Asuntos del Sur

Collaborative Governance for more legitimate, feasible and greater impact policies

Collaboration Makes a Difference

About Colabora.Lat

Colabora.Lat: Towards a New Model of Governance after Covid-19 aimed at studying and making recommendations on the governance models that guided public policy and social efforts introduced to respond to the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic.

The project was born to generate diagnostic and prospective information about the impact of collaboration on the feasibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the responses developed to address the numerous problems that emerged, especially in vulnerable communities. It is grounded in the conviction that defining a framework of good practices in governance, inclusion and gender parity will lay the foundations for a new long-term democratic agreement in Latin America.

The Colabora.Lat Implementation Council is comprised of Asuntos del Sur (Argentina), the Universidad Nacional de San Martín (Argentina) through its School of Politics and Government, the Faculty of Humanities of the Universidad de Santiago de Chile (Chile), the Fundación Friedrich Ebert (Bolivia), Diálogos (Guatemala), Nosotrxs (Mexico), and the Universidad Icesi (Colombia). We have the support of the Canadian Government's International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

About Asuntos del Sur

We are an independent non-profit research and action center. We design and implement political innovation, seeking to strengthen democracies by striving for effective participation, inclusion and the guarantee of rights. Our work revolves around three types of strategies:

> **Knowledge-generation:** We generate knowledge and develop tools to strengthen political innovation processes and actions.
> **Sharing:** We provide specialized training to social and political actors seeking to strengthen democracies.
> **Development:** We develop and strengthen communities of knowledge and practice in the territories.

Our efforts cover 19 countries in Latin America and the Global South, where we work together with civil society organizations, universities, grassroots movements, activists, governments and multilateral agencies.
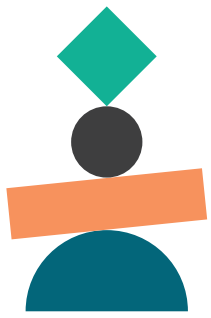
Collaboration Makes a Difference

Collaborative Governance for more legitimate, feasible and greater impact policies

Recommendations for Decision-Makers

The goal of this document is to demonstrate the necessity of collaborative governance for better government and the consequent recommendations for decision-makers so that, based on the evidence gathered, they can implement collaborative models of public management that promote the feasibility, effectiveness and legitimacy of public policies.

These conclusions and recommendations are based on the experience gained through *Colabora.Lat: Towards a New Model of Governance after Covid-19*, a project that examined the political responses of different Latin American States to the pandemic, highlighting those that favored collaboration as a strategy.

Collaborative Governance (CG) includes decision-making and public policy management processes and structures that involve people beyond the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government and/or the public, private and civic spheres to achieve a public purpose. By bringing together and seeking the knowledge of different actors and/or organizations that have different resources, these are leveraged and better put into practice when formulating policies.

Civil society organizations, social movements, the public and private sectors, and independent scientists, among others, each one with their own ideas, interests and experiences, can forge policies that are more responsive to the needs of communities (especially marginalized or vulnerable communities).

Below we present the salient points of the evidence gathered throughout the project and then identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that collaborative governance entails for good governance. Finally, we offer specific recommendations for decision-makers.

Figure 1.

Multilevel Collaborative Governance, 18 countries

Source: Collaborative Governance Index.
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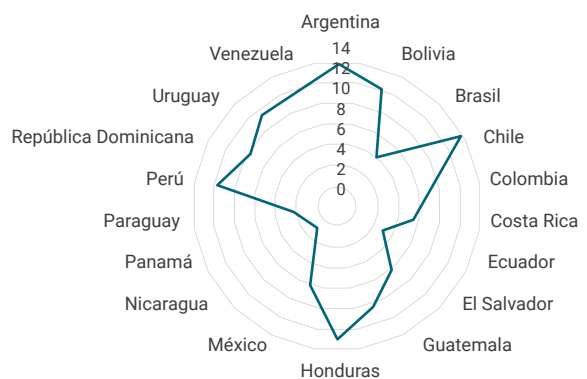
1 Collaborative governance makes a difference

Evidence collected over three years demonstrates a positive and significant relationship between the use of CG and lower death rates (Cyr et al., 2021)[1]. Collaboration helped foster cooperation over resources, buy time to prepare for a potential surge in cases, and produce a unified message about what the public needed to do to prevent the spread of the virus.

No single actor alone has sufficient resources (be them material, human, or symbolic) to solve wicked problems. **Collaboration improves collective intelligence about a social problem** by incorporating the views, knowledge, expectations and interests of all the actors involved.

Developing a shared vision and collaboratively deciding on a public policy does not by itself guarantee the policy's feasibility, impact and legitimacy. Other factors must be taken into account as well:

a. Those responsible for carrying out the policy (e.g., public officials) must participate in its design, incorporating their own viewpoints and interests.

b. Participating actors who are not responsible for policy implementation (e.g., universities or civil society actors) must be involved in the design according to their capacities and resources.

c. When state actors take the lead throughout the process, results are of a higher quality.

Without a), we may face failure during policy implementation because officials and bureaucrats do not recognize the goals as their own and/or simply because their actual capacities to act on the problem have not been taken into account.

Without b) synergies do not occur. The state manages affairs through its administrative apparatus but also through other social actors. Where stakeholders are involved in the implementation stage, State capacities are enhanced and policies can have an impact on previously unreached places. Collaboration increases not only intelligence but also collective muscle. The vaccination, technological solution development and assistance efforts in neighborhoods from Argentina, Chile and Uruguay are just a few examples.

Without c), collective action will fail. Undoubtedly, not all actors with an interest in the problems will engage in participation, nor will those who do participate have the same power and influence. Therefore, due to its legitimacy of origin and its institutional capacities, the State plays a fundamental role in assessing asymmetries and integrating all contributions into the final outcome. Collaboration, without denying differences, becomes a determining factor when power disparities are harnessed and coordinated in pursuit of the public goals.
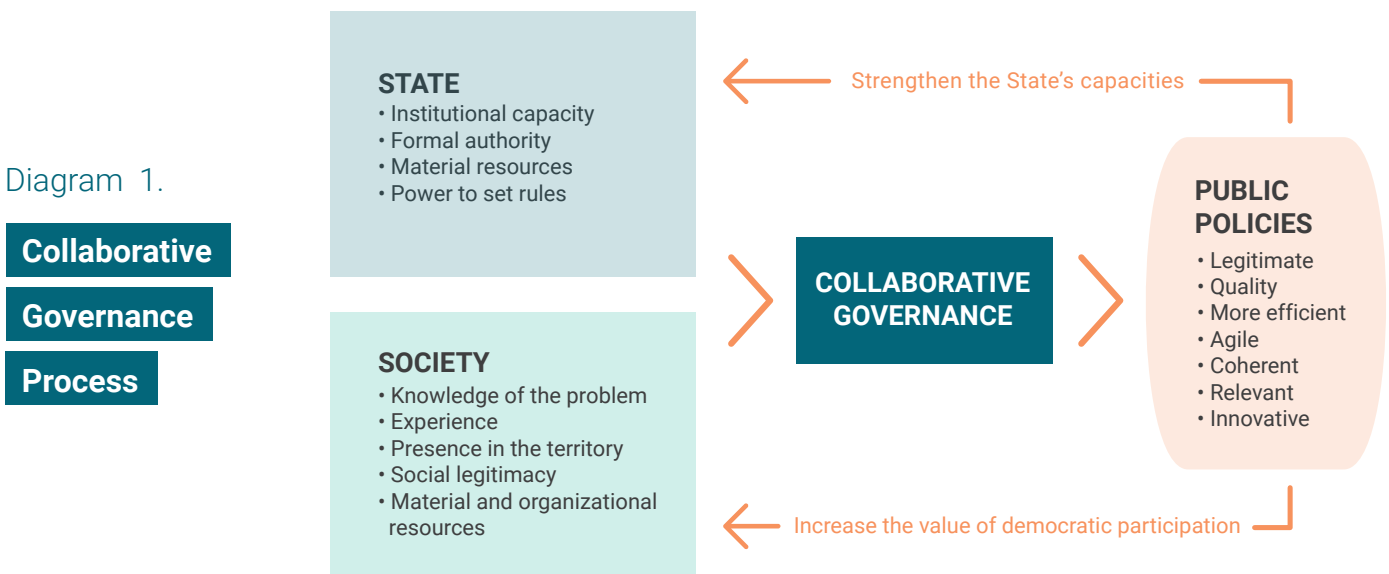

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[1] The documents that present the findings are available at https://colabora.lat/documento/. The following documents are also worth consulting:

Collaborative Governance Index. Methodological document: https://colabora.lat/indice/igc_docmetodologico.pdf

Working paper #1. 3M Regional Governance. Towards Converging Multilateralism in Latin America During Pandemic Times. Available at: https://colabora.lat/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Working-paper-1-Bianchi-and-Lara-2021.-3M-REGIONAL-GOVERNANCE-TOWARDS-CONVERGING-MULTILATERALISM-IN-LATIN-AMERICA-DURING-PANDEMIC-TIMES-4.pdf

Innovación pública 360°: inteligencia colectiva en acción: innovación pública desde el sur: agendas y recursos para gobiernos locales. Matías Bianchi et al. Directed by Alejandro Belmonte, 1st ed. - Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Asuntos del Sur, 2022. Digital book, DOCX. Available at: https://asuntosdelsur.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Inteligencia-Colectiva-en-Accion_IP360-1.pdf

Governing a Pandemic: Assessing the Role of Collaboration on Latin American Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis. Jennifer Cyr, Matías Bianchi, Lucas González, and Antonella Perini. Journal of Politics in Latin America 2021, Vol.13(3), 290-327. Available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1866802X211049250

Thus, where there exist wicked problems — which, by definition, involve different actors — collaboration improves governance when it occurs, preferably, in the problem description, solution design and implementation stages. This is so because the State can count on the resources (material, symbolic and human) of the actors involved to increase its infrastructural power and thus better reach society.

In short, when there arises collaborative governance and society's and the State's resources are brought together, it is possible to increase public capacities and achieve the goals set collaboratively through policies that exhibit **legitimacy** (society's appreciation of public undertakings), **quality** (satisfaction of demands through transparent mechanisms that comply with the rules), **efficiency** (optimal allocation of resources), **agility** (optimization between time and product), **coherence** (consistency between an institution's present and past actions), **relevance** (compatibility between responses and goals and/or problems), and **political innovation** (in the face of unusual situations, total or partial modification of existing institutional dynamics and/or the creation of new ones).

Diagram 1.

Collaborative

Governance

Process

STATE
• Institutional capacity
• Formal authority
• Material resources
• Power to set rules

Strengthen the State's capacities

PUBLIC POLICIES
• Legitimate
• Quality
• More efficient
• Agile
• Coherent
• Relevant
• Innovative

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

SOCIETY
• Knowledge of the problem
• Experience
• Presence in the territory
• Social legitimacy
• Material and organizational resources

Increase the value of democratic participation

2 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats: a point of departure for best practices

A key point of departure to leverage good practices in collaborative governance is understanding that the concept and empirical references have been developed based in great part on the experiences of collaboration in the Global North, and therefore may not easily apply to countries and cases outside of that historically defined, geopolitically dominant territory.

The political, social, and economic context of the Global South is demonstrably different. In Latin America, for example, political organizations and institutions tend to be less institutionalized. They have fewer resources and, more importantly, inspire very low levels of confidence amongst the population. Given these (and many other) differences it is very likely necessary to think about collaborative governance differently when it comes to regions like Latin America. It will likely look different in practice and, as a consequence, have a distinct impact.

The table below organizes the salient aspects of CG in the Global South that must be taken into account when it comes to encouraging it as a strategy for good governance.

Table 1. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of Collaborative Governance

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
It increases collective intelligence and widens the range of possibilities.	Wicked problems (such as the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, drug trafficking, migration, etc.) open a window of opportunity for collaboration.
It enhances the political feasibility of policies.	Governments are increasingly aware of the positive effects of CG on election results.
It improves the execution muscle.	The contexts of action are multiple, so actors can share gains and costs, victories and defeats in different spheres of collaboration.
It legitimizes public action.	The rich history of social organization in Latin America as a source of social action.
It produces more effective and inclusive policies.	The widespread presence of networks that are adaptable to different challenges according to their more flexible and less routinized nature.

| OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Difficult to sustain over time.	The deepening crisis of political representation further weakens the capacity of state actors to make a call to collaboration.
Low degree of formalization.	
Lack of trust among the actors.	
Lack of trust in state agents.	
Asymmetries between non-state actors.	Advancement of the competitive and individualistic views on social order promoted by right-wing populism.
Little institutional capacity of the actors to manage affairs collaboratively.	
Decision-making takes longer.	
Increased chances of vetoes.	

Based on this analysis, in the following section we propose schemes and incentives that minimize threats, address weaknesses, enhance strengths and leverage opportunities.

3 Policy recommendations: from diagnosis to action

The countries studied in the project reveal that the government is key to effective collaborative governance. However, the widespread lack of trust in the administration, as well as the apparent reluctance on the part of some officials to engage in collaboration, are serious challenges that must be addressed for collaboration to be successful.

We found, too, that CG in Latin America tends to be more dynamic and short-term in nature. Finally, the political and social context will shape the nature and the impact of collaborative governance.
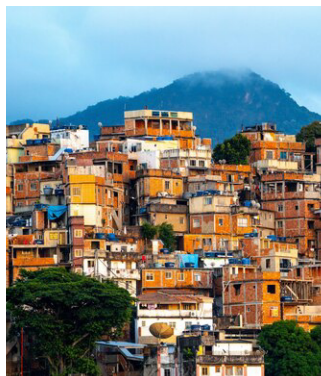
In short, there are many potential challenges to effective collaborative governance. Yet, there are success stories, too, which suggest that it is a recommended path for Latin American Governments to follow.

Below, we highlight the most important recommendations for effective CG.

Table 2. **Policy recommendations to drive collaborative governance**

WHAT?	WHY?	HOW?	EXAMPLES
1 Open and include	Collaborative spaces should allow participation of all social, economic and political actors (collectives) that wish to participate (and, exceptionally, of individuals whose expertise may be relevant), and ensure the participation of those actors that are fundamental to the success of the public policy. This enables increased **collective intelligence and muscle.** Knowledge and resources are scattered in our societies, so coordinating them and recognizing their value constitute a fundamental asset for the impact of policies.	a) <u>Map the actors involved:</u> i) Identify who should and wants to be involved in the process, keeping in mind representation across and within sectors. ii) Take note of stakeholder expectations. iii) Take inventory of the resources (material, symbolic, and human) each participant brings to the table. iv) b) <u>Call for participation through political authorities:</u> The involvement of the highest public authorities is a clear sign of the importance of participation for the success of the policy.	360 PI (Political Innovation) is an intervention model based on collective intelligence, aimed at Latin American subnational governments, which contributes to strengthening their innovation capabilities by providing them with tools to develop more efficient processes of co-governance, inclusion and collaboration.

WHAT?	WHY?	HOW?	EXAMPLES
(2) Manage and leverage asymmetries	Not all actors will have the same power, capacity, knowledge, degree of representativeness, resources and other attributes that bear upon their chances of influencing policy. Far from being a drawback, this constitutes an opportunity to bring together expectations that might otherwise compete with one another, leading to less than optimal results. Socially distributed power thus becomes an asset for the State itself.	a) Lead politically: While CG is a strategy based on relationships being as horizontal as possible, formal government authority is critical for the coordination and alignment of participants' input with shared goals. Leadership becomes critical to ensure collective action and thereby engage stakeholders according to their needs, capacities, and power.	In Chile, it was mayors that led coordination efforts in response to the pandemic. This happened mainly due to the heightening of demands and the role local governments play in being closer to citizens and coordinating action with local leaders. In Argentina, some municipalities in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area worked with social movements to distribute food in peripheral neighborhoods unreached by the State. They also led the collaboration efforts with private companies and universities to provide spaces for isolation, food delivery, testing, vaccination, etc. (as in the case of UNSAM, the Quilmes brewery and a Santa Cruz restaurant).
(3) Promote collaboration	In line with the previous recommendation, the mere presence of stakeholders does not entail participation. Asymmetries, without leadership that takes them into account to balance them out, lead to the formulation of policies that can reproduce inequalities and exacerbate the problems they are intended to solve. In view of this, it is necessary for spaces to be grounds for genuine collaboration and contribution to a more feasible, effective and legitimate public policy.	a) Distribute incentives: We know that collective action — in this case collaboration — depends on the distribution of material and symbolic incentives. The Government enjoys the advantage of having economic resources to distribute among participants (subsidies, the power to hire staff, meeting other demands, etc.), but it can also offer symbolic incentives (public recognition, press time, etc.). b) Keep in mind the different contexts of action: Mostly, participants do not work just on one issue. Their interests will probably lead them to join other areas of CG, where, depending on the problem, resources may have a different weight. Thus, positions of weakness in one turf may be offset by positions of privilege in another. Authorities should analyze the picture and ensure that "defeats" in one arena do not imply defeats in others. In this way, participants know that collaboration helps pursue their own interests in the medium term, in spite of short-term costs.	The successful participation of social movements in Argentina in the implementation of preventive actions during the pandemic can also be explained by the involvement of the movements with other public policies on the distribution of social benefits, subsidies to popular economies, financing of activities, and other resources for organizational strengthening and survival. For example, during the first three months of the pandemic, the municipality of Tres de Febrero went from supporting 60 to 150 organizations through the local Civil Society Strengthening Program.

WHAT?	WHY?	HOW?	EXAMPLES
4 Be patient	CG takes time. It can slow down decision-making. This can be a problem, especially when officials must make fast decisions. However, the time costs of reaching agreements are exceedingly balanced out by the benefits of improved policy resulting from collaboration.	a) <u>Manage time:</u> As mentioned before, leadership is crucial. This includes the ability to monitor the contributions and manage schedules and commitments undertaken by the participants. b) <u>Help participants make contributions:</u> Not all actors have sufficient institutional capacity to engage in collaboration. The government can support participants in a number of ways, from providing training to simply helping them say what they want to say. c) Lean on existing networks and organizations, which can be (re)activated for a new task or issue.	A good practice in almost all programs receiving national and international funding is to allocate resources specifically aimed at the institutional strengthening of participating agencies and organizations. There are plenty of examples of collaboration between counterparts, whether through training, review of internal processes, technical assistance, getting documents up to standard, etc. The role of existing networks and organizations was also evident in the municipality of San Martín, Argentina. Unions and social movements collaborated in the vaccine administration process, distributing information in the territories, since most of the social organizations had been working in the field for a long time, and since 2016/2017 both movements and municipal officials had participated in social policy congresses aimed at reaching consensus on priority social issues for designing municipal-level policies.

WHAT?	WHY?	HOW?	EXAMPLES
⑤ Work towards institutionalization	GC tends to be a weakly formalized process.

In general, what emerges are collaborative arrangements, created on an ad hoc basis in the moment and in response to a particular need or set of needs.

As such, they tend to be short-term: once the problem is addressed sufficiently, or to the extent possible, the collaborative effort will dissipate.

One of the reasons for the lack of institutionalization is that Governments do not visualize CG as an opportunity for their own success.

Establishing more or less formalized agreements depending on the subject matter can be a key way to ensure iteration of the arrangements in time, reduce the lack of trust, and improve collaborative outcomes. | a) Build a coalition: Coalitions and councils are effective mechanisms for organizing and supporting parties from policy design through implementation, review and update. They are a common way of pooling efforts and are especially important in building broad and diversified support for subverting the established order.
b) Establish working methods and responsibilities: All participants must be clear about how, with whom and for what purpose the collaboration is to take place. It is also important to know who does what as well as with what resources. A more formal space requires that participants agree with one another's contributions in order to avoid sporadic and uncommitted participation.
c) Be as flexible as possible: Although the aim of formalizing these spaces is to provide a time horizon that facilitates interaction and institutionalization, the space should not become a rigid environment closed to new actors and perspectives.
d) Monitor and evaluate: It is essential to know how the coalition is performing and the impacts achieved.
e) Advocate coalitions: Ongoing advocacy is key to ensuring the coalition's role as a coordinator of stakeholders in a specific policy area. Successful advocacy ensures that the goals and activities are widely informed to the target population, its members, and potential participants. | **The European Union's Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition** is an example of collaborative governance for promoting digital skills development. All organizations taking action to boost digital skills in Europe can become members of the Coalition, committing to take action to address the digital skills gap. Actions can range from training the unemployed to organizing Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for teachers, or offering coding lessons for children or cutting-edge training for ICT specialists.

- **eSkills: Guidelines for National Digital Skills Coalitions**

In some contexts, the adoption of easily accessible technological tools can be beneficial for the institutionalization of collaborative processes. An example of this is the centralization of internal coordination through instant messaging services on digital platforms such as WhatsApp or Facebook.

To a certain extent, the accessibility and flexibility of these practices has contributed to the consolidation of lasting collaborative relationships, making it possible to transcend barriers such as distance or the lack of transportation resources.

Surprisingly enough, these practices have paved the way for the formalization of internal communication processes, often using the tools and services of group chats to establish consensus, coordinate meetings and communicate opinions.

Examples
• Establishment of chat rules
Commonly used to establish activity schedules, coexistence rules, and specific group goals.
• Open voting tools.
Commonly used to establish consensus, express preferences and coordinate dates/times/places for onsite meetings.
• Message reactions
Commonly used to allow all group members to express their position on a communication without cluttering the chat with messages. Also used for internal notices. |

WHAT?	WHY?	HOW?	EXAMPLES
⑥ Involve participants throughout the process (put people at the center)	CG has better results when participation and involvement occur throughout the public policy process. Better defining problems is part of problem solving. But if CG is not applied during the decision-making and implementation stages, the resources that stakeholders can contribute to effective execution will go to waste.	a) Define collectively: The definition of a public problem results from the relationships established between social actors and between these and the state actors, who jointly — through reciprocal adjustments, arguments, power relations, information, knowledge, professional skills, etc. — build and structure an acceptable definition that overcomes the pitfalls of controversy and is somehow the product of consensus. This is how **legitimacy** is increased, by integrating the visions and expectations of those involved as subjects and objects of the interventions. b) Decide on the basis of agreements: Establish the goals and objectives to be achieved, identify and generate possible paths to reach them, assess and compare the impacts of these paths and, finally, select an alternative or a combination of alternatives based on the highest possible degree of consensus. This is not just about technicality. Rather, policy design and determinations must consider political feasibility and legitimacy, taking into account the winners and losers in each scenario (alternative) and their respective reactions to each of them. Policy design should be rhetorically compelling without losing sight of how **feasible** the policy actually is, not only in economic or technical terms, but also politically-wise, in order to widen the scope of what is collectively desirable and feasible by integrating it into political interaction. c) Implemente through others: Policy implementation is a process involving the interplay between the set goals and the expected results. Its success depends on the capacity of the different actors to reach agreements and exchange resources, since implementation is "managing through others," thus getting certain actors to carry out the policy. It is a space of permanent political negotiation and not a mere administrative milestone. Getting actors involved at this stage is central to reinforcing commitments and ensuring continued participation. If this happens, everyone is jointly responsible for success or failure, by monitoring progress and contributing to revisions. In short, it is here that, tapping into the different actors' resources, the infrastructural power of the State is expanded, as is, in turn, the actual possibility that the agreed decisions will have an **impact** on society and the territory.	The case of the **Pacífico Task Force** in Colombia shows the importance of involving various actors throughout the process in order to compensate for state weaknesses with greater citizen participation. The initiative called for a concerted effort between community councils, municipal and departmental territorial entities, universities, NGOs and grassroots organizations to act jointly against the effects of the pandemic in the most vulnerable territories of the Colombian Pacific. It aimed at pursuing an integral strategy that first covered the basic needs of the vulnerable population. The development of software for case tracking and traceability of the virus in **Uruguay** is another success story. The Government worked with the scientific community and more than thirty public and private companies to design and implement the software. Regarding **implementation**, the **DetectAr program in Argentina** evidenced increased response capacities. Workers from the departments of Health and Social Development, together with different organizations, moved from dwelling to dwelling to find out the health status of the people in each home, checking body temperature and evaluating symptoms. The program also applied disinfection measures in public spaces and distributed supplies.

WHAT?	WHY?	HOW?	EXAMPLE
⑦ Try again	Collaboration is not easy. It is difficult to integrate conflicting visions and interests in order to reach solutions which — if not the best — are at least satisfactory for all parties. Most of the time, the results are not optimal and efforts only go halfway, affecting credibility and future chances of collaboration. However, collaboration makes a difference. The alternative to CG is unilateral or biased decisions, not made on the basis of evidence, knowledge and social expectations. And, when that happens, the feasibility, legitimacy and impact of public policies are impaired. Governments' political will to take on the challenge of CG is fundamental to overcoming prejudice and moving towards a cultural change regarding how politics is understood and carried out.	a) Learn from mistakes: As mentioned above, it is necessary to monitor and evaluate the performance of the collaborative arrangements, as well as to identify weaknesses in order to adopt corrective measures. b) Share learnings: Collaboration does not belong to a particular actor. It belongs to all participants and they should be given the opportunity to know the reasons for failure. Sharing failure is also a way of committing to try better next time.	Although **monitoring and evaluation** are essential components of **internationally funded** programs, in Latin America, unfortunately, experience in this regard is scarce, and there is little inclination to evaluation as a programmed task to reflect on actions. A good example to follow is learning from best practices and conducting evaluations through systematic procedures for collecting, analyzing and interpreting information, and then draw informed and communicable conclusions on activities, results and impacts. These conclusions can be used to outline recommendations that guide decisions regarding how to improve efforts. Some of the experiences in Chile[2] offer fine examples. After unsuccessful attempts to implement policy revolving around the central Government, measures were introduced with more favorable outcomes as a transition to more horizontal collaboration took place. In this case, local-government actors and the community itself could make contextualized decisions to foresee and face crises.

² Suárez-Cao, Hafemann y Yanes-Rojas (2023) "Instancias de gobernanza colaborativa como respuesta a la pandemia: cuatro comunas de la Región Metropolitana en Chile" in Repensando la Gobernanza Colaborativa en América Latina [unpublished manuscript]
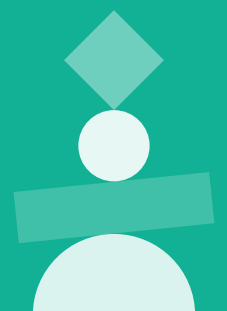
Conclusion

This document is intended to serve as input for decision-makers. It highlights the necessity of collaborative governance for better government. Based on the evidence gathered, it demonstrates that implementing collaborative public management models boosts the feasibility, effectiveness and legitimacy of public policies.

The proposed recommendations seek to outline a road map to leverage the benefits of CG in a context where States have less institutional capacity to address the problems faced by their societies.

Collaborative governance is not only a good practice to increase state capacities so that they are more effective in achieving public goals. It constitutes a fundamental challenge to reclaim and strengthen democracy.

Bringing social actors closer to the formal authorities, establishing spaces for meeting and working together, undertaking shared responsibilities for the implementation of policies, learning from mistakes, and sharing success, are opportunities to re-legitimize political institutions in particular and democracy in general.

COLABORA.Lat

Hacia un nuevo modelo de gobernanza post Covid-19

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