

# Chapter 5

## Nonprofit Organizations in Mexico: Case Studies

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### Introduction

Volunteer groups were analyzed in the two previous chapters, including their different facets, their relation to individual life experience, as well as the reasons for which people participate in them. The fundamental role played by the family group was also discussed among other elements that encourage a subject to take the path of activities to help third parties. Semantic categories related to volunteer action were also examined and the volunteer's perceptions were discussed, as well as the terms they assign to the type of activity performed. In this chapter, I will focus on exploring what happens in the organizations. Given the richness of the qualitative information gathered, it is possible to develop a framework in which volunteer group actions occur in order to achieve a complete scenario that also includes the type of organizations in which these volunteers participate.

### Background

There is little information about nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in Mexico and so there is a broad field of study yet to be explored from the standpoint of different perspectives. According to Verduzco (2006), NPOs are the most common form of organization in Mexico, and they also constitute a particularly heterogeneous universe, as other studies have already noted (Méndez 1998; Brody 2003.) These organizations direct their attention and concerns toward a very diverse range of fields of action. Among them, some of the most important include: helping the sick; caring for children, women, the elderly, or indigenous people in marginalized circumstances; educating specific groups; promoting sports or cultural activities; encouraging a sense of community; and the defense of specific causes, to mention a few. In addition to this multiplicity of fields and forms of actions, there are

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different organizational models and alternative practices, and, therefore, it is important to examine concrete cases of NPOs operating today.

In the bibliography on the subject, the complexity of establishing the position of NPOs as part of civil society stands out. There are few detailed studies in Mexico of organizations of this type that analyze the purposes, internal structure, operational mechanisms, and decision-making process, as well as the way they raise funds and the sources from which their funding comes from (see study by Gordon 1998). This is why it is pertinent, once we have analyzed the subjects who participate in NPOs in different ways, to undertake the analysis of the organizations themselves and deal with questions like those noted and which will contribute to the discussion about the difficulties in defining this subject of study.

## **Purpose**

This chapter analyzes the characteristics of 14 NPOs<sup>1</sup> that function in Mexico. The study is organized in terms of four main themes for each organization: (1) the origin of the organization and its objectives; (2) the goals it pursues and its achievements; (3) its operational structure and the way in which decision-making process is carried out; and (4) its sources of financing. From my perspective, the detailed analysis of these elements makes it possible to structure a first inventory of different types of NPOs in Mexico. For this purpose, I use the information derived from 14 case studies that included a total of 65 in-depth interviews<sup>2</sup> with different participants in the organizations, including the founder, the director or informal leader, the coordinators, and the personnel considered to be volunteers by the organizations themselves, as well as some materials generated by the organizations.

## **The Problem of Defining the Organizations**

NPOs are a particularly complex and heterogeneous universe, mainly because they participate in a wide variety of areas, which have very diverse characteristics. From the U.S. perspective, this group forms part of the third sector, as a way of establishing the difference with governmental organizations – which seek control – and business organizations – which pursue profits. Other authors prefer to speak of the volunteer sector, placing their emphasis on the unpaid, volunteer work that people provide through these organizations. In spite of this dispute, there is some agreement

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<sup>1</sup> A total of 15 cases studies were done, but only 14 of these were concerned with specific organizations. The remaining study was done about a person who was independently engaged in volunteer-type activity. So this last case is not discussed in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup>In this case, 14 organizations about which information was gathered are analyzed, with a total of 65 interviews. The person who is engaged on an individual basis in helping third parties is not taken into consideration in this regard.

that stable groups of people are involved. That is to say, they have been operating for several years, they have an operational structure and specific operational rules, they were initiated with an objective in mind, they have some concern for professionalizing their activities, and in many cases they have become formally established, and so they exist as legal entities (Canto 1998, 79).

So what is involved are citizen organizations that identify a field in which they are interested in carrying out collective actions and activities to support specific groups of the population that they have previously identified. This makes them different from labor or trade organizations, organizations having political representation, and those that produce commodities (Canto 1998).

If we take the foregoing points as a reference to group the organizations about which information was obtained, we find that Salamon and Anheier's proposal (1996), based on operational-structural type criteria, to be pertinent to analyze these kinds of entities. The definition proposed by these authors includes five characteristics: they must be organized, i.e., be institutionalized to a certain degree; they must be self-governed; they must be designed to control their own activities; they must be nonprofit organizations; and they must include volunteer activities or at least a certain degree of collaboration of this type by some of their participants.<sup>3</sup>

## The Organizations Selected

The organizations analyzed<sup>4</sup> are located in the following regions: the north, northeast, center, west, and southwest of Mexico. The gulf, northwest, and southeast regions were not covered, since it was not possible to include organizations from those places due to a lack of appropriate links. Table 5.1 shows the general characteristics of the organizations selected, their fields of action, their legal designation, and how long they have existed.<sup>5</sup>

As can be seen, the NPOs selected include an informal organization with almost 8 years of activity, two private assistance institutions (I.A.P., Spanish acronym),<sup>6</sup> ten civil associations (A.C., Spanish acronym),<sup>7</sup> and a governmental-type organization. This last

<sup>3</sup>Authors like Verduzco (2006) and Gordon (1998) also use this definition for their analyses.

<sup>4</sup>The way the organizations were selected and how the case studies were structured was discussed in Chap. 3 of this book.

<sup>5</sup>The exact name and location of the organizations is kept confidential, since this requirement was established by some of their directors or founders. This does not affect the analysis to be performed, however.

<sup>6</sup>In Mexico, some federative entities and the Federal District government have Private Assistance Institution laws. The following is a link to the law for the state of Mexico that may be consulted to understand the character of these organizations in the case of Mexico. [http://www.edomex.gob.mx/legistel/cnt/LeyEst\\_099.html](http://www.edomex.gob.mx/legistel/cnt/LeyEst_099.html)

<sup>7</sup>For information about what a civil association is and how to organize one, see [www.senado.gob.mx/comisiones/directorio/relexorg/Content/como\\_construir%20ONG/COMO\\_CONSTUIRUNAONG.pdf](http://www.senado.gob.mx/comisiones/directorio/relexorg/Content/como_construir%20ONG/COMO_CONSTUIRUNAONG.pdf)

**Table 5.1** Organizations by field of action, orientation, type of registration, and age

Sphere of volunteer action	Orientation of the organization	Type of registration	Year founded
Business	Aid to women in marginalized neighborhoods	A.C.	1990
Government institution	Dedicated to orphaned children	Governmental	1985
Religious	Values formed in the Catholic faith	Informal	1998
Sports/recreation	Promoting sports among children in poorer neighborhoods	A.C.	1999
Youth/educational	Educational attention for youth in risk situations	A.C.	1997
Rural/community	Support for management of community development and labor counseling projects	A.C.	1987
Urban	Support for construction of housing for populations in marginalized suburban areas	A.C.	1988
Vulnerable groups	Attention to the disabled to facilitate social integration	A.C.	1990
Vulnerable groups	Attention to working children in marginalized urban areas	I.A.P.	2004
Youth/educational	Help for abandoned and/or orphaned rural area youth	A.C.	1966
Health	Health care for women in extreme poverty	A.C.	1999
Causes	Attention for indigent sick people	A.C.	1988
Educational	Attention for street children	I.A.P.	1995
Cultural	Encouraging and promoting knowledge of our cultural heritage	A.C.	

organization is not self-governed and receives direct financing, although it fulfills the other three characteristics noted by Salamon and Anheier (1996). It is included because it is a very common organizational form in Mexico, usually generated by a government entity to take care of orphans, where it is common to find volunteers, and an operation that is formally separated from the structure of the government. Including it in this study has been a way of establishing differences and similarities with the rest of the organizations and emphasizing its particular characteristics.

A broad variety of organizational forms are found within the spectrum of civil associations in Mexico, both among those about which information was gathered and an endless number of private schools, not necessarily for people with limited resources, institutions of higher education, or organizations oriented toward promoting the political participation of the citizens, to mention only the most common. Therefore, the findings presented here are limited to the organizations studied.

## **Origins, Characteristics and Objectives of the Organizations**

The organizations were motivated by five different types of initiatives: (a) those that are part of a larger entity, either an international or nation-wide organization; (b) those that have been promoted by one or several people united by a common concern; (c) those that arose from an initiative on the part of a group of neighbors due to a specific problem; (d) those initiated by people related to the church; and (e) those promoted by a governmental entity. In this regard, the fields of action of the different organizations are diverse, even when the way in which they arose may be similar. The users or beneficiaries of most of the organizations are groups in conditions of poverty in urban, suburban, rural, or indigenous areas. Only in one case central objective was to resolve a problem cutting across different strata like disability.

### ***Organizations that are Part of a Larger Entity***

Two organizations fall into this first group. The first of them is a local office of a larger entity that began its activities more than three decades ago, encouraged by a business foundation and run by the wives of company officials. The purpose was to support housewives with limited resources who live in marginalized areas, by means of different courses that have to do with their households, as a way of taking better advantage of their resources, as well as training them for employment. This project was reproduced in 1990 in the northeast by a group of 13 volunteer wives of officials and/or employees in the company, who took up the task of getting the project started. They were supported by the organization's headquarters with some economic resources and knowledge about how to develop the project.

By 2006 the organization had a total of ten people, six of whom were volunteers – four participants from the original group who continued working on the project even when their spouses no longer worked for the company – two retired teachers who received support for their travel expenses, three students doing their social service who provided support with computer and English classes, and a cleaning woman who was paid for her work. The volunteers, all of them housewives, gave dressmaking, cooking, and beauty care classes and took care of the children with a game center while their mothers attended the classes.

The second organization began activities in Mexico in 1999 in the south of the country as part of an international organization that had been engaged in activity over several decades and had offices in several countries. Its central purpose is health care for women in extreme poverty conditions. When it was established in this country, they decided to locate a region with severe marginalization problems, in accordance with the purpose of their headquarters. Seven years after establishing themselves in Mexico, they had two small health units that offered medical visit and gynecological attention services to both marginalized and limited resource groups. They had professional personnel to attend to their patients: a doctor, nurses, and personnel trained in gynecology. A total of 22 people were working in the

organization, 13 of whom were personnel hired for specific activities, four were on scholarship, three were students doing their social service, and two were volunteers.

### ***Organizations Promoted by One or Several People***

Six more of these organizations were promoted by one or several people to achieve a common purpose. Of these, two organizations attended to vulnerable groups, specifically children, as a response to the lack of continuity of a project previously promoted by a governmental entity. The oldest group, which brought together a group of private individuals who collaborated with the DIF,<sup>8</sup> began in 1995 in a municipality of the western region, and arose as a response to a report prepared by UNICEF-DIF where an evident social problem was explicitly indicated: a large number of children were dropping out of school to work in the streets. In the face of this problem, the municipality took up the task of promoting the organization, the purpose of which was to help the children. They were divided into two groups: those who still maintained ties with their families and those who had broken these ties. Within this framework, the DIF tried to get the children off the streets and the organization tried to get scholarships. In addition to giving out a monthly package of groceries, cost studies to estimate the cost involved in maintaining a child in school were performed, and a donor program for private individuals interested in supporting the program was designed.

In 2002, they decided to become independent, since the support from the municipal government declined and limited to paying the rent and delivering the groceries. For this reason, they modified their purpose, devoting themselves exclusively to caring for working children with family ties. Four years later, a total of 18 people were working in the organization, 10 of the paid personnel distributed were among administrative personnel, social workers, and psychologists, five social service students, and three people who systematically supported different organization activities as volunteers.

Another organization, located in an urban area with important rural migration in the central region, was also established based on a report similar to the foregoing one and more or less during the same period. In this case, the DIF in the area established a project based on the report where the objective was to defend the children's rights by providing education and recreation for minors who remained on the streets and in the markets begging or selling gum while their parents worked, also generally, on the street. A group of promoters was formed for this purpose and they worked on the project for 3 years. In 2000, at the end of that administration, the project was closed, and in mid-2001, four of the promoters (all young people) who had participated in the project, decided to continue it as a way to respond to the demands of the children. Since they did not have a place to operate, they began to

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<sup>8</sup> *Desarrollo Integral de la Familia* (DIF), Integral Family Development.

give classes in public places, such as the park, the main square, and the market, until they were awarded some funds through a project from the Mexican Youth Institute, in 2002, and were able to pay rent and operate independently. In 2004, they decided to formalize the organization.

The organization's purpose is to provide support, attention, basic education, recreation, and the development of Christian values for children and young people who are socially vulnerable and apt to suffer from street situations. They have focused their attention on small children in day care, preschool, and elementary school, who are picked up from their homes every day to take classes, play, and be fed while their mothers work. By 2006, there were 17 people in the organization, 15 of whom were volunteers. Of this total, ten were young people committed to the organization's progress, five were teachers from the CONAFE and INEA system<sup>9</sup> who received minimal support for travel and meal expenses, and two were paid personnel, an accountant and a cleaning woman, although their pay was very meager, given the precarious nature of the resources available.

A third organization, the oldest of the group being analyzed, with 40 years of activity, is located in a small rural/urban population in the central region of Mexico and was promoted by two women who decided to contribute something to their community. They began by offering support and advice to people who had committed some offense. In their conversations, they found that many of them came from broken homes, had suffered some kind of child abuse, and/or had been abandoned by their parents. This was when they decided to create an organization whose purpose was to provide support for children and young people of age between 5 and 18 years old, who were in vulnerable circumstances. Their concern has been to accompany them during the process of growing up, offering them a "home life". They have installations for this purpose where the children and young people live, and they provide them with an education in the local schools. As part of their integral development, they also receive job training. This takes place through their participation in specific productive projects and human development and spiritual life practices, so that they become socially responsible and productive adults.

The organization has developed an integral and integrating educational proposal that has included important efforts to make possible human development and personal attention for the children and young people who live in the installations voluntarily. The organization had about 40 workers in 2006. One of the people in charge was a relative of one of the founders. The organization also included the participation of young people doing their social service and a small group of volunteers, mostly foreigners who participated over short periods and were carefully selected.

The fourth organization is located in the northeast region in an important urban area that receives members of the indigenous population coming from neighboring states. This organization is the result of intense activity begun almost 40 years ago by a woman concerned about sick people with limited resources and severe or

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<sup>9</sup>CONAFE: *Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo* (National Educational Promotion Council) and INEA: *Instituto Nacional de Educación para los Adultos* (National Adult Education Institute).

terminal health problems. It was formally established in 1998 as an organization of volunteers. The promoter, an active woman, began to personally help sick people in a hospital that received low-income people in the city where she lived. A short time later, her friends also got involved as volunteers and they helped her with the activities of getting both economic support and medicine.

Many years later, the organization was formally constituted with the idea of continuing the project that the founder had promoted. Similar work was continued with the goal of supporting sick people in precarious economic circumstances by providing specialized medical care and medicine, as well as burial services when necessary. The organization is made up of 18 volunteers, although only seven of them participate actively, because of their age.

The fifth organization, constituted as a foundation for a group of organizations, was formally established in 1990 in an important urban area in the northern region with the purpose of providing support and services for people with some kind of disability. The idea came from a woman with experience in organizations and management, who came in as an official of the municipal government and opened up the possibility of posing the need to promote a project that would coordinate the organizations devoted to helping the disabled. She received support from several people for this purpose, some of whom had family members with some type of disability.

When getting the project started, she identified the organizations that would participate and held several discussion meetings over a period of 2 years to outline the general proposal and method of operating. Once it was formed, the purpose of the foundation has been to work with organizations that provide awareness for certain types of disabilities, with the aim of achieving more efficient resource use, avoiding duplicate efforts, as well as sensitizing and educating society about disabilities, since it is a field that has received little attention, despite its impact on all sectors of society. Their efforts have been focused on promoting ways of getting close to disabled people in order to develop their human potential. From the beginning the project received support from a number of people in the business sector who made important voluntary donations. The organizations that have been part of this effort continue to operate their own programs.

Currently, 14 people work in the guiding organization, including professionals and administrative personnel, as well as some social service students. In terms of the volunteers, the patients' mothers participate directly as volunteers, even though the directors only have two people who are formally considered as such, since they think that some professionalism is necessary to care for their users. They carry out an annual fund drive 1 day per year in which different groups of the population participate in a voluntary way.

The sixth and last organization began its activities in the 1980s, through the efforts of a group of people who were working to promote a museum located in an urban area in central Mexico, and they were interested in making this resource known. At the beginning, they focused on contributing through donations, to care for, preserve, and popularize works of art, and to do so, they visited people who could make monetary contributions. As it became a solid organization, its objectives were strengthened, and a fundamental concern has been to promote knowledge of

the cultural heritage available through the museum, promoting visits and helping to consolidate and maintain this cultural patrimony by means of fundraising. The person in charge of the volunteers in the organization is a paid employee who has the assistance of five volunteers for specific periods of time for guided tours and cataloging.

### ***Organizations Promoted Through Neighborhood Initiatives***

Two other organizations arose due to the initiative of neighborhood groups interested in solving a problem where they lived. The first of them began informally and sporadically in 1985, in a densely populated urban area of central Mexico, when a group of neighbors began to organize soccer as a way of providing possibilities for interaction, and use of free time for young people and children in a lower-income neighborhood in an at-risk situation (drug addiction and gangs). One of the neighbors participating was a coach who decided to actively collaborate with the project to contribute to alleviating the problems where they lived. To begin with, they practiced in the afternoon. Later, the coach suggested creating an organization to provide continuity for the neighbors' concerns. However, he was not able to interest them in the proposal, and the practices were constantly interrupted over several years.

Finally, in 1999, with the help of an administration student, the coach was able to formally establish an organization whose purpose has been to help limited-resource children and young people who live in low-income neighborhoods by means of promoting sports activities as a way of preventing a high index of delinquency in the area. In order to attract people interested in soccer, he had to look for the institutional coverage of a recognized team. By 2006, the organization had a small office in a space provided by the founder's family, and the sports activities were carried out on some fields in the same neighborhood area, although it was necessary to pay for their use. The coach, and founder, is concerned about supporting the community, so he also gives classes to help children and young people catch up in school. In terms of the number of members, the organization consisted of nine people, five of whom were paid for their work and four who were volunteers, who are mothers of some of the children who receive grants to be able to participate in the soccer classes.

The second organization, located in a suburban area of northeast Mexico, has been active since 1998, although it has not yet been formally established. The idea arose from a group of neighbors interested in building a small chapel for the local residents, who had settled two decades before on nonpatented land. The area has been home to poor families, some of whom are squatting, especially those who are living along the river. Others have been able to obtain a deed for their lots and build houses, although these are made from temporary materials.

The group of women who promoted the idea began collecting funds to build a chapel, and they have been able to do so little by little, but at the same time, they have also been structuring a project where part of them work in the chapel giving catechism classes and others have chosen to provide support through church social

action, helping adults with greater economic problems. So far, the assistance has basically consisted of helping people with the procedures for getting their election identification cards and telling them about their rights and the possibilities for different types of help. At times they have gotten support from merchants in the urban area and they have given some food packages to the neediest people. The priest assigned to the chapel under construction has served as a normative figure and there is no interest in formalizing his activities. The group is made up of 11 people, all volunteers, although only eight of them participate actively in the organization, while the other three do so sporadically.

### ***Organizations Promoted by People Related to the Church***

Three organizations have been promoted by people related to the church, two of which operate as community base units, one in a rural area and the other in a rural/urban area. The first one began, thanks to the concerns of a priest who came to work in a very poor peasant area of northern Mexico at the beginning of the 1980s. Inspired by the spiritual principles of the ecclesiastical communities, he got involved in understanding peasant life and needs, which were very extensive at that time. Little by little they began to act in other areas, particularly in achieving a guaranteed price for the products harvested in the region. Gradually, other concerned individuals, including a municipal official, also became involved because of the situation the peasants in the area were experiencing. Later, other professionals with organizational experience arrived and they supported different producers' groups in the process of forming an organization that was formally established in 1987.

The purpose of the organization has been to promote fair prices for agricultural products and promote production, community development, and resource management projects. The organization has increased its presence in a third of the municipalities of the entity and has about 6,000 members. There are about 100 volunteers in this group who are the people who provide some service for the organization in the municipal councils. There are 11 people working on a daily basis in the main offices: four state coordinators with 2-year terms of service who receive living support from the members, two advisors, two technicians, a secretary, an administrator, and a field supervisor; these last seven people are paid organizational personnel.

The other organization is located in a low-income rural/urban area in the western region. It was created based on a movement led by a person with social concerns and who had participated in ecclesiastical communities and the urban people's movement due to his religious education. When he returned to the area where he was born, he became involved in community activities, where he found that one of the greatest needs was suitable housing and the difficulty of obtaining it. He took up the task of holding meetings among the people he knew. The idea he had was to work in dynamic communities with the aim of opening viable paths to developing residential areas. Over 3 years of discussions in meetings, the conditions arose to be able to obtain some land where the members of the group could begin to build

their houses. Finally, they took possession of the land, established a neighborhood, and formalized their organization in 1988.

The purpose has been to promote processes among low-income groups to advance community life, and build housing and areas for social interaction. So, from the beginning, they have worked together to design housing areas, streets, sidewalks, green areas, an area for community meetings, and the necessary water, drainage, and electrical services. Currently, the group has 15 active volunteers, although there are a total of about 100 families in the organization, and about 50 people who collaborate occasionally.

The third organization was promoted by a person who was the vicar for several years in a conflictive area of central Mexico, and had the opportunity to get to know and work closely with young people who were having problems with drug addiction, gangs, and violence. He found that one of the possible causes contributing to the problem was school dropout, precarious economic situation, and that, consequently, the interaction of these factors left these groups without options for a better future. A scholarship program was developed in an informal way in the community for several years so that young people could remain in school. The scholarship money made it possible to cover the costs of transport and school materials.

However, the complex situation required help. So he designed a project that was formally established in 1997 with the support of members of the community, particularly business people, who served as benefactors and began to participate actively and voluntarily in what they considered to be a viable project.

The main objective of this organization, which operates as a foundation, is to help low-income youth to continue with their studies by providing them with the economic resources for their basic necessities and for developing their abilities. They have opened another program in a different community which also seeks to work on community development problems. Currently, the foundation provides free elementary and middle school education and scholarships. At the high school level, a minimal contribution is requested. At-risk youth are admitted between the ages of six and 18, although the most important group is in the 13–18 year range. Language courses and workshops are also provided to prepare the young people for a productive life. They also have agreements with higher education institutions in the area, where some of the interested students have been able to receive complete scholarships for their professional education. There are 80 people currently working in the organization, including administrative, teaching, and maintenance personnel. The students themselves participate as volunteers and receive compensation for their activities. There are also three volunteers who are mothers of scholarship students, as well as teachers who instruct some workshops without pay.

### ***Organization Promoted by a Government Initiative***

In this last group, we find an organization that also operates as a foundation and was initiated by a government entity in 1985 in an urban area in central Mexico. It was

begun as a social welfare project for orphaned or abandoned children dependent on the state government. A council was established for this purpose as a decentralized public entity with its own legal status and resources, although it has been administered by a board of directors selected by the state governor. Its purpose has been to provide quality, friendly housing and protection, 24 h a day during the entire year, for 6-year-old children who are sent to this home. Its concern has been to provide a welfare rescue alternative for these minors and improve their physical and emotional circumstances, strengthening and preparing them for integration into a family or society. In 2006, 41 people collaborated with the institution, including administrative personnel, nurses, pig-farming personnel, cooks, washerwomen, and security guards. There were, also, five volunteers and some social service students.

## **Goals and Achievements**

The organizations analyzed vary from 2 to 50 years of existence from the time they were created, which implies important differences in their processes of consolidation and their achievements. In order to analyze the fulfillment of their goals, their activities are focused on the following three important criteria (a) a clearly defined and delimited project related to the niche where the organization will operate; (b) the support of a group with a clear idea of the project, and of how to transform it from a personal concern to a well-defined and institutionalized organization; and (c) a support network, in terms of social capital, from the beginning and throughout its process of development.

### ***Organizations that can Establish Themselves***

Half of the organizations analyzed, seven of the total, had the proposed elements, in spite of important differences in their longevity, which ranged from 10 to 40 years of operation. In this case, the goals they set and their achievements are evident: the projects were well formulated, the area in which they would operate was chosen, and the type of contribution expected was determined when setting up the organization. In some of the interviews, poorly organized beginnings were mentioned. However, it was possible for them to develop a project having a detailed proposal. In other cases, the project matured through discussion sessions and meetings with the group interested until it took shape. It is worth mentioning that, in most cases, the promoters of the idea were professionals with experience in organizations and an understanding of development processes. When the organization did not have this kind of profile, they looked for professionals in these fields. The beginnings were difficult, since this implied convincing possible participants and establishing viability networks. The process was facilitated, in part, when it was possible to show the first achievements.

In four of the seven cases, there were people who contributed part of the economic funds by means of creating a foundation or trust as a way of supporting a project considered to be viable. They even participated actively in raising funds, relying on networks of friends and acquaintances. One of the organizations in this group was created based on combined action by private individuals and the municipal government then in office. In another case, government funds were received through a foundation, which guaranteed its permanence. In yet another case, initial funds and solid institutional prestige were put into action to look for financing based on generating projects. The last case was a community project that, due to its design and support, achieved a broad base of supporters who were directly benefited by its operation.

All the foregoing, combined with a structured project, led to a process of institutionalization that implied the design of specific projects for foundations and national and/or international foundations and organizations that financed them. This made it possible for them to expand their resource options and fulfill different programs in progress. This also implied the growth of the organizations and even the possibility of opening new service areas and expanding the assistance, as well as recruiting more personnel. All the organizations in this group have prepared and submitted reports indicating their achievements and their maturity as organizations. Only three organizations in this group are in the process of becoming self-sustaining.

### ***Organizations with Difficulties in Establishing Themselves***

The other seven organizations were not able to achieve these three elements when required, for different reasons. This could have been due to the project being formulated with a very short-term perspective, without necessarily having expectations for growth, and/or a lack of support networks to help them on other fronts with the completion of the project. In this group, one of the community-based organizations was structured by a leader and a group of collaborators who established guidelines for the operation of the new entity. For some time, the direct users and beneficiaries actively participated in fulfilling some of the goals that had been set. Nevertheless, some years later, they began to experience difficulties in consolidating a constant network of external support to help with the negotiations they required. This generated, in part, a situation in which the advance was not as rapid as expected, and there were also disagreements between the members and the leader that caused greater delays in some activities than had been planned.

A second organization began as part of a project with very concrete objectives. Its members, organized as a group of volunteers, have carried out activities that are an extension of what they used to do in their homes. Even though they had institutional support to achieve their goals, they have had to deal with difficulties in trying to become integrated into the community they are interested in serving, which has required investments of time and multiple activities to develop the organization. They have had to dedicate time to building networks in the area where they carry

out their activities, and they have lost members from the original core. In addition to this, over the years they have practically lost the employment connection between the company and the participants, who were formerly officials' wives. In spite of this, they have continued to support the organization because they consider it to be a priority project. However, it now seems unlikely that they will be able to again increase the number of volunteers needed to push the project forward, notwithstanding the efforts of the members. Despite constant work, for the time being, the organization has begun a phase of adjustment with the aim of defining the path to be followed.

Two other organizations, also composed of volunteers, have achieved a well-defined project and established the niche where they operate, although they did not carry out careful planning about how they would develop and they also lack social networks to support the project. This is why it has been difficult for them to fulfill their goals, since the lack of a support network of acquaintances seems to have a negative impact on designing a viable long-term project. In both cases, although they have been able to carry out part of what they planned to do, this has led to important costs in terms of operational time for the members and leaders of the organization.

Two other volunteer organizations seem not to have planned how to maintain their operations. This meant that, although they have had a support network and have advanced in maintaining their operations, in recent years those responsible have devoted part of their time to establishing medium and long-term goals. Recently, they have been planning how to consolidate the project and expectations have been modified that, in large part, were derived from personal concerns, and therefore their transformation into an institution guaranteeing the continuity of the work is still a pending task. In terms of their achievements, there has been a slow advance, due in large part to the lack of expectations for the future on the part of the members.

Finally, the last organization, of an informal character and also made up of volunteers, has operated on a personal basis, planning short-term actions without a well-defined project. This is due to a lack of knowledge about management, as well as the lack of financial support and social support networks to be able to serve the small core of users. Their achievements have been expressed in terms of activities and actions planned over a very short-term, without any growth or consolidation in this respect.

## **Operational Structure and Decision-making Process**

According to the information gathered, there are at least three different kinds of operational structures in these organizations: (a) structures where horizontal decision-making predominates; (b) those with a well-defined command structure with specific functions; and (c) those operating based on consensus where the community base has an important presence.

### ***Horizontality and Consensus***

The first group consists of six organizations that, from their beginnings up until now, have been made up of volunteers without economic remuneration for their activity and have undertaken the most diverse activities to keep the unit active. The commitment they have had to the project's development and the commitment established among all the participants seems to be an element that has guaranteed permanence. These are small organizations, with five to fifteen members. They have a certain structure, i.e., there is a person at the head of the organization, the director, and others fulfill specific coordination responsibilities. There is a consensus among the members interviewed that the decisions are made in a horizontal way. They meet and discuss the activities and listen to the opinions of the director, and then the group decides what to do. According to the information, there is a good relationship among all involved, since they are interested in advancing and fulfilling the objectives established and they have maintained the idea that everyone can participate in decision making. Only in one case did the foundation that provides support, in terms of both how to do things and some economic support, decide on some activities.

### ***Well-defined Authorities with Specific Functions***

The second group consists of organizations that have a command structure made up of a general director, who in several cases responds to a board of directors or foundation as the entity that decides and plans what to do in the long-term, as well as administrative personnel and coordinators. In this case, the people considered to be volunteers represent a minority percentage of the whole. The operational structure varies in complexity according to the scope of the project. However, in all cases, I found there is a director who is in charge, reports to a board or council, and manages subordinates who coordinate the different areas of the organization. These coordinators, in turn, have a group of people who are directly responsible and have personnel who help them regularly, who are simply called volunteers. In all cases, the members of the structure are people who receive remuneration for their work, although, according to the information obtained, their salaries are not competitive with what they could make in other sectors in the same positions. That is to say, there is a profile of people interested in and committed to the project, who receive modest remuneration and are willing to work extra hours without any extra pay.

Four of these organizations have a foundation and/or trust made up of several members who perform their activities and responsibilities on a volunteer basis. This trust and/or foundation is headed up by a President who does not receive remuneration for his or her activities and to whom the management reports. Decisions are made by members of the foundation and/or trust and the directors can submit their proposals. In the case of organizations with only one director, this person is

responsible for annual planning, and listens in the evaluation meetings to the coordinators, and in some cases, may include his or her own suggestions.

Volunteers are at the bottom of the structure in all the organizations in this group. I also found that in most of the organizations analyzed, this label is assigned due to the lack of another or to emphasize that they do not carry out a specific activity, which also implies that they have few possibilities of professionalization in this field; the directors are not even clear about the kinds of activity these people can perform. This complicates the scenario for those interested in participating in these nonprofit organizations.

From the perspective of the volunteers, they do not have the possibility of making decisions, but just of carrying them out. This volunteer sector only has specific positions and responsibilities in two of the organizations in this group, where they consider themselves to be part of the structure. This fact seems to imply a relationship of commitment that also implies the professionalization of their activities in the middle term. In the other cases, the idea is to help however much one can, not necessarily in relation to some specific task, but rather to help the organization's workers with whatever is needed.

### *Operation by Consensus Among the Base*

The third group consists of two community-based organizations that have a different structure and membership from the types already described. Designed by professionals, the participants are inhabitants of the communities where the organizations develop their activities. All of them share similar living situations and do the same type of work to make a living. Among those interviewed, a sense of belonging and solidarity prevails, and the leader and founder receives recognition, although in one case he no longer participates in the project.

The organization with the largest number of members out of all the organizations analyzed has a board of directors made up of three people who are elected by the community and receive subsistence support from all members of the organization during their two year term in office. This structure is reproduced in committees that operate at the municipal level in the area where the organization has influence, although in this case they receive no subsistence support. These positions are renewed every 2 years. The peasants are responsible for leadership positions and the advisors are located outside the command structure, which has led to a more active participation on the part of the members. Both the advisors and the technical support team are paid personnel.

In this organization, everyone who participates in specific tasks in the different committees is a volunteer. In relation to decision-making, there is a consensus among the members about the kind of decisions they can make and the difference with regard to the governing entity, which decides about activities over the long-term. There have been ups and downs since, during certain periods, the members have viewed the directors as individuals who are distant from their concerns.

In the case of the second organization, the leader is the same person who founded it, although there are conflicting opinions about the role he has played among different members of the group. All the members of the organization are part of the general assembly, which has a coordinating commission elected by them and consists of five people. One person, at the head of the administrative council, is responsible for funds, and the other four people coordinate areas of interest for the community project. The members of the commission are changed periodically, although there is no specific term of office, but rather the assembly decides according to the “need for renovation”. In no case is any compensation received for these positions. Currently, they have problems with the commission elected recently, where the founder was reelected, which has partially blocked the development of activities, since it is thought that some goals have not been fulfilled and the way decisions are made has not been clearly identified.

## **Sources of Funding**

The organizations analyzed, in order to get started with their projects, require a group of people to manage them and make decisions in the field of action involved, as well as people interested in providing support to generate the economic resources that make development and consolidation possible. This implies putting multiple strategies into effect on different levels, among them the way daily expenses will be covered and the way the planned services will be guaranteed over the long run.

It is evident that it is important to obtain everyday and long-term financing, since this means the continuation of the project and even the possibility of expanding it, reproducing it, and making it self-sustaining in the middle term. The information collected indicates that three broad groups can be identified in terms of the characteristics of their organizational fundraising sources: (a) those that have enjoyed a constant source of economic resources from the beginning; (b) those that begin and diversify their possibilities at the same time they show concern for becoming self-sustaining; and (c) those that operate with uncertain economic funding.

### ***Constant Source of Financing***

This group includes organizations that have taken up the task of forming a trust made up of people from the community, usually business people, who devote time, make donations, and use networks of acquaintances and convince them of the viability of the project and the need to support it. In these cases, they began with a fund that is sometimes supplemented periodically with annual fundraising programs among the general population, as well as specific donor programs. In other cases, there have been problems with donors, due to the way the resources have been distributed, since the amount dedicated to administrative expenses and paying

salaries is considered to be excessive, leaving less than half of the funds for the scholarships. Organizations that have delineated a well-structured long-term project are found in this group.

### ***Diversified and Self-sustaining Financing***

The second group includes organizations that have obtained financing from different sources over time. At times these entities began with a group of donors who provided funds in a more or less systematic, although limited, way, which made it possible to begin the project. Their possibilities have been expanded over time by developing specific projects aimed at carrying out certain action. In other cases, they have received specific support to pay the rent or other needs. In other cases, they began with limited support from the larger entity they belong to with the aim of later developing their own financing, and have structured projects that, at the same time, have been planned out in order to develop their ability to sustain themselves in the long-term. In these cases, we are also dealing with organizations with a well-planned initial project and expectations of growth in the middle term.

### ***Uncertain Financing***

This group consists of organizations that were started, for the most part, based on the good will of some individuals but with very limited initial financing, and so they face financial problems on a daily basis. In fact, sometimes it is the people involved themselves who have provided the funds to cover eventualities and organized events, bazaars, raffles, food sales, and collections of minor donations among acquaintances whose support is irregular, or have even sought support from some businesses, which has also been temporary. This means that the organizations have to be constantly looking for funds to carry out their day to day activities. Some of the organizations in this group have a project and long-term objectives that have not been defined with precision.

When the organizations analyzed have achieved funding in addition to a trust, when there is one, it is noted that this usually comes from international foundations, or from federal funds (especially programs like INDESOL or SEDESOL), and by way of exception, support from state and/or municipal governments. In some organizations, where the need to become self-sustaining has been posed, funds from projects or services they offer, or the sale of products are also very important.

Among the financing problems found, what stand out are the difficulties with structuring financially viable projects. In some cases, as already noted, the organizations do not have trained personnel to design projects and submit them for consideration for funding to different possible entities on a national or international level. This seems to be a severe limitation about which there is no discussion. It is possible that this is due to the ignorance of the participants themselves about the

need to professionalize this aspect. In other cases, if somebody among the participants has the tools to be able to develop a project, it is usually the same person who leads the organization. For this reason, the flow of daily commitments limits the possibilities of attending to these matters, even when they are urgent. This problem is evident in organizations where the director is a volunteer and is also occupied with a multiplicity of daily matters.

Finally, another problem discussed in some organizations has to do with the amount dedicated to administration and paying salaries. At times, the donors that receive the monthly and annual reports consider the percentage dedicated to these items to be excessive in comparison with what goes to scholarships and direct services to the users. Although this is a problem detected in some organizations, it indicates the need for them to develop a more efficient administration, so as to avoid these kinds of complaints.

## Conclusions

We have discussed the characteristics of the NPOs involved in the study based on four concrete aspects: how they began and the kind of objectives posed when they started; the goals proposed and accomplished during their efforts; the characteristics of the structure with which they have operated and their decision-making process, as well as the mode of financing developed by the organization.

We found that the organizations analyzed make up a particularly complex and heterogeneous universe, due, in part, to the fields of action they are involved in, the way they were formed, and the length of time they have been in operation. For the most part, they are concerned with problems associated with poverty, with special emphasis on a very vulnerable sector, i.e., children. We found that the group of organizations analyzed arose due to four different kinds of initiatives that include: units formed as a replica of other larger units whose concern is to expand their field of action to other regions to meet different needs. Here the nodal point has been serving women in two different ways: through courses on better money management and maternal health care in areas with severe problems in this regard.

However, the largest number of organizations were formed by private individuals, i.e., by people whose concern has been to contribute, in the degree possible, to solving some problem through education. In these cases, attention has centered on children and groups of adolescents to have an impact on their educational process and provide tools and preparation to allow them to enter the labor market. Other important fields of action have been support for health care for the population in poverty conditions or trying to contribute with professional attention for problems that cut across social strata like different forms of disability. Neighborhood initiatives have also been a way of providing support for solving problems that the community considers to be important, such as gangs and drug addiction. In other cases, what concerns the local inhabitants is building a chapel, and helping alleviate

marginalized conditions, which require information about matters that, in another context, may involve things that have already been resolved.

The activity of people related to the church, whose concern has been to improve areas where the members of their church live, has led to organizations where the community has played a central role. In this case, church ministers or people with social concerns have taken up the task of attending to different problems. Some problems that stand out include the education of children and adolescents, access to decent housing, defense of guaranteed prices for their products, and the creation of production projects to improve their precarious economic situation.

In the case of Mexico, government entities are a familiar form of organization concerned with providing assistance to orphans, since they seem to be the appropriate entities for providing this kind of help, due to the characteristics of our legislative process.

In terms of the goals set, these units observed a correspondence between the objectives posed and the goals. In this case, we find enormous variations in the organizations in relation to their achievements, which seem to have to do with adequate structuring of the initial project. In this regard, it seems to be important to carry out prior discussions in order to plan a project with short, medium, and long-term objectives since, in the cases in which this was reported, there seems to be a certain guarantee that they will be able to maintain themselves in the niche they have opened to provide assistance services to third parties.

In relation to their operational structure, we found that some organizations, especially very small organizations made up of volunteers, have operated at times in somewhat precarious circumstances in financial terms. The reason for this has been that they have not enjoyed systematic support and do not have trained personnel in these areas. Larger organizations generally operate with long-term plans and projects and also seem to have their financing problems partially solved.

In the latter case, the few volunteers involved in the daily work do not form part of the structure, which blocks any increase in their activity, except in cases when they are assigned specific activities. For community-type organizations, it was observed that there is a difference in what is understood as such in daily practice. These are undoubtedly particularly interesting, since they require specific forms of interaction to establish solid relationships of mutual confidence among their members.

To conclude, it is relevant to emphasize that the group analyzed is diverse in terms of its composition, and so it may be supposed that this heterogeneity is in fact one of the characteristics of nonprofit organizations in Mexico, and it is, therefore, necessary to continue with this line of investigation in order to develop a more profound knowledge of these units.

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