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**"Citizenship and Social Accountability: Civic Monitoring of Social Programs in Argentina.
The Case of *Iniciativa Ciudadanía Social*"**

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What was the problem?

It is a widely accepted truth that Argentine society excludes many marginalized and impoverished groups. Experts agree that ending this cycle of exclusion is crucial to the future of democracy in the region. They are also in agreement that to change this situation successfully requires sustainable social programs that assist, without any distinctions, every person living in poverty. This assistance must consist of incentives that allow poor citizens to develop their capabilities and to be successful through their own individual effort. Despite this understanding, current social programs in Argentina stray far from these propositions and are framed within the traditional use of public funds to gain and strengthen support for political parties. Consequently, although there is considerable public expenditure allocated for social projects, an effective system of social protection in the country is nonexistent.

What was the innovation?

Iniciativa Ciudadanía Social (Social Citizenship Initiative) is a project focused on civil monitoring of social programs, led by civil society organizations and academic centers. It was created in August 2004 by the *El Otro* Foundation with the belief that if citizens do not adequately punish the diversion of social funds to political machines, these practices will increase and will undermine the development of a system of social protection needed to meet the social inclusion challenge confronting the region.

With the purpose of ensuring that Argentine citizens understand the importance of strong public programs that alleviate poverty and redress the failures of current policies, the *Iniciativa Ciudadanía Social* seeks to measure and publicly disclose the performance of social development policies. Its hope is to build a system of incentives in the political system that reward the introduction of improvements in public development initiatives and, therefore, it promotes the development and use of social indicators. We think that the innovation does not lie in the originality of this idea, which is widely known in the bibliography on social accountability, but in putting the concept into practice with relative success. In this way, the innovation appears to

be more closely connected to its implementation, which involved the development of strategic partners who made the activity technically, financially and politically viable.

What obstacles did you face?

One of the obstacles that Iniciativa Ciudadanía Social currently confronts is the low level of importance public opinion gives to social policies. A significant part of the population believes that economic growth is a necessary and sufficient condition to eradicate poverty; social policy is given no more value than charitable activities. Consequently, the public does not demand appropriate accountability mechanisms. We need to face the challenging fact that in order to influence solutions to this problem, we also have to put the problem on the agenda.

At the same time, governments are accustomed to using social funds for clientelistic policies that give politicians ample support from poor sectors. Consequently, demand for accountability in the use of these funds and for positive results of those social policies is very low. Therefore, one of the prime tasks of civil society in Argentina is not only to gather information through relevant and arduous social investigation, but also to work on the establishment of accountability as a topic on the agenda, as much for the public as for the government.

What were the planned versus actual results?

The Iniciativa Ciudadanía Social has tried different strategies, with varied results. Our requests for access to public information to obtain data on the implementation of social programs did not have major success. A second strategy of gathering information about the diversion of public funds from claims against those charged with abuses was also unsuccessful, because those who came forward expected governmental solutions to their problems that innovators, as non-governmental agents, could not offer them. On the other hand, the Iniciativa had positive results from public opinion research that demonstrated how voting patterns of the poor are influenced by social programs manipulated by clientelism. A study to investigate the degree of misinformation or lack of information that people have regarding their rights and responsibilities as beneficiaries of official social programs has also proved very revealing.

Marcelo Ugo is a specialist in the management and evaluation of development initiatives which he currently fulfills in his positions as president of the Foundation El Otro and coordinator of the Iniciativa Ciudadanía Social. He also teaches courses on Management on Results of Development and Monitoring of Social Programs at the Institute for Social Development (INDES) at the Inter-American Development Bank. He has been a consultant for international cooperation organisms and has a broad professional experience in the public sector and at federal and local government levels, both in positions with technical and political responsibilities. Ugo graduated with a degree as Professor of Higher Education in History from the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters from the University of Buenos Aires, with a specialization in Social History.

