

## **CIVICUS Civil Society Index**

### **A Summary of the Azerbaijan CSI Project Evaluation**

#### **Background: Purpose and Objective**

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and International Center for Social Research (ICSR), the CSI National Coordinating Organisation (NCO) in Azerbaijan, with an assessment of the implementation of the Civil Society Index project. It is hoped that the evaluation will be used to generate lessons that will inform current and future phases of the project as well as the final global evaluation undertaken by CIVICUS. It is also expected that ICSR will gain out of this evaluation through a process of self reflection as well as gauging any important lessons learned. The evaluation might also help to develop strategies for future civil society strengthening initiatives.

The evaluation attempted to assess the outputs and outcomes of the project as developed by ICSR and CIVICUS. Besides, it also assessed the project against other key criteria, such as relevance, validity, participation, capacity building, CIVICUS assistance, and sustainability, effective use of project resources, unintended changes and early impacts.

The evaluation included a mix of self-assessment surveys by the project partners as well as their evaluation of the outputs and outcomes of the project. The report was shared with the country partner and a final phone call was held to discuss the evaluation and next steps. This document presents a brief summary of the key findings.

#### **Key Findings**

##### **Project Outputs**

A body of knowledge on the state of civil society and civil society strengthening practices at national level.

According to the ICSR this output has been mostly achieved because the project generated very detailed and comprehensive information for a great majority of indicators. CIVICUS is satisfied with the overall quality of the CSI country report in terms of its comprehensiveness, accuracy and relevance. They however noted that ‘although the analysis was very good, the quality of the language is rather poor.’ The NCO plans to publish the report in two languages: English and Azeri and will be available in both hard and electronic copies.

Shared understanding of the state of civil society among a broad range of stakeholders

ICSR rated this output as mostly achieved. The NCO held that through thorough and intensive RSC and NAG meetings and discussions, the project was able to elicit a common understanding of the key aspects and notions, describing the state of CS in Azerbaijan.

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society

ICSR evaluated this output as fairly achieved. ICSR explained their rating with the fact that it might ‘not be easy to convert theoretical knowledge obtained and

recommendations into real practices and processes.’ However, they (the NCO), are committed to working towards follow-up plans and implementation of the action agenda recommendations generated by the national workshop.

#### Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society

This output, the second in priority for the NCO was assessed by ICSR as completely achieved. The NCO noted that ‘participants of regional consultations gave a lot of very useful and interesting information.

#### **Outcomes**

##### Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

ICSR evaluated this outcome as fairly achieved. They justified this assessment noting that ‘there is a gap between “theory” and “practice”. It is still a hangover of bad “soviet” tradition.’ The NCO noted examples of stakeholders (governments, donors, researchers, media etc.) making use of the CSI findings in order to acquire information on civil society. The NCO ‘made [a] big presentation about CSI findings at the Caucasian Research Resource Center (CRRC) under Eurasia Foundation for many local researchers, NGO activists [that] caused [a] great interest for the project.’ The NCO feels that the action agenda agreed upon during the national meeting has been fairly achieved.

##### Increased collective voice of civil society in governance and development

ICSR assessed this outcome as mostly achieved. The NCO held that ‘some recommendations [they] submitted to National NGO Forum, [were] used for law making initiatives like Law on Grants, Law on Charity, Law on Foundations, etc.’ They also ‘submitted some ideas of CSI to parliamentarians, and members of Parliament Commission on Social Policy’ (ICSR).

##### Increased receptivity of civil society by external stakeholders

This outcome was evaluated as mostly achieved. ICSR goes further to provide examples of how CSI project contributed to an (increased) voice of CSOs in governance and development and points that ‘members of Parliament Commission on Social Policy are well informed about CSI and expressed interest to provide further assistance.’

#### **Project Relevance**

*How relevant is the project for NAG, civil society, the ICSR and other stakeholders in the country?*

The project was evaluated by ICSR as completely relevant to their work. For them, ‘promoting informational-analytical support for strengthening CS in Azerbaijan’ is a key part of their mission. The only NAG member who took part in the evaluation was of the view that the CSI was completely relevant to his work as the CS is one of his main research interests.’ ICSR and the NAG member held that the project was perceived by other CSOs as mostly relevant to the work of civil society strengthening in Azerbaijan. According to ICSR, the project was perceived as mostly relevant to other stakeholders and has caused a great interest among government, donors, media, and the academia.

#### **Project Validity**

- a) **Secondary data review** was evaluated as between mostly to completely (ICSR) and fairly (CIVICUS ) able to generate accurate data/information on the state of the civil society in Azerbaijan.
- b) **Social Forces Analysis at 1<sup>st</sup> NAG meeting** was assessed as having been fairly to completely (ICSR) and fairly (CIVICUS) able to generate accurate assessment of the state of the civil society in Azerbaijan.
- c) **Regional Stakeholder Questionnaire & Consultations** were evaluated as completely (ICSR) and mostly (CIVICUS) able to generate data/ information about the state of the civil society in Azerbaijan.
- d) **Community Survey** was evaluated as completely (ICSR), and mostly (CIVICUS) able to generate accurate data/information about the state of the civil society in Azerbaijan.
- e) **Media review** was evaluated as being between mostly and completely (ICSR) able to generate an accurate assessment on the state of civil society in Azerbaijan. CIVICUS did not assess the effectiveness of the usage this methodology in Azerbaijan.
- f) **Fact finding studies (policy impact, corporate social responsibility):** were assessed as being between mostly to completely (ICSR) and mostly (CIVICUS) able to generate data/ information about the state of the civil society in Azerbaijan.
- g) **NAG scoring exercise** was seen as mostly to completely (ICSR) and completely (CIVICUS) able to generate data/ information about the state of the civil society in Azerbaijan.
- h) **National Workshop:** The national workshop is yet to be held and as such, could not be evaluated.
- i) **Country Report:** This is yet to be finalised and as such, could not be fully evaluated. However, CIVICUS noted that quality of analysis and data are rather high. However, it is sometimes ‘often difficult to understand (it is evident that the person who drafted or translated the report does not have a very good command of English).’

### **Project Participation**

According to ICSR, several participatory approaches were used during the various stages of the project implementation. These included group discussions, and consultations and these approaches worked well and according to plan.

### **Capacity Building**

Overall, the ICSR CSI team gained new research skills that included participatory research methods and in the scoring exercises. The ICSR team also gained skills in training and facilitation skills (e.g. training of NAG meetings, National Workshop) as well as in convening and networking.

## **Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance and overall implementation**

ICSR is completely satisfied with the overall support provided to it by CIVICUS. ICSR is also completely satisfied by the systems and procedures put in place for the assistance of NCOs in the implementation of the project as well as with the guidance received from the CSI toolkit. ICSR assessed CIVICUS support to them in fund raising as completely satisfactory. They also rated the CSP support as completely satisfactory. None of the areas of support was found wanting.

## **Evaluation of the overall implementation by the ICSR**

The evaluation reveals that CIVICUS is mostly satisfied with the overall implementation undertaken by the ICSR. For CIVICUS, 'ICSR have been responsive and responsible in the project implementation and [...] data produced. The major challenges were operational as the PC was ill for a good amount of the time and therefore the projects last and crucial steps had to be led by other project members. Language challenges were also rather apparent and as such, part of the delay might have been due to the translation/drafting of the report in English.

Overall, CIVICUS is mostly satisfied with the overall support they provided to the NCO. The CSP noted that her assessment was only based on the period that she was the CSP as she was the second CSP and was not yet their counterpart when the research support was necessary. Therefore, she did not need to provide substantial support except for the pre-scoring report and the indicator scoring process, NAG meeting and drafting of the final country report.

## **Sustainability/Replicability**

ICSR is planning to implement the CSI again in the future, perhaps 'in 2-3 years time in order to monitor trends, dynamics and developments, and to [overcome] mistakes made [in the current implementation].' They also note that this is extremely important for their transitional country. So far, CSI has already informed current and future programme activities of the NCO. For them, the CSI project is the first stage of a long-term program on the "building Democratic and Civil Society in Azerbaijan".

## **Project Resources**

### Financial Resources

According to ICSR they had completely sufficient financial resources to successfully implement the project. They were able to stay within the budgeted costs.

### Human Resources

ICSR assessed their human resources for the successful implementation of the project as being completely sufficient while CIVICUS assessed it as mostly sufficient. CIVICUS is mostly satisfied with the work done by the project coordinator, and the PR while they are fairly satisfied with the work done by the CSE.

The work done by the PR was found by the NCO, to be completely satisfactory especially because he did an excellent job when the PC was ill and the PR took all responsibilities on himself. The CSE's work was evaluated by the NCO as mostly satisfactory.

#### Time

ICSR evaluated the time allocated for the project as mostly sufficient. ICSR noted that 'the initial timeline 'was modified totally because of [their] fault and slow work. They noted that this 'was not good and [they] fully realized it.' CIVICUS on the other hand was of the view that the time allocated was mostly adequate had it not been for unforeseen circumstances (illness of PC).

#### **Short/Long Term Impact**

##### Unintended changes

No unintended changes were recorded in the course of CSI implementation in Azerbaijan.

##### Changes within the NCO

Positive changes have been recorded within the NCO. The NCO has been 'involved with a lot of very enthusiastic people, especially young researchers and NGOs activists, and [they have established] stable relationship, partnership, and cooperation for future projects.' They note that they have 'acquired many partners in the different regions of the country.'

##### Changes within partner organisation

Partner organisations have become more aware of the CS in Azerbaijan.

##### Changes within Government:

The government is now 'listening to the CS which is a good sign.'

##### Changes within other institutions

The NCO noted that the many CSOs and NGOs involved in such a serious and complicated project as CSI, gained invaluable experience and chance to communicate with many prominent specialists, well known persons, got intellectual food for thoughts and future activity. As highlighted by one participants of regional consultation in Baku, she had never seen something with as much intellectual insights and comfort psychological atmosphere.

#### **Conclusion:**

In general, the findings of the evaluation are largely positive in most instances. Despite the delays occasioned by the ill health of the project coordinator, the NCO ensured that another NIT member took charge of the PC's work. The engagement with the government (in legal and administrative issues like the Parliamentary Commission on Social Policy) is also a positive pointer and as the NCO holds, it would be of interest to re-implement CSI again in the future in order to track where such engagements have borne any positive results for the civil society and the society in general in Azerbaijan.