

COSTA RICA

CONSULTATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY IS NOT A MOMENT BUT A PROCESS

After joining the OGP in January 2012, Costa Rica took the decision to present its first National Action Plan at the OGP International Steering Committee meeting a year later in April 2013.

'We didn't want to rush the process. It was important to ensure that consultation with civil society was thorough and at all levels.'

says Maikol Porras Morales, National Coordinator of the OGP based in the Digital Government Office. Civil society in Costa Rica is active and has had notable successes in getting government to change vital policies and practices. There is a strong culture of people gathering around issues, demonstrating and building momentum. 'When people are dissatisfied, they go into the streets and protest. However, civil society has no structural organisation and there is no

national umbrella organisation responsible for coordinating the OGP process,' explains Ana Sofia Ruíz of Hivos. Hivos, an international organisation, has acted as a bridge, bringing government and civil society representatives to the table. This platform has been important in raising broader civil society awareness of the OGP and of the mechanics of the consultation process. During the course of 2012, the Digital Government Office focused on working with various public institutions to develop the commitments for the Action Plan. In tandem, government engaged bilaterally with the Institute of Press and Freedom of Expression (IPLEX) and Costa Rica Integra (CRI), both of which have established a track record of working on issues of transparency, access to information and human rights. The formal relationship with broader civil society kicked off in February 2013 at a meeting attended by

over 70 people from government, civil society, think tanks, media, universities and the private sector. 'At this meeting government presented the draft Action Plan and opened up the dialogue and discussion,' explains Maikol. This was followed by a three-week national online consultation process, in which feedback and modifications were invited from citizens and organisations on the actual contents of the document. 'Many were not satisfied with the scope of the online consultation process, in terms of both the process and content,' says Eduardo Núñez of CRI. CRI's evaluation has revealed that this process was too slow, which left CSOs waiting for the government report. In addition, it was unclear which organisations had submitted the proposals and there was a failure to make public which proposals were accepted and which were rejected and why. 'In our view, the original Plan had two fundamental limitations:

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firstly, it had a very strong focus on the government’s digital strategy. There was less emphasis on the development of policies and actions that promote citizen participation and transparency, that fight corruption or increase access to public information. Secondly, its emphasis was on short-term actions – spanning less than a year – based on the logic that the present government completes its term in 2014,’ says Eduardo. Following the formal presentation of the national Action Plan by the government of Costa Rica in London in April 2013, further dialogue between civil society and government has taken place. Government has presented the Plan to CSOs and, moreover, government has also requested CSOs to elect representatives to the National Steering Committee. This committee will be charged with developing the indicators and monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan. These peripheral

meetings, although located in San Jose, the capital city, are intended to further inform and increase the interest and involvement of broader civil society. Costa Rica has actively sought to learn from and be guided by the experiences of other countries in the region; in particular the OGP processes in Peru, Mexico and Chile.

‘From the Mexican experience, we learned that if government and civil society can agree on the main points, there is no need to have countless meetings, which are both time consuming and costly,’

says Maikol Porras. At the same time, the Peruvian experience emphasises the need to involve many different organisations and not just the ‘usual suspects’; for example, those working on the environment, education or gender. It is fair to say that the OGP process

in Costa Rica to date shows significant progress but challenges remain. The consultation process, while not perfect in terms of inclusivity and representation, did engage more than 15 civilian or allied organisations. For Costa Rica Integra, the decision to participate in the initiative has been positive, as have the actual process of developing the Action Plan and the creation of a steering committee with the active participation of civil society. The main challenges concern how to broaden the net and involve new partners (beyond the capital) in the process, partners such as the business sector, and how best to promote the principles of open government within the context of the upcoming presidential elections. From the government’s perspective, the lack of any formal national network has created the ongoing challenge of seeking new opportunities to engage with civil society, as well as the methods to do so. In this regard,

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at the end of June, CSOs will be coming together and establishing the National Network for Open Government, thereby creating a more organised space for dialogue, support and participation in the OGP process. This is an important step in the development from the civil society perspective. Ultimately, ‘Civil society is important to us. We need it not just as users and clients, but also to develop, implement and monitor public policies. The government needs to learn to be more open and to share its information. People have the right to know,’ says Maikol.

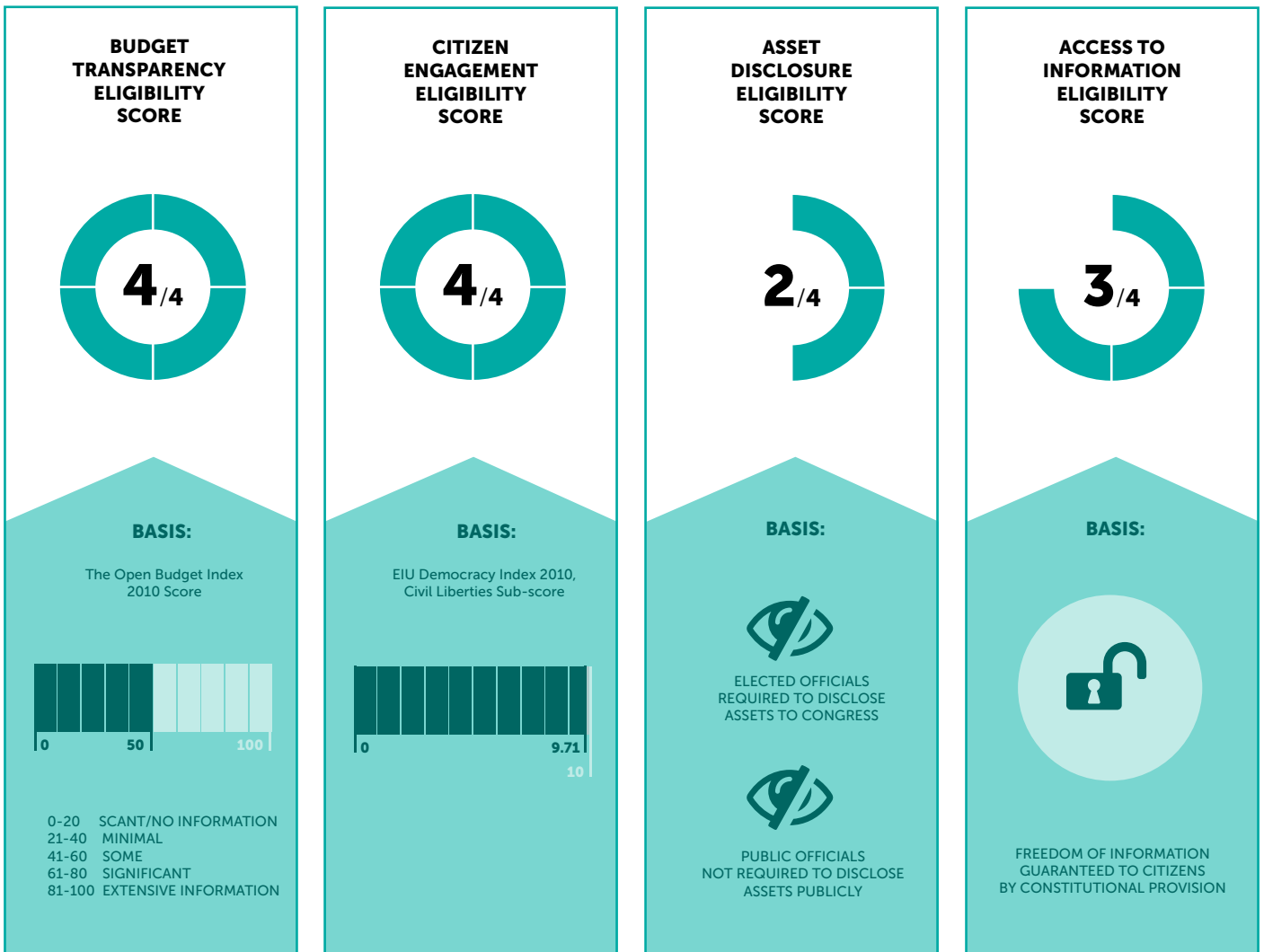
🔗 For more information or to get in touch with one of the people interviewed, please e-mail nvaart@hivos.nl.

OGP MEMBER SINCE:
April 2013

CURRENT STAGE:
1st Action Plan

OGP SITE:
Pending

COSTA RICA OGP ELIGIBILITY DATASHEET



TOTAL OGP ELIGIBILITY SCORE: 13/16