

# GALAPAGOS REPORT 2011-2012

## HUMAN SYSTEMS

### CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN GALAPAGOS

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*The **Galapagos National Park Service** has its headquarters in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos and is the Ecuadorian governmental institution responsible for the administration and management of the protected areas of Galapagos.*

*The **Governing Council of Galapagos** has its headquarters in Puerto Baquerizo Moreno, San Cristóbal Island, and is the Ecuadorian governmental institution responsible for planning and the administration of the province.*

*The **Charles Darwin Foundation**, an international non-profit organization registered in Belgium, operates the Charles Darwin Research Station in Puerto Ayora, Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos.*

***Galapagos Conservancy**, based in Fairfax, Virginia USA, is the only US non-profit organization focused exclusively on the long-term protection of the Galapagos Archipelago.*



Photograph: Carlos Zapata

## Citizen participation in Galapagos

Carlos Zapata Erazo

FUNDAR Galapagos

The challenge for Galapagos society and indeed for other human societies around the globe is to identify, build, and foster a suite of social benefits that enhance public wellbeing. "Public good" or "wellbeing" refers to those important but intangible civil rights that are guaranteed by the constitution of Ecuador (and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations). Ecuador has been a pioneer in terms of including third-generation rights, such as "rights of nature", the "right to personal privacy," etc., in its constitution.

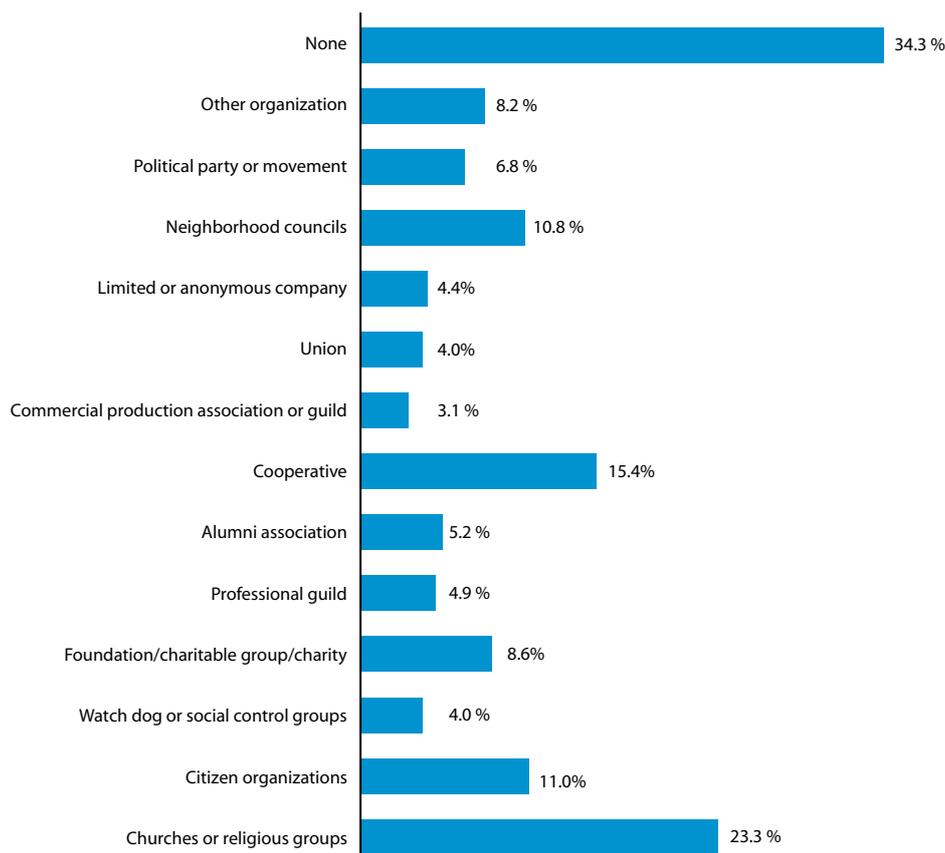
Identifying and constructing the "public good" is done both by public institutions (government) and organized civil society at different levels of partnership and responsibility. Ecuador's constitution guarantees citizens the privilege of participation at different decision-making levels.

When civil society participates in the construction of the public good, we can say that it is "democratizing" public policy. This has taken place in Galapagos since the Special Law for Galapagos of 1998, which permits organized groups within the civil society to participate along with the public sector in the creation of local public policy (INGALA Council and committees, Inter-Institutional Management Authority, Participatory Management Board). Within Ecuador, Galapagos pioneered the democratization of public policy, as reflected in the 1998 law that established the partnership and collaboration between the public sector and civil society.

Since the establishment of the Special Law for Galapagos tensions have existed between: 1) private or proprietary interests and the public interest; 2) the public sector and civil society, and 3) national public policy and local/regional public policy in Galapagos.

During the first decade of this century, in addition to the institutionalized opportunities for participation, several citizen groups temporarily emerged to generate public proposals. The Constitution of 2007 created new rights and opportunities for participation that allow civil society to find new ways in which to build the public good. However, despite the existence of constitutional and legal opportunities, as well as the freedom to organize and exercise the right to speak, oppose, collaborate, control, etc., the population as a whole is not participating in this process. To better understand the perceptions, motivations, and potential of Galapagos society on this topic, we conducted a qualitative study of local perceptions about citizen participation in Galapagos.

<sup>1</sup> Karel Vasak, first Secretary General of the International Institute of Human Rights, stated in 1979 that human rights are of three generations, based on the principles of the French Revolution: liberty, equality and fraternity. Third generation rights are related to solidarity.



**Figure 1.** Citizen participation in civil society organizations during the last ten years in Galapagos (May 2012).

## Methodology

This study was conducted within the populations of the islands of Santa Cruz, San Cristóbal and Isabela. We used a survey containing eight general questions. A total of 781 surveys were distributed as follows: 240 in San Cristóbal, 240 in Isabela and 301 in Santa Cruz. Respondents were randomly selected by neighborhood in order to achieve a more uniform coverage of the population. The surveys were conducted in May 2012.

## Participation in organizations

Citizens become drivers of social transformation when they speak out and create civil society organizations (CSOs). Formal or informal CSOs are fora for dialogue and participation. To know how much an individual participates in CSOs we asked the following question: *“Do you participate or have you participated in any of the following organizations during the last ten years? (Choose more than one if necessary).”*

A third of the respondents indicated that they had not belonged to any organization (Figure 1). Of those who said that they had belonged to some type of organization, the most frequent were religious organizations (23.3%), cooperatives (15.4%), citizen organizations (11%) and neighborhood councils (11%).

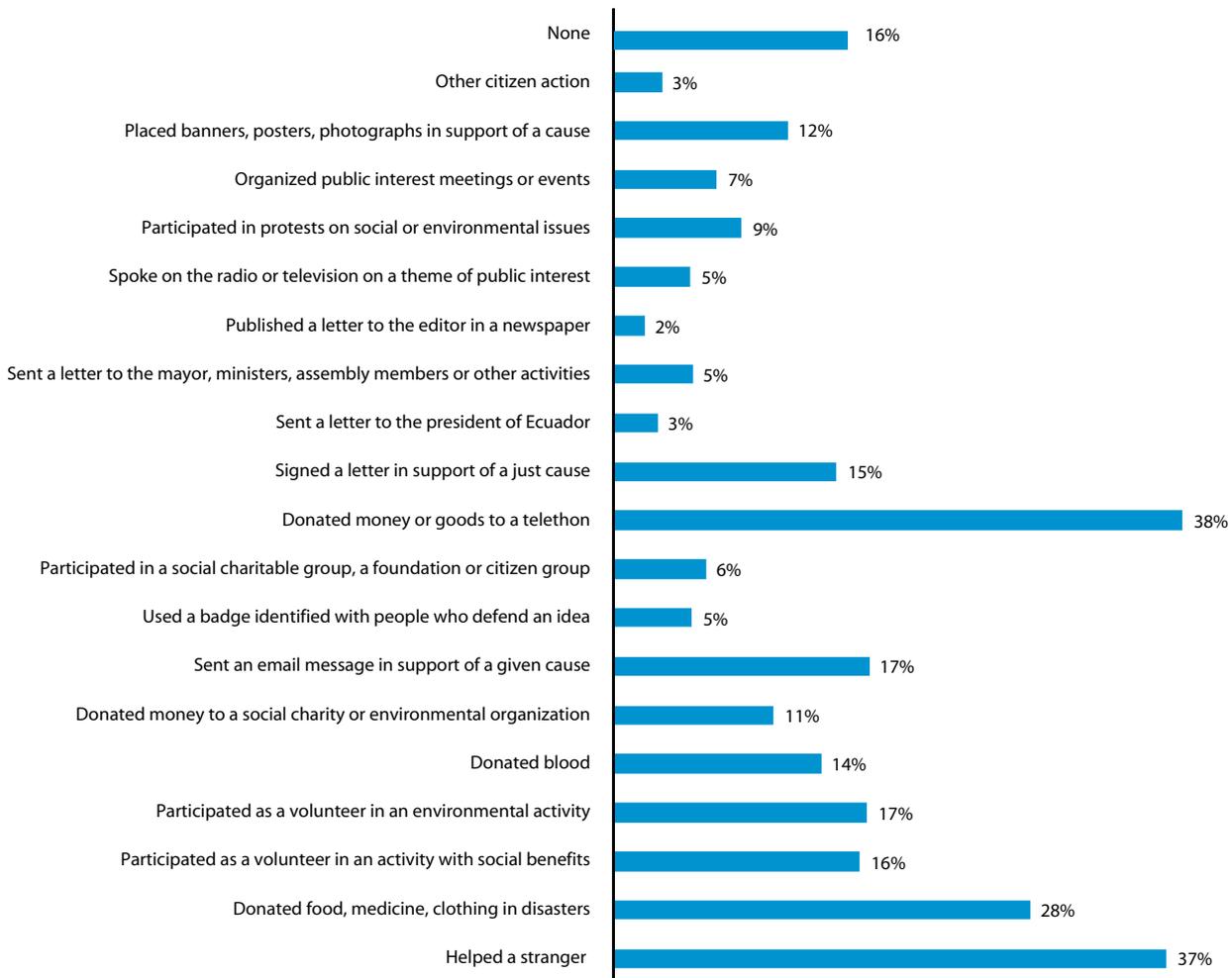
## Citizen action

Citizen participation can be considered as purposeful engagement in developing the public good or public “common.” To determine how citizen participation has occurred in Galapagos, we asked the following question: *“Have you at some time or other ever taken one or more of the following actions during the last ten years? (Choose more than one if necessary);”* 18 alternatives options were then listed.

The greatest percentage of respondents indicated that they had donated money or goods in response to “telethons” (38%), followed by providing assistance to a stranger (37%), or donating medicines, clothes or food in the case of a disaster (28%). A second group of citizen actions corresponded to volunteer participation in support of environmental and social causes, signing letters of support for an initiative, or sending supporting emails.

## Credibility and accessibility of citizen participation

Civic participation is often a thankless task as it does not always achieve results. To understand the perception of Galapagos residents regarding the importance and effectiveness of public participation, we asked six specific questions under the following general question: *“Please indicate your level of agreement with the following*



**Figure 2.** Citizen activism in Galapagos during the last ten years (May 2012).

questions (a lot, some, little, none), (strongly agree, somewhat agree, disagree)."

In general, respondents expressed optimism and belief in citizen participation (Table 1). Of greatest note is that 88% of respondents believes that programs implemented by public institutions are much or somewhat improved when there is public participation. Two out of three people showed much or some interest in actively participating and agreed that Galapagos would be much (20%) or somewhat (45%) better in ten years.

We also asked about the "Level of agreement on whether the constitution and laws of Ecuador allow active participation:" 51% strongly agreed, while 32% somewhat agreed (Figure 3). Only one in ten respondents disagreed. Respondents in Isabela tended to be more optimistic, while those on Santa Cruz were, relatively, the most skeptical among the three islands.

**Trust in organizations**

Trust in institutions was also assessed, defining an institution as those forms of social organization with

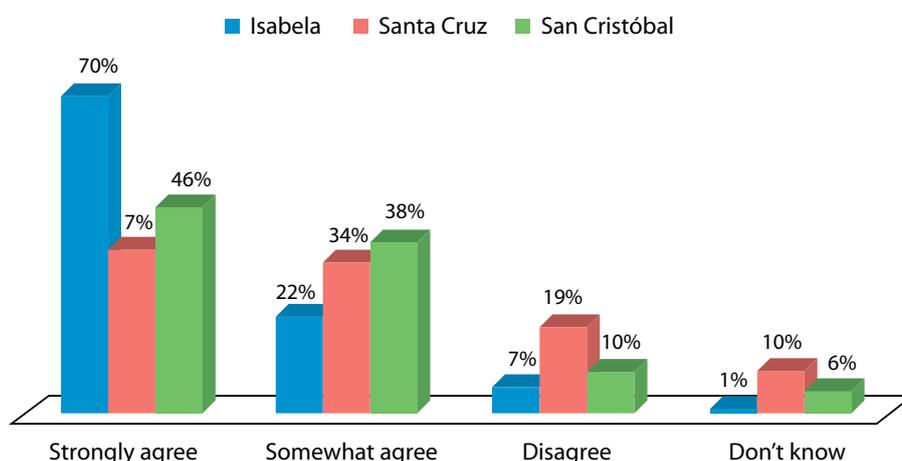
formal or informal structures that focus on specific purposes. Institutions were evaluated within the public, private and civil society sectors. The following question was asked: "Please indicate how much you trust the institutions or groups on the following list: a lot, some, little or none." The family was the institution receiving the most "very confident" responses (88.7%), followed by two public institutions: the educational system (42.6%) and the Galapagos National Park Service (GNPS - 34.4%; Figure 4). Foundations, churches and civic groups fell into a second level of trust (24-31%).

In contrast, the institutions that received more "no confidence" responses included neighbors (10.6%), tourism companies (9.6%) and the National Assembly (9%).

Comparing results among islands, the family and the educational system received the greatest levels of trust on all the islands; the GNPS is the third institution in order of confidence in Isabela, and fifth in San Cristóbal and Santa Cruz. Churches are the third organization in San Cristóbal and Santa Cruz, while not even among the top six in Isabela.

**Table 1.** Perceptions of citizen participation in Galapagos (May 2012).

Question	A lot	Some	Little	None	NS
How much do you think that the social and environmental programs of public institutions are improved by citizen participation?	58%	29%	8%	2%	2%
How much do you think corruption can be controlled by citizen participation?	36%	36%	19%	7%	2%
Do you consider the Galapagos community participatory?	33%	38%	22%	5%	2%
Are you interested in actively participating in meetings, citizen oversight committees or groups?	29%	36%	17%	13%	5%
Do you agree with the following statement: "only public participation generates social change?"	46%	29%	12%	10%	4%
Do you agree that Galapagos will be better in ten years than it is now?	20%	45%	13%	7%	14%



**Figure 3.** Level of agreement with the statement that the constitution and laws of Ecuador allow active participation (May 2012).

**Citizen interest**

To assess interest in participating, the following question was asked: "Would you be interested in actively supporting a cause? YES\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ . If the answer is yes, how? (Choose more than one if necessary)." In Isabela, 76% of respondents expressed interest in actively participating as did 62% in Santa Cruz and 36% in San Cristóbal (Figure 5).

Of those who indicated interest in actively supporting a cause, the vast majority indicated that they would like to do it through volunteer work (Figure 6). Participating by donating money was the least interesting option for respondents.

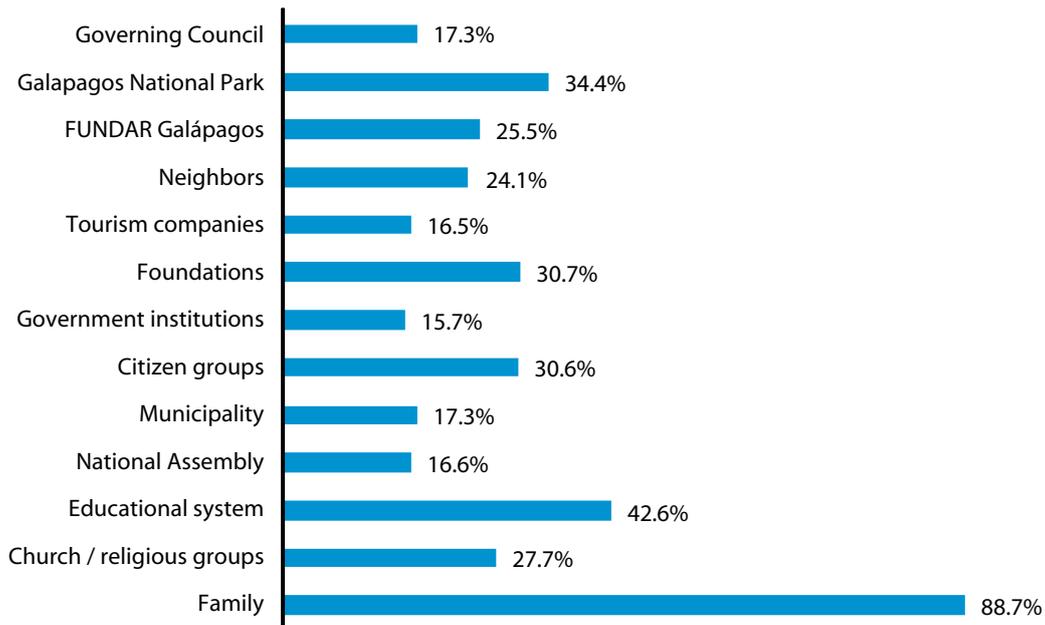
Exploring still further, we asked the following question: "What causes, ideas or topics would interest you to actively participate? (Choose more than one if necessary)." Conservation was of greatest interest (65%), while 37% and 36% were interested in helping to "avoid pollution" and "improve opportunities for young people," respectively

(Figure 7). Respondents on the three islands agreed with conservation as the primary cause, but respondents in Santa Cruz and San Cristóbal identified "avoid pollution" and "improve opportunities for young people" as the second and third causes respectively, while respondents in Isabela identified "improving opportunities for young people" and "improving economic conditions" as the second and third leading causes they would be interested in supporting.

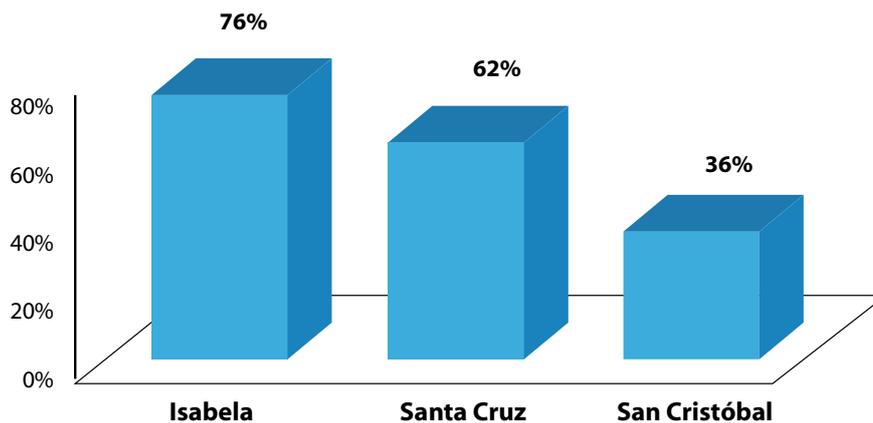
**Problems with citizen participation**

To determine why some people choose not to participate, the following question was asked: "There are people who have no interest in participating in citizen groups, why do you think this happens? Please list three causes." The most frequently listed reason was lack of time (70%) (Figure 8).

Digging deeper regarding the perception of the effectiveness of participation in achieving results, we asked: "Who really has the power to generate change in Galapagos?"



**Figure 4.** Percentage of responses indicating that they have a lot of trust in various institutions in Galapagos (May 2012).



**Figure 5.** Interest in actively participating in a cause (May 2012).

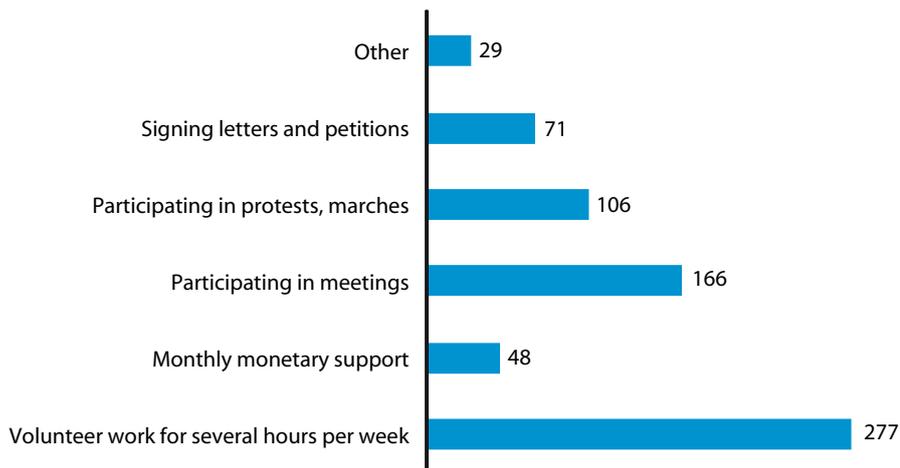
*Select the top three in order of importance.* Almost a third of respondents indicated that the central government has the greatest power (32%), followed by organized citizens (21%) and municipalities (16%; Figure 9).

**Conclusions and recommendations**

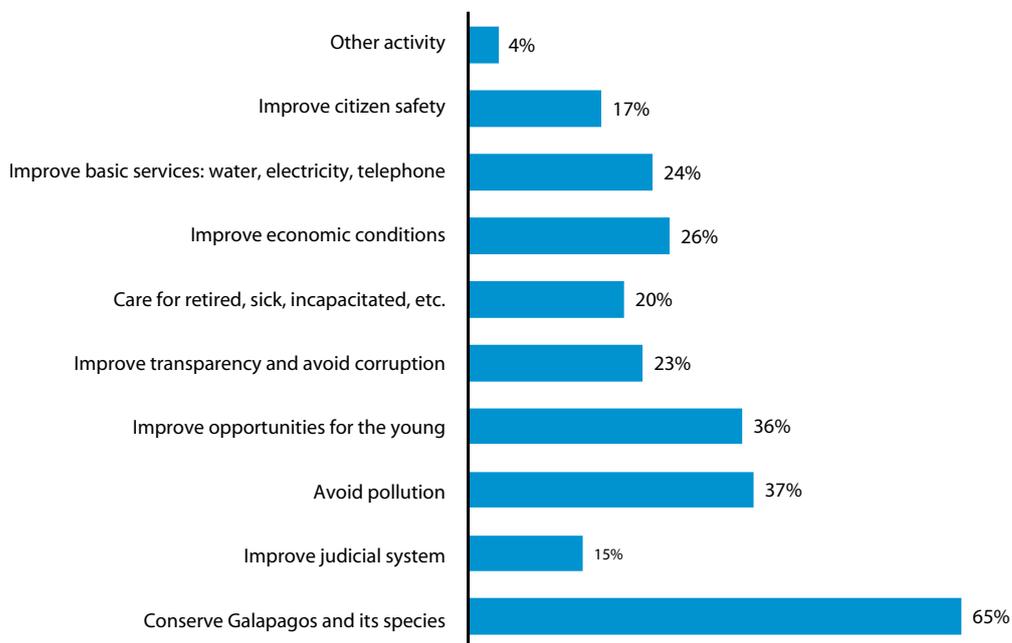
Although no good historical baseline on the evolution of citizen participation in the Galapagos exists, this research shows that a high percentage of the Galapagos population believes that participation is important for the archipelago. Specifically, the study revealed the following:

1. Churches, cooperatives and neighborhood councils are important places where social involvement is possible, although such participation is often not very visible. 66% of the Galapagos society is involved in some way with a Galapagos civil society organization.

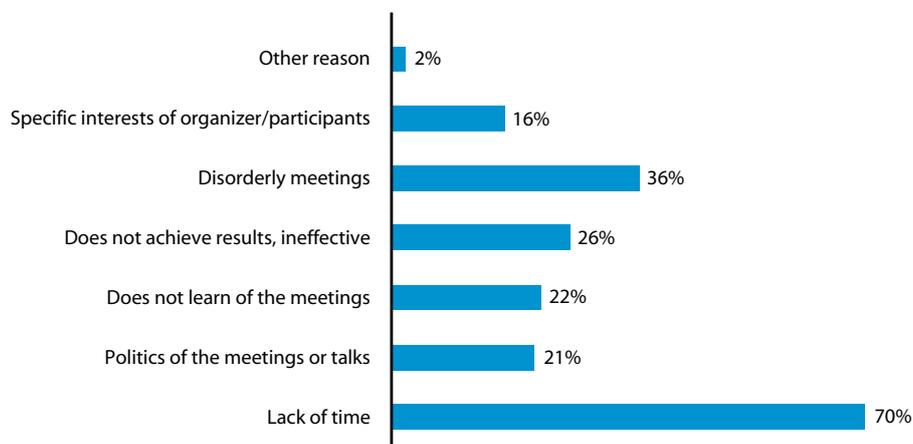
2. The majority of respondents agrees or strongly agrees that participation improves social and environmental programs of public institutions and helps to control corruption.
3. Galapagos society is interested in participating and has a positive perception regarding the usefulness of citizen participation. The preferred mechanism for participation is volunteerism, although the Galapagos society has primarily been involved through the donation of goods and money, and by helping strangers (although relatively fewer than in other countries, such as Mexico, where 56% report having donated goods and money, or assisting a stranger; Espinoza, 2008). Conservation of natural biodiversity motivates Galapagos residents, especially in Isabela where respondents expressed a greater willingness to participate in such activities.



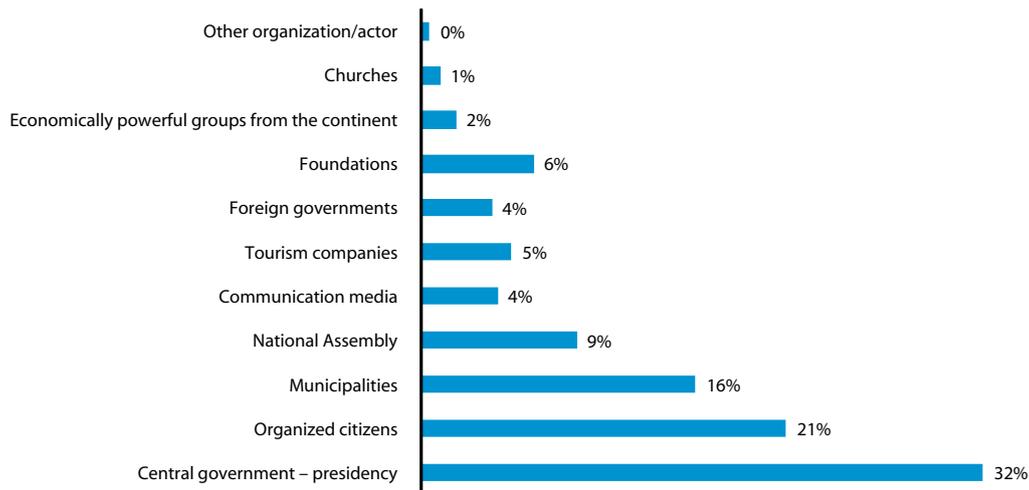
**Figure 6.** Total number of individuals surveyed with interest in participating through specific mechanisms (May 2012).



**Figure 7.** Causes, ideas or themes of interest to Galapagos residents for participation (May 2012).



**Figure 8.** Perceptions regarding the reason that some people do not actively participate (May 2012).



**Figure 9.** Perception about who has the power to initiate socioenvironmental change in Galapagos (May 2012).

4. The main reason that some people do not participate is lack of time, followed by the disorderly meetings of civil society organizations.
5. Galapagos residents believe the central government, citizens and municipalities are those with the greatest ability to generate change. The family, which is the most important institution for society, the educational system and churches represent important opportunities for socialization and have the potential for building public wellbeing.
6. There are constitutional and legal opportunities that allow citizens to be important social activists. The right to participate in formal or unconventional

ways (including the right of resistance) will continue to generate tensions, but far from representing an obstacle, this kind of participation makes it possible to develop societies with full rights based on discussion and collaboration.

Monitoring annual changes in perceptions on citizen participation is recommended, through the collection of homogeneous data that will make it possible to identify trends over time. A study of the potential impact of training (governance, managing meetings and volunteers, etc.) is also recommended with the goal of strengthening the ability of civil society organizations to promote and maximize the impact of citizen participation.

## References

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