

**Panel: Civil Society, Citizen participation and the Dawn of a New Era: The Third Sector in Mexico in Light of a New Political Regime**

**A new perspective of voluntarism and citizen participation in Mexico:  
Recreating civil society/government relationships.**

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**Abstract:**

In the past 15 years, Mexico has lived through intense social, political and economic change. This is reflected in the opening of markets, in the insertion into the globalization process, in the modernization of the governmental apparatus and just recently, in access to a new and different democratic political system. One could assume that these changes will eventually enable the country to provide better living conditions that will pave the path out of poverty, and social inequity that include more than 50% of the population.

A strong presence and influence of civil society organizations (CSO) has been felt during this series of conflicts and tensions. Their visibility has grown in the public eye and on many occasions they have been the initiators and facilitators of these processes. This sector of society has not only played an important role, but also continues to accompany change as it occurs. Actually, these CSO have been claimed to be a reference of governance and decided promoters of the basis to extend citizens' social, economic and political rights. During all these years this sector has also undergone important internal transformations which reflect on relationships with the market and the state. There has been a self examination of purpose and self identification undertaking various names: Non-profit sector, Third sector or NGO sector. They have overcome redefinitions, professionalization and some have met the challenge of sustainability.

External modifications have been to initiate and continue a dialogue with the state and more recently, with the market. There has been a redefining not only of terms, but also of actions to be taken on all sides. Citizen participation and voluntary action have been rediscovered. The elections proved that changes are possible when there exists a collective will for it to occur. CSO have sprung up in the past decade as new voices try to be heard and new actions are needed.

This paper will present what has been said in the dialogues with the government during this transition, providing examples and case studies of institutions and relevant CSO that have contributed with models of new relationships demonstrating how these have enabled social change in Mexico. It will also present the changes in relationships and structures of voluntary action under the new regime, including the latest studies and comparative volunteer surveys to date as to provide more accurate information about voluntarism and citizen participation in Mexico.

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**A New Perspective in Voluntarism and Citizen Participation in Mexico:  
Recreating Civil Society/Government Relationships**

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The Third Sector in and Era of Global (Dis)Order**

## I. Introduction

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## II. The Past

Many researchers have studied historical aspects of Mexican civil participation looking back into customs and traditions of the indigenous population in Mexico reflecting on the influence of the Spanish culture from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the present. (Reygadas, 1998). Other authors, (Mendez, 1997), (Arredondo,1996) (Aguilar Villanueva, 1997) & (Olvera, 2001) also present versions and visions of how these social organizations have evolved and are now part of the national scene, and are now beginning to influence public policy and social evolution in various degrees. This historical perspective also becomes a reference to explain the formation and expansion of modern Mexican CSO as well as to explore the attitudes that Mexicans have

exhibited around voluntary action and citizen participation (Butcher, 1999). Focusing on government relationships and CSO, Reygadas (2001), a recognized Mexican historian, presents of four distinct periods in the second half of the XX century that tell the story of how CSO have confronted the government in their struggle to create and institutionalize different kinds of relationships and interactions to assure independence of movement as well as to empower conscious and autonomous citizens into action. These periods are:

a) Visioning Democracy and Autonomy (1956-1968). Social movements that were initiated by teachers, doctors and students in the sixties set the stage for both autonomy and democracy through social practices such as meetings, strikes and democratic elections within their organizations, to mention a few. This attitude of functioning outside of established patterns, including lay organizations, still under some influence of the Catholic Church that sprung after the II Vatican Council, helped form what was called the “68 Student Movement” against presidential authority. This important movement proved that it was possible establish new paradigms for relationships with government.

b) Social Movements and Civil Organizations (1969-1981). Repression of the student “68 Movement” fostered other societal groups in the following ten years: feminists, factory workers, unionists, etc. This movement is considered the initiation of a transformation of the autocratic and corporatist model régime and contributed to the creation of some of the first NGOs, syndicates and independent political parties. Innovation created the beginning of many democratic changes between governors and governed. Paulo Freire visited Mexico in 1969 and 1970, offering a different vision and conceptual corpus, creating what is now called popular education, the basis for many of the CSO of this period.

c) Crises and Political Initiatives (1982-1988). As of 1982, polarization of society increased. The earthquake in 85, however, engendered a unique and authentic public response to the needs of others and is considered another benchmark for the building of Mexican CSO, fostering new visions of organized society. These possibilities of change were what led Mexicans to sustain new leaders such as Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas ( of the PRD political party) who promised to develop a response against the neo liberal practices. Many CSO grew outside the spaces that the government had originally created for them, since there were no subsidies offered by the government to these organizations and, in general, no services were rendered by CSO to government. A communality among CSO was their fierce independence and at times antagonism towards the government, thus the term NGO usually meant anti-governmental organizations. This created distrust from the official party towards civil society organizations, and may be one of the many causes of the size of this sector in Mexico.

d) Civil and Indigenous Movements (1989-2000).  
Civil movements.

After an election fraud in 1988, many civil organizations began networking to create a new democratic panorama. In 1991, dozens of CSO began to observe elections giving birth to the IFE<sup>1</sup>, an independent of government organization designed to monitor elections, observe electoral fraud and alleviate buying and trafficking of electoral votes. It is in this time period saw

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<sup>1</sup> Instituto Federal Electoral (Federal Electoral Institute)

new experiences such as: Citizen Power<sup>2</sup>, the Zapatista march into Mexico City, Citizen Movement for Democracy and others were as clear signs indicating that new citizen/government relationships needed to emerge. Citizens were not willing to accept impositions and were also acquiring an ability to group and respond when feeling attacked. Poder Ciudadano organized twelve different meetings in all regions of the country and managed to invite over 600 CSO to establish a national agenda in economic, social and ecological matters including a plan to bring it to life. However, several directors of the main networks of this organization were invited by local and federal government officials to be a part of the new governments. This created a situation that later repeated itself after national elections, as many heads of CSO due to their expertise and contacts in the NGO world and their knowledge at the local level and in sustainable development tactics, were recruited by President Fox as part of his team.

Indigenous movements.

The liberals in the XIXth century began the destruction and the dismantling of the indigenous communities in Mexico, based on the Reform laws. This was later stopped after the Mexican Revolution when article 27 of the Constitution was approved. In 1992, the Salinas government presented an amendment to this same article and with Congressional approval, the pillaging of land and cultural heritage began again. The world known Zapatista Movement is the example of the inconformity of these marginalized groups that felt were being excluded from the project of a nation. The “Acuerdos de San Andrés”<sup>3</sup>, signed in February 1996 were taken a step further into the drafting of a Federal Law: Ley de Derechos y Cultura Indígena de la Comisión de Concordia y Pacificación<sup>4</sup>, a law that is still in discussion in Congress. In general terms, CSO have historically shared, along with the Mexican Indian culture, a voice of change and defiance in the need for respect of differences and in a need for peace and fairness to all.

e) CSO Networks<sup>5</sup>. As of 1990, many CSO have begun to reach out and form diverse networks. For some of these organizations, it proved to be a form of survival; for others, a way to strengthen themes such as human rights, feminism and ecology. Others formed networks as an attempt to maximize services rendered to the public, as was the case of street children and drug addiction, and present a united front not only in the national, but in the international scenario.

Traditionally, CSO in Mexico have been independent, but present. There have always been individuals in civil society willing to go against the grain and renew or initiate new activities and organizations, usually covering needs not included in the general package of services offered by the government to citizens. CSO were viewed with suspicion by all past régimes perceiving NGO as anti-governmental, as is the case with other Latin American countries. In consequence, government funds have always been scarce or practically non-existent. It could be said that Mexican CSO have survived almost in spite of the existence of diversely excluding governments throughout the years.

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<sup>2</sup> Poder Ciudadano ( Citizen Power)

<sup>3</sup> The “Agreements of San Andrés”, named after a town in Chiapas where most of the Zapatista Movement has taken place.

<sup>4</sup> Law of Rights and Indian Culture from the Commission of Pacification

<sup>5</sup> ROCs, Redes de Organizaciones Civiles

The nonprofit sector in Mexico is small in comparison even with other Latin American countries, considering the size of the country and the non-profit situation in rest of the world (Salamon, Anheier, List Toepler, & Sokolowski, 1999). The reasons behind this situation seem to be linked to the distribution of political power and control over public funds. This is why the relationships between CSO and government now become key for Mexico at this point in its history. This statement, however, does not imply that there have not been successful CSO collaborations with government serving and helping numerous communities. Many coalitions of government programs and CSO that were turned into national programs such as SOLIDARIDAD and PRONASOL, and PROGRESA<sup>6</sup>, and recently, OPORTUNIDADES that were successful. Government provided materials in far away rural areas of the country and the people in the community contributed manual labor. Unfortunately, most of these “programs” were devised to also elicit votes for the ruling PRI<sup>7</sup> political party. Nonetheless, after many of the government programs officially disappeared, many organizations were born or rebuilt on what was left of these coalitions. Sometimes, these became legally registered organizations considered a CSO. On other occasions, communities discovered their potential and the possibilities of enhancing their own development, continuing to work together in informal ways. Many of these programs were designed for small rural communities, or microregions of which there are over 2000 in the country where the population in each of them is under 500 inhabitants. The Catholic Church, for example, (Verduzco, 2002) has always been present in the alleviation of needs, openly or covertly, depending on the historical period discussed, and many Mexicans consider this institution the one to trust for charitable contributions to channel their funds into supporting the community.

### III: The Present

Year 2000 elections in Mexico became a benchmark in the country’s history especially for the strategic role that CSO allegedly played in this process. Vicente Fox from the PAN<sup>8</sup> party won the Presidential elections, ending 71 years of rule by the PRI party. There was a need for the government to finally begin the process of democratization for the XXI century. It is said that President Zedillo had less ties and owed less “political favors” than other PRI officials and was the first to recognize Fox’s triumph.

What this single important change has meant to Mexicans is that now not only transition becomes a reality, but democratization could follow. The relationships presently being formed between CSO and government may bring positive results for the alleviation of the country’s needs, the outcome being fresh possibilities that may organize stronger and better support structures. What it doesn’t mean is that the mentalities that need to go along with those structures have also changed (Butcher, 2001). Expectations of these changes have been exceedingly high, and political promises made in a campaign, hard to keep. Alternating power is beginning to give way to a very fragile democratic transition. The step following transition is consolidating a democracy that requires both equity among citizens and strict application of the law.

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<sup>6</sup> Names of national programs for community participation

<sup>7</sup> Partido Revolucionario Institucional ( Institutional Revolutionary Party)

<sup>8</sup> Partido Acción Nacional ( National Action Party)

Some specialists, in referring to civil society, considered that the role of CSO was relatively important, but believe that the numerous crises of government in the eighties were truly the beginning of the democratization process. Such is the discourse of Dr. Luis F. Aguilar (2002) a former Undersecretary of State in the last PRI régime in the article : “New Social Agent: civil society organizations, social responsibility and citizen participation”, reminding us that *“social cohesion...has various factors sustaining it: these are the regulation/co-action, the exchange of goods and services in the market and the recognition ties of affection, help and solidarity that are present in families and in the various companies and social organizations...”*<sup>9</sup>

This author believes that the Mexican government for years had been the main player in the organization of society and social development. For decades the State monopolized practically all aspects of public life and social development, asphyxiating independent social action, even in areas where its incursion was not necessary. This damaged society’s capacity for self-government and for solving its own community affairs. The citizens were the beneficiaries and the objects of public policies, but not its subjects. One problems that results is a propensity of Mexican society to depend on the State. Another aspect of this situation is the misconception of what is “public” which is basically constituted by the authorities and public officials, with no place for the “public” citizen. In this perspective, citizens are voters, tax payers and sometimes voice an opinion, but they do not really participate, in either the definition, the application or in the evaluation of public policies.

In the eighties, with the crises of the State brought on by various reasons such as a centralist federal government without the balance of state government, corporatism and protected internal markets, a decision then had to be made: democratization of the political regime and the liberalization of the economy. These two strategic decisions caused what Dr. Aguilar calls the “resurrection of civil society” in Mexico. The democratization of the regime brought on an idea of a more “ active citizenship”. The PRI government understood that it was imperative to finally publicly recognize, the utility and the administrative value of non-partisan citizen participation. Here is where the explosion and proliferation of CSO flourished. In Mexico, the number of formal associations keeps growing, as an example, in only a ten year span from 1984 to 1994, the number of newly created CSO is the same amount as in the previous one hundred years.<sup>10</sup>

In reality, many organizations have been working for “others” since the arrival of the Spaniards and Catholic Church 400 years ago. Before that, historically, the solution of community needs and the sense of belonging to a community over and above the individual was very strong and well established among the indigenous population. Presently, around 10% of the population is considered indigenous, which means more than 11 million Mexican Indians still operate in a communitarian fashion. Their culture does not respond to a political change made in the capital, especially for many of these groups that live in small communities, with little or no communication with the rest of the country. They have created their own way of living and their own terms for making decisions. The result, many times ends up being armed feuds between factions and local leaders. An example of this is the killing of 26 Indians in the state of Oaxaca in the past month of May, 2002 over a land dispute. Indian rights have been trampled on for years and the new government, plus the CSO that work in these regions have begun to rethink

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<sup>9</sup> *Opus cit*, p..35

<sup>10</sup> Data from the Mexican Center for Philanthropy, CEMEFI

the situations to respect needs and culture incorporating at the same time diverse types of development that will lead to progress. (Butcher, 2001)

Things have changed, the term, Civil Organizations (CO) or CSO have lately been accepted to distinguish these groups from political institutions and State and Market, and now, these organizations order themselves around the citizen participation cycle: information-consultation-association-delegation-and control. Citizens now expect to receive pertinent information and claim their right to know what is happening in their communities for them to be able to make decisions accordingly. Just recently, in the month of May 2002, a new Law for the Right to Information passed in Congress. The State has admitted after a long struggle that information is a crucial resource for the viability of any society. The State should also be the reliable source of this information, either by producing it or by relying on pertinent research, by offering it both publicly and openly. The present relationships between government and CSO are marked by mutual recognition, a sense of respect and a beginning of trust. As explained before, the Mexican government reacted slowly to the fact that selected CSO could be useful for small collaborations. Social Co-investment Funds were opened, and a first encounter was established to be used by governments for better efficiency and greater quality of the development of its programs and responsibilities.

Research has focused on different aspects of the same reality and what is happening now in Mexico seems to be happening all at once. Dr. Alberto Olvera (2001), head of the Institute of Historical and Social Research of the Universidad Veracruzana,<sup>11</sup> prepared a report which was later turned into a series of books on Case Studies analyzing several axes: a) the nature of social and political actors, b) common spaces and forms of interaction between civil society and the government, c) the effects of this relationship in terms of the collective learning of the actors involved and of society in general, d) the terms of institutional innovation with the capacity of permanency, and e) the contribution made to the construction of democratic governability. Five researchers undertook these cases to create this report. For the purposes of this paper, what will be mentioned here pertains to the CSO/Government relationships. This study was done before the “transition” of governments from the PRI to the PAN so the results here presented deal with the political situation before transition, meaning they were undertaken under the PRI regime when Ernesto Zedillo was the Mexican president.

The great value of this research is the immense array of differences that existed in Mexican CSO at the time of the study represented here.

a) Conservative civil groups in Guadalajara. Made of mostly upper class women volunteers who united forces with other CSO organizations to create a new concept of government dialogue with society plus an idea of civic co-responsibility, thus formulating an opportunity to widen the government agenda to include a social justice dimension which is necessary to eventually stabilize democracy and make it “functional” in the long run.

b) The government of Mexico City and civil participation. The inhabitants of the largest human conglomerate in the country ( 17.5 million people )<sup>12</sup> were able to elect their governor or mayor as of 1997. A legislative assembly with limited powers was formed in 1994 and in 2000,

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<sup>11</sup> Report for the Project for the Institute of Development Studies. UK the Civil Society and Governance Programme, funded by the Ford Foundation., 2000.

<sup>12</sup> INEGI, National Census, 2000.

their delegation representatives were elected to office. Tired of the PRI dominance in the political national arena, they chose a member of the PRD political party, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who later became the presidential candidate for that party. Grassroots organizations and NGO could not coordinate their agendas to generate public policies. The political left demonstrated in this case that it had no project for redefining the relationship between government and society. Therefore, as a result, established CSO in Mexico City at the time, due to their plurality, were not able to form a coherent movement to democratize public life.

c) Civic Alliance and pro-democracy social movements. Beginning in 1983, when the régime began a process of relative political opening for the first time, the pro-democracy social movements began spreading across the nation. Initially, these movements were created by members of NGO, university students, participants in progressive Christian groups and other social leaders. The organization that carries the name Civic-Alliance claimed the identity of Mexican civil society which left groups such as grassroots and conservative groups practically out of the picture. This case study demonstrates how the urgency of a democratic outcome in elections motivated ordinary citizens to participate massively in the 1994 electoral observation, triggering political changes until the opposition gained a majority in the chamber of deputies in the 1997 elections, finally winning the 2000 presidential elections. This movement has been limited to the electoral field. Civic Alliance created much of this awareness and was a key element in helping define a new transparency culture which was extremely important for the democratic transition process. At the same time, although it was not able to truly build a functional civic agenda, it did, however point out the legal gaps that became evident such as: the need to legally recognizing civil society groups involved in politics.

d) Morelos: Three faces of civil society. The first case studied here was a grassroots group in the town of Tepoztlán resisting the construction of an exclusive golf course, which did not propose an alternative solution and found it difficult to use its power to change existing structures. The second case presents the time when the opposing right-wing PAN party won the municipal election in the city of Cuernavaca, but was not able to understand and cooperate with the existing leftist profiled NGOs who were not professional enough to negotiate with the local government. This case demonstrates that even when alternation in local power and political will for interaction with new local actors, such as the NGO exists, it is impossible to have successful political cooperation unless internal organizational and barriers are eliminated for this to happen. The third case was the legitimacy crises that arose when it was discovered that authorities and state police were involved in a series of kidnappings. Local civil society organized a campaign to demand the governor's resignation, using the force of national media, imposing limits to the authoritarian existing régime.

e) Grassroots civil society in the countryside: The CNOC. This is the case of a grassroots organization of coffee growers in a rural area. The CNOC (National Coordinator for Coffee Organizations) managed to maintain control of the top leaders while rotating the regional and local leaders in spite of the plurality of its members, presenting a coffee producing policy, that could have given viability to the sector, but which was nullified by the existing political restrictions. This demonstrated that only a radical change in the Mexican government's composition can create the favorable conditions for a constructive interaction between peasant-farmer organizations and the state.

Dr. Olvera finished this report with several proposals for improving democratic governability in the areas of:

1. The legal-institutional system

2. The network of associations and social movements
3. Cultural aspects
4. On the character of civil society organizations

He concludes emphasizing the need to understand the complexity of the components of civil society and the interaction of different levels of government in relationships with CSO. It is difficult to produce a single model that will resolve all variables, but that probably the key lies in continuing a process that has now begun in Mexico: a democratization of public life by strengthening and consolidating a participant civil society.

### III: Future.

This section of the paper reflects two distinct aspects that should be included in the future of CSO/Government relations in Mexico. One constitutes the processes that have already been undertaken in the past to assure and hopefully reach what some authors call a “democratic governability”. The other, is a bird’s-eye evaluation of what has taken place in these relationships after Vicente Fox’s first two years in office. Both represent a basis for the future. Making plans and confronting reality are two different subjects. Even in the most carefully designed strategic plan, circumstances change our visions and our outcomes. Global events forge local agendas and become out of control. What must be done is not always what ends up happening. Nevertheless, the intentions seem to continue to be genuine. It may be a question of how many underlying circumstances create this much needed future to bring Mexico up to par on development and justice for all and of how much of it is possible including both CSO and governmental participation. Many times what becomes out of synchrony is the time frame. Not all can happen as quickly as we would like to envision. If in four more years in office, this President does not show signs of creating progress out of misery, bringing poverty to a halt and controlling insecurity in the country, votes could well go the other way. The important element not to be forgotten is precisely the democracy that has been so sought after and longed for. The existing culture of corruption and client-patron relationships will not automatically disappear in a country where three generations of Mexican have been accustomed to infringe and bend the laws to their advantage. Inexperience in governance and lack of results can bring a turnaround in choosing a different party for the next presidential elections. President Fox has discovered that is difficult to handle a Congress where the majority is against him creating stumbling blocks in his way.

Another relevant factor is citizen involvement in public affairs. Many CSO demand democracy and equity whereas there are quite a number of them in Mexico that are not even able to handle their own internal democratic processes. It also seems that the demand on being able to deliver professional services to the public or even to the government undercuts the participation of voluntary elements. In the need for job creation, and economic recuperation, voluntary participation may be left behind without taking into consideration that voluntary work can be a jumping board towards the workforce. The biggest problem still lies in knowing the size, economic contribution, classification, conceptualization and understanding of the general public of the implications of citizen responsibilities within civil society and the value of CSO,

taking their great diversity into consideration (Fowler, 2001). It just may take longer that we would like to grasp the proper place for where CSO participation lies in Mexico's advancement into the XXI century.

### *A Legal Process*

If we rely on our knowledge of the relationships between Mexican governments with CSO on past experiences, we must remember that the Secretary General of the biggest union in the country, the CTM<sup>13</sup>, held the same position for 56 years. It took 60 years for a Governor of the opposition to win the elections of one of the 32 states and 90 years for the inhabitants of Mexico City, the largest in the world, to choose their own mayor (previously, he was designated by the President). A civil society initiative (Castro y Castro, 1998) proposed a Law change that has been in existence for ten years now, based on the past (PRI) government's National Development Plan that recognizes the governments have limited civilian participation stating that<sup>14</sup>:

- *“ The current legal environment is not sufficient for the initiatives and purposes of the independent and organized civil society. The Government of the Republic, considers that it is of primary importance to promote the establishment of a new regulatory legal environment that will recognize, favor and encourage social civic and humanitarian activities of civil organizations.*
- *“ On the other hand there are no adequate fiscal conditions that allow the creation and the measures of these development of civil organizations (...) This plan proposes to examine the convenience of establishing general regulatory kinds of activities.”*

If such a law were to be created, it would fulfill two of the central objectives ( III and IV) of such National Development Plan:

*III. “ Build a full democratic development with which all Mexicans can identify themselves to be the basis of certainty and trust for a pacific political public life and intense citizen participation.*

*IV. Advance in a social development that promotes and extends to the country as a whole, the opportunities for personal and communitarian growth, under the principles of equity and justice”.*

In 1992, a groups of concerned organizations, citizens and academics got together arriving at a consensus and writing the beginnings of what is now called: Law to Foment Activities of Well Being and Social Development<sup>15</sup>. These groups were: Foro de Apoyo Mutuo, Convergencia de Organismos Civiles, CEMEFI<sup>16</sup>, Fundación Miguel Alemán and the Iberoamericana University. This law is based on the contents of the Mexican Constitution and intends to revise

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<sup>13</sup> Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos

<sup>14</sup> Plan Nacional de Desarrollo PND ( National Development Plan 1995-2000)

<sup>15</sup> Ley de Fomento a las Actividades de Bienestar y Desarrollo Social

<sup>16</sup> Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía ( Mexican Center for Philanthropy)

and propose amendments that will emphasize the government's obligations of promoting private and public solidarity and social justice, allowing citizens to participate in decisions on public policies and distribution of public resources.

The PRI government was conscious of the need for a Law, but chose not to allow it to evolve into a reality. The "Proposal of Law" was presented to the necessary instances in Congress and in the Senate over this ten year span, being the first civil initiative in proposing a change of law. Lobbying for law changes was not common since, in the past, all laws came through a Presidential initiative and were usually voted in by a comfortable majority. After the change in government, this law was presented again to the new Congress in the hopes that it may pass eventually. President Fox belongs to the PAN<sup>17</sup> party, but actually, Congress is divided mainly between the presidential party, the PRI<sup>18</sup> who had been in power for over 70 years and the PRD<sup>19</sup>, and their inability to agree on issues has made it difficult for many law changes. This situation is deteriorating the new governments' intentions in overruling not only the CSO situation, but also in other important matters such as corruption, and issues of national safety. It must be clear that mere election and change of party will not automatically disarticulate mechanisms that have been in place for so long, or that institutionalized social practices will be different overnight.

For more than 40 years CSO were important actors opposing government and the networks of many of these organizations are responsible for civilian participation that made Fox's election possible. Most are legally constituted, but their new urgency of recognition and legitimacy in the form of a federal law that will contribute to overcome their precarious situation.

These changes will :

- Stimulate social conducts based on social responsibility, solidarity, philanthropy, assistance and elements that will contribute to social development.
- Maintain the existing forms of free association and the same laws that enable the formation of organizations, following the legal route necessary to dissolve them.
- Strengthen CSO through a series of prerogatives:
  - a) Participation and consultation so that federal and governmental plans coincide with national population needs.
  - b) The possibility of receiving government concessions to operate public services and programs.
  - c) Regulated access to public funds to operate and provide goods and services to the general population, especially to those in need and for activities of well being and development.
  - d) Find favorable conditions in fiscal matters so that they can obtain and optimize resources.

This Law contains a proviso that for CSO to have access to these prerogatives, they must be registered in a special Public Registry. To guarantee that these prerogatives will be responsibly accomplished, there are a series of obligations that CSO must fulfill, such as transparency and open accountability for public scrutiny. This Law establishes a new judicial relationship between government and society characterized by an open dialogue that will provide better attention to

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<sup>17</sup> Partido de Acción Nacional

<sup>18</sup> Partido Revolucionario Institucional

<sup>19</sup> Partido de la Revolución Democrática

public needs of development. There is a proposal of collaboration and coordination at all levels of government: federal, state and municipal, thus assuring participation and co-responsibility. Until this regulatory aspect is not solved, the relationships with governments will be volatile because they will be subject to the good intentions and whim of the authorities in turn. They will probably also be tense, because the State tends to minimize the contribution and the recognition to the importance and potential of civilian work in public matters. On June 18, 2002, President Vicente Fox together with the Secretary of Social Development, Josefina Vázquez Mota announced that the Executive as a whole were in favor and had begun talks with Congress over the importance of approving the promulgation of this Law, and “strengthen the civil society initiative”. This law finally became a reality on December 13, 2002 during the end of the year Congressional sessions.<sup>20</sup>

### *A Transition Process*

When Vicente Fox’s triumph was publicly recognized, a period for “transition” was established, thus meaning that a time frame was given to the President-elect to organize “Transition Teams”<sup>21</sup> with the idea of contacting all areas of government in preparation to receive all public offices as well as planning of a series of programs, projects and actions of the future government. The team in charge of the social and political area contacted civil leaders, members of CSO and networks of diverse groups and organizations. The methodology chosen to be able to integrate this information was by means of inviting these groups to a kind of public forum to exchange ideas and also, to invite known CSO to participate co-responsibly in the definition and elaboration of future public policies related to the social and economic development of the country. The name of this forum was a Dialogue Table<sup>22</sup> (Villalobos & García, 2002). In a four month period, more that 400 CSO managed to establish conceptual agreements and agree to some form of consensus on the content of priority and strategic programs so that the public policies established by the government would respond to the expectations that would alleviate the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable population in the country.

After CSO were invited to participate, a government contact was established. There were three main conceptual work areas, each of which contained a number of themes divided in to discussion tables, these were:

1. Strengthening civil society
  - a) Legal Framework
  - b) Resource mobilization
  - c) Community Foundations
  - d) Professionalization: Capacity Building and Institutional Development
  - e) Communication
  - f) Culture and Civic Education

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<sup>20</sup> More information on how this law was designed to be found in the chapter on Mexico by Consuelo Castro in “*El Tercer Sector Iberoamericano*”, Piñar, José Luis, Tirant Lo Blanch, Spain, 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Equipos de Transición

<sup>22</sup> Mesa de Diálogo

2. Poverty and Vulnerable Populations
  - a) Children and Adolescents
  - b) Young adults
  - c) Elderly
  - d) Women
  - e) Disabled and Disadvantaged
  - f) HIV Positive Population
  - g) Environment
  - h) Indigenous Populations
  - i) Migrants
  - j) Sexual Diversity
  - k) Disasters
  - l) Drug Addicted Population
  
3. Economic Policies and Social Economy
  - a) Workplace and job creation
  - b) Social Enterprises
  - c) Income

For this purpose, the Mexican Center for Philanthropy (CEMEFI) was chosen to be the Technical Secretariat: covering technical aspects, covering methodology, coordinating table participation and acting as the link between participants of the Dialogue and government representatives. To give this exercise plurality and a national perspective, academics and politicians participated with 400 CSO organizations, 16 thematic Regional and National networks, researchers and alumni from 18 universities plus four political associations. Leaders and CSO were invited through the CEMEFI Website, the media, radio and television. Press conferences were held as relevant material was produced. All previous important meetings that included any public policy proposals in the previous ten years were incorporated: Foro “Los Pobres Construyendo su Política Social” (Oaxaca, 1993),” Encuentro Nacional de Organizaciones Ciudadanas” (México, 1995), “Poder Ciudadano” (México, 1999) and “Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres” (México, 2000)<sup>23</sup>

The initial vision was one of social integration in:

- Focusing on the idea of promotion vs. dependency
- Participative type policies, non-authoritarian and federal
- Evaluation to government action
- Recognition of diversity and equity
- Acting as co-participants and actors in development
- Establishing participation as agents of development so to assure the State’s role in fulfilling its obligation. Also dissolving corporatism and client-patron relationships along with fighting corruption and impunity.

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<sup>23</sup> All these events were National forums with a high number of CSO involved.

a) “The Poor Building Social Policies” (Oaxaca, 1993)  
 b) “National Meeting of Citizen Organizations ( Mexico City, 1995)  
 c) “Citizen Power” ( Mexico City, 1999)  
 d) “ National Women’s Encounter” (Mexico City, 2000)

- Demanding participation in public and governmental issues. This meant recognizing CSO as portrayers of ethic and civic values of solidarity and public interest.
- Assisting government in its work with an attitude of democratic co-responsibility which means:
  - a) The government assures services, infrastructure, covering quality in attention to the vulnerable population
  - b) That the business sector become involved in development
  - c) That CSO and civil society in general participate with government in its social tasks

The idea was to present and manage development models that would be sustainable at local and regional levels to counterbalance economic differences in a context of globalization and insertion into local markets. The basic demands that still underlie dialogue with the new government were then established and continue to exist.

There are four points that CSO considered important to consolidate their incorporation and recognition in the public sphere.

- i. Federal, Regional and Local Laws that foment CSO activity, recognizing it as important and of public interest. This is previously discussed in this paper
- ii. Mechanisms for social and civilian participation.
 

Many of these are already in place such as Consulting bodies, but need to become more transparent. A way of establishing relationships with governmental authorities in the different Secretariats. The CSO proposal is designed to recreate the trust that has been long-lost in governmental actions.
- iii. Creation of Funds to enhance CSO participation and to support CSO projects, administered and controlled by both government and CSO.
- iv. Training, capacity building and professionalization. The experience of the first democratic government in Mexico City (1997-2000) demonstrated the inability of many CSO to collaborate in large projects.

## Results of the Dialogue

The executive summary of the results of the discussions that took place in what was called the transition period were published in December, 2000. It is difficult to take credit for influencing changes in policies when many other economic and political factors are in play while a new implementation plan for progress is established. One of the important factors that seem to have had role in the The Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (PND) 2001-2006<sup>24</sup> was the participation of CSO, since each program in this plan was designed to have a CSO consulting element in certain actions that the PND considered strategic. At that time, five new presidential coordination offices were created, attending to different populations needs: against discrimination, the indigenous population, assurance of inclusion for the handicapped, public policies and finally, securing the participation of civil society in public matters. Its name : “ Coordinación Presidencial para la

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<sup>24</sup> National Development Plan

Alianza Ciudadana “<sup>25</sup> A National coordinator was named for governmental dependencies and there seemed to be a disposition to link government work with what CSO were doing. The most interested were: Social Development, Environment, Foreign Affairs and the State Department, where institutional ties were then being defined.

### *CSO Relationships and Citizen Participation in the New Régime*

#### *Relationships*

Looking at two years into the new government there have been several changes since this consultation exercise with CSO. Historically, however, it was the first time there had been that level of recognition from a Mexican government to any group of CSO to include these pluralistic organizations as advisors in any kind of governmental processes. Even if the results have not turned out exactly as planned, it does indicate a will for interlocution and an interest in the Third Sector. The exception, was the case of consultation when the previous PRI government was forced into accepting when the Zapatista movement sprung in 1991. Here, various NGO were an important component of the peace negotiations and talks held in the State of Chiapas.

These Dialogues obviously set up a series of expectations that have not been met in their totality within the sector. For starters, these five new dependencies have dwindled down along with other special offices that were created to help the new President maintain strategic links with the public. Funds have not been sufficient, as the new régime begun to establish its priorities, it discovered less availability of money for its programs. In January 2001, in one of a series of a private meetings to revise the state of voluntary participation in the different government dependencies with the wives of the new Secretaries, the Secretary of Social Development commented on the lack of funds for the Federal government to face and resolve the problems of poverty and conditions of extreme poverty in the country<sup>26</sup>, she said that in her budget she had less than “ a peso a day”<sup>27</sup> to bring out of their misery and improve social and working conditions of approximately 40 million Mexicans and that she was willing to rely on the participation of the citizenship to accomplish her goals.

Of the Five dependencies created, the Presidential Coordination for Civil Alliances (PCCA) discreetly disappeared when President Fox married Martha Sahagún, the Spokesperson for the Presidency, a faithful follower and aide during his campaign. The director of the PCCA became the new Presidential Spokesperson without naming a successor, the Sector is still waiting for a decision in this matter. Other dependencies also suffered deterioration. Dr. Sarukán, a very much respected ex-dean of the UNAM<sup>28</sup> resigned form his post as in charge of aide to the

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<sup>25</sup> Presidential Coordination for Citizen Alliance

<sup>26</sup> Josefina Vázquez Mota, in a speech for the wives of all Secretaries of State at “Los Pinos” official residence for the President, January 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Approximately, ten US cents.

<sup>28</sup> Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México ( The National Autonomous University)

President in matters of youth and social development. His direct assistant took charge of the office for a while, but resigned shortly after, apparently for shortage of funds.

The issue of citizen participation with government began to evolve. The traditional Voluntarism of the State had always been represented by the presence of the First Lady of the nation. In 1929, a CSO named “Gota de Leche” evolved into the Asociación Nacional de Protección a la Infancia<sup>29</sup>, which later turned into the Instituto Nacional de Protección a la Infancia (INPI)<sup>30</sup> when, in the thirties, the First Lady decided to give special attention to children and turn it into a National program. In the late sixties, a presidential decree created the Instituto Mexicano de Asistencia a la Niñez, (IMAN)<sup>31</sup> and finally in 1977 the Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia DIF was founded, focused on attending problems of families and children. This meant that all states were required to have similar organizations, and the wives of the Governors of each of the States were the automatically Presidents of the voluntary programs that the government had initiated. They were all part of what was called “Voluntariado Nacional”<sup>32</sup>.

These “volunteers” were all the wives of officials on different levels of government. Bureaucracy in Mexico, in a country with three times less population than the US, at the time had three times the bureaucracy of the US, so basically women power for these tasks was abundant. There was an infrastructure set up on a national scale with budgets allotted to these programs. Sometimes these forced volunteers did a wonderful job, creating better systems in hospitals and orphanages. They had the knowledge of the needs of their states and municipalities and many began looking into the poverty stricken conditions of their voters. It was common knowledge that solicitation of votes for their party also came through these kinds of services to the poor. Unfortunately, sometimes monies were squandered, for example, into trips to Europe to “study” new hospital systems that were not always applicable to a Third World country like Mexico.

Traditionally, the First Lady was also always the head of the Red Cross fundraising effort and every year she began the official campaign. When Zedillo was elected in 1994, his wife was not interested in participating or in directing any “volunteer” efforts. Her allegations were that if people wanted to be volunteers, they could participate somewhere else, and she dissolved the Voluntariado Nacional program. This created a commotion in various PRI circles, but was met with approval of the general public for a variety of reasons, mainly because public funds were diverted into these programs.

Oddly enough, the new First Lady, Marta Sahagún de Fox did not follow the tradition of presiding the official government institution, but began her own foundation in favor of the poor. She says she decided to become an “activist”<sup>33</sup>. The name of her Foundation is “Vamos México” where she fundraised and continues to fundraise for her own programs. Since there is no money budgeted by the government for her foundation, all her resources have come from private national and international sources. However, the First Lady, has the power, and the influence to utilize government structures to fulfill her purposes. She has a way to reach all states, regions and microregions of the country, and the open disposition of all Secretariats to cooperate with her

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<sup>29</sup> National Association for the Protection of Infancy

<sup>30</sup> National Institute

<sup>31</sup> Mexican Institute for Attention to Childhood

<sup>32</sup> National Volunteer Group

<sup>33</sup> Philanthropy Offers a new Vision of Equality, *The Washington Times*, February 12, 2002.

programs. It is not that the causes that the Foundation supports are not worthy, since they are programs that have publicly existed mainly as CSO for a number of years and are being “adopted” by the First Lady to be turned into national programs. The problem may lie in duplicity and in exhaustion of resources. She has expressed that her intentions are to work alongside organized civil society and has publicly expressed that she is willing to support any worthy cause in favor of Mexico’s advancement. Criticism has been harsh and used against her husband’s political party. The allegations are that she is only the wife of the elected president and her functions are to be his escort, not an acting official of government. There have been protests and unconformities for the existence of this foundation because it has become a new powerful CSO and for many, its presence represents disloyal competition among CSO who are struggling to survive on donations, many of them from corporations that have preferred to favor and donate to the First Lady’s organization instead of the cause they regularly supported.

The money from the foundation has been channeled up to now, into programs that have been successful CSO models, such is the case, for example of “Excelencia Educativa”, a nonprofit organization that trains teachers. “Fundación Vamos México” donated \$1, 000,000.00 pesos to this enterprise, the same amount that three other corporate companies also donated. The director on this CSO feels that this way, there is no loss of independence and a collaboration was built on equal terms, with the four entities represented on the Board of Directors. This director instinctively followed a suggestion of Dr. Salamon<sup>34</sup> who reminds us that...” the key to avoiding loss of independence, it seems, is not refusing government support, but making sure that other sources of support are available as well.” The questions that arise here would be: How and why are these programs chosen? Do these programs reflect national priorities?

The Mission of “Vamos México” expresses ideas of these collaborations:

“Develop, support and promote projects that contribute to significantly consolidate an ample social network against extreme poverty, through actions of connectivity, linkage and professionalization, based on the shared effort of the social, private and public sectors”,<sup>35</sup>

The foundation utilizes four main concepts:

- a) Social Networks. Integrates diverse CSO and civil society groups for people to participate in common projects.
- b) Linkage. A joint cooperative effort between social, public and private sectors to legitimize programs and open new spaces of reciprocity and understanding between sectors.
- c) Connectivity. Promotes and coordinates actions of the institutions that constitute the social network by connecting social groups to elevate the level of effort and maximize resources, thus multiplying effects of the results.
- d) Professionalization. Create bonds between organizations that need training with the universities and institutions that are able to provide these services.

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<sup>34</sup> Salamon, Lester M., *The Third Sector and Volunteering in Global Perspective*, Presentation at the 17th Annual International Association for Volunteer Effort Conference, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, January 15, 2001. p.20

<sup>35</sup> Source: Fundación Vamos México

Initially, the Foundation created mixed feelings and reactions in the CSO community. With the idea of attending the most needy and the vulnerable populations of the country it is hard to say no to such a proposal. Although the cause may be worthy and the needs relevant to the country's situation, it may not be in every CSO's mission to alleviate precisely these purposes. It is also difficult to refuse an "invitation" from the First Lady to participate in any one of its programs, although, for those CSO that have already been chosen, it is an opportunity for them to create national ties and extend their work. Some organizations see this as an opportunity for advancement in official eyes. Others, the opportunity to receive a donation. The first report of the Foundation's activities is public knowledge and differs from the past customary utilization of public funds for private reasons with the risk of incorrect and unsupervised use of resources. As any CSO, it is constituted legally under the form of an A.C.<sup>36</sup>, and responds to a Board of Directors.

In its institutional presentation there is a Final Message which seems to reflect the present situation :

"It is clear that the "Vamos México" Foundation is a project that does not pretend to supplant or replace anyone, any organization or effort that is geared towards overcoming poverty in our country.

On the contrary, "Vamos México" is just one more piece within an impressive network that civil society has been able to build in the last decades. It is one more link in this ample system of articulated wills, of shared responsibilities.

This way, "Vamos México" only incorporates itself into the entirety of organized society determined in prompting a fundamental change in the lives of millions of Mexicans. This is the important point: focus into what the country needs and into what each Mexican can contribute to development of Mexico.

"Vamos México" initiates with the premise that all options are good and that each gesture and action in pro of the most vulnerable groups in the country is a legitimate act that society makes in its own defense. Mexico needs all of us. No one is superfluous. "Vamos México" is an organization to summate efforts, talents and resources. "Vamos México" is a Foundation for the equity, plurality and diversity that is characteristic of our nation. "Vamos México" contributes a commitment renewed in the present and the future of those who have little or nothing. "Vamos México."

This message seems to be all inclusive, trying to portray the idea that the "Vamos México" Foundation is the answer to keeping all civil society efforts and actions that alleviate poverty together. Time and results will eventually weed out how far away this new organization can separate itself from the paternalistic models that have prevailed in the past in most matters concerning poverty. The proof of this is the widening gap between rich and poor and the result of almost 40% of the population living in conditions of poverty or extreme poverty. Past efforts of Mexican NGO and CSO including the support International Aid have not been successful in creating self-sufficient models of participation and sustainability.

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<sup>36</sup> Asociación Civil ( Civil Association), one of the two legally permitted forms for CSOs to exist in Mexico, the other is an IAP, Instituto de Asistencia Privada ( Private Assistance Institution).

There are several issues here that can become important to the success of this project: the first of them is the creation of trust. Different sizes and types of organizations will have to collaborate with each other, a fact that has created difficulties in the past. Some CSO see the Foundation as a form of government control and/or incursion into their own affairs. This is because there is a long story of distrust towards government that must be overcome. Other issues to consider are time and continuity. The Foundation's inclusion of best practices from other organizations and focusing on what works, instead of beginning new projects, shows it understands the issue of lack of sufficient time. There are only four years left of President Fox's régime that can give support to the First Lady and her project. There is no guarantee the same party will continue in power and in creating a CSO, instead of a government program, if the political winds change, the "Vamos Mexico" Foundation will simply be incorporated into the already existing CSO in the country. Continuity also represents a challenge. Even in the days of the PRI régime, national programs kept changing names and forms. There was always a constant battle for CSO in getting to know the "official" in charge within the enormous Mexican bureaucracy and the re-initiation of "contacts" when his term was due.

The National DIF System, however, has continued operating. In 2000, the newly elected President Fox was divorced at the time and his daughter was too young to take over a national responsibility of this size and importance. The decision then was to employ a director for this Institution. The DIF structures are in place in all the states in the Mexican republic and they continue to be headed at the State and Municipal level by the wives of the elected officials in turn. The difference today is that these officials who all used to belong to the same party are now heterogeneous. In a State with a PAN governor, we could find several local or municipal officials members of different political parties, say from the PRI or the PRD. This still leaves the institution's efficiency up to the discretion of the President of the Board of the local or municipal DIF. This continues to be the "partisan volunteer" force at the helm of one of the government's programs.

The country is divided into 250 micro-regions containing 476 municipalities<sup>37</sup> each of these containing a number of communities attended through Centros de Desarrollo Comunitario<sup>38</sup> where many include health centers, opportunities for extracurricular activities, providing attention especially to highly vulnerable and at-risk families. Starting from goods and services traditionally provided by the DIF (e.g. shelters, popular kitchens, and attention in health and rehabilitation for the handicapped) the social assistance perspective was broadened by adding new actions of training and capacity building so as to integrate families and develop communities. In the strategic planning for the next political period, "citizen participation" is included, oddly enough, there are no specific plans for accepting, training or organizing any voluntary action.

Many of the ideas and collaborative efforts of the consulted CSO to develop a PND<sup>39</sup> 2001-2006 seem to have been included in this new DIF structure. International contacts such as UNICEF assure their success. Private and international sources of funding such as the BID have been sought out to insure administrative innovation. The DIF is dependent on the Health

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<sup>37</sup> Source: Lic. Verónica Portepetit, Secretary to the General Sub Director for Vulnerable Populations. DIF

<sup>38</sup> Centers of Community Development.

<sup>39</sup> National Development Plan

Secretariat. Other government dependencies such as SEDESOL<sup>40</sup> handle other programs to alleviate problems of poverty and marginality. The program that is still in existence after the changes that have been mentioned is called: OPORTUNIDADES. Another government instance handled by an ex civil society leader,<sup>41</sup> the INDESOL, depends on The Secretariat of Social Development which is the portion of government that provides funds for projects operated by CSO. This program was initiated under Salinas's PRI régime. To distribute funds there is a newly created mixed citizen/government commission that decides which projects receive the money. Here, experts from CSO and academia evaluate the technical aspects for these grants. On the day the money from INDESOL, 120 million pesos, was distributed to CSO by President Fox, an article in a National newspaper, *Reforma*<sup>42</sup> was published with a list of undelivered campaign promises to organized civil society, mainly complaining that the promise of inviting civil society leaders to be part of the Consulting Boards that would provide the follow up the 2001-2006 National Development Plan had not happened and that the government had not yet grasped the importance of civil society efforts. What was distributed to CSO is considered a drop in the bucket of what it means to collaborate and build functional coalitions that will alleviate real needs. Not all government dependencies that handle the same problem, poverty, for example work together, sometimes and overlapping support.

Despite criticism, what newspapers journalists do not seem to remember are the not so far away days that even mentioning any claim of and NGO or a CSO could bring on a revision or sanction from the authoritarian government. Although it is true that Fox and his counterparts have made a tremendous effort to include civil participation in government affairs, it is also true that there is still a lot to be learned in establishing the borders that need to exist not only to attain governance, but to divide what obligations lie in each camp and to act accordingly (Fowler, 2001). Due to the lack of information, many times efforts duplicate themselves or become pulverized. Ideally the idea sounds coherent. Government should provide the knowledge and information of where problems lie and work along with organized civil society in cooperation with the business sector to alleviate needs with goods and services, leading towards development. This way, all Sectors have an opportunity to collaborate. A word of clarity should be installed in remembering that there are several boundaries that should not be crossed by government into civil society or vice versa, or when they are, the reasons and duration of this crossing over should be initially established clear to both sides (O'Connell, 1989). Even in countries where there has been a tradition of giving and volunteering, such as the US, in diverse collaborations with government those boundaries should be clear, civil society should not be expected to contribute what is the government's obligation. Taxes should be distributed into the budgets where it is governmental responsibility to provide basics such as: peace, national security, health and social programs, international relations and market stability, to mention a few.

Mexico's CSO face an acute challenge of survival and sustainability. This has been one of the most mentioned challenges of the Third Sector (Salamon, 2001) ... " *But financial sustainability*

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<sup>40</sup> Secretaría de Desarrollo Social ( Secretariat of Social Development)

<sup>41</sup> Cecilia Loría, ex Director of Causa Ciudadana, ex candidate to the Senate for the PRD party and now Director of INDESOL ( Institute of Social Development)

<sup>42</sup> June 17, 2002, *Reforma* 8 A .

*is not the only sustainability issue the Third Sector faces. At least as important is the sustainability of the Sector's human capital. As democratization proceeds in different parts of the world, Third Sector activists find themselves drawn into governmental positions to replace the traditional officials they had worked so hard to depose, but leaving their organizations impoverished in human terms. The Third Sector is thus the victim of its own success. Ironically enough, while the Third Sector may contribute to democracy, in the short run, democracy may undercut the Third Sector's strength."*

In this same presentation Dr. Salamon<sup>43</sup> refers to his perception of the importance of collaboration with government..." *Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is collaboration with the state. The nonprofit Sector's relationship with the state is one of the most important relationships it can have. Yet the nature of this relationship has been obscured in much of the rhetoric that surrounds the Sector's development...there is a belief that an inherent conflict exists between the nonprofit sector and the state, and that private giving and voluntary action are the only valid sources of Third Sector support."* In the US, government provides over 30% of nonprofit revenue and in other places such as Ireland and Belgium, government support reaches over 70% of nonprofit income.

### *Citizen and Voluntary Participation*

In a Preliminary Report of the CIVICUS Index of Civil Society Project in Mexico, (2001) undertaken under the auspices of the Mexican Center for Philanthropy (CEMEFI), designed to state the healthiness of civil societies around the world, the index points towards several factors that are important to keep in mind in creating such relationships with government:

#### Strengths

- Numbers of CSO are increasing with an active base of members.
- CSO have difficulty in co-operating amongst themselves, a reflection of its great plurality.
- CSO have created strong networks and alliances on specific purposes.
- CSO are consistent with the values they promote and those they practice.
- The strongest dimension of CSO is that of impact, with greater identification of social needs.

#### Weaknesses

- The distribution of CSO is not proportionate throughout the country in accordance with social, environmental and economic needs.
- Concentration of CSO in three main cities and in some south-eastern states.
- There is need for improved distribution of CSO actions as well as the integration of programs on a regional level.
- There is difficulty in attaining sustainability.
- Philanthropic "culture" in Mexico is only beginning.
- Voluntarism and voluntary service is not clearly defined or understood.

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<sup>43</sup> *Op.cit*, p.22.

- Cultural and legal aspects have stopped the development of CSO and their actions.
- Space is the dimension considered the weakest by the stakeholders. In Mexico, the spaces for participation by civil society have been defined more by the needs of the population than by the legal recognition of their necessary participation.
- Government has not recognized CSO capacity for solving particular needs.
- The impact of CSO on the public policy process is weak since participation channels are weak and insufficient.
- CSO do not always reflect internal democracy and strict public accountability.

The richness of CSO and the variety of themes and interests within civil society lies in the array of interests and variation of participation which are many times are not complimentary, but can be even contradictory. What needs to be created in Mexico is a new sense of respect for difference and diversity. The concept of civil society goes beyond CSO concerned about alleviation of poverty. It reaches out into all walks of life and in the respect of the individual and the right of free association. To acquire in a more ample sense a healthy relationship between citizens and the Mexican government, the concerns must go beyond the alleviation of needs, towards a commitment in building the foundations of citizenship and equality, to then ensure responsible participation that eventually becomes the foundation of a functional democracy.

The CIVICUS report tells us that the philanthropic “culture” in Mexico is only beginning, since awareness of civil society, its potential, its definition and its performance are only beginning to take hold in the public eye. In the written media, for example, for the first year of government<sup>44</sup>, there is a regularity in number of press declarations, meaning newspaper impacts registered in the following newspapers: La Jornada, Milenio, Reforma, El Universal and El Financiero<sup>45</sup>. There were 1,501 impacts in the year with an average of 54 newspaper references every two weeks. The report says that themes appear, but that CSO maintain their own dynamics, which are not necessarily in synchronicity with the government’s interests. In the first year of government CSO had maintained their critical posture towards government, also keeping their high expectations of the new government, producing 9% of favorable notes in mentioning government, as opposed to a 1% in the past régime. CSO, however responded quickly throughout the year to very to diverse political situations. They do manage to impact public opinion by pressuring the media with their own opinion of Mexican problems. Human Rights maintained the most presence during this year.

From December 2000-November 29, 2001, positive notes towards President Fox’s activities occupied 11% of CSO declarations to the press. A very high number, considering past administrations. Most negative press notes from CSO were directed to the different government dependencies, not directly against the President. In the different states, negative notes have been on fraud during elections, sexual discrimination and violation of citizen’s rights.

As a final note in this report, it declares that CSO have harshly criticized the Legislative, mainly for approving reforms on indigenous matters, contributing to create and adverse climate towards Congressional behavior. We would need to have other media reports to present a complete

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<sup>44</sup> Source: Comportamiento de las Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil en Medios de Comunicación. Secretaría de Gobernación. (Behavior of the written media in the first year of Fox’s government, the State Department)

<sup>45</sup> Names of important National newspapers.

overview of the feeling of the CSO towards the new régime, but in all, there has been a positive perception in written media which is where most CSO have access.

In the area of citizenship and voluntary participation, after studying the history here presented, it can be seen that CSO were key in creating enough citizen awareness so as to overthrow the old régime. They were not the only ingredient to success, but definitively one of the main ones. Citizenship, however is not only participating in an election, it is also contributing and participating in many other activities: voluntary action, creating spaces and opportunities for participation, presence and activism in organizations, formal citizen education in public schools, to name a few. (Hodgkinson, 2001) “...essentially, this “people’s sector ... , is really where community is formed and forged, where new ideas get heard and debated, new social programs are tried, where much independent research and education are conducted, where publications and information are disseminated, where the voices of the powerless are heard along with those of the powerful, where informal and formal time is given by citizens for various causes: arts and culture, education, health, social services, recreation, religious for the sublime as well as the ridiculous. The size of this space depends much on the level of involvement by citizens and has become an indicator of the strength of a democracy”<sup>46</sup>. Voluntary activity in Mexico is many times relegated into organizations that are service providers, and this is a neglected and misunderstood area that needs attention so as to produce the “social capital” that the country so desperately needs.

In a recent article in the Harvard Review of Latin America<sup>47</sup> (2002) there are positive remarks for the new régime in the section of dialogue with government. President Fox at CEMEFI’s 2001 Annual Conference made public recognition and reference of the “non-profit sector or third sector” declaring ... *“The value of its work comes not only from the importance of the issue it addresses, but more than anything from the impulse it generates toward community participation as the best way to resolve shared problems and to elevate the quality of life of all citizens”*. The author continues ... *“Poverty, insecurity, water, malnutrition, a deteriorating environment and the widening gap between rich and poor are only some of the enormous social issues faced by Mexico today. No single sector can tackle it alone and there are not enough philanthropic monies that could even make a dent. It is the responsibility of all citizens to take part in the solutions. That responsibility is citizenship-citizens participating in the solutions of the problems of their communities; indeed philanthropy must function at all levels and throughout all institutions of society. Even though there is a long way to go, there is great cause for hope in Mexico”*.

2001 was declared by the United Nations as “International Year of the Volunteer”. The Mexican Association of Volunteers (AMEVAC)<sup>48</sup>, a CSO that stemmed initially off a course in volunteer administration offered by the Universidad Iberoamericana<sup>49</sup> in coalition with the Junior League of Mexico City and CEMEFI in 1992, one of the first of its kind, took charge in being the representative in Mexico of all activities during that year. The efforts were monumental, and the results admirable: a National poster competition, a Commemorative Postal

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<sup>46</sup> *Opus cit*, p. 3

<sup>47</sup> Arango, Manuel, , Giving and Volunteering in the Americas: From Charity to Solidarity, *Harvard Review of Latin America* David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, Spring, 2002., p. 37

<sup>48</sup> Asociación Mexicana de Voluntarios, A.C.

<sup>49</sup> Iberoamerican University, a private Jesuit university in Mexico City with affiliates in several other states.

Stamp and a special National Lottery ticket were designed and on December 5, 2001, the First National Volunteer of the Year Awards were officially presided by the President and his wife with the Award now institutionalized, meaning they will be presented by the President every year. Media opportunities were great and publicity of interest in the sector soared. What would now need to be measured is the amount of volunteers that increased because of these events. This same organization has been key in helping create a new web page where volunteers can make connections with organizations. They worked long hours interviewing both organizations and volunteers to launch this project.

On June 25, 2002, the new CEMEFI<sup>50</sup> web page was inaugurated : Hacesfalta.org.mx This page responds to a need of bridging the gap between those who want to volunteer and participate in organizations and those organizations that are willing to receive volunteers, spinning off of another CEMEFI program begun in 1994, *Mira por los Demás*<sup>51</sup>. This web page began functioning with 460 volunteer job offers and more than 200 organizations, covering practically all states and 60 cities throughout the country that work in all social development areas: health, education, environment, etc., giving attention to anyone interested in volunteering that wishes to subscribe to the program through Internet. It offers services such as: a) Volunteer opportunities in accordance with geographical situation and time disposition b) News related to Voluntarism and activities of CSO in Mexico and worldwide c) Testimonials of volunteers to enhance volunteer participation d) A Public Forum where any person or institution may exchange information with others e) A weekly bulletin that people that subscribe will receive according to their profile f) Register of both volunteer and job offers from CSO. This web page will help in calculating, the volunteer hours that an organization will receive a week and calculate their value and contribution to the economy as well as for and for future research information for the institution.

Voluntarism in Mexico still faces redefinition and professionalization notwithstanding all the efforts of CSO and good faith that there has been into setting up success in this area. The CIVICUS Index report on Mexico suggests that “*Voluntarism and voluntary service is not clearly defined or understood*”. This reality may have certain components that need somewhat closer attention:

1. The concept of Voluntarism is ambiguous:
  - Voluntary action is related to charity in a moral sense. For many, it is a religious duty and activism in non-partisan civilian organizations instead of religious organizations is scarce. The idea of citizen participation, as in voting, is relatively new.
  - There is no tradition or culture of philanthropic giving. There have been few State incentives for this to happen, either at an individual level or in the business sector. Formal organizations do, however, offer tax deductible receipts. In a society where the informal economy may surpass the formal one, if one pays no taxes, there is no need for

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<sup>50</sup> [www.cemefi.org](http://www.cemefi.org)

<sup>51</sup> Lookout for Others.

deductions. The statistics and figures of those who do contribute are not publicly available.

- Service to community and voluntarism are not yet considered a value in Mexico. The civics program in official government schools has been recently removed from the curriculum to install a different vision where community participation will be included by the Secretariat of Education. There are no service-learning experiences or programs set in place by the government at an early age. The only community service for youth is an obligatory 480 social service hours to receive a degree from the National University<sup>52</sup>. This policy was began in the forties, since superior education was relatively free, thus it was proposed as a way of “giving back” to the community. This official disposition only reaches a small percentage of the population who attend university and beginning with young adults, a very late stage in the development of an individual.
- Over a span of ten years, in a study on Mexican values, (Alducin, 1989, 1991,1993), over time: family, and family ties kept on being first on the list. There was still a strong emphasis on family values and relationships than go beyond family and into extended-family ties. This seems to be part of what has kept loyalty and economy going, as many Mexicans who migrate leaving their families, send money to those left behind and take “care” of them in their own way. Solidarity also seems to find its expression towards the inside of the family producing a sorts of “exclusive altruism” that includes a restricted number of individuals (Butcher, 1999). In rural areas and smaller communities it is common for old participatory communitarian models to prevail (Reygadas, 1998).
- Almost ten years after this study, the political changes and economic situation, the size of cities, mobility of the population, and first generation migrants staying in their adopted countries, is causing family fragmentation and for many, solidarity may need to find new forms of expression. If all sectors of society, especially the Third Sector were organized enough to stimulate citizen participation, it may be a crucial moment in Mexico’s history to encourage diverse forms of solidarity and voluntary action to create a volunteer and citizen participation movement.
- The concept of voluntarism also requires a redefinition in accordance to Mexican reality. Voluntarism means free will work with no pay providing benefits to others outside of self and family. This meaning must be clear. Although new CSO and associations are constantly being formed, voluntary action within them will also need a new format and clarification for professionalization and participation.<sup>53</sup>

## 2. Volunteer Structures Are Insufficient:

- The new law on non-profit organizations has not come into effect. This has been discussed in the previous section on legality.
- Information is insufficient due to lack of research on voluntarism and official statistics are not easily accessible public knowledge.

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<sup>52</sup> UNAM, ( National Autonomous University)

<sup>53</sup> There are many suggestions in Olvera 2000, *Opus, cit.*

- Networks have difficulty in organization.

### 3. Barriers to Volunteer Participation:

- Volunteer opportunities are limited due to closed admissions in many CSO.
- Private and public institutions do not foster voluntarism due to fear of competition with the workforce.
- Volunteer programs in the business sector are very few, social and community programs in corporations plus social marketing is only beginning to take hold.
- Companies that overseas are active in the community are not so in Mexico. This is due to Mexican civil society's lack of culture. There is no public expectation for business to contribute to CSO. Those who are beginning to participate in Corporate Social Responsibility programs however, are beginning to see positive results (Lara, 2000).

### 4. Public Perception of Voluntarism is Low:

- The media does not foster communication with the public on Voluntary Action. CSO struggle to demand attention to the media of their activities.
- TV is the most limited of all media resources. The two main networks that reach the majority of the population promote only projects that pertain to their own organizations and foundations.
- PSA<sup>54</sup> are rarely produced.
- There is government time on media, but it is not utilized in relationships with CSO.

## IV. Conclusions and Proposals

There has been a renovation of a relationship between CSO and the actual Mexican government. Public perception and CSO perception of this relationship is positive and will continue to be so if government actions start to live up to expectations that were created at the beginning of the new régime. From what was here presented, there is still a long way to go, not only in the area of relationships, but in the creation of understanding and clear cut guidelines for action. What is decided in the Presidential office and at high government level takes a time to trickle down into action on the local and municipal level. Change in government does not mean all Mexicans have left their partisan convictions. The reason they voted for a different party and trusted Vicente Fox was mostly because they were tired of a PRI authoritarian régime. The President himself has had a hard time to establish his own work plan having a majority politically against him in Congress. CSO and civil society as a whole has become invigorated with what it sees as an opportunity, and what it lacks at times in structures, it compensates in motivation. These groups have historically survived before and they will survive again, nevertheless, the sustainability struggle will continue for CSO due to the lack of sufficient funds in government to give impulse

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<sup>54</sup> Public Service Announcements

to what already exists. The actual government speaks of the three sectors working together, but is looking towards the business sector and the third sector to share a larger portion of the responsibility for advancement and development for the country.

There are however many actions that are possible and necessary to establish a better and more productive relationship between CSO and government that will hopefully contribute to development mainly in the areas of research, education and citizenship, fields that urgently need attention focusing especially on fostering responsible citizens and encouraging participation. The government has realized that it alone cannot provide all services the country it seeks to serve. Voluntary citizen participation and initiative can be important for the provision of services, in a defining a sense of purpose and community morale, in creating “social capital” and in building mutual trust and solidarity.

Proposals:

A)

Volunteering and citizen participation is mostly encouraged and learned. Government, schools, business, religious institutions and families all share responsibility for maintaining the quality of life in communities. In governmental participation, the creation of public policies that support this activity is crucial. Volunteer centers linked in with the official network institutions that already exist in Mexico, such as the DIF, or other public instances where participation becomes truly encouraged and fostered, would bring communities into mutual action for their own benefit. Clarity and public knowledge of how all government institutions that work in similar fields, such as poverty, are linked and work together would eliminate confusion and foster participation.

B)

The only path in understanding the efficiency, resources and health of the Third Sector in a country is by the creation of a body of knowledge in a systematic way. This information would help map the Third Sector in its entirety in Mexico. Mapping would be based on a conceptual idea of the sector. For this to happen, a Consultative Group or Commission<sup>55</sup> could be formed including: government, academics and experts in the field, to understand the state of affairs of the sector and make the important and necessary decisions pertaining to it.

C)

Survey and data is also a fundamental part for understanding the magnitude of the Third Sector and the main source that should be available to obtain data on Voluntary Action. There is no private organization, academic institution or CSO that is able to create this data. The government has the ability to obtain this information in Mexico through the INEGI, the National Institute of Statistics which is the official surveyor for the National Census every ten years. This Institute manages many other studies and surveys as well. If the Consultative group were formed, correct questions pertaining the sector, under a clear conceptual reference of Voluntarism in Mexico,

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<sup>55</sup> In the US, this procedure began with the Filer Commission. This Commission sprung after the Commission on Private Philanthropy and Public Needs published its Research Papers in 1977.

could be made in one or several of the studies the INEGI operates.<sup>56</sup> Some activity in this area is beginning to occur, however if all sectors are included, it will guarantee that information will be relayed onto all sectors of society as results are produced.

D)

To build a body of knowledge, some factors are needed to sustain this effort. Several key areas include :

- Research. This would include practitioners, researchers and academics and their institutions. Forming a Research Committee or Research Center, with an outlet to publish the work produced. A National or International Scholarly Association for researchers to belong to and exchange and discuss theories and ideas. Resources should be set aside for research. If governmental importance is given to this aspect in Mexico, it could be added on to the CONACYT programs for research that already exist in a specific area for the study for the Third Sector. Information must be the basis for policy creation and decision making.
- Education. Teaching in colleges and universities. Scholarships in private and public institutions to encourage knowledge on the sector. This implies the creation of interdisciplinary curricula at the college level and in graduate and post-graduate courses. It also means designing educational programs K to 12 and programs that foster civic education and participation. It would also include teaching to non-profits and about non-profits.
- Citizenship. Awareness of the importance of Citizen Service and Voluntarism to acquire the importance of participation as a civic obligation.

Once information is gathered, it should be available and public. This contributes to transparency and to accountability both for government and CSO. It would be a powerful tool towards development and sustainability not only to be able understand the Sector, but to help create a culture of solidarity and participation. Relationships and coalitions in CSO/Government projects are not enough to foster progress. In short, research and pertinent information of the Sector in Mexico would give the right the idea of what is properly public, which means not only government, referring also to private organizations that attend public needs. It would also stimulate and the work of the Third Sector and government for the creation and implementation of policies for the public good (Payton, 1988). This idea coincides with Dr. Aguilar (2002) as he finishes his article in saying ...” *there is not a doubt that CSO, in becoming involved in diverse ways in what pertains to their society, they contribute to re-establish the public nature of public administration... CSO represent human resources of great value that may be used by governments for a better efficiency and greater quality of the development of its programs and responsibilities... There is a life beyond the State and the Market. And what we call Republic, public interest, common good, country, and good governance is built with all elements that exist in a society...*”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> The United Nations has developed national satellite accounts under the John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project to tabulate the contributions of volunteers or tabulate separately the contributions of the nonprofit sector to national economies.

<sup>57</sup> *Opus cit. p.41*

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