

Ágora, A Catalyst for Building Inclusive Development

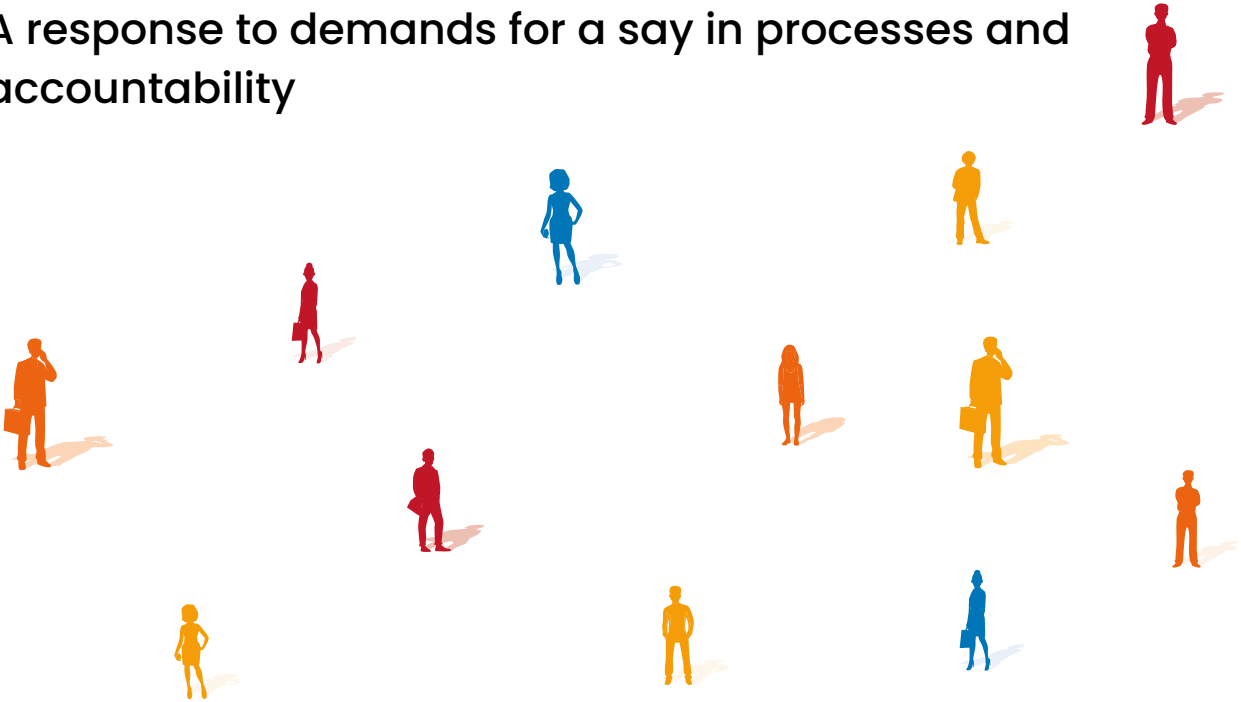


"The Ágora methodology developed by UNDP has helped narrow the gap between direct and representative democracy; and between people and decision-makers" ... Luis Felipe López Calva, UNDP Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean



Context:

A response to demands for a say in processes and accountability



Throughout the world, demands have multiplied for participation and a say in decision-making and policy-making processes that affect and concern citizens. It is no longer sufficient for representative groups to sit down in well-defined physical spaces to discuss and draw up public policy agreements on behalf of the majority.

Citizens in all their racial, ethnic, age and geographical variety **demand to participate**. They demand accountability from the state and the ability to monitor implementation and results.

The devastating effects of the COVID-19 health crisis on health, education, development and many other matters have intensified these demands for a say in building new democratic and sustainable societies, and have opened up opportunities for the development of digital innovations that can facilitate participation and interaction.

The Ágora methodology, created by the UNDP Panama Office, **provides a response to the need for inclusive participation for the co-creation of public policies** using technology. It proposes citizen participation in decision-making processes, identifying and discussing the causes of inequalities, drawing up agreements for the development of regional plans and drafting public policy guidelines.

Contributions, discussions and agreements begin in the smallest geographic areas (e.g., provinces, departments, municipalities and communities) and go up to the complex national level.

Ágora is applicable and adaptable to all contexts, issues and geographic levels of decision-making.

Strategic areas of the UNDP mission

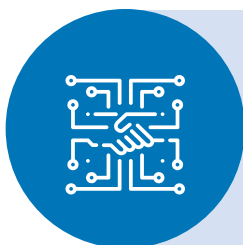
Cross-cutting citizen participation is key to achieving all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda, because the active involvement of citizens is required to design policies, programs and initiatives in areas that include education, health, the environment, the economy and inclusion, not to mention monitoring and accountability.



UNDP is **committed to strengthening democratic institutions and processes** for an inclusive, open public sphere with greater participation. This implies working for representative democracy until it becomes direct democracy.



The Ágora methodology proposes that citizens can freely **formulate**, in an organized way, **proposals for development and institutional policies in the public sphere**, thus ensuring maximum transparency.



The development of digital innovations is another strategic area. The Ágora methodology involves creating digital platforms so that citizens have greater access to participate. The more people have access to technology, the more people can be included in decision-making processes.



Technological tools can ensure that all input, information, decisions and actions are public, which promotes **transparency**.

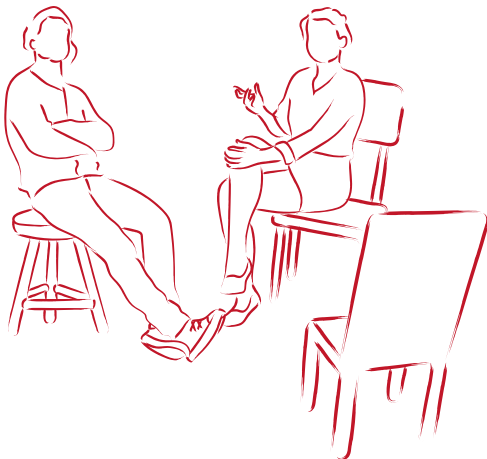
One methodology, five principles

Ágora is based on five key principles of the work done by UNDP

1

EMPOWERING PEOPLE AND ONGOING PARTICIPATION

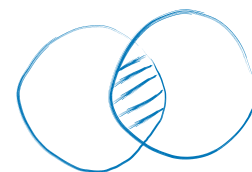
The Ágora methodology opens up spaces for dialogue so that individuals and civil society can participate in decision-making processes, either individually or as an organization.



2

TRANSPARENCY

The Ágora methodology guarantees that processes are open and transparent. Everything that happens during the different process stages is public and accessible on digital platforms, which ensures transparency and accountability.



3

REGIONAL APPROACH



This principle provides the basis for “building from the bottom up,” one of the premises of the methodology. It implies that citizen input is focused on identifying gaps in development and solutions that reflect the living situations of regional environments.



“UNDP support of counterparts and partners from the methodological design stage to the conclusion of the process is fundamental to ensure: impartiality, transparency, proper handling of information, rigour in data analysis and efficiency in process follow-up and monitoring.”



USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Developing online citizen participation platforms that are accessible via a computer or mobile phone is vital to facilitate and expand inclusive participation at the input, decision-making and monitoring stages.



INCLUSIVENESS



The inclusion of vulnerable groups such as minorities and people with disabilities is taken into account. It is therefore necessary to develop communication tools (such as videos in regional languages and sign language) and to enable people to make proposals in audio and video.

Illustrations: Noun Project/Waitala Es

Ágora and the Bicentennial Pact: Closing the Gaps

(Pacto del bicentenario: Cerrando brechas)

The methodology was successfully tested in the process of the “Bicentennial Pact: Closing Gaps” (PBCB) convened by the Government of Panama from November 2020 to November 2021 as an innovative participatory process aimed at building a new social pact for the design of public development policy guidelines.

The process adopted the three pillars of Ágora:



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

In the stages for presenting proposals and making decisions.



REGIONAL APPROACH

When preparing and discussing public policies.



THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

To broaden participation.

The three stages of the Bicentennial Pact	
PANAMÁ PROPONE (PANAMA PROPOSES)	A proactive, innovative stage , in which citizens freely expressed ideas, concerns, aspirations and proposals through the digital platform, also known as Ágora.
CLASSIFICATION DES PROPOSITIONS	Stage of classifying citizen proposals using artificial intelligence tools.
PANAMÁ DECIDE (LE PANAMA DÉCIDE)	Stage of formulating agreements , known as “Panama Decides,” characterized by: a) committee discussions of previously classified proposals, b) the formulation of regional and national agreements and the development of public policy guidelines, c) the drafting of the Bicentennial Pact: Closing Gaps.

11 Focus Areas:



Agri-food



Water



Environment



Health



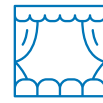
Economics



Education



State and Justice



Culture



Sports



Inclusiveness



Infrastructure

Based on these focus areas, **55 committees** were created, i.e., 11 for each of the country's four regions and 11 national committees (one for each thematic area).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the methodology designed for the Bicentennial Pact used Microsoft Teams as a tool to conduct the meetings of the regional and national thematic committees.

The committee members were selected through a stakeholder mapping exercise involving all sectors. All committees were supported by a team made up of facilitators, rapporteurs and coordinators trained in the Ágora methodology and moderating dialogues in virtual environments.

In addition, the PBCB also featured:

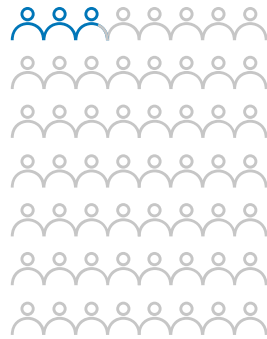
- ★ **A GOVERNANCE BODY CALLED THE ADVISORY COUNCIL**, made up of 25 citizens representing different sectors of Panamanian society and considered guarantees of the legitimacy, trustworthiness and transparency of the process.
- ★ **A SCIENTIFIC-TECHNICAL COMMITTEE** in charge of the classification, categorization and social, economic and cultural contextualization of proposals.

Results of the Bicentennial Pact:

Citizen participation stage, Panamá Propone:

(November 2020-February 2021) A total of 186,182 contributions were received in the 11 thematic areas proposed, which surpassed all expectations and traditional dialogue schemes.

- ★ **212,573** people registered on the platform and participated, representing 5% of the country's adult population and 10% of the voters in the 2019 general election.
- ★ **175,922** proposals moved on to the discussion stage after being classified.
- ★ **97%** of the proposals and statements of needs came from individual citizens.
- ★ **76%** of contributions were made by mobile phone.



■ People registered on the platform
 ■ Country's adult population



82.7% Proposals that went on to the discussion stage
17.3% "filtered" proposals



The PBCB was an unprecedented process in Panama in that it was the most democratic dialogue process in the country's history and gave citizens the ability to define the future.



Contributions in the 11 thematic areas showed significant gaps for citizens in the regions regarding infrastructure for roads, the community, health, education and electricity, as well as access to drinking water, the Internet and the public authorities for security and institutional matters.

They also highlighted the need to plan and coordinate development actions in the country.

These gaps are related to long-term transformational interventions.

Ágora made it possible to access data, including: participation by population segment, geographic area, sex and age, thus revealing results such as the high participation of young people (27.8%) and the parity between contributions from men (51.6%) and women (48.3%), as well as the de-

27,8% Of the participants were young people



velopment issues that concerned the members of each gender.

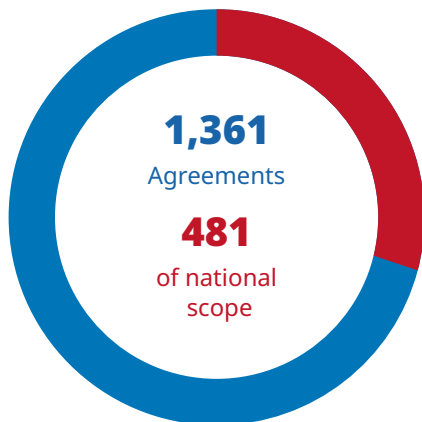
The bottom-up approach made it possible to reach agreements, not only to address the reality of each region and community, but also to agree on proposals that involved intervention at the national level, thereby enabling the regions to contribute to the country's overall vision.

**Deliberation stage,
Panamá Decide:**

It included the creation of regional and national thematic committees. The contributions of citizens in discussions at different committee meetings were citizens' only input in the dialogue between local and regional stakeholders for drawing up agreements.

★ **The 44 regional committees** reached 1,361 agreements, of which 481 were national in scope..

★ **The 11 national committees** reached 181 agreements on policy guidelines.



New facets of Ágora implementation:

The Ágora methodology and its digital tool will be adapted and applied to new citizen participation processes.

Ágora Monitoring of the Bicentennial Pact Agreements:

Focused on following up and monitoring the regional and national agreements reached in the Bicentennial Pact.



Ágora Local Governments:

The agreement signed between UNDP and the Association of Municipalities of Panama provided for the development and implementation of the Ágora methodology and the development of an Ágora digital platform aimed at involving citizens in different aspects of municipal and community management, starting with pilot local governments.

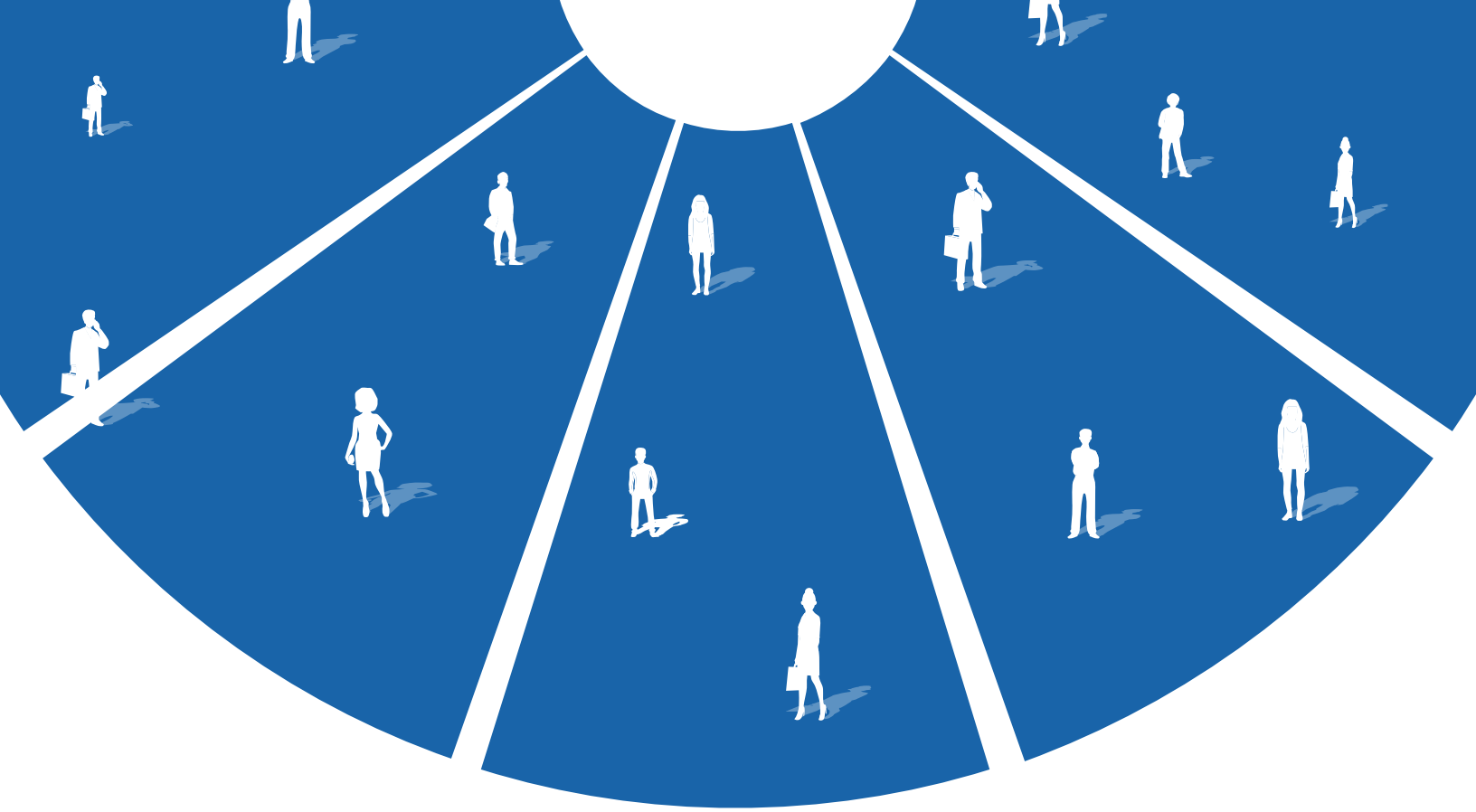


Ágora Youth:

Platform for the validation of the Public Youth Policy 2022-2027, which aims to guarantee the conditions for human development of young people, the full recognition of their rights and their participation in the construction of a more equitable, supportive, democratic and fair country.







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for Building Inclusive
Development**

