

## Alliances of Civil Society Organizations and Their Impacts on Social Indicators of Marginalized Communities: A Case of Sonora Community Network, Mexico

*Dr. Beatriz Ochoa Silva*

CICCSA, Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora  
5 de Febrero 8181 sur, Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, México  
E-mail: beatriz.ochoa@itson.edu.mx

*Dr. Imelda Lorena Vázquez Jiménez*

Rectoría, Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora  
5 de Febrero 8181 sur, Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, México  
E-mail: ivazquez@itson.mx

*Dr. Guadalupe Ross Argüelles*

Rectoría, Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora  
5 de Febrero 8181 sur, Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, México  
E-mail: gross@itson.mx

**Abstract:** Heterogeneity and the diverse causes of social problems are multiplying and most low-income communities are facing extremely difficult living conditions and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are concerned to help improve social development. This study aims to: Promote alliances between CSOs to work together with programs that impact individual and social development of marginalized communities in the southern part of Sonora, Mexico. The results based on the information gathered at the meetings with the participation of organizations, are that they decide to join the network and work through concreted alliances to carry out actions related to health, psychosocial, educational, training for micro-entrepreneurs and environmental orientation programs, promoting microcredit for micro-entrepreneurship, as well as paper, cardboard, aluminum and plastic recycling programs.

**JEL Classifications:** I12, I13, M14

**Keywords:** Sonora Community Network, Civil Society Organizations, Alliances, Social indicators

### 1. Introduction

Social changes occur constantly and the trust that people are placing in the civil society organizations (CSOs) is increasing, and therefore these organizations feel a commitment to meet the expectations of citizens about what they can do to solve the problems that affect them.

There are actions that maximize the value of the CSOs accountability, one of which is to promote a prosperous society that goes beyond traditional charitable programs seeking more sustainable programs. Its purpose is to carry out a social and economic change for the communities where they operate, transcending the traditional aid approach to proceed to influence root causes

that produce social problems and creating initiatives directed to improve social indicators such as quality of life, survival, self-sufficiency and social welfare.

The civil society organizations can contribute to the development and consolidation of democracy in their countries, working with government and business, offering innovative answers and knowledge to the solution of social problems. According to the Mexican Center for Philanthropy (2008) their participation is associated with three general ideas: a) The market does not offer solutions to meet all social needs and to all sectors of the population, b) The State, especially in the less developed countries, has been facing constraints to ensure social welfare and c) The organized civil society should be involved in the design and implementation of social development strategies. This Center reports that there are 33, 010 civil society organizations (CSOs) which are part of the Third Sector which is governed independently and nonprofit and that according to the Johns Hopkins University data derived from a comparative study of the Third Sector in 30 countries including México the sector resources are composed of 35% from the government, 53% from fees and services paid by citizens and 12% from philanthropy, including foundations and companies donations. 82% of the resources the CSOs work with are self-generating, 8.5% government funding and philanthropic giving 6.3% of resources.

### **1.1 Origin of Sonora Community Network**

Now, with the new and different way of including civil society, the creation of a horizontal network of organizations that promotes reciprocity and participation of women in the most vulnerable communities, is favored, this was why in southern Sonora, Mexico in 2006 a network formed by a group of people, civil society organizations and institutions of higher education, aware that social problems are not only concern of the government, or of themselves, was created, in addition to the low participation of private companies in such problems, they decide to join and work together with programs related to social problems linked to poverty, education, environment and health. This group is known as "Sonora Community Network" whose mission is to unite efforts, talents and resources to promote the social development of the community and improve their quality of life (Vazquez, Ross and Ochoa, 2007).

Sonora Community Network guarantees the involvement of the community in the search for a common good, where all members share goals and follow an orderly process to achieve development, far from being a problem, the achievements are joined thereof. It looks for social development through active participation and joint organizations network system and servers interested in improving social welfare and self-sufficiency of vulnerable communities in southern Sonora, Mexico.

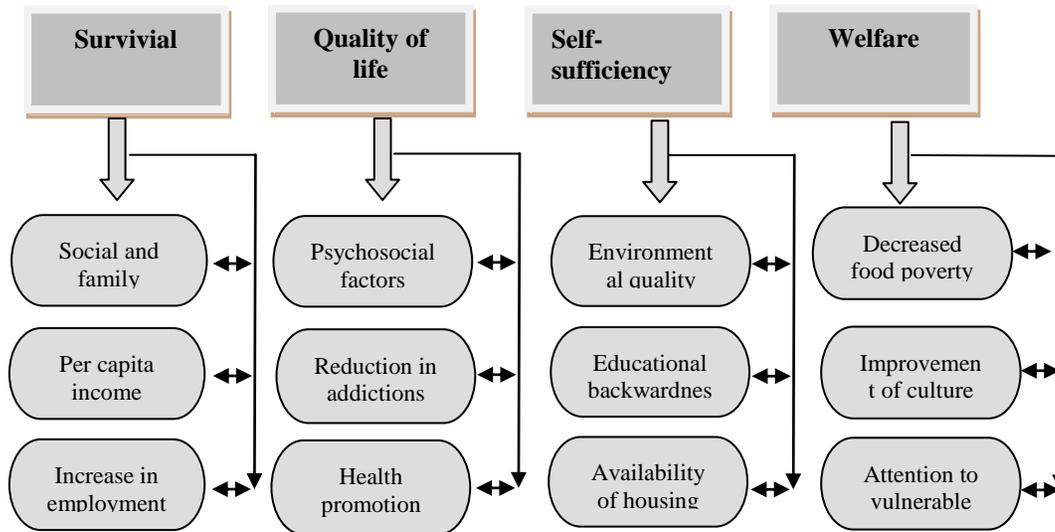
Since most low-income communities are facing extremely difficult living conditions. In Sonora Community Network, it is believed that, through alliances between Civil Society Organizations they may influence to reduce poverty, improve quality of life, seek self-sufficiency and welfare of the neediest communities; that it is necessary to advance with decision towards this convergence between social sectors, considering the principles or standards that are emerging from the lessons learned by practical applications that inspire, orient and guide the innovation process, for this reason it is seen as a leading Institution in the promotion of community development based on the principles of active and joint participation with will, energy and self-confidence.

### **1.2 Indicators and goals of Sonora Community Network**

In Sonora Community Network a complex set of programs has been planned and developed to strengthen the society and the learning of the organizations that are part of it, which means that they are working on a deal in which various actors are combined to improve the incidence in local development, from the generation of learning conditions of the included experiences.

That is the reason why, since its creation, special attention was given to the formation of a network that had as its main purpose the integration of CSOs and secondly learning and systematization of the experiences of this type of organization in relation to indicators of quality of life, social welfare, self-sufficiency and survival. It also raises strategic goals to achieve each indicator, see chart 1.

**Chart 1.** Indicators and goals of Sonora Community Network



The Community Network according to Vazquez, Ochoa and Ross (2008) has distinctive skills to coordinate its resources and put them to productive use which are specific strengths that allow it to differentiate its products and services and thus gain a competitive advantage that helps it to stand out from other CSOs, because: a) it is the first network of civil society organizations in Latin America and it is the pioneer in the State of Sonora, Mexico to use the alternate currency, b) it has a mega-wide strategic planning; c) it has intangible resources such as recognition, prestige, experience and knowledge of the promoters, and d) it has partnerships with international organizations such as the Consciousness Group and the Lases Network of Buenos Aires, Argentina. It also promotes the community's participation strengthening the social fabric, by giving users and members the opportunity to meet and fulfill its social responsibility by supporting social organizations, with the mere fact of being part of the network and it aims to achieve the following objectives.

- a. To improve social indicators related to quality of life, social welfare, survival and self-sufficiency.
- b. To generate self-sufficient enterprises, indirect jobs, increase family income and the ability to save and retain the workforce.
- c. To promote solidarity and generosity among the members of the community through the use and exchange of complementary currency.
- d. To generate a supportive network among providers of goods and services in the locality, in order to help reorganize the economy in terms of society, not money.
- e. To create the link between the demand for services from social organizations and the labor supply of people that offer it.
- f. To foster a surplus of resources that can be shared among social organizations allied to the project.

- g. To take advantage of all community resources: people, money, talent, contacts, etc., reconverting the regional economy through alternative money making companies, trade, and organizations participate in the network.

### **1.3 Problems of Civil Society Organizations**

Heterogeneity and the various causes of social problems are multiplying and force organizations concerned in some way to help promote the development of the poorest communities, to perform various actions and together attack the different shortcomings or take advantage of various opportunities. This is because; as an organization increases the relation between its activities with other organizations the probability of success increases because the synergy produces interdependence between organizations. As mentioned by Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson (2007) the synergy amongst organizations is achieved when the value the business units create working together exceeds the value they generate when they work independently.

When working together, the civil society organizations have more diversity and scope of action because their structure is horizontal and it makes more emphasis on communication and flexibility of action. At the same time, integration instruments and mechanisms are considered for organizations to give their contributions, see what they manage to make together and how they can improve their goals, share resources, contacts, exchange information and seek public visibility.

For that reason, in Sonora Community Network it the convenience of creating synergies between CSOs is seen to achieve greater social impact, for which it is considered convenient: to promote alliances between these organizations that are perfectly related to the value chain of the Network and generate immediate solutions based on an action plan that is committed to create, design and manage services that counteract in an immediate, consistent, supportive way the possible weaknesses and opportunities presented by the new scenarios in order to accomplish an impact on individual and social development of the communities in southern Sonora, Mexico.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Strategic Alliances**

Organizations in all types of industry and throughout the world have formed strategic alliances, partnerships or networks to complement their own strategic initiatives and strengthen their competitiveness; it is a complete change to create presence and to establish an attractive position in the market. They have concluded that participating simultaneously making synergy between themselves is what will help them acquire more skills, resources, experience and competitive capabilities more diverse and extensive of what they can gather and manage on their own, which is one of the key objectives of the alliances because by knowing their capabilities and services they become promoters amongst themselves.

Work in cooperation is not reduced to meet between organizations and their people. The monitoring of these meetings is an essential task. The allied organizations learn to create and use networks locally, nationally and internationally, to establish and maintain contacts.

One of the types of models for managing cooperation between organizations in networks exposed by Bernardez (2005) is the strategic alliances, which is used as a vital point for the development of organizations. Added to this there is the opinion of Thompson and Strickland (2012) on the strategic alliances that are considered as cooperative agreements between organizations and beyond the normal dealings amongst one organization and another, and do not get to have formal ownership ties. Thus we can say that the value of the alliance lies in the ability of the

allied organization to collaborate effectively and make their way to the changes that arise on its way.

When organizations are in this stage, the main difficulty relates to having the time needed to test the relationship before making commitments with a compatible partner. Strategic alliances are like any other relationship: thrive if given due attention, but may be counterproductive if neglected. Constantly set new benchmarks for evaluating progress can help keep the course of the projects and the interest of the relationship.

In order to make alliances, interested organizations should make an analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) that allows them to have an overview of their situation (Hill and Jones 2011). The strengths of resources, competencies and competitive capabilities are important as they represent the building blocks of a strategy, the weaknesses are fundamental because they point out the vulnerabilities that require correction. On the other hand, there are the opportunities and threats that come into play to get anything that may be favoring for the organization and for defending against threats that may affect their welfare.

Performing a SWOT analysis is the first step in the alliances, it represents an aid to have a clear view of the position of the organization in relation to the context. What is important is to determine which utility they want to give to the information obtained. In that sense, it is important to identify the most relevant that can be obtained internally and externally.

The alliance seeks to provoke synergies, perfectly cohesive in the value chain, generating immediate solutions based on an action plan that has the commitment to create, design and manage services that counteract in an immediate, consistent, supportive way the possible weaknesses and opportunities that will arise in the new scenarios that will develop.

The alliance between Civil Society Organizations may be recognized for their work in society and for their concern about the social welfare having in turn another purpose of promoting a culture of social responsibility.

### **2.2 Types of Alliances**

Alliances require direct relationships with other networks or associations (potential customers). Some CSOs choose to resolve this issue looking for a local partner who will support the provision of the service; this is the cheapest and easiest option to enter a new market. In fact, association between CSOs is perhaps the most appropriate solution in terms of macro-level plans that only wish to offer their services to local markets.

According to Boyd and Mullins (2005) there are different types of alliances between organizations such as the knowledge, identity, brand and shared resources. There is also another type of alliance that for its geographical location may be given amongst other Civil Society Organizations such as the local, national and international, this is a type of collaboration in which the benefit and the competitive value depend on the mutual learning (knowledge), effective cooperation through time and the successful adaptation to change. Furthermore, they can be supplemented with alliances by corporate identity considering the experience and track record of the national and international CSOs.

Through these alliances, the governmental dispositions of each country can be expanded and met with, get local market information, guidance in adapting their services and help them achieve an expansion in markets and whether the organizations have matches in the strategic value chain they can perform better together because of the potential of skills transfer, greater bargaining power, common collaboration benefits.

The value chain of CSOs shows all the activities and functions that are intertwined externally and internally. Similarly each value chain activity relates in a way that the manner in which each one of them performs influences the other, e.g.: software suppliers to communities rely on external financial support they receive from certain foundations or by government support. Moreover this will affect established programs for the development of society.

### **2.3 Methodology to carry out an Alliance**

There are different methodological proposals to carry out alliances such as that of Gomes-Casseres (2004), Krell (2002), Hill and Jones (2011) designed for profit companies but may be used by non-profit organizations, from the analysis of these a methodology is presented according to the characteristics of a Civil Society Organization, the steps are listed below:

**a) Objectives.** The organization interested in making the alliance, should have very clear the objectives, it is advisable, to have its strategic plan well defined, within which an analysis of the environment related to the current situation of the organization should have been carried out, where through a matrix relates the results of the analysis of internal and external context to obtain the main strategies and thus defining strategic objectives.

**b) Selecting prospects.** Having identified the objectives to be achieved and justified the need for the alliance, the potential partners are investigated exhaustively, their origin is analyzed and some aspects are evaluated such as their background, working methods, compatibility in objectives, experience, confidence, markets that are targeted, results of their programs and to third parties that have had dealings with them, this will serve to make a more reliable selection of potential allies.

**c) Negotiation.** When prospects have been identified to be part of the alliance, it is advisable to establish guidelines and procedures that will be considered to delve into the negotiation and establish the alliance. Negotiations will vary depending on the type of alliance, and cultural characteristics of the parties, in some cases the restrictions will be more flexible depending on the strengths, weaknesses, needs and opportunities.

The probabilities of finding points of convergence will depend on the awareness that each of the parties has for meeting its goals and it requires a negotiating group acting with rationality, balance and diplomacy for the management of human relations, it is very important to consider that for these cases of alliance, the intellectual, social and teamwork capital are an essential resource.

**d) Commitments.** Parties interested in forming the alliance must be fully aware of the projects and goals they want to achieve together and that they could not achieve by themselves, for which it is required to identify required the actions they would take and how they would carry them out, it is essential that the projects that are established are reviewed in detail so that there is safety in viability. At this stage it is necessary to define the project type, size, cost, funding sources and the social impact.

**e) Results.** This is a job that is done amongst the allies, it is a product related to the above points, where the alliance is established, the alliance analysis, the products of the alliance, the objectives to be achieved as an alliance and the definition of roles between allies.

**f) Conclusions.** It should be documented what will be the future of the organizations that will be part of the alliance, it is important that these findings have hard data from the social indicators to be hit.

### **3. Methodology**

Once Sonora Community Network is formally established, with an integration of five Civil Society Organizations, a group of individuals and a higher-level educational institution (Instituto Tecnológico de Sonora (Sonora Institute of Technology)) who had the responsibility to conduct its strategic planning in 2006 and within the identified strategies there is the formation of alliances. For that reason in 2007, the decision to initiate as a project in search of alliances with other CSOs to international and national level is taken. First there were two alliances with organizations in Buenos Aires, Argentina, one with Conciencia Group and the other with the Lases Network. For both a process where social programs with which each organization worked and the possibility of alliance were reviewed, was performed, it was a very simple and convenient process for the Network, because in this case the two organizations have a great strength related with time experience, strategies to get resources and the management of social programs in the case of Conciencia Group, for the case of the Lases Network, it considered to one hundred percent the experience that it has in the management of social currency and coordination of bartering between prosumers.

Later in that same year, 62 civil society organizations established in southern Sonora, Mexico were summoned; they had previously been analyzed according to their experience in the development and management of social programs in the communities in southern Sonora, Mexico.

They scheduled a meeting attended by all invited organizations, they explained the purpose of the meeting, and information regarding the opinion of these organizations was collected. Subsequently three divided sessions were scheduled in which groups of 12 organizations, with duration of 90 minutes each, being assisted by a moderator and four observers.

As part of the process followed, they began with a presentation of the project of Community Network (vision, mission, goals and social programs) and the purpose of the call. Subsequently it was requested to the representative from each organization to present relevant information of the organization, which also relates to their vision, mission, objectives, communities they serve and the types of programs that support with and after the presentation the following questions were asked to them: What are the objectives of the organization? Are they getting the expected results according to the objectives? What goals have worked and which have not worked? What is the impact of their programs in the society? Have they worked in cooperation with other CSOs? Are they willing to work together with other similar organizations to achieve the expected results? Based on the last question there were detected potential members of the network.

Once they responded the questions, 46 organizations expressed interest in participating in the network, they were invited to a workshop three sessions of four hours each session, which was intended to promote the participation as a member in the network, see the possibility of making synergy with organizations that have similar programs and propose projects that could be worked together. First they were given a talk of induction where they were grouped by related activities, after that they identified mission and common objectives based on social indicators such as social welfare, survival, quality of life and self-sufficiency of Sonora Community Network. Subsequently, an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of each organization was carried out and they identified the organization with which they could make an alliance based on the mission and objectives.

Once identified the allied organizations they worked on the identification of common projects and the distribution of roles as part of the alliance and funding sources to which they could resort to gather funds for their projects.

## 4. Results

According to the information gathered in the workshops, organizations that decided to join the Network and therefore work jointly on social programs, They took as reference the creation of their alliance, for organizations with experience, vision and mission well defined and consolidated at local level and with national and international recognition as is the case PROVAY and GRAMEEN de la Frontera, which proved to be efficient mediators and facilitated the construction of a relationship of trust between the organizations interested in participating in alliances.

The concretized alliances between organizations which decide to form part of Sonora Community Network are intended to carry out actions related to microcredit, paper and plastic recycling, small business development, health programs, psychosocial programs, educational programs, training programs for entrepreneurs and environmental orientation.

Considering the Sonora Community Network mission of "Uniting efforts, talents and resources to promote the integral development of the community and improve their quality of life, social welfare, survival and self-sufficiency" and that in all affiliates there are experiences and knowledge accumulated to discuss and propose alternatives, after learning from individuals, organizations and communities, various proposals were made which can be worked jointly and comprise the deployment of social intervention programs that propose one, or, simultaneously several of the following community and social action strategies that can be observed in Chart 2:

**Chart 2.** Social intervention programs

<b>Improvement of household economy</b>	<b>Improvement in education</b>	<b>Improvement in physical and emotional health in children, youth, women, and men</b>	<b>Promotion of dignified housing</b>	<b>Promotion of a culture of environmental care</b>
1. Promoting the generation of employments and self-employments	1. Training of reading children	1. Reproductive health	1. Improvement of housing	1. Educational programs
2. Training of trades	2. Pedagogical advice	2. Disease Prevention	2. Acquisition	2. Proper management of solid waste
3. Granting microcredits	3. Educational support	3. Physical Rehabilitation Programs	3. Construction Counseling	3. Recycling of paper, plastic, aluminum and cardboard
4. Encouraging savings		4. Personal hygiene	4. Construction	
5. Formation of barter clubs, with the use of social currency, involving prosumers (people producing a minimum scale and exchanging with another of the same type)		5. Addiction prevention	5. Credits for construction	
6. Utilization of resources of second use		6. Early pregnancy prevention		
7. Promoting the incorporation of the elderly to the labor market		7. Psychological counseling		
		8. Attention to high-risk children		

The development of these intervention strategies involves explicit and implicit agreements between communities and civil organizations in which it is clear the role and responsibilities of each one in the process.

Now, as participant organizations in the network they are willing to collaborate to transform in a positive way the economies and the life conditions of low income communities. And the stronger the relationships of trust and the self-aid groups that are the heart of the communities at base level, the greater the interventions for the most vulnerable.

As a result of these workshops, the participants concluded that forming alliances between CSOs can generate presence, survival, economy and achievement of the social objectives of each organization as well as to improve its image before the society.

## **5. Conclusion**

The base of the alliances is that trust is the basis of cooperation to create ways of understanding leading to new goals, by working under this perspective an integrated planning process should be utilized in order to carry out the activities jointly where they will share risks, rewards, goals, resources and the benefit obtained will depend on what each alliance achieves to advance.

A common denominator of the civil society organizations that comprise Sonora Community Network is that they are working in contexts of severe social problems, with a high percentage of young adult men and entire families living in places that do not invest in infrastructure, health, paving, education, housing and environment. Also, in these places the situation of community members is precarious, with problems such as unemployment, substance abuse, school dropout, psychological and health problems.

Most of the organizations that decide to join Sonora Community Network have practices and incorporate to their business strategy a social vision based on programs to perform, always taking into account the needs and expectations of the community to contribute to the formation of autonomous citizens more responsible of their environment, offering:

- a) Programs to support extreme poverty.
- b) Community programs aimed to the social welfare.
- c) Programs to promote respect and support to family union
- d) Promoting self-reliance, through funding for small business development, providing management and financial consulting.
- e) Promoting respect for the sustainable use of the environment (recycling paper, cardboard, plastic).

One way to guide the project in order to take advantage of the opportunity of local and national synergies with CSOs is to go in search of more national and international alliances that can be achieved as follows:

- a) Articulating and detecting the offer of cooperation from potential allies with the needs and interests they have.
- b) Developing a suitable methodology that allows providing information and facility access and diffusion of the support opportunities offered in the field of community service. This strategy can be called of approach and access to the offers of potential allies.

c) Identifying and jointly negotiate future cooperation projects according to indicators managed by the CSOs.

The ability to compete will depend strongly on the circumstances of the societies in which they operate and on the organizations forming the alliance, the efficiency of the joint work, of the way they adapt or respond to the internal and external changing conditions and most of to the willingness of each organization to develop according to their own capabilities in areas where internal control is transcendental.

Some of the innovation challenges that exist in this field are to generate links or define new ways of interaction in the provision of community services which provide a greater value to the market as well as to the ally customer. The future is the responsibility of all: governments, civil society organizations, businesses, colleges, citizens, and of our actions today from which society depends on where we will live tomorrow.

### References

- [1] Bernardez M. (2007), *Organizational Performance*, United States of America: Author House, (in Spanish).
- [2] Boyd & Mullins, J. (2005), *Strategic Marketing*, México: McGraw Hill. (in Spanish); Mexican Center for Philanthropy (2008), *Best Practices*. Document recovered in July of 2010 from [www.cemefi.org/esr/](http://www.cemefi.org/esr/).
- [3] Gomes-Casseres (2004), *Management Roundtable Alliance Workshop*, [Online] Available at: [www.alliancestrategy.com/](http://www.alliancestrategy.com/) .
- [4] Hill, Ch. & Jones G. (2011), *Strategic Management an integrated approach*, Mexico: McGraw Hill. (in Spanish).
- [5] Hitt, M., Ireland, R, & Hoskisson, R. (2007), *Strategic Management. Competitiveness and Globalization Concepts*, Mexico THOMPSON (in Spanish).
- [6] Krell, H. (2002), *What is an strategic Alliance*, [On-line] Available at: [www.ilvem.com/shop/otraspaginas.asp?paginan p=692](http://www.ilvem.com/shop/otraspaginas.asp?paginan p=692), Accessed on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012.
- [7] Thompson, A. & Strickland, A.(2012), *Strategic Management*, Mexico: McGraw Hill: (in Spanish).
- [8] Vazquez, I., Ochoa, B., & Ross, G. (2008), *Application of Mega Planning in a Community Network in Cd. Obregon, Sonora* (in Spanish).
- [9] Vazquez, I., Ross, G., & Ochoa, B. (2007), *Contribution of Higher Education Institutions in Generating Positive Social Consequences*. Bloomington, Indiana USA: Author House (in Spanish).