



# UPERHEROES

OF DEVELOPMENT  
PROJECTS THAT INSPIRE,  
LESSONS THAT MATTER





## SOLID MANAGEMENT SHINES ON ITS OWN

Achieving transformation through example

[COLOMBIA]



The medium-term is urgent, too

[COSTA RICA]



## WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES (AND NOT “FOR” THEM) MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

“Obvious” solutions must be documented

[MEXICO]



## NATURE OFFERS ANSWERS

Environmental awareness:

A seed sowed in schools

[BRAZIL]

Combating skepticism with  
pilot projects

[TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO]



The 10,000 citizens who invested  
in wind, helped reduce gas emissions  
and, in doing so, profited from it

[URUGUAY]





# Authors

Andrés Gómez Osorio

David Zepeda

Luz Ángela García

Dan Larrota





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This publication was made possible by all of the people who have provided unconditional support to Superheroes of Development from the beginning. 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.

This publication is of and for the executing agencies from Latin America and the Caribbean, who have made a lasting commitment to effectively implement the development projects financed by the IDB Group despite the challenges and adversities that they have faced along the way.





# Results matter, but challenges teach

Reaching a goal means reaching a destination. It means successfully moving from point A to point B. However, at the IDB Group, we believe that merit is not found in the arrival, but on the path that is traveled, on the way from point A to point B, which is never a straight line, but rather a winding, bumpy road. This tends to be the case with development projects: initiatives with clear proposals that must also navigate unexpected, complex, and winding paths.

This publication highlights six such stories: a wind farm in Uruguay that was to be funded using private citizens' resources; grass with roots measuring three meters long in Trinidad and Tobago that few believed could prevent landslides; a phone-based math tutoring program in Mexico that couldn't get students to answer calls; a program to strengthen the Colombian Comptroller General's Office that was impacted by the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing lockdowns; an environmental education program for public schools in Brazil on topics that were not considered to be priorities; and an airport in Costa Rica that was forced to operate ... with no passengers.

Though they would seem to have nothing in common, all of these cases share the feeling of having overcome significant adversities. As such, the teams responsible for



these six projects were chosen as finalists in the 2022 Superheroes of Development program. They stood out among the 77 applications submitted from 23 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean through an evaluation process led by a panel of IDB Group experts who considered the magnitude of the challenges faced and lessons learned along the way.

Results are important, but they don't necessarily teach us anything. We learn more from an Olympic athlete who wins a medal when we know their story, especially the adversity they faced and how they overcame it. The photograph on the podium is merely the point B of a long and challenging experience. At IDB, we value achievements, but we also value the path traveled to reach them. There are lessons there that can be useful for new projects based on others' experiences, leading to improved design and implementation. A team that can see itself reflected in others, as is the case for the experiences highlighted in this publication, can anticipate the challenges that others have already faced, draw support from solutions that others have developed, and even avoid mistakes that others have already made. In the end, it is the people who benefit from this, because an effective and efficient program has a greater impact on people's lives.

Beyond documenting these lessons, it is important that we share them. Ultimately, that is what Superheroes of Development is about. This initiative not only recognizes



and rewards teams that execute projects on the ground. As part of IDB Academy, we define ourselves as a knowledge platform -or even a best practices bank-, which inspires us to organize and disseminate the lessons learned so that any country in the region can find answers to its own challenges.

After five years of work on this initiative, we have evaluated over 415 projects, chosen 32 finalists and recognized 13 winners. We believe that this is just the beginning. There are more superheroes of development overcoming major obstacles throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. We are committed to continuing to identify them so that we can recognize them, learn from them and improve lives through their stories.

*The context, actions, results, and lessons learned from the projects' stories reflect the moment when they were written.*





# NATURE OFFERS ANSWERS

Environmental awareness:  
A seed sowed in schools

[Brazil]

Combating skepticism with pilot projects

[Trinidad and Tobago]



The 10,000 citizens who invested in wind,  
helped reduce gas emissions and, in doing so,  
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[Uruguay]







# Environmental awareness: A seed sowed in schools

## BRAZIL





## Environmental awareness: A seed sowed in schools

On average, Aracaju, the capital of the Brazilian state of Sergipe, has just 4.4 meters of public green space per inhabitant. That number drops to below 1 square meter in some neighborhoods. According to Google Maps, this municipality lacks green spaces and is dominated by the colors of brick and cement.

Public spaces like parks and forests have a positive impact on the environment and enhance residents' physical and mental health. The pandemic reaffirmed the importance of spaces in which people can have fun, exercise and interact.

In that regard - as part of an urban space improvement program funded by the IDB -, efforts were made to revitalize Parque Sementeira in Aracaju. This park is the municipality's largest green space, measuring nearly 400,000 square meters, just a little bit less than the 440,000 covered by Vatican City.





## “raise awareness of environmental responsibility and conservation”

Instead of seeing Sementeira as merely a space for recreation, the local government trusted that the park could be used as an environmental education tool. They decided to undertake a complementary initiative titled “The Art of Growing.” The program was meant to plant a seed in the population -and specifically in public school students- in order to begin to raise awareness of environmental responsibility and conservation “through fun activities that promote local sustainability and optimize the use of public and recreational spaces.”

However, they came up against an important obstacle: schools had little interest in the project. Why? Environmental pedagogy was not an especially important topic in the curricula and teaching processes. As such, the proposal did not seem to align with their academic priorities. They had to be convinced of both the importance of the topic and the idea that it could be useful and fun for everyone.





## From indifference to interest among new stakeholders

The project, which started out as an initiative of the Aracaju Environmental Secretariat, enlisted the support of the Education Secretariat. Both entities proposed involving school communities and invited these entities to set a timeline for the partnership and its activities. Together, they designed practical experiences in Parque Sementeira, the city's most important environmental asset, offering eco-education programs that attracted the attention of both students and their teachers. The logistical challenges faced -such as safely transporting the children to the park- gave the entities one more reason to work together. "Visiting Parque Sementeira and including fun content brought together the interests of the education and environment teams," local government officials recall.

“ Visiting Parque Sementeira and including fun content brought together the interests of the education and environment teams ”







“more teaching units sought to be part of the initiative, including teachers from private schools”

Once inside the park, teachers and students planted seeds and learned about the importance of growing medicinal, forest and ornamental plants. The project staff explained, “They are used in urban forestation to increase the index of green areas in the municipality.” Students also learned from theater performances -recordings of which were later posted on social media- and participated in workshops on household composting, urban gardening and making toys out of recyclable materials. “Practical and real experiences with nature were proposed to position the project through eco-education activities held at the site,” program spokespeople note.

The target audience was initially indifferent, but stakeholders who had not originally been included soon started asking to take part in the initiative. According to Aracaju government officials, thanks to the positive experience documented in internal reports and disseminated through the media and social media pages of various local entities, “more teaching units sought to be part of the initiative, including teachers from private schools,” along with parents and representatives of municipal agencies.





## Students' attitudes and behavior changed

A total of 3,500 students from 74 public schools were impacted along with an additional 500 students from 26 private schools. Most importantly, teachers from participating schools reported real changes among their pupils. For example, the amount of litter found on school grounds decreased, and water and energy use dropped because more students shut off faucets in the bathrooms and turned off lights that they weren't using. They also reported that students were more careful with plants and gardens.

Aracaju officials concluded that, "Encouraging students to experience nature changed their attitudes and behavior and may also contribute to improving school performance, especially among low-income children, who tend to have fewer recreational and educational improvement options outside of the classroom."



**3,500**  
students  
from  
**74 public**  
schools



**500**  
students  
from  
**26 private**  
schools



BRAZIL ◆ SUPERHEROES OF DEVELOPMENT 2022  
Projects that inspire, lessons that matter



The project went beyond the schools' walls. Play-based and sustainable activities extended into the neighborhoods that were priority sites of the urban improvement program mentioned at the beginning of this story, which was created with the overall goal of improving residents' access to infrastructure, housing and social services. Aracaju government officials explain, "The activities were launched within the park and beyond it in response to community requests."

One of the most important achievements is that the municipality's public schools now include environmental contents in their curricular programs. This means that the purpose of the project -to generate awareness- will endure even after the initiative ends. Children and even teachers are thus becoming "seeds" of knowledge for environmental conservation in Aracaju.





## Self-reflections, lessons worth sharing

- When teaching plans do not include environmental conservation topics, interventions can be designed to be held in local parks that allow educators to understand the importance of creating curricula that encourage the preservation of green spaces. In this case, an environmental education program was implemented in Parque Sementeira, and educational initiatives were offered together with public schools in Aracaju. These schools, which initially showed little interest in the initiative, understood the importance of teaching students about the topic thanks to the impact of guided visits, eco-education workshops, planting activities and theater performances. The public schools thus began to include environmental responsibility and conservation topics in their teaching plans.
- Effective communication channels are activated with different types of audiences in development projects, adding allies and interested stakeholders to benefit the proposed goals. The Environmental Secretariat in Aracaju engaged in a dialogue with the Education Secretariat and enlisted its support, explaining that they could contribute to enhancing schools' involvement by working together. They developed eco-education experiences, that is, activities related to the mission of both entities. As the projects progressed, organizers began to document and disseminate both the educational initiatives and their achievements through internal channels, traditional media, and social media. That approach was key for attracting the interest of new stakeholders such as private schools and neighborhoods that were not included in the original design of the program.





- When investments in public spaces and the environmental recovery of degraded areas are prioritized, strategic urban ecosystems can be preserved and recreational green spaces can be developed, providing safe and high-quality places in which residents can enjoy outdoor activities that benefit their physical and mental health. The recovery of Parque Sementeira was key during the pandemic, as the nearly 400,000 square meters of surface area became an open-air recreational area for the general public.





# Combating skepticism with pilot projects

## TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO





## Combating skepticism with pilot projects

Sometimes incredulity is the biggest challenge that development projects face. Few in Trinidad and Tobago believed that a species of grass with very unique characteristics could be as effective as retaining walls in preventing flooding and landslides.

According to spokespeople for IAMovement, an organization that promotes this bioengineering tool, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but throughout Central America, vetiver grass has roots that grow up to three meters below ground and are five to seven times stronger than the roots of other types of grass. "The vetiver system can prevent landslides, protecting infrastructure like highways, riverbanks, homes and farms, limiting erosion, and allowing underground water sources to refill."





“ the “vetiver system” has  
proved an important climate  
resilience tool ”



Vetiver grass was used throughout the Caribbean in the mid-20th century. However, according to IAMovement, it began to be replaced by concrete and steel-based solutions “based on the belief that hard, ‘man-made’ engineering approaches are always better.” The reality is that the “vetiver system” has proved an important climate resilience tool that is as or more effective as gray infrastructure, that is, traditional solutions for channeling and storing rain runoff. Even better, installing this grass is less expensive and has a minimal carbon footprint compared, for example, to a retaining wall.

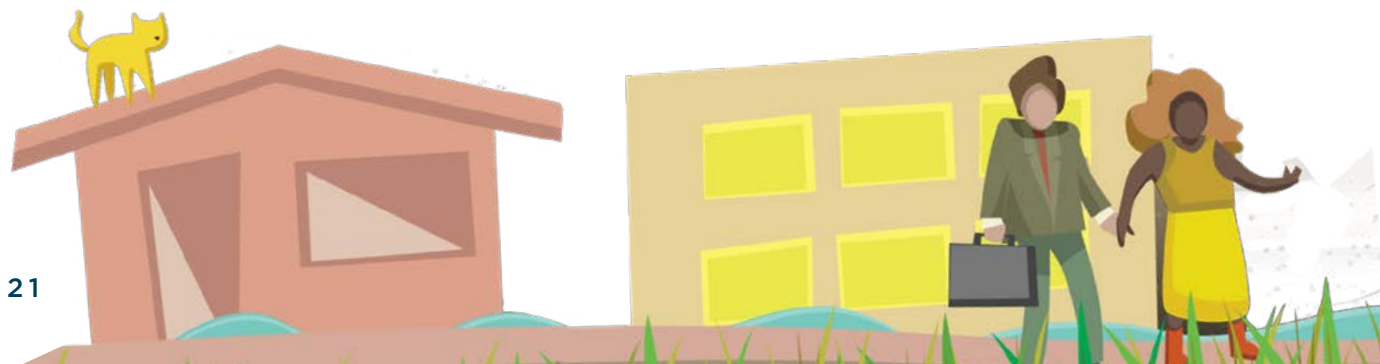
Yet despite all of these elements in its favor, many potential stakeholders were not sure that a plant -grass!- could be as effective as cement and steel. Everyone from community members to public and private stakeholders had to see it work before investing in this solution through a shared funding model.



## Savings of up to 90%

The executing unit identified 30 representative sites that could persuade a large number of allies and interested parties to invest if the implementation of the vetiver system was successful: “We sought out case studies that covered a wide range of spaces and situations to showcase its various uses and applications.” They used these criteria to choose sites with significant and critical infrastructure, such as highways and public buildings impacted by soil instability.

One of the emblematic cases that they chose was the stabilization of the ground on a roadway. The intervention would be financed by a private company. Although the company was attracted to the project because of the potential cost-benefit, its management was unsure about paying for maintenance for a year, the amount of time required to ensure that the plants would remain functional. The contract stipulated that only four months of maintenance was required, but the executing unit promised to provide this support for an entire year. It also contributed 20 percent more plants (nearly 1,000) to reinforce another portion of the land that also required stabilization but was not part of the agreement. The unit offered pro bono services and secured co-financing from the IDB Group. The goal was to ensure the success of the pilot project so that it could serve as an example for other stakeholders that remained incredulous.

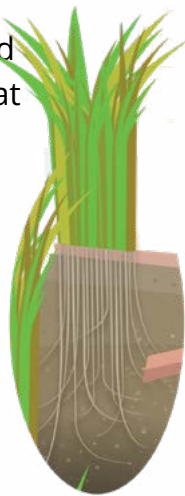






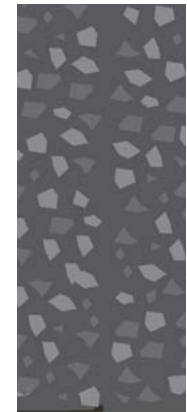
The final cost of the intervention was US\$ 23,500, far below the over US\$ 66,000 initially quoted for a gabion wall, which consists of metal cages filled with stones. The savings were 65 percent, but they wanted to invest more after determining that the vetiver system was, in fact, effective. The company approved a new intervention that would cost US\$ 200,000 to solve a coastal erosion issue at one of its facilities.

In another case, in order to avoid the collapse of the earth walls of a reservoir that channeled and drained rainwater near a mall with a cost of US\$ 1 million that was based on baskets of rocks and retaining walls, they installed vetiver grass for just US\$ 100,000. The alternative offered savings of 90 percent.



cost of the vetiver  
**US\$ 23,500**

cost of the  
gabion wall  
**US\$ 66,000**



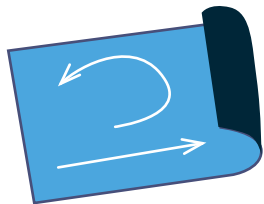
using vetiver generates  
**65% savings**



## Counterpart resources increased from US\$ 550,000 to US\$ 3 million

Questions were successfully addressed for the 30 pilot projects, which were executed in collaboration with over 100 allies. The project's promoters began to approach many more public and private stakeholders, including both individuals and funds and development agencies beyond Trinidad and Tobago. According to representatives of IAMovement, the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund alone allocated US\$ 1,5 million to bring the vetiver system to four countries in the region.

After the renewed interest, the members of the executing unit allowed the counterparts to lead the discussions. In other words, they described the problem that they were facing, the solution that they imagined -now that they were more familiar with the benefits of vetiver grass- and, very importantly, their willingness to invest. In this regard, the various stakeholders were more interested in the solution than in accessing co-funding resources.

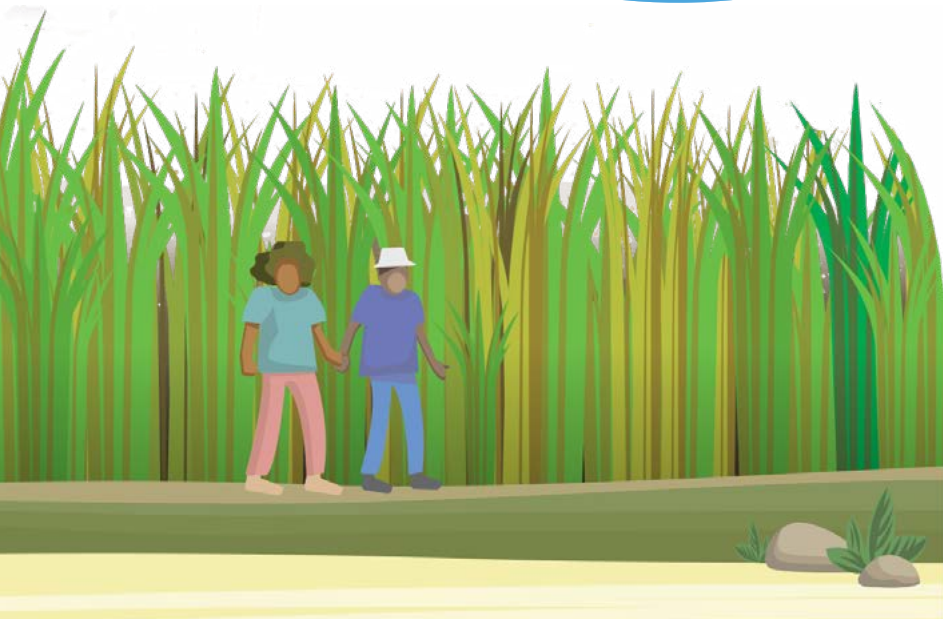


- ✓ 30 pilot projects
- ✓ more than 100 public and private partners
- ✓ more than 100 locations with the system in Trinidad and Tobago
- ✓ system multiplication for 4 more countries
- ✓ 200 thousand plants



As such, IAMovement presented possible solutions for each case and offered to complement the investments with 10 to 20 percent of the resources provided by the interested parties. They argued that this additional contribution from the executing unit would ensure the success of the investments, providing additional technical support or long-term maintenance. This approach, which sought to ensure the optimal performance of the work that was done, increased the trust between the parties.

In addition to the pilot projects, vetiver grass was brought into 100 other sites in Trinidad and Tobago alone. The counterpart resources, which were initially estimated to total US\$ 550,000, multiplied five-fold to nearly US\$ 3 million. The number of plants used grew from 80,000 to 200,000. All of these results exceeded expectations despite the barrier of incredulity that the organizers had faced since the outset. To paraphrase a popular saying, the 30 pilot projects said more than a thousand words.







## Self-reflections, lessons worth sharing

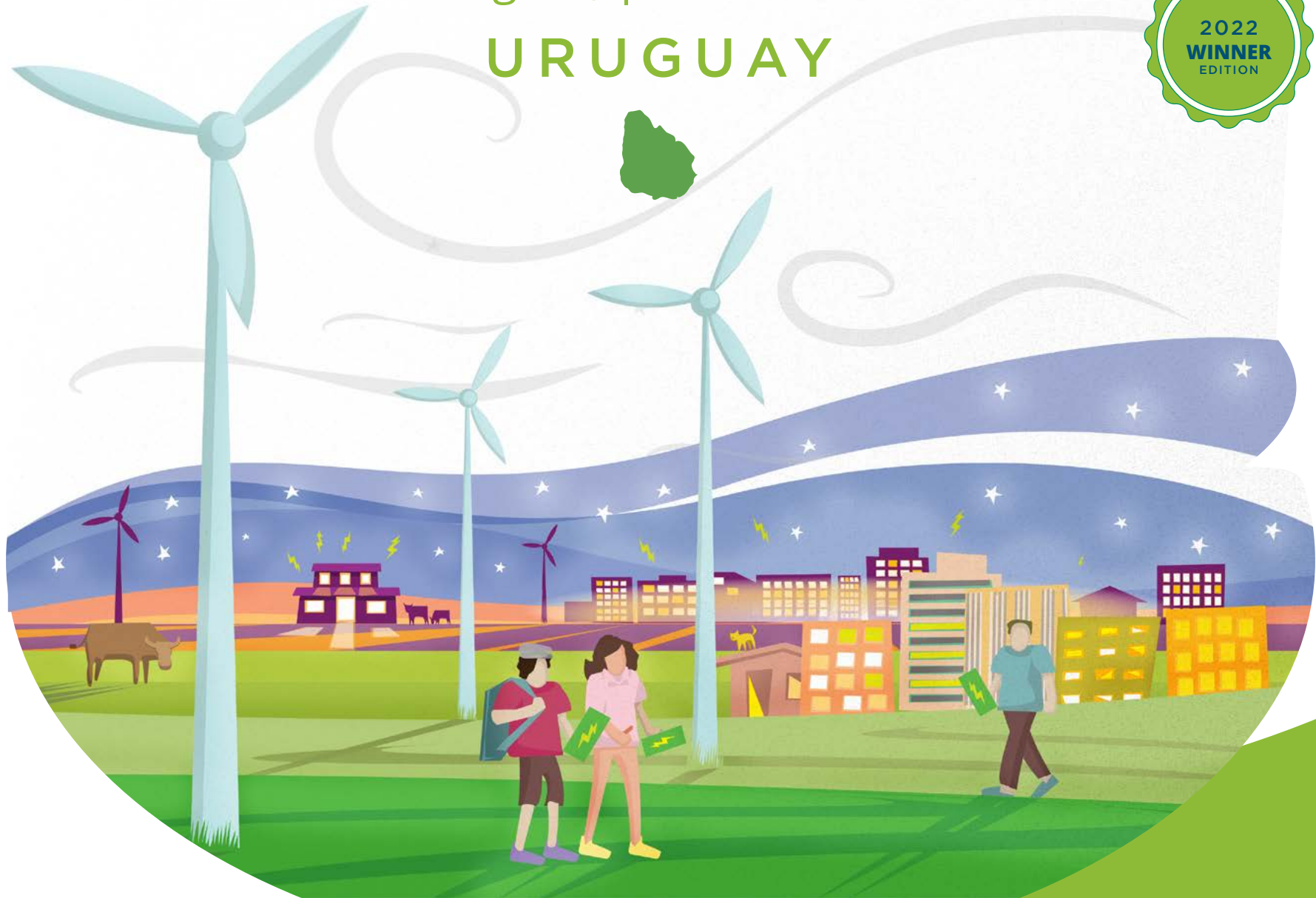
- Pilot programs can dispel skepticism about nature-based solutions and encourage others to get involved. In this case, vetiver grass was first planted in strategic locations in Trinidad and Tobago such as highways and public buildings that were well known or reflected issues that others were facing (for example, erosion or land instability). Demonstrating its effectiveness and the lower cost of this solution compared to gray infrastructure attracted the interest of stakeholders who became willing to invest in these projects.
- When a co-funded project allows counterparts to take initiative and determine how willing they are to invest from the outset -before the executing unit reveals the size of its contribution-, it is possible to make strategic use of non-reimbursable resources. After generating interest in the vetiver system, the executing unit for this project allowed potential allies to identify issues and propose the resources that they could contribute to resolve them. The executing entities proposed counterpart contributions of 10 to 20 percent for activities that would guarantee the success of the projects (such as extra technical assistance and maintenance of the plants for longer periods of time). The interested parties saw this as a “bonus” that increased their confidence in the project.





The 10,000 citizens who invested  
in wind, helped reduce gas emissions and,  
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## URUGUAY





## The 10,000 citizens who invested in wind, helped reduce gas emissions and, in doing so, profited from it

Energy transition is not a utopia. If there is one society that can demonstrate its viability, it is that of Uruguay. In the early 21st century, the country had no non-conventional renewable energy sources. In less than a decade, such sources came to represent 40 percent of the country's energy matrix. Wind energy played a particularly important role in this change, representing over 31 percent of all installed energy potential in 2021.

One project in particular played an important role in this process: Valentines Wind Farm, which is managed by Areaflin, the company created by the state-run electricity company UTE (Administración Nacional de Usinas y Transmisiones Eléctricas) to generate energy using wind. In coordination with IDB Invest, they secured initial funding in the amount of US\$ 120 million through loans contributed by BBVA, the China Co-financing Fund for Latin America and Caribbean Region, and, to a greater extent, the IDB itself.





“ the use of fossil fuels had a significant negative impact on the environment ”

As Areaflin spokespeople explain, this initiative was driven by an urgent need: “In 2020, Uruguay’s energy matrix was comprised of hydraulic and thermal generation sources with a high level of dependence on imported fossil fuels and energy imported from neighboring countries. As such, generation costs varied widely due to fluctuating international prices and hydrological dependence. Furthermore, the use of fossil fuels had a significant negative impact on the environment.”

UTE and Areaflin decided that shifting to clean energies would require more than public resources or even those that could be secured from traditional private entities such as multilateral agencies, insurers and pension and investment funds. They decided to invite members of the public to become minority shareholders in the wind farm. It sounded like a good idea, but it was easier said than done in 2014. “Uruguay’s capital market was not very developed. There was a lack of investment opportunities, and the public was not familiar with how it worked. It was not accessible to everyday people,” Areaflin spokespeople recall.





## Becoming a local shareholder

The hardest part was not persuading people to invest in a clean energy project. It was convincing them that they could be part of something that sounded difficult and almost out of this world: the Montevideo Stock Exchange. How could they encourage everyday people to become “shareholders” in a company, something that many of them had probably never even thought about?

The solution was to turn the massive share acquisition process into a simple task that would not cause them to feel unsure or limited by their lack of knowledge of the stock market. The partnership that they established with Redpagos, an extensive payment and billing company with over 400 locations nationwide, was key for this. People routinely use these offices to deposit money into the accounts of friends and family members, pay their bills and even cash their pension checks.

“How could they encourage everyday people to become “shareholders” in a company, something that many of them had probably never even thought about?”



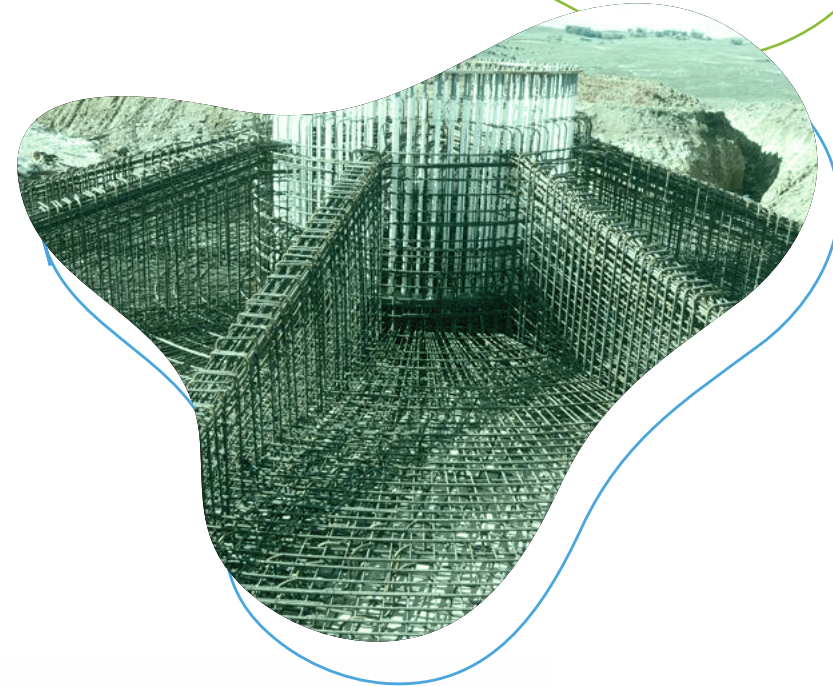




Redpagos locations had become gathering places where anyone could go buy shares as easily as they could pay an electric bill. The message that the executing agency staff sent was hard to resist: people could go to a Redpagos office and become a shareholder of Valentines Wind Farm by investing between US\$ 100 and US\$ 2,000. "The door to investing was not the traditional stock market, but an office just a few blocks away from their house," Areaflin representatives explain.

The plan worked. Nearly 4,000 people used the method to become owners of Valentines and environmental benefactors of their nation. Another 6,000 people did the same through alternative channels such as banks and stockbrokers by contributing up to US\$ 20,000.

Reality exceeded expectations. Initially, only US\$ 20 million in shares were offered, but Uruguay's over 10,000 investors demanded US\$ 85 million. To maintain the initial amount, the process was scaled using the following formula: First, the minimum amount of US\$ 100 in shares were assigned to each party. Next, up to US\$ 200 were distributed to those who had asked for more than US\$ 100 in shares. The process continued in this manner until all of the available shares were distributed.





## Financial and, especially, environmental achievements

Areaflin representatives proudly explain, “Valentines was the first public issuance of shares for an infrastructure project in Uruguay, and the first to involve minority investors.” In addition to capturing public funds with this strategy, they “captured depositors’ trust.” And it was worth it. Since the shares were issued in December 2016, shareholders have received approximately 10 percent annually in dollars. To put a finer point on it, together, these shareholders have received profits totaling nearly US\$ 10 million.

This is a major achievement, but it may be the least important result of this project. Looking at it from a broader perspective, the Valentines Wind Farm has been a fundamental part of a national plan that was implemented to radically change an energy matrix in which renewable energy represented just 37 percent of the total in 2005. “Today 82 percent of demand for electricity in Uruguay is met with generation from renewable sources, including the contribution of our project. In fact, at certain points each day, demand is entirely met using renewable sources,” Areaflin representatives explain.

**82% of demand  
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They also note that there has been a dramatic decrease in the annual cost of energy. Today it costs Uruguayans US\$ 700 million, that is, half of the US\$ 1.4 billion that had been generated due to years of drought and high international fuel and energy prices. “This change allowed the rate increases to stay below inflation. It also allowed us to allocate more resources to social inclusion and rural electrification policies,” Areaflin representatives explain.

But the most important achievement may be an environmental one. Carbon dioxide emissions have dropped by nearly 80 percent in Uruguay since 2015. This is a key change that may inspire other world economies not only in regard to what a country can achieve, but in terms of how individuals can be part of the climate change solution, contributing much more than just “grains of sand.” According to the initiative’s spokespeople, this shows that “everyone is a leader in the achievement of the Paris Accord targets, which were committed to through emissions reduction funding, which benefits all of humanity.”

“This change allowed the rate increases to stay below inflation. It also allowed us to allocate more resources to social inclusion and rural electrification policies”







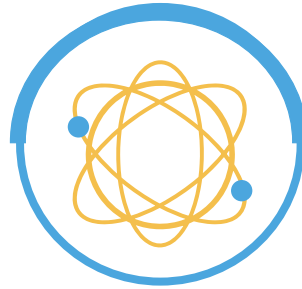
## Self-reflections, lessons worth sharing

- Using well-known payment networks to facilitate the widespread purchase of shares in underdeveloped capital markets allowed a larger number of people to invest some of their savings in projects of national importance. In this case, the Redpagos network, which has 400 offices throughout Uruguay, was used to simplify the purchase of shares of Valentines Wind Farm by minority depositors. This process became a simple task that interested parties could easily carry out in their own neighborhoods. Alternative sources of capital were used to build the wind farm.
- When residents invest in national non-conventional renewable energy projects, they can become the leaders of their countries' environmental achievements. The Valentines Wind Farm was one of the first projects to transform Uruguay's energy matrix. The nation has since become a regional leader in the use of renewable energies. The reduction in carbon dioxide emissions is a major achievement that can be attributed to the thousands of minority shareholders who invested in the project. They used the resources available to them to contribute to reaching the targets proposed in the Paris Accord in order to address global warming.





SUPERHEROES OF DEVELOPMENT 2022  
Projects that inspire, lessons that matter



# WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES (AND NOT “FOR” THEM) MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

“Obvious” solutions must be documented

[MEXICO]





“Obvious” solutions must  
be documented

MEXICO





## “Obvious” solutions must be documented

Coronavirus and lockdowns had a serious impact on the education of millions of young people around the world. A simple math problem -how to divide 210 by 7- became impossible for many students because in-person classes were suspended. During the pandemic, the percentage of 15 year-old low income students who could solve simple math problems dropped from 67 to 27 percent. In other words, just 1 in 4 students retained the ability to add, subtract, multiply, and divide on a basic level. Prior to the pandemic, that number was 2 out of 3.

“Mexican and Latin American schools had the longest school closures in the world, closing for a total of 53 weeks,” explains the spokesperson for the Center for Research and Advanced Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS), an executing unit that implemented a remote tutoring program to accelerate learning in the state of Tabasco. The plan seemed simple: children between the ages of 9 and 14 would receive eight personalized 20-minute sessions offered by student teachers who had been trained in advance. They would apply a principle called “teaching to level,” which classifies children based on their actual learning level rather than their grade level.





“In contexts like rural Central America or Mexico, lack of Internet cannot be a justification for leaving anyone behind”

The tutoring program was unique: it was neither virtual nor in-person. Tutors and students met by phone. While this may seem an obsolete medium in these digital times, it continues to have an extremely high penetration rate. CIESAS staff report that only half of Mexico's rural population has Internet access, but over 90 percent have a phone. This makes it an especially useful tool for reaching households with little or no opportunities to acquire knowledge virtually, as is the case of the students selected to be part of the program. “In contexts like rural Central America or Mexico, lack of Internet cannot be a justification for leaving anyone behind,” project staff members argue.





## “These calls are a scam”

The problem was that staff members did not manage to speak with students in Tabasco. First, they had been given outdated lists of phone numbers. Even worse, neither the teachers nor the families were properly informed about the tutoring program. As a result, when tutors finally managed to reach someone, they were met with distrust and rejected. “The parents told us, ‘I’m not interested... The teacher told me that these calls are a scam,’” CIESAS staff members explain.

After making over 5,000 calls, they were only able to contact 160 students, just 17 percent of the proposed goal (900). They understood that even though the program had been coordinated with Mexico’s Education Ministry, the information was not transmitted to schools, teachers, and families in a timely manner. The initiative would be worthless if they could not establish contact with the most important links in the chain.





“Involving the communities seems like an obvious solution now”

Following this setback, the executing unit contacted school communities directly with the support of state education officials. Instead of than simply informing principals, teachers, and parents, they decided to get them involved and make them part of their decision-making process, participating in aspects such as identifying the students who would receive tutoring. Following these meetings, they put together a list of 1,100 children in just 10 days. Even better, they were able to contact families on their first try 90 percent of the time.

“Involving the communities seems like an obvious solution now,” admits one CIESAS representative. “But it was not documented as a necessary task in the other remote tutoring programs that we consulted.” This was so much the case that in El Salvador, where the project had been implemented previously, there was no need to contact schools directly. However, following the experience in Tabasco, they found that it was not possible to assume that speaking with ministries is the same as speaking with school communities: “That is a common mistake that many teams can make.”







## A method that can double math scores

A survey was conducted once the tutoring program was complete. All of the students reported that they wanted to receive more classes by phone, and 85 percent of the tutors reported that the calls helped the students to accelerate their math learning.

Although no consolidated data were available on the improvements at the writing of this report -the respective assessments had not been conducted-, researchers found that students in El Salvador had improved their scores from 30 to 58 on a scale of 1 to 100. In other words, they had nearly doubled their math scores. CIESAS staff note that the results go beyond the tests: "Students who do not learn math well are much more likely to drop out of school. If they stay in school, they will have a better present and a better future."







“We made the presentation on the project in the schools a key task in the preparation of the tutoring program”

Based on this experience, the initiative's participants decided to make school community involvement a requirement, starting with the interventions that were subsequently launched in the state of Guanajuato and the neighboring country of Guatemala. “We made the presentation on the project in the schools a key task in the preparation of the tutoring program. This increased the percentage of engagement with the program compared to Tabasco... We use the time we used to spend making phone calls only to have them hang up on us or insult us to meet with school communities.”

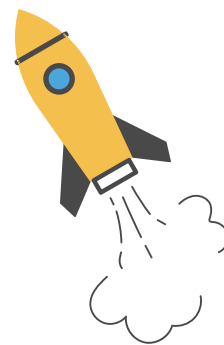
These results show that executing units cannot skip any steps when implementing a project. Nor should technological solutions be set aside because they are considered “old,” like using the phone instead of the Internet to tutor students. Both things, an “obvious thing” and a means of communication that many may consider “anachronistic” made the difference in Tabasco by not leaving anyone behind.



**1,100 boys and girls selected by school communities, with the support from educational authorities**



**100% of students expressed interest in receiving more classes by phone**



**85% of tutors recognized the math learning acceleration**



## Self-reflections, lessons worth sharing

- It is possible to avoid bottlenecks and unnecessary repetition by identifying and documenting critical procedures for development projects, even those that may seem obvious. In this case, that key step was contacting schools and teachers directly. If this procedure had been documented in advance, the step would have been taken as part of the process in Tabasco (Mexico), and the tutoring meetings would have begun earlier. In fact, when the program was implemented elsewhere, the staff made educational community involvement an essential step from the beginning. This resulted in much higher percentages of engagement.
- When technologies that may seem antiquated but that have high levels of penetration like the phone are used, learning acceleration programs can reach students from low-income households with little or no digital connectivity. Barriers to Internet access cannot be an excuse to “leave behind” those who do not have the tools that are part of what is called the digital world. Rather, that lack should be an incentive to find alternatives and work towards educational equity.
- If school communities -principals, teachers, and families- are involved and empowered beyond the natural coordination that occurs with national officials and education ministries, alternative teaching models and formats can be implemented. After failing to connect with school communities in a meaningful and timely way, the Tabasco team was unable to implement remote tutoring programs to recover math learning that had been lost. Families and teachers were unaware of the existence of the initiative and did not trust the calls that were made to promote it. After getting involved, principals, teachers and families were able to make satisfactory progress with remote tutoring.



- It is important to consider the unique context and specificities of the countries where development products are implemented so that external models can be adapted and not repeated in their entirety. In this case, the El Salvador experience was adapted with the understanding that the initiative had to be socialized directly and in advance with the various stakeholders in school communities. The reasons that they identified include the fact that -in contrast to that of El Salvador- there was a high level of distrust in calls from unfamiliar numbers among members of Tabasco households. Many families were completely unaware of the existence of a program to accelerate students' math learning, so they interpreted the calls as possible fraud attempts. By adjusting the process and giving teachers and families comprehensive information, they were able to meet the tutoring goals.





SUPERHEROES OF DEVELOPMENT 2022  
Projects that inspire, lessons that matter



# SOLID MANAGEMENT SHINES ON ITS OWN

Achieving transformation through example  
[Colombia]



The medium-term is urgent, too  
[Costa Rica]



# Achieving transformation through example **COLOMBIA**





## Achieving transformation through example

In the world of development projects, the program to strengthen Colombia's Comptroller General's Office was a stand-out. Everything was going well with this initiative, which was launched in 2016 to make government oversight more effective and efficient and ensure the proper use of public resources and goods.

In just three years, the entity doubled its performance assessment score from 1.5 to 3.0 out of a maximum of 4.0 points, becoming the highest performing in the region according to the standards established by the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI). The process was accompanied by the executing unit responsible for the program and for managing the loan granted by the IDB. Their annual execution levels exceeded 97 percent.

However, coronavirus threatened the continuity of the initiative, which at that point had 27 acquisition and hiring processes in place for that year. Some of the processes were critical, such as the design of an audit monitoring system. "Amid the uncertainty, many entities in the country chose to halt operations and wait. We had a project that was nearing the end of the execution phase and were facing major obstacles to successfully complete it without losing the progress made," the manager of the executing unit recalls.

Both the effective implementation of the program and the activities related to the mission of the Comptroller's Office were at play. There was an urgent need to immediately transition to virtual work, which would not be easy in an organization used to in-person activities and the use of paper.



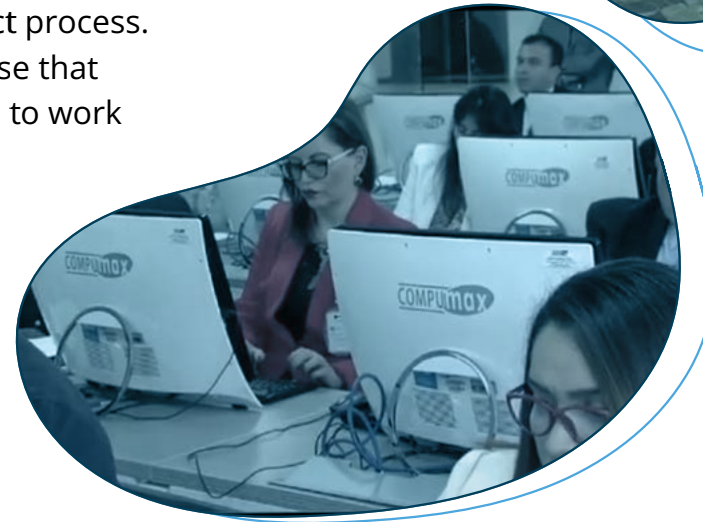




## From sealed envelopes to password protected digital folders

In that context -in which workers transitioned from office work to remote work-, the program executing unit decided to push forward. One priority for them was to maintain their pace and the goals that they had initially established. In that sense, they identified the need to digitize the entire loan operating process, which meant intervening in each pending acquisition and contract process. Beyond the implementation of hybrid procedures (i.e., those that combined physical and digital activities), the challenge was to work 100 percent virtually.

In the end, they digitized all the executing unit's work, offering the opportunity to work remotely and digitizing all of their processes and files. "We stopped producing paper entirely. We stopped receiving contract proposals in sealed envelopes and holding in-person hearings for hiring processes," the participants recall. "We provided password protected digital folders that only the applicants had.





All hearings and processes became completely virtual and secure.” For example, in hearings that had been conducted using video calls -which was unusual for the Comptroller’s Office at the time-, proponents were asked to share the password to the digital files containing their proposals so that they could be viewed for the first time during open and transparent events, ensuring confidentiality.

They did not only change how the operation of the loan was managed. Changing their processes as an executing unit, made them the first Comptroller’s Office unit to make this transition to digital processes. “We offered an example”, they explained.

They inspired and guided Comptroller’s Office staff down the path of adopting new technologies in their daily work. As part of the efforts to change the entity, they began to use the tools that many already had on their computers -some of them provided during the implementation of the product- but that they had never even seen. “Video calls, digital and cloud documentation, collaboration tools and digital processes, among others, ceased to be alternative means and became central to our work”, they recall.

“They did not only change how the operation of the loan was managed. Changing their processes as an executing unit, made them the first Comptroller’s Office unit to make this transition to digital processes”



## “We proved that a credit can be issued digitally”

At a time when much of the loan granting process was paralyzed in the region -and extensions had to be granted-, this executing unit maintained project operations in accordance with the stipulated times and costs with more than noteworthy results.

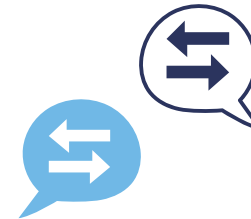
The entity executed 99.6 percent of the resources allocated for 2020, the highest percentage reached by the program since it was launched in 2016. The 27 acquisitions and contracting processes that were at risk were completed. Furthermore, the new methods developed remained in place for the following year and, based on the results, a new credit was created to expand the digital transformation that had begun at the Comptroller's Office. The IDB Project Completion Report (PCR) was awarded the highest overall score (highly successful). “We proved that a credit can be issued digitally,” the program coordinators celebrated.





The results of the executing unit reflected the mission-related results of the Comptroller's Office. Fiscal oversight improved. According to the PCR, there was an 11 percent increase in the implementation of the recommendations made to public entities. The quality of the audits also increased: 75 percent in finance and compliance audits and 172 percent in performance audits.

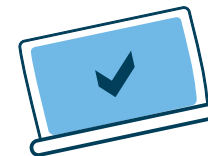
In addition, the oversight entity designed and implemented a series of tools for members of the public. "Web applications were developed so that anyone who wishes to can report corruption and even incomplete work such as the 'white elephants' from their cell phone, including photos, videos and geolocalized audio messages." The entity also increased its capacity to respond to



**Procurement and contracting digital processes led to the execution of 99.6% of the projects**



**The quality of financial and compliance audits grew 75% and performance audits 172%**



**100% capacity response to requests and complaints**



requests and complaints by 100 percent. Meanwhile, website visits increased by 715 percent after a redesign based on “high standards in order to ensure accessibility for the population with disabilities.”

There are numerous achievements, but this story goes beyond a list of statistics. In response to a crisis, this group detonated the largest transformation that had ever taken place in an organization that was nearly a century old. They summarize this in a single sentence: “This is the story of how we changed ourselves in order to change others.”



“redesign based on “high standards in order to ensure accessibility for the population with disabilities””

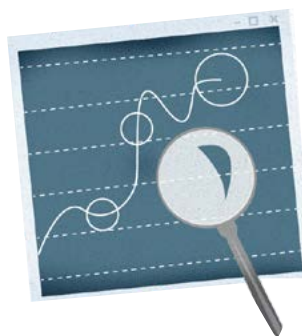






## Self-reflections, lessons worth sharing

- If profound technological changes are implemented within an executing agency in order to adapt to an external crisis, it can lead to a digital and cultural change in the entity where that unit is implementing the development project. In this case, the pandemic led to the reconfiguration of the executing team that was implementing the institutional strengthening program for Colombia's Comptroller General's Office. The team digitized all of its acquisitions and contract practices in order to operate remotely to the point where it ceased to produce a single sheet of paper. It thus became "the first Comptroller's Office unit to undertake a digital transformation," inspiring and guiding the rest of the entity in the daily use of computer tools. This in turn had a positive impact on the objectives of the strengthening program for the Comptroller's Office. The use of this approach did not only allow the initiative to continue, but the team achieved an execution rate of over 99 percent, which is even higher than pre-pandemic rates. This showed that it is possible to manage a development project remotely without changing the expected results, deadlines, or costs, especially in contexts and sectors in which in-person work can be eliminated. When the operation ended, a new loan was authorized to continue and expand this technological appropriation work in the Comptroller's Office.





The medium-term is urgent, too

## COSTA RICA



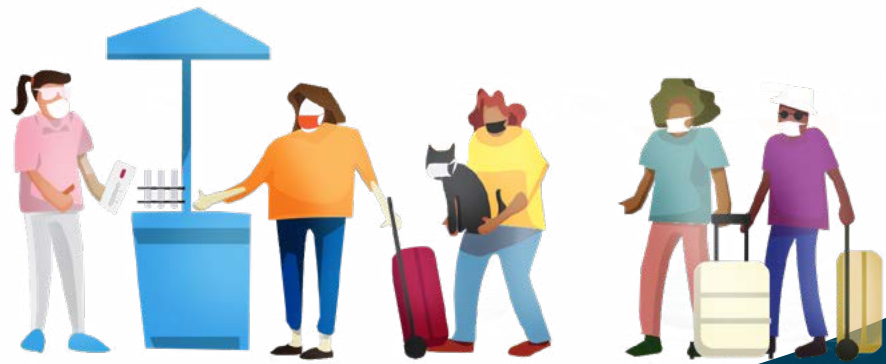


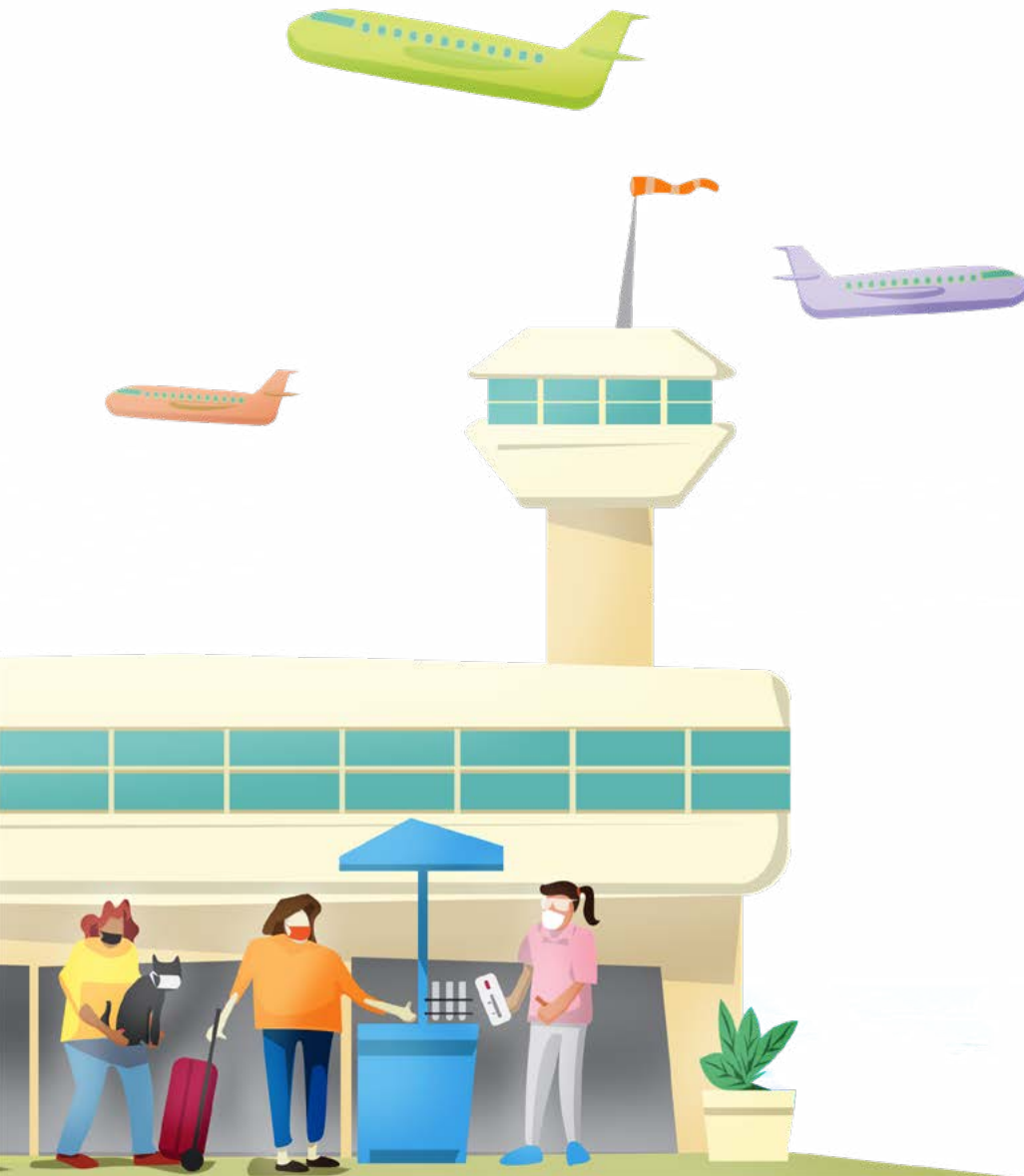
## The medium-term is urgent, too

The modernization and expansion of the airport in Guanacaste, which began in 2012, generated a great deal of expectation in the Pacific North region of Costa Rica. According to airport spokespeople, at that time “it was the province with the highest unemployment rate in the country and presented limited opportunities for personal development and with a productive structure focused on the agriculture sector.”

Government studies suggest that the region experienced 56 percent economic growth between 2010 and 2015, which is much higher than the national average of 39 percent. Even better, the province reported a significant decrease in its poverty levels, dropping nearly 13 percentage points to 20.3 percent in 2019 -close to the national median- from the 30.2 percent documented in 2014.

The explanation for this increase in prosperity and opportunities was the airport. The number of air travelers nearly tripled from 225,000 to nearly 600,000 between 2010 and 2019. This increase led to an explosion in tourism that benefited hotels, restaurants, transportation companies, artisans, and travel agencies. It also brought income and wellbeing to Guanacaste residents. “The multiplier effect of the airport is 12 times the region's economy. In other words, each dollar invested in the airport is multiplied 12 times in Guanacaste,” explain airport spokespeople.





In 2020, a common enemy appeared: coronavirus. The thousands of tourists who had visited each week disappeared. The impact on the province was enormous. Over 56 percent of the tourism jobs were lost, and the unemployment rate hit 31 percent, the highest in the nation.

Given that it was a vital asset for thousands of families who earn a living from the tourism sector in Guanacaste, the airport staff felt that they had a duty to maintain what continued to be a development pole in the region not in the near term because the lock down measures were very strict, but looking beyond it and thinking about what would happen when flights were scheduled again.



## “Operating an airport with no passengers”

The will was immense, but so was the challenge. They had to keep the air terminal functioning -because they had to be ready to provide support for potential humanitarian missions- without a single tourist. To put it another way, they had to operate an airport with no passengers and using an annual fixed cost structure of US\$ 1.5 million with practically no income: “We received just US\$ 16,000 in income between April and October,” airport operators recall.

In a matter of less than 10 days, they put together a “plan to address the crisis and anticipate the recovery of the business with a medium-term vision.” That means that they reacted with emergency measures without setting aside future planning.

On the one hand, they renegotiated some of their main supplier contracts, such as those in place with security and cleaning services, establishing that the number of staff needed -and the amount they would pay for- would depend on passenger traffic in the airport. They explain that during lockdown, “The security contract dropped from 25 agents to just two.” At the same time, they placed internal staff in the remaining security roles. “This change was key for us to keep costs down and keep the operations team staffed.”

“This change was key for us to keep costs down and keep the operations team staffed”







At the same time, they tried to find opportunities as soon as commercial flights began taking off again. They understood that the coronavirus, which had caused all of these difficulties, could also be an important source of income: “We realized that passengers would have to take COVID tests. Over 90 percent of visitors come from the United States and Canada and had to present a negative test in order to be able to go home.” As a result, they installed a modern laboratory that made life easier for visitors and generated US\$ 768,000 in income in 2021, more than half of the spending recorded the previous year.

“they installed a modern laboratory that made life easier for visitors and generated US\$ 768,000 in income in 2021”





## They didn't just survive the crisis: they gained efficiencies because of it

Looking ahead allowed them to receive tourists again as soon as it was possible to do so instead of waiting for that day to come before beginning to design strategies. With this in mind, airport representatives explain, “a route development plan was developed when no one else was working on them.” The goal of moving in this direction even amid lockdowns was for Guanacaste “to be ‘top of mind’ for airlines as a destination when the country reopened its borders.” Thinking ahead was productive. In 2021, they inaugurated seven new routes thanks to the negotiations that were conducted during the pandemic. Because they were developed with a medium-term vision, the measures implemented allowed the staff to get through the crisis and to generate new efficiencies once normal conditions were restored. Some urgent mechanisms even became permanent. This is the case of the security and cleaning staff contracts, where the staff required was based on the traffic moving through the airport.





Amid this situation and these efforts, the Guanacaste airport implemented improvements that remained in place over time. This was so much the case that the EBITDA margin -which provides an objective sense of a company's performance- was 59.2 percent in 2019 and increased to 64.9 percent in 2021. "This improvement was achieved with just 68 percent of the traffic and 75 percent of the income recorded during the pre-pandemic period," representatives of Guanacaste airport explain.

The air terminal operators proudly assured us that, above all else, they delivered for the people. When operations began anew, Guanacaste placed second in the decrease in the poverty rate, dropping from 32 to 26 percent between 2020 and 2021. This means that they were not simply saving a place. They were protecting the wellbeing of the entire region. People tend to say that "urgency leaves no time for the important things." Here the opposite is true: thinking with a medium-term perspective is urgent and important in a crisis.



7 new routes  
operating performance  
of 59.2%, in 2019,  
to 64.9%, in 2021

“This improvement was achieved with just 68 percent of the traffic and 75 percent of the income recorded during the pre-pandemic period”



## Self-reflections, lessons worth sharing

- When emergency measures are implemented, they can be kept in place to achieve new medium-term efficiencies. Some of the actions implemented at the beginning of the pandemic continue to be used at the Guanacaste Airport. These decisions were made with a sense of urgency, like renegotiating security and cleaning staff contracts to have staff clean and provide security services based on the number of passengers using the terminal. Preserving this type of measure has allowed the airport to improve its EBITDA margin by nearly 6 percentage points between 2019 and 2021.
- Amid a challenging situation, a private or public organization that anticipates post-crisis scenarios can design specific plans and actions that can be implemented as soon as normal conditions are restored. During global lockdown, when there was no certainty that flights would return, the Guanacaste Airport developed a new route plan that it negotiated with the airlines in advance so that it could be executed as soon as the airlines reopened, thus minimizing the amount of time it took to recover passengers. That facilitated the inauguration of seven new routes in 2021. A COVID testing lab was installed in the airport using the same criterion, anticipating that travelers would have to prove their health status when leaving the country. The initiative generated significant income at a key time for the air terminal's economic recovery.





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