

## CIVICUS Civil Society Index Project

### A Summary of the Egypt Evaluation Report

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

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide CIVICUS and the Centre for Development Services (CDS) with an assessment of the implementation of the Civil Society Index project in Egypt. 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 CDS will also gain out of this evaluation through the process of self reflection as well as gauging any important lessons learned.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to assess the project's success against the original outcomes and outputs set forth in the planning phase by CDS. 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.

#### **Key Findings**

##### *Project Outputs*

A body of knowledge on the state of civil society and civil society strengthening practices  
According to the NCO this output has been somewhat achieved. CIVICUS indicated that the quality of policy impact studies was rather poor and that the community survey was not conducted. Hence, important information on citizen participation and citizen views of civil society were not captured fully in the report. Nonetheless, CIVICUS indicated being satisfied with the country report.

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

For CDS, this output was only fairly achieved. The low rating indicated by CDS was due to the absence of major participants whose input on civil society issues could have been valuable and who were not able to contribute due to the tight schedule the CSI was conducted on. Nonetheless, the evaluation showed that the national workshop offered a platform for different stakeholders to share their ideas and knowledge of the civil society in Egypt.

##### A set of strategies for strengthening civil society

The CDS indicated that this output was mostly achieved. The National CSI Workshop feedback questionnaire showed that participants were concerned with what, if anything, might happen “after the report.” As indicated in the evaluation of the workshop, participants “did not expect such a positive reception of the report [...] as the current circumstances in Egypt and the negative stigmatization that has been built around civil society in the last few years told us that the study might suffer. However, to our surprise, things went smoothly.” The evaluation further elaborated that participants saw this as a good springboard for further research opportunities that aim at strengthening civil society in the country. NAG members indicated that “civil society in Egypt is perceived to be in

the nascent stages,” and that the CS environment is “changing very quickly”. As such, NAG members did not wish to “jump to conclusions and say that things will improve as they are not quite sure about the repercussions or the duration of such changes.” Overall, however, the NCO felt that the project offered a solid set of strategies that could possibly improve and strengthen civil society.

#### Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society

According to the NCO, forums for sharing knowledge on civil society were only fairly achieved. This output received a low evaluation from the NCO “because there was no follow-up to sustain the debates.” Furthermore, the NCO noted that to their knowledge none of the consultations resulted in cooperation between stakeholders beyond the CSI project. According to the NCO, as some consultation activities had been outsourced (RSCs) it was not reasonable to expect these debates would be sustained.

#### *Project Outcomes*

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

The NCO indicated that this outcome was only fairly achieved, although it was noted that the report was not yet made public at the time of this particular evaluation. The evaluations do not indicate that there has been any implementation of the action agenda.

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

The Regional Stakeholder Consultation evaluation indicated that this project represented “the first time that leaders from different types of CSOs met together to discuss and assess civil society action and collaboration in their governorate as well as nationally.” In these meetings, it was determined that CSOs should do more to encourage all people to become active in civil society (especially women, youth and minorities), and that each region should have a coordinating body to facilitate dialogue between civil society organizations. Despite these activities, the NCO indicated that it only fairly increased the collective voice of civil society in governance and development.

##### Increased openness to civil society by external stakeholders (e.g. Government, donors, business)

As with the other two outcomes, this one was also viewed as only having been fairly achieved. As noted by the NCO, “members from governmental institutions did contribute to the national workshop and its debates...and recognized the need for dialogue and change.” Action, however, appears to have stopped with only the recognition of the need for dialogue and change. As well, there is no evidence showing that the CSI project contributed to increased media coverage of CSO activities. On a more positive note, however, the Corporate Social Responsibility evaluation indicated that “there is a definite trend toward implementing CRS activities in Egyptian companies, especially in companies that have activities abroad or with international firms. However, this trend is as yet in its early stages and has not achieved breadth and consistency amongst the majority of Egyptian companies.” That said, this is not a trend that can be attributed to the CSI but rather to the nascent character of civil society in Egypt.

*Assessment of other criteria*

Project Relevance

Five members indicated that it was completely relevant and 3 indicated that it was mostly relevant. One member stated that it was only fairly relevant to his work. The evaluations indicated that the CSI was completely relevant to those members currently employed as either social or development workers. As one development worker wrote, “NGOs are part of civil society in Egypt so it is very relevant to us...” Another NAG member added, “The dimensions of society analysed in this project present a well-rounded, clear picture of Egyptian civil society. The project provides an appropriate description of the current climate of relations and work within the development NGO sector of Egypt.” One NAG member observed that the project itself “paralleled hardships encountered in civil society work.” He continued, “The research highlighted the important strengths, and the more challenging weaknesses that must be addressed before Egypt may effectively fill gaps impeding the progress of the civil society.”

Project Validity

According to CDS, “it was not the methodology per se, but rather the application of it that may have been problematic as various opinions and approaches were used during the implementation. This did harm the end product.” One NIT member indicated that he “didn’t really see any problematic aspects in the methodology since most of the problems we faced throughout the process are typical to such research activities - especially one that depends on a significantly large population of experts.” This sentiment was echoed by another NIT member who stated “having a broad representation of CSOs agree on set answers when they come from very different backgrounds” was problematic for the methodology.

CIVICUS believed that the quality of policy impact studies was rather poor. As well, a community survey was not conducted. Hence, important information on citizen participation and citizen views of CS were missing which was problematic for the research.

Project Participation

According to the CDS, a wide range of participatory methods were used during the CSI project including focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and ranking and scoring questionnaires. The CDS indicated that the focus group discussions and the semi-structured interviews worked the best out of all the methods used. Participation was never considered problematic but at times difficult to attain due to time constraints by many involved in the process.

Capacity Building

The evaluation assessed whether any specific skills were gained by team members of the CDS as a result of or in the course of implementing the CSI project. According to the CDS, skills were gained in the area of quantitative survey research methods, data analysis and interpretation, and report writing. Although one NCO member indicated that the project coordinator already had experience in conducting similar activities, it was nonetheless a good opportunity to improve these skills. One member of the NIT stated

“The process of working on the report was an excellent exercise in working with a team, task delegation and organization. I particularly enjoyed working with the CDS team who were extremely efficient and highly organized and committed.” He continued, “The CDS team responsible for moderating the sessions during the NAG meeting and the conference was extremely professional and I learnt a great deal just by observing them on the job.”

#### Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance

According to evaluations, the CDS was completely satisfied with the overall support provided to it by CIVICUS. As well, CDS expressed complete satisfaction with the systems and procedures put in place by CIVICUS for assistance, as well as complete satisfaction with the guidance received from the CSI toolkit. CDS was mostly satisfied with the support provided by CIVICUS with regard to fundraising, including support for development of proposals and identifying funding sources. Finally, the CDS indicated complete satisfaction with the Country Support Person and their assistance with the project. The NCO commented that “CIVICUS has a good system in place and they should keep it the way it is.”

CIVICUS reported being mostly satisfied with the overall implementation undertaken by the NCO. As well, CIVICUS was only fairly satisfied with the systems and procedures put in place by the NCO to implement the project. According to CIVICUS, the project coordinator changed frequently and there was a somewhat unclear division of labour between the CDS and other partners. As a result, fast and effective project implementation was hampered.

The CDS reported being completely satisfied with the Country Support Person’s assistance. CDS mentioned in their evaluation that “CIVICUS has a good system in place - it should keep it this way.” CIVICUS reported that having a CSP with Arabic language skills allowed deeper and more critical probing, which greatly assisted project implementation.

According to CIVICUS, frequent changes in the project coordinator role meant that the PC was not trained by CIVICUS and some activities were not conducted according to standards. Nonetheless, CIVICUS reported being satisfied with overall project implementation. As mentioned previously, the CDS indicated that they were pleased with the system CIVICUS has in place and indicated nothing should be changed.

#### Sustainability/Replicability

There was unanimity in agreement that the CSI should be implemented again in the future. The time frame, however, varied from every two years to every five years. As one member stated, “civil society changes continuously and CSI should measure the evolution of civil society every two years.” Another member suggested that once every five years would be adequate. All were in agreement that the project is important for tracking changes and progress in the evolution of civil society in Egypt.

### Project Resources

According to the CDS, the financial resources to undertake the project were mostly adequate. The CDS team felt that human resources were fairly adequate for the project. CIVICUS noted that frequent changes in the project coordinator role meant that the coordinator was not trained by CIVICUS. Thus, some activities could have been better implemented. Overall, however, CIVICUS indicated that the human resources provided by the NCO were mostly adequate. CDS indicated that the time allocated for the project was only somewhat sufficient. As mentioned on the NCO evaluation, “initially, yes (time was sufficient), if it had been carried on properly (but) it had to be wrapped up in a short period of time.” CIVICUS, however, indicated that the time allocation was completely sufficient. The National CSI Workshop evaluation indicated that more time would have allowed for a better and more nuanced Arabic translation of the report.

### Short/Long Term Impact

Unintended changes: According to the National CSI Workshop evaluation, participants did not expect such a positive reception of their report and event. As one participant wrote on the evaluation, “The current circumstances in Egypt and the negative stigmatization that has been built around ‘civil society’ in the past few years told us that this study might suffer. However, to our good surprise, things went smoothly.”