

CIVICUS Civil Society Index Project

A Summary of the Northern Cyprus Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide CIVICUS and MC-Med¹ with an assessment of the implementation of the Civil Society Index project in northern Cyprus. CIVICUS will also be conducting a parallel participatory evaluation exercise with Intercollege, as implementation organization for the southern part of Cyprus; findings that are common for the two cases will be featured in both reports. The findings of 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 hoped that MC-Med will also gain out of this evaluation through the process of self reflection as well as gauging any important lessons learned.

The evaluation attempted to assess the project's success against the original outcomes and outputs set forth in the planning phase by MC-Med . It should be noted that many outcomes will only become visible in the future and therefore will be evaluated in more depth at a later date. Therefore, in this evaluation, planned outcomes have been assessed against any relevant preliminary changes taking place due to the project. 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, and early impacts.

Methodology of the Evaluation

Methodological note of the CSI's implementation in Cyprus:

In order to explain the evaluation methodology it first needs to be advanced that the project's methodology was adapted to Cyprus geopolitical context: given the division in Cyprus the CSI was implemented by two Project Coordinating Organizations on each part of the island: MC-Med for the northern part and Intercollege for the southern part of Cyprus. The joint CSI implementation between MC-Med and Intercollege resulted from a protocol signed by the two organizations in 2004 and was the first project in which both institutions worked together within this agreement.

The Project Index Team was thus composed of both PCOs and created as a multi-communal team for both practical and political reasons. The project was implemented by members of each community yet encouraged and necessitated constant exchanges between the team members of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot origin with a Coordinator from the United States. The final product of the project was one report that was split in two sections to analyze the respective communities and also included a

¹ Due to the geopolitical situation in Cyprus the project was conducted by two partner organizations for northern and southern each, while one organization retained the responsibility of coordinating the project and its funds.

island-wide analysis.

The outcome of this exchange was deemed as very positive; one team member mentions that through these types of collaborations and exchanges in ‘small island-wide teams working together on concrete projects [...] long lasting peace needs to be built.’

Key Findings

Project Outputs

A body of knowledge on the state of civil society

According to the PCO this output has mostly been achieved. For the PCO the CSI “is the first comprehensive study of the state of civil society in Cyprus.” It was considered that although the methodology allowed for a broad spectrum of participation more effort, time and resources would have been necessary to completely achieve this output. Most respondents expressed satisfaction with the final report whereas the assessments ranged from satisfied to very satisfied.

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

The present output was considered to be only fairly achieved as the CSI aimed to establish a basis for dialogue between different stakeholders on the state of civil society as this was very limited beforehand. Both Project Advisory Group (PAG) and Regional Stakeholder Consultation (RSC) meetings and discussions grappled with understanding and digesting the methodology of the CSI first and thus left little space for “full discussion and consensus building”. It is to be noted that the concept of civil society was relatively new for most participants as the CSI is the first attempt of its kind in Cyprus.

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society

As the Final Workshop venue for identifying said strategies covered a tremendous amount of information before being able to flesh out strategies, this output was considered as fairly achieved. The Final Workshop consisted of two components a mono-communal section where each community looked at their own individual findings and an island-wide section which looked at findings across the communities. Given the current political climate in Cyprus, the act of bringing together members from both northern and southern parts of Cyprus limited the participation to those specifically interested in working together throughout the island and not a broader representation of CSOs. Several projects are expected to ensue from the CSI as in addition to MC-Med developing projects addressing the main issues identified by the CSI, the UNDP-ACT is using the findings for capacity building initiatives across the island and will use some findings as a baseline for monitoring specific indicators related to their internal evaluation process.

Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society

Forums for sharing knowledge were fairly achieved as these were considered as first steps toward a continued and fuller dialogue. Therefore it was considered that the final workshop and PAG meetings helped only somewhat to provide a space for civil society. Other workshops and forums are planned by the MC-Med, as mentioned above.

Project Outcomes

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

Knowledge-based actions are yet to be developed and MC-Med is basing its 2006-2008 CS Program on the CSI findings, in addition to the efforts by the UNDP to utilize these, as mentioned above. Outcome 1 is thus considered as fairly achieved. The action agenda has been only somewhat implemented as it is yet too early to assess.

Increased collective voice of civil society in governance and development

As it is deemed to early to assess, this outcome has not at all been achieved. It is however noteworthy that bolstered by the CSI findings an NGO network and the NGDO platform were created and will potentially increase civil society's collective voice. Both of these are however still at very early stages.

Increased openness to civil society by external stakeholders (eg. Government, donors, business)

Similarly to outcome 2, this outcome has not at all been achieved as it is too early to tell.

Assessment of other criteria

Project Relevance

The main output of the CSI, the final report, was considered as very relevant to the work of other organizations working to strengthen civil society in Cyprus. As above, it was stated that the UNDP has launched a call for proposals on capacity building for CSOs, to which it attached a copy of the CSI report and specifically requested for the proposals to address the weaknesses highlighted by the CSI assessment. MC-Med also observed that the project was completely relevant to them as an organization. In terms of the CSIs significance in strengthening civil society in northern Cyprus as well as its relevance to external stakeholders, both were assessed as mostly relevant.

Project Validity

The toolkit as the main project resource and guide was deemed a helpful tool for MC-Med; the methodology was adapted as mentioned previously to tailor it to the needs of a divided island. As the project was carried out in parallel in the northern and southern parts of Cyprus it also required an additional dimension between the individual assessments that outlined island-wide recommendations. As a result some questions were added to the Community Sample questionnaire around bi-communal activities. The final workshop also featured the additional component of discussing issues concerning civil society in Cyprus as a whole. As for the project implementation process, tasks that were considered as implemented particularly well were the first PAG meeting, the civil society questionnaire of the Population Survey, Media Review and the Policy Impact Studies, whereas the RSCs and the Final Workshop presented some challenges.

The implementation in the Cyprus context was a learning experience for all parties involved as it included a two-pronged project team. As a recommendation to CIVICUS, the PIT emphasized that the decision-making process needs to be more inclusive of both PCOs (both of MC-Med and of Intercollege) with respect to how to approach certain issues coming up throughout the implementation.

It was furthermore pointed out by the PIT that although it is of importance to have an actionable report and final output it would also be of interest to be able to assess some indicators separately for different types of organizations. The example advanced was of trade unions which are very distinct from other CSOs in Cyprus.

Project Participation

The entire methodology was considered to be very participatory by the implementing organizations and the PIT worked actively to build consensus during the project implementation. This was underscored as a very difficult endeavor within the context of a divided island, yet 'extremely rewarding at the end'. The PAG, RSC and Final Workshop were all conducted in a participatory manner. The implementing organization notes that the participatory process and tools enhanced the validity of the project as the PIT was 'dynamic and involved' to reflect a more accurate picture of civil society in Cyprus. It was noted that better training of the PIT would have been useful as facilitation of these forums was 'extremely difficult'.

Capacity Building

Research skills that were considered as strengthened during the implementation of the CSI project are mostly participatory and quantitative survey research methods. Other members of the PIT indicate that capacity in all areas relevant to research skills and report writing skills, to training and facilitation, use of participatory methods as well as convening and networking skills was built. Some of the work had however been subcontracted, and the experts hired that were already well versed on the respective topics. Facilitation and training skills were strengthened, yet it is felt by MC-Med that the training of the PIT 'should have been more participatory and more extensive by CIVICUS'. Facilitation skills should be emphasized to a greater extent, according to the PCO to take advantage to a greater extent of the RSC and PAG meetings. MC-Med also mentioned that 'the knowledge we've gained in having conducted [the CSI] was invaluable' and that 'overall it was an excellent learning process'.

Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance and PCO Implementation

The overall support provided by CIVICUS to the PCO was considered to be mostly satisfactory. The systems and procedures for the CSI were fairly satisfactory to the PCO; it was observed that there were frequent adjustments, adaptations or changes to the methodology that were not always clearly communicated to the PIT. Despite this, the toolkit was considered to be mostly satisfactory and 'very clear and helpful'.

CIVICUS was considered to be only somewhat helpful with respect to the fundraising activities conducted by the PCO. Although the project had secured full funding from the outset the need for more funds became evident to finance the Media Monitoring and Final Workshop. The PCO noted that no concrete support was received in trying to raise further funds, although the overall attitude by CIVICUS staff was considered as 'very positive'. As contingency funds were used by the project to cover these needs, they were not available at a later stage, when the project passed its deadline. CIVICUS' support that was considered as particularly effective was the training workshop, the conceptualization

of an island-wide project implementation and the design of the Final Workshop. On a more self-critical note, CIVICUS also pointed out that expectations would have needed to be further explained.

CIVICUS was mostly satisfied with the overall implementation undertaken by MC-Med. The project was completed in less than a year which presented the risk of sacrificing better quality as the organization was pressured on finishing the product. The systems and procedures put in place by the coordinating organization were mostly satisfactory, however at times tensions arose with respect to the coordination of the project between CIVICUS and MC-Med as the organization tasked with managing the funds and coordinating the implementation for both northern and southern Cyprus. It was commented on by a CIVICUS member that the fact that MC-Med was funded for the project by UNDP and sub-contracted Intercollege to do the assessment in the South created tensions. In the future it should be made clear that technical assistance is always CIVICUS's role and that MC-MED's role is financial monitoring. That said, CIVICUS and MC-Med generally worked closely and well together, and the communication was considered as fluid.

Sustainability/ Replicability

Having funded the CSIs implementation in Cyprus, the UNDP is planning to conduct another phase of the CSI in 2008 as part of their monitoring efforts; the PCO MC-Med will put forth a proposal with hopes to secure it for the second implementation of the CSI throughout Cyprus. MC-Med is also planning to conduct a number of follow-up activities to the 2005-2006 implementation of the CSI and will continue to monitor signs of impact of the project.

Project Resources

The financial resources were considered to be fairly adequate as it was unclear what costs some project elements would incur. The project did not stay within the budgeted costs due to 'continued changes that were required regarding the final report'. It is noted that 'negotiations between CIVICUS, UNDP and the two authors were very time consuming'. The finalization of the report was also noted to be more time consuming than expected and both institutions had to 'put in a very significant amount of extra resources, mostly related to staff time'. Staff capacities were considered between completely and mostly satisfactory although some PIT members required more support than others. The time allocated was not at all sufficient in the implementing agency's perspective. CIVICUS saw the timeline allocated between mostly and fairly sufficient but acknowledged that "there was a constant feeling of stress to complete the project in time". It was felt that if "three more months [would have been added] to the implementation, the quality of the research and report would have increased substantially."

Short/Long Term Impact

As mentioned at the beginning of the report the project was purposefully designed and implemented as an island-wide effort between northern and southern sides of Cyprus. Although this cannot be coined as impact as of yet it is hoped that it will send a message and inspire other similar efforts and collaborations between the two communities.

Changes within the organisation: Strategic planning and programme design in line with the findings of the CSI is being conducted, including the planning of CS programme for 2006-2007. MC-Med is also using the data and findings to support project proposals.

With respect to the collaboration in the framework of the protocol mentioned earlier, the two institutions are now working on two new projects related to supporting civil society as has been mentioned earlier:

1. Workshops, seminars, and an international symposium focussing on the CSI findings;
2. Creation of an Island-wide CSO Directory to be available online and in print.

Changes within media: Much more coverage and interest of media was noted during the implementation of the CSI because of their role as stakeholders at the PAG level. The media is also invited to the workshops planned for 2006-2007 in order to further this relationship.

Changes within Government: One impact registered on this level can be related to having members of government on PAG, which has opened much better relations between the sectors. MC-Med is also working on a symposium project that includes multi-sector partnerships (including government and the private sector) and follow-up seminars based on the findings and methodology of the CSI.

Changes within other institutions: The UNDP has taken the CSI to monitor changes within civil society and design capacity building projects along these findings, including a call for project proposals. Furthermore they have incorporated some indicators as part of their own internal evaluation process and use the findings as a resource in their strategic planning exercise.

Changes within the civil society sector: The CSI findings will be incorporated into a topic specific capacity building curriculum; depending on the group each seminar will focus on issues such as advocacy, strategic planning, etc at the CSO level across the island. Once the CSI's findings are used to a greater extent within these capacity building seminars it is hoped that more direct initiatives on punctual weaknesses stressed by the project will ensue.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be stated that the CSI implementation in northern Cyprus received a positive assessment from both CIVICUS and MC-Med, with the main highlights pertaining to the bi-communal nature of the project implementation and the potential for impact as several follow-up activities have ensued spearheaded by both a donor organization as well as CSOs. It is also of importance that the CSI generated knowledge as the first of its kind implemented in Cyprus. The challenges encountered were however also important: as related to the bi-communal project implementation, the complexity of coordination the project required indicated the need for more clearly defined guidelines

and procedures, while the strict timeline for the project also impacted its implementation. The lack of data and scant voluntary engagement in the RSCs and Final Workshop were also emphasized as a challenge whereas finding trained staff to form part of the PIT in northern Cyprus was also rather difficult. Lastly, more clarity is required from CIVICUS' side more clarity is required with respect to expectations in terms of the PCOs level of engagement and quality standards. The PIT however asserted their interest in implementing the project