

CIVICUS Civil Society Index

A Summary of the Macedonia CSI Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC), the CSI country partner in Macedonia 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 MCIC 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 MCIC 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 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.

The NCO considered this output as their highest priority and it has been the completely achieved.

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

For the MCIC, this output has been mostly achieved. The NCO elaborated that “the participatory approach of CSI challenged participants and members of the NIT and NAG, to see themselves as part of a “bigger picture”, to think beyond their own organisational or sectoral context, reflect strategically about relations within and between civil society and other parts of society, identify key strengths and weaknesses of their civil society and assess collective needs.” These led to “shared understanding on the terminology and most importantly, on the findings on the state of civil society in Macedonia.”

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society

This output, according to MCIC, has been fairly achieved. As the report is not yet published, the NCO reported that they cannot provide a concrete answer as regards follow-up projects on the CSI.

Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society

MCIC reported that this output has been mostly achieved.

The consultative activities within the project, based on the reflections of the NCO, mostly provided a space for civil society to debate and share information on issues concerning civil society in Macedonia.

Outcomes

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

MCIC indicated that this has been mostly achieved. The NCO reported that the report was used during the preparation of the draft governmental strategy for cooperation with CSOs. MCIC expressed hope that many stakeholders will be able to use the report as soon as it gets published.

Increased collective voice of civil society in governance and development

This output has been fairly achieved. According to MCIC, the CSI report will be published and promoted in Macedonian language in October 2006. The NCO is optimistic that the CSI will contribute to increasing the collective voice of civil society during this period.

Increased receptivity of civil society by external stakeholders

MCIC gave this outcome a fairly achieved rating. Until now, the NCO reported that the CSI team in Macedonia as well as the findings of the country report are being consulted in the process of creating the government's strategy for strengthening civil society.

Project Relevance

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

MCIC indicated that the CSI project is completely relevant to their organisation. A NAG member gave a mostly relevant rating indicating that the report was "well accepted by NGOs in Macedonia". The NGOs' show of interest with the findings of the report was proven and affirmed by their attendance in the consultative meetings while the filling out of questionnaires for the first time, gave an opportunity to the stakeholders to clearly see the real picture of civil society in Macedonia. Another NAG member agreed to the MCIC rating explaining that "CSOs are crucial resource, constituent, and partner for UNDP Macedonia in advancing sustainable human development goals and principles, and given the collective power of CSOs in building social, economic, and political agenda, it is clear that strengthening the knowledge and understanding on CSOs is very relevant for UNDP to make informed analysis and build relevant and effective partnerships with civil society organisations." Further the NAG member reported that the country report is "expected to assist UNDP in designing interventions" to address some issues that were

identified. The exchanges and consultations during the preparation of the report have also been useful, according to the same respondent. The NAG member concluded that "in broader terms, the project is relevant as it addresses data, information and analysis gaps and provides a mirror for civil society to reflect, correct, and grow."

Project Validity

For one NIT member, the secondary data review, Social Forces Analysis, community survey, NAG Scoring exercise and the National Workshop generated a mostly accurate assessment of the state of civil society in Macedonia while the Regional Stakeholders' consultation and the media review were able to provide a completely accurate assessment. However in the view of another member, the regional stakeholders consultation and the NAG scoring exercise only generated a somewhat accurate assessment as the former is not very well adapted to the local context thus generating "very general and superficial responses." The community survey was also listed by one NIT member to be problematic as the "NCO was not able to modify in it in Macedonian context making it of no use for some indicators."

Project Participation

In implementing the CSI project, the NCO reported that they have applied participatory methods and tools. For one, MCIC reported that they have involved more civil society experts and NAG members than what was recommended in the toolkit.

Capacity Building

By implementing the CSI, the NIT reported that they have gained research skills/capacities particularly in secondary data gathering, participatory and quantitative survey research methods, data analysis and interpretation and report writing. The NCO indicated that they already possess training and facilitation skills as well as convening and networking skills even before the project started.

Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance and overall implementation

According to MCIC, they were completely satisfied with the overall support provided by CIVICUS in the implementation of the project. While CIVICUS reflected that they were mostly satisfied with the support provided to the NCO. One member of the CIVICUS team commented that she made herself "available for the NCO's questions and requests, spent time reviewing documents, and trouble shooting via *skype*." The same respondent mentioned that the review of the country report and assisting in the conceptualization of the NAG scoring meeting were the areas of support which were effective.

CIVICUS was "impressed by the seriousness of the NCO in implementing the project, prioritizing, and using it for various internal and external purposes. Since the CSI is such a large and diverse project, it presents many such opportunities, however, not many NCOs, besides MCIC have used the project to such a great extent."

Sustainability/Replicability

MCIC indicated its interest to replicate the project in 2008 or late 2007. The NCO reported that they have used information from the CSI project to formulate their own medium-term plan which includes parts of the research methods as monitoring and evaluation tools. Further, MCIC indicated that the CSI influenced the programs of the MCIC Civil Society Departments specifically the Institutional Development of the Civil Society (IGO) and the Government Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society (SGO).

Project Resources

Financial Resources

According to MCIC, the financial resources to undertake the project were mostly adequate. Even if the NCO was only able to secure funding from UNDP, the funds were sufficient as they have decided at the onset of the project's implementation to finance the project from their own budget.

MCIC suggested for CIVICUS to “inform NCO prior to implementation on how much the project might cost, in order to prevent over optimistic budgets” and to “set up a global fund to assist the NCOs implementing the CSI.” It would also be helpful if other NCOs would share how they were able to cut cost in implementing the CSI.

Human Resources

The NCO indicated that human resource has been completely adequate as the MCIC employees have experience in project cycle management, networking and facilitation. MCIC, during the phone call, suggested that in the next phase the project should involve external consultants if there are enough funds to assist both in the contextual and written side of the country report. This person must have good regional knowledge and it would be an added value if that person is fluent in English to assist in report writing.

Time

For MCIC, the time allocated to complete the project was fairly adequate, it was “much too optimistic.” After the research part was completed, “a lot of people who were involved got tired and did not have the energy to complete the last parts of the report draft.”

Short/Long Term Impact

Changes within the NCO

During the ICSI Workshop, the NCO indicated that the CSI project raised their organisation's awareness on the importance of evidence-based approach in research. Implementing the CSI project also built their capacity/skills in conducting research in general. One of the unintended changes that happened while implementing the project was that the CSI, according to MCIC, was able to “improve the formulation of their programmes” which led to a successful fundraising with the European Union.

Changes within partner organisation

The NCO reported that the CSI project has “helped build common interest among CSOs which is a first step in reaching a consensus on the inclusive concept of civil society.” In addition, the NCO indicated that through the project, stakeholders were able to identify problems or challenges facing the different sectors of civil society.

Changes within the government

MCIC reported that the government was able to use the CSI findings as evidence in support of the strategy. Namely, later in 2005, using the report and the recommendations generated by the CSI consultative process, MCIC collaborated with international organisations, such as the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC) and COWI to provide technical assistance to the Government in a programme aimed at strengthening civil society in Macedonia funded by the European Agency for Reconstruction. The objective of this programme is to improve the relationship and cooperation between CSOs and government. In the next phases of the programme, MCIC will assist the Macedonian government in developing and implementing a strategy for the third sector. Their task will mainly consist of drafting the strategy and a combination of training and organisational development interventions. An NIT member served as project coordinator for said activity.

Conclusion

One of the highlights of the project identified by the NCO during the evaluation call was the participatory approaches used by the CSI. The project was able to connect CSOs working on diverse issues and focus on challenges that affect the sector and the society in general.

The MCIC came up with sound recommendations to further improve the next phase of the project including giving more focus on time and resource planning, levelling off of expectations among implementing organisations, and considering each research component of the project as a publishable output, among others.

There were notable impacts of the project on the implementing organisation, with the partner organisation and the government. Specifically, the project was able to raise the awareness of the MCIC on the importance of evidence-based approach in research and improve the development of their programmes. The CSI has also helped in building common interest among CSOs which is the first step in reaching a consensus in defining the concept of civil society. Further, the findings of the CSI informed the government’s strategy in strengthening civil society in Macedonia.

For the next steps, there are plans to conduct a workshop in Glasgow on legitimacy and transparency together with some countries from the CEE since these were identified as common problems for these countries. The NCO also reported doing several primary researches on areas identified in the process as having lack of data such as CSO’s internal democracy and accountability.