Changing political, social and economic conditions in Mexico have led to the need of understanding why and how people participate, the various ways in which this occurs, and in what measure they contribute to their society. This presents the structure and methodology utilized for the first National Volunteer Survey ever undertaken in Mexico. The Mexican Center for Philanthropy (CEMEFI, 2003) has engaged in a 12 month study that includes: a) a look into the historical (Reygadas, 1998) and cultural factors (Verduzco, 2003) embedded in Mexican society that surround giving and volunteering, b) findings from a national survey on voluntary action and service, c) a series of case studies on CSOs that add a qualitative understanding of the sector, and finally d) theoretical and empirical (Butcher, 2003) research that reveals a comprehensive outlook on both formal and informal volunteer participation throughout the country. One of the main hypotheses is that, as in the case of the economy, there is a large proportion of informal participation, which in a way, explains the subsistence of almost half of the country’s population living in extreme poverty. The results of the study provide an informed basis for decision making in the government public policy arena and reveal ways for established CSOs to promote and enable citizens for more effective participation in community issues.

This is the first time a study of such nature has been attempted due to the lack of reliable information on the Sector as a whole and on volunteer participation in particular. The National Statistics Agency, INEGI does, however, provide basic demographics on labor and on household expenditures. One of the objectives of the study was for INEGI to include several key questions on voluntary participation in their surveys, to subsequently provide ongoing statistical information for the public at large. Other sources of information for the study include the latest government information on citizen participation (ENCURP, 2003) research from national economic and social science institutions, practitioners and informed individuals from the Third Sector. Although Mexico was one of the countries involved in the Johns Hopkins Comparative 22 country study, (Salamon & Anheier, 1966) the rapidly changing social and political situation of the country requires new information on the size, growth and nature of the Sector, and specific information on participation, which implies continuous refurbishing, updating and ongoing research.

The social and economic implications of voluntary action are also discussed in this paper since participation, solidarity and voluntarism are some of the important sources for the creation

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1 The questions for this survey were influenced on other volunteer studies performed in the US in the Giving and Volunteering series of the INDEPENDENT SECTOR and on other Latin American surveys such as the most recent Peruvian study, (Portocarrero, F., Sanborn, C., Millán, A., Loveday, J., (2002) , still in process, since similar cultural elements are present from this geographic region.

2 Verduzco, G., (2003). Organizaciones del Sector No Lucrativo: Visión de su trayectoria en México, México: CEMEFI/COLMEX. This book presents a perspective on the history of CSOs in Mexico, also providing a historical explanation on motivation and participation in Mexican civil society. Many other authors, have studied paternalistic patterns of participation and citizen behavior throughout Mexican history.

3 A recent study with Mexican volunteers on a face to face interaction with recipients.

of social networks and trust, basic ingredients in the formation of the social capital (Putnam, 2000) within any given country. The numbers of participants, their economic contribution in volunteer hours in the formal and informal ambiance, plus the ways in which individuals become responsible citizens become key issues in the search of solutions to the country’s utmost needs: poverty, inequality, resource distribution, governance and civic participation.

References:

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5 AMEVAC (Mexican Association of Volunteers) This organization has studied voluntary action in Mexico City and the metropolitan area.