

Note on GIFT's flagship user-engagement initiatives: #DataOnTheStreets/FromHome Rallies and #BetterBudget Dataquests for Sustainable Development

How these initiatives work

#DataOnTheStreets Rallies

Ministry of Finance, public works or similar institutions in government together with one or more civil society organizations (CSOs) launch an open invitation for participation in an inclusive contest called Rally #DataOnTheStreets (called #DatafromHome in pandemic times). This call is typically made through institutional social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). The target audience is the general public, with an emphasis on young audiences particularly engaged in social media.

Clear rules and timelines are provided, with participants given a set period of time, spanning from a weekend to just over to month, to register online as individuals or teams, and to go through the construction project datasets or mapping platforms published by government entities, towards selecting the ones they would like to visit. They use project location coordinates to visit project sites, comparing what they see on the dataset/platform to what they see on the ground. They then creatively document their findings through social media (Facebook or Twitter), engaging their own networks using story-telling techniques such as infographics, interviews, multimedia entries, etc.

Participants are generally keen to better understand the use of public resources around them, specifically public infrastructure that impacts their environment and lives, such as the bridges, roads, hospitals and schools they see on their commute home, and the sports and cultural facilities they use. Additional incentives to participate arise from the opportunity to learn from others, display their research skills, analytical thinking and creative abilities, to win a prize, and to showcase their work on a global platform.

The best team/individual is selected by experts from government, civil society, academia, at times with support from the GIFT Coordination Team, using evaluation criteria including that examining the number of projects visited, and the creativity, engagement and data analyses displayed. Prizes are then usually awarded to the top 3 teams/individuals in a national awards ceremony. The winning team/individual then participates in an international event organized by GIFT.

#BetterBudget Dataquests for Sustainable Development

Government institutions and CSOs call on the public to, as part of a contest, explore open public spending data and relate it to public policy and development data (performance indicators, socio-economic information, geospatial parameters, etc.) towards presenting budget allocation and implementation findings. Topics are selected based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The target audience is members of the public with intermediate to advanced knowledge in data science, economics or journalism (or similar).

Clear rules and timelines are provided, with participants given a set period of time, spanning from a weekend to just over to month, to register online as individuals or teams, and to go through public spending datasets and fiscal transparency platforms' visualizations, data dictionary, metadata, as well as other sources of open data, either provided by the organizers or that they find online. Organizers typically provide a series of online capacity building opportunities to enhance participant knowledge on the contest topics, and at times guidance questions and/or templates for participant final project presentations. Participants are encouraged to use diverse media channels to present their results

towards making their research easy to understand, including through the use of graphics, platforms, dynamic or static visualizations, amongst others.

Participants are generally keen to display their research skills, analytical thinking and solution finding capabilities. Additional incentives to participate arise from the topics touching on issues participants are deeply concerned about, the opportunity to learn from others, win a prize, and to showcase their work on a global platform. The process also provides an opportunity for open data publishers to generate budget literacy and data use capacities, as well as an opportunity to observe the challenges that users typically face in using the data, towards improving its publication.

The best team/individual is selected by experts from government, civil society, academia, at times with support from the GIFT Coordination Team, using evaluation criteria including that looking at the creativity, critical thinking, strength of engagement, and data analyses displayed. Prizes are then usually awarded to the top 3 teams/individuals in a national awards ceremony. The winning team/individual then participates in an international event organized by GIFT.

GIFT's role in these initiatives

These initiatives relate to GIFT's agenda in various respects, including that they: rely on the publication of digital tools, including those that provide for enhanced data collection, user-centered publication and open data; encourage the adoption of public participation mechanisms, helping break barriers related to questions about the possible effects of participation, while simultaneously establishing bases for trust and collaboration among stakeholders from different sectors; and are strengthened through peer-learning and collaboration activities at the international level, as civil society and government practitioners from different countries co-create mechanisms and share their specific focus, methods and lessons learned.

GIFT has been promoting these initiatives since 2017 by:

- Introducing stewards to these initiatives and their dynamics;
- Assisting in organizing them, including by providing examples of basic rules and templates;
- Promoting the relationship and trust building process between CSOs and governments, as well as with other stakeholders such as that with open data communities and development agencies;
- Providing capacity building and peer learning opportunities;
- Providing technical assistance and strategic advice towards the adoption of impact-oriented approaches;
- Disseminating information on the events, their results and impacts; and
- Providing prizes, the opportunity for winners to present their results on an international platform and to become part of an international community.

The value of these initiatives

These initiatives are useful as they:

- Enable governments to engage on the public spending data they publish in open and collaborative settings;
- Generate a knowledge building experience on ways for the government to promote public participation;
- Inform both the government and potential users of the data;
- Promote and incentivize the use of published information;
- Allow government to promote information that it publishes;
- Lay the groundwork for future collaborations between governments and civil society on the use of public information;
- Can lead to policy corrections, that is they can have a social control effect;

- Inform and empower participants through the recognition that their research and reports will be considered by government;
- Offer light touch and low cost collaboration opportunities; and
- Offer scalable participation initiatives that enable collaboration in a semi-formal flexible setting for dialogue among different stakeholders, towards the specific objectives of improving certain processes and policies that affect sustainable development.

Where initiatives have been held

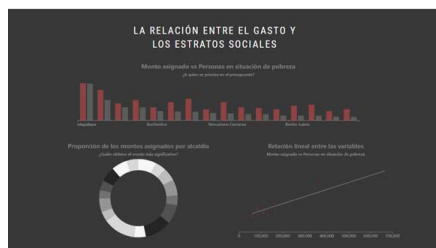
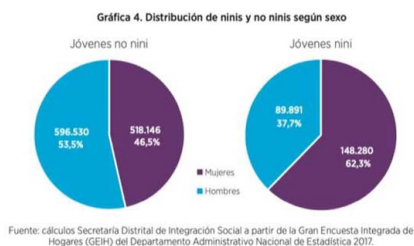
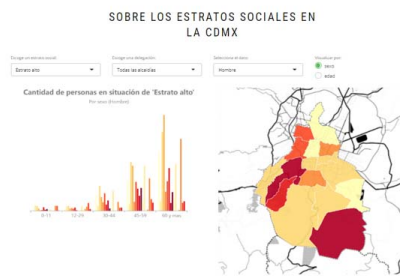
Initiatives have been held at both the national and subnational sphere of government:

- National: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Mexico, Philippines, South Africa, Uruguay. (Mongolia to be held soon).
- Subnational: Mexico City (Mexico), Guanajuato (Mexico), Bogotá (Colombia).

Selected examples of what initiatives have achieved

Below are some examples of what these initiatives have achieved in different countries:

- Argentina: The Ministry of Finance changed the way open budget data and physical goals information is published, and improved dialogue towards enhancing the development and monitoring of the Mother and Child Care program budget performance targets.
- Chile: The rally has engaged a growing community of stakeholders, including construction and private sector associations, the public works ministry and remarkably, the Supreme Audit Institution (SAI).
- Colombia: The Rally (2018 and 2019) and the Dataquest (2019) impacted the National Development Plan, including through a provision to incorporate cross-cutting budgets in the budget process.
- Costa Rica: A Memorandum of Understanding was entered into between Innovap, a CSO, and the Ministry of Finance that resulted in budget and spending open data being published through the Open Fiscal Data Package, and a budget school being established in 2020.
- Indonesia: Dataquests have benefitted from the continuous involvement of the highest authorities in the Ministry of Finance, including the Minister herself, and motivated the publication of standardized budgetary data, and the permanent availability of selected open data.
- Mexico: Several rallies has been held since 2016, with the Ministry of Finance continually taking lessons learnt on-board including by renovating the systems for public investments management and for reporting subnational government projects, thereby improving data quality for monitoring and decision-making.
- Bogotá, Mexico City and Guanajuato: All of these subnational governments have succeeded in involving young people, and in promoting the use of sophisticated mathematical tools, machine learning, visualizations and other software development in exploring and providing analyses on topics ranging from youth employment expenditures; land and its relationship with public revenue; to hospital geographically targeted expenditure.



Screen captures from 2021 winning team's presentations from Bogotá and Mexico City.

Enhanced collaboration between government entities and other relevant stakeholders, include that seen between the following institutions in different countries:

- Argentina: Ministry of Finance, Asociación Civil por la Igualdad y la Justicia (ACIJ), and ILDA
- Chile: Fiscal Observatory, Chamber of Construction, and General Comptroller's Office
- Colombia:
 - Ministry of Finance, Datasketch, Global Integrity, Open Contracting Partnership, and Open Knowledge (local chapter)
 - City of Bogotá, District Finance Secretary, and General Secretariat
- Costa Rica: Ministry of Finance and Innovaap
- Mexico:
 - Ministry of Finance, Center for Economic and Budgetary Research, Fundar, SocialTIC
 - Guanajuato City
 - Mexico City, Digital Agency for Public Innovation, Ministry of Finance, Inteligencia Pública and Supercívicos
- Indonesia: Ministry of Finance, Seknas FITRA, and Politeknik Keuangan Negara STAN
- Philippines: Department of Budget and Management, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Presidential Communications Operations Office, and Freedom of Information Project Management Office
- Uruguay: Planning and Budget Office and DataUy

In addition to the organizers listed above, Mexican national and local authorities engaged numerous partners to co-sponsor and/or act as mentors for their user-engagement initiatives, including cooperation agencies such as the National Office of United Nations Development Program; private companies such as Movistar; academic institutions such as the Economic Research and Teaching Center as well as other governmental agencies such as the national Ministries of Economy and the Environment, as well as the local Ministries for Women and for Mobility in Mexico City; and other branches of government such as the legislature through the Budget Commission at the national level. This is the first time this number of diverse organizations participated in this kind of country user-engagement initiative.

Additional information

The following contain links to further information:

- 2023 [call](#) for organizers and international showcase
- 2022 call for organizers on a twitter thread [summary](#).
- [Information](#) on 2021 winners.



- GIFT monthly newsletters contain up to date information on initiatives taking place. Subscribe to it [here](#).