CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Operational Plan 2013 - 2017
About CIVICUS

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation is an international alliance of civil society organisations and activists working to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world, especially in areas where participatory democracy and citizens’ freedom of association are challenged.

CIVICUS has a vision of a global community of active, engaged citizens committed to the creation of a more just and equitable world. This is based on the belief that the health of societies exists in direct proportion to the degree of balance between the state, the private sector and civil society, and that governance is improved when there are multiple means for people to have a say in decision-making.

CIVICUS seeks to amplify the voices and opinions of people and their organisations, share knowledge about and promote the value and contribution of citizen participation and civil society, and help give expression to the enormous creative energy of a diverse civil society.

CIVICUS, with its numerous partners, works by bringing together and connecting different civil society actors and other stakeholders in civil society; researching into and publishing on the health, state and challenges of civil society; and developing policy positions and advocating for the greater inclusion of and a more enabling environment for civil society. CIVICUS was founded in 1993 and is headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa.

CIVICUS welcomes new members and partners.
To join visit www.civicus.org/join

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From the Secretary-General

Welcome to the CIVICUS operational plan covering the next five years. The production of this document coincides with our 20th birthday, and the CIVICUS team has been using this moment to reflect on the world we want when we turn 25 – and how we will work to get there. We did this by taking our Strategic Priorities – arrived at after extensive consultation with our members and partners – and looking at the areas where an organisation like ours can uniquely add value.

The result is a document that will frame our core work over the next few years. Of course, we will remain agile and adapt to changing circumstances but we will also retain the focus on the vision embodied in this document.

As a global alliance, concerned about every bit of civil society in every country, there is no shortage of things we could be working on. So, we have taken our broad strategic priorities – our thematic triptych of influence, connect and enable – and applied them to the areas we see as important to civil society around the world and then tested them against the ways in which we (rather than someone else) are best placed to make a difference.

For me personally, this is a very important document. In the 5 months since I began working at CIVICUS, I have been talking to colleagues, members, partners and even the occasional stranger about what we should (and should not) be working on. These conversations have fed into this plan and, in turn, I hope the plan will shape the remainder of my tenure at CIVICUS. It might even be a way of checking how successful my tenure is!

The world has changed dramatically in the 20 years since CIVICUS was founded and, chances are, things will change again in the next five years. We believe our job at CIVICUS is to help civil society anticipate and navigate some of those changes, as well as to speak out and challenge those developments that undermine citizen participation. Indeed, while the context has changed and continues to change, our founding objective remains just as valid today – to help civil society be more effective.

Once you have read through our plans, please do let us know if you have comments or suggestions on how we can bring our vision to life. And please do keep checking back over the next few years to hold us to account on the progress we have made.

Dr Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah
Secretary General
CIVICUS
Our strategy

During 2012, CIVICUS ran an extensive consultative process to shape new strategic priorities for the alliance between 2013 and 2017. After 22 consultations and survey responses from 502 participants, the findings of which are captured in a summary report, the CIVICUS Board of Directors, responsible for setting the organisation’s strategy, authored a new document setting out priorities for the coming five years.

The full Strategic Priorities document also sets out a vision of the types of activities which CIVICUS will undertake over the next 5 years, as well as what success might look like for each Strategic Priority. This vision informs every aspect of the Operational Plan which follows.

1. Our Mission:
   To strengthen civil society and citizen action throughout the world

2. Our Vision:
   A worldwide community of informed, inspired, committed citizens engaged in confronting the challenges facing humanity.

3. Strategic Priority 1: INFLUENCE
   We want to ensure that civil society is taken seriously and is able to have a stronger influence on the making of decisions that matter to people’s lives.

4. Strategic Priority 2: CONNECT
   We want to connect the different sources and forces of citizen action so that citizen action as a whole becomes more robust and effective.

5. Strategic Priority 3: ENABLE
   We want to promote better conditions for civil society to do its work, and to enhance and protect optimal standards for all civil society.

CIVICUS’ Strategic Priorities are based on six core principles:
1. Working as an alliance in everything we do
2. Working as a network with multiple hubs and connections
3. Taking a rights-based approach to citizen participation
4. Working in partnership with others
5. Connecting the local with the global
6. Measuring and demonstrating impact

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Our unique contribution to change

There is no shortage of issues or areas that CIVICUS could be working on. So, as a way of helping us narrow down the interventions where we could add true value or make a difference, we have been looking at what makes us unique.

We believe the following four things set us apart:

1. We are a global alliance.
   At our heart, we are a network of civil society actors who work in every part of the world and cover every imaginable issue. We work in partnership with our constituents in everything we do, and have gained a reputation for being Southern-based. This enhances our legitimacy and allows us to draw on the expertise of a global network of civil society practitioners. When institutions partner with CIVICUS, they are tapping into the knowledge and wisdom of many, and not just the relatively few of us based at CIVICUS House in Johannesburg.

2. We care about civil society writ large.
   Our purpose is to strengthen civil society as a whole rather than to focus on a particular civil society concern. We work on the infrastructure that helps civil society actors be more effective; we speak up when the civic space is under threat. We have twenty years’ experience providing cost-effective, timely and global civil society strengthening initiatives that make civil society more effective.

3. We know the international arena.
   CIVICUS is a recognised actor in the global arena. We are widely considered a credible voice and neutral convener on civil society issues in key international processes, and work with several international agencies. We use this positioning to protect and grow the civic space where people can express and organise themselves, speak up for civil society when it is threatened and win it more recognition and influence.

4. We know what’s going on in civil society.
   Because of our network and our hub of specialist knowledge on the state of civil society, we are uniquely positioned to stay on top of the latest emerging trends, threats and opportunities for civil society as they happen. We use this civil society generated knowledge to share best practice, provide a civil society evidence base for advocacy and raise the profile of civil society as credible and important actors of change.

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What went into our plan

To derive our Operational Plan (OP), we asked and answered five key questions, drawing wherever possible on the Strategic Priorities set by our Board of Directors and members:

1. **What will we do?** Our OP is shaped by our new Strategic Priorities: influence, connect, enable.

2. **Why CIVICUS?** Our OP plays to our strategic advantage and niche.

3. **Who will we work with?** Our OP is based on working closely with CSOs, individuals and social movements, governments and media.

4. **Where will we work?** Our OP maintains our current global focus, but targets priority countries where we know we can add value and unlock the potential for a vibrant, sustainable, civil society, as well as countries of concern where we identify particular emerging threats to the minimal conditions for civil society to operate in.

5. **How will we do it?** Our OP is based on the core approaches of our new strategy: research and analysis; communication; convening and network engagement; and advocacy and lobbying.

At a glance: our theory of change

How the 2013-2017 CIVICUS Operational Plan will strengthen civil society and citizen action*

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*We recognise we operate in a complex system of change, where the actions and power relations of others will shape outcomes at least as much as our own OP does. As part of our consultative process to shape new Strategic Priorities, our staff worked with our alliance to map out CIVICUS’ role in relation to other actors. Some early results of this ongoing work are captured on pages 34-35 of our consultation report: https://civicus.org/images/stories/CIVICUS%20SP%20Summary%20Consultation%20Report.pdf.

**Success statements are taken from CIVICUS’ 2013-2017 Strategic Priorities, with some adaptation for standardisation.
## Our operational plan

The activities and outputs captured below are indicative only, and specific programmatic activities will change over the course of the five years and be captured in Annual Operational Plans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>INDICATIVE ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>INDICATIVE OUTPUTS</th>
<th>OUTCOME</th>
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| To protect fundamental civil society rights in countries where they are threatened | • Mobilise quick, principled and effective responses to threats to civic space  
• Amplify civil society responses to threats in the international arena  
• Strengthen civil society capacity to protect fundamental rights | • Campaigns, international solidarity actions and evidence-based advocacy  
• Capacity development initiatives, tools and networks | The work to protect civil society rights will have resulted in a discernible change to the conditions for civil society in each priority country and globally |
| To promote citizen participation and a vibrant civic space, especially among marginalised groups and in countries where CIVICUS can make most impact | • Build awareness of the importance of a vibrant civic space  
• Advocate for policies and practices that support and strengthen civil society  
• Support CSOs to share good practice and lessons learned in legitimacy, transparency, accountability, participatory governance and national networking | • Awareness campaigns about civic space and citizen participation  
• New joint projects and initiatives to strengthen civil society  
• Advocacy and diplomacy on issues which affect citizen participation, such as volunteering and the right to participate  
• Networks, spaces and platforms for CSOs to share best practice and knowledge | Increased level of citizen participation in each priority country and among priority groups will have been observed. |
| To democratise the international arena so that civil society can play a meaningful part in global governance processes | • Assess and lobby around the quality of civil society participation processes  
• Amplify and convene civil society voices in select, key, global governance processes  
• Create opportunities and spaces for civil society participation in global governance processes | • Analysis on civil society participation in international processes (reports, scorecards, communications)  
• Contributions to international dialogues and processes (submissions, meetings, facilitation of civil society participation) | CSOs will have achieved better influence over international institutions and processes. |
| To connect civil society actors across the world in creative and effective ways to generate change | • Connect CSOs with each other across different thematic sectors  
• Connect CSOs, citizens and different forms of citizen action  
• Work strategically with those actors whose first mission is to strengthen civil society  
• Connect civil society with governments, business, media and other actors | • Connections and networks for generating change  
• Spaces and forums for sharing civil society knowledge and strategies | Greater connections among CSOs in different sectors and between CSOs and citizens will have been created. |
| To generate and communicate knowledge and analysis about the state of civil society and emerging trends | • Assess the state of civil society at country and global level  
• Establish a new platform as the leading tool and evidence base for understanding civil society  
• Understand and shape responses to emerging trends affecting civil society  
• Communicate effectively and interactively key research findings and information and news about civil society | • Data collection and analysis about civil society at country and global level (reports, policy briefs, assessments)  
• A new online platform consolidating the leading sources of information on global civil society  
• Analysis of and new projects responding to emerging trends affecting civil society | Civil society actors from across sectors will have access to and use knowledge, analysis and global narratives on civil society to better respond to the emerging trends. |
Measuring our impact

Alongside our 2013-2017 Operational Plan, we're applying a 2013-2017 Impact Planning and Learning Framework (IPLF). This is derived from our guiding document on measuring impact, the Impact Planning and Learning Framework, first developed in 2009.

The 2013-2017 IPLF aspires to take to the next level our systems for monitoring and evaluating not only our activities and outputs, but also the extent to which we achieve our outcomes and, crucially, the impact of our work. In our Strategic Priorities document, we made a renewed commitment to reporting back to our members and constituents about how our work as an alliance is making a difference.

But measuring impact and the contribution of CIVICUS towards strengthening global civil society and citizen action is no simple task. We know we live in a complex world and complex system of actors, where CIVICUS is just one of numerous actors affecting the strength of civil society. Our 2013-2017 framework tries to take this into account, working hard to find new tools and ways of capturing not only hard quantitative evidence, but also the more nuanced, qualitative, stories of CIVICUS’ contribution to change. We’ll therefore have a range of tools for monitoring the health of our alliance, our projects, and whether we deliver our activities and outputs listed above under our Operational Plan - including an Organisational Dashboard, constituency satisfaction feedback, regular management reporting, and tailored monitoring and evaluation systems for our projects.

However, we’ve also identified a set of simple and measurable indicators which cut across each of the outcomes listed above in our Operational Plan, and which should tell us something meaningful about the extent to which those outcomes are being achieved, and about the extent to which CIVICUS is contributing to achieving those outcomes. We acknowledge that these indicators don’t measure perfectly each of our outcomes, and that because much of our work focuses on global civil society (i.e. outside the CIVICUS constituency, on issues such as legal regulation), by looking only at our impact on the stakeholders we work with and at feedback and perceptions from our constituents, we might not capture the full picture. But we think that as a membership alliance, feedback from our constituency should drive how we think. Our indicators are also truly measurable and realistic, and can be monitored without investing disproportionate (and thinly-spread) resources. If we can show substantial improvements on many of the indicators, we’ll be demonstrating with hard evidence – rather than intuition – to our constituents and funders that we’ve made a difference over the 5 years.

### OUR 2013-2017 IMPACT PERCEPTION INDICATORS

By 2017, our constituents will perceive…

1. civil society in the country they work to be more effective and influential.
2. civil society in the rest of the world to be more effective and influential.
3. that they are increasingly able to meaningfully influence the international processes and arenas in which they’re involved.
4. civil society to be more connected where they work.
5. that the conditions for civil society are improving where they work.
6. that the knowledge base about civil society is getting stronger and more useful for civil society.

Data for these six indicators will be drawn from an annual constituent survey, completed by CIVICUS constituents. For each indicator, we will also ask about CIVICUS’ own contribution to any change. The results will be included yearly in our published annual reports, and will be used for the purposes of evaluation.

Our risks and assumptions

**KEY RISKS**

- Decline in traditional donors’ capacity to support civil society, including CIVICUS, matched by disinterest among emerging donors in supporting civil society
- Decline in capacity of organised civil society, leading in turn to weak or disinterested membership
- Disinterest among social movements, activists and new forms of citizen action in connecting and working with traditional, organised civil society
- Balance of quiet diplomacy versus noisy advocacy, and potential to bring to surface tensions, worsening the conditions for civil society
- Further economic and geopolitical instability, including new trends or situations unforeseen in 2013
- Operational risks for CIVICUS (finances, leadership, human resources, governance, registration)

**KEY ASSUMPTIONS**

- That civil society, including CIVICUS, will be able to attract sufficient resources to work towards its mission
- That a sufficient number of civil society actors will commit to the vision of an international alliance dedicated to strengthening civil society and citizen action
- That CIVICUS will be able to find areas of common cause to connect and rally different, fragmented parts of civil society with each other and those outside the sector
- That CIVICUS will be able, through working closely with our partners on the ground, to strike the right balance between diplomacy and public advocacy, especially working in our priority countries
- That CIVICUS will be able to react and adapt to changing global circumstances, and indeed provide leadership in responding to the changing situation for civil society
- That CIVICUS will be able to strengthen its alliance and secretariat operationally
Strengthening the alliance and
the secretariat

We’ll only be able to achieve the goals of this ambitious Operational Plan with the right support platforms and enabling systems in place, which we’ll deliver by doing the following:

- Engaging, developing and growing our membership (organisations and individuals and implementing a clear membership strategy;
- Working through our members, strengthening CIVICUS’ physical presence and voice around the world;
- Mobilising financial resources to implement our Operational Plan and diversifying our income base, through implementing a clear resource mobilisation strategy;
- Continuing to improve the effectiveness of our financial, information technology, human resource and communication systems;
- Integrating perspectives of gender, youth and marginalised voices into our programming, projects and organisational review;
- Implementing and improving our Impact Planning and Learning Framework (IPLF).

Get involved

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