Coding and Decoding
CIVIL SOCIETY

CIVICUS CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX FOR VENEZUELA 2009 - 2010

ANALYTICAL COUNTRY REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2010

FOREWORD

Let us begin by remembering that the concept of 'civil society' has evolved through the ages from the days of Ancient Greece, and only in the middle of the last century did it begin to be defined as we understand it today. Since then, as it has been the experience of Venezuela, civil society has mainly appeared as the action space for charities and social welfare organisations, the classic 'NGOs', whose role in the public sphere involved upholding economic, social and cultural rights. Social movements began developing alongside fights for the rights of women, workers, and racial minorities, which would definitely impact on the course of history, especially the fight for the right to a decent life for all. The organisations that today are renowned for promoting and defending human rights developed in Venezuela during the 1980s. Nowadays, 'civil society' implies a broad action framework involving very different types of citizens' associations, to the extent that in some countries even political parties are considered to be civil society actors.

Today 'civil society' implies the organised action of citizens within the public sphere, through the aggregation and representation of social interests, both for the production of public property (laws, projects, services), and for the promotion and defence of rights, human rights, social justice, democracy and rule of law. This is an action typical of people who associate voluntarily, as a result of a free and autonomous decision to coexist in the desired manner, and the power to achieve it lies in the weave of associations and networks that share civic and democratic values, legitimate and non-violent public practices, and a deep consistency between the values they proclaim and the actions they perform for the common good.

Taking into account the nature of the organisations acting in the scope of civil society, and that their action takes place within the public sphere to attain social transformations that imply a decent life for all, locally and globally, there is no doubt as to the political nature of these organisations and the political nature of their actions, in the most virtuous and noble sense of the exercise of 'politics'.

This nature is clearly expressed by Bobbio (1989): "Civil society is the venue where powers which tend to obtain legitimacy are formed, especially during periods of institutional crisis, even at the expense of legitimate powers; where, in other words, the processes of delegitimisation and relegitimisation develop. Hence the frequent assertion that the solution for a material crisis which threatens the survival of a political system must be found, above all, in civil society, where new sources of legitimisation, thus new spaces of consensus, can be found."

Whatever the perspective, the role of civil society organisations is becoming more and more relevant, and this calls for reflection, debate and self-analysis processes for which an essential starting point is possession of some qualitative and quantitative tools. The Civil Society Index is one of those tools; it will help us know who we are, how we are, what values we promote and practice, what resources we have and of what sort: in other words, how we can actually contribute to bringing about the changes required by the ideal of creating a more just, equitable, and democratic world and society, where human rights are fully guaranteed.

Feliciano Reyna Ganteaume
President of SINERGIA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index for Venezuela is a collective work. More than 400 representatives of civil society organisations and other sectors (academia, business representatives, government representatives and cooperation agencies) joined in activities promoted by the project, which entailed answering surveys and participating in consultation workshops. We are thankful to them in the first place as co-writers of this participatory effort.

The conceptual approach and methodological aspects of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) were developed by CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation. A technical team assisted the project throughout the entire process. We are deeply grateful to our CIVICUS colleagues: Natalie Akstein, Tracy Anderson, Amy Bartlett, Mariano De Donatis, Andrew Firmin, Jacob Mati and Mark Nowottny.

The CSI has been implemented in more than 40 countries, six of which are from Latin America (Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Nicaragua, Uruguay and Venezuela). A work team was formed at the beginning, thus facilitating the exchange of results and tools and enabling the comparison of peoples sharing a history and a culture. We would like to express special thanks to Cristian Cao, Argentine Team Coordinator, whose generosity and analytical capacity contributed to improving the quality of the output, and saved endless hours of work.

The Executive Committee of SINERGIA, the organisation coordinating this effort in Venezuela, and its associates gave enthusiastic support to the project and contributed both by sharing ideas throughout the implementation process and by sponsoring activities. Feliciano Reyna, president, and Yolanda D'Elía assisted with their observations and support in the most critical phases of the process.

An Advisory Committee was formed at the onset of the project, comprised of representatives of civil society and other stakeholders. We would like to thank them for their invaluable support, both concerning the initial methodological decisions and the validation of results.

During the fieldwork phase, particularly difficult in a society characterised by distrust, the experience of Delphos Institute, especially its Director, Félix Seijas Jr. and Francis Abreu, Project Coordinator, was an important support.

The assistance provided by the associated centres helped to make this project more inclusive by incorporating the voices of the provinces. The consultation workshops would have not been possible without the knowledge of our local partners in each city, who provided infrastructure and logistical support to ensure a successful outcome.

Furthermore, the alliance with the Development Efficiency Forum and the Associations and NGOs Networks Articulation Board in Latin America and the Caribbean has enlarged the spectrum of organisations that participated in the National Dialogue, enriching the debate.

Finally, we are grateful to Farmatodo C.A. and Bancaribe, the Latin American Institute on Social Issues Research (Friedrich Ebert Foundation), the European Union, the 2009 Civil Society Fund (Social Development Civil Society Fund / Chacao Municipality / Caracas Insurance Foundation), the Local Initiatives Fund from Canada's Embassy, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and CESAP Social Group, which placed their trust in the team and supported enthusiastically the success of this ambitious effort.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CC	Communal councils
CESAP	Centre for the Support of Popular Action
CIEPV	Centre for Research in Education, Productivity and Life.
CISOR	Social Issues Research Centre
COFAVIC	Commission for the Support of Victims' Families – events of February and March 1989
CRBV	Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 1999
CS	Civil society
CSI	Civil Society Index
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
IIES-UCAB	Social and Economic Research Institute. Catholic University – Andrés Bello – Caracas
ILDIS	Latin American Institute on Social Issues Research (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung)
INE	National Statistics Institute
INVESP	Venezuelan Social and Political Research Institute
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OPAS	Right to Freedom of Association and Participation Watch Group
PROVEA	Venezuelan Human Rights Education-Action Programme
PSUV	United Socialist Party of Venezuela
RBV	Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
REDSOC	Venezuelan Network of Social Development Organisations
TSJ	Supreme Court of Justice
UCAB	Catholic University Andrés Bello
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VENAMCHAM	Venezuelan American Chamber of Commerce.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Civil Society Index is a participatory and action-planning research tool aimed at assessing and strengthening civil society. Its approach involves a diagnosis based on consultations with organisations and external sectors (academia, cooperation agencies, business sector, social communicators and government) to promote the inclusion of different visions in the assessment of civil society and drawing up of proposals.

Venezuelans have been inclined to perceive the state as responsible for the solutions of all their needs, and to give in to clientelism. Therefore, social organisation is not sufficiently appreciated as a way to solve citizens' problems. Three features distinguish Venezuelan civil society today: polarisation within a framework of discrimination, fast transformations in response to a volatile environment and deep-rooted anti-political attitudes. Venezuelan society is made up of two blocs: one in favour of the revolutionary project and one against. Between these two poles, most civil society organisations (CSOs) are equally affected by a model in which autonomous intermediate organisations are not considered by authorities as legitimate interlocutors.

FIGURE 1. Civil Society Diamond for Venezuela 2009
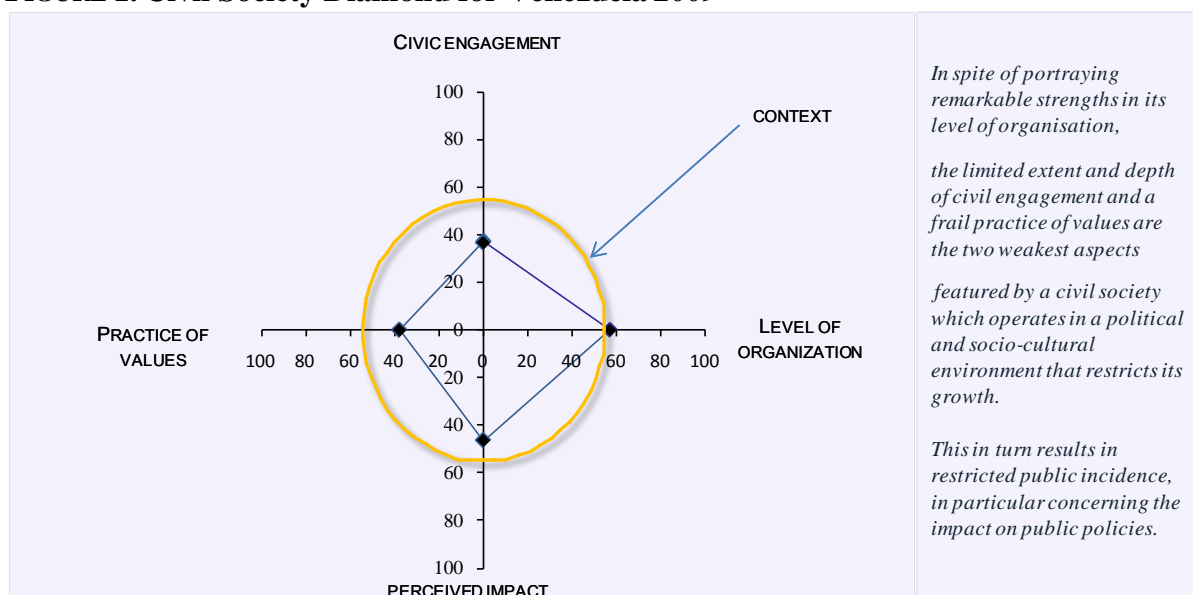
The common factor across all of the dimensions is a loss of institutionalisation, manifested in the weakening of coexistence rules. This is expressed by the ordinary citizen through prevalent anomic behaviours that favour violence and contempt, and on the part of the state by the centralisation of powers in the hands of the President.

Civic participation is low, when compared with international average levels. Only public protests reflect greater enthusiasm, for want of inclusive mechanisms of democratic governance, as the channel by which to affect the public sphere. However, in the last years, a growing number of Venezuelans have become interested in the public sphere. This, together with the incorporation of new organisations, has created a denser social fabric.

Organisation is civil society's greatest strength. In general, CSOs have formal managerial structures that hold regular meetings. An adequate staff base with technological training has enabled information gathering and exchange, in spite of poor and diminishing economic

resources. By contrast, the practice of values shows evident deficiencies in internal democracy and in processes that ensure transparency and accountability, only partially justified as a response to self-censorship.

The influence of civil society regarding the extension of social rights is substantial. However, success in public policies has been lower and civil society has a small impact on public attitudes. The sector's legitimacy, on the other hand, compared with the distrust of other actors, constitutes strength and an opportunity.

The external context does not favour the development of civil society. In the socio-cultural arena, tolerance is restricted by a virtual absence of interpersonal trust, and in terms of public spiritedness, Venezuelans acknowledge the validity of rules of coexistence, but do not abide by them. In the scope of state-society relationships, a significant number of CSOs have been forced to coexist within a restrictive legal framework and they face governmental practices that limit their autonomy.

In the light of this scenario, the first priority is to create a dialogue platform oriented to deactivate polarisation. This dialogue must include political parties, as well as the rest of civil society, CSOs and other sectors such as business, academia donors and sectors with different ideologies, both locally and nationally.

Another priority is to recover interpersonal trust and civic spiritedness by enhancing the scope of values training programmes, and to fight against clientelism, upholding the right to participate in public spheres and to access state resources without relinquishing autonomy.

Fostering civic engagement will involve organising a broad campaign informing of the rights granted by the CRBV (Venezuela's Constitution), so as to arouse citizen consciousness about the need to join actively in their promotion. A further proposal is to promote self-regulation and internal governance democracy practices, and another is to launch campaigns favouring the peaceful settlement of conflicts so as to reduce violence.

To increase organisations' efficiency, simultaneous strategies should be adopted, oriented on financial sustainability, the reinforcement of technological platforms and a more intensive and intelligent use of networking.

An effort should be made to develop training skills to favour a coordinated and complementary action by the state, political parties, civic organisations and the business sector. The actions should stress a constructive attitude and utilise legal mechanisms to ensure compliance with the state's obligations, overcoming the distrust in its efficacy that generally results in passivity and indifference. It must further ensure that the state observe its duty to provide public goods without transferring to communities tasks that do not fall under their purview.

The value of a research-action oriented project was recognised by all the participants, who consider it a very valuable tool to enhance the visibility of civil society in all its complexity, thus contributing to the destruction of stereotypes. In order to extend access to information and get a deeper insight into lesser-known aspects, we propose the forging of links with research and reflection centres to undertake joint agendas and make the most of the skills, capacities and resources of each.

INTRODUCTION

It is crucial for democracy to count on a dynamic civil society since it encourages participation in the formulation and control of public polices, and it is the driving force for communicating values such as solidarity, tolerance and equity. We ask ourselves, how can civil society be strengthened and how can it contribute to democratise public life?

Since the enactment of the 1999 Constitution, which defines the Venezuelan political system as a direct participatory democracy, Venezuelan society has undergone contradictory processes following the modification of the institutional scaffolding of state-society relationships. During these years, a new organisational ferment has been generated but social fragmentation and political polarisation have affected the behaviour of civil society organisations (CSOs). "The will not to coexist" (Marías, 1985; quoted by Hernández, 2004) seems to have replaced the "will to coexist" underlying the social contract in modern societies (Gruson, 2004), thus affecting the social fabric.

The difficulties for dialogue result from stereotypes built around the existence of two strongly opposed stances, which in part derive from the invisibility of the heterogeneous spectrum of 'civil society' and the absence of collective knowledge-based spaces in which to break down prejudices. Consequently, SINERGIA accepted the challenge to participate in this project, as a way to assess civil society beyond partial visions and to promote spaces for debate of proposals agreed on cross-sectorally.

This document describes the main findings resulting from applying the CSI in Venezuela. It first includes a brief explanation of the theoretical and methodological aspects that guided the process. Chapter II describes civil society in Venezuela. Chapter III includes a description of the condition of civil society according to the five dimensions that constitute the CSI conceptual core. Chapters IV and V present the main weaknesses and strengths of Venezuelan civil society and the recommendations based on these, that were made by the participants during the consultation stages. Finally, Chapter VI integrates all the results and visions to offer an overview of civil society in Venezuela.

I. THE CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX PROJECT AND APPROACH

Civil society is playing an increasingly important role in democratic governance and development around the world. In most countries, however, knowledge about the state and shape of civil society is limited. Moreover, opportunities for civil society stakeholders to come together to collectively discuss, reflect and act on the strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities remain limited.

The Civil Society Index (CSI), a participatory action-research project assessing the state of civil society in countries around the world, contributes to redressing these limitations. The CSI was initiated and implemented by, and for, civil society organisations at the country level in partnership with CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS). The CSI implementation actively involves, and disseminates its findings to, a broad range of stakeholders including civil society, government, the media, donors, academia, and the public at large. The following key steps occur in the CSI implementation:

Assessment: CSI uses an innovative mix of participatory research methods, data sources, and case studies to comprehensively assess the state of civil society.

Collective Reflection: implementation involves structured dialogue among diverse civil society stakeholders that enables the identification of civil society's specific strengths and weaknesses.

Joint Action: the actors involved use a participatory and consultative process to develop and implement a concrete action agenda to strengthen civil society in the country.

1. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The CSI first emerged as a concept over a decade ago as a follow-up to the 1997 New Civic Atlas publication by CIVICUS, which contained profiles of civil society in 60 countries around the world (Heinrich and Naidoo 2001). The first version of the CSI methodology, developed by CIVICUS with the help of Helmut Anheier, was unveiled in 1999. An initial pilot of the tool was carried out in 2000 in 13 countries.[1] The pilot implementation process and results were evaluated. This evaluation informed a revision of the methodology. Subsequently, CIVICUS successfully implemented the first complete phase of the CSI between 2003 and 2006 in 53 countries worldwide. This implementation directly involved more than 7,000 civil society stakeholders (Heinrich 2008).

Intent on continuing to improve the research-action orientation of the tool, CIVICUS worked with the Centre for Social Investment at the University of Heidelberg, as well as with partners and other stakeholders, to rigorously evaluate and revise the CSI methodology for a second time before the start of this current phase of CSI. With this new and streamlined methodology in place, CIVICUS launched the new phase of the CSI in 2008 and selected its country partners, including both previous and new implementers, from all over the globe to participate in this project.

TABLE I.1.1 List of CSI implementing countries index phase 2008-2010[2]

Albania	Ghana	Niger
Argentina	Italy	The Philippines
Armenia	Japan	Russia
Bahrain	Jordan	Serbia
Belarus	Kazakhstan	Slovenia
Bulgaria	Kosovo	South Korea
Burkina Faso	Lebanon	Sudan
Chile	Liberia	Togo
Croatia	Macedonia	Turkey
Cyprus	Madagascar	Uganda
Djibouti	Mali	Ukraine
Democratic Republic of Congo	Malta	Uruguay
Georgia	Mexico	Venezuela
	Nicaragua	Zambia

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[1] The pilot countries were Belarus, Canada, Croatia, Estonia, Indonesia, Mexico, New Zealand, Pakistan, Romania, South Africa, Ukraine, Uruguay, and Wales.

[2] Note that this list was accurate as of the publication of this Analytical Country Report, but may have changed slightly since the publication, due to countries being added or eliminated during the implementation cycle.

2. PROJECT APPROACH

The current CSI project approach continues to marry assessment and evidence with reflection and action. As such, CSI does not produce knowledge for its own sake but instead seeks to directly apply the knowledge generated to stimulate strategies that enhance the effectiveness and role of civil society. With this in mind, the CSI's fundamental methodological bedrocks include the following: [3]

Inclusiveness: The CSI framework strives to incorporate a variety of theoretical viewpoints, as well as being inclusive in terms of civil society indicators, actors and processes included in the project.

Universality: Since the CSI is a global project, its methodology seeks to accommodate national variations in context and concepts within its framework.

Versatility: The CSI is specifically designed to achieve an appropriate balance between international comparability and national flexibility in the implementation of the project.

Comparability: The CSI aims not to rank, but instead to comparatively measure different aspects of civil society worldwide. The possibility for comparisons exists both between different countries or regions within one phase of CSI implementation and between phases.

Dialogue: One of the key elements of the CSI is its participatory approach, involving a wide range of stakeholders who collectively own and run the project in their respective countries.

Capacity Development: Country partners are firstly trained on the CSI methodology during a three day regional workshop. After the training, partners are supported through the implementation cycle by the CSI team at CIVICUS. Partners participating in the project also gain substantial skills in research, training and facilitation in implementing the CSI in-country.

Networking: The participatory and inclusive nature of the different CSI tools creates new spaces where very diverse actors can discover synergies and forge new alliances, at the intra- and cross-sectoral levels. Some countries in the last phase have also participated in regional conferences to discuss the CSI findings concerning issues beyond the national scope.

Change: The principal aim of the CSI is to generate information that is of practical use to civil society stakeholders. Therefore, the CSI framework seeks to identify aspects of civil society that can be changed, and to generate information and knowledge relevant to action-oriented goals.

With the above mentioned foundations, the CSI methodology generates an assessment of the state of civil society at the national level. The CSI measures the following core dimensions:

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[3] For in-depth explanations of these principles, please see Mati, Silva and Anderson (2010).

TABLE I.2.1. Dimensions of CIVICUS Civil Society Index

Dimension	Description
Civic Engagement	The extent to which individuals engage in social and policy-related initiatives.
Level of Organisation	The degree of institutionalisation that characterises civil society.
Practice of Values	The extent to which civil society practices some core values.
Perceived Impact	The extent to which civil society is able to impact the social and policy arena, according to internal and external perceptions.
External Environment (context)	The conditions within which civil society operates.

These dimensions are illustrated visually through the Civil Society Diamond which is one of the most essential and well-known components of the CSI project. To form the Civil Society Diamond, 67 quantitative indicators are aggregated into 28 sub-dimensions which are then assembled into the five final dimensions along a 0-100 percentage scale.

FIGURE I. 2.1. The Civil Society Diamond
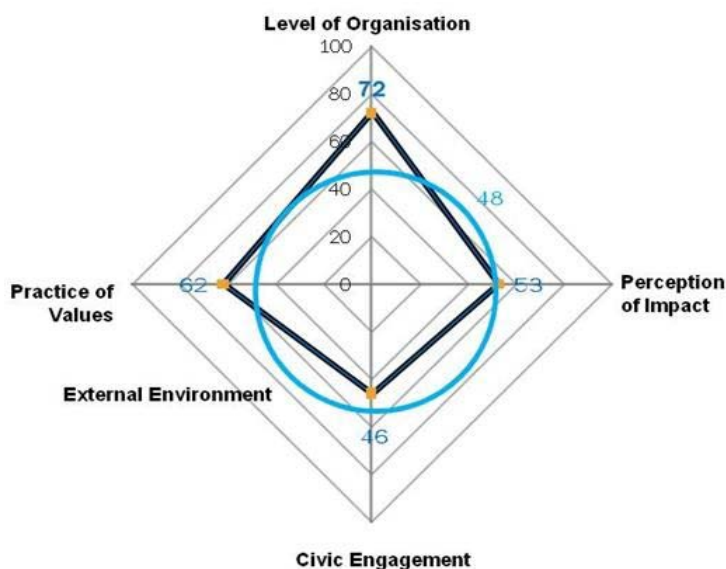
The Diamond's size seeks to portray an empirical picture of the state of civil society, the conditions that support or inhibit civil society's development, as well as the consequences of civil society's activities for society at large.

The context is represented visually by a circle around the axes of the Civil Society Diamond, and is regarded as something external that still remains a crucial element for understanding the challenges and outlining strengthening actions.

3. CSI IMPLEMENTATION

There are several key CSI programme implementation activities as well as several structures involved, as summarised by the figure below:[4]

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[4] For a detailed discussion on each of these steps in the process, please see Mati et al (2010).

FIGURE I.3.1 CSI Implementation stages

| 1. Call for expression of interest | 2. Application and selection | 3. Preliminary steps | 4. CSI Training Workshop |

Outputs

- B. Policy Action Brief
- A. Analytical Country Report
- C. Indicator Database

Monitoring and Evaluation

5. Trainings of the National Implementation Team (NIT)

6. Setting up of AC, and 1st AC meeting

Major Tools

| 11. National Workshop | 10. 2nd AC meeting | 9. Regional Focus Groups | 7. Quantitative Primary Research (PS, EPS, OS) | 8. Qualitative Primary Research |

The major tools and elements of the CSI implementation at the national level include:

- Multiple surveys, including: (i) a **Population Survey**, gathering the views of citizens on civil society and gauging their involvement in groups and associations; (ii) an **Organisational Survey** measuring the meso-level of civil society and defining characteristics of CSOs; and (iii) an **External Perceptions Survey** aiming at measuring the perception that stakeholders, experts and policy makers in key sectors have of civil society's impact.

- Tailored **case studies**, which focus on issues of importance to the specific civil society country context.

- **Advisory Committee** (AC) meetings made up of civil society experts to advise on the project and its implementation at the country level.

- Regional and thematic **focus groups** where civil society stakeholders reflect and share views on civil society's role in the region.

- Following this in-depth research, the findings are debated at a **National Workshop**, which brings together a large group of civil society and non-civil society stakeholders and allows interested parties to discuss and develop strategies for addressing identified priority issues.

This Analytical Country Report is one of the main outputs of the CSI implementation process in Venezuela, which was conducted by SINERGIA.

4. LIMITATIONS OF THE CSI STUDY IN VENEZUELA

In order to generate comprehensible results, the CSI could have created a ranking of countries, similar to the UNDP's Human Development Index. Yet it was deemed impossible to capture the complexity of civil societies worldwide through a reduced number of indicators, however carefully chosen.

There is still tension between the search for 'standardised' information and the need to keep certain flexibility to ensure that each country's individual characteristics are considered. The CSI seeks to balance these requirements by using multiple sources. The result, however, is not always the best in terms of the parameters applied, which may turn out to be too demanding for some realities. The cultural context makes it sometimes difficult to construe findings, which apparently are not expressed the same in the different environments.

In a society undergoing fast processes of institutional change, the CSI provides a valuable picture of a novel and therefore unknown reality. But, in this volatile environment, the picture fails to remain updated, and this constitutes a significant barrier to capturing the heterogeneous universe of current civil society.

Workshop discussions (specifically the workshop for conducting the Social Forces Analysis) clearly revealed the difficulties that the CSI drafting will encounter in a fast moving society operating in a highly polarised political scenario. On many occasions, participants expressed that some actors, who were very influential just one year before, are since weakened or divided or have changed their relationship with other forces (SINERGIA, 2008:1).

Political polarisation was a barrier difficult to overcome. In spite of the efforts to portray civil society in its diversity by inviting representatives of all forces to participate in surveys and workshops, the outcome was only partially successful. For the same reason, the participation of government representatives was very limited.

These limitations notwithstanding, the project enabled the gathering of a large volume of very valuable data, which will surely contribute to reflection on the sector's current state, and will favour debates, cross-sectoral learning and proposals.

II.   CIVIL SOCIETY IN VENEZUELA

1. CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

As a consequence of the polarisation process, the concept of civil society is expressed today in two opposing formulations. The first became popular in the 1970s, stemming from an anti political parties speech. It established a 'Manichean' opposition between the state, characterised as corrupt, inefficient and clientelist, and a mythical civil society, understood as the synthesis of all citizen virtues: creative, with initiative, efficient, honest and participatory (Lander, 2000). The other concept, which reached general acceptance after the 1999 constitutional debate, rejects the denomination of 'civil society', which is identified with characteristics of a social class, and prefers to use instead terms such as 'organised people' or 'sovereign'.

Deep within this controversy there is, on the one hand, the governmental intention to disassemble the institutional apparatus of representative democracy and its emblematic social organisations, thus creating a new model of direct relationship between the government and the 'people', and on the other hand, the decision of CSO sectors not to waive their right to freely associate and participate in public businesses according to the heterogeneity of their origins and interests.

In 2000, a public debate took place in connection with the concept of civil society, which contributed to drawing special media attention to the term. This debate illustrates the nature of the relationships between actors of civil society and the state today in Venezuela. In view of the refusal of the National Assembly to allow civil society to participate in the election of Citizen Power, as stated by the 1999 Constitution [5], a representative of the CSO Queremos Elegir threatened to call for civil disobedience. The President of the Republic answered:

> ...It turns out, Mr Santana, that civil society, as I have already mentioned, has rendered a decision here in seven repeated opportunities (…). Who voted here? (…) Was it not the civil society? (...) civil society is the vast majority of Venezuelans and supports this process (Hugo Chávez, Aló Presidente, 27 August 2000).

Elías Santana then clarified:

> Society is all of us, but civil society is something different. All citizens are part of society and there must be no exclusion or discrimination. But civil society involves the organised expressions of citizens with specific agendas and interests. Incipient, non-coordinated, diverse, plural, of multiple social classes, not aligned with the government or with the opposition, participative, proactive and reactive, it does not substitute political parties, it has no candidates or a single spokesperson and rejects violence (Santana, El Universal, 3 September 2000, pp. 1-14).

Aiming at demarcating the possibilities of participating in the new processes set by the Constitution, the Supreme Court of Justice passed a judgment oriented towards 'legally' defining who forms civil society:

> The representatives of civil society are Venezuelan associations, groups and institutions (<u>without an external subsidy</u>) which, for their subject matter, permanence, number of members or affiliated members and continuous activity, have been working from different angles of such society to get a better quality of life for it, separately from the government and political parties. TSJ, Judgment dated 30 June 2000 (underlining included by us).

In the case of Venezuela, political parties have been considered as an integral part of civil society. Although political parties differ from civil society because they are power actors, they also form organisations that defend citizen rights, maintaining different relationships with the state, from the defence of their autonomy and independence up to adhesion with the government. Another controversial issue is the identification of community organisations promoted and controlled by the government as part of civil society. The nature of their relationships with the state was also considered a matter to be proven empirically.

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[5] According to the 1999 Constitution Citizen Power is formed by: Public Ombudsman, State Attorney and Electoral Council, and civil society´s representatives should participate in the selection process.

2. HISTORY OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Autonomy and strength are not two adjectives ordinarily used by those who have described the evolution of civil society in Venezuela. The 'curse of natural resources', the syndrome developed by societies that depend on the income obtained from natural resources, has characterised the relationship between the state and civil society since the 1920s when oil became the main resource for export and the state became the income distributor to the rest of society. As a consequence, Venezuelans perceive that the state is responsible for the solution of all problems, and social organisation is not considered a way to search for the common good.

No strong native communities existed in Venezuela to leave a mark of community organisation like in other Latin American countries. Modern civil society developed in the 20th Century from a group formed by student movements, political parties and labour unions, the initial milestone being the struggle against the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez. In 1928, the student movement burst into political history with a leading role in the struggle against dictatorships, which it would have again in 1936 and in 1958. The first protest marches and a general strike took place in 1936 (Salamanca, 2003). Until 1945, protests were the modality of participation and crowds were the actors. From 1945 on, political parties and labour unions took the lead as promoters of social organisation (López Maya, 2007).

When the dictatorship fell in 1958 an era of negotiation between political parties – excluding the Communist Party – the Catholic Church and the labour unions started, based on a corporatist architecture (Arenas, 2009: 4). With this form of handling consensus, the so called 'harmony illusion' (Naim and Piñango, 1984) was generated, based on the idea of a rich country, with a stable democracy and a low level of conflicts, a scenario that lasted until the abrupt awakening of the Caracazo (see below) in 1989.

The idea of civil society, as currently conceived, appeared in the 1970s, when a "new paradigm driving collective action" was consolidated in the political culture (Salamanca, 2003), identifying the need to directly participate in political processes in order to have demands met. In 1977, the Urban Communities Federation proposed a set of reforms in order to strengthen decentralisation. In Venezuela,

> ....the neighbour movement was the pioneer of what was called 'civil society'. The 'neighbours' rebellion' ('La rebelión de los vecinos') is the title given by an author on urban issues to (...) the emergence of urban social movements in Venezuela. It was geographically located in Caracas, in the mid Seventies, and in the mid and mid-upper social strata (Fernández: 6)

During the Seventies and the Eighties, business foundations experienced a great advance. Neighbour associations, community groups, women and environmental defence movements proliferated. Their emergence, as the answer to the co-opting of society by political parties, gave an anti-political nature to their participation (Salamanca, 2003).

The Caracazo, a social outburst that occurred on 27 and 28 February 1989, marked the beginning of the decentralisation process (elections of local authorities) and the appearance of new human rights CSOs. In the 1990s, the state delegated the execution of social programmes and 2,000 NGOs were created to take advantage of this opportunity (CISOR, 1997; Ortegano,

1998). These NGOs were financially dependent on the government, and most of them disappeared when this policy changed.

A new cycle commenced during the 1999 process of drawing up a new Constitution. The new social contract represented an advance in the promotion of new rights, and new spaces were opened for participation in public affairs. For instance, in the discussion panels organised by SINERGIA, 209 CSOs presented 644 proposals, 50% of which were approved (García Guadilla, 2004: 9-10).

FIGURE II.2.1. History of civil society: milestones and actors

1928-1958	Décadas 60 y 70	1980-1998	1999 -2005	2006 -2010
Mobilisation and demonstration. Students, labour and trade unions. Universal voting	Corporatism Development of neighbours movement. Anti-politics Civil society diversification	Start of political parties crisis. Decentralisation and new actors. Alliances between CSOs and the state for service rendering	High CSO participation in CRBV 1999. Participatory democracy. Boom in civic and human rights CSOs, and new popular movements	21st Century socialism. Simón Bolívar and Popular Power Project. Polarisation. Two parallel civil societies

This stage of participating effervescence, between 2001 and 2004, was followed by a period of intense conflicts. Massive citizen marches in favour of or against the government escalated, and since political divisions grew deeper and some CSOs openly participated in politics, their relationships with the state deteriorated (CESAP –INVESP, 2005).

In the next phase, the most important milestone was the formulation of the Simón Bolívar National Project, (RBV, 2006) in which popular organisations are not considered autonomous, but associated to the state apparatus (OPAS, 2010a). In December 2009, the first draft of the Bill of Law for Participation and the Popular Power was approved; it defined participation purposes as attached to an ideological partiality and within the sphere of the Popular Power:

> Art. 4. The purpose of participation is as follows: 1. to achieve the strengthening of the popular power, to consolidate the revolutionary direct democracy and to build the bases of the socialist society, equity and social justice (National Assembly, 2009).

In March 2010, the law and the regulation of the Government Federal Council were passed, defining organised society under the concept of 'Popular Power':

> Art. 3: Organised society: It is formed by communal councils, workers, farmers, fishermen councils, communities and any other organisation based on the Popular Power duly registered with the Ministry of Popular Power, competent to hear matters as to citizen participation. (Regulation of the Law on the Government Federal Council, 2010)

In the context of this new legal framework a process of centralisation has occurred, through which the power and competences of sub-national levels of government have been substantially reduced. CSOs that work outside the capital, where local governments are usually close partners, stressed the negative effects of this process on their access to resources and to spaces of decision-making.

The government has confronted the reaction of civil organisations that try to preserve their autonomy by criminalising the opposition, in an atmosphere in which statements such as the following marked the tone of the state-society relationships:

> Here, there are two conflicting sectors: the middle class and its allies and the people and their allies, and there is no possible reconciliation. (…) We are and will always be in a battle, and our opponents will always be in a battle. This is irreconcilable (President Hugo Chávez, 2 December 2009, on the radio and television network).

3. CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In addition to the heterogeneity typical of all civil societies in the world, three main features distinguish Venezuelan civil society today: polarisation within a frame of political discrimination and criminalisation of opponents, quick transformations in response to a volatile environment, and deep-rooted 'anti-political' attitudes.

The clash between the two segments in the polarisation spectrum is based on deep gaps in Venezuelans' collective imagination, which fuel polarisation and conflicts (Gómez Calcaño, 2004; Lozada, 2004). Polarisation of a political nature was defined by López Maya (2010) as:

> (…) a strategic interaction developed by political actors, consisting in generating positions highly differentiated and/or antagonistic among them, as a result of considering that this benefits their projects or political interests (López Maya, 2010: 3).

As stated by this definition, political polarisation makes only two extremes visible, even though this feeling is not fully shared. This study shows that tolerance is a virtue more deeply rooted in Venezuelans' core than it was suggested by public debate. Opinion polls show that extreme sectors of 'Chavism' and the opposition do not represent a wide non-aligned sector known as the 'neither-nor'. (Noticias 24, 2009).

Besides polarisation, the second remarkable feature is the vertiginous transformation process: in less than one decade, the government has set the objective of transforming the society model from an alleged 'capitalist democracy' into a 'socialist democracy'. In this context, organisations were forced to assume a position on one side or the other, to develop adaptation strategies, to migrate towards other organisation forms, or to close down.

Therefore, information on the extension of civil society is scarce, stereotyped according to the point of view of the analysing party, and outdated. The most recent information available counted 32,013 organisations (Venescopio, 2002). However, the government states that it has promoted the creation of 57,725 organisations (Machado, 2009a).

Finally, a third feature, 'anti-politics', predominates as a behaviour and background where 'the exercise of politics' is considered an activity performed by those who take advantage of

power for their own interests, consequently weakening civil society's civic engagement and the practice of values, and affecting perceptions about its capacity to influence public life.

TABLE II.3.1 Country data for Venezuela

THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA	
Political-territorial division	23 States, 1 Capital District and Federal Dependencies
Area	916, 445 km^2
Population (30 June 2010)	28,833,845
Density	31.46 inhabitants /km^2
Population distribution	93% urban, 7% rural
Capital	Caracas (3,205,463 inhabitants)
Life expectancy 2010	72 years male; 78 years female
Crude birth rate	21.5 (2007)
Infant mortality rate	14 x 1,000 live births (2007)
Adult illiteracy rate	6%
GDP per capita	12,804 (US PPA$ 2008)
Unemployment rate	8% (March 2010)
Legal minimum wage per month	March 2010: 1,064 Bs F. (US $ 242)
Cost of household food basket per month	Bs. F. 1,155 / US$ 262 (March 2010)
Household poverty (income)	23.8% (II semester 2009)
Source: INE (National Statistics Institute) Social Indicators Summary, March 2010; World Bank, World Development Indicators 2009	

In this controversial context, behaviours assumed are as heterogeneous as the scenario of what is called 'civil society'. To greatly simplify a reality that is obviously much more complex, two blocs are identified, based on their alignment for or against the project fostered by the government.

The first bloc is formed by movements and old CSOs whose ideological affinity with the revolutionary project[6] has led them to defend governmental policies. The most numerous group of these is the CSOs promoted by the government, and made up of trade and labour unions that disregard pre-existing ones, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), and CSOs such as urban lands committees, water technical tables and communal councils, among others. 'Semi-legal' groups also form part of this bloc (Gómez et al., 2009). Battle units and Bolivarian militias, among others, have been organised to act in critical circumstances in the defence of the 'revolutionary process'.

The second bloc includes CSOs that do not identify with the revolutionary project in general or with some of its aspects. The prominent members of this group are the oldest CSOs, which were formed within the institutional framework of representative democracy: political parties, labour unions, business and professional associations and organisations affiliated with the Catholic Church. New networks and movements have appeared within this group: the student movement and neighbours' associations, human rights or workers' associations which have passed from individual protests to gathering into collective organisations to defend social, economic, civil and political rights. There is another group of organisations which is not identified with either rejection or adhesion to the 'process' but concerned with the

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[6] 'Revolutionary project' or 'process' is understood as the model fostered by the government to establish the 'socialism of the 21st Century', based on the centralisation of decision-making and resources, the setting up of a new political-territorial organisation, the imposition of a productive model where the presence of the state rules over any private initiative and the impulse of a network of co-opted participation or 'community power' (González M., 2010).

preservation of its autonomy and the denouncement of government conducts against people's rights, such as human rights associations.

The great majority of CSOs, regardless of their participation in the political arena, have been affected by these dynamics, in a model which establishes a direct relationship between the state and the people: financing to CSOs and participation in public policy dialogues has been significantly reduced.

III. ANALYSIS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Based on the five dimensions that make up the core concept of the CSI project, this chapter gives an overview of Venezuelan civil society today as seen by ordinary citizens, members of social organisations and movements, as well as by those looking at it from certain positions of interest (experts, business people, members of cooperation programmes and government). This outlook further includes several viewpoints from members of academia, the media, and from opinion polls. The international scenario finally adds another perspective with which to compare our situation.

1. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The Civic Engagement dimension describes the formal and informal activities of citizens undertaken individually or collectively to advance shared interests at different levels, from recreation to social and political interests (CIVICUS, 2008). The CSI distinguishes between socially-based engagement and civic and political engagement. These two sub-dimensions are in turn broken down into extent, depth and diversity, to examine the representative nature of civil society.

FIGURE III.1.1. Civic Engagement Dimension Scores
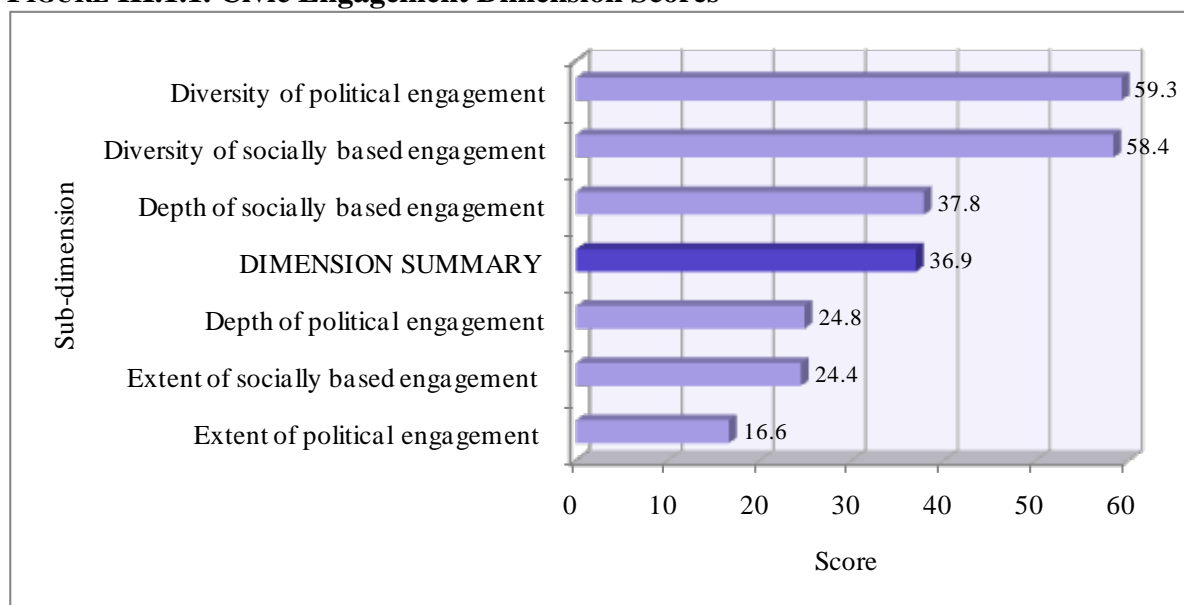
Civic engagement is distinguished by a reduced extent of participation, the percentage being lower in the political and civic spheres compared with socially-based activities, which can be considered to stem from prevailing attitudes of rejection in society towards politics. Restrictions concerning diversity in both spheres are minor.

As was recognised by participants in workshops two factors stand out as determinants of this low level of civic engagement. On the one hand, low interpersonal trust results in a scarce motivation to association. On the other hand, ignorance and low awareness about human rights makes for some fatalism about the virtues of participation as a mechanism to solve problems.

1.1. Extent of socially-based engagement

Engagement in social CSOs is low compared with world average participation of 34.5% (WVS, 2005). The highest membership is seen in religious organisations, where active and inactive participation together show a 28.1% engagement of people over age 18.

Table III.1.1. Extent of socially-based engagement

Type of organisation	Active members	Inactive members
Church or religious organisations	15.7%	12.4%
Sport or leisure	7.6%	1.7%
Art, music or educational	4.0%	0.7%
Consumers	0.5%	0.6%
Active members in at least one type of organisation (1.1.1)	23.4%	

The IIES-UCAB survey (2008: 27) also discloses that engagement is higher in groups that "foster the development of the body or the soul" (sports and religious groups). Based on this study, organisations stimulated by the government show a maximum 5% engagement.

Less than one out of five Venezuelans is engaged in voluntary work, compared with almost one out of three worldwide (The Wold Values Survey, 2005). The highest level of engagement in voluntary work is for activities related to religion. There is higher engagement in community-based activities than in formal CSOs. The average number of people over age 18 who participate many times a year in socially-based activities such as sports clubs or services and voluntary organisations (indicator 1.1.3) represents 32.1%.

1.2. Depth of socially-based engagement

The depth of socially-based engagement is below world average values, except for informal engagement, where almost four out of five people surveyed engage at least once a month in sport clubs or volunteering and service organisations.

TABLE III.1.2. Depth of socially-based engagement

Indicator	Venezuela	World average	Latin America average
Multiple membership (1.2.1)	16.7%	25.7%	24.9%
Multiple voluntary work (1.2.2)	17.5%	28.5%	25.4%
High engagement with community (1.2.3)	79.1%	64.2%	63.1%
Source: World values survey (2000; 2005) SINERGIA CIVICUS Survey Venezuela 2009			

It should be noted, as was often remarked in work sessions with CSO representatives, that results regarding depth of socially and politically based engagement reflect the fact that it is always the same small group of people which participates in several CSOs or engages in different activities.

1.3. Diversity of socially-based engagement

Since several interests coexist in civil society, the presence of traditionally marginalised groups must be assessed empirically. To that end the survey compared the engagement percentage of women, people belonging to the lowest socio-economic levels, people from rural areas and members of ethnic groups potentially discriminated against[7] to the proportion these groups represent within the population over the age of 18.

Except for remote areas where the participation level is minor (1.3% of those surveyed are engaged in social activities, accounting for 5.0% of the population) no differences exist in these groups' participation. Women's engagement shows considerable parity in terms of population representation (49.7%), compared with their engagement in social and political organisations (48.3%). Engagement is lower as far as citizens of lower socio-economic levels are concerned (29.7% vs. 41.4% of the population), though the difference is less significant in the case of potentially discriminated 'ethnic groups' (7.3% vs. 12.0%) or people from remote or non-urban areas.

1.4. Extent of political engagement

The percentage of the population that is active in political organisations is considerably lower than the prevailing level of engagement in Latin America (19.1%); only 13.6% of people surveyed are active members of at least one type of organisation with a political orientation. The highest membership accounts for political parties, where still only 7.8% of citizens are actively engaged.

TABLE III.1.3. Membership in some types of political organisation

Type of organisation	Active Members	Inactive Members
Political parties	7.8%	2.9%
Humanitarian or charitable organisations	3.3%	0.7%
Professional associations	2.8%	0.3%
Labour unions	2.1%	0.8%
Environmental organisations	1.4%	0.8%
Active members of at least one of these organisations (1.4.1)	13.6%	

Volunteering in political CSOs is also very limited (10%) in contrast with the bubbling enthusiasm showed by individual activism. One out of four Venezuelans has undertaken political activism, and a third would be willing to engage actively.

TABLE III.1.4. Individual activism

Type of action	Engagement (%)
Attending peaceful demonstrations	17.8
Signing a petition	17.0
Joining in boycotts	5.2
Other actions of individual activism	1.4
Some type of political activism (1.4.3)	26.1

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[7] People who stated being 'black', 'coloured', 'indigenous' or 'foreigners' were considered to be potentially excluded groups while those stating 'mixed race' or 'white' were considered to belong to non-discriminated-against groups.

The great enthusiasm in the streets is confirmed by 3,297 demonstrations in 2009, a 105% increase compared with 2008 (PROVEA-Espacio Público, 2010). Between May 2009 and June 2010 CSOs issued 244 press releases (OPAS 2010b).

The difference between the low rate of engagement in formal organisations and the relatively high participation in public demonstrations illustrates some dissatisfaction that cannot find an outlet to uphold rights, nor institutional channels to file actions.

> Demonstrations are a very basic form of participation. (...) They consist of a form external to the state and to the public-policy and decision-making arena. But those who engage in this kind of action, generally the weakest or people distant from political power spheres, can only impact on public decisions with their capacity to block the daily routines of others (López Maya, 2007: 2).

1.5. Depth of political engagement

Though showing a lower rate than the average in Latin America and worldwide, the depth of political engagement is more significant than the extent of political engagement sub-dimension. Therefore, we can see that the small group engaged tends to undertake a deeper commitment.

TABLE III.1.5. Depth of political engagement

Indicator	Venezuela	World average	Latin America average
Multiple membership	23.5%	30.8%	29.0%
Multiple volunteering	21.0%	25.5%	25.8%
High political engagement	29.9%	32.2%	33.5%
Source: World Values Survey (2000; 2005) SINERGIA CIVICUS Survey Venezuela 2009			

1.6. Diversity of political engagement

The diversity of political engagement follows the same trend as does socially-based engagement (see 1.3), that is to say, there is relative parity regarding gender participation (42.6% vs. 49.3%) and ethnic groups' engagement (26.7% vs. 23.5%), with relatively more important differences in the engagement rate of remote areas and lower in the case of people from the lowest socio-economic levels.

Conclusion

Taking into account that the political model has been defined as a 'direct participatory democracy', a remarkable response from the population might be expected after 11 years. Most analysts (Lovera, 2008; Machado, 2008, among others) hold that it is true, a perception shared by the population as well: 48% consider political engagement higher than five years ago (IIES-UCAB, 2008). But the level of civic engagement portrayed by this study does not conform to these perceptions. On the contrary, it constitutes a first sign of the limited response of the population to this so-called 'direct and active participation'.

Furthermore, engagement in formal organisations has decreased. Only religious (and, to a lower degree, charitable) organisations record higher membership compared with 2000. Membership in all types of CSOs recorded a decrease between 1996 and 2009, except for engagement in political parties, whose loss of members seems to have occurred earlier (World Values Study 1996 and 2000; self-data analysis).

This perception of a higher degree of engagement seems to derive from a feeling of citizen empowerment, especially in low socio-economic communities (IIES-UCAB, 2008). Disparity between perception and reality may also result from the fact that now there exist more engagement 'focal points'. In 87% of the communities there are organisations defending citizens' claims and 60% host social organisations. (IIES-UCAB, 2008). But a greater proximity has not been enough to lead to engagement.

2. LEVEL OF ORGANISATION

This dimension explores the levels of institutional development within civil society. It involves indicators that focus on the infrastructure, stability, sustainability and collective action capacity of civil society. With an average value of 56.6%, civil society's level of organisation appears moderately favourable. However, the values obtained in the different aspects considered as part of these dimensions show some weaknesses, especially concerning the sustainability of financial and human resources.

FIGURE III.2.1. Level of Organisation sub-dimension scores
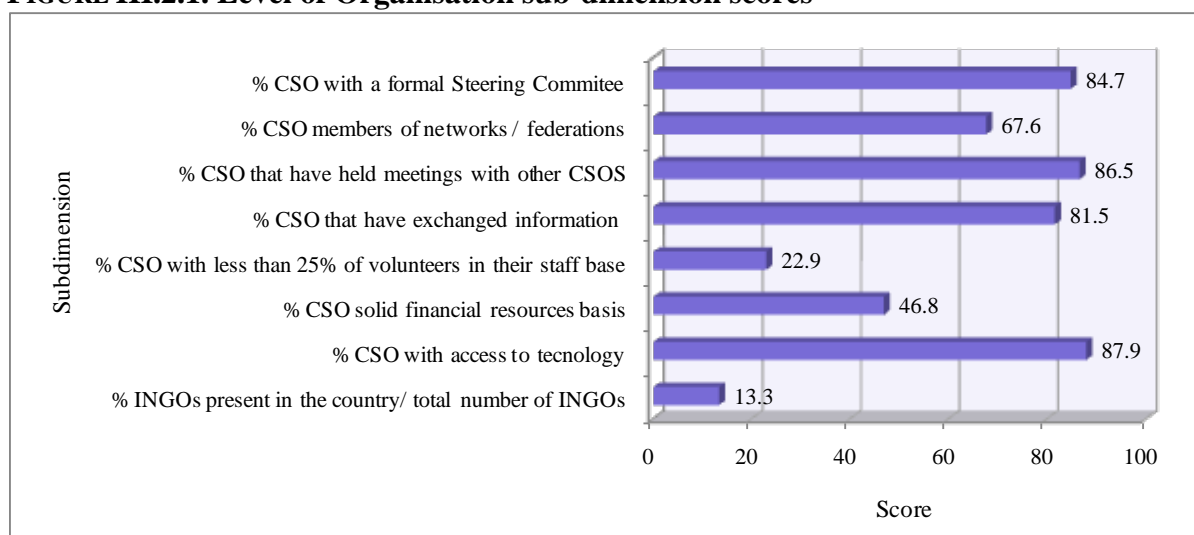
2.1 Internal governance

84.7% of CSOs present a formal governance structure. During the last year, CSO executive committees have held an average of 15 meetings, i.e., more than one meeting a month. This shows strong appropriate internal governance monitoring mechanisms.

2.2 Support infrastructure

Civil society's high-density network allows the coordination of actions and facilitates the formation of alliances to influence public affairs. Just over two-thirds of CSOs belong to networks or federations; half of them participate in more than one network and 3 out of 4 CSOs declare an active participation.

However, network participation may threaten autonomy if an association implies subordination to orders given from a higher level. As one of the case studies commissioned for the CSI process shows, the preservation of organisations' autonomous natures becomes especially important given that the government promotes an extensive number of community service organisations, the structure and operation of which is governed by regulations that set

forth how they should be organised, whom they should relate to and what their mission should be. The box below summarises the main conclusions regarding autonomy.

Communal Councils: autonomous CSOs or dependent structures?

Communal Councils are defined as 'instances of articulation and integration among the different community organisations and social groups. In theory, the objective is to implement a political model whose main aim is the communal state, under a 'socialist' society´. Under this model, the right to participate is restricted to those sharing this ideology, while all others are excluded from access to the public resources distributed through these channels. In practice, its implementation has tended to control and interfere in popular power expressions using them as the government and party's executive arm, that is to say, as workforce and election resources simultaneously.

From the perspective of the population involved, results are mixed. Some people manage to find solutions to their needs for infrastructure and services while yielding to political manipulation, or being convinced that 'one good turn deserves another'. When encountering obstacles they cannot overcome, other groups abandon halfway or get dissolved and disenchanted. But there is a third very small group, which is conscious of the power resources gained by social legitimacy, and which has moved from physical works to influential tasks, thus opening a channel for higher 'quality' participation. (Cartaya, 2010:40-43)

2.3 Sectoral communication

A supplementary aspect of network engagement is the informal exchange conducted among CSOs; almost 9 of every 10 of the organisations have recorded an exchange with another CSO of on average once a week. The effort is considerable in human rights CSOs and development CSOs networks. PROVEA, Espacio Público, REDSOC, SINERGIA and Alianza Social VENAMCHAM hold regular meetings to assess situations and plan actions. Human rights coalitions (Foro por la Vida and Red de Apoyo por la Justicia y la Paz) stand out for their communications quality and coordination capacity. CSOs promoted by the government also participate in networks.

Generalised access to electronic means has aided the distribution of organisations' bulletins, press releases and data housed on websites. Tracking the current political, economic and social situation through watch groups and other monitoring systems has become a common practice and findings are communicated to CSOs and to national and international public opinion. PROVEA publishes an annual follow-up report of 19 human rights CSOs and a weekly overview bulletin, and communicates frequently by Twitter.

Despite these high levels of communication, as it should be expected in a polarised scenario, participants in focus groups attributed to political and ideological conflicts the curtailment of initiatives to work together in some areas and the disappearance of very successful networks. The reduction in public funding for CSOs has created many situations of competition and distrust among organisations that used to work together.

2.4 Human resources

The sustainability of an organisation's human resources base can be assessed by the ratio of paid staff to volunteers. Only 22.9% of CSOs have at least a 75% paid staff base, although this is not deemed as a negative feature by external actors and by CSOs. On the contrary, they consider it a significant strength that shows the degree of commitment and engagement of voluntary human resources. At the Second Advisory Committee Meeting, some doubts arose

as to whether the existence of volunteering constitutes a weakness, since in many CSOs voluntary staff members have remained over long periods.

2.5 Financial and technological resources

More than 80% of CSOs have access to fixed phone, computer and internet. This is considered a strength, since it constitutes an important channel to strengthen other areas.

TABLE III.2.1. Access to technological resources

Resource	Yes	Only sporadically	No
Fixed phone	82.0%	9.0%	9.0%
Fax	62.0%	12.0%	25.9%
Computer	89.3%	3.6%	7.1%
Internet	84.7%	5.4%	9.9%
Indicator value	87.9		
The value indicator corresponds to percentage of CSOs which achieve a cumulative score of 4 or more, where regular access = 2, sporadic access = 1 and no access = 0.			

The CSI assesses financial sustainability through an indicator which measures whether an organisation's income and expenditure account has improved compared to the previous year. This is the case of 46.8% of the CSOs surveyed, which means that more than half of them have experienced a decrease in their resources during the period under consideration.

The analysis of resources provides very interesting information regarding relations with the external environment. The origin is diverse: there is no single source prevailing over others.

FIGURE III.2.2. Origin of resources
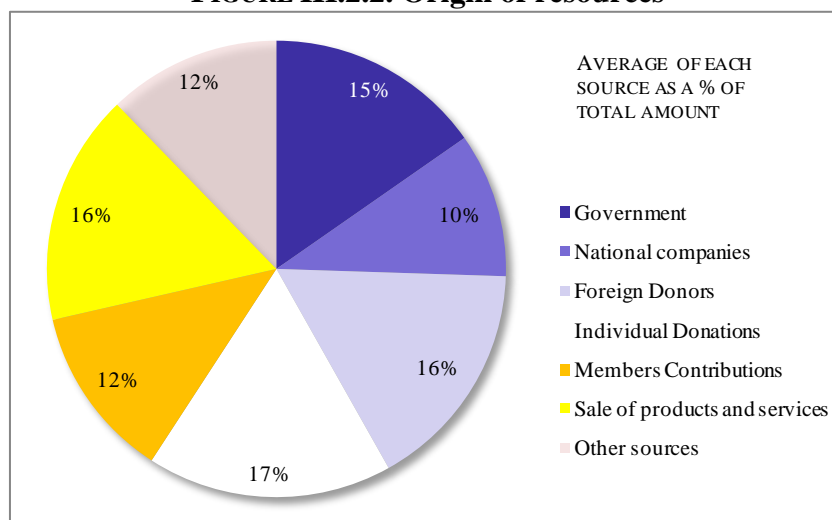
Only 15 out of 100 Bolívares handled by CSOs are provided by the government, the highest sources being individual donations, the sale of products and services and foreign donors (bilateral, multilateral, and private foundations). In the case of Communal Councils, 99% to 100% of their resources come from the government. But 88.1% of civic, political or human rights organisations do not receive government funds. This is also the case with two-thirds of supporting CSOs.

2.6 International linkage

Based on the indicator used in the CSI methodology, the presence of international CSOs is considered insignificant. Only 13.3% of the CSOs registered with the Union of International Associations (2009) are based in Venezuela.[8] However, one third of the Venezuelan organisations consulted belong to at least one international network in their action scope, which shows that Venezuelan CSOs do not constitute a sector completely isolated from the global context.

Conclusion

Except for the human and financial resources base, CSOs show an exceptional organisational strength, demonstrating proper internal governance, a very well-developed communication infrastructure which is used intensely to coordinate actions and share information, and a significant diversification of the sources of financial resources.

FIGURE III.2.3 Goal-adequacy resources as determined by CSOs
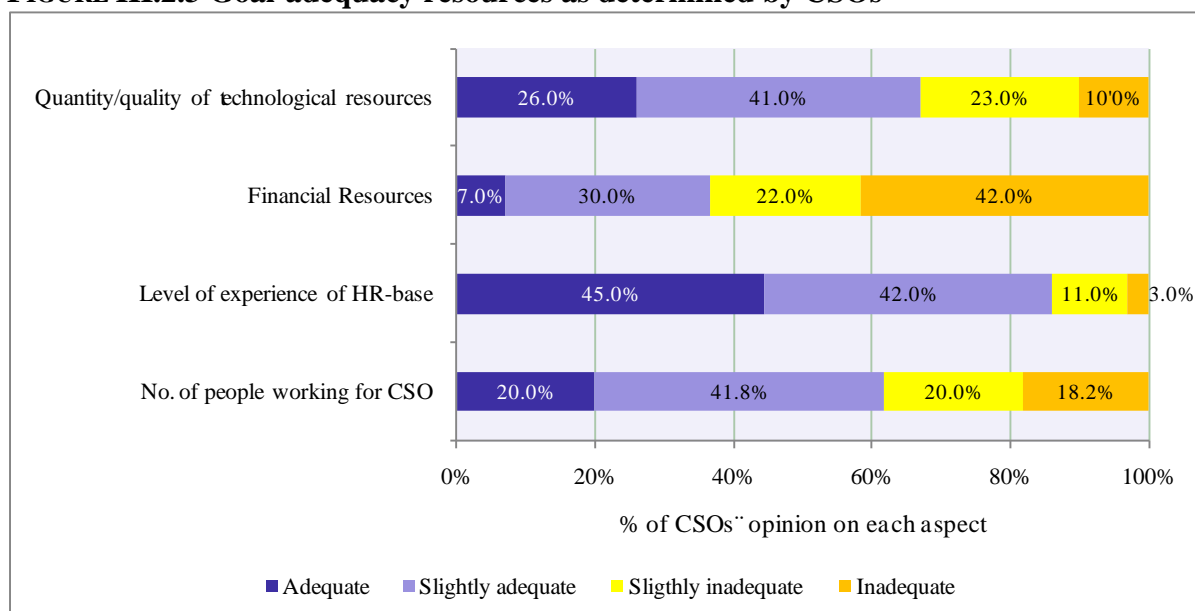
CSOs were requested to perform a subjective assessment of the adequacy of their resources to their objectives in order to put this information in the proper perspective.[9] On average, organisations stated a high satisfaction with the quality of their human resources and medium levels of satisfaction as to the volume of these resources and the quality and quantity of technological resources. By contrast, a higher proportion of CSOs state that the volume of their available financial resources is inadequate (63.2%).

3. PRACTICE OF VALUES

The CSI does not assume that civil society by definition consists of progressive and 'ethical' groups. Therefore, the extent to which they practice a set of values is assessed by examining two areas: the practice of values in internal governance and the extent to which civil society contributes to encouraging non-violence, democracy, trust and tolerance.

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[8] SINERGIA and CIVICUS are grateful to the Union of International Associations for this information.
[9] At the initiative of the Latin American group of implementing organisations.

This dimension shows the greatest weakness in the group of CSOs analysed, a result which can be related to weaknesses in the socio-cultural context. It is unlikely that you will find a 'civic' civil society when it develops in an environment itself subject to limitations.

FIGURE III.3.1. Practice of Values dimension, sub-dimension scores
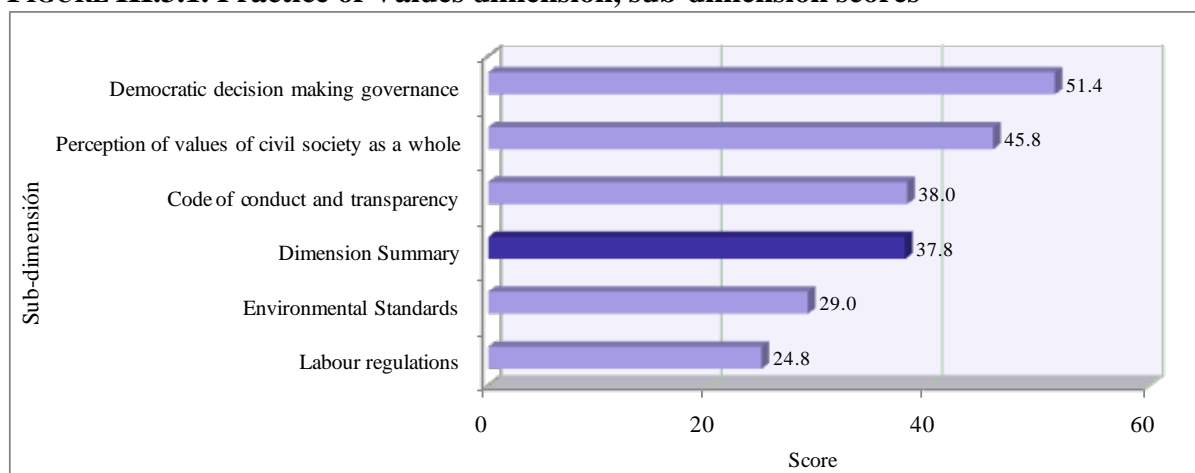
3.1 Democratic decision-making governance

It was found that 51.4% of CSOs implement democratic decision-making mechanisms. The limited willingness to share decision-making was highlighted in surveys as one of the most remarkable of civil society's weaknesses.

3.2 Labour regulations

TABLE III.3.1. Presence of codes and practices related to labour

No.	Indicator	Value
3.2.1	Equal opportunities	33.3
3.2.2	Labour union members	3.7
3.2.3	Training on labour rights	28.7
3.2.4	Publicly available policies regarding labour standards	33.3

Together these figures form the indicator on labour regulations, which scores the lowest of indicators in this dimension (24.8). It is assumed that available resources and the size and existence of CSOs based on voluntary work do not favour this.

3.3 Codes of conduct and transparency

The low results obtained in this aspect (38.0% score) may be partially justified by self-censorship in an adverse socio-political context. The most negative aspect corresponds to availability of financial information. One-third of CSOs makes financial information publicly available and an additional 14.2% implements a 'restricted' availability: access only to members, publication on a news board at the organisation's head office or similar procedures.

The availability of a code of conduct was recorded as more extended (42.7%), but CSOs taking part in the workshops found this practice to be rather uncommon.

CIVICUS Civil Society Index Analytical Country Report for Venezuela

FIGURE III.3.2. Available codes of conduct and transparency

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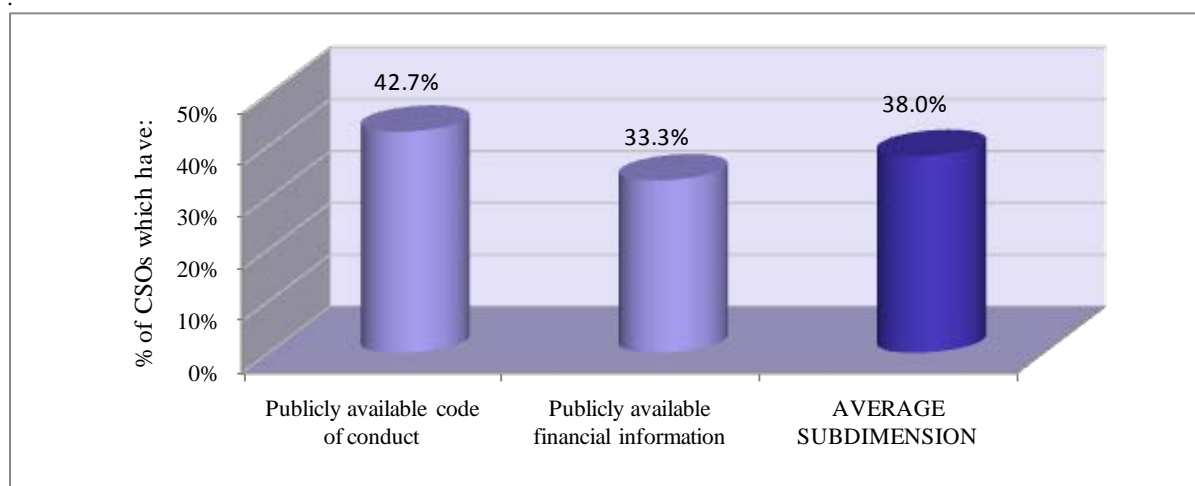
3.4 Environmental standards

The answer to the question 'does your organisation have a publicly available policy regarding environmental standards?' was affirmative in 29% of CSOs. However, this figure does not reflect the fact that there may be little connection between commitment to environmental protection, and the existence of a written environmental policy In a socio-cultural context such as Venezuela's, making a certain policy publicly available in writing does not imply that it is implemented, or that it is highly respected.

3.5 Perception of values in civil society as a whole

In the conflict-ridden context in which Venezuelan society is immersed, the role played by civil society as the group practicing and encouraging values that may counteract or modulate trends of conflict is particularly relevant. More than half of CSOs surveyed stated that there are isolated groups regularly using violence and only 7.7% estimated the use of violence as 'extremely unusual'. Indeed, some groups, visible in critical situations, are known to have taken violent action against mass media and reporters, and other CSOs' premises, or as part of street demonstrations. Nevertheless, two-thirds of those surveyed believe that civil society is playing a significant role in the promotion of peace (see indicator 3.5.6).

Roughly four out of ten organisations (43.0%) perceive corruption practices in civil as very frequent or frequent, a significant aspect taking into account the low rating obtained in the Corruption Perceptions Index, as will be seen in the analysis of the External Environment, below. Forty-three percent of CSOs identify many or some examples of discriminatory or intolerant conduct, but for most of them they involve marginal (27.7%) or isolated (38.5%) groups.

TABLE III.3.2. Existence of racist, discriminatory or intolerant groups of CSOs

Answer category	%
Many examples	4.1%
Some examples	39.2%
Only one or two	22.7%
None	34.0%
Indicator value (none to one or two)	56.7%

Finally, when CSOs were asked 'how would you assess the current role of civil society in the promotion of democratic decision-making within your own organisations?' a high proportion (59.6%) assessed this role positively, whereas CSOs that report to effectively implement democratic decision making (see above, 3.1) amounted to only 51.4%.

Conclusion

Self-regulation is the most critical aspect in civil society's behaviour in Venezuela. Nevertheless, the CSI methodology fails to fit exactly with civil society's institutional development and with the prevailing culture in Latin America. An assessment based on the existence of written standards will result in low scores[10] but this does not necessarily mean such standards do not exist.[11] Besides, transparency is distorted by CSO self-censorship. This aspect deserves the highest attention when devising a strategy for strengthening the sector. But this shall be done by aiming the actions not only at the internal but also to the external environment, which conditions the weak performance.

FIGURE III.3.3. Prevalence of self-regulating mechanisms
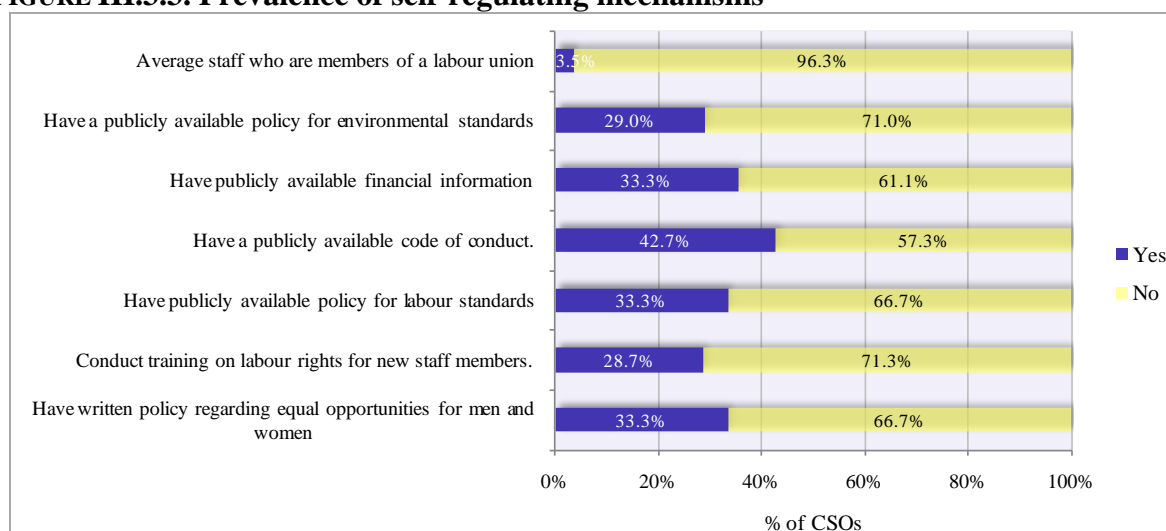
Civil society's role as the promoter of democratic and non-violent values is more positive, despite the fact that there are minority groups engaged in violence that limits the rights of other groups to express themselves. Two actors stand out due to their contribution to the renewal of values. The Catholic Church Social Network, has a campaign against violence under the slogan "Communication is key" ("Hablando se entiende la gente") (Díaz, 2010). The student movement broke out publicly in 2007 and played a vital role in the campaign for a Referendum on Constitutional Reform and has been active in public interest affairs.

Values renewal and democratic practices: the role of the student movement

As an example of how civil society can contribute to the promotion of values, one of the case studies commissioned for the CSI process suggests that during the first decade of the 21st Century, there is in no other Latin American country an instance of such a brave and at the same time peaceful student movement as the one defying Chavez's government in Venezuela. (Mires, 2009:3).

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[10] Nevertheless, these scales cannot be modified without affecting international comparability.

[11] People taking part in surveys and workshops and members of the Advisory Committee agree on the fact that availability 'in writing' does not entirely reflect reality with respect to the existence of environmental and labour policies.

Student organisations, the case study concludes, stand out for their transparency, democratic decision-making, the use of social networks to spread their positions and agile calls that take both the public and the authorities by surprise. The most important aspect of their contribution to deactivating intolerance is the use of speech that rejects violence and the symbolic nature of their actions.

In the words of one of their leaders: "Young people of Venezuela believe in dialogue as a possibility for reconnaissance (...). In recent years, we have lived in confrontation and the sad outcome is that we have two Venezuelas, both incomplete. I ask you, how long have we, Venezuelan people, not decided for ourselves? (...). Young people want cities with no 'East' or 'West'. We refuse a country where public or private aspects make us more or less Venezuelan. (Bolívar, 2007:1). (SINERGIA-CSI Team, 2010a: 20)

4. CIVIL SOCIETY'S PERCEIVED IMPACT

The impact of civil society is difficult to capture without resorting to case studies. The methodological alternative consists of an analysis of the perceived impact, by observers both inside civil society (internal perception) and external to it.

TABLE III.4.1. Dimension: Civil Society impact

Sub-dimensions	Indicators	Score
Receptivity and responsiveness	Internal Perception (4.1)	42.4
	External Perception (4.4)	51.2
Social impact	Internal Perception (4.2)	73.1
	External Perception (4.5)	67.9
Policy impact	Internal Perception (4.3)	42.9
	External Perception (4.6)	27.4
Social impact (4.7)		20.7
DIMENSION SCORE		46.5

The score in this dimension reaches 46.5%, a value which consists of a very limited impact on attitudes and on public policies and a more positive perception with respect to social impact. Organisations themselves perceive a higher impact of civil society on social aspects and on public policies than external actors.

4.1 Responsiveness (internal perception)

In order to appreciate the responsiveness of organisations to pressing issues, the Advisory Committee identified two issues with the highest social priority: insecurity and exclusion. Impact on exclusion is assessed to be much more significant than on insecurity. 62.8% of external actors and 49.0% of CSOs assessed civil society's impact on equity as high or very high. This proportion reaches 39.5% and 35.8% respectively with respect to insecurity.

4.2 Social impact (internal perception)

Impact on society in general presents a wider panorama of civil society's self-perception regarding its own effectiveness. CSOs acknowledge medium to high levels of impact on social issues, and assess individual impact as much more significant than collective impact. Less than one-third considered CSOs' impact to be limited.

TABLE III.4.2. Perceived impact of civil society and of CSO on social issues

No.	Sub-dimension and indicators	Value
4.2	Social Impact (internal perception)	73.2
4.2.1	Social Impact in general	68.1
4.2.2	Social Impact of CSOs themselves	78.3

The greatest impact was perceived on issues related to education (78.3% of CSOs and 83.1% among external actors), promotion of social rights (around 70% in both cases) and assistance to poor or vulnerable people (75.0% vs. 80.5%). There is a lower impact on practices from government and the business sector. The lowest impact occurs on governmental practices (35.1% vs. 41.9%).

4.3 Policy impact (internal perception)

Impact on public policies involves the attempt to influence or exert pressure for the creation or reform of laws or regulations, the implementation of programs, the promotion of rights or interests and other initiatives or proposals.

FIGURE III.4.1. Impact on public policies of civil society as a whole
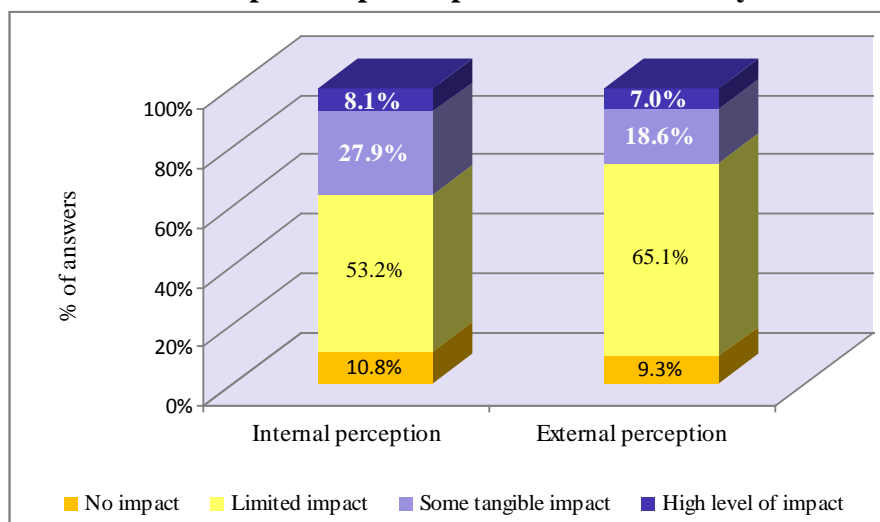
In a conflictive environment where CSOs remain isolated from negotiation opportunities, a rather unfavourable outcome could be expected, and this is shown by the data. Assessment by CSOs themselves and external actors is less optimistic. A limited or null impact is perceived by 63.0% (internal perception) and 74.4% (external perception).

TABLE III.4.3. Attempts to impact on public policies and levels of success

Answer	%
No attempts made	38.1%
Attempts made	61.9%
Attempts made, but with no success (proportion of the total of attempts)	69.2%
At least one successful attempt (proportion of the total of attempts)	30.8%
Proposals were accepted	20.5%
Proposals are under analysis	29.5%
No result: the political sector has not even responded	34.8%
Proposals were rejected	15.2%
TOTAL ATTEMPTS	100.0%

How many CSOs become involved in actions of impact? Sixty-two percent declared to have made incursions into this field, but less than one-third was successful. Taking into consideration the total number of proposals put forward by CSOs, 15.2% were rejected and 34.8% were not even considered. The areas where CSOs have been most active are promotion of social rights (41.0%), in particular the encouragement of laws and provisions related to education, health and social security, whilst one out of five CSOs has engaged in the promotion of political rights.

Impact of civil society on educational policies: a success story in adverse circumstances

A case study commissioned as part of the CSI confirms that impact on public policies constitutes a challenge that few groups in civil society have been able to engage in with success. Nevertheless, a group of organisations acting in the area of education has achieved significant success in several public policies throughout this conflictive period.

The Ministry of Education and the National Assembly have found CSOs of this sector to be opponents who act in a coordinated fashion, willing to dialogue and negotiate, with a capacity for proposals rather than only reaction, that have prepared many proposals and counterproposals as a contribution to debate, that are willing to intensively use the legal mechanisms, the mass media, calls for meetings for information, reflection and consultation, while using street actions to show their discomfort with public policies implemented.

The struggles in the education sector, the case study concludes, are perceived to have had effects beyond their boundaries, mainly awakening citizen awareness with respect to the value of public demonstration and of organizing. The involvement of a middle class sector in street actions and the emergence of a network of parent's associations is a historical occurrence, the repercussions of which will still be felt in the future. (Cartaya, 2010b:34-35).

4.4 Responsiveness (external perception)

As may be seen in section 4.1, external and internal perceptions coincide on the fact that impact on the issue of insecurity is low or null (over 60% in both cases). External actors positively assess the impact of civil society on exclusion (62.8%).

4.5. Social impact (external perception)

External actors deem the impact to be high on selected social issues such as education, but they are less optimistic regarding the global impact of CSOs on social aspects.

TABLE III.4.4. Social impact (external perception)

No.	Sub-dimension and indicators	Value
4.5	Social Impact (external perception)	67.9
4.5.1	Social Impact on selected issues	82.4
4.5.2	Social Impact in general	53.5

4.6. Policy Impact (External Perception)

Only roughly one out of four external actors surveyed acknowledges the impact of civil society on public policies, a more pessimistic perception than the impact perceived by CSOs themselves (see figure above, section 4.3).

4.7. Impact of civil society on attitudes

The CSI adopts an 'indirect' approach to assess this impact, based on the following hypothesis: if participation in organisations and associations is related to people's civic values,[12] a difference might be expected in the prevalence of these values among people involved in organisations and those not involved.

TABLE III.4.4. Impact of civil society on attitudes

No.	Indicator Name	Value
4.7.1	Difference in trust between members and non-members	2.8
4.7.2	Difference in tolerance between members and non-members	24.7
4.7.3	Difference in public spiritedness between members and non-members	0.0
4.7.4	Trust in civil society	55.4
Total sub-dimension civil society impact on attitudes		20.7

The influence of participation on the set of values associated with civic culture is mixed. A slightly higher interpersonal trust is observed among active members of political and social CSOs. In addition, people active in a CSO turn out to be consistently more tolerant than non-active members or non-members, but there is no differences in civic spiritedness between members and non-members.

FIGURE III.4.2. Trust in actors inside and outside civil society
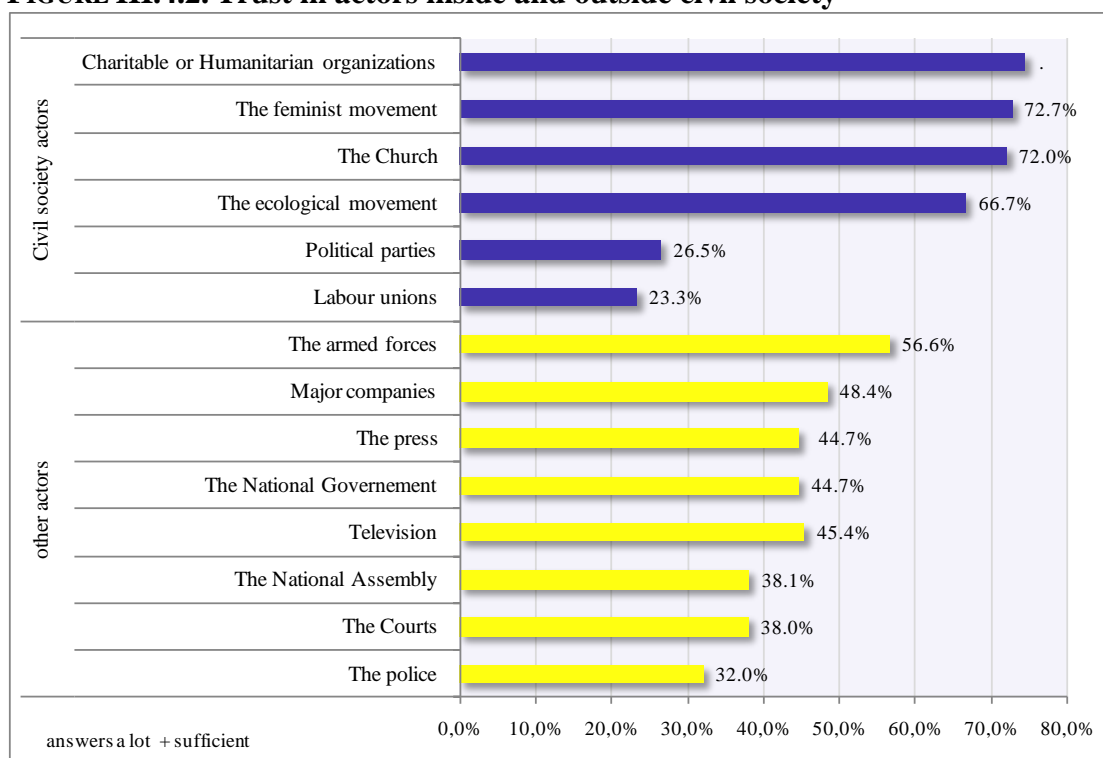
Regarding trust in civil society, the score obtained (55.4)[13] shows an appreciable degree of legitimacy. This value is the average between two contrasting situations. There is an exceptionally high trust in the Catholic Church, charitable organisations, feminist or

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[12] It is difficult to use the notion of 'impact' in this context because a cause-effect relationship cannot be proved.
[13] Value representing the percentage of people with an average trust in the CSO types listed in the figure below at or above 2.5 in a scale from 1 to 4, where 4 represents high trust and 1 no trust.

environmental movements. But the trust level regarding political parties and unions is even lower than trust levels attributed to public entities, such as the police (32%), which are traditionally assessed negatively by citizens. In a society where interpersonal trust is exceptionally low, the support of CSOs not related to political parties gets a higher value, especially if compared to the low trust level regarding entities related to public powers. Only the military are trusted by more than one half of the population. Instead, trust levels regarding the government, the Supreme Court of Justice and the National Assembly are lower than trust levels expressed towards private sector representatives, such as major companies and television.

SmartThinkers (2009) contributes information strengthening the validity of these findings from a recent opinion poll: when organising to work on resolving Venezuela's problems, a significant percentage (71.5%) said they would do so through a social movement. A portion of 14.7% would do so through a political party, while 13.8% stated 'no opinion' (SmartThinkers, 2009).

The strong trust in CSOs not related to political parties can be seen from two points of view. On the one hand, it is both a strength and an opportunity, since they are seen as legitimate institutional actors. On the other hand, this attitude may be interpreted as another expression of an anti-political attitude. In this respect, they would represent for the population: "a doctrinal shelter in organisations outside political parties, to express concerns and political ambitions" (Salamanca, 2003).

Conclusion

Both internal and external actors attribute to civil society an important role in the modulation of social inequalities, but its impact on public policies and on civic attitudes and values is perceived as limited or null. The exiguous success in public policies shows a resistance to act together with political actors to achieve changes in society. However, this possibility is also restricted due to the fact that CSOs are not seen as legitimate actors in policy formulation by government. It is noteworthy the role that civil society may play as a vehicle to strengthen weakened institutions.

5. EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

FIGURE III.5.1. External Environment
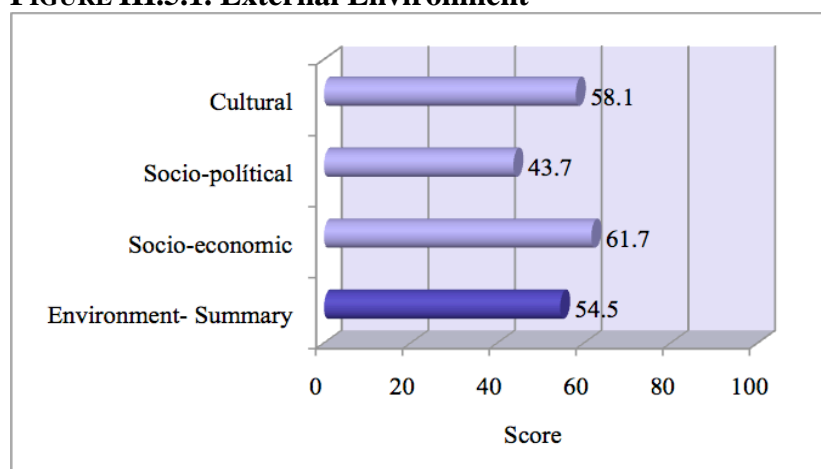
Venezuelan civil society develops in a enabling socio-economic context, a relatively unfavourable political environment and a cultural environment with intermediate values. It is a nuanced situation, however, which merits a more in-depth examination.

5.1. Socio-economic context

The socio-economic context is assessed through an examination of external corruption (Transparency International, 2008), inequality and macro-economic health indicators (The World Bank, 2008), and the Basic Capacities Index (BCI), (Social Watch, 2009).

The relatively favourable value is made up of indicators with opposite trends: a very negative score in terms of corruption perception, and favourable socio-economic conditions that reflect the influence of huge oil resources, which have permitted improvement of some basic social indicators and maintained public debt within a manageable level. However, participants in discussion groups considered that the BCI reflects only partially the social reality of middle income countries because it does not take into account important features beyond some basic indicators. In the case of an oil-rich country this index is therefore a poor reflection of what might have been possible given the available resources. Poverty, exclusion from education beyond basic schooling and low quality of educational and health services persist.

Perception of corruption in the public sector records the most negative level among the Latin American countries participating in this project, a situation which can be seen as historic in Venezuela. According to economic experts, the facts that resources from oil are managed and distributed to society by the National Executive and that administrative and budget control are weak, have permitted and fostered the existence of corrupt practices. The scarce enforcement of anti-corruption legislation contributes to the problem (Transparencia Venezuela, 2006).

FIGURE III.5.2. Socio-economic context sub-dimension
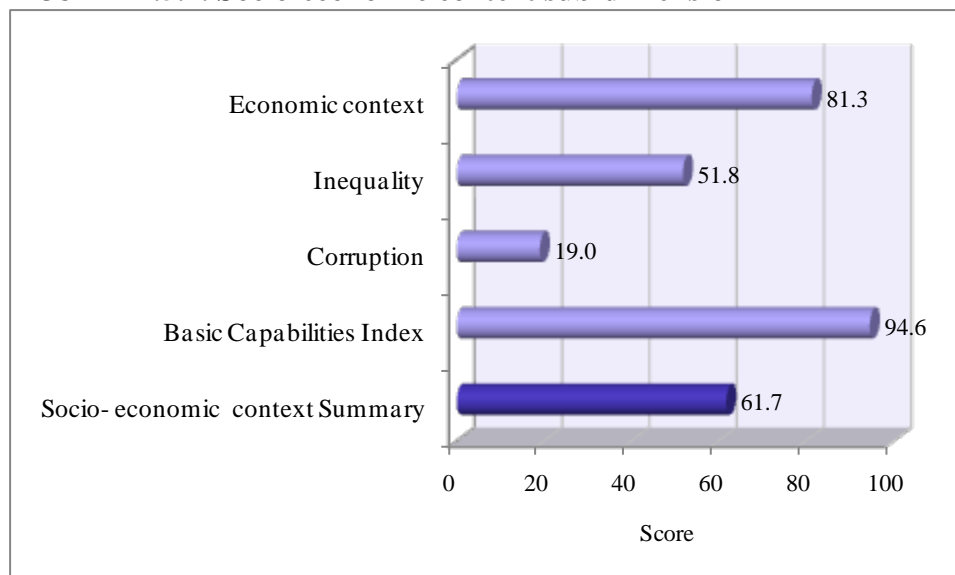
5.2. Socio-political context

This sub-dimension is assessed through five indicators, three of which have been adapted from Freedom House (2008): political rights and freedoms, personal rights and civil liberties, rights of association and organisation. The table further includes a government effectiveness indicator (WGI, 2008) and CSOs perception regarding restrictions to their activities.

TABLE III.5.1. Socio-political context indicators

Indicator	Score
Government effectiveness	32.6
Subjective experience regarding legal framework	42.4
Right of association	50.0
Rule of law and civil liberties	45.8
Political rights and political freedoms	47.5
Sub-dimension score	43.7

The situation ranked most negatively was the assessment of the state's capacity to meet its functions. This has been described as:

> A big, expensive, inefficient machine which is not only slow but also slows down social initiatives, failing more and more in its basic responsibilities of guaranteeing security, education, health and infrastructure. (González F., 2007: 62)

FIGURE III.5.3. Rights of participation and association: Latin America
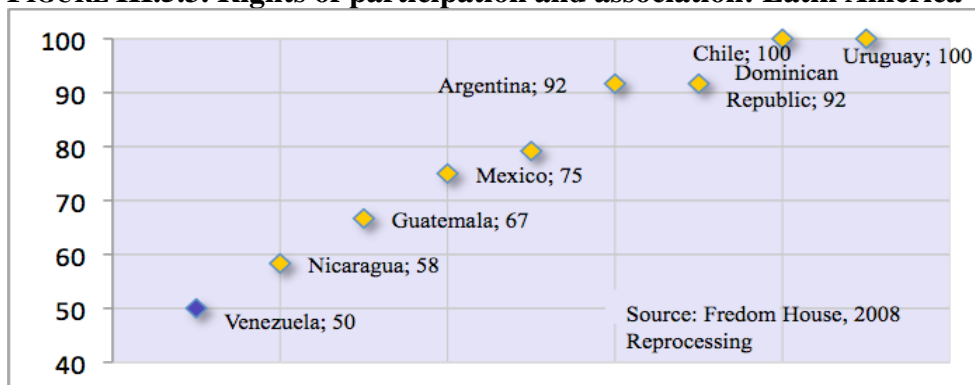
Among the countries incorporated in this project, Venezuela ranks the lowest in terms of the freedom of association, contrasting noticeably with Chile and Uruguay.

FIGURE III.5.4. Subjective experience of restrictions
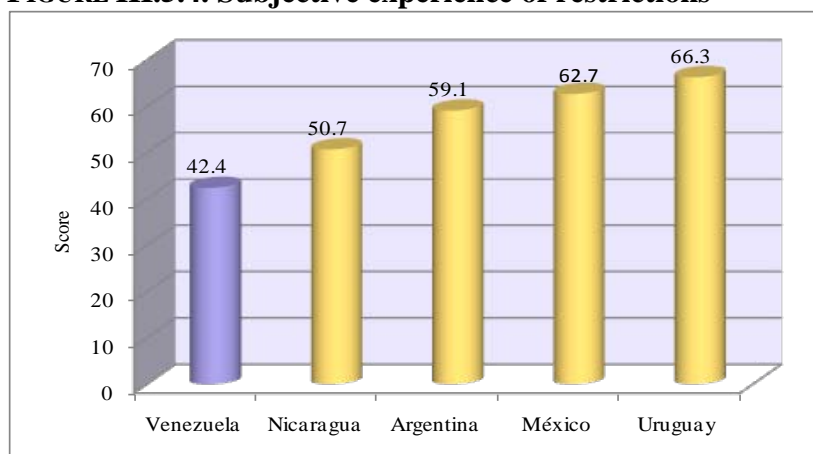
Source: Surveys to CSO in each country

Venezuela is also the country with the least favourable subjective experience concerning restrictions of the six Latin American countries in this phase of CSI. The score in this sub-dimension results from the average between two indicators. The first is the assessment made

by the CSOs surveyed under the CSI project. In this regard, 70% of the CSOs considered the environment highly or quite restrictive. The second indicator is CSOs' experience regarding 'illegitimate' restrictions. Roughly four out of ten CSOs reported suffering illegitimate restrictions to their freedom of association and participation by the national government, an indicator of civil society vulnerability. Around 60% of civic or human rights CSOs surveyed reported experiencing such restrictions.

State-society relationships and the rights to association and participation

A case study commissioned as part of the CSI study suggests that two different strategies are applied to CSOs depending on whether they are critical or approving of the government. The strategy applied to CSOs that promote the state includes, in addition to the granting of benefits in exchange of political support, a detailed control of their activities.

In order to restrict the action scope of CSOs that are critical of the government, new rules have been set, for instance, the amendment to the Criminal Code to extend circumstances of libel and slander and to increase the penalties. At the same time, officers from the government threaten CSOs so as to promote self-censorship. PROVEA (2009) identifies a triangle formed by the Attorney General, the Courts and the security forces to intimidate demonstrators judicially. Some rights are further disregarded, such as the right to strike, while delay tactics are used in registration procedures, and CSOs are discriminated against in negotiating spheres because of their political stance.

The degree and type of effects or consequences depend on a CSO's stance, its claim for autonomy and its criticism of rights violations. The most vulnerable groups are those whose weakening and disappearance facilitates the development of the socialist project.

The case study concludes that the CSOs suffering the greatest attacks are struggling with self-censorship and the implementation of strategies such as the creation of watch groups, the filing of reports before national public powers and international bodies, the organisation of campaigns and tactics in the streets, and the intensive use of social networks. The consolidation of networks exchanging information and sharing strategies has been a remarkable result of defensive strategies. (SINERGIA-CSI Team, 2010b:40-43)

Given restrictions vis a vis the public sector it is important to evaluate the scenario of relationships between civil society and other sectors as potential partners for future actions. The responses given by CSO representatives in the survey, as well as opinions expressed in the National Workshop, reveal that the most auspicious environment exists between CSOs and the media, academia and other CSOs that work in the same area. But there is room for improvement regarding relationships with major firms and donors. As was signalled before, there are conflicts and/or few contacts among different sectors of CSOS.

5.3. Socio-cultural context

How can a population's socio-cultural rules and attitudes favour the development of civil society? We can answer this question taking into account three aspects of social capital: interpersonal trust, the degree of tolerance and public spiritedness.

The low level of interpersonal trust among Venezuelans is particularly striking. Based on these data, only seven out of a hundred people state they "can trust others".

TABLE III.5.2. Socio-cultural context indicators

Indicator	Venezuela	Nicaragua	Argentina	Mexico	Uruguay	Chile
Interpersonal trust	6.6	3.0	17.6	15.6	17.0	12.4
Tolerance	79.6	81.3	94.0	83.6	96.7	84.6
Public spiritedness	88.0	82.5	85.6	73.7	89.5	78.6
Sub-dimension	58.1	55.6	65.7	57.6	67.7	58.5
Source: population surveys in each country, 2005-2009						

Welsch et al (2004), Guzmán (2004) and Koenecke and Varnagy (2007) share the view that low interpersonal trust is a relevant aspect of Venezuelan political culture. Largely they conclude that this behaviour is related to the prominence of primary relationships (family and close friends) over relationships based on abstract norms of conduct. The recent weakening of norms of coexistence as a product of a debilitating political system has deepened these attitudes. According to the Advisory Committee, it is broadly agreed and acknowledged that the levels of trust in others and in institutions in Venezuela are very low.

FIGURE III.5.5. Would not like to be neighbours of

Source: World Values Survey (world average); CIVICUS Survey (Venezuela)
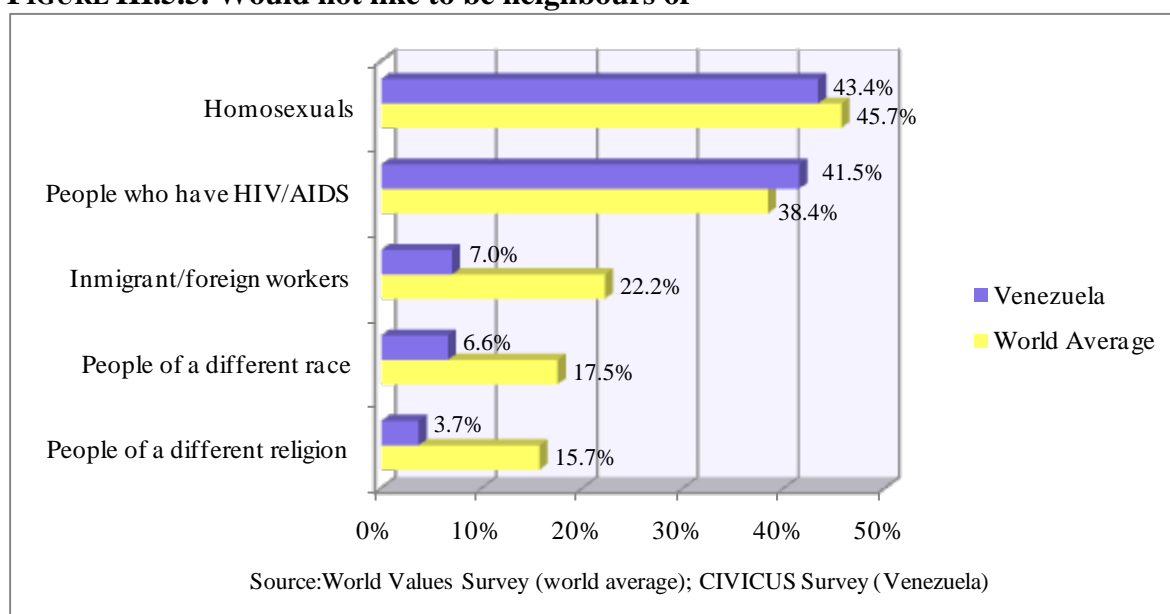
As far as tolerance is concerned, the public appears remarkably open towards 'people from another race, country or religion', although it still expresses prejudices against sexual diversity and people with HIV/AIDS. Yet, Venezuelan society is much more tolerant than in the past. Over a period of 13 years, rejection of homosexuality decreased from 68.0% to 43.4% of surveyed people, and rejection of people with HIV/AIDS fell from 58.0% to 41.5% (World Values Survey, 1996 and 2000; CIVICUS Survey 2009).

The survey did not ask about tolerance towards people with a different ideology, the aspect that today most affects coexistence in the country. But other sources state that the population is tolerant in this regard. Based on a survey from 2006, Hellinger affirms:

> People surveyed, both in neighbourhoods and cities, showed a remarkable degree of tolerance towards the "liberal rule of freedom of speech". Answers were quite similar in the case of Chavists, anti-Chavists and 'neither-nor' groups. More than 95% of the surveyed in the three categories agreed on the right to free expression in community meetings. (Hellinger, 2008: 23).

There is a high level of awareness about the inappropriateness of corrupt or illegal behaviours, although this must not be confused with the tendency to avoid them.

TABLE III.5.3. Justified actions, Venezuela and world average

Action	World average	Venezuela
Claiming government benefits to which one is not entitled	2.8	2.3
Not paying a public transport ticket	2.7	2.8
Cheating on taxes if possible	2.4	1.8
Accepting bribes for fulfilling one's obligations	2.1	1.4
(Average on a scale where 1 = never justified to 10 = always justified)		

In a context which gives very little importance to abstract rules (González Fabre) the high degree of rejection of inappropriate behaviours does not seem to show civic spiritedness in daily practice. There is an ambiguous behaviour that recognises rules but does not comply with them. A recent study on citizen culture in Caracas (Corpovisionarios, 2010), reported that 84% of people from Caracas considered that public officers are corrupt and 60% considered that more than half of the citizens are also corrupt.

> (…) the survey revealed that most of the citizens from Caracas recognise the validity of rules (...) and are aware of their importance. However, the survey also states that citizens from Caracas distrust the collective, and do not recognise themselves in others but consider them as corrupt. As a result, citizens from Caracas fail to comply with the law. (Acosta, A., Diario Ultimas Noticias, 20 March 2010).

Conclusion

The external environment reveals restrictions in its three dimensions. There is a positive impact of oil income resources on the socio-economic sub-dimension, which is counteracted by high levels of corruption and inefficiency from the state. This in turn impacts the quality and extension of social services, and affects the quality of life.

The prevailing feature in the socio-cultural sphere is inter-personal distrust. Consequently, this attitude directly affects the advance of projects reached by consensus:

> Without a minimum trust in ourselves it is impossible to reach long-lasting social coexistence modes, or design, and least of all, implement projects. Anything we agree on, (...) will show the inherent weakness of a defensive attitude. (Piñango 2003: 26).

In a context where the rule of law has weakened (ICHR, 2009), there is a remarkable difference between formal regulations and practical implementation. Consequently, when it comes to indicators based on the legal framework, the situation could be even more critical than was shown in this study.

IV. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN VENEZUELA

This chapter draws from the information gathered in the surveys and the ideas and reflections from the CSI workshops and consultative phases, in order to provide a brief overview of the strengths and weaknesses of civil society in Venezuela.[14]

As an introduction to this presentation let us remind that the CSI dimensions constitute different aspects of the same reality. The strengths demonstrated in each dimension generate a virtuous circle of greater engagement. A more efficient influence brings about changes to the environment, which in turn thicken the social fabric and result in organisational strength and a more democratic practice of values. Weaknesses, on the other hand, contribute to aggravating civil society fragility, hindering the extension of citizenship.

FIGURE IV.1 Strengths and weaknesses of civil society, causes and results
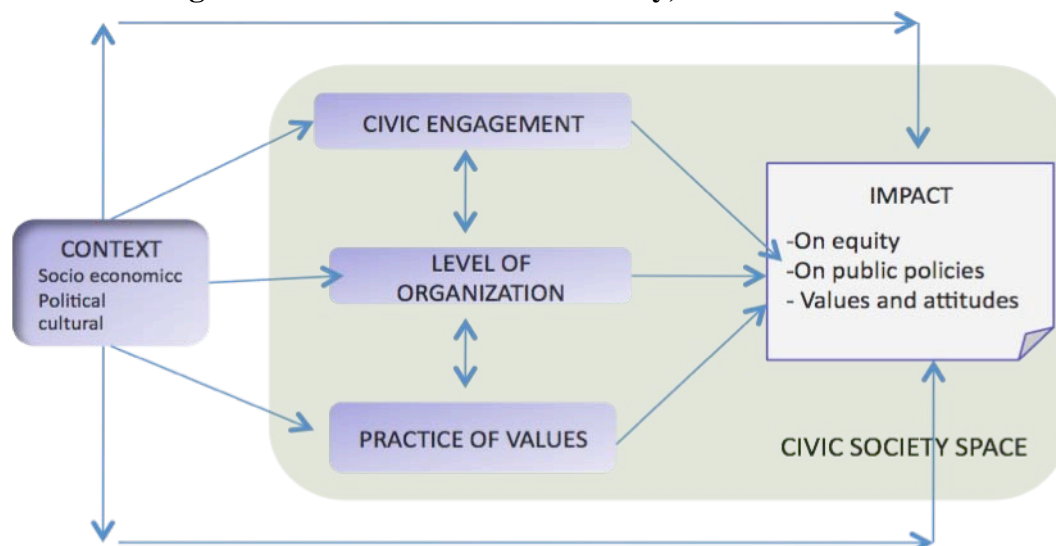
SOURCE: version based on Anheier, 2008

1. STRENGTHS

As expressed in consensus by all participants in this collaborative effort, a strong civil society can be defined as one that materialises the human rights enshrined in the Constitution, the social contract that Venezuelans adopted as a framework for coexistence in 1999.

Two issues stand out in this regard:

* The value of tolerance in Venezuela's population, in contrast with the uncompromising behaviour of its leaders, speaks of a strength that remains hidden under a veil of induced polarisation; it reveals a will to coexist, which has not yet found a way to materialise.

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[14] These findings, together with relevant recommendations, make up an accompanying policy action brief entitled 'Strengthening the associative fabric and influencing the public sphere: an action-agenda for CSOs.'

* A clear strength can be noticed in the legitimacy of CSOs, in contrast to the distrust of other institutional actors, especially the public sector. This legitimacy is the greatest asset of civil society in Venezuela, and so has become a maker and agent of social change.

In the domain of civil society and its relationship with the environment, there is an awareness that the fate of Venezuela concerns everyone, and not only politicians or the government, even though there is not always agreement on the means to pass from coexistence to organised action.

FIGURE IV.1.1 Internal strengths and weaknesses of civil society according to key actors
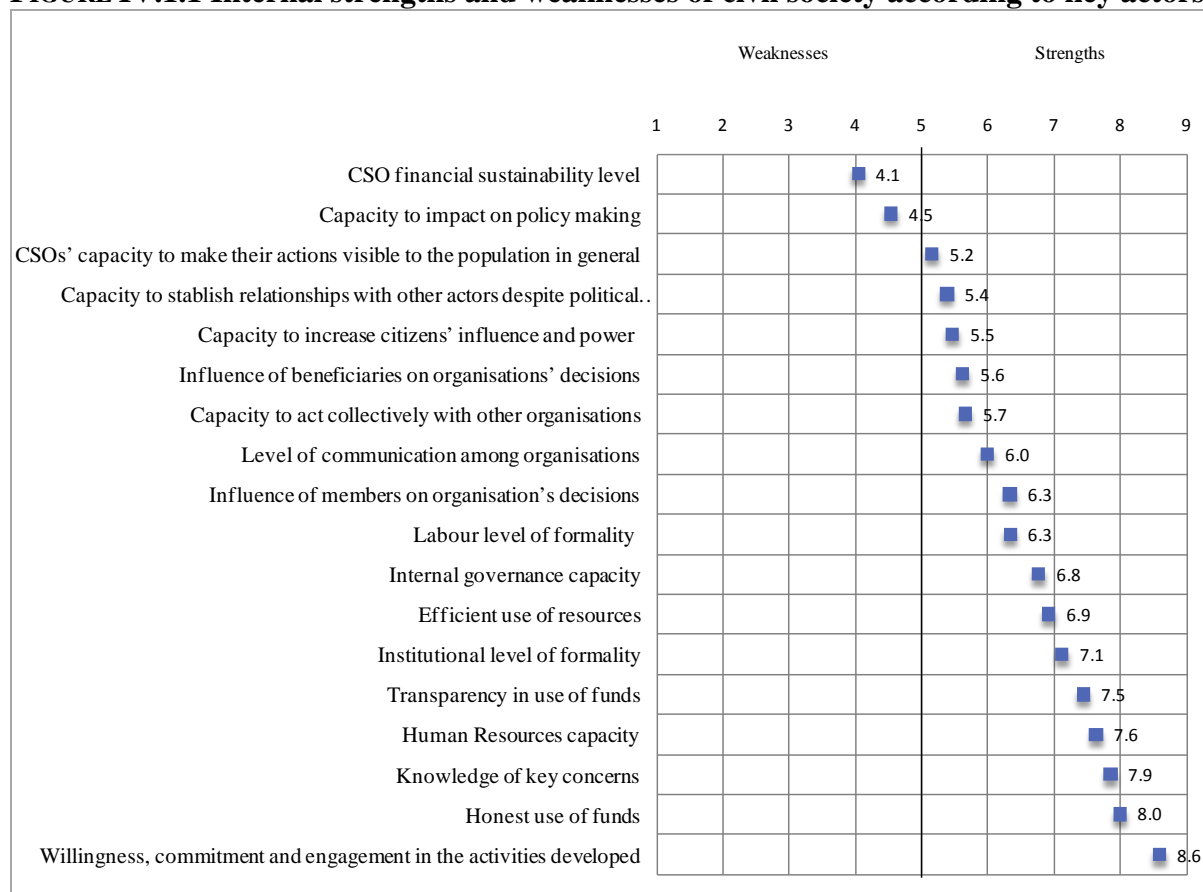
Source: Survey of key actors

Other strengths include:

- In the organisational domain, the quality and commitment of members and directors are recognised as a determining value of their social legitimacy.

- Network grouping has fostered impact, as it has facilitated the clarification of civil society's role as well as offered opportunities for negotiation to identify common interests and problems.

- Surveyed people and participants in focus groups considered it an asset to count on stable and committed volunteering.

- The trace of civil society's impact can be seen in the area of social rights, which proves civil society is strong to respond to the challenges posed by the environment. CSOs contribute to achieving equality, reducing exclusion and extending social rights.

- Relationships between CSOs, and between CSO and the media and academia - potential allies when designing a strategy to strengthen the sector - are considered highly cooperative.

- Civil society is recognised in its role as promoter of values that counteract trends towards violence and intolerance. Networks of the Catholic Church stand out for fostering opportunities for dialogue and promoting peace, while students' organisations can be seen to have contributed to a renewal of values and the vindication of new ways to do politics.

2. WEAKNESSES

All sectors are worried about accelerated processes of de-institutionalisation, expressed in weakened coexistence rules. Among citizens, the traditional phrase: "como vaya viniendo vamos viendo" (we'll see and deal with it as things happen) can be seen to be embodied in an absence of shared references to a common future, which hinders the possibility of making long-term projections. On the part of the state, this can be seen in the volatility of rules adapted to the designs of the central power, since there is no independence of powers. As CSOs survive in this environment, their energies get exhausted in defensive actions, to the detriment of their responsibilities to their original missions. The greatest weaknesses can be found in the dimensions of Civic Engagement and Practice of Values.

The main weakness is the poor commitment of citizens to public issues, increased by ignorance and scarce dissemination of knowledge on human rights; therefore the adoption of a human rights approach is still an aspiration.

Other weaknesses include:

- It has been repeatedly expressed that it is always the same group that participates, as shown in the contrast between the low extent and greater depth of engagement.

- Participation is frequently a response to concrete menaces. When the menace disappears or it is clear that it is not feasible to deal with it, the participatory momentum tends to dwindle.

- There is a marked weakness in the practice of values, which can be related to the socio-cultural context. Limitations are identified in the application of processes that ensure transparency and accountability as regards the internal governance of CSOs.

- The existence of groups that usually exert violence was repeatedly mentioned, as they constrain the performance of other groups, and create conflicts among CSOs.

- Many CSOs identify a gap between the findings of the quantitative indicators and their lived reality, which sees organisational limitations, among others, that include decreasing resources with limited access to public and private funds. A life continuously fighting crisis lowers efficacy and efficiency.

- Despite the active participation in networks, there is scarce communication and/or conflicts provoked by political/ideological differences, distrust and competition for resources.

- Impact on public policies is very limited. In addition to context restrictions, CSOs have the difficult mandate of impacting on the social sector while their political role is not clearly understood and even rejected.

- Impact on public attitudes and values is relatively low. As was recognised by organisations with the important exception of the Catholic Church and the new student movement, there are very few groups working on programmes aiming to impact on citizens' values.

- The existence of a restrictive legal framework, which is frequently modified, is considered an obstacle in the exercise of association and participation rights. It also limits the exercise of these rights to the exclusion of a very significant portion of CSOs as interlocutors in policy-making processes.

- Clientelism has traditionally characterised the state-civil society relationship, but these trends have deepened, thus hindering autonomy.

- The prevailing civic culture is marked by the distrust of institutions and of others, as well as by an inability to act on the basis of abstract norms. Defensive, individualistic attitudes predominate.

- **FIGURE IV.2.1 External civil society strengths and weaknesses according to key actors**

	Weaknesses					Strengths			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Level of aknowledgement of CSO's role in governemt		2,3							
Access to public funds		2,4							
Country's social and economic conditions				3.6					
Regulations and procedures concerning tax benefits and exemptions				4.3					
Labour regulations and procedures				4.5					
Regulations and procedures to obtain legal status				4.6					
Regulations and procedures to obtain donations from companies or..				4.8					
Access to funds from international donors					5.2				
Degree of freedom to express opinions contrary to the government					5.3				
Citizens' level of engagement and participation					5.4				
Level of transparency in access to public funds					5.6				
Acknowledgement of CSOs' role by population in general						6.0			
Access to private funds						6.0			
Access to mass media						6.1			

Source: Survey of key actors

- Debate is limited, due to lack of opportunities for cross-sectoral exchange and even among sectors within civil society (e.g. among political parties, labour unions and other social organisations). Relationships with companies and donors could be stronger.

- Organisations in the provinces mention difficulties in making an impact with their action because they now as a result of weakened local governments.

- Even if the indicators applied in the CSI show favourable life conditions, actors consulted think that the socio-economic context is marked by inequalities and by high fragmentation and social exclusion. Corruption and government inefficiency in the accomplishment of its role have meant that the enormous resources derived from oil income have not proportionally reached the population.

V.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the challenges that civil society faces to accomplish its interests, an action agenda has been designed, built on the foundations of civil society's strengths and on the opportunities created by recent learning situations. This agenda stems from the recognition that there is a heterogeneous civil society. Therefore, strategies must be developed within a framework of respect, so that this strengthening process may bring about a better accomplishment of each CSO's goals, without compromising its original mission.

A tension was recorded between pessimism about the ability to overcome obstacles to accomplish goals, and the intention to adopt a constructive vision so as to highlight successes and good practices. As expressed by one of the participants at the National Dialogue, "we can't grow and be creative when we are crushed by self-criticism."

It was also noticed that proposals for internal strengthening were raised very easily, while greater difficulty was experienced in the design of actions to influence civic culture and public policies. This observation ought to become a guideline to deepen reflection about the role of CSOs as change actors.

Dialogue must be a priority. The main aspiration and priority should be to strengthen civil society, so that it can become a platform for dialogue. Improving dialogue suggests:

- A way must be found to face problems together in an environment that is not highly ideologically charged. The main urgency is to contribute to the dismantling of polarisation, and to show though actions that dialogue is possible.

- There must be dialogue among CSO themselves, about social development, or about the promotion of human rights and communal groups, between political parties and the rest of civil society, between CSOs and business, academia and donors, and among sectors of different ideologies.

- Dialogue must be promoted at the local level. It is easier to promote exchange and negotiation based on concrete problems. The diversity of participants in regional CSI groups shows that it is possible, and that opportunities that favour this are highly appreciated.

Venezuela must recover a civic sense of politics. The recovery of the civic sense of politics entails the assumption by civil society of the following roles:

- Formation of associative interests and identities, preserving autonomy against any form of subordination to power.

- Construction of global visions of citizens' relevant issues and their defence in public affairs, through claims to party actors and the state.

- Permanent fight for rights recognition and updating, making citizens' legal and political claims binding.

- Placement of powers and conflicts under jurisdictional and institutional control to assure that the derived norms and sanctions are legitimately established.

Steps should also be taken to thicken the social fabric:

- Wide awareness-raising and a training programme on human rights is proposed for citizens in general and among CSOs in particular.

- Civil society has to play a relevant role in citizenship education, to raise awareness with the public that being an active citizen does not only mean exercising rights but also acting on the basis of the responsibilities of living in society.

Institutionalisation of civil society must be advanced. Here, three guidelines are a priority:

- Training in administrative and work methodologies, through distance learning, and promoting solidarity among the strongest CSOs, so that they can train other CSOs and spread 'good practices'.

- The achievement of financial sustainability, which takes into account project resources and financing, in order to maintain an infrastructure compatible with the challenges posed, including through the following means:

  - Promote exchange of information on CSOs' plans and programmes, and strengthen relationships with the business sector through their federations. CSOs must know their sources, get trained in project planning and improve their transparency and accountability to have better credibility.

  - Improve self-management practices and profit-making activities from citizenship contributions.

  - Organisations should take part in lobbying actions to make the financing they receive include provision for institutional strengthening.

- Network and federations should be used more intensively and intelligently, including in the following ways:

  - Tolerance and negotiation skills based on goals rather than on ideological positions should be basic conditions for networking.

- ▪ The most complex projects should be carried out through networking, which should allow for multi-institutional financing, impact on policy-making, shared implementation of accountability and behavioural code mechanisms.

As the practice of values is the weakest area, the strengthening of this aspect of civil society deserves special efforts:

- Behavioural codes need to be promoted and their internal adoption encouraged. Corporate foundations and large CSOs could support this process by sharing their experiences.

- Management reports should be spread beyond partners and financial experts and as required by law, and include indicators of matching of actions with the needs of the beneficiaries.

- Instead of emphasising sanctions, programmes should be introduced to reward good practices, such as holding an annual event to reward and publicise transparency and accountability practices.

Efficient and effective responses should be mounted to the external environment challenges in order to strengthen civil society's impact. The acid test for civil society lies in the impact it can achieve on the external environment:

- The effort to recover interpersonal trust and civic spiritedness should be a priority, including through widening the range of values formation programmes.

- Civil society should fight against clientelism, and to restore rights to participate in public spheres, and access state resources, without jeopardising autonomy.

- Agreed and complementary actions should be promoted between state roles, political parties and CSOs in search of the common good.

- Public policies should be more thoroughly controlled through 'watch groups' that document rights violations, file claims and raise awareness through the dissemination of their findings.

- The state should comply with its basic role to promote public goods without transferring its responsibilities to communities. All legal steps should be pursued to assure the accomplishment of these duties, thus overcoming distrust, which results in passivity and indifference.

CSOs require special training in impact skills:

- Knowledge needs to be made the basis for action. The experience of the CSI project confirms that the action-research formula helps to identify critical issues and general weaknesses. Relationships and combined efforts should be encouraged between CSOs and research centres,

VI.   CONCLUSIONS

The CSI project has been carried out with the conviction that we need to know how we are and what drives us in order to anchor our next actions in reality. This chapter offers an overview of the main advances made in knowledge about Venezuelan civil society and the thinking about how civil society can be a vehicle for the social changes that the present situation and trends require. The CSI project has combined different viewpoints, so as to offer a background of civil society's past and present conditions, which form the basis for how we may address an uncertain future.

In a polarised society, concepts and tools take on different meanings depending on which side of the ideological and political 'trench' the problem is analysed. Therefore, the first challenge involved identifying the key reference points from which to report the findings. The framework for this report is the rights enshrined by the 1999 Constitution. The underlying premise in this study is that the exercise of a set of rights by some groups cannot result in the exclusion of others from these rights, in a context aiming at plurality and tolerance. Findings were assessed according to this premise.

The picture revealed by the analysis of civil society's strengths and weaknesses is contradictory. Civil society would have had a greater impact if the energies wasted in attack and self-defence had been spent in building up values, and offering goods and services for the community. The current condition of Venezuelan civil society can be summarised as follows:

1. *despite showing considerable strengths in its level of organisation...*

2. *a limited extension and depth of civic engagement and a practice of values marked by fragilities and gaps are the two weakest aspects of a civil society...*

3. *which operates in a political and socio-cultural environment that limits its development...*

4. *which in turn means civil society has a restricted public impact, especially when it comes to influencing public policy-making.*

It is noteworthy that the quantitative assessment of this study was much more favourable than the self-analysis made by key organisations and actors in the consultations. Absorbed in an environment of uncertainty, conflict and distrust, organisations tend to reflect pessimism and a hostile environment.

During the last decade Venezuelan society has undergone a deep process of transformation of its social fabric and its coexistence rules. The most recent legal instruments aim at the creation of a 'Communal State', a new model of socialist society involving equality, equity and social justice (Statutory Law of Communal Councils 2009: section 2), the wording of which does not correspond with the principles of the 1999 Constitution, but with a progressive radicalisation of the political model.

The implementation of this project divides Venezuelan society since there is no consensus about its value as a solution to the challenges regarding equity. Although so far there has been a visible process to generate civic conscience, one cannot but consider the results that

could have been achieved if energies wasted in mutual attack and self-defence had served the building up of citizenship values, goods and services for the community.

Another significant finding concerns the over-determination exercised by the environment on weak civic engagement, failures in the practice of values and scarce impact on citizens' attitudes and public policies. One of the most critical aspects, as broadly developed in this report, is the restrictive socio-political context, especially if compared with the context prevailing in other Latin American countries.

But also the socio-cultural environment puts strong limitations on the development of the social fabric. Two aspects stand out in this field: distrust of others except family and close friends and distrust of traditional political actors and institutional actors related to the government. This can explain the weak practice of values shown by organised civil society. It is hard for civil society to practice a certain set of values if society shows an open weakness in this aspect.

Even amid these adverse circumstances there are reasons for optimism. In spite of the hopelessness of living in the short term, the CSI project has contributed to revealing the threads that join Venezuelans in their aspirations to live in a democracy. In spite of polarisation, both ordinary citizens and organisations, whatever their tendencies, show a will to coexist, linked to the interest of recognising others as part of a plural country. This will is clearly evident in the interest to create and institutionalise spaces for dialogue and reflection, in particular, on the part of groups in the interior of the country.

Changes in the institutional framework and in the current socio-political conditions happen at a dramatic pace and force organisations to adapt constantly. Sometimes they adapt successfully, by raising consciousness in other groups about the need to act, temporarily halting the introduction of measures and even implementing successfully some policies that extend access to public goods. On other occasions, they fail, by jeopardising autonomy in exchange for survival, giving in to self-censorship, or facing judicial actions. Finally, many organisations have been forced to close down, unwilling to work in an unfavourable environment or due to lack or resources to operate.

During our year and a half research and consultation process, the team had to constantly include new realities, which warns about the challenge of keeping alive this diagnosis during the next stages of the dissemination of this information and the drawing up of agendas, as we seek to make this action-research project a continuous process. Some participation aspects which require deepening were further identified. For example, further insight into civic culture and its relationships with the political environment is needed in order to discover further methods to increase interpersonal trust. The outstanding aspect is a dissonance between the standards we recognise as valid in theory, and the daily practice.

In a sector of society whose legitimacy does not derive from its representativeness but rather from its works, there is usually a strong relationship between the practice of values and the degree of legitimacy (Cruz and Pousadela, 2008). It is remarkable that a high degree of CSOs' legitimacy, except for political parties and labour unions, co-exists with an empty practice of values and outstanding fragilities.

It is also necessary to deepen transparency and accountability mechanisms in organisations, including revisiting existing mechanisms, how they are applied and which organisations use them, and examine the more successful strategies here.

The diachronic vision adopted in this study has enabled the highlighting of the historical continuity in this changing scenario. The current conflictive situation has its roots in the disappointment resulting from poor results in terms of welfare and the exclusion suffered during the last period of representative democracy in Venezuela. An idiosyncratic feature has further affected the weak autonomy and fragility of Venezuelan civil society: historically, the oil industry was incorporated within some precarious institutions, giving way to a state in which the re-distribution mechanisms of cyclical oil resources adopt excluding and populist ways. The process has deepened, and the delivery of resources and 'preferential attention' in exchange for political support finds a breeding ground in a population accustomed to this practice, a population which asks the state for 'favours' instead of recognising its own needs and goals as part of its rights as citizens.

A relatively surprising confirmation constitutes the main lynchpin of a future strategy: the significant legitimacy of the sector compared to the distrust of other institutional actors. Organisations receiving the highest degree of legitimacy are not the ones that held representation in the past, such as political parties and trade unions, but those perceived as 'not contaminated'. A plausible hypothesis, as mentioned above, is that this legitimacy rests on civil society's role as a shelter for citizen's political aspirations because of the rejection of traditional politics.

Looking into the future, the advantages offered by civil society's high legitimacy, together with the fact that social participation is more and more acknowledged as a right, are thwarted by an anti-political attitude and a weakness in the practice of values. Even so, difficulties may be overcome in a country where citizens show a relatively strong spirit of tolerance, which has been developing over time, and where the polarisation expressed in the most visible sectors is a feature of political leadership, but not a behaviour generalised in the rest of the population.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

PRESIDENT OF SINERGIA	Feliciano Reyna Ganteaume
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT	Illiana Muñoz
INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS	Ilvia Rojas
MANAGEMENT BOARD	Betty Ardila
CSI PROJECT - GENERAL COORDINATOR	Vanessa Cartaya Febres
RESEARCH ASSISTANT	Yuraima Becerra Rivas
THEMATIC STUDIES	Vanessa Cartaya Febres
	Yolanda D´Elia
	Feliciano Reyna Ganteaume
	SINERGIA-CSI team
SURVEYS	Delphos Institute
REGIONAL FOCUS GROUPS COORDINATION	Delia Lanz González
LOCAL PARTNERS - REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS	Centro de Investigaciones para la Educación, la Productividad y la Vida (CIEPV) Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Puerto Ordaz (Verónica Ramos)
	Proyecto RedDes, Universidad Centro Occidental Lisandro Alvarado, Barquisimeto (José Achúe)
	Asociación Civil Nuevo Amanecer, Maracaibo (Luis E. Pérez)
	UNIANDES, Mérida (Rosa Elena Acevedo y Juan Díaz)
	Grupo Social CESAP, Caracas (Heidy Pino)
ASSISTANCE WITH REGIONAL SURVEYS	Alejandro Pérez Moreno
	Yuraima Becerra Rivas
NATIONAL WORKSHOP COORDINATOR	Delia Lanz
	Ilvia Rojas
	Manuel Gómez
ASSISTANCE WITH NATIONAL WORKSHOP	Yuraima Becerra
	Lisset Do Rego
	Anna Gabriela Moros
	Jorge Olivares
	Cristyn Quiroz
	Winston Giménez
	Nhelsyr González

APPENDIX 2. MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Name	Organisation
Alberto Gruson	CISOR - Social Research Centre
Charo Méndez	SINERGIA Advisory Committee
Debora Van Berkel	INVESP - Venezuelan Institute for Social and Political Studies
Dennys Montoto	Responsabilidad Social Farmatodo C.A.
Flavio Carucci	Latin American Institute on Social Issues Research (Friedrich Ebert Foundation)
Heidy Pino	Cesap – (Centre for the Support of Popular Action)
Hisvet Fernández	Centro de Educación y Capacitación para la Vida, Observatorio de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres, Barquisimeto, Lara state (life training and educational centre, women human rights watch group)
Jesús Machado	Observatorio de participación y convivencia social Fundación Centro Gumilla (Gumilla Centre Foundation – social coexistence and participation watch group)
Lourdes Álvarez	Consultant
Lucio Segovia	Sucre Municipality, Miranda state
Magally Huggins	Observatorio de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres (women's human rights watch group)
Manuel Gómez	Acción Campesina
Manuela Bolívar	Fundación Futuro Presente
María Beatriz Medina	Banco del Libro
María Gabriela Ponce	Proyecto Pobreza, Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales. Andrés Bello Catholic university
María Pilar García Guadilla	Grupo Interdisciplinario de Investigación en Gestion Ambiental, Urbana y Sociopolitica (GAUS) Universidad Simón Bolívar (interdisciplinary research group in environmental, urban and socio-political management).
Mercedes De Freitas	Coalición ProAcceso
Nelson Freitez	Centro Gumilla. Barquisimeto; Cátedra Libre de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centrooccidental Lisandro Alvarado
Ricardo Sucre Heredia	Smart Thinkers, C.A. (consultant in public affairs)
Sonia De Paola	Asociación Venezolana de Ejecutivos (Venezuelan association executives)
William Requejo	Unión Vecinal para la Participación Ciudadana (neighbours association for citizens participation)
Yolanda D´Elia	Observatorio de garantías y derechos de participación y asociación (association and participation rights watch group)

APPENDIX 3. CSI INDICATOR MATRIX

| Sub-dimension	Indicator	Indicator name	SCORE
1. DIMENSION: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT			36.9
1.1		Extent of social engagement	24.4
	1.1.1	Social membership 1	23.4
	1.1.2	Social volunteering1	17.7
	1.1.3	Engagement with community 1	32.1
1.2		Depth of social engagement	37.8
	1.2.1	Social membership 2	16.7
	1.2.2	Social volunteering 2	17.5
	1.2.3	Engagement with community 2	79.1
1.3		Diversity of social engagement	58.4
	1.3.1	Diversity of social engagement	58.4
1.4		Extent of political engagement	16.6
	1.4.1	Political membership 1	13.6
	1.4.2	Political volunteering 1	10.0
	1.4.3	Individual activism 1	26.1
1.5		Depth of political engagement	24.8
	1.5.1	Political membership 2	23.5
	1.5.2	Political volunteering 2	21.0
	1.5.3	Individual activism 2	29.9
1.6		Diversity of political engagement	59.3
	1.6.1	Diversity of political engagement	59.3
2. DIMENSION: LEVEL OF ORGANISATION			56.6
2.1		Internal governance	84.7
	2.1.1	Management	84.7
2.2		Infrastructure	67.6
	2.2.1	Support organisations	67.6
2.3		Sectoral communication	84.0
	2.3.1	Peer-to-peer communication 1	86.5
	2.3.2	Peer-to-peer communication 2	81.5
2.4		Human Resources	22.9
	2.4.1	Sustainable Human Resources base	22.9
2.5		Financial and technological resources	67.4
	2.5.1	Sustainable financial base	46.8
	2.5.2	Technological resources	87.9
2.6		International linkage	13.3
	2.6.1	International linkage	13.30
3. DIMENSION: PRACTICE OF VALUES			37.8
3.1		Democratic decision-making governance	51.4
	3.1.1	Democratic decision-making	51.4
3.2		Labour regulations	24.8
	3.2.1	Equal opportunities	33.3
	3.2.2	Labour union membership	3.7
	3.2.3	Training on labour rights	28.7

	3.2.4	Public available policy for labour standards	33.3
3.3		Codes of conduct and transparency	38.0
	3.3.1	Publicly available codes of conduct	42.7
	3.3.2	Transparency	33.3
3.4		Environmental standards	29.0
	3.4.1	Environmental standards	29.0
3.5		Perception of values in civil society as a whole	45.8
	3.5.1	No violence perceived	7.7
	3.5.2	Internal democracy perceived	59.6
	3.5.3	Corruption levels perceived	22.0
	3.5.4	Intolerance perceived	56.7
	3.5.5	Perceived dominance of intolerant groups	66.2
	3.5.6	Perceived promotion of non-violence and peace	62.5
4. DIMENSION: PERCEPTION OF IMPACT			46.5
4.1		Responsiveness (internal perception)	42.4
	4.1.1	Impact on priority social concern 1	35.8
	4.1.2	Impact on priority social concern 2	49.0
4.2		Social impact (internal perception)	73.2
	4.2.1	Social impact in general	68.1
	4.2.2	Social impact of organisations	78.3
4.3		Policy impact (internal policies)	42.9
	4.3.1	Policy impact in general	36.0
	4.3.2	Policy activity of the organisation itself	61.9
	4.3.3	Policy impact of the organisation itself	30.8
4.4		Responsiveness (external perception)	51.2
	4.4.1	Impact on priority social concern 1	39.5
	4.4.2	Impact on priority social concern 2	62.8
4.5		Social impact (external perception)	67.9
	4.5.1	Social impact on selected topics	82.4
	4.5.2	Social impact in general	53.5
4.6		Policy impact (external perception)	27.5
	4.6.1	Policy impact issues 1-3	29.3
	4.6.2	Policy impact in general	25.6
4.7		Civil society impact on attitudes	20.7
	4.7.1	Trust difference among civil society members and non-members	2.8
	4.7.2	Difference in tolerance among civil society members and non-members	24.7
	4.7.3	Difference in public spiritedness among civil society members and non-members	0.0
	4.7.4	Trust in civil society	55.4
5. DIMENSION: EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT			54.5
5.1		Socio-economic context	61.7
	5.1.1	Basic capacities index	94.6
	5.1.2	Corruption	19.0
	5.1.3	Inequality	51.8
	5.1.4	Economic context	81.3

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5.2		Socio-political context	43.7
	5.2.1	Political rights and freedoms	47.5
	5.2.2	Rule of law and civil liberties	45.8
	5.2.3	Association and organisational rights	50.0
	5.2.4	Legal framework experience	42.4
	5.2.5	State efficiency	32.6
5.3		Socio-cultural context	58.1
	5.3.1	Trust	6.6
	5.3.2	Tolerance	79.6
	5.3.3	Public spiritedness	88.0

APPENDIX 4. THE RESEARCH AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

The CSI project involved three phases carried out from November 2008 to June 2010 (including a recess to coordinate resource mobilisation between November 2008 and February 2009).

FIGURE A-4.1. The Research and Consultation process
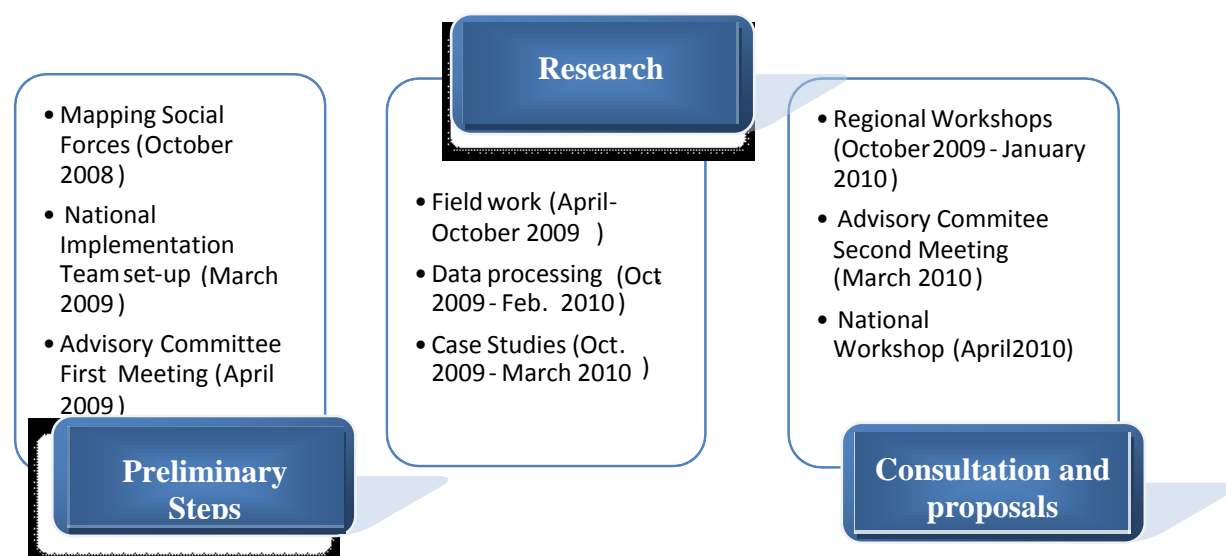
Preliminary phase

A Social Forces Analysis exercise was conducted during this phase (27 October 2008) which enabled the creation of a visual map of influential actors in Venezuela. The Advisory Committee was also established and held its first meeting on 1 April 2009. In this meeting, the AC discussed the methodological framework and reviewed the identification of the stakeholders to be included in the surveys, the definition of civil society and the proposed actors, and the most important concern issues.

Research phase

Three surveys were conducted to construct the quantity indicators of the Civil Society Diamond. Fieldwork and data preliminary processing was conducted by Delphos Institute.

The three surveys were processed with SPSS software to obtain the required indicators and other descriptive cross-references.

Population survey

This survey provided the information for the Civic Engagement dimension and the socio-cultural sub-dimension. It consisted of a face-to-face interview with a representative sample of 1,000 persons. It covered people over age 17 living in family households located in urban areas.

The sample framework drew on the cartographic and demographic data base of the XIII Population Census (INE, 2001) which was updated comprehensively. The sampling is of the superior semi probability type, which involves maintaining the concept of probability sampling in all the phases. A three-phase stratified sampling was applied, in which the selection layers consisted of the country's states. A systematic selection mechanism was applied within each layer so as to ensure that areas with different socio-economic levels were represented.

Survey to external actors

This survey was conducted by means of an electronic questionnaire to a group which is characterised as being external to civil society though it is involved in it from different perspectives. Thus, it is acquainted with its behaviour and dynamics. Of the people contacted, 71.7% answered the questionnaire.

TABLE A.4.1. External actors who answered the survey by institutional sector

Type	Surveyed	Proportion	Effective	Proportion
Academia	19	31.7	18	41.9
Cooperation/Donors	8	13.3	6	14.0
Businesses	10	16.7	11	25.6
Public opinion	13	21.7	2	4.7
Public powers	10	16.7	6	14.0
Total	60	100.0	43	100.0

The information they provided referred to their perception of civil society impact on society in general and the main strengths and weaknesses of civil society.

Survey of civil society organisations

A survey was conducted of a non-statistically representative or judgement sampling[15] of 113 CSOs, based on the following criteria: a) representation by types; b) regional distribution: pursuant to the limited resources, CSOs were incorporated from the Metropolitan area of Caracas, the states of Lara, Mérida and Zulia in the West, and Bolivar in the East; c) scope of action of organisations (national/regional, local); d) level of social and political impact, based on the Social Forces Map and the analysis of the national situation; e) diverse political positions within the polarisation spectrum.

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[15] The scarce and not very reliable available information concerning the organisations' universe prevented us from designing a representative sampling representative

The questionnaire designed for CSOs' directors had two purposes: a) to obtain basic information regarding civil society's profile; b) to obtain information about the internal governance, practice of values, and self-perception of impact on social issues.

In order to identify the CSOs to be included in the sample a directory with 1,824 CSOs located in the selected states was used, which includes all the data of the organisations and their location. To make up for any deficit, this base was partially and selectively[16] supplemented with records from research centres, CSOs' networks and websites.[17] CSOs were selected at random among those falling under the type required until the quota set for each state was reached. The procedure involved two stages:

First, surveys administered by Delphos Institute, April through August 2009. After verifying 524 records, and once Delphos was able to contact 256 of them, 79 surveys were conducted (68.7% of the set goal of 115 surveys).

In the second stage, the SINERGIA team itself conducted surveys of 36 of the CSOs pending. Emphasis was placed on contacting through face to face interviews the types of CSOs that could not be reached in the first stage (the less formally organised).

Due to changes in location or closures there was a loss of 40% in the CSOs initially included in the sample (560). The interview was actually conducted in one out of three of the organisations contacted.

The interviews covered an extensive range of CSOs, though we cannot state that the proportions match reality. Half of them have been recently created. The sample shows a balance in the organisations' scope of action: half of them act at the sub-national level, while one out of four work at the national level. Seventy-one organisations were interviewed in the Capital District and 41 in the cities of Mérida, Maracaibo, Ciudad Guayana and Barquisimeto.

TABLE A.4.2: CSOs interviewed segregated by type

Type	No.	%
Civic, political, human rights organisations	42	37.2
Support organisations	41	36.3
Basic Territorial Organisations	12	10.6
Organisations with similar interests or missions	12	10.6
Organisations' networks/federations	6	5.3
Total	113	100.0

Secondary information

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[16] That is to say, looking for specific types and locations to cover the quotas set as a goal.

[17] *Alianza Social.* Alianza Social Directory, Fifth edition. VENAMCHAM. [online] http://www.venamcham.org/ alianza/directorio 5ta edicion.pdf ; *Fundación Centro Gumilla* (2009): "*Directorio de la Red de Acción Social de la Iglesia*" [online]; *Red Venezolana de Organizaciones de Desarrollo Social – REDSOC (2009): "Directorio de ODS*" [online] http://www.redsoc.org.ve/seccion.asp?pid=68&sid=2698; *Venezuela sin Limites A.C.* (2009): *Directorio de Organizaciones Afiliadas* [online] http://www.venezuelasinlimites.org/afiliados/directorio.php, consulted April 2009.

For the construction of some indicators, as well as for supplementing the information, the study drew on international data. A broad bibliographic check was further performed on issues dealt with by the CSI in Venezuela.

Case studies

A thematic study entails studying in depth an issue deemed important or insufficiently explained by quantitative information. Through secondary sources and key informants, knowledge and viewpoints on the issue are condensed. For selecting the topics: a) an initial list was made, and then verified by the Advisory Committee; b) secondary sources were reviewed; c) consultations were conducted with members of other CSOs, and the coordinators of SINERGIA's projects. These case studies are summarised in Appendix 5.

Dialogue and consultations

The validation of findings, the identification of strengths and weaknesses of civil society and the formulation of action guidelines was performed through three types of instances: consultations with the Advisory Committee, regional consultations and national workshop.

Regional focus groups

These workshops were made possible thanks to the support of the World Bank Small Grant Programme in alliance with Chacao Municipality. The workshops were held in the cities of Barquisimeto, Maracaibo, Mérida and Puerto Ordaz, selected due to the contrasting features of their civil societies. Contact was made in each of them with a locally representative organisation co-sponsoring the initiative.

The aim was to gather about 15 representatives of social organisations according to the set type and people from other sectors interested in the thematic. Fifty-nine people joined in the discussions. Participants especially appreciated the opportunity to create plural meeting spaces.

The workshops had two purposes: i) to connect internal and external civil society actors to promote mutual learning and exploit action inter-relations at the local level, and ii) to draw up coordinated strategic agendas, oriented towards strengthening the social fabric in the regions.

TABLE A.4.3: Regional consultations

City/state	Sponsoring organisation	Date
Barquisimeto, Lara state	Proyecto RedDes, Universidad Centro Occidental Lisandro Alvarado	22-10-2009
Maracaibo, Zulia state	Asociación Civil Nuevo Amanecer, Grupo Social CESAP	29-10-2009
Puerto Ordaz, Bolívar state	Centro de Investigaciones para la Educación, la Productividad y la Vida (CIEPV), Universidad Católica Andrés Bello	18-11-2009
Mérida, Mérida state	Asociación Civil UNIANDES, Grupo Social CESAP	26-01-2010

The common features identified included instability, as shown by many organisations' closure or change of profile, poor participation, and organisational and resources weaknesses, as well as an internal governance not as democratic as expressed in theory. An unfavourable

environment was also mentioned as a consequence of partisan practices and limitations imposed from the government. All the regions highlighted as an asset the engagement and leadership quality of organisations.

Idiosyncratic features included contrasts between conflicts in the Guayana region and greater public spiritedness in the Lara region. In Guayana, the main actor is the union movement and there are divisions according to the visions and strategies of communal councils and labour organisations. In Lara, historically known for its dense social fabric, voluntary work and coordinated demonstrations contribute to a greater political conscience. Zulia revealed negative actions of political parties, which foster division and confrontation. This region also housed the two most successful cooperation experiences between government and communal councils. Mérida was distinguished by a core of organisations with collective action capacity which are recognised by society, but which act in an environment where civic engagement and citizenship training on participation are weak.

National workshop

The workshop, titled "A National Dialogue on the role of civil society as change agent" was held on 15 April 2010 at the Auditorium of Grupo Social CESAP, an institute which belongs to SINERGIA network. With 94 participants, which included representatives of NGOs, community organisations, academia, business associations, labour unions, international bodies, donors, political parties and independent professionals, seven states were represented (Lara, Zulia, Bolívar, Sucre, Monagas, Portuguesa and Mérida).

The workshop was divided into two main modules: the first, for informational purposes, involved the presentation of the study findings. The second module dealt with establishing hierarchical actions, based on the weaknesses and strengths analysed in each CSI dimension. Five discussion tables were organised, one for each CSI dimension. The results of this exchange were then presented in a plenary session.

APPENDIX 5. SUMMARY CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Anti Politics: Framework to Understand Restrictions and Challenges of Civil Society in Venezuela[18]

In the course of the research conducted, one of the most significant obstacles identified to achieving society's democratisation, common to all the CSI's dimensions, involved attitudes and practices denigrating politics as a legitimate activity within the sphere of civil society. Though this phenomenon is present worldwide, its effects may impact public life and citizens to a greater or lower degree depending on institutional strengths. Therefore, it was decided to study the matter in depth in order to determine which are the challenges faced by civil society in trying to transform this environment.

The methodology used to answer these questions included: (a) review of reports about the situation of democracy and human rights; (b) analysis of political and legal conducts of the state and other political actors based on media follow-up.

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[18] The full case studies and other outputs of the CSI project will be available at www.sinergia.org. and www.civicus.org

The review of participation expressions showed that politics is constantly denigrated and its imperfections are used to reject it and to promote its abandonment. Hostility towards politics happens because it is associated with dishonesty, corruption and greed. These characteristics which distinguish the way in which people in power use politics go deep in society, and their internalisation make citizens adopt conduct that allows them to break the 'rules of the game' so as to act through dogmas, imposition, arbitrariness and violence.

An analysis of this prevalence and its consequences allows us to propose as one of the challenges of civil society today, the need to confront the harmful use of anti-political behaviour which erodes institutionalism, and to adopt behaviours that rehabilitate politics in its civic sense, as a basic rule of public life.

Case Study 2: Autonomy of New Social Organisations vs. Social Participation Control

Internal governance autonomy and the freedom to participate in governmental programmes is relevant in the Venezuelan case due to the promotion by the government of a vast sector of community organisations, the structure and functioning of which are governed by regulations which establish how to get organised and with what ends.

Arguments from both ends of the polarisation spectrum include the following: (a) these are genuine expressions of popular power which have extended the right to participate to people who were excluded and granted a leading role to communities in decisions affecting them; (b) spokespersons of communal councils are 'local public officers' who execute resources according to the guidelines derived from the central power, which indicate how, when and where to participate. The study aimed to stock of the role played by these organisations.

The methodology comprised the following: (a) press and governmental web pages review; (b) analysis of the legal framework; (c) review of surveys and field researches on participation mechanisms and models; (d) a workshop 'Community Dialogue: Participatory Democracy 10 Years Later', with the participation of 69 CSOs representatives, co-sponsored by SINERGIA, the Neighbours Association for Citizen Participation and the Latin American Institute of Social Issues Research; (e) discussion groups with the participation of two specialists in community power, spokespersons of Communal Councils, a representative of local government and CSOs representatives.

The study assessed performance from three perspectives: (1) In theory - laws, regulations and planning - the aim is to put into practice a political model leading to the Communal State, under a 'socialist' society, restricting the right to participate to those who share this ideology, but excluding at least half of the population from access to public resources distributed through this way; (2) In practice, the implementation of this model has tended to control and interfere in popular power expressions, using them as workforce and election resources; (3) From the perspective of the population involved, conclusions are mixed. Communal Councils have contributed to the improvement of life conditions by overcoming inefficiencies of the public administration, as well as to the development of a civic culture by the acknowledgment of rights. But the destructive effects on social networks derived from the consolidation of clientelistic practices and from the distrust of neighbours of different political leanings could not be overcome. The study looked at groups that organised in the hope of finding a solution to the needs of infrastructure and services: some of them achieved the goal, while yielding to political manipulation, or convinced that gratitude is owed to the government. ('one good turn deserves another'); others just got dissolved or disappeared.

However, a third group has started a path towards a higher quality of participation. Aware of the power derived from its growing social legitimacy, it has moved from physical works, such as construction of infrastructure to more influential tasks related to policy decision making and defending social rights.

Case Study 3: Students' Movement as a Promoter of Democratic Values and Changes in Venezuelan Society

The evaluation of the status of civil society concluded that the weakest dimension is the Practice of Values. Groups which promote violence and intolerance were identified, as well as the lack of transparency, and very limited civil society impact on citizen attitudes and practices. This indicates a need to identifying way to counter these trends and the actors who may play a material role in this.

The objective was to explore the characteristics of the current students' movement, its relationships with the state and with other actors, and the ways of acting and speaking, in order to determine whether there exists a common substratum in terms of political and values culture. The research was based on documented sources and interviews with members of the students' movement.

The study identifies a set of features without any prior background in Latin America or in the previous eruptions of students in the country's political life. Mires (2009:3) points out that: "The historical rupture, or if preferred, the main difference with the student movements of the past, resides in the forms of struggles, mainly pacific, assumed by Venezuelan students (…). In the internal sphere, different from other periods, this time students act with the support of university authorities, other academic associations and citizens in general."

Their message, oriented towards the rehabilitation of the public role as a legitimate activity of civil society, encapsulated in slogans such as 'we, the students don't oppose, we propose', and the call to 'a new way of making politics' which rejects the values of older generations, has an influence in the moderation of anti-political attitudes in society. Therefore, the students' movement enjoys a great legitimacy and has been able to add other social actors to their cause, such as political parties, trade unions and other forms of CSO, to strengthen their struggle and improve their actions in defence of interests that reflect the aspirations of a large part of the population.

Case Study 4: Impact of Organised Civil Society on the Public Sphere: the Case of Education

The diagnosis of the impact of civil society is worrying: even when a moderate impact on equity is observed, the impact on public policies is very low. In a context of open conflict between the state and a substantial part of CSOs, achieving impact on public policies constitutes a challenge that very few groups have been able to overcome. The case of the Law on Education and other aspects of educational policy appeared as an area of special activity. In order to learn lessons to incorporate in a strengthening plan, we acquired an in-depth knowledge of the instigators of these actions and the factors that contributed to their impact.

First of all, a group of relevant actors was identified. After that, a bibliographic check was performed, aiming at identifying studies on the organisations and the most significant events, and documents containing the opinion of authors or different proposals, it was verified that

the events which marked the educational agenda during the last decade have been scarcely documented. Consequently, the main information source of this study is the opinion of the relevant actors, gathered in two brainstorming meetings carried out on 13 and 21 May 2010. With them, the map of actors and the chronology was built, the main documents and proposals were found and the most noticeable successes and failures were identified, as were the factors determining them.

During the most recent decades, CSOs which are active in educational politics are counted in tens and distinguished by the strong presence of networks and federations. This organisation model has favoured their greater legitimacy and representation power, enabling their capacity to mount demonstrations and lobby. This experience teaches the importance of the capacity for coordinated action among several organisations, such as educational networks of a religious origin (Fe and Alegría, and the Venezuelan Catholic Education Association), the students' movement, the principals' association of autonomous universities, parents' associations and federations and trade unions, which had the support, leadership and experience of organisations such as the Education Assembly (an educational policy think tank formed by former public officers) as well as academic groups. In the organisations' opinion, the crucial factors to explain successes are the capacity to elaborate proposals, the ability to act in a balanced way dodging polarisation, and the identification of consensus among different interests, which had an impact on the success of lobbying actions. Social legitimacy and representation power in a subject specially sensitive to public opinion and families since it affects values, largely explain such impact.

Case Study 5: CSO Performance in a Context of Restriction of Association and Participation Rights

The guarantee and exercise of association and participation rights were considerably extended in the Bolivarian Constitution (1999) and in many of the related laws. However, in practice, these rights have been limited, particularly since 2006, when the construction of a new model of state and society called 'socialism of the 21st Century' was proposed. The CSI survey of CSOs reveals that 41% consider that they have suffered 'illegitimate restrictions by the local or the federal government'. In a diagnosis of civil society's development and perspective, it is important to elucidate the nature of these restrictions, in order to be able to plan actions which allow a more effective action by CSOs in a restrictive context.

The study's sources of information were the federal press, keeping a balance in editorial trends, institutional websites in favour of and against the process, and websites of the organisations involved. The analysis was based on the information gathered by SINERGIA's Guarantees and Rights to Freedom of Association and Participation Watch Group, supplemented by new information so as to expand the study of some rights and to address inputs provided by civil society and other aspects of interest for this study not covered by other sources.

The information was systematised with the aim of concluding on the following aspects: (a) the way in which rights (their constitutional expression and their expression in further laws and regulations) were regulated; (b) the modalities adopted for compliance or infringement by different instances of the state and the identification of patterns and trends; (c) the main actors of civil society involved and their response strategies.

Regarding involvement patterns, in efforts to provide restrictions with a legal nature, the instrument *par excellence* has been the legislative power granted by the National Assembly to the President. In the voices of representatives of public powers or in the state mass media, organisations are disqualified and threatened, aiming at minimising their impact by promoting self-censorship. The criminalisation of protests shows a triangle formed by the Attorney General, the Courts and security forces to judicially intimidate demonstrators.

Concerning the collective entities affected, the type and degree of affect depend on CSOs' position on the polarisation spectrum, on their desire for autonomy and on their centrality for the new model. The most attacked CSOs are struggling with self-censorship and the implementation of strategies such as the creation of watch groups, the filing of reports before the national public powers and even to international bodies, the implementation of traditional and new struggle campaigns and tactics in the streets, and the intensive use of social networks. In view of new rights violations, new organisations have emerged: movements for rights defence, the revitalisation of students' movements and the creation of new labour unions and political movements that separated from the pro-government bloc. The consolidation of networks which exchange information and share strategies has been another notable result of defensive strategies.

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