

NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS
WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

SUMMARY
OF CONCLUSIONS AND DEBATES
ROUGH DRAFT

*“Y su conciencia dijo al fin, cántale al hombre en su dolor
en su miseria y su sudor, y en su motivo de existir.
Cuando del fondo de su ser, entendimiento así le habló
un vino nuevo le endulzó, las amarguras de su hiel.
Hoy es su canto un azadón, que le abre surcos al vivir
a la injusticia en su raíz, y a los raudales de su voz.
En su divina comprensión, luces brotaban del cantor.”*

Cantores que Reflexionan

Violeta Parra (Chile)

LIMA
July 2010

Open Forum – National Consultations with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

SUMMARY FROM LATIN AMERICA

Lima, July 19-20

When the Summary Workshop was held, **12 NATIONAL CONSULTATIONS** had been conducted in Latin America. In three countries, the consultation was preceded by workshops in different regions of the country and in other countries, different mechanisms had been used, as indicated in the following table.

Country	Organizers	Participants	Sub-national consultations
1. Venezuela	Asociación Nacional de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil, Sinergia	60	0
2. Uruguay	Asociación Nacional de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales Orientadas al Desarrollo (Anong)	26	0
3. Colombia	Confederación Colombiana de ONG (CCONG), La Alianza, Red de ONG por la Transparencia (ONGxT)	160	7
4. Nicaragua	Coordinadora Civil	110	6
5. Ecuador	Observatorio de la Cooperación - Ciudad	179	5
6. Chile	Asociación Chilena de Organismos No Gubernamentales, AG, Acción	61	Internet consultation
7. Argentina	Encuentro de Entidades No Gubernamentales para el Desarrollo, Red Encuentro	30	0
8. Guatemala	Coordinadora de ONG y Cooperativas (Congcoop)	NA*	NA*
9. Bolivia	Unión Nacional de Instituciones para el Trabajo de Acción Social (Unitas)	200	Survey
10. Peru	Asociación Nacional de Centros (ANC) and Propuesta Ciudadana	35	0
11. Mexico	Convergencia and Alianza de Organizaciones Ciudadanas (Adoc)	32	3 ¹
12. Honduras	Comisión de Acción Social Menonita, Foro Social de la Deuda Externa y Desarrollo de Honduras, Coalición Hondureña de Acción Ciudadana, Alianza, Asociación de ONG	31	0
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS		924	

*NA: Not available.

This summary does not contain the richness of contents and debates that took place in this process. We urge those interested in the topics presented below to consult the reports from all of the national consultations conducted, in the Open Forum's web site at (<http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/>).

i. INTRODUCTION

About National Consultations:

The Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) consulted unanimously view the space created by the forum in a positive way, as a place for debate on their own organizations. The topics proposed were new in some cases, but most typically these organizations discussed concerns and processes already established in their organizations and in their networks and associations.

¹ To date, one of the three has been conducted.

The invitation to participate managed to reach a broad, heterogeneous range of sectors and regions (with some differences among countries, of course), and this is enormously important. It is especially significant taking into consideration the increasing difficulty for CSOs to participate in this type of event. There are many different events being held, and there is increasingly less staff and limited capacity for attending these events.

It continues to be difficult to coordinate trade unions with other social movements. Although trade unions were invited and a previous global agreement for their participation had been reached, not a single one participated.

Participation by representatives from international agencies providing development assistance varied considerably. In some cases there was broad-based, representative participation and these agencies contributed to the consultations, and in other cases they simply ignored the process and did not participate.

Participation by government representatives also varied. In cases such as Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay and Colombia, high-level government representatives participated, offering real possibilities for deliberation and exchange. In other countries, governments avoided face-to-face discussions with CSOs, sending individuals without any knowledge of the topics covered. And in still other cases, the government's presence was hostile, or consultations were simply ignored and dialogue was impossible.

In all the consultations there were more women participating than men. However, in a number of the events held, the topics of women's rights and the struggle for gender equality did not appear as important points.

Some notes on the Latin American regional context:

The objective here is not to take an extensive look at the context of the Latin American region, in part because each country has its own particularities—which are the especially important aspects to consider. Nevertheless, some general, persistent characteristics that directly affect the existence and actions of CSOs are presented in the following paragraphs.

i.1) The first aspect to mention is the current **crisis** at hand. A group of CSOs from the region emphasized the following in the Madrid Declaration: *“This is a deep, systemic crisis, with economic, food, energy, environment and social dimensions. According to the ILO, 200 million workers in developed countries could be pushed into poverty and, according to the OECD, 39 million people in Latin America may fall again below the poverty threshold. This crisis has also revealed the weakness of the States in both our European and Latin American nations, and the power of transnational corporations.”*²

i.2) An interesting process of **political changes** has been experienced in the Latin American region over the last decade. *“In general post-dictatorship regimes were consolidated, although only a few are strictly democratic. Nevertheless, the different political crises—in some countries the result of vigorous social mobilizations—were resolved through institutional means, some positively (Bolivia and Ecuador) and others not (Honduras). Still, as correctly indicated in the United Nations report, what has been consolidated is no more than electoral democracy (periodic and free elections, political freedoms, freedom of expression, and a relative expansion of democratic systems), giving shape to a terrible triangle in which electoral democracy, high levels of poverty and the worst inequality on the planet have been expanded (translation).”*³

3) Thirdly, the context is characterized by **new international alignments**. Latin America is no longer the United States' backyard. To the contrary, a tendency that is autonomous and distanced

2 Madrid Declaration, V Euro-Latin American-Caribbean Civil Society Forum, March 2010.

3 Eduardo Ballón, “Las ONG de América Latina y las ONG europeas: La urgencia de una agenda común en un escenario desfavorable,” text presented on behalf of ALOP and the “Mesa de Articulación en el Tercer Diálogo Político sobre la Cooperación AL y Europa,” Madrid, 2010.

from Washington has become consolidated. “*Despite the clear differences among the countries, there are unquestionably regional efforts to move forward with some responses directed at insertion into the globalization process underway. Although these efforts are only partially shared, their potential is significant. Some encouraging steps in Mercosur, the attempt to lend form and strength to Unasur, ALBA, Banco del Sur and cooperation in the area of energy (Petrocaribe and Petrosur) are some examples that involve governments of different tendencies (translation).*”⁴

i.4) There are significant differences in the various countries, but the **tensions between governments and civil society** are generalized, and overall, it is clear that CSOs in Latin America are in an extremely vulnerable situation. There are cases of overt, permanent hostility expressed by those speaking on behalf of the State. When CSOs make critical statements, they are discredited and attacked. Their contributions and their potential are ignored. CSOs are only tolerated and supported by governments when they do not issue any opinions or express any criticism of those in power at any given time. The progressive tendencies represented in some governments are not reflected in smoother relations with CSOs.

i.5) And a fifth aspect that characterizes the region—in this case varying greatly by country—consists of the **different ways of understanding “living well”** or development. In countries like Bolivia or Ecuador, this alternative is now at the Constitutional level, and to a significant extent, this is a step to which social movements and CSOs have contributed. This means that in countries like Ecuador, “...representatives of indigenous organizations demanded that a differentiation be made between the concepts of *sumak kawsay* as utopia (fullness of life) and *allin kawsay* (living well).” (Consultation in Ecuador). In any case, it is very clear for us as CSOs that to speak of only effectiveness without entering into a debate on the concept of “development” is not only partial and problematic, but empty as well. The correct order of questions to be asked is consequently, first of all, “what is the concept of living well?” or the concept of development from the society’s perspective, and then, “of what does effectiveness in achieving such consist?”

Topic 1: THE ROLE OF CSOs IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT

The first element confirmed in the consultations with CSOs is that the process of reflecting upon their role and their function within society is ongoing, and has been undertaken on numerous occasions throughout our history, at both individual and collective levels. This is not only normal but also healthy, because it reveals an attitude in which one is constantly questioning the pertinence of what one is, what one is doing and what one is proposing. Change is the natural path in societies. The most congruent response by any stakeholder attempting to have an impact on social transformations is precisely to change and to adapt to the context, while preserving its principles and its most profound and strategic aims.

Part of the process of discussing the identity of CSOs involves the changes in the context and in other stakeholders with which they have been historically involved. Social movements, political parties, the private sector and even the State also experience profound transformations.

Regarding the identity and role of CSOs in Latin America, the following ideas are especially important to mention:

1.1) **Diversity.** CSOs in all the countries are characterized by their diversity and heterogeneity. This is expressed in their size and scope, their methodological and programmatic focus, the sector in which they operate, and the groups they prioritize. This, in and of itself, is enormously significant, and should be encouraged and preserved.⁵ What is valid within the sector is also

⁴ Eduardo Ballón, op. cit.

⁵ It is important to remember that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are only one sector within this universe and do not represent all civil society organizations.

reflected in the mission of contributing to the construction of societies that are based on dialogue and inter-cultural recognition, and that are diverse and respectful of plurality.

1.2) CSOs as stakeholders and partners in new development. There is general agreement that the idea of CSOs taking the place of the State is no longer supported. It is no longer thought that CSOs exist where the State is absent—as was the case during the 1980s and 1990s. In different ways and with different focuses, the State has recently recuperated its presence and its investment in social areas. There has been a change from the neoliberal posture that distanced the State from its social responsibilities, to a political practice in which the State is recuperating its central role in the social arena.

This makes it necessary to re-think the role of CSOs: it is not the same to operate in a context in which the State is absent and withdrawing its participation, as operating in a context in which the State is at the very center of social programs. Now what is involved is to fulfill a broad, diverse set of roles that assist, complement, oversee and demand that the State meets its obligations. CSOs need to serve as a trigger for society to organize around demanding rights, demanding adequate quality and coverage of services, participating in formulating public policies that properly direct the use of public resources, designing and testing innovations for problem resolution, etc. A particular challenge in recent years has been to contribute, with their accumulated knowledge, to lend content to proposals for new development currently emerging in the region.

In this sense it is clear that CSOs are demanding a role as stakeholders and partners in development. It is believed that the capacities and talents of CSOs are diminished when they are considered as merely the operators of policies and projects developed by others.

1.3) CSOs do not take the place of social movements. While there is a long-standing, natural and close relation between movements and CSOs, and mutual solidarity developed between them many years ago, there are cases in which tensions and conflict arise particularly when some NGOs become those speaking in the name of grassroots or social movements, without a process in which this role is delegated. It is currently clear for CSOs overall that grassroots organizations and social movements are different stakeholders that deserve solidarity, recognition and respect.

1.4) Non-partisan political actors. CSOs also demand a political role as promoters and advocates of public goods and matters of common interest. This constitutes a role to be fulfilled in areas such as criticism of government excesses when they occur, the construction of public policies, the defense of the checks and balances system within the rule of law, oversight of state powers, follow-up to electoral processes, strengthening of local democracy, and many, many other areas. CSOs are not parties aspiring to obtain State power, and this is a major difference with political organizations and movements. Nevertheless, it is not acceptable in today's world that the political agenda belongs exclusively to the State and political parties. As CSOs, we also have and demand a place in this context. For this very reason, CSOs often act as interest groups that project themselves in the political arena, representing their own points of view, with capacities for criticizing and making proposals. In this way the members of CSOs are exercising their roles as citizens. These actions do not only take place at the national level. There is a long chain of intervention, from the most local context to national and international contexts, in which highly diverse actions are taken.

1.5) Educational role. CSOs are teachers. They play an important role in creating democratic citizenship and in promoting citizen participation. This educational role is normally accompanied by activities involving the production of knowledge on actions, and frequently, research on social reality.

1.7) Autonomy. In order to fulfill the set of roles described above, it is absolutely necessary that organizations are autonomous, specifically that the major decisions regarding who they are and

what they do are made internally. Along these lines, exercising criticism is valued as both a right and an obligation of CSOs. From this point of view, CSOs cannot be co-opted by another other stakeholder, whether State or government, movement or political party. The absence of autonomy typically leads to the weakening and disappearance of CSOs.

Topic 2. VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF CSO WORK AND EFFECTIVENESS

The values identified by CSOs as those orienting their work are many. Those highlighted here are some of those that can be categorized in two major areas: principles addressing CSO missions and those addressing CSO actions, including those referring to their effectiveness.

In the area of CSO missions:

2.1) **Human rights.** Social organizations in Latin America are unified in their focus on human rights, and conceive of their work as demanding respect for, defending and advocating human rights. The starting point for this vision is the notion that every human being has inalienable rights.

2.2) **Right to development.** At the same time human rights are concepts in constant transformation. For some time now, organizations have been incorporating collective rights into their action platforms. For the discussion here, the “right to development” is especially relevant, and has the following general characteristics: a) its nature as a collective, public good to which humanity as a whole aspires, b) its focus on the rights of all individuals, c) economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability, and most recently, d) respect for the different ways of understanding development.

In the area of CSO actions:

2.3) **Coherence.** An initial value demanded for CSOs is coherence, or in other words, correspondence between speech and actions.

2.4) **Transparency.** Recognition of the need to improve our levels of transparency is unanimous. This is basically a problem of congruence between what we preach and what we demand of other stakeholders in society.

2.5) **Pluralism,** understood as recognizing, valuing and advocating diversity. This is both a value to be advocated in society as well as a principle guiding the work within each organization.

2.6) **Innovation.** An added value that CSOs frequently contribute to the solution of social problems is innovation and creativity. This involves the search for and experimentation with new formulas for confronting old problems, especially taking advantage of the energy and knowledge possessed by those involved in this work.

2.7) **Solidarity.** To follow the principles of solidarity, cooperation and coordination is another ethical imperative. Although it is common to find dynamics involving competition and individualism among CSOs, the need to overcome this tendency and take action in the framework of these values is recognized.

2.8) Taking **ethical and social responsibility** for what one does is a criterion guiding the behaviors and actions of individuals and organizations at all times. This involves taking responsibility for the consequences of the actions promoted.

2.9) **Environmental responsibility.** A principle for guiding the work of CSOs for which there is still a great deal of work to be done is incorporating environmental responsibility and the rights of nature into our everyday lives. Special attention must be given to the enormous challenges currently facing our planet in terms of global warming and a number of different types of environmental problems experienced around the world.

2.10) **Effectiveness.** There is agreement that the principle of effectiveness is important for CSOs and that this is not something new. Organizations have always asked themselves how their actions can make a greater impact as they work toward goals and results. There is also a collective recognition that discussion on effectiveness that does not integrate discussion focused on development is sterile and problematic.

2.11) **Gender equality.** Although this is a separate topic on its own,⁶ it is also important to mention the struggle for gender equality and women's rights as one of the principles guiding the work of CSOs. It is vitally important that CSOs share a deep conviction that without this dimension any social organization will be severely limited.

It is important to acknowledge that these values and principles must be viewed from two sides. On the one hand they guide the daily actions of CSOs and are a reality for many of them, but at the same time they constitute a challenge to be met by these same CSOs and many others. Great progress has been made, although not at the same rate in all organizations, and for everyone there is much to be accomplished in order to transform these principles into reality.

Topic 3. RELATIONS AMONG CSOs (South-South and South-North)

On the topic of relations among CSOs, concerns are focused on the following areas:

3.1) **This field is not homogenous.** The first point to be emphasized is to encourage everyone to avoid looking at these relations in a homogenous manner. In today's world there is a great deal of the North in the South, and a great deal of the South in the North. For example, it is clear that the migration phenomenon has completely changed the panorama and the geography of relations among CSOs.

3.2) **The need to re-politicize our relations.** A second point emphasized to all those involved in this network of relations is the need to "re-politicize discourse" and to highlight the political nature of the relations established among CSOs. After decades of work, we cannot limit ourselves to simply carrying out projects or being "contracted" by the State or by international development agencies. The political nature of our relations may be explicit or implicit, but it is unavoidable. It is vital that we demand the building of relations based on political solidarity in relation to shared purposes and shared goals. The idea is to build relations as allies with the objective of achieving redistributive policies for reducing inequalities around the world, in each region, in each country, and between men and women, between adults and young people, and between human beings and nature.

3.3) **South-South cooperation.** It is also necessary to work together to intervene in the processes of South-South development work currently being monopolized by States. We have a collective task of recognizing the importance of opening up this modality of development work to CSOs.

3.4) **Emerging countries.** Currently, there are a number of emerging States that are aspiring to become global players, and what we perceive is that their practices in development work and in the area of commerce are no different from and in fact often reproduce the same practices that

⁶ See Topic 5 below.

we thought had been overcome. In the case of Latin America, Brazil is one of these emerging States. The concern here is the need to include this topic in our agendas.

3.5) **Multi-lateral and international organizations.** In the international arena, not only National States are setting the pace. Multi-lateral and international institutions also have a role in defining the panorama and architecture of international relations, and there is very little if any control being exerted over them. There is a need for work focused on dialogue, oversight and control, and it is vitally important for associations, organizations and international networks of CSOs to include these areas within their established tasks.

3.6) **Questions for CSOs in the North.** CSOs in the South are questioning CSOs in the North:

- The asymmetry in relations between NGOs providing development cooperation and CSOs in the South is a reality, and recognizing this situation is a necessary starting point. What is happening is that when the political agenda is neglected, relations end up being reduced to simple establishing contracts to carry out projects.
- Relations based exclusively on operating projects are inadequate for establishing strategic, long-term perspectives. There is a phenomenon that CSOs refer to as “impatient cooperation” in which the focus in the International Development Cooperation world is on the short term, and at the same time impacts are demanded, requiring excessive use of administrative resources. This is something that does not make any sense when the duration of these projects may only be a matter of a few months.
- There is a tendency for those in the North to view the South as being the same throughout, failing to see the differences and heterogeneity that characterizes the region. This translates into treating everyone the same, independently of their capacities and their needs. This often leads to awkward mistakes and offensive actions.
- There is also a problem related to the individuals involved. CSOs in the South dedicate great efforts to helping individuals become experienced professionals—who are then almost impossible to keep within their organizations, since international organizations and development assistance agencies promote what is known as “brain drain” in which these professionals join their ranks, given their capacity to pay much higher salaries. Minimally, it is only fair that these efforts in bringing training and experience to these professionals be acknowledged economically.
- To date, the flow of information and accountability moves mostly South to North, and this must be modified. It is agreed that accountability must be reciprocal, and information must flow in both directions.
- In a number of countries there is a rejection of the role of international CSOs as intermediaries between community organizations and local CSOs, on the one hand, and their respective National States and governments, on the other hand. International organizations must not assume as a fact that they have the right to speak on behalf of local stakeholders.
- In a number of countries in the region, it is felt that there is unfair competition on the part of organizations from the North for resources in countries in the South. Not only must CSOs in the South face the very limited financing available to them, but in addition international organizations apply for national resources in their countries, and they have definite advantages over national CSOs in administrative and financial terms. The focus here should be solidarity, not competition.

Topic 4. LEGITIMACY, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF CSOS

The followed shared ideas on this topic were expressed in the National Consultations:

4.1) **A pertinent topic in our reality.** There is consensus in the region regarding the importance of this topic in today's reality, while at the same time, concrete experiences in this regard vary greatly. In some sectors there is still the perception that transparency and accountability are imposed from the outside. The generalized agreement is that although the pressure from the outside is very real, it is also true that the main reasons for emphasizing these aspects originate in the social sector itself. The demand for transparency and accountability from other stakeholders in society is an important aspect of CSO missions and demands, and they cannot exempt themselves from their responsibility to do the same. The justification used can be identified as a problem of congruence and coherence with our type of organization that seeks to and takes actions to produce public goods.

The same is true for legality and legitimacy, and they are often confused. The first originates from a legal decision. The second is a result of the relations developed and actions undertaken by each CSO. This does not depend on the "propaganda" produced by each organization on itself. Nor is it true that legitimacy depends only on being coordinated with a social movement, or we can at least say that simply coordinating efforts with a social movement is not enough.

4.2) **Accountability.** Legitimacy is closely associated with accountability and transparency. In most Latin American countries, CSOs are accountable to the State. In all cases this is regulated by laws and decrees, and represents a minimum standard that must be met. CSOs are also accountable to donors, member assemblies and other stakeholders. But this is only the beginning. The real challenge lies in the construction of policies at the individual (for each organization) and collective (for associations, federations and confederations) levels. These policies establish internal control, and should include practices for transparency and accountability to all interested publics. Emphasis is placed, however, on the importance of accountability within organizations. This is not only a matter of maintaining a solid accounting system, but also includes the responsible management of non-financial resources.

4.3) **Information.** For CSOs, transparency involves the quality and timeliness of information they provide about themselves to interested publics. In order to function effectively, CSOs must be profoundly rooted in institutional culture. Transparency is also a mechanism for trust-building.

4.4) **Institutional capacities.** It has been determined that many CSO activities currently underway in Latin America are limited by a lack of institutional capacities and not by a lack of will. Therefore, when addressing policies or programs for institutional strengthening, it is important to include capacity-building for being accountable and transparent.

4.5) **Good practices.** Important progress has been made in this area in a number of Latin American countries. We can point to a set of good practices that include: a) the Regional Initiative for Strengthening Transparency and Accountability Practices in Latin American CSOs (*Iniciativa Regional para el Fortalecimiento de Prácticas de Transparencia y Rendición de Cuentas de las OSC en AL*, or *Rendir Cuentas*),⁷ b) the Network of NGOs for Transparency in Colombia (*La Red de ONG por la Transparencia – Colombia*),⁸ and c) ethics codes in national platforms such as Anong, Unitas, and Acción.⁹ What is evident in all of these cases is that these are collective processes taking place in the sector, and the role played by second (associations) and third-level (federations,

⁷ Rendir Cuentas: <http://rendircuentas.org/>

⁸ Red ONGxT: <http://www.ongporltransparentia.org.co/>

⁹ Anong (Uruguay): <http://www.anong.org.uy/> . Unitas (Bolivia): <http://www.redunitas.org/> . Acción (Chile): <http://www.accionag.cl/>

confederations) organizations and networks in promoting these types of practices is very important, since it would be practically impossible for an isolated CSO to carry out this work.

4.6) **Communication.** It is generally recommended that transparency and accountability practices be accompanied by a communication policy that increases the sector's visibility and that places the information produced in the hands of interested publics. Also, when CSOs communicate what they are doing, this serves as an incentive for other CSOs to also be accountable and for the principle of transparency to spread throughout all sectors of society.

Topic 5: WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER

This topic deserves to be addressed specifically. The main points of agreement can be summarized as follows:

5.1) Women's and feminist movements are heterogeneous and diverse. This is also a value as itself.

5.2) The objective of gender equality must be placed above the objective of development.

5.3) Women and their organizations and movements are actors in development.

5.4) Feminism is an avant-garde cultural proposal. In this area CSOs have established themselves as cultural actors in the transformation of attitudes and the struggle against patriarchy.

5.5) The women's movement has been a key actor in democratization processes, against dictatorships and in the daily life relationships (women as political actors).

5.6) CSOs are not free from their own patriarchy. It is the task of CSOs to bring visibility to this problem and identify it as a challenge to be faced.

5.7) Strengthening women's organizations: this should be assumed as an effectiveness indicator by the various stakeholders in development. International development agencies should include strengthening women's actions as citizens and women's organizations and movements among their effectiveness indicators.

5.8) Public policies on gender equality are necessary. Feminists have posed the question "What State for what equality?" It is not necessary to discuss whether women's rights should be addressed through transversal policies or through gender-sensitive budgets—both are necessary.

5.9) Women's and feminist movements constitute an important national and international actor. Coordination among these movements and between these movements and other sectors and movements is a current and ongoing challenge.

5.10) Communication should be included as a strategy for bringing visibility to the unbalanced power between genders and for fighting against the subordination of one gender to the other.

TOPIC 6: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

What CSOs confirmed in the National Consultations in Latin America and the Caribbean is that the environment in the region, although marked by enormous changes and differences, is characterized by mutual distrust between the State, the private business sector and CSOs. While this is the case, it is also true that there is significant evidence of sectors beginning to come together, and these tendencies must be strengthened.

A friendly environment that strengthens CSOs is expressed at a number of different levels. Some of the characteristics that should be established in each case are the following:

At the socio-cultural level:

6.1) **Cultural value placed on organizations.** In the creation of an environment that is favorable to CSOs existing and operating, an initial element to be obtained is to construct and reinforce the following within the common sense and culture of citizens in general: the value of organizations; the advantages of collective, cooperative actions expressed in solidarity and aimed at resolving problems; and the importance of each group of human beings having the opportunity to express their opinions through the channel provided by their organizations.

But there are some serious problems. A number of presidents and high-level government officials in the region have made public declarations with generalizations discrediting NGOs and other social organizations. Something similar has happened in the case of authorities from the business world, the academic community and even from social movements. Attitudes like these contribute exactly the opposite of what we are proposing here. They create an environment that is hostile to social organizing, and are often a legitimization of aggressions against social organizations.

Tasks that can be very useful in creating an enabling environment include systematic communication through the mass media and supporting communication-oriented actions by CSOs in the mass media and other communication media. This is a challenge at all levels: international, national, regional and local.

At the political level:

CSOs conclude that the political environment in general is not facilitating their work. What can be found in the region ranges from governments that do not tolerate CSOs that criticize their policies and actions and that criminalize those in opposition, to governments that ignore their existence. What is necessary to improve this environment is, for example:

6.2) **A State with guarantees.** In a number of the region's countries, it is still necessary to create an environment in which government authorities respect human rights and the rights of association and expression. These rights and liberties tend to be limited, justified particularly by national security arguments. As long as the executive branch in a given country fails to express the clear and explicit will to respect these rights, an enabling environment is impossible. What is absolutely necessary is to guarantee that the rule of law truly exists, but unfortunately, in a number of the region's countries we find that even the government is working against this.

6.3) **Public recognition of CSOs and their autonomy.** In order to speak of an enabling political environment, we cannot limit ourselves to addressing only legal recognition. It is necessary for the importance of social organizations to be publicly valued, and this is an obligation of public authorities and individuals with responsibility in society. And this is closely associated with the obligation to respect the autonomy of CSOs. When governments attempt to co-opt, silence or eliminate civil society organizations that do not agree with their actions, the damage to the organizations involved and to the countries in general is severe.

6.4) **Equality of organizations before the law.** Recognition of CSOs and of the rights to citizen participation and the public expression of their opinions must be supported by the principle of equality for all CSOs before the law. Whether an organization is politically close to or distanced from the government cannot be a legitimate basis or criterion for its recognition. We have found a recent tendency in a number of Latin American countries, and from very different ideological perspectives, in which the term "governmental civil society" is used. This term refers to an extensive layer of organizations created by the State and totally at the service of the State and its defense.

6.5) **Decentralization.** It was established that the decentralization of government action generally favors the existence and actions of CSOs (especially smaller ones). This element is not the only one necessary for an enabling environment, and in fact there are occasions in which CSO activities are complicated in decentralized environments. But overall, a decentralized environment is closer to and facilitates the work of CSOs.

At the legal, regulatory level:

What is obtained at the cultural and political levels should be reflected at the regulatory level. The necessary legal framework should consist of a set of legal certainties that reduce any arbitrary and personalized tendencies in decision-making. It should also contemplate mechanisms for dealing with government officials who fail to comply with regulations designed to protect CSOs.

6.5) **Public policies for strengthening CSOs.** It is important to establish an adequate regulatory framework, although CSOs are aware that such a framework alone is insufficient. The State needs to implement explicit public policies for strengthening CSOs. These policies should define the rules of the game; create mechanisms to serve as an incentive for creating CSOs and placing them into action; provide opportunities for training those involved; and specify the real possibilities for meeting together with and debating with different sectors and stakeholders. This legal framework should be debated extensively and agreed upon, in part in order to understand the differences among the various organizations and their particular characteristics.

Regulations for recognizing the right to transparency and access to public information are enormously useful for society overall and for CSO activities in particular.

6.6) **Pro-active fiscal policy.** A particular area worth mentioning in relation to public regulations is the area of taxation. Given the nature of non-profit organizations, something that happens in all the region's countries is the promotion of CSOs and their activities through fiscal incentives (exemption from income tax, etc.), taking into consideration their social value and their status as producers of public goods. This is a good starting point, but fiscal policy can and should go farther, and should serve to promote social organizations. Other types of incentives for good practices can be explored, such as those for organizations working with especially vulnerable populations, for those using innovative methodologies and for CSOs that demonstrate their accountability. Also, efforts to develop economic activities focused on becoming self-sustainable can be facilitated.

6.7) **Funding.** One of the agreements reached is to work toward establishing public debate in the region and in each country regarding the need for public and government financing for CSO activities, taking into consideration that CSOs are organizations that work to produce public goods. This debate will open up exactly at a time in which many organizations see their very existence threatened, as international development assistance is withdrawn and practices that represent steps backward are increasing. These practices end up weakening CSOs and showing a lack of respect for them. They include, for example, the excessive, indiscriminate demand made of CSOs to provide counterpart funds, the tendency toward short-term contracts, and a lack of recognition of the knowledge and experience built over time and the administrative costs of projects.

There are some initial attempts, such as public funds available through an open bidding process. This is a good alternative, but it is clear that when this type of mechanism is implemented, it is immediately necessary to also establish clear instruments for controlling these funds and for establishing commitments to transparency and accountability, in order to avoid the illegitimate use of such funds and to guarantee that these funds be used for the purpose of strengthening organizations.

In particular the following needs for financing have been identified: for training individuals, for strengthening capacities in transparency and accountability, for the operation of communication media within organizations, for promoting second and third-level organizations (associations, federations) and networks for carrying out joint activities, and also funds that acknowledge the operating costs of CSOs.

Once again, this debate is necessary at the national level, and also at the international level. In the latter case, it is important to strengthen the role and the amounts of UN-linked global funds to which CSOs have access.

Efforts are underway in various countries to experiment with “inclusive enterprises” operated by civil society. These practices are in their earliest stages and require financial and technical assistance to get started.

At the level of International Development Cooperation:

6.8) **Strengthening CSOs as an effectiveness indicator.** In this area the first and most important message is the need to incorporate the strengthening of CSOs as an effectiveness criterion for development cooperation programs and projects. Currently, the mechanisms for managing international development assistance are weakening organizations, instead of strengthening them, as already mentioned here.

In line with a vision that strengthening CSOs is one aspect of development objectives, areas of financing should be established for consulting and jointly building an agenda with CSOs. The focuses of development cooperation should be established on the basis of acknowledging and dialoguing on development needs and priorities in a genuine participative manner at the national level. In addition there is a demand for efforts to simplify, standardize and increase the utility of registering and accountability systems.

Once again, there is a call to understand the relation between CSOs in the South and international organizations in the North and international agencies that work in Development Cooperation as political allies for global causes, such as the construction of a “new international financial architecture” for financing the right to development, and as allies in addressing topics that national governments in power are not in agreement with. And it is absolutely urgent to move beyond relations based merely on the simple relationship contracted-contractor.

At the level of CSOs:

Finally, at the level of CSOs, there are also responsibilities in building an enabling environment for their activities.

6.9) **Articulation.** An initial and very important responsibility is coordination. This refers to the need to build second, third and fourth-level organizations and networks for collective actions such as: defending the existence and autonomy of the sector and its organizations; the visibility and public presence of CSOs; building practices and policies for self-control, based on joint discussions and particularly including the coordination and promotion of transparency public accountability; creating instruments for strengthening and assisting the weakest organizations; and implementing a policy of identifying allies and alliances for defending the sector’s interests. And all of this needs to occur at the national, regional and international levels.

The urgent task of re-politicizing CSOs and their relations requires the joint efforts of groups of organizations. This cannot be nor should it be the isolated task of a single organization. Platforms—which can take different organizational forms (networks, associations, federations or confederations)—are the best instruments for this task. We have important building blocks for

this new architecture. The organizations that have been involved in this consultation provide good examples. However, what we have before us is the challenge and invitation to **ARTICULATE** our efforts in a deeper, more political and more strategic way. The time is right to move ahead with this task... and the current context makes it absolutely necessary.