The politics of civil society building: European private aid agencies and democratic transitions in Central America
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Four Aid Chains in Central America

Assessing Civil Society Building Performance

The dynamics of civil society building with private foreign aid resources will now be analysed in more detail by examining several aid chains in Central America. The analysis of individual aid chains is an essential (but given their singular character certainly not ideal) method for drawing broader conclusions about the achievements of private aid interventions aimed at speeding up democratic transitions. There are many risks involved, some of which were already mentioned in Chapter 3. Two appear to be critical. One is the risk of downplaying the importance of unique local context variables; aid chains primarily dealing with civil society building therefore should be carefully analysed within the specific socio-political context of national democratic transitions. The other risk is the temptation to generalise findings of individual (and unique) aid chains towards overall agency impact. Too often, aid performance assessments have been based on anecdotal evidence which in the end appeared to be either poorly researched or even underpinned the opposite of what had actually been intended to be proven. A careful selection and analysis of case studies in which the unique nature of each intervention is preserved but which simultaneously offers opportunities for broader generalisations is therefore a key challenge.

Four criteria were used to select a number of case studies for assessing the role of private aid agencies during democratic transitions in Central America: the character of intervention, the level of perceived success, geographical distribution and the length of intervention. By discussing these criteria it will become clear why they have been used. Five intervention strategies that contribute to civil society building were identified in previous chapters: strengthening organisational capacity, fostering alliances between societal actors, strengthening intermediary channels in civil society, providing access to transnational political space and contributing to building citizenship. It was argued that some intervention strategies might be applied simultaneously, often in combination with poverty alleviation strategies. The central criterion for selecting the Central American case studies was that the aid chains contain a primary component of any of these five civil society building strategies. As the stages of early and mid-transition were central to the analysis, it was obvious that the focus should be on those intervention strategies that are most appropriate to these two stages. Consequently, organisations were selected when they emphasised either fostering alliances or strengthening intermediary channels, preferably with a component of international advocacy.

A second selection criterion was that organisations be perceived by donors (and also by local experts) as 'outstanding performers'. At first sight, this might seem a
controversial point as it would automatically bias the assessment towards 'success stories'. But as was explained in Chapter 3, by selecting relatively successful organisations outcome and impact can be expected to be more clear and easier to determine. An additional advantage is that well-performing organisations usually have clearer objectives which are not continuously changing over time. The problem is, however, how to define 'success'. Private aid agencies were therefore requested to list those Central American counterparts that in their perception, based on recent and qualified external evaluations, had been 'fairly successful' in meeting their immediate objectives. An advantage of this method was that the use of evaluation reports provided valuable reference material for the impact analysis, as they often contained key baseline data.

Since the entire Central American region is the geographical focus of the research, choices had to be made about which countries to select for case study analysis. As was explained earlier, I decided to take more than one country in order to facilitate comparative analysis and increase the validity of the final conclusions. This was also logical from a (European) donor perspective, in which Central America is commonly categorised as a regional entity. However, choosing five or even seven countries (if Panama and Belize are included) would have been too ambitious. Three countries were therefore selected in which private aid interventions have been primarily concerned with civil society building and contributing to democratic transition: Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. It was also decided to include 'regional civil society networks' in the analysis, as these important counterparts of private aid agencies have performed a key role in linking up national civil society coalitions at the Central American level.

A final selection criterion was that the organisations had depended for the majority of their income on financial support from European private aid agencies for a substantial period of time, preferably starting in the 1980s and embracing at least two transition stages. The reason for choosing this long time frame was in order to get a better understanding of the relation between aid interventions and democratic transitions, but also because impact was defined earlier as 'sustainable social change over a longer period of time'. An additional advantage of trying to find aid interventions that had started in the 1980s was that this could contribute to understanding the impact of the 'political watershed' in Central America of 1989-90 on the dynamics of private aid interventions.

These four criteria were discussed with fifteen major private aid agencies in Europe. On the basis of this survey, a shortlist was made of eight organisations, all well known in the Central American region. During preliminary fieldwork, all the organisations were visited and consulted about their ability and willingness to participate in the present study. Several major private aid donors of each organisation also were requested to contribute to the study by providing documents and other key background information. Finally, the shortlist was reduced to four organisations, based on a number of practical criteria: the availability of sources, the willingness to collaborate, the diversity of private aid agencies involved, the
diversity of aid intervention strategies, and the feasibility of realising fieldwork. As a result, the following four case studies are presented in this chapter: the Honduran human rights organisation CODEH, the Salvadorean peace alliance CPDN, the Guatemalan indigenous development NGO FUNDASEDE and the regional network of peasant organisations ASOCODE.

6.1 Defending human rights in Honduras: CODEH

During the 1980s, the Honduran human rights committee CODEH was the public face of the excluded opposition in Honduras. Or as one observer asserted, CODEH not only symbolised the opposition to military rule and occupation by foreign troops, it was in fact the only opposition. CODEH often is mentioned in one breath with the name of one of its founders who has served as president ever since: Ramón Custodio. A medical doctor, Custodio, together with four other intellectuals, was alarmed by the increased militarisation of Honduras starting in 1981, a by-product of the US response to civil wars in neighbouring countries. Their concern about the sudden rise in human rights violations eventually led in 1983 to the foundation of the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Honduras (CODEH).

The newly-elected Reagan administration decided in 1981 to convert Honduras into a buffer zone for US-led counter-insurgency operations to support the Salvadorean army in their struggle against the FMLN and to destabilise the Sandinista government in Nicaragua by arming and training counter-revolutionary forces. The US embassy in Tegucigalpa was upgraded under the leadership of Ambassador Negroponte, a diplomat with long-standing experience in counter-insurgency warfare. Deployment of several hundred US military advisers was combined with huge increases in military aid, making Honduras the second highest recipient of US military assistance in Latin America by 1982. Critics ironically spoke of the ‘Pentagon republic’ (Lapper and Painter 1985). In 1980, General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez was appointed commander of the national police forces FUSEP, automatically becoming the chief of the intelligence branch DNI. General Alvarez was an anticommunist hardliner, known for his admiration of the Argentinian military rulers and a firm supporter of the National Security military doctrine. The Reagan administration considered him to be a reliable partner in its plan to reshape Honduras into a military stronghold for low intensity warfare in Central America. Alvarez developed a close relationship with Roberto Suazo Córdova, Liberal Party candidate for the 1981 presidential elections. After Suazo was elected, Alvarez Martinez not only became the new commander-in-chief of the armed forces, but also managed to marginalise his main military rivals.

The trinity Negroponte-Alvarez-Suazo (in that order) virtually ruled Honduras over the next two years, a period in which human rights violations rapidly increased. As chief of the national intelligence service DNI Alvarez had been responsible for persecuting Salvadorean refugees allegedly linked to the FMLN. His
philosophy (inspired by his training in Argentina) was based on ‘decapitation’: destroying ‘subversive movements’ by eliminating their (potential) leaders. The first clandestine cemetery was discovered in September 1981, with bodies that had been previously tortured. Reports on selective disappearances, systematic torture and political assassinations by death squads and military officers suggested that the (Argentinian-style) National Security Doctrine had been officially adopted. Selective repression of Honduran political activists was combined with collective repression against militant popular organisations (Funes 1995). It seemed paradoxical: the start of a democratically-elected government was paralleled by a sudden increase in human rights violations.

Activities of CODEH

In this atmosphere of U.S.-led militarisation of Honduran society, combined with counter-insurgency operations against political and popular organisations, two human rights organisations were founded: CODEH and COFADEH, the committee of families of the detained-disappeared. Both organisations denounced human rights violations committed by the national security forces FUSEP, the national intelligence agency DNI and the death squad Batallon 3-16. This battalion was set up by Alvarez in the late 1970s as a special department of investigations and was converted in 1981 into an instrument for kidnapping political opponents who were interrogated in clandestine prisons and often ‘disappeared’. A special section of Batallon 3-16 was recruited from former members of Somoza’s National Guard and trained by Argentinian military advisers with CIA support. The worst human rights abuses of the 1980s in Honduras were attributed to this death squad, which could flourish with impunity in a militarised society with tacit U.S. approval.

CODEH documented and denounced these violations to the security forces, to the U.S. embassy and to the judiciary, but they generally refused to take appropriate action. Therefore, international organisations were informed and with press conferences and street protests CODEH tried to speak out in public against these human rights abuses. In its early years, CODEH operated as a small and informal committee publishing a weekly bulletin and putting advertisements in local newspapers. In this period, Custodio was the only publicly visible member of CODEH in order to reduce the risk of retaliation. The worst abuses occurred between 1981 and 1984, the period in which General Alvarez was commander-in-chief. In late 1983 CODEH was formally founded as a committee, although the government refused to accept its legal status until the mid-1990s. The idea of a permanent national committee was earlier launched by the Jesuit priest Padre Guadalupe, who had founded several local human rights groups linked to the Church. This network of local human rights groups would form the basis of the institutionalised CODEH, which opened a small office in the Honduran capital Tegucigalpa.

After 1984, the activities of CODEH were extended from documenting and denouncing human rights violations to providing legal assistance and developing
educational activities on human rights. An assembly elected a national directorate for two years, of which for security reasons only the president (Custodio) and the vice-president would be publicly known. In 1985 a lawyer was employed to provide legal assistance. With support from private foreign aid additional staff-members were appointed to manage CODEH's main activities: documentation, press conferences, legal assistance, human rights education and publications (including audio-visual productions). The number of local committees rapidly increased from a few dozen in the early 1980s to over 150 groups nationwide in the mid-1990s. However, the total number of employed staff remained relatively limited: from a handful in the 1980s to 24 in 1996. Regional offices were opened in several departments in the early 1990s to service these local groups. Many local committees were run by priests, nuns and lay-priests, although the hierarchy of the Catholic Church refused to work with CODEH. The bishops generally took sides with the armed forces and Custodio was considered to be a communist radical who abused CODEH for his 'subversive political purposes'. Although Custodio never concealed that he was an advocate of progressive change in Honduras, his strongest tactical weapon was probably that he carefully prevented CODEH from losing its independence by refusing to link it to any political party.

The existence of local human rights committees in virtually all major municipalities in the country, linked to the national office in Tegucigalpa, meant that CODEH was better organised than any other organisation of the opposition. These committees often consisted of a combination of local community leaders and local lay-priests, so-called celebradores de la palabra. As they were elected by the community, these committees had a certain legitimacy but (for security reasons) still kept a low public profile. The Honduran bishops, aware of local collaboration by priests with CODEH, at some point in the mid-1980s tried to establish parallel Church human rights groups at parish level. But they soon discovered that this initiative would only further legitimise CODEH, as local parishes were the building blocks of the committee. A separate Church organisation for defending human rights as emerged in neighbouring countries therefore remained absent in Honduras.

Local human rights groups performed several functions for CODEH. They served as an antenna for detecting local human rights violations, which were reported to the main office or denounced to local authorities. For this purpose CODEH trained members to become procuradores populares. Another function was to improve the knowledge of local communities about their political and civil rights. Additionally, those communities most affected by the abuses of local security forces started to become better organised. There existed, however, a considerable gap between the national committee and these local groups, who were barely represented at the national level and complained about the lack of feedback, information and resources. The strict hierarchy of CODEH resulted in a serious crisis in 1989 when a majority of the staff members left the organisation after disagreements with Custodio about his centralised way of leading the organisation. In response, CODEH
was reorganised: six regional assemblies were founded in the early 1990s, each with their own office, to bridge the gap between the national and the local committees. More volunteers joined the organisation and the main office gradually came to be staffed by professionals.

**Private foreign aid to CODEH**

Since its foundation in 1981 CODEH has depended on financial support from private aid agencies, mostly from Europe. The *World Council of Churches* was the first to support CODEH. After the office was opened in 1984 the *Ford Foundation* financed the development of a documentation centre and later the Central American human rights work of CODEHUCA (of which Custodio also was a president in the 1980s). Due to CODEH’s close relationship with the Catholic Church at local levels, several European church-related private aid agencies decided to support CODEH’s activities after the mid-1980s. Among them were *Christian Aid*, *Brot für die Welt*, *CEBEMO*, *DanChurchAid*, *HERS* and *Diakonia*. The only non-church organisations supporting CODEH were the *Ford Foundation* and *OXFAM-UK/I*. In the 1990s support also was received from official agencies, such as the European Union and the Dutch ministry for development cooperation. The Dutch agency *CEBEMO* (renamed *Bilance* in 1996) has been one of CODEH’s major funders since 1985 and therefore has been selected for closer examination.

*CEBEMO* started supporting CODEH because of recommendations from Jesuits working with local human rights groups. They claimed that CODEH was a vital national channel for coordinating the denunciations of human rights violations and making these public to national and international bodies. Initially, *CEBEMO* only financed selected activities of CODEH (audio-visual department, press and publication department), but decided after some years to also provide institutional support. Respect throughout the country for his integrity and the international fame of Custodio (who had received various human rights awards) gave *CEBEMO* a ‘low-risk warranty’, even though CODEH’s lack of administrative capacity was, given the large number of foreign funders and the diversity of their activities, admitted to be one of its weaknesses. But *CEBEMO* argued that CODEH played a crucial role in Honduras, not only by denouncing human rights violations, but also by organising workshops and training courses to make people aware of their basic political and civil rights. *CEBEMO* considered CODEH to be the most important opponent to military impunity by effectively documenting human rights abuses at the local level (churches, peasant unions, women’s organisations) and channelling this material to the national level.

*CEBEMO*’s role as external funder was perceived as positive by CODEH. Contrary to some other agencies that had put conditions upon them, such as more participation of women in leading positions or more transparency in financial reports, *CEBEMO* generally did not want to interfere in internal policy discussions. By accepting the broad framework of CODEH’s structure and policies, *CEBEMO* was a passive provider of financial resources. Only because of policy restrictions by the
Dutch government did the agency have to turn down requests to finance second and third generation human rights activities, which were started by CODEH in the early 1990s. *Diakonia*, the other major funder of CODEH, took a more active position by searching for ways to improve the organisational structure and the financial sustainability of the committee. But this was a difficult task, as will be shown later.

- **Achievements of CODEH**

  The major achievement of CODEH was that it managed to break the silence in Honduras about disappearances, political assassinations, torture, abuse of power by security forces and the absence of justice. More generally, it managed to reveal the shortcomings of the political and judicial system. To use White's (1994) terms, CODEH performed civil society’s ‘disciplinary role’ *vis-à-vis* the Honduran state. It proved with numerous cases that an elected government tolerated impunity and that democratic elections had not automatically contributed to democratising the political system. CODEH served as the unofficial opposition during the 1980s and it offered legal and moral protection to those popular sectors that were persecuted by the armed forces, intelligence services, foreign military advisers and *contras*. As journalist Manuel Torres observes: ‘CODEH has been an independent pressure group, a voice looking beyond current events and guiding us towards what should be the great objectives of consolidating civil society in our country.’

  CODEH’s central goals throughout its existence have been to educate the Honduran people in defending and promoting human rights, to promote the defence of these rights without distinguishing between race, political ideas, social conditions or engaging in other forms of discrimination, and to work against impunity of human rights violators. There is no doubt that CODEH has been quite successful in all three areas. Numerous examples can be given of CODEH’s achievements: disappeared persons that reappeared due to CODEH’s pressure, military officers who were successfully charged and convicted in trials, and thousands of Hondurans that were trained in human rights workshops, to name a few. But what was accomplished with these activities? Did they contribute to strengthening (or as Torres argues, to ‘consolidating’) civil society? Did the ‘watchdog’ role of CODEH influence the balance between the state and civil society? And did CODEH eventually surpass its disciplinary role by simultaneously playing a (temporary) intermediary role in political society by mobilising the Honduran opposition? Before addressing these questions, it can be helpful to look at two key examples in which CODEH managed to discipline the Honduran state, especially the armed forces.

  The first example is a legal case of the 1980s against the Honduran state to determine its responsibility for the disappeared, which was presented by CODEH to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. The victims were Manfredo Velásquez and Saúl Godínez, two Honduran trade union activists who disappeared in the early 1980s after having been arrested by security forces. As their relatives had been unsuccessful in getting legal confirmation of their arrests, they turned to
CODEH who filed petitions to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights to investigate these cases. Requests from the Commission to the Honduran government to provide information and to investigate the cases were not satisfactorily handled. Therefore, in 1986 the Commission submitted the cases to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The trial that followed was unique, as it was the first time that a government was brought before a court on charges of death squad activity. The Court heard a large number of witnesses in relation to disappearances between 1981 and 1984. One witness was a former interrogator of the Battalion 3-16 death squad, who confirmed the existence of clandestine prisons to interrogate and torture suspects of subversive activity. Kidnappings had been selectively and well prepared, using civilian vehicles with tinted glass and false license plates. The testimonies made clear that the government systematically had denied detentions and that no formal arrest warrants had been issued (Hydén 1996). During the hearings in late 1987, CODEH members received several death threats and posters with their photographs appeared in the streets with the text 'promoters of subversion'. Custodio, who was also heard as a witness, publicly denounced the existence of a plan to kill him. Ten days later, the vice-president of CODEH, Miguel Angel Pavón (who also testified before the Court) was assassinated by a death squad.

In July 1988 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled that the government of Honduras had been responsible for the disappearance of Velásquez. The same conclusion was reached in the Godinez case, six months later. The Court found that enough evidence was presented to conclude that between 100 and 150 persons had disappeared in Honduras in 1981-84, and that this had been a deliberate and systematic policy carried out by the Honduran security forces. The government of Honduras was sentenced to compensate the relatives of the disappeared, to investigate all other forced disappearances of the 1980s and to identify and punish those responsible. The sentence of the Court was a precedent in international law for it was the first time ever that a government was convicted for deliberately 'disappearing' its citizens. In January 1989, a few days after the Court ruled in the Godín case, retired General Álvaro Martínez (responsible for the systemic disappearances in the early 1980s) was assassinated in Tegucigalpa. Although the government blamed the murder on the left-wing opposition, the professional way in which the execution was carried out suggested a revenge by his former colleagues.

The unprecedented sentences handed down by the Inter-American Court were a major success for CODEH. The Azcona government, the armed forces and the US embassy were of course very unhappy with this outcome, and Custodio continued to be threatened as he was held responsible for the wave of violence and killings that followed the Court ruling. Presidential candidate Callejas promised an amnesty for military officers who had been involved in human rights violations, which was effectively decreed in 1991 after his election. Nevertheless, gradual changes became visible during the early 1990s in the Honduran judicial system. A national Commissioner for the Protection of Human Rights was appointed by the government in
1992 to monitor human rights violations. Similar ombudsmen had been installed in neighbouring countries as part of the Esquipulas peace plan. The Honduran Commissioner Leo Valladares published a report in which 179 disappearances since 1980 were documented (Comissonado 1994). It was the first time the government officially admitted its responsibility for the disappearances. A special prosecutor for human rights was appointed in 1995 to investigate these cases, followed by ‘exhumations’ of the disappeared. Although the new political context was conducive for these achievements, they could be largely attributed to CODEH’s active campaign against impunity which was not paralleled in any other Central American country.24

The second example in which CODEH (together with several other organisations) played a prominent role in defending human rights is the ‘Riccy Mabel case’. It started in July 1991 when an anonymous phone call led to the discovery of the dead body of a 17-year old girl, with signs of torture and rape. The victim was identified as Riccy Mabel Martínez, a student who had visited a military base two days earlier to request the release of her boyfriend from military service. Up to that point, Riccy seemed to be just another (female) victim of a cruel homicide by common criminals that had been shocking Honduran society for over a decade.25 However, fellow-students were convinced that army base commander Colonel Castillo, and possibly other senior officers at the military base, had been involved in Riccy’s violation and execution.26 A witness declared that he had seen her leaving the base, where she received a ride from a non-military vehicle.

The next day, two thousand students demanding justice marched to the Supreme Court building, where CODEH’s president Custodio addressed the crowd and urged military and judicial authorities to conduct a transparent investigation and to bring the assassins to trial. Meanwhile, a military spokesman quickly rejected the possibility of military involvement in the cruel homicide, and denounced press reports (which did suggest this involvement) as part of a campaign to discredit the armed forces. Similar declarations by the chief of the armed forces, General Discua, only added to the suspicion that top military officers were responsible.27 Five days after the murder, Sergeant Ilovares ‘voluntarily’ presented himself to the investigating judge and confessed that he alone had committed the homicide. But Ilovares’s declarations were full of contradictions and he soon admitted that he had been pressed by his superiors to plead guilty, in order to protect others. Even so, a spokesman for the investigating police forces FUSEP declared that he considered the case to be resolved, and that it was proven that no superior army officer had been involved. Gradually it became clear that military officers were indeed involved and that the armed forces had tried to cover up the case, just as they had done in previous murders over many years.

Relatives of Mabel turned to CODEH for legal support and requested that the military officers under suspicion be subjected to DNA tests. A civilian judge ordered the arrests of Colonel Castillo and Captain Andino, two high-ranking officers at the military base, but the National Police Commander refused to effectuate this
warrant. He asserted that a civilian judge had no jurisdiction over active military officers and that they would be tried by a military tribunal. CODEH proclaimed publicly that the Supreme Court of Justice was now confronted with a historical decision that would show where the real power resided in Honduras: with the military or with the civilian authorities. After mediation by the US ambassador, civilian and military judicial authorities agreed to initiate a combined investigation, in which the FBI would examine DNA samples of the suspects and the victim. Six weeks after the crime Colonel Castillo and Captain Andino ‘voluntarily’ retired from military service and were sent to prison, finally opening the way for a civilian trial.

The court case that followed was exceptional. It was the first time ever that senior military officers were tried by a civilian judge in Honduras. It was also the first time the US embassy fully endorsed a trial against military officers, which illustrated that the tide was turning in Honduras. The combination of an innocent female student from a poor family who was brutally raped and killed by military officers, and the awkward efforts by the armed forces to frustrate a transparent trial, turned the Riccy Mabel case into a symbol of the struggle against military impunity. Street protests in various cities by student, women’s and human rights organisations to rally against impunity showed that the silent majority of civil society had lost its fear of the armed forces. The Honduran mass media were instrumental in the construction of a combative public opinion against military impunity by sustaining a constant stream of information on the trial and publishing every detail of new evidence provided by CODEH and the lawyer during press conferences. An editorial in the daily newspaper El Tiempo welcomed the ‘valuable and critical participation of different sectors of civil society [...] as the only way to safeguard the confidence of the people in our judicial system’.

In July 1993, Colonel Castillo was sentenced to sixteen-and-a-half years imprisonment for the rape and murder of Riccy Mabel, while Sergeant Ilovares was condemned to ten-and-a-half years for murder. The DNA tests had served as the main evidence against both officers. All the national newspapers published what they called ‘the historical sentence’ against top military officials. The fuero militar, in which the armed forces managed their own system of justice, was falling apart. Shortly before the judgement, Congress restricted military jurisdiction only to crimes committed by military officers in active service, thus enabling civilian jurisdiction over common crimes committed by the military. The military-led intelligence service DNI was abolished and replaced by a civilian-controlled body for criminal investigations. A year later, Congress amended the constitution to abolish forced military recruitment after strong pressure by popular organisations. In 1995 it was decided to bring the military-led security forces FUSEP under civilian control. What remained unresolved, however, was the prosecution of those responsible for disappearances and other human rights violations in the 1980s.

CODEH’s role in breaking the silence on disappearances in Honduras and overcoming the widespread fear in civil society of the armed forces is well illustrated
by the previous two examples. During early transition, CODEH performed a
disciplinary role within civil society _vis-à-vis_ the state, a ‘watchdog’ role, as it was
the main voice of opposition to the armed forces and US military presence during
the 1980s. By systematically denouncing human rights violations, CODEH managed
to break the silence about the internal situation in Honduras in a period in which
international attention focused overwhelmingly on Nicaragua and El Salvador.
CODEH was not liked by the US State Department as it transmitted denunciations
via international human rights groups and private aid agencies to the international
media, thereby accusing the Reagan administration of tolerating military impu­
niety. The successful outcome of the Inter-American Court cases increased CODEH’s
international recognition, but more important, it also boosted its national profile.
The armed forces, the government and the US embassy could no longer ignore the
existence of human rights violations in Honduras.

When the tide was turning in Central America in late 1989, and US policy
gradually changed to post-Cold War rhetoric, civil society in Honduras started to
‘open up’. Peasant organisations and trade unions rallied against the neoliberal
austerity measures of the new Callejas government with an alliance established in the
_Plataforma de lucha._ Although it virtually paralysed the country with national
strikes in June 1990, the _Plataforma_ never managed to consolidate itself as an
intermediary alliance in political society. Despite temporary unification of the
marginal left-wing parties, ideological and personal differences soon dominated this
promising initiative that presented an alternative programme to the neoliberal
policies pursued by the two traditional political parties. CODEH kept its distance
from the _Plataforma de lucha_ as Custodio considered it to be a ‘limited project’.
The fact that other initiatives to forge concerted action between popular sectors –
such as the Coalition of Popular Organisations (CCOP) – had been marginal or
unstable, gave more prominence to CODEH’s actions on human rights issues.

Despite the existence of a nationwide network of local committees and broadly
supported demands to stop military impunity, during the stage of mid-transition
CODEH did not really play a pronounced intermediary role in political society on
this issue, nor even in the Riccy Mabel case which had generated the broadest
public rejection of military impunity since the 1980s. One of the obstacles was that
Custodio was reluctant to share the coordination of the movement against impu­
nity with other organisations in civil society, such as student and women’s associ­
ations who took the lead in street protests and public mobilisations. While civil
society was opening up and had lost its fear in the trials against the top military
officers, CODEH was unable to change its function after the leading role it had
played in the 1980s. From a voice of the opposition, it was not prepared to trans­
form itself into a broader alliance of societal actors. CODEH even feared losing its
traditional watchdog function, given Custodio’s negative reactions upon the
installation of the governmental Commissioner for Human Rights (the ombuds­

In 1993 the Honduran democratic transition was about to enter the stage of late
transition. It was the year of presidential elections, in which disappearances and military impunity became key electoral issues. A consensus emerged on the need to reform judicial and police institutions, and shortly after the elections the official report on disappearances was published. The election of President Reina (a personal friend of Custodio) in late 1993 marked the beginning of a period in which a range of key reforms were effectuated. CODEH was granted legal status, which had been repeatedly rejected by previous governments. CODEH’s working style had gradually changed from public protest and legal action to policy reform and quiet diplomacy. Custodio envisaged transforming CODEH into a ‘civic movement’ acting as a ‘moral pressure group’ on a range of human rights issues. He considered CODEH to no longer be part of the opposition. Instead, he preferred to work more closely with the government, although this transformation from a persecuted watchdog in the 1980s to a legalised advisory group in the 1990s proved to be a difficult process. One problem was that Custodio refused to democratise the internal structure of CODEH. Another was that the government’s Human Rights Commissioner was gradually taking over many tasks previously handled by CODEH.

In sum, CODEH played a major role until 1989, and to a lesser extent up to 1993. Its systematic denunciations undoubtedly contributed to restricting the power of the military and brought the issues of disappearances, extrajudicial killings and impunity to the top of the national political agenda of the 1990s. CODEH’s active role in the first Ad Hoc Commission, which made recommendations to the government on police and judiciary reforms, was a logical and successful follow-up to these denunciations. By effectively limiting the autonomous powers of the armed forces, new space was indirectly created for civil society. However, CODEH was reluctant to take the lead in translating these new opportunities into the forging of alliances of societal actors to open up space in political society. CODEH’s crucial political role clearly diminished during the period of late transition, which was partly due to internal frictions, as will be analysed below.

**CODEH in the aid chain**

CODEH’s success in restricting military power can be attributed for a considerable part to the charismatic leadership of Ramón Custodio. He personified the struggle for the defence of human rights in Honduras, and it was no coincidence that the armed forces declared him as their number one enemy. Despite numerous death threats and attempts to eliminate Custodio, he continued his verbal attacks on the military hierarchy when the rest of civil society observed a fearful silence. By combining political instinct, courage and stubbornness, Custodio built CODEH into the key organisation of the Honduran opposition in the 1980s, achieving national and international recognition and admiration. Custodio could never have gained that reputation without the nationwide network of local committees that was channelling information on human rights abuses to the central office. Due to the voluntary nature of this network, the level of bureaucracy was relatively low, and communications were rapid and efficient. A further strength of CODEH was the
reliability of information it provided on human rights violations, which made it a credible source for the national media which often incorporated CODEH's declarations in its reporting. Custodio's international contacts with human rights organisations and aid agencies guaranteed him and other CODEH activists a certain level of protection. This reputation was reinforced by Custodio's efforts to prevent any direct relationship developing between CODEH and political parties. The government tried several times to link CODEH to the radical left-wing party Cinchoneros, to the point of accusing Custodio of being the intellectual leader behind the assassination of his colleague Pavón in 1988. However, among opposition leaders it was accepted that CODEH wanted to keep its autonomy from political parties and prevent its independent profile from being damaged.49

If the secret to CODEH's success was Custodio's charismatic leadership, his stubborn and authoritarian management style also gradually weakened CODEH. For security reasons, during the 1980s it was essential that only the president and the vice-president be known in public. But the negative consequence of this was that Custodio acquired absolute power over decision-making inside CODEH, tolerating no internal opposition. CODEH members who questioned his authoritarian style were dismissed, leading to a crisis in 1989 when more than half of the central office staff left the committee.41 The centralised structure of decision-making was formally changed with the installation of regional assemblies in the 1990s, but local committee members kept complaining that it was difficult to directly contact Custodio. This might explain why CODEH was unable to transform itself into a 'movement' of the opposition during mid-transition, when civil society was acquiring more 'political space'. CODEH in fact continued in its role as an intermediary NGO between local committees and the public by focusing on the optimal use of the mass media, rather than broadening its role as a movement of societal actors. Custodio's refusal to coordinate activities with other organisations, such as groups struggling for the defence of women's rights, was due to his perception that they lacked leadership capacity. Others argued that Custodio wanted to take all the credit for the successful campaign against impunity, to the point that he refused to share information with the other allies in this struggle.42 Custodio's inflexible attitude weakened CODEH's position and obstructed its adaptation to the new political circumstances. But CODEH was very dependent upon his decisions, as Custodio was the only one negotiating external funds with private aid agencies.

To the question whether CODEH's achievements were affected by funding from European private aid agencies, Custodio responded unambiguously that European aid had been crucial to the work of CODEH; the organisation probably could not have existed without this external aid as it would have been unable to finance the office and pay for the travel costs and meals of the voluntary members. Along the same lines, he argued that human rights work would always depend on external funding for it could not easily generate its own resources. In terms of partnership with private aid agencies, Custodio distinguished between agencies that put conditions on their funding, and agencies that provided unconditional aid. The
first category had proven to be ‘not useful’, as it tended to force an agenda upon CODEH that the organisation was not prepared to adopt. Custodio mentioned that some agencies, for example, felt the need to suggest that CODEH should pay more attention to women’s rights, while he considered aid for transport, expenses to run the regional offices or an emergency fund to protect witnesses from persecution as higher priorities. This had created tension in the past and various agencies decided to cut their funding relations with CODEH after its refusal to meet certain conditions.\(^3\) CEBEMO and Diakonia were mentioned by Custodio as private aid agencies that had not posed any conditions upon CODEH’s agenda. CEBEMO only warned CODEH not to put too much emphasis on socio-economic and cultural human rights, as it envisaged problems in then getting these activities approved for co-funding by the Dutch government. Both agencies also pressured CODEH to improve its financial administration, as decent reporting had become a top priority for the aid agencies in the 1990s. The question remains however how CEBEMO, as CODEH’s major funder, perceived its role in the successes of the committee. Would the achievements as described earlier have been possible without its financial support? According to CEBEMO external support was crucial in order to maintain CODEH’s structure, as it had no local resources to finance its activities. But CEBEMO also admitted that a number of funders contributed to maintaining CODEH’s structure; if one funder would have stepped out, certainly others would have replaced CEBEMO. CODEH’s achievements were therefore not directly attributable to CEBEMO’s financial support, but it certainly made a difference. Moreover, CODEH was considered to be one of their most successful partners in the region.\(^4\)

CEBEMO and other agencies emphasised that, besides financial aid, active moral support to CODEH and political support to international campaigns also had been part of their relationship with CODEH. Given the passive attitude of CEBEMO, and the dominant nature of CODEH’s leadership, the impact of private aid was above all indirect. Both Diakonia and CEBEMO refused to directly question the authoritarian way in which Custodio ran the committee, although they were among the few that had the power to do so. Diakonia did implement a participatory external evaluation procedure which tried to address several key internal obstacles that CODEH faced, but it had mixed results. CEBEMO kept its distance from these internal problems and actually preferred to continue performing a role as resource provider rather than become involved in ‘accompaniment’.

Assessing CODEH’s civil society building performance

In Chapter 3 two variables were proposed for assessing the performance of private aid aimed at strengthening civil society: the organisational capacity and the intermediary role of these key counterpart organisations in civil society. The first variable is considered by examining the level of internal participation, the accountability of leadership and the sustainability of the organisation as a result of private aid interventions. The intermediary role is assessed by focusing on the
capacity of an organisation to articulate and mediate (conflicting) interests and demands from civil society, and by examining the extent to which the balance between the state and civil society has been shifted towards democratic transition by the strengthening of political society. If these variables are applied to CODEH, the following conclusions are reached.

In terms of internal participation and accountability, necessary preconditions for establishing a viable membership organisation, CODEH scored remarkably low. Up to the early 1990s an internal structure for consultation and democratic decision-making was absent, which was understandable given the fierce repression in Honduras. But even after the installation of an assembly with an elected executive board de facto decision-making power was concentrated in one person. Although Custodio enjoyed a high level of credibility, he did not tolerate any internal opposition. This situation deteriorated when possible candidates to succeed him (which he also trusted enough to hand over some of his tasks) suddenly died. Participation of women at decision-making levels was low and Custodio refused to accept criticism on this issue. The network of local committees, important for articulating demands from the micro- to macro-level, generally performed well thanks to the active participation of local Church representatives. But as a membership structure it was weak and people participating in these committees often considered themselves above all to be part of a religious community. The meso-level structure of regional assemblies identified more with CODEH as an organisation, not only because they had shorter communication lines with the central office, but also because they coordinated educational activities and thus benefited more from CODEH's financial resources. Custodio's monopoly over contacts with funding agencies was not challenged by the agencies, although these contacts represented a considerable source of power. By questioning neither the structure of CODEH nor the absolute power of Custodio, private aid agencies complicated the start of a much needed internal reorganisation.

This problem-ridden internal hierarchy also negatively affected the prospects for CODEH's sustainability in the long run. In terms of activities, key functions of CODEH were gradually taken over by the Human Rights Commissioner (the ombudsman), the Prosecution Counsel and, for example, women's organisations, although human rights education and legal support were two areas in which CODEH continued to perform an important role in the 1990s. With several private aid agencies wanting to reduce their support to CODEH, the question arises whether it will manage to survive in the longer term with less external support. Self-sufficiency was to be increased, according to funders, by creating a demand-oriented human rights service for those who needed legal assistance. However, CODEH's technical capacities were too limited to transform the committee into a supplier of such income-generating activities, even apart from the question whether poor people would at all be able to pay for these services. An additional problem was that private aid agencies failed to offer technical assistance to CODEH for expanding its institutional capacity. As beneficiary contributions do not exist as an
alternative source of income, it is realistic to predict that CODEH will remain highly dependent on foreign assistance in the future. But this has become scarce since Honduras has dropped out of many of the Central American funding schemes of foreign aid agencies. If this is added to the difficult internal transition to a more accountable organisation, it must be concluded that the future for CODEH is very insecure. Pessimistic observers even foresee a rapid disintegration if no successor is found to the all-time president Custodio.

On the intermediary function, CODEH performed far better, at least during the 1980s, by articulating demands from civil society to end impunity for members of the security forces. Due to repression of opposition groups in civil society during the 1980s, CODEH was one of the few organisations capable of transmitting these demands to the media and to the international community. Its major success in that period was getting the Honduran government condemned by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for being responsible for forced disappearances. But when military domination eased in the early 1990s, CODEH did not expand its function by forming coalitions with other societal actors to forge an intermediary alliance in political society. CODEH rather aimed to transform itself from a human rights committee into a civil rights movement, although in practice its structure barely changed. Aid agencies did not push CODEH into reviewing its function as a key actor in civil society in the early 1990s, after Honduras began moving into a stage of mid-transition. It is likely that continued (and passive) private aid support, which was barely adapted to the new political circumstances, impeded CODEH from actively searching for new alliances with other societal actors and adjusting its internal structure, which could have improved its performance and prospects for future sustainability.

CODEH’s most tangible achievement probably has been its impact on public policy, which became visible during the stage of late transition. The continuous campaign against impunity for human rights violators resulted in 1993 in the creation of an advisory committee to recommend reforms leading to a demilitarisation of the police forces. This Comité Ad Hoc de Alto Nivel was established after security forces had been found responsible for several murders in early 1993. CODEH, as one of the committee members, organised a seminar in March 1993, together with academic experts and the Lutheran Church, to discuss proposals to demilitarise Honduran society (CODEH 1993). Many of CODEH’s recommendations were taken over by the Ad Hoc Committee, such as the demilitarisation of the police, the replacement of the intelligence service by a department for criminal investigations and the creation of a Prosecution Counsel. Subsequent advisory commissions, also with CODEH’s participation, further elaborated proposals for reform of the judiciary and the penitentiary system. In addition, CODEH played a major role in getting the government to prosecute those military officers responsible for disappearances in the 1980s, as one of the obligations following the Court ruling in 1988. Private aid support had been crucial in making these achievements possible, although they contributed little to improving CODEH’s organisational
structure or to enhancing its leading role in civil society due to the fact that Custodio did not tolerate any interference in internal affairs. The main funders, CEBEMO and Diakonia, realised that (even constructive) criticism would risk an end to their partnership with CODEH – one of their most successful partners in the region – and that other donors would be keen to replace them. Moreover, the absence of any coordination between the funders further weakened their leverage over Custodio, which actually made them indirectly responsible for weakening CODEH's potential to contribute to strengthening political society in Honduras. After all, CODEH was at certain times during the period of mid-transition probably the only actor in Honduran civil society that was capable of forging a broad alliance of the opposition that could have challenged the deeply entrenched bipartisan political system.

6.2 El Salvador’s national peace debate: the CPDN

The peace agreement signed in January 1992 between the FMLN and the Salvadoran government formally ended one of the bloodiest civil wars in recent Central American history. The agreement started a process of demilitarisation of Salvadoran society, a society which had been deeply polarised by two major positions, either in support of or against a revolutionary solution to the Salvadorean crisis. Nowhere in Central America had political positions been so antagonistic and apparently clearly defined as in El Salvador during the 1980s: oligarchy versus peasants, counter-insurgency versus revolution and foreign intervention versus anti-imperialism. The importance of the peace agreement was that it reconciled these extremes by combining demilitarisation with guarantees for democratic participation of excluded sectors. This shifted the battleground from the rural areas of Chalatenango and Morazán to the political arena of the capital. The US-financed armed forces were ‘purified’ and drastically reduced; former guerrilla fighters were incorporated into civilian life and the FMLN was transformed into a political party, becoming the second largest political force after the 1994 elections. Polarisation did not vanish, but certainly was diminished and ‘pacified’.

The process of depolarisation and reaching consensus on a peace agreement will be examined by focusing on a key actor in Salvadorean civil society during the early 1990s: the Permanent Committee for the National Peace Debate (CPDN). This broad national alliance of civil society sectors, set up by the Catholic and Lutheran Churches, was a forum for discussion and public action to contribute to a peaceful solution to the war. The CPDN represented a diverse ‘popular’ opposition to the government and gave a voice to those organisations not present at the negotiation table. The CPDN demanded to be present at these negotiations as a ‘third force’ representing civil society. Although direct participation was denied, the CPDN emerged as an important reconciling actor in El Salvador’s democratic transition. Its activities were financed by two major European private aid agencies which had
actively supported popular organisations in El Salvador throughout the war. The case study examines in what way these agencies indirectly contributed to peace and democratic transition in El Salvador.

- Emergence and activities of the CPDN

The early Salvadorean democratic transition was slow and lasted more than a decade, as was shown in Chapter 4. It started with the coup of young military officers in October 1979, which marked an end to the repressive Romero regime that had been confronted with an upsurge of mass demonstrations, labour strikes and left-wing kidnappings. The growing strength of revolutionary movements and the Sandinista victory in July 1979 convinced the new government of the need to introduce several socio-economic reforms such as agrarian reform and the nationalisation of banks. However, the new junta was unable to control the armed forces and curb their repression of popular unrest or to stop death squad activity organised by right-wing opponents. Because of this the progressive civilian members of the junta decided to resign after a few months. The failure of the October junta to stop political violence and to acquire legitimacy within a polarised civil society, exacerbated by the assassination of Archbishop Romero in March 1980, further complicated the start of early transition. Death squad violence and massacres by armed forces in the countryside intensified social polarisation and led to the left opposition uniting its forces in the FDR-FMLN and deciding to opt for revolutionary armed struggle.

The failure of the FMLN to bring down the regime in January 1981 with a military offensive was followed by an increase in military aid from the new Reagan administration which would unleash a decade of civil war. The civilian government of Christian Democrat Napoleón Duarte, elected in 1984, was unable to get the peace process started and to speed up democratic transition. Beginning in 1987, three positive elements contributed to breaking the deadlock of stagnating negotiations. The first was the regional Esquipulas peace plan, which created a conducive climate for peace negotiations. A second positive development was the return from exile of the two opposition parties MPSC and MNR in 1987 (forming the Democratic Convergence with the Social Democratic PSD) and the re-emergence of popular movements in the mid-1980s with more autonomy from the FMLN than before. Notably the formation of the National Union of Salvadorean Workers (UNTS) in 1986, a broad coalition of rural and urban associations, underscored the rebirth of a strong popular movement in civil society (Lungo 1995). A third positive element was the active role of the Catholic Church in promoting a renewal of peace negotiations, particularly after the right-wing parties had won a majority in the National Assembly in the elections of March 1988. The Catholic bishops were aware that the growing popular movement was excluded from any discussion about peace, which also had contributed to its radicalisation. The bishops therefore decided to initiate a national debate among social sectors with the purpose of achieving consensus on a peaceful solution to the civil war. Such a debate was considered to be complemen-
In June 1988 Archbishop Rivera invited over a hundred organisations from all civil society sectors, except political parties, to present and discuss their viewpoints on the prospects for peace and to forge a consensus concerning the future development of the country. Although organisations related to the (right-wing) ARENA party initially welcomed the initiative, pressure from extreme right-wing groupings made them and several business associations decide to reject the invitation. They argued that the search for national consensus was an exclusive task of the political parties; an understandable position given the new ARENA-majority in parliament. About sixty organisations accepted the invitation and participated in a survey to give their opinions about a list of propositions related to the causes of the war and possible solutions for peace. At a plenary session in September 1988 participants voted on these issues and reached a remarkable consensus about the fundamental obstacles and opportunities of the peace process. Although most political tendencies, except for ARENA, were (indirectly) present at the meeting, a large number of organisations (if not the majority) seemed to be sympathetic to the FMLN. At the end of the meeting, Bishop Rosa Chávez proposed a final declaration that urged all political parties to incorporate the consensus issues in their programmes for the upcoming 1989 presidential elections, called upon the FMLN and the government to deal in a responsible way with the resolutions and invited absent social organisations to actively participate in the national peace debate. This final declaration was approved unanimously and was, as Acevedo (1988: 779) notes, 'spontaneously followed by a standing ovation of several minutes'.

The leading Jesuit Ignacio Ellacuría of the Central American University (UCA) welcomed the debate as one of the most promising events in 1988, and criticised the government and the right for not having the courage to involve civil society directly in the search for a solution to a problem that mostly affected the people they supposedly represented (Ellacuría 1988).

At the same public assembly it was agreed to create a committee to continue the national peace debate and provide follow-up to the adopted resolutions. This Comité Permanente del Debate Nacional (CPDN) was made up of representatives of sectoral organisations that had participated in the meeting, such as trade unions, churches, universities, peasants, women, communities, development NGOs, human rights committees, small business associations and professional associations. Initially, the Catholic Church also participated in the committee, but decided in November 1988 to leave the CPDN as it preferred to keep a low public profile in its efforts to demand negotiations. As a result, other churches (notably the Lutheran and Baptist Churches) together with the UNTS (the broad alliance of peasant and trade unions) would become the driving forces behind the CPDN. At a forum organised by the UCA a few weeks later, presidential candidate Alfredo Cristiani acknowledged that he agreed with 85 percent of the conclusions of the national debate. He also promised that a future ARENA government would initiate a permanent dialogue with the FMLN (Whitfield 1994).
The first public CPDN activity was a large peace march, organised by thirty member organisations in November 1988. Its aim was to influence the Organisation of American States (OAS), meeting at that moment in San Salvador. The 30,000 participants demanded a political solution to the war, possibly with OAS mediation. Contrary to earlier public street protests, the march was peaceful and did not unleash riots and confrontations with security forces. A second peace march was organised just before the presidential elections of March 1989, in which Ellacuria assured the crowd that ‘peace was closer than ever’. Two months earlier, the FMLN had unexpectedly proposed to participate in the elections on the condition that these would be postponed for six months. Although the Duarte government eventually rejected the proposal, it did create an atmosphere of dialogue and prospects for a political settlement. However, the right-wing ARENA was convinced it would win the elections; initial talks in Mexico between the FMLN and several political parties therefore soon stagnated. ARENA’s candidate Alfredo Cristiani indeed won the presidency easily in the first round, also because the Christian Democrats were seriously divided. Democratic Convergence (CD), the small left-wing alliance of former FDR-parties led by Guillermo Ungo, only received a handful of votes.

Shortly after his installation in June 1989, the new president called for direct peace talks with the FMLN. But opposition from the extreme right wing of his party and ongoing political violence delayed the reopening of talks until September. Meanwhile, the CPDN tried to speed up the process of dialogue by organising several national ‘peace encounters’. The CPDN started using three different methods to advocate a negotiated solution to the Salvadorean civil war: (i) public promotion of a political settlement via peace marches, newspaper and television advertisements and public meetings, (ii) organising bilateral meetings with CPDN members and the armed forces, the government, political parties and the FMLN, to convince them of the need to restart negotiations and (iii) putting pressure on the US Congress and international bodies such as the OAS, UN, EC and international networks of churches and aid agencies. As a representative of social sectors, the CPDN also demanded to become a direct observer during the negotiations. At the first two rounds of the peace talks – in September 1989 in Mexico and October in Costa Rica – representatives of the Episcopal Conference were invited alongside OAS and UN officials, meeting separately with the two parties. Among the Church representatives was Baptist pastor Edgar Palacios, the coordinator of the CPDN. However, little progress was made during the talks, apart from a fragile agreement about implementing a ceasefire in November prior to a next meeting; the armed forces and the FMLN still thought they would be able to defeat each other. According to Ellacuria, the FMLN wrongly believed that it had built up enough popular support to provoke a general insurrection against the regime. Increased mobilisation of social forces and popular discontent was erroneously perceived by the FMLN as support for their insurrectional strategy. What the majority of the population wanted, argued Ellacuria on the basis of opinion polls, was a negotiated and peaceful solution to the war (Byrne 1996).
The immediate reason for the start of the November 1989 FMLN offensive was the bombing of the FENASTRAS office, killing ten trade union leaders, and bombings of the Lutheran Church and Rubén Zamora's residence. With this political violence targeted at people and organisations promoting a peaceful settlement, the FMLN concluded that the government was not serious about negotiations. A plan for a national guerrilla offensive was put in motion, and thousands of FMLN fighters invaded the capital, leading to aerial bombings by the air force of slum neighbourhoods and heavy fighting in all fourteen departments. The purpose of the offensive was ambiguous. On the one hand, the FMLN had been planning a national military campaign for several years, aimed at provoking a popular insurrection and the fall of the ARENA government. On the other hand, the FMLN knew it could not win the war as long as US military aid continued. Comments by the Cristiani government and US officials during the October talks that the FMLN had been militarily defeated further convinced some commanders that they had to strengthen their position at the negotiation table. In response to the offensive, the armed forces decided to liquidate the entire leadership of the Central American University (UCA), the intellectual leaders behind the promotion of a peaceful solution. By trying to cover up the killings and putting the blame on the insurgents, the army accidentally provided a turning point in the Salvadorean war. The brutal assassination of Ellacuria and five other leading Jesuits had direct impact on the US Congress, which eventually decided to curb military aid to El Salvador. Gradually the United States started to accept that the war had entered a deadlock, as neither of the two parties was able to achieve a military victory. The rapid changes in Eastern Europe, added to the growing conviction by the FMLN that peace would be more beneficial than continuing the war, contributed to renewed steps for peace negotiations.

In the midst of the offensive, CPDN leaders were forced to flee the country. With support from North American churches and solidarity groups an office was opened in Washington (led by Pastor Edgar Palacios) to lobby the US Congress and the United Nations. Meanwhile, the mobilisation of social forces in El Salvador was entirely directed by FMLN leaders. It was not until January 1990 that the CPDN was able to regroup itself, this time in a political climate more open to dialogue than ever before. A new leadership was elected, presided over by Palacios, with a stronger presence of FMLN members. Secret bilateral meetings organised by UN top official Alvaro de Soto in December 1989 revealed that the FMLN and the Salvadorean government were willing to resume talks under UN mediation. Strong pressure on both parties to negotiate also came from the Central American presidents. After intensive diplomacy, a new meeting between the two parties was held in April 1990, marking the start of an active negotiation process that ended with the peace agreement of Chapultepec, signed in January 1992.

Although the CPDN was not accepted as a third party nor as an observer to the negotiations, it played a key role in mobilising national and international support for the peace process. After implementation of the agreement, the CPDN continued
operating as a civil society alliance, but shifted its focus toward socio-economic issues. To understand the evolution of the CPDN, three periods can be identified. The first runs from its foundation in 1988 to the demobilisation of the FMLN in late 1992. In this period the CPDN tried to build a consensus within civil society for a peaceful settlement, and critically followed the negotiation and implementation of the accords with massive street rallies, public debates and civil diplomacy. The second phase of the CPDN covers the period from early 1993 until the elections of March 1994, leading to the formal incorporation of the FMLN into political society. With the peace process concluded, the CPDN had to redefine its role and decided to prioritise the search for a consensus among social forces on post-war reconstruction, for which a widely discussed document gave a number of recommendations regarding future government policies. In a third phase, since the 1994 elections, the CPDN has remained active as a public forum for discussion mainly focusing on socio-economic issues. As will be demonstrated, the most influential period of the CPDN was the first phase until 1992.

- **Private foreign aid to the CPDN**

Direct support from private aid agencies to the CPDN started during and after the November 1989 offensive. Until that period, activities were financed with funds from member organisations, in particular from churches and large trade unions such as the UNTS and FENASTRAS. Fundraising became necessary because the CPDN wanted to prevent dependence on its larger (and FMLN-controlled) members. Additional funding was required to finance transport and meals for participants from rural areas in the peace marches and to pay for the expensive spots on radio and television. Under the umbrella of the church-related NGO DIACONIA, fundraising started in September 1989 when prospects for renewed negotiations were increasing. The Lutheran Church – one of the key participants in DIACONIA and a leading member of the CPDN in the person of Bishop Medardo Gómez – provided contacts to external funders through its international networks of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. This resulted in contacts with the German Brot für die Welt, which decided to support the Washington office of the CPDN soon after the November offensive had started. Contacts with the Dutch private aid agency ICCO also were made prior to the offensive, but due to the emergency situation in El Salvador it took until early 1990 to materialise into concrete support. Both agencies were impressed by the broad alliance of social forces for peace that the CPDN had managed to bring together.

The start of the (final) peace negotiations in April 1990 contributed to acquiring new foreign aid resources, although private aid agencies were relatively slow in approving funding for the CPDN in contrast to the rapid advances being made in the negotiation process. This generated liquidity problems in 1991, leading to additional appeals for funding. By the end of 1991, with the negotiations nearly concluded, the CPDN had managed to raise over US$ 300,000 from private aid agencies. This was enough to cover its expenses for marches, advertisements, press
conferences and meetings throughout the negotiation process. The largest share came from the two Protestant agencies ICCO and Brot für die Welt, in addition to smaller grants from Norwegian People's Aid, CEBEMO, OXFAM-UK/I and several churches. The official endorsement of the peace accords in Chapultepec (January 1992) gave an additional impulse to the activities of the CPDN. New projects for social mobilisation and media advertisements were planned to press for implementation of the agreements according to the agreed schedule. With its small staff and rather short-term planning, the CPDN worked out a number of new project proposals (instead of multi-annual budgets which were preferred by the agencies) and presented these to the same group of private aid agencies.

Due to the promising developments in the Salvadorean peace process, ICCO, Brot für die Welt and other private aid agencies responded positively to these new appeals and increased their contributions to the CPDN. Consequently, donor income more than doubled between 1992 and 1993. In response to these increased donor contributions, and given the general increase of foreign aid resources flowing into El Salvador after the peace agreement, the CPDN adjusted its budgets again. It planned expenses of around US$ 1.6 million between 1993 and the election year 1994, which was probably more than it could handle. It was certainly more than the agencies were willing to contribute, for the CPDN only had a small staff and some agencies felt the organisation also had to generate income from member contributions. Despite these concerns, private aid agencies supporting the CPDN greatly valued its role in consolidating the peace process and stimulating civil society to actively participate in the electoral process. Consequently, foreign support kept growing in these years, although it was only in late 1994 that the agencies discovered that the CPDN was unable to spend all these funds. As will be analysed later, the CPDN started to create large financial reserves that were presented to the agencies as 'member contributions', but were in fact saved up donor funds. Brot für die Welt decided for that reason in 1995 to stop funding the CPDN, although support was resumed the following year. Most contributions from smaller agencies had already stopped after 1993.

The largest donor of the CPDN, the Dutch ICCO, accounted for over half of its income throughout these years. The significance of this role justifies a closer examination of ICCO's motivation to support the CPDN. ICCO had known the CPDN from its early beginnings in 1988, as several of the member organisations also received funding from ICCO. In late 1989, after the November offensive and with the peace process still in a deadlock, ICCO decided to support the CPDN for three reasons. First, because it positively valued the broad alliance of social organisations (from the moderate right to the radical left) that the CPDN was bringing together to rally for a negotiated settlement. Second, because it shared the concerns of coordinator Palacios, a Protestant pastor, about the dominant role of FMLN-related NGOs that wanted to convert the CPDN into an organ of support for the FMLN. Moreover, ICCO recognised the need for CPDN's financial independence from its 'richer' members such as the UCA, to improve internal unity. The CPDN was considered to be one of the few alliances in civil society where all political ten-
dencies of the opposition worked together to discuss key political issues. A third reason was political: (indirect) funding from the Dutch government would boost the international legitimacy of the CPDN and would add to the diplomatic weight of the Washington lobbying office.

Achievements of the CPDN

One of the principal goals of the CPDN was not realised: to be present as a third party representing civil society at the peace talks. Still, in the period from mid-1989 to early 1992 the CPDN achieved several important objectives. First of all, it succeeded in bringing together a large variety of social and political forces in El Salvador, from the radical left to the moderate right, under the banner of the peace negotiations. This creation of concierto among the majority of societal actors in El Salvador was a remarkable achievement given the deep polarisation in the war period; it initiated a process of depolarisation necessary to move democratic transition forward. Due to the absence of the powerful business sector in the CPDN it was not possible to speak of a ‘general consensus’ of civil society on a peaceful solution, but the alliance was probably the broadest possible at that time. It had taken over several functions of the dissolved opposition alliance FDR, which had acted in the 1980s as the civilian branch of the FMLN. Although individual FMLN members had a strong voice in the CPDN, the guerrilla movement was aware of the need to give an autonomous role to ‘the popular movement’ (assembled in the CPDN) during the peace process. The CPDN was therefore used by the FMLN as a sounding board for discussing proposals that were prepared for the negotiations. In addition, the CPDN performed an intermediary role between the FMLN and its constituency by ‘decoding’ messages coming from the negotiation table.

A further achievement of the CPDN was its success in mobilising national and (particularly) international support for the peace process, making optimal use of a period in which conditions for reaching an agreement were favourable. At the national level, pressure from civil society through mass marches contributed to breaking the deadlock at key moments during the peace negotiations. One of the biggest marches was held in December 1991, a few weeks before the negotiations were to be finalised in New York, organised to counter efforts by the army and extreme-right forces to frustrate the upcoming agreement. These social mobilisations were recognised by newly-elected leaders of the opposition as a sign of an expanding civil society. Press conferences and jingles on the radio and television were used by the CPDN as instruments to communicate with the government and the armed forces, but also with its constituency. At the international level, the CPDN approached international organisations and governments of the ‘Group of Friends’ to put pressure on the Cristiani government for keeping the peace process moving. As an ‘unauthorised third party’ in the peace process, the CPDN effectively used its international network in Canada, the United States and Europe to especially target a key player in this process: the US Congress. The latter was pressured to cut military aid to El Salvador, or at least to make it conditional
upon advances in the negotiations and on the prosecution of the assassins of the UCA Jesuits. This lobbying proved to be effective, as the House of Representatives in May 1990 voted in favour of cutting military aid and the Senate decided in October to make half of the military aid to El Salvador conditional upon advances in the peace talks and the Jesuit case. Civil diplomacy by the CPDN was of course not a determining factor, but certainly was important throughout the peace talks which had been criticised for their secret and elitist character. Although UN mediator De Soto spoke of a 'negotiated revolution', many observers have correctly pointed out that the agreement did not fundamentally alter the existing power balance: 'the core institutions of the Salvadorean government remained untouched' comments Foley (1996: 77).

Another achievement was that the CPDN had created a national forum for political debate on key issues parallel to the National Assembly. Until the 1994 elections (and definitely until the 1991 elections) the Salvadorean parliament was unable to perform that intermediary function because opposition parties were not yet incorporated into the political arena. During the negotiations and the implementation of the agreement, sectoral representatives of the CPDN formed what they called a 'popular parliament'. Meeting weekly, this (unelected) group of representatives from various societal sectors was the central policy-making body inside the CPDN that discussed peace proposals, monitored the implementation of agreements and made preparations for the elections. An influential product of this group was the June 1993 publication of a consensus document called 'Contributions to the Project for a New Nation'. Based on broad consultations among CPDN members the document launched policy proposals for a future government prior to the electoral campaign. This proved to be rather effective as several parties incorporated these proposals into their campaigns, particularly the FMLN. But it was in a sense also undermining for the CPDN because the successful participation of the FMLN in the 1994 elections implied that its role as mediator for the 'underrepresented' in civil society had become redundant.

After the elections the CPDN continued organising street marches, press conferences, discussion seminars and elaborating proposals for post-war reconstruction. It also kept emphasising the need for compliance with the peace accords, some elements of which were deliberately delayed or frustrated by the governments of President Cristiani and his successor Calderon Sol. But the CPDN had lost its momentum as a national peace forum and as a temporary actor in a political society in transition. Gradually, many organisations left the CPDN, often because of profound internal divisions in the FMLN, but also because post-war circumstances provided new opportunities for constructing other fora to articulate social demands. One of the FMLN tendencies gradually started to dominate the CPDN, which seriously damaged its relative autonomy. After 1994 the national dialogue and policy-making on post-war reconstruction was transferred to the National Assembly, in which the FMLN had become the second largest political party. The CPDN had to reformulate its mission, transforming itself from a one-issue movement (peace) into
a less attractive multi-issue forum promoting reconciliation and social justice. Despite producing proposals supported by a wide array of social organisations, the CPDN barely survived this transformation and its influence soon became marginal.

The activities of the CPDN had contributed to strengthening civil society by forging an alliance between a growing number of sectoral organisations and by playing an intermediary role between civil society and the state during the peace process. A closer examination suggests that both functions were only performed temporarily. In the first period (1988-1991) the combination of building an alliance for a political solution to the war and the transmission of this demand to national and international actors contributed to depolarising the tense climate after the November 1989 offensive. Despite its failure to get the associations of private enterprise on board, the CPDN was in a sense ‘the miracle of creating unity in civil society’ as Palacios called it. Unity referred to the alliance among the more radical organisations (such as the labour unions of the UNTS) opting for an active supportive role in an armed insurrection, and the moderate organisations opting for peaceful solutions. Some tendencies inside the FMLN were well aware that they could not afford to alienate themselves from these moderate organisations (Byrne 1996: 145). Furthermore, the dissolution of the FDR, the civil branch of the FMLN between 1980 and 1987, had created a vacuum on the side of civil diplomacy. A Church-sponsored initiative to create a national peace debate therefore offered a useful instrument for the insurgents to build a broad popular constituency during the peace talks and to lobby international actors. After the 1992 peace agreement, when the FMLN transformed itself into a political party, this alliance-building role of the CPDN lost its significance as it was no longer supported by all FMLN tendencies.

The same happened in fact with the intermediary role of the CPDN, and perhaps even earlier. Ellacuria (1988) envisaged a role for the CPDN as a ‘suprasectoral assembly’, acting on social issues parallel to the political issues of the National Assembly. However, due to the absence of FDR or FMLN representatives in parliament, the CPDN in fact also functioned as a channel for political demands in the early period of the peace process. This intermediary role ended with the election of eight ex-FDR opposition candidates as part of the Democratic Convergence (CD) in the National Assembly in the March 1991 elections. Especially the role of Rubén Zamora was important, as he became a vice-president of the National Assembly. During the peace talks he emerged as a key informal mediator between the opposition, the government and the international community. Zamora eventually was designated the presidential candidate for the FMLN-CD alliance in the 1994 elections, where he was defeated by ARENA candidate Calderon Sol in the second round.

The intermediary role of the CPDN also was weakened by the creation of two new institutions as part of the peace agreements: the National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (COPAZ) and the Forum for Economic and Social Consultation (FOCES). COPAZ was formed by representatives of all political parties in
parliament, the government and the FMLN. It was installed to oversee the imple-
mentation of the peace accords, as a complement to the UN verification process, and to monitor the participation of civil society in this implementation process. Between the final agreement of January 1992 and the elections of March 1994, COPAZ functioned as an unofficial ‘transition government’ and as a body that worked to create consensus on conflicting civil society interests (Johnstone 1995). It was illustrative that it was not the CPDN that was granted consultative status to COPAZ (with ONUSAL) but the Catholic Church. The other body replacing one of the functions of the CPDN was the Forum for Economic and Social Consultation (FOCES), in which labour unions, employers’ associations and the government had to reach a consensus about the implementation of socio-economic issues outlined in the peace agreement. Although some short-term advances were made on workers’ rights, FOCES was not a success. The business sector simply was unwilling to discuss fundamental socio-economic issues and to ‘negotiate the revolution’, leading to considerable frustration in lower FMLN ranks (Byrne 1996: 189).

The contribution made by the CPDN to strengthening civil society therefore should not be overstated. It forged important alliances previous to and during the peace process – initially despite, and later thanks to the FMLN – but after 1992 lost most of its relevance to other actors. This is not surprising, for it was primarily focused on getting the negotiations started and securing the demilitarisation of society. This achievement should not be exaggerated since there already existed a rather broad national consensus about the need for peace talks right after the November 1989 offensive, and only a small minority wanted to continue the war. On issues on which it could have been strong, such as socio-economic reforms, the CPDN surprisingly had no serious proposals. Alternative development plans were only elaborated after 1992 when the momentum of the transition process had passed. The CPDN was unable to get a grip on the ‘substantive issues’ of the negotiations, the issues that had been conducive to the war and that had been central to the struggle of many CPDN members. This illustrates that it actually did not have the capacity to anticipate issues that exceeded the agenda of the peace negotiations. Or as Ponciano (1995: 130) suggests, the CPDN was so focused on political-military issues that it failed to recognise that the Cristiani government actively kept its neoliberal stabilisation programme from becoming part of the negotiation agenda. The inability of the CPDN to focus in an early stage of the negotiations on the issues of post-war reconstruction – which would have created friction with immediate FMLN-leadership interests – was one of the main reasons for its downfall after the final peace accords were signed.

The CPDN in the aid chain

Between 1988 and 1991, the CPDN certainly was an influential peace alliance in civil society, combining three strong assets. First, it had an explicit and unambiguous goal: a negotiated resolution to the civil war, a goal that could not be compromised and was finally reached. Second, the CPDN managed to bring a wide spectrum of
popular organisations together in a loose coalition, producing and discussing constructive proposals without direct interference of the two contending parties. Despite close links between the FMLN and the larger organisations participating in the CPDN, the insurgents were reluctant to directly interfere. The FMLN leadership recognised the value of a discussion platform outside its ranks, as internal discussions often were hampered by hierarchically organised structures and military considerations. In fact, the constituency of the FMLN was more reluctant to engage in compromises with the armed forces than the leadership, and this is where the CPDN played a buffering role. A third factor contributing to its achievements was the strategic timing for launching proposals or protests. Much of this timing was directed by its charismatic leader Edgar Palacios, who was respected by the armed forces, the government and the FMLN, and knew how to handle the press. Without his combined role as a spokesperson, mediator and civil diplomat, the CPDN would probably not have been successful at all.

The main weakness of the CPDN was its inability to anticipate the challenges to be faced in the post-war period, including its own role. The absence of a long-term vision on the role of civil society in post-war democratisation, other than simply demanding its participation, made it easy for the advocates of the prevailing development model to pursue their own strategy without any serious opposition. The short-lived relevance of the CPDN has to do with the fact that it was a product of the war and not of post-war democratic transition. Many member organisations of the CPDN were accustomed to performing a mobilising role in civil society, whereas their leaders were often restrained by the logic of the political-military struggle. The transition to peace forced these member organisations to transform their discourse, their organisational structure and their mission in order to address newly emerging sectoral interests. This forced transformation, in addition to the confusion created by the internal FMLN splits, generated a climate of insecurity concerning the new role of societal actors in the stage of mid-transition. The inevitable crisis that emerged in many social organisations affected internal debates in the CPDN and seriously weakened the previously existing consensus. As a multi-sectoral alliance for peace, the CPDN also had to redefine its role and tried to secure a consensus in 1992 under the banner of 'constructing peace'. This effort failed as it was unable to reconcile the many conflicting interests in civil society that were emerging in a process of 'constructing democracy'. Although the formal number of member organisations increased to over eighty in 1995, in practice the 'alliance of social forces' and the 'conscience of Chapultepec' had become a remnant of the past. Private aid agencies supporting the CPDN failed to recognise this dramatic shift.

Support from private aid agencies, in particular from ICCO and Bros für die Welt, was indispensable to financing the activities of the CPDN. Without these external resources the CPDN would have had a lower profile in the Salvadorean peace process, according to coordinator Palacios. This private foreign aid enabled the CPDN to mobilise more (rural) participants for public marches (pay for transport
and meals) and to finance media advertisements. However, a closer examination of aid flows to the CPDN reveals that these increased after 1992, in other words after the period of peace negotiations and the implementation of the agreements when it achieved its main results. Given the low level of institutional consolidation it is likely that the increase of aid flows after the CPDN had lost its momentum negatively affected its performance. To examine this assumption, it may be helpful to address two questions: Why did private aid agencies increase their contributions while the role of the CPDN actually was diminishing? And how did this affect its (intermediary) role in Salvadorean civil society?

A look at the figures shows that private aid support to the CPDN increased twofold between 1991 and 1992, which was a direct response to the successful conclusion of the peace agreement of Chapultepec in January 1992. The CPDN budget for 1993-94 was on average four times the budget it had handled between 1990 and 1991, which was the period of the main achievements of the CPDN. Although only half of the requested funding was effectively received, 1993 and 1994 still were the years in which the CPDN received the largest contributions from private aid agencies. Several reasons can be given to explain this phenomenon. One is technical: there is always a certain period between funding requests and final disbursements. But in the case of ICCO, the largest funder of the CPDN, this period was rather long; usually more than one year. This was caused by ICCO’s lengthy application procedure for co-funding at the Dutch ministry, but also by its slow internal process of approval and disbursements. As a result, the CPDN had to raise additional funding to fill the liquidity gaps created by delayed disbursements.

Another reason for the increase of private aid flows to the CPDN after 1992 was that private aid agencies apparently did not make an accurate political analysis of what role the CPDN would play after the peace agreements. With the legalisation of the FMLN as a political party, the CPDN’s intermediary role was gradually taken over by the former guerrilla organisation. Poor coordination among the private aid agencies supporting the CPDN and the absence of a proper monitoring system meant that the agencies did not realise that the CPDN was losing its political momentum. The only external evaluation of the CPDN, carried out in late 1994 at the request of ICCO, actually came two years too late. Even though this evaluation was not very critical, its recommendations were not seriously incorporated into future planning. While local agency representatives were rather critical about the performance of the CPDN, desk officers of the Protestant agencies gave it the benefit of the doubt, largely because CPDN was run by a leading member of the Salvadorean churches.

A further reason for the income growth of the CPDN has to do with the ‘chemistry’ of donor-recipient relations. Recipients often exaggerate their budgets in project proposals because they know donors tend to approve lower funding than is requested. Although ICCO was somewhat surprised by the US$ 1.6 million budget for 1993-94, it did not seriously question the implications of this considerable increase in anticipated expenditures. ICCO decided to accept this growth and
increased its support for these years by almost fifty percent compared to previous years.\(^8\) Despite the incapacity of the CPDN to spend ICCO’s contribution in the period agreed, funding continued even after 1995. Another element in the chemistry was that ICCO’s decision to continue support to the CPDN encouraged smaller funders to also continue their support, as they trusted that contributions to the CPDN would be carefully monitored by ICCO, which was responsible for half the CPDN’s income between 1990 and 1996. This monitoring was, as argued earlier, poor if not virtually absent.

Possibly one of the key shortcomings of the donor agencies was that they did not put enough pressure on the CPDN to request contributions from member organisations in order to make the alliance more self-sufficient. Although the CPDN argued that members did contribute, in reality the CPDN was channelling funds to its members for the organisation of marches and the implementation of activities. These ‘reverse aid flows’ were a direct product of ‘overfunding’ by the agencies. Starting in 1992, with the first large increase in aid funding, the CPDN gradually created its own financial reserves as it was unable to spend all its income.\(^8\) This might have been understandable — given the small administrative staff, rather short-term planning and the exaggerated budget — but for some reason it did not alarm the agencies. It was not until 1995, after finding contradictions in financial reports, that ICCO became more strict about proper financial reporting and eventually demanded replacement of the ‘external’ accountant. However, funding to the CPDN was not made conditional upon a certain level of member contributions, and this generates the second question about the impact of ‘overfunding’ on the performance of the CPDN.

The large amount of agency income, combined with the low level of member contributions, meant that member organisations increasingly considered the CPDN as a channel to attract foreign aid resources and less as an intermediary alliance in civil society. Starting in 1993, many members started to become ‘delinked’ from the CPDN for three reasons. First, because they had other channels (such as the FMLN) to voice their demands to the state. Second, because they encountered considerable problems in renewing their leadership and adapting their internal organisation and discourse from confrontation to constructive dialogue and concordación. Third, because the policy of the CPDN to secure consensus among societal sectors was effective on the issue of peace, but did not work for (the more complex and often contradictory) socio-economic demands. Due to the continuous inpouring of foreign aid, the policies of the CPDN became scattered as it kept offering a variety of fora and seminars with poor outcomes.\(^9\) To avoid bureaucracy, the implementation of these activities was generally delegated to member organisations. This is not to say that the CPDN was not a useful forum for discussion (which it certainly was for young cadre) but it lacked the coherent strategy that had been followed in the late 1980s. Continued and increased private aid support and the absence of member contributions thus transformed the CPDN into a donor-driven alliance in civil society.\(^8\)
Assessing the civil society building performance of the CPDN

One of the striking lessons from the CPDN aid chain is the apparent difficulty private aid agencies experience adjusting their intervention policies to rapidly changing political processes. Essentially, support from private aid agencies increased after the CPDN had lost the political momentum. What was the impact of this on the organisational capacity of the CPDN? Let me first examine the level of participation by members and the character of internal accountability. It was shown that the CPDN started as a membership organisation with a rather flat structure, with active participation of members and a high level of downward accountability. Members that were closely linked to the FMLN (which had vertical and centralised organisational structures) indeed became influential in the CPDN during and after the 1989 offensive. But they did not convert the CPDN into a fachada (a puppet) of the FMLN, although right-wing opponents claimed that this was the case. Policy-making and implementation were coordinated by a directorio sectorial, a weekly meeting of representatives from all sectors active in the CPDN. Daily coordination and decision-making was performed by a revolving small committee (in which FMLN members were a minority), which also maintained contacts with funders. The ‘sectoral directorate’ served as an intermediary between the coordination committee and the national assembly in which all member organisations had two seats. Because of the active participation of many sectors during the peace negotiations, the assembly decided to change the image of the CPDN from that of a ‘permanent committee’ into a ‘social movement’. However, this movement character had de facto ended with the end of the war, when (a striking coincidence) a separate CPDN office was opened in late 1991. After 1992, and certainly during the electoral campaign, the sectoral directorate started to disintegrate with fewer members participating, followed by its eventual dissolution in 1994. As a result, direct feedback to member organisations diminished and communication to the constituency of the CPDN went mainly via the mass media. The decline of the CPDN therefore could be seen in its transformation from a membership organisation into a pressure group and a debating forum. Due to the absence of member contributions (and the availability of increasing private aid funds) this weakening of the institutional structure was not recognised as a problem by CPDN’s leaders or by the donor agencies.

Consequently, the financial sustainability of the CPDN was entirely dependent upon foreign aid resources and the prospects for long-term survival were therefore not very encouraging. This negative outlook can be largely attributed to the changed political circumstances after the peace agreement was implemented, which led to demobilisation and ideological confusion for many popular organisations. Without fully realising this, the CPDN gradually became transformed from a membership organisation into a sort of ‘socio-economic human rights NGO’. But it continued to call itself ‘an expression of the Salvadorean social movement’, although it was never financially sustained by this movement. On the contrary, as was argued earlier, the CPDN became a donor-driven committee paying
organisations for particular activities that they might have done anyway. Private aid agencies (in particular the two largest funders ICCO and Brot für die Welt) therefore made four mistakes in increasing their support to the CPDN in 1993: (i) they did not make an assessment of the political changes after the implementation of the peace agreement and how these affected popular organisations and the position of the CPDN, (ii) they did not press enough for the need to collect member contributions, (iii) they did not invest in improving the weak institutional structure of the CPDN and (iv) they did a poor job coordinating between each other, and only started to do so (after 1994) when it was in fact too late.

Regarding its role in civil society building the CPDN combined several elements. It boosted the formation of a peace alliance and performed an intermediary role in civil society vis-à-vis the state and the international community. The alliance between radical FMLN-controlled mass organisations and moderate societal actors was realised in 1988, before private aid started to flow to the CPDN. It is therefore likely that private aid agencies did not play a significant role in forging this alliance. It is even doubtful if the performance of this alliance would have been different if private aid had been absent in the period until the final peace agreement was signed in early 1992, as the FMLN had a vested interest in keeping a solid unity of oppositional forces in civil society during the negotiations. Nevertheless, by performing an intermediary role in civil society the CPDN was an effective alliance pushing for a negotiated solution, particularly in the year prior to the November 1989 offensive. After the offensive the FMLN increased its influence in the CPDN, which was the same period in which it started to receive private aid support. The activities of the lobbying office in Washington and the street marches which took place during the negotiations (and were partly financed by private foreign aid) were important contributions to the peace process. Without private aid support the activities of the CPDN to pressure the government and international actors would probably have taken place on a smaller scale, and the lobbying work might even have been absent. But it would be unreasonable to conclude that the outcome of the negotiations would have been any different without this support. The (negative) influence of private foreign aid was particularly visible after 1992, when the intermediary function of the CPDN declined despite increased aid contributions.

The strongest policy impact of the CPDN was achieved prior to the start of negotiations and during the peace talks. In September 1988, a few months before the presidential elections, the CPDN managed to get ARENA’s presidential candidate Cristiani to endorse important elements of the consensus document. One year later, organised pressure from the CPDN was one of the factors that pushed President Cristiani to open the dialogue with the FMLN. This was all in the period prior to private aid support for the CPDN. As the peace process had a strong dynamic of its own, it is hard to tell to what extent the CPDN directly influenced the texts of the peace agreements. According to Palacios the initial agreement on demilitarisation (May 1991) was drafted on the basis of a proposal from the CPDN, but David Escobar Galindo, a key negotiator for the government, denies this. The CPDN
probably contributed to influencing Democratic Senators in the US Congress, although they were lobbied from many sides. Still, private aid funding to the Washington office of the CPDN was important for lobbying and networking with churches and solidarity groups in the United States and for keeping European and Canadian partners informed. Policy impact after 1992 was marginal, except maybe for the 'Project for a New Nation' of June 1993 of which some elements were adopted by the FMLN-CD coalition (with which direct linkages already existed). Policy impact of the CPDN thus was minimally related to the inflow of private aid support, with the exception of the Washington lobbying office.

In sum, it might be concluded that the needs of temporary alliances in civil society do not always coincide with the logic of private aid agencies, which are often not geared toward providing instant and adequate support to these alliances. Private aid donors prefer to build up longer term partnerships, which often contradicts the temporary nature of civil society coalitions. Institutionalisation of the CPDN, although required by the agencies, generated internal resistance and rejection of bureaucracy but not a rejection of foreign aid. The private aid agencies ICCO and Brot für die Welt, for their part, have become reluctant to continue their support to the CPDN, as it no longer performs the functions it did when partnerships were established in 1989. It is possible that the CPDN will survive the late 1990s, for example as a 'social coalition against poverty'. But it will have to sustain itself through contributions of actively participating members. In other words, just like when it started out at the very beginning.

6.3 Incorporating indígenas in Guatemalan civil society: FUNDASESE

While the previous two case studies focused on human rights and on peace negotiations, the Guatemalan case study combines these two issues, albeit in a special way. Despite many political and historical commonalities between Central American countries, only Guatemala has an indigenous majority. Among the Guatemalan indígenas (Indians) five major ethno-linguistic groups and more than twenty different native languages have been identified, the majority descending from the Mayas. Another characteristic of private aid funding to Guatemala that is relevant for this study is that the amount of aid increased when it was stagnating in other Central American countries, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter. The reason for this increase was the resumption of peace talks between the armed opposition and the government and the emergence of a number of new associations in civil society. Particularly ‘Indian’ organisations, which had been most affected by military counter-insurgency operations, demonstrated remarkable growth in the early 1990s. It is therefore plausible to focus the Guatemalan case study on an Indian organisation that received substantial European private aid support.

Various organisations working with indigenous communities were suggested by European agencies for the present research. The problem was that none of these
organisations explicitly performed an intermediary role for Indian organisations in civil society, although one of them did have an impressive record in this area: FUNDADASE. This local development NGO was chosen because its leaders played a key role in Indian organisations that participated in national civil society alliances. But also because it was considered by many private aid agencies as one of the most successful Indian NGOs in Guatemala. FUNDADASE’s local development activities were praised, as well as its active role in opening up new political space for indigenous people during the Guatemalan democratic transition of the 1990s.

The case of FUNDADASE is however rather complex as it deals with a large number of Indian organisations that were either created or supported by its own leaders since the late 1980s. As all these organisations are in some way interconnected, an outsider could quickly get lost in the forest of abbreviations. The first part of this case study will therefore sketch a necessary overview of the recent revival of Indian organisations and coalitions. Furthermore, the case is far from transparent as FUNDADASE’s leaders often played a key role in several other Indian organisations, as representatives of FUNDADASE or personally. Another difficulty is that the Guatemalan peace process (and the democratic transition it spurred) is not yet complete. Although the peace agreement was signed in December 1996, by the time of this writing many agreements still have to be implemented and the outcome of the peace process is therefore inconclusive. However, the complexity of this case study probably also underscores that an analysis of private aid funding aimed at civil society building seldom is linear, transparent or simple.

- Participation of Indian organisations in the Guatemalan peace process

The current revival of Indian organisations in Guatemala has its origins in the 1960s, when social and economic developments contributed to a transformation of the impoverished and marginalised indigenous communities. The Catholic Church gradually introduced fundamental reforms with its influential rural programme Acción Católica, challenging the traditional authority of the priest-shamans and the religious brotherhoods (cofradias). Schools were built, cooperatives were set up and political parties (in particular the Christian Democratic Party) entered the communities to participate in municipal elections. Gradually, a consciousness developed among indigenas that this new space offered by external actors could be used to demand better social and political conditions. A new generation of Indian leaders (often catechists trained by Acción Católica) was replacing the traditional elderly community leaders and started to mobilise indigenous communities, eventually leading to the formation of a national Indian peasant organisation: the Committee for Peasant Unity (cuc). This new organisation emerged in the northern department El Quiché, a few years after the disappointing 1974 election results of the Christian Democrats. The cuc would increase its support in the highlands after the 1976 earthquake created a political vacuum in rural areas. This vacuum also was filled by right-wing US fundamentalist and Pentecostal sects that massively invaded indigenous communities after the earthquake (Perera 1993).
By the late 1970s, CUC had taken the lead in a broad, popular and predominantly Indian social movement which was quickly radicalising. Many CUC affiliates opted for revolutionary armed struggle, especially after the armed forces systematically started to kill Indian peasant leaders in the Alta Verapaz and in the Ixil and Ixcán areas (Carmack 1988). The massacre of 140 Indian peasants in Panzós (1978) generally is considered to be the start of the indigenous rebellion in the highlands. The army justified the killings by saying they believed the Indian peasants were part of the guerrilla movement, although this was not (yet) the case. The selective military repression was in fact counter-productive: whilst death squads tried to eliminate radical indigenous leaders, revolutionary groups started to grow and incorporated new members from persecuted indigenous communities. A key moment in this process was the massacre of a CUC-led delegation of nearly forty Indian peasants in the Spanish embassy in January 1980, who were protesting against the mounting repression in the Quiche department. The massacre made many indigenous communities decide to join with the guerrillas, creating a strong Indian-Ladino popular movement (Jonas 1991).

Ongoing popular protest, a large strike of sugar cane workers and rapid growth of guerrilla-controlled areas was responded to by the military regime of Lucas García with a counter-insurgency offensive in mid-1981 in order to defeat the revolutionary movement, which meanwhile had achieved unity in the URNG. Falla (1994: 183) describes how the army seeded terror in the indigenous communities: 'a growing degree of violence was used in the abductions, killings, and selective massacres; disfigured corpses were dumped and bodies were hung from trees in an attempt to instil terror'. Although causing thousands of casualties, the campaign did not deter guerrilla resistance. General Ríos Montt, who had replaced Lucas García in the March 1982 coup, therefore decided to apply scorched earth tactics by physically eliminating indigenous communities in guerrilla-controlled areas. The purpose was to destroy the popular basis of the guerrilla movement and regain control over these areas. Jonas (1991: 149) even argues that the war was 'an assault by the Ladino state against the Indian population', as the military intended to destroy ethnic unity and Indian identity. Between 50,000 and 75,000 civilians were killed or disappeared in this genocide, which left 440 villages destroyed and nearly one million indígenas displaced, of which around 200,000 sought refuge in Mexico. In an effort to consolidate its control over the conflict zones, the army established 'model villages' in which special committees implemented development projects under military supervision. In these model villages, but also in hundreds of villages in the highlands, 'Civil Defence Patrols' (PAC's) were established. These paramilitary organisations, in which during the mid-1980s up to one million civilians would participate, became a key instrument of the military for keeping control over rural indigenous communities and to counter guerrilla activity.

Indian organisational structures appeared to be effectively destroyed by the large-scale counter-insurgency campaign of the early 1980s. The URNG had not been eliminated, but was politically defeated and was pushed back to remote areas from
where it continued attacks on military targets. What was left of the CUC leadership was either underground or in exile, and CUC was not re-established until 1986. Although the process took more than a decade, Indian organisations were slowly rebuilt and would even become stronger and more diverse actors in civil society than before. This process of indigenous organisation building can be divided into three periods: (i) from 1984 to 1990, when human rights violations were emphasised, (ii) from 1990 to 1993, when the emphasis was on Indian rights, and (iii) from 1993 to 1996, when Indian organisations were actively incorporated into the peace process.

The first period of rebuilding Indian organisations runs (almost) parallel to the new civilian government of President Cerezo (1986-1990). However, the first organisation serving as a national channel publicly denouncing disappearances and atrocities committed in indigenous communities had already emerged in 1984: the Mutual Support Group (GAM). This human rights organisation was formed by a group of relatives of disappeared, led by Nineth Montenegro, and would become one of the most active opposition groups in civil society during the 1980s. Although initially founded by Ladinos, it soon also incorporated Indian members. Other human rights organisations more dominated by indigenas were set up after the Esquipulas agreement. The international attention generated by this Central American peace plan, and the call for a National Dialogue, provided new political openings for the Guatemalan opposition. Human rights organisations run by indigenas, such as CONAVIGUA (the organisation of Indian widows and orphans), CERJ (that rallied against civil patrols in the highlands) and CONDEG (which tried to organise the internally displaced) made the international community aware of the genocide that had struck the Indian communities. And more important, that paramilitary violence was continuing under the Cerezo administration. Within the framework of the National Dialogue, these organisations started to coordinate their activities. Until that time coordination around specific Indian issues had not existed publicly.

The second phase of rebuilding Indian organisations started in 1990, when the first round of peace talks began in Oslo between the URNG and the government. It was an election year and the presidency was won in the second round by conservative candidate Jorge Serrano. Two new coalitions of Indian organisations were founded in this election year: Majawil Q'ij and COMG. The first was an alliance formed during preparations for the Latin American counter-celebration of the fifth centennial of the 'discovery' (a campaign called '500 years of popular and Indian resistance') organised with several other Indian organisations from Latin America. A large international gathering of these groups was convened in Guatemala in October 1991 by the new coalition Majawil Q'ij, a joint effort of several Indian organisations including CUC, GAM, CONAVIGUA, CONDEG, CERJ and the CPR's. The gradual shift of emphasis of these organisations from socio-economic demands and human rights issues in the 1980s to an ethnic discourse in the 1990s illustrated a fundamental shift to prioritise Indian demands. This was an obvious move to
FOUR AID CHAINS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

prepare for input on Indian issues from civil society at the peace talks in Oslo. According to Bastos and Camus (1995) the 'popular Indian' organisations also were influenced by another current of Indian organisations emphasising and reaffirming their 'Maya identity'. This diverse set of organisations – including the Guatemalan Maya Language Academy (ALMG), the Maya education centre and publisher Cholsamaj, and several development NGOs, among them FUNDADESE – in 1990 formed the other new Indian coalition: the Guatemalan Council of Maya Organisations (COMG). These two coordinating bodies of Indian organisations, representing a 'popular Indian' current and one dedicated to Maya self-determination, were the first signs of a dynamic process in which Indian organisations would become active players in Guatemalan civil society.

COMG and its 'Mayanist' institutions stayed away from the October 1991 gathering of Latin American Indian organisations in Quetzaltenango (which was hosted by Majawil Q'ij) as COMG considered the event too dominated by Ladino organisations. However, progress in the peace talks forced the two coalitions to work together: point three of the negotiation agenda mentioned 'Indian rights and identity'. The organisations of COMG feared that this issue would be decided by Ladino-composed delegations of the URNG and the government. Together with Majawil Q'ij and others, COMG stated publicly that Indian organisations had the right to directly participate in the debates about this issue. In October 1992 they created a special section in the Coalition of Civil Sectors (csc), the so-called Mesa Maya, to work out proposals on Indian issues and discuss them with the negotiating parties. The Mesa Maya thus became the first united civil society alliance of Indian organisations, in which the basis was laid for a unified proposal on the issue of 'Indian rights and identity'. An additional impulse for concerted action by Indian organisations came in October 1992, when Rigoberta Menchú was granted the Nobel Peace Prize. By that time, however, the peace process had stagnated and even come to a deadlock, meaning that Indian organisations would be unable to discuss their proposals with the negotiating parties until after the talks resumed in 1994.

The incorporation of Indian organisations into the peace process characterises the third period of Indian organisation building, and starts in the aftermath of Serrano's autogolpe (self-staged coup) of 25 May 1993. With Serrano's forced resignation, the system of 'controlled democracy' that had reigned in Guatemala since Cerezo's election in 1985 was exhausted. A combination of economic crisis, widespread corruption and the inability to push the peace process further led to a temporary political crisis that would become a turning point in Guatemala's democratic transition. In the confusing days after the coup, in which Ramiro de León Carpio was elected by Congress to serve as a provisional president, Indian organisations convened a large meeting. The purpose of this Assembly of the Maya People, in which 86 Indian organisations were represented, was to guarantee their participation in the political process following the coup. They demanded a Maya representative in a new provisional government, and announced the formation of
a Permanent Maya Assembly (APM) to guarantee and monitor the effective incorporation of Indian organisations in the post-coup process. However, this effort to form a united coalition of Indian organisations failed as the ‘popular Indian’ organisations that were left over from the Mesa Maya took part in another alliance formed by civil society actors, the National Consensus Body (INC). Within the INC, the ‘popular Indian’ organisations constituted a new alliance: the Maya Unity and Consensus Body (IUCM). The reason for not achieving a united coalition of Indian organisations apparently had to more do with frictions among leaders than with the content of the proposals (Bastos and Camus 1995). Others believed that the lack of unity was the result of an internal struggle between various tendencies of the URNG and those organisations (especially ALMG and COMG) that refused to follow URNG tactics at that time. But all Indian organisations were conscious of the need to coordinate efforts in order to exploit the new political circumstances in favour of indigenous incorporation into the peace process and the process of democratic transition.

It took another year before one united coalition of Indian organisations would be established that would directly influence the peace negotiations. This delay was caused by efforts of newly-appointed President De León Carpio to change the framework for negotiations. But in January 1994 the two parties finally reached an agreement in Mexico on a framework for peace talks, in which the UN would serve as moderator. It was also agreed that representatives of Guatemalan civil society would not be admitted to participate directly in the talks (despite demands by various societal sectors) but that a newly created Civil Society Assembly (ASC) would perform a consultative role, with two important functions. On the one hand, the ASC was invited to present its own proposals on six ‘substantive’ issues. On the other hand, the ASC was assigned the task of endorsing the agreements made by the government and the URNG. Chaired by Catholic Bishop Quezada, the ASC was composed of all major civil society sectors that had been active in previous talks, except for the representatives of the business sector (CACIF).

Indian organisations realised that they had to close their ranks in order to achieve the best possible outcome on the issues that most affected them: the refugees and the displaced, and most of all the agreement on ‘Indian rights and identity’. With this in mind, all the existing alliances of Indian organisations met in early 1994 to prepare their proposals on these important issues. Present were the ALMG (which was actually more an academic institution than an alliance) and COMG, plus the two new alliances that had arisen after the political crisis of 1993, APM and IUCM. Although differences existed over the priority of demands they should put forward, particularly on the issue of Indian autonomy, an agreement was reached. The four alliances also decided to form a new organisation to coordinate their work in the ‘Maya sector’ of the ASC: the Coalition of Organisations of the Maya People of Guatemala (COPMAGUA), established in May 1994, one week before the ASC was officially installed by Bishop Quezada. COPMAGUA would become one of the most important players in the ASC during 1994 and 1995 because it managed to get the
best possible agreement on Indian rights approved by the two parties. COPMAGUA's composition changed in late 1994, when the APM stepped out and two new alliances (Tukum Amam and UPMag) entered the new coalition of Indian alliances. All these alliances together represented over a hundred (national, local, sectoral and multisectoral) Indian organisations. Within five years not only had the number of Indian organisations reached a record but also the level of unity had never been as advanced as with the formation of COPMAGUA. One of the key actors in bringing about this level of coordination among Indian organisations was FUNDADESE.

**Emergence and activities of FUNDADESE**

In the slowly depolarising political climate after the installation of the Cerezo government, several small relief organisations were formed in the highlands to give assistance to indigenous communities affected by the counter-insurgency war. Some of these organisations were related to North American evangelical churches, others were development NGOs set up by Indian leaders. One of them was FUNDADESE, founded in 1985 in Chichicastenango, in the southern part of the Quiche department. In the 1970s a dense network of organisations, committees and cooperatives existed in this area (mainly stimulated by the activities of Acción Católica) which developed into a broad opposition movement against the authoritarian regimes and the armed forces. Many Indian communities joined the ranks of the guerrilla movement in the early 1980s. As a result, repression was brutal and counter-insurgency activities destroyed most of the existing organisational structures. It was an area in which the Civil Defence Patrols (PAC's) were combative and actively frustrated the work of human rights organisations. FUNDADESE's goal was to counter the influence of these PAC's by contributing to a revival of community organisation structures.

Initially, FUNDADESE organised relief projects for orphans, widows and other victims of the counter-insurgency campaign. With primary health care it tried to gain the confidence of communities 'in which repression had left an illness called fear' (Carrera 1994: 39). Only after community councils began to trust their work did FUNDADESE start up new projects on collective enterprises, cultural promotion and organisation building. The idea was to rebuild the social fabric in the communities by strengthening new civil structures and pushing back the influence of the PAC's. FUNDADESE wanted to revalue Indian identity and revive cultural values as a means of counterpoising the military domination in these communities. It stimulated the formation of sectoral and community councils, in order to integrate these into intercommunal councils that in turn served as consultative entities for FUNDADESE's policies. A longer term purpose was that this association of community councils would present their development needs to the local municipality for financial support. In other words, in the long run the municipality would take over FUNDADESE's role as a supplier of funding.

Due to private foreign aid support, FUNDADESE grew quickly and expanded its activities in the late 1980s from southern Quiché to the Sololá and Totonicapán.
areas. New activities were started on infrastructure, education and agriculture. In 1989 fundadese inaugurated Pop Wuj in Chimaltenango, a Maya education centre for technicians in integrated community development. The foundation gradually decentralised its activities and opened a third office in 1993 in Quetzaltenango to assist the displaced and returning refugees in the departments of Quetzaltenango, San Marcos and Retalhuleu. The executive board of fundadese was formed by three of its founders: Israel Sequén (director of Pop Wuj in Chimaltenango), Alberto Mazariegos (director of the Quetzaltenango office) and María Riquiac (director of the central office in Chichicastenango). These three founders and their three offices would form the core of fundadese.

This decentralisation was partly the result of different priorities held by the three directors concerning the activities that fundadese should pursue at a national level. Since the late 1980s the foundation was active in two national networks: the Council of Maya Organisations, comg, and the national ngo coalition coinde. This dual membership reflected the identity that fundadese had developed from the beginning: being a ‘Mayan’ development ngo while simultaneously acting as an association of indigenous communities that through fundadese became (founding) members of comg. Alberto Mazariegos soon became one of the leading figures in comg, where he advocated closer collaboration with the ‘popular Indian’ organisations of Majawil Q’ij in which fundadese indirectly participated as part of coinde. Mazariegos also actively participated in the Mesa Maya in 1992, when the document on ‘Indian rights and identity’ was edited. He soon became publicly known as one of the national Maya leaders advocating a pluri-ethnic solution to the controversy over the position of the Indian population. In early 1994, Bishop Quezada invited Mazariegos – together with Rosalina Tuyuc and Juan León – to form the ‘Maya sector’ in the asc in which copmagua would draft the position paper on Indian rights and identity as input for the peace talks. Shortly before copmagua was formed, Mazariegos left comg because he was increasingly criticised for advocating positions too closely associated with the urng. As most members of comg wanted to stay politically independent, Mazariegos formed Tukum Amam, a new alliance of Indian organisations active in the south-western part of the highlands (where fundadese had set up a new office in 1993). Although a formal member of copmagua only in early 1995, Tukum Amam would serve as Mazariegos’s constituency, legitimising his leading role in copmagua and in the asc.

On account of its other two directors, fundadese also was present in other national alliances. María Riquiac initially participated as a delegate of comg in the Maya sector of the asc and later in 1994 in the ngo sector through coinde. Israel Sequén was active since the early 1990s in several human rights groups, and founded the Mayan human rights commission Wiqub’ Noj, which was a member of comg but also part of the human rights sector of the asc. Fundadese’s education centre Pop Wuj (directed by Sequén) was represented in the asc as one of the research centres and as part of almg. In addition to that, Mazariegos was a
Figure 6.1  The three FUNDADESE offices (1994-96): Aid chains and linkages with the Civil Society Assembly (ASC)

The active participation of FUNDADESE and other Indian organisations in various sectors of the ASC was obviously meant to get COPMAGUA’s position paper approved on ‘Indian rights and identity’. After a lively and emotional debate, and intensive lobbying by Indian leaders, the ASC finally reached consensus on the key points proposed by COPMAGUA: recognition of Guatemala as a pluri-ethnic and pluri-lingual nation, the need to restructure the state and guarantee equitable
relations in a new political system and the recognition of a number of Indian rights. Rejected were more radical points on the restitution of expropriated communal lands and the demand for political autonomy. The conciliatory role of Bishop Quezada as a chair of the ASC and the efforts by Indian leaders such as Mazariegos to reach a consensus were fundamental to getting one of the most critical issues in the peace process approved by the ASC. The next step was to get the agreement endorsed by the URNG and the government. However, the peace talks were stagnating as a result of strong negative reactions from within civil society against the agreement on the Truth Commission. The fear was that the Indian rights agreement also would be compromised at the negotiation table, leading to a vague and superficial document. COPMAGUA kept insisting that it wanted to participate at the negotiation table and that Indian organisations were to verify the agreement. To put pressure on the two parties, a number of massive public marches were organised in October and November 1994 by COPMAGUA members, including the FUNDADESE-led Tikum Amam in Quetzaltenango. The URNG commanders, disturbed by the negative reactions from civil society, announced in December that from now on they would accept the consensus documents of the ASC without modifications. In reaction, the Catholic Church decided to withdraw Bishop Quezada as chair of the ASC, afraid that it would be identified with URNG positions. The prominent role of the ASC was seriously reduced by Quezada's departure, but the Indian organisations knew that 'their document' had been saved.

After strong international pressure, by the UN and the paises amigos, peace talks were resumed in March 1995, although the government refused COPMAGUA's participation at the negotiation table. The process had to be speeded up as campaigns were gradually starting for the November 1995 presidential elections. Finally, at the end of March the two parties reached an agreement on the Indian rights issue, in which the basic proposals of the ASC consensus document were included. Alberto Mazariegos and Rosalina Tuyuc were invited as representatives of COPMAGUA to witness the formal signing of the agreement. In a special assembly, COPMAGUA discussed the outcome with its members and finally endorsed it as 'a first important step that opened the door' (Bastos and Camus 1995: 84). Many issues still had to be worked out in detail, for which the agreement proposed to establish special commissions (comisiones paritarias) in which Indian organisations would actively participate under UN supervision. In this follow-up stage FUNDADESE also performed an active role, as Tikum Amam was elected to take part in six of the eight working groups preparing positions for these commissions. With the agreement on Indian rights approved, Mazariegos used his position in the ASC to prepare for the upcoming elections of November 1995. In the framework of the new progressive political alliance organised to take part in these elections, the Democratic Front for a New Guatemala (FDNG), various Indian alliances participated as part of the Maya front N'ukuj Ajpop. Mazariegos was one of the founders of this front and a member of the political council of the FDNG, which nominated Indian leader Juan León as a candidate for vice-president. The FDNG successfully attracted
voters from the Indian communities and managed to get six deputies elected to Congress, among them Indian leaders Rosalina Tuyuc (CONAVIGUA) and Manuela Alvarado from Quetzaltenango, a member of Tukum Amam and trained by FUNDADESE’s education centre Pop Wuj.

In 1996, after the presidential elections, FUNDADESE’s activities in the ASC were scaled down. The Indian rights issue had been resolved and the new government of President Alvaro Arzú promised that the final peace agreement was only a matter of time. Maria Riquiac had already concluded her activities in the ASC in early 1995 as the office in Chichicastenango required her presence to continue coordinating the programme, which (after the successful elections) now also included building and maintaining municipal power structures. Sequén and Mazariegos both left the ASC in 1996, although they remained active in the preparatory work for the comisiones paritarias. Mazariegos’s priority had shifted from creating national political space for Indian organisations to assuring financial support for a new regional coalition of NGOs working in the south-western part of the highlands: the Movimiento Tzuk Kim-pop. Directed by Mazariegos, this coalition counted eighteen local NGOs, among them FUNDADESE. Its purpose was to contribute to strengthening civil society by supporting and coordinating local and regional development projects aimed at building up local Indian organisations. As a leader of Tukum Amam, Mazariegos participated in several follow-up commissions for the implementation of the Indian rights agreement. He also continued to advocate for the active participation of Indian organisations in the political arena as part of his activities in N’ukuj Ajpop. Gradually he handed over his responsibilities for FUNDADESE’s Quetzaltenango office to others, although he stayed on as a member of the foundation’s executive board.

- Private foreign aid to FUNDADESE

The initial activities of FUNDADESE were financed with resources from the health ministry and with support from other NGOs such as CAPS and IDESAC. Contacts with several international agencies in 1987 resulted in small donations from the Spanish IEPALA, the Inter-American Foundation and OXFAM-America (who financed the community development programme until 1990). Meanwhile, three European aid agencies decided in 1989 to support the new education centre Pop Wuj in Chimaltenango: NOVIB, Brot für die Welt and OXFAM-Belgium. In the same year, the Danish Ibis and the Spanish CIPIE expressed interest in financing the Chichicastenango programme. Particularly the support from Ibis, starting in 1990, meant a considerable enlargement in the community development programmes. Two years later, NOVIB decided to finance a similar programme, which would triple the amount of communities serviced by the foundation. Ibis and NOVIB would become FUNDADESE’s main funders by contributing to a rapid expansion of its community development programme in the 1990s. Both agencies highly valued FUNDADESE’s strategy of strengthening the process of community organisation by supporting locally identified development needs. Ibis originally would have
preferred to support a local Indian membership organisation, but these were still hard to find in 1989. Moreover, it considered FundaDeSe’s hybrid structure (between a service-delivery NGO and a community-based organisation) an attractive alternative. FundaDeSe’s active participation in several Indian networks, such as COMG, confirmed perceptions by *Ibis* and NOVIB that it was linked to key national efforts to strengthen Indian participation in civil society. However, surprisingly little coordination existed between the two main donors of FundaDeSe.

NOVIB, also a funder of COMG, was approached by FundaDeSe director Mazariegos in early 1994 to see whether it would be willing to support his activities in the ASC. Mazariegos by that time had left COMG and was building up his new Indian alliance *Tukum Amam*. A few months earlier he also had started ‘his’ new office in Quetzaltenango, although funds were still channelled through the central office in Chichicastenango. Mazariegos asked NOVIB to finance the consolidation of COPMAGUA in the ASC, and in particular to facilitate the incorporation of *Tukum Amam* into COPMAGUA. The request was approved, as Mazariegos represented an important NOVIB partner and had proven to be a key person in contributing to unity among the Indian alliances within the ASC. By supporting Mazariegos’s activities in the ASC, NOVIB also hoped to get a better understanding of discussions and alliances within the complex and rapidly changing network of Indian organisations. An additional reason for supporting the request was that NOVIB considered active participation of NGOs and popular organisations in the ASC crucial for the peace process. Although NOVIB was aware that Mazariegos’s activities in the ASC were not directly related to FundaDeSe’s local work, the legal structure of the foundation was used to channel support for his work to *Tukum Amam* for two years. These financial resources enabled Mazariegos to operate independently from COMG, but also from the other FundaDeSe directors.

*Achievements of FundaDeSe*

The previous analysis suggests that FundaDeSe’s achievements should be examined at the two levels on which it contributed to incorporating *indígenas* into civil society. At a local level the central office in Chichicastenango focused on supporting Indian communities by rebuilding Indian organisational structures. These activities, which have been running for over a decade, are rather well documented and have been examined by several external evaluations. The other level is FundaDeSe’s active role in national civil society coalitions, in particular its role in COPMAGUA which participated in the ASC. These efforts spurred the approval of the Indian Rights and Identity Agreement as part of the peace process. Because this work has not yet been evaluated, most attention of the fieldwork was concentrated on these macro activities. Although both areas of activities are narrowly linked from a political perspective, they were funded separately by private aid agencies and I therefore would prefer to examine them one by one.

The main goal of FundaDeSe’s community work in Chichicastenango was to
rebuild local organisational structures and 'community consensus', all destroyed during the early 1980s. The method used was the implementation of health and socio-economic projects to tackle the extreme poverty in the area, actively steered by local community groups. Fundadese had to walk on eggs, as local communities were reluctant to become involved in any organisational activity of a political nature: this had in the recent past been synonymous with guerrilla activity (Højrup Jensen 1995: 8). This is not to say these indigenous communities had no organisational structure, on the contrary, but existing organisations often had fractured the communities and made villagers reluctant to get involved in joint community activities. Many had even turned away from the Catholic Church (which had been associated with the guerrilla movement since the late 1970s) and become members of evangelical sects as a means of physical protection. Fundade's strategy was to work initially with existing comité's pro-mejoramiento, identifying members willing to set up new committees around particular projects. In this way it tried to neutralise the interference of sects and PA's in community development. These new committees were coordinated by a community council which would form the new organisational basis of the community; linkages between several communities were based on similar project activities (intercommunity councils). Their leaders were trained by Fundade to solicit their project funding in the long run directly from the municipality. In short, the programme aimed to improve the capacity of communities for self-management and planning, and to increase their negotiation capacity vis-à-vis the municipality.

What did Fundade achieve with this local empowerment model? The statistical outputs were impressive: working over a decade in more than twenty communities (in three different municipalities) resulted in the formation of about fifty local project committees, six community councils and five intercommunity councils (on health, culture, trade, agriculture and infrastructural improvement). Local project committees, which presented their development priorities to Fundade, generally most valued support in the area of infrastructural improvements (water and electricity), small credits for agriculture and support to improve trade conditions. Organisational and cultural projects scored rather low, which is understandable given the widespread poverty in these communities. However, the project outcome was not that community councils were strengthening cohesion in the communities. Participation of project beneficiaries decreased soon after projects had been approved, as most beneficiaries considered participation in community councils as a condition to get funding (Cabrera and Camposeco 1996). Consequently, new community organisation structures were not very sustainable as they depended entirely on financial input from and institutional decisions by Fundade. The long-term purpose, to make the communities self-sufficient by increasing their negotiation capacity with municipalities, thus was far too ambitious.

Evaluation missions identified several problems inherent in Fundade's approach. One was poor integration of projects and educational activities, which
were not only badly attended but also of low quality. Another problem was that Fundadese often imposed a new organisational model in communities without respecting traditional organisation structures or cultural patterns. A lack of involvement of target groups in the design phase of projects and a priority for working with young leaders (and disregarding the traditional importance of the elderly in Maya communities) generated various conflicts. Furthermore, Fundadese’s policy of increasing women’s participation in community organisations had not been very successful: men dominated all newly established organisations and projects were reproducing traditional roles for women, rather than challenging their subordinated position. Despite this fundamental critique, an Ibis evaluation pointed at the positive outcomes: communities slowly were getting reorganised, were starting to recuperate their ethnic identity, and new leadership was emerging. However, it was not clear to what extent external aid had contributed to these achievements, or whether this would have happened anyway. Given the severe conditions, spectacular results could not be expected in the short run, according to Ibis. But in the longer run the model was expected to contribute to integrated collaboration among popular organisations, NGOs and local governments, which was considered to be an important basis for future reconciliation (Bye et al. 1995: 35).

While Fundadese’s achievements at the local level were not (yet) very tangible, at the national level it managed to achieve at least three visible results. First of all, Fundadese (and more particularly Mazariegos and Sequén) from the late 1980s stimulated the formation of new Indian organisations. It started of course with Fundadese itself, followed by the foundation (together with other ‘Mayanist’ organisations) of the national Maya coalition COMG. Meanwhile, although only visible after 1992, Fundadese actively contributed to the formation of new Indian organisations in the south-western highlands, such as the human rights organisation Wuqub’ Noj and the Indian peasant organisation Consejo Campesino Kabawil. Both became members of Tukum Amam, where Fundadese played an active role as provider of technical and financial support, but also as a channel for access to foreign aid agencies. This facilitating role as intermediary between local Indian organisations and international aid agencies could be played thanks to Fundadese’s reputation derived from its community development work in the Chichicastenango area.

A second achievement of Fundadese at the national level was its contribution to the unity among Indian organisations. Mazariegos had been a strong advocate for unity among Indian organisations and NGOs, blaming its lack on the mentality of divisiveness within Ladino culture. Mazariegos played an active role in trying to establish a temporary alliance between the ‘popular Indian’ organisations of Majawil Q’ij (later IUCM) and the ‘Mayanist’ coalitions COMG and ALMG. As a leader of COMG, he managed to get the two currents united in 1992 within the Mesa Maya, a forum in which for the first time a broad spectrum of Indian organisations discussed the key issues of a future peace agreement on Indian rights and identity. The Mesa Maya lost its momentum when the ‘Mayanist’ organisations felt too little
attention was given by the popular Indian organisations of Majawil Q'ij to three fundamental issues: the explicit recognition of a Maya people, the right to education in Maya languages and the issue of autonomy. After Serrano's coup of May 1993 (the so-called serranazo), Mazariegos again tried to get the two groups united into a temporary alliance in order to maximise the influence of Indian organisations on the peace process. Although he initially failed in this effort (and was forced to leave COMG in late 1993) he did play a key role in founding COPMAGUA, in which all major Indian alliances finally worked together. This temporary unity was crucial in achieving the best possible result during the discussions about the Indian rights agreement in the ASC.

The third achievement of FUNDADESE at a national level was the active role it played in the preparation and approval of the peace agreement on Indian rights and identity. Even if it can be argued that FUNDADESE as a development NGO did not have a high profile in the ASC, its influence was illustrated by the active participation of Mazariegos, Sequén and Riquiac in several sectors of the ASC. Mazariegos was, beyond doubt, the most prominent of the three, as he was the leading representative of COPMAGUA in the ASC. His attitude was important, as he took an intermediate position between the two extremes within COPMAGUA. Most sectors active in the ASC confirmed that Mazariegos had been one of the key persons in the adoption of the consensus document on the issue of Indian rights, which was probably the most controversial issue of the entire peace process. That the final peace agreement on Indian rights was not essentially different from the ASC position paper was a clear political victory for COPMAGUA and its constituent organisations. Of course, a favourable political context and national and international pressure also contributed to the approval of the agreement on Indian rights, which had been the most difficult and complex step during Guatemala's democratic transition. Moreover, the agreement generated the sense that the peace process was entering its last stage (Aguilera et al. 1996).

An additional achievement was the incorporation of several representatives of Indian organisations into the political arena after the 1995 elections. However, it could hardly be characterised as an achievement of FUNDADESE itself: rather it was a personal accomplishment of Mazariegos, who actively supported the participation of Indian organisations in the electoral alliance of the FDNG as part of N'ukuj Ajpop in June 1995. Other members of COPMAGUA (COMG and ALMG) rejected this political alliance and feared that it would affect the independent position of COPMAGUA in the follow-up to the Indian rights agreement. But Mazariegos and his colleagues in N'ukuj Ajpop believed that the opportunity for Indian organisations to participate in political decisions had to be utilised, especially because they lacked any experience in this area (Bastos and Camus 1995). The effort was successful: the FDNG won six deputy seats and was broadly supported by Indian communities of the highlands, despite low voter participation. After the elections, it was clear that Mazariegos gradually had withdrawn from FUNDADESE, which in fact had been a stepping stone for him to get involved in the national Indian
What did all these achievements of FUNDADESE and its leaders contribute to the strength of Guatemalan civil society? At the local level, with the community organisation programme in Chichicastenango, it is still too early to determine whether one can speak of a process of sustainable change regarding demilitarisation of civil society. The influence of the PACh’s certainly decreased, but this was also the case in other parts of the country. Neither did the organisational model that was promoted function as it was intended: instead of empowering the communities by supporting the formation of community councils, evidence suggests that the communities were in fact disempowered and that the locus of empowerment was with FUNDADESE. This could not have been the intention of the donor agencies. But at the regional and the national levels, FUNDADESE’s activities (which served to stimulate Indian organising and coordination) no doubt contributed to the increased participation of indigenas in civil society.

An important characteristic of FUNDADESE, and in particular of Alberto Mazariegos, has been the commitment to a long-term vision of recovering ‘Maya identity’. On the basis of that vision, FUNDADESE’s leaders carefully analysed the various stages in which Guatemalan civil society provided new political openings for Indian organising. FUNDADESE reacted adequately in order to occupy these new political spaces, or perhaps more accurately: to occupy every possible space. Consequently, the evolution of FUNDADESE’s activities runs virtually parallel to the periods of Indian organisation building mentioned above. In the first period of the 1980s FUNDADESE focused exclusively on rebuilding Indian organisations at the local level in an area deeply affected by counter-insurgency warfare. As soon as the political climate eased in the early 1990s, when the second period started with the emergence of national Indian alliances, FUNDADESE was one of the active founders of COMG. This organisation strongly influenced the discussion on ‘Indian rights and identity’ within the Mesa Maya. In the third period, after Serrano’s coup and the resumption of peace talks, FUNDADESE’s leaders were active at several levels and in different sectors of the ASC to achieve the best possible agreement on Indian rights, followed by efforts to incorporate Indian organisations into the political arena.

Together with other ‘Mayan’ NGOs, working closely but tacitly with opposition-related popular organisations, FUNDADESE contributed to strengthening civil society, but also to opening up political society for the excluded indigenous majority of Guatemala. This process lasted a little over a decade and was of course also influenced by the favourable political climate in Central America after 1990. The peace process was carefully exploited to guarantee that this newly conquered space would lead to constitutional reforms and the acceptance of a series of Indian rights that were to prevent marginalisation of indigenas in the future. As the agreement states: ‘every issue directly concerning indigenous peoples requires their active involvement, and the current agreement wants to create, broaden and strengthen structures, conditions, opportunities and guarantees for participation
by indigenous peoples, fully respecting their identity and the exercise of their rights' (COPMAGUA 1995: 1). This affirmed that Indian organisations would be actively incorporated in decision-making, thus ensuring that the proposed changes could not be reversed. The Guatemalan agreement on Indian rights and identity therefore, was, as a top UN official commented, 'of transcendental importance and unique in the world'.

**FUNDADESE in the aid chain**

The 'secret' of FUNDADESE's success at the national level was in the first place based on the way it used its status as a local development NGO to legitimise its national role as an Indian membership organisation. FUNDADESE was a 'launching pad' for Indian leaders such as Mazariegos to acquire key positions in Indian organisations operating at a national level. From the moment Mazariegos became active in COMG, he began to co-found an amazing number of new Indian organisations. In all of them, he occupied a central position, which made him a spider in the rapidly expanding social web of Indian organisations. In addition to that, he (together with the other two FUNDADESE leaders Sequén and Riquiac) was well aware that unity was a precondition for achieving results for Indian organisations in the peace process. Thus, working towards consensus on polarised positions in the 'Maya sector' without compromising an explicit Maya focus was critical to his successful work in the ASC.

The question could be raised why Mazariegos needed FUNDADESE at all after he had acquired his leading position in COPMAGUA. The answer is that he was well aware that the conquest of political space for Indian organisations had to be combined with concrete actions to improve the well-being of indigenous communities (Bastos and Camus 1993: 192). This had been the method in Chichicastenango, and it was later applied to the communities attended by the Quetzaltenango office. But Mazariegos had learned from the Chichicastenango experience, in which competition with other local Indian NGOs (such as COINDI) had weakened FUNDADESE's performance. This competition was not only a result of political rivalry, but also an attempt to get access to foreign aid resources. This is why he established Tzuk Kim-pop, the NGO coalition in the south-western highlands. In this area political rivalry was minimal and various local development NGOs worked together in a complementary way, presenting integrated proposals to private aid agencies. Popular organisations that were formed or strengthened with Tzuk Kim-pop's community development projects were in turn linked to the national level through the network of Tukum Amam. In this fashion, Mazariegos used his political prestige to increase private aid flows to indigenous communities, and his contacts with donors to stimulate the formation of new Indian organisations that would in turn strengthen his own political platform.

Although this 'stepping stone' tactic created a vast number of Indian organisations in a short period, it also had negative sides. Linkages between national alliances and local Indian organisations, for example, were not very well developed.
Communication between the national and local levels during the negotiations over the Indian rights agreement generally had a one-way and top-down character. The communities supported by the Chichicastenango office were informed about the ongoing negotiations, but provided no input. Although most member organisations of Tukum Amam in Quetzaltenango had discussed the asc consensus documents (gatherings for which FUNDASESE had provided the funding) feedback on the final peace agreement sometimes took considerable time. All the Indian organisations forming Tukum Amam still were very young and lacked strong internal structures to keep their leaders accountable. Consequently, discussions at the level of the asc between national alliances about the peace process took place in a relatively small and elitist environment, in which little time or priority existed for consultations with the local organisations that these networks represented. This point can be refuted, however, by arguing that it is unfair to expect such consultations considering the short time frame of the negotiations and the embryonic stage of Indian organising.

The key weakness of FUNDASESE was in fact its organisational structure. In the Chichicastenango area it maintained an ambiguous image as a hybrid between a local development NGO and a membership organisation. This was apparent in the existence of two assemblies functioning parallel to each other. One assembly was basically formed by executive board members, who decided on FUNDASESE’s priorities and policies. The other was composed of members of the intercommunity councils, who were elected by the communities. The second assembly had no legal basis, and only functioned as an advisory board to FUNDASESE’s directors. Although the intention was that members of the ‘community’ assembly would become part of the executive board of the foundation, this did not happen in practice. One reason was that these council members often did not represent the communities, but only the projects supported by FUNDASESE. Another reason was that the gradual ‘decentralisation’ of FUNDASESE into three autonomously functioning offices with different development goals made the formation of a membership organisation highly problematic (Cabrera and Camposeco 1996). The biggest problem was that the three directors were unable to agree on common priorities while maintaining an (unworkable) organisational structure that was only kept up to please funders. Mazariegos’s preference to work at the national level and Riquiac’s priority to continue the community development activities were in fact no longer compatible. This explains Mazariegos’s gradual retreat to other organisations (such as Tzuk Kim-pop). The fracturing of FUNDASESE into three separate organisations would only be a matter of time.

NOVI B and Ibis both proposed FUNDASESE as a case study for the present research as it was considered to be one of their most successful partners in Guatemala. However, independent studies and evaluations suggested that the community development programme in Chichicastenango suffered from several deficiencies: low beneficiary participation in project design, too many activities for the communities, overworked (and often unqualified) staff, absence of a gender
focus, lack of educational activities, poor administrative systems for the revolving funds and worst of all: a method of organisation building that contributed to the disempowerment of the communities. Given this rather negative assessment of the community development programme, the question could be raised why NOVIB and Ibis were so positive about FUNDASESE. Part of the answer is that the local consultants, who were supposed to monitor the programme and give advice, hardly visited the communities, so that desk officers of the agencies had to rely on the (overly positive) biannual reports submitted by FUNDASESE. But this explanation is not completely satisfactory, as these desk officers should have known the critical content of the independent evaluation studies. More likely, the agencies gave FUNDASESE the benefit of the doubt, as it had to work under difficult political conditions (Bye et al. 1995: 35). In addition, their assessment of the community development programme might have been put off track by FUNDASESE’s successful activities at the national level. Only in 1996 did both agencies realise that FUNDASESE had been unable to handle the rapid increase of external funding.

The erroneous perception by both agencies of the quality of FUNDASESE’s community organisation programme illustrates that NOVIB and Ibis performed a rather passive donor role in their aid chains. This should be taken into account when the contribution of NOVIB to FUNDASESE’s national work is assessed. Although allocated to FUNDASESE as an institution, it was clear that NOVIB’s support for the ASC activities was handled personally by Mazariegos. NOVIB was aware that this was caused by the gradual decentralisation of FUNDASESE from one to three separate and autonomously operating offices, of which only the oldest in Chichicastenango had legal status. Mazariegos’s ‘chameleonic behaviour’ due to his responsibility for several organisations at the same time, often added to the confusion. Notwithstanding his multiple hats, Mazariegos enjoyed confidence among funders, and NOVIB knew that they were actually financing the formation of the new Maya alliance Tukum Amam, albeit formulated as a FUNDASESE project. But this was not contrary to NOVIB’s objectives, one of which was to strengthen Indian participation and unity in the ASC. From that perspective NOVIB directly or indirectly had supported all the tendencies that were present in COPMAGUA, the national coalition of Indian alliances.

The ASC played a temporary role in political society during the peace negotiations as it actually functioned as a parallel parliament. Virtually all organisations participating in the ASC were dependent on support from private aid agencies. The same was true for Indian organisations, who would not have been able to participate at the national level without private foreign aid. Without this support many alliances in the ASC would not have been able to meet, to travel and to elaborate proposals. It is therefore likely that NOVIB’s support to Mazariegos added to the unity of COPMAGUA, and thus indirectly contributed to the successful adoption of the Indian rights agreement. However, NOVIB also contributed to the formation of umbrella organisations with poor organisational capacity below the level of their
national leaders. Another downside to NOVIB's support for Mazariegos's work in Tukum Amam was that it accelerated the internal fracturing of FUNDADESE, as the need to achieve consensus over priorities was inhibited by the availability of foreign funding. Closer monitoring by NOVIB would have revealed that the national activities of FUNDADESE were virtually delinked from their local activities. By not actively promoting the incorporation of the FUNDADESE-supported indigenous communities into the macro-activities of COPMAGUA, a chance was missed to reverse the disempowering impact of the community development work which was also funded by NOVIB. It is surprising, given their priority for linking micro-level community development with macro-level policy advocacy, that both NOVIB and Ibis paid so little attention to making use of this unique opportunity in the case of FUNDADESE.53

Assessing FUNDADESE's civil society building performance
Not only for funders but also for me the case of FUNDADESE turned out to be rather complex. It actually deserves even more detailed treatment than what is possible in the framework of the present study, as FUNDADESE represents a good example of a newly emerging type of Indian development NGO in Latin America. In contrast to the other case studies, I will first make an assessment of the role of FUNDADESE in civil society building, before examining its organisational capacities.

The Guatemalan peace negotiations that started in 1990 stimulated the process of democratisation, which had entered a stage of early transition with the inauguration of a civilian government in 1986. The gradual incorporation of Guatemalan indígenas into civil society and the formation of multisectoral alliances (such as the CSC in 1992) suggested a step towards mid-transition. However, the return to military campaigns in the countryside in 1993, followed by Serrano's autogolpe represented a temporary setback in this promising process. With the resumption of peace talks in January 1994 and the installation of the ASC as a forum for discussion among civil society sectors, the mid-transition phase started, leading to the final peace agreement in December 1996. It was in this period that FUNDADESE, together with other Indian organisations, gave a decisive push to the peace process by demanding recognition of Indian rights and formal incorporation of the indigenous majority into Guatemalan civil society.

The main goal of private aid agencies supporting FUNDADESE was to contribute to this process of incorporating marginalised indigenous communities and groups into civil society, in particular those groups and communities in the highlands that were disarticulated by the counter-insurgency campaigns of the early 1980s. Two intervention strategies were used to achieve this goal: rebuilding the organisational capacity of indigenous communities by supporting self-identified development needs, and strengthening unity among national alliances of Indian organisations in order to guarantee their participation in the discussions about the agreement on Indian rights. The complexity of the FUNDADESE case is that these intervention strategies were delinked from one another, both by funders and by FUNDADESE
itself, and thus have to be examined separately. The outcome of the community organisation programme, which received most of the private aid funding, generally was disappointing. Recent evaluations have even suggested negative consequences of FUNDASE's intervention model, which contributed to disarticulating communal structures. The impact of private aid on strengthening civil society at the local level thus turned out to be rather negative. 

The policy impact of the activities by individual FUNDASE leaders at the national level, through a variety of national coalitions – initially COMG and CONADEHGUÁ and Tukum Amam – was more successful. Particularly Mazariegos and Sequén tried to achieve unity among the variety of Indian alliances assembled in COPMAGUA, which served as an intermediary coalition for Indian organisations in the peace process. However, the adoption of the Indian rights agreement was only an indirect achievement of FUNDASE. Thanks to his position as director of FUNDASE, Mazariegos was able to enter the leadership of COMG and participate in the Mesa Maya, which provided him with the credits to apply for external funding that would enable him to set up Tukum Amam in 1994 after his political conflict in COMG. Besides strengthening the 'sectoral' alliance of Indian organisations (in COPMAGUA), Mazariegos also managed to open up intermediary channels in political society by promoting the participation of Indian candidates (as part of the Maya front N'ukuj Ajpop) in the FDNG. This progressive political party acted as a new alliance of societal sectors in political society and will possibly become one of the key pillars of a future political alliance of the left-wing opposition together with the URNG. In other words, indirectly FUNDASE and their funders contributed to opening up space in political society that had been blocked for four decades.

The participation of local members in the activities of the national alliances was low or absent: negotiations took place in the capital and, at best, final results were reported to member organisations. However, the legitimacy of COPMAGUA was never publicly questioned by any of the parties, nor by the organisations active in the ASC. Although representatives from the organisations composing COPMAGUA were elected by their constituent members, below the level of national leaders little capacity and structure existed to make them accountable to the local communities that they represented. Of course, most Indian organisations had emerged only a few years earlier and were still in a process of building this capacity. But FUNDASE seldom managed to integrate these local and national initiatives, which could have been an opportunity to bridge that gap. Mazariegos and other Indian leaders spoke on behalf of communities that were barely organised, and represented Indian organisations with a handful of members. Furthermore, the low participation of women in the leadership of Indian organisations was remarkable given the active participation of women's organisations inside the ASC. Private aid flows after 1993 stimulated the formation of new Indian organisations, including Tukum Amam, but their top-heavy structure revealed a lack of downward accountability.

The sustainability of FUNDASE and its community organisation programme,
considered as an outcome of private aid interventions, turned out to be rather weak. The empowerment of the communities actually followed the pattern of the aid chain: private aid flows were channelled by FUNDADESE to the communities on the condition that they organised community councils. This pattern strengthened FUNDADESE's influence in the communities, without strengthening the communities vis-à-vis the municipalities. As long as aid flows continued, communities had no reason to actively search for funding from local governments. A reduction of aid flows to the communities would probably have destroyed the community councils, which left funders with no other choice than to continue funding the programmes and demand better integration of these councils with existing power structures in the communities. Only if the councils in the future were truly assimilated by the communities, would prospects be generated for getting municipal funding. The sustainability of national activities was better, not only because of the temporary character of the peace talks, but also because the amount of aid involved was relatively low. A new organisation, Tukum Amam, was set up with this temporary funding and would continue to acquire resources from Mazariegos's multiple activities in other Indian organisations. The case of FUNDADESE seems to confirm what was found in other case studies as well: modest and temporary funding based on detailed (political) analysis by funders generally generates better results in strengthening civil society than large amounts of funding, especially if serious monitoring is neglected.

6.4 Strengthening civil society from a regional level: ASOCODE

The fourth case study is not limited to one country, but covers the entire Central American region. It focuses on one of the strongest regional civil society networks that appeared in the early 1990s: the Central American Association of Small and Medium Agricultural Producers, ASOCODE. Founded in 1991, this regional coalition of national peasant organisations quickly impressed Central American governments and international organisations with its direct and innovative approach to pursuing alternative economic strategies for the Central American region. ASOCODE proposed to restructure the agricultural sector in post-war Central America, arguing that peace would not be sustainable as long as widespread poverty persisted in rural areas. ASOCODE'S leaders soon managed to negotiate directly with the ministers of agriculture, and were even invited to the summits of the Central American presidents. ASOCODE'S performance stimulated the formation of other regional civil society networks, eventually leading to a regional coalition of Central American civil society networks in 1994, the Civil Initiative for Central American Integration (ICIC). Private foreign aid played a key role in this development, as will be shown in the following case study.
Roots of regional coordination among peasant organisations

The timing of the establishment of ASOCODE (the early 1990s) needs some explanation: why was this Central American network of peasant organisations not established earlier, for example in the aftermath of the Esquipulas agreement? After all, it was in 1988 that similar regional coalitions were set up for labour unions (CCOTRA) and development NGOs (CCOD). One reason is that campesinos constitute a very heterogeneous sector: they include landless peasants as well as landholding agricultural entrepreneurs producing export crops. Another reason is that some organisations had tried since 1988 to establish a regional coalition, but were faced with several obstacles. By the early 1990s, a concurrence of at least five developments created new opportunities for regional coordination among peasant organisations: the end of the civil wars, re-emergence of a regional integration perspective, a new generation of peasant leaders, the end of the Sandinista revolution and new priorities of private foreign aid agencies.

As the rural population had been seriously affected by the civil wars of the 1980s, the regional peace process created new opportunities for peasant unity. Military repression had been strongest in rural areas and Central American campesinos often had confronted one another, for example during the Nicaraguan contra war (Bendaña 1991; Van Heijningen 1994). Many peasant organisations had been organically linked to guerrilla movements, which made them dependent upon the priorities of (often vertically organised) political parties. This changed with the regional peace process unfolding in the early 1990s. Still, peasants were facing serious problems of economic survival generated by stagnating economies and structural adjustment programmes. Rural areas were afflicted by poverty rates often exceeding seventy percent: unemployment was widespread and there were few prospects for improvement in a sector that employed half of the Central American population. Liberalisation of markets had increased cheap agricultural imports and facilitated a rise in transnational agro-export capital. This tendency threatened the existence of small farmers, especially while cheap credit programmes and price subsidies were being cut by governments. Peasant leaders from various Central American countries increasingly realised that they were confronted with similar problems, and that better coordination was a precondition for survival of the campesino sector (Arias and Rodríguez 1994).

The emergence of ASOCODE also was a response to a new regional governmental policy agenda that became visible after the ‘political watershed’ in Central America of 1989-90. At the Antigua summit in June 1990, with the Chamorro government installed in Nicaragua and peace talks underway in El Salvador and Guatemala, it was clear that the emphasis of the agenda had shifted from political to economic issues. But even more important, the presidents were no longer divided on political issues and agreed to renew Central American regional integration, creating new regional institutions as was explained in Chapter 4. The presidents announced a ‘broad process of consultation between governments and societal sectors’ to enable them to take a leading role in regional decision-making. Peasant organisations
realised that they had been absent at these regional fora and reacted suspiciously to this shift in attitude. As one representative remarked: ‘the appeal for concertación [...] is no more than a tactical concession to enable them to continue with structural adjustment and trade liberalisation’ (Campos 1994: 28-29).

The rise of a new generation of peasant leaders was another element that spurred the foundation of ASOCODE. Contrary to older generations, these young leaders had been to school or were trained in numerous ‘popular education’ courses offered by churches and NGOs. Some of them even had academic degrees. Furthermore, this generation was politically formed amidst the Central American crisis. They witnessed how peasant organisations had been abused by political parties and by the contras and how clientelistic relationships had weakened their organisations. The new generation also was better informed about the political situation in the rest of Central America, due to better communication and regular international travel. These leaders were accustomed to an urban culture with its negative perceptions of the traditional peasantry: they wanted to turn that image around, and considered campesinos as ‘small agricultural producers’. Edelman (1995) labelled them ‘peasant intellectuals’, although it is probably more correct to speak of a new generation of ‘modern peasant leaders’, supported by a new generation of young intellectuals committed to working closely together with peasant organisations.

The new generation of peasant leaders and their technical advisers were in the majority composed of Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans. The latter already had struggled for several years against structural adjustment programmes, which only recently had been started in neighbouring countries. The Nicaraguans took the lead as they had the strongest peasant union (UNAG) of the region. With its international network of contacts, UNAG often served as a meeting point for other Central American peasant organisations. In 1989 UNAG became president of the regional association of agrarian cooperatives CCC-CA, among other things to prevent political isolation of the Sandinista government (Blokland 1992). However, soon after the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, UNAG loosened its ties with the FSLN. The greater autonomy from political parties that the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan peasant organisations had was a key element in the formation of ASOCODE. The end of the Sandinista revolution, in which internationalism was subordinated to the party, thus gave room for new forms of regional cooperation between peasant organisations.

A final factor stimulating the foundation of ASOCODE was the availability of funding from private foreign aid agencies. Two issues are important here. One was a growing reluctance within peasant organisations to depend financially on local NGOs and their international contacts. Related to this was the success of the Central American Coalition of Development Organisations (CCOD) in getting access to private foreign aid, while acting simultaneously as a representative of Central American civil society sectors at international fora. Some European agencies offered financial support for initiatives aimed at better regional coordination of national sectoral associations, as was analysed in Chapter 5, and
were particularly interested in directly funding ‘popular movements’, instead of going indirectly through intermediary NGOs.

ASOCODE’s gradual birth started in the margin of a seminar on food security in November 1990, in which peasant leaders participated from Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras and El Salvador. The seminars were part of a European Community-sponsored programme on food security, organised by the Panamanian research institute CADESCA. The timing was significant, as the Central American governments were preparing their future agricultural policies for the region. A commission was formed to prepare a regional peasant conference in July 1991 and, in the meantime, to search for foreign aid to finance the founding process (ASOCODE 1991b). The commission was coordinated by leaders from the Costa Rican farmers’ association Justicia y Desarrollo. In April 1991 a document was produced to highlight priority issues of the future regional association: production, trade, credit, agro-industry and agrarian reform. This so-called ‘productive strategy’ urged the presidents to ‘democratise the Central American economies’ as a fundamental condition for peace and equitable socio-economic development. The document warned in a sharp and dramatic tone that if current policies were not fundamentally adapted, the campesino sector as a key producer of basic grains was going to disappear. The document was sent to the Council of Central American Ministers of Agriculture (CORECA) and to the seven Central American presidents. The latter, in their summit of July 1991, surprisingly adopted a resolution which welcomed the new initiative and promised to study its proposals. Even before it was formally founded, ASOCODE had been recognised by the Central American governments as the legitimate representative of the campesino sector.

Although the establishment of a regional coalition had been a slow and gradual process, developments accelerated in 1991: in December ASOCODE was formally launched. For the first time in Central America’s history, a regional concertación of peasant organisations was established after an agreement was reached about the key issues of the ‘productive strategy’. All major peasant organisations from Central America, including Belize, were present at the founding congress in Managua. However, the Guatemalan delegation was divided about its membership in ASOCODE, and only started to participate actively in 1993. A Regional Commission was elected, consisting of two peasant leaders from each Central American country. This commission would function as a coordinating body for the national associations, which each kept their own national autonomy, thereby making clear that ASOCODE was formally not a federation. The Regional Commission acted as a meeting space (mesa de encuentro) on a two-year mandate of the congress. The commission was chaired by Wilson Campos, a young and charismatic peasant leader from Costa Rica, and supported by a small team of technical advisors for policy-making and lobbying activities. The six (later seven) national peasant associations were considered to be the ‘building blocks’ of the new coalition where final decisions were taken by consensus. This organisational structure reflected the fear of national member organisations that ASOCODE would convert itself into a
powerful bureaucracy, speaking on behalf of five million campesinos.\textsuperscript{170}

\textit{ASOCODE}'s central goal was to 'democratise the Central American economies' by improving the economic and political conditions for small and medium-size agricultural producers. According to the statutes this was a fundamental condition to securing peace in the region and to facilitate a just socio-economic development (\textit{ASOCODE 1991b}). For this purpose, specific proposals on credit, access to land, commercialisation and sustainable land use were elaborated to lobby national and international decision-making bodies. The driving idea behind this emphasis on proposals was the slogan \textit{no hay protesta sin propuesta}: it is useless to protest at political levels without offering alternative proposals. A natural target for these proposals was the ministries of agriculture and their regional council (\textit{CORECA}), with whom \textit{ASOCODE} managed to convene regular meetings. Another target was the biannual summit of Central American presidents, in which political and economic integration was one of the central topics of discussion. But \textit{ASOCODE} also wanted to confront the international community with the devastating impact of neoliberal economic policies on the vulnerable position of the Central American rural population. For that purpose \textit{ASOCODE} delegations lobbied the European Union, European governments, the Inter-American Development Bank (\textit{IDB}), the World Bank and a wide variety of non-governmental development agencies and farmers' unions outside Central America.\textsuperscript{171} Apart from political support for \textit{ASOCODE}'s 'productive strategy', these delegations also requested financial support to develop training and research activities and to convene regular meetings of affiliated organisations.

\textbf{Private foreign aid to \textit{ASOCODE}}

Close relationships were developed with private aid agencies from the very beginning. Although the national member associations would have been able to finance the foundation of \textit{ASOCODE}, it was decided in early 1991 first to search for 'fresh' foreign funding.\textsuperscript{172} The provisional regional commission, led by Wilson Campos, approached various private aid agencies to request financial support for the foundation of the new regional body. Most agencies reacted positively and were enthusiastic that the initiative for more coordination was taken by peasant organisations themselves, and not by intermediary NGOs.\textsuperscript{173} They were also charmed by \textit{ASOCODE}'s priority for sustainable agricultural land use and its determination to request participation in the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Within a few months the necessary US$ 110,000 for the first year was covered by half a dozen agencies, of which the largest part was granted by the Dutch agencies \textit{Hivos} and \textit{ICCO}.\textsuperscript{174} Most of this budget was meant to finance travel and organisation costs for national and regional meetings, and to cover the expenses for a small secretariat in Costa Rica.

At the founding congress the newly-elected regional coordinator, Wilson Campos, straightforwardly criticised foreign aid agencies for funding peasant organisations indirectly through intermediary NGOs. This support in many cases had
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not benefited peasants, ‘but only the great number of NGOs who used our name’ (ASOCODE 1991b: 22). He called for a restructuring of foreign aid flows directly to the popular sectors of Central America. With (private) foreign aid to Nicaragua and Costa Rica declining, this was a risky move. However, more private aid agencies did show interest in funding the regional coalition and even the EC promised to consider financial support. This positive response to ASOCODE’s foundation demonstrated that private aid agencies had high expectations of the new coalition even though ASOCODE’s only achievement up to that point had been to bring all the major Central American peasant organisations together into one alliance. Nevertheless, several agencies had doubts about the creation of a supranational coordinating body of peasant organisations, which they feared could lead to more verticalist structures and less attention for coordination at the micro level.

The generous support from private aid agencies overwhelmed ASOCODE. The Regional Commission was pleased with the positive reactions from what they called la cooperación internacional solidaria, but they also realised that an uncontrolled influx of resources could eventually damage the fragile peasant unity. To prevent this, ASOCODE decided to convene a meeting with private aid agencies, delegations from national associations and their technical advisors to discuss a general framework in which foreign aid would be more adequately attuned to the process of regional coordination (ASOCODE 1993a). This was in fact a unique initiative, as the scarce efforts towards donor coordination always had been initiated by donors and not by recipients. The meeting was postponed several times as ASOCODE first had to draft its own long-term policy programme, for which consultations with all the national associations took considerable time. Two problems arose during these consultations. The first was that the national associations wanted to utilise the new contacts with private aid agencies to secure funding for their own organisations. They were reluctant to delegate this task to the Regional Commission, as it would then acquire enormous power by monopolising relationships with the agencies. It was decided that the Regional Commission would first secure funding for the regional process, and that national delegations in addition could raise funding to strengthen their national associations. The other problem was that the increasing influx of aid resources (nearly US$ 200,000 in 1992) could no longer be handled by the Regional Commission. Financial administration and reporting to funders were neglected, creating organisational chaos and frustrations with donor agencies. To improve this problematic situation, an executive director was appointed with a small staff to coordinate financial administration at a new office in Nicaragua.

Private aid agencies present at ASOCODE’s first conference on development aid in 1993 expressed concerns about the future development of the association. Was ASOCODE really a mesa de concertación or was it transforming itself into a new supranational organisation with separate projects, a luxury office and a steadily growing budget? The fear was expressed that aid resources were directed too much at strengthening an ‘elitist leadership’, instead of strengthening local member organisations. The general message from the agencies was that ASOCODE was to
actively make its coordination structure self-financing in the long run. Moreover, they preferred to support local organisations directly instead of supporting the national coordinating bodies, which eventually could lead to a more democratic structure. Although most of these critical comments were formally accepted, the practice turned out to be different. The problem was that the *instancias nacionales* wanted to receive a share of ASOCODE’s expanding aid resources: they considered themselves as the building blocks of the regional coalition. Contrary to what the agencies had requested, it was decided that sixty percent of ASOCODE’s income would be divided over the national associations (ASOCODE 1993d: 88). In other words, the initial agreement to finance the regional coordination structure with payments from the member associations was completely turned around: ASOCODE had become a chicken with golden eggs.

The Dutch private aid agency HIVOS, which was ASOCODE’s main funder, obviously was concerned about this development. The absence of self-financing measures made ASOCODE highly dependent on foreign aid resources. With aid flows to Central America declining in the mid-1990s, cuts in ASOCODE’s high level of aid income could possibly affect its longer term existence. HIVOS considered the lack of internal accountability and transparency of the Regional Commission to be a direct result of these ‘inverted’ aid flows to the national associations, as this had provoked a lack of ownership: ASOCODE was not ‘owned’ by its members. This problem was however not seriously taken on as ASOCODE’s income was growing steadily and its convincing public image attracted new agencies that were eager to give support. Trips to Europe and North America by members of the Regional Commission generated new contacts and additional cooperation agreements with private and governmental aid agencies. The budget would rise to US$ 1.5 million in 1996 to finance large regional training programmes which lacked (according to several funders) clear strategic priorities. HIVOS was worried about this enormous increase and feared that it obstructed the search for self-financing measures. HIVOS also realised that it had become useless to demand this, or even to threaten cutting support, as it would have been quickly replaced by other new donors who were all eager to support the successful regional peasant coalition.

- **Achievements of ASOCODE**

In its short period of existence, ASOCODE was quite successful in consolidating a united regional alliance for the *campesino* sector. Its formation had been hampered by a variety of adverse political conditions and by the diversity of the *campesino* sector itself. A key condition for establishing a regional coalition was the existence of well-functioning coordinating bodies at the national levels. Except for Honduras (COCOCH) and El Salvador (ADC) this national unity had been absent in most Central American countries, generally as a result of political differences or due to fragmentation of civil society. The need for coordinated negotiation with the government encouraged the development in Costa Rica of a unified national association (CNA), which was formed in May 1991. As a direct result of ASOCODE’s
foundation, new national alliances emerged in Panama (APEMEP) and in 1992 in Guatemala (CONAMPRO). The latter was not based on a genuine nationwide representation of small farmers’ organisations, which became clear when two major organisations left CONAMPRO as a result of internal political friction within the Guatemalan opposition. In Nicaragua and Belize, where unity was absent, national coordinating bodies were represented by major farmers’ organisations. ASOCODE considered the national associations to be essential pillars of the regional coalition, although it also was believed that better regional coordination would actually reinforce these \textit{instancias nacionales}. The process of building unity thus was a top-down exercise, from regional to national level, with several problematic implications as will be seen later.

Apart from political differences, peasant unity also was hampered by the enormous diversity within the \textit{campesino} sector. ASOCODE unified a variety of social segments (from landless peasants and small cooperative workers to medium-sized agricultural producers) but also organisations with different historical and cultural backgrounds. The founders of ASOCODE realised that the key to its success would be the search for commonalties, as the articulation of dissimilarities had been the main source of fragmentation in the past. A key condition for unity therefore was to work together on the basis of \textit{concertación} and to develop joint alternatives, rather than creating unity from confrontation with a common enemy. The other key condition was to establish an inclusive and transparent regional coordinating body, in which the traditional gap between leaders and grassroots would be seriously tackled (Román 1994). Although ASOCODE did not represent the entire organised \textit{campesino} sector, it certainly incorporated the vast majority of peasant organisations in Central America. It was therefore understandable that the Central American presidents recognised the legitimate role of ASOCODE as an intermediary alliance for organised small agricultural producers in the region. But what was actually achieved by ASOCODE during these top-level contacts with governments?

ASOCODE targeted the Central American governments at three levels: the Regional Council of Agricultural Ministers (CORECA); the biannual summits of Central American presidents; and the consultative group of the Central American Integration System (SICA). Initially, lobbying efforts were aimed at influencing the agricultural ministers who were preparing new regional agricultural policies. These plans reflected the overall shift toward neoliberal policies with an emphasis on modernising agro-exports and with little attention for agricultural production oriented at the internal market. In meetings with the ministers ASOCODE strongly criticised free trade agreements that were affecting regional food security, as this had stimulated extraregional imports of cheap basic grains. The ministers were surprised by ASOCODE’s well-prepared arguments and diplomatically responded that they would carefully analyse their proposals. However, in practice the regular meetings with the ministers did not lead to any change in agricultural policies. Only at national levels, particularly in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, did regional pressure speed up negotiations between the national associations and the minis-
tries of agriculture. But at a regional level it was clear that the ministers were not willing to negotiate: meetings were cancelled or delegated to less influential vice-ministers. As coordinator Wilson Campos remarked: ‘it turned out to be easier to meet with the presidents than with their ministers of agriculture’ (ASOCODE 1995b: 21).

An explicit result was achieved at the 12th Presidential Summit in Panama (December 1992) at which Wilson Campos was invited to address the presidents. The invitation was the result of several months of lobbying to influence the new agricultural policy framework that was on the agenda of the summit. Together with the associations of coffee producers UPROCAFE and the cooperative movement CCC-CA, ASOCODE and its technical advisors had prepared a joint package of proposals to improve the conditions of small agricultural producers.187 After detailed review of governmental policies and consultations with lower ranking officials, ASOCODE decided to request the establishment of a special regional credit fund to improve conditions for agro-industrial development and the internal trade of small agricultural producers. The proposal was accepted and almost thoroughly integrated into the final declaration of the presidential summit. Although the fund was never established, the example illustrates that ASOCODE’s policy advocacy methods were rather sophisticated.188 They were based on presenting well-prepared proposals in the name of a broad constituency to meetings where rhetoric generally predominated. By opening up political channels for negotiation and dialogue that had been closed in the past, ASOCODE also generated jealousy and adverse reactions. For example, the conservative Honduran President Callejas in early 1993 tried to set up a counter force to ASOCODE by founding a similar regional network of peasant organisations, albeit smaller and more friendly to neoliberal policies. The obvious intention was to frustrate the recent unity of peasant organisations at the regional level. But soon after its foundation, COCICA (as it was called) and the handful of right-wing peasant groups that it had organised appeared to be no threat to ASOCODE’s unity.

Another level on which ASOCODE tried to gain influence was the new framework for regional integration. This Central American Integration System (SICA) was created by six Central American countries to revive the Central American common market that had fallen apart during the crisis of the late 1970s.189 SICA was modelled according to the European Community and had created a Consultative Committee for civil society sectors operating at a regional level.190 It was in this committee that ASOCODE confronted its major opponent: FEDEPRICAP, the powerful regional association for private enterprise and considered to be the most important ally of the Central American presidents for the implementation of structural adjustment policies. Although discussions in the Consultative Committee were merely on procedures, ASOCODE considered its membership as a ‘strategic political space’ for involving civil society in decision-making on regional integration. Together with several other regional networks a coordinating body was created in late 1993 composed of regional associations of various sectors. This Civil Initiative for
Central American Integration (ICIC) was considered to be a 'voice of the voiceless' in Central America, and was invited to several international fora. The coordination of ICIC was soon delegated to ASOCODE, with mixed results as will be analysed later on. But the fact that it managed to get a wide variety of civil society sectors united to demand participation in the process of regional integration certainly was a major achievement of ASOCODE.

Another achievement of ASOCODE was its recognition by crucial international players in the region: the European Union, UNDP, FAO, the Organisation of American States (OAS), AID, IDB, the World Bank and several national governments. Contacts with some of these actors were established during several international trips of ASOCODE delegations. Frequent meetings with ambassadors in the region and Wilson Campos' appearance at a UNDP-sponsored international conference in Tegucigalpa (October 1994) further boosted ASOCODE's international profile. Efforts by ASOCODE-ICIC, supported by European private aid agencies, to demand participation of civil society sectors in the annual ministerial conference between Europe and Central America (the San José Dialogue) were seriously discussed. To improve relations with these important international actors ASOCODE organised another conference on development aid in February 1995. On this occasion Campos urged the international financial agencies to increase direct participation of excluded civil society sectors in the preparation and implementation of development aid policies. The EU ambassador even openly criticised neoliberal policies and their devastating impact on small agricultural producers (ASOCODE 1995a). The participants generally supported ASOCODE's demand to increase consultations and dialogue with popular sectors about foreign aid policies towards the region. Within five years, ASOCODE managed to open doors that only had been open for a privileged sector in the region. The obvious challenge was to use this newly conquered space.

The positive spirit that characterised ASOCODE's approach of looking for constructive dialogue instead of confrontation, combined with the presentation of concrete proposals, facilitated access to the holders of power. Mass media, ministers, presidents, ambassadors, international organisations and others were impressed by ASOCODE and particularly by the convincing performance of Wilson Campos. One of ASOCODE's central demands was to request participation of politically excluded and impoverished rural workers in decision-making about economic development policies, aid allocation and regional integration projects. As a result, ASOCODE's leaders were invited to speak at high-level summits, negotiated with ministers and participated in consultations. What was the impact of ASOCODE's activities on the strength of civil society, and did they really manage to influence or change policies?

There is no doubt that ASOCODE strengthened civil society by creating new intermediary channels at the national and regional level, and by encouraging excluded sectors to effectively use these channels for defining the socio-economic and political framework of post-war Central America. ASOCODE's dynamic
conquest of "political space" for dialogue and negotiation has not been equalled by any other (regional) organisation in Central America's recent past except maybe by the federation of private enterprise FEDEPRICAP. Other regional networks that had been established earlier than ASOCODE — such as the regional network of development NGOs (CCOD) or the trade union network COCENTRA — had not achieved a tiny fraction of what ASOCODE was able to realise in a relatively short period of time. It is therefore not exaggerated to assume that ASOCODE was one of the most important intermediary alliances of civil society to have emerged in Central America since the early 1990s. It created previously non-existing channels to transmit widespread concerns about the undemocratic character of the existing political system (and the destructive economic policies it pursued) without completely rejecting that system. In other words, it performed a temporary intermediary role in political societies that were not functioning properly either at the regional level (the Central American parliament), or at the various national levels.

A closer examination of ASOCODE's achievements shows that political pressure and lobbying were targeted one level higher than where it eventually had to be effective. By addressing the presidents at their regional summits, they harvested results in their national negotiations with agricultural ministers. To pressure their presidents to adapt economic policies, they turned to international organisations such as the European Union or UNDP. This 'roundabout-policy' was not deliberate, but a result of ASOCODE's policy of maximising the employment of external contacts. It was in fact similar to the way in which some of the national associations of ASOCODE had been formed, that is, in a top-down direction. The existence of a regional coalition thus gave an impulse to the creation of national coordinating bodies. ASOCODE functioned both as a shield for protection and as a supranational pressure group. For example, in its contacts with foreign governments ASOCODE made a plea for more pressure on the Guatemalan government to respect human rights and initiate peace negotiations. Meanwhile, Guatemala's President Ramiro de León Carpio was invited to inaugurate ASOCODE's second Congress in December 1993 in order to increase the legitimacy of Guatemalan peasant organisations associated with ASOCODE. The latter, however, were not allowed to openly criticise their president for his clumsy human rights record.

The political space conquered by ASOCODE thus was carefully handled and used to 'reshape official rhetoric' as Edelman (1995: 31) calls it. The strategy of constructive lobbying was effective enough to prevent marginalisation, and it proved to be contagious as the establishment of ICIC showed. The formation of ICIC had been a follow-up to collaborative lobbying work between ASOCODE and several regional networks of labour unions to influence decision-making at presidential summits. They realised that a broader forum for regional civil society networks would have more impact on the presidents and their discussions on regional integration than the lobbying work of individual sectoral associations. In 1994 eight regionally organised sectoral associations founded ICIC; it included labour unions, peasant organisations, federations of small and medium enterprise, development NGOs and
federations of community organisations. Asocode became the coordinating entity of ICIC, as it had built up experience in this area and provided the largest constituency, plus it contributed most of ICIC’s resources for the first year.

The creation of ICIC was an ambitious and unique step taken to confront the neoliberal agenda of the Central American governments, which had been heavily pushed by the federation of private enterprise (organised in FEDEPRICAP) and which was reluctant to admit ICIC into the committees of SICA where the future regional integration system was discussed. FEDEPRICAP therefore formed its own network of regional civil society associations (CACI) as it was afraid of losing control of SICA’s Consultative Committee. ICIC on the other hand maintained that ‘popular’ civil society sectors had been excluded in the regional integration process and deserved to have a voice since political parties had lost their legitimacy. In practice, the complex composition of ICIC meant that it needed time to consolidate as a regional coalition representing ‘popular’ civil society sectors. This was however, as one document admits, a ‘slow and difficult process’ (ICIC 1996a). A major problem was that ICIC did not have national associations (the key to Asocode’s regional structure) making the feedback to member organisations rather complex. At its second assembly in August 1996, ICIC slowly started to consolidate, and Asocode was re-elected to lead the coordinating committee.

Despite opening up new intermediary channels between state and civil society and opening doors that had been closed in the past, at least in the short run Asocode did not really manage to change governmental policies. Although it was unrealistic to expect quick results, concerns were raised in early 1994 within Asocode’s ranks about the viability of the strategy of constructive dialogue. Some leaders feared that Asocode was being co-opted by the Central American presidents. They rather wanted to organise street marches and land occupations to put pressure on their governments. This was effectively done in October 1994, when peasant organisations simultaneously mobilised their members during a one-day protest throughout the region. But it was rather a manifestation of strength than a return to confrontational strategies, although a minority did advocate for the activist approach. It was also evident that the process of internal consolidation of Asocode had been neglected due to its emphasis on lobbying and building up external contacts; Asocode had become a huge head with a tiny body. From mid-1994 onwards, Asocode therefore paid more attention to its internal structure, which also affected ICIC in which it played a leading role. Asocode’s leaders realised that policy changes would take time and that building internal capacity and strengthening the national associations was needed to prevent the young coalition from falling apart. Asocode had shown that campesinos had lost their fear to talk to those in power. However, Campos warned that success would depend on the capacity to strengthen both the organisation and its proposals, for ‘those who are in power do not respect us if we do not show our strength’ (Asocode 1994b: 7).
- **ASOCODE in the aid chain**

The emergence of ASOCODE as one of the most important regional civil society networks of the 1990s was in the first place a result of favourable political conditions. The end of civil wars, the shift from a political to an economic agenda, the emphasis on regional integration policies and the (albeit rhetorical) call from governments to increase participation of societal actors all were fertile ground for ASOCODE's encouraging performance. At least three other factors distinguished ASOCODE from other regional networks. The first was its capacity to develop a fresh and sharp discourse based on minimal consensus *(concertación)* among the varied peasant organisations in the region. It was a discourse distinct from the politicised discourse of the 1980s, for it was critical of existing (progressive) political parties and their instrumentalist NGOs. But also because it was constructive and innovative. A second factor was the capacity of ASOCODE to occupy the new political space that it was offered by prioritising networking and lobbying work as part of a so-called *estrategia de incidencia*. A third key factor that undoubtedly boosted ASOCODE's profile was the charismatic and sometimes brilliant leadership of Wilson Campos. This young and energetic Costa Rican peasant leader possessed the skills to unite and motivate ASOCODE's rank and file, and at the same time to speak the diplomatic language of governmental officials. As one peasant leader commented, 'probably seventy percent of ASOCODE's success is the product of Wilson Campos, the rest was done by others'.

As other case studies show, dependence on charismatic leaders is risky. After his re-election for a second term as a regional coordinator in December 1993, Campos was increasingly criticised by some colleagues for monopolising external contacts and not properly informing other members of the Regional Commission. Eventually this would generate a serious internal crisis and in 1995 Campos was accused of misusing ASOCODE's funds for personal ends. The crisis articulated two serious weaknesses of ASOCODE's internal structure: the lack of 'strategic accountability' (see Chapter 2), and a declining ability to respond to the high expectations raised in the first few years. Not only was the head bigger than the body (the constituency), the head was also in disorder. Although the structure of the national associations *(mesas nacionales)* as building blocks of the regional coalition certainly was innovative, it only worked when these national pillars were really controlled by their member organisations. Some national associations did not work properly and lacked active participation and feedback from their members; their representatives in the Regional Commission were, as a result, not kept accountable by the members they represented. But this was also a product of the regional diversity that was intrinsic to a regional coalition containing several national thrusts.

Due to its emphasis on external relations and its top-down development, ASOCODE was often equated with the regional part of its organisational structure, and less with its national components (Candanedo and Madrigal 1994). Moreover, lack of harmony and capacity inside the Regional Commission put too much
weight on the role of coordinator Campos, who became overwhelmed by his international agenda. Campos admitted that the emphasis on external relations had slowed down the internal process of building a strong and transparent regional coalition. Others argued that ASOCODE simply took up too many issues without setting priorities. This was also one of the main concerns of the aid agencies financing ASOCODE.

Private aid agencies were crucial in the early phase of ASOCODE’s development. Although ASOCODE initially feared that agencies would prefer to finance a regional peasant coalition by going through the channels of Central American NGOs, they soon learned that many European private aid agencies in fact shared ASOCODE’s concerns about the problems associated with this route. Another fear, that agencies would impose their priorities upon ASOCODE, also turned out to be a non-issue. Over the years, an open dialogue appeared to be possible with agency representatives, which was highly valued on both sides. Although most funders took on a passive role as providers of aid, agencies such as Ibis and HIVOS were fairly active. HIVOS stressed the need to actively increase the participation of women in ASOCODE, to improve its administrative operations and to strengthen the national associations. The 1994 evaluation, also sponsored by HIVOS, served as a learning experience rather than a tool for control: most recommendations were incorporated in the following years. Ibis performed a different role, but also was one of the most active funders. Ibis contributed to improving the lobbying capacity of ASOCODE by offering technical support and actively linking up several Central American regional coalitions with European lobbying networks. Although Ibis was cautious about providing large-scale funding to ASOCODE, it could not prevent expectations being raised about getting access to foreign resources. This was often at the expense of viable and self-sufficient networks being built up. An evaluation even concluded that weaknesses in the regional structures were very much a reflection of Ibis’s way of working; in other words, these weaknesses appeared to be donor-driven (Morales and Cranshaw 1997).

Looking at its diversified funding base, it is reasonable to conclude that ASOCODE became the Central American ‘darling’ of international private aid agencies in the early 1990s. Some even argued that ASOCODE was a product of international aid. Wilson Campos rejected this suggestion, as he was convinced that both ASOCODE and ICIC would have been established anyway. But he admitted that ASOCODE became very dependent upon private aid, which in turn generated the impression (also internally) that the process of regional peasant unity would have been impossible without foreign aid resources. Of all the case studies presented in this study, ASOCODE therefore is probably the clearest example of the ‘private aid paradox’: private foreign aid facilitated the emergence of influential intermediary actors in civil society, but simultaneously created new problems that obstructed their organisational development.

One element of this private aid paradox is the outright rejection of local intermediary NGOs by ASOCODE, while actually becoming an intermediary NGO itself.
In the first year after its foundation, Wilson Campos on several occasions criticised the role played by Central American NGOs in the 1980s. His critique contained three elements: (i) NGOs had acted as ‘representatives’ of the campesino sector, without properly consulting it, (ii) NGOs had monopolised relations with private foreign aid agencies (preventing direct funding to peasant organisations) and (iii) NGOs with their dispersed projects lacked a coherent and common strategy. Implicitly, Campos criticised the regional Concertación of NGOs (CCOD) which was heavily financed by (predominantly Dutch) private aid agencies. Ironically, CCOD assisted ASOCODE in establishing contacts with these agencies, which soon decided positively about their support. Private aid agencies increasingly preferred to work directly with membership organisations, as was analysed in Chapter 5, as long as they had enough capacity to administer (large-scale) funding. Although it was soon clear that ASOCODE did not have this capacity (the regional office only started to work well after mid-1993), foreign aid increased rapidly. As a result, ASOCODE quickly managed to isolate local NGOs from aid resources directed at peasant organisations, while creating its own bureaucracy that was barely controlled by the member organisations. ASOCODE’s critique of NGOs (bureaucracy, inefficiency, lack of internal democracy, monopolising relations with funders) eventually came back like a boomerang, this time from its own members (Candanedo and Madrigal 1994).

Although ASOCODE’s establishment apparently was not donor-driven, some of its priorities definitely were. Another element of the private aid paradox is that these priorities were assumed, while in reality they were actually generating considerable internal tension. HIVOS, for example, prioritised two issues: active incorporation of women and a focus on sustainable agriculture. The last issue figured in early ASOCODE documents, but was soon relegated to the backseat. Others funders, especially after the celebrations surrounding the fifth centennial of the ‘discovery’, requested more clarity about the participation of Indian peasants in ASOCODE’s ranks. But this issue also did not reach the stage of critical internal debate, possibly as a result of existing cultural prejudices. The main donor-driven issue therefore was the gender balance within ASOCODE. Various private agencies funding ASOCODE were concerned about the absence of serious efforts to incorporate women into the regional coordination process. Despite the establishment of a women’s commission and several meetings of peasant women within ASOCODE, it was clear that a majority of members maintained a machista position. Proposals to incorporate women into the national and regional coordinating bodies provoked strong resistance, except from Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Honduras who were already accustomed to this practice. The agencies felt that gender balance was too much seen as a ‘problem’ (la problemática de la mujer), and therefore artificially dealt with. Wilson Campos very much welcomed this ‘critical dialogue’ with private aid agencies, particularly on gender, as long as these issues were not imposed upon ASOCODE. The position of women active in ASOCODE’s member organisations was eventually strengthened, partly as a result of pressure from the agencies. An
indication was that in 1996 five national associations elected a female representative to the 14-person Regional Commission, which had been exclusively dominated by men between 1991 and 1994.219

A further element of the paradox is that private foreign aid to ASOCODE increased rapidly at a time that it was actually least needed, creating a situation of 'overfunding' with all its negative consequences. In several documents ASOCODE acknowledged that one of its major achievements had been to secure financial support from international aid agencies.220 Foreign funding to ASOCODE quickly increased from 1993 onwards, when its international profile skyrocketed and successes were achieved in opening up new political space for dialogue. Budgets were adapted and new activities were proposed to respond to the offers from private aid agencies.221 In other words, financial support created new needs that had been absent prior to these offers. ASOCODE initially aimed at financing only the establishment of a regional structure, but due to foreign aid income it soon was able to also finance the national associations.222 As was shown earlier, this redistribution of funds became increasingly more important and strengthened the top-down structure of ASOCODE. This had repercussions for the participation of lower-level member associations, who saw no need to contribute fees to ASOCODE and increasingly felt that it was not 'their project' (Candanedo and Madrigal 1994:148). This had, in turn, a negative effect on the accountability of the Regional Commission and of the national associations. Or to put it differently: the large influx of foreign aid negatively affected ASOCODE's 'ownership' and its accountability to its members.

A last element of the paradox is closely related to the issue of overfunding, that is, the demand on ASOCODE to search for alternative methods of income generation, eventually leading to self-sufficiency. The paradoxical point is that agencies which threatened to withdraw if self-sufficiency was not considered seriously never did so, as they knew that other funders would simply replace them. To put it more bluntly: private aid agencies would be acting against their own interests if they stopped funding a project that was achieving results and generating international recognition.223 Within ASOCODE's ranks dependency on foreign aid was a concern from the very beginning, although not equally shared by all national associations. Particularly the Costa Ricans, who had more experience with collective farming aimed at generating income for an entire group, made the point that ASOCODE had to decrease its dependence on external aid and that more effort had to be made to incorporate self-financing measures.224 But with steady external aid support, the majority of ASOCODE's leaders did not consider this to be a high priority (Candanedo and Madrigal 1994). ASOCODE's main funder HIVOS hoped that the regional coalition would invest more time in looking for alternative sources of income as long as resources were still abundant. But HIVOS also admitted that only a decrease in international aid to the region, expected for the late 1990s, would force ASOCODE to scale down its ambitions and to increase its self-sufficiency.225
Assessing ASOCODE’s civil society building performance

Although ASOCODE’s case might be exceptional compared to other regional civil society networks, it clearly illustrates how private foreign aid can affect an organisation’s internal dynamics. Although differences exist among the Central American regional networks, in general there has been poor linkage between regional networks and their local member associations. Morales and Cranshaw (1997) argue that the regional networks were seldom a product of local needs, as they pursued an (additional) agenda which was often not the agenda of their member organisations. The participation and accountability of national members within ASOCODE’s regional structure was poor and it was clear that improvements in this area would take time. ASOCODE was formed as a leadership of leaders (la cúpula de cúpulas) and was often not known to the campesinos at the grassroots that it was supposedly representing. ICIC was even one level higher, as it was a regional coalition of regional coalitions. Not surprisingly, ASOCODE’s legitimacy was sometimes questioned. Not by the Central American presidents – who were accustomed to the absence of genuine consultations with their citizens – but by local farmers’ organisations in countries where national coordination among campesinos was weakest, and by several private aid agencies. Starting in 1994, ASOCODE therefore prioritised strengthening the national associations and increasing their accountability. A positive indication of improved participation was the election of female representatives to ASOCODE’s Regional Commission in 1996. But despite this (for Central American standards remarkable) improvement, it was clear that it would take a long-term effort for ASOCODE to really be owned by its members. A transition from dependence on external aid to dependence on contributions from member associations could be a way to confront this problem.

Financial sustainability of ASOCODE had been an issue in its early years, but was deprioritised when access to external aid appeared to be more than easy. A minority position considered this dependence on foreign aid to be rather risky and it seems that this position has grown, in part as a result of donor pressure to look for alternative financial resources. According to ASOCODE, alternative financing could come from three different sources: self-run productive enterprises, official aid agencies or Central American governments. The second option is not a real alternative to current private aid flows, as official aid from bilateral agencies or from multilateral agencies such as the IDB and the EU would not solve ASOCODE’s dependency on foreign aid. On the contrary, the larger amounts of resources involved and their closer affiliation with the dominant development model that ASOCODE has been criticising hardly could be considered an alternative. Neither is support to be expected from Central American governments, despite their promises at presidential summits. This implies that ASOCODE’s only realistic alternative lies with production-related income-generation, possibly combined with the introduction of member contributions. This transition will take time to evolve, as it implies, as Campos observed, a ‘change of mentality from receiving to generating funds’. As long as private aid flows to ASOCODE continue to grow at the rate of the last few
years, such a transition will become more difficult. This is even more so because the recent past has demonstrated that private aid agencies (despite arguing the opposite) are intrinsically unable to push for alternative income-generation methods. Therefore, initiatives to improve self-sufficiency have to come from ASOCODE itself, in order to eliminate aid dependency and to survive as a crucial societal actor beyond the 1990s.

As for its intermediary function, ASOCODE probably performed better than any of the organisations described in the other case studies presented in this chapter. It managed to play intermediary roles for several constituencies at several levels. First of all, ASOCODE opened a channel for dialogue with the Central American governments in the name of organised (1.5 million), but also non-organised (an estimated 4 million) campesinos, a channel that was also recognised by the governments and by the international community. The diversity within the campesino sector and the internal divisions generated by civil wars make the achievements of ASOCODE especially relevant. Second, it contributed to either establishing or strengthening the intermediary roles of national associations vis-à-vis their governments, many of which had been reluctant to negotiate previously with peasant organisations. And third, ASOCODE was the major force behind the establishment of ICIC, the first regional coalition of societal actors that ever existed in Central America. In all these alliances, ASOCODE stressed the need to maintain autonomy from political parties, local development NGOs, governments and international organisations. The new channels also were used by ASOCODE to target international organisations, either in alliance with extraregional farmers’ organisations or with other Central American civil society networks. ASOCODE thus also opened political space within ‘global civil society’, although it is still premature to assess the impact of these activities.

Improving the policy impact of ASOCODE will be a key test for its future existence. Although the organisation has received official recognition from the presidents (as well as several unfulfilled promises) ASOCODE has not yet managed to force fundamental policy changes upon the Central American governments. Again, it would not be fair to expect this from a coalition that is still in its early childhood. But concrete results will be needed to prevent ASOCODE being questioned by its members, possibly resulting in internal cleavages as were sometimes visible in the 1994-95 period. One lesson to be drawn from the early years is that it is necessary to elaborate more on specific peasant-related proposals and to develop alternative market-oriented methods. Previous demands too much echoed rhetoric and calls for participation, without being specific about its implementation. It could even be argued that calls for participation were merely ways to get access to foreign aid resources. The newly-elected Regional Commission in 1996 therefore decided to prioritise economic issues: access to land and credit, and improving production and trade conditions. This implied that the political agenda would become less prominent, which will probably decrease ASOCODE’s profile as an intermediary alliance in the years ahead. But given ASOCODE’s central role in ICIC,
its large constituency in the region and its wide international network of contacts, there is no doubt that it will continue to be the leading regional actor representing popular demands from civil society in Central America.

6.5 Learning from private aid chain dynamics

The civil society building performance of four Central American organisations was assessed according to the methodological framework developed in the first part of this book. By taking into account specific context variables and analysing the achievements of these organisations as a product of particular aid chain dynamics, it was hoped to get a better understanding of the ways in which private aid agencies have contributed to civil society building in Central America. The case studies highlight the rich variety of methods aimed at strengthening civil society and fostering alliances that have eventually contributed to opening up political society. For instance, all organisations proved to be rather effective in challenging traditional authoritarian rule by giving a voice to the excluded, and demonstrated the capacity to play an intermediary role by articulating demands from civil society at crucial moments during democratic transition. This role was generally performed temporarily and was particularly effective during early stages of democratic transition when space in political society still had to be opened up. The organisations in Guatemala and El Salvador also spurred (indirectly) the entrance of new opposition parties into political society during mid-transition, although they sometimes paid a price by compromising their autonomy vis-à-vis these parties (CPDN). The Honduran CODEH remained strictly autonomous and decided not to compromise its position, but because of this it lost the political momentum needed to open up the bipartisan political system. The case of ASOCODE underlined how membership organisations managed to take over the lead from development NGOs in the process of opening up negotiation space with the Central American presidents at the regional level. But upon closer examination a number of weaknesses of these organisations become apparent, especially regarding internal organisation, downward accountability and longer term sustainability.

Private aid support was crucial for all four organisations to finance their organisational expenses and to expand the scale of their activities. Several organisations even argued that their success would have been negatively affected if this support had been absent. However, a closer examination shows that private aid support often increased after success was achieved. Moreover, weak internal accountability measures and prospects for financial sustainability were generally made worse by the absence of membership contributions, for which private aid actually functioned as a substitute. But it would be incorrect to simply attribute the weaknesses of these organisations to the influx of private foreign aid, because organisational capacities, adverse political circumstances or the quality of leadership are factors beyond the control of donors. Along the same lines, it would be a harsh
simplification to explain the achievements of these organisations as a product of private aid interventions. The case studies actually show that it is imprecise to speak of the 'performance of aid recipients' or to focus on the 'performance of (private) aid agencies'. If achievements of local organisations are judged in relation to foreign aid contributions it is probably more accurate to focus on 'aid chain performance', in which all actors involved in a particular aid chain contribute collectively to the outcome or the impact of an aid intervention. This has enormous methodological implications, as it would become inaccurate to evaluate only selected actors in the aid chain, which is the current practice. It implies that the 'upper actors' in the aid chain (official donors and private aid agencies, which are generally excluded in aid performance assessments) also will become subject to evaluation. New assessment criteria have to be developed for these multiple units of analysis, in addition to new planning and monitoring systems at all levels of the aid chain. This certainly is a complex and costly undertaking, but it can open new avenues for aid evaluation: it can encourage participatory evaluation methods among all actors in the aid chain aimed at learning from past experience, which eventually will be beneficial for improving the quality of aid interventions.
Tolerance and support was crucial for all new organizations to function. This institutionalization generally takes place over the years from development. In the presidential system, it is the opposition parties who are able to gain political power. Although many organizations may be formed, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are generally linked to other international organizations, especially regarding financial sustainability, accountability, and transparency.