

Summary Report: Latin America Learning Exchange

Prepared by Namati for the Knowledge Management Fund

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Introduction

[Namati](#) organizes Learning Exchanges, wherein budding legal empowerment activists learn from leading organizations in the field about addressing common challenges and improving legal empowerment methods. Through practical, hands-on learning, we aim to strengthen our community of practice and our movement as a whole. Namati's exchanges have produced many gains: participants returned home to test newfound strategies for improving case management, engaging communities in advocacy, and strengthening the rights of vulnerable communities.

Namati hosted our first regional learning exchange in Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 19-24, 2017, convening 30 participants from 13 Latin American countries. [Participants](#) represented organizations¹ working to secure access to justice on behalf of vulnerable groups, migrants, and indigenous communities.

There were multiple goals of the learning exchange. First, we wanted to foster a space for participants to collectively learn legal empowerment methods for addressing common justice challenges. In doing so, we discussed the particularities, opportunities, and challenges of the legal empowerment approach as it is currently applied in Latin America. Second, we aimed to be forward thinking - defining the next steps to strengthen the legal empowerment movement in the region; and generating knowledge and learnings about the unique practices and experiences in Latin America.

Highlights

Increasingly, grassroots organizations are using legal empowerment tools to address various justice challenges. But they are not yet synthesizing their efforts, therefore missing critical opportunities to work together towards widespread, sustainable change. Our learning exchange participants discussed ways to strengthen the movement for legal empowerment in the region. Specific highlights included:

1. A special session on opportunities for advancing legal empowerment presented by the Sustainable Development Goals. The topic generated so much interest that, two months later, we organized a [webinar](#) on the SDGs as an advocacy tool, led by an expert panel. For the full list of webinars hosted by Namati, following the exchange, click [here](#);

¹ Participating organizations included: **Argentina:** ACIJ, Poder Ciudadano and Andhes; **Bolivia:** Fundación Construir; **Brazil:** Themis; **Chile:** FIMA; **Colombia:** ILSA; **Ecuador:** Centro de Desarrollo Comunitario Los Pinos, INREDH; **El Salvador:** Grupo de Monitoreo Independiente de El Salvador; **Guatemala:** CEGSS; de México: Article 19, Fundación para la Justicia y el Estado democrático de Derecho, CEMDA; **Paraguay:** la Coordinadora por los Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia; **Perú:** APRODH y Paz y Esperanza; **República Dominicana:** ASCALA; **regional and international organizations:** ISLP, IRDC, NAMATI, TECHO, Hábitat para la Humanidad.

2. A session with donors and experts on funding diversification and financial sustainability, including Open Society Justice Institute ([OSJI](#)), Inter-American Foundation ([IAF](#)), Inter-American Development Bank ([IDB](#)), [Avina](#), and International Development Research Centre ([IDRC](#));
3. Discussions on what legal empowerment means and looks like in the Latin American context, resulting in a [concept note](#) written by a committee of participants;
4. Sharing of case studies and the initiation of a joint publication;
5. Sessions dedicated to defining next steps for strengthening the legal empowerment movement in the Latin America region, culminating in the signing of the “[Declaration of Villa Inflammable for Access to Justice & Legal Empowerment for All](#)”, a document that establishes the values and commitments that will guide the group, as well as demands to public institutions, the private sector, and international bodies to guarantee access to justice for all. Watch the short video promoting the regional community and declaration [here](#).

Next Steps

Participants agreed to continue discussions around research and production of information, collaborations among members, internal organization and long-term sustainability of the community. These ongoing conversations are already underway on the virtual platform of the [Global Legal Empowerment Network](#) that Namati convenes. We intend to meet again in person at the earliest opportunity.

In January 2018, Namati released a regional publication documenting five case studies about legal empowerment experiences and practices in Latin America. The publication will be made available to the Knowledge Management Platform.

Select Testimonials:

“The Learning Exchange was immensely constructive for ISLP and its partner organizations. It was a great opportunity to network with other organizations working on similar issues in Latin America, to learn from each other’s experiences on legal empowerment, and to discuss how organizations are addressing common challenges related to large-scale developments in Latin America. It was highly gratifying seeing the level of sophistication among the different participants in the event and their willingness to share strategies and knowledge with their peers in the region, in order to promote legal empowerment.” (Diana McGinley, [ISLP](#), USA)

“The learning exchange helped us understand the relevance and the importance of the knowledge of the law and the appropriation of mechanisms to demand it. The meeting helped me to bring to my organization more elements to position the approach of legal empowerment when we develop our work in settlements -- territories where the violation of rights in cities is concentrated. At a personal level, it was a very motivating space to share with other people of the region who are committed to access to justice for all.” (Laura Lacayo, [Techo](#), Regional organization)