

CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX FOR NICARAGUA

Restrictions and the politicisation of civic space: challenges for civil society in Nicaragua

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**RNDDL: Red Nicaraguense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local
(Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development)
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation**

FOREWORD

An autonomous civil society is a pillar of democracy.

Civil society is a setting of vast pluralism and complex diversity. It is a dynamic arena that is being continually constructed. Individuals, associations and organisations converge in this arena and link their various common interests and alliances with other sectors of society. Evaluating or measuring the state of affairs of civil society is a highly difficult task, raising complex questions which rarely have simple or limited answers: what is the best way to know truly the value of civil society in a given country? How can we accurately evaluate the contributions that citizens and their organisations make towards development and the economy?

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, believes there are five important aspects to observing, evaluating and properly understanding civil society in a given country. Thus, it is important not only to understand the mechanisms for and strengths of civic engagement, but also the solidarity between people and the density of organisations, coalitions and networks in which they participate. It is also significant to evaluate the extent to which civil society practises the values it promotes, as well as assessing the broad impacts and results produced by civil society organisations (CSOs). Finally, it is impossible to understand the state of civil society without grasping the nature of the external environment in which it operates.

In a number of specific national contexts, CIVICUS works with national partners to publish the Civil Society Index (CSI), a knowledge creation tool to understand civil society in depth and to be able to inform policies to promote and foster its growth.

The world of CSOs in Latin America is diverse, varied and complex. Thousands of individuals organise themselves everyday in neighbourhoods and in local, municipal, departmental, national and regional spheres to address specific concerns through movements based on solidarity. Thousands organise every day to raise the quality of life, and increase their opportunities. Generally, they ask little from state institutions, and yet carry out important and highly valuable work in the economies in which they operate. Dozens of organisations make continual efforts to research and educate, contributing to create intellectual heritage, produce knowledge in various fields and develop proposals to strengthen democracy.

CSOs affect all areas of life. Indeed, a strong, healthy democracy would be inconceivable without a strong and healthy civil society. Their technical capabilities, power of convocation, broad membership in numerous causes and ability to give a voice to excluded sectors are undeniable sources of legitimacy for CSOs. This legitimacy is both delicate and fragile, and organisations must work hard to consolidate it, and be ready to defend it.

Today, CSOs are aware not only that they must they continue to carry out their important work efficiently, but also that they must demonstrate and communicate their achievements and the fruits of their labour. An additional factor affecting the legitimacy of civil society is that of transparency. CSOs in the region today find themselves on a path towards fortifying their practices of accountability and transparency, and developing self-regulatory mechanisms based on consensus and a respect for ethical principles. A strong and autonomous civil society, working together with the state and the market in a complementary yet vigilantly critical manner, is ultimately central to enriching the democratic process.

Overall, the picture provided by this Civil Society Index report suggests that civil society in Nicaragua shares many features and characteristics seen across Latin America. Nicaragua has a robust history of both participation and moments of association. Many organisations throughout Nicaragua are undoubtedly everyday channels for constructive citizen participation. The implementation of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index, the results of which are included in this report, makes it possible to provide a current snapshot of the potential and needs of Nicaraguan civil society at a critical moment in time.

La Red Nicaraguense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local (RNDDL - Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development) and its partners deserve our congratulations and hopes for success for their rigorous and comprehensive work in implementing the CIVICUS CSI. I trust it will lead to a great leap towards a more systematic observation of the value and the capacities of civil society, which in turn should fortify a civil society strengthening agenda and concomitant action planning, owned and implemented by all sectors.

Anabel Cruz

Director of the Institute for Communication and Development (ICD), Uruguay
Chair of the Board, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (2004 – 2010)

PREFACE

“The citizenry and its participation are built on the institutional structures that enable them. It is a two person game between the governing and the governed, between the state and society. Both are public and private spheres simultaneously. The autonomy of both is a required condition for harmonious relations between the State and society” (RNDDL, 2007: 4).

La Red Nicaraguense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local (RNDDL - Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development) is pleased to present the results of the Civil Society Index for Nicaragua, implemented by RNDDL, with the assistance of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS).

RNDDL is a sphere of Nicaraguan civil society built for horizontal communication and exchange, and whose identity is constructed in a continual process of interaction, based on the principles and values agreed on by its members.

Currently, RNDDL consists of 52 members. Of these, there are 33 CSOs, three territorial networks, one national youth movement, one indigenous affairs coordinator and fourteen individual members. It is active in 130 municipalities in the Pacific, Central and Caribbean Coast regions of Nicaragua.

Since its foundation in 1993, the organisations and individual members of RNDDL have made efforts towards fortifying the spheres of participation for an informed and pluralist citizenry, promoting local and sustainable human development and state decentralisation, seeking to improve living the conditions for Nicaraguans, and strengthening democracy and local development at the national level.

This CSI study has been implemented in around 40 countries in an attempt to evaluate civil society and promote activities to advance its development. In the Nicaraguan framework, it will help promote public knowledge of the characteristics and impact civil society has achieved, and in turn should therefore strengthen its linkages, supporting human development and the democratic process in the country.

Here at the RNDDL, we hope that this report contributes to an inclusive and frank dialogue on Nicaraguan civil society, in which all people can contribute to a process of fortifying and increasing our collective support as citizens for development in the country.

Enrique Ramírez Asencio
Coordinator, RNDDL

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALN	Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance
ANDEN	Nicaraguan Association of Educators
BICU	Bluefields Indian Caribbean University
CAFTA	Central American Free Trade Agreement
CC	Civil Coordinator of Nicaragua
CDD	Departmental Development Committee
CDM	Municipal Development Committee
CIVICUS	CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CONADES	National Sustainable Development Council
CONAPRO	Confederation of Professional Associations
CONIMIPYME	Commission for Micro, Small and Medium Companies
CONPES	National Council for Economic and Social Planning
COSEP	Superior Council of Private Enterprise
CSI	Civil Society Index
CSO	Civil society organisation
DGI	National Tax Administration
DRCA	Department of Registry and Control for Associations at the Ministry of Governance
EAP	Economically Active Population
EMNV	Quality of Life Measurement Survey
FEMUPROCAN	Federation of Rural Women Producers
FENACOOOP	National Federation of Agriculture-Livestock Cooperatives
FSLN	Sandinista National Liberation Front
INEC	Nicaraguan Institute of Statistics and Census (now INIDE)
INIDE	Institute for Development Information (formerly INEC)
INFOCOOP	Institute for Cooperative Promotion
INSS	Nicaraguan Institute for Social Security
MAGFOR	Agriculture-Livestock and Forestry Ministry
MECD	Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports
MIFAMILIA	Ministry of the Family
MINGOB	Ministry of Governance
MINSA	Ministry of Health
MITRAB	Ministry of Labour
MRS	Sandinista Renewal Movement
PLC	Liberal Constitutionalist Party
PN	National Party
PNDH	National Human Development Plan
RMCV	Network of Women Against Violence
RNDDL	Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development
SILAIS	Integral Health Service System
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNAG	National Union of Agriculturalists and Ranchers
URACCAN	University of Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean
UPANIC	Union of Agriculture-Livestock Producers of Nicaragua

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CSI for Nicaragua was implemented by La Red Nicaraguense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local (RNDDL - Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development), along with CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS) in 2009 and 2010. The objective was to promote public knowledge of the characteristics and impact Nicaraguan civil society has been able to achieve to strengthen its linkages and support for human development and the democratic process in Nicaragua.

The CSI study has increased knowledge of civil society in terms of its different aspects, including diversity, forms of organisation, ethical values and perceptions of impact. Based on a scientific methodology that has been validated internationally and that permits comparisons with other countries, 141 CSOs of various types and from different regions participated in the study, as did 14 national networks and 31 experts and leaders. This enriched the research immeasurably and provided a firm basis for the findings.

The study also enabled an action agenda to be constructed in a participatory manner, aimed at strengthening civil society in the five areas of study: civic engagement, level of organisation, practice of values, perception of impact and CSO relations with other sectors, particularly the state and the market. Limiting factors found during CSI implementation include: a climate of political polarisation and a governability crisis due to 2008 electoral fraud, the rupture of constitutional order by the government in an attempt to remain in power, and restrictions against CSOs and the media not aligned with the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FLSN – Sandinista National Liberation Front). These factors discouraged some CSOs from participating (CINCO, Perspectivas 2009-2010).

The key finding of the CSI study in Nicaragua relates to the external environment dimension, which affects all over areas addressed by this report. Although this dimension of the CSI scored a moderate 52.7%, this was the lowest score of all five dimensions in the Nicaraguan CSI. Furthermore, the situation continued to shift rapidly during the process of this research study, suggesting that the quantitative data may not by itself paint the full picture. Over the last few decades, many CSOs have promoted human rights and citizen participation in public administration, in particular for vulnerable groups such as women, children and indigenous peoples. After arduous campaigns, a series of laws were passed favouring political democratisation, such as the law of citizen participation and the public information access law, in an effort to strengthen spheres of dialogue and negotiation with the state. Meanwhile, and contradicting this democratisation process, the major political parties (FSLN and PLC) made a pact to dole out state powers and set electoral rules at their convenience. The disregard of the rule of law and the application of rigged laws has been a historical trend. The current government has also participated in these practices, which include electoral fraud in 46 municipalities in Nicaragua and a ruling to permit presidential re-elections.

Nicaragua's national context is undoubtedly unfavourable for civil society to flourish, given its high levels of poverty, inequality, corruption, and economic stagnation resulting from the current crisis in global capitalism. Politically, the state is seen to have little capacity to carry out basic functions. Laws are considered restrictive due to difficulties in obtaining legal status, and discriminatory fiscal control methods are used according to party affiliation of CSOs. One third of CSOs surveyed said they had been the victims of aggression by the local or national government over the last 10 years, including abuse of power, restrictions on strikes and

mobilisations, aggression and deprivation of liberty, injury and libel, the closure of legal spheres of participation and violations of human and civil rights. The study, covering the period of 2008 to 2010, captures how the situation has worsened since the arrival of a new administration in 2007 that has implemented a system to exclude social organisations and that has limited rights of association, expression and cooperation of non-affiliated CSOs.

Culturally, a low level of interpersonal trust is detected that makes communication and association of people in CSOs difficult to satisfy common interests. A low level of tolerance is also seen towards other ideas, beliefs and lifestyles. The rejection of people with HIV/AIDS, homosexuals, immigrants, ethnic groups and people of different political parties is worrisome.

With regard to the 'civic spirit' of the population, the CSI study revealed a moderate level of ethical values of honesty, transparency and the fulfilment of citizen duties. In particular, citizens clearly reject illegitimate claiming of state benefits and bribes of public functionaries.

The unfavourable context for the functioning and development of civil society has made fulfilling its social and political roles difficult, including the association of citizens to satisfy their diverse interests, promote their rights and participate in public administration. Nevertheless, CSOs have taken these problems as challenges to face through various programmes focused on overcoming poverty, democratising the political system and promoting human rights.

One of the strengths of Nicaraguan CSOs in comparison to other countries that have implemented CSI in Latin America is the practice and promotion of ethical values. The study highlights that values tend to be well practised within civil society. Indeed, the Practice of Values dimension scored the highest (61.5%) of all five CSI dimensions in the Nicaraguan CSI. Civil society in Nicaragua is noted for gender equality, human rights, labour regulations, democratic governance and transparency, although there are still significant gaps that must be overcome. Most CSOs have environmental policies, both at the internal operational level, which can be seen as carried through to the social actions they perform. The work performed by civil society in promoting peace is also valued. However, there are large social groups that frequently use violence to express their interests. Many CSOs in Nicaragua have promoted human rights and have fomented attitudes of respect and tolerance towards those with different opinions, religious beliefs and political leanings. Nevertheless, within Nicaraguan civil society there are some groups that have shown racist, discriminatory and intolerant attitudes.

Most CSOs have published policies on labour standards, in which ethical criteria are established, contributing to better interpersonal relations, efficiency and responsibility at work. In terms of transparency, half of the organisations surveyed make financial information available through various means, particularly to donors and the state. However, a challenge remains in improving the transparency of CSOs to provide broad and timely information about their efforts and finances, especially to local actors and people who participate in their activities in some way. Likewise, it is necessary to combat certain illegitimate practices such as the use of CSO resources for personal or family gain, which continue to present a challenge for civil society.

Although there are such challenges, overall Nicaraguan civil society was found by the CSI study to have relatively strong organisations, with the Level of Organisation dimension scoring 57.2%. The findings reveal largely democratic administration in a large proportion of participating organisations, with members and staff making the main decisions through assemblies. In other organisations, the decision-making process and information is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals who hold positions of power. Significant advances in gender equality are also observed, as there is parity between men and women in administrative positions at CSOs. Most

CSOs have equal opportunity and equal pay policies for women. However, not all CSOs have yet formulated such policies, and where they do exist there remain challenges of implementation and institutionalisation. Further, policies do not always include reference to equality in terms of age or ethnicity.

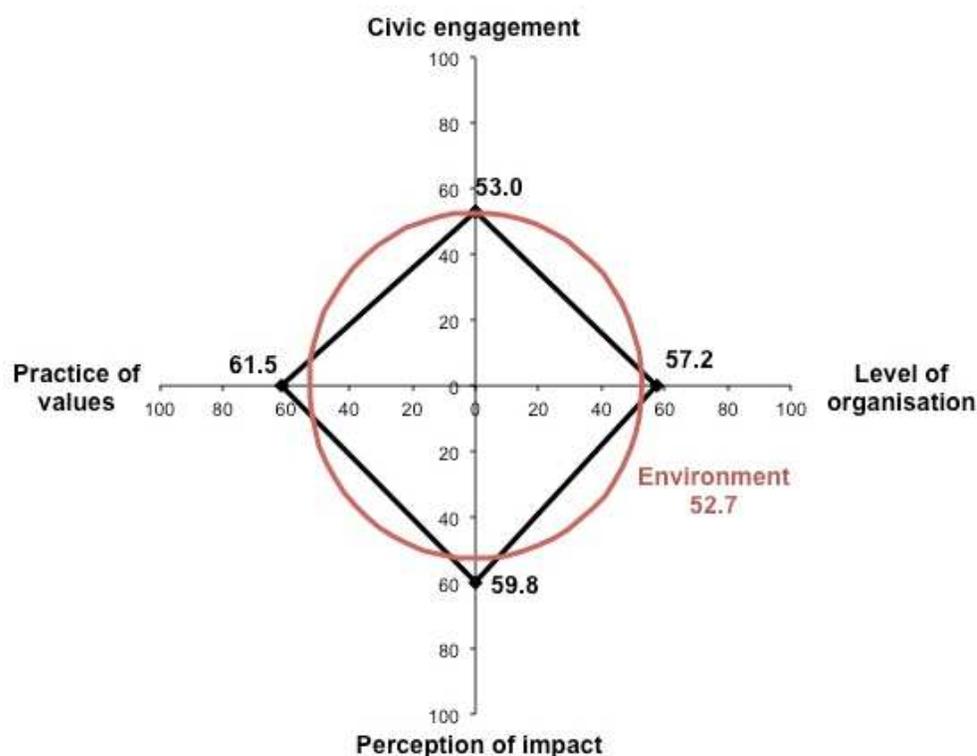


Figure 1: The Civil Society Index Diamond for Nicaragua

The study offered a mixed picture in terms of the Civic Engagement dimension, which scored 53.0%. The findings revealed significant participation by the population in social organisations, community actions and volunteering. One fifth of citizens are active members of diverse social organisations, to which they provide volunteer work. High numbers of citizens, a level much higher than the Latin American average, participate in various social actions.

The results show a very high level of participation in CSOs by traditionally excluded and marginalised social groups, such as women, indigenous communities and people who live in remote and rural areas. Citizen participation in social organisations and social actions is greater than in political parties, as only 10% of citizens are active members of a political party. Electoral participation since 1990 has been high, particularly in national elections. However, a downward trend has been observed, especially in municipal and regional elections, due to a decrease in the legitimacy of political parties, the non-fulfilment of pre-electoral promises and the lack of voter registration cards.

With regard to citizen participation in various political acts, the CSI study found that just 29% have signed a petition addressed at municipal, regional or national government authorities, 13% filed a complaint against a private or public company and 24% participated in peaceful protests to claim their rights. Nevertheless, there is a willingness to participate in civic actions to

influence officials and companies, which opens the door to opportunities to increase citizen participation in a climate of respect for liberties and human rights.

Meanwhile, the Perception of Impact dimension of the CSI study scored 59.8%, the second highest of the five CSI dimensions. This suggests that civil society in Nicaragua, when granted space, is capable of achieving significant impact through its work.

I. THE CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX PROJECT APPROACH

In this chapter, the historical backdrop is presented for the Civil Society Index project that CIVICUS has implemented for over a decade. Next, the conceptual and methodological focus of this participative study is addressed, as is the implementation process undertaken by RNDDL. Lastly, a brief evaluation of the process of this study and the limitations found during its implementation are presented.

I.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

Globally, several analysts have identified a rising trend over the last few decades in civil society organisation. An “associative revolution” has been facilitated by the development of communication, education, qualified human resources and support by international organisations, as well as a lack of ability of the state and the market to solve social and environmental crises (Salamon, et.al., 2003).

CSOs played a fundamental role in the change of authoritarian regimes in various countries at the end of the twentieth century. They have also questioned the current globalisation model of exclusion and anti-ecology by establishing international networks of dialogue and political influence, while at the same time creating initiatives for economic solidarity, agro-ecology and fair trade. In many countries, democratic systems have been established that have opened opportunities for free expression and social organisation, which has led to a multiplication in demands by citizens and interest groups. On the contrary, many political parties have suffered a crisis of representation due to their electoral practices and their inability to meet citizen demands and overcome interests of power (Hengstenberg, et.al., 1999).

In most countries, however, knowledge about the state and structure 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 also 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. It aims at creating a knowledge base and momentum for civil society strengthening. The CSI is initiated and implemented by, and for, civil society organisations at the country level, in partnership with CIVICUS. The CSI implementation actively involves and disseminates its findings to a broad range of stakeholders including civil society, government, the media, donors, academics and the public at large.

The following key steps in the CSI implementation take place at the country level:

1. **Assessment**: the CSI uses an innovative mix of participatory research methods, data sources and case studies to comprehensively assess the state of civil society using five dimensions: Civic Engagement, Level of Organisation, Practice of Values, Perception of Impact and the External Environment.
2. **Collective reflection**: implementation involves structured dialogue among diverse civil society stakeholders that enables the identification of civil society’s specific strengths and weaknesses.

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

The CSI first emerged as an idea over a decade ago as a follow-up to the 1997 *New Civic Atlas* publication by CIVICUS, which contains 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, followed by 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 the 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 the project. Table 1 below includes a list of implementing countries in the current phase of the CSI.

1. Albania	14. Ghana	29. Niger
2. Argentina	15. Italy	30. Philippines
3. Armenia	16. Japan	31. Russia
4. Bahrain	17. Jordan	32. Serbia
5. Belarus	18. Kazakhstan	33. Slovenia
6. Bulgaria	19. Kosovo	34. South Korea
7. Burkina Faso	20. Lebanon	35. Sudan
8. Chile	21. Liberia	36. Togo
9. Croatia	22. Macedonia	37. Turkey
10. Cyprus	23. Madagascar	38. Uganda
11. Djibouti	24. Mali	39. Ukraine
12. Democratic Republic of Congo	25. Malta	40. Uruguay
13. Georgia	26. Mexico	41. Venezuela
	27. Morocco	42. Zambia
	28. Nicaragua	

Table 1: List of CSI implementing countries 2008-2011²

I.2. PROJECT APPROACH

The current CSI project approach continues to combine assessment and evidence with reflection and action. This approach provides an important reference point for all work carried out within the framework of the CSI. As such, the 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

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 publication due to countries being added or dropped during the implementation cycle.

methodological bedrocks which have greatly influenced the implementation process of this report 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 contexts and concepts within its framework.

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.

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

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 (e.g. focus groups, the Advisory Committee, the National Workshops) should create new spaces where very diverse actors can discover synergies and forge new alliances, including at a cross-sectoral level. Some countries in the last phase have also participated in regional conferences to discuss the CSI findings as well as cross-national civil society issues.

Change: The principal aim of the CSI is to generate information that is of practical use to civil society practitioners and other primary 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 uses a combination of participatory and scientific research methods to generate an assessment of the state of civil society at the national level. The CSI measures the following core dimensions:

- (1) Civic Engagement
- (2) Level of Organisation
- (3) Practice of Values
- (4) Perception of Impact
- (5) External Environment

³ For in-depth explanations of these principles, please see Mati, Silva and Anderson (2010), *Assessing and Strengthening Civil Society Worldwide: An updated programme description of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index Phase 2008-2010*. CIVICUS, Johannesburg.

These dimensions are illustrated visually through the Civil Society Diamond (see Figure 2 below), 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. 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 or environment is represented visually by a circle around the axes of the Civil Society Diamond, and is not regarded as part of the state of civil society but rather as something external that still remains a crucial element for its wellbeing.

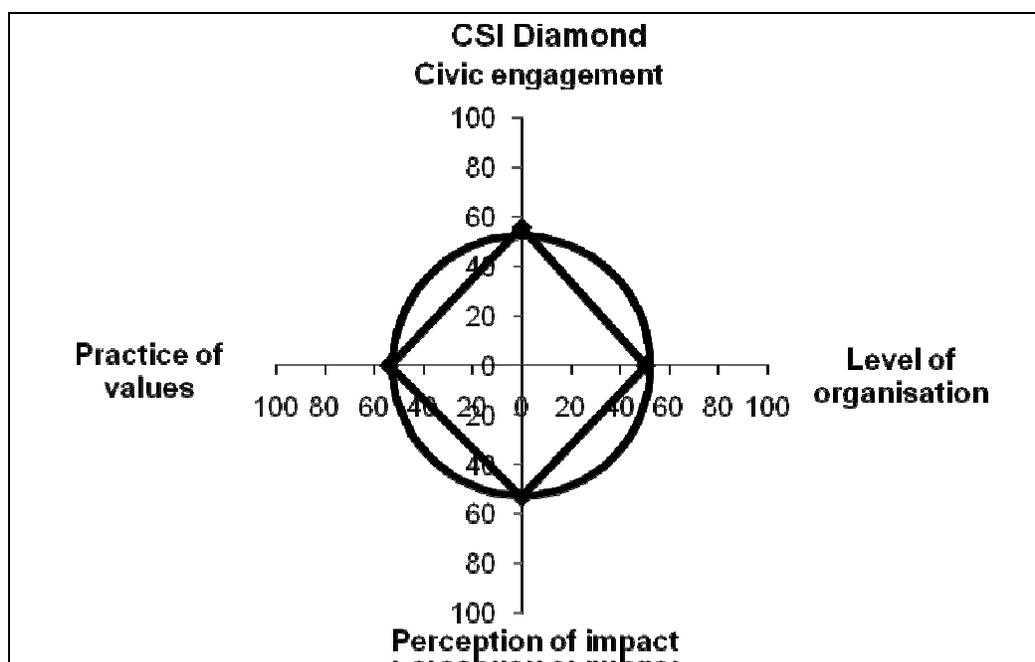


Figure 2: The Civil Society Index Diamond

I.3. CSI IMPLEMENTATION

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

⁴ For a detailed discussion on each of these steps in the process, please see Mati et al (cited in footnote 3).

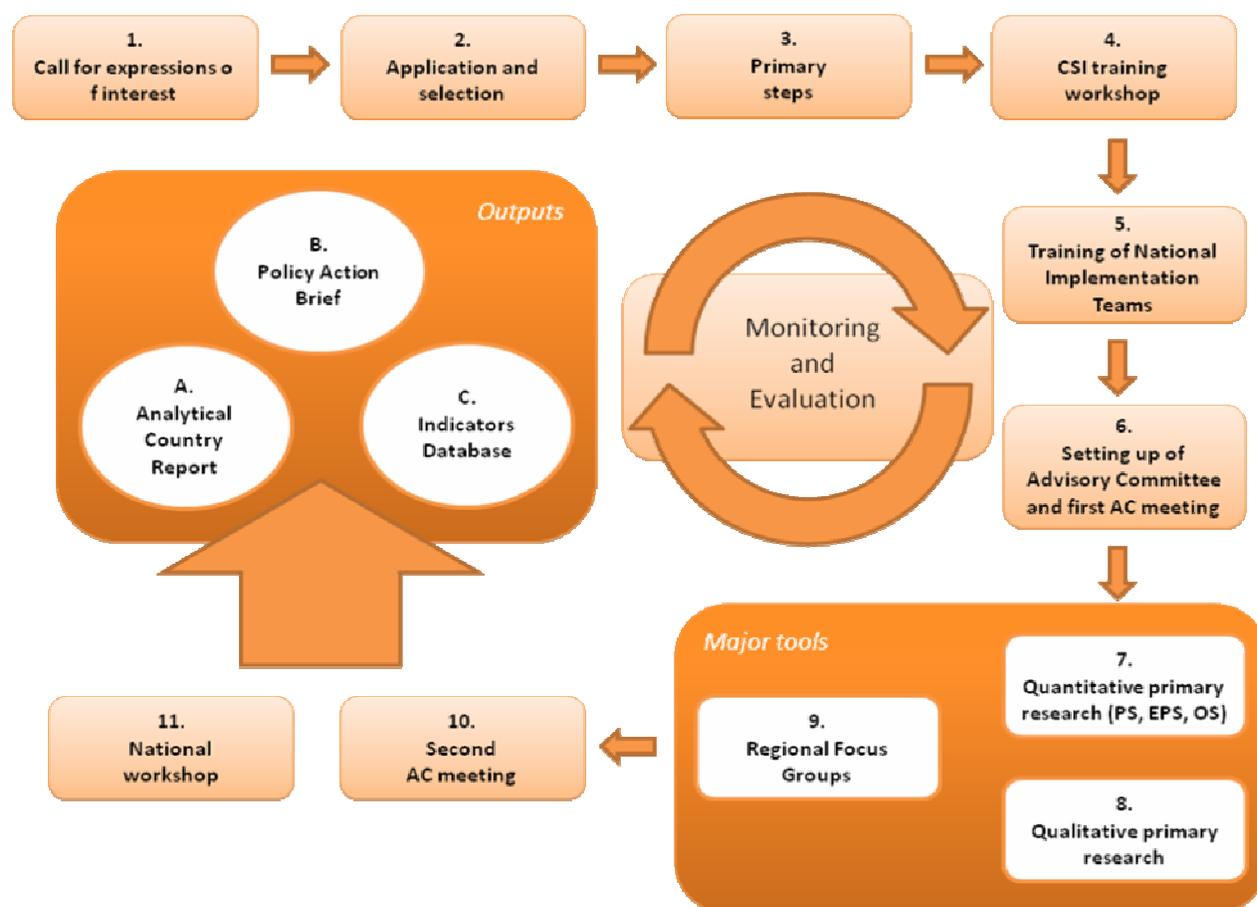


Figure 3: The CSI Process

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** aimed 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 in 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 society.

Following this in-depth research and the extensive collection of information, the findings are presented and 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 major outputs of the CSI implementation process in Nicaragua and presents highlights from the research conducted, including summaries of civil

society's strengths and weaknesses as well as recommendations for strengthening civil society in the country.

I.4 THE CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX IN NICARAGUA

In line with the global trend, a rapid process of growth in CSOs has been observed in Nicaragua over the last few decades. This responds to the diverse interests of CSO members, many of whom provide social services and lead multiple development projects with participation by citizens and financial support from external cooperation initiatives. Meanwhile, most of these organisations actively participate in a range of civil society social networks, addressing priority issues and spheres of negotiation with the state in an attempt to affect the formulation, execution and evaluation of public policy. Likewise, CSOs have become a key vehicle for citizen participation and have led major battles for social, economic and political transformation (García and Ulloa, 2010).

Nevertheless, research on these processes within Nicaragua has not kept pace with their complex growth, which has been led by multiple civil actors who have not been able to analyse or record their experiences. Over the last few years, various studies on Nicaraguan civil society have been performed, particularly descriptive works and essays, in addition to reports and evaluations of social programmes requested by cooperation organisations. Most studies have however focused on development organisations⁵ and on their social intervention projects, while other instances of civil society, that make up the great majority of CSOs such as community organisations, interest groups, cooperatives, syndicates and trade unions have been studied to a lesser degree (Serra, 2007).

In this manner, the RNDDL has promoted the Citizen Participation Observatory to investigate the role of citizens and their organisations in terms of local development and political influence, while extracting lessons learned and offering proposals to strengthen citizen participation (RNDDL, 2008 and 2009). RNDDL allied with CIVICUS in 2008 to implement the CSI in Nicaragua to study civil society in a participative and broad manner, in an effort both to contribute to its role and also strengthen its efforts.

The CSI in Nicaragua has had multiple facets and aimed to be:

- ✓ **participative** as it was implemented by CSOs;
- ✓ **framed historically**, as it focuses on the 2009-2010 situation, but includes a historical background of Nicaraguan civil society.
- ✓ **analytical and propositional** because it transcends the description of civil society to investigate the factors that determine its current situation.
- ✓ **propositional** because it gathers proposals for an agenda of fortification activities.
- ✓ **qualitative and quantitative** as it combines both methods to build an integral vision of civil society.
- ✓ **comparative** as it seeks standardised information to measure different countries and offers options to study specific aspects of each society.

The CSI for Nicaragua began at the end of 2008 with the main objective of promoting public knowledge of the characteristics and impact Nicaraguan civil society has been able to achieve in order to strengthen its linkages and its support for human development and the process of democracy in the country.

⁵ Commonly called non-government organisations (NGOs).

Specific objectives were as follows:

- To identify the organisational strength of Nicaraguan civil society with the objective of suggesting actions to overcome limitations and boost strengths.
- To determine the extent of ethical values and the level of civic engagement, driving civil society to strengthen its efforts to promote an active, inclusive and democratic citizenry.
- To analyse the results achieved by civil society in the various areas of its efforts to study contributions to development and democracy in Nicaragua.
- To create an agenda to internally strengthen civil society and its linkages with other sectors in Nicaragua, and links with others in the region.

The implementation process began in 2008 with the selection by CIVICUS of RNDDL as the CSI implementation organisation in Nicaragua. At the end of 2008, CIVICUS held a regional CSI methodology training workshop in Montevideo to participants in the Latin American region.

In early 2009, CSI implementation began in Nicaragua thanks to financial cooperation by Forum Syd and Alboam. Initial actions were as follows: an inventory of studies on Nicaraguan civil society (RNDDL 2009) and the establishment of an Advisory Committee (AC) of a pluralistic nature with participation by representatives of CSOs, state institutions, cooperation agencies and the media (Appendix 2). In its initial session, the AC created a social forces map through a participatory process that enabled the identification of the main actors in civil society, the state and the market (Appendix 3).

Based on the civil society map and studies on the issue, a sample of 141 CSOs was then created including: cooperatives (21), community organisations (19), indigenous and Afro-descendant communities (17), labour unions (13), development organisations (NGOs), networks and federations (7), women's movements (7) and youth movements (13). These CSOs were located across various departments and regions, including: Managua, Boaco, Jinotega, Carazo, the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) and the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) (Annex 4). The Organisational Survey of this sample investigated organisational structures, alliances, resources, impacts achieved and the legal framework that regulates CSOs.

In addition, RNDDL surveyed 31 key actors, made up of state employees, representatives of cooperation agencies, researchers and experts, to understand their perceptions of civil society's impact and its relations, strengths and weaknesses. A preview of the results of these two surveys was presented to the Advisory Committee for discussion and analysis.

The next step was a Population Survey using a representative national sample in an effort to understand people's participation in CSOs and in political activities, as well as their trust in institutions and in each other and their level of tolerance towards other social groups. The sampling method used random selection throughout all stages. An overall sample size of 630 households was calculated, in which 630 men and women aged 16 or older were interviewed. There was calculated to be a 95% level of reliability and a 4% margin of error in this. Other quantitative data sources used in the CSI to assess the social, economic and political contexts of Nicaragua were drawn from periodic reports by the World Values Survey, Social Watch, Transparency International, the World Bank and Freedom House. Based on the aforementioned surveys and information sources, the Civil Society Diamond was created.

Qualitative techniques were also employed to complement the data obtained from the surveys, thus providing a deeper analysis of the selected dimensions. To generate this qualitative information, focus groups were held with people and organisations to share the quantitative results and collectively analyse their significance.

In addition, five case studies of experiences relevant to Nicaraguan civil society were developed to better understand its dynamics and to derive lessons pertinent to each of the CSI's five dimensions. The case studies had the following conditions:

- Interest and willingness of actors to collaborate in the study;
- A case that has not been previously studied and published;
- An experience where civil society has played an important role;
- A case where valid lessons could be learned for other organisations
- Access to written and oral information sources.

The cases studies were as follows:

- Civic Engagement - *Volunteering in community health: the case of the Nueva Guinea Health Promoters Association.*
- Practice of Values - *Transparency in Nicaraguan civil society: the experience in La Cuculmeca.*
- Level of Organisation - *Social networks in Nicaragua: the organisational experience of the Women's Network Against Violence.*
- Perception of Impact - *Influence on environmental policies: the experience at Centro Humboldt.*
- External Environment - *The Kukra Hill Municipal Development Committee: an experience of negotiation between civil society and the state.*

The case studies have been published by RNDDL and a video has been made to show to leading figures these experiences and the sphere in which they take place in an effort to facilitate knowledge and duplication.

I.5. SUCCESSES AND LIMITATIONS

RNDDL believes that the CSI implementation in Nicaragua has helped broaden the knowledge of civil society in terms of diversity, organisational forms and results achieved. It should be noted that the CSI uses an internationally validated scientific methodology that enables comparisons among countries and studies the particularities of civil society in a given country.

Likewise, it was possible to construct an action agenda in a participatory manner to strengthen civil society in the five areas of study: civic engagement, level of organisation, practice of values, perception of impact and external environment. The agenda is open so that various networks, federations and CSOs of Nicaragua can discuss it and see how together they can help strengthen civil society and its linkages with the state and private companies for the sustainable development of Nicaragua.

Limiting factors found in the political context during CSI implementation include: a climate of political polarisation and a governability crisis due to 2008 electoral fraud, the rupture of constitutional order by the government in an attempt to remain in power and restrictions against CSOs and the media not aligned with the FLSN. These issues will be addressed in the analysis contained within Chapter III (CINCO, Perspectivas 2009-2010).

This political crisis has created a situation of fear and prevented much of the population from expressing themselves in public regarding political issues and from participating in activities promoted by CSOs who maintain autonomy from the government, such as RNDDL. As such, some individuals elected not to be surveyed, and RNDDL suffered low turnouts in CSI focus groups and presentations. Nevertheless, the information and analysis resulting from returned surveys was enriching and highly valued by focus group participants.

In addition, serious challenges occurring during this period shaped the interaction with government. Unfortunately, government employees did not participate in the Advisory Committee or in CSI activities, except in a limited number of cases. This also occurred in most of the spheres of enquiry and negotiation between civil society and the state.

To a lesser degree, RNDDL found some limiting factors in the pre-designed quantitative instruments used in the different CSI countries to enable data comparison. It was not possible to make modifications to questions except for translation into Spanish and the use of country-specific terms. The CSI team at CIVICUS has recognised this, noting, “there is tension between finding standardised information that can be compared between countries and maintaining the proper flexibility to ensure that the specifications of each country can be taken into account.” (CIVICUS, 2008: 14).

Nevertheless, new indicators were permitted to complement the existing questionnaires. Latin American organisations that participated in the 2009-2010 CSI did so to customise it to our context and enrich this valuable study. Participating organisations also performed case studies on civil society experiences conforming to the criteria established in each country by the AC and the implementing organisation.

It should be noted that one challenge faced by every organisation implementing the CSI is the delay in the presentation of the data. Particularly in Nicaragua, the speed with which the state of civil society is changing and fluctuating in the political context inevitably renders particular components of the quantitative data, gathered some time before the writing of this report, rather less relevant than others. Nevertheless, on the whole, RNDDL believes that this report and research study does paint an accurate picture of Nicaraguan civil society at a critical time.

II. CIVIL SOCIETY IN NICARAGUA

This section presents a background of civil society in Nicaragua to enable a better understanding of the findings and analysis of the study outlined later in the report. First, this section explores the main concepts of civil society that have arisen and which inform contemporary debates in Nicaragua. The section then proceeds to offer a brief history of civil society development in Nicaragua. Finally, a map of the various CSOs is provided, according to available analyses.

II.1 THE CONCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN NICARAGUA

The CSI is based on a broad concept of civil society that facilitates its application in various countries. For CIVICUS, civil society is: *the public arena (outside the family, state and market) that is created through individual and collective actions, by organisations and institutions, to advance common interests* (CIVICUS, 2009).

In other words, **civil society** is conceived as a particular space or sphere in a society where individuals gather to converse and associate to satisfy their interests. The **state** is focused on regulation and social control based on the legal framework in effect. Meanwhile, the capitalist **market** is guided by profits and the purchase and sale of goods. Lastly, the **family** is a specific area of social life and the core of socialisation.

Logically, the limits between these four sectors in reality are different for each country and shared environments can exist (e.g., cooperation between civil society and the market). Likewise, CIVICUS' focus considers that the actors can go from one sphere to another according to the type of action performed. A temporary dimension also must be considered as the interrelationships between these scenarios and their actors vary according to the correlation of forces and historical ages.

A key element of civil society is the ability of people to communicate and associate with others who share certain interests, whether it be sport, art, culture, environment, security, education, health, human rights or others. Thus, we find a rich diversity of CSOs that seek to satisfy the interests of their members in a joint fashion. In addition to collective actions by organisations, the CSI definition of civil society encompasses individual actions such as signing petitions, participating in marches and volunteering in community efforts.

In Nicaragua, the concept of civil society gained momentum in the 1990s at the end of the military conflict and the state of emergency which had restricted citizens' rights of association, information and expression, as occurred in other countries in Central America (Solís Rivera, 2008). José L. Velázquez, one of the first academics that used the concept of civil society to analyse the political reality of Nicaragua, states, "civil society is an intermediary instance between the elites that control the state on one side, and the individual and social classes on the other [...] it consists of all intermediary organisations that bring together citizens and social groups with the objective of organising the efficient administration of their interests" (Velázquez, 1986: 17). Civil society's main functions would be linking the interests of marginalised groups, watching over the exercise of state power, fomenting participation and citizen awareness (Velázquez, 2001).

Since the 1990s, diverse concepts of civil society have been found in Nicaragua that seem to correspond to the heterogeneity of its actors. In this aspect, Cranshaw states, "no single civil

society exists, rather there are multiple forms and expressions of civil society. Its force consists of the diversity of existing groups, but at the same time this dispersion tends to be its main weakness” (Cranshaw, 1996: 38). A common denominator of most concepts of civil society that have come about in Nicaragua is its distinction from the state, government and political parties or, in other words, its distinction from ‘political society’.

Faced with a loss of legitimacy of political parties and the state under neoliberal governments, it is perhaps unsurprising that in Nicaragua civil society has been eulogised as a group of organisations that are progressive, tolerant, democratic, transparent and representative of citizen interests. Thus, civil society on the one hand has been considered as “groups of citizens that are organised for the common good.” On the contrary, others note that civil society “also consists of [...] gangs, armed groups, drug traffickers [...] whose actions are not considered beneficial for society as a whole” (Miranda, 2002: 78).

From a Gramscian perspective, Orlando Núñez has conceptualised that “civil society alludes to the citizenry, individual or collective, participating in public or political life, in autonomous conditions vis-à-vis power and cultural self-regulation, building, disputing or reconstructing the social order or political hegemony, through spiritual, ideological and daily mechanisms of incidence, administration and negotiation” (Núñez, 2002: 7). This focus links civil society to a citizenry that has rights and exercises them in an individual or associated manner to dispute the hegemony of the dominant class or to defend it. The inclusion of political parties in definitions of civil society has been questioned by various analysts given that their objective is to access state power and the fact they are part of the state institutions from which their power and resources are derived.

As in other countries, there are different positions in Nicaragua regarding linkages between the business sector and civil society. On the one hand, it has been suggested that the market is part of civil society and that the private company is a model for CSOs, given its efficiency and ability to respond to human demands in accordance with the economic laws of supply and demand. On the other, it has been argued that the dominant logic of market forces is profit maximisation, which is detrimental to social and environmental considerations, while civil society is guided by the logic of voluntary, non-profit association geared towards responding to common interests.

A Central American concept of civil society that resounded in Nicaragua was the contribution of Edelberto Torres Rivas who states, “civil society exists when the society as a whole can structure itself and coordinate actions through a set of voluntary associations [...] that are independent of the state and that bring together citizens who have common interests” (Torres Rivas, 2001: 23). Nevertheless, this concept has been criticised because it pertains to a dichotomous vision of social reality that simplifies the complex cornucopia of groups and social relations into two different spheres, which are: (1) the ‘political society’ that consists of the state, the government and political parties and (2) the ‘civil society’ that covers a heterogeneous multitude of associations, interests and resources, including labour unions, cooperatives, private companies, trade unions, social movements, communal organisations, philanthropic groups and religious groups.

From a tripartite perspective of contemporary society, Alejandro Serrano suggests the following divisions: the state, the market and civil society. Civil society is formed by organisations and associations that exercise functions of a public and social nature, but are neither state nor mercantile entities. In terms of civil society functions, the author states that in this sphere “the role of the citizenry is reaffirmed that corresponds to the efforts of building a modern democracy, where liberty and social justice are an inseparable part of this reality” (Serrano, 2001: 57).

Currently, the conceptual debate on civil society reflects the aforementioned political polarisation. The government considers that civil society actors not linked to the FSLN party who call for the right to participate in public legislation are pawns of US imperialism. In this regard, President Daniel Ortega in 2007 said, “these groups that call themselves civil society are financed by the emissaries of the empire.” Meanwhile, others suggest that CSOs play a key role in the construction of the citizenry and in defence of human rights. In this regard, Mario Quintana of the Civil Coordinator said, “the role of civil society organisations is not to oppose the government in office or political parties, or to replace them in their functions. However, it is neither being an appendage, subordinate to government administrations, political parties or economic, religious or cooperative groups [...] it deals with contributing to the construction of the citizenry so that informed and empowered persons can influence state employees, whom we pay with our taxes, so that they carry out their functions and responsibilities...” (Quintana, 2007).

II.2 HISTORY OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN NICARAGUA

The first expressions of civil society in Nicaragua occurred in indigenous communities and towns that had a considerable demographic, economic and social disadvantage, at the end of the nineteenth century, and these communities are still organised to defend their land and rights (Gould 1997). In the early Twentieth Century, mutual savings and assistance organisations, retail associations, coffee grower associations and the first labour unions came about. The long-running Somoza family dictatorship (1934-1979) did not permit the emergence of strong CSOs that were autonomous of the state. The governing Liberal Party promoted the formation of communication organisations, labour unions and youth organisations affiliated to the regime (Walter, 2004).

After the overthrow of Somoza in 1979, the FSLN promoted CSOs that were aligned with the party to carry out the tasks of the ‘Sandinista Revolution’ with citizen participation. In these ‘organisations of the masses’ vertical management styles dominated with a concentration of decision-making power in the hands of high ranking members named by the FSLN who provided orientation based on their Leninist concept of the ‘vanguard’ who would led the country into socialism (Ruchwarger, 1985). Relations between CSOs and the state were ambiguous. Sandinista organisations defended the revolutionary government against the opposition, while they criticised its bureaucracy, called for a voice and voting rights in public policy and demanded material resources to be able to carry out their own plans.

In this decade, some 120 CSOs set up in Nicaragua from other countries that shared the ideas of the revolution and that collaborated with Nicaraguan CSOs and the state in several socio-economic projects against the United States’ commercial embargo and aggression (Varela, 1998). By the mid 1980s, the deepening military conflict meant a prioritisation of military defence tasks by the Sandinista CSOs (some of which were unpopular, such as the draft), relegating demands for an uncertain socialist future in a wartime context that was adverse to liberty and human rights. By the end of the decade, discontent over this situation worsened due to the fiscal adjustment plan and monetary changes imposed in 1998. This led to desertion by many Sandinista CSO members and the search for new channels of citizen participation that came about after the defeat of the party in 1990 (Serra, 1995).

The FSLN’s electoral defeat in 1990 led to a period of liberal governments that implemented profound changes in the state and in civil society. Neoliberal policies brought about a strong

response by CSOs and social movements (Cuadra, et.al., 2005). Sandinista CSOs saw a significant reduction in their actions and hegemonic role due to the loss of financial and political support from the state they had previously enjoyed. In addition, they suffered from internal conflicts that weakened them.

A noteworthy phenomenon at this time was the emergence of new CSOs focused on the rights of excluded groups (children, women, indigenous people, people with disabilities), agro-ecology and the environment, health and rehabilitation, education and citizen participation, with the support of international cooperation efforts. These CSOs implemented local development projects in their areas of specialisation and facilitated the organisation of various thematic networks nationally to exchange experiences and affect public policies. In a participative manner, CSO networks were successfully able to affect public policy, including advocating for a law that penalises acts of violence against women, an environmental law, an HIV prevention law, a child and adolescent code and others (Quintana, 2008).

Meanwhile, Caribbean Coast CSOs achieved the passage of the Autonomy Statute, a law for indigenous land ownership and recognition of officials, and the inclusion in national laws of regional budgets for education, health, fishing, forestry, water and tourism. They also helped create the North and South Autonomous Regional Development Plans and the Coastal Development Agenda (Local Network, 2009b).

CSOs showed their abilities when Hurricane Mitch struck Nicaragua in 1997. They immediately responded to help the affected population while the government was unable and corruption hindered international aid. CSOs established municipal commissions to help those affected while the Civil Emergency and Reconstruction Coordinator (CCER) performed needs diagnostics, a social audit of government intervention and a proposal for reconstruction and sustainable development. These actions were recognised by the people and the international community.

It should be noted that in 1999, a pact was made between the FSLN and PLC (the top two parties at the time) to share control of the State through reforms to the Political Constitution and the Electoral Law that prevented smaller parties from participating and local CSOs from proposing candidates for the municipal governments. Likewise, both parties agreed to share positions on the Supreme Electoral Council, the Supreme Court of Justice, the Comptroller, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Attorney General. This political agreement led to an exclusive political power structure that has benefited top party members, top state employees and top executives in banking and commerce (CONPES, 2006).

The FLSN won the presidential elections of 2006, causing a new challenge for civil society with the implementation of a citizen participation system called the Civic Power Councils and Cabinets (CPCs). These are formed at the local and municipal level and are organized by FSLN supporters under the direction of President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Rosario Murillo. In governmental policies, the CPCs are considered a link between Nicaraguan civil society and the state, excluding other existing organisations and networks.

The current government tends to reject demands for public information, influence on public policies or social audits of governmental administration. It has used methods of administrative control and intimidation against those CSOs and communication outlets not aligned with the FSLN party. This was verified by a CIVICUS mission in early 2010⁶.

⁶See <http://www.civicus.org/press-release/1232> for more details on the CIVICUS mission.

Rising polarisation and political intolerance has been observed, causing a fracture of civil society into three groups:

- ❖ CSOs allied with the FSLN such as the CPCs, the National Workers' Front, the Communal Movement, the Farmer and Rancher Union and other organisations grouped under the Social Coordinator.
- ❖ CSOs that are autonomous from the government that demand to participate in creating and auditing public policies and that are critical of policies that restrict free participation and citizen organisation, access to public information and electoral observance. Among these include the Civil Coordinator that groups together 630 CSOs and networks.
- ❖ At an intermediate level, a considerable number of CSOs that seek to work locally according to the interests of their members and do not have any significant links to the state. They avoid taking any positions for or against the government.

II.3 MAPPING NICARAGUAN CIVIL SOCIETY

Today in Nicaragua, various CSOs of different types, interests and resource levels exist, including labour unions, cooperatives, social movements, religious organisations, philanthropic organisations, communal associations, indigenous communities and towns, development organisations, education and research centres, environmental organisations, human rights organisations and organisations for women, children and young people (see Appendix 3).

It is worth noting that most CSOs are not legally registered, whether as non-profit associations or foundations (Ministry of Government), cooperatives (Institute for Promotion of Cooperatives), labour unions (Ministry of Labour) or as resident associations (municipal governments). Moreover, a good proportion of legally registered CSOs do not maintain updated information on their organisations at the corresponding agencies. As such, it is not known if they are active.

The following is a quick overview of CSO groupings in the country based on available information.

- ❖ **Labour unions:** In Nicaragua, some 180,000 workers are organised into 850 unions, or 4.5% of all of the economically active population (age 15 to 60). There are 21 major unions including the National Workers' Front, the Workers' Permanent Congress and the Syndicate Coordinator of Nicaragua. Moreover, there are unions at various companies that are not affiliated to any central labour union.
- ❖ **Cooperatives:** There are an estimated 6,600 cooperatives with more than 500,000 members in Nicaragua in the following economic sectors: saving and loans, transport, potable water, agriculture-livestock production, fishing, mining, textiles, handicrafts, tourism and housing construction. Nevertheless, most cooperatives do not have updated legal documentation, according to Martha Gutiérrez, Executive Director at the Institute for Cooperative Promotion (INFOCOOP, 2010).
- ❖ **Communal organisations:** In all rural and urban communities of Nicaragua, small community organisations exist that work towards local development in activities such as health, education, potable water, electricity, sport, culture and art, the environment, security, transport, construction and infrastructure maintenance (streets, bridges, schools, churches,

health centres and homes). This category has more CSOs, although there is no estimate available, as most are not legally registered.

- ❖ **Interest groups:** In this broad category there are very diverse CSOs organised by people who share common interests, such as professional associations, people with disabilities, retired people, consumers, sports and social clubs, sexual diversity groups, cultural centres, indigenous organisations, religious organisations, philanthropic foundations and social services. Some 4,130 associations and foundations had requested legal status and were registered in the Non-Government Association Registry as of early 2010, although some have not updated the annual information required by MINGOB and therefore do not hold the legal certification required.
- ❖ **Development organisations:** CSOs referred to as NGOs (non-government organisations) are non-profit foundations and associations that promote socio-economic and cultural development, particularly in human rights, citizen participation, political influence, consulting for other CSOs, health services, education, technical assistance, public communication and scientific research. NGOs represent a very small part of the vast panorama of Nicaraguan CSOs (about 600 to 700 are active). Nevertheless, they play a significant role as they have qualified personnel, material resources, multiple development projects and alliances with national and regional organisations (Cruz, et. al., 2006).
- ❖ **National networks of CSOs:** Over the last two decades, multiple national networks of CSOs have organised in an effort to overcome the dispersion and isolation of thousands of small CSOs that exist throughout Nicaragua. They seek to trade experiences and information and particularly to link shared interests and power to affect public policy. Major CSO networks, in addition to those mentioned in the union environment and those coordinated by churches are as follows:
 - Civil Coordinator of Nicaragua
 - Social Coordinator of Nicaragua
 - Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development
 - Network of Women Against Violence
 - Coordinator of Organisations that Work for Children and Adolescents
 - Federation of Agriculture-Livestock Cooperatives
 - National Commission for the Struggle Against AIDS
 - Federation of NGOs of Nicaragua
 - Nicaraguan Health Network Federation
 - Network of Water and Sewage of Nicaragua
 - Federation of Rehabilitation and Integration Organisations
 - Consumer Defence Network
 - Network of Civil Organisations for Migration
 - National Network of Potable Water Committees

III. ANALYSIS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN NICARAGUA

III.1 CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement of the population is one of the five dimensions covered by the CSI, focusing on the formal and informal activities, individual or collective where citizens are involved to advance common interests at various levels, from recreation to political and social interests. The Civic Engagement dimension scored 53.0%.

Various studies have highlighted the importance of citizen participation in CSOs to promote habits and values of cooperation, trust and public participation that contribute both to political democracy as well as social development (Putnam 1993, Coleman 2000, Kliksberg 1999). Generally, the concept of citizen participation is limited to relations between citizens and the state, a broader focus than that used for CSI, and one which includes participation in issues considered to be of common interest or of the 'public sphere' such as community development activities (Serra, 2008b).

To understand civic engagement, the CSI researches participation in social and political CSOs to distinguish whether membership is active or passive, whether there is voluntary support and whether there is participation in less formal community or political activities. Likewise, the CSI analyses three aspects of civic participation:

- extent: the number of active members of an organisation or in an activity
- depth: the frequency and intensity of participation
- diversity: inclusion in terms of gender, social strata, region and ethnic group.

This section draws its primary data from the CSI Population Survey.

III.1.1 Extent of socially-based engagement

Indicators in this sub-dimension identify the percentage of citizens who are members of social organisations, perform voluntary activities in these organisations and participate in less formal community activities (recreational, services and others). This sub-dimension scored 38.1%. Significant participation by the population is observed in social organisations, community actions and volunteer activities, as seen in the following chart.

Indicator	% of population
Social membership (1)	38.1
Social volunteering (1)	27.3
Community participation (1)	32.9

Table 2: Extent of socially-based engagement

In Nicaragua, churches have the highest membership levels, followed by political parties in second place, sport, educational and artistic organisations in third, and then humanitarian organisations, environmental groups, professional associations, unions, and lastly, consumer groups.



Figure 4: Membership in organisations (% of population)

Interviewees mentioned other organisations to which they belong, including cooperatives, women and youth organisations, community development committees, civic power committees, development organisations (NGOs) and indigenous and Afro-descendant communities.

III.1.2 Depth of socially-based engagement

In the CSI, the citizens are said to participate deeply if they actively participate in two or more social organisations and frequently collaborate in community efforts. This sub-dimension scored 45.9%. The following chart shows that a fifth of those who take part in social activity can be said to be active. The level of multiple membership or volunteering is slightly lower than the regional average. There is however a very high concentration (93.7%) of citizens participating in various social actions at least once per month, a level much higher than the Latin American average.

Indicator	% of population in Nicaragua	% average for Latin America
Social membership (2)	21.3	24.9%
Social volunteering (2)	22.7	25.4%
Community engagement (2)	93.7	63.1%

Table 3: Depth of socially-based engagement

These indicators show a deep significance of social engagement for many Nicaraguans. Nevertheless, in the focus groups, participants suggested that in some communities there is a small group of leaders and families that actively participate in various initiatives versus a passive majority.

III.1.3 Diversity of socially-based engagement

In this sub-dimension, the diversity and inclusiveness of civil society is evaluated by analysing the percentage of members in organisations that belong to minority ethnic groups, women, lower socio-economic levels and those living in remote areas. This sub-dimension scored 95.1%.

The indicator obtained from the CSI population survey shows a very high level of participation in CSOs by social groups that have traditionally been excluded in Nicaragua. Women predominate in religious and humanitarian organisations, while men are most common in other organisations.

Further, many organisations of women, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants have been very active since the 1990s in the promotion of their rights and have participated in broader-based organisations. Meanwhile, in remote and rural areas where the state is absent, CSOs tend to be the only entities that confront the multiple social problems the people face. For example, in Nueva Guinea the Association of Health Promoters and Midwives (APROSAPANG) has worked for 28 years in the community thanks to the volunteer efforts of 308 committed individuals⁷.

III.1.4 / III.1.5 / III.1.6 Political engagement – extent, depth and diversity

The sub-dimension scores for the extent and depth of political engagement scored relatively lowly (25.6% and 28.0% respectively) while the diversity of political engagement sub-dimension scored much higher (90.7%).

According to the 2009 CSI population survey, 16.4% said they were members of a political party, 10% said they were active members and 6.2% said they were inactive members. When asked if they performed volunteer work for a political party, only 6.5% survey respondents said they did. This level undoubtedly increases during election periods. Similar to the social sphere, the study identifies a high level of political participation by traditionally excluded citizens: women, ethnic groups and the poor.

Citizen participation in elections since 1990 in Nicaragua has been higher than the regional average, especially in national elections and to a lesser degree in municipal and regional elections. Nevertheless, a declining trend in electoral participation is observed, as seen in the following table. This is due to several factors including: a lack of credit in political parties and the Supreme Electoral Council, the non-fulfilment of pre-electoral promises, the lack of voter registration cards and the changes in household of the population.

President and Vice President		Municipal governments		Regional governments /	
Year	Participation	Year	Participation	Year	Participation
1990	86%	1990	87%	1990	78%
1996	76%	1996	76%	1994	74%
2001	73%	2000	57%	1998	49%
2006	77%	2004	51%	2002	38%
		2008	no data available	2006	45%

Table 3: Participation in National, Municipal and Regional Elections (source: Nicaragua Election Statistics Publication, IPADE 2008)

With regard to citizen participation in various individual activities over the last five years, the CSI study found that just 29% have signed a petition to municipal, regional or national government authorities, 13% have filed a complaint against a private or public company and 24% have participated in a peaceful protest to claim their rights, with a slight predominance of men versus women, as seen in the following chart.

⁷See www.redlocalnicaragua.org for more information.

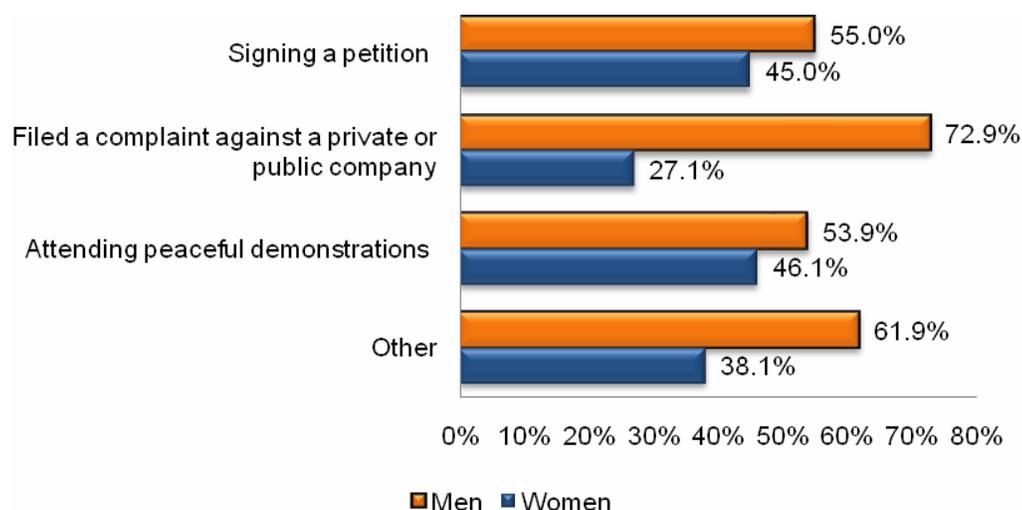


Figure 5: Participation in citizens' actions over the last 5 years

Nevertheless, when survey respondents who had not participated in civil actions in the past were asked if they would be willing to participate in the future, twice as many said they would. This suggests a willingness to participate in civil actions that has not been sufficiently taken advantage of by CSOs to affect government and business policy. However, it also reveals an opportunity to increase citizen participation in a climate of respect for liberties and human rights, as established in the Nicaraguan constitution.

Conclusions

The study shows significant participation by the population in social organisations, community actions and volunteering. One-fifth of citizens are active members of diverse social organisations to which they provide volunteer work. There is a high participation by citizens in various social actions at a level much higher than the Latin American average.

The results show a very high level of participation in CSOs by social groups that have traditionally been excluded, such as women, indigenous communities and rural people who live in remote areas. Citizen participation in social organisations and social actions is greater than in political parties.

Electoral participation since 1990 has been high, particularly in national elections. Citizen participation in political actions is low, but there is a willingness to participate in civic actions to influence officials and companies, which opens the door to opportunities to increase citizen participation.

III.2 LEVEL OF ORGANISATION

This dimension analyses the level of organisation within civil society, based on a survey conducted among 141 different types of organisations located in different municipalities. The purpose of the survey was to describe and analyse civil society's governing bodies, financial, technological and human resources, the coordination and communication between civil organisations, as well as their international linkages. Overall, this dimension scored 57.2%.

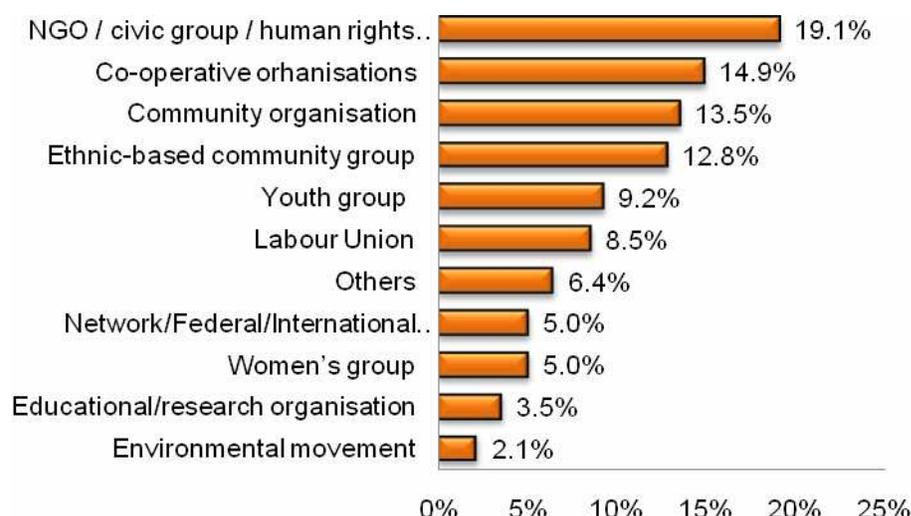


Figure 6: Civil Society Organisations surveyed in CSI Survey 2009

In regard to the geographic distribution of CSOs, the sample illustrates the situation of the civil society in the departments of Boaco, Carazo, Jinotega, Managua and the autonomous Caribbean region of Nicaragua. Most of the participating organisations (53.3%) work in the local or municipal area, one fourth (25.6%) has departmental or regional impact, while one-fifth (19.8%) works on a national level and some organisations work on a Central American level (1.2%). With respect to the date in which they were funded, 8% of the organisations were funded in 1979, 22% emerged during the decade of the Sandinista revolution, 36% were organised during the expansion stage of the civil organisations during the 90s, and 34% arose during the first decade of this century.

III.2.1. Internal governance

This sub-dimension scored 92.9%, with almost all of the organisations surveyed having a formal management structure. This refers to a Board of Directors or a Coordinating Committee, which meets periodically to deal with issues relevant to the organisation's work. This indicator demonstrates a high level of formalisation within civil organisations, although not all of them have legal status due to the difficulties already outlined. In the regional focus groups, participants pointed out that in several of the CSOs, the Boards of Directors are composed of well-known and publicly recognised people, who rarely meet and who do not fulfil their role of monitoring the executive components of the organisation.

III.2.2 / III.2.3 Infrastructure and sectoral communication

These sub-dimensions scored 76.6% and 82.6% respectively. The organisation of a large percentage of civil society organisations (76.6%) in different networks, federations or coordinators of similar organisations, at a municipal, departmental or regional, national and international level is worth pointing out. Their integration or membership in networks depends on the subject matter that the organisation specialises in or on the territorial area that it shares with other actors.

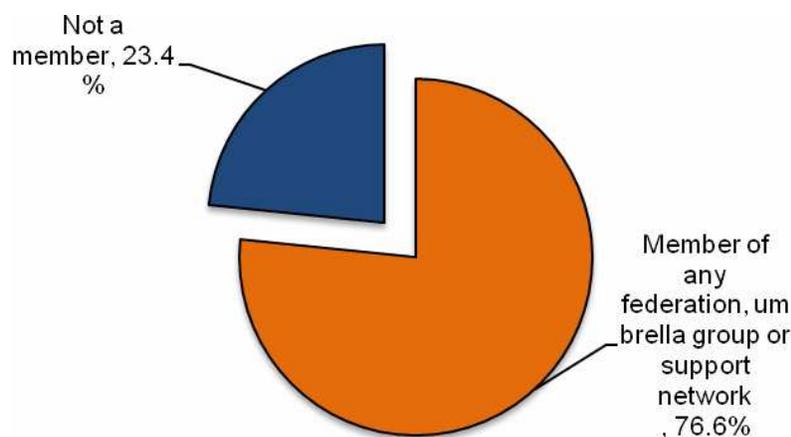


Figure 7: Membership in networks or federations

Most of the organisations (58.7%) which are members of networks and federations actively participate in joint tasks and a considerable number of organisations belong to two or more second-level networks. These networks have allowed organisations to combine efforts and share experiences, which have enriched civil society organisations in their development, as well as facilitated their impact on public policies, both on a national and Central American level.

Additionally, it is important to highlight the high level of communication and coordination that exists between civil organisations. As can be seen in Figure 8, 88% of the organisations included in the survey have held work meetings in the last three months and 78% have exchanged information of mutual interest.

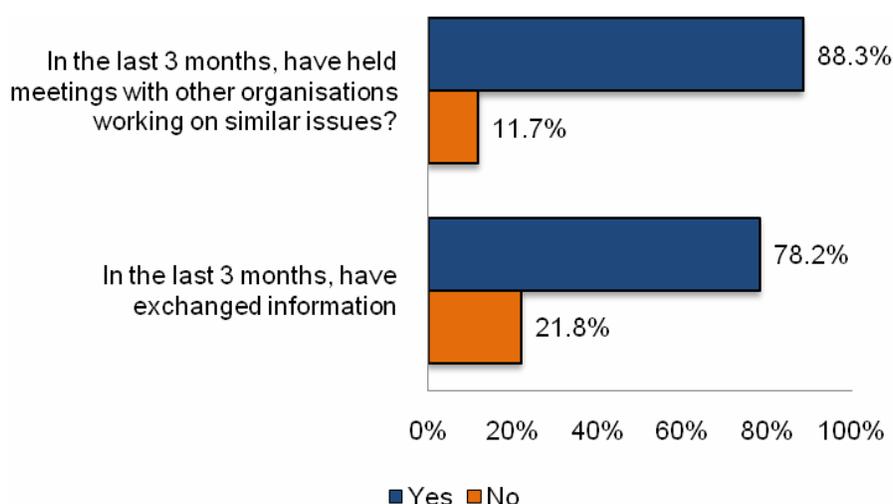


Figure 8: Communication between civil society organisations

Networks of social actors have multiplied in Nicaragua since the beginning of the 1990s as a flexible form of coordination of organisations and people who share certain principles and perspectives in order to face specific issues and defend members' rights. These networks constitute an alternative form of organisation to those traditional models of vertical ties with leaders, not least because they have democratic and volunteer-based structures based on the equal rights and duties of their members. With this in mind, RNDDL conducted a case study as part of the CSI study on the level of organisation of the Network of Women against Violence, which had important lessons for other social networks⁸.

III.2.4 Human resources

This sub-dimension scored 11.3%. Most CSOs in Nicaragua rely on a minimum number of paid staff, and carry out a large part of their social activities thanks to the volunteer work of members or sympathisers. According to the results of this survey, 69% of CSOs have fewer than 35 paid members of staff (59% have less than 10) to permanently attend its beneficiaries and manage the organisation, and 57% of CSOs rely on the volunteer work of 1 to 35 supportive people to carry out their local development projects.

CSOs' work to promote ethical values of solidarity, justice and commitment in the solution of community problems amongst Nicaraguans is especially noteworthy in a globalised world promoting individualism, competition and consumerism.

Number of Volunteers	% of CSO In each volunteer level
Between 0 and 35	56.9

⁸All five case studies implemented as part of the CSI study can be seen in full at www.redlocalnicaragua.org.

Between 36-70	12.4
Between 71-100	7.7
Between 101-150	5.0
Between 151-200	3.9
201 and more	14.2

Table 6: CSO Volunteer staff

The criteria for sustainability in the area of human resources used by the CSI considers that sustainability exists when the percentage of volunteers adds up to less than 25% of paid staff. In Nicaragua, there are a very low number of organisations in which this occurs; only reaching 11.3%. Nonetheless, this issue has been discussed in the focus groups and special consideration was given to the permanence of volunteers for many years, as is the case of APROSAPANG. The financial fragility that many organisations face to keep their personnel hired permanently was also discussed.

Furthermore, organisations were asked about how the quantity and quality of their personnel were adapted to reach their objectives. As indicated in the following graph, 63% of the organisations considered that the number of collaborators was adequate, and 76% value the fact that their personnel have a good level of professional experience.

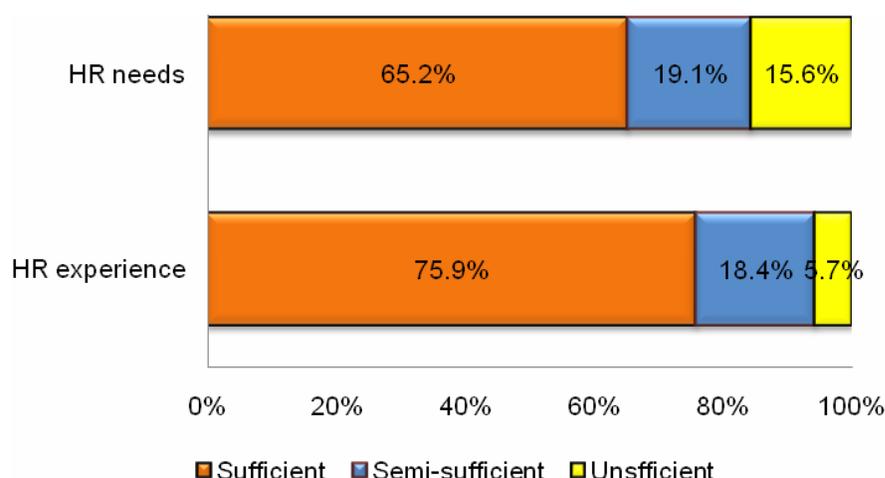


Figure 9: Human resources: quantity and experience

III.2.5. Financial and technological resources

This sub-dimension scored 74.5%. In terms of financial resources, the estimated budgets for 2008 show that CSOs had moderate funds for the implementation of their activities and operations. According to Figure 10, although there are significant differences between small local organisations and the bigger national CSOs and networks or federations, 38% of CSOs had less than USD\$10,000 per year and only 14% exceeded USD\$200,000.

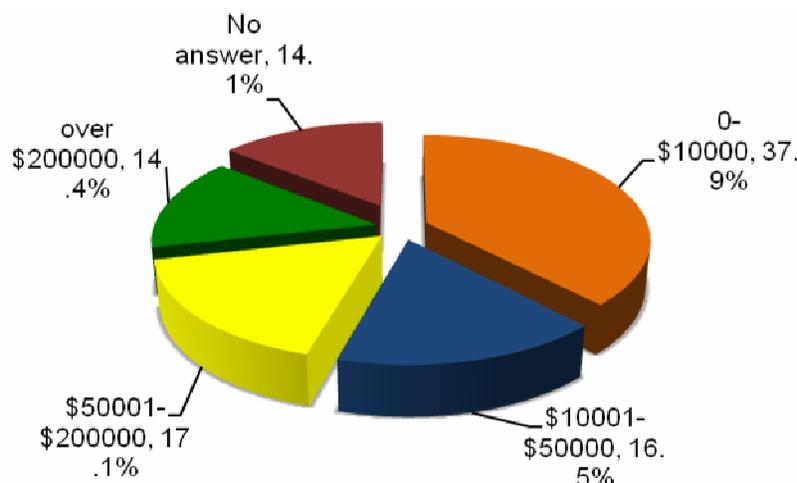


Figure 10: Estimated Budget for 2008 of the 141 Participating Organisations

The most important sources of financial resources were found to be external cooperation agencies; followed next by fees of affiliates in organisations such as unions and cooperatives. In third place came the individual donations and government funds, and finally the sale of services, company donations and other sources, as shown in the following graph.

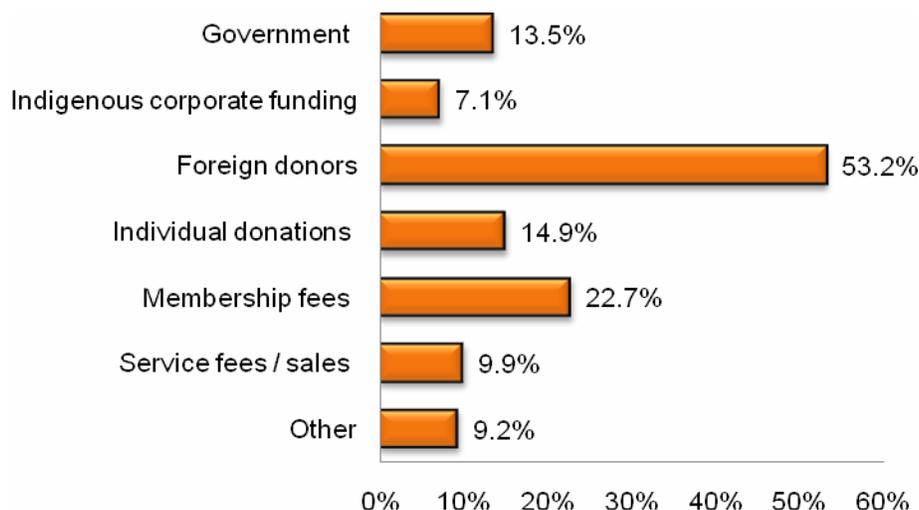


Figure 11: Financial sources of participating organisations

The financial situation of the participating organisations in 2008 was favourable for many of them, as only 24% experienced a fall in their income level, while 44.4% maintained their 2007 level and 30.6% received more funds than in 2007. As shown in the following chart, in regard to expenses, there was a significant increase in 45.5% of organisations, which corresponds to the increase of funding and national inflation, while 36.1% maintained the same level of expenses as in 2007, and 17.6% had to lower their expenses when their income level decreased.

	INCOME	EXPENSES
Increased in 2008	30.6%	45.5%
Same as in 2007	44.4%	36.1%
Decreased in 2008	23.9%	17.6%
N/A	1.1%	0.8%
Total	100%	100%

Table 7: Changes in financial situations of CSOs in 2008

Despite this situation of maintaining or increasing their levels of income, most of the participating organisations consider that the financial resources they dispose of are inadequate to carry out their programmes and efficiently respond to the demands of its members and stakeholders. Further, it is important to note that the economic crisis, the effects of which began to be felt most acutely in 2009 and 2010, are expected to test the financial sustainability of many CSOs to its limit.

In terms of technological resources, CSOs require technical equipment and means of communication to keep a flow of information, in turn allowing them to implement programmes successfully. The results of the CSI Organisational Survey indicated that 74% of the organisations in the survey had permanent access to telephones, 60% to the internet, 47% to a fax machine, and 78% to computers. As shown in Figure 12, these results demonstrate that there is a technological gap in many of the organisations.

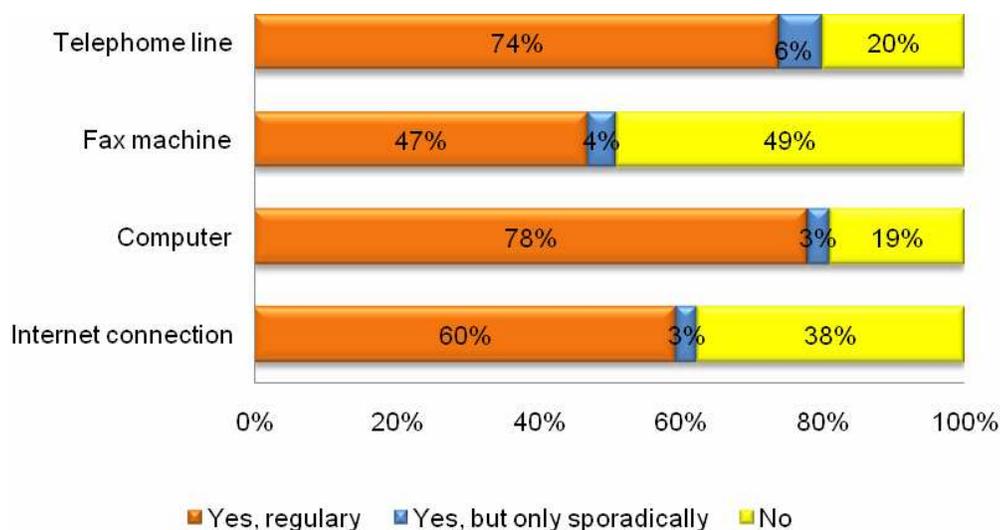


Figure 12: Technological resources of CSOs

In the era of global communication, the lack of internet prevents 40% of CSOs from accessing periodic and permanent sources of information, as well as virtual courses and various announcements and invitations for different activities of interest.

III.2.6. International linkages

In this sub-dimension, the indicator used by CIVICUS is the percentage of international non-government organisations (INGOs) which are present in the country out of the total number of INGOs registered in the International Union of Associations (IUA). This coefficient is extremely low (5.5%), the sub-dimension score of 5.5% does not in fact reflect the multiple linkages, unrecorded by the IUA, that Nicaraguan CSOs have with other organisations in other countries.

Since the 1980s, multiple decentralised, collaborative linkages were established between small organisations in cities in the global North and local Nicaraguan organisations. Some of these linkages have been maintained, while others have recently emerged. At the same time, many organisations in Nicaragua are affiliated to networks, federations and coordination spaces at the Central American regional level, and to a lesser degree, at a Latin American and international level.

Conclusions

Civil society organisations tend to be organised in diverse networks and federations of similar organisations at the municipal, departmental, regional, national and international levels. These networks have allowed them to combine their efforts and share experiences that have enriched CSOs in their development work, as well as enhanced their impact on public policies. Most of the organisations maintain their communication links and coordination ties with other CSOs located in the same territory or related to their subject matter. Nevertheless, participants of the focus groups criticised the lack of coordination between some organisations due to different motivations.

Most CSOs rely on a minimum number of paid staff members, who tend to be characterised by their experience, capabilities and sense of commitment. Organisations count on the work of volunteer members or supporters for their social work. In this way, they promote solidarity and fraternity in a global context which is otherwise often characterised by individualism.

Financially, CSOs rely on modest funds for the implementation of their activities and their organisational operations. The most important financial resources come from external cooperation agencies, and, to a lesser degree, from the contributions of affiliates, individual donations, government funds and the sale of services. Although they significantly increased their expenses, many of the participating organisations had a favourable financial situation in 2008, with the majority of these organisations maintaining the same level of income as in 2007.

In regard to technological resources, many organisations have access to computers, telephone, and internet. However, 40% of the organisations lack access to Internet, which limits the possibility of virtual communication, periodic information, virtual courses and announcements or invitations for activities of interest.

In Nicaragua, a number of collaborative linkages have been established between organisations from developed countries with CSOs and local government organisations. Additionally, many CSOs in Nicaragua are affiliated to networks, federations and coordination spaces, mainly at the regional level in Central America and Latin America.

III.3 PRACTICE OF VALUES

This CSI dimension analyses the ethical values that civil society promotes, both in its internal management as well as in its public work. In particular, the dimension explores the promotion of values such as democracy, gender equality, transparency, tolerance, peace and respect for difference.

According to the CSI, civil society is a space where different types of organisations, created by people to respond to their interests, come together. This space includes social groups that display discriminatory or violent attitudes and questionable ethical values. This study attempts to determine the importance of these groups, as well as the coherence between CSOs' practice and their discourse, which promotes human rights and social development.

This dimension scored the highest of all five CSI dimensions, at 61.5%.

III.3.1. Democratic decision-making governance

This sub-dimension scored 53.6%. The CSI study asked the representatives of 141 organisations included in the survey: "Who makes the most important decisions in your organisation?" In 51.4% of CSOs, both the assembly of members and staff make the main decisions, which means a democratic management process exists in many of these organisations. In second place, with 29.3%, the Board of Directors is the body that makes important decisions; followed thirdly by the Director or Executive with 17.0%. This indicates that the democratisation of decisions and information is an unresolved challenge for many CSOs, in which decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a few people who hold positions of power.

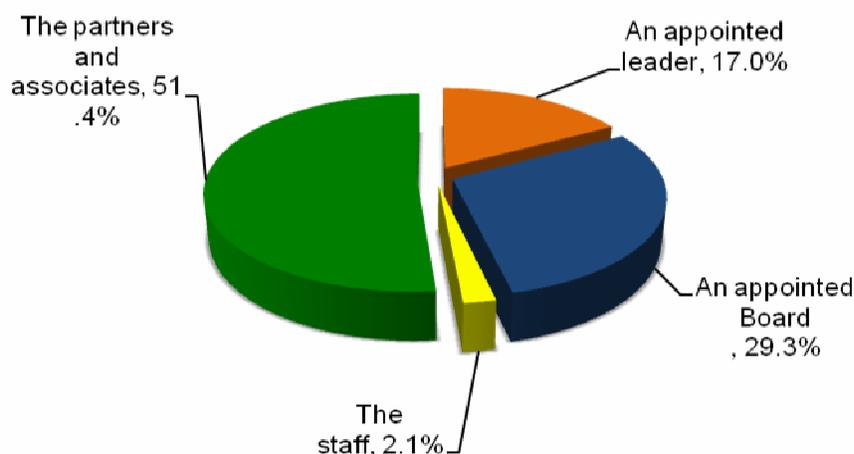


Figure 13: Decision-making

Representatives were also asked about the promotion of democratic decision-making within CSOs and social groups; 60.8% considers civil society to be carrying out this democratic work at a high or medium level, while 33.3% considers that it has been low or non-existent. As discussed in the next chapter, these figures correspond to the positive perception of civil

society's impact on good citizenship practices and in the construction of democracy in Nicaragua.

III.3.2. Labour regulations

This sub-dimension scored 64.5%. In terms of gender equality, most of the CSOs surveyed (62.4%) have a written policy of equal opportunities and salaries for women and men, in their statutes or regulations. Other organisations have pointed out that, although they do not have a written document as is customary, and due to the predominance of oral culture in Nicaragua, they promote gender equality amongst their hired personnel as well as amongst the beneficiaries of their projects. Undoubtedly, it is advisable to write down gender equality policy in order to specify its scope and ensure its institutionalisation; also, generational and ethnic equality should be included in these written policies.

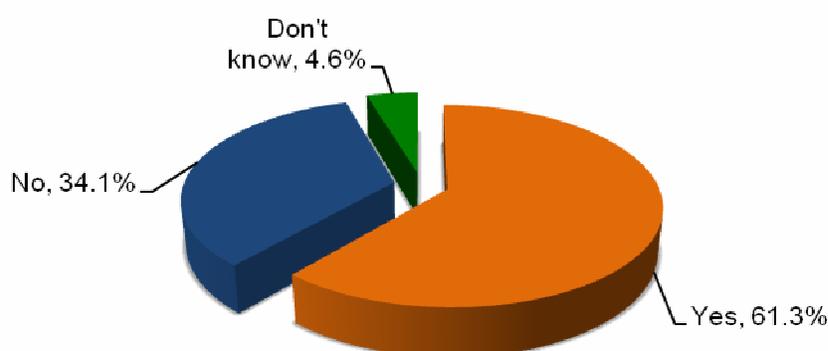


Figure 14: Written gender equality policy

Similar percentages of men (52%) and women (48%) occupied management positions within the sample of organisations included in the study. This reflects parity between genders in the leadership of CSO, which contrasts with the male predominance in political parties and Nicaragua's state institutions.

Most CSOs (73.8%) have a publicly available policy for labour standards, which establishes the ethical and managerial criteria to regulate interpersonal relationships and promote efficiency and responsibility in their tasks. In addition, most of the organisations (57.4%) have given their new staff members training about labour rights. Nevertheless, the affiliation to unions is minimal among hired staff in CSO due to numerous reasons, such as the limited capacity of labour unions, the subordination to political parties and public discredit.

III.3.4. Code of Conduct and Transparency

This sub-dimension scored 63.9%. Half of the organisations surveyed (52.5%) publicly provide information about their financial state of affairs through diverse means, such as annual reports, publications, and websites. Almost all of the organisations periodically present reports to

financial agencies, and annually to the Department of Government, besides informing their members and board of directors about their progress and difficulties of their work.

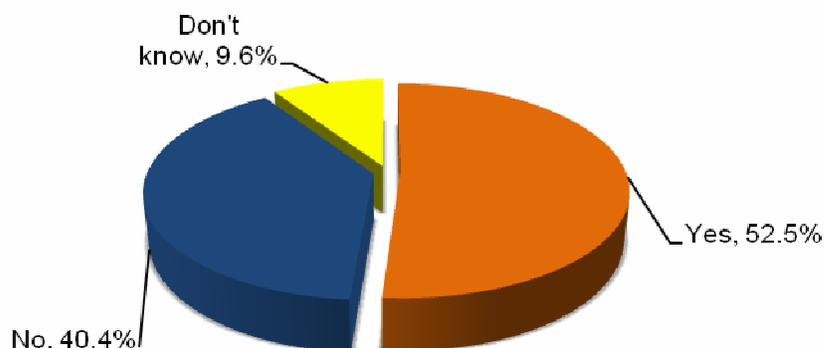


Figure 15: Publicly available financial information

The scarce public information provided by CSOs, along with the governmental campaign of discredit have contributed to high perceptions of corruption: 41% of people who were surveyed thought that the cases of corruption in these organisations were frequent, while 44.9% considered they were scarce. The regional focus groups identified actions, which can be perceived as corrupt in CSO: personal use of the organisation's vehicles and equipment, hiring and purchases for family members or friends, illegitimate loans to CSO officials, use of discretionary funds for travel allowances and travel.

In this sense, the CSI conducted in Bolivia highlights that “the corruption within CSO should not be seen as bad conduct on the part of the leaders, it is also a consequence of the lack of control of the members who are not interested in ensuring the transparency of the organisation.” (CIVICUS 2007: 119).

It is important to recognise that improving CSOs' transparency (as well as that of the state and private enterprise) is an unresolved challenge, which requires CSOs to provide ample and timely information about their work and finances, especially to the participating population and local actors. In this respect, it may be heartening that 75.2% of CSOs reported to have publicly available codes of conduct which although will not be enough by itself, is certainly a step in the right direction. Enhancing transparency can only contribute to organisations' legitimacy and help avoid the possibility of corruption, as shown in the case study about transparency practices of La Cuculmecca Association⁹.

III.3.4. Environmental Standards

This sub-dimension scored 69.5%. Environmental protection has become an ethical and political priority for all social actors in these times of climatic change and ecological destruction. Many CSOs in Nicaragua have played an active role in the defence of natural resources and have proved tangible results, presented in the next chapter. At an internal level, 73% of surveyed

⁹See www.redlocalnicaragua.org for more information.

organisations had a valid environmental policy, including internal norms (concerning, for example, waste management, energy, gas and paper savings) and guidelines for their social work (concerning, for example, reforestation, organic agriculture and environmental education).

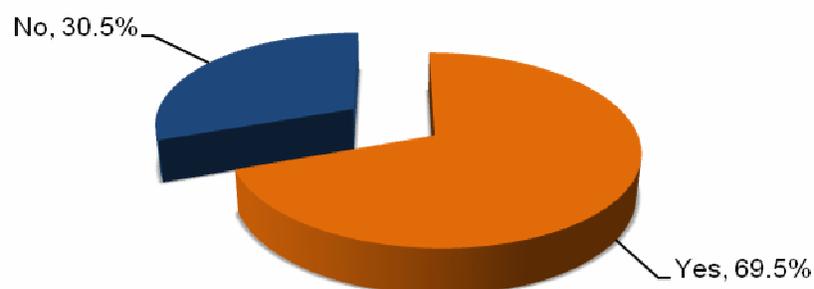


Figure 16: Policy for environmental standards

III.3.5. Perception of values in civil society as a whole

This sub-dimension, which looks at perceptions of non-violence, internal democracy, levels of corruption, intolerance, weight of intolerant groups and promotion of non-violence or peace, scored 56.2% overall.

In Nicaragua, a diverse range of CSOs have promoted dialogue as the best way to deal with differences and peacefully resolve conflicts that arise between people. Most of the people in the survey confirmed this when asked, “How would you evaluate the current role of civil society in the promotion of non-violence and peace in the country?” As shown in the following graph, 34% of respondents scored civil society’s role as high in the promotion of peace.

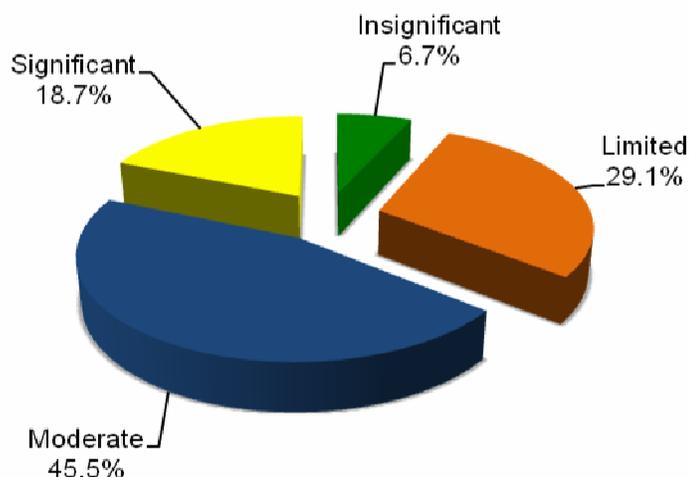


Figure 17: Perceptions of the promotion of non-violence

On the contrary, 73.1% of respondents considered there to be social forces in Nicaragua which use violence to express their interests--- 36.8% think that these groups regularly use violent methods, and 19.7% think that these social forces are important mass movements, as shown in the graph below.

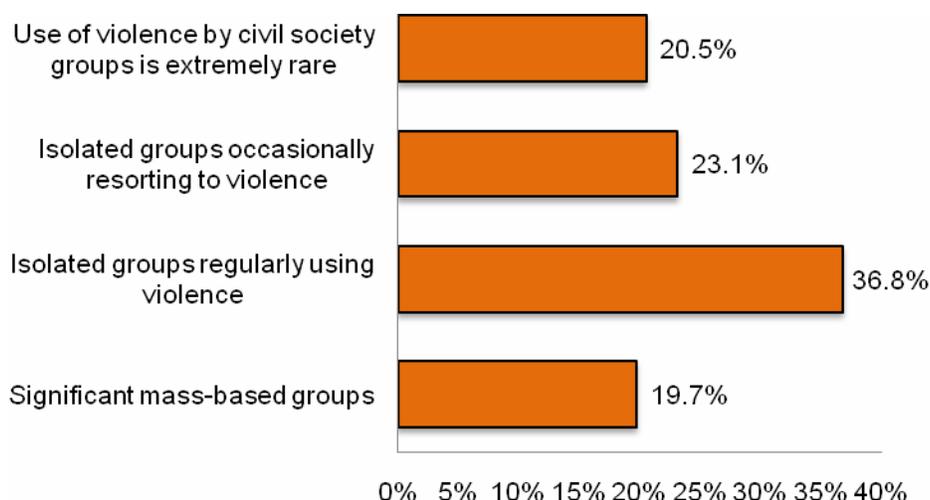


Figure 18: Social forces that use violence

These indicators reflect the violent situations that have occurred in Nicaragua during the last few years, greatly due to the clash between the party in power and the peaceful protests of civil society organisations and opposing parties who are faced with the passivity or complicity of the National Police. In other cases, CSOs resorted to traditional forms of complaints (for example, road blockages which can lead to violent acts) when the means of dialogue had been exhausted and competent authorities had not given any answers. It has also been noted that student groups from national universities often resort to violence in their struggle for positions of power

or in their protests against the restrictions set by the Sandinista student leaders to the electoral competition of new groups.

Meanwhile, many CSOs in Nicaragua have promoted human rights and promoted attitudes of respect and tolerance towards people of different opinions, religious beliefs or political affiliations. However, there are some groups within civil society, which are racist, discriminatory or intolerant; only 18.2% of the people surveyed considers that there are numerous intolerant groups, 28.5% know of some examples and 34.6% do not know of any. The CSI reveals a worrying level of intolerance in the population towards people with HIV, homosexuals, immigrants, people of a different race and other political party.

Conclusions

In comparison to other countries of the region in which the CSI has been implemented, civil society in Nicaragua stands out positively in the promotion of ethical values: firstly, in regard to environmental protection, labour regulations and the perception of values in general, and, secondly, in regard to democratic governance, codes of conduct and transparency.

The results of the study show democratic management processes in many participating organisations where the assembly of members and the staff are the main decision-makers. This process of democratic decision-making and information management, however, is yet to be implemented in other organisations, in which the power to make decisions is concentrated in a few hands.

There are significant advances in gender equality, which can be observed in the parity between men and women in management positions of civil organisations and in the indicator that most of CSOs have a written policy of equality of opportunities and salaries for both women and men. A written equality policy must be elaborated in order to specify its scope and ensure its institutionalisation and implementation; also, generational and ethnic equality policies should be included.

Most CSOs have public labour standards policies in which ethical and management criteria are set to regulate interpersonal relationships and promote efficiency and responsibility in their tasks. In regard to transparency, half of the organisations publicly provide financial information through diverse means, particularly to donors and the state. Nevertheless, improving the transparency of civil society organisations, through timely and ample information about their finances, especially to people and local actors participating in their activities, remains an unresolved challenge. Additionally, it is necessary to combat some illegitimate practices such as the exploitation of CSO resources for personal or family purposes.

The study highlights the existence of environmental standards policies in most organisations, both at the level of internal operations as well as in social interventions. Also, despite the existence of social groups that frequently use violence to express their interests, the work of civil society in the promotion of peace is highly valued. On a Latin American level, previous CSI studies have found that “civil society organisations tend to reproduce positive cultural elements such as solidarity and social activism, but also negative aspects such as the practice of obtaining votes with promises of government posts and favouritism, which are common in public institutions and society”. (CIVICUS 2007: 114)

Many civil society organisations in Nicaragua have promoted human rights and have encouraged attitudes of respect and tolerance towards people with opinions, religious beliefs or political preferences. Nonetheless, within the diversity of Nicaragua’s civil society, there are some groups that have displayed racist, discriminatory or intolerant attitudes.

III.4 PERCEPTION OF IMPACT

This chapter explores the impacts and results that civil society achieves as a result of the efforts of its organisations and citizens. The two priority issues were the fight against poverty and the strengthening of democracy. In regard to the concept of impact, “The CSI adopts a broad notion of impact, which refers not only to the final result or influence that civil society has on one determined area, but also to the process of involvement of civil society in a particular topic” (CIVICUS 2007: 8). Overall this dimension scored 59.8%.

Given the inherent difficulties in directly measuring the impact of civil society at the national level, the CSI bases its assessment on the “internal” perceptions of the protagonists of the 141 civil society organisations surveyed and the “external” perceptions of the 31 qualified informants who belong to state institutions, cooperation agencies and research centres.

In the first place, this chapter will discuss the impact obtained in terms of citizens’ trust in civil society organisations. Secondly, we will discuss the social results of civil society’s work in the fight against poverty, education, culture and environmental protection. Lastly, we will present the political impacts of civil society in its work to promote citizenship rights, impact public policies and strengthen democracy.

III.4.1 / III.4.4 Responsiveness (internal and external perceptions)

These sub-dimensions scored 69.5% (internal perceptions) and 70.0% (external perceptions), suggesting that those inside and outside of civil society share a broadly similar – and positive – assessment of the extent to which civil society responds well to social concerns. Both internal and external stakeholders agreed that civil society responded better to the second social concern (strengthening democracy) than they did to the first social concern (poverty alleviation).

III.4.2 / III.4.5 Social impact (internal and external perceptions)

These sub-dimensions scored 82.1% (internal perceptions) and 72.6% (external perceptions), suggesting that although civil society is universally perceived to achieve significant social impact, civil society has a higher opinion of the effect of its own work than external stakeholders do.

According to the official statistics based on the unsatisfied basic needs method (INEC 2005), the levels of poverty in Nicaragua reach 29.1% of homes, while 36.8% live in conditions of extreme poverty. Based on their potential, civil society organisations have addressed this serious problem through different action plans in education, health, strengthening of small enterprises, defence of labour rights, sustainable agriculture and other initiatives. However, structural determinants of the poverty reproduction cycle continue to operate; for example, the global capitalist market logic, the unequal distribution of national resources and income, and the regressive tax policies. Against these determinants, civil society inevitably struggles to change the direction of Nicaraguan society.

As seen in Graph 22, despite the differences that exist between them, there is a significant level of impact on the fight against poverty according to the internal and external perceptions. The “high” and “medium” levels add up to more than 60%, while only one third or fewer participants consider the impact to be “limited” or “none”.

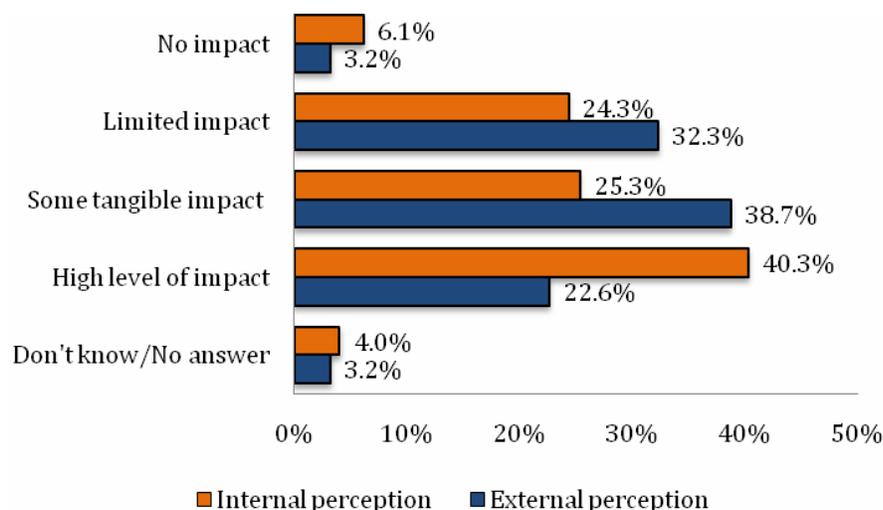


Figure 19: Impact on the fight against poverty

Many CSOs promote formal educational activities with the population such as those carried out in school centres linked to religious orders. These religious organisations teach preschool, primary, secondary, university and technical careers courses. Other organisations carry out informal education activities such as training courses in several subject matters of interest, as well as workshops, forums and sharing of experiences. Additionally, cultural activities such as dance, music, theatre, painting, poetry, craftworks and local festivities are promoted.

As shown in Figure 20, there is a high level of impact obtained by CSOs in education and culture. Although there are significant differences between the internal and external perception, more than 60% of stakeholders consider civil society to achieve high or medium levels of impact.

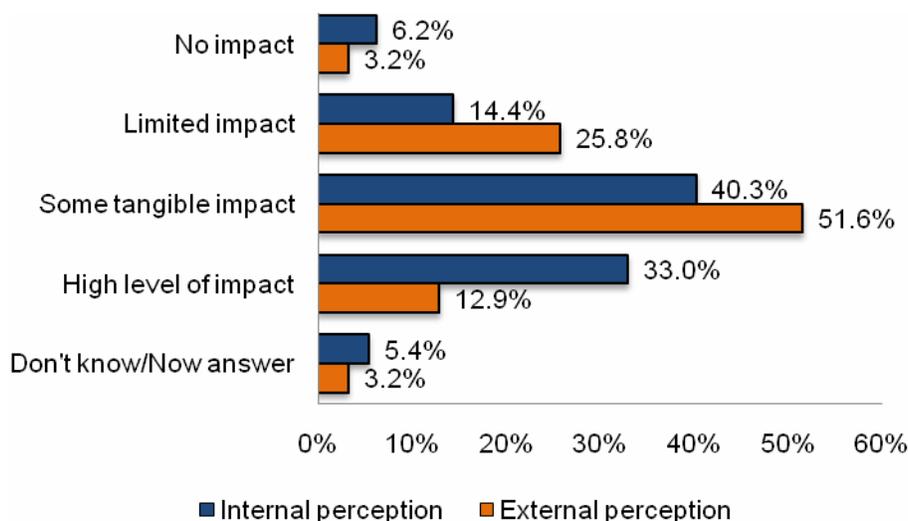


Figure 20: Impact on education and culture

The protection of natural resources has been an area of work for many CSOs who have promoted campaigns for environmental education, reforestation, soil and water conservation, organic agriculture, protection of basins, rivers and lagoons, waste management and sewage, and conservation of endangered species. Figure 21 shows that CSOs have obtained significant results in this regard: more than 60% of stakeholders believe the impact to be high or medium, although there are considerable differences between the internal and external perceptions.

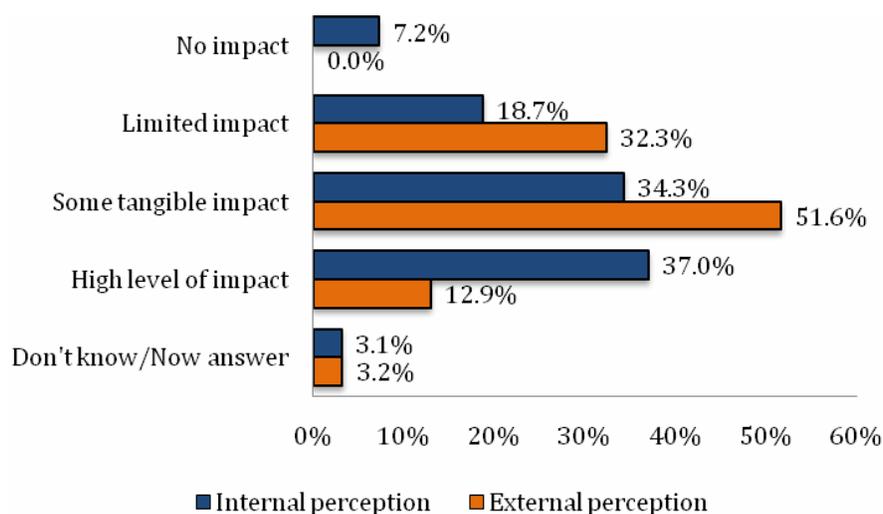


Figure 21: Impact on environmental protection

III.4.3 / III.4.6 Political impact (internal and external perceptions)

During the last few decades, civil society organisations have contributed to the democratisation of the political system in diverse forms such as civic education and participation, training of social leaders, impact on public policies, social auditing of the use of public resources and the performance of state officials. Civic participation in CSOs also constitutes a space for learning the knowledge, values and skills which make up the social capital needed for the functioning of a democratic society. One third of the people surveyed in the CSI consider civil society's impact on the democratisation of the country to be high (35%), and 45% consider it to be medium.

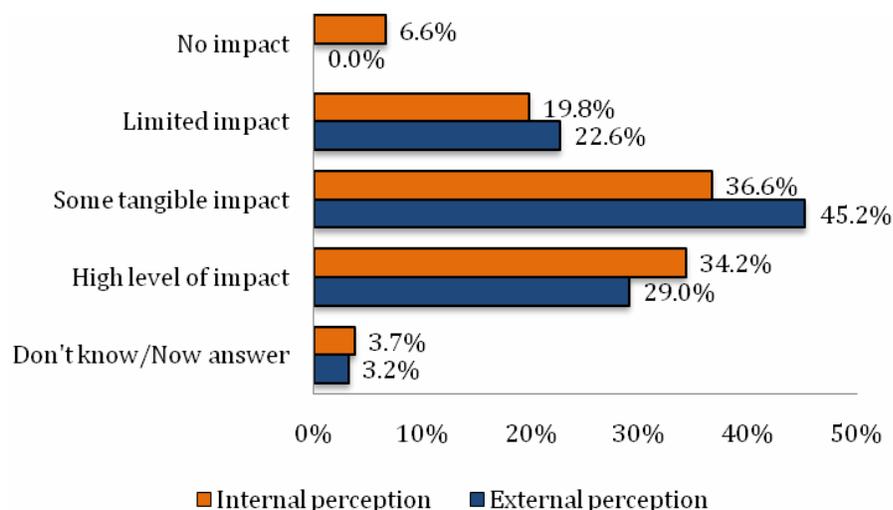


Figure 22: Impact on the construction of democracy

Through its educational and informative programmes, many CSOs promote the knowledge and respect of universal human rights, and particularly the respect for the rights of traditionally excluded groups such as women, children, adolescents and young people, indigenous and afro-descendent people, homosexuals, people with HIV/ AIDS and people living with disability. As shown in Figure 23, the CSI results indicate that civil society is perceived to have a high impact on the promotion of human rights and citizenship rights. However, there are violations of human rights, including civil, political, social and economic rights on a daily basis.

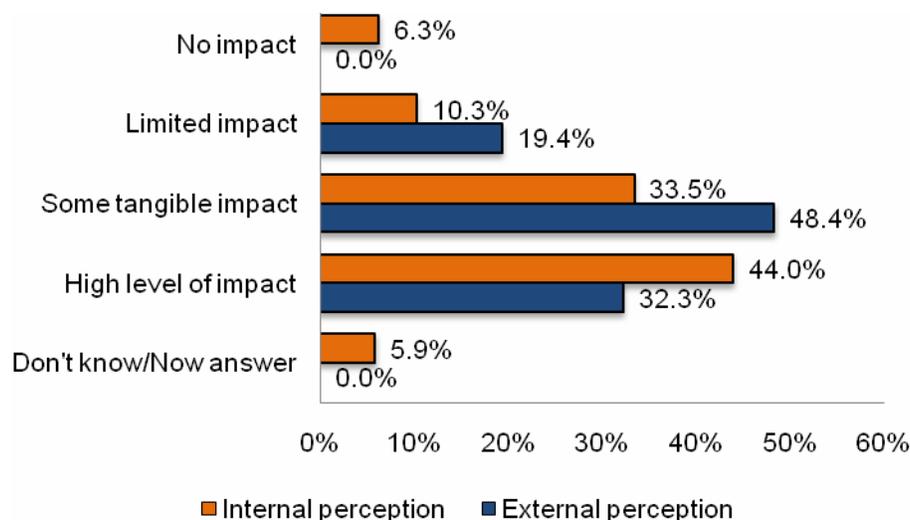


Figure 23: Impact on promotion of human rights

In their social, economic or cultural work, CSOs normally work together with public authorities to establish the demands of their members or communities so that they can be incorporated in public policies and government plans. The impact on public policies is defined by the CSI as “any attempt to influence or pressure for the creation or reform of laws or regulations, the implementation of state programmes, the promotion of rights or interests of different sectors of the population, or other initiatives or proposals directed specifically to the state.”

As shown in the following graph, results of the CSI Organisational Survey show that in the last couple of years, 74% of the organisations surveyed tried to influence public policies on a municipal, regional or national level.

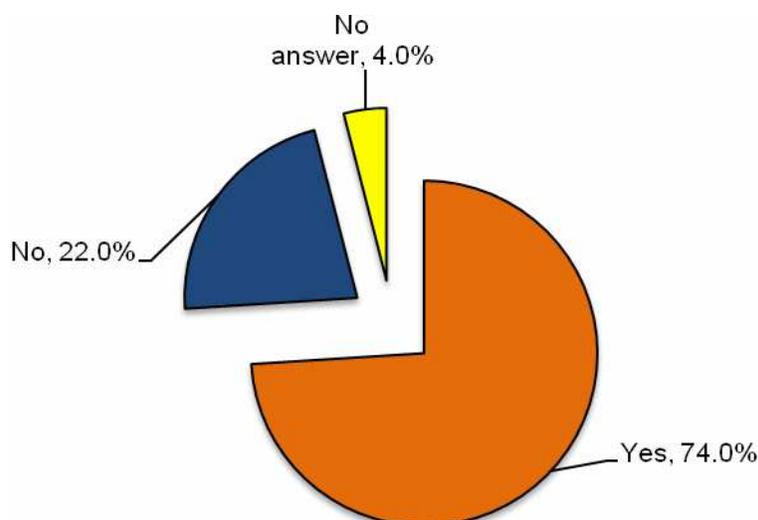


Figure 24: Actions towards political impact

The results of the impact on the political process were successful in one fifth of the cases (22.2%), given the fact that the results depended on the political receptivity. While the pertinent authorities are reviewing a considerable number of the proposals (36.5%), there have been few rejections and there is no information available regarding the rest of the cases. The most common issues that these processes of political impact deal with on a municipal level have been proposals to influence the annual budget, gender equality policies, children's and youth rights, and policies on drinkable water, public transport, environmental protection and labour rights.

On the level of the Caribbean Regions, there has been impact in terms of regional autonomy, the rights of indigenous and Afro-descendent people, and the regional health and education model. On the national level, there has been significant impact on health and education policy, credit policies, employment and salary, social security, agricultural development policies, access to public information, decriminalisation of therapeutic abortion, insecurity and violence, and natural resource protection.

In general, although the sum of the high and medium levels does reach 50%, the impact of civil society on public policies is generally considered to be limited, as outlined in Figure 25.

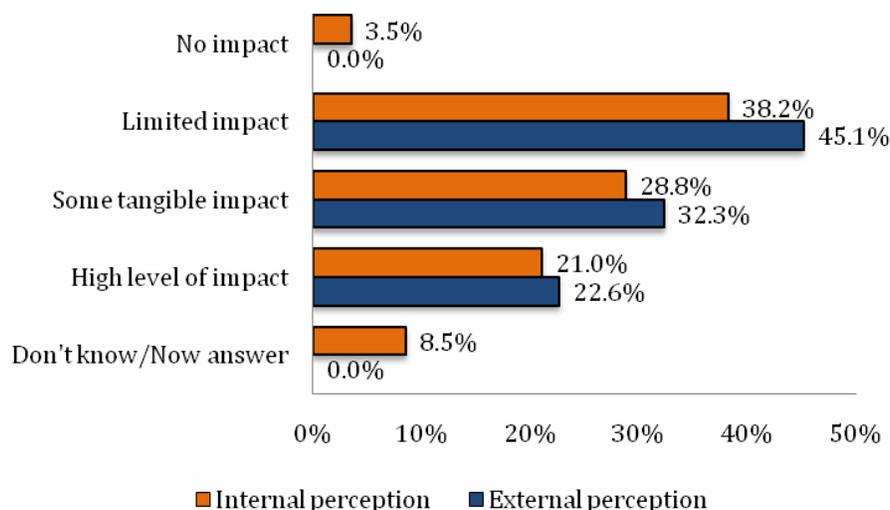


Figure 25: Impact on public policies

The Alexander von Humboldt Centre has had an outstanding experience in regard to its impact on environmental public policies in Nicaragua and Central America. According to the results of the case study done as a part of the CSI, this experience has included important results and valuable lessons for civil society¹⁰.

III.4.7. Impact of civil society on attitudes

This sub-dimension scored 13.3%, and was drawn from four indicators: the difference in trust between civil society members and non-members (2.5%); the difference in tolerance levels between civil society and non-members (14.4%); the difference in public spiritedness between civil society members and non-members (3.2%) and the trust levels in civil society (33%).

Of these indicators, the most revealing findings are those linked to the levels of trust in civil society. In the population survey interviewees were asked how much trust they had in a range of certain institutions. As shown in Figure 26, a clear indicator of the positive impact that Nicaraguan civil society has obtained is the high degree of civic trust in organisations, which provides them with a high degree of legitimacy. Second after churches, women's organisations stand out for their intense work in the defence of human rights, gender equality and the decriminalisation of therapeutic abortion. In third and fourth place, society places most trust in environmental organisations and CSOs in general, respectively. As other opinion polls show, political parties and public officials have the lowest levels of civic trust, which indicates an obstacle for the credibility of dialogue and agreement between civil and political society (Booth and Seligson 2010).

¹⁰The full case study can be read online at www.redlocalnicaragua.org.

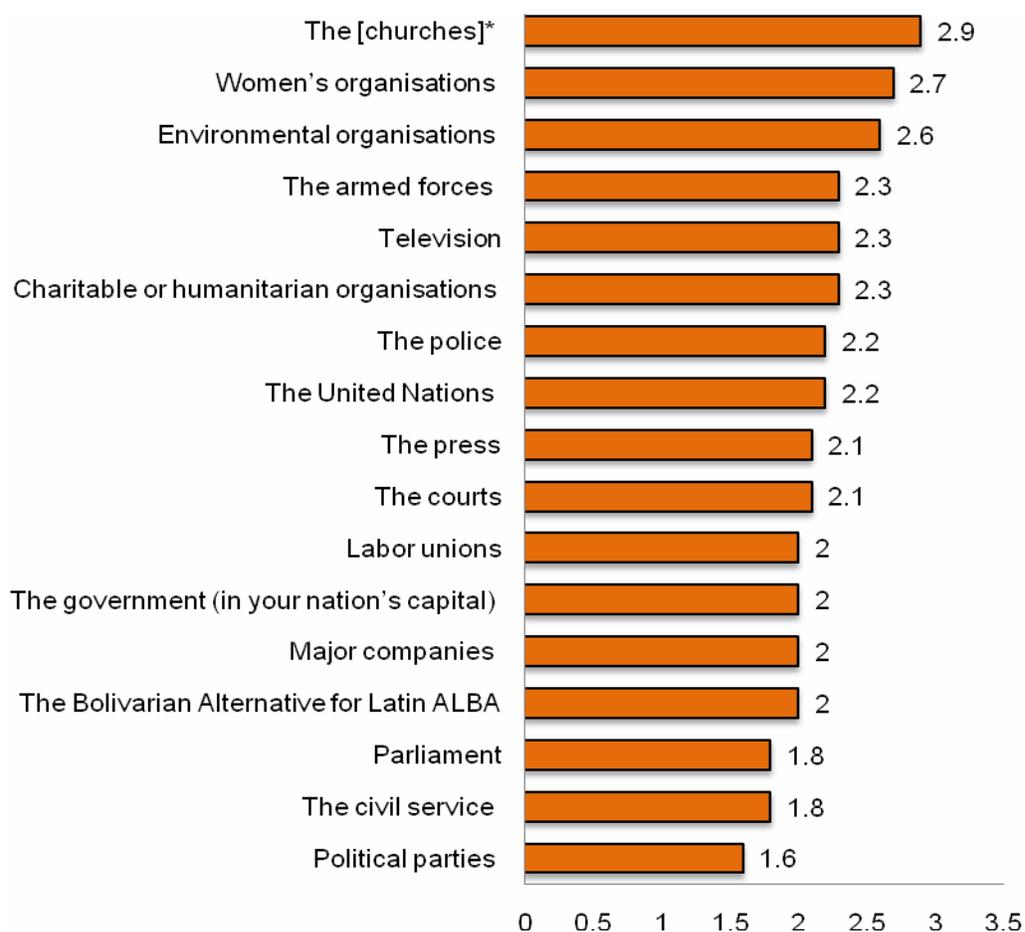


Figure 26: Civic trust in public institutions

Conclusions

The Perception of Impact dimension reveals that civil society in Nicaragua is achieving significant degrees of impact in its work. As captured in Figure 27, this impact is especially related to social issues such as education, culture, environment and the fight against poverty, and, to a lesser degree, to the impact on public policies and the strengthening of democracy where political actors, who can be opposed to direct civic participation in state management, intervene.

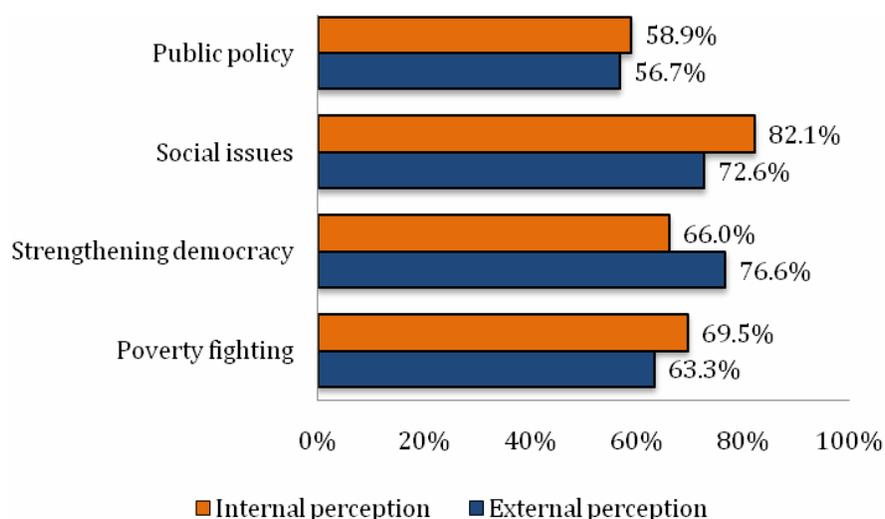


Figure 27: Social and political impact of CSOs

A clear indicator of the positive impact achieved by Nicaraguan civil society is the high degree of civic trust in its organisations, which gives them great social legitimacy. On the contrary, civic distrust is clear in regard to political parties and public officials, which makes dialogue and agreements between civil society and political society difficult.

The CSI shows that CSOs have reached a significant level of impact in the fight against poverty through different activities in education, sustainable agriculture and other initiatives. In addition, both in the educational and cultural sector, civic organisations have reached a high level of impact as a result of numerous programmes of formal and informal education, social communication, and promotion of artistic expression. Civil society's impact on the protection of natural resources, meanwhile, is noteworthy; especially through actions related to environmental education, reforestation, sustainable development, waste management and conservation of soil and water.

On a political level, civil organisations have contributed in diverse ways to the democratisation of the political system, including through the promotion of education and civic participation, training of social leaders, impact on public policies, social auditing of the use of public resources and the performance of state officials. Many CSOs promote knowledge and respect of universal human rights, and in particular, the rights of traditionally excluded groups such as women, children and young people, ethnic groups and disabled people.

Civil society has achieved particular impact in the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean, where specific forms of participation and organisation of the indigenous and Afro-descendent communities have been legally recognised and catered for. Also legally recognised are their collective rights to preserve their languages, religions and cultures, communal forms of property, natural resources, as well as their power to elect their communal, territorial and regional authorities.

The work and impact of CSOs to design and implement municipal, regional or national public policies that respond to the demands of the population through legally established spaces for consultation - or directly through governmental decision-making - has played a vital role in the

democratisation of Nicaragua. As Cohen and Arato point out, “the establishment and creation of an active role of civil society initiatives, at the level of constitutional structure and political structure, is required to preserve the democratic spirit” (Cohen and Arato 2000: 502).

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the work of civil society organisations to express the different demands of citizens on a municipal, regional or national level and their impact on public policy has been limited. This is due, at least in part, to low receptivity on the part of public officials.

III.5 EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

It is necessary to identify the national context in which civil society develops in a specific country in order to understand the situation it is in and the challenges it faces. A fundamental dimension of the CSI is the study of the context or environment in which civil society develops, which breaks up into three interrelated aspects: the economic, political and cultural context.

This chapter seeks to assess to what degree the political, economic and cultural conditions of a country contribute to or facilitate civil society's performance, or, on the contrary, constitute barriers to its development. The data for this dimension is drawn primarily from secondary, external sources. Among the favourable conditions for the functioning of civil society are the validity of civil rights and liberties, the respect to democratic institutionalism and state of law, the prevalence of ethical values such as tolerance, respect and interpersonal trust, and the economic opportunities available for to the population to obtain sufficient income to satisfy their basic needs in an equitable way. Overall, however, this dimension scored 52.7%, the lowest of all five CSI dimensions, reflecting challenges still ahead, particularly in the political sphere.

III.5.1 Socio-Economic Context

This sub-dimension scored 48.4%. In 2010, Nicaragua has an estimated population of 5,581,199 inhabitants and a territorial extension of 129,494 km². According to information from the Nicaraguan Central Bank, this country's economic situation is characterised by profound inequalities brought about by an elevated fiscal deficit, a limited Gross Domestic Product (USD\$6,149 million 2009), which only covers half of the global demand and a strong commercial balance deficit (USD\$1,814 million 2009). This external gap has been covered by the international remittances of Nicaraguan workers (estimated at USD\$800 million per year) as well as the external help (USD\$550 million per year on average) of donor organisations and international financial institutions (Avenidaño 2009).

According to the official statistics, there are high levels of poverty in Nicaragua, which reach 29.1% of homes, while 36.8% live in conditions of extreme poverty. Poverty has greater impact in rural zones than in urban, and it particularly affects women, children and indigenous groups (INEC 2005). A recent study showed a reduction of 3.6% in the level of poverty and 7.5% in the level of extreme poverty between 2005 and 2009 (FIDEG 2010).

Nicaragua is one of the countries with the highest unequal distribution of income and wealth: the top 20% of the richest population accumulate 47.2% of the total consumption, while the poorest 20% only receives 6.2%. The deterioration of education, health and income indicators have meant that Nicaragua's place in the Human Development Index has gone down from 124th to 185th in the world. Open unemployment reaches 12% of the active population, in addition to 36% who are in sub-employment. Therefore, half the population lacks stable, full-time employment with a fair income (PNUD 2009).

The information used by CIVICUS to produce the Civil Society Index Diamond comes from the indicators produced by well-known international organisations, such as:

- The Basic Capabilities Index used by Social Watch, which contemplates: the percentage of children who reach the 5th grade and the child mortality index until age 5.
- The Corruption Perception Index in the public sector produced by Transparency International.

- The Gini Coefficient produced by the World Bank to show the level of inequality within a society.
- The relationship between the External Debt and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as an indicator of economic development.

Indicator	Score
Basic Capabilities Index	72.3
Corruption	25.0
Inequality	56.9
Economic development	39.4

Table 8: Indicators about the socio-economic context in Nicaragua

Corruption in public institutions has been a chronic problem. Transparency International's report gives Nicaragua a 2.5 score on a scale that goes from 0= totally corrupt to 10= lack of corruption. The country has gone down from 123rd in 2007 to 134th in 2008 out of 183 countries in the world. It is located in the category of countries with "an extreme level of corruption due to diverse factors such as: the scarce auditing of public institutions, the reduced access to information about governmental management, the use of state resources in the electoral campaign of 2008 and the fraud in the municipal elections (Transparency International 2008). In this sense, a recent survey identified governmental corruption as the main problem perceived by 68.7% of the population (Jarquin 2010).

In synthesis, Nicaragua's socio-economic context is not favourable for the flourishing of civil society given the levels of poverty, inequality, corruption and economic stagnation. However, civil society has taken on these problems as challenges as far as is possible and strives to confront them through agreements and partnerships with other sectors to create income generation opportunities and pursue human development.

III.5.2 Socio-political context

This sub-dimension scored 54.2%. As described in the previous chapter, the current political context in Nicaragua, particularly since 2007 with the installation of a new government regime which has promoted an exclusive system of social organisations, has limited the rights of association and expression of non-related civil society organisations and has tried to perpetuate itself in power at the expense of the break up of the constitution and electoral control.

In this sub-dimension, CIVICUS uses different sources to collect indicators about political rights and civil liberties, the legal framework and the government's actions in regard to civil society organisations, as well as the effectiveness of the state:

- The Political Rights Index produced by Freedom House
- The Governability Database produced by the World Bank
- The Organisational Survey of the Civil Society Index in Nicaragua

Indicator	Score
Political rights	67.5
State of law	62.5

Rights of association and organisation	58.3
Legal framework experience	50.7
State effectiveness	31.8

Table 9: Indicators about the political context in Nicaragua

(Sources: Freedom House 2008, World Bank 2008 and Organisational Survey CSI 2009)

It is important to note that some of the data on political rights and freedoms is unfortunately somewhat obsolete. Through the duration of this study, there were significant shifts. These changes began to take force from the start of 2007 with the beginning of the FSLN government. The greatest restrictions, however, took place in 2008 (including the closure of three political parties and varying degrees of electoral fraud, attacks on CSOs and media restriction). These continued in 2009 and at the time of writing there is a new wave of restrictions within the context of 2011 elections (in November the President and deputies are elected). These restrictions are necessary because Daniel Ortega seems likely to run for President as the FSLN candidate, even though his re-election is prohibited by the constitution.

The low score given to state effectiveness refers to the state's ability to fulfil its basic functions. This score was based on the indicators of the annual study about governability carried out by the World Bank (World Bank 2008b). The legal framework experience is based on the survey given out to the representatives of civil society organisations in different areas of the country. As shown in the following chart, 49% of representatives consider that country's laws to be restrictive, while 43% consider them to be enabling.

Considers that the regulations and laws in regards to civil society are...	
Very restrictive	19.2%
Somewhat restrictive	29.4%
Moderately empowering	31.2%
Totally empowering	13.1%
N/A	7.1%
Total	100%

Table 10: Assessment of Nicaragua's legal framework

Among the restrictions pointed out in the regional focus groups were the difficulties and the costs involved in obtaining the legal status as an association, as well as the bureaucratic barriers faced by unions and cooperatives to obtain their legal approval and annual certification. Obtaining legal status requires a National Assembly law and a Ministry of Government registration. In addition to the judicial restrictions, participants criticised the discriminatory implementation of laws by competent authorities of consecutive governments according to the political affinity of civil organisations. As pointed out by one participant in the Boaco focus group, "The main problem is not the laws, but the government officials who implement the laws at their political convenience."

As shown in the following graph, when participants were asked if their organisation had faced any illegitimate restriction or attack by the government during the last 10 years, we received an affirmative answer from 35.5% of respondents, who stated they had suffered some type of aggression by local government, and 26.2% by the national government.

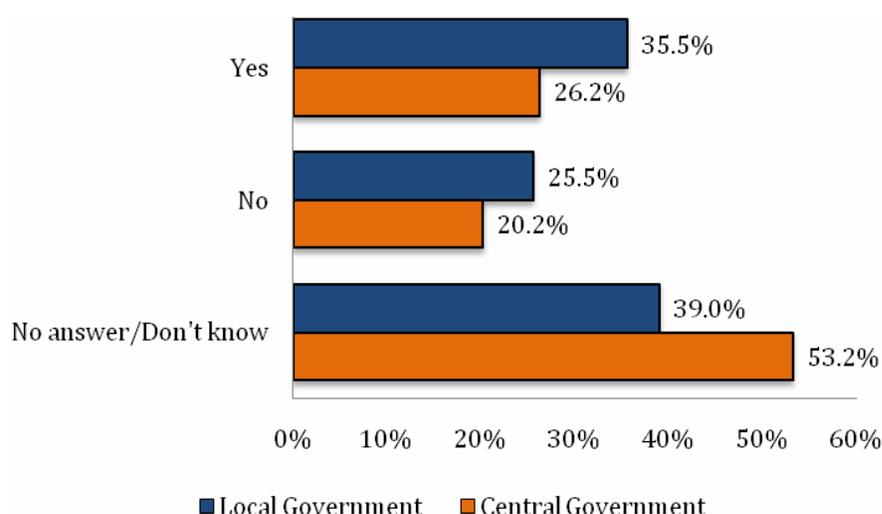


Figure 28: Illegitimate restrictions by the government against CSOs

The most frequent cases of illegitimate actions suffered by civil society in the last decade have included abuse of power by authorities, restrictions on strikes and mobilisations, aggression and deprivation of liberty, fiscal retaliations and discriminatory controls by state organisations, insults and slandering, exclusion due to political motives, closure of legal spaces of participation, imposition of organisational forms, and violation of human and civic rights. The high percentage of abstentions in the answers is particularly noteworthy. The focus group interpreted these abstentions as an expression of fear of the possible retaliations on the part of the government or affiliated political groups, as has occurred on several past occasions.

To better understand the political context in which civil society works, it should be pointed out that political parties in Nicaragua are characterised by their weak institutionalisation, their vertical organisation led by charismatic leaders (*caudillos* or “strongmen”) who fluctuate between confrontations and agreements. The main political activity occurs in the lead-up to elections in order to obtain votes to secure positions within the state, which many visualise as a source of earnings and power. Most political parties have underestimated the promotion of citizen participation in public management and better coordination with civil society organisations, except with subordinate organisations, because they are seen as competitors for the representation of civic demands. In addition, many fear the critical auditing threatened by civil society organisations (Guzman 2004). In short, the current political context in Nicaragua presents unfavourable indicators for the development of civil society, despite the work carried out by many civil organisations in the promotion and defence of citizens’ rights.

III.5.3. Socio-cultural context

This sub-dimension, which scored 55.6%, studies the attitudes, values and predominant conceptions of the Nicaraguan population, in order to analyse its influence on the functioning and development of civil society. A key indicator is the level of interpersonal trust because it impacts on the communication and association of people in civic organisations to satisfy common interests. According to the CSI population survey, there are remarkably and worryingly low levels of trust; only 3 out of every 100 people consider that “other people can be trusted”, while the remaining 97 think that “we must be very cautious.” Nevertheless, a recent survey based on a question with 4 levels of trust (very trustworthy, somewhat trustworthy, a little

trustworthy, not trustworthy); classify Nicaragua in an intermediate position on a Central American level (Booth and Seligson 2010).

Another important indicator is the level of tolerance and respect for people who are different or have different ideas. These ethical values facilitate the coexistence, associability and peaceful resolution of differences and the strengthening of political democracy. The CSI population survey shows high levels of intolerance towards drug addicts, alcoholics and delinquents, which are perhaps more understandable and common in many countries. However, the rejection of homosexuals, people living with HIV, immigrants and other ethnic groups is worrying.

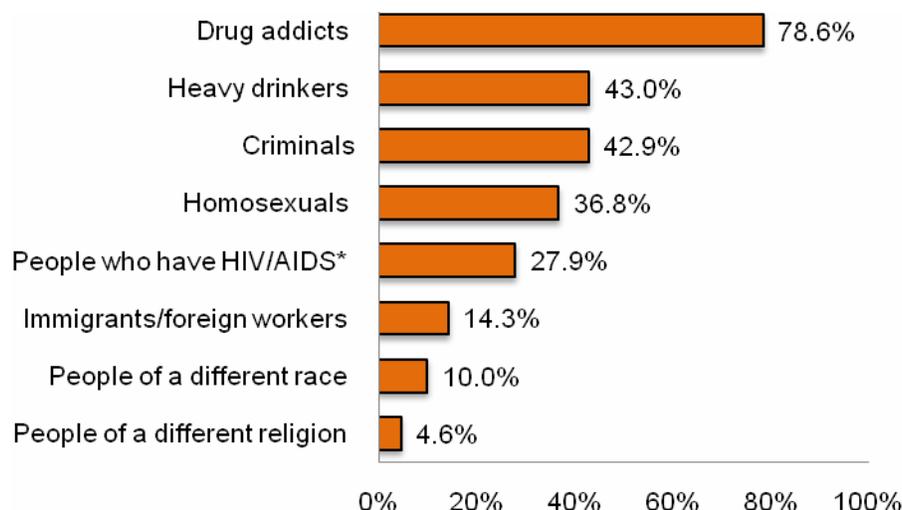


Figure 29: Tolerance
Question: "Would you accept as neighbours...?"

Unfortunately, the CSI did not enquire about tolerance towards people of different political ideology, which is an element that has historically affected the Nicaraguan society and that has aggravated the political polarisation during the last few years. Indeed, this may be one area deserving of further research and closer inspection.

The third indicator that the CSI assesses in the socio-cultural sector refers to the public spiritedness, or in other words, the ethical values of honesty, transparency and the fulfilment of civic duties. In the population survey, people were asked to assess if certain actions which lack public spiritedness could be justified, on a scale of 1 (never justified) to 10 (always justified). The answers indicated a clear rejection of dishonest actions by Nicaraguan people, especially in the cases of illegitimate claims to state benefits and bribes, with small variations in respect to the global average.

ACTION	GLOBAL AVERAGE	NICARAGUA
Claim state benefits to which one is not entitled	2.7	2.4
Avoid paying the ticket on public transport	2.7	3.2
Cheat on tax payments, if possible	2.4	3.0
Accept bribes in the fulfilment of one's obligations	2.0	1.7
*AVERAGES IN A SCALE WHERE 1 = NEVER JUSTIFIED AND 10 = ALWAYS JUSTIFIED		

Table 11: Justification of actions that lack public spiritedness

Conclusions

The socio-economic context in Nicaragua is unfavourable for the flourishing of civil society given the high levels of poverty, inequality, corruption and economic stagnation, which have been worsened by the current global capitalist crisis.

On a political level, the state has limited ability to fulfil its basic functions. National laws are considered to be restrictive due to the difficulties involved in obtaining legal status and the discriminatory implementation of the fiscal control measures, according to the political affinity of civil organisations. In the last 10 years, one third of civil organisations which were surveyed have suffered some kind of aggression by the local or national government; for example, abuses of power, strike and mobilisation restrictions, aggression and deprivation of liberty, slanderous allegations and defamation, the closure of legal spaces of participation, or the violation of human and civil rights. The situation has worsened with the installation of the new government regime since 2007, which has promoted an exclusive system of social organisations and has limited the rights of association, expression and cooperation of civil society organisations to whom they are not related.

On a cultural level, there are low levels of interpersonal trust, which makes communication and the association of people in CSOs difficult. Additionally, there is a low level of tolerance of other ideas, beliefs or ways of life, which is seen in the discrimination and rejection towards people with HIV, homosexuals, immigrants, ethnic groups and people with other political party affiliations. In regard to the population's public spiritedness, there is an acceptable level of sharing of ethical values such as honesty, transparency and the fulfilment of civic duties. In particular, citizens clearly reject actions of illegitimate claims of state benefits and bribery of public officials.

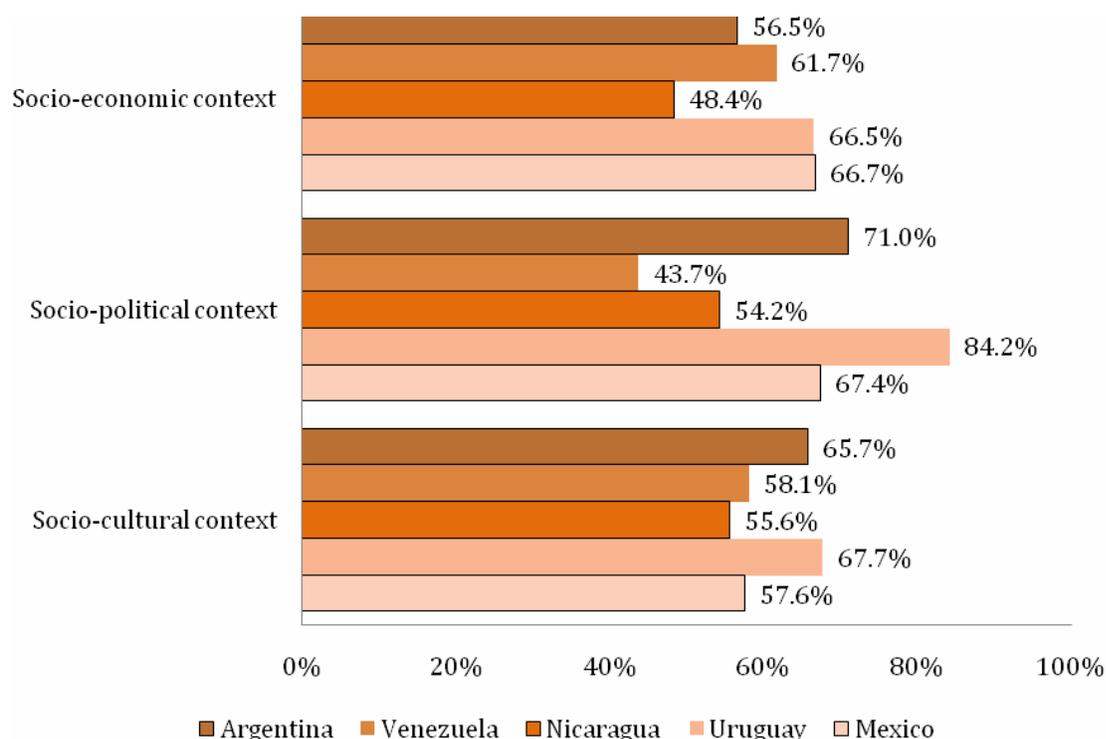


Figure 30: The external environment for civil society in Latin American countries

Compared with other countries in Latin America, the CSI comparative indicators place Nicaragua in the poorest positions in the political, economic and cultural sectors (as shown by Figure 30). In short, Nicaragua has an unfavourable context for the functioning and the development of civil society. This prevents the fulfilment of civil society's social and political roles, such as the association of citizens for the satisfaction for their diverse interests, the promotion of rights and participation in public management. However, CSOs have taken ownership of these problems as challenges and have implemented different programmes focused on overcoming poverty, making the political system more democratic and promoting human rights.

IV. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF NICARAGUAN CIVIL SOCIETY

This section presents a general balance of strengths and weaknesses of the Nicaraguan civil society, which have been identified in the study. The strengths and weaknesses also draw on supplementary qualitative information provided in the regional focus groups and National Workshop, in addition to the analysis of quantitative data already outlined in Chapter III.

Key Strengths

- The CSI study shows that a **significant proportion of the population participates in civil society organisations and community actions**: one fifth of citizens volunteer as active members of various social organisations. This figure is much higher than the Latin American average. On a regional level, it is important to highlight the very high levels of participation of traditionally excluded social groups, such as women, indigenous communities and peasants, in civil society organisations. Political participation in elections has been high, but seems to be decreasing due to the discrediting of the Supreme Electoral Council and political parties.
- In Nicaragua, **civil society is well organised** across the entire national territory, including rural zones where the state is not present. The rich diversity of ways in which Nicaraguan civil society organises opens the possibility of participation by the general population according to their interests and could also enable a thematic specialisation by organisations in their specific area of social development.
- **Civil society organisations are organised in various networks or federations** of similar organisations on a municipal, departmental, regional, national and international level. It is important to highlight the connections in communication and the coordination between those CSOs which share a specific subject matter or intervention zone, although the CSI study did reveal some situations of lack of communication and tensions between some CSOs.
- CSOs enjoy a **high level of legitimacy amongst citizens**. This is particularly the case among women and environmental organisations. In fact, the level of legitimacy for CSOs is very superior to that of political institutions in Nicaragua. CSOs stand out for their work in supporting the demands and interests of the population to the corresponding authorities, as well as for their work in external cooperation and the execution of social projects to attend to society's needs. The work of CSOs compares favourably with that of a state more notable for its absence and failure.
- The **population trusts civil society organisations**, who on the whole have understood how to defend the population's rights and respond to its demands. The organisations which deliver social services to the population, for example, in education or health, are recognised for their efficiency and quality of attention. On the other hand, several civil society organisations have had an active role in the promotion and defence of human rights, especially those of traditionally excluded social groups such as women, children, indigenous, and disabled people.
- The legitimacy that civil organisations have obtained is based **on their work in the practice and promotion of ethical values**, which are essential to democratic

coexistence and sustainable human development in Nicaragua, such as gender, generational and ethnic equality, environmental protection, transparency, norms of conduct, labour rights, democracy, tolerance, respect, solidarity, justice and peace. These ethical values of solidarity with, justice and commitment to the Nicaraguan people are even more important and highly valued in an increasingly globalised world promoting ever greater individualism, competition and consumerism.

- Many of the organisations surveyed presented **democratic management processes** in which assemblies of members and staff make the main decisions. There are significant advances in gender equality due to the parity between men and women in management positions of civil society organisations. Most of these organisations have a written equal opportunities and salaries policy for men and women.
- Most of the organisations have **labour standards and regulations** in which ethical and administrative criteria are established to regulate the interpersonal relationships and promote efficiency and responsibility at work. Most civil society organisations have a minimum number of paid personnel characterised by their experience, abilities and sense of commitment. To reach their objectives, organisations rely on the volunteer work of their members or supporters, and, in this way, promote solidarity and fraternity in a global context characterised by individualism.
- Civil society has achieved some **impact on public policies** and has influenced a number of specific different laws and policies, at a municipal, regional and national level. There have also been experiences of social auditing of the use of public resources and the performance of officials. The role of some journalists and mass media has been outstanding in these experiences. However, much of this work to achieve impact and engage in social auditing has faced the rejection of a political elite impermeable to civic participation.
- The **financial situation** of organisations participating in the CSI survey in 2008 has tended to be positive: most organisations maintained their level of income of 2007, although a significant rise in expenses was observed. In regard to the technological resources, a significant number of organisations have access to computers, telephones, and internet, as well as furniture, cars and infrastructure; nevertheless, there are significant differences between small and large organisations.

Key Weaknesses

- **Financial sustainability** could be a challenge for many civil society organisations in the near future, due to scarce funds combined with a decrease in external cooperation to Nicaragua as a result of the global economic crisis, changing cooperation policies in European countries, and the scarce democratic governability in Nicaragua. In a context of poverty and ignorance of human rights, the demands of the population significantly exceed the capacities of civil society organisations, which are often overwhelmed by existing national problems.
- The financial limitations of many civil organisations translate into **the hiring of a reduced number of personnel** to carry out their work plans and fulfil their objectives. Also, the variations in the flow of funds according to the offer of donor agencies leads to the rotation of qualified and experienced personnel and the overload of work on the few hired members and volunteer staff. Weaknesses in the area of virtual communication

were identified: 40% of the organisations lack access to internet due to limitations in the telephone network and in the organisations themselves. These are ongoing obstacles to the potential for information, training and management.

- **Some CSOs lack legal status** or have not updated it. This is particularly the case with small organisations in rural zones, due to the difficulties and costs of obtaining and annually validating legal status. This situation limits legal recognition and therefore partnership possibilities with state, credit and cooperation institutions.
- On an organisational level, some CSOs are seen to be weak in the **strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation** of social interventions and programmatic activities, as well as there being a limited dissemination and systematisation of past experiences.
- The CSI study also identified **limitations in the transparency practices** of organisations, which give priority to donors and government, but hardly provide ample information about their performance to beneficiaries and participating stakeholders. Horizontal and downward accountability is therefore often limited.
- Civil society can be **prone to short-termism**, responding well to immediate social needs, but unable to develop longer term interventions or develop human resource skills to address the root of the problems or find alternative sustainable solutions. At the same time, various organisations have been criticised because of the concentration of the decision-making process and information in a few people who hold positions of power and who, in this way, reproduce the predominant political culture.
- Internal tensions within civil society organisations and networks threaten to undermine civil society. These tensions arise in large part from the **ongoing political polarisation** in Nicaragua. According to the connection to the current political regime, it is possible to identify a fragmentation of civil society into three groups: (1) a sector which is subordinate to the will of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FLSN – Sandinista National Liberation Front), (2) another sector that maintains independent and critical positions before the government, and (3) an intermediate sector that avoids taking position due to fear of reprisals.
- Due to civil society's heterogeneity, it is **logical to find contradictions** amongst sectors with opposing interests; for example, in regard to the topic of sexual and reproductive rights, feminist organisations confront church organisations, while, in the subject of labour rights, unions confront employers guilds. The prioritisation of sector-specific or local demands also makes the articulation of civil society organisations difficult, especially around common interests of the entire community.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY IN NICARAGUA

In this section, we will present the main recommendations for the strengthening of the Nicaraguan civil society for each of the five dimensions of the CSI study. These recommendations were proposed by participants of the surveys, the regional focus groups and the National Workshop which was carried out with representatives of different social sectors.

Civic Engagement

In this dimension of the CSI, different initiatives aimed at promoting civic participation in activities of common interests were proposed. There was a consensus amongst the participants around the following propositions:

- Implement programmes to disseminate information and educate about civic rights and responsibilities.
- Promote volunteerism among the population towards activities for the public good, and establish forms of social recognition for their altruistic work.
- Promote the political participation of citizens based on the principles of tolerance, respect and peace, by focusing on politics as a sphere of public life where decisions regarding topics of collective interest are made and which is not exclusively the domain of political parties.
- Strengthen the social fabric through activities that promote communication, mutual trust, inclusive organisation and solidarity amongst the Nicaraguan people.
- Facilitate citizens' spaces of information and analysis regarding issues of common interest that allow for the unification of efforts to overcome the problems faced by a great majority of the population.
- CSOs should promote peaceful and legal activities based on citizens' proposals before government authorities or private businesses, which facilitate the participation of all stakeholders.
- Open and protect safe spaces for critical reflection about the authoritarian political culture that prevails in Nicaragua and about the need to promote a democratic culture.

Level of Organisation

To enhance the level of organisation of civil society in Nicaragua, different initiatives to strengthen the management capacity, coordination and effectiveness of civil society organisations were proposed:

- Implement training programmes for members and technical teams in the areas of communication, human relations, social ethics, work methodologies and topics specifically related to the organisation and the staff positions.

- Administer teams and develop abilities for to enhance internet access with the aim of taking advantage of the opportunities provided for the communication and work of civil society organisations.
- Promote processes of organisational development with a systemic approach that will strengthen the different components of a civic organisation or network in a comprehensive way.
- Set up spaces for dialogue and agreement between networks and civil organisations to analyse reality, reach a consensus on agendas and activities to improve the relationship with the state and private businesses.
- Promote the solidarity between civil society organisations in sharing knowledge, methodologies, resources and efforts for local or national development.
- Learning experiences and examples of best practices constructed by CSOs should be systematised and disseminated with the aim of multiplying them and valuing the work that has been done.
- The networks or federations of civil society organisations must play an active role in the training of its members, the exchange of knowledge, communication about topics of interest, approval of codes of conduct and systems of auditing, the management of funds for joint projects and the impact on public policies.
- Create a 'census' and up-to-date directory of civil society organisations accessible to the public as well as to the cooperation agencies that operate in Nicaragua.
- Different steps and actions to strengthen the financial capacity of the civil organisations were proposed:
 - investigate diverse available sources and areas of cooperation including private businesses;
 - create expertise on the methods of designing, monitoring and evaluation of projects;
 - improve accountability and communication with donors;
 - negotiate institutional support beyond specific projects;
 - promote alternatives for self-financing;
 - stimulate volunteer support and contributions.
- Promote dialogue between different CSOs to deal with issues of common interest and the peaceful resolution of controversies that might arise in social dynamics.

Practice of Values

In the Practice of Values dimension, several activities were proposed to promote ethical values in the internal functioning of CSOs as well as in their external activities:

- Establish codes of conduct and institutional policies that guarantee the practice of ethical values defended by the organisation, while maintaining coherence between the discourse and reality.

- CSOs' regulations must be established explicitly, including the principles of gender, generational and ethnic groups equality; their fulfilment should be periodically assessed.
- The fulfilment of labour laws must be improved by hiring staff. Norms to regulate interpersonal relationships and promote work efficiency should be established.
- Ethical values are transmitted primarily through daily practice and there is no substitute for practising honest, responsible, supportive and transparent behaviour on the part of directors, members and personnel of civil society organisations.
- Organisations should conduct a rigorous selection of their paid and volunteer staff including an assessment of their ethical quality. Also, organisations should provide their staff with training and monitor their performance.
- CSOs should create and carry out their intervention projects in a democratic and participatory way. These projects should include a focus on equality among gender, generational and ethnic groups.
- The promotion of ethical values such as tolerance, respect and peace within the current polarised context in Nicaragua is facilitated when CSOs are not involved in political or religious distinctions, and when they provide inclusive services without any discrimination and by opening spaces of dialogue and collaboration amongst all Nicaraguans.
- Organisations, which display racist, discriminatory or intolerant attitudes towards certain sectors of the population, should be publically denounced. A public opinion favourable to tolerance and respect between people should be encouraged at all times.
- Civil society organisations should practise and implement collective leadership, democratic decision-making mechanisms and group work based on relationships of respect and collaboration.
- It is necessary to systematise and disseminate experiences developed by CSOs, which are related to the promotion of ethical values, in particular, best practices and lessons learned.

Perception of Impact

In this CSI dimension, participants proposed different activities in order to increase both the results achieved by the civil society organisations in their areas of work and also their impact on public policies:

- Organisations should plan their work so that their results and products reflect their aims and investment of material and human resources.
- The methodology to determine the results and impacts of the work of civil organisations must be improved within the framework of a system of monitoring and evaluation of their activities that starts from a baseline of the situation prior to the intervention.
- CSOs require medium and long-term strategies to achieve significant social impacts. These strategies should be implemented in a joint manner by organisations that work in a certain territory or subject matter, in coordination with the state and private sectors.

- CSOs must establish alliances with mass media and journalists in order to provide public information about the work they do, their mission and organisational profile.
- CSOs should ensure they create communication strategies, both on an internal and external level to make their work visible, receive feedback and practise transparency in their administration.
- CSOs should set up spaces for the exchange of experience and training about ways to influence public policies, including examples of best practice.
- The impact on public policies should go beyond the passing of a law or policy and include monitoring and evaluation of its implementation, as well as social auditing of the use of public resources and the performance of officials.

External Environment

The proposals of this broad dimension centre on the ways to improve the relationships between civil society, the state and market, as well as other actions regarding the legal framework and civic culture:

- Promote spaces of dialogue between civil society organisations, state institutions, political parties, businessmen and external cooperation to tackle problems of national interest and find common solutions.
- Establish alliances between universities and civic organisations for the exchange of information, the organisation of debate forums, monographic investigations and student internships.
- Create awareness within the business sector and promote social responsibility in the protection of the environment, work conditions and greater collaboration in social development activities with sectors with fewer resources.
- Establish observatories for monitoring public policies from a human rights perspective. These observatories will serve to register the implementation or ignorance of human rights and will help contribute elements to authorities and citizens with the aim of achieving their validity.
- Implement public communication programmes through different means, festivals and campaigns that highlight citizens' contributions to the development of the country and opportunities for voluntary civic participation.
- Demand the respect of civil rights of freedom of association, expression and mobilisation established in the Political Constitution, as well as the fulfilment of the Citizen Participation Law and Access to Public Information.
- Promote a reform of the electoral system that guarantees transparency and honesty in the administration of identity cards, registration documents and votes, as well as the option for civil society organisations to propose candidates for the municipal and regional government elections.

- Implement civic education programmes specialised in ethical values, especially about tolerance and the respect for the ideas and rights of others, and about peaceful resolution of differences and the strengthening of solidarity.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The quantitative results of the surveys and the sources used by the CSI are summarised graphically in the Civil Society Index Diamond in Figure 31. This diagram shows the values obtained in a scale from 0 to 100 of the indicators of the four dimensions that are located on the horizontal and vertical axes: Civic Engagement (53.0%), Level of Organisation (57.2%), Practice of Values (61.5%), and Perception of Impact (59.8%). All of the dimensions show values greater than 50%, and the practice and promotion of ethical values, as well as the perceived impact of civil society on social development and political democratisation, stand out as particularly noteworthy in Nicaragua.

The fifth dimension is the environment – the socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural context - of Nicaragua. This is graphically presented as a circle that conditions civil society; the bigger the circle is, the more favourable the environment in which civil society functions. In this case, the circle is small, which reflects an unfavourable environment for the development of civil society. This situation has been analysed in chapter III and is coherent with the CSI carried out in 54 countries during 2003-2006 which point out that, “All the authors mention that a critical element that facilitates or limits the civil society in a given country is the type of political regime in place and attitudes of the government” (CIVICUS 2007).

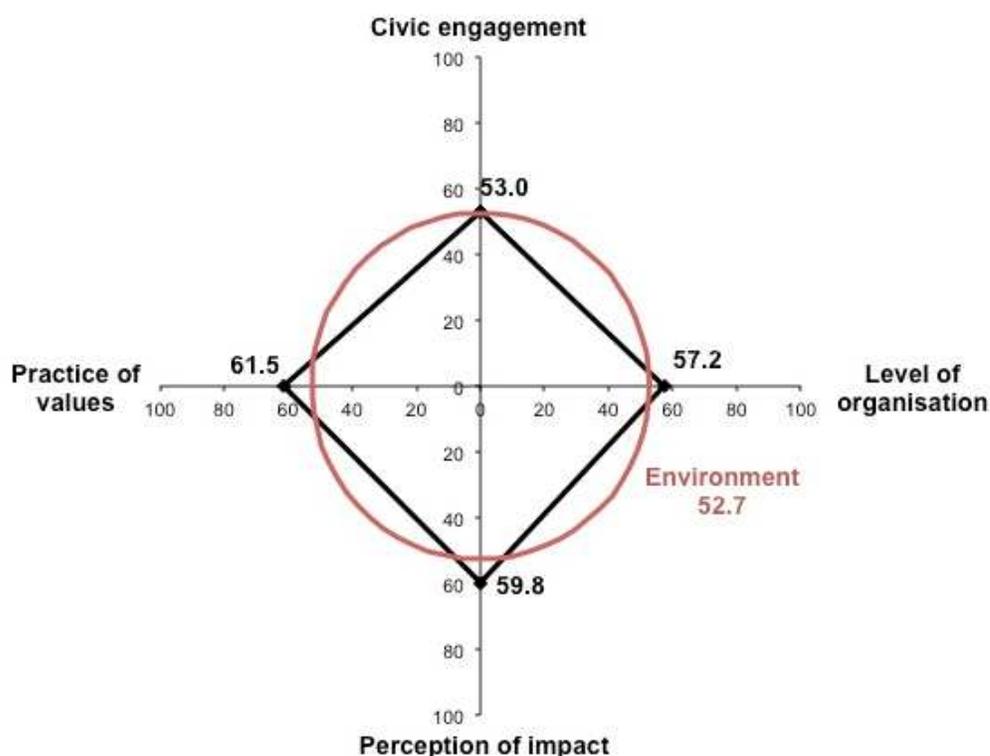


Figure 31: The Civil Society Index Diamond for Nicaragua

As shown in Table 12, if Nicaragua’s situation is compared with that of other CSI countries in the Latin American region, that the results obtained by Nicaraguan civil society are above the regional average, particularly in regards to the promotion of ethical values and social impact obtained.

	Argentina	Uruguay	Chile	México	Venezuela	Nicaragua	Regional average
Civic Engagement	38.8	45.8	49.5	56.1	36.9	53.0	46.4
Level of Organisation	52.6	59.5	52.3	45.9	56.6	57.2	53.7
Practice of Values	39.5	43.4	43.7	50.7	37.8	61.5	46.1
Perception of Impact	47.6	59.8	46.5	45.0	46.5	59.8	51.0
External Environment	64.4	72.8	72.9	63.9	54.5	52.7	63.5

Table 12: CSI Latin American Indicators 2010

Source: Civil Society Index of each country, developed by Cristian Cao (Gadis, Argentina).¹¹

However, Nicaraguan civil society has the most unfavourable political, economic and cultural context in the region. This prevents civil society fulfilling its social and political roles, such as fostering the association of citizens to satisfy different interests and the promotion of civic rights and participation in public management. Nevertheless, CSOs have confronted these problems as challenges and have implemented different projects and activities focused on overcoming poverty, democratising the political system and promoting human rights in Nicaragua.

The picture painted in this report of Nicaraguan civil society is one of contrasts. On the one hand, civil society has a great number of strengths, practising the values that it promotes, achieving significant impact, and with a fairly well developed infrastructure. However, civic space is fundamentally challenged by the political environment in Nicaragua. Political and legal restrictions and attacks on civil society, both formal and subtle, create difficult operating conditions. Civic space has become highly politicised, threatening to subject the everyday activities of civil society organisations to their affinity – or lack of affinity – with the FSLN. Until steps are taken to depoliticise this civic space and safeguard civil society against attacks from government, civil society will continue to struggle to realise its full potential and build on its strengths.

¹¹Note: dimension scores for other Latin American countries were tentatively correct at the time of publication of this report, but are subject to change during the finalisation of other Latin American Analytical Country Reports.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: CSI Indicator Matrix for Nicaragua

1) Dimension: Civic Engagement			53.0
1.1		Extent of socially-based engagement	32.8
	1.1.1	Social membership 1	38.1
	1.1.2	Social volunteering 1	27.3
	1.1.3	Community engagement 1	32.9
1.2		Depth of socially-based engagement	45.9
	1.2.1	Social membership 2	21.3
	1.2.2	Social volunteering 2	22.7
	1.2.3	Community engagement 2	93.7
1.3		Diversity of socially-based engagement	95.1
	1.3.1	Diversity of socially-based engagement	95.1
1.4		Extent of political engagement	25.6
	1.4.1	Political membership 1	20.6
	1.4.2	Political volunteering 1	14.8
	1.4.3	Individual activism 1	41.4
1.5		Depth of political engagement	28.0
	1.5.1	Political membership 2	26.9
	1.5.2	Political volunteering 2	25.8
	1.5.3	Individual activism 2	31.4
1.6		Diversity of political engagement	90.7
	1.6.1	Diversity of political engagement	90.7
2) Dimension: Level of Organisation			57.2
2.1		Internal governance	92.9
	2.1.1	Management	92.9
2.2		Infrastructure	76.6
	2.2.1	Support organisations	76.6
2.3		Sectoral communication	82.6
	2.3.1	Peer-to-peer communication 1	85.8
	2.3.2	Peer-to-peer communication 2	79.4
2.4		Human resources	11.3
	2.4.1	Sustainability of human resources	11.3
2.5		Financial and technological resources	74.5
	2.5.1	Financial sustainability	73.8
	2.5.2	Technological resources	75.2
2.6		International linkages	5.5
	2.6.1	International linkages	5.5
3) Dimension: Practice of Values			61.5
3.1		Democratic decision-making governance	53.6
	3.1.1	Decision-making	53.6
3.2		Labour regulations	64.5
	3.2.1	Equal opportunities	62.4
	3.2.2	Members of labour unions	
	3.2.3	Labour rights trainings	57.4
	3.2.4	Publicly available policy for labour standards	73.8

3.3		Code of conduct and transparency	63.9
	3.3.1	Publicly available code of conduct	75.2
	3.3.2	Transparency	52.5
3.4		Environmental standards	69.5
	3.4.1	Environmental standards	69.5
3.5		Perception of values in civil society as a whole	56.2
	3.5.1	Perceived non-violence	34.0
	3.5.2	Perceived internal democracy	66.0
	3.5.3	Perceived levels of corruption	22.7
	3.5.4	Perceived intolerance	68.1
	3.5.5	Perceived weight of intolerant groups	74.5
	3.5.6	Perceived promotion on non-violence and peace	71.6
4) Dimension: Perception of Impact			59.8
4.1		Responsiveness (internal perception)	69.5
	4.1.1	Impact on social concern 1	66.0
	4.1.2	Impact on social concern 2	73.0
4.2		Social impact (internal perception)	82.1
	4.2.1	General social impact	79.1
	4.2.2	Social impact of own organisation	85.1
4.3		Policy impact (internal perception)	54.4
	4.3.1	General policy impact	56.0
	4.3.2	Policy activity of own organisation	73.8
	4.3.3	Policy impact of own organisation	33.3
4.4		Responsiveness (external perception)	70.0
	4.4.1	Impact on social concern 1	63.3
	4.4.2	Impact on social concern 2	76.7
4.5		Social impact (external perception)	72.6
	4.5.1	Social impact selected concerns	80.7
	4.5.2	Social impact general	64.5
4.6		Policy impact (external perception)	56.7
	4.6.1	Policy impact specific fields 1-3	58.6
	4.6.2	Policy impact general	54.8
4.7		Impact of civil society on attitudes	13.3
	4.7.1	Difference in trust between civil society members and non-members	2.5
	4.7.2	Difference in tolerance levels between civil society members and non-members	14.4
	4.7.3	Difference in public spiritedness between civil society members and non-members	3.2
	4.7.4	Trust in civil society	33.0
5) Dimension: External Environment			52.7
5.1		Socio-economic context	48.4
	5.1.1	Basic Capabilities Index	72.3
	5.1.2	Corruption	25.0
	5.1.3	Inequality	56.9
	5.1.4	Economic context	39.4
5.2		Socio-political context	54.2
	5.2.1	Political rights and freedoms	67.5
	5.2.2	Rule of law and personal freedoms	62.5
	5.2.3	Associational and organisational rights	58.3
	5.2.4	Experience of legal framework	50.7
	5.2.5	State effectiveness	31.8

5.3		Socio-cultural context	55.6
	5.3.1	Trust	3.0
	5.3.2	Tolerance	81.3
	5.3.3	Public spiritedness	82.5

Appendix 2: Advisory Committee Participants

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 Luisa Molina, Civil Coordinator of Nicaragua (CCN)
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 Omar Treminio, Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development (RNDDL)
 Patricia Orozco, Autonomous Women's Movement (MAN)
 Rafael Henríquez, Common Fund for Governability (FC)
 Raití Juárez, Youth Movement of Nicaragua (MJN)
 Roberto Zeledón, Popular Help Norway (APN)
 Rosario Cuadra, Center of Popular Education (CEP)
 Sixto Ulloa, District Attorney of Human Rights (PDH)
 Violeta Granera, Movement for Nicaragua (MPN)

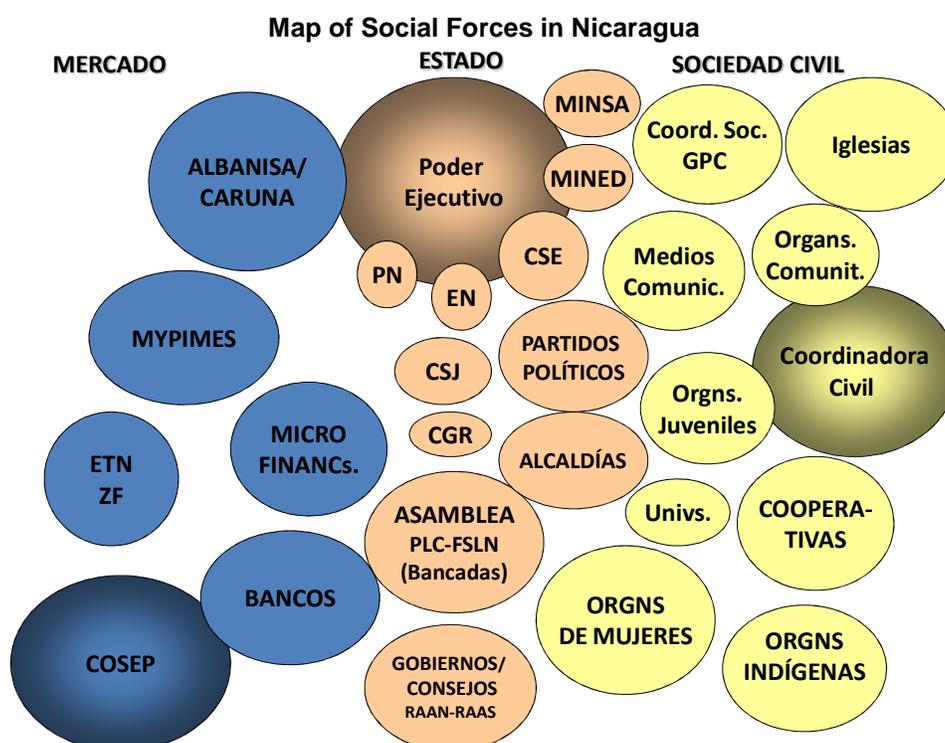
Research Team

Coordination: Dr Luis Serra
 Assistant: Dr Oscar Herrera

Appendix 3: Map of Social Forces in Nicaragua

This activity was carried out with the participants of the first session of the Advisory Committee (19-5-09) with the aim of identifying the main actors in the sectors of the state, market and civil society, as well as to assess their interrelationships. The participants were divided into 3 groups to identify the main powers or actors that currently exist in Nicaragua. Group 1 tackled the state sector, group 2 analysed the market sector and group 3 identified civil society actors.

Once the main actors of each sector were identified, the group assessed the level of influence in four categories: very influential, somewhat influential, little influence, without influence. Then the relationships among actors of each sector were established by distinguishing three situations: alliances, neutrality and tensions. In the meeting, each group presented their flipchart with the map of actors of their section and proposed suggestions. Lastly, the relationships between actors of the 3 sectors were identified and the validity of the activity was analysed. Below is presented a summary chart of the main actors of the three sectors:



During the final analysis of the activity, some observations were made regarding the methodology and the validity of this map of social forces, which we will summarise in the following points

- ❖ The map made by the participants shows us a “photograph” of the current main actors of Nicaragua in the sectors of the state, market and civil society, as well as the main interactions and relationships between them and the different existing alliances. The diversity of actors in the civil society sector is noteworthy. These actors deal with different topics and social groups. Nevertheless, the time for activity was too short to further explore the relationships between actors of different social sectors.

- ❖ The relationships of the state with civil society organisations are diverse; in some cases, alliances and in other cases, conflicts and in some, neutrality. Additionally, there is a relationship of cooperation between the state and certain media and churches. The same occurs with the relationship between the state and private businesses. It was pointed out that secret alliances exist between political actors, which are important in understanding the role of the state. However, it was mentioned that it is necessary to study the different state and government organisations in greater detail in order to differentiate their contributions and relationships with other actors.
- ❖ It was suggested that we should consider the variations of the Map of Social Forces, which are observed in the different municipalities, departments and regions of Nicaragua. There are local actors in these territories, which should be included. Also, there is a need to examine the presence and influence of national actors. In addition, the relationships between social actors will have their differences with regard to the National Map. It was pointed out that the map of social forces are not static, but rather they are modified according to the situations and the changes in power relationships between social actors.

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