BRAZIL

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS DRIVE CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Brazil is one of the key nations that founded, shaped and nurtured the OGP. As early as March 2011, representatives of both government and civil society were locked in discussions regarding the design and structure of the initiative. The work of Brazil's Institute for Socioeconomic Studies (INESC) on budget transparency, human rights and citizenship spans more than 30 years. 'People in the White House working in the CSO field knew about our expertise and legitimacy and so invited us to discuss the idea further,' Iara Pietricovsky de Oliveira of INESC explains. The Brazilian government, co-chairing with the US, provided support and helped craft the document on the declaration principles. It formulated structures and prepared for the launch in September 2011. 'The time was short and as we had to juggle many different tasks – related to the creation of OGP's basic structure – we did not have adequate time to invest in our own Action Plan,'

Roberta Solis of the Office of the Comptroller General (CGU) explains. The first Action Plan, elaborated by government, had limited inputs and lacked any meaningful participation of civil society.

'We feel government wanted to show something publicly in New York and they rustled up a document pretty quickly,'

Iara says. Civil society protested by saying it disagreed with the process and had no ownership of that first Action Plan.

AWARENESS AND MOBILISATION

Following the launch and as a member of the international OGP Steering Committee, INESC took on the role of informing and mobilising CSO participation in the national engagement process of revising the Action Plan. The first meeting of the Coalition of Civil Society, convened in Sao Paulo, was attended by over 30 organisations. Staff of the CGU were also present. 'It was important to start by raising awareness of the OGP within civil society as no one really knew about it,' Iara adds. The first international OGP Annual Conference in Brasilia presented both government and CSOs with an opportunity to become more organised and to engage in more participatory processes. Before the conference, CSOs met with government and a working group made up of government and representatives of ten civil society organisations was established. Its remit was to promote greater participation in the OGP, start the process of evaluating the first Action Plan and identify the steps needed to formulate the second one. The civil society groups involved in the OGP are generally perceived as being high-level, dynamic and very committed. From the government's perspective, they bring their voices

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and demands to the table, and add new perspectives to the debate. Their engagement in policy development increases the breadth of ownership and this, in turn, raises the likelihood of success. Furthermore, 'transparency and public participation are core principles of the government of President Dilma, as they were during President Lula's term, meaning it is common practice for government to involve social movements, academia, NGOs and think tanks when developing policies and guidelines,' Roberta explains. And the contribution of young people remains critical in a country where 40% of the population is aged 24 or younger. 'The challenge is to find ways of working with our youth and learning from them. They are smart and are developing new ways to communicate, especially using technologies and social media,' says Iara.

EMBRACING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

The process of developing Brazil's second Action Plan involved two phases: an online virtual dialogue lasting two months (October–December 2012) and a national conference (March 2013). The technology that has been vital in facilitating the online dialogue is the work of the Chamber of Deputies (National Congress). They created the e-Democracia website that hosted the dialogue. Says Roberta,

'We believe that technology is a tool that allows us to reach out and engage in dialogue with many more citizens.'

The dialogue itself was structured in three steps. During the first step, the assessment of the implementation of Brazil's first Action Plan, both citizens and organisations could

comment on the implementation of commitments and provide suggestions for future consultations. The second step gave civil society and citizens the opportunity to submit proposals for new commitments, and all five grand challenge areas of OGP could be addressed. Finally, participants were asked to vote and choose 15 proposals the government should prioritise. For the government's part, it posted online the proposals made by federal agencies (59 proposals in total) so that civil society could provide its comments and inputs. The culmination of the consultation process was the national conference held in March 2013 by the CGU and the Civil Society Working Group. 'We want to broaden engagement. In practice we are seeking the participation of a wider group of civil society entities in public policy development. That's why unions, NGOs, social movements (e.g. LGBT community and afro-descendants), faith-based

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organisations, students, academia, media and open data groups have been invited,' says Roberta. Furthermore, given the size of the country, geographical inclusion was sought by having representatives of different regions and states. After the conference, all the proposals prioritised by citizens during the virtual and face-to-face dialogues will be evaluated by federal agencies. They will decide whether to accept them fully or partially or reject them. Their analysis will be based on a range of criteria, such as feasibility, legal regulation and the availability of budgets and human resources. The reasons for incorporating or rejecting the 32 (15 from the virtual dialogue and 17 from the face-to-face meeting) proposed commitments submitted by citizens and civil society will be reported and made available on the e-Democracia website in April 2013. Finally, civil society proposals and government proposals will be

reviewed and submitted to the CIGA for approval. This is Brazil's Inter-ministerial Committee for Open Government, which was created by President Rousseff in September 2011. The approved selection will be consolidated in the new Country Action Plan for 2013-2014. At the national conference, civil society and participant citizens also presented a proposal for the governance of the OGP in Brazil. Their proposal, which advocates greater social participation in the work of the CIGA, will be considered by the CIGA and later debated by the Committee and civil society. Another issue raised by CSOs is the need for sustained financial support for their participation. Events such as national conferences that representatives need to attend in person are particularly costly.

Civil society acknowledges its role in the consultations and that the development process of the new Action Plan has been a

collaborative effort. It also seeks to remind government that, 'this is part of the democratic process'. 'In Brazil, we have a political vision of OGP; it provides an opportunity to push government towards transparency, to open up the areas where government is operating in a secret way,' Iara explains.
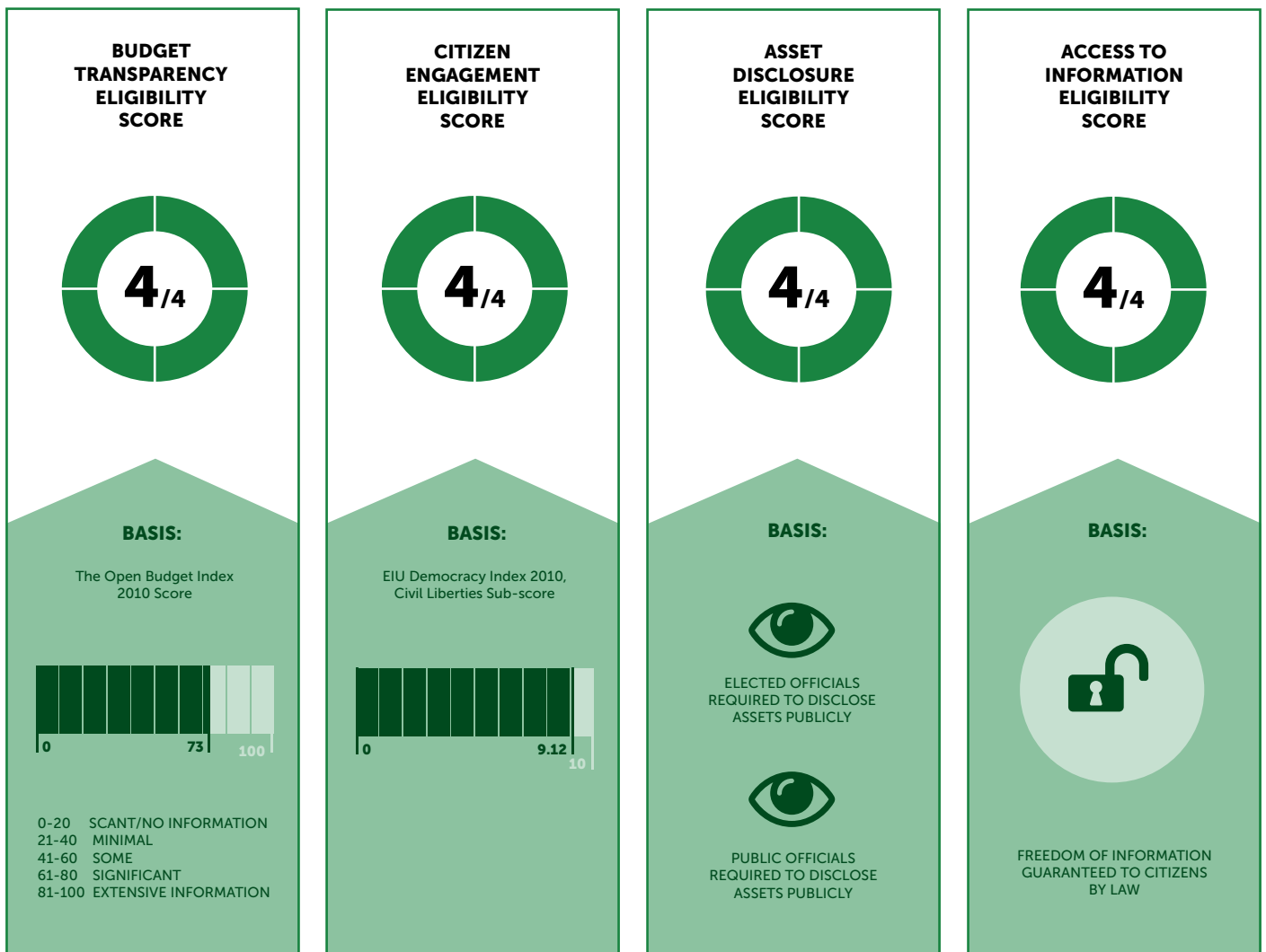
For more information or to get in touch with one of the people interviewed, please e-mail nvaart@hivos.nl.

OGP MEMBER SINCE:
September 2011

CURRENT STAGE:
2nd Action Plan

OGP SITE:
http://edemocracia.camara.gov.br/web/acoes-ogp/inicio

BRAZIL OGP ELIGIBILITY DATASHEET

BUDGET TRANSPARENCY ELIGIBILITY SCORE

4/4

BASIS:

The Open Budget Index 2010 Score

0   73   100

0-20   SCANT/NO INFORMATION
21-40   MINIMAL
41-60   SOME
61-80   SIGNIFICANT
81-100   EXTENSIVE INFORMATION

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT ELIGIBILITY SCORE

4/4

BASIS:

EIU Democracy Index 2010, Civil Liberties Sub-score

0   9.12   10

ASSET DISCLOSURE ELIGIBILITY SCORE

4/4

BASIS:

ELECTED OFFICIALS REQUIRED TO DISCLOSE ASSETS PUBLICLY

PUBLIC OFFICIALS REQUIRED TO DISCLOSE ASSETS PUBLICLY

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ELIGIBILITY SCORE

4/4

BASIS:

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION GUARANTEED TO CITIZENS BY LAW

TOTAL OGP ELIGIBILITY SCORE: **16/16**