

## SPOTLIGHT ON ORGANISATIONS: KEY CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS USING THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION



Throughout Latin America, civil society organisations (CSOs) are pushing for accountability by undertaking independent assessments of the implementation and outcomes of public policies and programmes. To get the information needed for these assessments, CSOs are effectively using the right to information guaranteed by Freedom of Information Acts (FOIAs), Constitutions, or in the absence of these, Court decisions. By conducting these exercises, civil society has successfully highlighted mismanagement and inefficiencies in public policies, and pushed for reform, especially to ensure policies benefit socially excluded groups.

The following selection highlights some of the key Latin American CSOs that are using the right to information to carry out independent assessments of policies and programmes in different sectors. CSOs from other regions could likely benefit from learning about the variety of creative ways these Latin American groups are using the right to information to push for accountability and reform.

### ► Article 19-Mexico

Link: <http://www.articulo19.org/>

**Areas of Expertise:** Freedom of expression, media regulation, freedom of information, censorship, freedom of the press, governance and democracy, discrimination, information and communication technologies and new media

**Key Activities:** Research, case studies, training, consultancy and technical assistance to Supreme Audit Institutions

Article 19 bases its work on the 19<sup>th</sup> article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on the Right to Freedom of Expression and Information. It has a presence in many regions of the world, including Latin America. Its Mexico office is actively using the right to access information to promote transparency and accountability. For example, in their [Citizen Observatory](#) (*Observatorio Ciudadano*) project, Article 19-Mexico gathered public information on critical urban services like water and waste collection in Mexico City, then made the information available to citizens so they can monitor government performance in providing those services. Article 19's work using the right to information can be useful to organisations in other regions that want to strengthen accountability in government provision of urban services.



## ▶ Association for Civil Rights (*Asociación por los Derechos Civiles - ADC*)

Link: [http://www.adc.org.ar/sw\\_contenido.php?id=383](http://www.adc.org.ar/sw_contenido.php?id=383)

**Areas of Expertise:** Access to information, discrimination, justice, freedom of expression, legislative monitoring, education, Inter-American human rights system

**Key Activities:** Strategic litigation to advance human rights, monitoring public policies and institutions, capacity building, drafting legal and institutional reforms

The ADC works to advance the right to information and freedom of expression in Argentina, with a focus on requesting public information to monitor budget allocations to [government advertising](#) and its relationship with acts of indirect censorship. Along with the [Open Justice Initiative](#) and other Latin American organisations, the ADC has also conducted [cross-national research on official advertising](#), covering Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Honduras, Peru and Uruguay. ADC's monitoring of government advertising will be useful to CSOs of other regions that want to advance the right to freedom of expression and information and highlight situations of indirect censorship.

## ▶ Centre of Archives and Access to Public Information (*Centro de Archivo y Acceso a la Información Pública - Cainfo*)

Link: <http://www.cainfo.org.uy/>

**Areas of Expertise:** Right to information, transparency, human rights

**Key Activities:** advocacy, access to public information, information management, research, consultancy work

Cainfo promotes the right to information in Uruguay, seeing this right as an effective tool for advancing and monitoring the fulfillment of other human rights. Currently, Cainfo is requesting information from public agencies to monitor the degree to which they are producing and making available information on domestic violence and migration. Cainfo also undertakes [multi-country research](#) on the types of challenges and barriers faced in implementing FOIAs in various Latin American countries. Cainfo's experience would be valuable for South Asian and Sub-Saharan African CSOs wanting to use the right to information to monitor the fulfillment of specific human rights in their own countries.

## ▶ Centre for Legal and Social Studies (*Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales - CELS*)

Link: <http://www.cels.org.ar/home/?info=&ids=&lang=en&ss=>

**Areas of Expertise:** Human rights, institutional violence and citizen security, democratic justice, criminal justice, freedom of expression, access to information

**Key Activities:** Strategic litigation, oversight and dialogue with public agencies, advocacy-driven research, coordination of international and national networks and alliances

CELS is a CSO working to promote and protect human rights and to strengthen the democratic system in Argentina. CELS is using the right to information to assess and monitor various public policies, for example, the Buenos Aires city government's [policy on access to safe water](#) or the [national health policy](#) for people living with HIV. In addition, CELS is a member of relevant national and international [networks](#) and they have developed [partnerships](#) with other Argentinean organisations. CELS' social audits using the right to information can be useful to CSOs in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa interested in advancing specific human rights.



## ► Citizen Action (*Acción Ciudadana*)

Link: <http://accionciudadana.org.gt/index.php>

**Areas of Expertise:** Transparency, access to information, citizen participation, corruption, democratic development

**Key Activities:** Monitoring and oversight of public institutions, research, advocacy

*Acción Ciudadana* is the Guatemalan Chapter of [Transparency International](#). It promotes transparency in public management and fosters citizenship committed to the development of democracy in Guatemala. In 2010, a year after Guatemala's FOIA was adopted, *Acción Ciudadana* developed a methodology to assess the level of compliance with the law at the executive level. The organisation evaluated public agencies' compliance based on six indicators, and by making access to information requests to a sample of ministries and public agencies. Their methodology and the study's [findings](#) can be of use to CSOs working towards the advancement of transparency and access to information in other contexts.

## ► Citizen Proposal Group (*Grupo Propuesta Ciudadana*)

Link: <http://descentralizacion.org.pe>

**Areas of Expertise:** Decentralization, citizen participation, transparency and access to information, extractive industries, local governance

**Key Activities:** Monitoring, support to CSOs, applied research

Formed by 11 Peruvian CSOs, *Grupo Propuesta Ciudadana* aims to strengthen civil society's role in the decentralization process and in local governance. Recently the organisation has begun focusing on using the right to information to increase transparency and accountability in [Peru's extractive industries](#). Currently they are using the right to information to monitor implementation of projects selected by citizens through the participatory budgeting process in six Peruvian localities with extractive industries activities. *Propuesta Ciudadana's* work offers a useful example to CSOs working on improving transparency and accountability in extractive industries in their own countries.

## ► Civil Association for Equality and Justice (*Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia - ACIJ*)

Link: <http://descentralizacion.org.pe>

**Areas of Expertise:** Human rights, strengthening democracy, transparency, access to information, corruption, rule of law enforcement, social justice, education

**Key Activities:** Advocacy, applied research, litigation, development and promotion of participatory and deliberative practices

The Argentinian organisation ACIJ works to defend the rights of the most vulnerable sectors of society and to strengthen Argentinean democracy. One of its key areas of work is advocating for the right to education in the city of Buenos Aires. To monitor the city's subsidies of private schools, ACIJ made access to information requests about the criteria used by the city government to allocate subsidies and the amount these institutions receive. Armed with this information, ACIJ published its [assessment](#) of the subsidies, finding that they actually widen education inequality, instead of promoting education for all. CSOs in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa working towards the advancement of the right to education could benefit from learning about ACIJ's experience.



## ► Ecuadorian Center for Environmental Law (*Centro Ecuatoriano de Derecho Ambiental – CEDA*)

Link: <http://www.ceda.org.ec/inicio.php?idiom=2>

**Areas of Expertise:** Conservation, environmental governance and democracy, sustainability and development

**Key Activities:** Training, capacity building, technical assistance, research and publications, consultancy work

CEDA is a CSO working to promote environmental rights and sustainable development in Ecuador and throughout the region. Based on the idea that effective access to environmental information is critical for promoting participation and governance, one of the pillars of CEDA's work has been monitoring the right to information in Ecuador. In 2008, CEDA conducted an [assessment of the right to information in Ecuador](#) by analysing the legal framework regulating the right to information and making information requests to a sample of environmental and human rights public agencies. CEDA's experience in promoting the right to information as a tool for realizing environmental rights can be of use to environmentally-focused CSOs in other countries.

## ► Pro Access Foundation (*Fundación Pro Acceso*)

Link: <http://www.proacceso.cl/>

**Areas of Expertise:** Transparency and access to information, public policies, human rights

**Key Activities:** Applied research, monitoring and evaluation of public policies

*Fundación Pro Acceso* promotes the right to access public information in Chile. The organisation is well known for bringing cases before national courts and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, such as the *Claude Reyes vs. Chile* case that ruled that States should enforce the right to information. *Fundación Pro Acceso* makes information requests to monitor the implementation of Chile's FOIA and identifies barriers that might affect citizens' access to information. *Fundación Pro Acceso's* work might be useful to South Asian and Sub-Saharan African CSOs aiming to monitor the realization of the right to information in their own countries.

## ► Social Management and Cooperation (*Gestión Social y Cooperación – GESOC A. C.*)

Link: [http://www.gesoc.org.mx/site/?page\\_id=96](http://www.gesoc.org.mx/site/?page_id=96)

**Areas of Expertise:** Evidence-based and result-oriented management, transparency, accountability, social responsibility, social rights, inter-organizational collaboration for development

**Key Activities:** Applied research, monitoring and evaluation of government institutional and management capacities, capacity building, training

Through research, monitoring, and capacity building, GESOC aims to improve the effectiveness, sustainability and responsiveness of governments, NGOs and private firms. In particular, GESOC is using the right to information to monitor the implementation of Mexico City's Human Rights Programme. Using these information requests, GESOC, along with other Mexican CSOs, built an easy-to-use website called [Monitor Your Rights](#) (*Vigila Tus Derechos*) to provide citizens with information to monitor the Human Rights Programme's progress and to increase overall accountability. GESOC's experience can be valuable for CSOs in other regions aiming to improve accountability and citizen participation.



## ► Sonora Ciudadana

Link: <http://www.sonoraciudadana.org.mx/>

**Areas of Expertise:** Human rights, public service provision, right to health, accountability

**Key Activities:** Advocacy, applied research, promotion of citizen participation

*Sonora Ciudadana* works from the local level to promote and defend human rights and to build an integral democracy in Mexico. *Sonora Ciudadana* has used the right to information to monitor and track the budget allocated to ISSSTESON, the health system in charge of providing health care to people working in public institutions in the Sonora province. In its [assessment](#), *Sonora Ciudadana* demonstrated that the way the budget was allocated actually prevented the system from providing effective and accessible health care to all its users. The experience of *Sonora Ciudadana* will be of interest to CSOs from other regions working to push for health care rights at the local level.

### CONTACT [FUNDAR](#)

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### FIND OUT MORE FROM [ELLA](#)

To learn more about how Latin American CSOs are using access to information to push for accountability, read the [ELLA Brief](#). To learn more about other Transparency and Access to Information issues in Latin America, read the [ELLA Guide](#), which has a full list of the knowledge materials on this theme. To learn more about other ELLA Development issues, browse other [ELLA Themes](#).



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