

## Mexican Solidarity: Findings from a National Study

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**Abstract** This article presents the results of a two-year nationwide study presenting the structure and methodology utilized for the National Survey on Solidarity and Volunteer (ENSAV), one of the first national volunteer surveys ever undertaken in Mexico. This study is designed in two distinct segments to be able to engage all formal and informal volunteering in Mexico. The first segment is the analysis of a nationwide survey which presents the main data and findings plus the analysis of these numbers. The second segment reveals some of the main motivations that individuals have for giving and for participating both within and outside of group settings. The national nature of this research project reveals interesting patterns of volunteerism and citizen action by gender, location, and motivation, plus various forms of solidary participation that may be useful guides in the prevailing need to build and strengthen civil society organizations in Mexico and in this region of the world. These results provide an informed basis for decision making in the government public policy arena and reveal distinct and diverse ways for established CSOs to promote and enable citizens for more effective participation in community issues (Butcher, Springer, 2010).

**Résumé** Ce rapport présente les résultats d'une étude nationale réalisée sur deux ans, présentant la structure et la méthode utilisée par l'ENSAV (Étude nationale sur la solidarité et le volontariat), l'une des toutes premières études nationales sur le

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The study this article refers to a research Project entitled: “*Citizen participation and Voluntary Service in Mexico*” that took place from July 2005 to September 2007. The research team included: Gustavo Verduzco from El Colegio de México, Guadalupe Serna from the Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José Ma. Luis Mora, Ernesto Benavides from The Tecnológico de Monterrey, Miguel Basáñez from Global Quality Research Corp. in Princeton, USA and was coordinated by Jacqueline Butcher at the Mexican Center for Philanthropy, Cemefi.

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volontariat jamais réalisée au Mexique. Cette étude a été réalisée en fonction de deux groupes sociaux distincts, susceptibles de s'engager dans le volontariat, de manière officielle ou non, au Mexique. Le premier groupe représente l'analyse d'une enquête nationale présentant les principales données et conclusions, ainsi qu'une analyse de ces chiffres. Le second groupe nous révèle quelques-unes des motivations principales qui poussent les individus à faire des dons et à participer à la fois à l'extérieur et au sein des organisations. Le caractère national de ce projet de recherche révèle de façon intéressante les tendances qui caractérisent le volontariat, et l'action des citoyens par leur sexe, leur situation géographique et leurs motivations. En outre, les formes diverses de participation solidaire peuvent se révéler des guides utiles pour le besoin prépondérant en termes de création et de développement des organisations de la société civile au Mexique et dans cette région du monde. Ces résultats fournissent une base judicieuse d'aide à la prise de décisions dans le domaine de la politique publique des autorités, et révèlent les méthodes diverses et variées utilisées par les organisations de la société civile existantes afin de promouvoir et de permettre une participation plus efficace des citoyens aux problèmes de la communauté (Butcher, Springer, 2010).

**Zusammenfassung** Dieser Artikel präsentiert die Resultate einer landesweiten zweijährigen Studie über Struktur und Methodologie des National Survey on Solidarity and Volunteer (ENSAV), eine der ersten landesweiten Befragungen von freiwilligen Helfern in Mexiko überhaupt. Die Studie ist in zwei Segmente geteilt, um ehrenamtliche Arbeit in Mexiko, formell und informell, zu erfassen. Das erste Segment ist die Analyse einer landesweiten Umfrage und präsentiert die Hauptdaten und Ergebnisse plus Analyse dieser Zahlen. Das zweite Segment offenbart einige der Hauptmotivationen von Einzelpersonen für Spenden und Teilnahme an sowie außerhalb von Gruppen. Der nationale Charakter dieses Forschungsprojektes deckt interessante Verhaltensmuster von Freiwilligenarbeit und Bürgeraktion entsprechend Geschlecht, Ort und Motivation auf sowie verschiedene Formen von solidarischer Teilnahme, die nützliche Leitfäden zu Aufbau und Stärkung von immer noch benötigten zivilgesellschaftlichen Organisationen in Mexiko und in dieser Region der Welt sein könnten. Die Resultate bilden eine informierte Grundlage für die Entscheidungsfindung in der staatspolitischen Arena und um etablierten CSOs klare und diverse Weg zu zeigen, Bürger zu fördern und zu befähigen, sich effektiver für die Belange der Kommune zu engagieren. (Butcher, Springer, 2010).

**Resumen** Este trabajo presenta los resultados de un estudio de dos años de duración en toda la nación en el que se da cuenta de la estructura y la metodología utilizada para el National Survey on Solidarity and Volunteer (ENSAV), una de las primeras encuestas de voluntarios nacionales que jamás se hayan realizado en México. Para poder abarcar todo el voluntariado formal e informal en México, el estudio se estructura en dos segmentos distintos: el primer segmento es el análisis de una encuesta nacional que presenta los datos principales y los descubrimientos, además del análisis de estos números. El segundo segmento revela algunas de las principales motivaciones que tienen las personas para dedicarse a la caridad y para participar, tanto dentro como fuera del entorno del grupo. El carácter nacional de

este proyecto de investigación revela interesantes patrones de voluntariado y de acción ciudadana según el sexo, el lugar y la motivación, así como diversas formas de participación solidaria; todo ello podría constituir guías útiles dentro de la necesidad prevaleciente de construir y reforzar a las organizaciones de la sociedad civil en México y en esta región del mundo. Estos resultados proporcionan una base informada para tomar decisiones en el campo de la política pública gubernamental y revelan las distintas formas en que las CSO establecidas promocionan y permiten a los ciudadanos tener una participación más eficaz en las cuestiones de la comunidad (Butcher, Springer, 2010).

**Keywords** Solidarity · Volunteering · Citizen participation · Giving · Mexico

## Introduction

Citizen participation has become one of the main issues in recent social movements resulting of the needs for change from a one-party government that ruled Mexico for over 70 years. Solidarity, expressed through voluntary activity and other forms of citizen participation, has followed a distinct route within the country, contributing in its own way in the consolidation of an incipient democracy on the American continent. Evolving political, social, and economic conditions in Mexico have led to the importance of understanding why and how people volunteer and participate, the various ways in which this occurs, and in what measure they contribute to their society (United Nations Volunteers 2004).

Studies on volunteering and patterns of various forms of citizen participation vary around the world (Better Together 2000; Corporation for National and Community Service 2006; Dekker and Halman 2003; Hall et al. 2006; Inglehart and Basáñez et al. 2004; Schervish 1993; Putnam 2000; Putnam and Fieldstein 2003; Thompson and Toro 1999; UNDP 2004; Wilkison-Maposa 2005). In the World Values Survey of 1999–2002, (Hodgkinson 2003) based on questions from the European Values Study, the questions related to membership and volunteering were quite limited (Butcher 2008 p. 37) ... “no questions were asked on the time volunteers spent volunteering nor what they did when they volunteered”. Also, that “the lists of types of organizations and activities for volunteers provided in these surveys were determined before there was a serious attempt to classify volunteer activity”. In the numbers for Mexico for that year, it is interesting to find that 36% of the adult population in Mexico was counted as volunteers. This number compares to the US, being 66% and Canada 47%. It is also interesting to see that, volunteering in Mexico was higher than in Western European countries such as the Netherlands (31%), Denmark (32%) and Belgium (33%), and close to Britain (43%), countries with a long tradition of volunteering and several, with large government subsidies and support for this kind of activity (Salamon et al. 1999; Salamon and Sokolowski 2003). In another important comparative effort, the Johns Hopkins Comparative Study, Mexico comes out as the smallest Nonprofit sector and provider of employment (0.2%), compared to Sweden (8.2%) and the US (4.6%) and the

international average being 2.5%. In this 24 country study the levels of volunteering were expressed as a proportion of total nonagricultural employment.

With such a small sector, what more can be said about voluntary action? It is irrelevant to only consider the formal aspects of volunteering and expressions of solidarity especially in a country of the “South” such as Mexico, where much of the volunteer activity seems to take place in informal settings as well as within formal existing CSOs. It becomes thus evident that there is more research needed towards the understanding of volunteering and participation in different regions of the world.

In the Mexican context, the word *volunteer* is understood well in structured organizations (Arredondo 1996; Arvitzter 1999; Cadena 2004). The meaning of this activity is work with no pay for the benefit of others not including family. However, it is the informal aspect of volunteerism that does not receive a connotation, although the activity is the same (Escalante 1992; Ziccardi 2004). The term “citizen solidary participation” was coined for this investigation to distinguish it from the formal aspects of volunteering. In the toolkit designed for the UN (INDEPENDENT SECTOR & Voluntarios de las Naciones Unidas 2001)<sup>1</sup> to identify and count volunteers all over the world, the concept is handled as “managed” and “unmanaged”.

When we consider Mexico’s historical background (Reygadas 1998) and how culture (Verduzco 2003) has influenced citizen participation. (Butcher 1999, 2002, 2003, 2004), the informal realm of volunteer time and effort becomes evident. Previous Mexican studies (Méndez 1997, 1998; Merz 2005; Moreno 2005; Olvera 2001, 2004) led us to believe that the majority of voluntary activity in the country could end up in this classification, becoming the main hypothesis for our study. The explanation for this seems to be threefold: first, legal and fiscal circumstances do not foster the creation of formal CSOs in Mexico. Second, evidence shows that there is an underlying mistrust of individuals towards Mexican institutions and third, there is a lacking culture of group participation among the population (ENAFI 2004; ENCUP 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007).

### **Mexican Volunteer Study. Key Findings**

As of July 2005, the Mexican Center for Philanthropy approved a national study on voluntary action. Its objective was to: “Research voluntary/solidary action and volunteer service to understand and evaluate the contribution to society of these activities in terms of material resources, time value and influence on citizen participation in Mexico”. Methodologically, the study was divided into quantitative and qualitative portions that would complement each other so as to encompass all aspects of volunteer activity within the country. A concept of volunteering based on the United Nations definition was established, a national survey designed and the case study methodology was chosen to study volunteers that worked within CSO in 15 different regions of Mexico for a better understanding of the social and cultural processes that influence solidarity and voluntary action in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/toolkit/IYVspanish.pdf>.

The main research questions driving this study were: How many people are considered volunteers in Mexico? What is their gender distribution? How much do they contribute both in time and in money to society? How often and why do they volunteer? What are their main motivations? What kinds of volunteer activities do Mexicans favor most and how are these activities distributed in the country? How do volunteers work within formal and informal structures in Mexico?

## Quantitative Results

To design a survey that would respond to these questions, an exhaustive search of existing volunteer surveys was revised to produce a national survey for Mexico (Giving and Volunteering in the United States 1996; Gallup 2000; Portocarrero et al. 2002; Swilling and Russell 2002).

Because of the lack of knowledge and some misconceptions on volunteering among the population, those interviewed received an explanation before answering the questionnaire:

“I am going to ask you about the help that you give in time and services, or what you gave or give to other people that do not belong to your family, where you do not receive money in return for your services and that you have done this voluntarily. It can be any kind of help: teaching someone to read; organizing events in your community and helping the neighbors, organizing a party for the school or church, directing a sports team weekly, helping out at the local Red Cross or giving free medical services; attending someone who is sick, without him being a relative; help in a religious procession or a local political group; construction for the community. Whatever benefits others, without receiving pay and in a volunteer fashion”.

In this explanation, volunteer activity is implicit containing its basic elements: choice, no pay and help for someone outside of family, this last point being important for Mexico, since family values are strong and custom of giving within the family and extended family is prevalent. (Alduncin 1989, 1991 & 1993). The sample size was of 1500 interviews, with an error margin of  $\pm 2.5\%$  with 95% reliability. Using a probabilistic framework following the Federal Electorate Institute (IFE) electoral sections actualized to 2003. The survey was named ENSAV and can be found in its entirety on the Cemefi website ([www.cemefi.org](http://www.cemefi.org)).

The survey disclosed that the Mexican population that is inclined to act in solidarity towards its fellow citizens is quite high, since 66% of the adult Mexican population (41.4 million people) responded positively to the question: *Have you ever done anything for others without receiving payment?* Half of this number answered in the survey that they had realized not only one activity, but one or several more, around 20 million individuals. Half of this universe (33%) claims to have engaged in more than one activity, 17% declared engaging in two and 16% in three or more. In that year (2005), 77% of the volunteers had engaged in at least one activity in favor of others. If we consider the whole sample, those who did and those who did not engage in voluntary activity in their lifetime, we find that 50% of the adult population of the

country has engaged in this activity (31.3 million). This number is comparable to Canada and the US which has been 45% and 27%, respectively.<sup>2</sup> If we consider activity at the time of the survey, 40% of the population was doing something for others without pay, the equivalent of 25 million people, still an impressive figure.

### Monetary Contribution of Volunteer Participation to the Mexican GNP

The analysis of volunteer time (Investigator 2005) for this survey indicates that Mexicans employ on average 27 days a year, on this activity, which equals 2.2 days a month. If we extend this amount to 40% of the population over 18, which *was* practicing some form of solidarity in 2005, it sums up to 23 million people that were giving 2.2 work days a month voluntarily.

Converting the hours of voluntary work picked up in the survey and turning them into 8 h units, or 1 day of work, multiplied by 260 working days in the year equals: 677,561,247 million days, divided by 260, results in a total of 2.6 million 8 h work days, or the equivalent of 11.3% of the population that is occupied outside of agriculture and cattle raising tasks. The monetary value can be multiplied by the minimum wage, free work that could range between 29.33 thousands of millions of pesos up until 88.082 thousands of millions of pesos if we considered either one or three minimum wages. *This last number is the equivalent of 1.14% of the total GNP of the country. If we used this amount compared only to communal, social, and personal services, which is where voluntary participation should be taken into account, this number would reach 4.7% of the GNP.*

### Volunteer Activity. Gender and Socioeconomic Status

The differences between men and women that participate voluntarily on a national scale are not significant with a slight difference favoring women. In a formal organizational context, however, we will find ahead in our qualitative portion a 3:1 women to men ratio. We also find that there is a tendency of older people (adults 30–49) to participate (69%), compared to our younger group (ages 19–29), with 61% participation. There is also more activity in the rural areas (71%) compared to urban ones (65%). We must remember here that this survey covers both formal and informal voluntary citizen participation based on our own inclusive definition of a volunteer for this study:

“Volunteer: is the person that by choice and without pay, gives time to an activity that goes beyond family in service to others for the benefit of others and the community”. (Butcher 2008, p. 37.)

One of the main findings in this investigation indicates that voluntary participation is quite similar in *all socioeconomic and educational levels in the country*. This means that solidarity in Mexico can be found in the totality of society,

<sup>2</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service, *op. cit.* y Hall Michael et al. (2006), *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2004 Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, Imagine Canada, Statistics Canada., Ottawa.

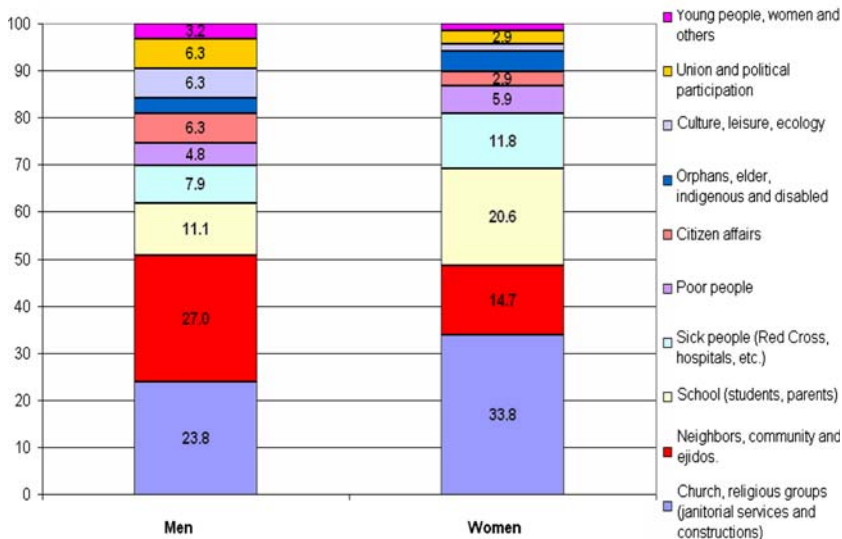
it is neither the rich nor the poor that can claim to be the majority, a key factor that should be underlined for future research on the subject.

Where are Mexicans investing their efforts in citizen participation and in volunteer work? We found that across the country with only a few differences the first choice in volunteer participation has to do with Church-related activities (Fig. 1). These come in very many different variations: from helping to paint or clean inside the buildings and surroundings to preparing the altars for religious services, provision of flowers, religious instruction, assistance in delivery of sacraments, celebrations of patron saints days, pilgrimages as well as other festivities and services.

The next two activities have to do with school-related endeavors with community participation with neighbors in third place. In community activities, men participate more (1.7 men/women ratio) and in school related activities women participate the most (2 to 1 women/men ratio). Activities with the poor and sick are mainly covered by women and political and citizen causes, participation with government engage more men. School activities have to do with parents helping to make infrastructures better including some help with teaching and fundraising.

As far as regional differences (Fig. 2), we find that the southern part of the country participates more (78%) actively than the North (60%) and in the center of the country where we find the Federal District with 59% participation. The inclination for the main triad of activity: Church, school and neighbors, in that order, also prevails across the board. This means that the main volunteer and solidary activity in Mexico goes to direct services to others including the sick and the needy. Other causes such as social activism, ecology and culture definitively take the backseat.

More analysis on the meaning of these regional differences in volunteering is necessary since our survey did not add enough questions to address these



**Fig. 1** Volunteer work by type of activity. Solidarity work according to activity and sex. Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi

	Region						
	Total	North	West	Center	South	Mexico City	Chihuahua
N =	1497	388	309	310	330	160	300
Yes	66%	60%	71%	62%	78%	59%	75%
No	34%	40%	29%	38%	22%	41%	25%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Fig. 2** Regional Differences in Volunteering. Volunteer work by region. *Source:* ENSAV 2006, Cemefi

differences. Some of those could be: Do migration patterns in certain parts of the country create a need for more participation of the population, or is it that there is more religious incidence certain regions? These and other questions are left for further research to obtain better and more refined explanations of these discrepancies and differences in volunteer participation.

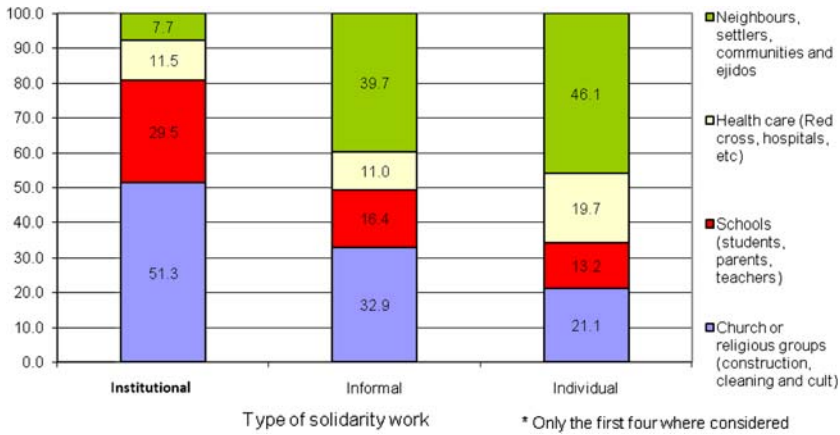
### Voluntary Work by Type of Participation

A large percentage of solidary participation is manual labor (42.4%), followed by personal attention to others (17.8%), teaching and training (11%) and fundraising (11%). Those who participate in Church and school related activities give mostly physical labor; other activities follow in a much lesser degree. One important volunteer characteristic one has to do with religious participation and volunteering. For the whole sample 84% individuals declared that they were Catholic and 10% belonged to other religions. 6% declared not having a religion. Of those that declared having a religion 68% have expressed solidarity towards others. Of those that did not declare having a religion this number was 51%. Interpreting the data, we could say that the differences are not that vast, however, religion does appear to have an influence in voluntary participation in Mexico (Fig. 3). Of those that declared not having a religion, the order becomes: community-school-sports, leaving church related activities at the end. Given these numbers, we can also say that belonging to a religious faith also elevates the intensity in voluntary participation. The distinction of practicing religion and just belonging was not made for this study.

How do Mexicans participate in their communities? People participate both in informal groups and in an individual fashion. *The most important division, however, comes where the participation happens in an individual manner, thus indicating many possibilities: difficulty or inability to work in groups, complications in procedures to create volunteer groups, nonacceptance into volunteer groups, etc.* In Mexico 32% of volunteers participate outside of groups, in an individual manner, 24%, participate in informal groups (with neighbors and friends) and only 44% volunteer in a formal institution. The informal expressions of solidarity add up to a 56% corroborating the main hypothesis of this study.

The next graphic (Fig. 3) explores the differences of these formal/informal ways of participation. It is shown that individuals that participate within institutions perform mainly (51.3%) within religious structures, 29% in schools 11.5% helping the sick and 7.7% in their communities. This contrasts with the informal



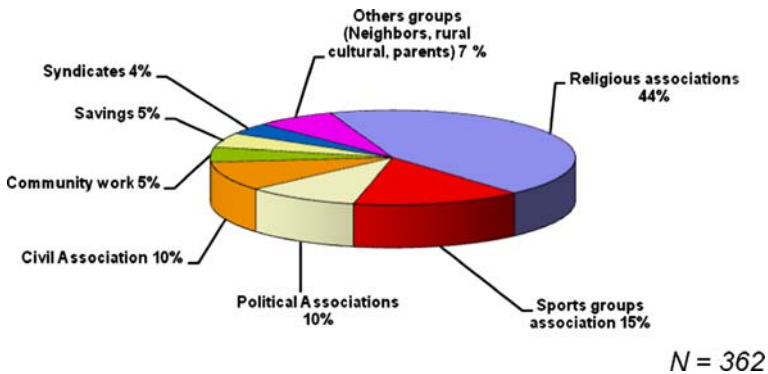


**Fig. 3** Main areas where solidarity work is practised. *Source:* ENSAV 2008, Cemefi

participation where we see a strong commitment to expressing solidarity with the community in various tasks.

When people do belong to groups, the division goes thus: 44% a religious organization, 15% sports group, 10% a CSO, 10% in a political association, 7% a parent or cultural group, 5% a community group, 5% savings group and 4% to a syndicate (Fig. 4).

Two aspects that we can refer here to are that two-thirds of those who have indulged in volunteer activity (69%) do not belong to any group. Of those who do, most of them (86%) have been volunteers in any given moment versus those that do not belong to groups. This information clearly suggests that in Mexico, belonging to a group indicates a strong inclination to voluntary participation. It must be said here that the study does not ask the question of official membership, the question simply referred to group belonging. This could add onto the informality if more questions were made on this issue. Of the individuals that do not belong to a group, a third (36%) did so though an institution. It seems that not belonging to groups also



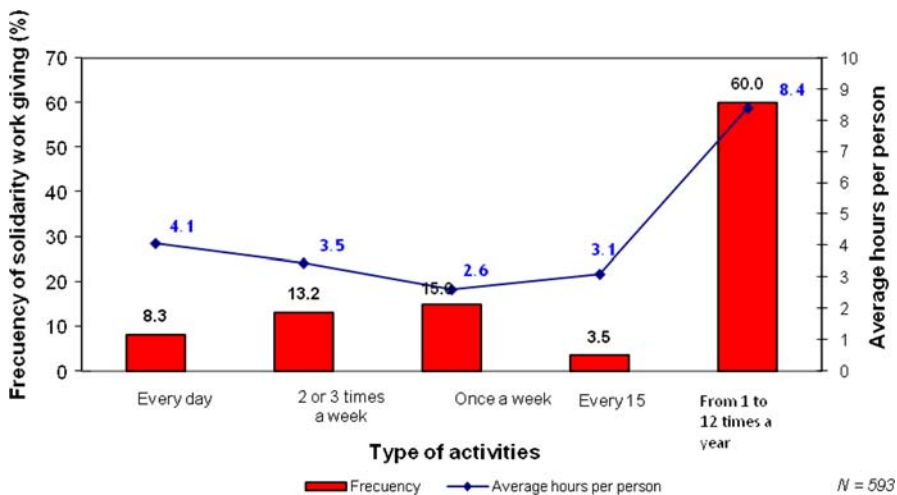
**Fig. 4** Belonging to groups. *Source:* ENSAV, 2006, CEMEFI

elevates the inclination to not participate through an institution; it drives people to act on their own.

### Families of Volunteers

Another important aspect in voluntary participation, shown here in Fig. 5, has to do with those who practice solidarity and the fact that their families are also involved in this kind of activity. These findings link strongly in with the qualitative information that was obtained when we studied volunteer groups on the influence of family and close relationships on volunteer activity. More than half of the people that are volunteers (54%) have family members that also participate in volunteer activities. This number contrasts enormously with the 24% of volunteers, shown here that represent those that do not have family members or close relatives that do volunteer work.

The questionnaire also addressed the point of frequency in volunteer participation explicitly inquiring the number of hours dedicated to this activity. Some people are very intense and dedicate their whole day to volunteer work while other dedicate a few hours a week. Many do so only a couple of times a year. The frequency in the way Mexicans dedicate time to volunteer activity also helped determine our own classification of volunteers in Mexico into three categories: Intense, typical and infrequent. The majority of Mexican volunteers (60%) dedicate some time that goes from every 2 weeks to once or twice a year. Here we are considering around 15 million individuals. Those that participate very frequently (8%), say every day or several times a week, elevate the participation numbers and make the total number of hours an important figure. These individuals dedicate 186 days a year to this activity, while our majority, the 60%, actually dedicates 1.7 days a year in total.



**Fig. 5** Frequency of volunteer participation. Hours of volunteer service. Frequency and average time dedicated to solidarity activities. *Source:* ENSAV 2006

Volunteers in Mexico: A Typology

The two final graphs shown here paint a clear picture the volunteers we have named: intense, typical and nonfrequent. In Fig. 6 we can see where the frequency of their participation. In Fig. 7 we can see what kind of activity the engage themselves in.

The first group refers to those who dedicate a large amount of time to volunteer work. We have named them: *intense volunteers*. These represent 8% of those who answered positively and 3.3% of the total population of the country. In this group we find more women (66%) and a great majority of these individuals engage in several

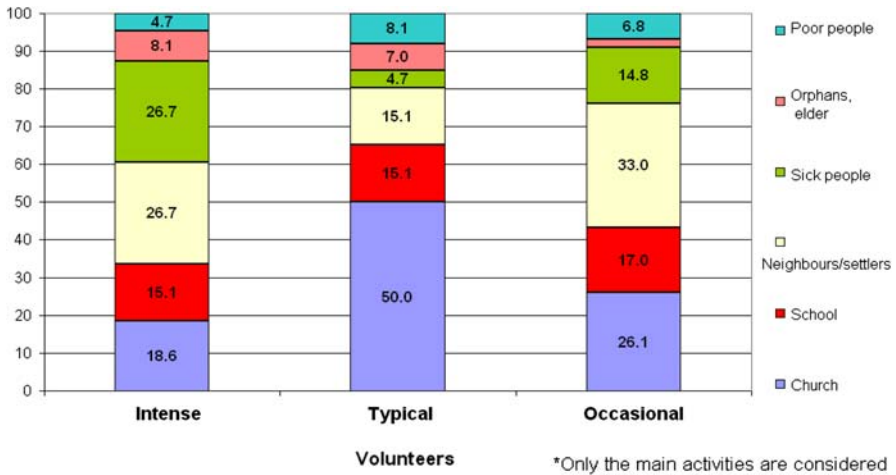


Fig. 6 Typology of volunteer participation. Analysis and classification. Type of solidarity work according to area of participation. Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi

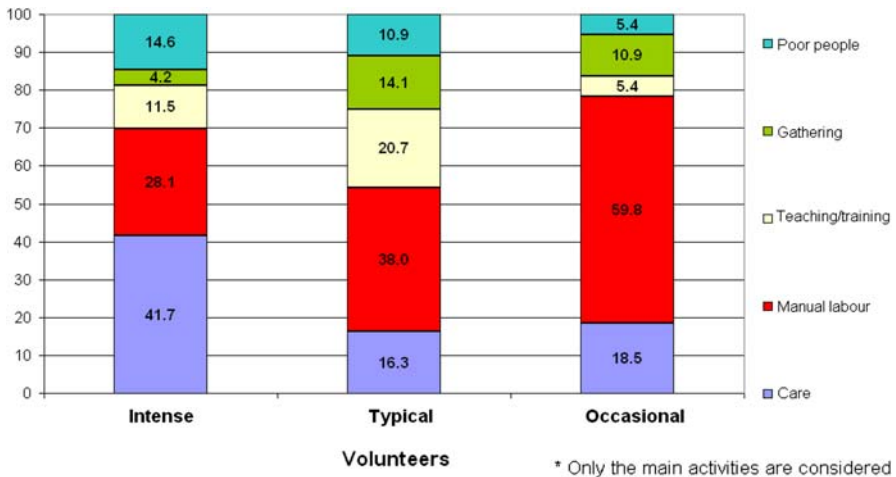


Fig. 7 Modes of volunteer participation. Types of solidarity work according to type of work given\*. Source: ENSAV 2006, Cemefi

volunteer activities (67%). Many of them dedicate the majority of their time to volunteering. This is the category that acts most on its own, without joining other groups. They give a lot of “personal attention” to others. These are also the individuals that began volunteering on their own initiative and they are also the ones that favor activities through the Church less. Here, the proportion of Catholics is high (89%) with 69% saying they go to Church more than once a week. Their age range is 30–49 years. Socio-economically they receive low to median wages. This is also the group that has received less monetary help from the government than the other two.

The second group has been denominated: *typical volunteers*. This group contains individuals that work for the Church more than the other two (50%). Almost half (49%) convey their activities through a formal group structure and 55% have been invited to participate by other group members or by their families. The great majority declared to have made friends (89%) through volunteering and helping others. This is also the group that donates the most in money, clothes and food though the Church (25%). These are also the individuals that are more apt to participate in community issues and speak up on problems though groups. These people are also the ones that have received the most help either from the Church or from government, approximately 70%. Their socio-economic stature is also in median wages. They work less in the public sector than in the private one and tend to work on their own. They also are the group that receives more help from other CSO and institutions. On the motivation side, this group expresses having a religious motivation.

The third group, the *infrequent volunteers* are those who practice a voluntary activity in a range of time that goes from once a month to one or two times a year. They volunteer 1.05 days a year. Their profile reveals that a good number (59%) give physical work, they are those who help in building schools and churches as well as providing water and other services to their communities. These volunteers are the ones that participate the least in organized groups. The infrequent volunteers donate the most clothing and food directly of all the classification. They declared being Catholic in the same proportion of the other groups, but they are the least church-going of the three. Here the proportion of men and women is exactly the same. It is where we can find the least amount of housewives and a larger proportion of full time workers. This is also the group where the proportion of individuals working on their own is largest.

*The nonvolunteers*. This group of individuals have declared that they have not consciously given of their time and talents to others, for free and outside of family. In this group we counted the proportion to be half men and half women, and this group has the youngest of the population studied. The educational level is slightly higher in this group and their socioeconomic level is also higher. This group does not give money although as far as food and clothes, they give the same as the other three. They are the least inclined to give time to volunteer causes. This group is the least religiously inclined, and those who did declare having a religion no not assist very frequently to their respective churches.

As far as group participation, this group is the one that participates the least, if we compare the volunteers that participate in groups in 30%, the nonvolunteer number goes down to 10%. The reasoning behind this nonparticipation is said to be lack of time to engage in voluntary activity (57%) and 37% expressed a lack of motivation to do so.

## Qualitative Results

### Case Studies. 66 In-depth Interviews

Our objective in this portion of the study was to narrow our research down to the individuals that work within formal organized settings. Fourteen case studies refer to organized formal settings plus an individual case study, since a high amount of people volunteering in isolation was found in the ENSAV.

The 15 case studies are based on the information provided from 66 in depth interviews to individuals that belong to and/or work in CSOs in Mexico, the natural scenario of volunteer participation. Within these organizations we found people to consider themselves “volunteers” in a classic sense, where commitment and the idea of service to others is understood as well as the wider meaning of volunteering. The in-depth analysis of the text of the interviews revealed the processes these individuals go through as they re-signified their lived experiences.

Case studies were considered the most adequate methodological choice to produce a better understanding of the processes involved in Mexican volunteering (Yin 1991; Meyer 2001). In choosing a series of *case studies* (Stake 1994), we were able to form a “collective case study” where theoretically...“understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases...” The information was gathered from within organizations in different regions of Mexico to explore motivations and diverse volunteer trends.

Also, life histories (Harris 1987) were useful to understand the life trajectory of each of the individuals interviewed. Concrete examples explain the influence of different life trajectories that mesh with social circumstances of the individuals that engage in voluntary activity. As we analyzed the biographies of these individuals, we were able to approach the context in which social action takes place, not only in terms of the experience or specific conditions of the subject studied but also the use of these experiences as a partial effect of past actions, in the context of present activities. Although the sample is not statistically valid, it is large enough for us to be able to propose a Mexican volunteer profile as well as to provide some explanations of some general trends within CSOs in Mexico <sup>3</sup>

### *Main Characteristics of CSO Participants*

Of the universe studied, 74.2% were strictly considered volunteers in accordance with our definition, this is: they did not receive money for their services. The rest (25.8%) were paid personnel. When the information was analyzed there were no differences found as far as their reasons for participating in a CSO and this is why the entire group (66 interviews) was considered for the analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> The organizations had been previously selected by the Tecnológico de Monterrey for their students to work on service projects. However, we specifically looked for a set of CSOs that were regionally diverse and working in different areas of social need within their own communities. The spectrum was: educational, government, religious affiliation, youth, rural/community, vulnerable populations, health, urban/popular, culture, business and social causes.

As far as gender, 74% of those interviewed were women (36) and 26% men (13), a 3:1 ratio. However, the myth of women with leisure time housewives as the main formal “charity” or volunteer groups in Mexico was dissipated, since there were the same amount of people that participate in the workforce and same proportion of retired individuals. The group of volunteers represents average median of productive-age men and women that divide their personal responsibilities between working, keeping house and volunteering. The profile shows individuals that express a strong commitment towards others which is reflected in the perseverance of their actions as well as the time dedicated to volunteering and the expectations of continuity on the same activity. Age coincides with the ENSAV, the numbers cross-check as individuals in active and reproductive stages of their lives.

An interesting finding has to do with the educational levels of the individuals that work in CSOs in Mexico. In contrast in the ENSAV survey, within organized groups, the levels of education turn out to be far above the median for the country which is 7.7 years of education. 50% of those interviewed has a college education or had college level studies, 18.2% had technical studies or had finished high school, 12.1% had finished junior high and 10.6% had graduate studies. These numbers indicate that there may be certain skills required to found and give continuity to social endeavors such as CSOs.

Most individuals (84%) that were interviewed had worked in or belonged to other social organizations before. For the other 16%, this was the first time they had been involved in organizations. As far as time given, 24% had been giving voluntarily of their time for at least, the past 10 years. In this group we found mostly the founders and leaders of the organizations studied and a large proportion of professional women. Another 55% had been participating as volunteers between 1 to 5 years. In this group is where we found major disparities in age: young and older men and many women.

To build the case studies, the interviews were directed to specific players within the organization. It was decided that five interviews per organization would be sufficient to give an idea of its functionality. Two of these were directed to volunteers. The organization received a researcher that directed questions at:

- Director, Founder or Informal leader
- Staff of the organization
- Board member
- Two volunteers

The following chart (Fig. 8) presents the institutions studied, the number of men and women interviewed both volunteers and paid personnel.

### *Typology and Motivation*

Two distinct groups of volunteers were identified:

- (a) The first group coincides closely with the “intense volunteer” profile described in the previous section. These are people that give most of their time to voluntary activities for a specific period of time.

AREAS OF VOLUNTEER ACTION OF THE ORGANIZATION AND ENTREVUE PERSONEL			
Areas of volunteer work	Main activity	Paid Personnel	Volunteers (No pay)
Entrepreneurial	Help women in marginalized areas		4 M
Governnmet	Orphans	1 H 1 M	3 M
Religion	Catechism values		5 M
Sports/Recreation	Promote sports in populated areas	1 H 1 M	3 M
Youth/Educational	Educational programs for at risk youth	2 M	1 H 1 M
Rural/Community	Community development labor assessment		3 H 1 M
Vulnerable Groups	Attention to the physically impaired	2 M	1 H 1 M
Youth/Rural	Support to youth without families	2 H	2 M
Health	Health attention for women	2 M	2 M 1 H
Social causes	Helps for swick indigenou groups	1 M	4 M
Eucational	Attention for street children	3 M	1 H 1 M
Cultural	Culture promotion	1 M	3 M
Individual	Free professional help		1 H
Vulnerable Groups	Attention to the urban poor children		5 M 1 H
Urban/Popular	Support for marginalized urban zones		4 H 1 M
Source: Information from case studies. México Solidario. 2008.			

**Fig. 8** Areas of voluntary action of the CSO interviews

- (b) The second group will be called “systematic volunteers”. This group differentiates from the first in that they are individuals that set aside a definite time allotment to cover a specific cause and express a definite and punctual commitment to it.

The motivations and reasons of why individuals act in favor of others seem to strongly reflect family values of participation and caring for others. In some distinct cases, this kind of participation is triggered by specific and usually important events in people's lives, such as sickness, loss or a particular experience lived in extreme circumstances of poverty or inequity. These become a social preoccupation towards others, where volunteering in organized settings gives them the opportunity to address the needs of their fellow citizens. Comments such as the following provide an idea of their commitment...

*...look, in my family there has always been a great concern for others...but here (in the organization) my wife's family, once at a family luncheon...they started talking politics... and this lady (a person on the Board of the organization) started talking about what was done here... I got interested...she invited me to be a patron to one of the children, I came to the office and I remember they were giving out food that day..., I started helping...I will have been helping here for almost two years in a row... (Male volunteer, 32 years old)*

### Time and Type of Volunteer Activity

In the two distinct groups of volunteers found through qualitative analysis, the first group dedicated full time attention to volunteering, between 7 and 10 h a day. Here we found a wide range of individuals: from young people, still living at home that decided to volunteer a couple months of their life to a cause as well as women between the ages of 45 and 50 who were dependent on their husbands and family for a living, dedicating time to an organization they had either initiated or firmly believed in. These individuals assumed the responsibility in diverse areas, including fundraising for the organization. This group also includes people that come from outside Mexico to volunteer for rural areas and poor communities as well as people that used their spare time, such as weekends to engage in volunteer activity.

The second group that dedicated between 1½ h and 10 h a week presented different characteristics. Here we found individuals that planned to set aside a specific time to these chores. These were people that combined work and volunteering and distributing their time accordingly.

### *Life Trajectories*

For this research project, it was pertinent to examine life trajectories of participants in Mexican CSOs in search of elements that would explain the volunteering phenomenon on a wider scale throughout the country. For in depth interviews, attention was rendered into this aspect to help explain the motivation behind these activities. We found that 57% of the individuals interviewed had received some kind of influence from their family environment which led to manifest a special preoccupation towards others. 23% had received influence of the spouse, brothers or immediate family. In 20% of the cases there was no specific reason we could find to incline towards volunteer activity. In other cases, education was also a source of understanding deep differences in Mexican society and an interest in solving them. This seems to indicate that the family setting has a keen influence in caring for



others since it is in the family where patterns and practices are observed and learned. The interviews show the way this family influence is present. 32% of the women said that the influence for volunteering and participation came from their mother's example in contrast with 10.5% of the men who mentioned this fact. A few comments illustrate our findings.

*...I grew up with an uncle whom I cared about since I was with him since I was eight years old...he had a pharmacy in Spain...the truth is that my uncle felt he was responsible for the wellbeing of the neighborhood... they took care of him, his sister and his mother and he gave back in equal measure... (Male volunteer, 62 years old)*

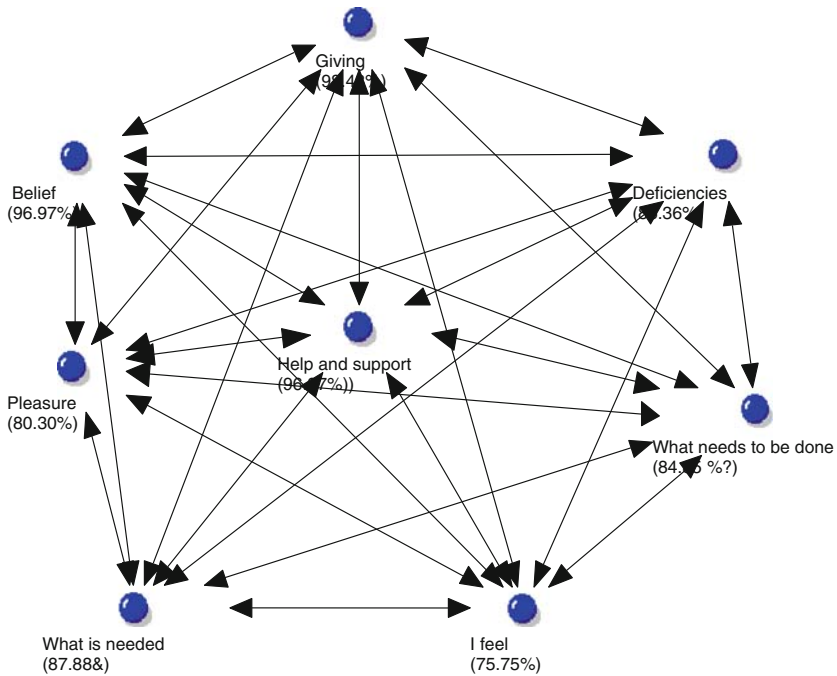
*... I think it has a lot to do with the education I received from my parents as well as the education I received in school...I remember since I was very little we would go out to places in the outskirts of the city... since I was young we participated helping out at the local dump, where we started a school...I have always wanted to be an instrument of God... before my child was born, I always asked for his intercession. I did not know I was to have a sick child and He sent me one... the message was clear to me... (Female volunteer, founder, 54 years old)*

Each person comes from a different context and background. However, there seems to be a certain lived experience that had a determinant relevance and consequently a reflection in personal attitudes and actions. For some, there happens to be a single event in their lives that enhances participation. For others, the sum of subtle everyday examples creates a different but concurrent approach to awareness towards their fellow citizens. What we may conclude of this complex exercise reveals that there is not really a single motivation to act, but a mixture of elements and motivations: religious adscription, living in precarious conditions, empty-nest syndrome, family influence, etc. which make the subjects give personal significance to their activities. This particular research methodology gives us the opportunity to observe how these individuals re-signify their actions within each of these contexts.

### *Conceptual Mapping*

An NVivo<sup>4</sup> program was utilized to allow us to elucidate the textual patterns of the answers of the interviews. The information generated in our 66 in-depth interviews was based on a “coding system” of a set of variables which are the words that the volunteers used to describe their activity. We were seeking that the patterns expressed actions or activities, ideas and feelings which derived into a semantic category that were recurrent for those interviewed. Of the total of 66 interviews, we compared those that had between 98.5% and 75.7% of similar answers, which resulted in a semantic field of volunteer activity: “give” (98.48%), “help/support” (96.97%), “belief” (96.97%), “what is needed” (87.88%), “what is missing” (86.36%), “what should be done” (84.85%), “pleasure” (80.30%) “feeling” (75.75%). When we set on these frequencies we obtain a conceptual map (see

<sup>4</sup> This conceptual map allows the reader to understand the way in which the relationships of the words that were picked up in the 66 interviews.



**Fig. 9** Conceptual map of Mexican volunteer activity

Fig. 9) which represents the central nucleus of words utilized in the totality of the interviews.

When the volunteers evaluated their own activity, as a group, they believed that much more could be achieved in development if only more Mexicans were exposed to volunteering. They honestly felt that Mexico would be better off if more people were to volunteer their money, time and energy to the roots of poverty and inequality in the country. They also spoke of the pleasure and contentment received when they are able to give both time and resources, considering it more than enough payment for their work. Even though our observations conclude that voluntary activity is quite heterogeneous and difficult to sum into one set of motivations, it is, however, possible to point out enough similarities that make it possible elaborate a first prototype of the Mexican volunteer.

To build hypothesis or implication relationships, there were cross-references between codings to two general conditions: men + code versus women + code. In each case, a comparative analysis was made. Each hypothesis has a set of examples, where here we will portray only two: (Butcher 2008, pp. 13–143)

- (1) Men give differently than women do.
- (2) The preoccupation for helping is conceived differently by men and by women.
- (3) Volunteer participation is visibly defined based on personal belief.
- (4) Both men and women understand their commitment, based on the needs of others.

- (5) Men and women define differently the needs that promote volunteer participation.
- (6) The ethical vision of the objectives that are pursued by volunteers is shared by both men and women.
- (7) Participation in volunteer activity is valued in subjective, and not monetary terms by both men and women.
- (8) Both genders “feel” their belonging to volunteering in a different way.

For this article, we provide only two extracts of the dialog in the interview that portray some of these differences.

Example.

Man: “Even though I heard when I was little boy about missions and missionaries, I think that today we are all missionaries in some way, even if we are not religious, which really has no relevance here. I believe that if all of us help out, we can live doing something for others and in this way one grows, in helping other people grow as well.” (47, volunteer)

Woman: “Personally, I feel fulfilled, because I realize the needs that we have in our society, you just become more human and you try, with the elements you have at hand, to solve these needs to the best of your ability. I believe that all of us should participate, because there is a great need for disinterested cooperation. We should work, not only where we receive money, but in that each of us works giving a bit of our time, to help those needs that our society has, it’s the only way to solve these problems”. (53, volunteer)

### *Giving as the Most Mentioned Activity*

The study portrays the qualitative element of the nature of giving and what it means to Mexican volunteers and participants within social organizations. The word “give” obtained 98.48% mentions in our coding system. On a closer analysis, on “giving” be it material resources, time or talent we elaborated several categories that hold a different semantic weight:

- (a) Cognoscitive category: Giving is not reduced to just a practical activity. Furthermore, “giving” implies knowledge of the needs that are being covered with the gift. This is why “what is needed” and “what is missing” fit into this category. These present the giver as an expert, one who recognizes both what is needed and what is missing, not only in what others need, but also in what volunteers need to do to fulfill their mission.
- (b) Symbolic category: To give is a symbolic gesture where the giver bestows recognition through his own actions to those who need his gift. This is why “giving” is a “pleasure” and a “feeling”. The dimension of these categories is symbolic because it is intangible and it depends on the collective imagery of volunteer activity. The use of the word “belief” portrays to a belief system on how the volunteers see those to whom he extends his generosity.
- (c) Moral category: “giving” is a duty, an ethical obligation. It does not need retribution because it is about the ethical basis of recognition where “I give to others what they do not have”. The logic of the gift supposed some ethical

correlation onto one would like to have, develop or learn, if one were in the same needy situation.

- (d) Pragmatic category: “help/support” condense the practical aspect of solidary activity. To help others it is necessary to evaluate what is needed and to adopt a position towards those needs.

Intersections of the word giving and all the other main semantic expressions (see Fig. 9) were made utilizing the 66 in-depth interviews. Here we present a few examples of this main activity of giving within these intersections.

“...we must help, and above all, give..., I believe that we encounter many times with a society that is not used to giving, don't you think?...” (Male volunteer, 47)

“...helping, because in the end, it is good for our children... and helping, I come back to that... sets an example for our children, so that they become the same...” (Female volunteer, 43)

“...Look, it is very important for me to give yourself to others. I have always said that we all need of each other...” (Female volunteer, 61)

“... I think we should all give ourselves the time to put ourselves in the place of others, I mean of the people that need our attention...” (Male volunteer, 46)

“I believe that it means sharing and living with others, in knowing that you can give something, maybe of the little that you know to another person, and watch how he grows...” (Female volunteer, 35)

With the data obtained in this portion of the analysis we can affirm that for Mexican volunteers:

- Giving to others is an unselfish act where “satisfaction” is obtained.
- The “need” to “*help and give support*” to others is seen not only as an “obligation”, but also as a form of “satisfaction”.
- For those who participate in the CSO that were studied there is a recognition and a knowledge of “what is missing” that is needed to continue supporting their activities.
- The use of the word “I believe” is used by those interviewed to self-evaluate their action, and also to evaluate the needs and requirements that are mentioned as demands for “help/support”.
- “I feel” is used frequently by women to show how they value and perceive their own participation in the organization.

### *Mexican CSO. Case Studies*

The 15 case studies utilized for this portion of the study are based on four main axes: (1) the origin of the organization and the objectives of its creation; (2) the goals that it pursues and its accomplishments; (3) the structure and decision making processes with which they operate, and (4) funding sources. Here 14 case studies and 65 interviews<sup>5</sup> were taken considered.

<sup>5</sup> The individual case study and interview were not taken into account for this portion of the analysis.

In the definition of CSOs or NPOs (Nonprofit Organizations), the structural–operational definition of Salamon and Anhier (1996) was sufficient. It must be recalled that many groups in Mexico are not formal, that is not all have the characteristics of an NPO, however, they are functional groups where volunteers work and thrive.

- Origin and objectives of Mexican CSOs. Here our classification went as to how these organizations originated: (a) those that are part of another organization; (b) those initiated by one or more individuals for a definite cause; (c) those that initiated from a community or neighborhood group with a specific problem; (d) those initiated by a religious group e) those promoted by a government entity.<sup>6</sup>
- Goals, accomplishments.
- Structure. These refer to three main elements: (a) well defined project; (b) a clear definition and direction with a group of people to support the initiative to transform it into a long-standing initiative; and (c) a support net that will provide with social capital for it to continue.
- Sustainability. Funding sources. These can be constant, diversified, or uncertain.

These four characteristics: origin, goals, structure, and funding are lens through which the Mexican CSOs of our study were classified for their study. We found out that most organizations were initiated by individuals that have wanted to contribute personally to their own communities. The main focus of attention for CSOs in Mexico is poverty related problems and vulnerable issues of women and children. In the cases that the Catholic Church is the origin and basis for existence, the needs of the population are also the main focus of attention beyond the building of religious facilities and taking care of them. Mexico has a very distinctive case of government related CSOs and not all of them have been well off or taken care of. All of these organizations represent a large heterogeneous mix of organizations and of structures that sustain them. This seems to be one of the major characteristics of these groups manned mostly by volunteers.

## Some General Conclusions

### Quantitative Conclusions

- (a) About two-thirds of the Mexican adult population is inclined to voluntary and solidary participation according to our definition. It total we are referring to 41.4 million individuals.
- (b) Accounting for the 40% of the population that were engaged in voluntary activity at the time of the survey, we are referring to 23 million adults that give an average of 2.2 eight hour working days a month.

<sup>6</sup> This is a very common kind of group due to the one party rule for over 70 years. Most of these groups do not contain volunteers. We have called them “pseudo-volunteers” since there is a certain obligation to serve in them.

- (c) In numbers, volunteer work amounts to 1.14% of the Mexican GNP in 2004, and if we count the GNP in communal and personal services we would reach 4.7% of the GNP.
- (d) Mexicans participate in voluntary endeavors in the same proportion in *all socioeconomic and scholastic levels of society*.
- (e) There is a clear distinction of the places where volunteers participate in Mexico. Church, school, and neighbors follow in that order across the board in the different regions of the country, with very slight variations.
- (f) Individuals that belong to and practice a religion have more inclination to volunteer participation.
- (g) Voluntary and solidary expressions of participation occur in a larger proportion in informal settings, proving the main hypothesis of the study.
- (h) There is a large contingent of Mexicans that participate in a solitary fashion. Group belonging seems to have a strong influence in volunteering.

### Qualitative Conclusions

- (a) One of the main discoveries, in the qualitative results, highlights the influence that *family* has had on these individuals. This corroborates our survey results. Most of these individuals had some kind of previous experience of observing or of volunteering in a family setting.
- (b) CSO founders are the key to preserve and help an organization continue alive and vital. These individuals help consolidate the original vision and mission of an organization and are also staunch supporters of its future in many ways: fundraising, volunteering, etc.
- (c) It was found that in Mexico, once individuals have chosen to belong and support an organization, they remain in them for long periods of time.
- (d) Most of the individuals that volunteer within organizations found themselves in the productive age group.
- (e) Within our sample, it was interesting to see the differences in the roles of the volunteers that belonged to organizations manned mostly by volunteers and those who had paid staff. Leadership and responsibility in positions of direction and control were evident in the first kind of organizations while in the latter, volunteers were not given the same opportunity in the decision-making process.
- (f) For most volunteers in CSOs, their activity reports a sense of satisfaction and meaning. Their main motivation lies in giving of themselves to support and help others.

The study portrayed makes strides to advance in the knowledge not only of individual volunteer activity in Mexico, first though the survey of the whole population and second because of the glimpse at the activity within CSOs through its case studies. The investigation brings to light the fact that in giving of their time and talent, many Mexicans do not consider themselves “volunteers”, so it strives to fulfill a double purpose: the one of creating knowledge and understanding on these

forms of citizen participation and also the purpose of building up some form of national awareness on these matters.

This project encompasses the first study of its kind in Mexico. Based on the data obtained, it proposes a series of recommendations for government, the business community, and the society at large, leaving an open and inviting door to more research on volunteering, citizen participation, and civic engagement. The main conclusions are presented throughout this article and it will be left for others interested in finding out the intricacies of Mexican participation and volunteering to continue with this task.

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