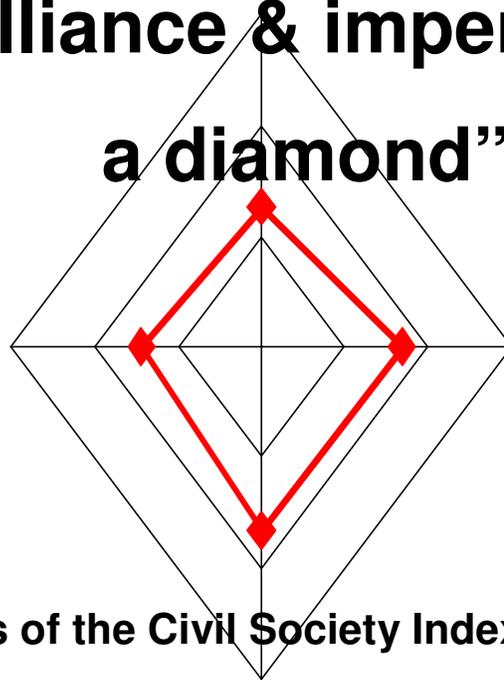




“The brilliance & imperfections of a diamond”



Results of the Civil Society Index in Uruguay

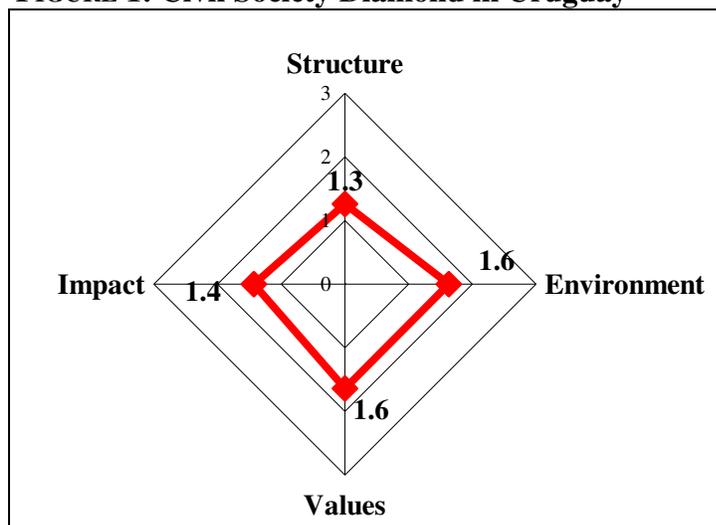
**ICD - Instituto de Comunicación y Desarrollo
(Institute for Communication and Development)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between mid-2003 and the end of 2005, the Civil Society Index (CSI) project was implemented in Uruguay, and information was gathered from a wide range of civil society representatives, citizens, experts, scholars, government representatives, the press and international agencies, in order to assess the state of civil society in Uruguay.

FIGURE 1: Civil Society Diamond in Uruguay



The National Index Team (NIT) was in charge of gathering the information for the 74 indicators that make up the CSI. This information was submitted to the National Advisory Group (NAG), which was tasked with evaluating the state of civil society in Uruguay. The result of this assessment is graphically summarised in the Civil Society Diamond for Uruguay (see figure 1).

The diamond depicts a relatively balanced civil society sector that exists in a slightly enabling environment and moderately promotes and practices positive values. However, it has a slightly weak structure and limited impact on society at large. The assessment revealed the main strengths and weaknesses of civil society in Uruguay and highlighted some challenges for the future development of the sector.

Though the study has a broad scope, it was only able to capture a segment of the complex and diverse realities of Uruguayan civil society. In general, civil society in Uruguay is characterised by the diversity and heterogeneity of CSO types and the issues they confront though the diversity of CSO membership continues to lag.

Civil society's profile, activities, relations and its impact have substantially changed over the past years, along with its external context. While new actors have joined civil society, existing organisations explored other avenues to express their interests and explore their potential. In Uruguay, civil society embraces long-standing movements, such as trade unions, the peasants, professional organisations, and business organisations as well as many organisations created under the influence of the churches, specially the Roman Catholic Church. However, other actors have also joined civil society, such as thousands of citizens organised to improve their quality of life and defend their rights, or who seek responses to a social emergency at times of profound crisis.

In a very diverse and complex context, civil society in Uruguay and worldwide faces the challenge, among others, of finding mechanisms and tools to systematise its rich experience and to reflect on the challenges it faces in order to then design adequate policies and strategies. Though the role of civil society is increasingly important, information and knowledge of their features and state are still relatively limited in several countries of the region. The Civil Society Index (CSI) can become a valuable tool for increasing the strength and sustainability of civil society since it is built upon the active participation of a variety of actors in civil society, since it considers civil society to be an arena for debate, a scenario of large pluralism, rather than a closed space.

The following is a summary of the main findings of the CSI implementation in Uruguay.

In regard to its **structure**, civil society shows many weaknesses. The structure dimension attained the lowest score (1.3) of all four dimensions. Its weaknesses primarily lie in the narrow scope and limited depth of citizen participation. This is signified by very low participation of the population in collective community action and low levels of membership in organisations, which both are below 30%. The highest percentage of membership in CSOs is in social and sports clubs, followed by trade unions and religious organisations. This data suggests that membership in CSOs is not widespread within society and is mostly concentrated in traditional institutions. Although a large number of individuals make charitable donations (more than 60%), the amount of donations seems very low in relation to personal income. In parallel, Uruguayan civil society has certain weaknesses in regard to the representation of some significant social groups (especially young people) and to its geographical concentration, which is mainly urban. Finally, according to the collected data, it can be said that some difficulties exist in the extent of communication and information exchange among Uruguayan CSOs, though examples of cooperation to develop joint activities exist. The strengths of this dimension relate to the fact that organisations claim to have adequate economic, human, technological and infrastructural resources to accomplish their goals.

The external **environment** in which civil society operates is slightly enabling for civil society's activities (1.6). First, it can be said that the political context, basic rights and freedoms and the socio-cultural context are not detrimental to the functioning of civil society and that the legal environment is conducive to CSOs. However, the negative consequences of the considerable social crisis that took place in Uruguay between 2000 and 2002, which strongly affected society as a whole and consequently CSOs, are still being felt. In addition, private sector – civil society relations indicate some weaknesses. Although some progress has been made in the development of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), there still remains a degree of mistrust between the corporate and civil sectors.

Similar to the environment, the **values** practised and promoted by civil society show an average development (1.6). According to the data collected, democratic values, non-violence and poverty eradication have a strong presence in civil society. These are followed in importance by transparency, tolerance and gender equity. Nonetheless, though these values are present and practiced by civil society, value-promoting actions by civil society are scarce and have poor public visibility. This might suggest that, on the whole, civil society perceives itself, or is perceived by other sectors, as strong with regards to its internal values, even though it plays a

weak role in promoting these values in society at large. Transparency and accountability are a key concern for stakeholders. Though transparency is a civil society value and cases of corruption in civil society are not particularly common, many organisations do not publicly report their financial statements. Only a minority of CSOs are publicly accountable and only to their own members. CSOs are also weak in promoting transparency within society at large, partially due to the low public visibility of CSO action. The major weakness of this dimension is the low public visibility together with the relatively low influence of civil society in promoting environmental sustainability.

The assessment of civil society's **impact** received the second-lowest score (1.4), which reflects civil society's limited impact on society and politics. The greatest weakness in this dimension relates to civil society's limited activities aimed at holding the state and particularly private corporations accountable. The perceived level of civil society's activity to monitor business actions and the perceived success of these activities is very low, with almost no examples of such activities being detected. Another weakness is civil society's lack of influence on public policies. Nevertheless, civil society is regarded as being very responsive to the needs of society. Research outcomes show that civil society has good to very good levels of impact on meeting the needs of society through service delivery and in lobbying the state to provide services. Additionally, more than 70% of respondents to a population survey believe that CSOs deliver better services to poor people than the state.

The CSI's comprehensive assessment of the state of civil society provides some recommendations of strategies to address civil society's weaknesses and enhance the strengths. In the coming years, based on the outcomes of this study, civil society should engage with a number of crucial issues, such as: promoting and fostering increased participation in CSOs; seeking mechanisms and tools for facilitating communication and cooperation among CSOs; strengthening networks and umbrella bodies; seeking higher public visibility of CSO activities; implementing self-assessments and certification mechanisms for the quality of their services; quality control practices; promoting a culture of transparency and accountability and strengthening the links with the state and corporate sector, in the joint pursuit of solutions to the problems of the country.

It is hoped that this study, which was based on a participatory and consultative approach, will lay the foundations for civil society at large, and other stakeholders, to achieve their goal of building a strong and sustainable society over the years to come.