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Citizen Experiences and Challenges in Bringing Transparency and Accountability to Local Governments in Southern Mexico

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Unicam-Sur

Accountability Research Center

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Contents

About the Author 4
Acknowledgements 4
Summary 5
I. Introduction 7
II. Exercising the right to know: the way forward becomes clearer 9
III. Monitoring and social accountability: mechanisms that help to solve problems 10
IV. Impacting public policies: the ultimate goal of citizen action 12
V. Organizing and citizen education: key for taking down the entrenched elite 14
VI. Conclusions 16
Endnotes 18
References 21

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Summary

Citizen Experiences and Challenges in Bringing Transparency and Accountability to Local Governments in Southern Mexico

Despite Mexico's constitutional provisions for transparency, accountability, and citizen oversight of government practice, in Guerrero—a southern state of Mexico which has historically fluctuated between periods of peace and violence—the entrenched elite continues to dominate.

Nonetheless, grassroots citizens' groups have been working against the current. With the accompaniment of the *Universidad Campesina del Sur* (The Peasants' University of the South, or Unicam-Sur), a local organization that promotes alternative rural education and participatory research), they have been promoting and positioning these new concepts and practices of government. Citizen action for accountability continues, in spite of persistent practices of bad governance that include indifference towards citizen proposals and the use of the "fear factor" as a means of social intimidation.

Modest citizen accomplishments—on issues of transparency in public works and the opening up of local municipal council meetings to citizen participation, for example—have opened cracks in the centralized and opaque structure of the entrenched elite.

Over the last 15 years, these experiences of persistent voluntarism and self-taught citizen literacy, have led to the emergence of a pathway for citizen intervention in public affairs. We can describe the steps of this approach to citizen involvement as follows:

1. **Recognizing a problem and building empowerment to tackle it.** Citizen groups become involved in problems that affect them and that are related to government action, and commit to changing their situations. The exchange of views about what is and what should be—drives citizens to investigate the causes and consider possible solutions.

2. **Exercising the right to know.** Drawing on the public transparency laws and following the operating rules of government programs, citizens request and analyze official information, and then compare it to reality. In the process, they learn about the causes of the problems—and possible solutions.

3. **Monitoring and social oversight over public affairs.** In light of the information obtained, the group then organizes to monitor the government action. With their evidence and arguments in hand, citizens approach government officials to correct their actions and address the problem. This type of citizen action sometimes leads to clear information about the project, course corrections, or project completion.

4. **Public policy advocacy.** After evaluating the progress made, citizens conclude that to prevent the problem from recurring, flawed public policies or programs need to be changed, along with their decision-making and implementation processes. In order to engage the authorities in a dialogue among equals, communities must advance to a higher level of organization, knowledge, citizen education and training.

These citizen intervention processes have resulted in modest outcomes and the construction of a basic level of citizenship. Nonetheless, they have not carried over into permanent forms of citizen involvement because of the prevalence of adverse governmental conditions and the lack of essential resources for keeping these initiatives alive.

These experiences are highly localized and focused on specific situations. However, they can inform similar citizen-led processes elsewhere and inspire citizens to build sustainable initiatives that promote transparency and accountability in local governments.

The historic victory of the anti-establishment coalition (led by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador) in Mexico's 2018 election, signals the start of a more favorable context for these citizen initiatives.

Map 1.

I. Introduction

More than 20 years ago, the Mexican legal framework began to undergo reforms that institutionalized international democratic norms, such as the right to know, maximum public disclosure, social accountability, and citizen participation.[1] These norms are now inscribed in the rules of government programs and the discourse of the Mexican political class, yet they are of little use if everyday citizens' efforts to exercise these rights are blocked by the opacity and centralism of those in power. The discretional management of public resources for sinister aims continues to prevail, becoming ever more scandalous.[2] Add to this impunity, and the narco-criminal violence that has become part of the social fabric and government structures,[3] and the result is the antithesis of participatory democracy and open government.[4]

In some places in Mexico, glimmers of citizen intervention—with the backing of these global norms—are pushing to "civilize" the conduct of government and resolve everyday local problems. This is the case in Guerrero,[5] a state where the government-citizen relationship has historically been distant, polarized, and often violent.[6] In the state's Costa Grande region,[7] citizen initiatives promoting the democratization of public life have faced the authoritarian centralism of local governments, as well as the "fear factor" (see Box 1) perpetuated by the government and by the criminal violence that has expanded throughout Mexico in the last decade.

The power elite, entrenched in the government, use the fear factor as a dike, to hold back citizen initiatives that promote transparency and accountability. How have citizen initiatives begun to take down this dike and have oversight of public affairs? What are the most significant accomplishments of organized citizens? What are the challenges along the road to establishing practices of good governance? [8]

To consider these questions, this *Accountability Note* outlines the path taken by citizens' groups in Costa Grande region of the state of Guerrero—with the accompaniment of Unicam-Sur—to begin to build transparency and accountability into local government.[9] This note examines: what they have had to do to access information that by law should be public; some results of monitoring and social oversight of public works and programs; and opportunities for citizen advocacy to impact public policies. This note then presents a roadmap for citizen actions, in the medium- and long-term, to push governments to open up to citizen participation and oversight of the public sphere.

Box 1. The fear factor

The fear factor is a social phenomenon that affects citizens in different ways:

A. Citizens express disinterest, apathy, and ignorance when it comes to public affairs (expressions of civic illiteracy). The fear factor accentuates this kind of behavior; fear of authority and fear of public insecurity lead to a passive attitude– "let's not get involved with the government to make sure we don't have any problems."

B. Citizens support or acquiesce to authority. The fear factor generates submissive or collaborationist behavior so that the benefits they receive from public programs will be maintained or not taken away from them. This behavior includes not questioning how the government is being run, "applauding" official actions, being content with the benefits they receive, and not joining groups that oppose the government.

C. Citizens promote transparency and accountability, in order for public benefits to reach more people. The fear factor is the result of intimidation and threats from the government, cornering citizens into "negotiating" "peaceful" conduct in exchange for public benefits or not suffering reprisals.

Beginning a social accountability workshop with community representatives from Coyuca de Benítez and Atoyac de Álvarez. Credit: Unicam-Sur

II. Exercising the *right to know*: the way forward becomes clearer

Mexico's federal law on access to public information came into effect in 2003. Three years later, limited state level versions of information rights laws were enforced; yet in Mexico practically no one knew about these laws. Given this lack of information, Unicam-Sur organized the campaign in Guerrero, *El derecho a saber hagámoslo valer y el deber de informar también!* (The right to know, let's uphold it, and the duty to inform as well!). Through this citizen initiative, the idea that the "right to know" is a human right began to reach public opinion, social organizations, and government officials for the first time in Guerrero.[10] The initiative broke the paradigm that public information is the property of the government authorities, by filing official requests for information and holding training workshops and forums to analyze specific problems.

"What do you want to know for?" "How are you going to use the information?" "Who sent you?" were the illegitimate responses from public officials when citizens came forward for the first time to request information. In reaction to the citizens' perseverance, the response process was bureaucratized, information was provided drop-by-drop or distorted, and many times high fees were charged for turning it over. Many citizens were dissatisfied with the authorities' response; they learned about the fragility of the transparency laws, the opacity with which the government agencies subject to the law actually operate, and the negligence of the agencies responsible for promoting compliance with the transparency laws. These local experiences fed into a national citizen movement, which in 2014 succeeded in securing an amendment to Article 6 of the Constitution to expand governmental transparency in favor of citizens (Secretaría de Gobernación 2014).[11]

Since the era of transparency was established in Guerrero, journalists, academics, representatives of civil society organizations, and citizens have freely exercised the right to know about a range of issues (Méndez Lara 2009). Examples include: access to the feasibility study and budget earmarked for the misguided *La Parota* hydroelectric dam in Acapulco; the budget for equipment, physicians, and medicines at local health centers in the Costa Grande region; the budget for decentralized basic education services in rural schools; the technical records for community public works financed by the Fondo de Apoyo para Infraestructura Social Municipal (Municipal Social Infrastructure Support Fund); the budget allocations for federal rural programs; the salaries and job descriptions of municipal public servants; and the minutes of municipal town hall meetings, among others.

These citizen groups concluded that gaining access to the information alone does not resolve citizens' problems or needs, but they were able to learn about the cause of the problems and clarify the routes to possible solutions.

III. Monitoring and social accountability: mechanisms that help to solve problems

In order to understand the technical documents related to a community social investment project, citizens must become familiar with the public budget, the planned project completion date, the type of materials used, the architectural design, and the construction company, among other aspects. This process of understanding what is taking place is commonly called monitoring and social oversight; it involves the exercise of observing, analyzing, comparing, and verifying that the public information provided by the government is consistent with what is happening on the ground. This approach makes it possible to cross-check the official information with reality, to compare it with other years and places, and to draw conclusions and make proposals that contribute to redressing or solving the problem that led them to request the information in the first place.

Through monitoring public investments and actions, citizens may find that the social investment projects carried out in communities are costly and of poor quality; that despite the allocation of a sufficient budget to health centers, they don't have medicines or physicians; that the municipal governments break the law when they do not hold public town hall meetings; and that the information that government agencies are supposed to publish is not published. Behind these findings is a process of recognizing (and learning) citizen rights, taking on the problems they face, seeking solutions through dialogue, requesting information from the authorities, comparing the technical record with how the project is implemented, and organizing themselves to follow up with the government, to address shared needs. By keeping tabs on public activities related to their interests, citizens are able to develop norms for how public affairs should be conducted. Unfortunately, these experiences do not necessarily continue over time, nor become widespread, nor succeed in taking the form of permanent structures for citizen participation. This continues to pose a challenge to those who promote these initiatives.

Collapse of a bridge retaining wall in the community of Plantanillo, Coyuca de Benítez; an example of a poor quality public works project. Credit: Unicam-Sur

The civic nature of social accountability (*contraloría social*) draws from many experiences around the world.[12] In Guerrero, the idea goes back to the *comités de vigilancia* (community oversight committees) which are traditionally formed to oversee the performance of the agrarian authority, the traditional or religious festival, or the committee that manages local public works. For Unicam-Sur, our understanding of social accountability goes back to our experience in Guerrero with promoting community oversight of roads, health care, and primary schools (García Jiménez and Barreda 2010).

As stated in Unicam-Sur (2008-2009):

> Social accountability is an expression of organization and informed decision-making by citizens, aimed at correcting and improving public programs so that they can operate with effectiveness, timeliness, and quality, in keeping with the laws, regulations, and operating rules in force. It is the appropriate space for exercising citizen oversight of public programs, in keeping with their interests and the corresponding legal framework.

This is the approach that citizens have used—in groups or with the collaboration of community authorities and/or civic organizations—to ensure that: incomplete or poor quality social projects (such as homes, classrooms, pavement) are repaired or completed;[13] municipal "transparency windows" (offices or departments in town halls where information can be requested) are up and running as mandated by law; municipal council meetings are held publicly; social investment budgets are made public (for example, from the federal government's Ramo 33 budget line for municipal projects) (Oviedo 2007 and PADS 2015).

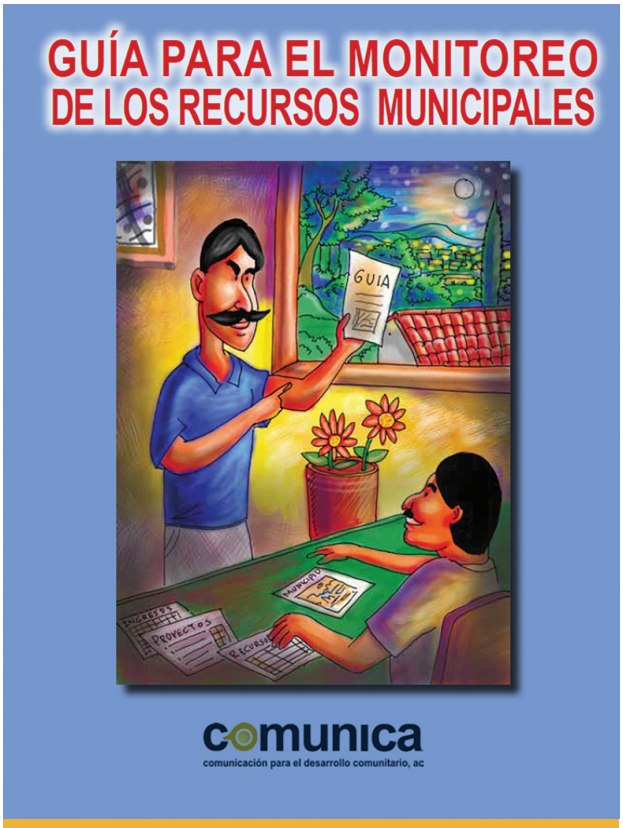
IV. Impacting public policies: the ultimate goal of citizen action

While social oversight makes it possible to correct specific government actions (associated with everyday problems that affect the citizenry), public policy advocacy is aimed at institutionalizing these "overseen" actions, upholding the law, and making public programs work as they should.

With this frame of reference, Unicam-Sur has helped to promote citizen advocacy initiatives in Guerrero, with some encouraging results:

Recognition of the right to know. From 2015 to 2017, through grassroots mobilization, citizens of Coyuca de Benítez made their local government open its transparency office (Pacheco 2015). Also, by filing information requests, citizens contributed to the reactivation of the transparency offices of the neighboring local governments of Acapulco, Atoyac and Tecpan, which had recently opened but only to comply with formal legal requirements. These citizen initiatives pushed the four local governments to publish the information most requested by citizens on their websites: the municipal budget, minutes of the town council meetings, organizational chart of the local government, and the most important local government activities.

Monitoring, social accountability and rural public pro-grams. Between 2013 and 2015, peasant farmers repeatedly occupied the Guerrero state office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food, after the leaders of peasant organiza-tions were denied access to the financial information concerning the budget and implementation of the Corn and Bean Producers' Incentives Program (Pimaf: *Programa de Incentivos para Productores de Maíz y Frijol*). This brought to light the irregular, discretionary and centralized management of that program, at odds with what was called for by law (Auditoría Superior de la Federación 2015; Chavez 2015).[14] This led to more than a dozen rural organizations gaining access to the benefits of this program; the signing of an agreement



Cover of training pamphlet for groups of community monitors. Source: Méndez Lara (2013), illustrated by Amaury Velázquez Martínez

(between the Ministry of Agriculture and social organizations) to install a commission to audit rural public programs in Guerrero; and the commitment to convene the Guerrero Rural Sustainable Development Council (CGDRS: *Consejo Guerrerense para el Desarrollo Rural Sustentable*), as mandated by law.[15] It should be noted that the sustainability of these accomplishments is un-certain: they work so long as the social mobilization is maintained, since there is not yet a culture of legality and the state government officials do not have the po-litical will to foster transparency and citizen participa-tion in the conduct of public affairs.

Opening of institutional spaces to citizen participation. As a result of written requests, lobbying, and hearings with local government officials of Coyuca de Benítez, citizens have pressured the municipal council to hold one public session annually, where citizens can participate--though only with the right to speak. This is moderate progress towards governmental openness to citizen participation (the law states that at least six sessions must be held each year); and the sessions are just pro forma, held as the authority sees fit, and only when citizens insist (Pacheco 2017a). Unicam-Sur worked with the Union of Communities, a grassroots organization with a presence in 30 rural communities within the municipality of Coyuca de Benítez, to write requests, lobby and hold hearings with local government officials. Similarly, in Acapulco, in response to citizen requests, the concept of mobile, open city council meetings (*cabildo abierto itinerante*) was included in the regulation on citizen participation (Municipal Government of Acapulco 2016).[16] However, these sessions are held only when a group of citizens proposes it repeatedly; otherwise, the council members ignore this measure.

In the face of the entrenched political elite and the fear factor in the citizenry, these sparks of public advocacy are just that—sparks. Nonetheless, they illuminate the path ahead for citizen actions that aspire for transparency, participatory democracy, and open government.

"The Right to know, Let's Uphold it, and the Duty to Inform as Well!"

"What is budget line 33?", "How much did it cost to build the road?", "How will next year's budget be divided up?", "And why do you want to know?"

Conceptual creation of participatory action research team at Unicam-Sur, illustrated by Benjamín Zúñiga Samaniego.

V. Organizing and citizen education: key for taking down the entrenched elite

Although the law allows citizens to access public information, engage in social accountability, and pursue policy advocacy, in practice these processes are still in their infancy due to the obstacles of authoritarian, institutional structures and the high level of civic illiteracy. The dominant and entrenched political elite are sustained by discretional use of public resources, institutionalized corruption, and a narco-criminal element that is deeply embedded in the government structure and has spread to the social fabric.[17] In this context, the mayors (who concentrate the decision-making power in local governments) are impeded from becoming transparent and accountable; and in turn strengthen the entrenched elite. The fear factor is a "relevant" resource that the rulers use to bolster the influence of their discretionary payments to community authorities and citizen groups. It is a resource that helps them to contain citizen discontent and to hold on to oligarchic power.

The leading role that citizen groups and social organizations have played in trying to democratize public affairs (such as public works, health, rural development, and the performance of town councils) has paved the way to bring down the entrenched elite, and overcome citizens' fears in local governments. Though these citizen efforts are not consolidated or systematic, they are the start of citizen advocacy for the public interest.

How have these experiences in citizen intervention been possible? Integrating transparency and accountability processes into everyday political life is gradual, and requires grassroots organizing and citizen education. These two components should be brought together at every stage of the process of social intervention; so that as there are gains in grassroots organizing, there are also gains in citizen education (for instance, information and training on local government, citizen rights, and how public programs work).This process gives rise to grassroots leadership, a strategic vision, and collective actions which, as they become a form of community self-management may contribute to solving daily problems. This process can help citizens overcome the fear factor, but only for as long as the dynamic of organizing and educating continues.

The process of citizen organizing and education, supported by Unicam-Sur in Guerrero, can be framed in terms of the following steps:

1. Recognizing a problem and building empowerment to tackle it. Community promoters or leaders of local civic organizations approach residents to engage in a dialogue about a problem with a social project or government action that has been carried out in an irregular or unjust manner. This dialogue gives rise to doubts or concerns that become the pivot for seeking more specific public information. The animating group, community authority, and/or group of citizens then make commitments to generate information and address doubts, in order to reorient the development of a social project, correct its results, or manage a new project.

2. Exercising the right to know. Once more information is obtained on the issue of concern, a group or committee for action or social oversight is established (preferably in a community assembly). The animating group orients and trains these citizen representatives in the procedures for filing public information requests, interpreting, and using them to monitor public works and services; as well as sharing about the legal framework, government programs and the basics on municipal governance.

3. Monitoring and social accountability of public affairs. With the backing of their community, the committee contacts the person in government responsible for the public project, to discuss the details in the information obtained. The committee is monitoring the public project; they have already identified: (1) the subjects of the oversight (who needs monitoring?), (2) the objectives of the oversight (what needs monitoring?), (3) the forms of oversight (how will they monitor?), (4) the frequency of monitoring, and (5) the type of accountability and proposals for improvement that will be put to the authorities.

The community committee is then in a position to question or demand proper use of public resources by the appropriate office. At this stage citizens are getting closer to solving the initial problem.

4. Public policy advocacy. After achieving favorable results from the process, the citizens conclude that the flawed public policies or programs and their decision-making and implementation processes need to change, so the same problems do not recur. They must impact decision-making in the town council, the Municipal Development Planning Committee, and hearings to bring about changes in public policies.[18] A greater level of organization and education is required to reach this stage, which can be difficult given the short-term focus of citizen actions and the absence or fragility of participatory processes and citizen structures.

Figure 1 represents a pathway of citizen action for transparency and accountability in local governments. In the case of Guerrero, these processes have an impact at specific moments but tend to be short-lived, occurring at different times and places, and sometimes with the advocacy support of Unicam-Sur activist groups. Citizen awakening that influences state and municipal politics unfolds in participatory waves related to the cycles of government administrations.

Figure 1. Stages of the process of citizen intervention into public matters.

Organización social > Educación ciudadana > Organización social > Educación ciudadana > Organización social >

1. Unjust public policies; 2. The right to know; 3. Monitoring and social audit; 4. Impact public policies
Social organization > Civic education > Social organizing > Civic education > Social Organizing >
Source: Unicam-Sur

VI. Conclusions

The global trends pushing for greater transparency and accountability in local governments are being implemented by a section of citizens in southern Mexico. Through small actions, they have begun to overcome the fear factor experienced by citizens, which for many years kept the local elites entrenched.

Following the victory of anti-establishment presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador in the 2018 elections, there is now a favorable context for exercising the right to know, social accountability, and citizen advocacy in public policies, and for positioning these issues in the public discourse (see Box 2). There is a wave of citizen awakening in opposition to the prevailing corruption and impunity; citizens are demanding greater transparency and more accountable governments.

The active citizenry, which has been chipping away for decades, cultivating this hope for democratization, now faces the challenge of weaving together the public information and civic education, making adequate use of the laws on transparency and social participation, integrating citizen oversight mechanisms, and activating the institutional mechanisms for social participation.

Municipal activists requesting the officials of the Town Hall of Acapulco that the town council meetings be public, itinerant and that they give voice to the people. Credit: Unicam-Sur

First session of the public, itinerant town council meeting in August of 2017, in the locality of de Bajos del Ejido, Coyuca de Benítez, which was created through the efforts of the Union of Communities. Credit: Unicam-Sur

Turning these concepts into systematic processes sustained over the long-term requires the organization and action of citizen groups and networks which, day after day, so they can develop citizens' capacities to: produce their own information outlets, position themselves in the mass media, design and implement outreach campaigns, build alliances with social actors from other regions, and engage in lobbying and diplomacy with public officials.

In contemporary Guerrero, the discord between citizens and the government is to be expected; they are caught up in the tragic events involving the disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa, the recurrent assassinations of social and political leaders, and the violence stemming from the everyday clashes among narco-criminals. In this context, the global norms that encourage the democratization of public affairs are relevant for an active citizenry, to open the doors to transparency and democracy in local governments.

Box 2. Mayors-elect of Acapulco and Coyuca de Benítez say they will promote transparency and citizen participation

In the July 1, 2018 elections, citizens voted in large numbers in favor of the "*Juntos haremos historia*" ("Together we will make history") electoral coalition, led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador. During the elections, the Union of Communities (a regional grassroots organization associated with Unicam-Sur) called on mayoral candidates in Acapulco and Coyuca de Benítez to hold public dialogues on the issues and to share proposals generated by the citizens.

As a result of that dialogue, the candidates seeking office for the 2018-2021 term signed the "10 commitments for transforming the municipality and rescuing the rural area." The first three commitments address the issues of participatory planning, open government, and citizen participation in the following terms:

1. ***Draw up the 2018-2021 Municipal Development Plan (PDM) using a model of consultation and participatory planning.*** *A Mixed Technical Commission will be formed with citizen participation; and community, micro-regional, sectoral, and municipal meetings will be held. That planning instrument will include the proposals of the Plan de Ayala Twenty-First Century Peasant Movement (Movimiento Campesino Plan de Ayala Siglo XXI).*

2. ***The municipal administration will operate under the principles of open government.*** *The municipal transparency office will have the information of interest to the public, applying the constitutional principle of maximum disclosure; innovations will be introduced to the municipal communication systems, establishing a digital communication platform open to the public, and an official municipal gazette will be published periodically; the accountability of the local government, more than a ceremonial act, will be a space of information, evaluation, and citizen consultation; and the spaces for citizen participation mandated by the various laws will be established: open Municipal Council, Municipal Development Planning Committee, Comunders, watershed management committee, public security council, and advisory councils, among others.*

3. ***To foster citizen participation in municipal life*** *the Office for Social Participation and Human Rights will be established; its principal functions will be: to disseminate the public programs and activities of the local government; to promote and regulate the operation of the social participation councils; and to launch a civic training program for municipal public servants, community authorities, social representatives, and citizens at large.*

These commitments were signed by the incoming new mayors of Acapulco and Coyuca de Benítez, Adela Román Ocampo and Alberto de los Santos Díaz, representing the electoral alliance led by López Obrador's Morena party.

Citizens need to take advantage of the opening of a broader discourse and urge the incoming mayors and the president-elect to turn those commitments into deeds. The priority tasks for active citizens are to position these commitments in public opinion, lobby local council members to keep their word, and be active participants in the resulting actions.

Endnotes

1. The program for a New Federalism promoted during the presidency of Ernesto Zedillo (1995-2000) was an important process of the government opening up to accountability.

2. In the national context, in the last five years, the unbridled corruption of high-level officials of the federal and state governments has been front-page news. Corruption is also found in the municipal governments; the statement by the former mayor of San Blas, Nayarit, says it all: "I stole, but just a little" ("*robé, pero poquito*").

3. When the federal government under president Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) arrested hundreds of municipal and state officials in the state of Michoacán in a surprise operation, for alleged acts of corruption and ties to drug-trafficking, an effort was made to justify the situation saying that it was an isolated case. Nonetheless, as the years went by the drug violence worsened and spread to Mexico's states. Today there is still no clear and reliable strategy for addressing this issue.

4. "Open government" is a global term that gave life to the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a multi-stakeholder initiative which "brings together government reformers and civil society leaders to create action plans that make governments more inclusive, responsive and accountable. … Since 2011, 79 OGP participating countries and 20 subnational governments have made over 3,100 commitments to make their governments more open and accountable" (https://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/about-ogp, accessed 22 September, 2018).

5. Situated in southern Mexico, Guerrero is one of the states with the worst indicators for extreme poverty, inequality, corruption, impunity, and violence. See Open Society Initiative (2015).

6. For historical context, see Bartra (1996, 2000) and Fox, García Jiménez and Haight (2009). Also see Bartra (2015) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAIyvHuII50), (in Spanish).

7. The Costa Grande and Acapulco are located to the south and southwest of Chilpancingo, the capital of Guerrero. A major part of the history of the state and of the country has played out in this geographic space. The region's identity is based on distinctive historical events: the insurrection of General Morelos and the Galeana brothers during the war of Independence (1810-1815); the federalist conspiracy of Don Juan Álvarez (1850-1870); the civic-agrarian struggle of the Escudero and Vidales brothers against Spanish elites (1920-1930); the agrarian reform movements of the Cárdenas and post-Cárdenas years (1934-1960); the bloody confrontation of the forest agrarian reform communities (*ejidos*), against private loggers (1950-1960); the struggle of the copra growers, culminating in a massacre in Acapulco (1960-1967); the guerrilla movement led by teachers Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vázquez (1967-1974); the development of the self-managed organization of coffee growers in the Coalición de Ejidos (1980-1994); the civic-Cardenista movement against electoral fraud (1988-1991); the emergence of the Organización Campesina de la Sierra del Sur after the killing of 17 peasants in Coyuca de Benítez, leading to the fall of Governor Rubén Figueroa (1994-1995); and the formation of the Commission for Regional Sustainable Development (Comisión Promotora del Desarrollo Sustentable Regional), which pushed public programs at all three levels of government (2000-2003).

8. We use the term "good governance" to refer to those practices that are promoted by the government in conjunction with organized civic actors: media outlets, public hearings, social participation in institutional bodies, citizen consultation, training on citizen rights, and so on.

9. Unicam-Sur is an alternative rural education initiative that has been promoted by civic organizations in the states of Guerrero and Morelos since 2004. The pedagogical approach of Unicam-Sur is based on the three Freirian moments: problematizing, reflecting, and going back to reality to transform it. Recognizing and analyzing rural challenges leads to new ways of thinking and acting, as well as advocacy proposals and actions to change rural public policies. Depending on the nature of the educational plans and work projects, the team of facilitators from Unicam-Sur interacts with local organizations, groups, and authorities. In addition to educational initiatives (in the areas of ecological agriculture, traditional medicine, community organizing, history, and culture), the university also promotes participatory research and public policy advocacy around innovative, citizen action initiatives. (Unicam-Sur 2013).

10. See resolutions of this forum at Unicam-Sur (2007).

11. This amendment to Article 6 of the Constitution emphasizes that the information in possession of any mandated agency should be subject to the principle of "maximum disclosure" (Secretaría de Gobernación 2014) http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5332003&fecha=07/02/2014.

12. See Hevia de la Jara (2009) and Fox (2018).

13. "All the houses are cracked, it's scary to sleep here, especially now with the earthquakes, one doesn't sleep there; I sleep in the wooden house that I made over there," said Francisco Juárez Castrejón, an inhabitant of Barrio Nuevo La Laja, Coyuca de Benítez, to describe the poor quality of the 33 homes built by the federal urban development ministry (Sedatu) in the upper part of the town, after hurricanes *Ingrid* and *Manuel* in 2014 (Pacheco 2017b). In this case, the persons left homeless organized and, with the involvement of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), pushed Sedatu to repair those houses. The same happened with 70 homes built in the Tierra y Libertad district, in the municipal seat of the same municipality; and 75 homes in El Paraiso, Atoyac de Álvarez (Valadez 2018).

14. The Pimaf is one of the main public programs for supporting primary production in the rural sector. The federal audit bureau's Forensic Audit report 15-0-08100-12-0331 confirms anomalies in the program, which had repeatedly been questioned by local peasant organizations, such as non-existent producers, duplicate producers in the Pimaf and other programs, irregular enterprises and several with the same owner, excessive resources deposited and without invoicing, packages of inputs with no verification of delivery to producers, and so on. (Auditoría Superior de la Federación 2015; Chavez 2015).

15. Peasant advocacy in the area of transparency is part of a movement of rural convergence which, with different organizational forms, has been finding expression in Guerrero for more than three decades; questioning rural public policies and constructing alternative proposals (Bartra 1996, 2000; Fox, García Jiménez, and Haight 2009).

16. Article 63 of the regulation on citizen participation recognizes the mobile open councils.

17. If we exemplify the impact of this "new actor," the narco-criminal element, on the traditional budget exercise for a community social project, corruption occurs as follows: Of 100 percent of the amount authorized for a community, 10 percent goes to the "central broker" ("*gestor central*") (legislator or political leader), 15 percent to the mayor and his or her "partners" or "associates" in the local government, and 30 percent to drug-trafficking interests (through the local government or its contractors). The direct consequence of this corruption-extortion arrangement is that projects are carried out with 50 percent of the original budget. (So that the numbers work out, the local governments "increase" the project budgets). This leads to poor quality, incomplete and non-existent public works.

18. The Municipal Development Planning Committee (Coplademun: Comité de Planeación para el Desarrollo Municipal) is an auxiliary body of the local governments. In the national planning system, these committees are in charge of drawing up, monitoring, and evaluating the Municipal Development Plan. They are made up of the plenary of the local council, one representative of the state government, and one representative of the municipality's localities and social organizations. On localities as submunicipal governments, see Fox (2002, 2007).

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