

STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Each year the CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report seeks to celebrate the achievements of civil society, understand the conditions it works in and encourage action to address the challenges it encounters. In addition to reviewing the civil society landscape as a whole, every year our report has a special theme. This year we focus on 'exclusion and civil society'.

Our report is by, about and for civil society, having at its heart a series of inputs from partners in the CIVICUS alliance. These include 33 guest contributions from civil society activists, leaders and experts on the theme of exclusion and civil society, 27 responses to our annual survey of national and regional civil society networks that are members of our Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), and a series of interviews with people close to the key civil society stories of the day. Contributions on this year's special theme address a wide range of different forms of exclusion, including exclusion by gender, sexual identity, age (for children, young people and older people), disability, mental health and HIV status, indigeneity, ethnicity, refugee and migration status, faith, location, income and vulnerability to climate change. The guest contributions are further analysed in our thematic overview.

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FOREWORD FROM CIVICUS SECRETARY-GENERAL



Last year was a dismal one for civil society around the world. CIVICUS colleagues tracked serious threats to one or more civic freedoms in over 100 countries. Particularly for those activists who dare to challenge economic and political elites, the environment in which civil society operates has continued to deteriorate. Some of the most brave and inspiring activists, from Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Peru, the Philippines and South Africa, paid the ultimate price in 2015, simply for exercising their rights as citizens to organise and mobilise.

We in civil society need to find new ways of responding to these growing threats. Yes, we must challenge the legal and regulatory restrictions on our operations. Yes, we must protect our funding, our voice, and our independence. But we must also seek to win hearts and minds. One of the most sinister developments we see today is the widespread demonisation of civil society activists – as terrorists, traitors, foreign puppets, or disconnected elites. We need to challenge these narratives, demonstrate the value of civil society and convince people of its worth.

PROMOTING INCLUSION

It is within this context that this year's theme – civil society and exclusion – really matters. Much of civic life is about promoting inclusion. It is about amplifying the voices of the marginalised, tackling the causes of discrimination, and promoting equal rights and

access to services. Put simply, civil society is often about people helping other people. But, for many millions of people exclusion remains a painful, everyday reality.

Taken together, our 33 guest contributions expose the common threads that characterise so many different types of exclusion. They touch upon contemporary, dynamic drivers of long-established patterns of exclusion. They emphasise the need for excluded people to be understood not as victims, or objects of charity, but as people striving to access their basic human rights. And, they highlight the disproportionate affect that civic space restrictions have on excluded groups.

CHALLENGES WITHIN

What is also clear from this year's report is that CSOs are not immune from reproducing the exclusionary attitudes and practices of the societies around them. Policies on inclusive working are easy to put down on paper and much less easy to realise in practice. Yet a civil society sector that falls short of modeling good practice in addressing inclusion risks seriously undermining its own legitimacy.

One obvious example of our shortcomings relates to women in leadership. Back in 2013, we looked at 100 leading NGOs around the world (according to a list prepared by another organisation) to see how many were women-led. At the time the figure was 31. In preparing this report, we looked again at those same NGOs and the figure now stands at 38. This may seem better than women leadership figures in politics or big business, but women make up some two-thirds of the workforce of many CSOs. The possibility that a 'glass pyramid' is stifling the potential of women in civil society, and thereby constricting the work of the sector, cannot be ignored.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

In 2015, our governments set the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reached the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. It is clear that civil society will be central to the delivery of this vision of a more just and sustainable world. We will need to mobilise to make these 'global goals' relevant to local actors, to do our fair share to implement the goals, to invest in ways to monitor progress, and to ensure accountability. We are hopeful that the new [Action for Sustainable Development](#) platform, launched in conjunction with our partners, will help us in these endeavours.

In particular, and importantly for the concerns discussed in this report, we need to work hard to ensure that our leaders' commitment to 'leaving no one behind' actually means something. It may be easy to say – indeed leaders use the phrase no fewer than six times in their [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) – but it is a much harder challenge to deliver inclusive development. Civil society has to be at the vanguard of shaping and delivering the 'leave no one behind' agenda.

OUR PROMISE

As always, at CIVICUS we look closely at the findings and recommendations that are made by our guest essays and try to improve our own practice. This year, this will include two key measures, one internal and one external. When this report is published, we will begin an 'inclusion audit' of our own policies and practices. We will engage an external consultant to come up with recommendations for how we can live up to best practice on inclusion. We will also work with partners to look at the notion of 'leaving no one behind' to see how we can use the opportunity of the SDGs to promote a sustainable development that is truly *for all*.



Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah

June 2016



PART 1: YEAR IN REVIEW

Photographer: rbreve - Honduras protest against alleged corruption in government

INTRODUCTION

In the past year, civil society responded to profound human rights abuses caused by conflicts, particularly in the Middle East, and worked to alleviate human suffering in the wake of disasters, such as the major earthquake in Nepal. In the same year, citizens took to the streets to demand change in countries all over the world, from Chile to South Africa and from Armenia to South Korea, with public anger fuelled by skewed and unequal economic systems, corruption and the failure of governments to put citizens' interests at the heart of their actions. Sometimes, as in Guatemala, Iceland and Romania, protests led to high-level political change, although the deficits that fuelled protests proved themselves to be deeply ingrained, suggesting that major challenges remain in the relationships between states and citizens for civil society to address.

Frequently protests were met with violent state response, which should be seen as part of a broader pattern of restrictions and attacks on civil society. Civil society personnel found themselves targeted in conflict settings, with international humanitarian law routinely flouted, and in numerous contexts civil society activists were violently attacked, jailed or detained. Worryingly, restrictions on civil society's ability to act or organise continued to be introduced and applied in all parts of the world.

On the global stage, civil society has seen some success, having campaigned successfully to make the major international commitments of 2015 - the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate change - more comprehensive and rights-based than previous agreements. Civil society still faces a huge task to ensure that the new agreements are

implemented fully, and that duty bearers make sure that no one is left behind in the face of global emergencies such as climate change, conflict, poverty and inequality.

In a world that is increasingly unequal and where human rights are under attack, the challenges that civil society faces and seeks to address could seem overwhelming, were it not for civil society's continuing energy, willingness to engage and commitment to speaking unpalatable truths to power.

CIVIL SOCIETY ON THE FRONTLINE: RESPONDING TO CONFLICT AND DISASTER

The period covered by this report has been one of major, continuing conflict in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Yemen. While much of the dominant narrative about the conflicts centres on states that are fighting proxy wars in the region, the work of civil society is being overlooked. In Syria, local civil society structures responded where possible to provide essential services, rescue people from bombed buildings and monitor and report on human rights abuses. There is a need for the voices of Syrian citizens and civil society to be more strongly heard, and fully included in peace processes. At the same time, civil society has paid a heavy price for its work. Journalists have been particularly targeted in Syria, and there has been an alarming spate of attacks on civil society medical facilities and personnel in Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen, indicating a callous disregard for the Geneva Conventions by all sides. In Syria, citizens have faced the use of siege and starvation tactics by the state against rebel-held areas, throwing up additional challenges for civil society trying to provide humanitarian aid.

Part of the fallout of the Syrian war, and of conflict in the Middle East more generally, was an influx of refugees into Europe in 2015. In a continent where politics have become more volatile and polarised, the response of many European governments and the European Union (EU) as a whole was defensive, miserly and mean-spirited, falling far short of the EU's stated human rights commitments. While levels of racism and xenophobia were high, it is important to note that there was also a voluntary response from citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) to communicate that refugees were welcome and to help settle them into communities. Civil society mobilised heroically to provide essential services and document human rights abuses in refugee camps.

Civil society also played a major role in the response to Nepal's April 2015 earthquake, the aftermath of which saw both CSOs and spontaneous movements respond to identify needs, provide services and monitor the use of emergency aid. However, government suspicion about humanitarian aid and civil society activity, particularly when this came from outside Nepal, led to an attempt to insist that resources be channelled through the state, which slowed the response and left the recovery, a year after the earthquake, off track. Civil society also faced challenges in responding to the earthquake in Afghanistan and Pakistan in October 2015. The location of the disaster in a conflict zone made work more difficult for civil society, as it had to contend with extremist militant groups and suspicious security forces, in a context where it is already heavily restricted.

It is clear that humanitarian emergencies, including those caused by conflicts and disasters, are becoming more complex, with more lasting impacts, including larger footprints of displacement. This has stretched the international humanitarian system

to the limit, and underlined the need for a new global agreement in which the right of humanitarian workers to work without violence is respected, the funding for humanitarian response is provided at an adequate level and affected communities are put at the heart of the response, by being empowered to identify their needs and make decisions. Additionally, there is a need for closer coordination and less competition between different civil society bodies. Local civil society, because it is able to work with communities and understand local nuance, needs to be more strongly supported as an essential part of the response to conflicts and disasters.

CITIZENS MOBILISING: PROTEST, ACTIVISM AND PARTICIPATION

The past year was marked by large-scale mobilisations of protest in many parts of the world, with concentrations in countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, parts of East Asia, the EU and East Europe.

Common concerns could be seen across different protests: with corruption, repressive, unaccountable governments, and with elite economic power and the economic inequality this perpetuates. In many countries, people are seeing their material conditions worsening as public services and employment rights are slashed while the cost of essential goods is rising. As elites grow wealthier many see that their governments are unresponsive, or even complicit in their impoverishment. The exposure of corruption scandals triggered protests in Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Iceland, Macedonia, Moldova and Romania, while other protests, such as those in Armenia, Bolivia, Ethiopia and South Africa, had their origins in anger at economic exclusion, poverty and inequality. Others still, including in France and South Korea, were sparked by the proposed weakening of employment laws. In Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Egypt, there was widespread public anger at the subversion of democracy by ruling elites.

Mass protests are often criticised for failing to achieve change, but this was not the case with many of the popular mobilisations of the past year. Following protests, the president of Guatemala stood down and faced prosecution, the governments of Macedonia and Romania quit, and the prime ministers of Iceland and Moldova lost their jobs. Armenian demonstrations saw electricity price rises cancelled, a key demand, and protests by South African students



Photographer: Julien Harneis - Yemen health clinic



Photographer: IIP Photo Archive - Nepal earthquake

led to tuition fees being frozen, rather than increased as planned. At the same time, immediate short-term successes could be misleading; behind changes of leadership, elite power was often maintained. It is significant that in many cases, protests continued even after initial victories, suggesting a sustained demand for transformation.

Continued engagement is often necessary, and the year offered success stories. In Burkina Faso, after ousting the president in 2014, people continued to mobilise, defying an attempted military coup and ushering in a novel era of multi-party politics. In Tunisia, the commitment and sustained engagement of civil society to build peace and democracy, and resist a slide into repression and extremism, was recognised by the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Tunisian Dialogue Quartet, comprising a human rights organisation, a lawyers' group, a labour union and a trade confederation.

Elsewhere, as in Bolivia, Honduras and South Korea, mass protests came up against governments that simply refused to give ground, but even in such cases this did not necessarily mean that protests failed: our research suggests that protests can act as schools of participation in which people develop confidence and networks, making some participants more likely to act again, particularly when the issue that motivated protest remains unaddressed. There is evidence that young people in particular are using participation in mass movements to forge new forms of politics, while rejecting the conventional means of political participation on offer. The process of protests, in fostering participation, can be as important as the outcomes. For example, in the USA, Black Lives Matter, which started as a hashtag, established itself as a widely recognised locus of resistance, embedded itself in communities and continues to challenge impunity and racism.

In several contexts, including Burundi, Egypt and Ethiopia, protests were met with heavy-handed state response, including violence and the demonisation and criminalisation of protestors. There is a need to assert the rights to peaceful assembly that exist in international law, and make clear that these rights apply to protest in all forms. There is also a need to connect protest movements more closely with the efforts of established CSOs to uphold and advance civil society rights; doing so will help to resist the danger of protests being co-opted by narrow political interests, and ensure that a wide diversity of civil society is able to follow up on protest agendas.

CIVIC SPACE: RIGHTS IN RETREAT, CIVIL SOCIETY FIGHTING BACK

CIVICUS works to uphold the three fundamental rights - the freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression - on which civil society relies. Together, these three rights define the parameters of civic space - the space in which civil society can exist and act. Our analysis over the series of State of Civil Society Reports is that in many countries, and in all global regions, civic space has worsened appreciably in recent years.

The sources and methods of restriction are manifold, with attacks on civic space coming from political leaders, government agencies, state and private sector security forces, corporations, organised crime and extremists, and often from combinations of these. Methods of restriction in the past year included:

- the introduction or passing of legislation to constrain how civil society can organise, what it can act on, how it must account for itself and how it can be funded, e.g. in Israel and Uganda;
- verbal attacks and hate speech, e.g. in India and Venezuela;
- arbitrary detention and disappearances, e.g. in Burundi and Syria;
- criminalisation through biased judicial proceedings, e.g. in Angola and Malaysia;
- restrictions on travel, e.g. in Azerbaijan and Egypt;
- physical attacks and assassinations, e.g. in Honduras and the Philippines.

The restriction of online freedom of expression, including through the targeting of social media commentators and restriction of content, is now a marked trend, seen for example in China, Thailand and Turkey, but also in supposedly mature democracies such as the UK and USA. The trend of restricting the receipt of foreign funding, and slandering CSOs that receive such funding as the agents of foreign powers, has continued, most notably in Russia, to the extent that some CSOs have been forced to close.

Photographer: Igor Rugwiza - protest against President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to run for a third term in Burundi



Not all civil society has been attacked or restricted in equal measure; in several instances attacks have been used to divide civil society and isolate particular CSOs and activists. CSOs faced restriction most strongly when they worked to question the power of political and economic elites, expose corruption and poor governance and realise human rights. CSOs, activists and investigative journalists that challenged corporations linked to economic and political elites, such as extractive and agribusiness concerns, were liable to experience violent attack. Assassinations of activists who took a stand against such businesses were recorded in Brazil, Colombia, Honduras, Peru, the Philippines and South Africa, among other countries.

Often attacks on civil society were made with reference to upholding national security and stability, countering terrorism and combating extremism. This was seen, for example, in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. When civil society challenges dominant narratives, it risks being accused of promoting terrorism, sedition and instability. This happens even though civil society is the target of threats from extremist and terrorist forces, as encountered in Pakistan and demonstrated particularly in an epidemic of attacks against secular and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) bloggers and activists by religious fundamentalists in Bangladesh.

What should be clear by now is that institutions of formal democracy, and the regular holding of elections, are not enough to guarantee civil society rights and people's participation. In several Sub-Saharan African states, including Chad, Equatorial Guinea and Uganda, increased civic space restriction occurred around elections, even when the iron grip of political leaders made these a formality. Civic space was also diminished by moves to rewrite constitutions to allow incumbent presidents to overturn term limits, seen in Burundi, DRC and Rwanda, as these were accompanied by crackdowns on dissent.

Civil society also won important battles, in engaging to improve proposed restrictive laws, campaigning to shame governments into releasing detained activists from jail, as in Azerbaijan, and securing key victories on the freedom of the internet, not least by exposing surveillance through court action at the European level. The restriction of civic space can be seen to have become a mainstream concern of many international CSOs, including those seeking to advance human rights and development. The beginnings of a broad global movement to defend civic space can be discerned. This emerging movement should work more closely together to develop stronger, more accessible messaging about why civic space matters and the roles citizens can play in defending it, engage international processes to foster norms and structures to uphold civic space, and apply these standards at national levels. At the same time, civil society should maintain the highest standards of integrity and develop its capacity to demonstrate transparency and accountability in order to rebut criticisms that question its legitimacy.

CIVIL SOCIETY WORKING AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

The past year saw two major global compacts reached: the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. Civil society played a major and sustained role in the processes to develop both, advocating for the agreements to be ambitious, inclusive and rights-oriented. The broad civil society consensus on these agreements was that, while there was room for improvement, they go further than past agreements and provide a basis for future action. Concerns around the Paris Agreement largely centre on the fact that it is not binding, and does not give states sufficiently urgent stimulus to act, which means that civil society must continue to mobilise public pressure towards decision-makers. The debate on the SDGs has turned to their implementation, and the monitoring of progress; there is a need to have ambitious indicators for the SDGs' many targets, and for civil society to play a major role in im-

plementation and oversight. Current fears are that ambitious goals will be watered down when it comes to questions of detail, and states will cherry pick goals rather than embrace the SDGs' universalist, human rights-based approach.

Elsewhere, the international system has manifested familiar problems of bureaucratic dysfunction, inadequate resources and dominance of state interests. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), stymied by the vetoes of powerful states, consistently failed to defend the rights of citizens in crisis situations, including in the Middle East and Burundi. UN Peacekeepers were themselves revealed to be complicit in gross human rights abuses, including in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. The threat of many African states to withdraw from the International Criminal Court continues to offer a potential major setback for the fight against impunity.

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) remains a key forum that civil society engages with to defend rights. In the last year it passed two important resolutions, on the protection of defenders of economic, social and cultural rights, and on the protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests. However, the body remains challenged by the manoeuvrings of its member states, which engage in political one-upmanship, apply double standards and use their influence to water down its decisions and investigations. This could be seen, for example, in the blocking of attempts to convene an international inquiry on human rights abuses in Yemen.

There is growing civil society concern about Official Development Assistance (ODA) from established donor governments. Several global north donor governments, having moved to the right, are tying ODA more closely to national interests, including the prevention of terrorism and the assertion of trade advantage. In response to the 2015 influx of refugees, a number of European donors redirected substantial portions of ODA to the domestic reception of refugees, as opposed to making additional funds available for this humanitarian emergency. These moves negatively impacted on several CSOs in both the global south and north. If current trends in ODA continue, this threatens to undermine ambition in the implementation of the SDGs.

A connected concern is the increased role that the private sector is being asked to play in development financing, including of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. This threatens to privilege those parts of the global agenda that most closely connect with private sector interests, and downplay those the private sector does not agree with. More broadly, there is civil society alarm about the role that large, transnational corporations are being asked to play in funding UN and other international initiatives. This risks creating opportunities for corruption, reducing accountability and substituting corporate charity for citizens' rights. It also raises the accusation that the international system is being used to advance corporate agendas and launder the reputations of companies.

Privileged corporate access to lobbying, compared to very limited opportunity for civil society input, could be seen in the negotiation of two trade treaties, the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) between the USA and a number of Pacific Rim states, signed in 2016, and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), currently under negotiation between the USA and the EU. Civil society expressed concern about the impacts of these, including on food safety standards, employment rights and the ability of citizens and states to stand up to large corporations. Civil society continues to mobilise to try to prevent ratification of the TPP in the USA in particular, and to bring public concern to bear on European leaders negotiating the TTIP.

Some progress was achieved in opening up international processes to civil society involvement, notably with the SDGs, while the current process of choosing the next UN Secretary-General has been considerably more transparent than in the past. Civil society also continued to engage with constructive proposals to curb veto power in the UNSC and to make UNHRC members more accountable, and UNHRC decisions achieve greater impact. Civil society needs to continue to engage with the SDGs and the Paris Agreement, build broad-based international coalitions for action on issues such as defending the ICC and resisting the TPP and TTIP and, given the rising role of the private sector in international governance and development, push for a new international convention on business and human rights.



Photographer: Talker - Shoes in Place de la République, Climate of Peace #climat2peix



PART 2: EXCLUSION AND CIVIL SOCIETY

One of the main tests of whether a society is just is how it addresses exclusion, reduces inequality and protects minorities, while enabling their access to services and decision-making. On this measure, many of our societies are failing. The history of the past year can be seen as one of exclusion, observed in numerous examples, from the dismal reception given to Europe's new refugees to the physical attacks made on indigenous people's rights activists and women's human rights defenders, and from the enactment of new discriminatory measures against LGBTI people to the continuing fact that black people in the USA are far more likely to die at the hands of the police than anyone else.

Exclusion occurs whenever people or groups are denied opportunities, goods and services, or access to decision-making processes, often on the basis of an aspect of their identities. Exclusion matters because it is part of the everyday lived experience of many millions of people, and some facets of exclusion are worsening. Currently there is a huge and growing gap between super-rich elites and the overwhelming majority of humanity, and public anger about this is increasing. Climate change and conflicts are also disproportionately impacting on people who are excluded, and driving further exclusion. Addressing exclusion is therefore an urgent political issue.

The need to address exclusion has been given renewed emphasis by the advent of the SDGs, which promise to change the present reality and leave no one behind. Inequality increased even in countries that experienced a substantial reduction in extreme

poverty under the SDGS' predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals; this makes it clear that specific measures must be taken to tackle exclusion, and the emphasis given to inequality in the SDGs should be seen as a recognition of the urgency of challenging exclusion.

CONCEPTS AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF EXCLUSION

While the guest contributions focus on different aspects of exclusion, taken together, they show remarkable similarity across different experiences and issues of exclusion, suggesting that common responses with wide applicability can be derived from the examples of civil society work that our contributors put forward. As a collective, our guest contributions encourage an understanding of exclusion as something that is intersectional and dynamic. Exclusion is intersectional because different forms of exclusion compound and overlap; for example, people with disabilities are excluded, but women with disabilities face further exclusion, and even more so if they also come from an impoverished community. Exclusion is dynamic because new drivers of exclusion can come into play and interact with existing experiences of exclusion; for example, people who were most exposed to human rights abuses in Syria on the grounds of poverty or minority status became newly excluded as refugees when they were forced to flee.

The sources of exclusion vary from historic practices of marginalisation of particular groups, for example on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, or caste, to present day market-driven models of economic growth that foster inequality. New forms of exclusion can pattern onto existing histories and traditions of exclusion, but it would be a mistake to see exclusion as something that is principally culturally ingrained: exclusion cannot be understood without an analysis of power and an enquiry into whose present day interests exclusion serves. For example, indigenous people have long been excluded, but when they are attacked today it is often because they live on land that states and corporations seek to exploit.

Excluded people are deprived of vital goods and services, but there is a need to reject charitable responses: excluded people need to be understood not as mere victims or objects of charity, but as subjects of rights that are being denied. Even if excluded people are provided with charity, they will remain shut out of decision-making processes. This can be the case even after apparent success in opening up access to decision-making arenas, as key decisions may be shifted to more closed circles. This lock-out from decision-making feeds exclusion as a cycle, because an inability to participate and articulate demands means that exclusion remains unchallenged.

In response, interventions to help excluded people must focus on helping them to demand and access their rights, and work on multiple and intersecting forms of exclusion. Attention must be paid to enabling excluded people to participate in decision-making processes, but also to challenge and change processes, with the aim of moving beyond more equitable representation to transforming the nature of decision-making. The innate value of participation in nurturing confidence and competence for excluded people should also be recognised and encouraged.

THE CIVIC SPACE OF EXCLUDED GROUPS

CSOs and civil society activists of excluded groups often experience heightened risks of restriction and attacks in conditions of limited civic space. This happens because when civil society challenges exclusion and asserts rights, it asks questions about power and seeks its redistribution, which is resisted by those who hold power. In contexts where states are restricting civil society on the grounds of national security and national stability, the civil society of excluded groups, including ethnic, faith and ideological minorities, may be characterised as anti-national, extremist or terrorist. Women human rights defenders and LGBTI activists may be attacked as a threat to national identity and national morality by political leaders who see them as a soft target, useful for distracting publics from political and economic failures. When groups such as indigenous people resist development initiatives that adversely affect them, they may be characterised as being anti-development. Because notions such as national security, stability and morality are defined by the powerful, they rarely encompass the positions and identities of people from excluded groups.



Photographer: Steve Evans - Refugees at the Greece-Macedonia border

Excluded groups are most affected by civic space restrictions because they already have the least voice in society. When measures to suppress dissent are introduced they are often the first to be targeted. Because people from some excluded groups, such as ethnic, faith or indigenous, are more visible to repressive forces on the basis of their identities, they also face particular risk of being physically attacked, detained and criminalised. Excluded groups can also face heightened challenges of impunity when they face abuses by security forces.

In response, there is a need for the emerging global movement on civic space to undertake more nuanced analysis, to understand how restrictions impact on different excluded groups, including civil society formed by excluded groups. Targeted interventions may be needed to uphold the civic space of excluded groups, and stronger connections made between excluded groups and civil society working more broadly to uphold civic space. In follow-up to this report, CIVICUS will launch the Civic Space Monitor, a responsive online platform where global comparative analysis is complemented by up-to-date information on how civic space restrictions affect a diversity of civil society, including excluded groups

LAWS AND RIGHTS

Excluded groups are increasingly using national courts and institutions, and regional human rights systems where these exist, to win important victories to defend rights, notably LGBTI rights, even in difficult contexts. Civil society is often the originator of and lead advocate for progressive legislation to protect and promote the rights of excluded people.

However, it is often the case that new laws that confer rights for excluded people on paper are not realised in practice, and rights guaranteed at the international level, such as those in widely ratified conventions, are not implemented at the national level. There has also been a lack of debate on how the SDGs should mesh with existing commitments set out in international conventions, such as those on child rights and disability, and how the SDGs can be made to uphold and realise the highest standards of these international covenants.

In response, there may be a need to build awareness among excluded people of their rights, and the existing laws and processes through which they can claim rights. There may also be a need for training, peer support and other forms of capacity enhancement to enable excluded groups to use such processes. In addition, sensitisation, advocacy and capacity enhancement of legal officials may be required to encourage them to understand the need to act on exclusion. There should also be more debate and clarity on the relationship between the SDGs and progressive international conventions.

STIGMA, STEREOTYPING AND HATE SPEECH

Stigma and stereotyping have real power to hold people back. Negative attitudes lead directly to the practical denial of rights and access to opportunities, including for young and older people, people who are HIV positive and people with mental illnesses, making it harder to achieve change. Negative attitudes may be exerted subconsciously, but aggressive justifications for exclusion are also often mounted with reference to traditions, faiths and cultures, even when the reality is that exclusion is perpetuated in contemporary defence of power and resources. A pressing issue is the deliberate use of stigmatisation and

stereotyping by political and cultural leaders, including through hate speech towards LGBTI, ethnic and faith minorities, particularly when combined with dominant narratives of national identity, national religion and national culture.

In response, there is a need to enhance the capacities of civil society and excluded groups to challenge dominant narratives and enable excluded people to tell and celebrate their own stories. There is a need to confront prejudice by sensitising publics, including by working with the media, making use of new media, encouraging exchanges and holding regular campaigning events. Narrow constructions of identity, security and morality need to be challenged, including through law courts and institutions such as human rights commissions, women's commissions, minority commissions and ombuds offices. Those propagating hate speech, including political and religious leaders, need to be engaged through a multiplicity of approaches, including by mobilising positions from within faiths to challenge negative attitudes towards excluded groups.



Photographer: ILO in Asia and the Pacific - Pakistan

DATA AND EVIDENCE

The absence of adequate data on exclusion exacerbates challenges. Problems include a lack of data disaggregation, as the experiences of some excluded groups are not recognised as deserving documentation, and the limited role played by excluded people in the collection of their own data. In some instances, excluded groups are forced into secrecy, as in the case of undocumented migrants, which means they will not show up in official data. Difficulties in gathering data on and from some excluded groups serve to perpetuate their lack of visibility, fuelling cycles of exclusion.

In response, a greater range of data tools needs to be employed, leveraging the power of citizen-generated and open data to broaden the available information on issues of exclusion, and supplement and challenge official data sources. The experience of excluded groups, including human rights abuses, needs to be documented and reported. Data can be gathered in ways that build participation skills and develop a sense of ownership among excluded people.

RESOURCES

Many organisations of excluded groups, particularly smaller organisations in the global south, struggle for resources. Some forms of exclusion attract far more resources than others, for reasons including long-established patterns of thought and practice among donors, and the popularity of causes linked to high profile support and their association with charismatic personalities. There is also a current fear that changes in ODA will have an adverse impact on the resourcing to address exclusion, particularly when resources are linked to aims of countering extremism and upholding national security and stability, given that these can perpetuate exclusion.

In response, civil society coalitions and alliances could play a role in helping to channel resources to smaller and less visible CSOs, and in advocating for funders to adopt more expansive approaches. This could include going beyond project funding to the provision of core resources, and supporting the development of networks and intersectional working. There is also a need to develop alternate sources of philanthropy in the global south, and to work with existing philanthropic institutions to sensitise them to give more support to addressing exclusion, and particularly neglected and overlapping aspects of exclusion.

LOOKING INWARDS: CHALLENGES WE NEED TO ADDRESS IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Our focus is particularly on what civil society can do itself to challenge exclusion. Given the failures of governments to tackle exclusion, and the complicity of some governments and other actors in fuelling exclusion, civil society must lead the urgent challenge of addressing exclusion, and pioneer innovation. Civil society's identity as being rooted in values should be seen as conferring a strategic advantage: civil society enjoys a great deal of legitimacy when it works to challenge exclusion, because it is a sphere where many organisations operate close to communities, and many CSOs and activists are driven to act by a sense of justice and a desire to advance rights. At the same time, shortcomings in civil society need to be acknowledged, and civil society should be encouraged to be more proactive in fostering inclusion.

If CSOs are grounded in the lived experience of excluded people, then they are more likely to address exclusion. If civil society sometimes falls short of expectations, there is a need to look at the internal workings of civil society, and ask whether these are conducive to addressing exclusion. Established CSOs in particular may be accused of reproducing exclusion in their internal workings, by not having a diverse membership, staff and leadership. For example, research points to a wide disparity between the percentage of CSO staff who are women and the percentage of women leaders of CSOs, with leadership by women rarer in larger and better resourced CSOs.

CSOs may have policies on inclusion that are strong on paper but weak in practice, and CSO personnel may have subconscious attitudes that inhibit them from recruiting excluded people or helping them to progress in their careers. Workplace practices, such as macho working cultures modelled by CSO leaders, and the set-up of workplaces, which may not be amenable to people with disabilities, can work against the inclusion and progression of people from excluded groups. Sometimes challenges arise because CSO advisory and governance structures do not take internal exclusion seriously, or fail to reach out sufficiently to hear and be informed by excluded groups.

CSOs are not immune from having socially conservative outlooks, leading to a lack of willingness to confront social taboos and have preconceptions challenged. Even CSOs dedicated to working on specific issues of exclusion, or those that receive resources from funding schemes to address a particular set of issues, may miss opportunities to work on overlapping areas of exclusion. At the same time, while intersectional working should be encouraged, it is important to recognise the value in self-organisation for groups working to overcome their exclusion, and to enable space for self-organised groups to establish and grow. A civil society of excluded people, rather than civil society designed for excluded people, has much more legitimacy, and can be expected to be closer to the issues and better understand the needs.

A plural approach is therefore needed among civil society: to encourage self-organisation, particularly of the civil society of excluded groups of the global south, and as part of this to recognise and respect a diversity of different organisational forms within civil society; but also to build alliances that bring excluded voices into mainstream civil society and human rights arenas, and enable work across the intersection of different exclusions. Coalitions and alliances are needed for this, and to defend the civic space of excluded groups.



Photo: CIVICUS International Civil Society Week, Bogota



To address deficits in civil society, what is needed above all is honesty, openness and transparency about the ways that CSOs may be falling short of modelling good practice in addressing inclusion. However, such honesty is hard in conditions where civic space is restricted, as to do so risks being seen to confer credibility on those who attack civil society. Moreover, in a civil society arena characterised by competition for visibility and resources, honesty is often sadly compromised.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the contemporary urgency of exclusion places a duty upon civil society to organise as best it can to realise its strategic advantage to lead. Responses to internal challenges of inclusion could include the development of mentoring and coaching programmes within civil society, capacity enhancement and peer support schemes, and quota and affirmative action approaches. Specific funding could be made available to encourage CSOs to develop and implement inclusive policies and practices, for example to fill funding gaps that make it hard for smaller CSOs to provide adequate paid maternity leave.

A civil society-wide response is required that reduces the risks of competition and the potential for isolation of individual CSOs. In this regard, a joint civil society affirmation of principles of inclusion may be needed. This should include commitments to reach out actively and listen to the voices of excluded people; to bring excluded people into every level of CSOs, including membership, staffing, leadership and governance structures; to work in coalitions that identify opportunities for intersection, but that also respect self-organising by excluded people; to be rights-based at all times; and to make the achievement of impact on inclusion a key test of the effectiveness of all civil society actions. New assessment tools, including peer review processes, may be needed to enable a wide range of CSOs to audit their adherence to such principles and their performance on inclusion, and encourage openness and debate across civil society.

In taking forward the findings of our focus on exclusion, CIVICUS proposes to demonstrate that inclusion must start at home. We intend to undergo an inclusion audit, share the results widely among our alliance, and regularly monitor our inclusion performance in future. In doing so, we aim to prove how seriously we take the issue, and demonstrate our commitment to challenging exclusion, as well as indicate how civil society can lead by example. We will undertake this as a small step towards ensuring that we are working for the progress urgently needed towards a vision of a world in which everyone has an equal opportunity to participate, and everyone has equal access to their rights.

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