

## 5. Civil Society

### → MANDATE

*The Presidents and Prime Ministers of the Americas, gathered at the Quebec City Summit, recognized the critical role of civil society participation in the consolidation of democracy, and that this participation constitutes one of the vital elements for the success of development policies. They noted that men and women have the right to participate, with equality and equity, in the decision-making processes affecting their lives and well-being. They also agreed to establish public and private funding instruments aimed at building the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) in order to highlight the work and contribution of these organizations and to promote accountability.*

In the months leading up to the Third Summit of the Americas, the OAS supported a broad process of consultation with various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, and other representatives of civil society. This effort was coordinated with the Corporación Participa of Chile, the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL), and the Esquel Foundation, headquartered in the United States. Subsequently, civil society organizations have increased their participation in the agencies and entities that support the process of the Summits of the Americas.

The governments have developed national policies on this subject, and with support from the OAS, other multilateral organizations and development banks, have implemented strategies to increase the capacity for civil society to participate in the inter-American system, and in the political,

economic, and social development of their communities and countries.

Globalization has contributed to strengthening dialogue and political interaction between our leaders and between civil society stakeholders. According to a recent Carnegie Endowment for International Peace study by P.J. Simmons (2002): “a recent explosion of activity by NGO’s has energized volunteers in almost all countries to advance causes that range from banning landmines to protecting endangered species. Their presence has helped turn once-controversial concepts—such as the efficacy of microcredit, the empowerment of women, and the need for environmentally sustainable development—into conventional wisdom.”

In a recent study by the Justice Studies Center for the Americas (JSCA) in Argenti-

na, Chile, Colombia, and Peru—titled Justice and Civil Society—it is clear that civil society has played a key role in legal system reform in those countries. The nongovernmental organizations “contribute comprehensive studies, reform proposals, and follow-up activities.”

In the Caribbean, civil society has played a significant role since 1993 in the Caribbean Court of Justice’s gender and youth cases, in the prevention of HIV/AIDS, and in economic and social affairs. Participation of civil society in this region has increased since the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) signed a declaration of principles in the Forward Together Conference in Liliendaal, Guyana, in July 2003. This establishes procedures for consultation between representatives of civil society and the 15 CARICOM members, which includes dialogue between the Heads of Government and nongovernmental organizations. It stresses the need for constructive relations, especially in the Council for Trade and Economic Development, the Council for Finance and Planning, and the Council for Social and Human Development of CARICOM. A small working group on civil society coordinated by the CARICOM Secretariat was created.

In Brazil, according to an article by Marcos Kisil, Regional Director of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, published in *TerceiroSector.org*, there has been an upsurge of civil society organizations “following the return of democracy to the country during the 1980s.” This has led several political analysts to consider that the growth of the so-called third sector “is the most important factor that by itself could have ensured the future of democracy for Brazilian society,” which is defined as a democracy that is shifting from representation to participation.

The Government of Canada polled civil society organizations in January 2003 by

## PROGRESS

*The Hemisphere’s Heads of State and Government stressed the importance of civil society by noting: “We welcome and value the contributions of civil society, including business and labor organizations, to our Plan of Action. We affirm that openness and transparency are vital to building public awareness and legitimacy for our undertakings. We call upon all citizens of the Americas to contribute to the Summit process.”*

on-site visits and electronic dialogue with civil society organizations and the general public. In the discussion called “A Dialogue on Canadian Foreign Policy,” participants analyzed and reviewed Canadian foreign policy developments since 1995 in the areas of global and Canadian security, promotion of global and Canadian prosperity, and the protection of values and culture. As a result of the dialogue, 38,000 copies of the document “A Dialogue on Foreign Policy—Report to Canadians,” which contained the reflections of the various participants, were distributed. The dialogue established a vehicle for direct interaction and cooperation between the government and civil society to contribute to the development of Canadian foreign policy.

In the Americas, civil society has contributed to redefinition of the role of international organizations and the redesign of a system of international institutions better equipped to cooperate and work together with them. Working meetings have been held between the OAS, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, national and international cooperation agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Inter-American Agency for Cooperation and Development (IACD), with civil society to identify new forms of cooperation and joint work.

The Organization of American States (OAS) is at the forefront of multilateral organizations in terms of civil society participation by affording it the opportunity to



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## PROGRESS

*During the process of drafting the Inter-American Democratic Charter in 2001, the OAS invited citizens to submit their comments on a special web site created for the purpose. It also organized a virtual forum to collect the views of more than sixty-nine (69) civil society organizations, which provided important input for final approval of the Inter-American Democratic Charter.*

comment on draft resolutions, not only in the framework of the General Assembly but also those adopted in specialized conferences, or in the process of approval of inter-American conventions. This progress is reflected in the “Guidelines for Participation of Civil Society Organizations in OAS Activities,” which defines how CSOs can participate in activities of the OAS and its political organs, and attend their meetings. The OAS has taken great strides by creating a web page for civil society and updating it to make it more accessible for all through a

design that clearly shows the many ways civil society can connect with the Organization. The OAS promotes the registration of NGOs. There are presently 78 civil society organizations working with the political bodies and 1380 working with the functional areas of the Organization.

According to a study by Laurie Cole of the Canadian Foundation for the Americas, “Participation of Civil Society in the Inter-American System: the Case of the Organization of American States,” the application of the above-mentioned guidelines “[have] proved to be [...] valuable mechanism[s] for legitimizing civil society organizations.” This publication notes the increased participation of civil society in the inter-American system—especially in the OAS—and shows that additional work is needed to “build lasting relations and truly consolidate the inclusion of society and tolerance of diverse opinions.”

**The regional forum on,  
Civil Society in the  
Process of Hemispheric  
Integration within the  
Framework of the Special  
Summit of the Americas.**

*November 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> 2003  
Mexico City, Mexico*



Civil society organizations have participated in ministerial and high-level meetings, and in the political organs of the OAS. At the OAS General Assembly in 2003, in Santiago, Chile, the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy (UPD) and the Summits of the Americas Secretariat of the OAS helped the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLAC-SO) in Chile and other civil society organizations and networks to hold a workshop on democratic governance. The workshop's results were presented in the informal dialogue between civil society organizations, foreign ministers, and the OAS Secretary General. At that meeting in June 2003, the Foreign Ministers adopted a resolution to establish a dialogue between civil society and heads of delegation as a regular feature of the General Assembly, which shows the effort made by the OAS to increase the involvement of these organizations and ensure greater transparency in its deliberations.

At the First Meeting of Ministers and Senior Officials of Culture, held July 12 and 13 in Cartagena, Colombia, some 20 representatives of civil society and four culture ministers discussed the Plan of Action of Cartagena, with special attention paid to cultural diversity and other matters related to culture and equity.

The OAS also invited representatives of civil society to participate in a workshop on education, held in July 2003 in Bogotá, Colombia, two weeks before the Third Meeting of Ministers of Education in Mexico City. On that occasion representatives of educational networks, teachers' associations, and parent groups adopted recommendations to present to the education ministers in Mexico.

In similar fashion, the Organization invited civil society organizations registered with the OAS to participate in the "Second Meeting of Ministers and High-Level Authorities Responsible for Policies of Decentralization, Local Government, and Citizen Participation at the Municipal Level in the Hemisphere," which took place September

24-26, 2003, in Mexico City. In addition, several civil society representatives attended the Special Conference on Hemispheric Security, held September 27 and 28 in Mexico City.

Civil society has also participated in recent follow-up of hemispheric treaties against corruption and terrorism and in preparation of the draft American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

For the Eighth Meeting of Ministers of Trade of the FTAA, in Miami November 17 and 18, 2003, civil society organizations held the Americas Trade and Sustainable Development Forum (ATSDF) with informal dialogue and substantive exchanges between civil society and the government delegations. This forum supplemented and enhanced work accomplished on the Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations.

## PROGRESS

*In the OAS, the Summits of the Americas Secretariat is responsible for ensuring that civil society organizations are involved in OAS activities and the design of the summit agenda, as well as follow-up and implementation. In preparation for the Special Summit of the Americas in January 2004, the Secretariat for the Summits of the Americas, together with the Government of Mexico, Corporación Participa, The Regional Coordinator of Economic and Social Research (CRIES), the Inter-American Network for Democracy, Partners of the Americas and USAID, the Civic Alliance, the Canadian Foundation for the Americas (FOCAL) and the Latin American Association of Advocacy Organizations (ALOP) organized a regional forum on "Civil Society in the Process of Hemispheric Integration Within the Framework of the Special Summit of the Americas," which was held in Mexico City in November 2003, with participation of 98 non-governmental and academic organizations from 20 countries in the Hemisphere. The forum's primary purpose was to afford representatives of civil society organizations that are working for peace, economic and social development, and democratic governance an opportunity for dialogue and agreement to make a contribution to the Special Summit of the Americas and present their recommendations to the governments in the GRIC meeting in December.*

SUMMIT IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW GROUP (SIRC)

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The World Bank uses mechanisms similar to those of the OAS to transmit information on its programs to civil society organizations. Specifically, the communication includes meetings for consultation and transmission of electronic information. In addition, the World Bank has a newsletter for civil society on its web site. The World Bank has a Civil Society Program for the Latin American and Caribbean Region that encourages opportunities for expanding the dialogue among governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector at the national and local levels. Part of this effort includes providing resources and expert knowledge to create the alliances and synergies needed to face the challenges of inclusiveness and development in this region.

Since its inception the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has been working with civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Latin America in projects to increase the social and economic well-being of the population. The IDB's work with civil society occurs on several levels: operational, institutional, and policy. For example, the Bank and its borrowers consult

NGOs and target population in the preparation and execution of projects. The NGOs and interest groups can also review and comment on draft strategies and guidelines for loans. In addition, the IDB uses mechanisms that include loans to enhance the institutional capacity of civil society organizations at the national and local levels, stimulates dialogue between the various sectors of the IDB and the CSOs, and when necessary, asks them for assistance to implement projects and conduct research. Furthermore, in the past year the IDB has carried out an intensive effort in lending, technical cooperation, dissemination, understanding, and consensus building in five major areas—governance and political development, integration and economic development, ecology and sustainable development, equity and human development, and connectivity and technological development—through which the IDB is supporting the mandates of the Quebec City Summit. At that summit the IDB presented 22 programs in these five areas, all of which have been moving ahead well.

The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) involves

CSOs in initiatives of the inter-American system, especially in the areas of transportation, migration, trade, gender equality, and connectivity. ECLAC's contribution in all these sectors includes the preparation of substantive input for intergovernmental debates, and support for organizational aspects and the Secretariat.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) began in 1990 to build a civil society coalition to respond to the challenges experienced by health systems after reforms in the health sector. This coalition, which PAHO calls "partners," includes networks of NGOs, public foundations, and the private sector.

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA) consults civil society in the process of consideration of its policy documents. The most recent of these consultations was held to draw up the "AGRO 2003-2115" Plan of Action for agriculture and rural life in the Americas, which was adopted at the Second Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Life, held in Panama on November 11 and 12, 2003.

## CHALLENGES

Although significant strides have been made in this area, civil society's participation in the region continues to face several challenges. First, it is necessary to continue strengthening their technical ability and expertise in their areas of interest, by developing internal mechanism for consultation, accountability, and selection of leaders, in order to ensure its members are truly represented and its work and contributions are of high quality. Second, resources must be allocated to ensure effective and sustained monitoring and implementation of the mandates of the Summits of the Americas. In addition to the internal processes, they must creatively promote efficient vehicles for exchange of information with governments at the national level and with decentralized administrations. This is facilitated with the establishment of networks to promote synergies in innova-

tive joint initiatives that assist in the search for the necessary financing.

To create opportunities for participation, the governments need to have the political will to dedicate adequate resources and mechanisms to facilitate the dialogues. Some governments have done excellent work in creating focal points for dialogue with civil society right in the foreign ministries.

Furthermore, international agencies need to have the requisite human and financial resources to enable them to contribute to the development of a community of civil society organizations that helps nurture and enrich the development thinking and strategies that are adopted in the Americas.

Finally, civil society organizations are key partners in helping national governments implement the mandates of the Summit and provide the necessary accountability. The Summits process is a joint initiative of the governments and civil society, and its success requires a shared effort by all social stakeholders.

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