

FINDINGS RELATED TO INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING IN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS: THE CASE OF CUETZALAN DEL PROGRESO, PUEBLA

Nicolás Pérez-Ramírez*, José Arturo Méndez-Espinoza, José Regalado-López, Javier Ramírez-Juárez, Aglae López-Zaragoza

Colegio de Postgraduados. Campus Puebla. Boulevard Forjadores de Puebla Núm. 205, Santiago Momoxpan, municipio de San Pedro Cholula. 72760, Puebla, México.

*Corresponding author: perezn@colpos.mx

ABSTRACT

Institutional strengthening of civil society organizations (CSOs) is very important, as it helps amplify impact on the beneficiary population by the development of a powerful organizational structure by functioning more effectively and efficiently. Demonstrating the practices and limitations faced by grassroots CSOs is relevant to improving their function. The objective of this study was to analyze the various aspects of CSO structure in order to evaluate their potential institutional strengthening. This research is of the descriptive exploratory type; it was based on a questionnaire applied to nine CSOs and a descriptive analysis of this information. Results indicated that only 55.5% of organizations have a well-developed annual operating plan. There is a link to local governments, educational institutions and other CSOs. Staff are encouraged to become professionals; 77.8% of members participate in training courses and 66.7% in specialization courses. 66.7% of organizations do not have a fundraising plan and if they do, it will be very limited. 66.6% of organizations have a monitoring and evaluation plan, but these are outdated or only partially implemented. In conclusion, almost half of the CSOs have limitations in terms of their operational plan and most do not have a fund-raising plan or a monitoring and evaluation plan. Generally, weak organizational capacity is apparent, resulting in limited institutional strengthening.

Keywords: links and communication, monitoring and evaluation, planning, resources.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, Mexico faces varied and serious challenges, such as improving the living conditions of almost 52 million inhabitants living in poverty (National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy, Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, CONEVAL, 2014); reducing the high levels of violence in the country, and eradicating the state of powerlessness and vulnerability in which women live. Other challenges include the very fragile situation concerning human rights, rising food prices and food insecurity for large sectors of the population, as well as climate change, environmental pollution and deterioration of natural resources, among others.

Given the magnitude of these challenges, it is difficult for governments or the State to attend to and respond to all these aspects. Instead, the participation of all sectors of the population, including civil society organizations (CSOs), is required. These are diverse and manifest varied characteristics; in this case, we refer to philanthropic or non-profit third sector organizations (Chávez and González, 2018).

Although these emerged in Mexico more than a century ago, it was post mid-20th century that a series of events occurred that were the driving force behind the multiplication of

Citation: Pérez-Ramírez N, Méndez-Espinoza JA, Regalado-López J, Ramírez-Juárez J, López-Zaragoza A. 2024. Findings related to institutional strengthening in civil society organizations: the case of Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla. *Agricultura, Sociedad y Desarrollo* <https://doi.org/10.22231/asyd.v21i3.1611>

ASyD 21(3): 402-420

Editor in Chief:
Dr. Benito Ramírez Valverde

Received: June 16, 2023.
Approved: August 31, 2023.

Estimated publication date:
June 19, 2024.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International license.



these organizations. Among these, the most significant included the student repression of 1968, the economic crisis of 1982, the earthquake of 1985, the dubious presidential elections of 1988 and the Zapatista uprising of 1994 (Castañeda, 2013; United States Agency for International Development, 2019). These were some events that led to the proliferation of this type of organizations for addressing social problems in the country. Furthermore, Salamon *et al.* (1999) point out that CSOs emerged and multiplied, partly due to growing doubts about the State's capacity to address problems related to social well-being, development and the environment. In this sense, these organizations play an outstanding role, in terms of manifesting the interests of civil society and constitute one of the main instruments for its projection (Serrano, 2015). CSOs are notable for undertaking those tasks for which the State appears overwhelmed, either failing to attend to them or attending to them in a limited way and with negligible results. They depend on citizen participation and association. They are autonomous and self-manage their processes and activities; they seek improvements for all citizens and do not seek to obtain income from their activities, rather, they seek to democratize the economic income they obtain, through projects and programs for the benefit of citizens. Furthermore, they serve as a counterweight to the actions of the State, although many receive part of their finances from the government (Aguilar, 2006).

For CSOs to develop their activities and fulfill their function for the benefit of civil society, they need to have strong institutional development. However, in the third sector, development of civil organizations is differentiated, in terms of economic and human resources, infrastructure and their legal status for receiving resources from different sources. In Mexico until 2018, 10% of these were authorized non-profit organisations, meaning the Tax Administration System allowed them to receive unlimited tax-deductible donations. This condition allowed them to diversify their sources of finance, obtain greater income and optimize their conditions for institutional development. However, most CSOs are small and have few resources, so that, their institutional strengthening is limited. Many do not have tax deductible status making it difficult for them to access financial aid from other sources. Small CSOs depend, for the most part, on public resources; however, these represent those located at the local level, which are in direct contact with the beneficiary population, in terms of addressing and attempting to solve a number of social problems. Prior to 2018, all CSOs worked under non-ideal conditions; however they were accustomed to this. As of 2019, they entered an unfavorable environment for implementing their activities and functions, because the current Federal Government discredited them and designated them as intermediaries between the government and citizens (Equipo Pueblo A.C., 2020; Badillo, 2020). Following these condemnations, a circular was issued to cut the flow of public resources to them, with the justification that the money would be delivered directly to the beneficiaries (Office of the President, 2019).

In this context, organizations find themselves in an uncertain situation of financial instability, especially those whose income was mostly provided by public resources. This means that the organizations most affected are the smallest ones, manifesting

limited institutional development that functions at the local level and directly with the beneficiaries. This study aimed to analyze the different structural forms of civil society organizations in the municipality of Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla, in order to evaluate their potential for institutional strengthening.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Reality and social processes constantly change; for this reason, the institutions or organizations in charge of addressing and solving social problems must evolve simultaneously; principally in order to strengthen and develop, while also providing better care to the target population.

Our research is based on the theory of organizational change, as a means to understand how social organizations plan, implement and manage change appropriately, in order to implement institutional strengthening and development. We focus on how CSOs can implement strategies, processes or even structural changes, in order to adapt to new social realities, improve their interventions and achieve their objectives and goals. In this regard, we stress that change will only be effective if the actors involved are committed, as the central facet of change refers to group behavior, manifested in norms, roles, interactions and other social processes (Coria *et al.* 2016).

Concerning institutional strengthening, the Mercedes foundation (De Angoitia and Márquez, 2012), mentions two approaches to address this process. First is the technical one, which underscores the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization; in this instance, strengthening measures can be applied without distinguishing between the type of organization and the sector to which it pertains; this approach is associated with the internal dimension of the organization and seeks to optimize resource use and quality programs. In the second approach, institutional strengthening, results from a series of actions that, implicitly or explicitly, aim to find the greatest possible cohesion between a project, which has clear objectives and a mission; an organization that comprises a set of social relationships facilitating progress in terms of realizing the project; and a series of resources: human, material and financial, that make the implementation of the project viable. However, above all, this coherence, between project, organization and resources, must enable the generation of collective knowledge of all the actors participating in the process of strengthening CSOs (Center for Accompaniment and Strengthening, CAF, 2012).

The second approach is political; here, the idea is to articulate the work carried out by the CSO with the desired social and political implications. This approach encourages participation and recognizes that the organization is driven by its values and intent, immersed in a context where relationships with the environment are essential (De Angoitia and Márquez, 2012). On this theme, the Zícara Foundation (2012) comments that CSOs need to expand understanding of how the public administration works, while developing negotiation, lobbying and joint work capabilities. Besides this, knowledge of how to work online and the legal and fiscal framework that regulates CSOs is required.

Concerning this, institutional strengthening must be applied to the internal processes and functions of the organization (Carrillo *et al.*, 2005, CAF, 2012) and to the visibility or positioning of the work of CSOs abroad (Quintero, 2017). This means that institutional strengthening involves a process of adaptation and response on the part of the organization, to changes that occur within it and in the environment where it develops (Zamora, 2018). In summary, strengthening is viewed as social actions (agreements, behaviors and learning) that provide certain strength to the internal structure of the organization, ensuring its efficiency in the social, political, economic and cultural environment (Douard and Uriza, 2016). Likewise, institutional strengthening per se is a complex process; furthermore, its design and implementation can take years and the process can continue indefinitely (CAF, 2012; Fundación Zícara, 2012). This means that CSOs that become involved in these processes must be aware that to achieve favorable results, in terms of their own development and for the benefit of society, they must constantly and effectively undertake institutional strengthening.

Due to the complexity of strengthening and the long continuous time required to carry it out, there are no models or guides to indicate the institutional strengthening procedure (CAF, 2012). Notably, each institutional strengthening stage, involves a different process, implemented by the strengthening agent (Zamora, 2018). Here, it is important to mention that the institutional strengthening of CSOs, promoted by the Mexican government and by the organizations themselves, dates back to the nineties of the last century, and since then it has formed part of the public agenda. In this regard, Gutiérrez (2020) points out that over the last three decades, the strengthening of CSOs in Mexico has increased.

Currently, the worsening of Mexico's varied and complex socioeconomic and environmental problems demands more developed and stronger civil society institutions for its attention. However, it is very common that grassroots organizations or those that are developing work directly with people in socially depressed territories - such as the region of the municipality of Cuetzalan del Progreso - are operating in conditions of institutional fragility, putting their permanence and likewise the correct performance of their activities at risk, and also above all, their ability to obtain favorable results and achieve positive social changes.

In another context, in Mexico, there are almost 300 agents dedicated to strengthening¹, including foundations, private consultants, companies, educational institutions and CSOs (strengtheners) that are located mainly in the central-northern area of the country (Gutiérrez, 2020). However, the greatest needs for strengthening are found in the south-southeast of Mexico, as in this region of the country, there are almost 35 thousand CSOs (National Institute of Social Development INDESOL, 2021), most of them also focused on high levels of marginalization and poverty and poor social development. Moreover, there are few strengthening institutions to serve CSOs in Mexico. In this regard, Carrillo *et al.* (2005) indicate that there are not enough organizations to implement strengthening or undertake this in a truly effective way.

However, if someone asks what aspect of a CSO requires strengthening, this turns out to be a complicated question to answer, as there is great variety concerning organizational

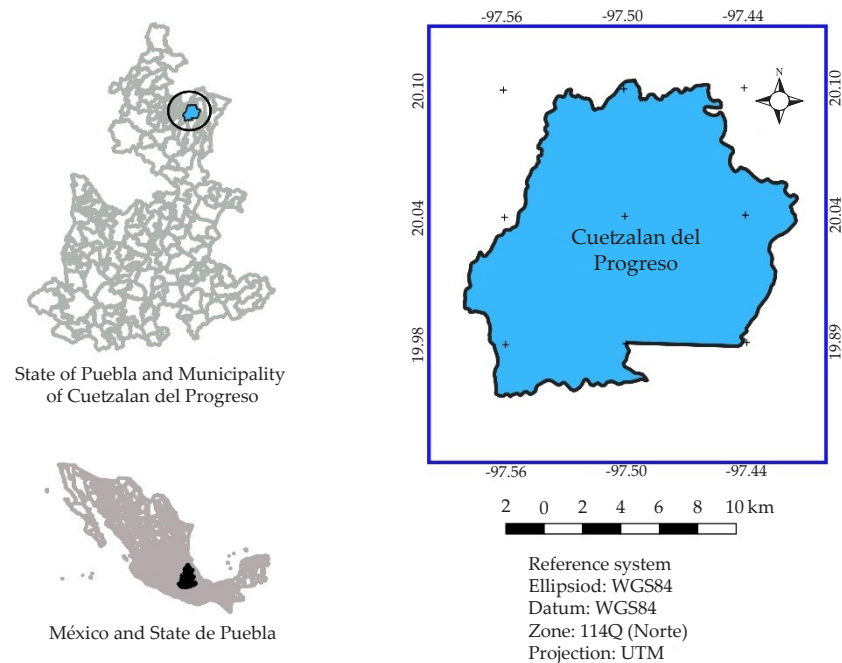
agenda and in terms of activities or programs carried out by the organizations. In this regard, Carrillo *et al.* (2005) argue that some practitioners believe that strengthening should cover all issues of organizational performance but that others consider it should focus on management process and use of resources.

The least strengthened CSOs are found in the most precarious conditions, concerning their context and institutional development. Furthermore, they have few resources to pay for training, support or advice from the organizations in charge of strengthening them. Therefore, a diagnosis must be made of each organization to identify their problems and prioritize attention to strengthening those less effective areas within the organization.

STUDY AREA AND METHODOLOGY

The municipality of Cuetzalan del Progreso is located in the northeast of the state of Puebla (Figure 1). Its altitude varies between 1,000 and 2,000 m, with a territorial area of 135.22 km². The population of Cuetzalan consists of 49,864 inhabitants, of whom 25,715 are women (National Institute of Statistics and Geography INEGI, 2020). The average level of education is 6.2 years and of the population aged 15 and over, 13.1% is illiterate and 67.7% of the population speaks an indigenous language (CONEVAL, 2015).

Regarding the indigenous population, this sector has always been a focus of attention, as frequently the human rights of women are affected. In the municipality, there are CSOs that are addressing this problem. In this regard, the National Institute of Social



Source: Data from the Digital Map of México (INEGI, 2017); elaborated by the authors.
Figure 1. Location of the municipality of Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla, Mexico.

Development (INDESOL, 2015), indicated that the situation of gender inequality and discrimination present among indigenous peoples and communities, continues to erode the social fabric and likewise, the fundamental rights of people, especially women. This situation of discrimination and inequality also applies to the indigenous population of the state of Puebla and specifically to that of the municipality of Cuetzalan.

The National Population Council (CONAPO, 2015) mentions that Cuetzalan del Progreso is classified as having a high marginalization index, ranked 40th at the state level and 381st at the national level. In this condition of marginalization, the population in poverty in 2020 was 98.7%, in moderate poverty 64.1% and in extreme poverty 34.6% (Secretaría del Bienestar, 2022). These data are a reflection of the limited social development of the population of this municipality (Table 1). This is possibly also the reason why several CSOs were established in this area.

The municipality of Cuetzalan was chosen, due to the presence of CSOs that address the social problems present in the place of study. Information collection was carried out during the months of July and August 2020, the year in which the Covid-19 pandemic began and expanded in the national territory. This disease and its high level of contagion greatly limited field work. This study is of a descriptive exploratory type (Supo, 2020), which is based on the application of a questionnaire that collected information related to the characteristics of CSOs, aspects of planning and leadership, the linkage and alliances of the organizations, the professionalization of human resources, internal and external communication, fundraising and transparency, and monitoring and evaluation of activities. The questionnaire was answered by representatives, coordinators and staff on the organizational panels.

Besides this, informal interviews and direct observation were applied to collect qualitative information. Likewise, two informal interviews were carried out with collaborators of organizations; these people provided information on the location of organizations with recognition and impact in the region. Notably, prior knowledge existed concerning the context in which CSOs develop. The interviews were face to face and in some cases, interviewees were visited on more than one occasion.

According to the Federal Register of CSOs, in 2021, in Cuetzalan, there were 18 registered and active organizations, of which, the following nine civil organizations were interviewed:

Table 1. Social indicators in Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla (México).

Social indicators	Level
Marginalization	High
Human development index	Medium
Education index	Low
Social backwardness	Medium

Source: elaborated by the authors with data from CONAPO (2015); United Nations Development Program UNDP (2019) and the Welfare Secretariat (Bienestar 2022).

La Esperanza del Mañana, Timosepanpaleuij, Yohualichan, Ti-jiohtli, Espacio Espiral Totalmanik, Xoxoctic Botanical Garden, Timomachtikan Agency, Kualinemilis Trainers Network, and the Residence for Indigenous Women (Casa de la Mujer Indígena). The information from the questionnaires was captured in the Excel program and a descriptive analysis of the data was carried out; the information from the interviews was systematized and integrated with the information derived from the questionnaires.

RESULTS

Civil society organizations in Cuetzalan del Progreso

According to INDESOL (2021), in Mexico, at the end of 2021, 43,690 CSOs were registered in their different manifestations. In effect, the country's population in 2020 comprised more than 126 million inhabitants; based on these data, the number of CSOs per 100 thousand inhabitants was 34.7. Likewise, in 2020, the population in the State of Puebla consisted of 6.6 million inhabitants (INEGI, 2020); correspondingly, the number of CSOs per 100 thousand inhabitants was 24.7, ten less than at the national level. The topics addressed by the organizations in the state were promotion of educational, cultural, artistic, scientific and technological activities (39.1%) as well as development of indigenous peoples and communities (37.1%), community development (29.5%), social assistance (29.4%) and sustainability and use of natural resources (28.6%).

In the Federal Registry of Civil Society Organizations (INDESOL, 2021), in the municipality of Cuetzalan, 30 CSOs were registered; 96.7% were civil associations and the legal representative for 43.3% was a woman. 73.3% of the CSOs are located in the municipal capital and the rest, in one of the towns in the municipality. The topics they worked on were related to social development, natural resources, gender relations and human rights (Table 2).

In the period during which the study was carried out, there were 18 active and operating organizations, these represent 1.1% of CSOs at the state level. The index of organizations per 100 thousand inhabitants in the municipality is 36.2, that is, almost one more than at the national level and 11 more than at the state level, indicating that organizations are more concentrated in the municipality than in the state.

Table 2. Problems tended to by CSOs in the municipality of Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla (Mexico) in 2021.

Subject	CSO (%)
Development of indigenous communities and centers	76.6
Community development in rural and urban contexts	60
Sustainability and use of natural resources	60
Promotion of gender equality	50
Defense and promotion of human rights	40

Source: elaborated by the authors with information from INDESOL (2021). Organizations attend to more than one problem, which is why the percentages in this table add up to more than 100%.

The nine organizations interviewed are defined by their constitutive act and unique code and represent civil associations. Only four are authorized to receive donations, in the sense that donations are tax deductible. Almost 90% have been carrying out activities in the area for between 10 and 20 years and the main reason for their integration as CSOs was the social context that prevailed. Organizations are limited in terms of human resources; comprising an average of six people as workers. For this reason, the members of the board of directors are involved in the substantive activities of the CSOs, that is, they carry out the planning and decision-making and support the activities carried out by the organization. Given the limited staff, 77.8% of organizations rely on volunteers and 55.5% on permanently hired staff.

The main activities carried out by the organizations, in terms of the problems they address, are education 34%, development and social well-being 22%, environment 22% and defense of human rights 22%. 88.8% of organizations address several problems; however in this study, the four most representative activities or those that stand out, in terms of their experience and impact, are presented. These organizations define their activities in the form of projects and programs, which are aimed at different groups in the following order: women, youth, children and the overall population.

Financial support has been essential for the development of organizations, providing the dynamism necessary to carry out activities within the organizations themselves and with the external beneficiaries. The sources of financing, in order of importance, come from donations made by national private foundations, projects financed by governments and own funds generated by raffles, events and sales of services.

Information and communication technologies represent an opportunity for organizations. This is because they make it possible to create synergies, share useful information, manage resources and disseminate impacts and incidence. All of the organizations interviewed have computer equipment, programs and access to Internet that function appropriately. The others rely on obsolete equipment or inadequate internet.

Concerning the employment of communication tools, Vera *et al.* (2011) and Uriarte and Acevedo (2018) indicate that the emergence of new forms of organization or evolution of organizations has been possible, thanks to the development of information technologies and the internet, which enable remote coordination, interaction, synchronous and asynchronous collaborative work, in addition to overcoming limitations related to space and time.

Areas of institutional strengthening in the structure of Civil Society Organizations

The final goal of institutional development is to strengthen institutions, the latter understood as neither a spontaneous or incidental change; but rather, planned and systematized, whose purpose is to remain relevant and efficacious in terms of activities carried out by organizations. In this section, we present our findings for institutional strengthening in different contexts where the CSO structure participates.

Leadership planning and development

The organizations have clearly defined their mission, vision and shared values, although it is necessary to make adjustments in 33.3% of these. 88.8% consider the political environment and the needs of interest groups, when planning their activities. Based on this context and its mission, the organization's objectives are established. According to the perception of those interviewed, only 55.5% of organizations have a well-developed annual operating plan, a plan which is socialized and serves as a guide for implementing activities. 44.5% have a plan resulting from limited preparation that has not been updated, having an unfavorable impact on the organization's activities and goals. The board of directors is responsible for conducting the planning process in 44.4% of cases, individual departments in 33.3% and the entire team in 22.2%. The planning modalities reported include long-term strategic, semi-annual or annual operations or by activities. Most organizations structure their planning according to two planning methods (Table 3). CSOs must take care of planning processes, in order to develop a well-structured and complete annual operating plan, which is updated at least annually. The plan needs to reflect a long-term outlook, while simultaneously establishing activities to be accomplished in the short term, in order to best meet objectives and establish goals. In this regard, Caldera *et al.* (2017) indicated that planning is an important factor and procedure, as it enables advanced decisions concerning what, when and how to do things. This helps to plan the procedure and guide future of the organization as desired.

These organizations have constructed a formal organizational chart; 55.5% of its structure is aligned with organizational planning and expectations, clearly separating administrative, operational and technical functions. Collaboration between the different work areas and between all participants is encouraged. Members of the organization have been informed of plans of activity and the progressive fulfillment of goals.

Good planning contributes to institutional strengthening, as it enables the establishment of precise goals, the design of more appropriate operational strategies and the application of better management and administration of resources, with transparency and rendering of accounts. Considering the importance of planning, it is necessary that all these organizations fulfill this procedure in an optimal way.

Table 3. Planning methods applied by CSOs in Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla, Mexico.

Planning method	Organizations (%)
Operative and strategic	22.22
Operative and by activity	44.44
Strategic	22.22
By activity	11.11

Source: elaborated by the authors with data from field work.

In relation to leadership, the majority of CSOs agree that the most outstanding characteristics of a good leader are honesty, tolerance, communication, solidarity, respect, empathy and trust. In organizations, the council is made up of personnel from different contexts, which provides greater diversity of opinions and experiences; in the context of decision-making, there is gender equality concerning representation, voice and vote of both women and men.

In 55.5% of organizations, continuous activities are carried out to improve the relationship between members of the organization and promote the leadership of members, among other activities, there are meetings for coexistence and gift exchanges, teamwork, dialogue circles, meetings and self-care workshops. Collaboration between the different departments of the organization is promoted; furthermore, the interviewees point out that there is good cooperation and cohesion between those who make up the organizations; through these activities, collaborative leadership is encouraged.

Association and alliances

Organizations (100%) are linked to municipal governments, educational institutions and other CSOs; and 66.6%, to state and federal governments, respectively. Only 44.4% have links with companies; concerning this aspect, improvement is necessary, as in other countries, such as the United States of America, companies provide resources for the operation of CSOs (International Resource Center for Civil Organizations A. C. CERL, 2023). 33.3% of the organizations have perpetual cooperation and network coordination agreements with other CSOs and the same percentage, cooperate partially or seasonally. 66.7% of organizations participate in national networks to some extent or very sporadically, although they recognize the benefits and advantages of relationships at this level. These organizations mention that the main benefit derived from these relationships is that their activities become more conspicuous, they obtain and exchange learning and methodologies, provide feedback and carry out joint projects, share experiences and link with people who have extensive experience, in order to help solve problems and participate in meetings, where knowledge and other sources of finance can be shared. Some of these advantages are pointed out by the Institute of Communication and Development of Uruguay ICD (2015).

Professionalization of human resources

In relation to human resources, Uribe-Plaza *et al.* (2017) indicated that “people who work in CSOs are distinguished from those who work in other sectors by having ideals and motivation; they mention that these values are an essential prerequisite for entering the third sector.” In addition to people’s ideals and motivation, they must have the expertise, skills and abilities for optimum performance in CSOs. The professionalization of personnel can range from academic training at the diploma, undergraduate or postgraduate level; through the development of expertise and skills, by training or specialization courses, in different contexts.

On average, the organizations' work team is made up of six people. When hiring personnel, 55.5% announce vacancies or job offers publicly, but recognize that this is necessary. 77.8% of CSOs implement induction processes for people who join the work team to familiarize them with the organization's activities. In 88.9% of organizations, a code of conduct exists to identify any behavior that is contrary to the organization's ethics. In addition to the code of conduct, 77.8% establish and implement guidelines to guarantee quality care, by egalitarian and non-discriminatory treatment of the target population. Organizations promote the professionalization of their staff; this is implemented in different ways (Table 4).

The training topics are related to the work of the organizations, however the interviewees mention that it is desirable and necessary to train in finance and fundraising, as well as organizational and accounting aspects.

66.7% of those interviewed mentioned that the individual performance of team members is measured by the achievement of goals and their contribution to the projects and programs, although it is necessary to improve evaluation processes. Currently, 77.7% of organizations design a methodology to diagnose the knowledge and needs of personnel; then, based on this information, an appropriate training plan can be devised.

Internal and external communication in organizations

Communication management in CSOs is a dynamic process that operates transversally in the internal and external spaces of the organization, this increases trust in the medium term and reputation in the long term (Díaz *et al.*, 2015, Herranz, 2010, Herranz, 2007). In this regard, Carldalda (2014) comments that civil society organizations exist to communicate, that is to transmit their values to society; he indicates that communication on the part of organizations is part of their essence, and must be present in all their activities.

Among 88.8% of the CSOs interviewed, a knowledge management policy exists to share results and encourage the exchange of ideas; however it is necessary to improve the strategy to obtain more and better results. In complementary fashion, analysis forums are held periodically to expand knowledge; good results have been achieved in these forums.

CSOs use formal internal communication channels; hold team meetings, reciprocate information, and minutes and agreements are shared according to an established

Table 4. Methods for training members of civil society organizations (CSO) in Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla, Mexico.

Method	Participants (%)
Training sessions	77.8
Training courses	66.7
Graduates	66.7
Postgraduates	44.4

Source: elaborated by the authors with data from fieldwork.

calendar. Means of communication include email, WhatsApp, telephone and personal communication. All organizations have computer equipment with an internet connection and the necessary software to operate.

In 66.7% of the organizations and according to the perception of those interviewed, there are insufficient trained personnel to manage the external communication strategy; 22.2% have trained personnel, but it is necessary to improve their training; and in 11.1% of organizations, there are sufficient trained personnel to carry out efficient external communication.

Communication is important in all areas of the organization; however most CSOs lack an appropriate external communication strategy. In this regard, it has been documented that some CSOs do not have proactive and professional communication management; likewise many of them indicate that they are not efficient in terms of their communication procedures (Plano *et al.*, 2015).

In spite of this, apparently 66.7% of CSOs disseminate the results achieved, systematized knowledge and the exchange of ideas and experiences is encouraged. Regarding assessment of the impact of communication, 55.5% of organizations do so in an elementary and sporadic manner; whereas 33.3% analyze and measure impact; although this methodology needs to be strengthened.

Fundraising and transparency

In general, CSOs in Mexico finance their activities through funds generated by the organizations themselves and receive external resources from private donations and public resources (Rivas, 2016). To obtain resources, organizations develop fundraising plans and have an area dedicated to the search, mobilization and construction of finance (Zícara Foundation, 2012).

In the study municipality, the organizations do not have a fundraising plan or when they do, it is very limited or obsolete. Regarding sources of resources, 77.7% of CSOs have managed to access more than two sources of financing; however, 66.7% do not have a fund with which to operate for a year without financial worries. This reflects that the procurement plans and availability of funds of these CSOs are limited and that they operate almost daily in relation to financial resources. In this regard, Díaz *et al.* (2017) indicated that small CSOs of local origin, such as those in Cuetzalan, frequently suffer from a shortage of financial resources and Hernández *et al.* (2015) added that the main limitation for CSOs to move forward is the lack of economic resources, as well as the difficulty of obtaining resources from government institutions and programs.

In 44.4% of organizations, the main source of financing comes from national and international private foundations; with 33.3% of projects financed by governments and among 22.2%, resources are generated by raffles, events and sale of services. This contrasts with what happens at the national level, where 53% of organizations' income comes from internal or self-generated resources (Grandé, 2015); In Cuetzalan, there are few CSOs that self-generate resources (22.2%); the majority depends on financing from other sources.

44.4% of the organizations interviewed reported having proof of being an authorized non-profit organization; although in the report of authorized recipients of tax free donations, only 33.3% appear (Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público-SHCP, 2022). These organizations receive cash donations of national origin, only one reported receiving resources from abroad.

Regarding transparency in the management of resources, 88.8% of organizations have the mechanisms to guarantee efficiency and transparency in terms of executing budget. All organizations manage an updated electronic accounting system and 88.8% prepare financial reports periodically.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation in organizations are fundamental processes so that activities, projects or programs operate effectively and results are achieved as anticipated. Monitoring is a systematic activity to track the progress of activities and verify whether objectives are being met. This evaluation allows us to determine the impact and efficiency of the actions implemented by the CSO and its contribution to achieving results. In this respect, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, 2021) indicated that the benefits of monitoring and evaluation include the identification of areas of performance that are not working as planned and follow-up concerning the changes implemented to correct these variations, as well as to facilitate learning and decision-making, achieve more efficient, sustainable and systemic interventions and contribute to the understanding of complex social problems.

In the municipality of Cuetzalan, 66.6% of the organizations have a monitoring and evaluation plan; although these are usually very simple and either outdated or only partially implemented. However, all organizations evaluate local problems to carry out planning, but only 77% take this evaluation into account when making decisions; likewise, 88.8% of organizations considered the results from the diagnosis to design work programs. Another indicator that monitoring and evaluation are not carried out optimally, are the written reports of the evaluations of local problems and the impact of the work carried out, as these are very simple or only published sporadically.

Regarding limited monitoring and evaluation, Niño-Martínez (2013) indicated that these processes are not always carried out in a methodical and systematic way, as no cultural evaluation is undertaken. Likewise, he mentioned that social organizations are overworked and do not dedicate enough time to regular monitoring so that consequently, evaluation is carried out in a superficial and hasty manner, decreasing potential to improve procedure. Monitoring and evaluation are processes that contribute to the institutional strengthening of organizations, as they enable problems and opportunities to be detected and informed decisions to be made to redirect the direction of projects and programs. The interrelationship between monitoring and evaluation is important to verify whether objectives are being met and to verify that the needs of the beneficiary population are being fulfilled (Project Concern International, A.C., 2013).

The professionalization of human resources is related to institutional strengthening; staff who improve their skills and abilities perform more efficiently in terms of services. Besides this, organizations improve planning, project management and the activities they carry out. Similarly, they appropriate greater resilience and institutional sustainability, by improving their capacity to adapt to changes in the environment and to the demands of beneficiaries and donor institutions. The problem in this context refers to the lack of a precise diagnosis of training needs and the lack of attention to relevant topics, such as fundraising, organizational models and accounting.

DISCUSSION

The number of organizations per 100 thousand inhabitants in the municipality of Cuetzalan del Progreso is 36.1, which is very similar to the value obtained at the national level and exceeds that of the state of Puebla by 10 organizations. In this municipality, there is a high density of organizations, as social problems are numerous and varied; there are also marginalized and vulnerable groups that need to be served by CSOs. In this regard, Chávez and Gonzáles (2018) indicate that the number of CSOs in Mexico is low, when compared to other countries in the world.

The issues that CSOs address in Cuetzalan del Progreso are consistent with the context that prevails in the territory. In this area, promoting social assistance programs is a priority for bringing development to indigenous peoples and communities and to aid conservation of natural resources and protection of the environment. These issues in Mexico are of vital importance, as indicated by Girardo and Mochi (2012). Considering the indigenous population, Stavenhagen (2006) and Solís and Reyes (2022) point out that indigenous people continue to suffer ethnic, racial and gender discrimination; this social phenomenon is tended to by CSOs. In addition to the above, due to its geographical position and environmental characteristics, the territory represents a great reserve of natural resources and biodiversity, which are being deteriorated by livestock and agricultural expansion; another very urgent problem for local organizations.

In spite of this, institutional strengthening processes depend on the leadership exercised by those responsible for the different areas and the person who is in charge of the organization. Strong leadership results in dynamic institutional strengthening (Egaña, 2015); like the planning process, leadership promotes the comprehensive participation of members in the design of better strategies to achieve the established objectives and goals. Similarly, Hernández *et al.* (2015) found that leadership is essential to achieve greater impact on the population served.

Concerning the issue of relationships and alliances, there are limitations, as not all organizations have cooperative agreements with other institutions and those that do, may not do this adequately, as they lack formal agreements or these may be informal or temporary. In the context of collaboration, the importance of working in alliance with other institutions is recognized by global donors and financiers, who seek to channel resources to beneficiaries, especially in the social areas of - health and education – through

the promotion of alliances, which include both the public and private sectors, as well as organized civil society (Ecuadorian Center for Environmental Law-CEDA, 2015). Establishing alliances between organizations is a strategic alternative for achieving combined success (Díaz *et al.*, 2016).

The interviewees point out that communication is an important aspect for achieving institutional strengthening in CSOs, as it contributes to disseminating the activities and impacts achieved, facilitates the creation of collaborative networks with other CSOs and institutions, and promotes greater citizen participation, while contributing to consolidating the image of the institution abroad. In this regard, Guerrero (2012) comments that the purpose of communication on the part of CSOs is to permanently disseminate to society their achievements, challenges and progress of the organization; furthermore, Herranz (2010) adds that communication provides visibility, notoriety, trust, credibility and reputation to CSOs.

Regarding the financing of CSOs, fundraising and transparency are related to institutional strengthening. A good fundraising strategy, accompanied by transparency and accountability mechanisms, contributes to the safe and effective development of the activities and projects implemented by CSOs, thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organization. Transparency within CSOs benefits the sector itself; the culture of accountability, democracy, transparency and legality, legitimacy, credibility and trust, as well as technical and resource capabilities. However, the main limitation concerning the issue of transparency is that most organizations do not carry out an annual external audit process (Instituto de Comunicación y Desarrollo ICD, 2013 and Kuri *et al.*, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

The organizations interviewed are of civil association type and less than half have proof of being organizations authorized to receive donations that are deductible from income tax. Most are located in the region and have undertaken activities for more than ten years. The issues addressed are education, development and social well-being, environment and defense of human rights. The main sources for its financing come from national private foundations and governments.

In approximately half of the organizations, the fulfillment of their objectives and the favorable impacts on the beneficiaries are compromised, because their operational plan has limitations or is obsolete. Furthermore, most organizations do not have a fundraising plan or manifest deficiencies. This circumstance can lead to a situation of financial restriction or instability.

Organizations promote the training of their human resources and the majority of staff participates in training courses. Notably, the greatest strength of civil society organizations is in their trained human resources and effective leadership, to contribute to the strengthening of other areas, comply with the development of the organization and with the demands of the beneficiaries.

Organizations are conscious of the need for institutional strengthening and have made this issue visible, and have even identified the areas that need to be reinforced. Currently, they

have a set of strengths that have contributed to optimal performance of their activities. However, they must strengthen the areas of planning and fundraising.

NOTE

¹A strengthening agent is one who trains, accompanies or advises an organization, in order to improve its function or results (Center for strengthening organizations of civil society; personal communication).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the members and leaders of the civil associations interviewed; La Esperanza del Mañana, Timosepanpaleuij, Yohualichan, Tijiohtli, Espacio Espiral Totalmanik, Jardín Botánico Xoxoctic, Agencia Timomachtikan, Red de Formadoras Kualinemilis and the House for Indigenous Woman, who, with great openness and trust, provided the information for the study, we offer our recognition.

REFERENCIAS

- Aguilar R. 2006. Las organizaciones de la sociedad civil en México: su evolución y principales retos. Tesis de Doctorado. Universidad Iberoamericana. http://www.bib.uia.mx/tesis/pdf/014753/014753_00.pdf.
- Badillo D. 2020. Organizaciones de la sociedad civil y Gobierno: una relación disfuncional. *El Economista*. <https://www.economista.com.mx/politica/Organizaciones-de-la-sociedad-civil-y-Gobierno-una-relacion-disfuncional-20201108-0001.html>.
- CAF. 2012. Modelo de fortalecimiento institucional. Gómez Palacio, Durango. <http://indesol.gob.mx/cedoc/pdf/L.%20SOCIEDAD%20CIVIL/FORTALECIMIENTO%20DE%20LAS%20OSC/Modelo%20de%20Fortalecimiento%20Institucional.pdf>.
- Caldera D, Ortega MA, Sánchez ME. 2017. Planeación estratégica en organizaciones de la sociedad civil. Un breve análisis para el estado de Guanajuato. *Holos*. 2. 337-348. <https://doi.org/10.15628/holos.2017.4762>.
- Carldalda S. 2014. La comunicación en las organizaciones no lucrativas. https://www.academia.edu/6732559/LA_COMUNICACION_C3%93NN_EN_LAS_ORGANIZACIONES_NO_LUCRATIVAS.
- Carrillo P, García P, Tapia M. 2005. El fortalecimiento Institucional de las OSC en México. Debates, oferta y demanda. *Alternativas y Capacidades A. C.* <https://alternativasycapacidades.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Fortalecimiento-institucional.pdf>.
- Castañeda LM. 2013. Una mirada a las organizaciones de la sociedad civil en México. Pertinencia de su estudio desde la administración. XVIII Congreso internacional de contaduría, administración e informática. México, D. F. <http://congreso.investiga.fca.unam.mx/docs/xviii/docs/16.14.pdf>.
- CEDA. 2015. Un camino para avanzar y para crecer. Guía para el desarrollo de alianzas colaborativas en la sociedad civil. Instituto de Comunicación y Desarrollo Uruguay. <http://www.lasociedadcivil.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2015M-CEDA-alianzas-colaborativas.pdf>.
- CERI. 2023. Financiamiento de Proyectos Sociales de organizaciones de la sociedad civil con fondos privados de Estados Unidos de América.
- Chávez C, González P. 2018. Las organizaciones de la sociedad civil en México. Hacia una reforma de la LFFAROSC. <http://bibliodigitalibd.senado.gob.mx/handle/123456789/4157>.
- CONAPO. 2015. Índice y grado de marginación, 2015. INEGI, Encuesta Intercensal 2015 y Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010. INE. https://apps1.semarnat.gob.mx:8443/dgeia/compendio_2016/archivos/04_pobreza/D1_POBREZA00_11.pdf.
- CONEVAL. 2014. Medición multidimensional de la pobreza en México. *El Trimestre Económico*, LXXXI (321). 5-42.
- CONEVAL. 2015. Informe anual sobre la situación de la pobreza y rezago social 2015. Subsecretaría de Planeación, Evaluación y Desarrollo Regional. https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/38012/Puebla_043.pdf.

- Coria AL, Valderrama AL, Neme O, Rivera IA. 2016. Aplicación del modelo de Lewin a una OSC: cambio organizacional y liderazgo. *Gestión y estrategia*. (49). 45-62. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/83079854.pdf>.
- Girardo C, Mochi P. 2012. Las organizaciones de la sociedad civil en México: modalidades del trabajo y el empleo en la prestación de servicios de proximidad o relacionales. *Economía, Sociedad y Territorio*, XII(39). 333-357. <https://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/est/v12n39/v12n39a3.pdf>.
- De Angoitia R y Márquez MT. 2012. Construyendo madurez institucional en las OSC. Fundación Merced, A.C. <https://fundacionmerced.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Fundacion-Merced-Libro-Fortaleza.pdf>.
- Egaña R. 2015. Fortalecimiento institucional: una mirada desde la experiencia. Artículo preparado para la publicación del CLAD en el XX aniversario del congreso. <https://biblioteca.digital.gob.cl/bitstream/handle/123456789/745/2015%20Fortalecimiento%20Institucional%20-%20Egana.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Equipo Pueblo A.C. 2020. La permanencia y los derechos de las OSC en México en riesgo. DECA, Equipo Pueblo, AC. <https://laoms.org/impacto-restricciones-gobierno-osc/>.
- Díaz MG, Chávez AC, Peña MC, González EJ. 2016. Alianzas estratégicas: una alternativa de permanencia y crecimiento para las organizaciones de la sociedad civil. *Revista Internacional Administración & Finanzas*, 9(4). 1-11. <https://www.theibfr2.com/RePEc/ibf/riafin/riaf-v9n4-2016/RIAF-V9N4-2016-1.pdf>.
- Díaz MG, Chávez AG, Hernández IG. 2015. Comunicación corporativa, visibilidad y transparencia: su impacto en las organizaciones de la sociedad civil en México. *Revista internacional administración & finanzas*. 8(3). 1-13. <http://www.theibfr2.com/RePEc/ibf/riafin/riaf-v8n3-2015/RIAF-V8N3-2015-1.pdf>.
- Díaz MG, Chávez AG, Peña MC, López CP, Lluévanos AA. 2017. Planeación estratégica: procuración de fondos y transparencia en organizaciones de la sociedad civil de México. *Revista Internacional Administración y Finanzas*. 10(6). 65-74. <http://www.theibfr2.com/RePEc/ibf/riafin/riaf-v10n6-2017/RIAF-V10N6-2017-5.pdf>.
- Douard R, Uriza I. 2016. Transformaciones organizacionales en las OSC: el modelo de evaluación de Corporativa de Fundaciones 2012-2015. Corporativa de Fundaciones, A.C. <https://www.cf.org.mx/publicaciones/transformaciones-organizacionales-en-las-osc>.
- Egaña R. 2015. Fortalecimiento institucional: Una mirada desde la experiencia. <https://biblioteca.digital.gob.cl/handle/123456789/745>.
- Fundación Zúcaro A. C. 2012. Fortalecimiento institucional y profesionalización. México D.F. https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/563209/Fortalecimiento_y.pdf.
- Grandé HM. 2015. Entrampado institucional de las Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil en México. https://www.academia.edu/12302118/ENTRAMPADO_institucional_de_las_Organizaciones_de_la_Sociedad_Civil_en_M%C3%A9xico.
- Guerrero M. 2012. ¿Cómo lograr la visibilidad y optimizar la comunicación en las Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil?. CMS Consultores. https://www.cmsconsultores.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/CA-PITULO_III_Visibilidad.pdf.
- Gutiérrez L. 2020. Fortalecimiento Institucional de las OSC en México. COMECSO. <https://www.comecso.com/publicaciones/fortalecimiento-institucional-osc-mexico>.
- Hernández JA, Herrera F, Chávez C. 2015. Capacidades, liderazgos y estrategias de gestión de organizaciones de la sociedad civil en zonas rurales. *Contaduría y administración*. 60(4). 817-835. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cya.2015.07.001>.
- Herranz JM. 2007. La comunicación dentro de las organizaciones no lucrativas. La construcción de la confianza con los ciudadanos. *Razón y Palabra*. (58). <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=199520717023>.
- Herranz JM. 2010. Comunicar la economía social: cómo difundir otra forma de emprender. *ICADE. Revista cuatrimestral de las Facultades de Derecho y Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales*, (80). 303-318. <https://revistas.comillas.edu/index.php/revistaicade/article/view/194/147>.
- ICD. 2013. Transparencia, rendición de cuentas y legitimidad. Instituto de Comunicación y Desarrollo. Montevideo. <http://www.lasociedadcivil.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Manual-Transparencia-rendici%C3%B3n-de-cuentas-y-legitimidad.pdf>.
- ICD. 2015. Guía para el desarrollo de alianzas colaborativas en la sociedad civil. Centro Ecuatoriano de Derecho Ambiental. <http://www.lasociedadcivil.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2015M-CEDA-alianzas-colaborativas.pdf>.
- INDESOL. 2015. OSC en derechos humanos y equidad de género en las comunidades indígenas de cuatro

- estados. Indesol. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320087731_OSC_en_derechos_humanos_equidad_de_genero_en_las_comunidades_indigenas_de_cuatro_estados.
- INDESOL. 2021. Registro federal de las organizaciones de la sociedad civil. <https://datos.gob.mx/busca/dataset/registro-federal-de-las-organizaciones-de-la-sociedad-civil>.
- INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía). 2020. Censo de Población y Vivienda 2020. <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/ccpv/2020/>.
- Kuri A, Layton M, Reyes C. 2006. Transparencia y rendición de cuentas al interior de las OSC. Proyecto sobre Filantropía y Sociedad Civil, ITAM. <http://www.filantropia.itam.mx/docs/nuevos%20documentos%20JUN10/Presentaciones%20en%20pdf/ITAMTRCOSCs.pdf>.
- Niño C. 2013. Guía para el seguimiento y evaluación de proyectos sociales. Project Concern International A.C. <https://indesol.cloud/cedoc/nuevo/basic/web/index.php?r=catalogo%2Fview&id=736>.
- Plano MA, Fernández MG, Maroscia C. 2015. La comunicación en las organizaciones de la sociedad civil en la ciudad de La Plata y zona de influencia. II Congreso Latinoamericano de Administración y V Encuentro Internacional de Administración de la Región Jesuítico Guaraní. <http://sedici.unlp.edu.ar/handle/10915/49438>.
- PNUD. 2019. Informe de desarrollo humano municipal 2010–2015. Transformando México desde lo local. <https://www.mx.undp.org/content/mexico/es/home/library/poverty/informe-de-desarrollo-humano-municipal-2010-2015--transformando-.html>.
- Presidencia de la República. 2019. Circular uno. https://reunionnacional.tecnm.mx/RND_2019/sa/CIRCULAR%20UNO.pdf.
- Project Concern International, A.C. 2013. Guía para el Seguimiento y Evaluación de Proyectos Sociales. Handel Mayer. México, D.F. <http://indesol.gob.mx/cedoc/pdf/I.%20SOCIEDAD%20CIVIL/Elaboraci%C3%B3n,%20Seguimiento%20y%20Evaluaci%C3%B3n%20de%20Proyectos/Gu%C3%ADa%20para%20el%20Seguimiento%20y%20Evaluaci%C3%B3n%20de%20Proyectos%20Sociales.pdf>.
- Quintero CA, Álvarez ES, García-Yepes K. 2017. El proceso de fortalecimiento de las organizaciones sociales: análisis desde la dimensión individual y organizacional del empoderamiento. *Desarrollo, Economía y Sociedad*, 6(1). 35-53.
- Rivas M. 2016. Retos, perspectivas y horizontes de la sociedad civil en México: los caminos hacia una reforma de la LFFAROSC. <http://bibliodigitalibd.senado.gob.mx/handle/123456789/4098>
- Salamon LM, Anheier HK, List R, Toepler S, Sokolowski SW. 1999. La sociedad civil global. Las dimensiones del sector no lucrativo. Fundación BBVA. <https://www.fbbva.es/publicaciones/la-sociedad-civil-global-las-dimensiones-del-sector-no-lucrativo/>.
- Secretaría del Bienestar. 2022. Informe anual sobre la situación de pobreza y rezago social 2022. Unidad de Planeación y Evaluación de Programas para el Desarrollo. Cuetzalan del Progreso, Puebla. https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/698148/21_043_PUE_Cuetzalan_del_Progreso.pdf.
- Serrano A. 2015. La participación ciudadana en México. *Estudios Políticos*, Novena Época. (34). 93-116. <https://www.scielo.org.mx/pdf/ep/n34/n34a5.pdf>.
- SHCP. 2022. Reporte de donatarias autorizadas 2022. <https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/765200/RDA2022.pdf>.
- Solís P, Reyes J. 2022. Discriminación percibida, características etnoraciales y género. Proyecto sobre Discriminación Étnico-Racial en México (PRODER). El Colegio de México. https://discriminacion.colmex.mx/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Documento_de_Trabajo_6.pdf.
- Stavenhagen R. 2006. Los derechos de los pueblos indígenas: esperanzas, logros y reclamos. *In: Pueblos indígenas y derechos humanos*. Mikel B. (coord). Bilbao, España. 14. 21–28. <https://corteidh.or.cr/tablas/24006.pdf>.
- Supo JA. 2020. Metodología de la investigación científica. Sociedad Hispana de Investigación Científica. Bioestadístico EEDUEIRL. Arequipa, Perú.
- Uriarte LM, Acevedo M. 2018. Sociedad red y transformación digital: hacia una evolución de la consciencia de las organizaciones. *Economía industrial*, (407). 35-49. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6535706>.
- Uribe MG, Mendoza PC, Carmona N, Contreras DI. 2017. Diagnóstico del recurso humano en las OSC en el estado de Guanajuato. *Revista Sociología Contemporánea*, 14(13). 16-24. https://www.ecorfan.org/bolivia/researchjournals/Sociologia_Contemporanea/vol4num13/Revista_Sociologia_Contemporanea_V4_N13_2.pdf.

- USAID. 2019. The legal environment for civil society organizations in Mexico. Analysis and recommendations. United States Agency for International Development. https://socialimpact.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/USAID-Civil-Society-Activity_The-Legal-Environment-for-CSOs-in-Mexico.pdf.
- USAID. 2021. Paquete de solución: monitoreo y evaluación. Programa para la sociedad civil de USAID. <https://rutasparafortalecer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/9.-Paquete-de-Solucion-de-Monitoreo-y-Evaluacion.pdf>.
- Vera P H, Labarcés C, Chacón EM. 2011. Influencia de las TIC en las organizaciones: Cambios y aparición de nuevas formas organizativas. *Clío América*, 5(10). 228-244. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5114802>.
- Zamora MG. 2018. El desarrollo organizacional como generador de un cambio significativo en las organizaciones de la sociedad civil. *Revista Extremeña de Ciencias Sociales ALMENARA*. (10). 87-109. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6415690>.