



MAINSTREAMING SOCIAL ADVOCACY INTO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' (CSO) ROLES

USAID / MEXICO'S CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVITY

This white paper is part of a collection of strategic documents developed by the Civil Society Activity (CSA), implemented by Social Impact, Inc. and financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The texts that comprise the collection describe the systemic capacity development approach and methodology that the Civil Society Activity designed to accompany more than forty civil society organizations in institutional strengthening, grants management, and legal compliance. In particular, this document details how civil society organizations can mainstream social advocacy into their work based on CSA's experience. The full compendium is a useful resource for strengthening civil society organizations. You may reference the complete collection at Social Impact's website, <https://socialimpact.com/>.

Authors: Yolanda Talavera and Leonardo Escobar

Editorial Team: Brandon Melecio Fischer, Ileri Ablanado and Gladys Rivera

ABOUT USAID/MEXICO'S CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVITY

The Mexico Civil Society Activity (CSA) was a 4-year program funded by USAID Mexico. CSA aimed to improve the sustainability of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to effectively implement their agendas on violence prevention, human rights protection, and justice reform in Mexico. To this end, CSA focused on improving CSOs' capacity to communicate and work collaboratively, increasing their connections with key stakeholders, strengthening their capacity to develop strategies that respond to their changing environment and to their communities' needs and priorities, and improving CSO access to knowledge and resources. Social Impact (SI) Inc. implemented the Civil Society Activity in partnership with Fundación Applesseed.

ABOUT SOCIAL IMPACT

Social Impact (SI) is a management consulting firm that provides monitoring, evaluation, strategic planning, performance management and capacity building services to advance development effectiveness. SI's work helps to reduce poverty, improve health and education, promote peace and democratic governance, foster economic growth, and protect the environment. To achieve this, SI delivers consulting, technical assistance, and training services to government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and foundations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	5
I. INTRODUCTION	6
II. DIVERSITY OF CSO ROLES	9
ADVOCATE/CAMPAIGNER	9
WATCHDOG	10
SERVICE PROVIDER	10
GRASSROOTS MOBILIZER.....	10
MAVEN (INFORMATION SPECIALIST).....	10
III. FRAMING SOCIAL ADVOCACY FUNCTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES FOR MAINSTREAMING	13
IV. CSA CASES STUDIES IN SOCIAL ADVOCACY MAINSTREAMING	15
1. ASISTENCIA LEGAL POR LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS, A.C. (ASILEGAL).....	15
2. CIUDADANOS EN APOYO A LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS, A.C. (CADHAC) ...	17
3. RED MESA DE MUJERES DE CIUDAD JUÁREZ, A.C. (RED MESA)	19
V. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE CSOS' SOCIAL ADVO-CACY FUNCTIONS....	21
VI. NEW HORIZONS IN ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: INCORPORATING EFFECTIVE SOCIAL ADVOCACY FUNCTIONS.....	222

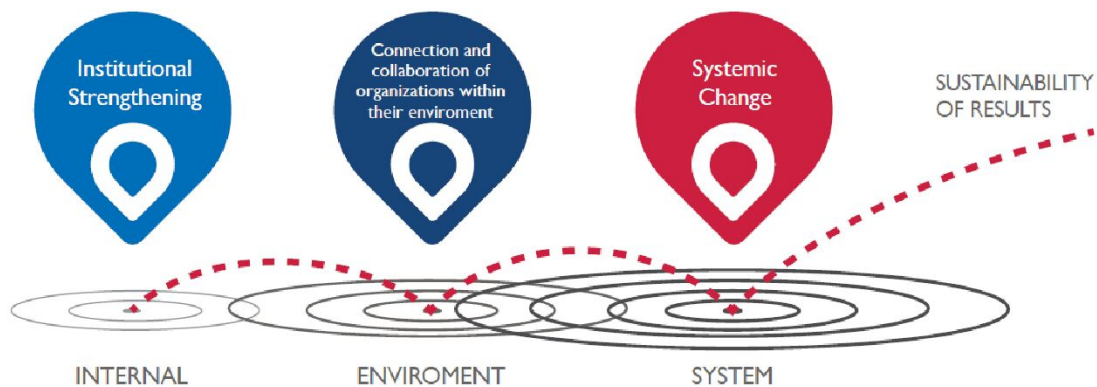
ACRONYMS

ASILEGAL	Asistencia Legal por los Derechos Humanos, A.C.
CADHAC	Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos, A.C.
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CD 2.0	Capacity Development 2.0
CIVICUS	International Non-Profit Organization CIVICUS
CSA	Civil Society Activity
CSI	Civil Society Index
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECOSOC	UN Committee on Civil and Political Rights of Mexico (Consejo Económico y Social Mexico ONU)
FEM	Specialized Prosecutor's Office for Women (Fiscalía Especializada de las Mujeres)
ISO	Intermediate Support Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OAS	Organization of American States
Red Mesa	Red Mesa de Mujeres de Juarez, A.C.
RFOSC	Registro Federal de las Organizaciones de Sociedad Civil México
SI	Social Impact
SJPA	Accusatorial Criminal Justice System (Sistema de Justicia Penal Acusatorio)
UN	United Nations
UnidOSC	Collective of civil society organizations, academic institutions and activists in defense of free association in Latin America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

I. INTRODUCTION

The objective of USAID/Mexico's Civil Society Activity (CSA) was to improve the sustainability of Mexican Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) so they would more effectively implement their agendas on violence prevention, human rights protection, and justice. Over four years, CSA improved the capacity of CSOs to communicate and work collaboratively, increasing the connections between CSOs and key stakeholders, strengthening the capacity of CSOs to develop strategies that respond to their environment, and improving their access to knowledge and resources. Figure 1 illustrates CSA's strategy.

FIGURE 1. CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVITY'S STRATEGY



When organizations work together, they accomplish more, learn more, and have more opportunities to achieve impact. However, given the diversity of its partner organizations, CSA understood the challenges of nurturing connections and engagement incrementally among multiple CSOs and key stakeholders. Thus, CSA took time to pause, reflect,¹ and ask: “While implementing a capacity development program with a systemic approach, how can CSA better understand and respond to what triggers CSOs’ collective work? How can we leverage the opportunities that greater engagement and connection provide for systemic change? Where do we begin and what kind of realistic outcome can we expect?”

This paper synthesizes learning derived from CSA’s work with its partners and analyzes the diversity of civil society roles and functions within Mexico. Some of these roles include social advocate, watchdog, service provider, grassroots mobilizer and maven (information specialist). CSOs operate in relation to power and politics, within any context. They are subject to the conditions of the sectors in which they operate, as well as legislation, regulation and relationships determined by the State and the private sector’s approach to using power. In turn, CSOs might perform roles in a specific capacity based on their style, preferences and societal needs. Key elements such as the

¹ USAID. (s.d.) “Learning Lab, Collaboration Learning and Adaptation CLA Framework and Key Concepts.” Accessed at https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/keyconcepts_twopager_8.5x11_v7_20160907.pdf on June 11, 2020.

legal and regulatory framework for CSO operation; the availability and patterns of CSO funding; the human rights context; the country's status on social development and demand of social services; and corruption highly influence the role that CSOs have decided to play. The selection of specific roles is also determined by the degree of influence of the CSO sector in specific contexts. Thus, by understanding the implications of the various roles, organizations can select diverse roles according to specific contextual needs.

Although this paper does not suggest a particular homogeneous role that CSOs can and should play in order to achieve their desired results, this paper suggests that the social advocate functions should be mainstreamed by all CSOs in order to perform effectively. Furthermore, CSOs should consider regional experiences that are pertinent to their that work in their respective thematic areas to inform their mainstreaming process vis-a-vis their individual role, placing emphasis on the recommended characteristics for effective social advocacy that reflect and prioritize comprehensive traits from all other roles. These include representativeness and legitimacy; data collection and/or analysis; connection, collaboration, and engagement with stakeholders; monitoring and critical analysis; innovation in intervention models and social justice.

Within any context, CSOs operate in relation to actors such as the state, the private sector, and the academy. CSOs' relationships with these actors are subject to the conditions of legislation, regulation and relationships determined by the local systems² in which they operate. Largely, the State, corporations, and public interest groups set the conditions for various types of collaboration and resource exchange to occur. Though, in turn, CSOs respond in a specific capacity based on their social agendas, preferences, their expertise, and the needs of their target population.

CSO actors and networks are heterogeneous in their identity, causes and methods such that they do not operate with a single purpose. In general, CSOs are able to influence public policy and other decision making processes through advocacy and/or collaboration with government entities and stakeholders, which requires finding common ground among different interests and building momentum based in mutual support and dialogue with multiple actors that possess a range of knowledge, resources, and talents.³

Democratic societies operate best when there are mechanisms to promote transparency, accountability and the guarantee of public goods and services. In its capacity, a vibrant civil society can contribute to ensuring that citizens can assume the shared responsibility to promote social development and the wellbeing of all. A bustling civil society allows for citizens to organize collectively around common concerns and agendas. One way of approaching this is to institutionalize civil society organizations that foster collaboration with the state and other relevant actors. Furthermore, CSOs' strategic role can serve to contribute complementary resources and ultimately build bridges between diverse groups, which implies working with key stakeholders to collaborate around a common cause.

² USAID. (2014). "Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development." Accessed at <https://www.usaid.gov/policy/local-systems-framework> on May 29, 2020.

³ Veneklasen, L with Miller, V. (2002). "A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation." *World Neighbours, USA*, Chapter 3, Power and Empowerment, pp 45.

Democratization and decentralization bring potential for constructive partnerships for social development in any country. Recent moves towards government decentralization – with greater decision-making power and financial resources at the local level – have built upon and extended the scope for CSOs to participate in collective movements to advance public policy within their respective region or locale. These processes have increased citizen participation such that individual citizens are able to respond to opportunities to influence decisions that affect their wellbeing and that of their communities.⁴ Consequently CSOs have recognized that their impact and influence is derived from a diverse range of social advocacy efforts that include serving as information specialists, grassroots mobilizers, campaigners, watchdogs, and service providers, to name a few examples.

Civil society, the State and the private sector actors may complement each other's functions, where neither can replace the other. Albeit, within civil society, CSOs may play a diversity of roles, dependent on specific contextual factors. There inlies the question as to whether CSOs can interchange various roles in their relationship with these stakeholders as the circumstances require and which approach deems better results? Thus, is it possible for CSOs to complement these actors and enhance the overall society gains through effective collaboration whilst performing checks and balances on state and private sector power when required? Which key functions should CSOs mainstream that add value to the variety of roles that they play in order to contribute to the development of the sector and society at large?

The Civil Society Index (CSI)⁵ defines civil society as “the arena, outside of the family, the state and the market where people associate to advance common interests”.⁶ One of the key features of this definition is that it configures civil society as an arena, understood as the particular space in a society where people come together to debate, discuss, associate and seek to influence broader society.

Over the course of the last two decades, CSOs have served as critical agents of change within society and have moved beyond a “supply-side” approach -- concentrating on the delivery of services or development projects -- to adopt a “demand-side” approach -- helping communities articulate their preferences and concerns so as to become active participants in the development process.⁷ CSOs have played an important role in amplifying the voice of underserved communities and to improve visibility of pressing social issues in the public agenda.

⁴ ODI. (2006). “Policy Engagement: How Civil Society Can be More Effective.” Research and Policy in Development, pages 1, 13, 17, and 18. Accessed at <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/200.pdf> on September 30, 2020.

⁵ The Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) is an instrument designed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the capacity of civil society organizations in a country to act as an ally in the implementation of development programs and solutions in the short term as an agent that helps to ensure that the results of these are lasting in the long-term. For more information, please visit <http://ciesc.org.mx/csosi.html>.

⁶ Fin Heinrich, V. CIVICUS (2004) “Assessing and Strengthening Civil Society Worldwide.” CIVICUS Civil Society Index Paper Series Vol. 2, Issue 1, Page 13. Accessed at <https://www.civicus.org/view/media/CSIAssessing-andStrengtheningCivilSocietyWorldwide.pdf> on August 31, 2020.

⁷ Clark, J. (1997) “The state, popular participation and the voluntary sector. Chapter Three in NGOs, states and donors: too close for comfort?” London: Macmillan (also in World Development, 1994, Vol. 23, No 4, pp 593-601).

Given the many types of civil society organizations, it is difficult to categorize them into specific spheres with clear limits and well-established roles. As suggested, one of the most important roles that CSOs perform is in their social advocacy role by generating community engagement and collaboration, which will enhance their credibility as an actor that contributes to social development within a democratic context.

Throughout this process, CSOs should be mindful of elements that determine the scale and type of social advocacy functions such as the legal and regulatory framework, the human rights context, social development and access to social services, mechanisms for public accountability and transparency, among other areas.⁸ These factors create the environmental conditions in which CSOs may operate in a way that enables them to mobilize resources to strengthen the sector and their social causes. Though, regardless of the operating environment, CSOs may specialize in particular roles that respond to their specific contexts while also mainstreaming social advocacy functions to enhance their particular line of work in collaboration with other actors. These social advocacy roles are described below.

II. DIVERSITY OF CSO ROLES

Although CSOs present various characteristics and fill different roles, there are four general types of functions⁹ that they may perform:

- Advocate/Campaigner
- Watchdog
- Service provider
- Grassroots Mobilizer
- Maven (Information Specialist)

Each of these types of roles are described below:

ADVOCATE/CAMPAIGNER

The advocate/campaigner role involves raising awareness of issues, amplifying the voice of the marginalized and advocating for change. This advocacy role involves identifying unaddressed problems and bringing them to the public's attention to protect basic human rights and communicate a variety of social, political, environmental, ethnic, and community interests and concerns.¹⁰ By

⁸ Cooper, R. (2018) "What is Civil Society, its role and value in 2018?" Helpdesk Report. K4D Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development. University of Birmingham, Pages 10,18. Accessed at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c6c2e74e5274a72bc45240e/488_What_is_Civil_Society.pdf on August 31, 2020.

⁹ These CSO functions are a synthesis of a variety of literatures that address civil society experiences in social advocacy, which are referenced in this document. This categorization has been produced by the authors.

¹⁰ Salomon, et al. (2003). "Global Civil Society Global Civil Society: An Overview." The Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, pages 20 and 29. Accessed from http://ccss.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/09/Book_GCSOverview_2003.pdf on August 9, 2020.

performing this role, CSOs continue to develop knowledge and experience working with their target population, strengthening their capacity to represent social interests.

WATCHDOG

The “watchdog” is a CSO role that involves holding governments and institutions accountable. Thus, they act as informal or social auditors, imposing costs on actors that would prefer to keep such information private.¹¹ When corruption and lack of political will hampers accountability and transparency, CSOs are able to shed light on the situation. In other words, civil society organizations may promote transparency and democratic mechanisms to improve the public services that are provided to citizens. Watchdogs may also keep the private sector’s actions in check in terms of limiting their power over citizens as consumers or employees.

SERVICE PROVIDER

The role of service provider involves supplying services demanded by underprivileged communities or groups. Therefore, organizations deliver a variety of services, from health care and education to social programs and community development. Often times, these services are basic needs that have been unmet by the responsible entity, whether due to lack of resources or political will. These organizations are well known for identifying and addressing unmet needs, for innovating, for delivering services of exceptional quality, and for serving those in greatest need.

GRASSROOTS MOBILIZER

CSOs can impact society by addressing the interests and needs that are shared by citizens or segments of the population and by empowering civil society, particularly the most disadvantaged groups within the communities that they serve. These CSOs are particularly skillful at mobilizing citizens around community/empowerment-driven initiatives that may directly impact their communities. They are particularly concerned with channeling the voices, interests and needs of disadvantaged groups as well as promoting activities in which local community members can become leaders of change.

MAVEN (INFORMATION SPECIALIST)

CSOs may also contribute to knowledge development by exchanging information with the targeted groups or the public at large, through their expertise and research skills. According to Malcolm Gladwell from *The Tipping Point*¹², Mavens are considered information specialists and are particularly curious and adept at gathering and retaining information on a wide variety of topics. Their emphasis lies in providing recommendations based on the information gathered, thus providing resources for decision making processes, which may lead to advocacy around public

¹¹ Cooper, R. (2018), Page 6.

¹² Gladwell, M. (2000). *The Tipping Point: How little things can make a big difference*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

policy. Mavens develop a detailed understanding of social topics that may be considered complex and multi-faceted.

Figure 2 highlights these CSO Roles classified by determining the functions, resources, favored mechanisms and driving forces for each of these roles, providing a general overview of what their work entails. In the table, “functions” refers to the main activities that the organizations perform per role; whereas “resources” refer to the outputs that the organizations produce as well as the contextual rules and regulations that support their functions. Favored mechanisms refer to the specific processes and/or methodologies that they employ when they carry out their functions. Finally, the driving forces column presents their underlying purpose in relation to their role; i.e., the specific changes that drive their efforts.

FIGURE 2. CSA - CSO ROLES CLASSIFICATION

Source: Authors

Role	Functions	Resources	Favored Mechanisms	Driving Forces
Social Advocate / Campaigner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy engagement • Critical observation • Alliance making • Engage in critical dialogue and debate • Influence and policy engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Communities • Communities of Practice • Campaigns • Interest Groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue and Debate • Social mobilization • Networking • Coalition-building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote systemic transformation in favor of citizens and vulnerable groups • Raise awareness on strategic societal challenges • Fortify policy engagement • Enact social policy reform
Watchdog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public oversight and accountability • Monitoring government compliance with the law • Monitoring private sector compliance and use of economic power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen participation laws • Mandatory frameworks • Media monitoring • Monitoring the enforcement and impact of laws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checks and balances • Observatories • Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote Accountability, Transparency and Governance • Efficiency • Raise public awareness • Mitigate social and economic risks

Role	Functions	Resources	Favored Mechanisms	Driving Forces
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote social justice
Service Provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-based social service delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intervention models Technical capacities Surveys Focus Groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local service delivery Technology Innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfy local societal demands and needs Cater to marginal and vulnerable groups
Grassroots Mobilizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community-based social demand mobilization Local community empowerment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitation and empowerment capacities Participatory approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community consultations Participatory budgeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address and voice target population needs Citizen empowerment Support for local community champions (power dynamics)
Maven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop evidence-based research Provide recommendations for decision making processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports Research papers Policy Papers Policy Briefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research Data Comparative analysis In-depth analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce relevant social data and recommendations

For CSA, these roles were important in categorizing and understanding what we are coining as **CSOs' Social Advocacy** within the Mexican context. Drawing upon the Activity's experience in Mexico, the following sections provide a description of these functions and reflect on best practices, highlighting specific cases of CSA's partner CSOs that perform these roles, followed by a breakdown of the specific organizational capacities to prioritize when mainstreaming these functions. Certainly, this will require adjusting the approach based on the given context – social, political, economic, and otherwise – as social advocacy is always the product of its context at the community, country and regional level.

III. FRAMING SOCIAL ADVOCACY FUNCTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES FOR MAINSTREAMING

Social advocacy functions are not exclusive to organizations that specialize in social advocacy. These functions are important for the sustainability of CSOs regardless of the specific role they have decided to play within society. In fact, many of these organizations already perform functions attributed to social advocacy and might not necessarily be aware of the impact it has on their performance. For instance, organizations that specialize in social and economic research for public policy are increasingly making use of channels and relationships in order to influence decision making processes to shape public policies. Although maven organizations may function as think tanks and place importance on the quality of their research products, nowadays most understand that in order to generate impact they must not only rely on producing useful evidence and research, but they must also become advocacy think tanks dedicated to positioning their products and influencing decision making.¹³ Additionally, CSOs that work at the community-level, whether through service provision or through grassroots mobilization and empowerment, increasingly rely on collaboration with public authorities and with other civil society actors in order to further their agendas, increase their scope and achieve greater impact.

Social advocacy functions are based on a set of values such as communication, relationship building, collaboration, authenticity, and influence. Often, these traits are present in organizations that perform a variety of roles. Therefore, the Civil Society Activity considers that social advocacy functions can be mainstreamed and optimized within civil society organizations regardless of the specific role that they perform. Figure 3 presents the shared role that CSOs have towards this end. Watchdogs, mavens, service providers and grassroots mobilizers may all perform social advocacy functions in order to enhance their work. Although some organizations may identify themselves as social advocates exclusively, the Activity's experience has been that most organizations already perform social advocacy functions in practice.

¹³ The Think Tank Initiative (TTI) invested in think tanks throughout ten years 2009-2019 to ensure that research results informed and influenced national and regional policy debates. The Initiative was funded by a donor group composed of Hewlett Foundation, UK Aid, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NORAD, IDRC and the Government of Canada. TTI considered that think tanks have the potential to have a positive impact on the lives of people in their countries. Therefore, policy engagement – that is, participating effectively in the policy-making process – is considered critical to achieving that impact.

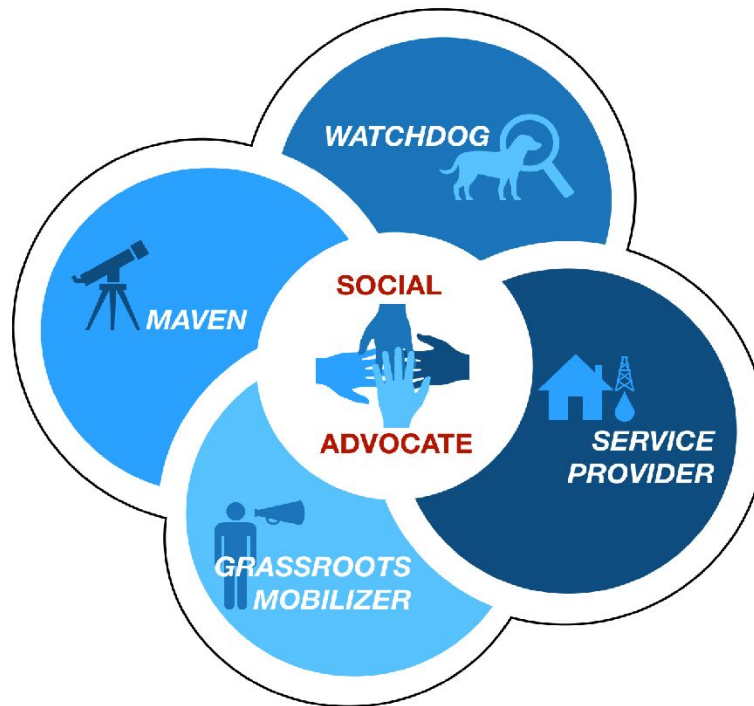


FIGURE 3. CSA - SHARED SOCIAL ADVOCATE FUNCTION FOR DIVERSE CSO ROLES

Source: Authors

Civil society organizations possess the ability to monitor relevant social, political and economic decisions through their various projects, by expressing controversial views, amplifying the voices of underserved communities, mobilizing citizens at a community level as well as within larger platforms, developing evidence-based research, building support across stakeholders, and bringing credibility to the political system by promoting transparency and accountability.

Figure 4 presents practical alternatives for mainstreaming social advocacy into each of the existing roles in order to add value to their work. CSOs may perform these multi-functional practices once they decide to incorporate social advocacy functions into their core work.

FIGURE 4. CSA – PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVES FOR MAINSTREAMING SOCIAL ADVOCACY INTO EXISTING CSO ROLES

Source: Authors

Watchdog	Maven	Grassroots Mobilizer	Service Provider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alert citizens and community to non-compliance or abuse of power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence public policy formulation and adaptation by sharing evidence-based research and analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voice citizen demands to influence social and economic policy for the well-being of local communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence public service provision driven by local community demand

Watchdog	Maven	Grassroots Mobilizer	Service Provider
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide alternative recommendations for sound enforcement of legislation, policies and transparency 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote local-driven projects and initiatives and identify scaling-up alternatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complement or enhance public service provision strategically to ensure effective and efficient delivery

Performing social advocacy functions entails raising awareness on social issues and challenges as well as advocating for change. Additionally, social advocates understand that no one sector can solve the world's major societal challenges alone. Therefore, these particular roles are increasingly carried out through engagement in partnerships and collaborative frameworks across civil society, and with stakeholders from the public sector, the private sector and international organizations. In this fashion, civil society is increasingly becoming an enabler to drive change.

IV. CSA CASES STUDIES IN SOCIAL ADVOCACY MAINSTREAMING

The CSA worked alongside a vast array of civil society organizations that performed several of these roles. The Activity's partner organizations employed social advocacy functions and were agile in navigating the complex social contexts in which they operate to further human rights, justice and violence & crime prevention agendas. The following CSA case studies provide greater detail regarding the experiential application of social advocacy mainstreaming into a diverse set of CSO roles through three organizational examples: Asistencia Legal por los Derechos Humanos, A.C. (ASILEGAL), Ciudadanos en Apoyo a los Derechos Humanos, A.C. (CADHAC), and Red Mesa de Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez (Red Mesa). These organizations perform diverse roles upon having mainstreamed social advocacy effectively. What these organizations share in common are the constructive relationships of collaboration with public authorities. The Activity considers this to be the quintessential element in achieving systemic results. Through these efforts, these CSOs have become public sector allies for social change and they have been able to add value through their expertise, on-the-ground presence and emphasis on social advocacy.

I. ASISTENCIA LEGAL POR LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS, A.C. (ASILEGAL): Service Provider, Maven, Watchdog and Grassroots Mobilizer

During the organization's collaboration with CSA, ASILEGAL implemented a pilot program for social reintegration in compliance with the National Criminal Enforcement Law (*Ley Nacional de Ejecución Penal*) and international standards on human rights for imprisoned populations, especially incarcerated indigenous, LGBT, and female groups. As part of this effort, the organization participated in dialogue with the government of the state of Baja California to generate collaboration agreements with the previous government and with the current administration that entered in 2018.

During the implementation of the organization's inter-institutional and inter-sectoral project, ASILEGAL worked to improve compliance with the National Law on the Enforcement of Criminal Justice and established key recommendations on priority areas for authorities in Baja California to adopt to improve conditions for incarcerated populations in-line with human rights standards, and subsequently collaborated with authorities to provide services, supporting the state's social reintegration programs. This collaboration promoted the proper implementation of Article 7 of the National Law on Criminal Enforcement, which sets standards for the performance and collaboration of key stakeholders of the justice system, to include a collaboration between the State Health Secretariat and the Ministry of Education with prison authorities and civil society organizations that worked together to guarantee compliance with a range of best practices in social reintegration (i.e., compliance in areas of health, employment opportunities, vocational training, education and sports).

Initially, ASILEGAL communicated the conditions of the state prison system through meetings in which they presented qualitative and quantitative assessment findings and recommendations, and ultimately produced a comprehensive proposal for the design and execution of social reintegration programs. Additionally, based on the information gathered during visits to prisons, documentary research and collaboration with the authorities, ASILEGAL developed the first Methodology for Social Reintegration Programs designed for the state of Baja California, which is also applicable in other entities in the country with the necessary adjustments based on context.

To accomplish this, ASILEGAL established strategic alliances with the outgoing and incoming administrations. By design, the organization's methodology is the product of inter-institutional working groups and subsequent agreements. In addition, the organization crafted a public policy proposal to implement the social reintegration program, which draws on the very lines of action in matters of social reintegration that the government as well as local institutions and agencies within Baja California are legally obliged to comply with given their mandate and the legal framework that guides their functions.

ASILEGAL also promoted access to public information on the right to social reintegration based on national and international legislation. Consequently, as part of the communication strategy, they informed the general population through strategic communication and public appearances in which the organization disseminated information produced through eight publications that range from assessments, methodological proposals, implementation reports, guides, etc. The CSO also participated in public fora, advocacy & decision-making spaces such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and the Committee on Civil and Political Rights of Mexico (ECOSOC), among others.

Within these spaces, ASILEGAL advocated for issues that affect incarcerated populations within the agenda for the defense and promotion of human rights. To do so, in its watchdog y maven role, the organization drew upon emblematic cases that served as references for authorities to identify how to improve compliance with federal law based in human rights standards. Ultimately, ASILEGAL submitted formal recommendations before the Universal Periodic Review, whereupon sixteen of the recommendations addressed by ASILEGAL were included in the final document.

Highlighting ASILEGAL's Role in Social Advocacy

- Service provider roles through the organization's innovation in creating a methodology for social reintegration programs.
- Maven role by placing emphasis on technical capacities to produce quality evidence-based assessments that highlight human rights violations against incarcerated populations, particularly minority groups (i.e., indigenous, female, and LGBT populations).
- Maven functions with mainstreamed social advocacy by developing quality evidence-based research which stems from their grassroots experience. The data produced is the basis for their advocacy efforts in the national and international arenas in order to provide recommendations concerning the treatment of incarcerated populations in agreement with human rights at the international and national levels.
- Social advocacy functions mainstreamed into their intervention by establishing a collaborative model to improve the implementation of social reintegration programming and craft a scalable public policy proposal at the state and national levels.
- Social advocacy functions mainstreamed through public awareness campaigns with access to information and analysis that positions their target populations at the center of the public agenda and influences the perspective of decision makers and communities at large towards incarcerated populations to advance the respect for human rights.
- Watchdog role by identifying possible human rights violations such as torture within the prison system and outlining the international standards in place to respond to them.
- Grassroots mobilizer functions by carrying out fieldwork in Baja California to identify the needs of their target communities and collect data to inform their advocacy efforts.

2. CIUDADANOS EN APOYO A LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS, A.C. (CADHAC): Service Provider, Grassroots Mobilizer and Watchdog

CADHAC provides free social, psychosocial and legal support to the families of missing persons in the state of Nuevo León and Tamaulipas. The CSO is particularly committed to finding new alternatives to accompany victims of forced disappearance. Part of their approach involves the in-depth review and follow-up to the archives of pending investigations of those forcibly disappeared with their family members in collaboration with the Attorney General for the state of Nuevo León. This process involved the review of archival materials, as well as the identification and documentation of omissions, negligence, and lack of due process.

In order to carry out this important work, they have also exchanged legal strategies with members of other organizations that also accompany cases of disappearance. As part of the organization's strategies, for instance, CADHAC reviewed and documented the progress of symbolic cases in which extrajudicial execution was inflicted to then develop expert reports on the psychosocial

effects of human rights abuses to be considered when determining damage reparation, such as torture.

CADHAC's work has contributed to situating forced disappearance in the public agenda, which has been possible through the organization's relationship and recognition by federal and international institutions. An important result of this work was an increase in public officials' knowledge on human rights standards, improved attention to victims' cases from a human rights perspective, and an increase in interest by public sector stakeholders to establish strategic alliances that help to address the needs of the victims' families.

Awareness of the effects of disappearance has generated a positive effect in reducing the re-victimization of victims and families, giving a new face to the problem, transforming the judicial culture to recognize and respect the rights of family members and loved ones who seek justice. Through CADHAC's work, victims are being heard and are better able to communicate the situations they experience. Furthermore, the construction of one, unified message, has been effective in reaching target audiences in Nuevo León.

In addition, CADHAC focused on legal reform. The CSO carried out legislative analysis and presented proposals for the harmonization and modification of the *General Law on Victims*, the *General Law of Torture*, the *Law of Attention to Victims of the State of Nuevo León* and the *General Law of Declaration of Absence due to Disappearance*.¹⁴ Likewise, the organization successfully advocated for legal benefits such as the status of the victim and the declaration of absence so that the rights of the victims are guaranteed.

Another key result of CADHAC's work is the approval of the reform of the *Law of Declaration of Absence for Disappearance in Nuevo León*¹⁵. Thanks to this reform, families have managed to speed up their trials to declare disappearance due to the fact that a provisional certificate is no longer issued, rather only one official certificate is issued following a single hearing. Furthermore, prior to this reform, only four effects of forced disappearance were considered whereas now fifteen are considered. These effects are related to the protection of rights, private property, family members, and legal status. This is a significant victory for the protection of human rights and the legal framework that protects them.

Highlighting CADHAC's Role in Social Advocacy

- Social advocacy functions mainstreamed by establishing strategic alliances with key public authorities and peer CSOs.
- Social advocacy functions mainstreamed by promoting legislative harmonization and reform to support their target audiences.
- Service provider by providing quality assurance and human rights compliance through operational processes within the justice system for victims of disappearance.

¹⁴ State of Nuevo León, México. (2019). General Law for Victims in the State of Nuevo León (*Ley de Víctimas del Estado de Nuevo León*). Accessed at http://www.hcnl.gob.mx/trabajo_legislativo/leyes/leyes/ley_de_victimas_del_estado_de_nuevo_leon/ on August 15, 2020.

¹⁵ Idem.

- Grassroots mobilizer by voicing the grievances and needs of victims and victims' families, ensuring that their human rights are respected.
- Watchdog role by monitoring the application of due process for victims of disappearance.

3. RED MESA DE MUJERES DE CIUDAD JUÁREZ, A.C. (RED MESA): Service Provider, Grassroots Mobilizer, Watchdog and Maven

Red Mesa de Mujeres is a network of ten CSOs committed to women's issues and caring for women in vulnerable situations. Red Mesa de Mujeres implements community intervention models that incorporate a gender perspective for social development, the prevention and eradication of violence, and the promotion and defense of human rights. The organization is based in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and has worked in these thematic areas for the past 20 years.

Red Mesa de Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez, A.C. (Red Mesa) successfully created a new model for the protection of women's rights in Chihuahua in collaboration with state officials, CSOs, and citizens. During the organization's collaboration with CSA, Red Mesa developed a project aimed at promoting access to justice for female victims of gender-based violence (mainly forced disappearance, trafficking and femicide). The project advocated for strategic litigation and the institutionalization of mechanisms and support systems within government institutions to attend to victims of gender-based violence and their families. This led not only to the verification of cases as cases of gender-based violence, but also to analysis and proposed improvements to the accusatorial criminal justice system that oversees gender-based crimes in Ciudad Juárez. As a result of Red Mesa's efforts, the state governor declared that it will implement a Femicide Alert.

In addition, Red Mesa established an agenda to collaborate with the Specialized Prosecutor's Office for Women (*Fiscalía Especializada de las Mujeres-FEM*), dedicated to crimes involving gender-based violence for the state of Chihuahua, which resulted in a formal alliance with this office. Red Mesa, together with a coalition of local organizations, successfully advocated for the Special Prosecutor's Office to receive an increase in its budget in excess of 45 million pesos (more than \$2 million USD), and supported the creation of a new state court specializing in gender-based issues that will help advance progress in cases that require a gender-based perspective. Moreover, the organization gathered assessment data on gender-based violence, which provided the evidence required to prompt legislators and members of the Human Rights Commission of the local Congress to redirect resources to institutionalize gender-based perspectives that will impact all regions of the state.

Red Mesa also provided direct, comprehensive support to 58 families of victims of violence, including nineteen families of victims of gender-based violence, seven families of those forcibly disappeared, and eleven families of victims of femicide. As part of this effort, Red Mesa supported 653 legal proceedings and granted 6,865 social relief services to families of men and women who were victims of forced disappearance, trafficking, and/or femicide. Ultimately, Red Mesa successfully defended 19 cases in favor of victims.

An important result of Red Mesa's project was the empowerment of families of victims of violence in order to create networks between themselves and other organizations. By sharing experiences

of the families of victims, women leaders emerged who have played a fundamental role by carrying out different activities to demand justice. Many of these women have made public appearances, providing interviews to media in which they share their cases and demand justice for their families and their daughters.

Finally, another significant outcome of Red Mesa's CSA grant-funded project was the creation of the Citizen Justice Observatory, which specializes in monitoring the Accusatorial Criminal Justice System (SJPA, per its acronym in Spanish) with a gender-based perspective. As a result of this work, the authorities linked to the operation of the SJPA have increased their knowledge of victims' rights from a gender-based perspective to comply with due diligence in attending to crimes against women. This effort was replicated through public forums to train 158 civil servants and officials representing more than 20 institutions on the institutionalization of gender perspective in the justice system. Likewise, alliances were created with 30 CSOs that will replicate the methodology.

Red Mesa's activities exemplify collaboration with the public sector in order to better attend to the target population by designing a joint strategy to respond to local needs, improving the quality of service delivery to vulnerable women and their families, and strengthening both the local government bodies that enforce justice and citizens' organizations with vested interest in the social development process. Ultimately, this CSA grant-funded project contributed to the responsiveness of local government to gender-based violence by establishing new procedures and refining practices to better attend to victims' cases and promote transparency.

Highlighting Red Mesa's Role in Social Advocacy

- Service provider role through the organization's innovative model for the protection of women's rights, which centers on promoting access to justice for female victims of gender-based violence through the use of strategic litigation.
- Social advocacy functions by establishing strategic alliances with key public authorities and peer CSOs for the institutionalization of mechanisms and support systems within government institutions to attend to victims of gender-based violence and their families.
- Grassroots mobilizer functions through their the organizations' support of local communities affected by human rights issues involving gender-based violence (mainly forced disappearance, trafficking and femicide).
- Maven role by carrying out research that informs their social advocacy for changes in legislation, budget allocation and the public sector's organizational infrastructure to tackle femicide.
- Watchdog functions by developing an institutionalized citizen justice observatory to report on femicide and forced disappearance, promoting the state's Femicide Alert and follow-up processes that promote public sector accountability.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE CSOS' SOCIAL ADVOCACY FUNCTIONS

Over the last 30 years, civil society has had a leading role in promoting human rights and defending the rule of law in Mexico. It is hard to imagine a modern democratic state without the support of civil society, especially in developing countries with high levels of inequality, poverty, violence, human rights abuse and corruption.¹⁶ CSOs perform a set of functions such as defending collective interests, increasing accountability, providing solidarity mechanisms, promoting participation, influencing decisions and directly participating in the provision of services.¹⁷ 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.

Figure 5 presents the characteristics of effective social advocacy driven CSOs, highlighting organizational traits for those that wish to influence decision making processes while advocating for social change. These characteristics include representation and legitimacy; data collection and analysis; connection, collaboration and engagement with stakeholders; monitoring and critical analysis; intervention model innovation; and social justice. These characteristics are specific traits of organizations that perform the roles described earlier. Although it is not plausible for organizations to exude all of these characteristics, it is important to consider each of these elements for effective social advocacy to occur. This proposal highlights that CSO roles are not mutually exclusive of each other but that they can reinforce each other in order to create more robust civil society organizations.

FIGURE 5. CSA - CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SOCIAL ADVOCACY DRIVEN BY CSOS

Source: Authors

CSA - Characteristics of Effective Social Advocacy driven CSOs



¹⁶ UCLGA. (2014). "Policy Forum for Development Meeting of Latin America and Caribbean region." Accessed at <https://www.uclga.org/news/policy-forum-for-development-meeting-of-latin-america-and-caribbean-region/> on August 30, 2020.

¹⁷ Echt L & Mérola, M. (2019) "Advocacy strategies of CSOs in the Southern Cone in Latin America: a Path of Many Lessons." Politics and Ideas. Accessed at <http://politicsandideas.org/advocacy-strategies-of-csos-in-the-southern-cone-in-latin-america-a-path-of-many-lessons/> on August 31, 2020.

VI. NEW HORIZONS IN ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: INCORPORATING EFFECTIVE SOCIAL ADVOCACY FUNCTIONS

Through its collaboration with its partner organizations, the Civil Society Activity has gained experiential knowledge about how this process occurs and what elements may trigger more effective and complementary relationships, particularly between the state and civil society organizations. Through the three cases presented (ASILEGAL, CADHAC and Red Mesa), CSOs have managed to effectively mainstream social advocacy into several functions that these organizations play: maven, service provider, grassroots mobilizer, and watchdog. Additionally, these success stories highlight certain organizational development areas which must be strengthened in order to develop impactful and lasting results in society, in collaboration with the public sector. The following sections describe the key performance areas that may be prioritized through organizational development in order to develop more effective social advocacy mainstreaming.



REPRESENTATION AND LEGITIMACY:

Due to loopholes civil society organizations face in terms of the legal and regulatory frameworks within the region, it has become increasingly important for them to focus on their representativeness and legitimacy. All too often, when CSOs act on their own, they struggle to be recognized for their legitimacy and accountability. Many also query the policy positions put forward by CSOs – researchers question their evidence base and policymakers question their feasibility.¹⁸

Legitimacy refers to the capability CSOs have to represent the communities they serve. CSOs may claim their legitimacy from representing a particular group and argue that the size and views of their membership can give weight to their proposals. For instance, when organizations are capable of unifying the voices of marginalized communities and optimizing their empowerment efforts through their work, they become increasingly legitimate through their power of representation and agency. CSOs that are representative of their target populations may contribute to a shift in power relations in order to amplify the voice of the marginalized or under-represented.

It is important for CSOs to leverage their grassroots connections and representation. This involves strengthening their capacity to respond to pressing social concerns, prioritizing attention to those most affected. Not only should CSOs ensure that their initiatives meet crucial social demands, but they also need to strengthen their presence at the grassroots level in close proximity to their beneficiaries, which will lend to a greater impact, improve their public image, and reinforce their credibility vis-à-vis all levels of government. A closer connection with their target communities will strengthen the capacity of the CSOs that operate within Mexico to influence policy-making or, at least, to mobilize relevant segments of the citizenry to support their advocacy

¹⁸ ODI. (2006).

activities.¹⁹ Additionally, through these efforts, CSOs are able to become citizenship champions by encouraging citizen engagement and supporting their rights. This has the effect of progressively shifting the power dynamics by aiding citizen participation and community empowerment.

The Civil Society Activity suggests that CSOs should focus on reinforcing their role at the grass-roots level as a means of regaining public support and encouraging citizen participation. In turn, this would enhance their legitimacy as credible representatives of the ‘voice of the communities’ and would also strengthen their capacity to influence public policy.²⁰



DATA COLLECTION AND/OR ANALYSIS:

CSOs must develop capacities to influence and advocate public policy. Limited CSO influence on policy-making is not only due to institutional deficiencies and reluctant governments, but also to CSOs’ limited capacity. Many CSOs that operate in developing countries lack the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully monitor and influence political processes. There lies an opportunity for CSOs to execute a role in influencing public decision-making processes. Consequently, CSOs must acquire specific research skills and learn how to better utilize the evidence they collect, if they want to stand a better chance of improving their capacity to influence policy. In this capacity, CSOs will be able to influence public decision making and strengthen the influence of the sector as a whole.²¹

Civil society organizations have also been able to carry out research that raises the profile of marginalized communities. This becomes increasingly relevant as excluded groups are more likely to form and participate in organizations that represent their interests.²² Additionally, when mainstreaming social advocacy, it is important for CSOs to incorporate target population’s feedback into their action plans, informing the organizations’ strategic planning, intervention models and institutional budgets. When these target populations actively participate in the organizational development of CSOs, organizations develop the capacity to become more responsive to the needs of the communities they serve and develop the tools to more effectively engage with the state.

It is important to consider that even when CSOs are aware evidence is important in their social advocacy efforts, they may not know what type of evidence will be most influential. Often policy-makers within the public sector tend to have a ‘hierarchy of evidence’ with a preference towards

¹⁹ Fioramonti Lorenzo, V. F. (2007). “How Civil Society Influences Policy: A Comparative Analysis of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index in Post-Communist Europe.” CIVICUS/ODI, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), pages 8, 9, and 24. Accessed at <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/224.pdf> on June 20, 2020.

²⁰ Ibid, page 38.

²¹ Ibid, page 31.

²² Echt L, & Mérola, M. (2019)

'hard' empirical research, such as quantitative data or surveys. By contrast, CSOs tend to produce and rely upon soft evidence (anecdotes and case studies). In many instances, this causes the evidence that is generated by CSOs to be ignored.²³ Therefore, it becomes increasingly relevant for organizations to engage in data collection and evidence-based analysis, and to develop proposals based in this evidence in order to effectively influence decision-making.



CONNECTION, COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS:

It is important to promote CSO interaction and relationship building with other society actors, particularly the state as networks, coalitions and partnerships often enjoy greater political weight and success than a single organization or individual.²⁴ For instance, a stronger interaction between CSOs and the state is another crucial factor for ensuring long-term sustainability, as it makes it easier for CSOs to access public funds to support their activities. An institutionalized interaction between organized civil society and government would also create the conditions for more transparent policy-making processes. It is important to note that collaboration with the public sector does not hamper the autonomy of CSOs that perform watchdog functions. CSOs should adopt transparency in their interactions with the public sector to minimize adverse effects.

Additionally, CSOs must promote systemic networks and engagement platforms wherever possible. In some cases, fora in which government and civil society actors collaborate already exist, and in other cases, CSOs must advocate for the creation of these spaces. Whenever these interactions are formalized, CSOs, public authorities, private sector and donors should work hand in hand to improve and extend their dialogue. Furthermore, donors and other actors interested in strengthening civil society should focus on assisting CSOs to gain specific skills to facilitate conversations using their convening power to build networks with stakeholders that promote exchanges on learning, capacity development, and experiential knowledge. For instance, CSOs would benefit from stable interactions with researchers working at universities or research centers. This would help CSOs position research that is already in place and it would also add credibility to CSOs' proposals.²⁵



MONITORING AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS:

²³ ODI. (2006).

²⁴ Echt L, & Mérola, M. (2019), Page 20.

²⁵ ODI (2006), Page 39.

The role of civil society is to highlight issues of social significance. Civil society representatives may act in the public interest as whistle-blowers, holding institutions and individuals accountable for their actions and their effects on citizens. CSOs can either act as impartial parties that monitor the state of affairs and the state of compliance with regulations that affect citizens and their rights. While fulfilling this role, they may observe a social issue in objective manner, whereas state actors may be compliant.

Alternatively, they can also represent the interests of marginalized communities and provide monitoring with the interest to shift the power dynamics and position the interests and needs of marginalized communities within public forums or simply within the public light. By performing this function, CSOs are able to highlight irregularities and illegality that has high social repercussions. In addition to monitoring, organizations must be able to form an informed opinion; therefore, provide critical analysis based on the social data that is available.



INTERVENTION MODEL INNOVATION:

A stronger role in social advocacy would benefit the long-term sustainability of CSOs by complementing the service-delivery profile of many organizations operating in the region. Possibly, a more significant social advocacy function would also contribute to reshaping the public image of many CSOs that, due to their service-delivery profile, are often perceived as bureaucrats rather than autonomous civic actors that innovate and contribute to social development. This is mostly due to the fact that the provision of many social services is seen as the responsibility of the public sector.

In terms of service provision, CSOs are a valuable partner in providing deep subject-matter expertise based on first-hand experience, piloting and scaling up innovations in social services and facilitating citizen engagement.²⁶ Innovation stems from the flexibility to design and implement streamlined practices that increase the efficiency and quality of services to communities.

In this context, international donors could play a significant role by providing flexible funding that supports innovation, investing in programs aimed at building the capacity of CSOs in technical capacity, innovation and social advocacy. Additionally, many CSOs could benefit from developing specific skills to attract the attention of the media, which could be an important ally in supporting advocacy campaigns to advance their social intervention models.²⁷

²⁶ World Economic Forum. (2013). "The Future Role of Civil Society." World Scenario Series, Page 7. Accessed at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_FutureRoleCivilSociety_Report_2013.pdf on August 5, 2020.

²⁷ ODI. (2006), Page 39.



SOCIAL JUSTICE:

Finally, CSOs can act as enablers of and catalyst for cross-sector change, creating the political and policy “space” to make difficult or otherwise unpopular decisions for the benefit of the communities that they serve. When CSOs have a particular interest in advocating for social justice, they are usually focused on long-term results. Since creating social change is a challenging task, organizations will focus their advocacy in terms of significant long-term efforts instead of short-term gains.

Over the last decades, civil society organizations in Mexico have become an important tool for poor and otherwise marginalized communities to gain access to the political system. It is difficult to imagine a modern democratic state without the participation of the CSOs in the development of its political institutions. The role of civil organizations in brokering social justice and their role in political and economic development may be prioritized.²⁸

²⁸ OXFAM. (2017). “What is really going on within ‘shrinking civil society space’ and how should international actors respond?” Accessed at <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/what-is-really-going-on-within-shrinking-civil-society-space-and-how-should-international-actors-respond/> on August 28, 2020.

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