More than a storybook, a knowledge platform
AUTHORS

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His publication was made possible by all the people who have provided unconditional support to Superheroes of Development from the beginning: the President of the IDB, his Chief of Staff and our colleagues in the Vice Presidency for Sectors; the Vice Presidency for Countries; IDB Invest; IDB Lab; the Office of Strategic Planning and Development Effectiveness; and the Country Offices. All of them have contributed their perspectives, experience, and creativity and have made an invaluable effort to make Superheroes an emblem of the IDB’s unique mission: to improve lives.

To the executing teams of Latin America and the Caribbean, who remain fully committed to the development of their countries through the effective implementation of their projects despite challenging local and international conditions. This publication is from and for you.
Unlike comic book characters, the protagonists of Superheroes of Development are humans whose only superpowers are their determination, perseverance, intelligence, and resourcefulness. Their teams are responsible for making IDB-funded operations a reality, helping real people, and overcoming real challenges.

This publication highlights the eight finalists selected for the fourth edition of this initiative, which is designed to recognize the work of these anonymous heroes and share knowledge. A total of 91 proposals were submitted by executors in 24 of the 26 borrowing countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The four winners chosen for 2021—one from El Salvador, one from Belize, and two from Ecuador—overcame major challenges and implemented solutions worthy of becoming benchmarks. Superheroes of Development is not just about giving a well-deserved recognition to project executors. This initiative is also meant to share their experiences, so that—as we have said since the first edition—everyone has access to the knowledge generated by a few key individuals. This was reaffirmed by the President of the IDB, Mauricio Claver-Carone at our most recent awards ceremony: “We can and must learn from the challenges you have faced and the solutions you have developed so that others do not have to start from scratch.”
In fact, Superheroes of Development has increasingly moved in this direction. What began as a one-time competition in 2018 has evolved into a knowledge platform that identifies and shares good practices and lessons learned through the execution of initiatives. The goal is for these lessons to be used by other teams, and that has a lot to do with one of the pillars of the Bank’s management: operational excellence, which refers to the projects’ transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency. The more we learn from them—the more their successful experiences become known—the more progress we will make towards operational excellence, because future projects will have benchmarks that will allow them to be more transparent, effective, and efficient.

The fourth edition of Superheroes of Development was adjusted to reflect that approach. We decided to include both ongoing initiatives and those that had been completed in the past five years. We selected completed projects that IDB entities had evaluated and found to meet the proposed development objectives. The finalists in this group were identified as having had a positive impact in their countries based on the evidence gathered.
It is very gratifying to see that the projects included in this competition align with the 2025 Vision that the Bank has proposed for "reinvesting in the Americas." That vision is comprised of five lines of work: Regional Integration and Supply Chains; Digitization; Support for SMEs; Gender Equality and Diversity; and Action against Climate Change. Superheroes of Development is a tool that can be used to make progress in all of these areas, as it allows us to integrate the lessons that have emerged from the design and execution of the initiatives. Together with the recently launched BIDAcademy—the IDB Group’s new knowledge and learning platform on development issues in Latin America and the Caribbean—, we will continue to offer knowledge through the systematization and dissemination of lessons, challenges and innovations that contribute to good project management.

Since 2018, Superheroes of Development has evaluated nearly 340 initiatives, selected 27 finalists, and chosen 10 winners. And we hope that this is just the beginning. There are many needs to be addressed in the region, which means that there are many projects to be carried out and many more lessons to be learned, shared, and disseminated. The work ahead is arduous and challenging. We know that there are heroes—true heroes—who can do it. The stories in this publication are proof of that.
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LET GO TO FLY HIGHER

ARGENTINA
September 2021 was the first time a spaceship staffed entirely by civilians reached outer space. The Crew Dragon broke free of its long booster two minutes and 45 seconds after launch, shortly before reaching orbit. The engine that had gotten it that far was now dead weight. In order to continue to ascend, the ship would have to drop the engine.

Some projects are like that: they have to let go in order to fly higher. One example of this is IncluTec, a plan to train 1,500 at-risk young people in Argentina in computer programming. The goal was to help them access the knowledge economy, the sector that includes everything from software development to nanotechnology and the aerospace industry. The goal was for 30% of the participants to be women and to achieve 50% job placement.

Argencon, an entity comprised of companies from the knowledge economy that works to develop the industry in Argentina, was responsible for leading IncluTec. Its offerings included a 10-month Java programming course. (Java is a computer language that supports a good part of the world’s applications and websites.)
IncluTec would contribute to efforts to reach this global goal by training 1,500 young people. The program would include socio-emotional skills and English classes in an effort to ensure that participants had the skills that companies needed.

The reality, however, is that there were many issues with the implementation of Plan 111 Mil's various components. In the case of IncluTec, 70% of the young people who enrolled in the course dropped out. The overall strategy fell apart, but IncluTec decided to make changes and move on.
“WE LEARNED VERY IMPORTANT LESSONS DURING THE FIRST YEAR AND REFORMULATED THE PROJECT,” EXPLAINS AN ARGENCON SPOKESWOMAN. ON THE ONE HAND, “THE DURATION WAS EXCESSIVE FOR THIS POPULATION, SO WE REDUCED THE PROGRAM’S LENGTH FROM 10 MONTHS TO THREE OR FOUR.”

Secondly, they understood that restricting the training to Java programming considerably limited the program’s potential, “so we expanded the content and did not limit ourselves to Plan 111 Mil.”

One of the initial ideas was to take students to work as programmers in large companies like IBM. Unfortunately, those companies had very few spots for programmers. So they made another important adjustment: “We expanded the training to include tools that would be useful for enterprises, such as e-commerce, digital marketing, and testing (verifying code).”
INCLUTEC RELEASED THE DEAD WEIGHT, LEAVING BEHIND EVERYTHING THAT KEPT IT FROM FLYING HIGHER.

Project executors reviewed the course of action, made the respective adjustments, and set out again, confident that they would be successful.

But no one anticipated the pandemic or the lockdowns that were implemented around the world in 2020. All of the training that they offered was designed to be delivered in person with the exception of the English lessons. They still had to reach 60% of the 1,500 young people they had set out to educate.

The initiative's organizers benefited from the support of two NGOs that adapted the courses to an "online" format. They quickly developed digital material, shifted pedagogical platforms, and trained instructors. They also shifted to virtual tools to manage the call for applications and registration process.
What was initially bad news (the introduction of measures that would suspend in-person learning) ended up enhancing IncluTec’s achievements. The “online” mode attracted many more participants and expanded the project’s geographic reach. Instead of training 1,500 young people, they reached almost 2,400, and 1,800 of them actually graduated. The program also far out-performed the initial goal of having 30% of the participants be women. In the end, 53% of students were women.

A total of 116 courses were offered between 2017 and 2020, 80 of them online. In addition to Java, students had the opportunity to choose from several IT development options, including Node JS, PHP, Mobile, React, and Full Stack. They also signed up for social media management and technical support courses.

By diversifying the program’s offerings, its organizers attracted more young people. Shortening the duration of the courses allowed them to better align the initiative with students’ availability. In the end, they achieved an average retention rate of 63%. The pandemic and confinement measures ended up allowing them to train students who would never have been able to attend in-person courses. Better yet, a survey revealed that 56% of the students who landed a job did so in the tech sector.

The IncluTec coordinators are particularly excited about Ernesto Vivanco’s story: “He contacted us from Amaicha del Valle, a small town in Tucumán, to say how grateful he was.” The online community manager course allowed him to expand the network of the Ciudad Sagrada de los Quilmes (Sacred City of the Quilmes), one of the area’s main archaeological sites. The coordinators explain, “He told us that training in digital trades is essential to allowing young people from native communities to improve their quality of life without having to emigrate in order to access training and work.”
When a program yields deficient results because of implementation failures, it can be adjusted without halting its progress, maintaining some of the original components. Project executors in Argentina decided to dismantle Plan 111 Mil when they realized that they could not meet their goal of training 100,000 programmers, 10,000 professionals, and 1,000 entrepreneurs. But they went ahead with one element of the plan: IncluTec, a project designed to provide computer programming training to 1,500 young people. After making various adjustments, IncluTec met and even exceeded the goals set out for that component of the program.

Offering several short courses and modules allowed organizers to increase the number of students enrolled and graduated. Argentina’s IncluTec project went from offering a 10-month Java programming course to providing a broader range of IT development training along with social media management, e-commerce, and digital marketing classes, among others. The result was a sharp increase in the number of young people interested in participating in the program. The program far exceeded the initial goal of training 1,500 people. In the end, it had over 2,360 participants and 1,800 graduates.

Shifting a training course for at-risk youth related to the knowledge economy from in-person to virtual delivery increased its geographic reach and the participation of women. The pandemic forced students in Argentina to attend their IT programming courses online. This expanded the geographic reach of the project, as enrollment expanded to include students from remote areas who would never have been able to access that opportunity in-person. The initiative also brought together many more women than expected. In the end, they represented 53% of participants, far exceeding the initial goal of 30%.
2 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS THAT CALL FOR CULTURAL SHIFTS
It costs US$5 to obtain a police record in the Bahamas, and the process can be completed online. Before online access was granted a few years ago, it could cost up to $330 for someone who did not live on the island of New Providence, where the capital city Nassau is located.

For example, a resident of Long Cay in the southern Bahamas would have to take a ferry and then a plane, and the ticket for the latter costs around $327. Furthermore, the procedure involved two separate office visits, and flights were only available on Wednesdays and Saturdays. This forced anyone wishing to obtain a certificate to complete the journey at least twice or pay for three nights’ lodging. All that for a $5 certificate.

One of the main challenges for Bahamian authorities has been to offer administrative services to 400,000 inhabitants spread over 30 islands and cays. The lack of efficiency in public offices was also an issue, and one that had been recognized internally at the highest level: “It is intolerable that Bahamians have to stand in long lines in the 21st century just to get a passport,” remarked Foreign Minister Darren Henfield in March 2019.
Registering a company costs four times as much in the Bahamas as it does in member states of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). This is a disincentive for both local entrepreneurs and foreign investors.

The system's overall inefficiency became even more noticeable in the wake of Hurricane Dorian, which hit the country in September 2019. Some 5,400 Bahamians were evacuated from Abaco, Grand Bahama, and the surrounding cays. Most of them lacked identity documents, which made it difficult to provide organized assistance to the victims and led to even longer lines at the General Registry and Passport offices and the Immigration, Transit and Social Services departments.
Bahamian authorities were inspired by the developments that they observed in Estonia during an IDB-funded trip. That country is recognized worldwide for its progress in the area of digitization and development of safe, efficient, and transparent processes. In Estonia, 99% of government services can be processed online using the unified exchange platform. The technology used can be installed quickly and has minimal costs and requirements. It can also be adapted to different public structures and is easily scalable, which is why it has been adopted by countries on four continents.
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS THAT CALL FOR CULTURAL SHIFTS

THE PLATFORM THAT WAS BUILT IN THE BAHAMAS BASED ON THE ESTONIAN MODEL IS CALLED MYGATEWAY. THE APPROACH HAS ALLOWED DIFFERENT ENTITIES TO JOIN THE SYSTEM AT THEIR OWN PACE AND TO SHARE DATA.

A combination of cutting-edge management strategies and tools drawn from good practices in the private sector were used in its implementation. These strategies and tools allowed executing entities to be very precise about the direction they wanted to take and provided enough flexibility to weather unforeseen events.

For example, they used the waterfall methodology, which consists of a strict sequential development of projects based on detailed planning of the various phases. The process begins with a routing sheet that covers as many details as possible.

Bahamian entities also used the "Agile" method, which emphasizes simultaneous, yet independent work performed by several teams, which provides adaptability and speed.

In order to constantly monitor and follow-up on the project, they used an instrument known as the “RAID register,” an acronym that refers to the evaluation of risks, assumptions, issues, and dependencies.
Changes are often met with resistance. “In the Bahamas, services have traditionally been requested and provided in person. Can you imagine the heavy reliance on paper-based processes? It took a lot of effort to convince people to connect to the Internet,” recalls an official from the Digital Transformation Unit, the part of the office of the Prime Minister of the Bahamas in charge of executing the initiative.

They began a cultural transformation process that would impact many entities in order to help officials to understand the importance of moving towards the provision of digitized services. “We trained and certified the first team of ‘managers of change in the public service’, explains a project spokesperson.

They formed a group of professionals to guide, support, and secure the commitment of staff in each ministry to undertake the profound changes that lay ahead. Participants would have to take ownership of the process in order to successfully digitize government services. The strategies implemented included early communication activities designed to inform officials about changes in a timely manner and encourage them to participate in the process.

Once the tools and strategies were implemented, the amount of time required to develop MyGateway dropped from 18 months to just two. The platform was launched in early 2021. By September of that year, 23 services offered by 10 agencies were being offered online, including the issuing of birth, marriage, and death certificates, and renewing or securing duplicates of drivers’ licenses. Over 57,000 birth records were digitized.

These achievements have been so important that several Bahamian agencies have asked to have other services digitized. Furthermore, government entities from other countries have begun to ask the executors about the initiative and are considering the possibility of implementing it in their territories. As online access to administrative procedures has expanded in the Bahamas, lines have begun to disappear. Now no one is forced to take a plane and pay $327 to complete a $5 procedure.
When a digital transformation initiative faces strong resistance on the part of public entities and employees, teams can be created to support, guide, and inform other officials so that they understand the project and commit to it. As the Bahamas moved towards a digital model of government services, they launched a program to train “managers of change in the public service.” This group of professionals was trained to socialize the project within the various entities and to secure the support of officials in the participating ministries. The goal was for everyone to understand the initiative and take ownership of it so that it could be successfully implemented. In the end, the initiative’s achievements were such that several agencies have asked to digitize even more services.

It is possible to combine management methodologies across various government agencies in order to allow entities to get involved and move at their own pace based on their own priorities, while following a specific course of action. Government officials in the Bahamas used the waterfall methodology, which proposes a strict planning of the different phases, to implement the MyGateway platform. They also used the “Agile” method, which allows units to adapt to unforeseen events by breaking up the work among different teams that complete specific tasks independently. They used the “RAID register” for monitoring and follow-up, evaluating risks, assumptions, issues, and dependencies.

When a country decides to undertake an ambitious government digitization project and has very little experience with such initiatives, it is possible to look abroad for easily implemented, scalable solutions. In fact, this effort need not be limited to the same region or even a country with similar characteristics. In the Bahamas, nearly all administrative services had to be completed in person, which meant that anyone who did not live in the capital was forced to travel by plane and pay for lodging in order to carry out simple procedures. During a trip to Estonia, where 99% of government services can be completed online, Bahamian officials found a platform that they could install quickly and with minimal costs and requirements. A total of 23 services offered by 10 different entities could be completed online within a matter of months.
03 WHEN BENEFICIARY FAMILIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

ECUADOR

2021 WINNER EDITION
The world was not prepared to educate millions of children and adolescents who had to stay home due to the global pandemic. The experience of learning through a screen, listening to class through a speaker or interacting with peers by activating a microphone is quite different from in-person learning. It is especially difficult for students with disabilities who cannot see a screen, hear sound through speakers, or interact using all of their physical, mental or sensory faculties.

This was clear to Ecuador’s Asociación Fe y Alegría from the beginning. The entity had begun to implement new methods in a school in one of Santo Domingo’s poorest neighborhoods with the support of the IDB in 2010. Over time, they expanded their coverage to Quito, Guayaquil, and Manta, reaching almost 500 students in six schools.

But it is one thing to use technology to serve a population with different disabilities in-person, and quite another to provide such support remotely. Digital tools are often designed without considering users with visual or auditory limitations, or those with limited mobility. “A tablet and the Internet are not enough. Some students will not be able to power them on, turn up the volume or use the touch screen,” explains one teacher.

Another teacher, echoed this concern. “At the beginning of the pandemic, I wondered, ‘What am I going to do? How am I going to teach my classes through a screen if it is already tough to hold their attention in person?’ They are distracted under normal circumstances.”
THE STAFF AT FE Y ALEGRÍA UNDERSTOOD THAT THERE WOULD BE NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL SOLUTION. EACH CASE WOULD PRESENT UNIQUE CHALLENGES. AFTER ALL, THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WHO USE SIGN LANGUAGE ARE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE WHO READ BRAILLE.

Students in both groups use their hands to communicate, but they do so for different reasons: those in the first group can't hear, and those in the second can't see. “Our students’ needs are so specific and complex that we had to carry out several diagnoses to better understand their priorities and accessibility requirements,” explains a representative from Fe y Alegría.

They assessed each student and teacher’s level of connectivity through phone calls and home visits and identified the technological tools available to them. Stable Internet connections were an issue for 44% of students, and 46% did not have the equipment they would need to engage in remote learning. Students shared equipment and connectivity when they attended in-person classes.
BUT TECHNOLOGY AND CONNECTIVITY ALONE DO NOT GUARANTEE BETTER LEARNING. STUDENTS REQUIRED SUPERVISION DUE TO THE FACT THAT THEY COULD FREELY ACCESS GAMES, VIDEOS, OR INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT.

Many families do not know how to protect their children from risks such as cyberviolence or harassment on social media.

After ensuring that all students had adequate connectivity and equipment, the organization launched a security platform that allows them to manage devices, block applications and downloads, and configure access to certain websites. It also identified the specific equipment-related needs of 207 students who face greater challenges due to their limited autonomy. “In the end, we managed to reach them in their homes through remote learning, which helped prevent risks and protect their rights,” explain representatives of the initiative.
The program’s executors also conducted a study in an effort to identify which students were not meeting basic learning goals. They developed study guides and follow-up plans focused on students’ emotional well-being, monitoring physical and psychological aspects in an effort to support them when necessary and avoid new delays or setbacks.

They also used teachers’ contact with the families to design virtual education solutions on a case-by-case basis. The program leaders explain that “Teachers and family members played a key role in identifying aspects that we had overlooked.”

But they discovered a new challenge while developing innovative strategies: a significant number of households had decided to withdraw their children from school. The news forced them to work on additional interventions. Fe y Alegría staff members understood that it was urgent to listen to the families and identify the support that they needed as a family rather than solely focusing on the student. Supporting and training the students would be of little use if their relatives faced other limitations that impacted the initiative’s success.

They decided to create a space called “The Knowledge Exchange.” This initiative allowed staff to recognize family members’ efforts and commitment. It also allowed participating family members to share their experiences and the challenges that they faced. In the end, it allowed them to identify the obstacles that were leading them to withdraw their children from school. Families were overwhelmed by financial challenges and long hours spent with everyone at home. They also faced the additional responsibility of parenting students with disabilities, which they had previously been able to delegate to professionals.

Such scenarios can lead to neglect of the vulnerable family member resulting in malnutrition, increased domestic violence, and even negligence, abandonment, and abuse. In view of all of this, the staff at Fe y Alegría concluded that reduced financial burdens related to education and additional support would have to be provided to the most vulnerable households.
With the support of the CRISFE foundation, they awarded scholarships based on an objective analysis of the families’ circumstances in order to ensure equitable and effective distribution of resources. They increased the size of the scholarships by 43% in 2020-2021 compared to the previous year. They also worked with other institutions to secure food donations for the most vulnerable households. They even established an ongoing program to collect food for students at participating schools.

“Talking with the families and considering their concerns allowed us to design solutions and determine that it wasn’t enough to provide devices and Internet access. We must address community members’ priorities, provide emotional support, and meet other basic needs,” a Fe y Alegría spokesperson explained.

They increased the program’s goals for beneficiaries, increasing the number of students supported from 331 to 420, or by 27%. It was ambitious to increase our goal during a pandemic and a period in which students were dropping out, especially for education that requires specialized technology. Representatives of Fe y Alegría believe that the key to their success was including officials, teachers, students, and their families in the process.

Their reward is seeing students graduate and reach even higher goals. In September 2021, 12 Fe y Alegría graduates completed university. Theirs are 12 stories of tenacity and resilience, 12 young people with a disability who conquered what might seem unconquerable. According to one student’s mother, they now serve as role models for other young people and families: “You ask them, and they want to be everything.”
When a project is designed to benefit individuals with disabilities under exceptional circumstances that interrupt the services that they ordinarily receive, it is possible to find more effective solutions by talking with beneficiaries’ families. In Ecuador, the decision to educate students remotely posed special challenges for those children with disabilities. The staff at Asociación Fe y Alegría saw that students’ needs were as unique as they were complex. This led them to invite family members to share their perspectives so that solutions could be developed on a case-by-case basis.

When it becomes clear that an educational program will not achieve the desired effects, it is possible to act quickly to make informed decisions and meet program goals. Staff at Asociación Fe y Alegría discovered that many families had decided to withdraw students from schools. Why? Families faced more challenges due to the pandemic, including a lack of resources, long days with the entire family at home, and the loss of support for students with disabilities. The entity decided to offer more scholarships in an effort to alleviate some of that pressure. They also secured donations of food for those facing economic difficulties in order to ensure that basic needs would be met. In the end, they increased the number of program beneficiaries from 331 to 420 students.
WOMEN WHO OPEN DOORS TO ENTIRE COMMUNITIES

E L S A L V A D O R
“It was tense when we first arrived. Our legs were shaking.” This is how an official from El Salvador’s Ministry of Public Works and Transportation remembers her first visit to a group of vulnerable communities in the municipality of Tonacatepeque called Las Palmeras. “We were immediately surrounded by lots of men and women... Some had huge Mara Salvatrucha tattoos on their necks. Others had tears painted on their cheeks. Each tear represents a murder.”

Her fear was not unfounded. Local gangs had already frightened away other officials who visited the area with the intention of implementing a project or repairing infrastructure. Many of them had been robbed. State contractors preferred not to participate in projects there. Several construction companies had even abandoned their projects. Companies risked having materials stolen and were forced to pay “rent” to the gangs.

But companies weren’t the worst off. The greatest impact was on the communities. Houses in Las Palmeras had been flooded and lacked basic services. There were no streetlights. The communities were classified as “precarious urban settlements.”
ALL OF THIS MADE THE INITIATIVE THAT THE MINISTRY OFFICIALS WANTED TO PRESENT OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE. THE PROJECT INCLUDED BASIC SANITATION AND OTHER RISK MITIGATION MEASURES. THE PLAN WAS TO REDUCE THE DEVASTATION CAUSED BY THE FLOODS AND LANDSLIDES.

The initiative included providing potable water to 400 families, paving 10,000 square meters of roadways, and installing public lighting.

Ministry officials were welcomed because they had worked with community representatives in the past. “We got out of the vehicle and gave each person a firm handshake. We began to present the project and explain the intervention,” ministry representatives recall.
QUALITY OF LIFE AND EMPLOYMENT

THE MINISTRY OFFICIALS HAD REACHED OUT TO A COMMUNITY LEADER TO COORDINATE THEIR ARRIVAL. LOCAL WOMEN PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN ADDRESSING CHALLENGES SUCH AS ENSURING THAT WORKERS WOULD BE SAFE.

Several women spent two months leading "community tours" to explain the plans to their neighbors ahead of the contractors’ arrival.

The entity Ciudad Mujer played a key role in their efforts. The initiative provided inter-institutional services to support their rights and economic empowerment. They held workshops and training activities on topics such as equal rights and productive activities.
Other women from contractors, the supervisory organization, and the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation joined this effort to build trust and empathy. Together they worked on solving the problems and conflicts that arose as the intervention progressed.

The process required the women to work together before and during the project and to involve the rest of the community in these efforts. The meetings that they held to explain the job opportunities related to the projects and how they would improve families’ quality of life were particularly important. Some 240 residents of Las Palmeras were hired as part of the project.

Local eateries and tortilla shops were established to provide food to workers, and older women were given the opportunity to manage them.
Though it sometimes seems that children have the least amount of power to shape their communities' future, they also had a role in this project. They got involved in dance classes and recycling and painting workshops. They also shared their experiences at the Tin Marín Children’s Museum with the help of a social worker and learned about healthy coexistence. The knowledge and skills they acquired in the workshops and in the museum would transcend this initiative. The children helped give new meaning to several community spaces, painting murals and covering up gang-related messages.

It took less than three years to see the intervention's results. More than 2,200 families benefited from it, including some who had abandoned their properties because of the risk involved with living in the area. Meanwhile, families living in high-risk areas were able to relocate to safer ground. Their properties increased in value, and there were even spaces for holding social and recreational events. Many adults who had spent years with no access to formal jobs or social security secured employment. After the projects were completed, many of them were hired to work on other construction projects thanks to the experience they had gained and the references they were able to present based on their work at Las Palmeras.

Things changed so radically there that the area was no longer classified as a "precarious urban settlement." Project organizers decided to transfer this intervention model to five other territories where gangs also operated, and it worked. “We found a vaccine,” ministry officials proudly explain. “And the components of that vaccine are inclusion, citizen participation, and a very high dose of affection.”
Local women played a key role in supporting the safe execution of projects implemented in areas in which gang activity posed a risk to the safety of contractors and projects. El Salvador’s Ministry of Public Works and Transportation relied on women leaders to mitigate the risk of working in gang-controlled areas. Contractors and supervisory organizations were able to develop a relationship based on trust and empathy with local residents. Together they addressed the conflicts that arose. This allowed project developers to complete basic sanitation, risk mitigation, road paving, and public lighting projects.

When vulnerable communities resist plans to implement projects designed to improve their quality of life, it can be helpful to present the employment opportunities that such activities can generate. Salvadoran officials worked with local populations in the community of Tonacatepeque to generate interest in the implementation of infrastructure projects that would benefit the entire population. In addition to presenting the project as an opportunity to improve residents’ quality of life, they explained how it would generate job opportunities for men and women of different ages in the community. In the end, 240 residents found permanent employment even though many of them had been without formal work or social security for some time. Some even found opportunities to work on other infrastructure projects due to the experience and references that they gained. Older women in the community generated income by setting up eateries and tortilla shops for the workers near the job sites.
05 OLDER ADULTS GO DIGITAL URUGUAY
Aging is becoming a longer, and sometimes, a more pleasant process. This is especially true in Uruguay, which has one of the highest life expectancies in Latin America. The average life expectancy for Uruguayan men is 78, and that of women is 81. This has led many local entities to commit to improving older adults’ quality of life and ensuring that their rights are visible and protected, particularly those of the most vulnerable.

Over the past few years, Montevideo has created two Reference Centers for Active Aging (CREA, for the Spanish acronym), and organizers hope to replicate them. Older adults can spend time at these centers to take classes, engage with peers and take part in physical and recreational activities such as dance, singing, photography, arts and crafts, cooking, and cognitive stimulation exercises.

These spaces are designed to increase the quality of life of people like Rosa, age 75. She had left behind her native Venezuela to build a life with her Uruguayan husband. When he died, Rosa was left with no family, no friends, and no resources. She was invited to join one of the CREA centers after they opened in July 2019. In December of that year, they hosted a year-end party featuring meals prepared by the members themselves.

They closed for the summer, and then reopened in February 2020, motivated by the improvements they had observed in members’ health and well-being. But they would be forced to close just a few weeks later. The first coronavirus infections were detected in Uruguay in mid-March. Staff members feared that members would not only lose out on opportunities to improve their health and well-being, but would suffer setbacks.
older adults go digital

“WE FOUND OURSELVES FACING A VERY BIG CHALLENGE, BUT WITH A VERY CLEAR CONVICTION: WE CANNOT ABANDON THEM,” explains a representative of Fundación Astur, the entity responsible for running the active aging centers.

But how could they keep from losing the progress they’d made? How could they continue to engage in the socio-educational progress that had benefited so many at-risk older adults?

The obvious answer was to offer virtual programming. It was less clear whether project beneficiaries would be willing to use virtual tools and maintain their previous level of engagement. The first step was to assess CREA users’ digital skills. Based on the results of this diagnosis, they adopted tools tailored to each user’s knowledge and technology use, which “turned out to be heterogeneous, but greater than expected.” That is, the capacity of older adults exceeded the initial assumptions.
IN ADDITION TO PROVING THAT THEY COULD DO IT, THEY WERE EXCITED ABOUT LEARNING TO USE NEW TOOLS.

This allowed organizers to redesign the workshops based on the users’ digital skill levels. The centers launched virtual activities through video calls and social media platforms like WhatsApp, allowing members to exchange information and different types of multimedia content.

They knitted woolen blankets for the homeless. They also developed the workshop “Cuéntame tu vida en 1,000 palabras” (“Tell me about your life in 1,000 words”). Though challenging, the vast majority of participants were part of the project. Over 200 stories were submitted about their journey through this world. Some members managed to have a little physical contact despite the circumstances through snack delivery to members who lived alone. As one program participant put it, that snack “pampered my heart.”
The implementation of virtual activities was so successful that the centers began to serve more people than they had before the pandemic. One reason for this was the fact that the program was no longer limited to the city of Montevideo. “The number of participants increased daily. We reached Villa del Carmen, a small town located in the middle of nowhere 290 kilometers from the capital. Each day, 33 residents of the town would engage in virtual activities,” Fundación Astur staff report.

The organizers talk about the many ways that older adults who faced social isolation expressed their gratitude. The centers provided critical guidance on mental health, which turned out to be crucial for dealing with feelings of abandonment and depression. The CREA centers thus reached various corners of Uruguay, and also transcended borders. Older adults from Argentina and Chile participated in CREA activities. In fact, Rosa, the Venezuelan widow living in Uruguay, recruited other older adults from her country so that they could connect during the activities offered by the centers. She had returned to Venezuela to reunite with her family, but kept in touch with the CREA and encouraged ten people there to become part of the community.

In September 2021, the centers coordinated activities for more than 320 older adults, almost three times as many as they had in December 2019. “This is just the beginning,” explain staff members from Fundación Astur. “Older adults showed us that they can learn. Learning makes them feel young again.”
Assessing older adults’ ability to use technological tools allowed project executors to design workshops, courses, activities, and support programs for them, improving their quality of life. In Uruguay, a series of socio-educational activities designed to improve at-risk older adults’ quality of life transitioned to online programs. They first assessed participants’ digital skills and discovered that they had more knowledge and skills than staff members anticipated. This allowed them to adjust the interventions to each user’s abilities. In less than two years, they tripled the number of project beneficiaries and saw improved health and well-being. Staff members also were able to promptly address cases of abandonment and depression.
COMPLETED PROJECTS, LASTING LESSONS

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LEARNING TO TEACH WITH STATE-OF-THE-ART PEDAGOGY

BELIZE
“How many people remember the Pythagorean theorem?”, asks an official from Belize’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology. "It doesn’t matter. Nowadays, if you forget something, you can just Google it. But...if you’re facing a work or personal challenge, relying on Google could be problematic.”

In other words, some challenges can’t be solved using formulas you learned in school, and you no longer have to memorize them anyway. However, we do need critical thinking and problem-solving skills, that is, the ability to analyze a situation, identify its causes, and determine the best possible course of action.

Project participants in Belize engaged in an in-depth assessment of the model used to teach elementary school (through grade 8). At the time, just two out of every five students were completing that educational phase on time. Most repeated one or more years of studies. Overall, just 48% of girls finished eighth grade. The results for boys were even worse: only 38% of those initially enrolled in school graduated from the eighth grade. According to the national elementary testing, over half of students earned grades of C or lower, which is equivalent to a grade of 3 out of 5.

All this led project staff to be critical of the education being offered to young people. Staff at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology began to question everything, from classrooms with straight lines of desks to the way students copied down formulas and repeated the information written on a board: “They spent a lot of time memorizing and little time acquiring new skills. They spent their time reciting instead of creating. And they learned in isolation rather than collaboratively.”
TEACHERS WHO LACK KNOWLEDGE AND TRAINING

PROJECT STAFF FOUND THAT THE APPROACH TO TEACHING SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE. “OUR REGION HAS SPENT MILLIONS OF DOLLARS TRAINING TEACHERS TO SIT AT A DESK, LISTEN TO AN INSTRUCTOR TALK TO THEM ABOUT TEACHER-CENTERED TEACHING, AND THEN TAKE A TEST,” MINISTRY OFFICIALS EXPLAIN.

They began to see that there is a direct relationship between educational results and teachers’ knowledge. For example, when teachers were given the same test as their eighth-grade students, 31% earned a grade of “C” or lower. The grades earned by teachers in training were even more concerning. More than half, 56%, earned a “C,” and only 6% earned an “A” (5 out of 5).
Given the high demand for teachers and the limited supply, schools were forced to hire instructors who did not meet the minimum standards. They lack sufficient knowledge about the content they taught, and there was a great deal of room for improvement in terms of pedagogy, that is, in effective teaching strategies. Just 47% of primary school teachers in Belize had adequate teacher training, while this was true for 80% of their peers in Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, and Trinidad and Tobago.

This was clearly a structural issue. The institutions involved did not offer teachers methodological and quality training. They had never been taught to integrate subject knowledge and proper pedagogical strategies. They taught the same way they had been taught: memorizing concepts and repeating formulas.
Belize began to implement the "Education Quality Improvement Program" with the support of the IDB in 2014. The goal was to train teachers using "state of the art pedagogy," which involved implementing a learning methodology based on inquiry and problem solving (IPP). The goal was to teach students to work together to analyze challenges that make sense to them (practical cases) and explore potential solutions.

The initiative’s leaders recall how challenging it was to leave behind that paradigm of memorizing facts and figures: “It wasn’t easy. We had to convince principals that a classroom need not be a silent space. We asked teachers to ‘lose control’ in order to empower students as active participants. We even had to convince parents that there was no need to report a teacher if his or her blackboard was empty, and it seemed like the students had played all day.”

They identified principals and parents who were resistant to the idea and included them in the process. They even discussed the changes with them, exploring situations like tolerating the idea of having a noisy classroom in which the chairs were not perfectly arranged and facing the board. The important thing was exploration, discussion, and critical perspectives.

They also changed teacher training, which tended to last less than a week and focused on the presentation of information with no interaction. However, it would take more than that to introduce a new methodology. They would need to complete a two-year certification program while teaching.

The solution was to allow faculty to engage in learning while they continued teaching. Instructors began to visit classrooms and provide teachers with feedback on their lessons and teaching strategies. All participants engaged in both individual training and group activities with their peers.
OVERCOMING MATH ANXIETY

THIS PROGRAM HAS IMPACTED 50% OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN BELIZE IN JUST FIVE YEARS. 60% OF TEACHERS RECEIVED TRAINING, AND NEARLY 40% OF STUDENTS BENEFITED FROM THE NEW METHOD.

One study found that third graders’ math gains were equivalent to an additional nine weeks of school, which is almost a quarter of the school year. The gains observed in language and science were even greater, coming in at 14 and 16 weeks, respectively, which is comparable to 35 and 40% of the academic calendar.

Teachers also improved their knowledge of subject matter, though emphasis was placed on teaching methods and not on content. When they were retested, the number of teachers who earned a grade of “B” (4 out of 5) was 7% higher in the group that participated in the program. Teachers went from earning an average grade of “D” on math tests (2 out of 5) to a “B.” Many began to overcome “math anxiety,” a feeling of tension that interferes with the ability to understand and apply mathematical concepts. An IDB study conducted in Belize found that “students’ mathematical anxiety was related to that of their teachers.”
The initiative also included a campaign to attract talent, identifying the participants who performed best on the tests.

They implemented the program “Big Men Teach” to attract more male candidates, as they had traditionally been a minority in elementary schools.

Ministry staff are proud to have achieved these results without having to invest in expensive equipment or increase instruction time: “You cannot improve learning by buying educational materials. When you train teachers using the same pedagogical model that didn’t work in the past, nothing is going to change in the classroom, no matter how many teachers you train. You have to transform what happens in a classroom. You have to transform pedagogical practice [...] It isn’t about the Pythagorean theorem. It’s about becoming Pythagoras himself.”
It is possible to make significant progress towards improving elementary student learning by implementing cutting-edge methodologies, which does not involve major investments in materials or teacher training. Officials in Belize decided to rethink the teacher-centered model and forced memorization of formulas and figures. They began to implement a learning methodology based on inquiry and problem solving, that is, on collaborative exploration and discovery by students. The results included significant progress in science, language, and mathematics without the need for major investments in infrastructure or school materials. Meanwhile, teachers were able to receive a 2 year training, while continuing to teach. Program instructors conducted classroom observation visits, and teachers received individual and group feedback on lesson planning and teaching strategies.

When a group of teachers receives ongoing professional training based on cutting-edge educational models, they can improve their knowledge of the subjects they teach while enhancing their pedagogical practices. Some teachers in Belize lacked a strong foundation in the very subjects they taught. In fact, 31% of them earned a grade of “C” or lower (equivalent to a grade of 3 out of 5) on a test designed for eighth graders. Furthermore, 56% of future teachers who took the test earned that score, and only 6% got an “A,” the highest of the five possible grades. After participating in a teacher certification program, they significantly improved their knowledge of course content. Teachers went from earning an average score of “D” (2 out of 5) to a “B” (4 out of 5) on math tests.
THE VALUE OF A PROTOTYPE: NOT DEFINITIVE, BUT POTENTIALLY DECISIVE
Alarm bells sounded in Bahía in 2006. Urban growth, agricultural expansion, and the effects of climate change degraded its water resources to such an extent that the water supply for more than half of the state’s population was at risk. This posed a threat to the economic and industrial activities of the eastern hydrographic basin and the Salvador metropolitan region, which are responsible for 60% of Bahia’s GDP.

This was mainly due to the lack of public policies on environmental management and preservation of natural resources. In-depth institutional restructuring was implemented in response to these gaps. First, the state of Bahía created the Secretary of the Environment. It also approved two key laws that guided policymakers’ actions in this area: the State Environmental and Biodiversity Protection Policy and the State Water Resource Policy.

68% of the Brazilian state of Bahía is semi-arid. This means that there is not enough rain for vegetation to grow steadily throughout the year in two-thirds of its territory. It is always important to use water judiciously, but in such a context it becomes crucial.
The main goal was to achieve the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, particularly those associated with water. Policymakers also wanted to address environmental conflicts around economic development projects.

With support from the IDB, the team created the Bahía Environmental Development Program, a pioneering initiative that allowed them to design a modern Environmental and Water Resources Management System. That was when the biggest challenge began.

THESE REFORMS ALLOWED THE STATE OF BAHÍA TO IMPLEMENT A PLAN WITH A VERY SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE: DEVELOPING AN EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.
A PUBLIC PLATFORM
WITH OBJECTIVE, PRACTICAL, AND ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

POLICYMAKERS NEEDED TO BUILD A PLATFORM THAT WOULD SERVE AS THE CORNERSTONE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.

It was clear that they had to build a digital tool that would offer objective, practical, and accessible information on different environmental realities of the state of Bahía and its water sources. The idea was to create a system that would allow anyone to access the data and use it to make decisions. For example, this could include a community that wanted to voice concern regarding how a project would impact its water resources. The system would also be available to a business owner who wanted to provide information related to an economic development project’s environmental impact. Finally, officials would be able to develop informed opinions about the area for which an environmental permit was to be approved.
WITH THAT GOAL IN MIND, THEY BEGAN TO DESIGN SEIA, THE BAHÍA STATE ENVIRONMENTAL AND WATER RESOURCES INFORMATION SYSTEM.

It is a "public platform consisting of continuously updated georeferenced data on water quality, quantity and users, as well as social and environmental data that is available to various actors," explain the leaders who helped develop the initiative.

But implementing the process was much more difficult than designing it. "It was incredibly difficult to hire someone to develop the SEIA. Preparing the terms of reference for a highly innovative system that would support a ‘modus operandi’ that had yet to be defined is quite a challenge,” the project executors explain.

They decided to ask a wide range of stakeholders to contribute ideas. They established a dialogue with local environmental organizations in order to better understand the diversity of profiles of the future users of the technological platform. This allowed them to design the first version of SEIA, but with one caveat: it would be a prototype and not a definitive version.
THE NECESSARY TRANSFORMATION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

A SEIA pilot was released in 2012. It was very useful because it helped developers to better understand users’ expectations and revealed several of the technological challenges that they would have to overcome. This initial experience led them to explore other features that they had not considered.

The prototype made it clear that they were not trying to implement a simple information system. This would be a complex and highly disruptive process that would modernize the public management of the environmental sector. For this reason, the most revealing element may have been uncovering a major challenge that they never considered: the need to transform the institutional culture. “The SEIA presents a high level of technological complexity. In order to reach the desired level of excellence, we had to review the organizational structures, design new operating procedures and, above all, change the mentality of the main actors involved in the preparation and use of the platform.”

They determined that the public officials from the different state and municipal entities responsible for environmental matters and conservation would need to profoundly change their behavior. Measures were taken to move towards a collaborative culture, encourage employees to contribute data to the platform, share information, and work as a team, focusing on helping users instead of bureaucratic processes.
However, senior management worked to foster collaboration among such dissimilar units as the administrative, technical, environmental, and technological departments, making this synergy a fundamental aspect of the system's success.

For example, they engaged officials from various entities and ranks in the co-creation of SEIA. This allowed them to understand its advantages (for the public and for their own work) from the beginning as well as the commitment that it would require on their part to make the project a reality. One key element of the strategy involved encouraging leadership to foster an innovative spirit within the organizations, that is, to allow officials to explore, propose, fail, learn, and correct.
“IT IS NOT JUST A HIGH-QUALITY PLATFORM,” AN INITIATIVE REPRESENTATIVE EXPLAINS. “TODAY SEIA IS A TOOL THAT CAN BE USED TO EXECUTE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND REGULATIONS. IT ALLOWS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES, ESPECIALLY WATER.

It is a true practical, objective, and functional environmental management tool with online monitoring. The data allow users including citizens, business owners, environmental technicians, managers, and officials to make decisions.”

The system even facilitates environmental analyses of investment programs. The platform provides data on the region in which the intervention will take place, a map of its vegetation, socio-environmental information, a description of the water resources network, and the registry of natural and legal persons who use the local water resources. It is even possible to extract recommendations to increase the socioeconomic and environmental benefits of the initiative being evaluated.

In other words, the SEIA allows for community oversight, supports the work of technicians who analyze risks, and facilitates economic development projects. In addition, officials can use it to make decisions about matters such as the recovery of degraded areas and sustainable control of the environment.
SEIA’s implementation led to a decrease in response times for reports and complaints.

It also improved the efficiency of environmental licensing processes and beneficiaries’ satisfaction with environmental services such as the issuance of permits and water resource use authorizations. The size of the areas subject to legal protections increased by more than 15,000 hectares.

Given how much geographic, social, and environmental data it provides, the Secretaries of Finance and Planning now rely on SEIA for their development programs and land policies. The system has even fostered greater cooperation among these entities. Environment Secretary coordinators explain that “Bahía decided to advance water resource conservation, control, planning and management of agendas without losing sight of economic development.”

They also say that SEIA, which began as a prototype, “has established itself as the largest and most important strategy for modernizing environmental management and water resources, making Bahía a national leader on environmental issues […] SEIA ushered in a new era.”
The Value of a Prototype: Not Definitive, But Potentially Decisive

When project developers face challenges understanding all of the complexities related to a technical development initiative—which is key for executing a project—it is possible to start with a prototype to identify key functionalities and technical conditions. In the Brazilian state of Bahía, officials took on the task of creating the SEIA (the State Environmental Information and Water Resources System), a tool that would make it easier for them to implement their environmental management and natural resource conservation policies. They faced challenges in the area of technological development, and they had to redesign the terms of reference on several occasions due to lack of certainty about technical or functional aspects. They decided to start with a prototype that would allow them to better understand those technical challenges. This approach also allowed them to explore features they hadn’t considered. It also helped them to identify a major challenge: in order for SEIA to work, it had to be accompanied by a cultural transformation of the institutions and officials involved in the project.

The implementation of a technological platform can lead to a profound modernization of public administration, but it is possible to transform the institutional culture at the same time in order to ensure that the technological development is properly implemented by officials. In Bahía, officials had to change state and municipal employees’ mentality and move towards inter-institutional collaboration, facilitating the exchange of information and enhancing the technological platform they were developing. They encouraged officials from various entities and hierarchies to participate in the co-creation of the SEIA, so that they could learn first-hand about the benefits of the new system and the commitment that it would require on their part.
THE TRUST FACTOR
IN A RURAL CENSUS
ECUADOR
Success stories tend to feature moments of failure that inspire stakeholders to change course. This is the case of an ambitious rural census project that was implemented in Ecuador. They could only achieve the outcomes that have made them so proud of this effort after facing setbacks.

Rural censuses are key tools that generate data that can be used for an array of purposes, including formalizing land ownership, making decisions about strategic regional development investments, and planning the use of resources. With the support of the IDB, Ecuador began to design a comprehensive system that would allow them to describe the country’s rural properties, including their uses, boundaries, and ownership.

It looked like it would be a long road. An IDB-funded project allowed specialists to implement a pilot project between 2005 and 2009 that would generate data on eight out of 221 “cantons,” the unit used to subdivide Ecuador’s 24 regions or provinces. Based on that experience, they estimated that it would take two or three years to make significant progress. For example, they planned to complete the process of orthophotography for the vast majority of the territory. This would result in a complete and scaled cartographic plan based on aerial photographs.

But by the end of 2012, they had failed to meet expectations in several areas. The aerial photography was complete, but scaled plans had been approved for less than 50% of the national territory. Worse still, there were restrictions on the distribution and use of the images that were already ready. Census work had barely begun in a couple of cantons.
Residents had a deep mistrust of local governments. After two years of work with limited progress, tension began to increase. This situation was exacerbated by the restrictions on access to orthophotographs and a failure to properly educate residents about the initiative. Few people were familiar with the benefits of a rural census, which is sometimes seen as a simple measure to inventory the land and collect more taxes.

The reality is that the census data give farmers more legal certainty because the results can be used for land titling. This can result in more access to credit, paving the way for new investments and the opportunity to increase production. Furthermore, censuses allow officials to improve and increase the collection of property taxes for local budgets. They are also key for planning, territorial organization, and guiding officials’ decisions regarding a variety of investments.

Project executors tried to redefine their relationships with various stakeholders. “Here, in Ecuador, the censuses are managed by the municipalities, so it was key for mayors and councilors to take ownership of the project executed by the Ministry of Agriculture. We thus tried to implement a strategy of personal relationships even though it was a massive national project,” says one of the spokespersons for the project.

The strategy included talking with mayors and leaders from different political parties in the municipality as part of an effort to make everyone aware of the importance, convenience, and uses of this initiative. This process of rebuilding trust included sharing the orthophotomaps—the same ones whose circulation had been restricted—starting with the local governments that had been connected to the project from the outset.
Project coordinators hired and trained local residents to perform this work: “It was really important for people to trust us, allow us to go into their houses and take photos of their crops. It was important for them to show us the documentation and tell us whether they had deeds to those properties,” recalls an official.

All of the field work manuals were rewritten to help team members develop working relationships with residents. They wanted to make it clear that team members were there to ask questions and to offer solutions. For example, they helped to address common land ownership concerns and problems. They also offered legal advice, outlining possible courses of action for those who might have to be involved in legal proceedings.
A FEW MONTHS LATER, PROGRAM REPRESENTATIVES RETURNED TO THE TERRITORIES TO PRESENT THE CENSUS RESULTS. EVERYONE WAS INVITED TO REVIEW THE MAPS, WHICH HELPED VALIDATE THE PROCESS.

All local residents received a free map of their property. “For business owners, land generally represents figures or investments. For politicians, it represents a map or a tax. But for the people who live there, it is their work, their life, the roots that will allow them to avoid migration,” program officials explain.

Free legal assistance was offered to residents on matters related to inheritances and property lines. Most issues were resolved during those visits. Program staff remember a visit they received from two women. One said that she wanted to formalize ownership of a plot of land that she had inherited from her mother-in-law. She would need a death certificate to do so. The other lady suggested that she wouldn’t be able to obtain the document because she was the mother-in-law: “Where do I sign?,” she said enthusiastically. "At that point, it became clear that it was not an inheritance, but an 'inter-vivos' gift, which required a different solution," recalls an official who participated in the census process.
Project organizers decided to take on one final challenge: migrating all of the old and new census information, including paper maps, to a new digital platform that would be free and easy for all stakeholders to access. They named it the National Land Administration System (SINAT). It was designed to include useful functionalities for different profiles at the local and national levels. One of them was the single window for collections related to the census that would serve as a management tool for local governments. They also created an application that would allow residents to ask questions, participate in proceedings, and receive legal advice.

Given how useful the tool was, municipal officials asked project executors to add an urban census module, which expanded the project’s coverage considerably.

The project was successfully completed in 2017, five years after it had reached a breaking point. As of 2021, SINAT contains data on over 1 million rural properties that cover 3.2 million hectares of land.

Orthophotography has been completed on almost 90% of the nation’s territory, and the information is available free of charge to all public entities and projects. SINAT is now used as a management tool by 67 local governments in Ecuador.

The census benefited some 5 million people who can now use the system to submit a query, complete a procedure, or obtain a certificate. One could say that the failure was worth it for ordinary Ecuadorians because that allowed the program to be adjusted until the goals were reached.
When a rural development project is paralyzed by tension between local actors, individualized communication channels can be opened to rebuild trust and generate synergies, allowing executors to reach project goals. Data collection work for a rural census in Ecuador had been stalled for two years. Due to the lack of communication and education regarding this initiative, local governments disagreed with the project and staff members faced distrust from local residents. Their approach included creating open spaces for dialogue to socialize the benefits of the project. First, they spoke with mayors and councilors from the different municipalities to make them aware of the details of the initiative and its benefits. They also talked with people in rural areas. They visited the parcels to ask questions related to the census and sought to understand and address key issues and legal concerns related to land tenure. After collecting the data, they went back to present the maps to the communities and gave each resident a map of their farm. They also offered free legal aid to anyone who wanted to make additional inquiries. In the end, they managed to collect data from more than one million properties and launched a digital platform to hold all of the census information. This made it easy for public entities and residents to submit a query, complete a process, or obtain a certificate.