



A South-South project on making local governance work for women

Supported by the International Development Research Centre, Canada (2012-2014)

# BRAZIL: Preliminary Research Analysis

February 2014 (Draft not to be cited)



Instituto Nupef, Rio de Janeiro

## **I. Introduction: An Overview of the Theory of Change guiding the project**

*The empowering ecologies constituted by digital technologies can enable marginalised women to enhance their active citizenship at the local level, democratizing formal and informal institutions and systems, particularly in the sphere of local governance."*

This statement reflects the main hypothesis that guided this project. In its implementation in Brazil, this mother hypothesis has generated two main reflections: the first is related to our understanding on what are the empowering ecologies constituted by digital technologies. Our view is that we're experimenting on the drafting of possible frameworks for an analysis of *"a culture still in formation, defined by the technological appropriation as an instrument of liberation, emancipation and advocacy of rights and warranties of multiple natures"* (Antoun and Malini, 2013). From our perspective, the ecologies constituted by digital technologies are neither empowering nor disempowering per se. It is the culture constituted around the access, appropriation, development and uses of technologies that can affect and transform the perceptions of what is possible for individuals and collectives to achieve, express and transform. By challenging determined cultural aspects internalized by the women who participated in this process, we were able to identify among them some possibilities of (re)signification of technologies and its claimed emancipatory potential. These perceived possibilities have reshaped the initial project design and strategy, giving place to a live dynamics of experimentation which involved both the project team and the women participants. We will explore this issue further in the second part of this report, focused on "Reflections on the intervention experience".

The second reflection is around our understanding of what are the possibilities for "democratizing institutions and systems" within a highly unequal, racist and excluding society such as the Brazilian. We have learned, throughout the project, to work in a

framework of intersectionality<sup>1</sup>. In Brazil, it would be a huge mistake to consider the possibilities of democratizing institutions and systems without addressing the multiple dimensions of exclusion and marginalization, especially in regards to race and institutional racism in a so called racial democracy. While recognizing that

(...) racism is a central force perpetuating socio-economic inequality in Brazil, which is one of the world's most unequal countries in socio-economic terms. The origins of racism in Brazil go back to the trade in African slaves. The notion, long widespread, that Brazil is a "racial democracy" keeps preventing recognition of racial inequality. But this is deep and persistent; it imprisons black Brazilians in a vicious circle of poverty, academic setbacks, limited access to goods and services, discrimination in the labour market, and violence. (Ciconello, 2008)

our interpretation of the hypothesis has reached a much wider dimension that we had expected – and this recognition has opened to the team possibilities for a much richer, nuanced approach to the analytical category of 'women's active citizenship'. We must recognize that our initial interpretation of this category was based on a simplistic perspective about the possibilities of women's participation according to existing spaces and processes within the local governance structures – but this view had to be revised. In a rich learning process, the project team was led to reevaluate its premises on women's participation and citizenship, not only incorporating, but mainly centralizing its analysis and interventions on aspects of identity politics and struggles, voice and (in)visibility.

1 According to the Geek Feminism Wiki, "Intersectionality" is a concept often used in critical theories to describe the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. Third Wave Feminism, especially, thrived on the concept of intersectionality in order to redefine Feminism as inclusive. The concept first came from legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and is largely used in critical theories, especially Feminist theory, when discussing systematic oppression. When possible, credit Kimberlé Crenshaw for coining the term "intersectionality" and bringing the concept to wider attention. <http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Intersectionality>

In this process, the founding assumptions about the empowering potential of ICTs that have guided our work were reassured – starting with the assumption that technology is a cluster of material objects, social practices, social relationships, and social organization. One of the key factors that characterizes the work developed by Nupef along the years is an approach to sociotechnical systems aimed to make evident the existing power dynamics within the system itself - and consequently the power imbalances, which are usually quite opaque. In Nupef's understanding,

This approach provides a window into the ways in which technologies are intertwined with values. Technologies are developed, promoted, and used because people perceive that they will fulfill a certain need, accomplish a certain task, or achieve a certain goal within a given set of circumstances. Technologies are not simply chosen at random. People are motivated to integrate technologies into the fabric of society because they have certain values and they want to promote those values. Once created, sociotechnical systems can sometimes seem to take on a power of their own. They facilitate and constrain certain actions and thereby facilitate and constrain certain values. In other words, the intertwining of society and technology is not neutral; it is value-laden. Values shape the technologies we get and technologies subsequently have a significant effect on the values that are realized in a society. For example, some technologies facilitate democratic decision making; others reinforce race and gender bias; yet others facilitate individual independence and autonomy and erode community cohesion. Whether these values are thought to be cultural, social, moral, political, or whatever, recognition of this aspect of technology has important implications for future technological development. (...) Cultural norms including those with regard to race, class, and gender are at work in sociotechnical systems. Once we acknowledge that technology is a combination of things and people, i.e., that it is sociotechnical systems, and that sociotechnical systems affect and are affected by values, then it follows that those who contribute to the production and use of a sociotechnical system are not just building a 'thing'; they are building society and making value decisions that will affect society. (Johnson and Wetmore, 2008)

This approach proved to be particularly valid in this experience, in which we had so many rich opportunities to witness how artifacts and techniques shape the way people see the

world, impact the way people interact with each other, and help certain rights to be realized.

## **II. Methodology**

The Yalodês project was developed in partnership with the Criola NGO – a local civil society organization dedicated to help overcome the invisibility of black women in Brazil. Criola was founded and is run by black women, and in its 21 years of activities has developed an important level of legitimacy among women leaderships and organizations in Brazil. Criola is recognized as a reference in terms of its capacity of developing high level interventions in political processes while at the same time providing support and strengthening capacities among poor women in some of the most violent and socially excluded communities in the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro city. It is in this context that the group of women who directly participated in the Yalodês project was reached – the 12 religious and community leaders, together with their assistants, were already part of a network created and facilitated by Criola in the past 6 years.

Our approach to the group was facilitated by Criola – what helped the team overcome resistances and establish a candid and live dialogue with the women. Between March and April 2012, the Nupef team held several meetings with the representatives in Criola to organize our research process, to elucidate the design of the research and to find out from them the dynamics they held with the local leaderships. This was done in order for us to take advantage of the bonds already in place amongst the women and between the women and Criola, in a respectful and productive way. Our first meeting with Yalodês was held at Criola headquarters. Each one of the leaderships accompanied by one or two assistants came and were open to listen to our research objectives. They engaged with our topics and showed great interest, which made it clear to us that the work they already carry out in their communities was in line with our research objectives and

methodology.

The research component of the project was developed alongside with the intervention in the communities through the work with the Yalodês. The initial moment was focused in the application of the questionnaire developed in collaboration with ITforChange. The questionnaires were developed, translated and adapted to the Brazilian context, in line with the base questionnaire provided by IT for Change. In this phase the team of researchers visited the Yalodês in their communities and applied the questionnaire to 152 women. In this process the Yalodês played a key role in inviting the women in their communities, explaining to them the importance and objectives of the research, providing the spaces in which the women were interviewed or taking the researchers to some of the women's homes. The Yalodês' work was crucial in terms of mobilising and assuring the presence of the local women to participate in the questionnaire interviews. Without their efforts our work would have been much more difficult to carry out. Also, in the sites visited by the research team, each of the Yalodês has a history of genuine political engagement and support to local women in issues such as reproductive health, domestic violence and other types of injustice they face. Their presence and active engagement in the research process helped the team create the bonds that are essential within a research process, while strengthening the local women's confidence on our commitment to respect the privacy and sensitive information of the interviewee. As we have stressed since the very first meeting with the Yalodês, research must follow ethical considerations – and the Yalodês presence as introducers/mediators of our work made us realise that our team approach stood on to ethical commitment.

After the application of questionnaires the answers were input into a survey tool in order to generate analysable results – which were subsequently structured to generate this narrative.

In the conduction of some of the project activities – mainly the events held in the communities and some informal meetings and visits organised throughout the project

implementation – Nupef's team members have been collecting data as participant observers. These opportunities brought us a deeper understanding of the power dynamics and relationships among the Yalodês, frequently marked by their status as religious leaders, by histories of the past of some members of the group that emerged during informal conversations and provided the team an opportunity to capture and analyse the peculiarities of their relation to their respective local communities and groups.

In the next four months Nupef will work in the endline assessment, mostly developing qualitative research, what will include focus groups, in depth interviews and the structured analysis of the data collected along 2013 through direct observation.

### **III. Reflections on the Intervention Experience**

#### **a. Context analysis**

The research component of the Yalodês project has reached, in its initial phase, a wide group of women – mainly through the mobilization put forward by the Yalodês. The collaboration of the women leaders in the first phase of the research process has been a key factor for the achievement of our objective of applying the survey amongst more than 150 women: the Yalodês not only gathered these women in their centers, but also took us to the women's houses when necessary. In some of the communities visited by the team, the conditions for the research work were not favourable, due to the fact that transportation services are very precarious in many of the localities and also due to security issues – we've worked in some of the most violent neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro. This meant that we've had to negotiate with local leaders in order to guarantee that our team wouldn't be badly received by the local drug dealers. In spite of the tension that these circumstances have caused, it represented an important opportunity

to understand the variety of factors that impact on the women's possibilities to exercise citizenship and express their voices. It was clear that in some localities there were very concrete constraints for women's participation in meetings and events, as the flow of people is controlled either by the police or by the members of criminal factions.

## **About the field**

### **I. Socio-economic Profile of Project Participants**

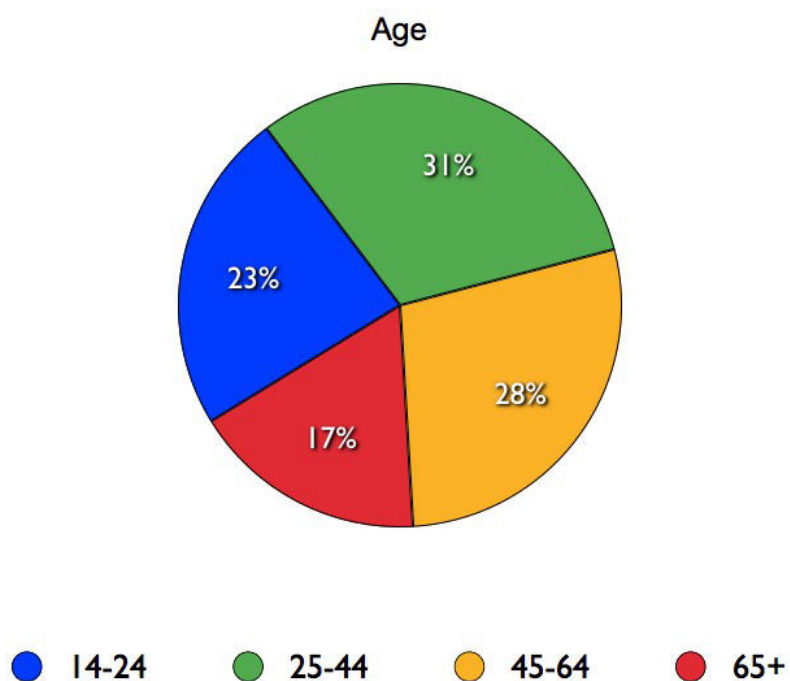
The profile of 152 women who participated in the survey that was one of the components of the research activity.

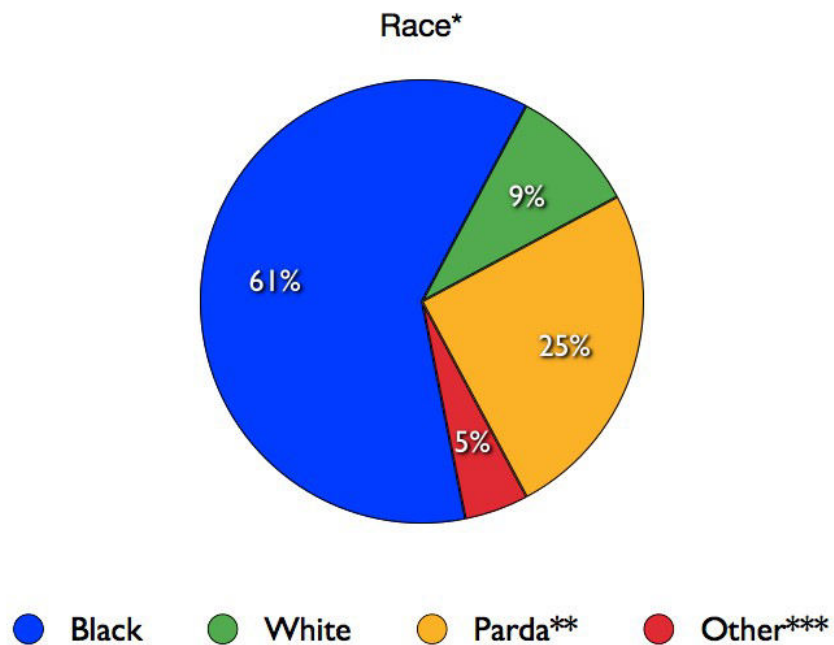




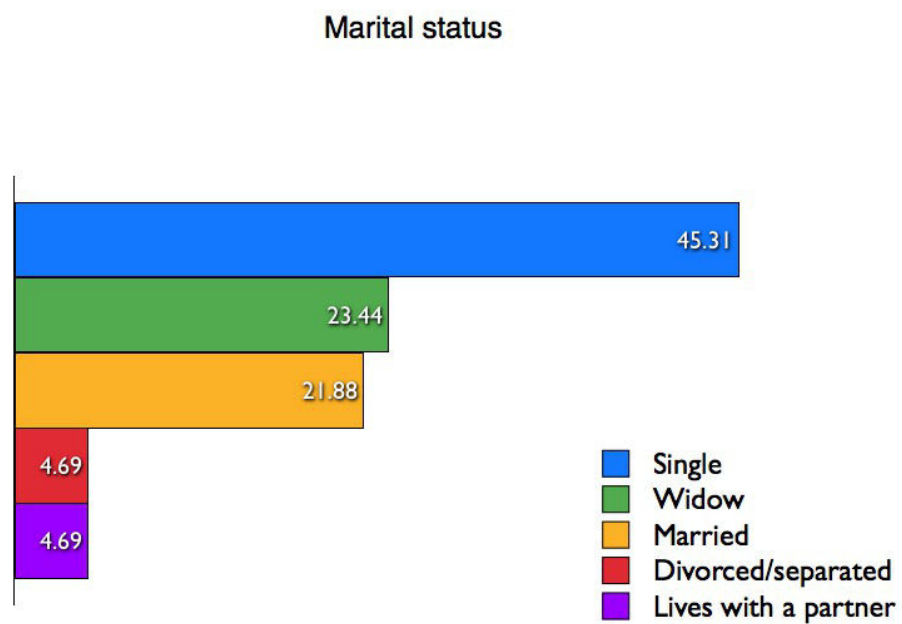




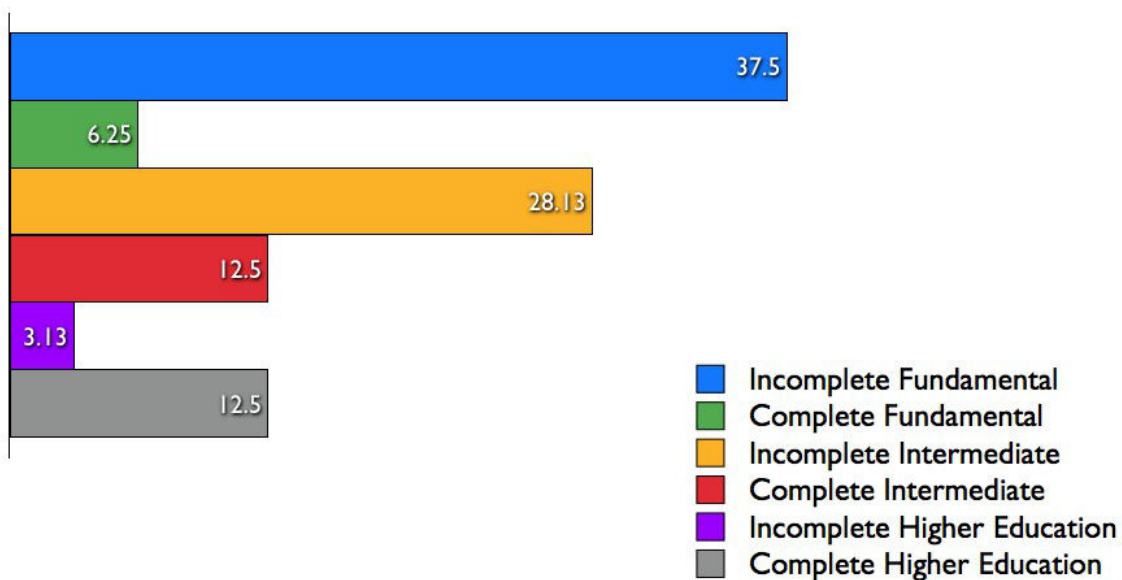




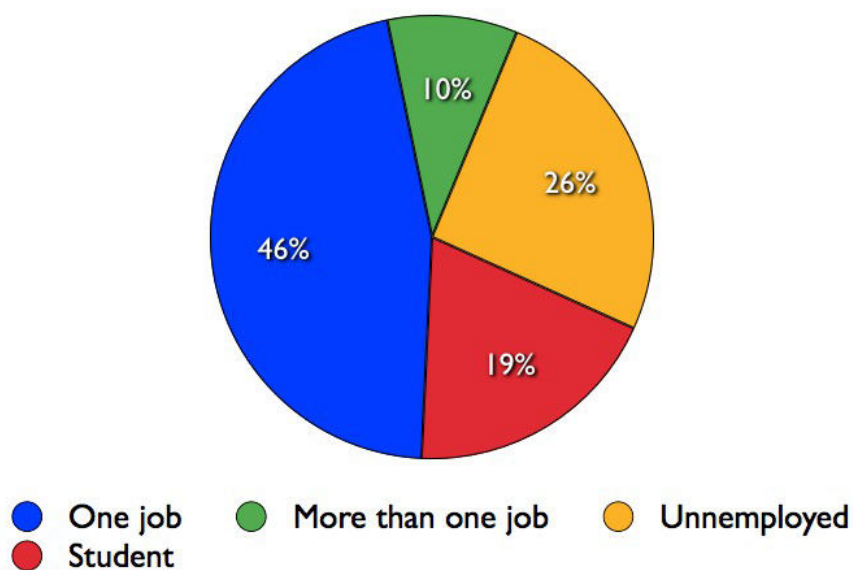
\* Self reported



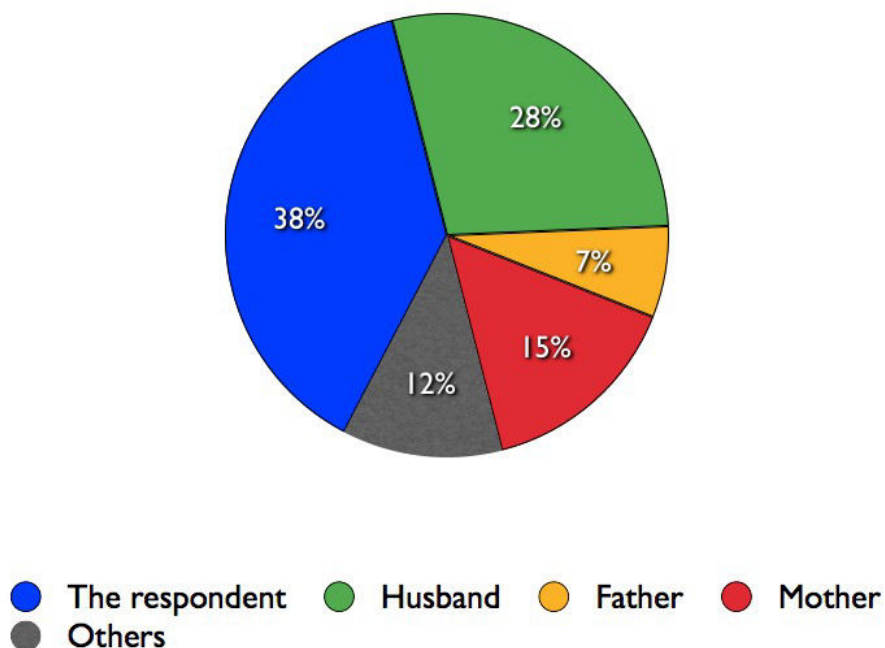
### Education



### Working situation



Who is the head of the family?



## **II. Nature of local governance systems and institutions and the opportunities they offer, for women's participation.**

(This section will be complemented with the literature review on local governance systems)

### **Spaces of participation**

For a better understanding of the nature of different spaces for participatory governance and

deliberative democratic processes in Brazil, this section provides a brief explanation on the function and objectives of what we consider to be the main spaces of citizen participation in the country.

## **I. Councils**

The Women's Policies Councils and the State and Municipal Councils for the Rights of Women are important tools in the process of formulation, monitoring and coordination of policies for defending women's human rights. The creation of bodies exclusively dedicated to women's policies and their rights is a special recommendation of the IV World Conference on Women, which took place in Beijing in 1995. Their creation is also amongst the commitments taken on by the Brazilian government in the Beijing Declaration – ratified in 2000 during the Beijing +5 Conference in New York – and in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which came into force in 1981.

Councils are spaces where civil society leaders and government representatives can dialogue and interact. Their role is related to the formulation, monitoring and assessment of public policies. They can be deliberative or advisory. On the one hand, deliberative councils are able to determine, supervise on and check up on public policies. On the other hand, advisory councils' recommendations are not mandatory.

Councils can be classified as sectoral, which refer to specific policies, or rights councils, relating to rights of certain social segments, assuming the recognition that there are groups who suffer inequalities and discriminations for historical and cultural reasons and that these groups do not have institutional channels to make their interests and voices heard by the State. The creation of rights councils in both municipal and state scales has been a significant demand made by women's movements.

## **II. Centers for the Defense of Citizenship:**



These Centers aim to carry out integrated and systematic policies of access to the Judicial system and the defense of citizenship through the provision of quality public services and the encouragement of community citizenship. The Centers can provide services such as: free medical and dental treatment, legal assistance, provision of personal identification documents, work opportunities, access to small claims and consumers courts, access to civil and military police (that carry out physical education activities for children and adults), civil registration and social service, free burial services, postal services, professional training workshops, etc. Through these spaces the population can also participate actively in decisions regarding community development through informative lectures, cultural workshops, social and legal orientation, community conflict mediation, and cultural and educational activities for the promotion and creation of awareness of human rights and citizenship rights and duties.

### **III. Social Control and Rights Forums**

Social Control and Rights Forums are spaces of political articulation coordinated by civil society. These forums are constituted as legitimate spaces of representation, mobilization, social participation and leadership in the process of guaranteeing and protecting rights. Their aim is to ensure a space for the affirmation of the autonomy and empowerment of civil society, ensuring its legitimacy as a social actor and its independence from the State or business spheres. Also, these forums seek to boost the existing permanent forums and provide political support to the creation of new forums in regions, states, counties and other localities.

The main objectives of Social Control and Rights Forums are: to unify struggles in favor of protecting citizens' rights; to build, organize, strengthen and articulate the various public spaces for social democratic control; to stimulate debate on issues, demands and

public policy; to legitimately represent the entities of the forum members in various socio-political spaces, nationally and internationally. These forums can be organized around specific groups such as children and youth, the elderly, citizens with special needs, etc. They can also focus on specific issues such as health care and privatization, amongst others.

#### **IV. Dwellers' Associations/Groups**

Dwellers' associations are a types of political associations created by residents of any neighborhood in any city in the country. Their goal is to centralize the problems of a neighborhood or community, be they structural, safety, educational, health related, etc.. Through a representative elected by the residents (association members), these problems and demands are brought to the attention of the municipal executive administrative powers. In order for a dwellers' association to be formed, more than two thirds of all residents in the community must agree to it. In a first meeting the members should decide the objectives of the association, the problems the community intends to tackle, and draft a statute. The statute should be approved by two thirds of the members of the association and should indicate the deliberative and administrative body.

#### **V. Public Hearings**

According to paragraph II of Article 43 of the City Statute, public hearings should be promoted to ensure the democratic management of the city. Hence the public hearing be set as an instrument of popular participation based on the constitutional principle of publicity and on the rights of citizens to information and participation. Through public hearings the population is involved in the implementation processes of projects or activities with positive or negative effects on the natural or built environment, comfort, safety, or any issue that may affect people's daily lives.

According to the Polis Institute<sup>2</sup>, public hearings are guaranteed by the Constitution, Federal Laws and the Organic Laws. While some are mandatory, as in the preparation of the “Plano Diretor” or in the licensing processes, the city administration can leverage its potential as an area for collecting public opinion and debate, whenever it deems it appropriate for the community. In general, public hearings are moments of public debate, where the public administration should deliberate about the issues on the agenda. The population is only able to make decisions when this is established by the law. The rules established for the hearings should seek to ensure the largest possible representation of the actors in the municipality. In this way, the dates and times of hearings should be decided to ensure the largest possible attendance of the population. For example, hearings should not occur in the middle of the working day or on religious holidays. Also the location of the hearing must be easily accessible.

From the standpoint of the city administration, a greater the participation in the hearings will result in greater legitimacy of the diagnoses or decisions made. Furthermore, broad participation allows for the development of public policies which are more connected to the demands, needs and wants of the population. Because of its very nature, it is essential that hearing results are disseminated to the general population.

## **VI. Municipal/State/National Conferences**

The conference is a public forum for debate between the state and civil society which seeks to contribute to the construction, planning, implementation and assessment of public policies in all spheres of government. Conferences activate participatory democracy and bring about deep social dialogue. In their preparation, experts are brought together, lectures are organized, social organizations are mobilized and public services in tune with the themes discussed are created. Normally, a conference is proposed by the Federal Government, by State Governments and the municipalities. When a conference is called, an Organizing

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.polis.org.br>

Committee is established with the participation of governmental and civil society bodies. To encourage debate, a document is produced by the Organizing Committee systematizing the issues that will be discussed throughout the conference. The Organizing Committee will also produce by-laws with the procedures to be adopted in each phase of the conference.

In situations where there is a Council concerning the theme of the conference, the Council itself may convene the conference and/or participate in the Organizing Committee. In some cases, when the executive power does not call a conference, civil society can do so. States and municipalities can also organize conferences on specific topics independently, according to the need for public debate.

A conference can take place in the local, municipal, regional, state, interstate or national spheres. In each sphere, proposals related to that sphere and the above sphere are made, so that, for instance, the municipal conference passes resolutions for the municipality, state and country, and chooses representatives that will participate in the following spheres. The final stage of this process is a National Conference with delegates chosen in the previous rounds. The outcome of the conference are propositions, resolutions or National Action Plans that set priorities for public action. More recently, the organization of conferences that promote free discussions in smaller groups have been frequent, allowing for the deepening of discussions and the inclusion of social sectors that would not normally participate in other forums.

### **III. Women's access to public information**























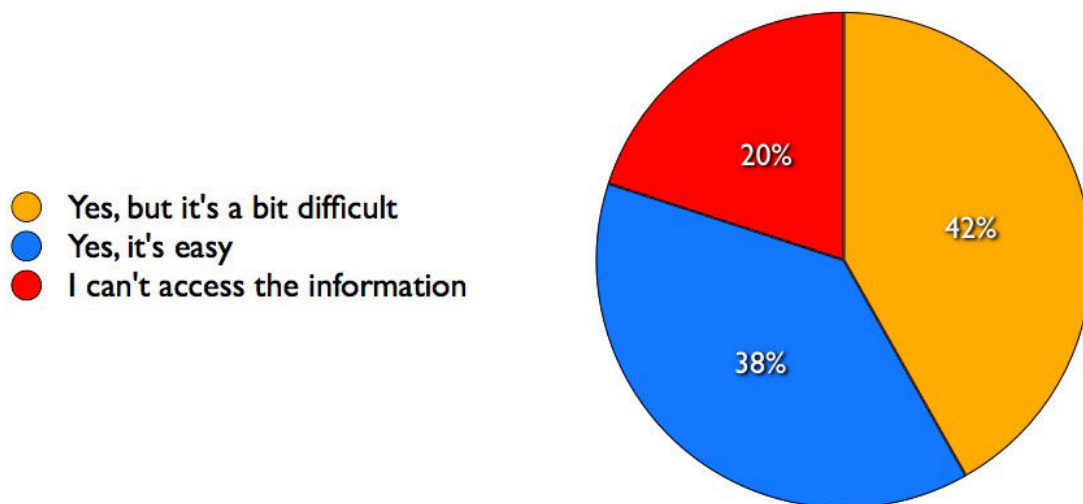




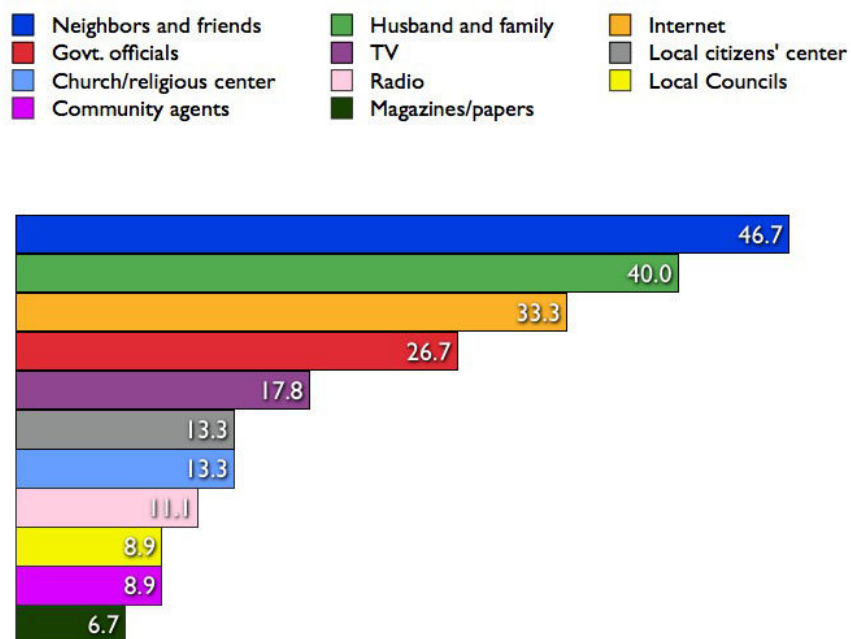




If you need some information related to government schemes, accessing government services etc. will you be able to find it in your community?

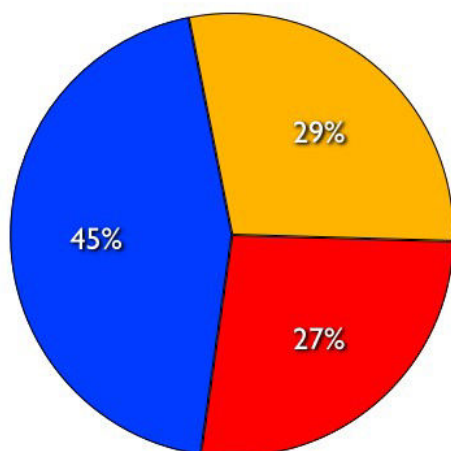


How do you usually access information on government, public services, policies, etc?



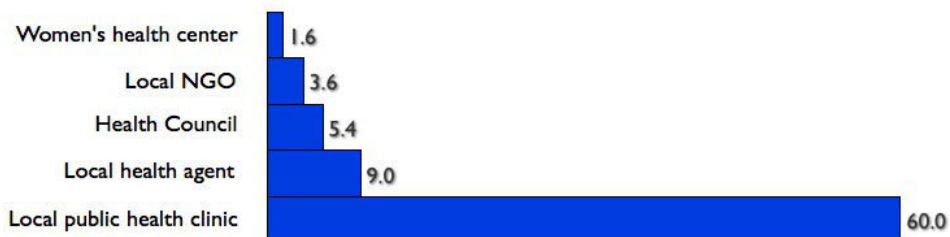
How easy is it to access basic information on health?

● Easy   ● Not so easy   ● Difficult

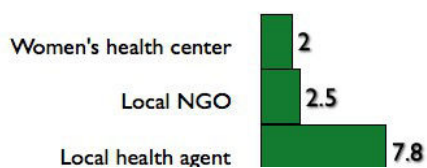


### Where do you get information on health?

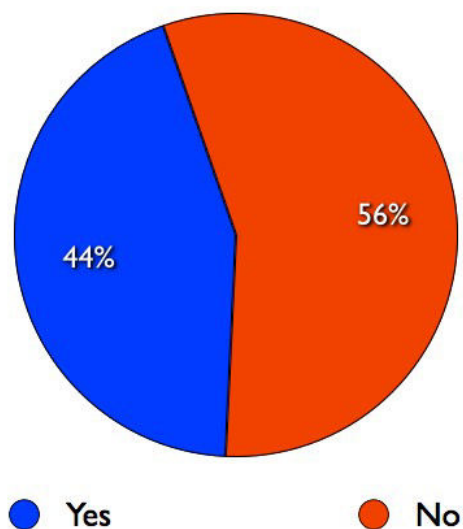
#### Reproductive health



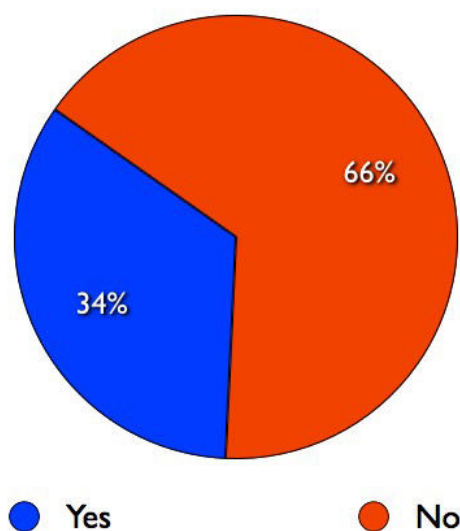
#### Children's health



### Are you satisfied with the information you get on health issues?



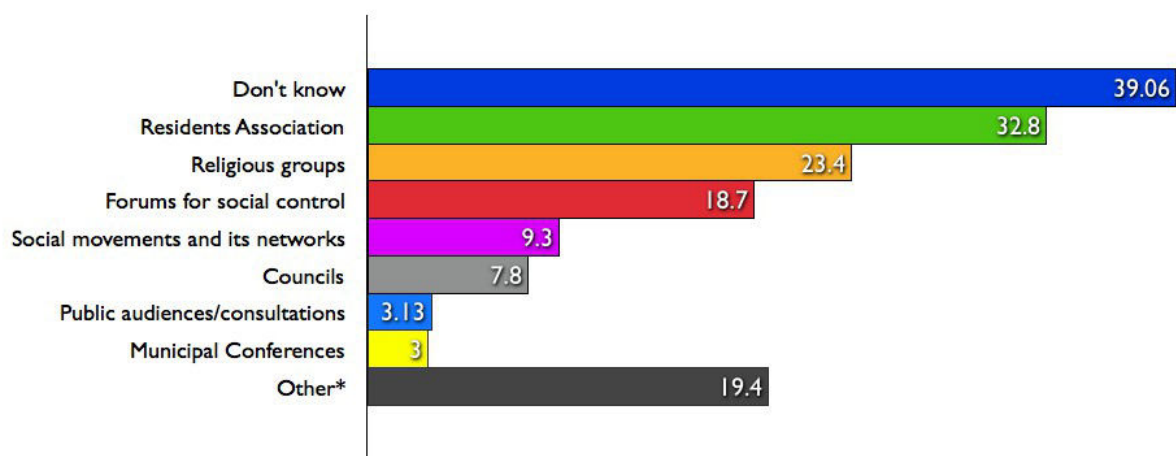
Do you get the information with enough time to answer to your needs?



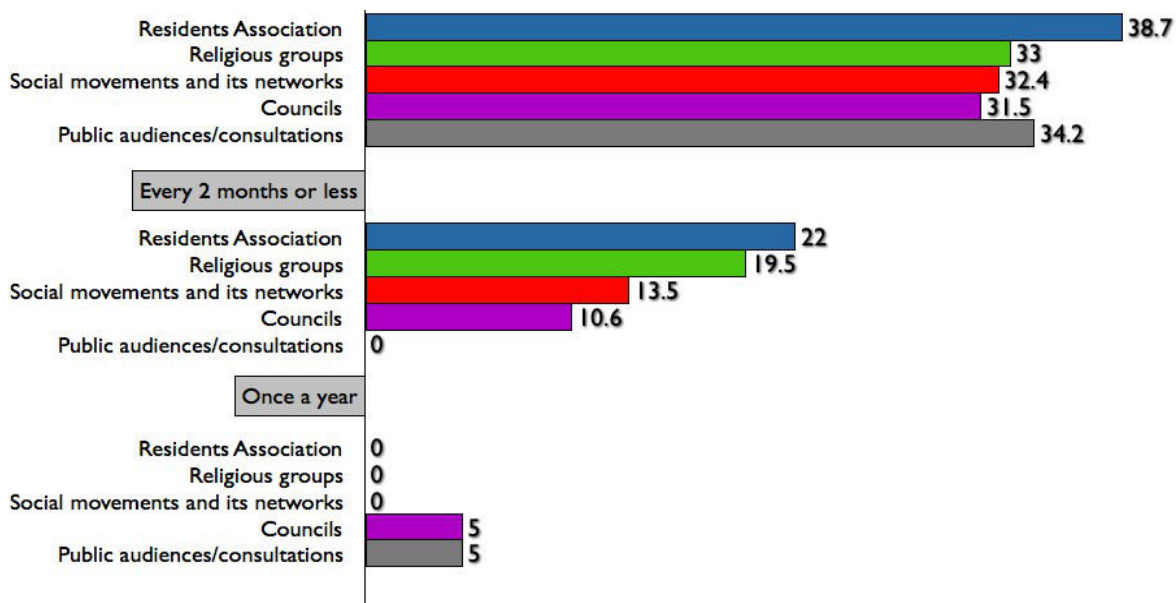
**Knowledge on existing spaces for citizen participation in the local level**

Do you feel you have adequate opportunities to share your ideas and opinions with your community and the larger society?

Knowledge on forums and spaces for citizen participation in the local community



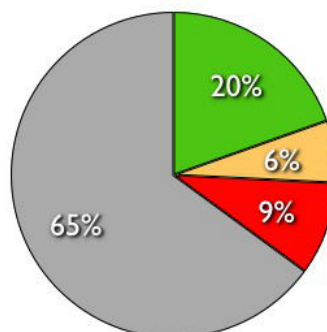
\*The other forums mentioned were: the local public school, the police headquarters, spaces created by local politicians for their campaigns. A frequent answer registered as "other" was: "There are no such spaces in my community".



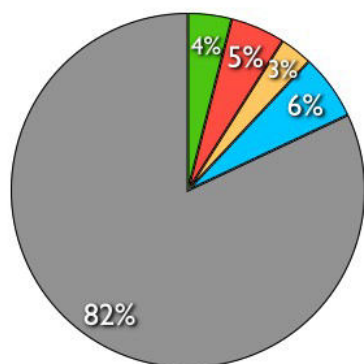
Do you regularly participate in community level / community level forums where public interest issues are discussed?

Religious groups

- Yes
- Sometimes
- No
- I don't participate in any forum/groups



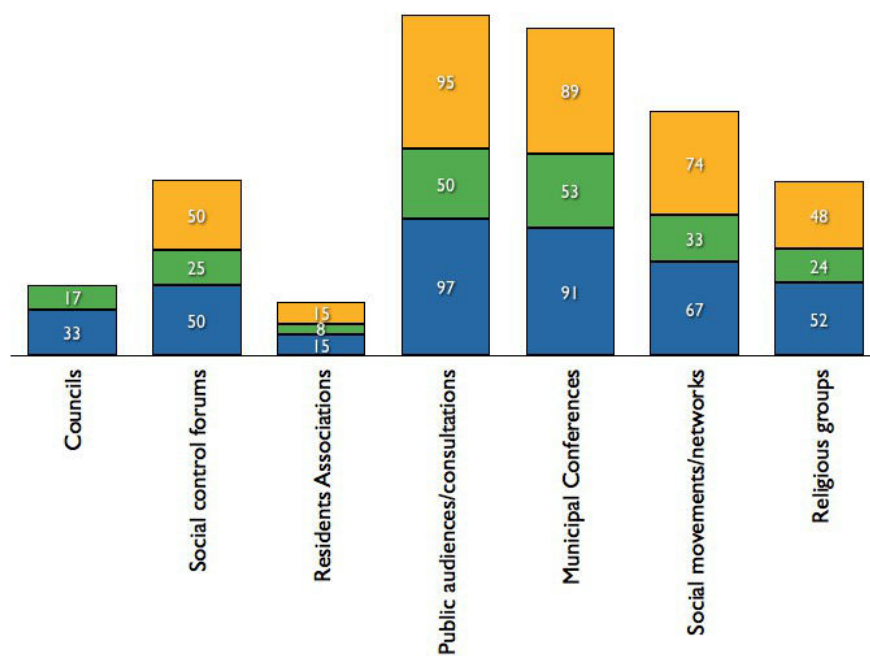
Public hearings/consultations



- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- There's no such forum in my community
- I don't know what this is

- Too much work at home
- Time of the meetings

- I don't care about the issues



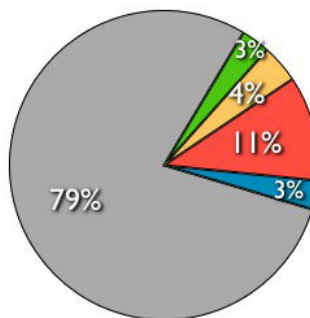




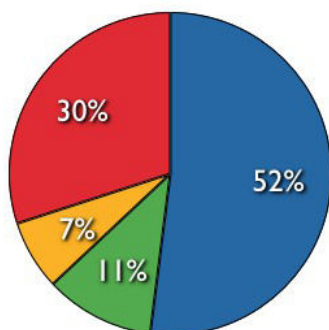
Do you regularly participate in community level / community level forums where public interest issues are discussed?

Municipal Council

- Yes
- Sometimes
- No
- There's no such forum in my community
- I don't know what this is

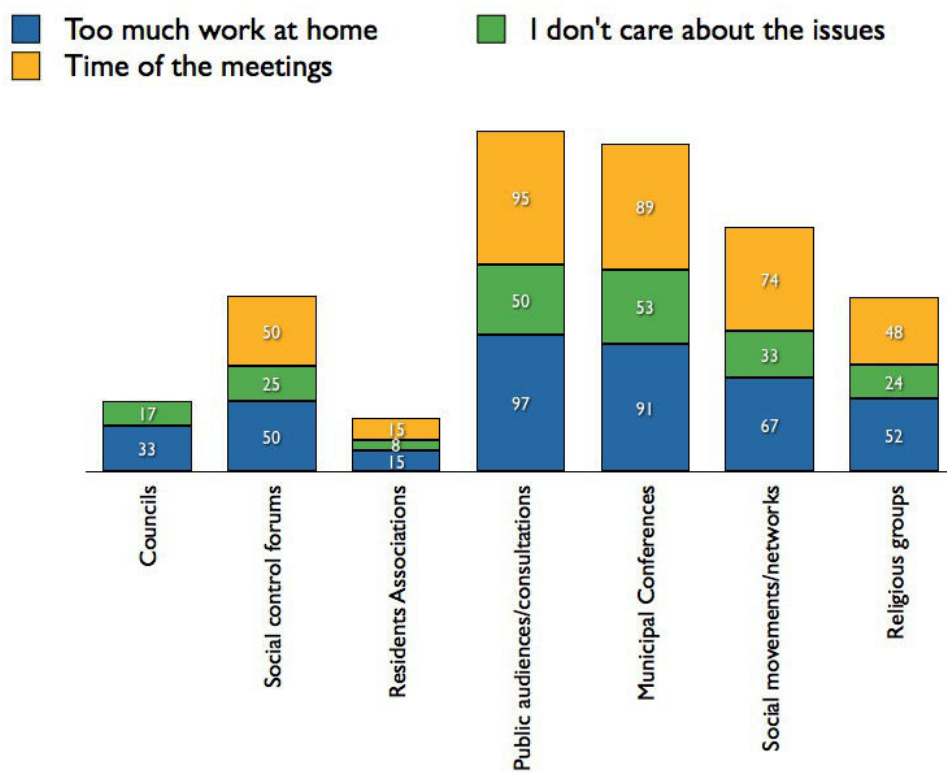


Local associations

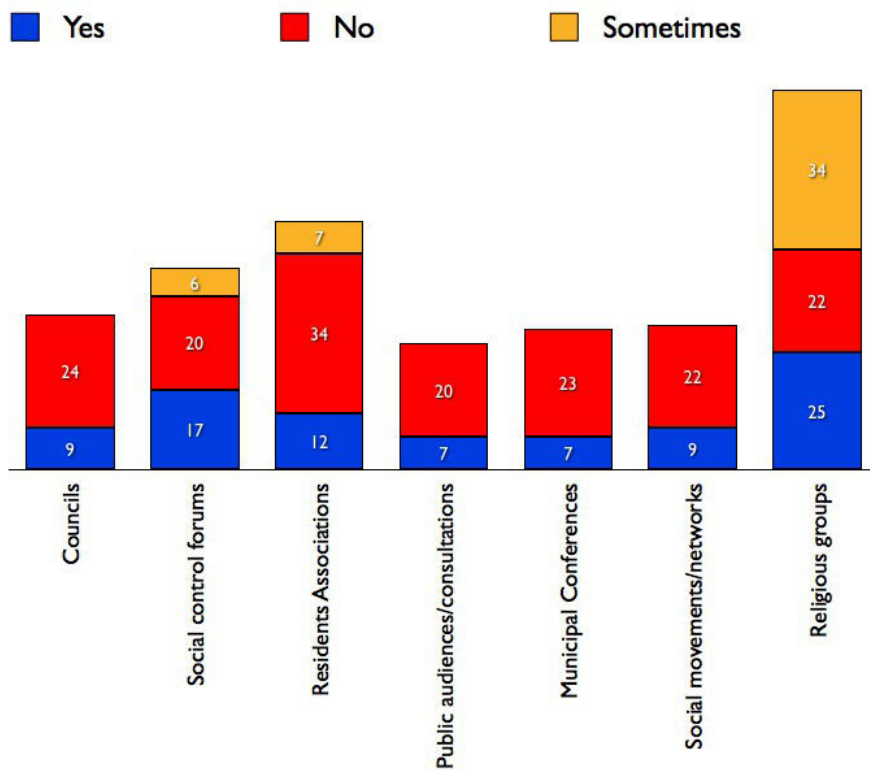


- There's no such forum in my community
- Yes
- Sometimes
- No

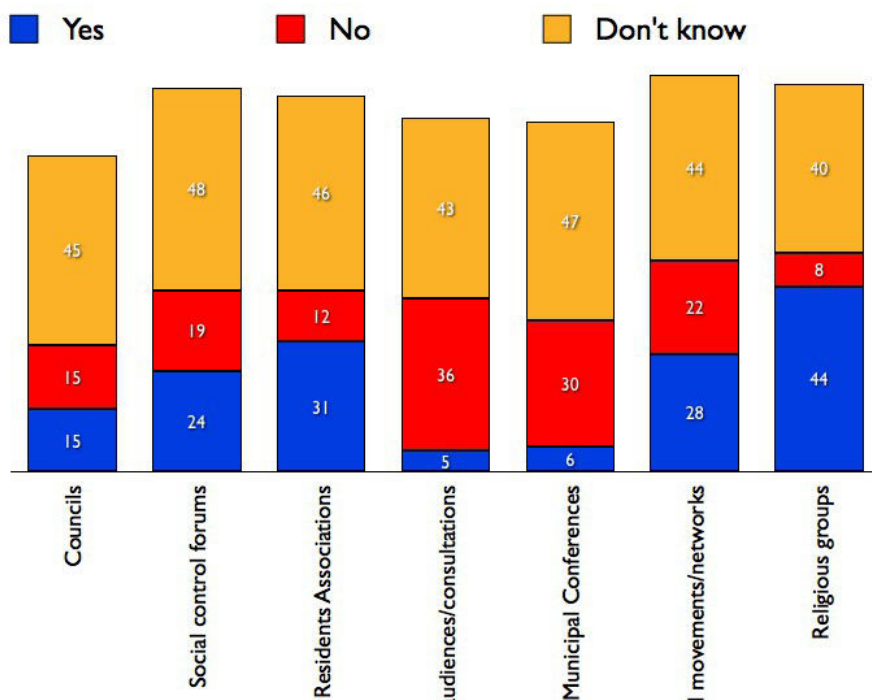
### Why you don't participate in these forums?



Are you invited to these forums and spaces by the organizers?

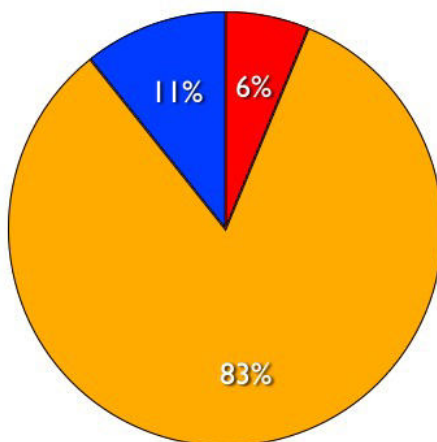


Are the women organizations and groups from your community invited to these forums?

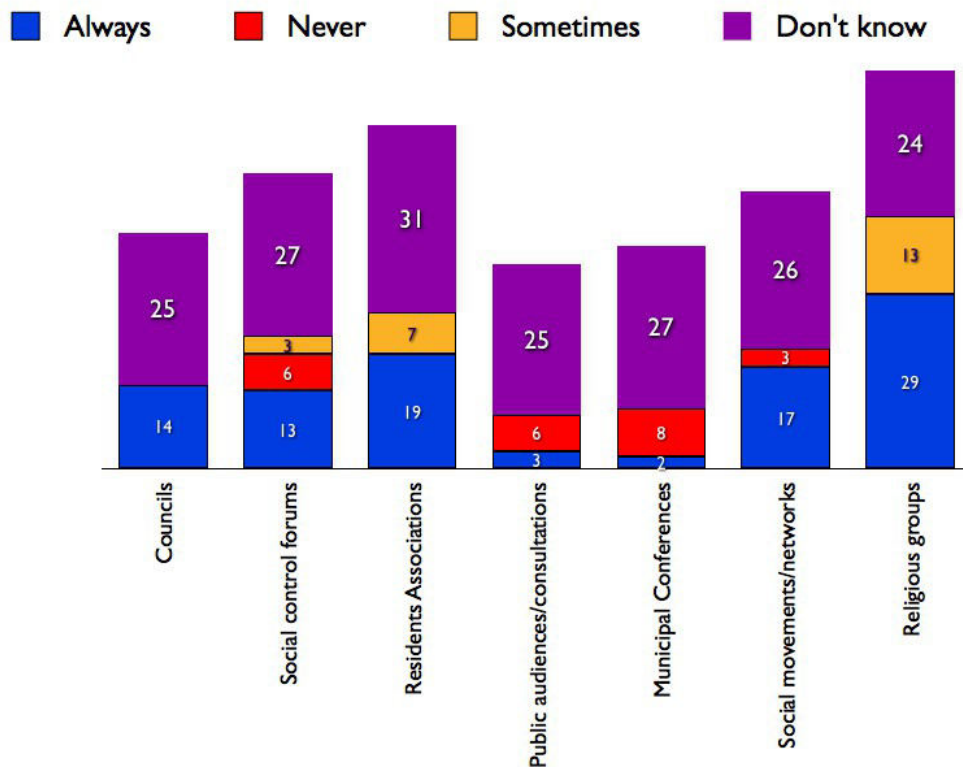


Why are the women organizations and groups invited?

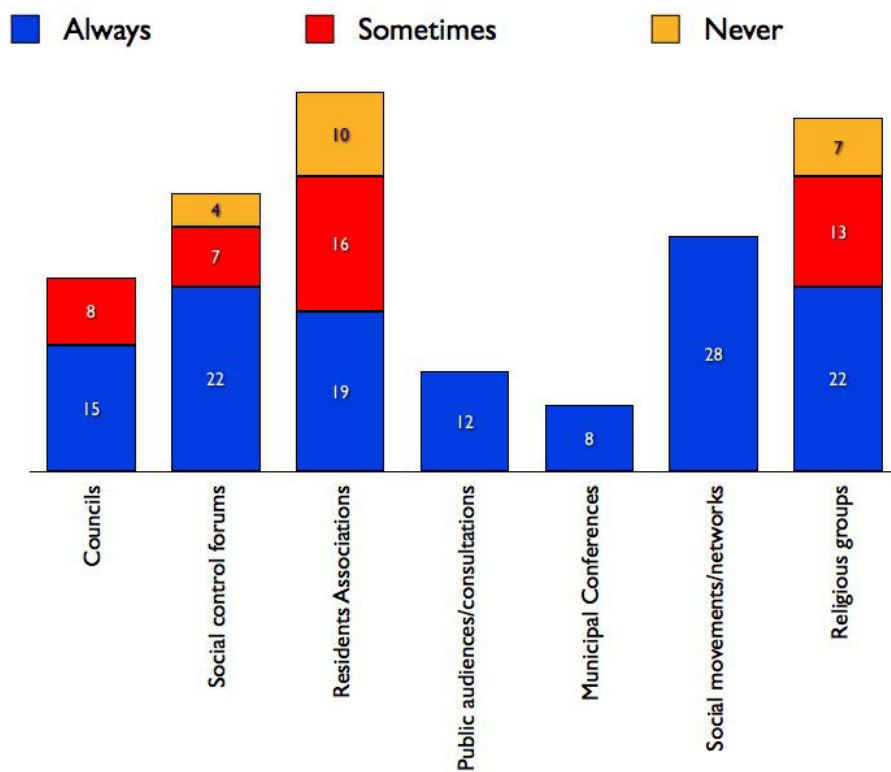
- Women groups are strong and will protest if not invited
- Women groups are well informed and bring relevant inputs
- The organizers of the forums need our help



Do the women from your group/community participate in these forums?

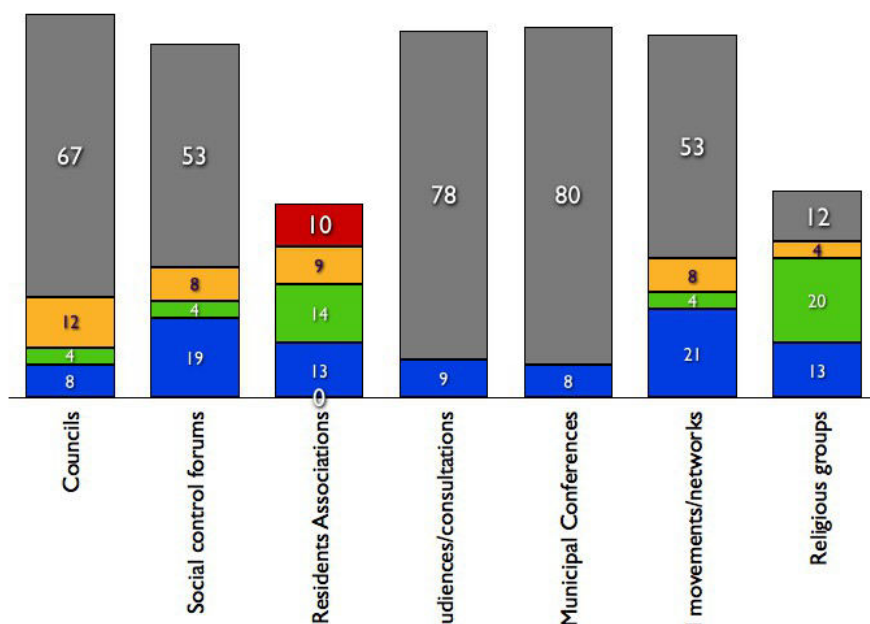


Do you raise issues in the forums in which you participate?



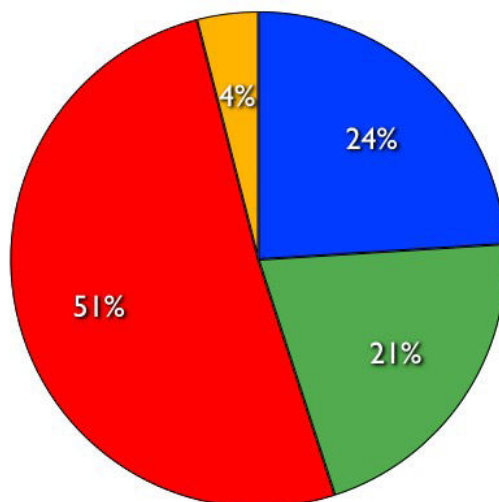
Do you think you influence the decisions in the forums in which you participate?

Very much   More or less   Just a bit   No   Don't know



Do you feel you have adequate opportunities to share your ideas and opinions with your community and the larger society?

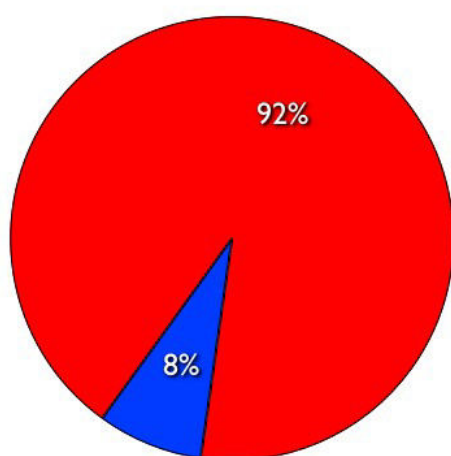
Yes, I have enough opportunities  
Yes, but the opportunities are not enough  
Not as much as I need/would like to have  
I don't know









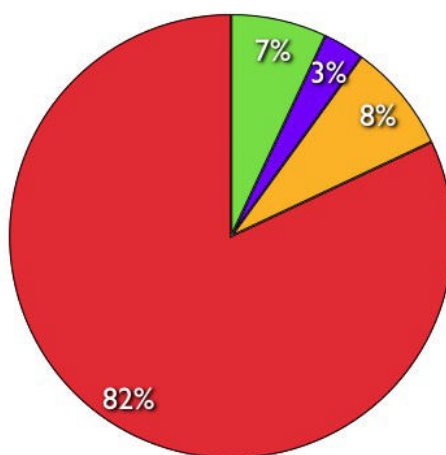
In the last six months, have you participated in any activity in a municipal council?

● Yes      ● No

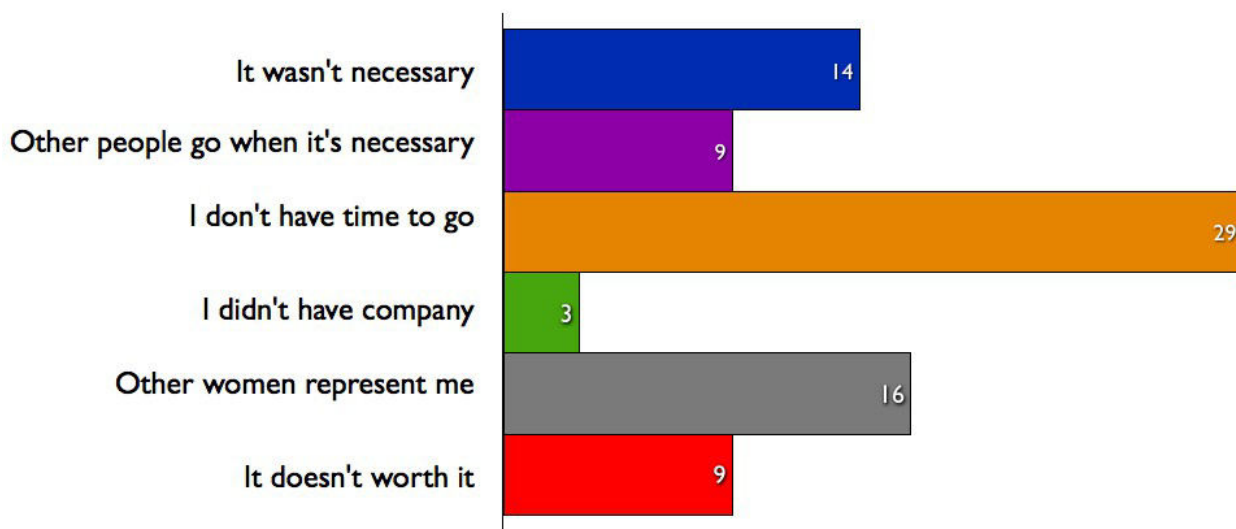


Do you get to know in advance when meetings of the Municipal Council are held in your community?

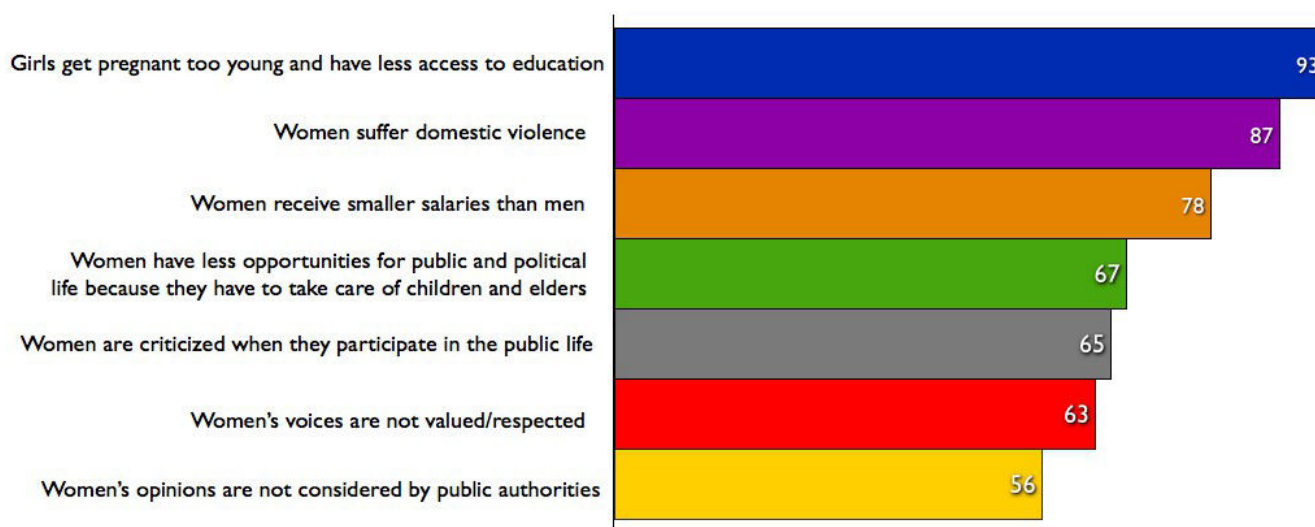
-  I always know in advance
-  I sometimes know
-  I never know in advance
-  I don't know what is a Municipal Council



### Why didn't you participate in the council?



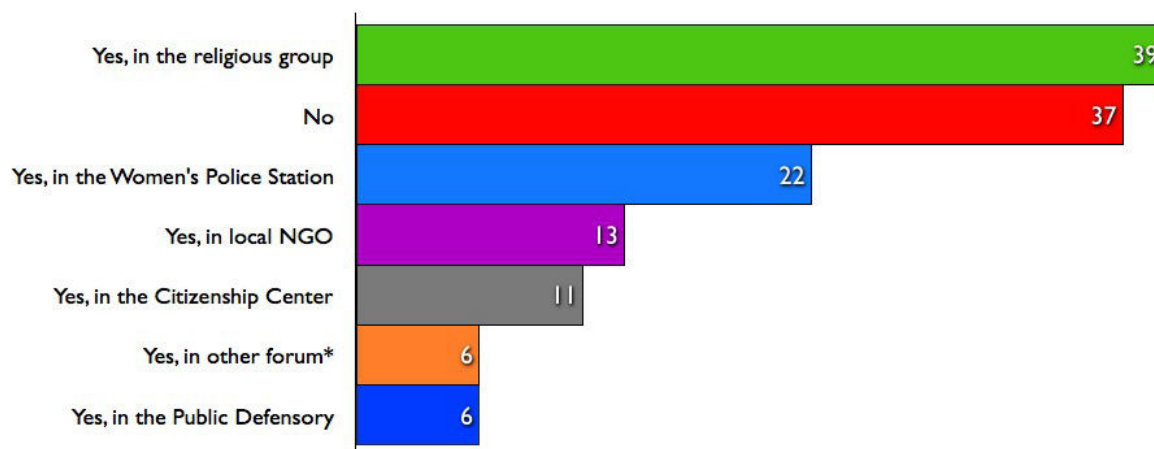
### What kind of injustice do women face in your community?



### Why do you think women should participate in decision making processes in the community/municipality?

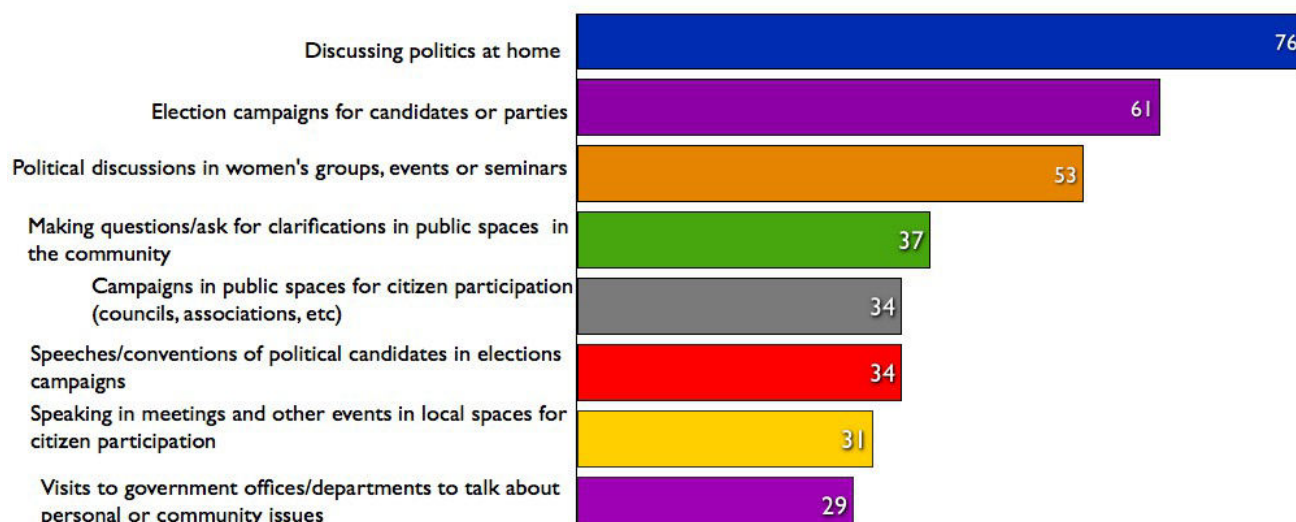


### Have you ever helped another woman raise in public her personal problems or difficulties?

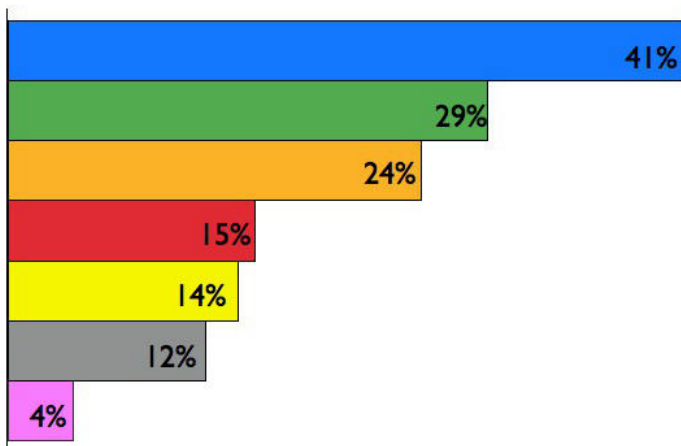
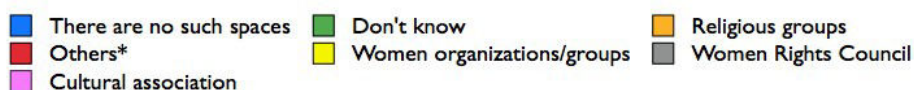


\*The other forum mentioned was the local public hospital.

## Have you ever participate in the following political activities and processes?

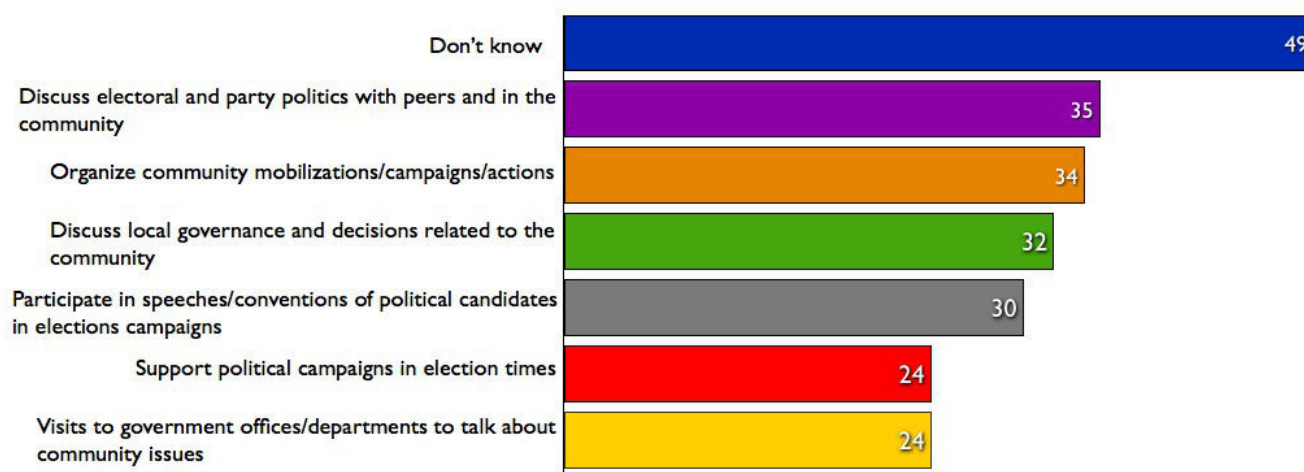


In your community, what are the forums (both membership based and forums that address grievances/ issues of all women in the community) that are exclusively for women?



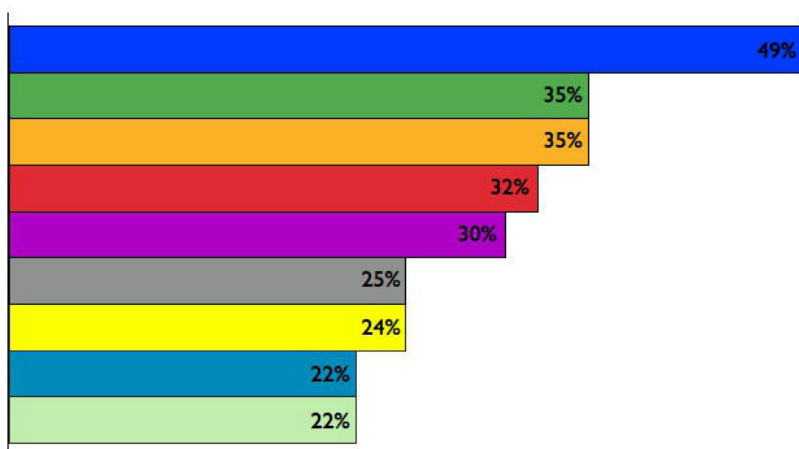
\*Within the category "others" we find women's hospital; gym center; women police station and the superintendence for women.

In what type of political activities and processes do the women in your group participate?



What sort of political processes and activities do the women's group you belong to in your community undertake?

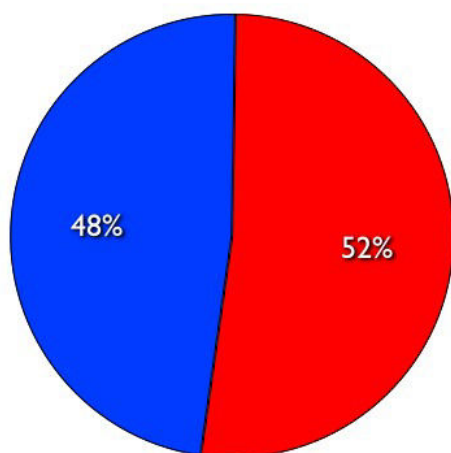
- Don't know
- They discuss politics during election campaigns
- Organize community campaigns and collective actions
- Participate in local governance and decision making processes
- Participate in political rallies
- Work in political campaigns during election times
- Some women visit government departments in search of solutions to community problems
- Represent the community in public forums and spaces
- Some women visit government departments in search for solutions to group members' problems



## Access, diffusion and use of ICTs

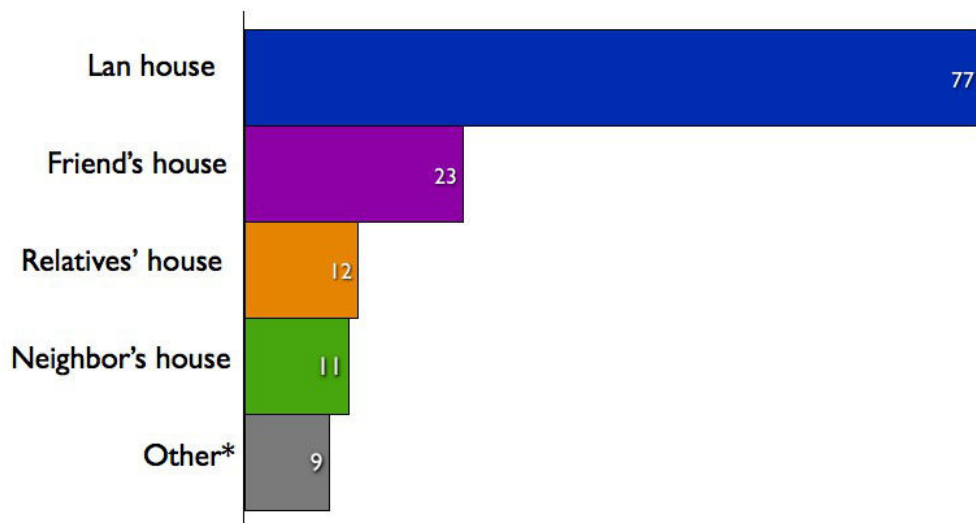
If you don't have access to the Internet at home, can you access from another place?

● Yes      ● No



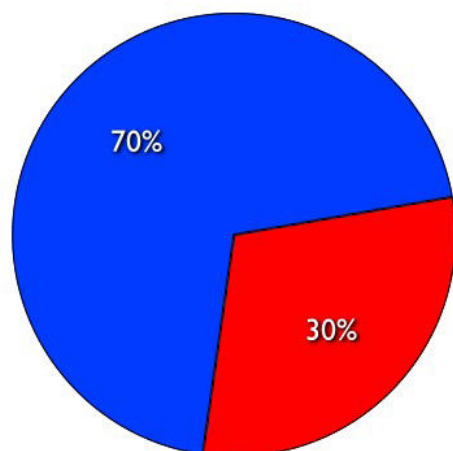


From where?



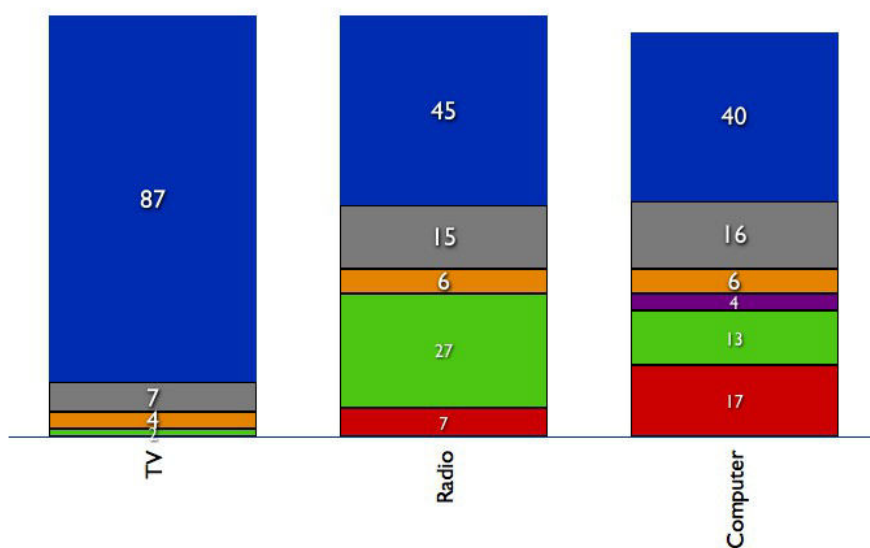
Have you used a computer in the last six months?

● Yes ● No



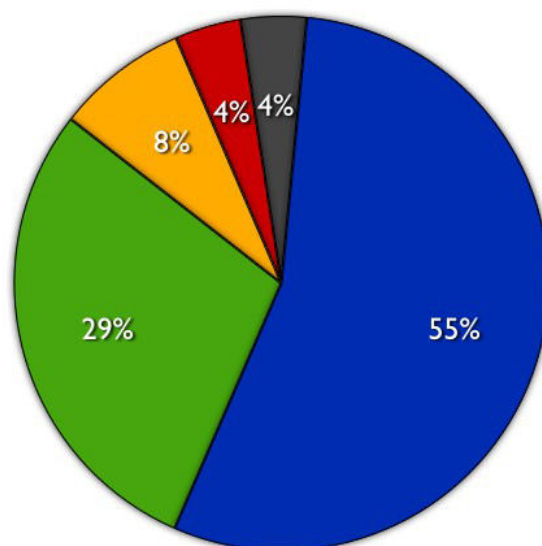
With what frequency do you use each of these equipments?

■ Never      ■ Rarely      ■ Once every 4-6 months  
■ Once a week      ■ More than once a week      ■ Every day

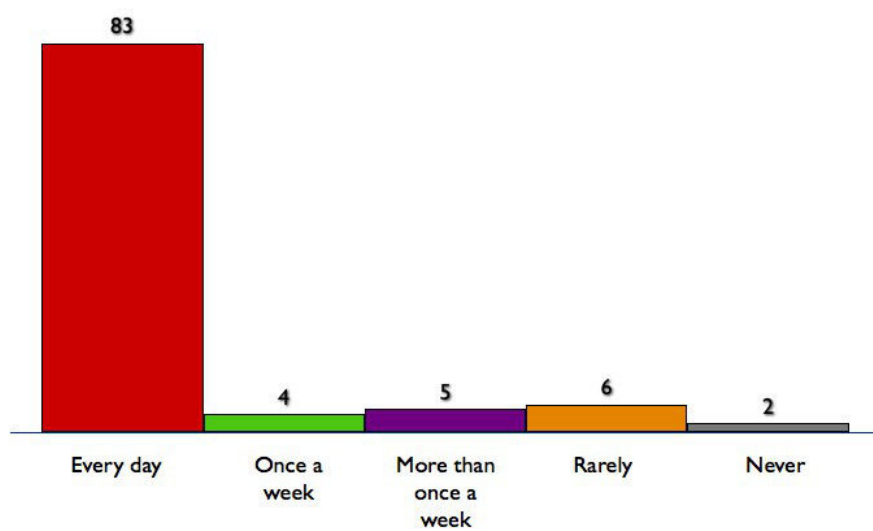


How much do you spend each month with mobile telephony?

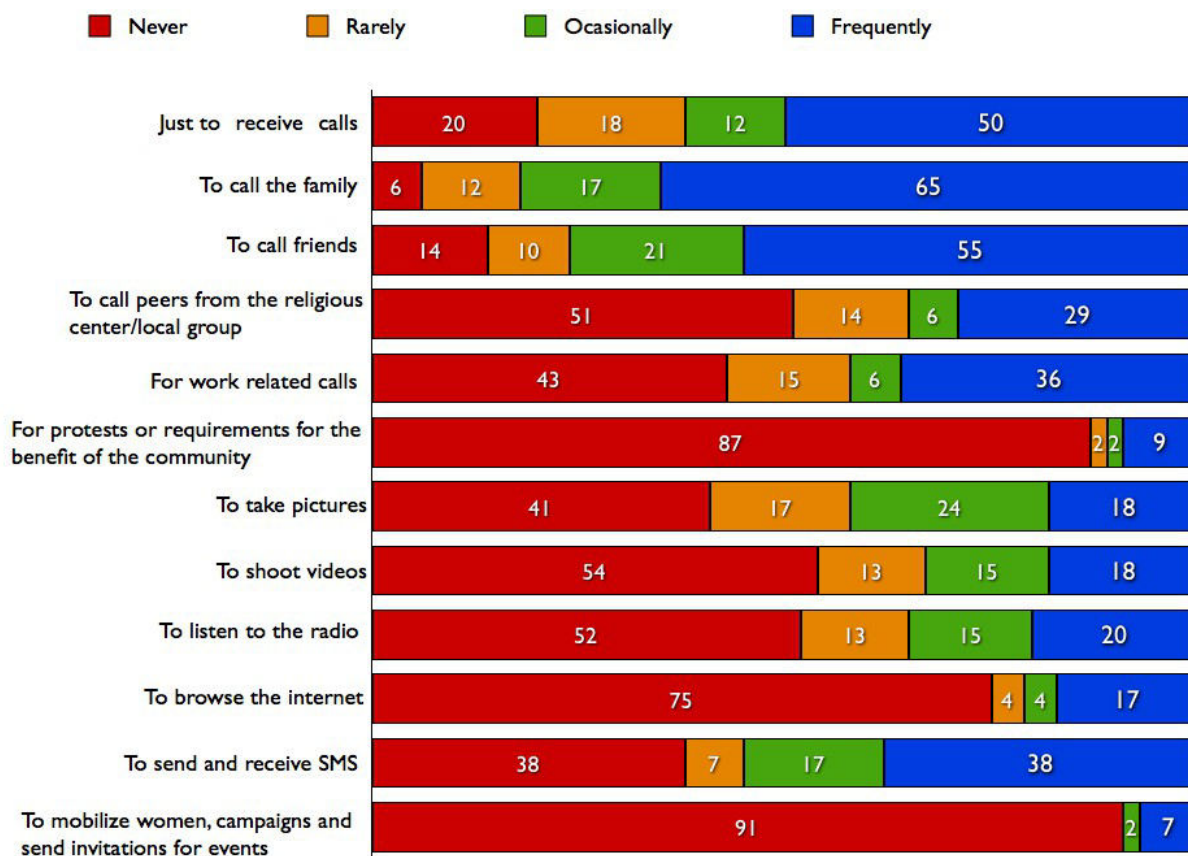
- Up to U\$ 12
- From U\$12 to U\$20
- From U\$20 to U\$40
- More than U\$40
- Don't know



How often do you use a mobile phone?

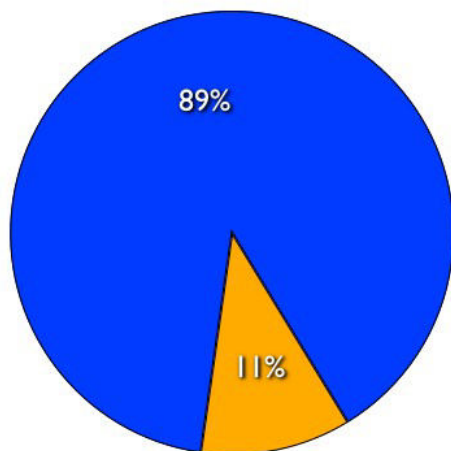


### What do you use the mobile for?

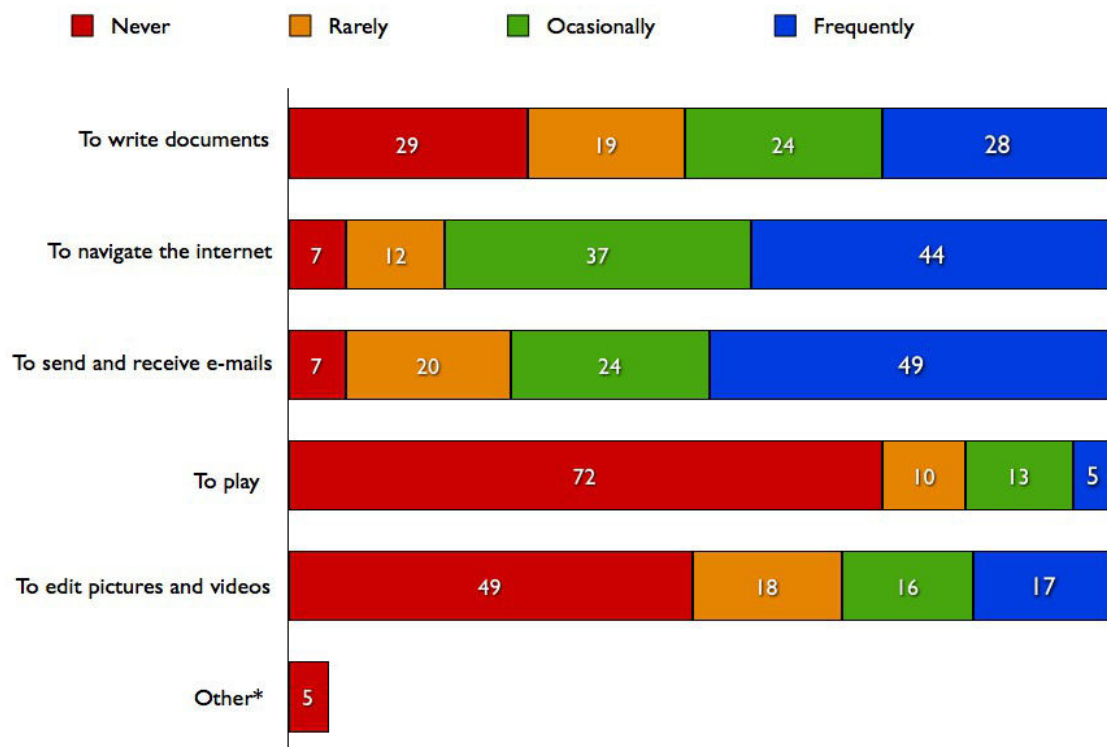


Do you need help to use the computer? In case you do, who helps you?

 I don't need help       A family member helps me

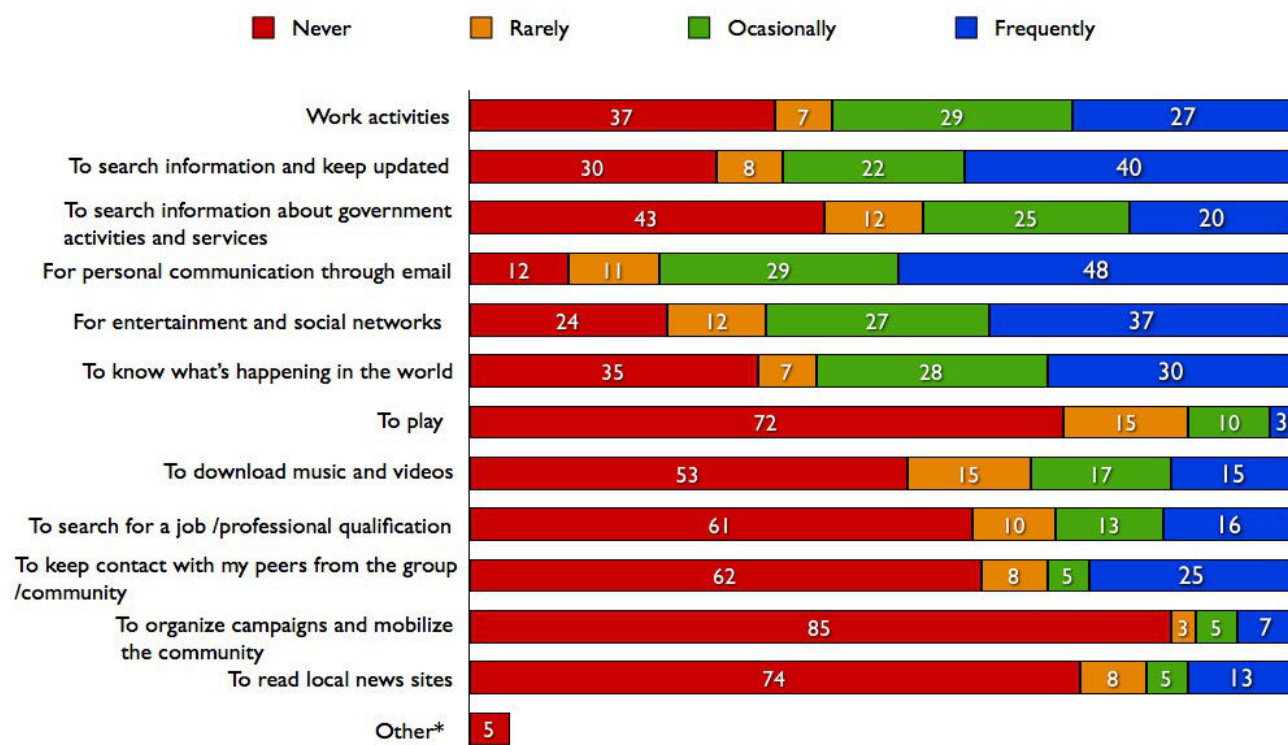


### What are your main uses for the computer?



\*To help children/grandchildren with their homework; to see pictures, movies and listen to music downloaded by someone else.

### What are your main purposes for using the computer?



\* For school related activities