

Taking the Pulse of Civil Society Worldwide: Insights from the CIVICUS Civil Society Index project (2003-2007).

A paper presented at the 8th conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain July 9-12, 2008 .

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Abstract

This paper gives an overview of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) framework, the key findings from CSI implementation between 2003 and 2007. The paper contributes to knowledge on civil society in various regions, as well as the actions aimed at civil society strengthening around the world, that have been inspired by CSI. The paper argues that the CSI framework has proved relevant not only at country level, but also as a cross-national programming tool as it generated data that can be compared across countries. The CSI process and results have also served as catalyst for mobilisation of donor and financial support for civil society programming, national policy dialogues on the role of civil society in development, and especially in creating a more enabling environment for civic participation and cross-fertilizations of ideas between the different stakeholders.

Background:

The last few decades have witnessed a great shift in the perceived role of civil society and its emergence as an increasingly important player in governance and development around the world. This has resulted in increased recognition by trans-national governance institutions, as well as individual governments, of the civil society organisations' (CSOs) critical role in governance and development. Today, CSOs are seen as effective advocates of pro-poor development through their inputs in policy formulation, service delivery,

¹ This paper benefited from ideas in a presentation under the same name during the 8th ISTR conference at Universitat de Barcelona, Spain. The presentation was done by Jacob M. Mati, Lorenzo Fioramonti, Natalia Kirytopoulou and Alan Fowler. The author would like to thank them all as well as Katsuji Imata for moderating the session, and for reviewing a draft of this paper. More thanks also to Rose Lefeh Ngwenjah and Tracy Anderson both at CIVICUS for their reviews. Correspondence should be addressed to jacob.mati@civicus.org.

holding governments to account, and in developing social consensus on many development issues.

While the transformation in the perceived role of civil society has been happening, knowledge about civil society in many countries is still limited. Further, in many countries, there are very few opportunities for civil society stakeholders to come together to discuss and reflect on the current state of civil society, the challenges it faces, as well as how to make civil society more effective in contributing to positive social change (CIVICUS, 2006). In the last two or so decades, civil society's growing visibility has attracted a lot of attention from scholars and practitioners in an effort to understand and measure the state and impact of civil society (Anheier, 2004; Knight *et al.*, 2002; Manor, 1999; Salamon, 2004). The result has been a significant contribution to advancing the knowledge-base on civil society.

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) is one of such efforts. The idea of a Civil Society Index originated in 1997, when CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation² published the *New Civic Atlas* (CIVICUS, 1997). The *New Civic Atlas* contained profiles of civil society in 60 countries around the world. For the purposes of improving the methodological rigour, as well as the quality and comparability of the information contained in the *New Civic Atlas*, CIVICUS embarked on the development of a comprehensive assessment tool for civil society: the 'Civil Society Index' (Heinrich & Naidoo, 2001; Holloway, 2001).

With seed funding from UNDP in 1999, CIVICUS designed the CSI as a participatory needs assessment and action planning tool to be implemented by, and for, civil society organisations at the country level. Helmut Anheier, the then director of the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics, played a significant role in conceptualisation of CSI and the resultant Civil Society Diamond³ (Anheier, 2004). CSI's ultimate aim was to create a knowledge base and momentum for civil society

² CIVICUS is an international alliance of civil society organisations based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

³ This is dealt with in greater detail later in this paper.

strengthening initiatives at both the country-level, and cross-nationally. CSI was therefore designed to achieve two primary goals:

- 1) As a participatory self-assessment and reflective tool, it was designed to generate knowledge on strengths and weaknesses as well as corrective measures (recommendations) and actions needed from civil society actors and stakeholders towards its strengthening.
- 2) As an action-planning tool, the CSI sought to build capacities of CSOs in research and policy advocacy.

After a thorough development process, the CSI was implemented in over 50 countries worldwide between 2003 and 2006. With over 7000 stakeholders (such as governments, donors/development partners, academia, media and the public at large) directly involved in the process, the CSI framework proved relevant not only at country level, but also as a cross-national programming tool as it generated data that can be compared across countries. As shall be seen later in this paper, the CSI process and results have also served as catalyst for mobilisation of donor and financial support for civil society programming, national policy dialogues on the role of civil society in development, and especially in creating a more enabling environment for civic participation and cross-fertilizations of ideas between the different stakeholders. This paper gives an overview of the CSI framework, the key findings from its 2003 to 2006 implementation, as well as the various actions aimed at civil society strengthening around the world as influenced by CSI.

The CSI methodological framework (2003-2006)⁴

Measurement of something as contentious, fuzzy and vague (in meanings and frames), as civil society (Beck, 2001:15 as cited in Heinrich, 2005b:211), is always fraught with methodological challenges that make it normatively and empirically difficult to capture. These challenges are further compounded by what Heinrich (2005b:212) argues, are civil society's 'diverse historical roots, as well as its widely varying current usages, interpretations and perspectives.'

⁴ This section draws heavily from a more comprehensive CSI project description available on the CIVICUS website: www.civicus.org.

CSI designers were also conscious of the need to develop a methodology that met some basic scientific rigor, and therefore generate data and information across countries that were both nationally and globally relevant, while at the same time, flexible enough to capture context specificity as well as cross-country comparability needs of the project. CSI conceptual framework therefore acknowledged the immense variety of social, cultural and political contexts of civil society across the world, and did not strive for *identical*, but *equivalent* assessments of civil society (van Deth, 1998; Przeworski & Teune, 1966-1967). As experience has shown over the years of CSI implementation, there is indeed a constant tension and a dilemma in finding an appropriate balance to the demands of seeking ‘standardised’ information that can be compared across countries, while maintaining adequate flexibility to ensure that country-specific factors are taken into account.

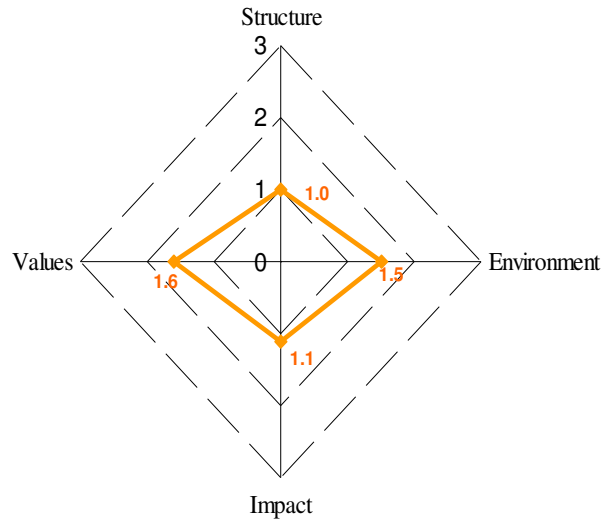
Conscious of these complexities and challenges, the conceivers of the CSI sought to accommodate cultural variations in the conception of civil society as well as its diverse forms and functions in different countries around the world. The decision was made, therefore, to use the following broad and all encompassing functional definition for civil society: ‘the arena in society between the state, market and family, where citizens advance their common interests’ (Heinrich, 2004:13; Heinrich, 2005b:217).

This definition focused on the nature of activities undertaken by various actors and explicitly included individual citizen actions such as participation, demonstrations, social movements and other ‘unorganized’ forms of civic activism. This definition also allowed for adaptive application and measurement of the concept of civil society in many different contexts while avoiding an obvious ‘Western’ bias. Furthermore, the CSI definition tried to accommodate a variety of multidisciplinary and theoretical viewpoints and interests by identifying and generating knowledge about different features and dimensions of civil society through its embodiment of collective voluntary action as its definitive feature, devoid of any ideological or socio-historical baggage (Lauth, 2002; Norton, 1995; Edwards, 2004 as cited in Heinrich, 2005a:3).

For example, given the importance of this action orientation, the CSI designers had to explore whether the definition of civil society should reflect the realities of the ‘uncivil’ elements of civil society, or make a normative stance to look at only the ‘good’ actors and actions oriented towards the public good and adhering to basic civil manners (Diamond, 1994; Knight & Hartnell, 2001; Shils, 1991; Merkel & Lauth, 1998). CSI resolved this by recognising that the ideal type definitions and conceptualisation of civil society were less useful in seeking to understand and assess its reality in countries across the globe. As such, it adopted a realistic view by acknowledging that civil society is composed of ‘both progressive liberal, democratic and peaceful ones that advance values of social justice and human rights, as well as illiberal, anti-democratic and violent and extra ordinarily oppressive, authoritarian, and intolerant elements that may advance or obstruct social progress (Wild, 2006:2 as cited in Mati, 2008:26). This was an acknowledgement that civil society is not a homogenous, united entity, but a complex arena where diverse values and interests interact and power struggles occur (Fowler, 1996:18).

Once the definition was agreed upon, the CSI set about establishing the framework upon which to measure this elusive concept of civil society. It was decided that the CSI should use an indicator system to assess the various aspects of the state of civil society (Heinrich & Naidoo, 2001). Finding the most suitable set of indicators has gone through a number of stages, beginning with the CSI’s pilot phase in 2001. Upon completion of the pilot phase, the project approach was thoroughly evaluated and refined in 2002. The outcome of this review was the methodology that was utilised between 2003 and 2006. This methodology had a set of 74 indicators that were grouped together into 25 sub-dimensions, and further aggregated into four dimensions: - structure, environment, values and impact. Each indicator data is converted to a 4 point score (0-3, where 0 is the weakest and 3 the strongest). These four dimensions are represented graphically in the form of a Civil Society Diamond (see figure 1 below).

Figure 1: The Civil Society Diamond



Below we look briefly at what each of these dimensions entailed and measured.

The **STRUCTURE** dimension is composed of six sub-dimensions and twenty-one indicators that specifically look at civil society’s make-up, size and composition. It examines the actors within the civil society arena, their main characteristics and the relationships among them. The six sub-dimensions include three representing individual actions within civil society: 1) Breadth of citizen participation; 2) Depth of citizen participation; 3) Diversity within civil society; and three representing organisational aspects: 4) Level of organisation; 5) Inter-relations; and 6) Resources. The convoluted organisation and understanding of this dimension to include both individual actions as well as organisational, was revealed to be a problem in the CSI design. This weakness has since been addressed in subsequent revision of the CSI methodology in 2008.⁵

The second dimension, the **ENVIRONMENT**, sought to answer questions related to the nature of the political, socio-economic, cultural and legal environment that civil society exists and operates in. This dimension, even though not a part of civil society itself, was deemed crucial in understanding and explaining the contexts within which civil society

⁵ For more information on the revised CSI methodology, visit the CIVICUS website: <http://www.civicus.org/csi/csi-whats-new/11-revised-methodology>

exists. It also provided pointers to the potential problems within civil society as reflections of the wider society. Specifically, the dimension had 7 sub-dimensions and 23 indicators. The sub-dimensions included: 1) Political context, 2) Basic freedoms & rights, 3) Socio-economic context, 4) Socio-cultural context, 5) Legal environment, 6) State-civil society relations and, 7) Private sector-civil society relations.

The third dimension, **VALUES**, sought answers to the questions of whether civil society practices and promotes positive social values. In selecting indicators under this dimension, the CSI had to make an explicit normative judgment as to what the defining features of civil society were, what functions civil society should serve, and what values it should embrace. To accomplish this, the CSI took guidance from universal standards such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, CIVICUS' own values and vision of its work that includes accountability and transparency, democracy, inclusiveness, non-violence and peace, participation, and tolerance (see www.civicus.org) as well as from the broad academic and practitioners' literature on civil society's characteristics and roles. Worth noting here is that the emergence of civil society as a player in governance and development has not come unchallenged. This is especially due to the failure of civil society to meet the many unrealistic expectations from many quarters⁶ as well as, in part, from civil society's own ambivalence to accountability and transparency standards (Mati, 2008). The result of these concerns has been a forced reflection on the preconceived notions of what are civil society's values.⁷ It must be noted that the creation of CSI was happening when some critics were already observing that the concept of civil society was facing a severe crisis (see for example Chandhoke, 2001; Knight et al., 2002; Edwards, 2004; Lewis, 2002; Avritzer, 2004). Others predicted that the term's vogue could 'soon be over if the concept did not succeed in proving its usefulness for policy, practice and research – through conceptually sound empirical

⁶ Some had seen civil society as the 'magic bullet' or the panacea for development and governance. Reacting to this, Taylor and Naidoo (2004) wrote: 'we are now past the 'magic' phase of ... civil society, a new realism has set in, with events wiping away the naivety of the 1990s to some extent. Munck (2006: 331) added 'we are probably in an era of paradigmatic transition in all realms.'

⁷ The Civil society values are usually preconceived as being typically positive. Kaldor (2003), as well as Keane (2004), for example, see civil society as 'based on universal moral norms and values that [...] eschews all that smacks of self-interest and the merest hint that force might play a role in progressive social change' (cited in Munck 2006:327).

analysis of civil society and of its contributions to development and governance' (Heinrich, 2005:2). The CSI therefore sought to collect information on tolerant as well as intolerant, progressive and fundamentalist, pro-poor and the anti-poor civil society actors using values deemed critical in measuring civil society's legitimacy and credibility. The values dimension was composed of a total of 14 indicators in the following 7 sub-indicators: 1) Democracy, 2) Transparency, 3) Tolerance, 4) Non-violence, 5) Gender equity, 6) Poverty eradication and 7) Environmental sustainability.

The fourth dimension, **IMPACT**, measured the impact of civil society actors on governance & development in the society at large. This dimension utilised a fluid, plausible association model of impact assessment. It therefore interprets the notion of impact as not only the end results, but also in relation to the different levels, and capacities, process and actors, as well as how actively civil society was engaged in a particular area; how different capacities and relationships have been built through participation, and, how civil society actions have influenced civil society itself (Morrissey (2000), cited by McGee & Norton, 2000:68). This dimension included 16 indicators under the following five sub-dimensions: 1) Influencing public policy, 2) Holding state and private corporations accountable, 3) Responding to social interests, 4) Empowering citizens and 5) Meeting societal needs.

It is important to note that the CSI's methodology of the assessment of civil society was not to be reduced to a single numerical score, but rather assessed and scored multiple dimensions of civil society, accompanied by a detailed description and analysis.

A critical question to ask is why CSI used such a wieldy set of indicators when an easier and, perhaps, smaller number of indicators might have been sufficient? The simple answer is that CSI recognised the complexity of civil society and reasoned that it would be counter-productive to over-simplify it by using a smaller, easier set of indicators. Moreover, it was considered impossible to capture the complex reality of civil societies across the globe with a small number of indicators no matter how carefully chosen. Therefore, CSI strove for a comprehensive assessment that would be able to identify civil

society's major strengths and weaknesses as well as exploring their causes. That said, CIVICUS acknowledged that no amount of indicators would represent civil society in its entirety, and choices of what to measure had to be made.

Project Implementation Approach

Between 2003 and 2006, the CSI methodology was implemented in the 55 countries listed in the table below:⁸

Table I: Countries participating in the CSI implementation phase 2003-2006

1. Argentina	19. Germany	39. Palestine
2. Armenia	20. Ghana	40. Poland
3. Azerbaijan	21. Greece	41. Romania
4. Bolivia	22. Guatemala	42. Russia
5. Bulgaria	23. Honduras	43. Scotland
6. Burkina Faso	24. Hong Kong (PR China)	44. Serbia
7. Chile	25. Indonesia	45. Sierra Leone
8. China	26. Italy	46. Slovenia
9. Costa Rica	27. Jamaica	47. South Korea
10. Croatia	28. Lebanon	48. Taiwan
11. Cyprus ⁹	29. Macedonia	49. Togo
12. Czech Republic	30. Mauritius	50. Turkey
13. East Timor	31. Mongolia	51. Uganda
14. Ecuador	32. Montenegro	52. Ukraine
15. Egypt	33. Mozambique	53. Uruguay
16. Fiji	34. Nepal	54. Vietnam
17. Gambia	35. Netherlands	55. Wales
18. Georgia	36. Nigeria	
	37. Northern Ireland	
	38. Orissa (India)	

Actors in the CSI implementation:

Once the CSI framework was ready, CIVICUS placed a public call for statement of interest to take part in the project. The interested CSOs underwent a rigorous desk and peer review process before they were selected by CIVICUS to play the role of the National Coordinating Organisation (NCO). This was to ensure that the CSI was implemented by national-level CSOs with convincing research and convening abilities.

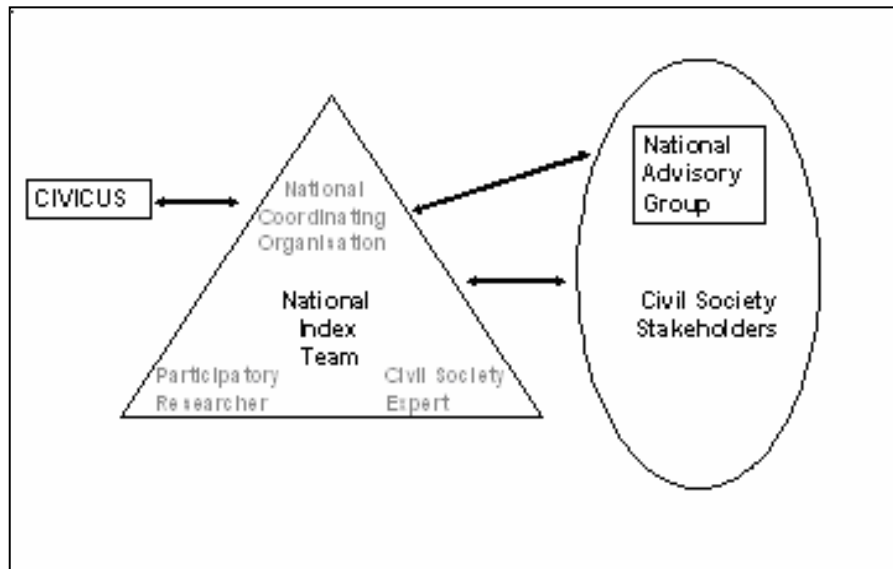
⁸ Six African countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Senegal, Botswana and Guinea), with the support of UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, (in addition to Mozambique- a late phase 2003-06 implementer) are still utilising this methodology in their implementation.

⁹ The CSI assessment was carried out in parallel in the northern and southern parts of Cyprus due to the de facto division of the island. However, the CSI findings were published in a single report as a symbolic gesture for a unified Cyprus.

In each participating country, the NCO, in line with the project implementation guidelines developed by CIVICUS, identified a three person National Index Team (NIT), comprised of: 1) a project Coordinator to coordinate the overall project implementation and act as the main contact person with CIVICUS; 2) a civil society expert, responsible for drafting the country report; and 3) a participatory researcher, responsible for conducting primary research activities.

The NIT was responsible for the preliminary stakeholder analysis and identified important opinion leaders and knowledgeable persons from civil society and other stakeholder groups to serve in the National Advisory Group (NAG). The NAG's primary role was to provide overall guidance and assistance to the NIT in implementing the CSI as well as scoring the indicators which entailed using a CIVICUS CSI prepared indicator score matrix to assign a value of between 0-3 (Where 0 is the weakest and 3 the strongest) to the data gathered. With the aim to be as inclusive as possible, a diverse set of stakeholders besides the NAG, were involved in the CSI implementation through the different research activities. CIVICUS trained and provided regular technical assistance and support to the NIT to guarantee a successful quality implementation of the CSI project. The figure below represents the actors involved in the implementation of the CSI.

Figure II Actors in the CSI implementation:



Source: CIVICUS CSI toolkit (2003-6 Version).

CSI Implementation Steps

The implementation approach was broken down into the following ten steps:

1. Step one: A review of secondary data available on civil society indicators was conducted by the NIT and an overview report prepared and distributed to the NAG and CIVICUS for feedback.
2. Step 2: A NIT representative from each NCO was trained by the CIVICUS CSI team on how to implement the CSI.
3. Step 3: The NAG met to:
 - ◆ Review the overview report
 - ◆ Discuss and adapt the project methodology
 - ◆ Discuss the definition of civil society in different country contexts
 - ◆ Conduct a social forces analysis (SFA) to identify the main actors in society and civil society and to plot the power relations between them
 - ◆ Assist in identifying participants for the regional stakeholder consultations.
4. Step 4: Primary research on civil society issues and practices was done using a thorough mix of the following instruments:
 - ◆ Regional stakeholder consultations
 - ◆ A community sample survey
 - ◆ Media review
 - ◆ In-depth fact finding studies
5. Step 5: Findings were submitted to the civil society expert who drafted the country report.
6. Step 6: The NAG met to score indicators, based on a draft country report and according to the project's scoring guidelines.
7. Step 7: The country report was updated with results from the NAG scoring meeting.
8. Step 8: A national workshop was convened to review and validate findings, as well as analyse principal strengths and weaknesses of civil society and to identify potential civil society strengthening activities.

9. Step 9: Final scores and national workshop results were incorporated into a final country report, which were reviewed by CIVICUS.
10. Step 10: A CSI evaluation was conducted by CIVICUS, based on the project findings and internal project monitoring undertaken by the national CSI partner. In addition to the 'in-house' evaluation, a thorough external evaluation was conducted by INTRAC to assess the suitability of the project as well as get stakeholder views on their experiences with implementing CSI.

THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE CSI PROJECT (2003-2006): COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES.

While the main bulk of CSI's work resided at the national level, the CIVICUS CSI team that coordinated the study undertook a comparative analysis of the findings. This section provides annotated findings of the CSI project in the 54¹⁰ implementing countries. The comparative analysis was multi-layered and involved cross national as well as regional (Western Europe, Central Eastern Europe and Eurasia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, Middle East and the Mediterranean, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean) comparisons. The findings of this analysis were published in a book: *CIVICUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society, Volume 2: Comparative Perspectives* in 2008. The book provides key cross-cutting findings of the CSI project in more than 50 countries around the world. Specifically, it addresses the following issues:

- What is the current state of civic activism?
- What does 'real' civil society look like? What are the specific differences and the overarching similarities of civil societies in different parts of the world?
- What are the main challenges civil society faces in a world characterized by global security concerns, democratic deficits and new forms of participation?
- Is it possible to promote social change through knowledge generation and self-assessment research projects such as CSI?
- What is the state of relations between civil society and other key sectors, such as the state, the private sector and the international community?

¹⁰ This excludes Mozambique which due to delayed funding only started its implementation in 2007.

- How can civic activism truly promote social development, citizen participation and accountability?

Below, we briefly look at the different aspects of the findings beginning with the regional comparative aspects and later deal with the thematic issues.

1) REGIONAL COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES:

Sub-Saharan Africa:

The countries that took part in the CSI implementation in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) whose data and findings were used for this analysis were Ghana, Sierra Leone, Togo and Uganda. However, the analysis also utilised existing literature on civil society in SSA. The analysis sought answers to three main questions:

- a) What are the main similarities found by the CSI in the countries of SSA regarding civil society's structure, environment, values and impact, as well as its strengths, weaknesses and challenges?;
- b) What are the main differences? And;
- c) What explains these similarities and differences? (Opoku-Mensah, 2008:75).

To begin with, it is important to acknowledge that SSA is diverse in political, socio-economic and cultural terms. This presents methodological problems and questions of the extent to which findings from four countries are generalisable for an entire region. As such, one would have to cautiously treat these findings by avoiding over generalising. Notwithstanding the caution, it must be taken into consideration that there exists a set of 'African' experiences, problems or opportunities that it is worth generalizing about' (Lipton (1998), as cited in Opoku-Mensah , 2008:76).

With this in mind, the CSI comparative analysis found that the main features of civil society in SSA include the imagery of an arena, dotted with big INGOs, in an environment of widespread informal indigenous civil society. SSA's civil society operates in a difficult socio-political context, marked by rather frequent violations of human rights, widespread corruption, and a socio-economic context characterized by severe income inequalities, a rural-urban divide, inadequate basic services and infrastructure, extreme poverty and illiteracy, and the HIV-AIDS pandemic. It is also

hampered by political turmoil, such as the civil wars in Uganda and Sierra Leone, which then worsen the socio-economic context (CIVICUS, 2006). In such an environment, civil society in Sub-Saharan Africa has traditionally had to be more service-provision orientated, and therefore has had a weak advocacy profile.¹¹ Civil society in SSA also lacks adequate resources & infrastructure to ensure they meet their mandates. Moreover, many civil society organisations (in particular those that enjoy higher levels of financial resources) are based in large cities and are far removed from the majority of citizens, most of whom live in rural areas. The above fragility of civil society is further aggravated by rather low levels of citizen participation, especially for marginalised groups in these countries.

Despite the bleakness of these findings, Opoku-Mensah argues that civil society has,

Since the late 1980s, emerged as one of the leading concepts in African development, expected to both reconstitute the state and contribute to development and democratization objectives' [...with expectations that it has a potential to provide...] 'the missing key, at both theoretical and policy levels, to sustained political reform, legitimate states and governments, viable state-society and state-economy relationships, and to prevent the kind of political decay that had undermined African development in the past [*my words*] (Opoku-Mensah, 2008:75).

In terms of policy influence, civil society overall is actively involved in policy issues in SSA countries. Their impact is seen in the enactment of new policies or change in government policies in order to meet the needs of the people. In most cases, civil society has influenced the enactment of policies that have addressed pertinent issues in the country. There are many good examples of civil society involvement in policy development as well as in budgeting (e.g. Uganda, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana).¹² Interestingly, civil society in Togo seems to play no role at all in budgeting.

¹¹ See CIVICUS, 2006: *Preliminary findings: Civicus Civil Society Index Project Phase 2003-2005*, (available online at <http://www.civicus.org/new/media/ICSI%20paper.pdf> for detailed discussion on this.

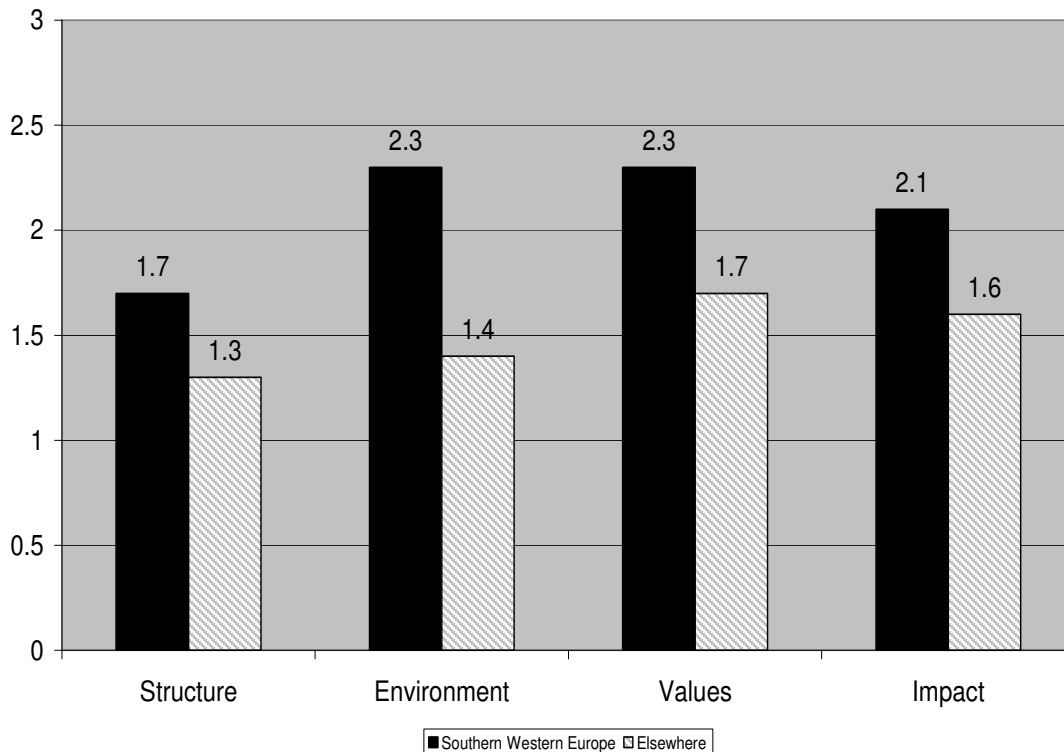
¹² Even though Nigeria and Sierra Leone took part in the implementation of CSI between 2003 and 2006, their country report was not ready at the time of the publications of the Comparative volume. Therefore, examples of these used in this part were only developed in 2007/2008.

As a result of these CSI findings for Sub-Saharan Africa, it is strongly recommended that the weaknesses and fragility of civil society in Africa will need to be constantly nurtured and facilitated to enable civil society to emerge as a critical arena whose actors make significant contributions to the search for a better Africa.¹³

Western Europe:

The Western European countries included in the CSI analysis were: Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The CSI findings indicate that civil society is manifested as stronger than in all other regions of the world, as the graph below illustrates.

Figure III. Civil society dimension scores. Western Europe compared to other regions



Source: Knight 2008:164

¹³ Further readings on the recommendations for strengthening civil society in SSA can be found in Opoku-Mensah (2008) 'The State of Civil Society in Sub-Saharan Africa' in Heinrich V.F. and Fioramonti, L., (eds) (2008) *CIVICUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society, Volume 2: Comparative Perspectives*, Kumarian Press, Inc. Bloomfield.

There are two principal factors according to Knight (2008:163-4) that account for this. Firstly, the notion of civil society generally adopted by academics and practitioners has its origins as a European idea. As such, one would expect such a powerful political and philosophical idea to have embedded itself into the ways in which society works. Secondly, Western European countries are consolidated democracies where the rule of law and political competition are well established. In general, the relationship between state and civil society is characterised by mutual respect and, therefore, civil society organisations have several avenues of influencing policy-making at their disposal, including the so-called tripartite institutions (where trade unions, business and the state negotiate common agreements as far as social policy and the labour market are concerned) and a myriad of social dialogue forums in which various civil society organisations participate (CIVICUS, 2006). Indeed, civil society would naturally thrive better under such political, cultural and socio-economic environments. One drawback however, is that civil society has become increasingly dependent on state funding. This brings in the question of its autonomy and independence; as the saying goes, ‘he who pays the piper gets to choose the tune.’¹⁴

It is therefore important for civil society in Western Europe to critically investigate their dependence, as well as the illusion that its directives and strengths are on par with the state and the market. Furthermore, it must be noted that the relatively conducive environment for civil society in Western Europe should not be taken for granted, as a gradual deterioration of longstanding legal provisions aimed at ensuring personal rights and civil liberties has been occurring. For example, the governments in these countries have introduced reforms that are potentially restrictive to personal freedoms as a consequence of the so-called ‘war on terror’. We are witnessing more and more curtailment of the freedoms and rights of many citizens (especially marginalized groups and immigrants). The spaces and avenues for citizens and organisations to associate and voice their concerns and advance their common interests have also shrunk in many countries as a result of the current political environment (see for example Sidel, 2008).

¹⁴ This is used by Mati (2008) in analysing the influence of donors and other actors who control CSOs purse strings.

Another important finding is that many CSOs in Western Europe conduct campaigns around corporate responsibility, monitor corporations and aim at holding the private sector to be socially accountable. However, it is interesting to note that the impact of these campaigns varies and mostly depends on the responsiveness of the corporations themselves. This raises an important research agenda on the interactions between social power (of CSOs) and economic power (of corporations).

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)

Civil society in CEE is characterised by low civic engagement and a disintegrating social capital attributable *inter alia*, to the legacy of Soviet socialism. Because citizens in communist USSR were often ‘coerced into volunteering’ for state-controlled organisations, many still strongly associate volunteering and civic engagement with the negative implications of the communist era (CIVICUS, 2006). It is also noteworthy that civil society in this region emerged as an anti-systemic (state) movement for popular mobilisation in the late 1980s and early 1990s and was instrumental in people’s revolutions ending communist rule in the region. According to Celichowski (2008:157), this has in effect ‘given the concept of civil society a decisively anti-state character and a predisposition to protest’ so much so that in the subsequent democratic consolidation periods, civil societies have remained generally distrustful of the state as cases of hostility or suspicion by the state reinforce this attitude. This is further compounded by a problematic and often adversarial relationship with the state and a particularly weak connection with the private sector. It is thus fitting to argue that after the fall of the Soviet system, one of its lasting legacies has been the widespread distrust between citizens (and their civic organisations) and the state. This distrust is in fact not limited to the state, but is exhibited among citizens themselves, which has resulted in low levels of civic participation. It is a hangover from the Soviet era when so much was done to destroy any forms of social and political institutions and activities.

The situation in CEE has been further compounded by the arrival of foreign donors and their seemingly easy access to funding. This influx of international organisations has

further pushed civil societies away from local constituencies, thereby losing much of their grassroots energy. While the death of the Soviet system opened up sources of financial support to nurture the growth of civil society especially from Western Europe and the United States, it also led to a strong role of donors. To date, civil society in the region remains highly dependent on donors. This has resulted to the following:

- a) Structural deficiencies in terms of limited citizen participation alluded to in the preceding paragraph;
- b) Negative public image of the sector with the possible exception of environmental groups;¹⁵
- c) Scant promotion of important values (e.g. transparency and social justice) in the wider society, even though CSI found that internally, CSOs are strong in practicing and promoting values and that a majority of citizens believe that instances of corruption in civil society are far rarer than in any other sector), and
- d) A limited capacity to influence policy-making (CIVICUS, 2006; Celichowski, 2008).

CSI observed that civil society stakeholders in CEE are generally aware of the risks and challenges of donor dependency as it might seriously jeopardise the long-term sustainability of the sector (CIVICUS, 2006). Another double-edged feature of civil society in the CEE is what Celichowski (2008:157) calls their ‘immense advances in the levels of professional and organisational development.’ This advancement has, in return, made CSOs to be elitist and concentrated mainly in urban areas, and instead of embedded in communities where they are mostly needed, especially in the marginalized groups in society. Not surprisingly, the CSI found that a rather common perception exists among citizens, that CSOs are simply representatives of specific interests and do not address issues that are important to society at large.

¹⁵ Throughout post-communist Europe, environmental organisations began playing a significant role in the early 1980s, when they managed to channel the growing popular disapproval of communist governments through their campaigns, and acquired international popularity, after the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl. Environmental organisations have been able to attract the attention of the media and are currently the CSOs that, along with the trade unions, receive the most significant media coverage and contribute most to policy-making (CIVICUS, 2006).

Civil society in the region therefore recognises the need to respond to these challenges by focusing on increasing the level of public involvement and building stronger connections with ordinary citizens, and better relations with the state and private sector. It also needs better accountability mechanisms, stronger policy engagement capacities, and greater attention to poverty reduction. Finally, civil society in the CEE must improve the image of the sector in the media and develop better sustainability mechanisms to divorce itself from donor dependency.

Asia and the Pacific:

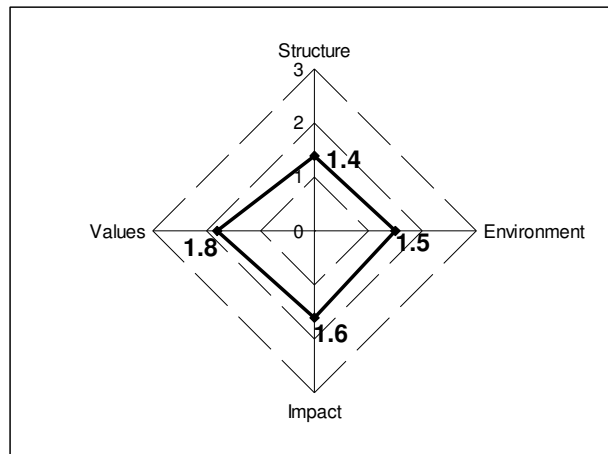
Ten countries in the Asia-Pacific region where CSI was implemented included China, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mongolia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Nepal, Orissa (India) and Fiji. Compared to other regions covered in this paper, Asia and the Pacific is by far, the most diverse in terms of political context, history, economic trajectory and culture. This makes a generalized assessment of the specific strengths and weaknesses of civil society in the region particularly difficult. Therefore, while a look at the four CSI dimensions across the countries of the region suggests some interesting patterns, many exceptions were also identified (CIVICUS, 2006; Tandon and Kak, 2008). The principal questions that guided the comparative analysis of such a diverse region included: how does civil society grow and function in the face of rapid economic growth within a restricted democratic framework? What are its limitations, strengths and challenges? (Tandon and Kak, 2008:91-2).

CSI findings show that the Asia-Pacific has a rich tradition of civic activism despite negative contextual factors, such as a restrictive political environment. In many of the countries, CSOs have long been present and active in various ways, including informal community/caste/village-based groups, cultural and religious groups. In their analysis, Tandon and Kak (2008:92) observe that:

Voluntary action is deeply rooted in Asian communities. ...CSOs ... objectives and activities [are] directed towards common concerns that cannot be adequately addressed by individual families and extended kinship support systems: production, exchange, rituals from birth to death, and collective security, all of which maintain community consensus and cohesion.

However, despite this observation, CSI also found that both the structure and operating environment of Asian civil society are the weakest dimensions. However, as the diagram below shows, the values practiced and promoted by civil society and its impact on governance and development issues in Asia-Pacific are relatively strong:

Figure IV. Dimension scores for civil society in Asia-Pacific Region



Source: Tandon and Kak, 2008:95.

Generally speaking, there are structural deficiencies that include a relatively low level of citizen participation, low levels of non-partisan political action (such as participating in demonstrations or writing petitions, limited volunteerism and charitable donations) as well as limited financial resources. There are of course exceptions. For example, Nepal witnessed the overthrow of King Gyanendra through mass action, (this took place while the CSI implementation was still ongoing). In Vietnam, more than 70% of those interviewed are members of an organisation with more than 60% of them belonging to more than one organisation (CIVICUS, 2006). However, it needs to be mentioned that this is explicable by the fact that the Vietnamese CSI study included ‘mass organisations’ in the definition of civil society, which are closely linked to the Vietnamese state/party system. This definitely inflated the results regarding civil society membership and citizen participation. Membership in other types of civil society organisations in Vietnam, such as Vietnamese non-governmental organisations (NGOs), is particularly low.

A defining feature of the operating environment in Vietnam, China, and Mongolia is that civil society enjoys little autonomy from the state, is heavily dependent on state funding

mainly in sub-contracting for service delivery, and operates in an environment affected by high levels of corruption and low confidence in the rule of law. As such, co-optation of civil society is not infrequent (CIVICUS, 2006). Financial transparency is rarely practiced or promoted with exceptions in India (Orissa). Despite this, civil society promotes and practices a number of progressive values such as non-violence, poverty eradication, environmental sustainability and gender equality, especially in Mongolia, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Over the past decades, civil society in the Asia-Pacific region has played a significant role in promoting democracy, social development, and values of social justice and equity (Tandon and Kak, 2008). This has happened because of civil society's strong belief in progressive values as well as in 'its ability to balance its collaborative vs. contesting role vis-à-vis the state' so much so that the values dimension is the strongest for the Asian civil society in the region (Tandon and Kak, 2008:107). However, accountability and transparency of the sector still remains one of the greatest challenges.

The impact of civil society on policy making, particularly the national budgeting process, remains limited with the exception of South Korea and Taiwan. Moreover, there is still, limited capacity of CSOs to hold private corporations accountable. Even in South Korea and Taiwan where CSOs have activities and programmes in place to hold corporations accountable, the CSI found that their impact on corporate accountability is very low.

Overall, CSI findings indicate that political liberalisation and developments over the last decades have brought about positive consequences for civil society seen in the widening space for civil society activism, albeit, many obstacles remain.

Latin America:

Civil Society in Latin America has been described as operating between 'contentious politics' and 'participatory democracy.' This is for various reasons. To begin with, Latin America has over the years seen more than a fair share of both politically and economically oppressive regimes. As a result, issues of socioeconomic justice as well as human rights have been at the heart of many CSOs in Latin America. Many organisations

conduct campaigns on human rights issues and have been particularly vocal against abuses committed by previous and current political regimes. CSI findings confirm that the development of civil society in the region is thus affected by the political and institutional development of the state, and is strongly embedded in the specific political culture and social environment (Serbin and Fioramonti, 2008:111).

The countries analysed by CSI in Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Uruguay) show relatively high levels of citizen participation in civil society activities. However, popular mobilisation and participation tends to increase during socio-political and economic unrests and decreases during phases of political normalisation (e.g. Argentina in 2001 was at the peak during the socio-economic crisis) thereby displaying traits of a vibrant, yet fragmented civil society (CIVICUS, 2006; Serbin and Fioramonti, 2008). These mobilisations are usually spearheaded by strong social movements with charismatic leadership and enjoy a high level of popular support.

Civil society organisations are also active in promoting values, such as non-violence, tolerance, democracy, and environmental sustainability. On the other hand, the main weakness of civil society in Latin America is its centralisation. This centralisation is two fold: first, it is reflected in the structures of civil society. Strong charismatic leaders dominate the most vocal groups within civil society. Further, there is a higher concentration of the most professionalised CSOs in urban areas, even though there are also a wide range of local organisations, especially indigenous and self-help groups, social movements and peasant groups which are active mostly in rural areas. Moreover, while civil society is very vocal at calling for transparency and accountability from the government and the private sector, there is much less practice of these values internally, and few CSOs have wholeheartedly embraced the value of transparency and accountability. As such, incidences of corruption in CSOs exist (CIVICUS, 2006).

In terms of impact, civil society's contributions vary from country to country in Latin America and it is dependent on specific institutional arrangements. The existing institutional channels for both representative and participatory democracy are not

transparent enough to ensure meaningful participation. This often leads to social conflict and polarization. No wonder then, that for the majority of the countries, civil society engagement with government and private sector has predominantly been highly politicised and yet has had limited (or, at best, short-term) political impact (CIVICUS, 2006; Serbin and Fioramonti, 2008). CSI argues that these 'intense forms of social mobilisation are not sustainable because they are either hijacked by charismatic leaders within civil society movements or stifled/co-opted by centralistic governments' (Serbin and Fioramonti, 2008:122). New forms and avenues for citizens' control over governments and, specifically, policymaking processes need to be nurtured for productive engagements.

Middle Eastern and the Mediterranean (MEM):

The main findings in the countries participating in CSI implementation (Cyprus:-both North and Southern parts, Egypt, Lebanon and Turkey) generally shows a disabling political context, low membership to CSOs, low participation and low volunteering with the exception of the northern part of Cyprus and Lebanon. In Northern Cyprus, about half of the respondents to the community survey declared being a member of at least one CSO while in Lebanon and 57% of the respondents declared having undertaken voluntary work in the past year (CIVICUS, 2006). The CSOs are also weak in their advocacy roles as they are constrained by authoritarian and conservative states and societies. As such, even popular social movements like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt as well as elite-based pro-democracy groups, are also very conservative.

The structure dimension also reveals that until recently, citizens in these countries were not very active in non-partisan political action. This is particularly so because the legal environment makes strikes and other forms of collective action extremely difficult. As such, membership in CSOs oriented towards the public good or the political sphere, particularly advocacy and human rights NGOs, is negligible, with professional associations, trade unions and sports clubs usually being the most popular forms of CSOs. However, there have been instances of citizen demonstrations around recent political events in the region, with examples in Lebanon after the assassination of Rafik Hariri in February 2005, and the Israeli war in the summer of 2006. In Egypt there have

also been mass demonstrations in the wake of the presidential elections of 2005, and the emergence of the *kifaya* ('i.e. enough') movement. However, these are more like politics of the street (protest) and rarely connect with the more long-term initiatives by advocacy NGOs and quickly lose momentum. Structurally, another weakness has to do with limited level of institutionalisation and inter-organisational cooperation, even among CSOs working in the same field. The low levels of activism also reflect in low representation of marginalised groups (not only women, but also the poor, rural dwellers and religious and ethnic minorities) even though many organisations provide various services to citizens and marginalised groups. CSOs in the region are strongly elitist and top-down character (Khallaf and Tür, 2008). While the characteristics of civil society in MEM may seem negative, this is not the case as there is a widespread practice of charitable giving based in Muslim religious customs. As a result, citizens give a certain share of their income to the needy as a religious duty (known as *zakat*). The preaching and practice of non-violence is also seen as a widespread value of civil society in MEM and thus, a strength of civil society in these countries.

Interestingly, very few organisations in this region try to influence policy or hold the state and private corporations accountable. As already alluded to in the previous paragraph, the socio-political context in these countries is rather restrictive for civil society. The legal restrictions are manifested in the form of a state of emergency lasting over 20 years in Egypt; the tension between the state apparatus and Kurdish movements in Turkey, and in Lebanon political assassinations. In such an environment, it is not surprising that systematic influence by civil society on public policy, is virtually absent in most of these countries. The relationship between state and civil society is also one of contention and sometimes hostility. The northern part of Cyprus is the sole exception, where the CSI found a rather good capacity to influence social and human rights policies due to a more conducive political context (CIVICUS, 2006). In conclusion, CSOs in the Middle East and Mediterranean region need to deepen and broaden their interactions and relations on two fronts, firstly with the citizens and secondly amongst each other.

2) COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES: KEY THEMES AND CHALLENGES

Despite the fact that civil society comes in all kinds of shapes and forms, there are some interesting similarities across countries which can help us identify some common trends and challenges, as the regional analysis above already alludes to. This section discusses these common threads as key findings worthy of further elaboration.

A) Civil society accountability:

CSI sought to collect and collate data relating to the critical questions of whom CSOs were accountable to, as well as the different lines of accountability, and specifically, whether there was sufficient downward accountability. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, aspersions have been cast on civil society accountability due to the frustrations on the part of those who had great faith in CSO impacts on the provision of services, promotion of democracy, the fostering of social capital, and other desirable social, economic and political outcomes. CSI findings confirm that while civil society is making important contributions to development and governance in many countries, accountability 'lapses' and ambivalence limit the sector's ability to make best use of its capabilities' (Heinrich, Mati, and Brown, 2008). As such, CSI identified accountability as the single most mentioned challenge for civil society, as the table below shows.

Table II. Most Common Challenges for Civil Society

Challenge	% of reports (n=43)*
Legitimacy, accountability, transparency of civil society	67
Infrastructure & level of organisation of civil society	50
Level of civic engagement	48
Financial resources available to CSOs	43
Civil society's relations with private sector	38
Civil society's relations with the state	36

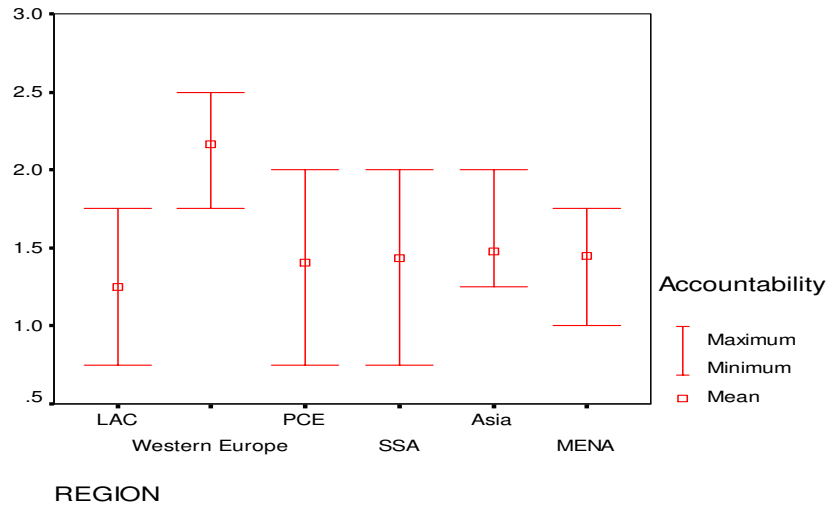
* Up to ten challenges were coded in each country

Source: Heinrich, Mati, and Brown, (2008:331)

However, there are variations on the levels of CSO accountability within regions. The figure below shows the comparative averages of the score for civil society accountability as the main weakness across the regions. Except for Western Europe, all other regions

scored relatively very low scores. This might explain the mushrooming of initiatives to address issues of CSO accountability in many parts of the world.

Figure IX comparative averages of the score for civil society accountability



But why has accountability become such an important aspect of the discourse on civil society? To answer this question, we draw on the discussions among civil society stakeholders captured in the CSI reports. To begin with, as civil society became increasingly prominent not only at the national level but also globally, there have been increasing calls by governments and critics on the accountability and legitimacy of civil society. As such, many CSI country reports mention the crucial importance of accountability for gaining and maintaining public trust, which is seen as a key asset for civil society’s public impact (e.g. Argentina and Croatia). Secondly, an additional reason for tackling accountability issues head-on is to pre-empt regulation by the government, which, in many cases, is likely to be less conducive than civil society’s self-regulation (Jagananda and Brown, 2006). Third, the demands of donors are another key driver of accountability mechanisms and processes. However, these demands that encourage prioritizing upward accountability towards those stakeholders can undermine public trust in CSOs in donor-driven contexts, such as certain post-Communist European countries and much of sub-Saharan Africa. In this respect, it is encouraging to note that many CSI assessments advocate for strengthening CSO accountability towards their target group, what Bonbright and Kiryrttopoulou (2008) identify as downward accountability.

Bonbright and Kiryrttopoulou argue that this is in fact a key condition for ensuring the effectiveness of civil society infrastructure.

The question of accountability is closely related to the basic expectations that civil society, especially in its progressive form should be able to live true to what they preach. As such, internal democracy, codes of ethics, labour rules and environmental standards observed by civil society have been subjected not only to public lenses but to those of researchers and sometimes of governments who are eager to neutralise civil society's growing profile in governance and development. Heinrich, Mati, & Brown (2008), found that 'first generation' efforts to tackle the accountability challenge, such as voluntary codes of ethics, have yielded limited results and therefore recommend the adoption of new innovative approaches and tools with more 'teeth' in terms of regulation and enforcement. This will need to be done as the era of blind faith and blank cheques seems to be over for CSOs. As such, they need to gain legitimacy and credibility in the eyes of the public. This, in the view of this author, is achievable through a rights and responsibilities framework where CSOs take seriously the trust bestowed upon them by the public.

Civil society is aware of this concern and there are many efforts underway to address this weakness. One such effort is the International Advocacy NGO (IANGO) Accountability Charter.¹⁶ The charter illustrates civil society's commitment to maintain the highest ethical standards possible and to never take public trust for granted. In so doing, they want, as Mahatma Gandhi said, 'to be the change they want to see in the world'. There are also a number of efforts that aim for accreditation and accountability at a national level, including the Credibility Alliance in India, the Philippines Center for NGO Certification and the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy.

b) Declining levels of citizen participation:

Two closely related issues come next in terms of the trends and challenges of civil society according to CSI: the infrastructure and level of organisation of civil society and

¹⁶ See <http://www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org/about-the-charter.php>

the level of civic engagement. Arguably, these could be offshoots from the unresolved issues of accountability. Notwithstanding the repressions on civic participation by authoritarian regimes, that forces civic participation especially demonstrations down, the decreasing levels of citizen participation in both rich and poor countries can be interpreted as a sign of resignation and frustrations on the part of the population, as well as an indicator of the lack of trust in these institutions. However, in literally all countries surveyed by CSI, trust in civil society was far above trust in all other institutions.

c) Effective democratic governance:

A key finding on the suitability of the environment in which CSOs operate is the presence or absence of democracy. In other words, if we were to single out the most critical condition identified by the CSI for civil society to be able to flourish, it would most likely be the existence of an effective and democratic state. Put simply, CSI found that civil society as a sector is more vibrant, stable, better resourced, and well-organised in those countries where there is adherence to the rule of law, where the government is receptive to external input, and where the state is strong enough to meet the basic needs of its people. While this might sound like stating the obvious, it is clear that policies of the international aid community have not paid enough attention to the symbiotic link between a vibrant civil society and an effective democratic state.

Moreover, in the last five years, there have been growing restrictions on civic association around the world, especially because of the war on terror in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. This war on terror has also affected the resources available for social development as the global agenda and economic resources have shifted from development goals to the war on terror (Mati, 2008). These trends, coupled with the new orthodoxies (such as the Paris Agenda) that champion the strengthening of the state at the expense of civil society, point towards the danger of turning the progress on civil society strengthening on its head. To guard against this, what is needed is a 'functional' relationship between civil society and other actors including state and private sector while keeping a guard to the dangers of co-optation for effective and democratic governance.

d) The dilemmas of professionalisation and institutionalisation versus self-organisation:

In addition to the challenges of civil society legitimacy and accountability, there is a challenge for civil society organisations' effectiveness in its efforts to make significant impact necessary for progress. An underlying theme of the CSI country reports and comparative analyses relates to the tension between greater professionalisation of the sector and its civic-driven nature. A number of country reports (especially those about donor-dependent civil societies in post-Communist Europe and sub-Saharan Africa) note the challenge of marrying CSOs' function as the voice of citizens (particularly marginalized groups) with the greater professionalisation required by donors and governments. The dilemma arises out of the recognition that while more institutionalization and professionalisation might result in greater efficiency and perhaps more power, it can also lead to more elitism and abuse of citizen trust. The rhetorical question here is whether CSOs become more oligarchical like political parties and in effect lose the trust of citizens? This could be an interesting research agenda for scholars of the third sector in the coming years.

It is interesting to note that since the CSI looked 'beyond NGOs' to analyse all different forms of civil society, it picked up on the vibrancy of social movements in Latin America and Asia, which might provide interesting lessons especially on matters of mobilisation and popular support, for the more professionalized NGO-driven civil societies of Europe and Africa. Also, hand in hand with the question of professionalisation has been a constant tension of whether civil society should concentrate on functions of service-delivery or on advocacy as the more professionalised CSOs tend to concentrate more on advocacy. Critical questions have been asked of the efficacy of advocacy strategy while ignoring service delivery. CSI findings confirm that a balance between the two is needed if meaningful and long term sustainability of civil society is to survive.

e) Civil Society resources and autonomy questions:

Lack of financial resources for CSOs to carry out their mandate was cited as a critical challenge in 43% of country reports in the participating countries. This has resulted in

dependency on donors (as in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia and Africa) or state (as in Western Europe) for monetary resources. This financial dependency has compromised the independence of civil society, as those who pay the bills for CSOs have, at times, tended to hijack civil society agenda (see for example Mati, 2008). A compromised and weak civil society does not augur well for today's world of contestations between the state and the market. Today's globalised world is characterized by an increased power and influence of trans-national corporations that has eroded the capacity of individual states to regulate the market. The result has been a call on civil society to not only contribute to the provision of services, but also to protect our global commons. Furthermore, civil society needs to continue contributing to holding to account the acts of both state and business powers so that they are exercised in a progressive, responsible and accountable manner.

A BRIEF CATALOGUE OF INITIATIVES GENERATED BY THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CSI

At this point we need to reflect on one of the dual core objectives of CSI. That is, providing knowledge based actions for civil society strengthening through CSI implementation. To begin with, it is important to note that CSI has been an important resource in providing an independent assessment of the civil society sector that is owned by CSOs in the country and has multi-stakeholder involvement. Moreover, CSI has also proven to be a useful source of information and understanding of local civil society context, actors and challenges – capacities, resources, strengths, weaknesses, and impact. But the critical question to ask is: what civil society strengthening initiatives has CSI inspired since the 2003-2006 phase of CSI implementation? A project evaluation and ongoing monitoring of civic driven change towards civil society strengthening resulting from CSI implementation has recorded many initiatives in a broad range of countries. These initiatives mainly address the key challenges for civil society that were identified in the course of implementation or as key action plans and recommendations. A few examples worth highlighting here include:

- 1) Many CSI partners have succeeded in employing CSI as a stimulus for their own as well as their partners' programmatic development. At the global level, the CSI has

contributed to the development of a ‘common language’ and a ‘way of thinking’ on civil society strengthening issues among policy-makers, practitioners and researchers who have utilised the tool. Such agencies include civil society departments of SIDA, UNDP, and EuropeAid.

- 2) The outcomes of CSI have increased avenues for cross-sectoral collaboration through the participation of civil society (including development agencies such as the UNDP), private sector, and the state collaborating on the National Advisory Group and other consultative research activities of the project. UNDP country offices in Ghana, Nigeria and Cyprus and Mongolia have used CSI findings to inform strategic directions in their civil society engagement and strengthening initiatives, as well as in broader governance and development assessments. It is important to note that dealing with contemporary world challenges, calls for closer collaboration between the civil society, academic community, state policy makers, and the business community in knowledge co-production and in seeking lasting solutions to the societal problems. This entails finding a greater common ground for dialogue and action between the different actors.
- 3) Various multilateral governance institutions, especially UNDP, have utilised CSI findings to leverage their advocacy/lobbying of national governments on different development issues, such as participatory governance. CSI has therefore proven to be a useful governance assessment
- 4) In Fiji - the CSI initiative contributed to the establishment of the ‘Social Leadership Training Institute’ by bringing civil society stakeholders together to find solutions to address the leadership gap in Fijian civil society.
- 5) In Macedonia - the government adopted the ‘Strategy for Cooperation with the Civil Society Sector’ in January 2007 based on the CSI findings and diligent advocacy work of the CSOs involved in the CSI project.
- 6) In Uganda – from the CSI consultative process and findings, civil society stakeholders in Uganda made a concerted effort to mobilize and develop proposals in effecting change to government and Legitimacy, Transparency, and Accountability policy.

- 7) In Ukraine – the CSI increased the interactions and strengthened relations between civil society and the government and media in regards to the CSI report. It also facilitated the development and adoption of the “Concept of Government and Civil Society Cooperation in the Ukraine”.
- 8) In Vietnam - the CSI contributed to the promotion of civil society in Vietnam through disseminating the country report findings at major workshops and seminars (e.g. UNESCO International Forum of Civil Society and UNDP-VUSTA Seminar on “CSOs and Aid Effectiveness, Hanoi 10/07”).

This is far from an exhaustive list of initiatives ignited by CSI. CSI has, therefore, a potential to become a hallmark tool for taking the pulse of civil society in countries around the world and providing stakeholders with knowledge on how to improve civil society’s contribution to social change worldwide. Moreover, as CSI tries to promote an informed understanding of the civil society sector at the national level, it has helped better identification of development priorities, as well as development partners.

CONCLUSION:

As illustrated by this paper, the CSI has generated a fascinating picture of the current state of civic activism around the world. However, one must recognize that vast differences in political, social and cultural contexts across the world affect the specific forms of civic activism and make it difficult (if not impossible) to identify global patterns. As the second volume of the CIVICUS Global Survey attests to, the national specificities and particularities of civil society’s forms and functions are possibly the most striking feature of the comparative analysis. CSI findings reaffirm the vital role that the civil society is playing in governance and development and reinforce the need to continue to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world as humanity collectively seeks solutions to the challenges it is facing.

In light of these findings, one can confidently argue that CIVICUS CSI has in the last few years contributed to discourse on the sustainability of civil society and at the same time is charting a new frontier in action research as well as research agenda through an

innovative self-reflective and action-oriented tool and will, for the years to come, continue to be a useful tool in this field.

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