Building Capacity for Citizen Monitoring in Pará
Lessons from Three Case Studies

Authors
Andres Martano, Emilie Reiser, Gisele Craveiro
With contributions from Paulo de Rezende and Marisa Villi

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Introduction

Overview of Promise Tracker

Promise Tracker is a citizen-monitoring platform designed to help communities track issues they care about and use that information to advocate for change with local government, institutions, or the press. More than a data collection platform, Promise Tracker is a civic process designed to gather groups of citizens to discuss critical issues in their communities, collect actionable information to better understand those issues, and engage in dialogue with local actors in order to develop solutions.

The project started in 2014 and has been developed by the MIT Center for Civic Media in partnership with civil society organizations in Brazil. Through a series of collaborative design workshops, a first version of the platform was created and released in spring 2015. As part of Phase I of the project, the Center for Civic Media worked with members of the Brazilian Network for Just and Sustainable Cities in nine cities across Brazil to pilot and test the tool for monitoring issues ranging from handicap accessibility of bus stops, to quality of free WiFi hotspots and maintenance of public parks.

Promise Tracker Process


Methodology

In spring 2016, the Center for Civic Media partnered with Humanitas360 Institute and the University of São Paulo's Colaboratory for Development and Participation (Colab-USP) to launch Phase II of the project, focused on better understanding the ongoing use of Promise Tracker in the field.

Over the course of 12 months, project partners documented the use of Promise Tracker in citizen monitoring initiatives in three cities in the state of Pará, Brazil, where the tool was most actively being used. Case studies were developed based on three visits to Pará, in-person meetings, interviews and focus groups, communication through WhatsApp groups, and review of the data collected during monitoring campaigns.

Background

The initiatives studied in Phase II were implemented in Santarém, Belém, and Ponta de Pedras to monitor the quality of lunches served in public schools. Across the three cities, the Social Observatory of Belém (OSB) played a key role in introducing participants to the Promise Tracker platform and offering guidance on the structure of the campaign and indicators to track. OSB is a civil society organization in Belém dedicated to fostering greater civic engagement in the oversight of public policy. The Observatory adopted the tool after the Phase I pilot and has been central to its ongoing use in Pará.
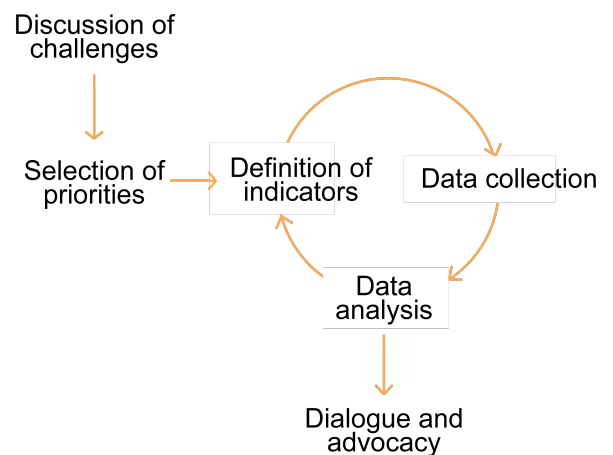
School Lunches in Brazil

The National School Nutrition Program (PNAE) is Brazil's longest-standing public policy related to food and guarantees the right to nutritious lunches for all students enrolled in public elementary, middle and high schools. PNAE is considered to be one of the largest and most comprehensive school nutrition programs in the world, reaching over 42 million students with a budget of $1.1 billion USD in 2014, according to the Brazilian government [1].

As part of PNAE, the federal government provides municipalities with a stipend per student (10 cents as of 2015), which is to be supplemented if necessary by the state. Management of funds and procurement of lunches is by default handled by the state, but if municipalities have the capacity to take on these responsibilities, they can handle this process directly. The program goes beyond minimal requirements, specifying that a nutritionist must be involved in developing menus for school lunches to ensure balanced and appropriate choices for students. PNAE also stipulates that 70% of government funds must be spent on items from local producers in line with regional food traditions and at least 30% of the budget should go to purchases from family farms.

The implementation of PNAE is complex and involves a multitude of actors at the federal, state, municipal and school level. Challenges arise at several phases and levels of this process, many of which are well known by government oversight agencies and were raised in discussion with interviewees throughout the Phase II case studies.

Case Studies

Across the three case studies, school lunch was monitored in a total of 28 schools with over 26,000 enrolled students. Each initiative involved a distinct set of actors and a different approach to organization. The structure of each initiative is detailed below.

Key actors are categorized in three broad roles. **Campaign organizers** appear in orange and were responsible for activities including survey design, training of data collectors and outreach to participants. **Data collectors** appear in turquoise and were responsible for gathering and submitting data. **Advocates**, who appear in pink, played a key role in using data gathered to engage in dialogue or efforts to address issues identified in the campaigns.

Santarém
In Santarém, the implementation of the monitoring campaign

Key Actors in Santarém
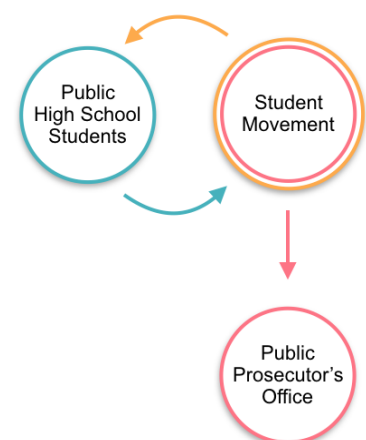
- Campaign organizer
- Data collector
- Advocate

[1]Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação, http://www.fnde.go

was led by the Student Movement Pact for Education in Pará. Founded in 2015 with support from Project SOL, the Movement joins students from 14 schools across the city to channel key concerns on campus to the Public Prosecutor's Office.

During initial advocacy efforts around school lunches, prosecutors felt there was not sufficient data to pursue concrete action with schools or municipal actors. When prosecutors made visits to schools, they observed that adequate lunch was being served but it wasn't possible to conduct daily visits. Data gathered through the campaign was intended to fill this information gap.

With support from the Social Observatory of Belém, an initial survey was developed to collect basic information on what was served each day during lunch. Using this survey, the Student Movement organized trainings and dissemination events across the city in order to raise awareness about the challenges with school lunches and encourage students to participate in monitoring. Data collection launched in June 2016 and continued throughout the year.

Ponta de Pedras

Following the launch of the campaign in Santarém, a member of the Social Observatory of Belém shared the model with the Public Prosecutor's Office in Belém and prosecutors decided to replicate the school lunch monitoring initiative on the island of Marajó, starting in August, 2016.

According to the Public Prosecutor's Office, negotiations with the Ponta de Pedras City Hall had been underway since 2015 to improve school lunches throughout the city but the results observed by representatives were deemed unsatisfactory.

Involving students directly in monitoring efforts was seen as a way to gather daily information on lunches without the prosecutor having to make in person visits to schools, which in a municipality as large and distant as Ponta de Pedras is a significant task. Daily monitoring was also intended to reduce the chances of school lunches only being provided on the days the prosecutor was known to be visiting.

In August 2016, the Public Prosecutor's Office organized a workshop for approximately 20 students from three schools in order to train them on PNAE and show them how to use the Promise Tracker app for documenting. A committee was created to coordinate the campaign including students, teachers, school coordinators and representatives of the Public Prosecutor's Office. A WhatsApp group was also created as the primary channel of communication between students and prosecutors throughout the campaign. Data collection began in August 2016 and remained active for roughly one month.

Key Actors in Ponta de Pedras

- Campaign organizer
- Data collector
- Advocate
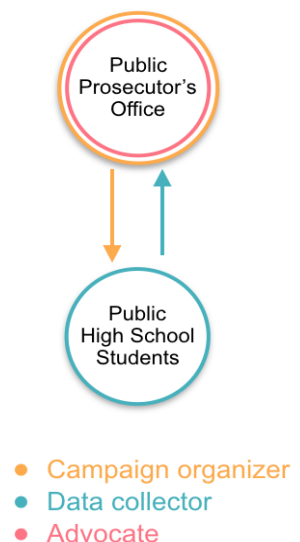
Belém

In the capital city of Belém, a series of monitoring initiatives were implemented through the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) in 2016-2017 as part of a collaboration between the university, the Social Observatory of Belém, and the Ministry of Transparency, Supervision and the Comptroller General (CGU).

Led by a professor of public accounting at UFPA, the projects were designed to give university and high school students real world experience designing oversight mechanisms that connect public spending with the quality of services delivered to citizens. Drawing on the Social Observatory's expertise in social organizing and the Ministry's understanding of oversight mechanisms, the initiative also served as an experiment in developing a new model for citizen feedback for CGU's Ombudsman program.

The largest monitoring initiative was launched in January 2017 to evaluate lunch served in public middle and high schools throughout the city. To launch the campaign, 100 UFPA students visited 15 public schools to train students on PNAE legislation and introduce them to the Promise Tracker app. Separate monitoring campaigns were run in each school for two weeks and the results were aggregated and compiled into an internal report to the Ministry on the quality of lunches.

Key Actors in Belém

● Campaign organizer
● Data collector
● Advocate
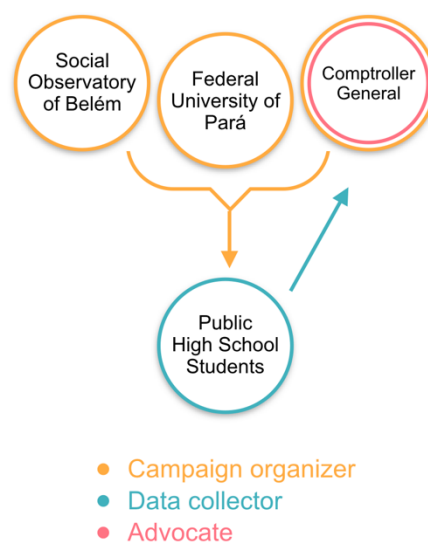
Key Findings

Summarized below are observations from a wide range of actors involved in the implementation of these initiatives including partner organizations, student participants, teachers, school directors, lunch preparation staff, and representatives of the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Transparency, Supervision and the Comptroller General, the State Secretary of Education, and the School Council.

School Lunch Outcomes

Participants in several schools reported an improvement in the quality of food preparation and storage of ingredients as a result of monitoring campaigns. While little change was perceived in schools with better quality lunches, one school in Santarém, where no food was being served, reported that the Public Prosecutor's Office had intervened as a result of the campaign and managed to reinstate lunches. In the case of Ponta de Pedras, it appears the mere threat of monitoring resulted in the return of lunches, though only for a short period.

Interviewees shared that school leadership in some cases had become more attentive to deliveries – refusing shipments when the contents were too close to the expiration date – and taken initiative to improve the hygiene and organization of stock rooms. Students also noted

less resignation with regard to missing or poor quality lunches and felt that, as a result of the initiative, the school community was more willing to advocate for improvements.

Participant Outcomes
Greater Awareness of School Lunch as a Right
Students in all scenarios reported a better understanding of the PNAE legislation and the rights they had related to school nutrition. Many felt this awareness of lunch as a right contributed to less complacency and more willingness to mobilize around the issue.

Increased Curiosity and Engagement on Behalf of Students
Some teachers and administrators noted that students involved in the campaigns demonstrated a desire to expand monitoring to explore additional challenges related to school lunches or other issues within the school community. One teacher reported that the campaign had spurred other student-led efforts to improve conditions on school grounds including self-organized clean up and maintenance activities.

Citizen Monitoring as a Learning Tool
Experiences at UFPA in particular offered new perspectives on the value of Promise Tracker as a pedagogical tool to engage critically and creatively with new models for government oversight. For many students, the monitoring projects were the first time they had engaged in applied coursework outside of the classroom and they expressed excitement at being able to connect theoretical learning with real-world interactions with citizens. For the Ministry, the tool offered an accessible way to test at scale a concept that had been of interest previously but never implemented.

Findings on Technology and Mobilization
Technology as a Means to Facilitate Speed, Scale, and Visibility
Both campaign organizers and participants felt that as a technology platform, Promise Tracker allowed them to achieve greater scale, save time, and attract new participants and more media coverage. Students who had previously used Facebook to document the school lunch situation felt that Promise Tracker provided greater legitimacy and credibility to the information gathered. Actors in all roles noted the power of images in mobilizing the public around this issue and achieving a response.

Use of Technology Platforms in Concert
In all cases it was noted that other technology tools or social media platforms played a significant role in the implementation of Promise Tracker campaigns. Groups reported using WhatsApp as their primary channel for internal communication and coordination and Facebook as one of the main ways they sought visibility for campaigns with the wider public.

Importance of an Ongoing Campaign Organizer
Organizers noted that participation and engagement on behalf of data collectors was significantly higher when there was active management and coordination of the campaign through WhatsApp groups or the organization of public events. The least engagement was noted in the Ponta de Pedras case in which a coordination group was established but no active

outreach was maintained following the launch of the campaign.

Findings on Networked Organization
Roles and Division of Work
Observation of these three cases has led to a reassessment of the imagined roles and users involved in the implementation of a Promise Tracker campaign. In the initial conception of the platform, it was imagined that a group of citizens or existing civil society organization would come together to lead all steps of the process including the selection of topic, development of survey form, recruitment of data collectors, analysis of results, and direct advocacy with local government, the press, or the wider community.

In the Pará cases, a more nuanced division of roles was identified, often played by different individuals. Reflection on these roles has informed the way implementing partners organize their work has become the basis of best practices they share with others.

Power of Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for Monitoring
In Santarém and Belém, campaign organizers developed approaches to monitoring that involved active collaboration between civil society, government oversight agencies, and in the case of Belém, the academic community. Participants felt these partnerships were a powerful way to leverage skills, knowledge and networks in order to tackle complex shared challenges.

Value of Collaboration with Government Oversight Agencies
In all three cases, the Public Prosecutor's Office or the Comptroller General played a key role as a recipient of information and advocate. Though government oversight agencies were not imagined as an implementation partner in the initial phase of the project, it has proved a mutually beneficial relationship for those involved. Both oversight agencies recognized the need for previously unavailable citizen-level data in order to effectively carry out their work, and civil society groups felt these actors allowed them to channel demands into concrete action. This response was particularly important to organizers as they believe it sustained interest and engagement in monitoring.

Development and Consolidation of Partnerships
The development and implementation of campaigns appeared to provide an opportunity in all cases to build new partnerships or strengthen existing relationships. On the school level, interviewees reported feeling closer to other students, school lunch staff, teachers, principals, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the local executive branch as a result of campaigns. On the organizational level, initiatives provided an opportunity for actors who were previously acquainted to develop concrete projects together for the first time.

Challenges
Struggle to Keep Participants Engaged
Interviewees in all cases acknowledged the challenge of keeping participants engaged in collecting data over an extended period of time. While the pilot campaigns during Phase I of the project were designed as short-term collection windows to create a data "snapshot" of an issue, the school lunch initiatives were modeled on daily collection over a longer timeframe. In

some cases, interruptions in data collection were attributed to school exam periods, strikes, or students attending only morning sessions.

Organizers noted that ongoing public events and trainings were key to maintaining interest and momentum for campaigns. Interviewees also perceived that it was critical for data collectors to see some sort of response or action as a result of their efforts in order to stay involved.

Potential Consequences of Monitoring
Some participants noted hesitation to engage in monitoring due to concerns about negatively impacting relationships within the school or the city. Interviewees in the smallest city noted that City Hall was a primary employer in the area and there was concern of possible repercussions if they were seen as criticizing local government. In other schools, students felt that monitoring may cast school lunch staff in a negative light and didn't want to jeopardize relationships.

Limitations of Technical Infrastructure
Technical challenges presented obstacles in all three scenarios. Though the majority of participants had smartphones, the devices often had older versions of Android not compatible with the mobile app or lacked sufficient memory to install new applications. In some cases, poor mobile internet service or unreliable WiFi was cited as an obstacle to monitoring and may have contributed to loss of data. Loss and theft of cellphones was also noted as a significant challenge in the midst of growing concerns about safety on school campuses in Belém and Santarém.

Final considerations

The case studies conducted in this phase are a small sample and were documented for a relatively short period of time, ranging from two to six months. While far from conclusive, the initial findings from this process highlight the potential of citizen monitoring initiatives with Promise Tracker to contribute to increased dialogue, greater sense of self-efficacy, closer collaborations and greater accountability on behalf of actors involved.

This process has generated a wide range of learnings around campaign organization and implementation that have been adopted by project partners and will actively influence the development of new campaigns moving forward. It is the hope of project collaborators that these reflections can serve as a reference point for others in Brazil and beyond seeking to pursue similar models of citizen monitoring.