

CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI)

A Summary of the Bulgaria CSI Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the Balkan Assist Association (BAA), the CSI country partner in Bulgaria 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 BAA will gain out of this evaluation through the 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 outcomes and outputs the project as developed by BAA and CIVICUS. Besides it also assessed the project against other key criteria , such as relevance, validity, participation, CIVICUS assistance, 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 organised 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

This has been mostly achieved and self-assessment by the National Coordinating Organisation (NCO) reflects that the project has mostly achieved what it set out to achieve. There were some challenges – it lacked depth in certain aspects e.g policy impact of civil society, the country report did not necessarily reflect the findings from the research. According to CIVICUS the project falls short in analysing and identifying clearly the strengths, weaknesses and recommendations.

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

This output perceived as the most important output has been assessed as completely achieved. Events such as RSC, NAD, NW meetings helped build a shared understanding on the state of civil society in Bulgaria.

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society developed

This output has also mostly been achieved. One important and positive result has been the “1% Bill” – an initiative that recognizes that citizen’s taxes could potentially finance a certain amount of civil society activities.

Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society within participating countries as well as cross-nationally

This output has also been completely achieved. The challenge here is that there is a need for continuous dialogue and debate on civil society. Only then will this output be fully achieved. Future evaluations are necessary to assess this output.

Project Outcomes

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

There has been much demand for the country report from various institutions and organisations. The challenge is that the major political and social changes might date this report.

Increased collective voice of civil society in governance and development

This output has mostly been achieved however like output 4; it needs to be repeated for effective results.

Increased openness to civil society by external stakeholders

There has been some achievement with regard to this outcome by way of motivation of stakeholders participating in the NW to take forward the “1% Bill”. It reflects a good start.

Project Relevance

How relevant is the project for civil society, the NCO and other stakeholders in the country?

1. According to the NAG members, the project has helped them gauge the perceptions of stakeholders regarding many aspects of charity and volunteering in Bulgaria – issues which are important for achieving their organisational purpose.
2. For BAA, this project has been completely relevant and bodes well with the organization's objectives and purpose. One concern has been that the skills set necessary for the CSI especially research is not the strength of BAA. Thus the research aspects were a definite challenge.
3. Also, NAG members consider the project completely relevant for civil society strengthening. They are of the view that the project will provide a benchmark that could be used to evaluate this sector in the future. However the BAA felt differently – the project was not considered by stakeholders as truly reflecting the real situation and that the CSI is 'similar to other research'. Future monitoring and feedback will provide important insights on this issue.

Project Validity

Did the project succeed in providing an accurate picture of the status of civil society in the country?

1. The collection of secondary data, primary research tools such as community survey and the RSC and activities like the National Workshop achieved their slated objectives. The media review and fact finding did not achieve the objectives. Challenges include – recruiting volunteers, lack of implementation of the policy impact and CSR studies frequent changes in the toolkit, the perception that there was lack of flexibility in implementing the project lead to difficulties and some negative consequences in the implementation.
2. A major concern raised by CIVICUS was with the scoring exercise – the NAG often did not score on the basis of the evidence presented. This led to a disconnect between the narrative and the scores – according to BAA, they were aware of the tendency of many CSO representatives to score on the basis of their perceptions rather than evidence.

Project Participation

What was the extent and quality of participation by relevant stakeholders in the project?

1. Activities where participatory process and methodologies were applied include – RSCs, NAG meeting and National Workshop. All these activities worked out well according to the NCO.

CIVICUS Assistance

What was the quality of CIVICUS's support to the NCO as well as the NCO's role in executing the project?

1. CIVICUS by and large provided adequate support. However the frequent changes to the toolkit led to some difficulties in the implementation. Other concerns cited include funding (all NCOs should have been given funding or not at all), timeline.
2. For CIVICUS two support and coordination activities worked well – trouble shooting and editing the country report document. What ailed the project was a lack of quality control systems which thankfully has been rectified.

Sustainability/Replicability

What is the NCOs perception regarding implementation of the project in the future?

1. According to the NCO, this project should be implemented again after 3-5 years. A large percentage of NAG members are also of the view that this project should be repeated in the country in the future.

Project Resources

To what extent has the human and financial resources been appropriate for the implementation of the project?

1. According to BAA the financial resources to undertake the project were fairly adequate. However they did fall short of resources which led to the decision of not implementing certain activities – media review (not implemented fully) and fact finding.
2. While HR was considered mostly adequate, some concerns were raised whether BAA was fully equipped with the task of implementing this project especially the research aspects. Also concerns were raised about the involvement of the CSE.
3. A major concern raised by the NCO is the time period for the project which they felt was not sufficient.