CIVICUS
World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Bridging the gaps: Citizens, organisations and dissociation

Civil Society Index summary report: 2008-2011

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Foreword

'Within every border, across every country, exists a multitude of separate silenced voices.' Those are the words on the poster above my desk at CIVICUS. They serve as a daily reminder of the daunting scale, the stupendous opportunity and the stark simplicity of the task that confronts civil society.

The term civil society has grown increasingly popular in recent times. It is bandied about by world leaders and business barons, philanthrocapitalists and anarchists, academics and revolutionaries, and pops up with ever greater frequency on social networks, blogs and in traditional media alike. Many definitions have been proposed, but, at its essence, civil society is our species' response to the basic human need to come together in pursuit of common goals. Throughout human history, in every culture, on every continent, humans have felt impelled to transcend individual interests to seek common cause. Neuroscientists, anthropologists and behavioural scientists have all shown that the impulse to altruism and community are innate human instincts.

"Civil society is our species' response to the basic human need to come together in pursuit of common goals."

From pre-historic groups of women pooling their resources for the benefit of the tribe and its children, or medieval artisans collaborating to enhance and protect the fruits of their labour, civil society today is a vast ocean of human action encompassing neighbourhood groups, trades unions and faith-inspired initiatives through to formal non-governmental organisations and global alliances seeking solidarity, justice and freedom for all humanity and the very survival of our planetary ecosystem.

Each great advance in human rights and freedoms – the abolition of slavery, votes for women, protection for minorities, children, workers and the disabled against discrimination, exploitation and abuse, and the rights to information, freedom of expression and to representation, even the international co-operation necessary to facilitate trade, commerce, transportation, communication, the prevention and control of pandemics and crime-fighting – has been the result of small groups of individual humans putting collective goals ahead of their own narrow interests.

The ends of collective action are not always benign, however. From the exploitation of the powerless, ethnic cleansing and terrorism to genocide – the arena of collective action has often been exploited to cruel and inhuman ends. Those ends have necessitated and justified the monitoring and regulation of civil society by governments. Predictably, governments have abused these powers to co-opt, control and direct civil society to achieve political ends.

As citizens have demonstrated their growing capacity to mobilise against repression, corruption, exploitation and discrimination, powerful elites – political, economic, social and cultural – whose continued dominance these movements have challenged, have struck back. Over the past decade in particular, the so-called global war on terror has been used by governments around the world to roll back civil society freedoms through legislative, fiscal, technological and extra-judicial measures including abduction, kidnapping, torture, assassination or other forms of state violence.

Since the financial implosion of 2008, arguably itself caused by the capture of state power by elite interest groups, economic pressures have further threatened civil society freedoms. Cutbacks

in funding, especially for work whose outcomes are not easily measured in the short term, the erosion of political support for the interests of "the other" – ethnic minorities, immigrants, foreigners and the socially excluded – and the prioritisation of economic interests over human rights and political freedoms in national policies and international relations, as well as the seismic shift in geo-political equations, have all provided excuses to renege on commitments and to turn a blind eye towards violations.

"Our understanding of what civil society is has to be challenged and become more fluid in response to these changing times."

CIVICUS' Civil Society Index has, from the completion of its first pilot phase in 2002, been the preferred measure of the health and vitality of this amorphous and eclectic sector. It combines academic rigour with a unique participative approach that endows it with unparalleled authority and legitimacy. This summary of the CSI findings from the 2008-2011 global phase, drawing on over 2,000 pages of analysis produced by CIVICUS' civil society members and partners, could not come at a better time. The paradigms that shaped definitions of and relations between state, market, media and civil society in the late 20th century have all come into question, social contracts are being re-negotiated overtly and covertly on every continent, the concept of national sovereignty has never been more fluid, and global governance mechanisms are threatened with obsolescence by rapidly changing power dynamics. Countries which have been described as established democracies, those that achieved democracy more recently as well as authoritarian regimes that make little pretence to democratic values are all witnessing challenges to the status quo from people's movements of varied hue, united by their quest to gain or reclaim an active say in governance. Our understanding of what civil society is has to be challenged and become more fluid in response to these changing times. Excitingly, a fresh look at what civil society is and does reveals as yet under-explored potential for association, participation and activism.

"There exists a noticeable disconnect between established civil society organisations and the increasing number of citizens involved in both new and traditional forms of activism."

The key finding of this global phase of CSI is that there exists a noticeable disconnect between established civil society organisations and the increasing number of citizens involved in both new and traditional forms of activism. We need all these forms of civil society, and they all need each other. If we are to ensure constructive and sustainable pathways to participation and progressive change - rather than a series of fleeting moments of mass-based protest, prone to capture and cooptation by elite interests committed only to preserving the status quo - then an investment in rebuilding these connections between organised and less formal civil society is now essential. Whether donors, governments or civil society organisations, I would urge all those re-evaluating how best to support civil society in these extraordinary times to take note of the key findings summarised in the pages that follow, based on perhaps the most comprehensive picture of contemporary civil society currently available.

As the sector's premier mechanism to assess and shape itself, CIVICUS' Civil Society Index will continue to evolve to encompass the changing landscape, to meet the needs of its many stakeholders and, in doing so, to provide one leading barometer of that human impulse to freedom, justice and collective endeavour.

Ingrid Srinath

Secretary General, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

1. Introduction

Summary

In many countries around the world, civil society organisations (CSOs) exist in a state of heightened volatility and flux. The conditions for CSOs include low levels of popular trust in public institutions, which bring correspondingly low levels of public participation in formal processes, and persistent structural weaknesses of CSOs, including in financial and human resources. These problems are exacerbated by newly challenging economic and political conditions, which emerged over the course of this study and which continue to play out. Such conditions inhibit the ability of CSOs to serve the public, achieve influence over policy and even sustain their operations.

"In many countries around the world, civil society organisations exist in a state of heightened volatility and flux."

Despite this, people at large retain their desire to associate. They also continue to believe in the broad concept of civil society, even if they may not always understand the forms of association in which they take part as being captured adequately by the term 'civil society'. In this often unstructured participation, and in the new forms of participation enabled by technology, lie the key to the sector's survival and renewal.

These are among the key conclusions of the recently concluded CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) 2008-2011 project, from which this report draws.

This report begins by setting out the aims and areas of focus of the CSI, before going on to describe some of the key findings that emerge from an analysis of the various CSI Analytical Country Reports. These include the findings that:

- 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, as expressed through the application of labour and gender rights and internal decision-making processes
- Networking offers a strength but is still insufficient, with significant gaps in international connections and civil society–private sector partnerships

- CSOs achieve greater impact in the social sphere than in influencing policy, and there is a gap between high levels of activity and medium 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.

The report concludes by suggesting that as a follow-up to these findings, the understanding by governments and donors of the civil society sector needs to expand to encompass non-formal movements, including both traditional forms of participation and online activism; and that new processes need to be instigated which better connect formal CSOs with these under-explored forms of participation, offering citizens new pathways for effective civic activism.

About the Civil Society Index

The CSI is a participatory action-research project which aims to assess and improve the state of civil society in a range of countries around the world. It exists to create a knowledge base and momentum for civil society strengthening. It does this through encouraging civil society self-reflection and analysis in a process which includes a broad sweep of civil society stakeholders.

The CSI is initiated and implemented by CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS), in partnership with CSOs at the national level. It brings together a range of CSOs and enables them to conduct self-assessments on an array of key indicators which build up a picture of the strength of and constraints against civil society in five key areas: civic engagement; level of organisation; practice of values; perception of impact; and the external environment. The views of the population as a whole, as well as those of knowledgeable external experts, are also assessed alongside those of CSO representatives in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of civil society's role, health and challenges. Together, the findings of the CSI can be said to represent the views of thousands of people – over 30,000 members of the public, over 4,000 CSO representatives and over 1,000 experts on civil society.[1]

One of the values of the CSI lies in this participatory and consultative methodology, which helps, through the inclusive national level processes of civil society-led self-assessment and reflection, to build new connections and social capital within the civil society sector, thereby strengthening it. For example, the CSI in Cyprus brought together civil society from both sides of the Green Line (the United Nations buffer zone that partitions the divided country) to compare their respective strengths, weaknesses and ways of working, to critique the current workings of the peace process and, on that basis, formulate joint plans and platforms for action. In Kosovo, the CSI created a space for an emerging consciousness of Kosovar civil society at a critical moment in the young nation's history. In countries with changing and challenging political situations, such as Guinea, the CSI offered a safe and relatively politically neutral space for discussion on civil society's role.

"The CSI helps to build new connections and social capital within the civil society sector, and thereby strengthen it."

The CSI process also enables civil society across a range of countries to compare regional notes, pinpoint shared challenges and strategise on ways to address these. The six Latin American CSI partners, for example, worked regionally to compare and analyse trends between their contexts in order to build up a comprehensive picture of the current state of Latin American civil society and, as a result, new connections have been developed in the region.

[1] For a detailed description of the thinking behind the CSI and its methodology, see the CIVICUS document Assessing and Strengthening the State of Civil Society Worldwide: an updated programme description of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index Phase 2008-2010, available at www.civicus.org.

The CSI studies encompass great diversity, covering countries in Latin America, East and South Europe, Central, East and South East Asia, the Middle East and North and Sub-Saharan Africa. The CSI provides new information on highly wealthy, developed countries such as Italy, and some of the world's poorest such as Liberia; huge expanses of land such as Kazakhstan and small islands such as Malta; long-sovereign countries such as Mexico and fledgling nations such as Kosovo.

A COMPREHENSIVE BUT INTROSPECTIVE TAKE ON CIVIL SOCIETY

The CSI offers a valuable, one-off opportunity to take the temperature of civil society across a wide range of countries. For countries that have already undertaken CSI studies in previous phases, there is the added opportunity to spot and track trends.

Because the CSI encourages civil society reflection and self-analysis, it should be acknowledged that the findings tend to be mostly internally-focussed. They tend to examine what civil society feels it needs to do itself to enhance its capacity and make the best of whatever opportunities may be available to it, given that civil society is in many countries operating within difficult contexts, including conditions of restrictive and changing space, as well as low political status, as we shall see below.

"The research prompts challenges to existing thinking and definitions about what civil society is and means."

This introspection necessarily influences the nature of the recommendations that emerge. The Venezuela CSI report captures this tendency when it notes, "It was noticed that proposals for internal strengthening were raised very easily, while greater difficulty was experienced in the design of actions to influence civic culture and public policies. This observation ought to become a guideline to deepen reflection about the role of CSOs as change actors."

Also it should be clear that, as discussed below, while a sense emerges from the CSI of the richness and changing nature of civil society, as reflected in the broad-reaching definition the CSI adopts of civil society, as "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," the process is led by a particular segment of civil society, the CSO, and as such it tends to focus on the roles, needs and challenges of CSOs. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the research prompts challenges to existing thinking and definitions about what civil society is and means.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is one of the many outputs of the 2008-2011 CSI project. Other key outputs of the CSI are the Analytical Country Reports (ACR), comprehensive country level civil society self-assessments. Some 29 of these were published by CIVICUS and its national CSI partners in the first half of 2011, with two more forthcoming, and many of these were accompanied by a recommendations-focussed Policy Action Brief, specially commissioned case studies and other nationally specific outputs. Put together, the ACRs add up to a vast and potentially bewildering amount of fresh knowledge, running into over 2,000 pages of new intelligence. This current report does not attempt to capture the whole CSI analysis, but rather focuses on aspects of the CSI findings that connect to core CIVICUS concerns and values. It draws its material mostly from the ACRs, from which all quoted text is taken. In doing so it seeks to bring out some highlights from the ACRs and attempts wherever possible to use the words of the civil society partners to reflect and respect their own assessment of their reality and the value of locally-owned knowledge. The CSI analysis combines quantitative and qualitative data, and this report draws mostly from the qualitative data. A companion paper, Cutting the Diamonds, analyses in more depth the quantitative data, while the qualitative indicator database, included here in a short summary form, will also be published in more detail to allow independent analysis of other CSI aspects.

2. Volatile civil society space and difficult relations with the state

When it comes to the operating conditions for civil society today, the picture that emerges is distinctly mixed.

Attacks on civil society

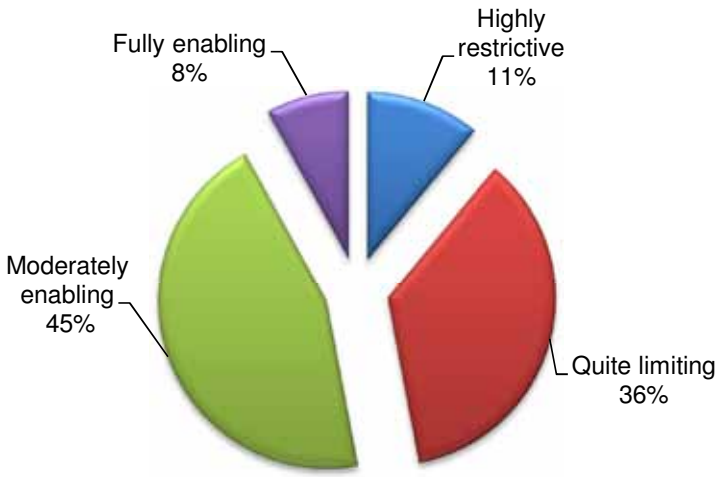
While many of the countries surveyed are recognised as democracies, with legal provisions for civil society operations, the CSI reveals that almost half of CSOs surveyed, 47%, find the legal environment for civil society either somewhat or highly limited. Further, 21% of CSO surveyed report that they have at some time experienced restrictions on their activities or direct attacks by central or local government.[2]

As an example of this, the Nicaraguan CSI report describes the uses of law to restrict space:

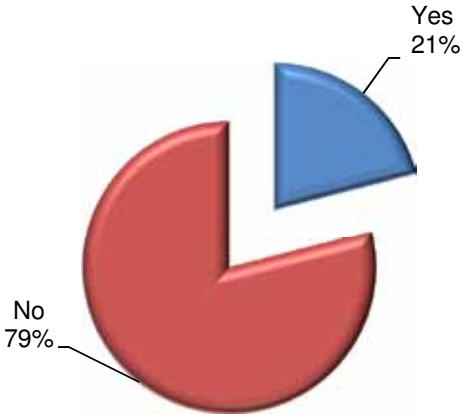
> "Laws are considered restrictive due to difficulties in obtaining legal status, and discriminatory fiscal control methods are used according to party affiliation of CSOs. One third of CSOs surveyed said they had been the victims of aggression by the local or national government over the last 10 years, including abuse of power, restrictions on strikes and mobilisations, aggression and deprivation of liberty, injury and libel, the closure of legal spheres of participation and violations of human and civil rights. The study, covering the period of 2008 to 2010, captures

[2] The particular challenges human rights defenders face, including trends in government attacks on their work and the conditions of their work, are well captured in the annual reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders. See www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/defenders/annual.htm. For another recent overview of the trends on civil society space, which provides a range of case studies from non-CSI countries, see also the February 2011 report of the ACT Alliance, Changing Political Space of Civil Society Organisations, available at www.actalliance.org/resources/publications/ACT_enabling_environment_shrinking_policy_brief.pdf/view.

You believe that your country's regulations and laws for civil society are …



Has your organisation ever faced any illegitimate restriction or attack by local or central government?



Source: CSI Organisational Surveys

how the situation has worsened since the arrival of a new administration in 2007 that has implemented a system to exclude social organisations and that has limited rights of association, expression and cooperation of non-affiliated CSOs."

In Venezuela, the picture includes attacks on civil society using political rhetoric and attempts to criminalise what used to be seen as legitimate areas of civil society activity, including through extension of libel and slander laws.[3] The Venezuelan CSI report also notes growing polarisation of political debate for and against the ruling party, in which civil society struggles to assert its neutrality outside party politics, and to maintain the value of the middle ground. They observe, "Venezuelan society is made up of two blocs: one in favour of the revolutionary project and one against. Between these two poles, most civil society organisations (CSOs) are equally affected by a model in which autonomous intermediate organisations are not considered by authorities as legitimate interlocutors."

The difficulties of operating within conditions of political polarisation are echoed in Senegal: "It is still rather difficult for civil society to become autonomous and to efficiently control political

[3] For more on recent developments in civil society law, see the quarterly reports on NGO law, Global Trends in NGO Law, provided by the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), available at www.icnl.org/knowledge/globaltrends/index.htm. The December 2010 issue provides an overview of new and proposed laws which particularly seek to restrict the international funding of Venezuelan civil society.

leaders, mainly because of corruption, distrust, political manipulation and other factors."

In Jordan, while a greater political openness and the relative stabilisation of parliamentary life are noted as encouraging developments, it is also observed that:

> "Jordan still needs to adopt effective policies to build a sustained democracy, and these include profound reforms of the laws regulating the rights of organisation, assembly and expression, in addition to an election law that secures a fair representation of the population and generates an effective parliament that is truly representative."

In Kazakhstan, a connection is drawn between low levels of participation and a restrictive framework for civil society:

> "While it is possible that political apathy is the consequence of citizens' indifference to socio-economic concerns, it seems far more likely that the limited legal framework for political activism and competitiveness is seriously inhibiting the depth, diversity and extent of political engagement. These findings of the CSI study reinforce and provide evidence for serious and emerging concerns about the democratic deficit in Kazakhstan, and suggest that it will be difficult to build an active citizenry without first opening up space for genuine political engagement, competition and contestation."

Beyond the legal and political sphere, the Jordan CSI report also highlights ingrained conservative forces as a continuing barrier: "The general environment CSOs operate in is believed to be politically conservative and biased in favour of the state's interventionist role in their affairs, which in turn weakens impact."

While the CSI survey questions only enquire about restrictions from government on civil society space, other factors that inhibit space should also be acknowledged. For example, in Mexico, the growing insecurity caused by organised crime is also recognised as a challenge to CSO operations, with the report noting the "…deterioration perceived as a result of growing corruption, impunity and insecurity in Mexico. This critical situation is daily confronting the essential values promoted by CSOs. Furthermore, the 'normalisation' of violent situations never before seen in Mexico, and further boosted by the media, is a phenomenon that undermines the sector's work." The trade-off between security and liberty of operations is rarely an easy one.[4]

Restrictions and attacks on civil society

A core concern of CIVICUS is defending civil society space against the kind of threats and restrictions identified above. Its 2010 report, Civil Society Space: the Clampdown is Real, sets out some of the major recent limitations on civil society space, which include legal and policy restrictions, repressive uses of the police and army, imprisonment and violence. CIVICUS' Civil Society Watch project enables people on an ongoing basis to monitor, report on and disseminate information about new threats to civil society, civic activists and human rights defenders around the world, while the Eurasia IDEA Network aims to promote awareness of and international solidarity around human rights abuses in former Soviet Union countries. 2011 saw the launch of the new CIVICUS Civil Society Watch Online Platform – www.cswatch.org. CIVICUS also runs the Every Human has Rights Campaign to promote greater awareness of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as one of the building blocks of supporting human rights defenders - ww.everyhumanhasrights.org.

[4] As well as its own primary data, CSI also draws from a range of existing secondary data sources in developing its quantitative indicators. One of these is the Freedom House Freedom in the World annual assessments of the state of political and civil liberties, which ranks countries on a scale of 1 (fully free) to 7 (not free). The average score of the 2010 survey for the 29 CSI countries which produced ACRs is 3.3, which is classified by Freedom House as 'partly free'. Nineteen of the CSI countries were classified as partly free or not free. See http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15 for more results of this survey.

Civil society – government relations

The Kosovar CSI report underlines the special challenges and compromises a fledgling country may face in developing the trust needed for a critical relationship between civil society and government to grow:

> "It is a general perception... that processes through which Kosovo has passed in recent years have damaged the culture of criticism and participation in decision-making, on the grounds that any reaction will harm the process of state building and international recognition. International presences and donors have not supported organisations that adopted non-conventional approaches to processes. Above all, civil society has applied self-censorship out of fear of losing funds."

Even where the state moves to establish space for civil society, issues remain about the quality and value of the space, and the danger of civil society being seen to confer legitimacy by participating in processes that fall short of true inclusiveness.

For example, the Turkish CSI report describes a somewhat selective attitude by the state when it comes to civil society engagement, with government funding being used as a controlling mechanism:

> "In terms of dialogue, the majority of CSOs believe that the state only engages with a selective group of CSOs on a needs-only basis. Regarding public support to CSOs, 97% describe the range of CSOs that benefit from such support to be limited or very limited... In comparison with the previous CSI study, the dialogue and cooperation levels remain the same while there has been a significant worsening of the CSO perception of autonomy. This might be due to the failure to fully implement legal reforms."

Georgia describes a similar situation, with favouritism compounded by the existence of red lines on state–civil society dialogue:

> "On the one hand, the government does not hesitate to give certain civil society groups a free hand in dealing with some unimportant issues, both on the legislative and practical levels, in exchange for their full loyalty. On the other hand, however, once political or economic power sharing (such as civilian oversight of security and police structures, transparency of the budgeting process, or decentralisation of government) is suggested, it refuses to even discuss such a possibility."

The Slovenian CSI report, meanwhile, describes a situation of:

> "…merely formal inclusion, which is mainly justified as meeting the criteria for the legitimisation of policies, and contrasts civil society's lack of useful contribution (given structural weaknesses and under-development of civil society) with the strong role of the state and the hierarchic and legalistic state bureaucracy. The government's distorted motivation (with arms-length evidence and creation of invited spaces), the passive population (with low levels of civic engagement after the transition to a liberal democratic regime) and questionable practices on the part of civil society (with a relatively low image of CSOs in public opinion surveys) often result in the sector's neutralisation, notwithstanding a few positive exceptions."

The Senegalese CSI report puts it simply: "When selecting CSOs it will talk to, the state obviously prefers the ones unlikely to criticise it," while in Russia a typical distinction between socially-oriented and more politically challenging CSOs is highlighted: "Government is still distrustful and

suspicious in relation to politically active CSOs. It is necessary to continue intensively trying to form spaces for real rather than formal processes of interaction, dialogue and feedback on issues which arise from modernisation, including on matters of policy."

Further challenges in the relationship between civil society and the state include fears of co-option due to state funding dependency. For example, the Uruguay CSI report points to:

> "…the existence of a significant number of NGOs and other CSOs that have entered into agreements with several state bodies with this being, to a large extent, their main source of financing. Thus, CSOs rank as 'employees' or organisations hired by the state and this generates some tension due to the employer-employee double function."

Further, some countries, such as Zambia, report the use of obsolete, sometimes colonial era legislation, or unnecessarily unwieldy and bureaucratically centralised laws, as in the case of Uruguay, that make it harder to instigate new civil society actions, for example by making the process of CSO registration cumbersome and difficult. For example, in Senegal only 39% of CSOs surveyed said CSO registration was simple and fast; in Rwanda only 32% said it was fast. In Tanzania this figure was as low as 25%.

Many countries report high levels of public agency corruption, which make it more difficult for CSOs to operate in the manner they would wish. For example, the Armenia report states: "The external environment within which Armenian civil society operates continues to be hindered by corruption and by a lack of adherence to the rule of law."[5]

New space and its drivers

Civil society and conflict

Several of the CSI countries have experienced or are experiencing various forms of conflict and can be classified as being conflict or post-conflict countries. Conflict cuts across and blocks other initiatives to promote development and uphold human rights. CSOs can play a positive role in helping to overcome conflict and promote reconciliation, but conflict and violence can threaten, impact on and polarise civil society. In 2011 CIVICUS, with the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, published a study on Civil Society Organisations in Situations of Conflict and its implications for development effectiveness. In 2012, the first of a series of books based on the CSI findings will be published, on the theme of civil society and conflict, focussing on selected CSI countries such as Kosovo and Liberia and key themes in conflict such as transitional justice, the uses of violence by civil society and the impact of security measures on civil society space.

In other contexts there are drivers, often outside national boundaries, that can be seen to be enlarging space, albeit sometimes in an instrumental and top-down way. The process of European Union accession is one example of this, and with several of the CSI partner countries being recent or would-be members of the regional bloc, this phase of the CSI presents a valuable opportunity to focus on an example of how regional integration can change the civil society dynamic. Presumably, the perceived economic benefits of regional integration, including the

[5] Another external data source from which the CSI draws is the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, which assesses levels of public sector corruption in 178 countries. The average score of the 29 CSI countries which produced ACRs on the 2010 Corruption Perception Index is 3.8, on a scale of 0 to 10 where 10 indicates no corruption; 24 of the CSI countries fall below the threshold of 5 out of 10, which indicates a serious corruption problem. There is also a striking correlation between low political freedom scores and high corruption scores for the CSI countries. For more information, see www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010.

financial support made available by the core EU agencies, may outweigh qualms governments might have about enlarging civil society space as a precondition of entry.

In this regard the Bulgaria CSI reports new arenas being created, through a top-down process, by its recent EU membership, as does Croatia:

> "…with sustainable programmes of financing and EU programmes of civil society support being introduced, it is reasonable to expect some improvements… in the near future. Indeed, Croatia's accession to the EU has also created a real opportunity for CSOs to participate in new regional processes. However, their capacity to engage in these processes may be limited."

Turkey, meanwhile, identifies a similar useful but mixed externally driven experience:

> "The EU accession process also kept its positive perception despite its ups and downs. It was found to be beneficial in terms of legal frameworks, dialogue with the state, and financial resources, as well as support for social movements. There were only concerns regarding financial resources on the terms that they create dependency on foreign aid."

There are other opportunities created by political changes. In Uruguay, for example, the CSI report suggests that recent political shifts in the light of elections have created new opportunity for civil society, albeit not without some disappointments:

> "CSOs that took part in regional surveys consider that the government of the 2005 to 2009 period encouraged several political reforms that have had a positive impact on the generation of social movements and that room has been created that enables participation, even though results have not been as expected in all cases."

Argentina records a similar recent experience, noting, "...a wider acknowledgment of the sector by state actors, which is reflected in the creation of several governmental areas, the specific mission of which includes the strengthening of civil society and its organisations, and improving relationships with the government that favour the formulation of joint initiatives." However, it also tells us that, "...limitations include a high level of distrust between the state and civil society representatives, lack of continuity of civil society-related policies, and a tendency to relegate the sector to implementation or consultation activities rather than to the real design of specific policies."

Similarly a very different country, Albania, reports, "There is currently an upward trend in state actors' willingness to cooperate with CSOs, although often driven by a pro-forma approach."

The Georgia CSI, meanwhile, reports that new possibilities at governmental level are frustrated by familiar capacity problems:

> "A positive tendency that has recently emerged in Georgia is that in the wake of the government's falling credibility, authorities have given a clear signal that they would like to cooperate more with civil society groups on numerous issues. Unfortunately, civil society... has been substantially weakened in the last seven years and is thus no longer able to respond adequately to new challenges most of the time."

Further, new opportunities can bring with them increased potential for favouritism and corruption, if fresh money is expected to flow through inadequate systems. Returning to the

example of EU expansion, in Bulgaria a particular key concern was expressed:

> "Despite the undeniable positive economic and political effects of membership, various issues surround Bulgaria's integration. EU structural funds are a public resource earmarked for development and are the main financial tools of EU cohesion policy. They have considerable impact on national public policy. For this impact to be positive, however, a change in the way resources are allocated is needed in order to ensure transparency and eliminate any management capacity issues… The procedures for application and selection of beneficiaries under the Operational Programmes are open to serious criticism due to their centralisation within the administration, strong bureaucracy and ineffectiveness."

This is echoed from an EU candidate country, Macedonia: "European Union integration processes offer positive potential for the development of civil society by promoting values such as participatory democracy, inclusion, transparency and accountability. However, present corruption in the public sector feeds fears of abuse of the incoming larger EU funds."

Throughout the CSI consultations, the fears of co-option through participation and of being seen to legitimise limited structures through engagement, and worries about the lack of capacity to meet the challenge of participation, are ever present. The tension between CSOs proving their worth as responsible deliverers of services and as aggressive agents of change is also frequently raised. The challenge for CSOs in such a context can be stated as: how can they take advantage of opportunities that are created, especially when they do not themselves create them, without compromising their independence? And when those opportunities are driven by external forces, such as donors, as we shall discuss further below, how can CSOs respond without being seen as overly-opportunistic or externally-driven, a frequently expressed factor in limiting public trust in and people's participation within CSOs, and do work which will still have a footprint once donor fashions have turned their attention elsewhere?

Part of the response to this is surely for civil society to take charge of defining its own space and its own identity, on its own terms. In this regard, the Chile CSI makes a call to, "create a training space to help civil society leaders and representatives define themselves and the sector as a third party, deserving of conditions equal to those of the state and the private sphere."

Finding a greater range of ways to forge stronger, collective, identities remains a key challenge for civil society within this context.

CSOs at a crossroads?

A growing sense emerges from the CSI reports that CSOs are facing both a crisis and an opportunity, and stand at a historical crossroads. For example, the Turkey CSI tells us that: "Civil society in Turkey faces a major turning point: it will either use its strengths to deepen its role as an indispensable actor in social and political life in Turkey; or it will enter a period of stagnation."

This is echoed from the very different context of Japan:

> "Although the CSI project has revealed many weaknesses of Japanese civil society, it was found that there are already CSOs working on those areas that need strengthening. Hence, those movements within civil society show that Japanese civil society is still progressing. However, there remain concerns about financial sustainability or lack of human capital. Additionally, there are CSOs that violate the law. Hence, Japanese civil society today can be said to be very much standing at a crossroads, and it is uncertain whether it will develop further or stagnate."

Georgia, meanwhile, suggests that a stark choice now faces their society:

> "The optimistic scenario foretells an empowerment of democratic institutions within Georgia and the formation of a sustainable basis for the stable development of democratic institutions through international support and mobilisation of society as a whole. The pessimistic scenario however suggests further consolidations of authoritarian rule in Georgia as a potential threat, in conjunction with a deteriorating economy, high emigration, domination of police structures and increasing power of international criminal cartels (for example, drug and weapons smuggling). CSOs believe that only the support of further developments of the civil society sector may lead to the achievement of the optimistic scenario."

Key conclusions

- The space for civil society operations is volatile, contested, often limited and, even where it has improved, there are resulting challenges of managing civil society's role, status, integrity, the expectations placed in it and any new funding opportunities that arise.
- In many countries at least some CSOs feel that the legal environment is restrictive or cumbersome for their operations and that there is favouritism in civil society–state relationships or limitations on what it is permissible to challenge.
- Some CSOs feel that the sector is at a historical moment where it faces either decline or renewal, depending on what actions are taken next.

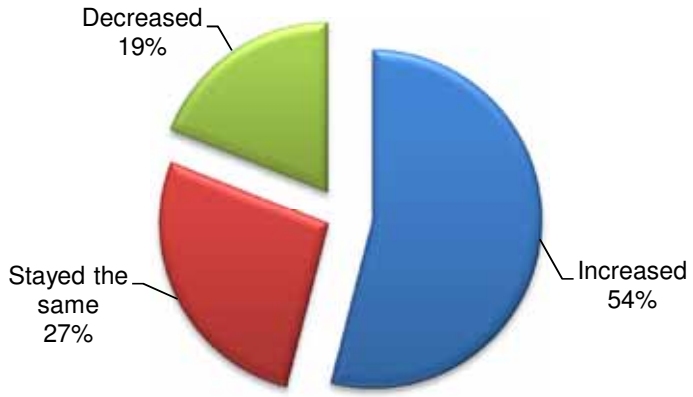
3. Resource challenges for CSOs

What are some of the consistent challenges that the CSI tells us CSOs face?

Financial resources

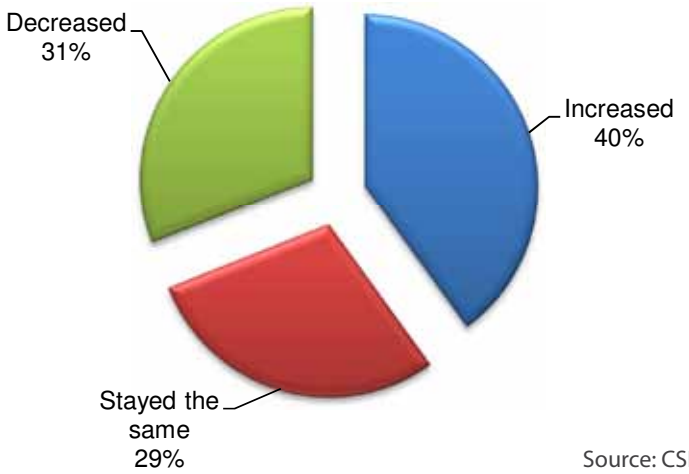
In a world continuing to experience the implications of the global economic crisis, it is no surprise that financial issues for civil society loom large. Many CSI partners report difficult funding regimes for civil society, with a large number of CSOs experiencing reduced levels of funding from previous years. This can be presumed as only likely to get worse as time-lagged funding cycles are affected. The overall CSI figures show that while 40% of CSOs surveyed report that their revenues increased over the two years covered by their research, this is outweighed by the 54% which saw their expenses increase from one year to the next.[6]

CSO expense changes (compared to previous year)



[6] These findings are supported by a UN-commissioned study, published by the NGO Committee for Social Development, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Sisters of Charity Federation and Marianists International, published in February 2010 and available at http://ngosocdev.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/full-study-on-impact-of-global-crises-on-csos-2-25-10.pdf. Surveying 640 CSOs in 2009, they found that many reported budget decreases, with the ratio of those reporting decreases compared to increases roughly two to one.

CSO revenue changes (compared to previous year)



Source: CSI Organisational Surveys

For example, in Zambia only 50% of organisations are judged to have a sustainable financial resource base; in Slovenia it was found that while the number of CSOs multiplied more than twofold between 1996 and 2008, their income as a share of GDP grew from only 1.92% to 1.99%, implying a stretching thin of resources between CSOs; in Venezuela, more than half of CSOs surveyed had seen their income reduce from one year to the next.

Beyond this, the CSI reports remind us that many CSOs already operate on minimal budgets in any case. For example, Nicaragua records that 38% of CSOs operate on less than USD$10,000 per year, Macedonia reports that 85% of associations and foundations have an annual budget of under US$2,300, while in Japan 15% of specified non-profit corporations (SNACs) report their income to be zero. The implications of this for the human resourcing of civil society in Japan are clear: "…about half of SNACs cannot afford to employ even one young, full-time worker."

The Mexico CSI report establishes a threshold of US$50,000 of annual CSO income, above which CSOs seem capable of having national presence and impact:

> "These organisations tend to have a larger paid staff, greater possibilities of membership in a network or federation of organisations and tend to exchange more information with other CSOs... those with budgets under US$50,000 tend not to have formal collective governance entities and fewer paid staff. They also exchange less information and receive a smaller amount of government funds."

Further, CSI reports overwhelmingly tell us that donor dependency, and the corresponding danger of unsustainable and arbitrarily reduced funding, remains high. Even when funding is assured, the implications of this on civil society independence need to be considered.

For example, the Armenian CSI summarises the challenge:

> "A significant percentage of the interviewed CSOs, despite having stably secured their budgets in 2007 and 2008, either totally or extensively relied on foreign donors. Such extensive dependency on a single source of revenue, even if stably secured, jeopardises the independent functioning and long-term security of an organisation, which becomes more susceptible to donor priority shifts, reduced resources or unavailability of donor funds."

The Albanian CSI report, meanwhile, fears the consequences of loss of donor attention:

> "Having built up the needed infrastructure (communication, experience and support networks) in the past two decades of generous support from foreign

> donors, Albanian CSOs must now adapt their strategies to an environment that is experiencing donor withdrawal."

These fears, along with a concern for the quality of donor-driven work, find an echo in Kosovo:

> "Large scale financial and technical support from international donors resulted in a massive growth in the number of CSOs, which was not necessarily followed by the increased quality of their work. 'Easy to get' funds, combined with the dependence on foreign donations, created many donor-driven NGOs as well as 'hibernating' ones which become active only upon available funds. From more than 6,000 registered NGOs in 2010, less than 10% are estimated to be still active or partially active." The report adds, "After a decade of huge international funding for civil society, many donors have started to shift their geographical focus and withdraw from Kosovo."

The Georgia CSI, meanwhile, underlines a concern echoed in many of the reports, that chasing donor funding amidst the lack of alternative sources of support causes CSOs to make uneasy compromises: "…in view of their limited resources, CSOs obediently accepted all priorities laid out by donor organisations, implementing projects even in areas outside their sphere of competence, provided they are ranked high among donor priorities, in order to secure donor funding. For example, gender organisations are often forced to deal with environmental problems." This is supported by the perspective from Kazakhstan: "Financial survival often demands that values be sacrificed, particularly when faced with securing funds either from foreign donors or from a state which discourages political competitiveness."

The Morocco report calls attention to the loss of energy that chasing resources entails, and the distortion of CSO priorities it can bring:

> "The lack of financial resources that characterises the situation in most CSOs results in considerable diversion of energy onto organisational matters rather than topics related to organisations, strategies and implementation of missions. Some consulted people say there is at some point a switch between the organisations' objectives and missions: CSOs no longer exist with the aim of accomplishing their missions, but instead slip towards searching for financing to maintain themselves."

The challenges this presents for CSO legitimacy and popular support are summarised by the Kosovar CSI report:

> "Most of the sector remains highly dependent on international funding. Adding to this the continuous increase of the European Union proportion in civil society funds, bureaucratic application procedures and fairly high minimum grant amounts exclude most organisations from benefiting from these funds, as they are too small to apply or absorb such figures, thus increasing the division between 'large' and 'small' CSOs. Trying to survive in this situation, the priorities of civil society in most cases have reflected the priorities of the donors, meaning that many civil society initiatives were not driven by the interest of the community. This has weakened the connection between CSOs and their constituencies, calling into question the legitimacy of their actions." This leads to a situation where, in Kosovo, findings reveal "a very low level of correlation between official missions of CSOs and the fields of work they are involved in. 71.7 % of surveyed CSOs think that most CSOs apply for funds outside the field of their mission..."

A connected concern emerges about self-perpetuating elites of CSOs that enjoy access to funding. Morocco reports, "Funding seems limited to closed circles, with half of CSOs not receiving any state support and over 90% not receiving funding from foreign donors."

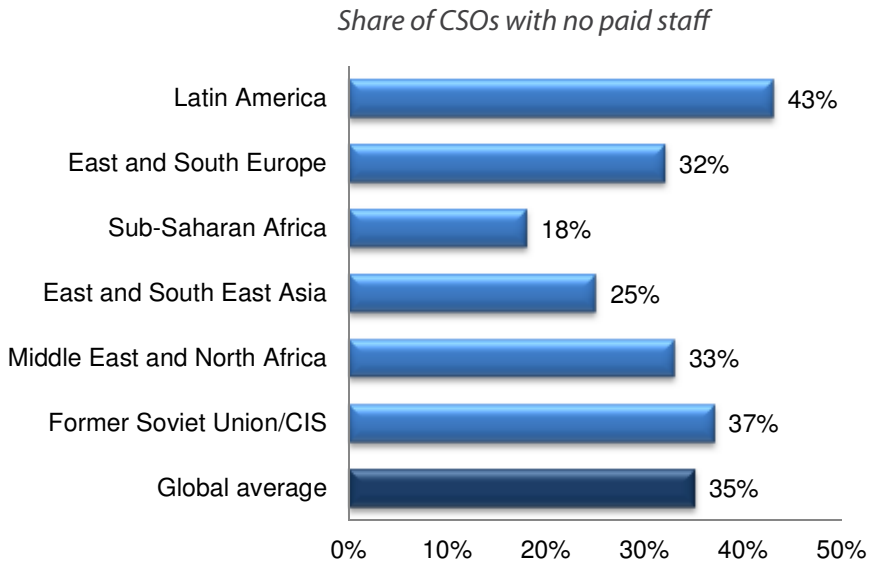
While diversification of funding sources is clearly a necessary part of the response to this, this entails a human resources challenge, as the Russia CSI records:

> "Opportunities for accessing other sources of funding are underused. Often the barrier would seem to be an insufficiently high skill level on the part of employees and heads of CSOs. Only 17% of the heads of CSOs reported that they offer good opportunities to increase the qualifications of employees in fields such as strategic and financial management, bookkeeping and fundraising. This can be assumed to lead to an inability to convince potential partners, the public and mass media of the importance of their activities and an inability to attract new human, material and financial resources."

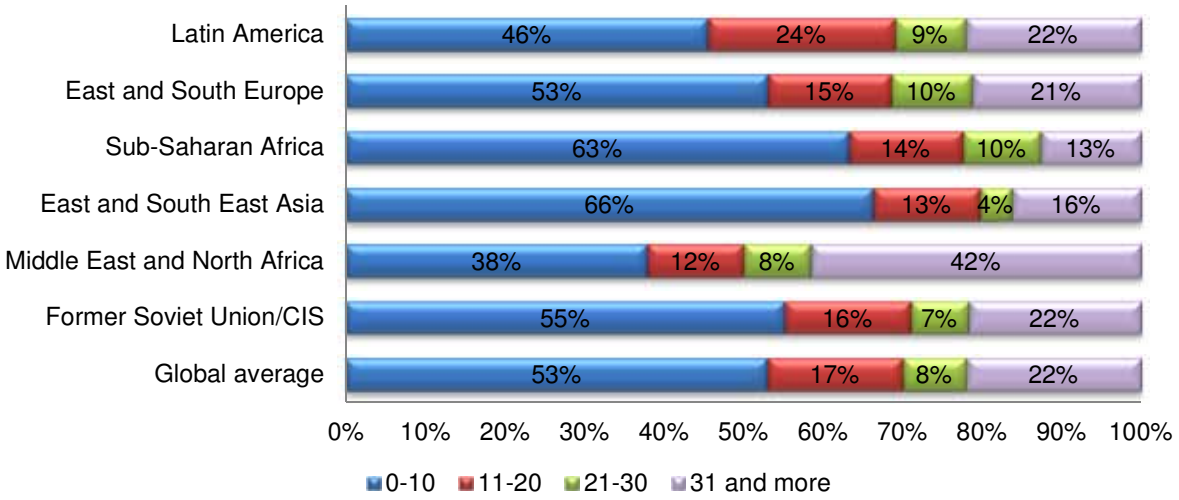
Human resources

While access to technological resources does not emerge as a strong issue, with 84% of CSOs surveyed reporting that they have adequate access to technology, beyond even their financial challenges, the CSOs surveyed suggest that the most pressing resource problem they face is that of human resources. These are of course connected, as the Chile CSI indicates, identifying "…a negative cycle...in which CSOs have to hire external consulting firms to develop competitive projects which will attract public funding. If material and human capital is not developed within CSOs, it is very difficult to compete for funding."

The CSI measures the percentage of CSOs where the proportion of voluntary to paid staff is less than 25% of the total staff complement. Across all the CSI countries, only 19% of CSOs have such a high level of paid staff. In contrast, 35% globally have no paid staff at all. In very different countries, CSOs report a lack of paid staff. For example, in Morocco 62% of CSOs do not have any paid employees; in Jordan 48% have two or fewer; in Cyprus, on the southern part of the island 42% of CSOs have no paid staff, while in the northern part of the island the figure is as high as 64%. Even in countries considered to have a more developed civil society, such as in Latin America, most CSOs have low levels of paid staff: in Nicaragua 59% of CSOs have fewer than 10 paid staff, while in Mexico 35% have no paid staff at all. Consistently a picture emerges of very weak human resource bases, with a reliance on volunteers instead of paid staff. While, as we will discuss further below, volunteering is a valuable social asset and a potential source of renewal for CSOs, it also begs questions of sustainability, given volunteer turnover. There are also challenges about the quality of the volunteering experience CSOs offer, and the substantial hidden costs that CSOs can entail from engaging volunteers.



Share of volunteers within CSOs



Source: CSI Organisational Surveys

Turkey reports a widespread perception of inadequate human resources within civil society: "Insufficient human resources – be it volunteers or professionals – is a core weakness with multi-dimensional results. 85% of those that employ professionals and 71% of those that benefit from volunteers find their human resources insufficient to realise their goals."

The Croatia CSI again connects financial and human resources challenges:

> "Unsustainable and poor human resources were assessed as being one hindrance to the greater professional development of CSOs. At the same time, irregular and limited financing for CSOs continues to pose a threat for the stability of human resources and for the sustained employment of young, educated professionals. The CSI study found that this was a problem even for more developed organisations."

The Armenia report has similar findings, while also discussing some of the issues around reliance on volunteers: "Volunteer input is a defining factor in an Armenian non-profit sector which relies extensively on volunteer efforts. Yet volunteer input, however valuable it is, presents problems of its own. Volunteers often lack the necessary work experience to ensure adequate quality of CSO human resources. On the other hand, those Armenian CSOs which do employ qualified personnel are continually exposed to insufficient financial resources and instability of projects. Since many organisations are not sustainable and survive from grant to grant, they find it difficult to retain professional qualified staff in ongoing positions." Similar findings could be cited from almost any ACR.

Project-based funding, which allows CSOs to conduct specific activities, but does not enable them to develop a sustainable personnel base, is a particularly recurring issue here, that affects the employment conditions of CSOs. Again, there are many examples that could be cited. The Bulgaria CSI tells us that, "Given the project-based operation of most CSOs, a large portion of staff are employed under temporary contracts or do work for multiple organisations. Employment in the civil society sector is characterised by instability and a variable workload, which can be directly linked to the problematic funding of the sector."

This is also captured by the Philippines CSI:

> "Many CSOs are constrained from putting their employees on a more regular footing since there is no certainty that the organisation will be able to obtain future grants with which it could implement projects and pay salaries. Thus, it is important

> for the sector to develop standards on labour practices that provide protection and fair salaries and benefits to employees of CSOs, while at the same time taking into account the project-based nature of some CSOs."

Connected to the project-based nature of CSO funding and work, the CSI assessments also throw up many instances of unequal competition for personnel with other sectors, and between local and international CSOs. CSOs consistently emerge as very vulnerable to high staff turnover, including loss of staff to governments, political parties, the private sector and international agencies. For example, Zambia records that "...most donor-funded projects exclude administrative costs such as salaries. The voluntary nature of employment in CSOs brings about a high level of turnover, with people moving from small to bigger CSOs or international and donor agencies for more attractive conditions of service."

Time and again this emerges as an issue, whether it be in the Philippines, which tells us that, "… it is more difficult to retain good middle managers within civil society given that opportunities also exist for development work in government."; Rwanda, which reports that, "Most of those who initiated associations have left CSOs for highly paid jobs, be it within international NGOs or in the government's political positions."; or Liberia, which states that:

> "CSOs are unable to meet their human resource needs. This is exacerbated by the fact that other sectors and actors in the country, such as international NGOs, the United Nations, the private sector and the Government of Liberia attract large numbers of competent employees, as they are able to offer better salaries and benefits. During the field research, key informants estimated that three out of every five qualified staff members employed either partially or full-time in CSOs leave their organisations within less than eighteen months for lucrative employment offers elsewhere."

This becomes a more worrying issue still in the light of the findings of the accompanying analysis of the CSI quantitative data, which suggests a clear correlation between a stable human resource base and impact, implying that human resource stability is more important for achieving impact than even financial stability or access to technological resources.[7]

Perhaps these losses would not be so challenging if movement of civil society personnel into government enabled greater space creation for civil society. Yet this does not appear to be the case, as the Albania CSI reports: "CSOs' human resources and capacities are often attractive to political and governmental actors. Yet, once involved in politics, former civil society members have failed to facilitate a greater impact of civil society."

In the light of this, worries also emerge about how leadership will be renewed, for example, as expressed in the Philippines: "Development work and community organising have been fertile training grounds for developing civil society leaders but only a few young people are getting interested in taking this career path today."

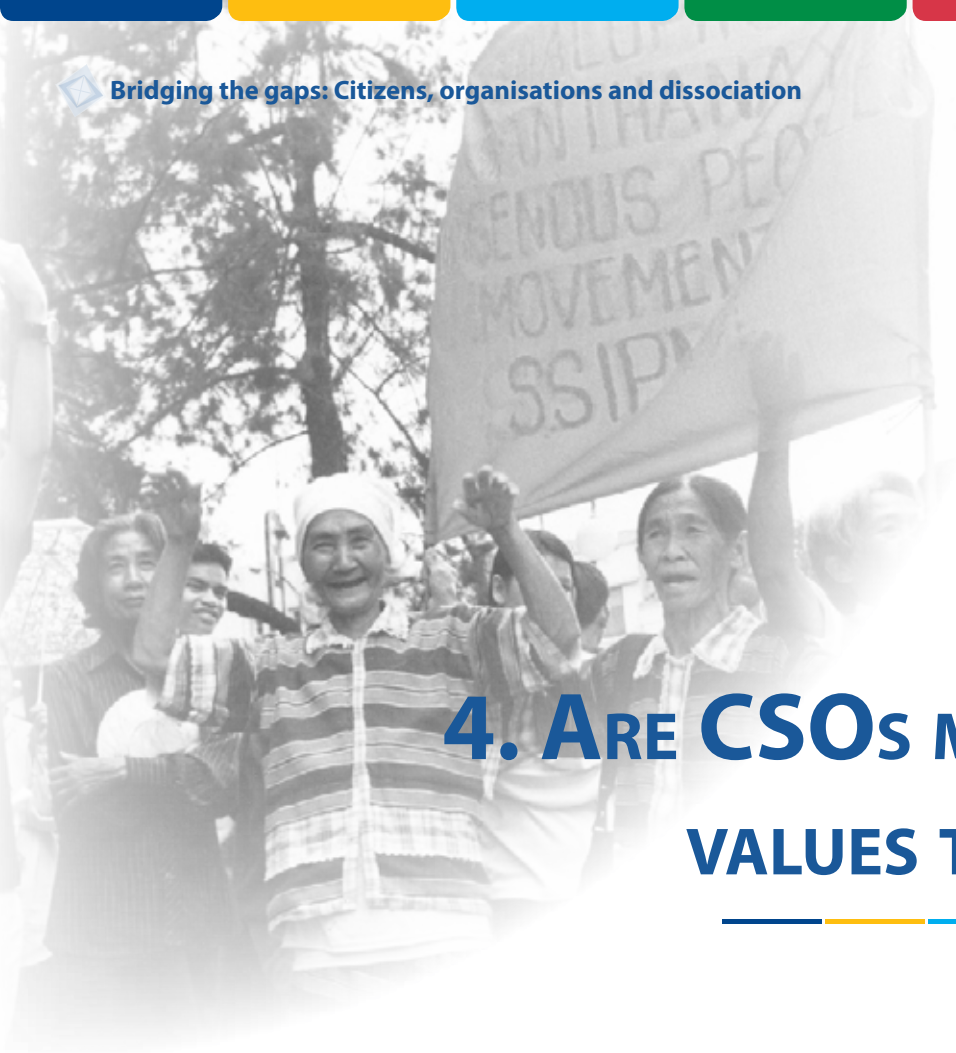
The key challenges outlined above – various kinds of constrained and volatile space or limited capacity, even in conditions of opportunity, and problems in retaining a viable financial and human resource base – surely threaten the ability of many CSOs to do an effective job during times of rapid social change.

[7] See Cutting the Diamonds, CIVICUS, 2011. It should further be noted here that Cutting the Diamonds does not find any evidence of a 'crowding out' effect that would happen if a high share of paid staff in CSOs was seen to be reducing valuable opportunities for voluntary civic engagement.

The implications of the findings on funding are also worrying when thinking about the future funding of civil society. The 2008-2011 CSI phase captures the experience of civil society in many former Soviet and former Yugoslavian countries after the euphoria of civic revolution has turned sour. They report time and again an experience of a civil society being shaped by donor priorities, struggling as a result to root itself locally and being vulnerable to change in funding fashions and the projectisation of their missions. As the 2008-2011 CSI project came to completion, a new wave of civic revolutions, or attempts at them, were witnessed in the Middle East and North Africa. One of the key questions for civil society must surely be how it can be assured that the donor mistakes made in the past in supporting civil society, as captured in the CSI reports from former communist countries, can be prevented from being repeated in another part of the world.

Key conclusions

- There is a sense amongst CSOs that the financial climate worsened over the course of the study and that CSOs are very vulnerable to financial shifts.
- Many CSOs feel that they severely lack adequate human resources, are prone to loss of staff to other sectors and rely strongly on volunteerism.
- CSO activities continue to be very project-oriented, implying a lack of continuity of operations and vision and risking a potential loss of values, mission and public support.



4. Are CSOs modelling the values they espouse?

While, as we have seen, the CSI reports that CSOs face key challenges of external origin, it also sheds light on some major internally-located challenges that CSOs have reported, and that CSOs believe they need to focus greater attention on addressing.

Labour rights

One internal challenge linked to the human resource problems described above is the very low emphasis CSOs are placing on labour rights, according to CSI reports. The CSI shows consistently low levels of formal CSO policies for equal opportunities and equal pay for women and men (48% of all CSOs surveyed), and of policies on labour standards (45%). It also shows low levels of labour rights trainings (39%) and very low rates of union membership (12%) for CSO staff. On all indicators for labour rights, globally CSOs scored lower than 50%.

The Slovenia CSI reports one key reason for this, and the contradiction this implies: "Practice has seen violations of rules, and often of labour regulations, sometimes even with employees' consent. The reason for this is the general shortage of labour and finance in the sector. Financial survival often demands that CSOs sacrifice their values." Chile tells us that, "Work relationships are informal, verbal contracts are predominant, and there are few workers with health and retirement provisions."

To a large extent this pattern can of course be explained by the factors discussed above: by the reliance on volunteering and on short-term, contract-based staff, which itself has an origin in funders' reluctance to support core and ongoing costs and the project-based nature of much CSO funding and activity.

The danger is that this apparent disconnect between something values-based CSOs might reasonably be expected to endorse – the defence of labour rights and equal employment rights – and their own practice risks weakening the external legitimacy of CSOs and their ability to speak with authority on issues such as decent work and gender equality. The Mexico CSI report

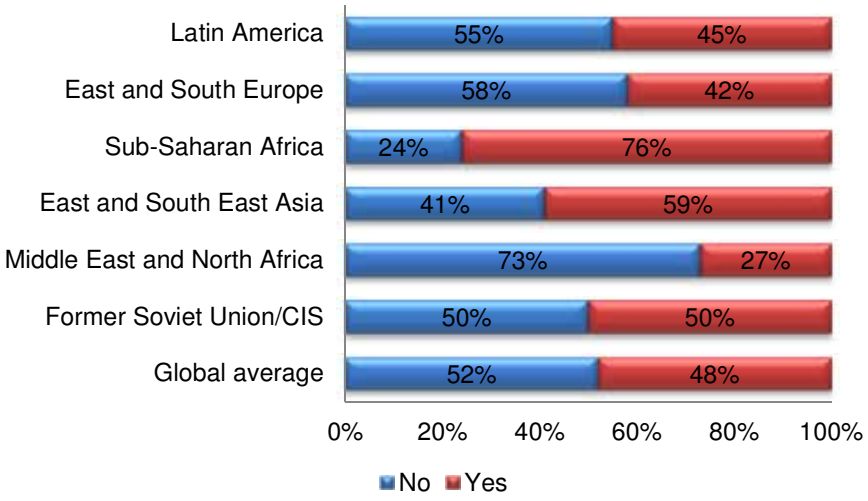
captures this dilemma: "CSOs in Mexico face a complex situation since in general they defend the rights granted by the Federal Labour Law but on the other hand they are hardly able to grant their employees convenient labour conditions."

A connected question that emerges from the CSI is whether there are strong connections between NGOs as one part of civil society and trade unions, a rather different component of civil society, on the other. The answer is usually not. This is exemplified in the Italy CSI report, which tells us that, "…the special status and strength of trade unions in political, institutional and social life… makes it impossible to compare them with other CSOs," and the Slovenian CSI, which reports that, "...trade unions occupy a special place (often differing from the conventional perspective of a CSO) in the social, political and economic development of Slovenian society." This suggests that closer and more structured collaboration between these two sectors of civil society could enhance an adherence to labour rights standards within CSOs in future, without compromising on the resources available to CSOs.

Women's participation

On women's participation, the picture is mixed. As discussed above, under half of all CSOs surveyed, 48%, have a formal gender equity policy, albeit this scores higher than the existence of any other CSO labour policy.

Existence of gender equity policies in CSOs



Source: CSI Organisational Surveys

However, some notable positive examples also emerge of the role CSOs can play in redressing gender inequality in society at large, by offering routes for participation and promoting a stronger role of women in leadership. In Argentina, for example, 57% of the staff of CSOs surveyed are women. Similarly, in Uruguay, "CSOs seem to be a sphere with a strong presence of women, who outnumber the male staff. On average, women also exceed men in number in the positions of executive committees," whilst in Russia, a society where traditional gender roles persist, "46% of members of collective management bodies are women." Mexico further notes that, "Women have greater participation than men in political organisations... 67% of humanitarian CSO members and 60% of environmental CSO members are women."

The role CSOs can play in developing women's leadership is also emphasised in the context of Rwanda, which reports that:

> "CSOs have offered a very favourable environment for the development of women; through CSOs women are able to speak in public more readily, they have their own incomes, and they are often part of the decision-making authorities of CSOs. Empowerment of women is one of the most remarkable impacts of CSOs."

Champions of democracy?

CSOs report consistently high levels of awareness of internal democracy, and in most cases strongly practise the mechanisms of internal democracy. Globally, the CSI data tells us that 64% of CSOs practise some form of democratic decision-making They also show widespread willingness to condemn violence: 65% of CSOs believe the sector plays an active role in the promotion of non-violence and peace This suggests there is an opportunity to promote CSOs as belonging to a distinct sector that practises and encourages democracy and progressive values.

Nevertheless, the question inevitably remains as to how far formal guarantees of internal democracy play out in practice. Many ACRs flag concerns here, with Armenia expressing a typical view: "Advisory Committee members raised concerns that many CSOs create boards or report to boards either to show they abide by the law or to attract foreign grants. In reality, the functioning of many such boards does not go beyond these formalities."

Uruguay tells us that:

> "Even though the percentage of organisations with steering committees or executive committees exceeds 90% due to high formality levels, internal democratic decision-making seems relatively low. In 42% of CSOs, decisions are made by a democratic method – such as by members, an elected steering committee or executive committee, or staff. However, most decision-making in CSOs in Uruguay is entrusted to appointed executives."

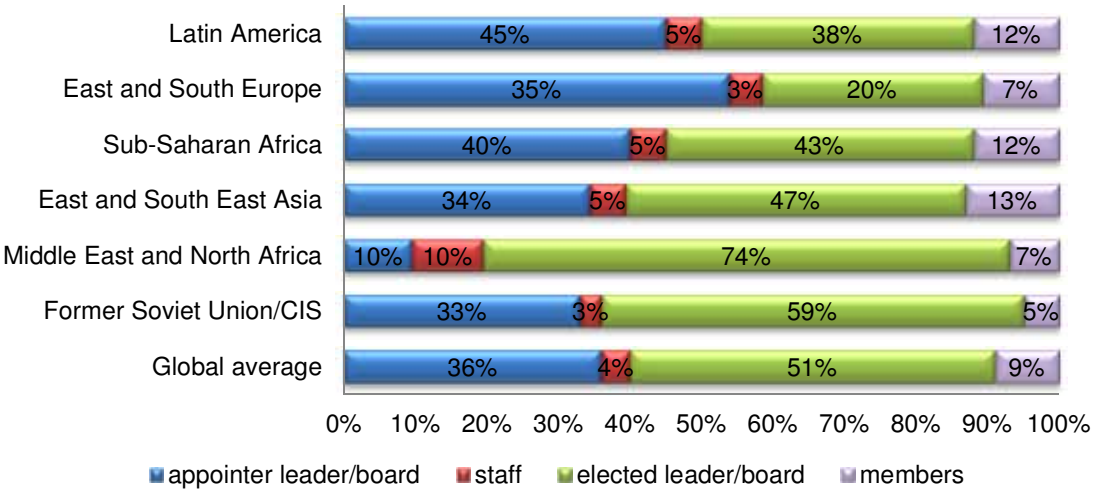
The Philippines CSI reports, "There have been anecdotal studies that show that, in many instances, board members have not been empowered or empowered themselves in order to judiciously oversee the operations of civil society groups," while the Jordan CSI tells us, "Experience shows there is a tendency by administrative bodies to authorise the chairperson to assume the task of managing day-to-day CSO activities," and the Liberia report describes a "public relations whitewash" given "the overbearing influence and authoritative manner in which the executive directors run their organisations." The geographical spread of these concerns suggests a wide-ranging challenge for CSOs to demonstrate that they are practising internally the democracy they often claim to be the key guarantors of in the socio-political sphere.

Connected to this, the reliance of many CSOs on long-serving charismatic leadership, as well as enduring leadership succession issues, offer a frequently expressed source of concern for the durability of the sector and its ability to renew itself, as recorded in Armenia:

> "The 'one-man show' is still a classic pattern of internal governance for many CSOs, where the activities, procedures and even the very existence of organisations are dependent on a single leader. Another problem that arises is that leaders of such organisations tend to have very long terms at the head of the organisation, thus limiting the opportunities for rotating leadership."

Morocco echoes this: "The… issue of the rotation of organisational executives must also be discussed. Today, organisational executives are generally in the 45 to 55 year-old age group and renewal is often made through co-option. While there is a high level of participation of young people in civil society… the question remains: what possible pathways do they have to power?"

Location of decision-making powers in CSOs



Source: CSI Organisational Surveys

The Georgia CSI report, meanwhile, points out that CSOs can, in trying to improve their effectiveness in difficult conditions, concentrate their power in way that ironically echo the form of the forces they are trying to change: "After 2004 the constitution was repeatedly amended to expand presidential powers. As a result, some of the very CSOs that opposed authoritarian tendencies in the government opted for a rather authoritarian model of internal governance themselves."

Beyond the welcome emphasis on internal democracy, and the willing self-criticism on this front, civil society is being challenged to live and act out its values. This is what citizens seem to expect of CSOs. While the picture is complex, people surveyed as part of the CSI research, as we will discuss further below, seem to have high expectations of civil society as a concept, but a range of responses to how CSOs work in practice. These responses include disappointment over unmet expectations, worries about corrupt and self-serving behaviours and a widespread lack of understanding and knowledge of the sector.

Driving progressive values?

CSOs should, according to many advocates of civil society, serve as a force for the generation of social capital. It is often assumed that people who work in or who are members of CSOs are drivers and incubators of progressive values in society to help advance social change. This, after all, is the thinking behind much of the funding for CSOs. If this is the case, one should see that people active in civil society espouse more progressive values than those outside CSO structures, for example, when it comes to issues such as tolerance of minorities and marginalised groups, and willingness to take a stance on anti-social attitudes and acts. Yet the CSI research has largely suggested that this is not happening, with data showing minimal or no difference in values between those inside CSOs and those not (a mere 6% difference in trust levels, an 8% difference in tolerance levels and a 5% difference in public spiritedness). Many of the CSI partners note this. For example, in Armenia, "Membership in Armenian civil society does not translate into enhanced social capital – both civil society members and non-members are almost equally distrustful and intolerant, sharing a low level of public spiritedness". Bulgaria, meanwhile, reports the same: "There is little difference in attitudes between people who are part of civil society and those who are not, and CSOs have limited abilities to influence the practice of these values."

The risks CSOs are running here seem clear, if there is a gap between the values they are expected to uphold and their own practice of them. This is captured by the Venezuela CSI: "It is

remarkable that a high degree of CSOs' legitimacy... co-exists with an empty practice of values and outstanding fragilities."

This surely calls for a further examination of what motivates those who seek to work in CSOs. Two theses could be advanced for additional investigation. First, could it be that those who choose to work in CSOs are less motivated by a concern with advancing the public good and seeking to redress social justice, as we might want to believe, than by something less idealistic, such as careerism? Given what was highlighted about staff turnover earlier, are people passing through CSOs as an employment route into more lucrative arenas? To put it bluntly, is civil society simply something for the CV? The Kosovo CSI might suggest so, as it tells us:

> "A number of civil society activists tend to show a high level of economic and political opportunism. In this regard, civic engagement through civil society is seen as a well-paid job or a trampoline to a political position rather than a contribution for change in society. This has also a direct impact on the public image of individuals working in the civil society sector."

An alternative proposition could be advanced, given the lack of difference in values between CSOs and the population as a whole, as outlined above. In some cases, are people coming into the civil society sector because their particular CSOs offer a base for the defence of narrow sectional or group interests, rather than broader social benefit? If we look back to the CSI definition of civil society, as an arena in which competing interests are advanced and may compete and clash, there is no apparent contradiction in joining a CSO to advance a narrow sectional interest that does not correspond to advancement of the public good.

This idea of civil society as an arena of competition is strongly supported by the CSI findings as a whole, which draws attention to the diversity within civil society, as is discussed further below. What this implies for CSOs that exist to further progressive values, such as democracy, human rights and social justice, is that they need to embody, actively promote and prove the worth of their values. In short, they need to be seen to live their values and be seen to fight for them. Currently, it seems a gap is being described between what the public expect of progressive CSOs and the behaviours and attitudes of the people working in them. How can people working in CSOs demonstrate that they connect with citizens' concerns and serve the public good? And further, how can CSOs recapture public imagination and reconnect better with their publics? Any response to this latter question must surely include strengthening connections between CSOs and media, which emerge time and again in the CSI reports as weak or non-existent.

Further, while CSOs in many countries report that they play a positive role in the promotion of non-violence and peace, a particularly depressing feature of the CSI is that time and again, in country after country, people report high levels of intolerance. This is especially the case when it comes to acceptance of sexual minorities and people with HIV/AIDS – and there is generally very little difference between inactive and active citizens on these issues. CSOs need to be urged to

Addressing legitimacy, transparency and accountability challenges

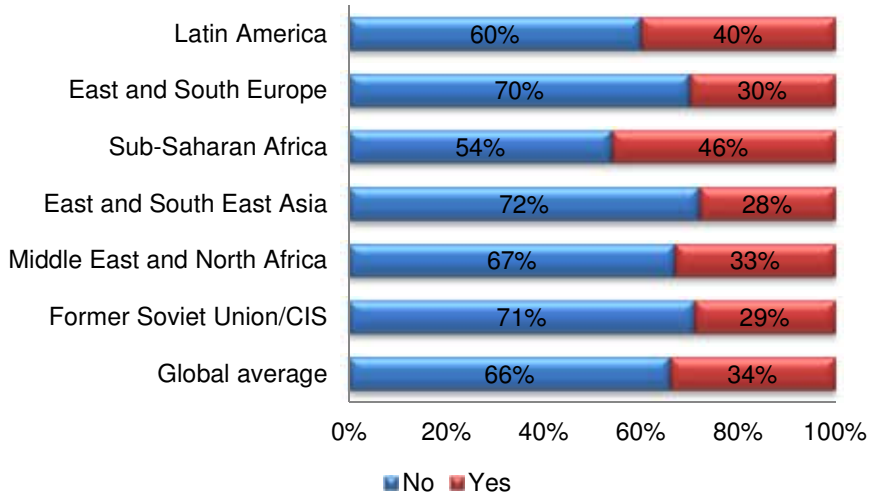
CSOs are frequently challenged, including by governments and donors, to demonstrate that they are accountable and transparent and that they are have a legitimate basis for their actions and objectives. One of the major findings of the previous CSI phase from 2003 to 2006 was that there were large gaps in the legitimacy, transparency and accountability (LTA) practices of CSOs and, in the light of this, it subsequently became a special focus for CIVICUS' work, with an emphasis on the generation of knowledge and awareness and the promotion of cross-learning on LTA. The current CSI tells us that there are still gaps, but CSOs are prepared to be admirably self-critical, and awareness of the issues is larger. As well as greater awareness, recent years have seen a growth in CSOs specifically working on this issue, and progress is demonstrated by the institution of the International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) Accountability Charter, which promises to make key INGOs stronger and more public in their accountability. CIVICUS is a founder and signatory of the Accountability Charter.

do more to play a leadership role in challenging such social attitudes, even when that runs the risk of taking unpopular stances and alienating organisations' more conservative support bases.

Concern for the environment?

A positive development in the arena of values, compared to the last phase of CSI, can be seen in an increased environmental awareness of CSOs, with several countries that have previously implemented the CSI reporting that more CSOs now have environmental policies in place. What progress there is, however, clearly comes from a low starting point, with only 34% of all CSOs surveyed reporting the existence of publicly available environmental standards.

Location of decision-making powers in CSOs



Source: CSI Organisational Surveys

Further, the application of environmental policies in practice is questioned by many involved in the CSI process. At the same time, in some countries, environmental CSOs, while seen as successful in mobilising people and raising awareness through imaginative campaigns, are perceived as a somewhat specialist branch of civil society, disconnected from other civil society sectors, as in the example of Georgia, which reports, "… these organisations are perceived to form a separate community which is distanced from other CSOs which operate in different spheres."

How can connections be strengthened within civil society for the sharing of sound environmental practice from environmental CSOs? How can environmental concerns be mainstreamed as a part of core, active civil society values that take us beyond 'greenwashing'? The Philippines CSI report outlines some key challenges here: "Despite the general awareness of CSOs on environmental issues, there is still a lack of knowledge on how to codify environmental norms. Many technologies necessary to improve waste reduction are still prohibitive in terms of costs."

Key conclusions

- CSOs are often neglectful of applying key labour rights, including recognition of gender equality, which is at odds with the values many CSOs promote outside the sector, and this can erode their credibility.
- Most CSOs recognise the value of internal democracy and embody it in some way, but there is still a tendency towards centralising power, often in a long-serving leader.
- CSO personnel and active members are in the main not seen to be stronger champions of progressive values than the public at large.

5. How important are networks?

One of the strengths the CSI reports is the widespread existence of national level CSO networks, with networks in most CSI countries having a high level of membership and the exchange of information between similar CSOs being frequent. Globally, 53% of all CSOs surveyed are members of an umbrella organisation, while 73% had held meetings with other CSOs and 70% had shared information with them within a three month period. This suggests that CSOs are showing themselves to be committed to networking with other CSOs to achieve common goals, particularly in their immediate areas of expertise or thematic interests. Interestingly here, Cutting the Diamonds, the analysis of the CSI quantitative data, also finds a positive connection between the existence of networks and the tendency for CSOs to involve themselves in lobbying.[8]

This is an area that would seem, according to the CSI countries that are able to compare with the previous phase, to be expanding. For example, Armenia tells us that, "The number of NGO coalitions has increased and in many cases such cooperation has yielded successes. For example, the draft Law on Lobbying which, if approved, would permit the government to exert unprecedented control over NGOs, was removed from Parliament's agenda due to the consolidated efforts of NGOs."

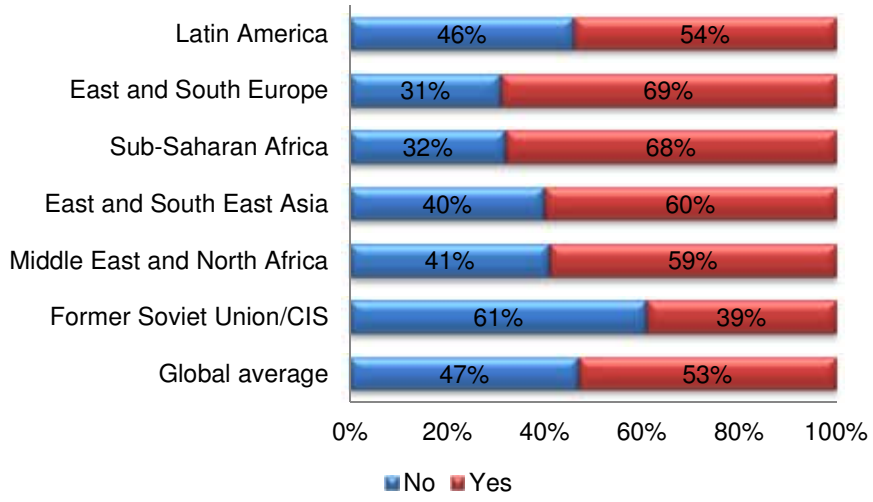
Considering what has changed since the CSI was last implemented in the country, the Turkey report comments on "...significant improvements in CSO access to umbrella bodies, networks and support organisations, which are symptoms of recent reforms that have provided a more enabling environment for establishing and joining umbrella bodies for associations."

The value that derives from these is captured well in the Nicaragua report, which tells us that:

> "Networks of social actors have multiplied in Nicaragua since the beginning of the 1990s as a flexible form of coordination of organisations and people who share certain principles and perspectives in order to face specific issues and defend members' rights. These networks constitute an alternative form of organisation to

[8] See Cutting the Diamonds, CIVICUS, 2011.

Membership of support organisations



Source: CSI Organisational Surveys

> those traditional models of vertical ties with leaders, not least because they have democratic and volunteer-based structures based on the equal rights and duties of their members."

In Jordan, however, challenges around demonstrating impact are seen to undermine networks: "Although the vast majority of Jordanian CSOs join networks, levels of coordination and cooperation are weak or limited. Lack of continuity of alliances is attributed to lack of responsiveness from government, which weakens incentive to continue."

Further, concerns also emerged about issues of competition, both between different networks for primacy, and sometimes also between networks and their members. For example, in Slovenia:

> "A problem alleged by interviewees who participated in the case studies was that such networks and support structures cater first to their needs, and only then to the needs of the sector. The respondents also pointed out the lack of consensus within CSOs about who is a legitimate representative of a sector."

Chile reports a mixed picture: "There were no reports of second level organisations being used by the state to control civil society, although individual reports about the pervasive ill effects of second level organisations capturing or dominating the public tender system and resources did emerge."

In Liberia the fear that networks might compete with their members is made clear:

> "…it is evident that networks and coalitions, instead of scouting support and funding for their members, are in the business of implementing projects. Most are in competition with their members for funding, because all parties submit similar proposals to the same donors. Therefore, instead of providing basket funding that supports the activities of all members, they undermine the ability of their members to raise funds. Any donor examining funding proposals from a coalition of NGOs and a proposal from an individual NGO would give preference to the coalition rather than fund a single organisation for the same type of project. This is causing major problems in civil society."

Linked to this must be a suspicion that coalitions form for short-term, instrumental purposes, for example, in order to attract donor funding, because that is what donors expect to see. There

are concerns that network creation tends to be donor-driven, again as expressed in Liberia: "Close communication is largely promoted amongst organisations funded by the same donor(s), largely due to the donor's coordinating and monitoring role of the organisations it funds. Donor organisations strive to ensure that grantees work together and exchange information because under project implementation the groups must communicate with one another."

This leads to concerns about sustainability of networks, as captured in Georgia:

> "Other forms of coalitions are usually created in the framework of large projects, provided donor organisations put forward networking as a condition for funding. The lifespan of such coalitions and networks, however successful they may be, rarely extends beyond the duration of a project. Afterwards, with scarce opportunities for their continued existence, they either break up or continue to exist only on paper."

Albania echoes this: "There is scepticism of the real impact and sustainability of the national support networks. Most participants of the regional focus groups stated that donors' financial support is essential on both accounts – impact and sustainability – for the majority of the national networks". Kosovo, meanwhile, reports: "It is a general impression that donor-driven networks were the ones which did not survive, while competition between CSOs for resources and lack of joint bodies to coordinate a network may be other reasons. However, ad-hoc coalitions and non-formal groups of CSOs have very successfully undertaken a number of initiatives."

Liberia further makes the startling point that:

> "...there are many CSOs that find the idea of joining networks and coalitions repugnant. They prefer to do their work and advocacy alone. Such organisations are well funded through partnerships with donors from whom they can expect constant funding. Such organisations only wish to be a part of a coalition when they themselves form such coalitions or are at the helm of its leadership and can be the first to respond to the major issues of public concern that civil society vocalises. When this happens, they position themselves to be at the forefront of any eventual action that might evolve on the issue. In such circumstances, this group would make commitments without the knowledge of other coalition members."

The above suggests that there are mixed motives for CSO participation in coalitions, perhaps not always because they want to, but sometimes because they feel they have to, whether to try to win funding or because of power relations with other CSOs. This begs the question: are networks sometimes only coalitions of the weak and unwilling?

Networking the networks

The CSI recognises that civil society umbrella groups are important, as are international networks between CSOs. The Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), which was launched at the 2004 CIVICUS World Assembly in Botswana, aims to combine these two priorities. It convenes national umbrella associations of CSOs to share knowledge and experiences on civil society issues and to encourage civil society engagement and co-operation across national boundaries in the pursuit of mutual interests. AGNA aims to address needs that are particular to national associations, which provide and give a collective voice to civil society, serve as interlocutors between their civil society members and other sectors and struggle for the creation of an enabling environment for civil society by providing services to members and the sector as a whole. The annual CIVICUS World Assembly, meanwhile, offers a key forum where traditionally disconnected sectors are able to engage in a dialogue about the state of civil society and the actions needed to strengthen it. The theme of the 2011 World Assembly was Civil Society and Global Decision-Making: Doing it Better.

International connections

Further, while domestic networks may be strong for a variety of reasons, the CSI shows consistently that linkages between domestic and international NGOs are very weak. The CSI indicator which assesses the presence of international NGOs in a country has a very low score, at only 15%. This suggests that international NGOs concentrate their presence in only a few countries, rather than distribute themselves evenly.[9]

For example, Bulgaria, in a comment that typifies the reported experience of many different countries, draws attention to, "…limited networking and partnerships between Bulgarian CSOs and international NGOs and European entities. Even though a specific need has been recognised, such cooperation is underdeveloped and the international linkages to Bulgarian CSOs remain limited."

Jordan reports a frustrating experience of attempts at international cooperation:

> "Over the last two decades, local CSOs have increased involvement in regional and international dialogues, particularly CSOs covering human rights and environmental concerns, among other issues. But the effectiveness of participation is limited, with their slight role in influencing regional and international policies of networks and organisations the subject of complaint by those involved."

Alongside this, the Liberia CSI draws attention to some practical barriers, including, "…the lack of opportunities to fundraise locally for international travel to meetings, training sessions and conferences… Only a few groups have donors who pay for international travel…"

In addition, issues of space contestation between local and international civil society emerge, for example in the Philippines, which tells us that, "Some NGOs in Mindanao have observed that more and more international NGOs are beginning to implement projects on their own, rather than letting local NGOs implement these for them. This creates further competition for local NGOs in terms of raising funds for projects, which poses serious problems for local NGOs, given the decreasing availability of funds." The Rwandan report wonders what this means for the independence of local civil society:

> "Respondents from civil society believe that the international NGOs hold the economic survival of local civil society in their hands. These INGOs impose their policies and frameworks on local civil society and do not allow them the democratic latitude to make their own choices and orientation based on local needs. Thus local associations simply swallow ideas from western donors in order to keep the financial package that goes with this."

The location of civil society

The dominant CSOs also emerge from the CSI as excessively urban-focussed institutions. Many CSI reports show centralisation in capital cities and weak connection between urban and rural CSOs.

For example, the Tanzania report states, "CSOs were seen to be largely urban-based, with those communities in the margins, such as the rural areas, less represented," while the Liberia report

[9] For a comprehensive listing and mapping of international CSOs, see the Union of International Associations online databases, available at www.uia.be. As an example of another international network of national level NGOs, for Francophone countries, see also the networking promoted by Coordination Sud, www.coordinationsud.org.

points to a, "High concentration of CSOs in Monrovia… links between coalitions operating in Monrovia and community-based organisations in other parts of the country are blurred." The Kazakhstan report tells us that, "Most active NGOs tend to be concentrated in cities, while at the rural level they are largely absent," while the Albania report records that, "Significant discrepancies are observed between civil society organisations in Tirana, CSOs in other major cities and civil society structures in small urban centres in terms of infrastructure, resources, capacities and, for remote and rural areas, even (in) existence of formal civic structures."

There are of course good reasons for CSOs to locate their headquarters in capital cities, not least to exert influence and improve civil society–state relations. It can also be argued that in many countries CSOs necessarily reflect a pattern of a strongly capital-centred state bureaucracy, such as is reported in Uruguay.

Nevertheless, concerns also emerge about what this means and says about CSO values, areas of focus and leadership. For example, Turkey states, "CSOs were criticised for appealing to an 'urban' and 'elite' segment of the society and remaining rather detached from the rest of the population."

Questions also emerge again here about resource competition, as captured in Uruguay: "Regional consultations detect some tension between organisations in the capital city and in the provinces, which feel consigned to be left aside in the awarding of financing, and fear knowledge gathered in their territory being co-opted by CSOs in the capital city." Chile also makes a link to financing: "The public tender system creates differences among organisations and favours fragmentation. Additionally, larger NGOs and foundations are better equipped to pursue public funding, while community-based organisations are impeded in accessing funding due to lower capacity to meet onerous requirements."

When rural populations are often those most suffering, particularly from acute problems of deprivation, isolation and limited opportunity, there would seem to be a need to investigate new ways of brokering urban-rural connections that shifts the balance of civil society power away from the city.

A question for further analysis also arises from such findings: does the drive for development effectiveness, accountability and value for money entail a centralising and bureaucratising trajectory for civil society that impinges on what many would consider to be key positive aspects of the sector: local ownership, connection to the grassroots and the diversity of the sector as a source of strength in its own right?

Partnerships with the private sector

While a mixed picture at best emerges from the CSI as regards civil society–state relations, as set out earlier, the pattern of civil society–private sector partnerships and civil society–media links seems to be consistently weak. The danger here is captured in the Albanian CSI report: "A civil society that appears to be distant from the other portions of society is by default relegated to a peripheral position from where it is unable to exert full influence towards positive change."

Turkey was one of the CSI countries to make an in-depth study into relations with the corporate sector, offering a mixed picture:

> "CSO partners and projects are selected and supported on an ad-hoc basis, generally with the advice of public relations/corporate communications consultants, commonly funded from the companies' PR or marketing budgets. Decisions are rarely made according to any set guidelines and the practice is often treated as a 'sponsorship' rather than a 'grant'. As such, corporate funds are accessible only

> for a small and selective groups of CSOs. The unfavourable fiscal framework for donations and grant making appears as another factor affecting CSR and corporate philanthropy negatively."

The Georgia CSI supports this:

> "Many existing initiatives serve a purpose of improving company images and/or developing their human resource bases. Correspondingly, many forms of implementation of CSR are not even discussed by top managers. Also, the level of awareness about the nature and activities of the civil society sector is very low among managers. Managers do not see in the immediate future any possibility for cooperation between business and civil society. They see international donors as 'natural' sponsors..."

The Tanzania report suggests there are cultural and attitudinal gulfs:

> "Perceptions that civil society interferes with personal matters would seem to play a large role in the attitudes of the private sector. On the other hand, civil society often regards the private sector as preoccupied with minor issues, such as sponsoring national football games and making occasional gifts, with only marginal effort directed to supporting key societal needs, such as poverty eradication programmes."

Senegal points to an obvious tension between developing relations and fulfilling campaigning roles: "There are not many examples of cooperation between the private sector and civil society. We must say that fighting against corruption often means targeting the private sector also."

At the beginning of 2011, during the completion of the CSI study, there were emerging signs, including in response to dramatic political shifts in the Middle East and North Africa, of a renewed interest in a new social contract between those working in the three sectors (government, private, civil society) towards tackling shared global risks.[10] Nevertheless, whether this realisation that no one sector can 'go it alone' will translate at the local and national level into meaningful cooperation between the private sector and civil society which transcends historical barriers remains to be seen.

Key conclusions

- CSOs consider networks as important, but there are frustrations about how they work in practice and difficulties in sustaining them, while networks beyond the civil society sector are very limited.
- CSOs find international connections weak and hard to maintain, suggesting that there is still much working in isolation and lack of sharing of practice.
- CSOs are in danger of being seen as urban, elitist institutions, disconnected from their constituencies.

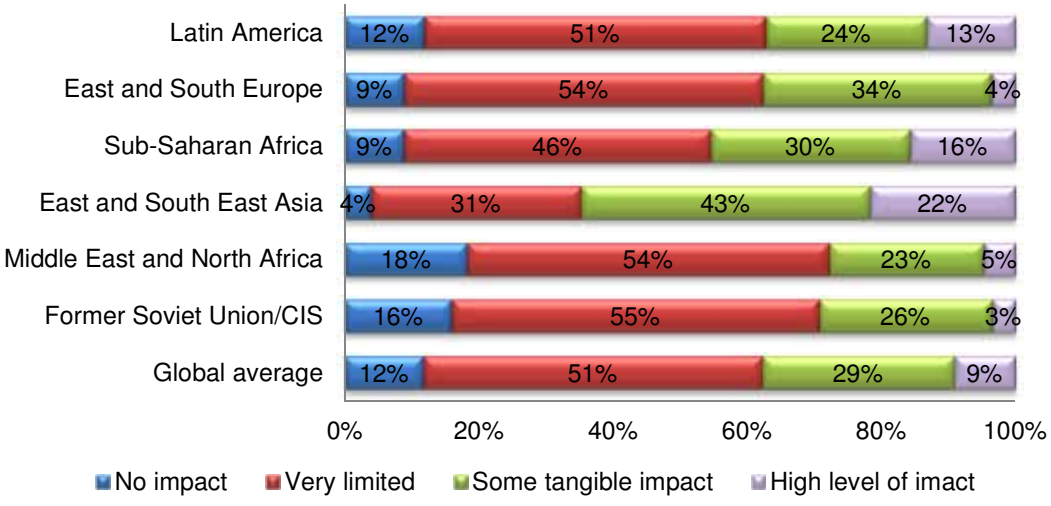
[10] As examples of new stimulus for co-operation between state, civil society and private sector that emerged over the course of the CSI study, see the 2010 report of the private sector-led multi-stakeholder Global Redesign Initiative, Everybody's Business: Strengthening International Cooperation in a More Interdependent World, available at http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-redesign-initiative/index.html, or the suggestion of the need for a new social contract with civil society in response to mass popular actions in the Middle East, made in a speech by the President of the World Bank, April 2011, available at http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:22880264~pagePK:34370~piPK:42770~theSitePK:4607,00.html.

6. Are we witnessing civil society impact?

As part of the CSI, CSOs are asked to assess the impact they achieve, both individually and as a sector, on social and political issues. The reports show that civil society believes it is achieving high levels of impact on the social sector, but rather less political impact, including influence on policy-making. Globally, amongst all the CSOs surveyed, 64% of them believe civil society as a whole is achieving a satisfactory impact on social issues, but only 47% think the same when it comes to policy issues. This disparity is borne out by panels of independent experts (from government, legislature, private sector, media) who were also asked to give their opinions on the impact civil society is making, and rated civil society's social impact at 61% and policy impact at 46%.

Time and again, social issues emerge as the area where CSOs are able to demonstrate impact, with the perspective from Bulgaria being typical: "In some sectors, such as education, the environment and support for vulnerable groups, civil society's activities are considerably more

Self-assessment of perceived civil society impact on policy-making



Source: CSI Organisational Surveys

effective and visible than in other issue areas." The Georgia report further describes how CSOs' perceived roles change according to an assessment of potential for impact:

> "When dealing with the most urgent problems of Georgian society, CSOs see their role as chiefly limited to civic education and humanitarian programmes, effectively admitting that they are not key players in this sphere. But in other, less sensitive areas, CSOs suggest a greater range of activities, indicating that they actually would have the ability to influence key processes."

Argentina strikes a realistic note about the potential for civil society impact, which it is well to bear in mind:

> "…even though civil society contributes to social issues significantly, the scale and complexity of these problems is far beyond the present capacities of the CSOs themselves. Examined globally, the contribution of civil society to these issues tends to be considered a palliative treatment for a number of specific situations of need and vulnerability, rather than a medium- or long-term articulate programmed response."

This question of the scale on which impact can be achieved is also seen in Chile: "The most important distinction to be made is local impact versus national impact; the former seems to be the space where civil society is most effective, while its influence is scarce in the areas of global and national politics."

The findings suggest that it is easier for civil society to achieve impact in social areas – which may be those which are politically less contested, and which may play more to a service delivery role for CSOs which many governments tend to find more comfortable – than in policy-making areas, which call for deeper engagement with often fraught political processes and more complex CSO capacities. Many small-scale CSOs, able to achieve localised impact, simply do not attempt policy influence. The Russia CSI tells us, "Most CSOs do not engage with decision-making by authorities: most of those surveyed have never tried to influence policy-making," while the Georgia CSI puts this starkly: "CSOs have achieved some success, albeit only in issues that pose no threat to the ruling elite's political or economic powers. The proposals that provide for at least partial redistribution of power and/or resources, or that demand a decentralisation of government, have not even been discussed, let alone approved and implemented."

And there are fears of a trade off between a policy implementing and policy influencing role, neatly captured by participants in the Chile CSI: "As the bidding system turns CSOs into implementers of public policy, the possibility of influencing policy definition and design moves farther away."

The question of where best an intervention can be made is also an issue; the Mexico CSI, by analysing more deeply the different stages of policy formulation, was able to identify that CSOs are strongest at problem diagnosis but weakest at achieving policy approval and evaluating policy impact.

There are of course success stories in the CSI of CSOs which have attempted policy advocacy and can be seen to have influenced government. For example, Argentina reports that:

> "Around two thirds of the organisations surveyed (68%) showed some level of involvement in public policies in the last two years and were able to mention at least one influence attempt such as conducting campaigns, putting forward proposals or performing lobby actions. Of this CSO sub-group with influence attempts, almost half (49%) were able to mention at least one successful attempt where proposals were accepted by state authorities or where actions had yielded satisfactory results."

Civil society and development effectiveness

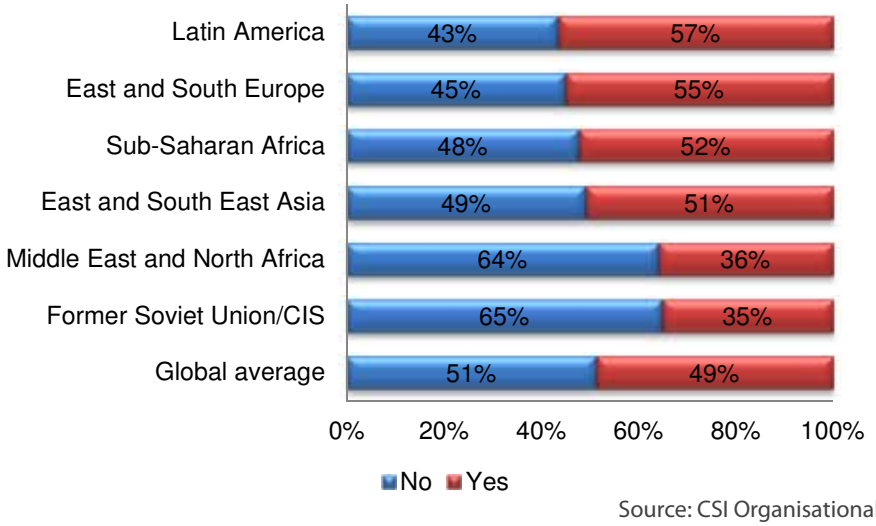
Development effectiveness – maximising the impact of all development actors on improving the lives of the poor and the marginalised – has become a key debate for CSOs in recent years. The CSI findings tell us that CSOs are prepared to be self-critical about their ability to achieve impact, and the Istanbul CSO Development Effectiveness Principles, adopted at the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness World Assembly in September 2010, set out eight key areas which should guide the work of CSOs for contributing more effectively to development. It is of course also a vital civil society role to push to make the development initiatives of other sectors more effective. CIVICUS is playing an active role in two international civil society initiatives that seek to bring civil society voices to global processes on development effectiveness, Better Aid and the Open Forum, ahead of the OECD and UNDP-led High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in South Korea at the end of 2011.

However, failure seems more common than success. A gap consistently emerges between high levels of activity and, at best, medium levels of impact, leading to a concern about the gearing and efficiency of civil society advocacy initiatives.

Examples of the gap between activity and outcome include Kosovo, which reports "a limited outcome from this activism, with only 14% of these policies approved and more than half still under discussion," and Uruguay, which tells us that, "While 60% of organisations declare to have worked during the last two years for the approval or implementation of public policies… only 31.9% of them declare to have succeeded in their actions." As Senegal puts it, "CSOs judge themselves to be satisfyingly active, while admitting that the impact on government accountability remains limited, even very weak." The Italy CSI suggests that poor networking and competition between CSOs is one of the reasons for weak impact, while the lack of institutionalised, well-constructed mechanisms for policy influence is highlighted by many different countries.[11]

The question this then suggests is whether there are unexplored ways in which CSOs can be supported to move from impact in social fields, such as service provision, to achieve also impact on policy-making, in order to fundamentally change the conditions for their constituencies. Potential responses to address these challenges could include more training programmes in cooperative advocacy and in policy analysis, and a focus on actively supporting better connections

CSO activity in the last two years for policy change



Source: CSI Organisational Surveys

[11] Some of the factors an analysis of the CSI quantitative data finds are connected to impact include a favourable legal situation for civil society, a high level of individual political activism and, as mentioned previously, a stable human resource base for CSOs. See Cutting the Diamonds, CIVICUS, 2011.

and coalitions between CSOs serving local, social agendas and national and international CSOs concerned with policy advocacy, for their mutual benefit.

The Guinea CSI perhaps best captures the issues and frustrations here, pointing out that:

> "...A gap between high levels of activity and medium levels of impact emerges time and again. At the same time, civil society would appear to be struggling to raise itself from a service delivery role to an advocacy and policy influencing role, although... the circumstances, particularly the socio-economic and socio-political situation, are against it here. This also accounts for civil society's weaker watchdog role towards the state and the private sector, where a clear need emerges for initiatives that strengthen constructive, critical relationships. The trust in civil society, and the track record it has begun to demonstrate over the last few years, proves that civil society is capable of acting more as a two-way interface between the government and the population."

Key conclusions

- CSOs are showing more impact on social issues than on achieving policy change, suggesting additional support is needed to replicate social impact in the policy sphere
- Many CSOs are not able to achieve impact on a national, as opposed to local level, suggesting that impact could be improved by better coalition building between different CSOs at different levels.
- There is a gap between high levels of activity for policy change and medium to low levels of impact, suggesting there is still unrealised potential for impact, given more support, better coordination and a more structured and better managed relationship between civil society and the state.

7. Are CSOs and citizens connecting?

A picture is emerging from the CSI, as outlined above, of CSOs as constrained, financially challenged, short-staffed and struggling to demonstrate impact. They are also facing challenges of perceptions of being urban, elitist, remote from people and disconnected from the values expected of them. A consistent portrait is emerging of two gaps: one between CSOs and other sectors, such as the state and the market, and one between CSOs and citizens. These invite us to question our assumptions about what CSOs can and cannot do, how they are organised and set themselves up, and what additional relationships and connections may be required.

There is the linked and ongoing internal question, as we have for example seen in the question of where CSOs locate themselves, of how CSOs retain their ethos and their closeness to the people, and resist becoming elitist, seen as corporate and distant.

The Morocco report sums up the strengths and weaknesses of CSOs in this regard: "The three main assets CSOs have are proximity and involvement in citizenship, a track record in social and human development, and credibility, independence and a willingness to engage. The key deficits reported are inadequate financing, opportunistic behaviour and lack of independence and favouritism."

In some cases, citizens need to be convinced that CSOs adequately offer vehicles for civic participation and sufficiently embody civic values. For example, Turkey tells us, "Turkish citizens remain rather disconnected from the civil society movement, despite its growth in recent decades. Citizen participation is characterised by a narrow and deep trend where different social groups are not represented enough."

Connected to this is the question of how CSOs can counter accusations, such as in Bulgaria and Kosovo, as we have seen above, that they are donor-controlled vehicles, and even the top-down creations of donors, and resist temptations, as discussed earlier, to chase project funding and short-term funding.

Trust, apathy and participation

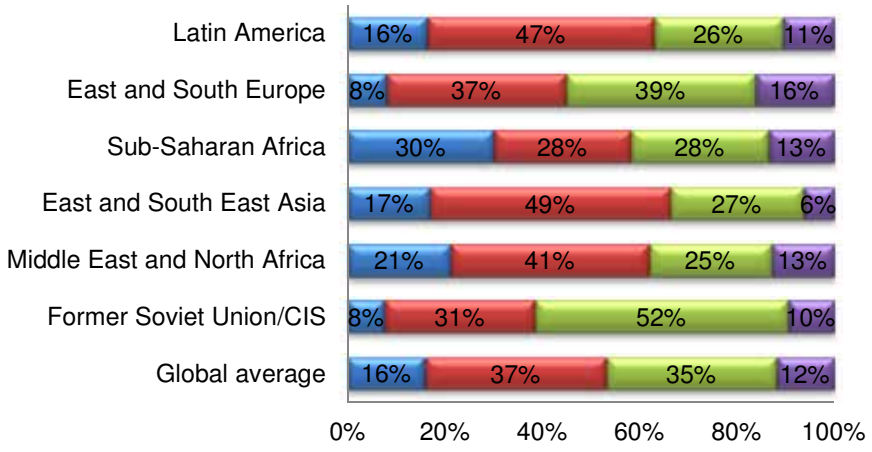
There is powerful evidence found within the CSI that people want to associate, want to improve social conditions and want to participate in civic life. Yet it could also be said that they want to do so on their own terms.

Encouragingly, in many countries, CSOs are recorded as enjoying higher levels of trust than the state and other public institutions, such as political parties, arms of the government and the army and police. Public trust in civil society is a valuable asset, as Venezuela makes clear:

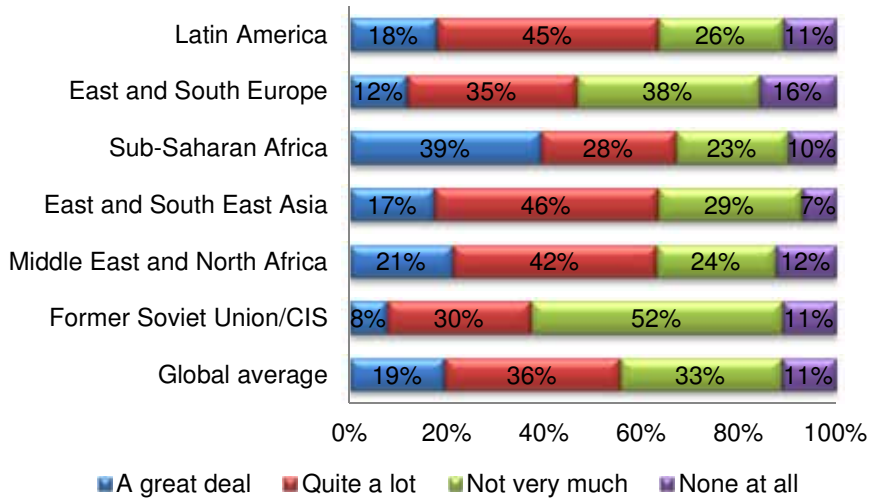
> "A relatively surprising confirmation constitutes the main lynchpin of a future strategy: the significant legitimacy of the sector compared to the distrust of other institutional actors. Organisations receiving the highest degree of legitimacy are not the ones that held representation in the past, such as political parties and trade unions, but those perceived as 'not contaminated'. A plausible hypothesis, as mentioned above, is that this legitimacy rests on civil society's role as a shelter for citizens' political aspirations because of the rejection of traditional politics."

The research from the Philippines supports this: "…there has been a generally positive association with civil society groups given the sector's role in democratic restoration. Civil society has also provided a mediating mechanism to channel the socio-economic demands of marginalised groups."

Confidence in environmental organisations



Confidence in women's organisations

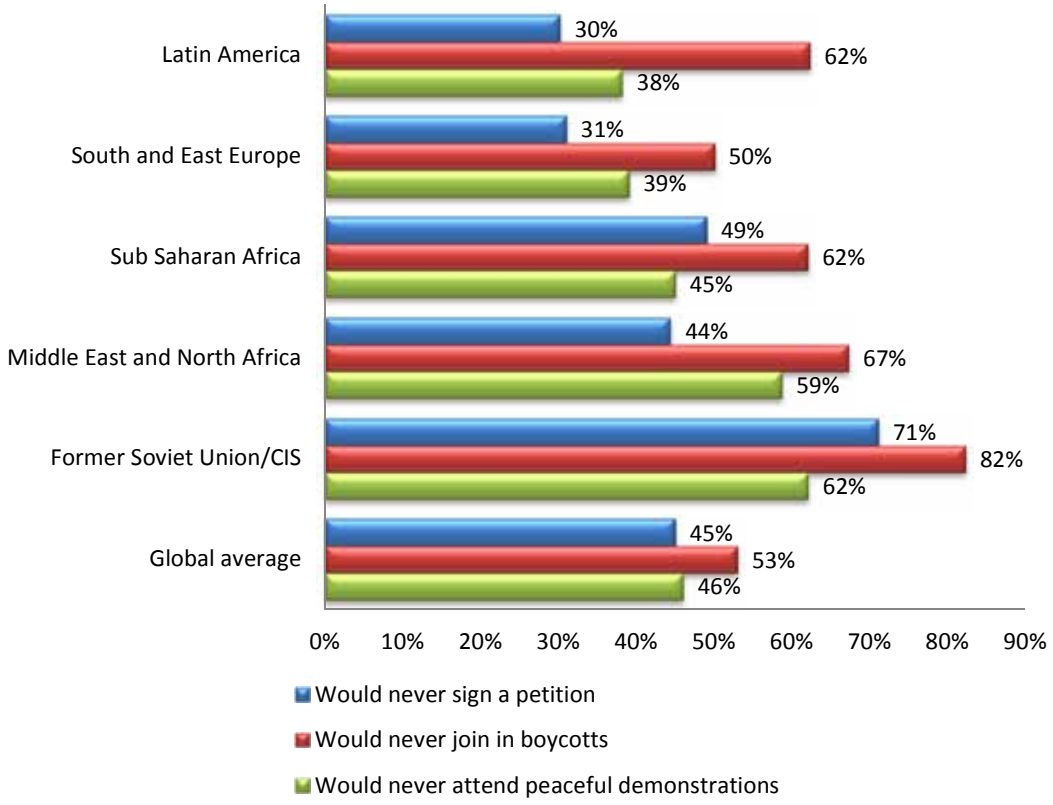


Source: CSI Population Surveys / World Values Survey

Trust is seen as consistently higher in certain types of organisations, with environmental and women's CSOs scoring strongly. Human rights CSOs tend to enjoy less public trust. In almost all countries, there is very high trust in religious institutions.[12]

Yet in many contexts, while trust seems to remain in the idea of civil society, we are also seeing low levels of participation in conventional politics, high degrees of political apathy and what could be considered a rejection of established forms of politics. The Armenia CSI report states that: "...the low level of political activism is a conscious choice of Armenians. Of those surveyed, 72% reported that they would never sign a petition, 86% would never join in boycotts, and 71% would never attend peaceful demonstrations."

Share of people who would never take part in different political actions



Source: CSI Population Surveys / World Values Survey

The report from Kosovo offers a warning which may be of relevance to civil society in the Middle East and North Africa about the challenges of sustaining patterns of activism and participation following a crisis, which may see high, temporary levels of activism turning into apathy: "The high political motive of that time no longer exists following liberation and independence, and the resources and energy of that time are long spent." Kosovo has seen a corresponding decline in volunteering: "48% of the surveyed CSOs think that volunteer work is decreasing, and most of them see the lack of the proper legal framework on volunteering as one of the reasons for this."

The danger for CSOs is that a rejection of traditional forms of participation which attempt political influence is, partly, a rejection of participation in CSOs, not least because, as we have seen above, they are perceived as unable to achieve strong political impact in many cases, or are felt by many

[12] CSI findings about trust in CSOs are also borne out by the research of the Edelman Trust Barometer, which has consistently shown higher public trust in NGOs than in business, government and the media. Its 2011 report, based on the views of more than 5,000 people, shows trust levels in NGOs to have risen by 4% from 57% in 2010 to 61% in 2011. For the findings of the 2011 research, see www.edelman.com/trust/2011.

to be part of an elite. We are seeing consistently low levels of membership in CSOs, with a global average of 27% of people members of a social CSO in its broadest sense, and only 14% in political CSOs, which correspond to the more recognised and formalised CSO entities that attract the bulk of external support.[13] The findings suggest nothing less than a participation deficit which undermines the credibility and reach of established CSOs.

Could it be said that, with high levels of trust but low levels of participation, people want to believe in CSOs, but do not trust their reality? Perhaps it could even be said that citizens like the idea of civil society, certainly in contrast to their lived political reality, but experience a gap between their expectations and the organisations they come into contact with which are held to represent the sector. CSOs are emerging as not representing a satisfactory vehicle, as they stand, for participation and realisation of citizens' aspirations. People may be rejecting conventional politics, but they are not necessarily turning to find a home in CSOs.

For example, in the Philippines, it seems there is a gap between the rejection of conventional forms of participation and the continuing desire to associate, which CSOs have not yet adequately filled:

> "Filipinos have a 'natural tendency to get involved with the affairs of others' and Filipino cultural values have allowed them to get readily engaged in responding to social issues. However, civil society groups, according to the study, have not provided a clear framework for citizens to participate in political issues. At the same time, people have become increasingly aware of the shortcomings of the political system, for instance, corruption and abuse of authority, especially in the past several years. This, the study suggests, has not helped to reduce the cynicism of ordinary citizens that inhibits participating in political campaigns, because these are seen as suspect and unlikely to lead to improvements in social wellbeing. Therefore, it is necessary to effectively institute mechanisms that would allow for more authentic participation, especially of the poor and marginalised, so that people can be motivated to participate in the political system."

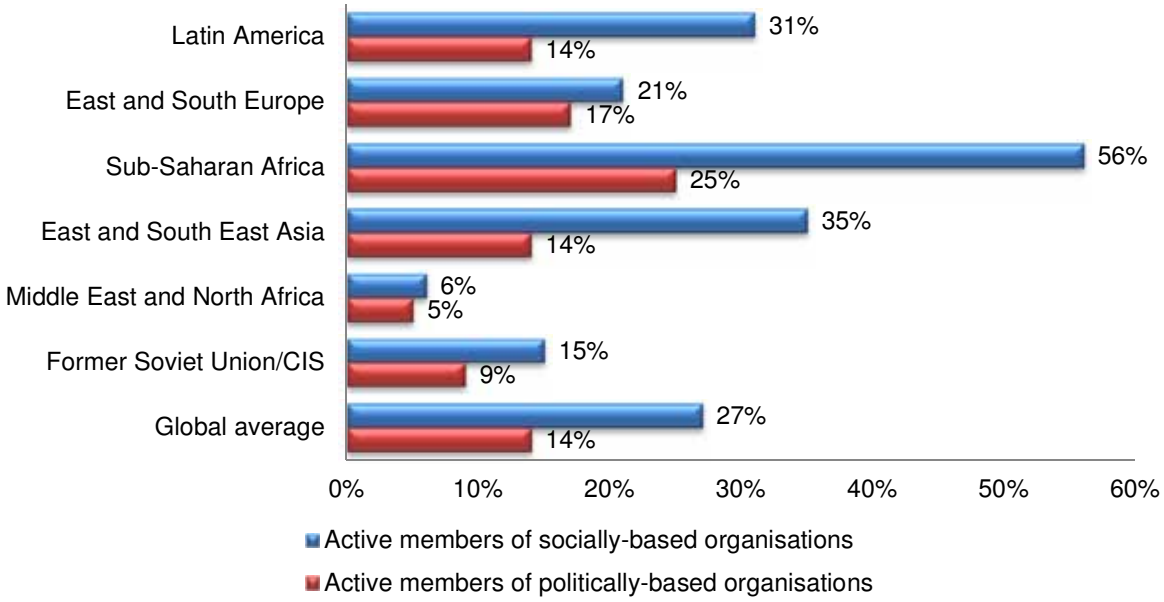
Argentina is another country that reports a worrying decline in formal volunteering, which suggests apathy about participation, while the Kosovo report offers an overview of the challenges CSOs face here, identifying: "a high level of apathy of citizens towards public life in general. The low level of membership and volunteering in civic initiatives confirms the gap between citizens and CSOs, which still do not build on the potential seen at higher levels of non-formal and individual activism."

During the course of the CSI study, perhaps the most significant development in civil society globally was the rise of mass-based citizen action in the Middle East and North Africa in late 2010 and 2011. Yet it was in this region that the CSI reported the lowest levels of membership in CSOs, suggesting that the existence and membership of formal CSOs is not an accurate barometer of the potential for activism.

Further, in a different context, the Russia report tells us that, "Participation in civil society activities is not a typical behavioural practice for citizens of Russia. Civic participation in Russia is limited and there are low levels of trust in CSOs." They suggest lack of trust in institutions of participation is a particular challenge: "Most Russians do not trust CSOs, a situation which can only hinder their

[13] The 2008-2011 CSI methodology makes a distinction between socially-based CSOs, such as cultural, religious or sports associations, and politically-oriented CSOs, such as advocacy groups, NGOs and trade unions.

Share of people who are active members of socially-based and politically based organisations



Source: CSI Population Surveys / World Values Survey

work. Distrust in institutionalised segments of civil society can be supposed to be one of the drivers behind the kind of informal voluntary work and philanthropy that is harder to capture in the variables included in the CSI." They then go on to suggest that more spontaneous forms of association are, however, in a healthier state:

> "This was demonstrated in 2010 with the spontaneous voluntary response to the unprecedented summer fires in Russia… the rapid increase of such informal citizenship initiatives… demonstrates not only effective civil self-organisation, but also self-regulation and actual self-government…The atmosphere of working for a common cause was unique in modern Russia."

People also consistently tend to report high levels of public spiritedness and do not express support for anti-social behaviour. For example, in Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriot Community public survey returned a mean of 96% for condemnation of anti-social acts based on four questions (claiming government benefits you are not entitled to; avoiding fares on public transport; cheating on taxes; accepting bribes). Globally, 84% of people surveyed for the CSI expressed condemnation of such acts.

High levels of public spiritedness are reported, even in politically polarised situations such as Venezuela, where the CSI report tells us that, "In spite of polarisation, both ordinary citizens and organisations, whatever their tendencies, show a will to coexist, linked to the interest of recognising others as part of a plural country," and Nicaragua, where the CSI report records, "…a clear rejection of dishonest actions by Nicaraguan people." Of course, there may be a gap between lofty expressions of goodwill, compared to how people behave in practice. But still, how can this apparent willingness to do the right thing, and the latent potential social capital, be harnessed better by CSOs?

The implications of the above for established CSOs are interesting and potentially troubling. It suggests that in conditions where there is limited institutionalised civil society, protest can find other forms; it also suggests that there is a constituency, and potential social capital, ready to be mobilised which formal CSOs have had limited contact with. Further, an inference that can be drawn is that CSOs play a key role as modifiers or pacifiers of social protest, by offering

circumscribed participation routes and the mediation of radical viewpoints, whether for good or ill. The Senegal report hints at this dilemma:

> "From a sociological point of view, the value of a peaceful society, which is to say, social behaviours that reject conflict and favour modes of compromise, is as a stabilising force. But this strength is also a weakness: if the population is always urged to calm down, to wait, to seek a compromise instead of vocalising and mobilising to address their concerns, change will not come."

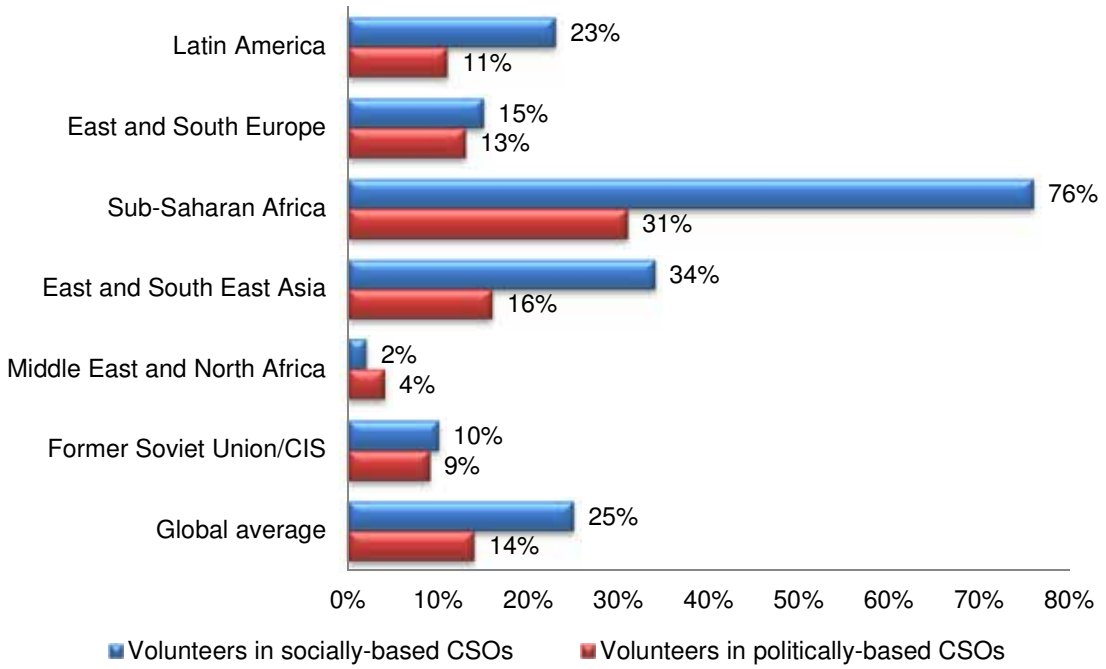
The new frontiers of civic mobilisation

The CSI study has arguably caught a moment when 1990s notions of what civil society is and does are being found to be outmoded, not least because of the very recent and extraordinary shifts in technology that have seen social media playing a new role in activism. New trends in participation, and new forms of mobilisation, will be the focus of the second of the series of books to be based on the CSI research, provisionally entitled The Age of Participation: Civil Society, Democracy and the New Frontiers of Civic Mobilisation, to be published in 2012.

Trends in volunteering and unorganised action

As we have begun to discuss above, the picture on formal volunteering is indeed mixed; while the Argentina and Kosovo reports record declines, the Uruguay CSI notes an encouraging increase in volunteering: "Since 1998, the engagement in voluntary work has increased from 7% to 20%. This may result from many factors, which to a different extent assisted in the achievement of this change during the last decade, among others: the economic crisis, the greater spreading of information on the topic, and a growth in opportunities to do voluntary work in an organised way."

Share of volunteers in socially-based and politically-based CSOs



Source: CSI Population Surveys / World Values Survey

The findings from Chile are similar: "There has been significant growth in and media exposure of volunteering in recent years. Volunteers in Chile contribute an average of 11.6 hours per month and donate twice as much in money to social causes compared to those people who are not volunteers." [14]

As we have begun to see above, while the CSI reports low levels of citizen engagement in CSOs, both socially and politically oriented CSOs, and low and sometimes declining degrees of volunteering in CSOs, it also tells us that people in almost all countries surveyed are engaging in social activity and are actively and voluntarily involving themselves, particularly at the local and community level. People may not see themselves as part of civil society, but through their activities they can be understood to be generating and strengthening social capital.

Kazakhstan, for example, tells us, "Although the depth of volunteering is limited, the relatively high engagement in social activities may provide positive social capital from which civil society could develop further," while Armenia, bearing in mind what it said about low rates of political participation, also reports a positive practice and a limitation:

> "…there is evidence that ordinary community members actively participate in the life of their communities by making cash or in-kind contributions and providing voluntary labour for various communal initiatives. On the other hand, the level of participation of local community members in the decision-making, with regard to the formulation and design of local policies and programmes and resource allocation, is usually low…"

Georgia is another of many CSI countries which notes a strength in local participation:

> "In contrast to institutionalised activities, community participation, which is not institutionalised as a rule, is higher in Georgia... This can be seen as a reflection of the fact that public confidence in formal structures has never been high in Georgia. In a country where official structures have always been treated with a fair dose of mistrust, it is mainly the neighbourhood and community groups and other similar informal associations, such as within groups of friends, which traditionally enjoy high levels of public confidence and thus have higher levels of civic participation."

Time and again we see the strongest levels of involvement and association in religious, cultural and sporting structures. For example, in Zambia, "81% of respondents belonged to at least one social organisation. However, activism was mostly associated with religious activities." Uruguay reports, "The highest level of [voluntary] engagement… in cultural, artistic and educational organisations, followed by churches and religious organisations and then community organisations." Mexico adds, "Multiple volunteer activities can be seen in sports/recreational CSOs and those dedicated to art, culture or education, followed by volunteer work in religious CSOs and sports/recreation CSOs," while Chile suggests social participation offers the most effective route for youth participation: "Young people have better spaces for organisation in the social than in the political sphere." Morocco tells us,

> "People spend most of their time with their family and friends, and although some people make a significant time commitment to CSOs, civic engagement is not widespread. Sports, educational and cultural organisations represent the most common vehicles for civic participation, with CSO membership lower for women and higher for young people."[15]

[14] One of the challenges around volunteering identified by CSOs in some of the CSI ACRs is the lack of a national legal framework to support volunteering. Based on a global research study, UN Volunteers (UNV) published a guidance note on Drafting and Implementing Volunteerism Laws and Policies in March 2011, available at www.unv.org/en/news-resources/resources/on-volunteerism/doc/drafting-and-implementing-volunteerism.html.

This is interesting because such types of organisation and forms of association do not always show up strongly on the radar of those analysing or seeking to support the civil society sector, compared to more politically-oriented organisations. Further, less attention has been given to forms of participation that take place outside an organisational framework, but the CSI tells us that informal association and participation is in good health. Globally, 37% of people report taking part in associational activity at the less formal level, roughly twice as many as people who are active in politically-oriented CSOs.

Further, there are often quite traditional, culturally-rooted wellsprings of voluntary participation. For example, in Jordan, "The highest three motivations are 'Volunteering is a national duty', 'Volunteering is a religious duty', and 'Volunteering is a way to get a job'." And community level, informal activism is often particularly seen in rural contexts, such as in the Philippines, where "…there is a long tradition of civic engagement, especially at the barangay (village) level," and Rwanda, which reports:

> "On the last Saturday of every month between 7 AM and 12 PM, everything in Rwanda stops. Or at least all the restaurants are closed, markets do not operate and public and private transportation is limited. The reason for this is that the entire country is supposed to take part in umuganda – community service. This includes digging ditches, sweeping the grounds, making compost, building houses, clearing land, or any other activity that is helping the country become better. Some people use this day to have a sleep-in but, at least in the countryside, every family has to have a representative in the umuganda in the village."

In Guinea, "Voluntary work is usually of the local kind, typified by assistance to a neighbour or a member of the community without expectation of being paid in return," whilst in Liberia, "People work together for their communities for free."

Even in former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries, where there remains a negative image of formal volunteering due to past practices of 'compulsory volunteering', informal voluntary civic action would still seem to be thriving. Armenia tells us:

> "A seemingly inconsistent finding was recorded by the… CSI population survey, which reported that only 8% of the survey respondents do voluntary work for at least one socially based CSO. Such a low level of volunteer engagement revealed by the study may be explained by the fact that the measurement of volunteering is done through the examination of formal volunteering that takes place through organisations only, while instances of informal volunteering go unreported… high percentages of voluntary engagement in Armenia are on account of informal volunteering: assistance to neighbours, friends, co-workers, refugees and people living with disabilities. This finding shows that informal, unmanaged volunteering is the dominant form of volunteering in Armenian culture, with formal volunteering through organisations still underdeveloped…."

Turning to other forms of informal activism, some countries report a rise in mass demonstrations and other types of more spontaneous action. For example, the Venezuela CSI report notes that 3,297 demonstrations were held in 2009, and goes on to contrast this to the low rate of formal participation, suggesting that this indicates a lack of adequate institutional channels for dissent. The Argentina report relates the role of spontaneous 'pot banging' protests as an important part of the response to its financial crisis in the early 2000s, which to some extent reconfigured civil society. New forms of association, using new technology and social media, are also driving

[15] For an overview of the value of culture-based spaces for people's participation, see Putting Culture First, Commonwealth Foundation, 2008: www.commonwealthfoundation.com/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=16LU0GdSEto%3D&tabid=247.

Ten years on from the International Year of Volunteers: new trends

As can be seen, the CSI generated a large amount of new data on trends in volunteering – including formal volunteering within organisations (from the point of view of both the population who volunteer and the CSOs that receive volunteers) and also informal forms of volunteering. A key question for CIVICUS, as part of its Participatory Governance project, is how volunteering can lead to civic activism, and what policies might best support this. This is the focus of a special study on volunteering and civic activism, published by CIVICUS and UN Volunteers, to mark the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10).

new waves of participation, particularly among those who may previously have been missed by formal CSOs. For example, the Bulgaria report tells us:

> "A new trend in civic engagement deserves attention. Some types of informal activism seem to enjoy larger public support than the traditional CSOs. The new faces of civil society (activist groups, such as students and environmentalists) and the faces of the transition (such as pensioners) represent a significant percentage of the whole... A positive case here is the change within Bulgaria's environmental movement observed since the last phase of the CSI. It evolved from individual protests to an organised movement with political representation. It is based on voluntary actions, flash mobs, online mobilisation, viral mails, online petitions and social networks, which ensure sustained individual civic engagement. Its supporters are primarily young, educated people who live in bigger cities."

Bulgaria also identifies a new funding trend using mobile phones: "Fundraising through text campaigns represents a growing trend in donations. According to the Bulgarian Donors Forum, for 2008 it represents 6.25% of the total number of donations. The Donor Messaging Service (DMS) has accumulated 250,000 texts for 2009 and around 750,000 texts for 2010."[16]

How representative and progressive is participation?

At the same time, we should enquire about whether informal voluntary participation and association, when it stays within and serves its immediate sphere, can be said to be contributing to breaking down barriers and building broader social capital between groups and identities, or whether it is reinforcing narrow identity positions within families, villages and sectional interests, given that family, friends and identity seem to offer the main source of motivations. The Uruguay report captures this: "Some of the reasons for this strengthening of voluntary work and volunteers' engagement are that almost 80% were motivated by family members, friends, neighbours, co-workers or study mates and members of organisations, while the engagement of only 20% derived from personal interest."

In Turkey, a connection was made between low levels of public trust and activism within identity groupings: "…it was surprising that citizens got together in civil society with such low levels of trust and tolerance. Some participants stated that this would mean individuals getting together and organising only with people who have similar backgrounds and identities, thus reinforcing and deepening the divides in society." [17]

[16] During the period of the CSI study, 2008-2011, access to technology that can enable online activism grew. The World Bank Development Indicators for 2009, for example, show that in the 28 of the CSI countries which published ACRs at the time of writing for which this data is available, mobile phone subscriptions average 89.8 per 100 people, while internet users for the same 28 countries increased from 21.6% to 30.2% in just two years, from 2007 to 2009. All data is available online at http://data.worldbank.org. The time period covered by the CSI also saw the launch and take-up of new online tools such as Crisis Commons, which connects online volunteers to support crisis response (http://crisiscommons.org) and Ushahidi, first developed in response to the Kenya elections violence of 2008, which provides crowdsourcing tools for online activists (www.ushahidi.com), amongst many others.

The CSI also assesses the depth of participation – how many times and in how many places an active citizen participates and volunteers. The evidence here presents both a strength and a weakness. It shows that people who serve one organisation tend to be involved in others, suggesting that civil society can draw people into activism and share constituencies, and that natural coalitions of activists can be built. For example, although the above concerns were noted in Turkey, "Despite the narrow nature of citizen participation in Turkey, those that do participate in civil society activities do so rather deeply and intensely. A significant percentage of citizens that are members or volunteers of a CSO are members and/or volunteers of at least one other." The same holds true in Armenia:

> "…volunteers are extremely dedicated and contribute a significant amount of time to CSO efforts. The depth of community engagement, measured by the percentage of citizens spending time socially at sports clubs and voluntary or service organisations at least once or twice a month, is higher in Armenia. The respective score for the indicator of 65% indicates that when engaged in community activities, Armenians do so weekly or nearly every week."

The weaknesses, however, are obvious: if the same people are participating in CSO activities again and again, not only is there a risk of fatigue amongst that small, active community, but also there is a danger that civic participation, if not broadly defined, becomes seen as somehow niche or specialist and limited to a self-perpetuating few. For example, Croatia tells us, "There is an impression, not only within civil society, but also in the general public… that there are always the same individuals from civil society that participate in different activities, such as conferences, education, consultative bodies, or that are present and recognised in public." Uruguay reinforces this self-criticism: "Civil society representatives remark on and value civil society engagement, but also consider there to be a participation crisis, where 'the participants are always the same', resulting in weakened efforts…" This suggests that CSOs need to find ways of refreshing their participation base and activism pool; the obvious place to start looking to do so are those currently taking part in informal forms of association, participation and activism outside the formal structures of CSOs.

The Russia CSI report suggests one way to do this: the research segments the Russian population into five groups, and proposes that the battle is for the middle ground. While those who form the core of civil society and those who would never engage in civil society are equally small (at 8% and 9% respectively), they identify a satellite group of 27% with some engagement with charity and knowledge of civil society, and a buffer group where there is potential to participate, but a lack of knowledge and structures for participation. They conclude, "Opportunity for the development of Russian civil society lies with the expansion of the two core groups, by encouraging movement by members of the 'buffer' group."

On the whole, the CSI reports tell us that the diversity of participation, when viewed with a broader focus on all forms of participation, including informal, appears to be sound, with marginalised sections of communities, such as people from ethnic minorities, people with low incomes and women taking part in a range of different informal community and participatory activities. This also suggests there may be avenues that have not been fully explored, by focussing on less organised and more informal forms of participation, to bring marginalised groups more into the civic mainstream.

[17] Cutting the Diamonds, the analysis of the CSI quantitative data, also suggests that the more civic engagement is characterised by diversity (people from minorities and marginalised groups being active in civil society), the more citizens tend to engage in a specialised and exclusive manner. See Cutting the Diamonds, CIVICUS, 2011

8. New pathways for participation

The above CSI findings should challenge us to reinvent our definitions and visions of civil society and to invest our efforts in building broader coalitions between established organisations and more informal and looser forms of association.

One thing that is clear from the CSI is that civil society means so much more than the now traditional typology of NGOs and CSOs with which donors and international agencies remain largely preoccupied. In trying to understand and grasp what civil society is and how it can be strengthened, we may have been looking in the wrong places.

There is a need for donors, governments, the private sector and CSOs themselves to stop making CSOs a proxy for civil society. Doing so causes them to lose out on an understanding of the richness of participation, and of people's reasons for participating. It will not only mean that opportunities are missed for joined-up activism, advocacy, policy shift and social change; it will also effectively disenfranchise people who are already engaging on their own terms.

The CSI findings imply that the rigid organisational lens may not be the best one through which to view and understand volunteering, for example, or to find new generations of activists. It also suggests that traditional constructions of what constitutes a CSO worthy of engaging with in attempts to address human rights, development and social justice need to be broadened to encompass cultural, sporting and religious associations as valuable vehicles for active civic participation.

The picture that emerges from the CSI is complex, but the potential it suggests is exciting. It tells us that the sources of participation are often deeply traditional and conservative, but that this overlooked, under-acknowledged participation is quietly generating social capital.

Alongside the traditionally rooted, sometimes little understood motivations for participation revealed in the CSI, we can place the new forms of activism that emerged even as this last CSI phase was being carried out, enabled by newly available technology and the rise of social networking. We have seen informal online activism, often located in cities and involving young educated

people, play a large role in recent social movements and upheavals, not least by enabling rapid organisation of protest and unmediated international outreach.

Both of these forms of association have one thing in common: they bypass organisations as they are traditionally understood. They entail people making things happen on their own, without the impetus or support of CSOs. In some places, in recent times, we have seen an arc effect, where forms of protest rooted in traditional, religious spaces have combined with online activism to bypass traditional CSOs but mobilise people sufficiently to bring down governments.

What the CSI findings also tell us, however, is that this participation and activism is presently amorphous, diffuse and, to some extent, directionless. As such, it cannot be considered to be achieving its full potential. And in the extreme case of a revolution, the question of what happens next, when the euphoria fades and jockeying for political power reasserts itself, is critical. Arguably, this is when effective, well-informed and legitimate CSOs are the most urgently needed if they are to play their crucial watchdog role over the new wielders of power, ensuring that as the power vacuum is filled, the change is transformative rather than destructive.

With this picture emerging from the CSI, key questions stand out: how can we better make connections between different forms of participation and activism? How can we do so without compromising on the independence and special value of different strands of civil society? How can initially modest and apolitical forms of civic action, rooted in notions of community or group service, be supported? How can an already active person's capacity and latent potential to engage more politically and more strategically be strengthened? How can we adopt a more expansive understanding of civil society in practice?

How, in short, can broad-based coalitions be built between people participating in traditional, community-oriented ways, new loose associations of interest on the internet and established CSOs as brokers, convenors and shapers of activism?

But there is also an obvious tension that needs to be addressed, with the simultaneous efforts being made to increase the professionalism and institutionalisation of the CSO sector (also measured by the CSI, for example, through counting the number of CSOs that have board meetings and publish their financial information). A key question to consider in follow-up is how CSOs can satisfy the legitimacy, transparency and accountability demands so often made of the sector, and address the development effectiveness agenda, while remaining nimble and flexible enough to better connect with and serve the vibrant, informal community of activism the CSI findings have highlighted.

One response to this would be to promote the notion of participation and activism as a spectrum, and of civil society as a multi-stranded arena, while positioning CSOs as playing a continuing central role, as the organised, accountable face of civil society, but with greater emphasis on reaching out to latent activists and offering them easier pathways for participation.

In moving forward to strengthen civil society, one question above all stands out from this global phase of the CSI study: can CSOs renew their relevance by making themselves hub organisations sitting at the centre of a broad, deep but diffuse web of activism that transcends the fuzzy boundaries between civil society, families and individuals, that connects new private sector forms such as social enterprises, and traditional, but often isolated, non-NGO civil society actors such as faith groups and trade unions?

From the point of view of donors, funders and others with an interest in the health of the sector, the follow-up suggests a further investment in new processes that allows these different constituencies to come together in ways they have not achieved before, and define new ways of

working that draw from the strengths of local, community participation, new online activism and the institutionalised standing of CSOs. Policy interventions should focus on allowing, through a light touch and minimal interference, the growth of this delicate, evolving, vital space.

In the growth of such a new space, these new networks, and these new pathways to participation lies, perhaps, the key to the renewal and increased importance of the sector, and a greater realisation of what civil society could and should be.

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Kazakhstan: Public Policy Research Centre

Kosovo: Kosovar Civil Society Foundation

Liberia: AGENDA

Macedonia: Macedonian Center for International Cooperation

Mexico: Mexican Centre for Philanthropy (Cemefi) / Citizens' Initiative for the Promotion of Culture of Dialogue (ICPCD)

Morocco: L'Espace Associatif

Nicaragua: Red Nicaraguènse por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local (RNDDL) (Nicaraguan Network for Democracy and Local Development)

Philippines: Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE - NGO)

Rwanda: Conseil de Concertation des Organisations d'Appui aux Initiatives de Base (CCOAIB)

Russia: Centre for Study of Civil Society and the Non-for-Profit Sector

Senegal: Forum Civil

Slovenia: Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia

Tanzania: Concern for Development Initiatives in Africa (ForDIA)

Turkey: Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV)

Uruguay: Institute for Communication and Development

Venezuela: Sinergia

Zambia: Zambia Council for Social Development

The Analytical Country Reports, along with a range of other materials, such as case studies and Policy Action Briefs, and a more in-depth analysis of the CSI quantitative data, are available from www.civicus.org.

CSI DIMENSION SCORES BY COUNTRY

Country	Civic Engagement	Level of Organisation	Practice of Values	Perception of Impact	External Environment	Country average score
Zambia	60.81	58.34	59.26	61.73	57.23	59.47
Nicaragua	54.30	67.16	60.64	59.95	52.85	58.98
Uruguay	44.80	59.47	43.11	60.89	73.02	56.26
Japan	44.48	62.32	41.26	57.16	76.03	56.25
Cyprus - GCC*	43.58	59.81	46.14	53.29	77.09	55.98
South Korea	44.37	64.75	54.26	46.66	67.78	55.56
Philippines	54.72	57.86	48.09	62.00	53.06	55.15
Albania	47.60	58.12	58.58	51.19	60.21	55.14
Italy	48.48	63.17	45.83	42.08	72.36	54.38
Morocco	39.87	50.51	59.24	61.83	57.02	53.69
Liberia	55.96	50.53	54.06	55.18	52.66	53.68
Cyprus - TCC*	43.58	50.54	50.91	49.82	70.35	53.04
Macedonia	45.00	59.83	57.73	45.66	56.53	52.95
Chile	47.31	52.34	42.61	46.98	71.04	52.06
Kosovo	44.04	70.73	59.43	32.87	51.34	51.68
Slovenia	46.62	60.18	42.26	32.49	73.76	51.06
Jordan	36.80	55.25	57.23	49.02	55.38	50.74
Mexico	44.90	46.17	50.63	46.26	65.70	50.73
Togo	47.49	58.12	50.98	47.50	45.36	49.89
Croatia	39.44	59.99	41.08	43.19	64.11	49.56
Bulgaria	39.63	56.06	44.75	43.59	63.16	49.44
Argentina	39.04	52.57	39.56	47.58	64.58	48.67
Serbia	42.75	59.18	44.59	38.77	52.27	47.51
Georgia	17.63	64.52	63.54	28.79	59.04	46.70
Venezuela	37.52	56.64	37.79	46.53	54.46	46.59
Armenia	37.43	54.92	51.07	35.10	54.18	46.54
Turkey	31.37	54.56	48.98	40.22	57.48	46.52
Kazakhstan	47.25	48.41	47.38	40.09	46.72	45.97
Belarus	43.36	51.95	45.47	39.49	47.54	45.56
Russia	33.72	51.36	39.79	34.41	53.28	42.51
Dimension average	**43.46**	**57.18**	**49.54**	**46.68**	**60.19**	

* GCC (Greek Cypriot Community) and TCC (Turkish Cypriot Community)

This report draws from the Analytical Country Reports of 29 countries that completed the CSI process in the first half of 2011: Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus (Greek Cypriot Community and Turkish Cypriot Community), Georgia, Guinea, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Liberia, Macedonia, Mexico, Morocco, Nicaragua, Philippines, Russia, Rwanda, Senegal, Slovenia, Tanzania, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela and Zambia.

The numerical data presented in this report comes from the same phase but draws from a slightly different set of countries, as some countries that produced reports used an older and not easily comparable quantitative methodology, while some countries produced quantitative data but did not go on to develop a report. The quantitative data therefore draws from Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus (GCC and TCC as two separate datasets), Georgia, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Liberia, Macedonia, Mexico, Morocco, Nicaragua, Philippines, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, South Korea, Togo, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela and Zambia.

At the time of writing, country reports for Madagascar and Malta were still in progress.

For the purposes of regional comparisons, CSI countries were clustered into six regions, as follows:

- Latin America: Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Nicaragua, Uruguay, Venezuela
- Sub-Saharan Africa: Guinea, Liberia, Madagascar, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia
- Middle East and North Africa: Jordan, Morocco, Turkey
- Former Soviet Union/CIS: Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Russia
- East and South Europe: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Kosovo, Macedonia, Malta, Serbia, Slovenia
- East and South East Asia: Japan, Philippines, South Korea

All CSI scores used in the text were rounded into whole numbers.

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