



SUMMIT TALKS

Democratization of Information: Open Data in Preventing and Combating Corruption May 6, 2020

Final Thoughts

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On behalf of the Summits of the Americas Secretariat, I take this opportunity to convey our sympathies to everyone affected by the crisis brought on by COVID-19, and our gratitude to the healthcare and other professionals on the frontlines of the fight against this scourge.

I greet the Chair of the Summits of the Americas Process, Ambassador Luis Chávez Basagoitia, Peru's National Coordinator for the Summits of the Americas Process, and wish to thank him for taking part. Likewise, I greet and thank the presenters who have joined us from the public sector of Colombia (Luisa Medina, MinTIC) and Mexico (Ricardo Valencia, INAI); from the Joint Summit Working Group institutions, including ECLAC (Alejandra Nasser) and CAF (Camilo Cetina); and from the Peruvian civilian investigative journalism organization *Ojo Público* (Nelly Luna).

Thanks to you, we managed to have a very full discussion of the issue that brought us here, through the perspectives you each brought to the table from different angles.

As the technical secretariat to the Summits of the Americas process, the Summits Secretariat is charged with providing the member states with support to implement the Summit mandates and initiatives, and to follow up on implementation of the mandates arising from the Eighth Summit of the Americas. We are therefore pleased we could be part of this along those lines, together with other JSWG organizations, government actors, and civil society.

The Lima Commitment is an agreement on mandates that are without precedent in the region, to prevent and combat corruption. It is what I would like to discuss in these brief conclusions. It provides an opportunity as well – an opportunity to capitalize on concrete efforts for governments, civil society, and social actors to find solutions and ways to reduce the scourge of corruption in the Americas.

It is precisely in the spirit of the Lima Commitment that we are conducting these exchanges to see to it that the progress made on various fronts, to strengthen democratic governance, has a positive effect in terms of preventing and fighting corruption.

By no means therefore is it a coincidence that we began this round of dialogue, or Summit Talks, with a discussion of the democratization of information. Information, and the data used to construct it, must be treated as resources accessible to all citizens, not only for them to know what is happening around them but also to be able to bring some control to bear over and monitor public affairs; while at the same time adding value to the data.

Access to information through proactive openness of data does strengthen democratic governance and is a key tool for bringing an end to lack of transparency in handling public affairs.

In light of the observations presented today, data are the vital component upon which we must build democracy that honors truth, justice, and transparency – even in crisis situations like the one we are currently experiencing with COVID-19.

Allowing those data comes from a willingness and desire for openness. It is born out of a political decision mindful to promote access to information in order to provide anyone an opportunity to have access to it. In this webinar today, we label this the Democratization of Information.

Democratization of information is an expression of the will to allow any individual to have free access to data and information. The effect of this democratization of information is to bring about benefits to strengthen good governance, including increased levels of transparency, as we have seen today. Lack of transparency in information fragments democratic governance and undermines transparency in public affairs; and, similarly, the rapid global adoption of ICTs over the last few decades has led to an exponential increase in data and information generation. According to the fifth edition of the Data Never Sleeps report, 90% of the total information ever generated in the world has been produced over the last two years – an average production rate of 2.5 quintillion bytes data per day. Thus, all of us, institutions and citizens alike, are now generating data and information.

In addition, in this world of data, governments are leading efforts to securely and inclusively regulate openness and use. The easier it is for people to be able to access sources and the more the capacity to process information, turn it into value-added, and disseminate it digitally, the more it changes our world, also affecting the dynamics of the relationship between governments and citizens. This relationship is today extended to a two-way relationship with open government, in which the digital citizen makes demands, participates, decides, and monitors.

Thirteen countries of the region (including Ecuador, which is to approve its data policy in April) have regulations governing open data. There are also 19 national data portals with a cumulative total of 356,127 data sets (Canada, Mexico, and the United States account for 91% (324,423)).

The ecosystem of non-governmental actors has also increased and has become highly specialized, contributing to more experiences in public service use of data in different sectors, among them health, education, the environment, agriculture, transportation, and preventing and fighting corruption.

Beyond the number of national portals or policies, institutions in countries with sufficient capacity autonomously publish data in open formats on their websites, as do local governments, even in countries that do not have national open data portals.

The progress notwithstanding:

- We have to overcome challenges with collecting and processing data; and must strengthen capacity for governments to produce quality, and thus reliable, data.
- We must also strengthen the policy, human resource, and technology infrastructure to consolidate open data.
- And lastly, as a matter of urgency we must – together with external, nongovernmental actors – promote the use of those data and make them dynamic, and certainly for preventing and fighting corruption.

With respect to (private or independent) investigative journalism and data journalism, as Nelly Luna of *Ojo Público* in Peru explained, the importance of openness to be able to investigate, report, and communicate truthfully, based on evidence is quite clear to us today.

We would like to thank Alejandra Nasser of ECLAC for outlining for us the transition to e-government and open government as well as the synergies so powerfully driven today by the value of data and open data to economic development and governance in the region.

Likewise, as Camilo Cetina of CAF inferred, not only do open data hold significant direct economic potential but also great intrinsic value by ensuring that they are a source of transparency, whether in public procurement, budgets, international cooperation, etc., hence the value of the data to the agendas of international financing institutions and development banks, such as CAF.

In the meantime, Colombia demonstrates that opening up priority data sets can combat corruption by uploading these data sets to the Colombian national open data portal. I wish to note that it adopted early the Inter-American Open Data Program to Prevent and Combat Corruption (PIDA) and shows that opening up priority data in order to combat corruption is possible.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the pressing need to deal with threats to democratic governance, such as corruption. One way to counteract these effects of COVID-19 is precisely by opening up information, as Ricardo Valencia of INAI told us. Access to information on government responses to crises, with open data such as budgets, procurement, spending, decision-making, stimuli, etc., helps reduce discretion in public sector management and therefore enhances transparency.

I would like to conclude with the point that if we are to reduce corruption, access to information and open data for everyone we must be promoted and expanded.

Let me once again commend the states and the leaders of the Americas for wisely including in the Lima Commitment, as part of its mandates, anti-corruption aspects of the promotion of e-government and open government, and in particular, for encouraging promotion of the democratization of information through open of data.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite civil society organizations and social actors that have been engaged in preventing and fighting corruption to join the national anti-corruption hubs set up as part of the Lima Commitment follow-up and implementation. These are self-managed forums designed to give visibility to what civil society is doing, with a view to sharing experiences and practices and to help to sharpen their advocacy skills.

Thank you very much.