

# Guyana NGO Sector

## Historical background of the nonprofit movement in Guyana

The formation of non-profit organizations in Guyana is rooted in the country's cultural and ethnic history. Guyana's population is a mix of indigenous peoples and those descending from African slaves and indentured laborers. When slavery was abolished in 1838, indentured servants came primarily from India (but also from China and the Madeira Islands) and were employed until 1917 (USAID 2002, 31). Rice and sugar plantations, in colonial times, were primarily situated along the coast, which has resulted in higher population concentrations of Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese in the more crowded coastal areas, while the indigenous population has remained chiefly in the remote hinterland. The geographic divisions of ethnic groups in the country's early history helped fuel ethnic divides that have persisted into modern times. The free laborers organized some of the earliest non-profit organizations (NPOs) in Guyana. Among the earliest groups were precursors to trade unions, associations formed to provide welfare in times of hardship (sickness or death) to their working class members (Canterbury 2005, 24). Other long-standing nonprofit organizations in coastal areas are churches, faith-based groups, agricultural associations, fishing cooperatives, and chambers of commerce. Some cooperative villages were also formed in the coastal areas. The villages met their own social development and infrastructure needs, such as road development, water, sanitation, health services, education, housing and recreation (Canterbury 2005, 29-30). In the interior rural indigenous communities, traditional cooperative living and working arrangements were prevalent and preceded the formalization of cooperative societies, the first NPOs in the hinterland.