

## ABSTRACT

### **NGOs PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC POLICY MAKING AND SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT IN ARGENTINA: THE SOCIAL MONITOR INITIATIVE**

Although NGOs have a lasting tradition in Argentina (pioneer institutions being active in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) it is in recent years that they have become visible and recognized, beginning to gain increasing importance and voice during the transition from dictatorship to democracy. Moreover, recent public opinion surveys related to the credibility of local institutions demonstrates churches and NGOs receive the higher percentages of credibility. It is apparent that in these difficult times people are more and more concerned about better ways to increase social control over public expenditures to avoid corruption and increase effectiveness of social programs. During the recent economic recession and social crisis, citizen's response through associations and collective expressions has occurred. Currently, interest to contribute to public policies and fight against poverty has increased.

The World Bank, IADB and UNDP jointly launched and supported the initiative of the Social Monitor in 2003. The SM is a consortium of fifty NGOs, aimed at developing and implementing mechanisms for social accountability of social emergency programs in the country. The purpose of the eight-month pilot project was to develop the capacity and provide forums for participation of the beneficiaries of the social emergency programs to ensure the services provided meet the needs and satisfaction of those directly impacted by them, and corruption practices are detected and controlled by civil society. The primary objective of the Social Monitor was to assess social programs' achievement of results, impact on beneficiaries, transparency and accessibility of information. Two complementary group of activities were defined as central to attain the SM goals: a) to produce a relevant and pertinent amount of information related to social programs being monitored, and b) to strengthen NGOs technical and institutional capacities to monitor government programs, by means of networking activities, training activities for volunteers, co-operation agreements with universities.

The data gathering tools were focus groups and interviews with delivery units and beneficiaries, participatory observation in delivery units, toll-free phone number to receive claims and complaints.

The paper aims to present the conclusions of the pilot phase of the project, lessons learned and contributions to research and practice aimed at the development of social capital and NGOs organizational capacities to participate in public policy making in Argentina and other LAC countries.

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