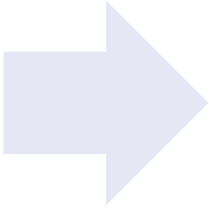


*Partners of the Americas*

**CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE SUMMITS**





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Civil society participation is essential to a vibrant and legitimate democracy. Article six of the Inter-American Democratic Charter underscores the need for citizens to “participate in decisions relating to their own development.” Since 1994, the Summits of the Americas have united democracies in the Western Hemisphere to address common concerns and create a shared vision for the future development of the region. As such, civil society participation is equally important at the local, national, and international levels to ensure that governments are responding to the needs of citizens and that citizens have a voice in decision-making processes.

# INTRODUCTION

Partners of the Americas has been working to strengthen civil society capacity to constructively engage in the Summits process through deliberative forums and to increase the presence and effectiveness of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the inter-American system. With the support of the Foundation Open Society Institute, Partners implemented a two-year pilot project entitled “National-Level Advocacy on Mandates from the Fourth Summit of the Americas” with the principal goal of increasing compliance of Organization of American States (OAS) member states with mandates from the IV Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina in 2005. As such, Partners provided three CSOs in Latin America with small grants and technical assistance to form coalitions and advocate for the implementation of policies that correspond with agreements made at the IV Summit.

CSOs have been active in presenting recommendations and building consensus prior to a Summit and in working with the OAS to monitor compliance and follow-on with Summit mandates at the national level. They have been less active, however, in linking advocacy efforts and projects to the Summits process and government initiatives. Through this project, Partners hoped to learn how civil society can support the Summits process at the national level and contribute to government efforts to create laws and policies that fulfill the commitments made during the IV Summit by heads of state throughout the hemisphere.

To implement the program, Partners worked with the Fundación Centro de Información y Recursos para el Desarrollo (CIRD) in Paraguay, Fundación para la Paz y Democracia (Funpadem) in Costa Rica, and Corporación Solidaridad y Desarrollo (SODEM) in Chile. Each organization examined different needs within their own country and selected one or two mandates from the IV Summit in which to focus their advocacy efforts. They also formed a coalition of CSOs working on similar issues among different stakeholders in order to plan and implement an advocacy campaign. The coalitions then worked together to engage citizens, media, and government officials in dialogue on policies related to the Summit mandates, raise awareness on specific issues, and hold events or forums to advance their campaigns.

Throughout the two years, Partners and the coalition leaders learned about working on advocacy campaigns, working in coalitions, and how the Summits process relates to national policy. Because each organization chose a different theme and different coalition members, the projects and advocacy strategies were decidedly unique in each country, yet each enjoyed success in advancing their goals and objectives. The following section describes each of the projects’ lessons and results. These experiences should provide other CSOs with examples of successful strategies for coalition building and advocacy and provide a basis for broader discussion on the role of the Summits of the Americas on national policy.



The following case studies highlight the challenges encountered in the process of working with governments and citizens for the fulfillment of Summit commitments and the solutions that were found to produce results. While each project was implemented by a coalition of three or four organizations, the cases focus on the lead organization, who Partners worked with directly and who contributed most to the compilation of lessons learned.

# CASE STUDIES



## ADVOCACY FOR THE REGULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FIRST-TIME EMPLOYMENT LAW

**Coalition leader:** Fundación Centro de Información y Recursos para el Desarrollo (CIRD)

**Coalition members:** Estación “A”, Fundación Paraguaya, Red Juventud Paraguay, Corporación “REMA”

**Country:** Paraguay

### ➔ PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In 2002, the Paraguayan Congress passed the First-time Employment Law. One of the biggest barriers to employment for young people in Paraguay was identified as lack of previous employment experience, which is often a requirement for employers when hiring new employees. The First-time Employment Law provides an incentive to employers to hire inexperienced youth by allowing them to contract youth for one year without the full package of benefits required under Paraguayan law. Though working with reduced benefits, young people can gain a year of fruitful employment that will allow them to pursue other opportunities. The Law passed through Congress by default and, therefore, was never debated among government officials or the general public. Subsequently, the Executive Branch did not take any steps to implement the Law and, as a result, the Law was largely unknown in Paraguay and was not utilized to help increase youth employment.

The Fundación Centro de Información y Recursos para el Desarrollo (CIRD) set out to advocate for the implementation of the First-time Employment Law by the Ministry of Justice and Labor, thereby responding to Summit Mandate 3 “Reduce youth unemployment and significantly lower the percentage of young people that neither study nor work,” and Summit Mandate 14 “To

increase the proportion of the active population, both employed or unemployed, that participates in occupational training activities.” CIRDA convened professional associations and youth organizations to form a coalition in favor of the Law’s implementation. It became clear early in the project, however, that not all stakeholders were in favor of the Law. Lack of support for the Law involved more than mere lack of government implementation; the Law was ill-constructed from the beginning.

As part of its advocacy, the coalition launched a media campaign to increase public knowledge of the Law and allow stakeholders and opinion leaders to express their views on the Law and its implementation. Coverage appeared in local and national newspapers and television, including opinion pieces and political talk shows. As a result of feedback from stakeholders, the coalition chose to change their course of action and instead of advocating for implementation of the Law, began advocating for a modification of the Law, including introducing new elements, such as internships, into its design. The coalition also organized a youth forum in Asunción during International Youth Day in August to mobilize support for better employment policies and the modified Law.

## ➔ CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

The challenges faced by CIRDA and the coalition were instrumental in shaping project activities, and in the end, new activities helped CIRDA successfully work toward the ultimate goal of increasing employment opportunities for youth. Because the Law had never been debated in Congress, and since the Executive Branch did not implement the Law after its passage, it was largely unknown by the Paraguayan public, including youth groups and professional associations. Believing that lack of knowledge was a primary reason for the Law not being implemented, the coalition conducted a media campaign to raise the Law’s profile.

As the campaign continued and coalition members gained a better understanding of the Law and its implications, they were forced to reexamine their original goal and the needs of the stakeholders they worked with. In the end, a majority of stakeholders agreed that the best course of action was to modify the Law instead of implementing the version passed in 2002.

To modify the Law, however, the coalition needed to collaborate with different government branches and agencies. From the outset of the project, CIRDA and the coalition faced resistance from the government concerning the Law. The Ministry of Justice and Labor was uninterested in the Law and its implementation and did not respond to CIRDA’s inquiries or requests for meetings. The coalition, therefore, approached congressional representatives and found new allies to support a modification of the Law.

Using the Summits of the Americas as an advocacy strategy also proved challenging. General lack of knowledge about the Summits process and lack of confidence in the government created an environment where citizens were largely uninformed and disinterested in how the Summits could affect youth employment policies at the national level. The government's disinterest in the Law and the efforts of the coalition also made it difficult to use the Summits as an advocacy tool in engaging the federal government. CIRD therefore used the project as a platform to educate citizens about the Summits process and mandates when possible.

## ➔ RESULTS

Although the project encountered various challenges, it succeeded in opening a public discussion about the Law and the government's response to youth employment issues. The campaign had unexpected results, in that opinion leaders and journalists began discussing the Law in other forums, further increasing the Law's visibility. The Law became a symbol for the government's ability to take action and produce results toward increasing youth employment.

This new dialogue succeeded in bringing multiple stakeholders to the table to discuss the Law and its provisions. As a result, CIRD and the coalition were forced to take a better look at the Law and possible alternatives. Even though opinions about the Law were widely split among interest groups, the dialogue was healthy and CIRD and the coalition were able to guide the discussion toward a consensus that appealed to youth, the private sector, and other stakeholders simultaneously. As a result, a modification of the Law, which more accurately reflects the needs of stakeholders, has been drafted and has political supporters in the Congress.

In addition, CIRD succeeded in truly incorporating stakeholders into the project's design and activities. By listening to youth organizations, professional associations, and opinion leaders, they were able to adjust to new developments without losing sight of the overall objective. Although the project was designed to implement the Law passed in 2002, the end result—a new, modified Law that people support—will do even more to promote increased youth employment in Paraguay.



## FOLLOW-ON TO THE CONSULTATION WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND SUPPORT FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE AUTONOMOUS DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY LAW

**Coalition leader:** *Fundación para la Paz y la Democracia (Funpadem)*

**Coalition members:** *Mesa Nacional Indígena (MNI), Fundación para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Costa Rica (Fundehuca)*

**Country:** *Costa Rica*

### ➔ PROJECT DESCRIPTION

For more than ten years, the indigenous community in Costa Rica has been fighting for autonomy through the passage of the “Autonomous Development of the Indigenous Community Law.” This Law will guarantee political autonomy for the 24 indigenous territories in Costa Rica and is widely supported by the indigenous community. The development of the Autonomous Development Law began in 1995, but without support from the members of the Legislative Assembly, it was tabled until 2005. The indigenous community worked for several years with civil society to reopen the debate, finally succeeding in not only reopening the debate, but also in guaranteeing that recommendations from the indigenous community would be included in the process.

The *Fundación para la Paz y la Democracia (Funpadem)* worked to support this process by ensuring that legislative and media representatives are better informed on issues important to the indigenous community in order to promote the passage of the Law before the Legislative Assembly. In order to do this, *Funpadem* worked in coalition with the *Mesa Nacional Indígena (MNI)* and the *Fundación para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Costa Rica (Fundehuca)*.

Each member of the coalition brought a distinct set of skills and experience and therefore, each organization was able to draw from this expertise to play a distinctive role in supporting the approval of the Law within the Legislative Assembly. MNI organized and implemented a broad scale consultation with indigenous territories to collectively provide recommendations to the Legislative Assembly. Fundehuca provided training to indigenous leaders on media relations and human rights.

Funpadem implemented media and educational campaigns to increase visibility of the consultation process and the necessity of the Law. As such, they worked to provide links between indigenous communities, legislative representatives, and the media. Funpadem also organized a two day event for journalists in indigenous territories, providing an opportunity for them to get to know the communities and their culture. For most participants, this event was their first experience with the indigenous community in Costa Rica.

#### ➔ CHALLENGES

Guaranteeing passage of the Law was a challenge for the coalition considering the various political implications associated with it. Many of the reforms included in the Autonomous Development Law would eliminate existing federal agencies and programs. Instead, the indigenous territories themselves would become direct recipients of financial resources from various government agencies, and would take primary responsibility for implementing programs within the territories. Since indigenous issues have not been at the forefront of Costa Rican politics, many legislative representatives were not aware of the reasons behind the demand for autonomy from the indigenous community. Instead, they were worried about the political repercussions of dismantling government agencies and eliminating intermediary bodies between the federal system and municipalities.

In addition, Funpadem and other organizations feared delays as a result of the prolonged debate over the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which has distracted political officials from other issues. While Funpadem has worked to raise awareness of the issue within political circles and among the general population, it was uncertain if these efforts would create the political will necessary for substantial political change.

Funpadem also faced challenges in connecting the issue of indigenous rights to Mandate 51 of the IV Summit “To promote an ongoing, respectful, and constructive dialogue with indigenous peoples and develop policies to create the necessary conditions to facilitate their integral and sustainable development.” In total, the Declaration of Mar del Plata contains 70 declarations that

cover many topics supporting democratization and development of the hemisphere. While the rights of indigenous communities are included in the declaration, they are not the primary focus and can get “lost” in discussions about the process. On the other hand, the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169 specifically and solely addresses this issue. As such, it is more widely known among the indigenous community and often referred to within texts for promoting indigenous rights. While Funpadem worked to raise awareness of the Summits process in support of their work, it was difficult to get the indigenous community to embrace it as an advocacy tool as they do ILO Convention 169.

## ➔ SOLUTIONS AND RESULTS

By working with legislators and with the media, Funpadem raised awareness of the issues surrounding the Law by providing indigenous communities with tools and opportunities to express their opinions and views on national policy. Through increased knowledge of this marginalized population, legislators can draw on new sources of information to better understand the issues and make an informed decision on the Law.

As such, Funpadem and the coalition succeeded in making certain advances and guaranteeing that the Autonomous Development Law will be presented to the Legislative Assembly. The Law enjoys support from key members of the legislature, including the members of the Social Affairs Commission, which drafted the text of the Law based on the recommendations of the indigenous community.

In addition, Funpadem has succeeded in securing broad coverage of indigenous issues as well as the Autonomous Development Law and the consultation process in local, national, and international media outlets. In the process, indigenous communities have become better able to represent themselves in the media and before government officials.

The process for passing the Law has been long and slow. But with the help of Funpadem and the coalition, it has moved forward in a manner that respects the opinions, thoughts, and needs of the indigenous community, and includes them within the process of developing the Law and educating political and cultural leaders on their needs.



## YOUTH ADVOCACY IN THREE REGIONS OF CHILE FOR FULFILLMENT OF COMMITMENTS MADE BY THE GOVERNMENT ON EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

**Coalition leader:** Corporación Solidaridad y Desarrollo (SODEM)

**Coalition members:** Desarrollo Local Colchaqua, Estudios y Trabajos Agrícolas

**Country:** Chile

### ➔ PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Throughout most of Latin America, young people face challenges in finding and sustaining employment. Either they lack certain qualifications to enter the job market, or discrimination against youth prevents their active participation. This is especially true for youth who live outside of city centers. The Corporación Solidaridad y Desarrollo (SODEM) sought to increase the effective participation of youth in local decision-making processes in rural and semi-rural areas of Chile, focusing on the areas of education and employment. Increasing the presence of youth in local government and providing them with necessary tools in advocacy and problem solving enables them to work with local governments to find solutions to issues in education and employment.

The project worked in the Fourth, Sixth, and Metropolitan Regions of Chile to advance compliance with Summit Mandate 3 “Reduce youth unemployment and significantly lower the percentage of young people that neither study nor work.” One member of the project coalition led activities in each region. The coalition included Estudios y Trabajos Agrícolas in the Fourth Region, Desarrollo Local Colchaqua in the Sixth Region, and SODEM in the Metropolitan Region. This ensured that each region had support from one member of the coalition throughout the life of the project.

The project focused on three areas: research on the actual situation of youth in rural communities, leadership training and problem solving, and network building. Working with coalition members and youth participants, SODEM conducted research on education and employment and the needs of rural youth. The research filled a gap in recent studies looking at these particular regions and the final report was distributed to local governments and CSOs in order to better inform future policies and projects, and will be presented at the Iberoamerican Summit to be held in Chile in November 2007.

The coalition also reached out to local youth organizations to conduct a series of leadership workshops. The workshops focused on leadership characteristics, needs assessments and problem solving, and developing action and advocacy plans. Youth participating in the workshops then became local facilitators, actively engaging other youth in identifying community needs concerning education and employment for youth, and developing proposals and projects to address those needs.

Lastly, SODEM worked to build networks of organizations working on youth employment in Chile, both regionally and nationally. The organizations in the coalition worked at the regional level to incorporate youth and other interested organizations into project activities. At the national level, SODEM worked with members of the Action Network to increase its influence and legitimacy as it conducted advocacy with different government agencies at various levels.

#### ➔ CHALLENGES

One of the primary challenges of the project was to develop a media campaign that would increase the visibility of issues related to rural youth and raise awareness of the need to find creative solutions in addressing these issues. The campaign needed to target multiple stakeholders, including government officials, citizens, and youth themselves. Making youth aware of their right to participate and showing citizens and government officials how youth could positively contribute to local development was essential to seeing the desired results.

In addition, SODEM found that few citizens or government officials in the regions where they worked knew about the Summits or the agreements made at the IV Summit. They lacked a connection to a political forum that felt very distant from the needs of rural communities. Without a space previously constructed for open dialogue on the inter-American system or the Summits process, the coalition found that invoking the commitments made at the IV Summit had little influence on project results. Instead, they focused discussions on issues that youth participants felt were important to their daily lives and tried to connect these to the Summit mandates.

## ➔ SOLUTIONS AND RESULTS

SODEM and the coalition approached their media campaign from various angles. By doing a comprehensive study of the situation of education and employment of youth in Chile, they were able to open a space for dialogue and present information to government officials that will contribute to better policy-making by the government. By forming various networks, the coalition amplified their reach in discussing and exploring youth issues.

The coalition also incorporated youth into the media campaign by providing trainings on communication to youth participants and allowing them to participate in developing the campaign strategy. Not only did this help the coalition members to implement the campaign and raise awareness in the three regions, it also helped motivate youth participants to be more active in the campaign, and highlighted the capacities of youth in the communities. In addition to radio spots, the youth incorporated technology such as internet blogs, demonstrating how youth can contribute to community development in new, creative ways.

Youth participants then developed proposals to present to their municipal governments and advocated for improved policies. These proposals sought to find creative solutions to improve educational policy in these regions, including increasing teacher training for primary schools, fostering spaces for artistic expression, and improving the public transportation system for students, thereby increasing access to education and school attendance.

As a result, SODEM and the coalition succeeded in signing agreements with Mayors in three municipalities to incorporate youth proposals and suggestions in projects and policy decisions. Youth participants were also invited to form part of local organizations such as neighborhood committees and citizen councils in five municipalities. These youth now have more spaces for participation and a greater voice in policies that affect their education and access to employment.



These projects advanced national or local policies that directly benefit the stakeholders with which they worked. Each project built coalitions of organizations working toward common interests, and in the process, each succeeded in increasing compliance with at least one Summit mandate. Yet, several questions still remain, and these three cases serve as lessons learned for other CSOs as they work to strengthen civil society participation in the Summits process and the inter-American system.

# CONCLUSION

Partners of the Americas and the Foundation Open Society Institute initiated this pilot program with several objectives. Although the overall objective was to increase government compliance with agreements from the IV Summit, the program also sought to increase civil society capacity to advocate for fulfillment of Summit agreements by providing technical assistance in coalition building and advocacy in order to continue such efforts in the future.

Ultimately, incorporating these elements into the individual projects contributed to their success. Working in coalition was not a new experience for any of the lead organizations. Yet, reaching out to and working with other organizations on project planning and activities proved beneficial in multiple ways:

- **First, it broadened the geographical scope and access to stakeholders for each project, allowing the lead organizations to increase influence or draw on new and different points of view.** This was especially true for SODEM's project, which used local partners to strengthen relationships at the municipal level where they could have the most influence.
- **Second, it allowed participating organizations to draw on different strengths and capacities among coalition members,** as was the case with Funpadem's project. In this case, each coalition member led different aspects of the project as per their organizational strengths.
- **And third, it created spaces for dialogue among diverse stakeholders.** This was especially evident in CIRD's project, where increased awareness among the general public and coalition members led to new discussions and ultimately altered the project work plan and advocacy strategy to better reflect stakeholder needs.

In addition, the coalitions helped focus the projects in a way that would be difficult for one organization working alone. The Summit mandates speak to policy ideals, but not specific actions. Both of the projects led by CIRD and SODEM chose to focus on Mandate 3, yet were able to interpret it in very different ways and produce different results. In this respect, the coalitions provided spaces for dialogue among members of society as to how each country should interpret the mandate and find solutions that would meet their country's needs.

The three cases also show the benefits of advocacy strategies that work to raise public awareness, both among stakeholders such as youth, indigenous communities, and government officials, and among the general public. The awareness campaigns served several purposes, including informing citizens of government initiatives, policies, and commitments; presenting citizen concerns and ideas to government officials; and motivating beneficiaries to become

more engaged in issues of importance to them. In this respect, the media became an important ally in all three cases. By increasing media participation in dialogues and coverage of project activities, new discussions were generated. These discussions focused on the themes of the projects, such as youth employment and indigenous rights, and also on the role of the Summits process in national policy.

In all three cases, invoking the Summits as an advocacy tool was challenging. While the coalitions were able to pull out specific mandates on which to focus their advocacy efforts, the Summits process remained too broad and too disconnected from national or local concerns to resonate with citizens. The projects confronted not only a lack of knowledge about the Summits process, but also a lack of faith in government commitments at any level. Surprisingly, however, this lack of knowledge and confidence did not prevent citizens from involving themselves in the various dialogues opened in each country. While the Summits process did not resonate with all stakeholders, the specific issues addressed by the projects certainly did.

These case studies provide several lessons and raise new questions for civil society as it continues to increase its participation in the inter-American system and provide support to initiatives such as the Summits of the Americas and the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The coalitions' abilities to help governments find ways to fulfill Summit mandates show potential synergies between the public and third sectors. Civil society can, and should, play a key role in these processes, not only at the international level, but also in engaging citizens at the national level in finding appropriate ways of fulfilling commitments.

