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Paper:
***Mexican Solidarity
Final Results and Analysis of a National Study on Volunteering
and Citizen Participation***

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Abstract:

Citizen participation has become one of the main issues in the recent social movements that have surged as a result of the needs of change of a one-party government for over 70 years in Mexico. Voluntary activity and solidarity have followed a distinct route within the country, and both these actions have contributed in their own way in the consolidation of an incipient democracy on the American continent. Changing political, social and economic conditions in Mexico have led to the need of understanding why and how people participate, the various ways in which this occurs, and in what measure they contribute to their society.

This paper presents the structure and methodology utilized for the ENSAV¹, (National Survey on Solidarity and Volunteer Action) one of the first national volunteer surveys ever undertaken in Mexico. It also gives a quantitative overview to add a qualitative understanding of the sector, presenting the findings of 15 case studies based on volunteers and employees of CSOs in various parts of the country that include 66 face to face interviews to sustain them.

The study is designed in two distinct segments to be able to engage all formal and informal volunteer and citizen participation in the country as well as to analyze the structures of volunteer groups and the contributions of their various members. The first segment consists of

¹ ENSAV, in Spanish: *Encuesta Nacional de Solidaridad y Acción Voluntaria*

the analysis of the nationwide survey² previously discussed by this author, presenting not only of the main data and findings, but enhancing the analysis of some of the structural meanings of these numbers as well, going into the classifications that emerge from this piece of research. The second segment reveals the main motivations that the subjects have for giving and for participating both within and out of group settings presenting some important findings in the trends that arise and are sustained by personal motivation and family environment.

The two year long investigation, underwritten by Cemefi, also provides us of a look into the historical (Reygadas, 1998) and cultural factors³ (Verduzco, 2003) that are embedded in Mexican society that surround giving and volunteering plus some theoretical and empirical⁴ (Butcher, 2003) research that reveals a comprehensive outlook on both formal and informal volunteer participation throughout the country. One of the main hypotheses is that, as in the case of the economy, there is a large proportion of informal participation, which in a way, explains partially the subsistence and support of almost half of the country's population living in extreme poverty.

The national nature of this research project reveals interesting patterns of volunteerism and citizen action, plus various forms of solidary participation that may be useful guides in the prevailing need to build and strengthen civil society organizations. These results provide an informed basis for decision making in the government public policy arena and reveal distinct and diverse ways for established CSOs to promote and enable citizens for more effective participation in community issues.⁵

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² The initial results of this study were presented on Bangkok at the previous ISTR meeting with the paper: Butcher, J. (2005) *Myths and Realities of Citizen Participation in Mexico: The Volunteer Effect*.

³ Verduzco, G., (2003). *Organizaciones del Sector No Lucrativo: Visión de su trayectoria en México*, México: CEMEFI/COLMEX. This book presents a perspective on the history of CSOs in Mexico, also providing a historical explanation on motivation and participation in Mexican civil society. Many other authors have also studied patterns of participation and citizen behavior throughout Mexican history.

⁴ A recent study with Mexican volunteers on a face to face interaction with recipients.

⁵ Butcher, J., (2008) Ed. *México Solidario: participación ciudadana y voluntariado*. This book presents both the ENSAV survey and the 15 case studies here mentioned.

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