

## ➔ HONDURAS: DEMOCRACY TRUST BACKS NATIONAL CONSENSUS AMIDST VOLATILE POLITICS

### In a Nutshell

The Democracy Trust was conceived as a policy advocacy tool to encourage commitment to the PRSP process among political parties. By ensuring that political parties publicly back policies of development and poverty eradication, the trust has granted the Honduran population a mechanism to hold elected officials to their obligations, and to demand their right to improved and sustainable services. As well, commitments to development thus become state policies and no longer belong solely to the government of the day.

Without capacity development, long-term strategies for poverty reduction are difficult to achieve. Thus, the Democracy Trust plays a crucial role in promoting the growth of social capital, expanding capabilities through the creation of formal and informal communications networks that exchange ideas as well as shared norms, goals and beliefs.

### The Story

In 2000, after a broad-based “sounding out” of basic deficiencies within national development, government ministers, civil society representatives, ambassadors and development agency representatives identified the lack of political continuity in Honduras as a major stumbling block. It was severely threatening long-term commitments, particularly with respect to poverty reduction and achievement of the MDGs. The fact that these goals coincided with national agreements under the HIPC and PRSP initiatives provided an important opportunity for action.

Against this background, the Democracy Trust was conceived to build consensus on public policies. It was launched on 5 October 2000, with the President of the Republic signing the Democracy Trust Declaration, together with representatives of the UN system, embassies and international organizations. The Cardinal of Tegucigalpa was asked to preside over the trust’s board, which now contains highly reputed civil society representatives, the Minister of Finance, and the Ambassadors of Argentina, France, Japan, Sweden, the United States and Venezuela. To date, 25 embassies and international organizations have committed themselves to participation, providing financial support for policy forums and civil society dialogue, think-tank activities, advocacy, and training of journalists on covering poverty-related themes.

The overall objectives of the Democracy Trust are to:

- Generate an open and de-politicized dialogue on issues pertaining to sustainable human development and poverty reduction, within an overarching process of democratic consolidation

- Identify policies and approaches aimed at transforming national policy and building social consensus
- Strengthen civil society's role in the follow-up and monitoring of the PRSP
- Involve the participation of all sectors of society: government, private enterprise, mass media, NGOs, political parties, academic and intellectual sectors, cooperatives and unions, religious organizations, ethnic groups and minorities

Since its inception, the Democracy Trust has achieved some notable results. It has opened an unprecedented public dialogue among political parties and leaders, as well as created space for national consensus building. An interactive methodology brings together different agents and social actors, with a view to assisting the government, civil society and the donor community in the design of policies, programmes and projects on sensitive areas of human development.

The trust encouraged social and political entities to prepare a 20-year vision for the country, with a view to generating farsighted policies instead of those that merely reflect the interests of the government in power. Consequently, leaders of political parties and civil society signed a series of longer term commitments and 16 other agreements on national transformation. The Democracy Trust is now working on facilitating compliance, follow-up and monitoring.

It is also leading a programme to facilitate the modernization of the five registered political parties in Honduras. Some initiatives include the redefinition and/or consolidation of political doctrines, the formulation of political programmes, and a greater incorporation of youth and women in politics. A training programme has begun for journalists, with a curriculum prepared in cooperation with Honduras' three leading universities. The course includes subjects such as the interpretation of the social and political context of the country; ethics and the process of generating news in strict adherence to the truth; and the responsibility of the media in providing the general population with constructive critical analysis of crucial problems.

## **Results and Critical Factors**

The Democracy Trust has already proven itself to be an important tool for building social capital and consensus in the face of substantial change and the instability inherent in any developing country. In a short space of time, it has promoted dialogue and consensus on crucial issues for the advancement of democracy and poverty reduction; bolstered the capacities of civil society to prepare proposals on public policies; contributed to the strengthening and modernization of political parties; and developed the capacities of journalists for critical analysis on development and democracy. Factors that account for these accomplishments include:

- ***Promotion of complementarity of efforts:*** The trust has not sought to duplicate the concerted activities of existing institutions such as the

National Forum of Convergence, the Presidential Commission for Participation of Civil Society, and Interforos, among others. Instead, it has sought to generate a dialogue on development issues and democracy that will allow the creation of a social consensus oriented around constructing a country vision. This has minimized the risk of conflict flaring among organizations.

- ***Incorporation of the five political parties and the various agencies of the international community:*** Looking beyond just civil society, the trust extended a privileged space for the five political parties and the international cooperation agencies to plan initiatives, and to coordinate and receive information on the different social, political and economic processes that they observe in the country.
- ***Pursuit of agreements and written pacts for the political parties and civil society:*** The adoption of social agreements has been a step forward, along with a monitoring and tracking strategy.
- ***The credibility and leadership of the trust's president:*** Effective dialogue requires a great amount of integrity on the part of the entity organizing it. In the case of the Democracy Trust, the presidency was deliberately offered to one of the very few people in the country whose reputation is unharmed: the Cardinal of Tegucigalpa, who is also widely acknowledged as an extremely intelligent and articulate leader.
- ***Facilitation and continued support:*** UNDP has provided active support while maintaining adequate boundaries and autonomy. Its facilitation of the management of financial and technical resources, together with the strong social and political capabilities of the members of the trust, has resulted in a solid institution, reliable and capable within the public sphere of Honduras.

### Further information

Foro de Fortalecimiento a la Democracia (FFD) ([www.ffd.hn](http://www.ffd.hn)).

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*The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Gisella Camoriano and UNDP Honduras.*