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México's Food Security and Civil Society organizations, A global affair

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As a member of the Public Service Leadership faculty at Capella University and as the Board of Directors Chairman for the Center for World Indigenous Studies I have what I consider to be a distinct academic and professional responsibility to join my international relations experience, experience as an advisor to governments and business, and non-profit organization leadership with my scholarship in the fields of indigenous peoples' food history, food security and climate change. It is in this context that I shall explore in this essay the subject of ***México's Food Security and Civil Society organizations. A global affair.***

I am a firm advocate of the scholar-practitioner model. It is this approach that calls on the scholar to investigate, explore, synthesize and critique questions that advance and expand our understanding of the material and immaterial worlds while systematically formulating and implementing practical applications testing that knowledge in everyday life. While it is perfectly legitimate for scholars to passively seek truth and document their thoughts for use by other scholars to advance knowledge, it is equally important for scholarship to directly serve the social, economic, political and cultural needs of the daily world in which we live.

Sectors identified

Three organizational sectors dominate the local, regional and global social, economic, political and cultural environment in México. Governments such as the *District Federal* and the *municipio* and the local community governments

are called upon to establish policies that promote the welfare of citizens. Their mission is to provide for the common welfare, ensure justice and provide for security. Businesses are called on to create wealth through the application of labor and resources promoting prosperity benefiting citizens to ensure the common good. Civil Society organizations (also known as Non-profit organizations and cooperatives) fill the gaps left by government and business to advance social change, promote social justice and improve the quality of life. Given these rather brief descriptions, admittedly all too brief, one can see that the role of non-profit organizations seems an apt response to the limitations of government and business.

Non-profit or community self-help activities through civil-society institutions have existed since well into the pre-Hispanic ages when the México, Mixe, Zapotec, Nayari, Waxárika and other indigenous nations ruled the México civilization. Clearly, the practice is deeply embedded in the indigenous peoples of México and continues in local communities to this day. While it is true that civil society organizations worked in the 18th and 19th century to support education, promote health, reduce poverty, and contribute to the México's economy they remained a small part of the economy and were rendered even less important during the seventy-one-years of Institutional Revolutionary Party rule. PRI's governmental programs extended deeply into communities throughout México during this period limiting the demand for civic organization.

The México government enacted its law governing the formation and operation of civil society organizations in 1987 though rules had long existed in general. This law provided the basic guidelines for non-profit organizations in México. It is a rather limited guide that demands, by virtue of its limitations, a stronger and better-considered body of laws to support and encourage the non-profit sector.

With the election of President Vicente Fox in 2000 the non-profit sector was more strongly encouraged and indeed promoted. In 2004 the México government enacted the *Law to Encourage the Activities of Civil Society Organizations*. This law established two important mandates: It directed that various governmental secretariats work to

promote citizen participation in community service organizations; and it established a *Registry of Organizations* now administered by the Secretary of Social Development (SEDESOL). In the last ten years, the number of non-profit or civil society organizations working across México has increased to more than 35,000 community-based, regional, countrywide and international organizations. Compared to the number of civil-society organizations in the United States and the European Union, México's civil society sector is clearly in its infancy.

With these important efforts, there still remains much to be done. For the non-profit sector to grow and flourish as it has in other countries, both government and business will need to step forward lending improved laws, strong financial support, and strong support of educational institutions such as UNIVA. The Analytical Report on the Civil Society Index of México produced by *Centro Mexicano para la Filantropia*, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation and the Citizens' Initiative for the Promotion of a Culture of Dialogue documented 35,357 civil society organizations throughout México. Most of these organizations concentrate on social support or aid services, community development and 8% focus on health. More than 10 thousand organizations concentrate on education, research, the environment and human rights. Of all civil society organizations in México just 283 function as philanthropic organizations.

Civil Society organizations in México rely primarily on two sources for revenue: Individual donors, and government. Many have voluntary employees and a little more than a third have an average of five employees. Overall the civil society

sector employees about 1 million people in Mexico and manages an estimated $120.6 billion MxPeso ($8.9 billion dollars). In the United States of America, 1.6 million general non-profit, private foundation, and public charity organizations administer more than $1.8 trillion in revenues. Most of these revenues (70%) are spent by public charities with general non-profits handling about 21% and private foundations managing about 2% of those revenues.

Puerto Vallarta is home to scores of non-profit organizations, non-governmental and other so called "civil society" organizations. Most of these organizations, such as ***Feed the Children Vallarta and School of Champions*** that feeds an estimated 2300 children per day and ***Grupo Ecológia de Puerto Vallarta*** that promotes adoption of dogs and cats and ***Asociación Down*** dedicated to the rehabilitation of Down's syndrome children, are the kinds of organizations that make up the vast majority of non-profit organizations in Puerto Vallarta, México country-wide and across the hemisphere.

Non-Profit globalization

An example of the significance of non-profit organizations in a globalized world is the **United States-México Chamber of Commerce** (USMCOC) established in 1973 as a non-profit business association. It was chartered in Washington, D.C. as a coalition of businessmen established to promote trade, investment, and joint ventures between companies in the United States and in México. The Chamber now has twenty offices (10 in México and 10 in the United States. This non-profit organization works to bridge legal and regulatory differences between the countries as

well as differences between the economic systems, language and cultures.

Another globalized non-profit organization is the **Institute of the Americas** founded in 1983 and established to promote cooperation between the public and private sectors to "improve, the economic, political and social well-being of people in the Americas.

AMEXTRA, the **Mexican Association for Rural and Urban Transformation**, is an example of a México-founded non-profit organization established in 1984 that organized a collaborative association with Medical Teams International in Portland, Oregon, United States. AMEXTRA's mission is to "promote the holistic transformation of marginalized communities in Mexico" providing education workshops on hygiene, healthy diets, appropriate technology, microfinance, emergency services, and infant care in ten (10) states and 350 communities and Mexico City serving more than 100,000 people each year. AMEXTRA's association with Medical Teams International provides funding and resources to local communities.

These examples of international cooperation between civil society organizations demonstrate a growing trend toward globalization for non-profit organizations.

Non-profit organizations in Mexico Globalization then and now

Modern state globalization policies are dramatically changing the demands on civil society organizations throughout the world. Organizations are now deeply engaged in local and global negotiations to identify mitigation and adaptation

strategies for responding to the adverse affects of climate change. Of all the countries in the world, México has become the center of global concern over the security and future availability of critical foods needed to feed many world populations. The combined concerns over the adverse affects of climate change and México's centrality to the global food supply place a special burden on the small but growing Mexican civil society sector. It is this sector that may most productively and seamlessly ensure the continuity of México's food production capacity that is the small farmers and subsistence farmers.

In the decade beginning in 1999 over 80% of the economic losses resulting from weather-related disasters, according to México's 2009 report to the Food and Agriculture Organization, occurred in the agricultural sector. Drought was a major factor in the loss of food production. Most of these losses occurred in industrialized, modern agricultural businesses. To be sure, small farmers and subsistence farmers suffered losses, but at a much smaller proportional rate per hectare planted in a season. Relying on diversification as a short-term reaction to weather changes, replanting and switching to drought resistant "subsistence maize" small farmers and subsistence farmers remained productive. These farmers responded to adverse weather changes, as did their ancestors more than 2000 years ago. México's small farmers and subsistence farmers constitute a legacy borne of the successes of an earlier age that remain in place to generate new and adaptive strains of nutrition dense food that can continue to feed México and the world.

México's indigenous knowledge systems supported an agriculture system that successfully weathered environmental and climatic changes (volcanoes, droughts, frosts for example) that provided sufficient nutrition for a growing population for more than 2000 years. That system built on and elaborated a food production system that saw population growth of more than 7% per year. México's ancient food system engaged in its own globalization project extending its reach from Yucatan to the great lakes and central regions of what is now Canada and the United States as well

as the upper regions of the Amazon in Brazil and throughout what is now the Caribbean. In addition, the peoples who lived in what are now the states of Nayarit, Jalisco, Michoacán, Colima and Guerroro, extended their reach to what is now Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. For

more than three thousand years the globalization project emanating from México promoted wide distribution of maize, manioc, chia, cacoa, pineapple, huazontli, cacuahuti, avocado, jitomati and chilis. The hemisphere benefited enormously from México's food domesticating and food transforming abilities rooted in its ancient cultures. México too was a major beneficiary of this global reach with the introduction of metallurgy from South America's northeastern shores, textiles, and architectural influences.

México's food domestication and transformation heritage, indeed its very capacity to continue as a nursery of human foods is in jeopardy of being destroyed. The loss of human generated food security produced by small farmers and subsistence farmers will endanger not only nutrition dense foods for the Mexican people, but for peoples on virtually every continent who depend on México's continuing food diversification.

México's ancient food generating food system is not now being jeopardized by changing climate, but by human created policies and practices intent on eliminating what some consider a backward and inefficient food production system. Just as the original food support system of México is so needed when the world experiences dramatic climatic changes that threatens food security worldwide, spending and subsidies in support of small farms and subsistence farmers have been cut or completely curtailed. These and other policies privatizing *ejidos* combine to create a risk of collapsing México's fundamental food system.

This need not happen, and indeed, it should not be allowed to happen. Government and

business sectors depend on healthy people to maintain a stable social and economic system. Redefining policy to recognize small farmers and subsistence, as an essential part of a modern and economically secure México will be necessary to ensure its continuity. Civil Society organizations dedicated to enhancing the ancient food producing systems of México providing economic, political and social support to small farmers and subsistence farms will significantly change the present trajectory of decline. México's government and business sectors should recognize the more than 50 thousand small and subsistence farmers and a part of the non-profit sector where they will be allowed to receive public support, business support and government support without taxation. They should be considered part of civil society due to their centrality to the food security system.

The liberalization policies advantage the commercial system, but undermine the very system that promotes effective food security strategies responsive to climate change. In other words, the current liberalization policies are removing the ability of Mexico's indigenous peoples to produce sustainable food sources adapted to the adverse affects of climate change. This is both risky for the health of the population and a major risk for long-term economic stability in Mexico.

Hallie Eakin writes in her recently published book, Weathering Risk in Rural Mexico,

> It is important to recognize that the policy decision to orient public support for production only toward farmers who fall within a narrow definition of commercially viable has significant welfare and economic consequences for those who are by definition excluded. If smallholder agriculture has truly been

> written off, then opportunities to develop viable alternative (rural livelihood strategies must be supported. (Eakin 2006, 202-203)

The modern era of globalization has placed México in the center of decisions about the ability of humanity to survive in the face of changing climate. And, the first consideration is where will food come from? México is and has been the nursery of foods that now feed the world. Continuing its culturally rooted capacity to diversify food sources is only possible if the people who continue to practice the successful methods of farming that adapted foods to changing climates over the last 2000 years become recognized as a major asset to Mexican society. Removing the stigmas associated with small farming and subsistence farming by indigenous peoples is essential, and recognizing this small farming sector that produces 40% of the foods consumed in Mexico as a part of civil society may be the most reasonable approach to ensuring the economic and social stability of México itself.

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