

CIVIL SOCIETY IN LATIN AMERICA: RETHINKING CIVIC SPACES

During 2019, civil society in Latin America and the Caribbean experienced many restrictive and repressive measures regarding the exercise of their civic freedom and human rights. Still, at the same time, it was the main actor in multiple mobilisations and social protests in response to the shrinking of civic spaces, events that kept going in 2020. With the arrival of 2020, civil society was forced to put on hold different actions of social mobilisation due to the mechanisms that were adopted by the governments in order to attend the pandemic, mechanisms that contributed to violating human rights and fundamental liberties of civil society, hindering the realisation of massive protests and the participation in public deliberation spaces.

Within this context, the Regional Office of ForumCiv for Latin America and the Caribbean developed a virtual forum called **“Civil society rethinking civic spaces”**, as an opportunity for dialogue and exchange of ventures and initiatives driven by civil society for the promotion, defence and expansion of civic spaces and democracy in the region.

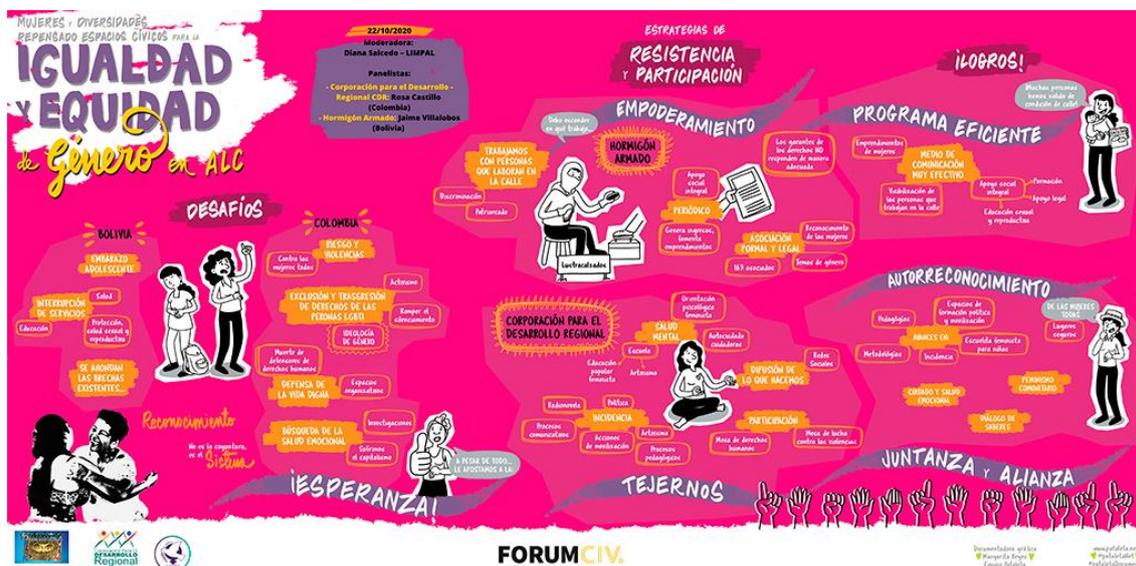
The forum had four dialogue spaces with representatives of different social sectors from Latin America and the Caribbean, who have been working towards the expansion of civic spaces in the region and towards strengthening the capacities of civil society.

In the first discussion **“Social mobilisation as a civic space”**, held on October 21, 2020, we had the participation of Julián Bautista from **La Otra Juventud** (Colombia), Patricia Castillo from **ActionAid** (Guatemala) and Faustino Torres from **CLOC Vía Campesina** (Nicaragua). During this space, the importance of local, community-based and alternative spaces for the participation and advocacy of civil society was highlighted, as well as for the strengthening of their agency, in contexts where governments have taken different measures to limit and restrict the citizens' participation, the social mobilisation and the protest through stigmatisation and criminalisation of social movements.



Hence, Latin American civil society is rethinking other forms of mobilisation and access to the information, that allows them to advocate the local power's recomposition, the strengthening of self-management and the establishment of alliances and articulations with different sectors of civil society.

In the second discussion **“Women and diversities rethinking civic spaces for gender equality and equity”**, held on October 22, 2020, we had the participation of Rosa Castillo from **Corporación para el Desarrollo Regional CDR** (Colombia) and of Jaime Villalobos from **Hormigón Armado** (Bolivia). These organisations highlighted the various strategies of resistance and participation developed by their organisations, such as spaces for popular formation and feminist politics, activist practices, appropriation and use of communication tools for advocacy.



Through these initiatives, women have contributed to the strengthening of their agency, establishing processes of articulation and local alliances with other social sectors, and the promotion and inclusion of women in local and community spaces for civic action.

On the third discussion **“Civil society rethinking the environment and development in their territories”** carried out on the 22nd of October of 2020, we were joined by Arnobis Zapata from **Asociación Nacional de zonas de Reserva Campesina ANZORC** (Colombia), Pedro Ivo Bautista representing the **Associação Alternativa terrazul** (Brazil) and Alicia Ortiz from **“Fundación AITropico”** (Ecuador). During the discussion, the panellists highlighted the various barriers, obstacles, and risks that communities, social leaders and environmental defenders, face due to their activism favouring sustainable life models. At the same time, the various initiatives and projects that the communities have developed to position their alternative proposals for decent ways of life were showcased, such as peasant guards, strategic litigation, communication for advocacy, and popular and solidarity economies. Evidencing that the environment and the territory are physical and cultural spaces where social relationships are built and rethought for the protection of life.



On the last discussion **“Communication as a civic space for advocacy”**, held on October 23, 2020, Colombian associations such as **Proyecto Antonio Nariño PAN**, **Alharaca Radio Feminista** and **Pacifista**, as well as **Radio Pio XII** from Bolivia, participated. The discussion focused on reflections on the importance of communication as a tool for the generation and implementation of advocacy processes that contribute to access to information, the creation of own, popular and local content, and the strengthening of the social fabric.



Local, community and alternative media became an instrument that contributes to the expansion of democracy and the strengthening of civil society, since these media diversify and democratise information.

Through dialogue in all its discussions, the forum made it possible to demonstrate the importance of civil society as a fundamental actor for promoting and defending civic

spaces, democracy, and human rights. Likewise, the various strategies that Latin American civil society has been developing and rethinking to contribute to the construction of more just, sustainable and equitable societies were made visible.

If you want to know more about the forum “Civil society in Latin America: Rethinking civic spaces” listen to this [podcast](#) (in Spanish).