

---

## ***Coalitions and Networks: Opportunities for a Proactive Civil Society***

---

“Civil society networks are increasingly used to advance development objectives because they have the potential to facilitate relationship-building, sharing of information and resources, and democratic decision-making and to effect social change in the environment external to the network.”

*Partners of the Americas  
Engaging Civil Society in the Americas*

---

### **Definitions of Coalitions and Networks:**

Coalitions are temporary alliances of distinct parties, persons, or states for joint action. They tend to be loose, flexible associations of people and groups brought together by a common concern or interest to share information and ideas.

Networks often have a more formalized structure with an office and full-time staff. They usually involve long-term relations among the members. Their permanence can give clout and leverage. Networks should be very focused and must have clearly defined goals, agendas, and resources.

Coalitions and Networks are important because they can:

- Represent the interests of many citizens and groups, have potential to be diverse, plural, and inclusive
- Combine the knowledge, experience, and resources of multiple civil society members
- Unify common goals to become a single, persuasive voice
- Present a "critical mass" to other actors or bodies who might normally consider civil society as fragmented and weak
- Act at local, national and regional levels at the same time
- Adapt to changing conditions and act rapidly
- Serve as good negotiators and intermediaries
- Provide a proactive way for all members to best utilize their capacities
- Generate increased capacity to share effective practices and strengthen the CSO sector.
- Create an attractive way to join forces and unify coalition and network members without jeopardizing the independence and identity of each.

---

### **How to Create Sustainable Coalitions and Networks:**

- Identify common interests as the raw material for forming a network or coalition.
- Develop and encourage strategic alliances with a variety of actors, including other programs, institutions, and governments. The coalition or network must be very active in maintaining these relations, as it is these relations that will later provide opportunities for collaboration on future projects as well as possible sources of financing.
- Sign agreements, and stay accountable to them.
- Commit to being able to provide services in a quick and efficient manner to large geographic areas, to assemble large audiences, as well as to deliver compelling messages.
- Create various opportunities to involve member participation (support team, specific interest work groups, e.g.).
- Maintain relations with directors of member NGOs, as they generally have the best grasp of the big picture.

---

### **Challenges and Opportunities for Coalitions and Networks**

#### *Challenges:*

- To achieve consistent, active participation of members.
- To agree upon a common objective, recognized by all members and included in the mission statements and objectives of each member organization.
- To secure financial resources.
- To maintain credibility and visibility among public opinion.
- To avoid tensions between members who are competing for leadership roles and financial resources.
- To maintain the basic structure and stated values of the network or coalition, while at the same time, to be able to reinvent and adapt as necessary.

#### *Opportunities:*

- To have the possibility to unite a large number of member NGOs according to ability and experience.
- To be able to quickly mobilize and reach a large number of citizens in various geographic zones.
- To be able to develop data bases of abilities and talents.

- 
- To share technical and administrative information.
  - To be able to utilize and combine ideas and concepts with which members already possess.
  - To be a central mechanism for advocacy and promotion work.

---

**12<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION CONFERENCE**  
**November 15 – 18, 2006 - Guatemala**

**Workshop 4.4.**

**“An Anti-Corruption Action Plan for Post Communist Societies”**  
**Friday, November 17, 2006**

*Coordination: Casals & Associates Inc.*