EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From November 2004 through March 2006 the Centro Hondureño de Promoción para el Desarrollo Comunitario (CEHPRODEC) carried out strenuous research work in their attempt to diagnose the status of civil society. Many hours were devoted to this research effort, which included the gathering of existing bibliography, carrying out focus group consultations, interviews, community surveys and ice-breaking workshops seeking input and media reviews. We did this to become familiar with Honduras’ civil society, its structure, values and impact, as well as to understand the scenario within which it exists and operates.

The figure used to measure the status of civil society is a diamond. The diamond reveals that Honduras’ civil society is weak, and exists and operates in a scarcely adequate scenario. In spite of this, civil society practices and promotes positive values in a moderate fashion; its activities are strong and varied, but have only limited to moderate impact.

The Civil Society Index process made us explore the concept and define the peculiarities of Honduras’ civil society and, consequently, identify its most evident weaknesses and strengths. It also allowed us to identify the greatest challenges that lay ahead, in order to attain in the midterm a strengthened civil society.

The most outstanding findings are discussed under each of the dimensions studied, based on the analysis of 74 indicators. Such findings are as follows:
**Structure.** The civil society structure is weak and the main evidence of such weakness can be found in the limited depth of citizen engagement in organisations, and in the exclusion that some people experience, especially when considering leading roles in CSOs; in the lack of a meaningful functional structure to support first level CSOs and in the lack of adequate resources necessary to meet their goals.

Despite the above, not everything is negative in the civil society structure, in the relationships among actors (CSOs), in the diversity of actors or in the breadth of citizen participation.

**Environment.** Honduras` civil society exists and operates in a scenario that is barely adequate. The most visible signs of this adverse environment are its relationships with the private sector, the political and economic context and basic liberties. Considering these limitations, there are some positive factors present in this scenario, which have made the environment assessment less negative. It is noteworthy for instance that the working relationship with the past three administrations in charge has seen significant improvement with regards to the legal environment and socio-cultural context, among others.

**Values.** The interpretation of scores suggests that the best quality of Honduras` civil society resides in the practice and promotion of its values. Tolerance, non-violence and environmental sustainability are values that the civil society practices and promotes beyond averages found by this study. There is no doubt that the value most practiced and promoted by CSOs is the fight against poverty. Some other values assessed continue being a challenge for civil society. These are: gender equity, internal democracy and above all, transparency.

**Impact.** According to the assessment made by this study, CSOs impact is limited to moderate. The lack of significant impact is fundamentally due to CSOs little or no success in making the government and the private sector accountable, and also due to their poor influence on national politics. This scenario is somewhat balanced by the relative success that civil society has had in its actions regarding citizen empowerment, its direct response to social needs and in actions related to the well-being of the community.

This study was guided by research-action criteria. The expectations of those actors involved in it were based on the profile of civil society at large and on its diversity, as well as on the actors ability to study and share these findings, seeking paths to overcome their weaknesses and to sustain the strengths identified.

In order to have a joint and comprehensive vision of the country, it is the responsibility of the private sector and the government itself to detect in this or any other study paths to achieve greater involvement with civil society.

Going beyond their own agendas, international donors, whether permanent or temporary, may be able to support the efforts to articulate the civil society sector from within, but they may also use their own resources and experience for better participation by the three sectors to help Honduras achieve sustained and equitable development.