

**Communities' trust
towards civil society
organizations:
action research**



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Publication date: August 2023

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Our gratitude to our allies and participants:

- Corporativa de Fundaciones
- Fundación Comunidad
- FEYAC (Fundación del Empresariado Yucateco A.C.)
- Fundación Comunitaria Malinalco
- Fundación Punta de Mita
- Global Fund for Community Foundations

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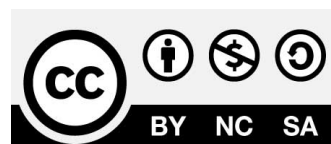


Table of Contents

• Presentation 1
GFCF	
Comunalia	
“Good Society Project”	
• Introduction 2
• Methodology 3
• Conceptual definitions 6
• Results 9
— Perception of community foundations 9
• <i>The role of community foundations</i>	
• <i>Importance of community foundations in the community environment</i>	
— Attention to community needs 13
• <i>Attention to needs</i>	
• <i>Participation in the attention to needs</i>	
— Trust 17
• <i>Definition of trust</i>	
• <i>Trust in community foundations</i>	
• <i>Do other people trust community foundations?</i>	
• <i>Actions that increase or decrease trust</i>	
— Emerging subcategories 27
• <i>How trust is built</i>	
• <i>Commitment</i>	
• Conclusions and final considerations 29
• Bibliography and References 30



Presentation

GFCG

The Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF) is a worldwide organization with a mission to support a global movement of vibrant, resilient, and locally owned and directed community philanthropy organizations, mobilizing and channeling resources and influence for progressive social change.

Comunalia

Comunalia is the Alliance of Community Foundations of Mexico, a Mexican non-profit organization which focuses on community development and strategic social investment by bolstering the collective actions of the country's community foundations. It was established in 2011 and is aimed at strengthening community foundations through support and training, as well as through strategies which enhance their collective work and develop an ecosystem conducive to their expansion and consolidation.

Currently, Comunalia is made up of 17-member community foundations in 16 states of the country. Together, they create spaces for network building and strengthening, as well as collective opportunities and collaborative learning. It is a place of convergence and transformation, as well as a space for articulation.

“Good Society Project”

In 2021, the GFCF launches a call for global partners to participate in the “Action research: mobilizing the demand side” initiative. This action research initiative is based on the idea that, in order to promote change in our communities and the systems in which civil society organizations operate, we need to change the nature of the conversation and encourage and mobilize it from the demand side, that is, from the community.

“If we want to create a genuine alternative to existing ways of deciding and doing, we need to embrace a vision of a “good society” built around core values of equality, democracy and sustainability and a set of organizing principles based on global solidarity and distributed leadership “ - Manifesto for Change, GFCF.

Six organizations in Uganda, Mozambique, Romania, India, the Philippines, and Mexico are participating in this initiative. Each organization determined the specific topic used as an entry point to the research and how the demand perspective looks in order to propose their questions and perspectives. At the end, the group will collectively analyze a general frame of reference.

For Comunalia, the objective for this research is to motivate conversations around the factors that motivate and hinder the communities' trust towards civil society organizations, specifically community foundations.



Introduction

One of community foundations' main objectives is to assume a leadership role in the community, since, immersed in a given space, they can identify problems, have a general vision of the desired outcome, and lead a process that integrates a wide range of community interests to address these needs through consensus and collaborative work (Natal & Muñoz, 2015). By being part of civil society, the work of community foundations is not governed by relationships of political prowess, or economic or mercantile exchange, but by cultural relationships of cooperation, solidarity, and friendship; these relationships are social bonds that foster formative and socialization processes (Hernández, 2006).

One of the elements that guarantees this formative and social bond is trust, which, as an abstract, but everyday concept, is not often studied, analyzed, understood, or strengthened in the practice of community life. This report seeks to explore the concept from Comunalia's perspective, as well as from the perspective of the individuals, grassroots groups¹ and Community Foundations immersed in specific spaces.

For this study, we brought together five community foundations that collaborate with Comunalia and together, we designed an action-research plan which allowed us to explore the perception that people have regarding civil society organizations, trust, and its levels in different environments, thus understanding the type of actions that promote and strengthen the link between communities and organized civil society.

The report consists of 5 sections: a methodological section which outlines and explains the decisions taken in the construction of the research framework to understand and explain community trust towards civil society organizations in Mexico; a conceptual section defining the notion of trust from the point of view of various authors and the people who direct or represent the community foundations that participated in the study; a results section reviewing the information obtained during the fieldwork and highlighting the actions in favor of trust building; and finally, a conclusions section where the findings are summarized.



Picture 1. FESAC

¹ These are groups made up of people from the same community, who come together to work on the solution of problems that affect them in their territory. Organizations managed by members of the same community allow the creation of spaces to identify opportunities and collective problems and jointly develop proposals for the benefit of the community (Villar, 2014).



Methodology

This is a qualitative action-research study which explores the perception of a segment of the population regarding actions that encourage or weaken trust, allowing us to identify strategies to strengthen the links between community foundations and social organizations and the community. Two qualitative data collection techniques were used: focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The data was analyzed using grounded theory and open coding, classifying the information obtained into the 3 categories and 10 subcategories that are presented in the body of this report.



Stage 1:

Literature review and quantitative analysis.

Information on the levels of trust that the population has towards civil society organizations, as well as the theoretical considerations surrounding the concept of trust were consulted in updatbases and publications.



Stage 2:

Focus groups and qualitative instrument design.

Interested community foundations were identified and invited to focus group conversations to understand the problem and, through dialogue, define the issues and questions for analysis in order to design and evaluate the data collection instruments. The following community foundations participated in this effort:

No.	Community Foundation	Localización
1.	Corporativa de Fundaciones	Guadalajara, Jalisco
2.	Fundación Comunidad	Cuernavaca, Morelos
3.	FEYAC	Flamboyanes, Yucatán
4.	Fundación Comunitaria Malinalco	Malinalco, Estado de México
5.	Fundación Punta de Mita	Bahía de Banderas, Nayarit

Table 1. Participating foundations



Stage 3:

Collection of qualitative information.

This stage corresponds to field work, contact and dialogue with the people and groups that collaborated in this study; it is presented in sub-stages due to the complexity it encompasses.

- 3.1** A first focus group was held with the people who direct or represent the participating community foundations. The focus group explored their perception of trust that the communities with which they work have in them. Topics and analysis questions for the instrument design were identified, as well as the sample groups for field interviews.
- 3.2** Based on the information from the first focus group, the instrument for the semi-structured interviews was designed and a second focus group with the participating community foundations was carried out to validate it.
- 3.3** Fieldwork to collect perceptions of trust was conducted in the locations of each participating community foundation, interviewing local government representatives, community foundation initiatives participants, and general community residents.

The sample selection criteria are based on the convenience technique. An initial interview universe of 15 people was proposed, covering the local government sector, community foundation initiative participants, and the general population (Table 2).

	Sector	Description
	Local government	Local government representatives who work directly with the community through public service positions. Individuals were referred by the community foundations.
	Community foundation initiative participants	People who have collaborated with the community foundations as participants in their grants or other initiatives, they are part of various community groups and organizations. Individuals were referred by the community foundations.
	General population (non-participants)	People living in the communities who do not know the community foundations firsthand or do not participate in their initiatives. They were approached randomly, and they agreed to be interviewed.

Table 2. Sample



Picture 2. Fundación Comunitaria Puebla



Stage 4:
Analysis and Report writing.

The interviews from stage 3 were transcribed and systematized, analyzing the data by means of grounded theory and open coding, classifying the information obtained into the 3 categories and 8 subcategories (Table 3) from the instrument designed through the theoretical review and the community foundation focus groups in stages 1 and 2. The additional 2 emerging subcategories were drawn directly from the interviews, identified as themes that had not been considered in the process as categories to be explored but, because of their repetitive appearance in the conversations, are deemed important to be included in the results.

Category		Subcategory
	Perception of community foundations	The role of community foundations Importance of community foundations in the community environment
	Attention to community needs	Attention to needs Participation in the attention to needs
	Trust	Definition of trust Trust in community foundations Do other people trust community foundations? Actions that increase or decrease trust Emerging subcategories How trust is built Commitment

Table 3. Conceptual matrix

Methodological clarification

The testimonies of the interviewees are neither statistically nor theoretically representative of the opinions of the participating sectors. However, they provide an in-depth illustration of the explored characteristics. Through interviews with individuals, we seek to approach the perspectives of the sectors they represent, and in this way bring us closer to understanding their experiences regarding trust and the construction of strengthened bonds between society and civil society organizations. In this sense, this report constitutes an exploratory study, where the research is situated squarely in the qualitative field, and has no pretensions of generalizing what happens in the communities and their localities.



Conceptual definitions

Trust as a concept, construct, and action from community foundations

The following are **definitions of trust** and its processes, based on the literature review and the dialogue with the allied community foundations that participated in the research. Ideas for concepts and processes emerged through the focus groups' review of the theory and discussions of our own concerns and perceptions about trust.

The concept of trust describes a situation between two individuals that implies a mutual desire and willingness to initiate or maintain a reciprocal exchange relationship (Hevia, 2006). It is the generalized belief in, or value assignment to, someone or something based on evaluative standards of technical and ethical competence, and on the future actions said person (interpersonal trust) or an institution (institutional trust) (Sautu & Perugorría, 2007).

For Lomnitz (1971), more than a characteristic of certain types of people or groups, trust describes activities, since **it is a characteristic of those relationships between social subjects** and depends on various factors: cultural (social distance), physical (proximity of residence) and economic (intensity of exchange). Consequently, trust presupposes a certain degree of familiarity (social proximity), opportunity (physical proximity) and compatibility of needs (economic proximity) (Hevia, 2006).

In conversation with the participating community foundations, we defined trust as a process that is built, in which certain decisions are entrusted to another person or figure with whom there is a bond. We agreed that a bond of trust provides certainty or security when it is based on agreements. Thus, understanding between the parties is crucial, as well as recognizing that, given the diversity of thought, many times we do not hold the same concepts about the same situations, and it becomes necessary to work together to create shared meanings that lead to the understanding of these concepts.

Fukuyama (1996), in turn, defines trust as "...the expectation that arises within a community of normal, honest, and cooperative behavior, **based on common norms, that is shared by all members of that community**". As Hevia (2006) suggests, we can translate the concept of common norms into the concept of social capital. Social capital being a set of values or informal norms shared among the members of a group that allow them to cooperate, and what, culturally, has the power to produce social well-being and development, it is generally measured in the associative capacity of a given society.

The pursuit of well-being, development, and social justice hardly occurs in isolation, it is a process that **requires, among other things, active collaboration. Collaboration, In turn, requires trust, and trust requires understanding.**

Civil society organizations, community foundations, and grassroots groups, seeking these paths to development and well-being, must extend channels of understanding that build trust and collaboration. Weaver (2022) speaks of the core of trust as the deepening of relationships with other people; familiarity allows for better sharing and understanding of each other's world, which can lead to strengthening committed relationships.

During group conversations **dialogue, listening, and observation were discussed as continuous actions which allow us, as organizations, to recognize the levels of trust we have** in the communities which we collaborate. We found, on one hand, there are the elements that build trust, and on the other, there are also actions that embody the essence of that trust, namely, we maintain a communicative exchange that shows organizations the trust that communities have towards them; the characteristics of community trust can be accounted for through a non-judgmental remark, open to the possibility of other perspectives or meanings and observed in the subtleties of the bond.

Among the elements that build trust, coming from the community foundations:

1. FOLLOW-THROUGH

The first is follow-through; to do what was said would be done, and do so from place of equality and horizontal treatment, through collective and non-hierarchical action, allowing body, intellect, and emotion to converge with the bodies, intellect, and emotions of the diverse community, showing appreciation and respect.

2. EMPATHY

As a second element of trust building, there is empathy, as it allows the recognition of vulnerability that trust implies. By empathizing with the other as being vulnerable, the importance of honoring what they are giving is recognized, building collective results that look after the needs of the people involved.

3. CONGRUENCY

The third element considered in the conversation is congruency between objectives, actions, and results.

4. ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION

The fourth element that builds trust, as previously mentioned, is assertive communication, which allows to reach common concepts and agreements. In other words, that the language used allows common understanding, and thus an agreement on the route to follow without diffuse or uncertain expectations. In the construction of trust, agreements based on common understanding are necessary.

5. TRUSTING IN THE COMMUNITY

The fifth element is reciprocal trust. As an organization, trusting in the community with which we work, not only in staff, volunteers, sponsors, or allies, but in the community itself, in the people who make up the society that embraces us, in their capabilities, their word, their vision of reality, and their power of transformation is vital.

However, it is in **actions and behaviors where these elements of trust towards others**, whether individuals or institutions, are shown. For this reason, the conversation between community foundation representatives also considered which actions might show that a community has trust in the organization, so that they might identify them. For instance, a behavior identified as an indicator of trust is the **participation** of people in the organization's initiatives, since believing in the proposed work allows the community to integrate in an active and collaborative way. An even higher level of trust would be indicated by **collaboration**. Beyond participation, putting one's own economic, organizational, labor, or intellectual work resources into the projects implies a deep **commitment** and trust. Another action that can reveal the level of trust that communities and grassroots groups have towards a community foundations is them talking to other people and groups about them, either through direct or mass **communication**, recognizing and sharing the work done together, the benefits and learnings achieved through the relationship, among others. In the end, it is individuals who define the value of the organizations, and who will express that value through their networks.

Whereas trust-building allows for collaboration, its absence feeds community distancing. This leads to the burden of individualized responsibilities, dividing and isolating the necessary capacities to address social and community challenges. At the same time, it feeds the idea that transformation and action is not possible, which leads to a perception of impossibility to change reality, leading to resignation and lack of action.

Therefore, beyond an abstract conception, for community foundations trust is a living and flexible construction that is born and nourished by concrete and continuous actions, and allows for collaboration, mobilization, and collective transformation of unjust realities.



Picture 3. Comunalia



Results

The results and analysis of the interviews are presented below in accordance with the three categories and eight subcategories defined in the theoretical review and focus groups with community foundations, as well as the two additional subcategories that emerged from the interviews themselves.



Picture 4



Perception of community foundations

Community foundations are defined as non-profit, non-governmental, independent, and autonomous organizations that are supported by public and voluntary resources; they are devoted to meeting the needs of the community and improving the quality of life of a given geographic area and have a main fund or patrimony established for the purpose of meeting those needs (Charry & López Jasso, 2004).

- The role of community foundations

We examined the community's perception of community foundations as a first step to explore trust and their ideas surrounding it. It was found that people representing local governments feel close to community foundations, they are familiar with the associations and civil society organizations, and they know and express in their discourse the need to work together, delegating responsibilities that often cannot be fulfilled, not even in positions of power. They recognize community foundations as allies to organizations, know the services they offer, and see their usefulness in the community. Although the roles of community foundations are not so clear to local government representatives, they do perceive them as support organizations in community life.



“The first community foundation that we have knowledge of is Fundación Comunitaria Malinalco, it has been around for a while now, it was just its 15th anniversary, and the truth is that we have always been part of these sectors that seek the well-being, perhaps of not so vulnerable groups, but of the community.”

Local government, Malinalco

On the other hand, the participants in community foundation programs have a clear understanding of their role and recognize that one of their objectives is to collaborate with organizations and grassroots groups to professionalize their procedures, and to find and design strategies and tools that approach to the community based on community-led methodologies and collective organization. Professionalization implies knowledge of community participation methods that range from the detection of needs, participatory diagnoses, process design, and field intervention, to results reporting. The work of community foundations bridges the efforts of organizations and grassroots groups to promote joint efforts.



“...because Corporativa de Fundaciones helps you, it not only cares about helping you, which is giving you the income, but it also measures the impact of what you are doing, and it also cares about you having an integral, personal development, etc.”

Participant, Guadalajara.



“...I think that Fundación Punta de Mita has also been one of the key elements for Red Altruista to do a better job of bringing organizations together, at some point Fundación Punta de Mita has organized training and professionalization workshops for the civil associations that make up Red Altruista”.

Participant, Bahía de Banderas

Community members who have not participated in community foundation initiatives identify some civil society organizations but are unable to differentiate between associations, foundations, and grassroots groups, although the latter are easier to identify and remember. They express that there are “foundations” in the community that help people or that organize cultural events, without being able to identify specific ones or their objectives.



Do you know what is the problem I had? Sometimes I also still have? that I get the foundations mixed up, I used to think that there was only one foundation because there was a foundation that gave training to the children out in Nuevo Vallarta, I don't know if it was English lessons, I don't know what or I don't know what it was but they took the children there in the afternoons, I don't know if it was this foundation or the other foundation”.

Non-participant, Bahía de Banderas



“What is it called? I don't know what it's called, the one with the nuns [...] they help the elderly, they provide medicine, it's there”.

Non-participant, Guadalajara

- Importance of community foundations in the community environment

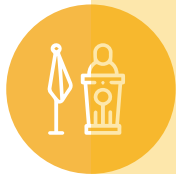
With regard to the importance of community foundations in the communities' environment, the three participating sectors of the interviews agreed in their assessment, with some subtle differences.

Local government representatives describe the work of community foundations and civil society organizations as important. While there is a lack of knowledge about the different roles and initiatives of foundations, organizations, and associations, they express that their work is to assist and support the community. This sector places the importance of community foundations in fundraising and economic support from foreign sources, in the emotional support that the community needs to propose goodwill initiatives. Furthermore, they recognize their capacity to meet certain community needs that cannot be met by overwhelmed local governments.



"...well, the reality is that sometimes [government] institutions are overwhelmed, so when you go out into the community or do an intervention there are things that you cannot do as an institution, so you need the support and collaboration of organizations, besides they can provide accompaniment, and follow-up."

Local government, Guadalajara



"Look, first of all, if there is no foundation, you can't bring the support of the Americans, of the businessmen, if even with all this support, you can see the state of the streets, these are things that correspond to my municipal president, I agree..."

Local government,, Bahía de Banderas

For the participants in community foundation initiatives, these are important because they help maintain high standards in the quality of the work of civil society organizations and grassroots groups, they regulate and lead groups and organizations' development, they support their processes, and motivate community work and attention to needs. Even though they often cannot support all groups and organizations because they do not have sufficient capacity, they serve as a support or platform, becoming partners of these groups and organizations as equals, in terms of a mutual collaboration.



"Community foundations are vital because, by being part of a group, they can work with first-hand information that allows an immediate analysis that provides, through experience, a panorama where conflicts, scenarios and characters that constitute the situations that merit attention are identified and broken down."

Participants, Cuernavaca



"I think that the Foundation has been helping a lot in that sense, I think one of the benefits has been the fact that it has set a higher standard and that we all get to be there within that standard, within that search for better standards."

Participant, Bahía de Banderas



"...I think that Corporativa Fundaciones here in Jalisco is the strategic organization to support civil associations, it seems to me, it can't support all of them sometimes because that's not feasible either."

Participant, Guadalajara.

Non-participants in the initiatives, who are residents of the communities where the community foundations are located, but do not know their programs first-hand, express that civil society organizations are important because they help people address needs that the government is not attending to, and they believe that all of this can change people's lives in a positive way. As a counterpoint, there is also a perception that organizations work with communities to evade taxes and therefore their work, although important, is also dishonest.



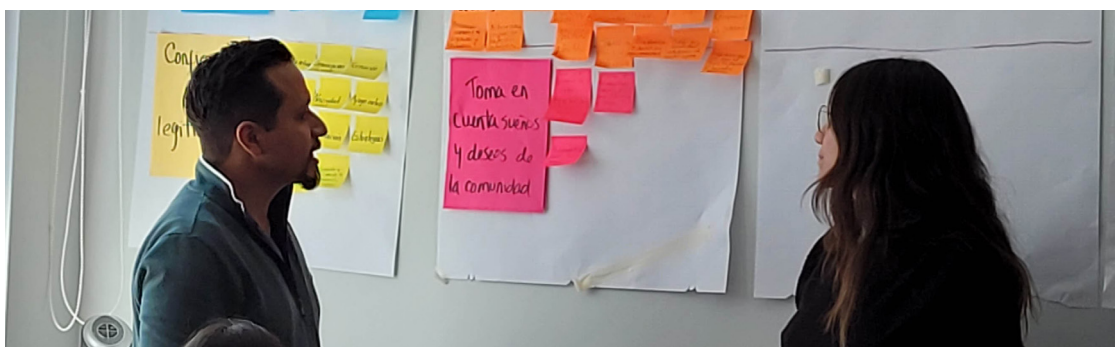
"I believe that enchanting children with cultural activities, which from my point of view do not seem wrong, it is simply their activity, because they are people with a high budget, they evade taxes."

Non-participant, Malinalco



"They are important because they provide support to people that the government does not give them enough importance to or that their own family cannot provide for them either because they have different abilities or simply because of their precarious situation... I have witnessed many people who have been benefited and their lives have changed partially due to the support they have received."

Non-participant, Cuernavaca



Picture 5. Comunalia



Attention to community needs

Not all communities perceive social needs equally, their definition depends on specific circumstances and the environment itself, as well as expectations and living conditions. Needs, in addition to being value judgments about a situation that affects quality or preservation of life, are also situations that motivate action to satisfy those necessities, solve a problem, correct damages and/or overcome a negative situation (Montero, 2006).

The field work of this research explored community needs, who attends to them, and how each interviewed sector participates in satisfying them. The analysis is shown below.

- Attention to needs

The interviewed local government representatives express that the government should fulfill the social needs of the community, but recognized that it is often the community foundations that bear the burden of attending to them.



"Well, I believe that the municipality is the one that is closest to the citizens, it also depends on the social need, because if it is very broad then, for example, each municipality is divided in its structure, so depending on the power is what is being addressed, I imagine that there are also civil society organizations that deal with issues of social needs."

Local government, Guadalajara



"I choose FEYAC which is the Foundation that is having an impact, because they are much talked about because they are involved and involved in the reality [...]when I went, the commissioner told me, I said "commissioner, what about the parade, how are we going to do it" and he told me "ah yes we are going to organize it, but we are going to wait for FEYAC to come". So FEYAC comes in, assists the commissioner, and they organize the parade."

Local government, Flamboyanes

Participants in the community foundation initiatives show awareness that there are a diversity of sectors that observe and attend to needs, such as the church and local government, but also smaller-scale citizen initiatives. Meanwhile, organizations and grassroots groups address specific, targeted, observed needs, which results in a very limited target population. As more organizations and groups can standardize their procedures, there will be increased coverage in the communities, since there are people observing these needs but often do not have the knowledge to initiate and maintain processes of intervention and action in the community.



“...perhaps I do see it that way, even community members are attending to a need, different needs and different problems, perhaps not directly but they are doing it, for example, the church addresses the problem of the preservation of traditions...”

Participant, Malinalco



“As I was telling you, we are... here in the region there are numerous civil associations and work groups that are attending to all these, or not all of these, right? but many of these different needs that are present in the communities.”

Participant, Bahía de Banderas

For residents of communities that are not linked to initiatives of community foundations or civil society organizations, identifying needs is a complicated and often unsuccessful task. There is a perception that there are many needs in the communities and that they cannot be addressed in a unipersonal approach; that each resident of the community attends to their own needs. In this dimension there were three predominant positions: those who identify the different government levels with specific programs to attend specific needs, those who identify that the organizations attend to the diverse community needs, but for their own interests, and those who consider that the needs should be covered by the residents of the community themselves, without a defined leadership or assistance.



“The needs are addressed by the different government levels, educational institutions, community foundations, and civil organizations.”

Non-participant, Cuernavaca



“Unfortunately, no one, but unfortunately no one [sic] because no one knows them, I am not an expert in many of these needs and therefore I cannot focus on them, but there are many needs and unfortunately the only ones who are responsible for these needs, we have already seen why, are the foreigners.”

Non-participant, Malinalco



“Well, everyone takes care of their own needs, each their own, yes, that is, there is not like a government institution, when there are needs, everyone takes care of their own.”

Non-participant, Guadalajara



Picture 6. FEYAC

- Participation in the attention to needs

Local governments stated that their role in attending to needs is to listen to the population and to manage and bring solutions to the community; they act as a bridge to bring communities closer to community foundations or organizations. They seek to attend to needs through government agencies and in collaboration with companies and organizations, but it also depends on the commitment of each official.



“That is why we have also moved on our side, looking for alternatives so that good results can be achieved, a good job in that sense, we have searched, or we have moved to other agencies, spurring them on, so it is a matter of managing, moving, searching for alternatives, that is our work at the end of the day.”

Local government, Malinalco



“He is the municipal delegate, he directly attends to people with requests and manages them, sometimes approaching the municipal president or government officials and other times the community foundations, businessmen and the business council.”

Local government, Bahía de Banderas

Grassroots groups and organizations are involved in attending to needs in a specific way, approaching issues based on what motivates them and what they observe, while also trying to maintain a community relationship of constant collaboration, in other words, working with other initiatives and strengthening their community relations.



“Public problems are divided... which is why different civil society organizations emerge, because the public problems are there but we decide to take a closer look at some problem [...] therefore, the public problems we act on are almost the same, of course there are other problems of a different nature, I am citing only the end of poverty, zero hunger, right to education, but of course there are more and sometimes we meet other organizations and sometimes do not.”

Participant, Guadalajara



“We participate in different ways, I repeat, if I collaborate with this man who is taking care of the problem of not giving [plastic] bags, then I am also collaborating, if I separate waste, I am also collaborating with this environmental problem. It is as I once heard, that the grains of sand do not exist, that is, it is either: you give or you don't give, so I faithfully believe in that.”

Participant, Malinalco

The population that does not participate in the community foundations' initiatives expresses having little participation in attending to needs, and they speak mostly in terms of representative participation.



“By participating in meetings and assemblies of the organizations to which I belong, voting in elections, and supporting community organizations and foundations when I have the opportunity.”

Non-participant, Cuernavaca



Trust

As explored in the literature review at the beginning of this report, trust is a necessary condition for the functioning of organizations, it is largely related to institutions' perceived good performance, namely, their ability to meet people's demands (Baker, 2008; González de la Vega et al., 2010; Hiskey & Seligson, 2003; Morales Quiroga, 2008; Price & Romantan, 2004, as cited in Beramendi, M., Delfino, G., & Zubieta, E., 2016).

However, trust is also a concept that comes from common sense, and to understand what it means to different community members we can explore the ideas they have on this topic. It is for this reason that the perception of trust, its nuances, and the actions that promote it, strengthen it, and express it have been the motive of this research. During the field interviews we explored the topic of trust from each sector's different vantage point.



Picture 7. Fundación Comunitaria Cozumel

- Definition of trust

The interviewed local government representatives do not have a clear or definite concept of trust; they identify it in characteristics and actions in which it can be developed, or in which it can be lost. They agree that it is a value that is earned from others, that it is based on personal will, and that it grants security; it is similar to faith and is related to actions such as keeping secrets or knowing that someone is capable of helping in the face of need.



“It is the fact that you are being entrusted with, to a certain extent, for example, with a secret; I am entrusting you with the biggest, greatest secret of my life, and that for me is to have the trust in you [sic].”

Local government, Malinalco



“You see, trust is earned, it is earned because if people trust you, it is because you have earned it. You can't say, I have a lot of trust in you, I trust you like this, I trust you like that, for me trust is that, if you have an employee, a friend, I don't know, you have all my trust, it is because you have faith in him [sic].”

Local government, Bahía de Banderas



“It is a value, that I do think is fundamental because I think it is also something that we have lost a lot, and it is also a matter of perception, of whether you felt satisfied; and it means a lot to us as an institution that people trust the institution, because the reality is that, right now, there is a low perception of institutions, and it is understandable because of the situation we are living. So, in the levels of trust, I would dare to say that it is something very valuable institutionally speaking.”

Local government, Guadalajara



“Trust has to be something very close, ultimately, it has to be an action, a very personal, a very individual willingness, which can only be based on the knowledge of the other...”

Local government, Flamboyanes

For participants in the community foundation initiatives, the concept is clearer, they know that trust is related to vulnerability, to knowing how to recognize their own needs, knowing that whoever offers help meet those needs will be congruent, and that the people or organizations will act correctly, for the benefit of the people or the community they serve. They consider that trust and resilience go hand in hand, that a trustworthy opinion of the organization is built by being persistent in their established objectives and goals.



“We would define it as the ability to give yourself permission to be vulnerable without the fear of unforeseen risk.”

Participant, Cuernavaca



“...to think that this person or this organization is going to fulfill its objectives, or that, at least, it will do everything possible to carry out its mission in an open way, transparently, with good accountability. I feel that, to the extent that organizations have this, that we have good accountability, that we socialize the work we do, and that this work is demonstrated in society, that it is reflected, this is how we gain the trust of the people and of other organizations [...] I believe that trust and resilience often go hand in hand [...] the important thing is that the organizations continue to work, that we are also agents of change, often the changes are not immediate, they are changes that are often generational.”

Participant, Bahía de Banderas



“I don't have the exact words but I will draw a picture of what I think it is: it is the capacity of human beings to leave something very delicate in the hands of others (of another organization), therefore you seek to try to make sure that, as you are making yourself vulnerable, as you are leaving something very delicate in the hands of another, whether it is an organization or a person, you try to predict the behavior of the organization or of the other person, in order not to be so vulnerable, but in the end, trust has to do with making yourself vulnerable and leaving in the hands of someone else that you believe has the capacity to do something, an assignment, a mission, a task [sic].”

Participant, Guadalajara

For the non-participants in community foundation initiatives, trust can be defined as the certainty of making decisions according to an expected objective, which allows for the delegation of responsibilities and the certainty that these decisions will be carried out well. They compare it to a friendship, in which appreciation, affection, and values are shared in the knowledge that there will be no disappointments or frauds.



"I think that it would be a little bit delegating [sic] responsibilities and even delegating certain activities, that would be trust, in putting those responsibilities and those activities in the hands of other people."

Non-participant, Malinalco



"...this for me is trust with someone who truly appreciates you, who has the same ideals and who has those virtues, because even delinquents are also friends, because they have the same ideas."

Non-participant, Bahía de Banderas

- Trust in community foundations

The local government representatives in the sample expressed their full confidence in the community foundations because of their transparency in the management of resources, their responsiveness to requests, and their track record.



"I do trust. Yes, because I participated, and as I insist, at that time, in this environment that I like numbers, I also participated in carrying out the control of resources, and we were accountable, and we saw that everything was going well, in those years. And now I perceive that things are going well, they are inviting a lot of young people, to the projects, to grow, and I am really very proud to have Fundación Malinalco here."

Local Government, Malinalco



"Yes, when I have asked for support, because my first choice is to turn to my work peers, but my second choice is Corporativa de Fundaciones and, in fact, I have also invited them to programs that we are doing, and I can say that I trust them, and we have worked on some things together."

Local Government, Guadalajara



“Yes, I’m going to start from their background, I’m going to start from that, if that organization has been working for years and continues to work and keeps working [sic], it is because it is doing things well. Then it’s simple, if they are working and are achieving or, in some way, are impacting the community and are doing things, and the community has received them with appreciation, it means that the work is well done.”

Local Government, Flamboyanes

Those representing the participating organizations express their full trust in community foundations and suggest that it should be linked to transparency.



“totally, I have had the opportunity of indirectly knowing different foundations indirectly, but I have known or studied them, and I am very surprised at not forgetting the human essence, over everything. That is, there can be many problems and different needs in the community, but if you do not understand first of all, that we are all human, then you will totally lose your reason for being.”

Participant, Malinalco



“We think that it is difficult to trust in an idea of “of the community” that is not linked to transparency, because, by including the contribution of time, commitment, and often funds and money from the community, there is a real risk of damaging the people involved when there is no oversight. However, we believe in the possibility of generating strict and open safeguards that allow the trust of the communities in their organizations.”

Participant, Cuernavaca

Non-participants either trust or do not trust community foundations based on their personal experiences. Those who do not trust them believe that the organizations are deceptive in their practices, that their objectives are not honest, and that their work conceals their own need for tax evasion or easy money. Furthermore, they do not see the people who run the organizations as allies who share their values and expectations, or even their problems and needs. Those who do trust community foundations express their appreciation for the help provided to specific vulnerable sectors of the population, they share the excitement and desire to help, and they notice in their communities that the organizations are meeting those needs.



"No, it is tax evasion model, that is why I do not trust any of them. All foundations seem the same to me, most of them that I know, and of course those that are involved in my town. I want to get rid of them all for the same reason. Unfortunately, I do not trust anyone, maybe that is a negative point, I base this on interests, if their interests are in agreement with mine, I'm there, if they are not in agreement with mine, I stay away."

Non-participant, Malinalco

- Do others trust in community foundations?

We asked local governments and initiative participants whether they believe that people in the community trust community foundations.

The local government representatives find that it is difficult for the community to trust community foundations when there is a lack of knowledge; when the people who lead the organizations are external to the community, their intentions are distrusted, as it is perceived that external people do not have the same needs as the natives of the communities. It is believed that they have the economic capacity to accomplish the processes they promote, the distrust then emerges from the perception of not receiving that economic resource directly, and that it is the outsider who intrudes into the community and takes advantage of that resource that could belong to the community inhabitants.



"Malinalco is very lacking in empathy on this issue, because we are very reserved in the fact that they come and we say, "they are outsiders", they are people from outside, what do they want, why do they come to profit? Sometimes Malinalco is very prone still having that part of "if they are outsiders, outsiders can take care of it, they have money" and sometimes that part is the one we still have to overcome, to try to give them trust."

Local government, Malinalco



"I believe that it has been gradually earned, because the truth is that we have heard two or three negative opinions, as I mentioned before, "you should know that the Foundation has never given me anything", I say "well, they are not going to bring you money, they are not going to bring you food, they are not going to ask you for anything, they simply offer you what they offer you", [...] what happens is that those who do not trust also do not participate in anything."

Local government, Bahía de Banderas

For the participants, the trust or distrust of the community towards the community foundations also depends on the experience between the organization and individuals. In small territories, where the role of the organization is clear, trust is clearer and more evident, while in larger territories it is more difficult for the relationship to be close, and trust can be compromised.



"I feel that it is something that is growing, I feel that there is [trust]. Well, at least in my organization I have noticed a greater participation of people, more people who want to be part of it, and that has to do with that projection of trust, it has given me confidence to belong to a network, to be able to say to people, well, here we becoming more professional, and not only the [bird] observatory, another 30 organizations that are growing. This way, being to be able to talk about the network [of organizations] allows me to have more confidence in myself and project that trust in what we do outwardly."

Participant, Bahía de Banderas



"If you interview all the civil associations here in Guadalajara, Jalisco, they have seen a very important reduction in their income. It is not directly related to trust, no, but according to the profile I spoke to you about just now, if people and associations are reducing their trust, then how do we talk about sustainability?"

Participant, Guadalajara

In small, structured communities, people have trust, but it is important to effectively communicate the objectives of community foundations, as there can be confusion among people about the methodology and activities of community foundations, as well breeding a desire for paternalism and the expectations of receiving financial and in-kind benefits from community foundations.



"There are foundations, as I said, that have been quite paternalistic, so there is a level of trust there because they feel cared for and protected, so I repeat, it all depends on the reason for being of a foundation. But I believe that they do trust, only that sometimes foundations or organizations are not clear about their objectives, and then what happens? then I start to give to them because from my point of view that is what the community needs, and it becomes paternalistic."

Participant, Malinalco

- Actions that increase or decrease trust

Local government representatives believe that, the actions that increase trust in community foundations include: effective outreach in communicating what a community foundation is, fighting to counteract a lack of empathy, making their actions visible through mechanisms such as a catalog of the organizations in their communities, and being involved with schools and institutions that are representative in the community.



“...a little bit of outreach, a little bit of outreach [sic] on the understanding of what a foundation really is, get closer to the people, look for alternatives and programs that also provide a benefit, that are truly viable in certain communities, and it would be like looking for an activity or some method to remove this lack of empathy.”

Local government, Malinalco



“I think that making themselves visible, because the work of Corporativa is to guide the organizations, to train them on how to obtain resources, on how to structure themselves as a civil society organization, so it seems to me that they could make themselves visible perhaps through this mechanism, such as the catalog. It seems to me that it could be a first step for them to make themselves visible within the community.”

Local government, Guadalajara

Participants in community foundation initiatives believe that the actions that can increase trust are those that build honest bonds, in addition to training in community methodologies and professionalization. They exhort organizations not to be afraid of the need to professionalize processes, and to bet on the quality of the work being done. They also propose to consider the needs of the community as their own, to empathize from a horizontal perspective, not to save the community, but to work starting from the community, to maintain and promote its sense of belonging.



Picture 8. Corporativa de Fundaciones



“We believe that there are three elements that can empower community organizations to give lasting and solid support to the communities in which they are established: (1) Training of the people who are part of the organizations to share and improve their strategies; (2) Transparency, generating activities that can draw attention to the way in which the undertaken projects apply the invested capital to generate the desired results; (3) Continuity, that allows to qualify the work and offer windows of possibility to put down roots in the selected geography of the organization.”

Participant, Cuernavaca



“From a more community perspective, for me, a community foundation should, first of all, be part of the community; that its presence is felt not only by saying, ‘this is what I bring you, this is what I have,’ but, ‘I am here, look at me, and now together lets...’. And also, that the foundations should embrace the needs of the community not as ‘how am I going to solve them,’ but as, ‘how do we do it together.’”

Participant, Malinalco



“To demand of ourselves to have a higher degree of professionalization, of accountability, to improve our practices, and to strengthen the sector. Perhaps with all these changes we will be fewer organizations, but stronger [...] to aim towards resilience, to remain also with this conviction and well we have to reorganize ourselves to these new conditions.”

Participant, Bahía de Banderas



Picture 9. FEYAC

Non-participants in the community foundations also agree that the actions that allow them to trust are: members of the foundations approaching and getting closer to the community, maintain bonds by being part of their traditions and customs, and of community life. Another element that builds trust for non-participants is to make themselves known without depending on the people they help, that is to say, to present themselves as an entity with their own personality beyond their actions and the people who receive their contributions.



“That they would have more presence in the community, that they would generate stronger ties with specific portions of society, so that people themselves will take on the task of spreading that feeling of trust to others. [...] To showcase achievements without abusing the image of the groups they support, to interact people not only to give and take.

That they make themselves known more by the facts, than by what good foundations are presumed to be. Usually foundations target a specific part of the population, and few people other than the beneficiaries and their families know and search for them. Having a larger presence in the community in which they operate by sharing their achievements would definitely make us all trust them more.”

Non-participant, Cuernavaca

They also confirm that transparency, not only of the resources and funding, but also of objectives, is an action that generates trust. Often the transparency presented in official reports is confusing, so they propose a more direct and clear transparency. One in which foundations state what resources they have and what they are being invested in, as well as communicating the real objectives that defines their origin as a foundation, making their history and development known in a daily and friendly way to the community.




“to trust more, there should be a transparent administration, to prove, yes, that there is a place, a page, now everything is handled like this, ‘Mr. Meyer or Mr. so and so donated this much, here we have this much, this much was given to the school’. Well, maybe they already do it, but you as an ordinary citizen do not see it [sic].”

Non-participant, Bahía de Banderas

Emerging subcategories

- How trust is built

Trust is built over time, based on good practices, perseverance, and resilience; it is built in the community by maintaining personal trust and trust in the team, in the established goals and objectives, and by knowing how to adjust to community processes and needs. Trust is built in companionship, knowing that one is part of a network of allies that strengthens knowledge and methods, in the professionalization acquired in the fulfillment of standards, which gives self-confidence and, in turn, is mirrored to obtain it from the communities. Stability and institutionalization also strengthen trust without losing the heart or the driving force behind organizations, maintaining a transparent process in which intentions and methods are communicated.




“with years of good practices [...] I think it is something that is built up over time and also from showing the results of sustained work [...] it makes me more confident as an organization, and that is something that is projected towards others [...] the inspiration, the collaboration within the sector and I think that all of this points to greater trust within the people who lead the organizations and that is projected outwards, to the people, to our beneficiaries, to the general public and also to the donors.”

Participant, Bahía de Banderas



Picture 10. Fundación Comunitaria Malinalco



“I don't know, because, well, getting people to recognize us was not a simple process, all work must start from the investigation of what you desire, and also in what they want; and from there to start working and not be cut off, that is to say, that it not be something of a month or two months.”

Participant, Flamboyanes

- Commitment

Collaborating on and being a part of foundations and organizations' initiatives also represents a commitment to work. It is for this reason that some people in the community prefer not to interact or participate, not to be there and not to trust, because trust is not only unidirectional. When trust is given, it is also necessary to work to receive it and, in this way, to maintain it. Therefore, the commitment that this represents is not so attractive to some, especially since in assistencialism there is no such commitment, one of the parties receives without having to be an active participant in the relationship.



"I have not approached them, first, because I have no need, I have no need for help, thank God. But for example, I know people who have been offered help, but they do not accept. What happens is with the foundations you must also have commitment, people do not want that responsibility or that commitment, I do not know, sometimes people do not even want to even spend that time."

Non-participant, Bahía de Banderas

Trust is expressed with empathy, respect, and collaboration, accompanying the processes and initiatives that community foundations undertake in response to the observed and expressed needs of the communities. When there is trust, it is easier to propose projects, programs, and interventions, because there is a network, and the responsibility does not fall on a single person, group or collective.

Although one way of expressing trust is collaboration, inclusion, and appropriation of actions by organizations, some people who do not trust can also make use of services and initiatives, in order to attend to their own needs and experiences. In other words, participation, in and of itself, cannot be an indicator of trust; people express their trust through participation, but it is not the only indicator of trust.



"As a matter of fact, my daughter goes to La Fundación del Tecorral. As I was saying, we all go for our own interests, it is in my interest for my daughter to be in contact with international people, so this is also part of my tolerance to this kind of things, because in a way it is also convenient for me, even though I am not doing anything for the people, and I am not doing anything for society either."

Non-participant, Malinalco



Conclusions and final considerations

The objective of this work has been to delve into the perceptions regarding **trust and the actions that motivate or weaken it**, as well as the search for strategies to **strengthen the bonds between community foundations and the community**. The conversations had with the representatives of three different sectors in five territories is not intended to generalize the results, but to take a deeper dive into the actions that these population sectors have identified as actions that build or damage trust.

From the field surveys, it was possible to observe that, in general, people have a **positive perception of community foundations**. Although there is not as much clarity regarding their specific functions, there is a generalized consensus that they are a **figure which performs actions for social well-being** and, therefore, they consider them important in the community's development.

The interviewees cite community foundations and civil society organizations as the entities that identify and attend to social needs, sometimes in collaboration with these same interviewed sectors. It is in this **alliance of community members where the strength to transform unjust or uncomfortable social realities lies**.

We observe that trust is a living, moving characteristic that is built and changes as relationships develop. **There is no trust without relationships**, which is why, through the interviews, we observed that people with a pre-existing relationship to them are the ones that trust that community foundations and civil society organizations' objectives are firmly in favor of their communities' well-being. We also found that, although it is difficult for some social sectors to differentiate between specific types of organizations, they trust their work, above all, because of the impact it has on people and communities.

Through this analysis it has become evident that, **for an organization to be considered trustworthy there are multiple elements that must be addressed**: the first is that its function must be clear and present in the community, through **communication strategies**, but also through **direct relationships in community processes**, striving for honest bonds through horizontal connections and joint action.

Another key element for an organization to be considered trustworthy is transparency; **an accessible transparency, which is not simply fulfilling a requirement**, but which manifests from a desire to share results with people.

On the other hand, the elements that weaken trust have to do with the distancing of community foundations from community life and a lack of communication that makes it difficult to understand their processes and reason for being.

Because of its quality as a construct, trust is a subject to continue to be studied in order to better understand it and to take actions which allow it to be strengthened from and for the communities.



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**Communities' trust
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