

Promoting local commissions for political incidence from municipalities

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Abstract. The project “Promoting Local Commissions for Political Incidence from Municipalities” has been driven by the Political Incidence Program at Costarrican Gerontological Association (Asociación Gerontológica Costarricense: AGECO) since 2016. The main objective focuses on promoting the creation of Local Incidence Commissions. These commissions are organized by municipalities, and are committed with the efforts made locally in accordance to older adults’ active ageing and rights. Different social sectors, holding common aims within the local sphere, are usually involved in these commissions. Some of the participants are: the municipalities (which assume the coordination tasks), public institutions, civil organizations, as well as older adults who participate as leaders. There are currently 9 of these commissions in cantons such as Nicoya, Hojancha, Garabito, Poás, Naranjo, Heredia, San Pablo, Acosta, and Alajuelita. People who participate receive training on gerontological topics, counseling, and support from AGECO. Provided with this orientation they are able to perform tasks such as preparing the “Report on Older Adults’ Realities in the Canton.” This report is of utmost importance as it would be presented to the local government in order to present the current situations faced by this age group. The objective of this report is to help with political incidence to achieve actions, projects and other policies that benefit them as a social group. Among the main outcomes, it has been possible to get support from the local governments to improve sidewalks, parks, community halls, and other accessibility related spaces. Also, socio-educational actions have been implemented for and with older adults, and public policies as well as budget plans have been created and approved in order to help this population group. This paper examines the project and refers to its objectives, methodological strategy, results, discussion and conclusions.

Keywords: Municipality, local commissions for political incidence, older adults, active ageing, political incidence.

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Introduction

The work on Political Incidence in AGECO is focused on intersectional and generational articulation in order to create local commissions for political incidence. These commissions are known for being a group of people from institutions, organizations and older adults themselves who work in their town to bring about changes that contribute with active ageing and rights defense for the ageing members living their local community.

With this in mind, the Project “Promoting Local Commissions for Political Incidence from Municipalities” started in 2016 from the Political Incidence Program, and its purpose is to encourage municipalities to create a Local Commission. This Commission has the task of preparing the “Report on Older Adults’ Realities in the Canton” in order to trigger political actions that contribute to favor active ageing and older adults’ rights.

This paper examines the project and refers to its objectives, methodological strategy, results, discussion and conclusions.

Project objectives

Overall objective

Promoting the creation of Local Commissions for Political Incidence organized by the municipalities and committed to working locally on active ageing and older adult’s rights. The commissions are spaces in each local government, of articulation with other instances of the community and the elderly, who meet periodically to promote active aging at a local level.

Specific objectives

- Creating articulation and coordination with municipalities to shape and work with Local Commissions for Political Incidence that generate actions in older adult’s favor.
- Developing processes for training and encouraging awareness about topics that are framed within the purpose of promoting active ageing and older adult’s rights with the Local Commissions for Political Incidence.
- Advising and assisting municipalities on building and executing the process of Political Incidence according to the local realities.

Methodology

The Project implements three stages: Elaboration of a diagnosis of the Situation of the human rights of elderly people in the community, execution and evaluation. These stages are described below.

Stage 1. Elaboration of a diagnosis of the Situation of the human rights of elderly people in the community

The project is promoted in the framework of the Older Adult's Law, Act N°7935, which encourages municipalities to take actions that benefit the older population in article 3, clause b. This article states:

“All older adults will have the right to have a better quality of life by the creation and execution of programs that promote: (...) b) Participating in recreative, cultural and sports activities promoted by organizations, associations, municipalities and the state”, among other actions”. (CONAPAM, 1999: 6).

b) “La participación en actividades recreativas, culturales y deportivas promovidas por las organizaciones, las asociaciones, las municipalidades y el Estado”. (CONAPAM, 1999: 6).

In addition, the statement “encouraging comprehensive and institutional care for older adults from public and private institutions, and (to) ensure that programs and services for this population work properly” (CONAPAM, 1999: 4) supports the creation and efforts of Local Commissions for Political Incidence. “Impulsar la atención integral e interinstitucional de las personas adultas mayores por parte de las entidades públicas y privadas, y velar por el funcionamiento adecuado de los programas y servicios, destinados a esta población.” (CONAPAM, 1999: 4)

Moreover, in 2015 AGECO sent letters to the 81 town councils in the country in order to learn about the existing resources that these councils have which benefit older adults. Regarding this issue, 26 municipalities provided an answer by handing the requested information. These towns were: Heredia, Flores, San Isidro, Cartago, Oreamuno, La Unión, Alvarado, El Guarco, Paraíso, San José, Curridabat, Aserrí, Escazú, Santa Ana, Goicoechea, Moravia, Tibás, Dota, Hojancha, Guatuso, San Ramón, Buenos Aires, Garabito, Parrita, Coto Brus, and Mora. From the mentioned municipalities, Dota, Guatuso and Oreamuno replied that currently they do not have projects or policies for older adults specifically.

The following are the resources currently available for older adults from the information provided by the towns:

The municipalities of Heredia, San Isidro, San José, Coto Brus, Santa Ana, Moravia, Curridabat, Goicoechea, Tibás, Cartago, Paraíso, Mora, San Ramón, and Hojanca hold participation and support the “Red de Atención Progresiva para el Cuido Integral de las Personas Adultas Mayores”, or “Progressive and Comprehensive Care for Older Adults Network.” Also, several municipalities such as San José, Parrita, Buenos Aires, Cartago, Escazú, Flores, Goicoechea, El Guarco, Hojanca, Paraíso, Tibás y Santa Ana hold events to commemorate the National Day Against Older Persons’ Abuse, Mistreatment, Exclusion and Neglect on June 15th, and The International Day of Older Persons on October 1st.

In summary, some municipalities are part of the “Progressive and Comprehensive Care for Older Adults Network”, others commemorate important dates for this population, while others do not take any form of action.

These previous facts support the importance of the project “Promoting Local Commissions for Political Incidence from Municipalities”, holding the target of population and participants which involve:

- Municipalities around the country.
- Local Commissions for Political Incidence which are defined as: A team of people from institutions, organizations and older community leaders who work in their communities to bring about change that contributes with active ageing and advocacy rights for this age group.

Stage 2. Project Implementation

As previously mentioned, this project started in 2016 and continues to this day.

Implementation Activities:

The project is implemented by taking the following steps:

1. Ensuring contact with the 82 municipalities in the country

In March 2016 the municipalities were contacted by sending a letter to each town council. The letter explained AGECO’s intention and commitment to articulate and coordinate actions, so the municipalities create and work on Local Incidence Commissions that receive advice from AGECO’s Political Incidence Program.

2. Briefing with municipalities

AGECO conducted a briefing with the municipalities that replied to the letter sent, and were therefore interest in being part of the project.

The matters considered at the meeting included:

- Welcome and introduction of the participants.
- Significant data regarding population ageing worldwide and in Costa Rica specifically.
- What is AGECO?
- What are the institution's Gerontological Programs?
- What are the Local Commissions for Political Incidence?
- What are the project's actions to help municipalities create and work with a Local Commission for Political Incidence?
- How does the agreement between the municipalities and AGECO to participate in the project "Promoting Local Commissions for Political Incidence from Municipalities" work?

3. Signing of the agreement between the municipalities and AGECO.

The agreement was signed in the respective municipalities during a meeting between the mayor and AGECO's Chairperson of the Board of Directors. The project's manager for the Political Incidence Program by AGECO, as well as the coordinator for the Local Incidence Commission in each municipality also attended this meeting.

4. Invitation to constitute the Local Commission for Political Incidence for different social groups.

Once the agreement between the municipalities and AGECO was signed, the project implementation started. The municipality was in charge of making the invitation and confirmation of the different social sectors such as public institutions, organizations, civil society, and others.

5. Meeting to create the Local Commission for Political Incidence for different social groups.

The different social groups that confirmed participation attended to this meeting. It was conducted by the municipal official assigned to coordinate the project and by the project's manager for the Political Incidence Program from AGECO.

6. The following issues were addressed at the meeting to create the Local Commission for Political Incidence:

- Welcome and introduction of the participants.
- Reference to the agreement signed between the municipality and AGECO.
- Project Promoting Local Commissions for Political Incidence from Municipalities Presentation.

- Time for comments and questions.
- Creation of the Local Commissions for Political Incidence.
- Selection of the person who will be the sub coordinator for the Local Commissions for Political Incidence. Regarding this, it is important to clarify that the municipality is the one in charge of the project's coordination because by signing the agreement the municipality assumes this task.
- Schedule dates for monthly meetings and for the socio-educational training workshop.

7. *Socio-educational Workshop with the Local Commissions for Political Incidence.*

Once the Local Commissions for Political Incidence were created, a training workshop was conducted. The issues addressed in this workshop were:

1. Ageing and old age.
2. Specific rights for older adults.
3. Political Incidence as a means to work for older adults' rights.

The topics were discussed during a 5-hour workshop which had a participative approach in order to encourage collective thinking and creation.

8. *Organizing and preparing the "Report on Older Adults' Realities in the Canton."*

After the workshop, the Local Commissions for Political Incidence has to attend the monthly meetings to organize and fulfill the "Report on Older Adults' Realities in the Canton."

The creation of this report is important because it is considered a reference, and it is one of the first steps to take in order to promote political incidence as part of the work done by the Local Commissions.

The implementation of this action is focused on:

- Being informed and aware of the older adult's reality in their own town. This has to be socialized through team meetings as well as with collective work and analysis.
- In addition, it is key that each Local Commission collects and analyses the gathered information by preparing the "Report on Older Adults' Realities in the Canton" as a product of this action.

The elaboration process of this report requires gathering literature and applying investigation techniques such as survey, interview, and observations, among others.

The purpose of this is to explore older adults' reality based on these six aspects:

- Democracy
- Sociocultural
- Education
- Health.
- Economy
- Infrastructure

The project's manager for the Political Incidence Program by AGEKO will advise and clarify any inquiry related to the report and the Local Commission's work. That person accomplishes this by conducting follow up meetings to encourage the work with the coordinators (municipal worker) in each Local Commission.

By means of a report system with the coordinators it will be possible to learn about the progress made, where the manager is able to check and provide feedback about them.

It is important to point out that for the Political Incidence Program it is considered essential that the commissions have these reports. As it provides a closer look at the older adult's realities in each town. This in turn is useful to identify gaps that need to be addressed in order to improve or change current situations for this age group.

Thereupon, the Local Commissions for Political Incidence must depict in the report all the conclusions and requests that they will make to the Municipal Council in order to successfully achieve political impact and benefit older population. Therefore, the next and last task in the project is necessary.

9. *Presentation of results on the "Report on Older Adults' Realities in the Canton" to the Municipal Council*

The Local Government must be aware of the elaboration of this report. Each commission presents the results in order to show the older adults' reality in their town and make political impact by making requests or motions. These requests have the purpose of making positive changes to benefit older adults.

It is important to mention that the definition of requests is made by the Local Commissions for Political Incidence themselves. In doing so, they take the report's results, in line with the active ageing approach and the older adults' rights as reference to propose action on their behalf.

It is advised that the report is presented in the Municipal Council session which is the local authority, and invite older adults and local institutions, especially the ones that work with and for older adults, to be part of the audience.

Joining the report presentation to the Municipal Council along-side the Local Commissions is the manager from AGECO. As mentioned earlier, the Local Commissions are in charge of presenting the results and making the requests.

10. Follow up meetings and organizational strengthening with the Local Commission for Political Incidence coordinator.

As mentioned earlier, the coordinator of the Local Commission is the municipal representative. During these follow up meetings the manager from AGECO advises the commission's coordinator about the different requirements to implement the project. The follow up is conducted through in-person meetings, e-mails, phone calls, and other means.

Stage 3. Assessment

Through a brainstorming meeting with the Local Commission for Political Incidence there is a discussion about the achievements and limitations of the project's issues.

In this sense, the achievements the Local Commissions consider are:

- The municipality as a coordinator figure and representative of the Local Commission for Political Incidence.
- AGECO's support, training and counseling.
- The "Report on Older Adults' Realities in the Canton" and the approval and support from the Municipal Council.
- The older adult's whose participation in the political incidence process makes them feel self-fulfillment.

The main limitation that the Local Commissions for Political Incidence report is:

- There is the need that more institutions in the canton join the Local Incidence Commission in order to reach more representation.

Opportunity for improvement:

- Arrange meetings with institutions in order to persuade them about the importance of their participation. This is a way to strengthen representativeness from different social sectors in the Local Commission for Political Incidence.

Results

The project “Promoting Local Commissions for Political Incidence from Municipalities” has shown the following results:

- 9 agreements have been approved by the respective Municipal Councils, and they have been signed by Municipalities.
- 9 Local Commissions for Political Incidence have been created in Nicoya, Hojancha, Garabito, Poás, Naranjo, Heredia, San Pablo, Acosta, and Alajuelita.
- 7 Reports on Older Adults’ Realities in the Canton were concluded and presented to the Local Governments in Poás, Hojancha, San Pablo, Nicoya, Naranjo, Heredia, and Acosta.

The results that were presented have consequently brought support from the local governments. They have improved sidewalks, parks, community halls, among other issues regarding accessibility. Also, they have taken socio-educational actions for and with older adults, and they have approved and created public policies as well as assigning budget to work for this population group.

Discussion

Costa Rica has laws that favor older adults’ rights. Among them, there is the Integral Law for Older Persons (Ley Integral para la Persona Adulta Mayor) N°7935, the National Policy about Ageing and Old Age, the Inter-American Convention for the Protection of Older Persons’ Human Rights, among others. All of them urge local governments to take action for these rights. In doing so, the national policy on Ageing and Old Age 2011-2021 (CONAPAM, 2013), in its strategic line III, about social participation calls on local governments to take action regarding active ageing and rights. In addition, the Inter-American Convention for the Protection of Older Persons’ Human Rights defines the institutions’ duty of working for healthy and active ageing. Hence, the project “Promoting Local Commissions for Political Incidence from Municipalities” is framed by these regulations and by the challenges that come to implement them within their communities.

In discussing the results, it is important to point out that creating the Local Commissions for Political Incidence as well as preparing the “Reports on Older Adults’ Realities in the Canton”, and presenting them to the Municipal Councils allow the articulation of different social sectors. They are able to organize and work collectively in order to politically advocate before their local governments. In consequence, it is possible to progress and make impact in the older adults’ agendas. In this regard, Wola states:

Political incidence represents the efforts of organized citizenry to weigh in the creation and implementation of public policies and programs. They can achieve this by persuading and pushing state authorities, international financial institutions and other institutions of power. These activities are aimed to gain access and influence over the people who have decision-making power in important issues regarding a particular group or society as a whole. (Wola, 2005: 21).

The previous quote helps to think about the afore-mentioned project since it shows how important it is that different social sectors, including older adults themselves, are organized strategically. Together they can persuade other decision-making authorities such as local governments to achieve progress and changes that support active ageing and rights.

The International Longevity Center Brazil (2015), further states that the World Health Organization (WHO) urges the countries and institutions to promote actions for active ageing based on a collective responsibility from society and politicians. Therefore, local governments must comply and provide inclusive policies and action plans. Also, they must understand how active ageing factors correlate (context, culture, and each person's backgrounds) in order to define these policies and actions, so they can be elaborated with the older population participation and taking into account their interests and needs.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the project "Promoting Local Commissions for Political Incidence from Municipalities" and its importance in relation to continuously strive for active ageing policies and older persons rights. The main conclusions highlighted are:

- Local governments and municipalities must facilitate and push for current laws regarding older adults. In doing so, the scope of this project becomes important since it allows for a close dialogue with municipalities in order to bring collective action for active ageing and the rights for this age group.
- Political incidence guides the project, thus, it allows to:
 - Design a participative methodology strategy that is focused on the shape and work of the Local Commissions for Incidence, which are made up of different social sectors such as municipalities and older adults.
 - Grant the fulfillment of older adults' rights by actions and local public policies that are inclusive with this group.

At present the respective "Report on Older Adults' Realities" shows the affirmative actions carried out by the Local Commissions for Political Incidence. This report serves as means to weigh on local governments as decision makers.

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