CIVICUS Civil Society Index

A Summary of the Mongolia CSI Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the Center for Citizens' Alliance (CCA, former CEDAW Watch Network Centre), the CSI country partner in Mongolia 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 Mongolia 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 Mongolia 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, 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.
According to the NCO this output has been completely achieved. CCA explained that indicators for each of the dimensions "allowed them to assess the information on civil society in Mongolia."

Shared understanding of the state of civil society among a broad range of stakeholders
For the CCA, this output has been mostly achieved as the "CSI project provided a good opportunity for CSOs that were involved in the implementation to achieve a broad understanding of the major theoretical and practical issues involving CSOs and their activities."

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society
This output has been mostly achieved. Citing the results of the National Workshop, the CCA reported that the participants agreed on the adoption of seven broad strategies for civil society strengthening.

Of the strategies that were identified, CCA reported that priority shall be given to the development of the National Civil Society Network of Communication and Cooperation, the

Development of the Ethical Self-Regulating Mechanism and *aimag*[1]-level CSI exercises starting with 4-5 *aimags* for the first round in 2006.

Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society

CCA reported that this output has been mostly achieved. The CSI project has done well in "bringing together various CSOs at the national and local levels" to discuss common issues that affect them. Further, the project was able to use different methods of cooperation among CSOs, including information sharing, joint assessment, and exchange of knowledge, experience, insights, and strategies.

Outcomes

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

CCA indicated that this has been mostly achieved. Although it is still too early at this stage to assess this outcome, the NCO reported that the "process has provided information, knowledge and analytical skills" to the participants evident during the national and local workshops.

Increased collective voice of civil society in governance and development

This output has been fairly achieved. The NCO indicated that it is still "too early to make an assessment" however, they had been informed that local CSOs raised many issues with the local authorities and in some cases, even collectively agreed to take concrete action. In one instance, CCA reported that 130 Hovd *aimag* CSO participants met to discuss and address some of the critical environmental issues affecting the community.

Increased receptivity of civil society by external stakeholders

For the NCO, this output is the most important however they "do not have any indications on the openness of external stakeholders."

As detailed in the country report, local authorities, according to CCA, are more open to listen to CSOs in some *aimags* (Uvurhangai and Hovd), which shows that somehow, the CSI project contributed to this receptiveness.

Project Relevance

CCA indicated that the CSI project is completely relevant to their organisation as it helped them "promote democracy and civil society in Mongolia through improved methodology and strategy." It has been a very useful and productive engagement, according to the NCO, as the project has been undertaken within the framework of the International Civil Society Forum for Democracy (ICSFD).

In CCA's view, CSOs perceived the project as completely relevant for CS strengthening as "the project's implementation process had vividly shown that interaction and networking helped participating NCOs improve their capacity in gathering and analysing relevant information."

Most external stakeholders including donors, the media, and the academic community welcomed the project and perceived it as mostly relevant. As for the government, the International

[1] *Aimag* is the Mongolian word for province. (www.wikipedia.org)

Conference of New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD) team had shown interest in the project's future impact.

Project Validity

In CIVICUS' view, the NCO mostly adhered to the CSI toolkit, however, "due to the special character of Mongolian civil society, some adjustments were made around the selection of communities" which were previously agreed upon by both organisations.

In CCA's view, the Regional Stakeholders Consultation and the NAG scoring exercise were the most problematic aspect of the methodology. On the other hand, an NIT member shared that the methodology itself was "very informative and useful," however, "mechanical translation of the questions seemed somewhat artificial and the NIT had to make some adjustments in them." Further, the same respondent mentioned that the "different approaches in understanding and interpreting the indicators would likely influence the accuracy of scoring," however these inaccuracies have been addressed during the second NAG meeting and the national workshop.

The NIT member shared that despite the limitations of the toolkit, it provided a "very useful and comprehensive methodology to help assess the state of civil society." Since it was the first time that Mongolian CSOs have used said toolkit and methodology, for the said NIT member, they do not exclude the possibility that they might not have been able to maximize the toolkit's potential. Moreover, the same respondent added that the toolkit is designed for use of as many CSOs as possible, therefore, it cannot be ideal for every occasion. During the implementation of the project, the NAG, reflecting the diversity of Mongolian society, had to make some adjustments among themselves in their scoring, and the NIT had to make some adjustments in the questionnaires, as well. For CIVICUS, pointing out these adaptations is "a very positive sign" and also an indication that the NCO followed the project's suggested guidelines. In many other countries, according to CIVICUS, these adaptations were not made which led to some problems. Lastly, one NIT member shared that hopefully "the next CSI project in Mongolia would be able to even better adjust the methodology to the Mongolian environment and thus produce even more precise information and analysis."

Recommendations:

- A CSI exercise should start with a theoretical and methodological workshop for all NIT and NAG members. This is particularly important when the implementing organization is not an academic or research institution but an "activist organization." (NIT)
- Give sufficient thought to the adaptation of the concepts, definitions and terms used in the CSI toolkit, especially in the questionnaires, to the country context. The CSI exercise in Mongolia would have benefited greatly if the NIT and NAG had engaged seriously on the conceptualization and operationalization of this indicator in the Mongolian context and, for example, focus more on verbal, psychological, symbolic violence, inter-personal physical violence, institutional violence, domestic violence, violent crimes, violence against children, violence against elderly people, against the poor, etc. (NIT)
- Mongolian translation of the toolkit needs to be looked at again to be able to extract the precise information needed for evaluation. This can be done in consultation with Mongolian sociologists and researchers. (NIT)
- The toolkit has to be more flexible so as to enable a more accurate assessment of the state of civil society in a given country. That way it would be more reflective and thus, serve the needs of the given country/province. This applies especially to questionnaires for the

RSC and CSR, which "should reflect to the fullest extent possible the perceptions and traditions of the people and not a mechanical translation of the questions in the toolkit."

Project Participation

In implementing the CSI project, the NCO reported that they have "used all the suggested tools with mixed results" and most of the participatory processes worked according to plan. However, the social forces analysis created some difficulties because "some NAG members insisted on their partisan positions rather than their individual views."

The participatory researcher commented that the NAG, RSC and NC discussions "enhanced the validity of the findings greatly as they allowed for open criticism, additions and amendments to the information, which was particularly important in highlighting regional as well as, to some extent, sectoral differences."

Recommendations:

- More experienced facilitation (NIT)
- Greater conceptual clarity on indicators and some concepts involved in the research (NIT)
- Greater mastery of the NIT and NAG members of the analytical and methodological aspects of the exercise (NIT)
- Conducting a broad awareness-raising/promotion on CSI exercise was also important to ensure fuller attendance, which is especially important in the capital city given overloaded schedules of most active members of civil society and other stakeholders (NIT)

Capacity Building

The NCO gave a mostly satisfactory rating saying that the advice given by the CSP has been helpful during and after the implementation of the project. On the other hand, CCA noted that the assistance in raising the needed funds has not been adequate despite the fact that CIVICUS has a wide network of funders and supporters.

Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance and overall implementation

CIVICUS expressed that it is completely satisfied with the overall implementation of the project and commended the NCO for a "fabulous job" despite the "difficult context of Mongolia." Specifically, CIVICUS cited "fundraising and getting the scarce human resources on board to implement the CSI effectively" as areas where the NCO did very well. Also, the NCO managed to link the CSI to other ongoing activities (ICFSD) and to publicize the project widely.

Sustainability/Replicability

CCA indicated its interest to replicate the project in 2-3 years time as it has been "very useful both at the national and local levels." The CSI, according to the NCO, was able to inform their current programme activities specifically in elaborating national democracy governance indicators and in assessing the state of democracy in Mongolia.

Project Resources

Financial Resources

According to CCA, the financial resources to undertake the project were somehow adequate. Translation and additional work because of the changes in the toolkit have taken much time, as well as human and financial resources.

Human Resources

CCA believes that human resources have been fairly adequate. The lack of experience to implement the project and in some cases, language difficulties proved to be problematic based on the NCO's experience. For CIVICUS, on the other hand, human resource was completely adequate.

Assessing the work undertaken by the participatory researcher and the civil society expert, CCA gave both very satisfactory ratings. The participatory researcher, according to CCA, has done an excellent job because of her commitment in the project and background knowledge both in the Mongolian and English language; the CSE was also helpful and effective in carrying out his duties.

CIVICUS expressed complete satisfaction with the work undertaken by the project coordinator and the participatory researcher and gave a mostly satisfied rating to the work of the latter who drafted the country report. CIVICUS, however, commented that the country report drafts showed "a certain political bias without providing substantial evidence in the country report."

Time

CCA is of the view that the time allocated for the project was mostly sufficient as "more time was needed for the conduct of participatory research." CIVICUS gave a completely sufficient rating for this indicator.

Recommendation:

? Allocate more time for the conduct of participatory research. (NCO)

Short/Long Term Impact

Changes within the organisation/within partner organisations/with project participants: The CSI project was able to help improve their understanding of the issues and concerns of CSOs and their relations with the stakeholders. CCA also shared that many of the project's participants are keen to replicate the project at the local level.

Changes within media : The project has somewhat provided the media with a better understanding of the problems of CSOs.

Conclusion

The evaluation report had drawn its findings from the point of view of the whole National Index Team (project coordinator, participatory researcher, and civil society expert) which helped provide a very comprehensive evaluation of the CSI project in Mongolia.

Despite the scarcity of information about the Mongolian civil society, the NCO was able to gather an "impressive amount of information and resources" through the conduct of participatory research methods suggested in the CSI toolkit. This resulted in a "broad and in-depth" representation of the state of civil society in Mongolia based on the reflections of the NIT.

It is also worth noting that the NCO was able to conduct a successful national workshop which, along with Mongolian stakeholders, was able to generate a set of strategies for strengthening civil society including the development of a national civil society network for communication and

information sharing, the implementation of the CSI project in each of the *aimags* to examine more closely the contextual differences among regions, and the development of a civil society justice system, among others.

In the evaluation report, CCA shared some challenges that they have encountered during the project's implementation. For one, the NCO found difficulty in adapting some of the concepts and terms used in the toolkit into Mongolian context. Language translation of the questionnaires and the country report from English to Mongolian and vice versa was also a challenge as it incurred additional work and costs to the NCO. CCA also indicated low satisfaction in terms of CIVICUS' support in fundraising. In general, both organisations expressed satisfaction with the over-implementation of the CSI project in Mongolia with the partner NCO indicating its interest in replicating the project in two- or three years time.