



COLABORA.Lat

Towards a New Model of
Governance after Covid-19

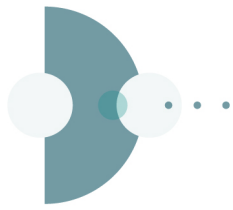
POLICY BRIEF # 5

THE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF SAN MARTÍN, TRES DE FEBRERO, AVELLANEDA, AND QUILMES

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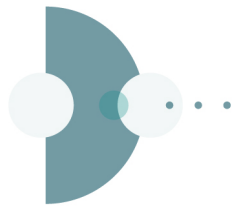
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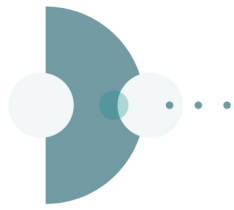
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The Covid-19 pandemic has brought us into uncharted territory. It represents a crisis with health, economic, social, and also political dimensions. Besides, it has exacerbated the inequalities and exclusion suffered by sectors living under conditions of vulnerability. It represents a crisis that has given rise to additional concerns, due to the likely deepening of political discontent and the consolidation of authoritarian practices through the expansion of the Executive Branch's powers and the restrictions of civil rights in a post-Covid-19 scenario.

This reality has shown us that the pandemic poses a challenge to which we cannot respond unilaterally, from the one-sided perspective of a single government or specific community. This is a global challenge with profound impacts on several dimensions of society, as well as differential impacts on the different women and sectors living under more vulnerable conditions. Therefore, it is a challenge that requires a multidimensional solution with an intersectional approach – a solution that is not yet available to us.

This is why we need political practices that promote collective intelligence-oriented collaboration as a way of finding solutions to public challenges, such as the one posed by the pandemic. The premise behind collective intelligence is, precisely, that no one knows everything, but everyone knows something. Translating this fact to the way in which decisions are made in a society represents a significant challenge, and requires collaborative mechanisms involving a variety of actors. It specifically requires collaborative governance.

For this reason, the *Colabora.Lat: Towards a New Model of Governance after Covid-19* project aims at studying and making recommendations on the governance models that have the greatest potential to respond to convoluted crises such as the



Covid-19 pandemic. By collecting quantitative and qualitative data in several Latin American countries, we seek to generate diagnostic and prospective information about the impact of collaboration on the feasibility, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the responses developed to address the numerous problems that have emerged during the pandemic, especially in vulnerable communities.

The project is grounded in the conviction that defining a framework of good practices in governance, inclusion and gender parity will lay the foundations for a new long-term democratic agreement in Latin America.

Antonella Perini, Jennifer Cyr, and Matías Bianchi

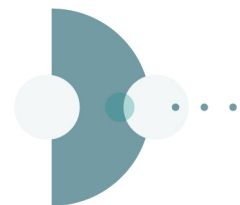
Colabora.Lat is driven by an Implementation Council comprising universities and think tanks with experience in research and territorial anchoring in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico.

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THE RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE MUNICIPALITIES OF SAN MARTÍN, TRES DE FEBRERO, AVELLANEDA, AND QUILMES¹

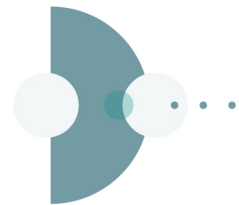
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Introduction

The objective of this work is to analyze the main governance challenges that emerged in for municipalities of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. These municipalities are San Martín, Tres de Febrero, Avellaneda, and Quilmes. The work highlights the collaborative governance efforts that allowed for a more comprehensive and effective treatment of the problems. Among them, there stand out the measures to avoid the spread of the infections, the systematic detection of positive cases, providing food relief to vulnerable populations, and the increase of

¹ The research team was comprised of Augusto Abdulhadi, Mariana Iorio, Iván Jacobsohn, Luis Karamaneff, Victoria Ortiz de Rozas, and Penélope Vaca Ávila.



hospital capacity. The four municipalities exhibited instances of multilevel, horizontal, and public-private collaborative governance.

The Covid-19 crisis was a hard blow to the municipalities of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, which concentrates most of the urban poverty in Argentina. This posed significant challenges for local governments. In many cases, they had to devise, together with the national and provincial governments, other municipal governments, and civil society actors, collaborative strategies aimed at keeping the spread of the virus in check, testing for cases, containing risk populations, and ensuring food security for workers in the informal sector, who saw a dramatic decline in income due to the isolation measures. However, the crisis also brought along opportunities for collaborative governance between public actors at different levels of government, and between public and private actors.

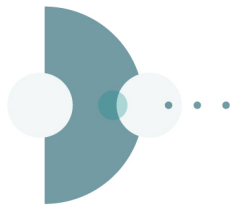
Collaborative governance in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area

Avellaneda

- Case detection through the “Detectar” device.
- Isolation, lockdown and containment of the neighborhood Barrio Azul.
- Provision of basic protective equipment.
- Creation of two isolation facilities for people with mild cases.
- Provision of primary care in neighborhoods.

Collaborative governance: main challenges and measures adopted

The most important instance of collaborative governance in Avellaneda occurred ensuing the emergence of Covid-19 cases in Barrio Azul, a poor settlement which

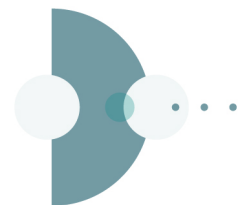


spans over both Avellaneda and Quilmes (the part located at the municipality of Quilmes is called Barrio Itatí). In May 2020, the cases in Barrio Azul reached the 344 figure, with a rapid daily growth in the number of cases due to the population's inability to isolate. While Barrio Azul – in Avellaneda – enjoys a greater degree of urbanization, Barrio Itatí – in Quilmes – is a neighborhood of alleys and much more penurious life conditions, which implied a huge risk that the virus spread would escalate quickly. In the face of this, the authorities of the Avellaneda and Quilmes municipalities decided to shut down Barrio Azul and impose a two-week lockdown to halt the spread of the virus. The decision paid off and the virus was kept in check in that area. This was an example of horizontal collaborative governance between two neighboring municipalities.

Another example of collaborative governance – of the multilevel kind, in this case – is the national case detection device “Detectar,” which was implemented with the help of the province of Buenos Aires and in coordination with the municipality of Quilmes for the Barrio Azul and Barrio Itatí situation. The municipality had to put together teams and train the health task forces that would be in charge of the swabbing. An epidemiological team was organized to identify the transmission hotspots.

Quilmes

- Expansion of the healthcare structure.
- Creation of an isolation facility at the Universidad de Quilmes.
- Testing scheme.
- Containment of Barrio Azul and Barrio Itatí (together with the municipality of Avellaneda).
- Establishment of the “Economic Reactivation Committee.”
- Handing out of the “Alimentar” cards.
- “Aid Stands” for handing out food.



Collaborative governance: main challenges and measures adopted

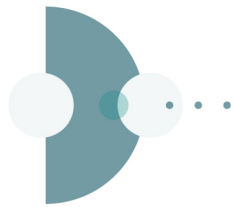
In the municipality of Quilmes, the main challenge posed by the arrival of the pandemic in early 2020 was to expand the existing hospital infrastructure, scale up the distribution of food among those whose food security was threatened due to the isolation measures, and keep in check the infections coming from Barrio Azul in Avellaneda. The national government built modular hospitals, and the municipality was able to increase its capacity as a result of the policy, and also thanks to the strengthening of the healthcare structure by the municipal government.

The detection of Covid-19 cases fell mainly to the municipal authorities. The municipality conducted 120 detection procedures which consisted in actively identifying Covid-19 cases by visiting house after house. The procedure sought to prioritize the neighborhoods most prone to the spread of the virus, after a previous mapping task.

A major challenge in the context of the pandemic was to ensure that families in vulnerable sectors, especially those dependent upon informal jobs, who could not work due to the Mandatory, Preventive, Social Isolation, had proper food security. The municipality handed out food bags or rations at pre-defined spots, and set up 133 “Aid Stands” that prepared and distributed food. The army’s kitchens contributed to the cause.

The main collaborative governance initiative in Quilmes was the coordination of efforts with the municipality of Avellaneda to prevent infections in Barrio Azul (Avellaneda) from spreading to Barrio Itatí in Quilmes. Horizontal collaborative governance was also evidenced through more frequent meetings between officers from different municipalities belonging to the same health region.

An example of multilevel collaborative governance was the distribution of the “Alimentar” cards, which constitute a comprehensive food supplementary policy for

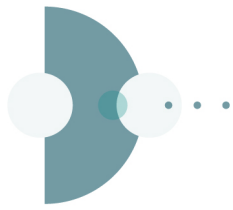


vulnerable populations. The policy's implementation is the responsibility of the National Ministry of Social Development, but the municipality contributed with the logistical aspects of the cards' distribution.

Then, the distribution of food at the "Aid Stands" also included the handing out of food bags at state schools in Avellaneda. These tasks involved concerted work between the municipal authorities, school principals, and the schools' cooperatives. This provides an example of public-private collaborative governance, considering that school cooperatives are non-state, civil society actors.

San Martín

- Implementation of the case detection device "Detectar."
- "Care Centers."
- Increasing of the healthcare capacity through concerted work with private establishments.
- "Neighbors Watch over the Neighborhood" national program.
- Handing out of food parcels.
- Tax exemptions.
- Health emergency special levy.
- "Conectar de nuevo" (municipal school tutoring program).
- Distance education.
- Participation of provincial and federal law enforcement authorities to prevent crime and control compliance with the Mandatory, Preventive, Social Isolation measures.



Collaborative governance: main challenges and measures adopted

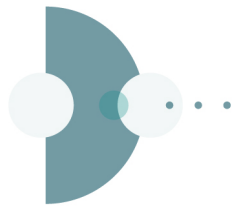
In San Martín, the issue of food was a central problem. The greatest challenge was to deliver on food distribution to families that had to be in isolation, and to provide the most underprivileged populations with food aid. Through public-private collaborative governance actions, and concerted work with the civil society, the municipality was able to enhance its capacity for the distribution of food parcels.

San Martín was one of the hardest-hit municipalities, the number of cases reaching a steep high. The response was to implement the federal detection plan “Detectar” working together with the provincial and national governments. In addition, “Care Centers” were set up to provide lodging both for people awaiting their swab test results and for those who had already tested positive for Covid-19 but who could not isolate themselves at home.

In the field of health, there were numerous instances of collaborative governance of different kinds: public-private (between public and private institutions), horizontal (between municipalities), and vertical (between municipalities and the national government). The healthcare capacity was increased through coordinated work between the municipality and private hospitals and clinics, in addition to maintaining a close contact with the municipality of Tres de Febrero, since it is quite common that neighbors from either area attend healthcare facilities at the neighboring community.

Regarding the administration of education policies, the digital divide had a big impact on the localities farthest from San Martín’s downtown area. To try to alleviate this problem, horizontal collaborative governance initiatives were deployed together with the municipality of Hurlingham.

This multilevel coordination was also seen in the implementation of preventive and coercive measures. The coordinated work carried out by the provincial and federal law enforcement officers to ensure compliance with the social isolation measures – by



controlling vehicle traffic and doing street rounds – had positive results, especially in “barrios populares” (informal settlements), where the living conditions made it more difficult to observe the isolation measures.

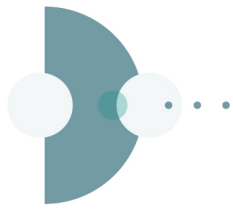
Tres de Febrero

- Emergency modular hospital.
- Makeshift hospital.
- Mobile Testing Unit.
- Prevention squad.
- Emergency Operations Committees in “Popular” Neighborhoods.
- Strengthening of the “Women Services Center.”
- Control and monitoring of recent travelers (coordinated with the Immigration Office).
- Temporary redistribution of the Safety and Hygiene Inspection Tax rate.

Collaborative governance: main challenges and measures adopted

In the municipality of Tres de Febrero, the highest job instability resulting from the isolation measures strongly impacted on the need for food assistance. In light of this, the companies in the area became important actors in the development of public-private governance initiatives, collaborating both with the distribution of food and with the donation of products for cleaning, disinfection and logistics, as well as with direct assistance to the areas’ leaders.

The limited or lack of access to an Internet connection represented another challenge. In the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, state school students have little access to Internet and to devices enabling their participation in virtual lessons. During the



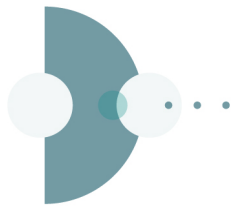
interviews held, this stood out as a dimension of public policy that requires an effective multilevel solution preventing the increase of existing inequalities in the access to education.

The rise of violence, both gender-based and against children, was yet another challenge. In the face of rising cases, authorities at the Secretariat for Human Development redesigned the strategies implemented by the “Women Services Center,” and worked in the field with community leaders.

Thus, there emerged different kinds of collaborative governance in the municipality of Tres de Febrero. As for public-private governance, the concerted work between areas’ leaders and various organizations was crucial to reaching the most vulnerable populations. In this respect, there mainly stood out the importance of concerted work between the municipal government and social organizations when it comes to implementing efforts to mitigate the effects of Covid-19.

Opportunities for the future after the pandemic

The case studies bring into focus the strengthening of collaborative bonds and the active search for modes of governance that made it possible to address an unprecedented health, economic and social situation. The pandemic forced the different levels of government in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area to work together, as evidenced by the implementation of the “Detectar” device along the four municipalities or by the distribution of food coordinated through national government programs (such as the “Alimentar” card), municipal programs, and a distribution network that included schools, social and community leaders, and companies who made donations. At the same time, the procedures conducted in Barrio Azul and Barrio



Itatí provided one of the finest examples of the importance of horizontal collaborative governance.

The virtual work and the introduction of videoconferencing strengthened multilevel collaborative governance through more frequent meetings between officers at different levels of governments, since the need to travel to meetings became redundant. They were also used for working in the field, for example, for holding video calls with women suffering from domestic violence or online meetings with neighbors.

An area where it was not possible to fully exploit the possibilities of the virtual world is education. In the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area, state school students have little access to Internet and to devices enabling their participation in virtual lessons. In many cases, this deficiency led to schools keeping in contact with students via WhatsApp or otherwise to fully lose contact with students belonging to more vulnerable populations. This stands out as a dimension of public policy that requires an effective multilevel solution preventing the increase of existing inequalities in the access to education.

