed announcements, posters and flyers. Items such as T-shirts and rulers were used as incentives for children and adolescents to participate. Coordinators, municipal agents, parents, school directors and community leaders organized neighbourhood meetings, and community leaders were invited to be OP Mirim "agents", who would be trained to work directly with the children and adolescents. One of the great victories was the fact that approximately 100 agents were attracted to the project. Starting with them, a real network of agents as multipliers and hosts of the process was set up.

The OP Mirim process involved the following steps. Children and adolescents participated in neighbourhood assemblies, electing their "neighbourhood delegates" who, in turn, chose the "district delegates" in the district assemblies. The district delegates, gathered in municipal assemblies, chose the 36 councillors, 18 boys and 18 girls. All children aged between nine and 15 could participate and vote in the assembly, but only those in school could be elected delegates or consultants. Those under nine or over 15 could participate, but could not vote or be elected. At each level, concerns were debated and voted on according to the priorities of the delegates and consultants. The young people were surprised by the sheer quantity of demands and priorities raised by their peers: "*The day of the neighbourhood plenary . . . there were nearly 1,000 priorities! The district plenaries were like a raffle.*"⁽³⁾

The challenge for the children elected to the council was to select three priorities for each district: one on a neighbourhood scale, another on a district scale and the third on a city scale. The project at that point took place in six city districts, which meant a total of 18 priorities to be

3. Augusto Sergio Soares Dutra, 11 years old, consultant of the OP Mirim.

dealt with in one year, with a total budget of 150,000 Reals (at that time worth US\$ 150,000) allocated by the municipal government. The task was a challenge and an educational opportunity – it was known from the beginning that the resources did not come close to meeting the scale of the demand. Choosing priorities based on needs as well as on technical and financial viability had to guide the process, and this motivated everyone to learn. The “caravans of citizenship” were an important part of this learning. These were visits to the different neighbourhoods by the young councillors, which helped them to acquire a better knowledge of the city. Through discussions about their visits, the young citizens could choose priorities in a more informed way.

These features of the process – the training of agents, the assemblies in the neighbourhoods, districts and the municipality, and the formation of the council, as well as the “caravans of citizenship” – have been repeated every year since 1998. The process has also included the involvement of two child councillors in the municipal council.

During this second phase, an international seminar on “Participatory Governance and Child Citizenship” in April 2000 gave the project legitimacy locally and began to awaken the interest of other municipalities, not only in Brazil, but also more broadly in Latin America.

Third phase: transition and the development of a new political culture (2001–2003). In 2001, a change in municipal administration resulted in a new administrative model in Barra Mansa, and the municipality was divided into 17 units of planning. This had implications for how the OP Mirim process was carried out, and several members of the municipal government held internal meetings of evaluation and met with some child consultants to discuss and promote changes in the project. Those responsible for OP Mirim looked for support from residents’ associations, which had an important role in the new government.

The rules and criteria of the project underwent changes based on both the internal evaluation and the meetings with the child consultants. As of September 2002, children were elected from each of the 17 units of planning, rather than based on neighbourhood assemblies, and the final council consisted of 17 child councillors. Gender equity ceased to be a criterion. The budgetary allocation from the municipality was divided equally among the 17 units of planning, its use in each case to be determined by the full council. This approach, which does not take into account the disparities between different parts of the city, was intended to be a temporary measure until the units of planning had been classified in terms of quality of life.

OP Mirim today remains an instrument of participatory administration, despite its lack of legal status in municipal law. The fact that a change of administration did not extinguish the project is a testament to the fact that the population, and the children and young people of the municipality, have taken on the project as their own, making it difficult for any public agent to put an end to it. The commitment of the children, along with the visibility of the project, both locally and more broadly, was decisive for the continuity of OP Mirim.

d. Impacts

Although it took time to achieve results, and it was not possible to achieve everything planned, the accomplishments of OP Mirim were a cause for

happiness and pride for the children involved. Projects that cost little often had great social importance, as in the case of the sports areas in the Roberto Silveira school, which, besides changing the life of the school, validated and strengthened the leadership of the local child councillors. The installation of lights in a pedestrian tunnel in the central neighbourhood of Pombal, as well as the streetlights and traffic signals in the Paraíba valley, are both remembered as important OP Mirim achievements. One of the projects children were proudest of was the refurbishment of the neighbourhood health centre in Mangueira, where a dental clinic was installed with modern equipment. The sports ground in the Nossa Senhora de Lourdes (Vila Brígida) neighbourhood, which was still under construction in 2003, was already being used by the region's children and young people.

Again, the improvements suggested by the children were often marked by their simplicity. In one neighbourhood, they pointed to the need for an open ditch to be covered to prevent injury; in another they wanted ten trees to provide shade for their play space.

An especially simple change was suggested by the youngest children – they wanted the school bus to stop for one minute longer because they felt so rushed by the older children – they were often pulled on by their elder brothers and sisters. The mayor spoke to the bus company and instituted this change – which resulted in fewer upset children in the morning and a better start to the school day.

Among the non-material effects of OP Mirim, the following stand out:

- recognition of the importance and value of children in the definition of all municipal policies, not only in those that concern them directly;
- the mobilization of the many adults involved in the OP Mirim process, which stimulated more widespread work with regard to rights and participatory administration in the city;
- the development of new means and models of civic education through the participation of parents and teachers, local residents and municipal officials, in the budgetary discussions and the implementation of projects and works of common interest;
- the involvement of two child councillors in the municipal council;
- the inclusion of the national budget as a topic in the school curriculum, starting from grade 4; and
- awareness of, and interest in, the Barra Mansa experience by other Brazilian and Latin American municipalities.

e. Challenges, opportunities and lessons learned

What stands out currently is the need for better coordination between OP Mirim and the public entities, NGOs and local associations that work directly with issues related to childhood and adolescence in the municipality and the state. Reinforcing the role of the NGO Encomen is particularly important in this regard, given their track record with children and adolescents and their understanding of the dynamics of OP Mirim. A monthly forum to bring all these stakeholders together could be very constructive.

There is also still a need to involve municipal technicians (from

departments of education, health, culture and planning) in the coordination of OP Mirim activities, in order to improve continuity. Considering that the main objective of OP Mirim is the formation of citizenship, even the adults involved need to go through a transformation in this regard. Even when administrations change, a nucleus of people in the administrative apparatus of the municipality, familiar with the process and able to work with young people, could help to ensure the viability of the project.

One of the main lessons is that it is possible and very positive to work with children and adolescents on the budget and public investment. Although this is not an area that appears to have immediate appeal, in fact many children quickly become interested and, in some cases, end up involving their parents and family. According to Wanessa da Silva, *"I began to participate in OP Mirim as if it were a game. I liked the game so much that I will play it my whole life. I will never forget that project!"* The pleasure that children took in this level of involvement, the pride of parents in hearing their children speak in public, and the recognition of the community at large of children's capacity to take an active, knowledgeable and responsible role, has been decisive for a generation – even if the process has subsequently become more structured and detached from community life.

IV. ICAPUÍ, BRAZIL: "DÍA FELIZ" ("HAPPY DAY") – PLAYING A SERIOUS ROLE IN CITIZENSHIP

a. Context

The municipality of Icapuí on the east coast of Brazil in the state of Ceará has a largely rural population of 17,203 and an annual growth rate of around 2 per cent. Almost half the population is under the age of 20. Owing to the distance of Icapuí from the state authorities and, even more, from the national authorities, which are little interested in a distant "village", the local government has often had to take on responsibilities that should be assumed by other levels of government.

Icapuí, like many municipalities in Brazil, has suffered the consequences of neo-liberal development policies and, in recent years, unemployment and poverty have increased considerably, due mainly to crises in their most important economic activities, the extraction of salt and lobster fishing. Child labour and failure to attend school have been fairly common, especially in the fishing communities. Problems such as drug use and prostitution are still quite minimal; nevertheless, care needs to be taken because of the proximity of more developed coastal cities where predatory tourism is a sad reality.

The municipal government has been especially active with regard to education. By 2001, almost all children in the primary school age group were enrolled. The greater challenge has been with young people aged 15 to 17 years, mainly because of their involvement in lobster fishing. The municipality has worked on providing alternatives to the regular educational system, encouraging and facilitating access to education for all.

The urban consultation began in Icapuí at the end of 1998, with internal discussions within local government on enlarging the range of

issues dealt with within the participatory budget, with an eye in particular to integrating children and young people in the process. The notion of “*Día Feliz*” arose from this – a day for considering the perceptions and dreams of children and adolescents. Far more than that, *Día Feliz* is a method for addressing the concerns of young people through political decisions, and an instrument that would further the practice of local democracy.

b. The process

Día Feliz took place for the first time in 1999, as a pilot project in eight municipal schools. In parallel with this, the first youth assembly was held within the municipality, so that the concerns of young people could also be included in the municipal participatory budget. By 2001, all 22 local schools were participating, with more than 3,000 children. After the first *Día Feliz*, the by-laws of the local participatory budget were amended to include concerns related to *Día Feliz* as a theme for its plenary session.

The day itself. *Día Feliz* takes place annually in September, when the municipal budget is being prepared. In order to involve local organizations and the community in general, a number of strategies are used: interviews on local community radio, leaflets distributed in the schools, paintings on the school buses with the project slogan, and banners in strategic places throughout the city. *Día Feliz* is carried out simultaneously in all the schools, with the support of 30 municipal staffers and trainees who have been trained in working with children. Over a four-hour period, children participate in the following steps (although due to human resource limitations, not all activities take place in all schools):

- through puppets or theatre, the team establishes rapport with the boys and girls;
- the participatory budget is explained through comparison with the family budget, so that it is understood by the young people. The class is divided into small working groups, and by means of drawing and painting, the children describe their perceptions of the city, as well as their expectations and dreams for the future;
- several collective class activities then take place, such as theatre, dance or drawing, that allow children to share, propose, discuss and participate – essential elements in a practical apprenticeship for democracy; and
- children elect a representative from each classroom to participate in the general assembly of the school and to present the demands of each working group – what they would like for their family, their home, their school, their community and their municipality. Each representative explains the priorities selected. The general school assembly then chooses a representative to be a part of the Council of Child and Youth Participation. In this secret ballot, every student is entitled to vote and to be elected.

Among the main concerns for the city’s future expressed by the children as part of this process have been the improvement of schools, the creation of children’s parks, the establishment of health centres, improved access to electric power and asphaltting of the streets. The demands most voted for in many schools have been the construction of sports areas and classrooms for information technology.

According to Dora Farias, a municipal technician who works with *Día Feliz*:

“. . . the children raised questions about their personal leisure time, improvements for the school, improvements for the community and entertainment areas for themselves. But they also pointed out their fathers' unemployment, their mothers' sadness, the poor conditions in their homes, and sometimes they just wanted a toy that they could take home. They also wanted a doctor available in the health centre to attend them . . . it was incredible. People always think that children don't worry about those things. The programme demonstrated that they do have these concerns. They drew the school, the electric network, they knew where the health centre was, they drew the health centre. In the coastal communities, they drew the sea and they drew the school.”

Following on *Día Feliz*. The representatives elected by the children during *Día Feliz* make up the Council of Child and Youth Participation, which consists of 22 regular councillors and 22 substitutes, all aged between six and 15. This body is essentially a monitoring mechanism for ensuring that the priorities established on *Día Feliz* are addressed.

Despite the energy in the schools that goes into the election of these representatives, the council has not really played its part in a satisfactory way. More thought needs to be given to the best way to transform it into a practical instrument. Ongoing support appears to be needed for the children so that monitoring and the evaluation really happen. In addition to the evaluation carried out by the council, before each year's *Día Feliz*, there is an evaluation of what was or was not executed the previous year, as well as the reasons why it was or was not accomplished. The fact that NGOs do not exist in Icapuí means that only municipal institutions carry out monitoring and evaluation of the activities.

In addition to the activities of the council, representatives from the schools have also participated in Icapuí's annual participatory budgeting congress. Fifty children and youths, representing 11 municipal schools, appeared at the 2001 Congress of the Participatory Budget, attended previously by adults only.

c. Impacts

Limited financial resources have influenced the extent of concrete material results, but given the limitations, these results are significant:

- two children's parks have been built with the State University of Ceará, one with resources from the municipal Department of Education. Although this does not come close to the number of parks requested by the children, it is worth noting that only 14 per cent of schools in the northeast of Brazil have any children's parks; and
- school equipment has been acquired or renovated – for instance, three schools have received computers, new drinking fountains have been installed, and some schools were painted.

The non-material outcomes are perhaps even more important:

- the process has led to the creation of municipal indicators on the children's living conditions, thereby facilitating decision-making by

the municipal government on these issues and establishing and strengthening policies for a group that had previously been neglected in the city's participatory processes;

- it has also meant the development of methods and skills for working with children and youth, for both municipal staff and the NGO partner;
- the ideas and creativity of the boys and girls have benefited urban development more generally;
- the children have been encouraged to think of the city as a whole and not to look solely at their own neighbourhood or community. They gain an understanding of the municipal machinery (budgetary limitations, collection systems, the constitution of the municipal budget) and learn about reaching consensus. Prioritizing demands in the course of voting, and attempting to minimize discrepancies among districts, has meant a greater understanding of the principles of democracy and the meaning of real citizenship;
- the recreational component of *Día Feliz* highlights the importance of the right to play, which is often forgotten. The violence and insecurity these children are exposed to, as well as their premature introduction to the world of work, has led them to take on adult responsibilities. The methods used, based on the Paulo Freire approach, allow the children to approach complex topics related to city administration, and at the same time to enjoy themselves as children;
- the teachers' opinion about the experience has changed over time, as they became more aware of changes in the children's behaviour, above all with regard to the care of the school and their responsibility to their duties;
- there has been a productive exchange of experiences among children, youth and technicians of Icapuí and the cities of Independence-CE, Barra Mansa and Belém; and
- participation in meetings and seminars, both national and international, in order to exchange experiences and present results, impacts and lessons learned, has been another way to disseminate information beyond the municipality.

d. Challenges and opportunities

The first rounds of *Día Feliz* demonstrate that the planted seed is sprouting, and that the mechanisms of participatory democracy – involving children and adolescents – are being consolidated little by little. Building on the experience could result in the construction of an important instrument of public administration. There are hints of how to go about this:

- greater involvement of teachers and children in the preparation of the process should be encouraged;
- a team of young people and adults to encourage and support the members of the elected children's council could be very helpful;
- the involvement of the Guardian Council of Icapuí (El Consejo Tutelar de Icapuí) would be valuable. Its members visit schools and communities, and have first-hand knowledge of the problems children face;
- the minimal presence of NGOs in Icapuí means the process is

concentrated within the municipal government's team. The establishment of a permanent forum on children could create a space for the mobilization of other actors to accompany municipal activities; and

- most important, budgetary restrictions represent a true limit for these programmes. Although Icapuí has established health and education as a priority, with the highest budgetary allocations going to these needs, there are still limits to what it can accomplish. There is a need to mobilize national and international partners to support the realization of the projects debated and prioritized by the children. A fixed amount should be allocated to the priorities of children and adolescents. More resources are also needed for training adults and children, improving working methods, and acquiring materials, equipment and logistical support for the process.

V. CIUDAD GUYANA, VENEZUELA: "WE, THE CHILDREN AND THE YOUNG, ARE CITIZENS TOO"

a. Context

Ciudad Guyana in Venezuela is the capital of the district of Caroní in the northeast state of Bolívar, strategically located for business and industry in the fork of the Orinoco and Caroní rivers. The city is characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity, due to immigration following the expansion of big business in the 1970s. In 2000, Ciudad Guyana had a population of 732,456, with 38 per cent being under the age of 15.

This city is an outstanding example of planned development in a Latin American country in the early 1960s. However, the provision of basic services has remained a concern. Some of the city's problems have to do with generally increased poverty in the country, related to falling investment, inflation and unemployment and a failure to develop a non-oil economy. The poorest sectors lack access to the city's programmes and political sphere because they are not formally registered as citizens. There are significant implications for children. Child abandonment in Ciudad Guyana has increased since the 1990s, and growing numbers of children fail to complete primary school. Domestic violence is an issue, along with teenage pregnancy and high infant mortality levels. With these problems in mind, the city undertook the urban consultation process.

b. The framework of the urban consultation

The urban consultation in Ciudad Guyana marked an innovation in Latin America and the Caribbean, and became a formative experience in promoting city planning from the perspective of children and young people. The general objective, established in the 1998 framework document, was to *“. . . improve participatory governance for economic development and to strengthen the participation of children, young people and women in decision-making, in order to consolidate a project for democratic administration of the city, directed at eradicating poverty.”* Specific objectives included:

- finding options for economic development, training and participation for the young people of Ciudad Guyana;

- promoting the competitive inclusion of young women in employment, occupation, technology and local decision-making;
- establishing a Municipal Council for Youth (Consejo Municipal de Jóvenes) and a Municipal Council of Boys and Girls (Consejo Municipal de Niños y Niñas); and
- formulating a plan of action to implement the proposals developed during the urban consultation.

The target population was young people between the ages of seven and 20 from municipal, state and national schools, as well as colleges run by the civil association, Faith and Happiness (which managed the urban consultation together with the local government). Because of a change in administration in 1999, there were two distinct stages in the process initiated by the urban consultation.

1998–1999. After initial commitments were made to the urban consultation process in Ciudad Guyana, a delegation of children, youth and representatives of the local institutions went to France in July 1998 to become familiar with other experiences in the field. In November that year, an agreement was signed between the local government, the UMP, Faith and Happiness, and other civil society organizations. Media campaigns and door-to-door canvassing were used to inform local citizens of the process, and sponsors were identified for contributions to special cultural and recreational activities.

In early 1999, meetings were held with the social organizations of the ten parishes of Ciudad Guyana to familiarize them with the urban consultation process, and then with teachers. There were also workshops held with non-school-going children to explain the process, and over 4,000 school-going children and adolescents were surveyed, with a focus on five themes: school, home, the community, the neighbourhood and the city.

The children's concerns varied somewhat, depending on where they lived. In general, they focused on civil security, drug prevention and projects to improve the environment. They were fearful of the risks in the street and the violence of local delinquents, and pointed to the need for preventive programming. They drew attention to the poor condition of streets and the general lack of maintenance, the lack of recreation areas, and the need for public space where they could expend their energy and expand their creativity. The growing number of landfills was seen as a common and serious problem. Although sports came highest on the list of activities they wanted, especially among girls, there was also a lot of interest in the formation of music and theatre groups. In addition to diagnosing the state of their city, young people elected representatives through a process of discussion and consensus in a series of weekly meetings.

One of the limitations of the urban consultation process was a delay in the tabulation of the survey results, both as a result of technical inexperience on the part of the commission responsible and because of the municipal electoral campaigns taking place at the time. There was a similar delay in processing information from the meetings with non-school-going children. This prevented a plan of action from being completed on time. Participants, however, pulled together a preliminary plan of action in October 1999, based on the data they had at that point. This plan was proposed as an instrument of negotiation in the middle of a significantly polarized political campaign. Although there was a

political commitment to carrying out the process, the time needed was greater than the political time available, and the change in municipal administrations left promises unfulfilled. The children's demands for an improvement in physical environment, for instance, were not incorporated into the Ciudad Guyana city plan; and the delays also prevented the establishment of the child and youth municipal councils – a fundamental component of the planned civic empowerment of the new generation.

Despite the limits in achievement, however, various programmes and initiatives were developed in response to the preliminary plan, with priority given to initiatives already undertaken by the various partner organizations that focused attention on children with particular needs. A number of these initiatives involved the economic inclusion of young people:

- employment training was provided for young women, jointly through FUNDAMUJER and the governorship of Caroní. This benefited young women aged between 14 and 25, most of them disadvantaged single mothers working solely in the home. The majority of these young women graduated from the programme with improved life skills and a better understanding of their rights as women. Of the 70 participants, 14 of them later returned to formal education. Others worked in fashion and sewing warehouses;
- the Don Bosco Centre of Training (Centro de Capacitación Don Bosco) offered employment training to working-class youths. This programme had been conducted in the area of San Félix since 1995 but, in 1998 and 1999, it was extended to the whole city. Students participating in the programme received vocational training but they also provided weekly service to the community focused on environmental improvement. In 1999, 300 young people graduated from the programme; and
- training courses were also held by the Foundation La Salle for young people aged between 16 and 25 who had left formal education. These courses provided opportunities for quick placement within the labour market in companies and industries that supported the programme: utilities, mechanics, welding, refrigeration and air conditioning, and electronics. In 1999, approximately 175 youths graduated from the programme.

Unfortunately, these pilot programmes did not continue after the change in administration. There was also a series of significant initiatives intended to introduce children and young people to active citizenship within their daily lives:

- the “personalized ticket” (Boleto Directo Personalizado, or BDP), which provided subsidized student transport, had already been operating in Ciudad Guyana since 1977, but there were frequent abuses of the programme (children giving their tickets away, trading them, using them to pay for other people and so on.) The programme improved noticeably during the years of the urban consultation, when the children and young people directly controlled its use. Workshops were held on the importance of using the tickets correctly, and the students carried out daily monitoring of the number of users. The creation of the Committee for Monitoring the

Personalized Travel Ticket provided a clearing-house for children's complaints and suggestions;

- another transport-related initiative was the naming of student representatives to the Advisory Council of Municipal Transport. This council supported the integration of the various entities that form the public transportation system – transport companies, users in general, students and regulatory bodies. The objective was to ensure the quality and comfort of public transportation, especially for the children and young students in a city of extensive journeys and great distances from educational centres. Service inspection committees and mechanisms to gather student complaints and suggestions were created. This initiative has been identified by the World Bank as an outstanding example of public management, not only for setting up real mechanisms of control and civic surveillance around transport, but especially for its commitment to introducing the perspective of young people;
- the programme of “school justices of the peace” was conceived as a way of achieving solutions to conflict through friendly dialogue. Elected students over nine years old, backed by trained facilitators, acted as mediators among conflicting parties in problems arising in daily relationships: violence in the school, conflicts among students, conflicts between educational staff and students, and internal problems in the school that affected the life of the school community. These young school justices of the peace also led campaigns for the protection of the school environment and of the rights of the “school consumers” – the students. A support committee was chosen, consisting of parents, educators and orientators, willing to work voluntarily to support the young justices in the resolution of difficult cases. More than 1,000 children worked as school justices, contributing to better conditions within school communities. The young people involved became visibly more confident in their capacity to make decisions, and the initiative also had an effect on teachers, many of whom modified the way they related to their students; and
- the “Week Together for Children's Rights” (*Semana Juntos por los Derechos del Niño*) began in April 1998 in almost all the schools. Coordinated by Faith and Happiness in Caroní (Fe y Alegría en Caroní), the objective was to work with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in an educational and interesting way. The week's special activities were conducted in different parts of the city over the course of a month, and included an educational unit on the Convention and a discussion of the degree to which the rights of children and youth in Caroní were realized in their homes, schools and community. Students pointed to the frequent violation of their right to a loving environment, and confirmation of hidden cases of child abuse gave rise to reports that raised local awareness and called for solutions to particular cases. Students also identified the right to recreation as one often violated in the community. This gave rise to efforts on behalf of the parents to improve school parks for the youngest children.

A number of measures taken by Caroní's municipal administration made possible the accomplishments of the urban consultation. Priority

was given to assigning professional personnel to the various programmes and initiatives, and to uniting institutional forces and resources. Municipal civil servants assumed promotional roles in urban consultation activities, sharing these tasks with professionals from the local institutions that were involved.

The total budget of the urban consultation, estimated at US\$ 50,000, was shared by the UMP (US\$ 35,000) and the municipality (US\$ 15,000). The administration also reserved some seed money in the 1999 annual budget to partially finance the plan of action that was to result from the consultation process. However, delays in deadlines and the change of administration prevented this action plan from taking shape and being implemented.

Various steps were taken to ensure the financial sustainability of the urban consultation process:

- coordination with the social organizations of the parishes and communities and the educational authorities to carry out programmes using the community's own resources and the voluntary help of teachers and parents;
- the combined execution of projects on a neighbourhood scale, with the municipality granting economic resources, technical supervision, and workforce;
- association with non-governmental institutions, which multiplied resources and efforts in conducting training programmes;
- sponsorship from private companies, which financed a centre for "street children", and the installation of the first municipal ombudsman in Venezuela to deal with the increase in cases of abandonment and child abuse; and
- international cooperation sought for the technical consultancy and financial backing of the urban consultation process.

2000–2002. In 2000, a change in municipal government meant that many initiatives fell by the wayside, especially the urban consultation process. This was a setback for the establishment of child and youth councils, and the plan of action (still in a preliminary stage of development) was not adopted by the new administration. This was partly the result of a lack of political will, but also because of the introduction of legislative changes regarding the rights of children and adolescents. All municipalities were now required to install a new system of protection for children and adolescents (Law for the Protection of Children and Adolescents (LOPNA)), and the new local authorities undertook to implement this system without first considering the advances made as a result of the urban consultation.

Unusually for Venezuela, the elaboration of LOPNA was participatory and public. The team responsible for drawing up the draft bill of the law came from the Catholic University Andres Bello (UCAB) – one of the institutions that organized the urban consultation in Ciudad Guyana. Because of that, the experience of Ciudad Guyana in the urban consultation process in many ways formed the basis for the legal instrument. The principles underlying "We, the Children and the Young, are Citizens Too," were a reference point for articles 80 to 85 of LOPNA (and refer to the right to speak and to be heard, to the right to participate, to the right of assembly, to the right to demonstrate, to the right of free association and to the right of petition that it is granted to children and adolescents in their position

as citizens in training). The outcomes of the participatory consultation, similarly, became a reference point for article 64 of LOPNA, the requirement that the city plan ensure the creation of green, recreational and sports areas dedicated to the use of children, adolescents and their families.

Under the new municipal team, various components of the new protection system were put into place: the Fund for the Protection of the Child and Adolescent (Fondo de Protección del Niño y Adolescente) in August 2000; the Municipal Council of the Rights of the Child and Adolescent (Consejo Municipal de Derechos del Niño y Adolescente) in April 2001; the position of Defender of the Child and Adolescent (Defensoría del Niño y Adolescente) in September 2001; the Council for the Protection of the Child and Adolescent (Consejo de Protección del Niño y Adolescente) in November 2001. In May 2002, the first Consultation on Public Policies (Primera Jornada de Consulta de Políticas Públicas) took place – a joint situation assessment on the part of local institutions.

A number of municipal initiatives were established, including days focused on educational reform, a drive to promote citizen registration; the creation of school defenders in the 19 municipal schools; the establishment of a municipal school of music; and a project entitled “My Family Is My Teacher at Home”.

It was a challenge to set LOPNA in motion in a coordinated way, however, and there were persistent tensions around the administration of resources, and exaggerated attention to the emergencies and social politics surrounding children and adolescents, which diverted attention from policies focused more on public participation.

The local government of Caroní assumed responsibility for the investment of resources for the Fund of Protection of the Children and Adolescents of Caroní, the use of which was dictated by LOPNA. For 2002, it assigned 200 million Bolívars (US\$ 200,000) to the fund, although at the time of writing this report, it had not yet been paid. Other sources of revenue were also approached to increase this fund – private companies, civil institutions, NGOs and the organized citizens. The expenses that can be financed by the fund are:

- specific programmes of protection for children and adolescents;
- training and investigation programmes;
- legal, communication and cultural protection programmes; and
- exceptional financing of basic social policies.

Administrative expenses cannot be funded, and the protection system is heavily dependent on voluntary contributions of time and expertise on the part of the citizens and municipal officials elected as representatives. Only the protection advisors who do this as a full-time job receive honorariums.

Despite the challenges, however, there have been some important achievements:

- the protection system has been set in place and is operating in the context of increasingly fluid inter-institutional relations;
- there has been good public involvement around policies affecting children and adolescents in the municipality;
- an information system has been established on the situation with regard to children and young people, and the working meetings on the situation analysis have involved secondary school students;

- of 5,000 children without identification or birth certificates, 2,000 cases were resolved during the campaigns undertaken;
- a pilot programme, "Children of Hope", has responded to the needs of 1,300 children, providing them with food and roofs over their heads;
- over 300 teachers have been trained and are qualified to use the arts as a learning resource;
- nearly 200 young people have graduated from a programme as art teachers, endorsed by the Musical School of Caracas. Most of them work in educational institutions, motivating popular expression; and
- 60 children and adolescents have received musical training that was previously unaffordable.

c. Challenges and lessons learned

Despite breaking with the urban consultation process, there were a number of ways in which LOPNA developed from the earlier initiative. The urban consultation represented a real leap for the local municipal authorities. It was the first time that they had really given serious thought to the concerns and potential of local children and young people. This commitment remained evident with the putting in place of the protection system, which made it clear that childhood and adolescence were a real priority for the governorship. Local institutions, which had risen to the challenge of carrying out the urban consultation within a difficult political situation continued to pull together, along with educators, professionals and community volunteers, to respond with flexibility and creativity, to give of their time, and to organize a plan for the installation of the protection system.

However, there remains a sense of separation or rupture between the two situations, a function of municipal teams acting within different political contexts. The central challenge in Ciudad Guyana is to integrate the experiences and lessons learned from the two instances. Almost all the participants from the governorship and the civil corporation spoke of the need to overcome the limitations that interrupted the continuity of the urban consultation process, and of the importance of ensuring the sustainability of valuable programmes. The experience of the school justices and of the initiatives for non-school-going and unemployed young people seemed especially critical.

Despite the ongoing challenges, there have been important lessons learned. It was demonstrated, first of all, that participatory consultations can be a quick and reliable way to bring together the dreams, expectations and demands of new generations. New direction can be given to programmes designed initially for adults, once the perspective of young people is introduced. The local population has also learned the importance of turning to young people to recognize problems that are often not spontaneously expressed – domestic violence, mistreatment and abuse committed by the people closest to them. This has been picked up by the participants of the protection system as a high priority to be dealt with.

Young people have demonstrated unexpected skills in the course of the activities. Teachers and parents were pleasantly surprised, for instance, by the capacity of the young people who worked as school justices. It became clear to the adults that youth is not an impediment to the assumption of collective responsibilities.

But it was also clear that simply involving young people is not enough. Political will is critical in adopting an agenda focused on children and young people. It is only in this way that true democratic governance is guaranteed. There is also a need for concrete tools and techniques in order to execute commitments and common objectives. In the case of the participatory consultations, for instance, technical knowledge on the processing of data was critical to the adequate use of this information.

A key lesson has been acknowledging the importance of the schools as favourable environments for programmes that guarantee the well-being and full development of children and adolescents. To achieve this, it is important to include all schools, municipal, state and national, in common programmes.

VI. CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE EXPERIENCES

The strategy of active consultation has been confirmed in these four municipalities as a valid approach to improving the situation of children, especially with regard to their own participation in the discussion, prioritization and formulation of solutions that concern them. Those experiences relating to formalizing policies, channels and instruments directed at the participation of children and young people in municipal administration, as well as the related resources mobilized and committed by local governments, have been extremely valuable. But also valuable have been the less tangible changes in attitude that affect local people and processes over a longer period of time, encouraging attention to the situation of children and to their capacity as active citizens.

This strategy has also been confirmed as being adaptable to the different contexts and processes of some very different cities. The experience in these four cities, so different in scale, makes it clear that youth participation is possible even in small and remote places like Icapuí or Cotacachi. In fact, there may be more scope for action within these smaller towns. They have problems similar to those in big municipalities, despite the difference in complexity: they also experience poverty, violence, insecurity, unemployment and inadequate public services. The precarious state of infrastructure can be even greater in small municipalities, and malnutrition and undernutrition more serious. But in small cities, there is more likely to be more solidarity among inhabitants. People know each other, they participate in the same events and they help each other in case of illness. This helps to reduce the vulnerability of the community and, in particular, that of the children and young people. Experience with larger cities, for instance in São Paulo where there are 2 million children and young people, indicates that initiatives such as these with children tend to become more rule-based, and to thin out as they scale up.

A decisive factor in the results achieved in the four cities is the level of local involvement, especially that of the local government. The commitment of the various municipal authorities has been definitive in guaranteeing the initiatives' success and political, economic and even social viability. The mayor's leadership – or that of his or her representatives – during the initiative has been essential in determining the disposition of other local participants, and has given legitimacy to the decisions and agreements reached, as well as the implementation of specific projects. The dedication of the mayor in Barra Mansa, for

instance, even after her term expired, was critical to initiating the process; and in Cotacachi, the mayor's commitment to the Great Plan of Childhood and Youth was considered key in getting it passed.

At the same time, the critical role of the municipal authority as a point of articulation has meant that these processes are vulnerable to political changes of direction, especially during elections or periods of transition, which have put initiatives at risk and led to uncertainty for those who participate in them. In three out of the four cases, Barra Mansa, Icapuí and Ciudad Guyana, the local government changed. Not much is known about the effects on the programme in Icapuí, but in Barra Mansa and Ciudad Guyana this had a tremendous effect on the job being done. Although in both cases it is commendable that the projects continued at all, it must be acknowledged that they became very different, and arguably not as interesting in terms of their implications for the active citizenship of young people. This demonstrates the importance of political will and, at the same time, the fragility of these processes.

At the local government level, decentralization has allowed greater freedom at the same time that it demands more responsibility from local politicians in terms of policy and the "financial health" of the municipality. A municipality's important role in local interest politics can create a favourable atmosphere for supporting laws and negotiations with a view to a public administration shared among the public and private sector and the communities.

One of the difficulties, however, with mainstreaming these initiatives for children into larger processes of governance is the fact that young people, although they constitute a significant proportion of the population, are perceived as one among many special interest groups. Municipalities are faced with a number of groups whose interests they are pressured to address. There are various ethnic minority groups, people living in the streets, those with HIV/AIDS, the elderly, and gays and transsexuals, among others. Making special efforts to include children in local processes as a routine matter of business can mean intensified pressure to create the same kind of political space for all local groups.

On the other hand, the focus on children in these initiatives has been decisive in sensitizing and mobilizing other important participants. Through the children and young people, families, teachers, officials, municipal authorities, base organizations and NGOs have come together, stimulating a very broad process of participation and, at the same time, generating understanding about a more democratic model of city administration, where children are considered citizens with rights. Consider the case of Ciudad Guyana, for instance, where the implementation of the first stage of the initiative called on active contributions of time and resources from parents and teachers, civil servants, members of the social organizations of parishes and communities, and representatives from NGOs and private companies.

An important factor in the success of these processes has been the training that the promoters of the process received in each phase. Despite the competence that children have demonstrated in the course of these initiatives, it is evident that support from well-prepared adults is key to success. In Icapuí, for instance, the absence of appropriate support has meant that the children's council, primarily intended for monitoring relevant activities within the municipality, was not as

effective as it might have been. Also of critical importance have been the strategies of information, communication and diffusion to the population in general, and to the children in particular, with the purpose of generating real local mobilization. The variety of forms of mobilization drawn on in these four cases could contribute to participatory processes in other contexts.

Although committed adults are essential, the participation of children has injected a notable element of creativity into these consultation processes, and has been extremely enriching and motivational. A vision and understanding of a city from the perspective of children has left its mark, as much on the diagnosis of problems as on fresh and innovative solutions. This perspective is fundamental for the visibility of issues that, in general, are absent from the perspective of adults, and it contributes to a better understanding of the problems of the city. The particular issues identified by girls (for instance, the need for lights in the pedestrian tunnel in Barra Mansa) also make it clear that both age- and gender-sensitive perspectives are essential.

Nevertheless, according to the analysis of the participants of each process, there still remains a lot to do to overcome an excessively "adult" vision of urban administration. The proven capacity of children to assume a responsible role can do as much as anything to promote respect for their particular perspective; the dependability and thoughtfulness shown by the school justices in Ciudad Guyana, or the willingness of child councillors in Barra Mansa to give their time to inspecting the problems of neighbourhoods citywide make it clear that their age does not prevent the young from assuming collective responsibility. This awareness is likely to give more credibility to their perceptions and solutions as well.

The concerns articulated by children in these four cases are marked by certain characteristics. They demonstrate a keen awareness of the surroundings and of the problems that most affect people. Their concerns tend to be simple: young people focused on issues basic to their health and well-being. Few unrealistic demands were made. On the contrary, the tendency was to present immediate, down-to-earth solutions to more general problems. They wanted lights in dangerous tunnels, covers for drainage ditches that threatened their safety, window repairs in schools, sports areas that could be completed for a small investment, or a doctor at the local health centre. What the children wanted often did not cost much, and yet these were things that could markedly improve the quality of their lives.

Simple as the improvements were that the children requested, the implementation of activities to resolve the problems they identified and prioritized were restricted in every case by the limits to municipal resources and the difficulties in obtaining other funds from other local, regional, national or international participants. This meant an exaggerated dependence of the participatory processes on the good will and political commitment of municipal administrations, and the potential for disappointment on the part of the children, youth and those who have supported them and driven the process.

The fact that the initiatives described in these four cases are focused on children and young people, both as the main protagonists and the main beneficiaries, has another critical implication. When these young people become adults, they can no longer build on their accumulated

experience to continue supporting the process, at least not in the same way. Therefore, these child-based processes are to a certain extent fixed in time and space. How can they be formalized in order to last for more than one or two governments, or through more than one or two cohorts of children? Or is this even important?

Although the continuity and institutionalization of these processes is an aspect that is frequently raised, it is important to recognize that the changes that take place in the young people themselves and in the adults around them over the course of these experiences also provide a vital kind of continuity. The process is anchored in the people it affects as much as in local structures and laws. The experiences in these four cities can fairly be said to have stimulated events and processes that go well beyond the consultation process and any attempts to formalize it. In returning to visit some of the young councillors in Barra Mansa after five or six years, it is striking to see these outspoken, thoughtful, socially active young people who continue to carry their experience into their adult lives. Even when the formal processes deteriorate with changes in administration, or disappear entirely, it is important not to see them as failures, but to consider the impression they have made on a generation of young people and the ripple effects for those around them. These new adults are the real sustainability factor in building citizenship and participatory democracy.