ABOUT CIVICUS

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation is an international alliance of civil society working to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world, especially in areas where participatory democracy and citizens’ freedom of association are challenged. CIVICUS has a vision of a global community of active, engaged citizens committed to the creation of a more just and equitable world. This is based on the belief that the health of societies exists in direct proportion to the degree of balance between the state, the private sector and civil society, and that governance is improved when there are multiple means for people to have a say in decision-making. CIVICUS seeks to amplify the voices and opinions of people and their organisations, share knowledge about and promote the value and contribution of citizen participation and civil society, and help give expression to the enormous creative energy of a diverse civil society.

CIVICUS, with its numerous partners, works by bringing together and connecting different civil society actors and other stakeholders in civil society; researching into and publishing on the health, state and challenges of civil society; and developing policy positions and advocating for the greater inclusion of and a more enabling environment for civil society. CIVICUS’ membership encompasses individual citizens and local, national, regional and international civil society organisations, and CIVICUS has members and partners in around 100 countries worldwide. CIVICUS was founded in 1993 and has its main office in Johannesburg, South Africa.


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Views in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of CIVICUS donors, and external individual and organisational contributors and advisors.
This is the first incarnation of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation’s report on the state of civil society. In line with our core mission as an alliance that aims to amplify the voice of ordinary citizens, our inaugural report features five thematic chapters with salient contributions from an array of civil society constituents and 30 country profiles produced together with CIVICUS partners.

We cannot be effective if we don’t know who we are as civil society. We cannot strengthen what we cannot see, cannot describe. CIVICUS walks the path of self-knowledge through structured action research. For 20 years CIVICUS has undertaken cutting edge action research on the dimensions and dynamics of civil society. This report continues this central line of our work as a critical champion and friend of civil society.

It is our goal to make this report a truly collaborative product, co-owned, co-authored and co-edited by CIVICUS members, partners and friends. We will now support a range of convening and advocacy activities around the State of Civil Society report with a view to supporting our partners’ efforts to create a more enabling environment for civil society around the world.

We envisage that the report will serve as a space for diverse civil society groupings to reflect on their internal challenges and the external environment for their operations, to celebrate their dynamism and strengths, and to formulate collective strategies to achieve greater impact. Through the creation of a corresponding online platform, we hope this report will evolve into a living conversation through which civil society actors can explore key issues and use their evolving understandings to shape their work in real time.

If this report on the state of civil society today is able to become a highly participatory forum that is useful to civil society champions everywhere, then we believe that it can become a definitive regular snapshot by civil society on civil society.

I hope you find the report useful. Please work with us to make future versions more inclusive, comprehensive and definitive.

David Bonbright
Chair, Board of Directors
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
ACRONYMS

AAA  Accra Agenda for Action – agreement of the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Accra, Ghana, 2008

AU  African Union

BRICS  Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

CIS  Confederation of Independent States: most former Soviet Union Countries

CIVICUS  CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

COP17  17th Conference of Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Durban, South Africa, 28 November to 9 December 2011

CSI  CIVICUS Civil Society Index project

CSO  Civil society organisation

CSR  Corporate social responsibility

DAC  OECD Development Assistance Committee

EC  European Commission

ECOSOC  UN Economic and Social Council

EU  European Union

FDI  Foreign direct investment

FTT  Financial transaction tax

G8  Group of Eight: governments of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, United Kingdom and United States of America.

G20  Group of 20: group of finance ministers and central bank governors from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States of America, plus the European Union.

GCAP  Global Call to Action against Poverty, an international civil society campaign

GDP  Gross domestic product

HLF4  4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Busan, South Korea, 29 November to 1 December 2012

HRDs  Human rights defenders

IATI  International Aid Transparency Initiative

IBSA  India, Brazil, South Africa

ICNL  International Center for Not-for-Profit Law

ICTs  Information communication technology

IMF  International Monetary Fund

INGO  International non-governmental organisation

LGBTI  Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex

MDGs  Millennium Development Goals

MENA  Middle East and North Africa region

NATO  North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGO  Non-governmental organisation

OCHA  UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OECD  Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

ODA  Official development assistance

OHCHR  Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights

PPPs  Public-private partnerships
R2P Responsibility to Protect
Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20 to 22 June 2012, commonly known as Rio+20.
SADC Southern African Development Community
SDGs Sustainable development goals, posited as a potential successor to the Millennium Development Goals
UN United Nations
UNDP UN Development Programme
UNFCC UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHRC UN Human Rights Council
UNSC UN Security Council
UN Women UN Entity for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment
UPR UN Human Rights Council – Universal Periodic Review: the process by which States review other States’ human rights reports
USAID United States Agency for International Development
WA CIVICUS World Assembly, held in 2010, 2011 and 2012 in Montreal, Canada
WP-EFF Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, which organises the High Level Forums on Aid Effectiveness
DEFINITIONS

CIVIL SOCIETY

This report follows the definition of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index project, which understands the term civil society to mean ‘the arena, outside of the family, the state and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests’. Civil society therefore encompasses civil society organisations (CSOs) and the actions of less formalised groups and individuals. Where the term ‘organised civil society’ is used in this report, it refers to independent, non-state and non-private sector associations and organisations that have some form of structure and formal rules of operating, together with the networks, infrastructure and resources they utilise.

CITIZENS

References to ‘citizens’ in this report do not imply any legalistic definitions of what constitutes a citizen and citizenship in any particular context, but are meant broadly to imply people who are governed and therefore have a stake in governance.

CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX PROJECT

One of the primary information sources for this report is the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) project, a participatory, self-assessment exercise on the state of civil society, which was carried out in 35 countries between 2008 and 2011. The CSI, through a mixture of surveys, case studies, focus groups and workshops, takes the views of citizens, CSO leaders and external stakeholders with an interest in civil society, such as people from government, parliament, the judiciary, the media, academia and the private sector, generating a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. It examines issues of people’s participation, the institutional arrangements of CSOs, the extent to which CSOs practise progressive values, the impact CSOs are perceived to achieve and the external environment which sets the context for civil society, as well as the historic development of civil society in a particular country and the power relations between different actors. It therefore attempts to build up a comprehensive picture of the strengths, weaknesses, constraints and opportunities for civil society in a participating country.

All in all around 50,000 members of the public, 5,000 CSO representatives and 1,500 external stakeholders fed their views into the 2008 to 2011 CSI. In 2011 the following countries published CSI data which is drawn on in various places in this report: Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Georgia, Guinea, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Liberia, Macedonia, Madagascar, Mexico, Morocco, Nicaragua, Philippines, Russia, Rwanda, Senegal, Serbia, Slovenia, South Korea, Tanzania, Togo, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela and Zambia. The CSI project’s research partners were the University of Heidelberg, Germany.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Civil Society 2011, published by CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, April 2012, is the first report on the changing health and state of civil society. This pilot report was produced with inputs from a number of civil society activists, leaders and other stakeholders, and in future years will be developed through increasing collaboration with a widening spectrum of civil society actors.

INTRODUCTION

2011 marked a critical juncture for civil society. Authoritarian regimes buckled under the weight of citizen pressure, and prevailing political and economic orders faced unprecedented opposition from people power movements in a great wave of protests across many countries. The opening of new arenas and avenues for civic participation and mobilisation in turn provoked significant state backlash against activists and CSOs, with a heavier focus on restricting internet usage. Foreign investments by emerging powers, particularly China, impacted on civil society space in donor recipient countries, but this was not matched by a rise in advocacy by CSOs based in emerging powers to press for more progressive foreign policies by their governments. On the global stage, civil society continued to experience limited access to key multilateral forums and despite the rise of a cluster of economic and political powers, states tended to use the year’s key global meetings to advance national interests. Many CSOs are facing existential crises, which includes problems caused by a deteriorating funding environment. New and broad-based coalitions between diverse civil society formations are needed to best capitalise on what is currently a generational opportunity to demand transformational political, social and economic change.

COUNTRY Profiles

The report’s 30 civil society country profiles, drawn from the research of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) project, suggest the following conclusions when considered as a collective:

- Civil society space is volatile and changing;
- State-civil society relations are limited and mostly unsatisfactory;
- Financial and human resource challenges for CSOs are continuing and in some cases worsening;
- There is often a gap between CSOs’ articulation of values and their internal practice of them;
- Networking is insufficient, with significant gaps in international connections and civil society-private sector relationships;
- CSOs achieve greater impact in the social sphere than in influencing policy, and there is a gap between high levels of activity and moderate levels of impact;
- There is continuing public trust in civil society as an idea but low levels of involvement in formal civil society activities compared to higher levels of non-formal participation;
- Understandings of civil society need to be expansive to encompass non-formal movements, traditional forms of participation and online activism;
- New processes need to be instigated to better connect formal CSOs with non-formalised forms of participation.
MAJOR CIVIL SOCIETY THEMES

The report looks at five key thematic areas across civil society: civil society response to emergency and crisis; protest, activism and participation; the space for civil society; the resourcing of civil society; and civil society’s role in the multilateral arena.

CRISIS, RESPONSE, OPPORTUNITY: CIVIL SOCIETY AND EMERGENCY IN 2011

The many emergencies of 2011, such as the Japan earthquake, the East African food crisis and the Thailand floods, offer new examples of the complexity of crisis events for civil society. Disaster response forced international humanitarian NGOs in particular to grapple with challenges such as prioritisation, working with uncivil forces and cooperating with local CSOs. Emergencies can also provoke crises of legitimacy, which create new space and visibility for CSOs and expose inefficient and corrupt governments, and therefore serve as catalysts for civic mobilisation and broader societal change. It is often under the intensity of emergencies that the dynamics and tensions affecting civil society most clearly come to light, and the effectiveness of civil society’s contribution, its support and its legitimacy can best be seen. In the immediate aftermath of a sudden natural disaster, civil society is often able to respond more rapidly, more nimbly and more effectively than government, and the existence of social capital and local community structures are key indicators of resilience and effective response to emergency. Investment in civil society in the sites of emergency should be prioritised to strengthen future response capacity.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

A power and legitimacy vacuum. Crises represent opportunities for governments and CSOs to demonstrate their efficiency, but a failure to deal swiftly and effectively with natural disasters and other emergencies can result in a rapid loss of legitimacy for both parties. Emergencies also offer moments for civil society to gain credibility and push for permanent social and civic gains.

Supporting diverse forms of civil society is crucial. Civil Society Index (CSI) data shows that trust in CSOs is generally at least 10% higher than trust in all other public actors. The findings also show that in most countries, faith structures have the highest trust of any non-governmental formation, followed by socially-oriented organisations and then environmental and women’s CSOs. This suggests the need for approaches which identify the diverse locales of public trust and social capital and enable the contribution of the special strengths of different parts of civil society and the making of connections between them. For example, in cases of conflict, humanitarian INGOs playing politically neutral roles are often able to access areas and affected people which would be off-limits to other actors. Faith-based CSOs can have the ability to reach and channel diasporic, immediate support. However, the primary interest among communities to ‘help your own’ can work to the detriment of the most marginalised citizens.

Humanitarian INGOs and the constant tension between their values and operations. Humanitarian INGOs necessarily face constant self-questioning about issues of timing, methods, harm minimisation, partnering, relations with the media and the public, and how to strike a balance between delivering direct assistance and maintaining an independence that also allows them to become engaged in campaigning and advocacy.

Limitations of international solidarity and the challenge of public appeals. Responses by INGOs and other CSOs depend heavily on public reactions to appeals, and so the varied reactions of people to different disaster events offer a challenge. Simplistic fundraising messages are risky for INGOs if they are relying on additional financial support from appeals to enable rapid and then sustained responses to a complex crisis. Compassion fatigue poses a problem too.
Enhanced role of new media. New applications of social and mobile media are enabling new forms of response, and thereby making possible new formations of social capital and new civic groupings. Innovative tools include those which enable existing CSOs and relief agencies to more rapidly coordinate workers and gather data, and those which enable people to self-report and self-organise.

Importance of donor investment in local civil society. The immediate presence of CSOs on the ground in crisis situations suggests that more attention should be paid to supporting communities and groupings at the local level and connecting these with humanitarian INGOs. There seems to be some greater recognition of the importance of investments in local civil society. Emerging donors arguably share a disinclination to give through multilateral channels and a desire not to be seen simply as a source of financial support, which implies a corresponding need to develop the capacity of local civil society.

Citizens in action: Protest as process in the year of dissent

2011 was the year of dissent, in which apathy became unfashionable and seemingly unassailable dictators and systems were challenged. At least 88 countries saw different forms of mass citizen action. The origins and motivations of dissent are complex, but the roots of 2011’s protests were interconnected: protest was driven by the inability of states to address the fallout of the economic crisis, making serious income inequalities and corruption more acute, and compounded by demographic shifts giving rise to more urbanised, unemployed, frustrated young people. The internet, mobile and social media played a vital role in catalysing civic action, both as an organiser of physical protest and as a civic space in its own right. The state’s response to economic crisis can be seen as impinging on the fundamental social contract between state and citizens, and protest can be understood as a way of citizens re-asserting the power to negotiate a new social contract. 2011’s movements and moments of protest, dissent and activism must be seen as part of civil society, yet the mass waves of civic action were not foreseen by many CSOs, which in most contexts were not highly involved. A pressing issue for CSOs is the need to build broad-based collaborations with newly mobilised citizens; a challenge is to sustain momentum and a sense of a community of ideas and practice, and of continuing the globalisation of currents of mutual inspiration between protest movements in different contexts.

Key Observations

Awakening of a global consciousness. 2011 was a remarkable year of participation, activism, mobilisation and dissent, linked by common currents of inspiration and imitation. What was new included the scale of dissent, its spread, the methods employed, the connections made and the potential implications.

Advocating for system change. Protests often started out addressing local issues but blossomed into broader critiques of leaders, governance structures and ruling ideologies. Protest also seemed capable of absorbing inProtest also seemed capable of absorbing individual or group concerns. Different demands were made in different contexts, while some movements were characterised by a lack of demands, other movements were seeking changes to the prevailing status quo. What united protests could be summarised as a striving for dignity and a questioning of the current rules of engagement.

Online space, and social and mobile media as tools and arenas to organise and contest ideas. New technology facilitated the viral spread of information, ideas and symbols, and enabled people to organise and mobilise offline protest. Movements originally largely downplayed by the mainstream media and politicians, made heavy use of social media to create headlines and generate momentum and cross border solidarity. Online activism needs to be seen as a valid form of participation which enables people to feel involved in a cause.
Protest as a brand. The Arab Spring and the 99% became frequently referenced and imitated brands that could easily be adopted across a range of contexts. 2011 can be seen as a ‘cultural revolution’, with cultural forms and acts of creation challenging the politics of dour necessity and asserting the value of idealism and imagination.

Redefining the paradigms of success, protest as a process. The eventual outcome and legacy of the 2011 movements is yet to be determined. In the MENA region, for all the complexity and continuing contestation, many people now believe they have an opportunity for their lives to be different. Elsewhere, politicians had to be seen to be taking the protests seriously. Beyond this, the success of the 2011 protests may be seen in their having forged new connections and galvanised, radicalised and exposed new publics to activism. Some of the movements that practice consensus-based decision-making and direct democracy are more about modelling alternatives than the articulation of specific policy recommendations, and the success of these movements should be seen as the endurance of processes that develop and practice alternatives.

The need for CSO vigilance and action. Some countries have extended freedoms, and vigilance now needs to be exercised to ensure that these are not rolled back. Some of the classic CSO roles – of acting as a watchdog on the state, proposing policy change, defending the rights of protesters and delivering services in sites of government failure – are most needed. Contestation will remain in post-revolutionary and non-revolutionary sites of protest, and progressive voices will need to remain organised, engaged and imaginative.

Disconnected CSOs. Many CSO representatives expressed the view that they were behind the curve of protest in 2011. The picture is one of disconnects: disconnects between CSOs and other sectors of society; between CSOs of different types, such as NGOs, faith groups and trade unions, and between service delivery and advocacy CSOs; and between CSOs and citizens. The majority of people have no association with civil society in its institutionalised form, but globally, around half of people associate in less organised forms, in more organic structures. Involvement with CSOs is not an accurate barometer of civic activism; rich associational life exists beyond formalised CSOs.

The necessity of broad-based alliances. In 2011 many protesters experienced the ethos of civil society – participation, activism, collective action, self-help, empowerment – in the raw. New looser, more inclusive alliances and coalitions of different parts of civil society that reflect the unique roles, strengths and contributions of each must be developed to enable enduring pathways for continuing the activism and participation of the newly mobilised. These alliances must combine the institutionalised strengths of CSOs with the flexibility, creativity and mobilising power of the new movements.

**A DISENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY:**
**PUSHBACK, PERSECUTION AND PROTECTION STRATEGIES**

The increase in protest action saw a corresponding rise in state pushback in both democratic and authoritarian states. Legal and extralegal measures were employed by both state and non-state actors to intimidate or cause harm to civil society personnel to deter them from carrying out their work. There were also several attempts to introduce repressive laws to regulate CSOs, while the key role played by mobile and social media in civic action in 2011 brought fresh attempts to place technical and legal restrictions on this evolving space. In light of this, there is a need to invest in and strengthen protection strategies for human rights defenders and civil society activists who come under attack. 2011 also offered some hope, due to some progressive multilateral measures to protect civic space. After a tumultuous year, at present there may be fresh opportunity to secure the new space opened by civic action by pressuring states to create a more enabling environment for civil society.
Mass protests, heavy pushback. A number of governments misused the law to pre-empt or crackdown on protests. In response to protests in Algeria, Angola, Belarus, Russia, Senegal, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe, the leaders of movements were detained in an apparent leadership decapitation strategy.

Activists and journalists: the targets of persecution. Persecution of civil society actors, including human rights defenders, trade unionists and campaigners, remained rife throughout 2011, and showed a marked increase in some contexts. Several activists were jailed during the year on the basis of ill-founded accusations. This phenomenon was particularly pronounced in countries ruled by long-standing despotic regimes or monarchies, which became increasingly nervous about popular movements taking inspiration from the Arab Spring, such as in Bahrain, Belarus, China, Ethiopia, the Gambia and Zimbabwe. Journalists in particular came under heavy scrutiny, for example in Burundi, China, Iran, Rwanda, Thailand and Venezuela. Women human rights defenders and LGBTI activists remained particularly vulnerable to targeting, intimidation and harassment, particularly in Cambodia, Egypt, Nigeria, Russia, Uganda and Yemen.

The influence of emerging donors. The global context is one of geopolitical shift towards a multi-polar world where the influence of Western democracies is being counterbalanced by the growing economic and political clout of new power centres. As major providers of foreign aid and investment, they sometimes provide a lifeline to governments facing sanctions or censure for human rights abuses from Western donors.

A disenabling legal environment for civil society. The CSI research sheds light on laws covering aspects of civil society that are outdated (e.g. Madagascar, Zambia), fragmented and contradictory (Mexico, Tanzania) or assessed by CSOs as disenabling (Albania, Jordan, Kazakhstan). A concern that arose in many countries (Armenia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Madagascar, Philippines, Senegal, Turkey) is that laws that are on the books are not always translated into effective policy and implementation. In many contexts, relationships between civil society and the state are clouded by lack of transparency (Argentina, Morocco), and key issues are not open for discussion (Georgia, Russia). Common complaints are of a pro forma approach to civil society consultation (Philippines, Rwanda, Slovenia), or of limited or sporadic dialogue (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Tanzania), and of relationships where the government exercises favouritism towards some CSOs (Kazakhstan, Morocco, Senegal) or where there is excessive government interference (Croatia, Guinea). Lack of government capacity to engage in constructive dialogue also emerges as an issue (Albania, Kosovo).

Changes in the regulatory environment for civil society. In 2011, several regressive laws were instituted or proposed that negatively impacted on the operating environment for civil society. A number of countries targeted the foreign funding of CSOs, e.g. Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Israel and Kyrgyzstan. Many governments imposed measures restricting the ability of individuals to exercise their freedoms of assembly, association and expression, including in Belarus, Malaysia, Uganda and several countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Also many governments proposed or enacted legislation affecting the formation, registration and general lifecycle of CSOs, such as in Algeria, Cambodia and Iran. Following intensive campaigning from domestic and international civil society, plans were shelved or delayed to introduce restrictive civil society laws in Cambodia, Iran and Israel. However, the threat of legislation remains a potent weapon for governments to subdue civil society voices. More positive reforms were introduced in Montenegro, Rwanda, Tunisia and the Kurdistan region in Iraq.

A clampdown on internet freedom. In 2011 a number of governments abused their control of infrastructure to limit access to controversial content, institute countrywide filtering and surveillance systems or, at critical political junctures, intentionally reduce the speed of connection or even shut down the internet. In the revolutionary contexts of North Africa, the shutdowns tended to be counter-productive, drawing greater international attention to restrictions on freedom of expression and bringing people onto the streets. As the parameters of what constitutes a journalist shifts with the rise of social media and blogging, netizens have increasingly come under attack by governments.
Towards an enabling environment for civil society.
CSO framework laws and access to information laws, amongst others, should not impede the work of CSOs but rather form the basis of frequent, transparent, consistent and institutionalised high-quality engagement between CSOs and the state. Support came from multilateral human rights bodies that helped to advance international norms on freedom of expression, association and assembly. In 2012, these bodies and CSOs must continue to monitor the practice of states and strive to influence legal and policy developments to create a favourable regulatory framework.

THE CHALLENGE OF RESOURCES: CHANGING FUNDING PROSPECTS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

A key question for CSOs is whether they have sufficient resources to respond to the connected crises the world faces, and how those crises are affecting their funding positions. There seems to be growing influence of domestic political concerns on donor agendas, with many CSOs reporting declining funding and changing prioritisation of donors. In response many CSOs are paying more attention to fundraising and diversification of funding sources. Difficulties in analysis remain due to the lack of availability of comparable and up to date data from donors, which the growth of the International Aid Transparency Initiative may help to address, while a further information challenge lies in gathering data across the broad spectrum of civil society. The future of CSO funding will inextricably be linked in the next few years to broader debates on development effectiveness, the shifting roles of CSOs and changing global power relationships.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

The economic crisis, a turbulent time for CSOs. The CSO funding landscape is characterised by unpredictability and volatility, lack of funds for capacity development and organisational strengthening, limited support to long-term strategies and planning, and declining support from a range of sources in the wake of the economic crisis. Various studies and projections indicate that the global economic crisis is expected to reduce capital inflows to developing countries through negative impacts on foreign direct investment (FDI), official development assistance (ODA) and receipt of remittances from diaspora populations. A majority of CSOs consulted by CIVICUS in 2011 reported constraints in accessing funding, with the situation worsening after 2009, and particularly during 2010 to 2011.

Increased role of commercial interests in shaping donor countries’ funding priorities. Business-centred approaches to development cooperation have been promoted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s focus on the private sector as a development actor in the aid effectiveness process. Major bilateral donors such as Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden are increasing their share of ODA set aside for public-private partnerships or for the full implementation of programmes through private actors.

The securitisation and politicisation of aid. A heavy focus on bilateral aid from Western governments to countries of strategic importance such as Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq and Pakistan can be observed, suggesting politicised aid policies and practices that undermine international commitments on needs-based aid policies. Changes of government and austerity in many traditional donor countries are seeing a re-emphasis of the domestic agenda on international aid, partly in response to ODA becoming harder to sell in domestic politics.

Bypassing the middleman, changing North-South aid flows. Northern-based CSOs have traditionally had higher expectations of sustainability, partly because they have acted as conduits for development funding from Northern governments to the South, but there seems to be some evidence that donors are increasingly funding Southern CSOs directly. Northern donors are also beginning to offer pooled funding approaches to directly contract work with Southern partners.
Donors rush into the MENA region. In the wake of the Arab Spring, there is a sudden growth of CSOs and donors expanding their operations in the MENA region. CSI findings from former Eastern Bloc countries, where the previous great wave of civic revolutions happened in the 1990s, suggest that a sudden influx of donors can harm the long-term sustainability of CSOs.

Aid transparency gaining ground. A major challenge in understanding civil society funding is the lack of standardised, disaggregated and timely data. Although key advances on aid transparency were made at the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness IV in Busan, more progress is still needed. New donor countries must commit to take real action on aid transparency.

Emerging donors support Southern states, not CSOs. Though data from emerging donors is particularly difficult to obtain, an assessment of published reports from new donors seems to show prima facie preference for large scale and prestige infrastructure projects, and direct support to governments, with little interest in CSOs. This could perhaps stem from a history in many of the new donor countries of top down development with minimal CSO participation.

Different types of CSOs display different funding patterns. Politically-oriented CSOs - those engaged in campaigning, advocacy, human rights work and policy level work – are highly dependent on donors and government funding. Socially-oriented membership organisations and faith-based organisations are less likely to face resource crises. More than half of CSOs consulted by CIVICUS in 2011 state that membership fees are their most reliable source of income, followed by international donors and private foundations; the least reliable are individual domestic government contributions. In terms of the significance of these contributions, CSOs placed international donors first, followed by membership fees, then private foundations and lastly individual and domestic government contributions. Ideally, CSOs should have a mix of important and predictable sources of income.

Regional and North/South funding trends. Over 80% of the budgets of developing country CSOs surveyed depend on the contributions of international institutions, with bilateral donors being the principal source of income. In developed countries, individual contributions, corporate donations and government funds constitute the main part of CSOs’ funding base.

The value of CSO networks. CSO platforms and networks are seen as important in offering CSOs access to sources of funding and technical support from peers, and networks are generally perceived by donors as more representative and legitimate voices than single CSOs, particularly in countries where political constraints inhibit a strong organised civil society sector. But there is some concern about competition for resources between networks and network members.

More research required. There is also a need to research trends in ODA in the coming years and to analyse the data from 2010 and 2011 once it is made available, to fully understand the impact of the economic crisis on funding patterns and trends.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE GLOBAL ARENA: HIGHLIGHTS AND LESSONS FROM KEY GLOBAL ENGAGEMENTS IN 2011

The existing institutions of global governance have failed to provide people-centred responses to the current global economic, social, political and environmental crises. Too often in key multilateral meetings and processes, the narrow national interests of states prevailed. The Durban climate change summit (COP17) fell short of the decisive action required, as did the G20 meeting of the world’s most powerful economies. Hope came by way of the advent of the new UN Women entity, the Busan summit on aid effectiveness (HLF4), and many of the stances adopted by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, particularly during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), its peer-reviewed assessment of human rights in UN member states. In Busan and in Geneva, the space guaranteed to civil society enhanced the credibility and quality of the process, and these
procedures should be regarded as minimal standards that should be extended to other arenas. A predicament for both states and civil society alike is the fact that disconnected summits purport to address intertwined issues such as economic growth, development effectiveness, climate change and human rights in silos. CSOs must combine to advocate for a multilateral system that has the reach and ambition to tackle connected challenges and the imagination to put global interests first.

**KEY OBSERVATIONS**

**Heightening tension between international cooperation and national sovereignty.** In times of economic downturn, states tend to move away from multilateral action and adopt insular protectionist stances. Fears by states of reducing their economic competitiveness lie at the heart of failures to commit to binding agreements to reduce carbon emissions and to a financial transaction tax. Global decisions on finance, development, aid, the structure of multilateral bodies and climate change are the product of interactions between power-holders acting in their own interests. Several governments found themselves in a classic “prisoners dilemma”, seeking progress and understanding the value of cooperation, but fearful of the comparative advantage gained by states that choose not to act or do not play fair. The rise of new global powers is not translating into more effective multilateral institutions.

**Asserting the value of civil society as a knowledge generator, norm-creator and guardian of the public interest.** In addition to proposing advances on key issues, civil society must also assert its general right to inclusion in multilateral processes. Decisions and agreements made with civil society input are more aligned with the public interest. High quality civil society participation increases the legitimacy of, compliance with and accountability of agreements reached.

**Finding common ground between activists outside high level meetings and civil society representatives on the inside.** CSOs purportedly representing the voice of citizens at high level international meetings must endeavour to broker more strategic convergence between activists on the ‘outside’ of meetings and civil society representatives on the ‘inside’. Closer joint working within civil society, and stronger connections between those at the negotiating table and protest movements outside the formal arenas are required for greater impact and CSO legitimacy.

**CSOs in emerging economies and global decision-making.** While many CSOs in emerging powers have a history of pushing for reforms in their countries, their experience of galvanising national coalitions for international advocacy is less extensive. It is necessary for civil society in emerging powers to press their governments to adopt progressive foreign policy positions.

**The HLF4, a model for CSO engagement.** Although commitments to transform aid effectiveness and put human rights at the centre of delivery efforts remained elusive in 2011, the multi-stakeholder process leading up to Busan was viewed by many as a pioneering model of civil society engagement, with civil society emerging as a prominent, equal and valuable actor in influencing decision-making. The challenge now for civil society is to monitor adherence to commitments contained in the outcome document, as well as to promote the Busan approach as a minimal model for other processes.

**Trends in CSO participation in the UN Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review.** From CIVICUS’ analysis of data on CSO participation in eight sessions of the UN HRC’s groundbreaking mechanism, it was determined that nearly three-quarters of CSOs engaged in the UPR came from Europe and North America. The system naturally privileges larger, better-resourced CSOs, which can afford to maintain a permanent presence in Geneva, suggesting a need for broader coalitions so smaller CSOs can benefit from the presence of CSOs in Geneva. It is also important to look beyond Geneva, as the domestic side of the UPR process can be of great value, particularly in the stage of implementation of the recommendations, and to support civil society activity around such national level processes.

**UN bodies and the uprisings in the MENA region.** UN bodies devoted much attention to promoting and protecting human rights and democracy in
the MENA region in 2011, with CSOs playing a pivotal advocacy role. However, 2011 showcased the shortcomings of UN processes: controversial multilateral action on Libya was followed by near paralysis on human rights violations in Syria. The Arab Spring was a citizen-driven call for peace and prosperity, yet fragmented world powers were unable to respond in a principled and effective manner.

Few entry points for CSOs at COP17. CSOs’ disappointment with the outcomes of COP17 reflects the limited opportunities for CSO access, influence and engagement. With more observers than actors present at the negotiations, it is questionable whether CSOs can impact on state positions at highly technical, complex and brief diplomatic summits. Given these drawbacks, it may be more beneficial for CSOs to invest in engagement strategies in advance of these meetings.

Converging crises demand ambitious transformational agendas. The connected crises the world currently faces underscore the need for a radical rethinking, reinvention and renegotiation of governance paradigms. CSOs can draw inspiration from citizen movements in 2011 that called for the end of business as usual and ambitiously pressed for systemic change. The Rio+20 summit in June 2012 will provide a key test whether the multilateral system can improve its ability to respond to present crises.
INTRODUCTION

TAKING STOCK OF A PIVOTAL YEAR: WELCOME TO THE CIVICUS STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY 2011 REPORT

The beginning of the end of business as usual

2011 was an extraordinary year for the world, and for its civil society. Millions mobilised to demand more from their rulers. People sought democracy and a fairer distribution of wealth. They fought against corruption, exclusion and humiliation. They demanded dignity.

In some places, they achieved remarkable breakthroughs that deserve to be celebrated, albeit successes that demand constant vigilance and civil society engagement in the new spaces created. In others, the pushback from governments and other institutions of power was severe. In some settings, as the euphoria of protest faded, there was the reassertion of entrenched political and social orders, opportunistic jostling for prominence and power, and the fragmentation of protest movements.

The question for those of and engaged with civil society, and for this report, which seeks to understand the state of civil society after 2011, is where does civil society fit into all this? CIVICUS’ response here is two-fold.

First, as civil society, we need to affirm that protesters, occupiers and online activists are civil society, even when they are not formed into organisations, and even when people have acted individually. The common disconnect that CIVICUS’ research identified in 2011, between the institutions of civil society and citizens, needs to be addressed.

As civil society activists, although we know that the diversity and breadth of civil society are amongst our greatest assets, there is also insufficient connection between different forms of civil society in different locales. We have become better at networking with organisations similar to ourselves and with adjacent aims, but not with different kinds of organisations, and the unusual suspects. We remain fragmented. We compete, and a worsening funding climate for CSOs risks turning that competition toxic.

In civil society, we have also been slow to grasp what we should have understood naturally, the potential offered by social and mobile media to enable new forms of mobilisation and build social capital. In many places, CSOs were behind the curve of protest in 2011 rather than at the vanguard. We need to learn how we can serve and better enable the new protest movements, rather than seek to capture or instrumentalise them.

The new need, including amongst donors, governments, academia, the media and the private sector, as well as the people of civil society, is to adopt a more expansive understanding of civil society, as encompassing any actions in the public sphere which seek to advance interests that are not those of governments and businesses, and to recognise all such actions which promote democracy, good governance, human rights, social justice, equality and sustainable development as being part of the civil society that CIVICUS seeks to promote, strengthen and support. A fixation on the rather uninteresting organisational make-up of civil society should not inhibit our thinking.

Second, protest and pushback call renewed attention to the urgent need to establish and uphold a more enabling environment for civil society. Regardless of the source of mobilisation or the form it
takes, there must be appropriate legal and policy provisions to allow people to express themselves freely, gather in collective spaces, organise, model alternatives and make demands. In too many countries the environment for civil society remains profoundly disenabling. Repressive laws that seek to limit space for civil society, for example through making it harder to hold a meeting, exerting onerous registration and reporting requirements on CSOs or limiting CSOs’ ability to receive funding, continue to be put forward. Even when these do not pass into law, the mere threat of their imposition can have a chilling effect and result in self-censorship, and fighting them can consume considerable civil society energy.

Regardless of the form civic action takes, and the success of some protest movements in 2011, in the longer term, the key civil society roles of holding government and other power holders to account, offering spaces for the articulation of solutions, guaranteeing pluralism and, in many cases, addressing state and private failures of essential services provision, can only be sustained where there is space to convene, organise and act, whether that space be physical or virtual.

At the multilateral level, the space granted to CSOs is always a gift rather than a right, often contested, sometimes ceremonial. The rise to global influence of a new range of governments – such as those of the newly confident and powerful countries of Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa – has not, in the main, been reflected in the assertion of global interests over national interests, and multilateral forums tend to remain arenas for the testing and negotiation of different national powers. In 2011, civil society saw this in the climate change talks in Durban, during the development effectiveness debate in Busan, and at the UN Security Council in New York and Human Rights Council in Geneva, amongst others.

Multilateral relationships based on national interest trade-offs and the privileging of private sector over civil society voices have not worked; as part of the problem, they cannot now be the solution.

**Redefining the social contract**

Indeed while the world is faced with a convergence of crises, economic, social, political and environmental, too often the response has been business as usual. At the national level, the state’s reaction to crises has been to cut back on the public sector, crackdown on the spaces and vehicles for dissent and implement measures that drive increased economic and social inequality and poverty. At the global level, recent world summits have failed to muster the imagination and ambition required to tackle the pressing problems of the world, offering largely conventional approaches and technocratic tinkering. They have not understood the significance of the upheavals of 2011.

This suggests that government and related institutions are failing on even their basic obligations to people, at the national and international levels. We believe it is time to revisit assumptions. The impact of unilateral state actions on citizens has ruptured any notion of the fundamental social contract, as a mutual agreement for cooperation between holders of power and citizens. One thing is clear: there can be no going back. The existing institutional arrangements that governed relations between citizens, the state and other actors of power, including the market and the institutionalised section of civil society itself, are not delivering, at any level. They must now be up for renegotiation.

The challenge is that relations between citizens and institutions are already being redefined – but by the institutions themselves. The social contract is already being torn up and redrafted, by power holders such as governments and large corporations, in an exclusionary way.
For us as civil society, the pressing need arising from this is to assert our voice and our right to be included. To do this we need to organise ourselves, in more comprehensive, inclusive and multifaceted ways than we have managed before. We need to learn from the social movements which rose to prominence in 2011 to not just advocate, but to model alternatives in the way we organise, convene, act and speak. We need to develop new relationships based on consent.

Within civil society itself, this calls for fresh connections and changes in the balance of power – between North and South, international and local and between established, organised civil society forms and new movements.

To underpin all this, we need to generate our own intelligence, do our own research, and use this as the basis for our convening and coalition building.

**The inaugural state of civil society report**

It is therefore in these dynamic, volatile circumstances that CIVICUS believes there is a need for this: a state of civil society report by civil society. We believe that in changing and challenging times there is an urgent need for information on the health, state, challenges and evolving nature of civil society, and the trends affecting us. We believe that this information should be generated by civil society ourselves, rather than those looking in on what they define as a sector. And we believe that the rate of change is such that there is a need to track changes as frequently as possible, to be able in future years to identify emerging trends on such key issues as the changing shape of activism, the constantly contested enabling environment for civil society, the shifting resourcing of civil society and the space and impact civil society is able to make at the multilateral level.

CIVICUS has therefore worked with a wide range of civil society partners to develop this first and prototype report, which will continue to evolve and live through its web version and social media, and will expand in future versions to become more comprehensive and offer an even wider range of civil society voices and viewpoints.

Taken as a whole, CIVICUS believes the five thematic sections and the 30 country profiles, which form the core of our report, tell us that we are at the most pivotal and contested moment for civil society in a generation.

Everything now seems up for discussion, with new formations and methods for expressing dissent, renewed political contestation of civil society space and an apparent loss of faith in many of the traditional civil society forms by donors. Key opportunities arise in the mobilisation into action for the first time of many people across a great spread of countries, an extraordinary boom in access to mobile and social media and a growing acknowledgement that the existing institutions for international cooperation are unfit for purpose in an increasingly interconnected and multipolar world. The apparent paradox is that civil society, in its organised, institutional form, is more contested and subject to questioning than ever – but the need for civil society, understood in its fullest sense, has never been greater.

This is a time of shift and flux, and CIVICUS sees our new report as a contribution towards debate, a source of innovative thinking from within civil society and an attempt to make some sense of a volatile situation. We hope you find our information and insights fresh and valuable; and we look forward to partnering with you to take our analysis and reporting even further in future.

*Netsanet Belay*

Director, Policy and Research
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

“In changing and challenging times there is an urgent need for information on the health, state, challenges and evolving nature of civil society, and the trends affecting us.”
PART 1

GLOBAL TRENDS AND HIGHLIGHTS