

CIVICUS Civil Society Index Shortened Assessment Tool (CSI-SAT)

A Summary of the Montenegro CSI-SAT Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the Centre for Development of NGOs (CRNVO) with an assessment of the implementation of the Civil Society Index project in Montenegro. 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 CRNVO 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 outputs and outcomes of the project as developed by CRNVO and CIVICUS. Besides, it also assessed the project against other key criteria, such as relevance, validity, participation, capacity building, CIVICUS assistance, project 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. 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 mostly been achieved. The rationale for this assessment is that the CSI successfully managed to assess the state of civil society in Montenegro. The NCO states that this is the first time that Montenegro has developed such a comprehensive assessment.

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

It is worth noting that the scope of stakeholder learning in the CSI-SAT is largely limited to the exchange within the Stakeholder Assessment Group (SAG). Within the given scope of stakeholder discussions it was considered that this output, enabling a shared understanding of civil society, was considered as somewhat achieved as “many organizations and institutions were not involved in the process. Those who were involved agreed on most of the issues. The process was important as many of the participants changed their view on some key issues after the discussions and data had been presented”.

Improved self-understanding of civil society and better appreciation of its roles

At this stage the self-understanding of the organizations and individuals that are part of civil society has been improved in as much as they were part of the SAG or National Index Team. This output was perceived by the NCO as mostly achieved.

An assessment of civil society's strengths and weaknesses as well as priority areas for policy and action

The NCO was of the view that this output was completely achieved. The NCO also commented that cooperation between stakeholders beyond the project is yet to be seen. So far some of the CSOs involved have established cooperation with companies representing the business sector. Furthermore, the NCO states that the cooperation with media improved significantly during the CSI project. In the future the NCO suggests the establishment of a larger NAG and the involvement of some other forms of consultations with those stakeholders who cannot directly be involved in the process.

Project Outcomes

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

There are certain signs that knowledge-based actions by civil society may yet gain momentum due to the findings the CSI-SAT yielded, although it is still premature to state this conclusively. An example of stakeholders making use of the CSI SAT's findings so far is the NGO coalition that has created a code of conduct as a response to CSI SAT findings. Furthermore, strategies between government and civil society have been developed for future cooperation. This outcome is therefore suggested to have been somewhat achieved at this stage.

Project Relevance

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

The CSI has been completely relevant according to the NCO and the "project has given the team a good framework to conduct research on civil society and other related areas, through a variety of new tools". The NCO was also of the view that "the team managed to find much more secondary data than they had expected through the CSI project in Montenegro". Increased cooperation with civil society from other countries has also been identified by the NCO.

Although it is still early to detect further impact at this stage as the country report is yet to be disseminated, all those who were part of the project believed that it was mostly relevant for the wider civil society.

Project Validity

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

According to both CIVICUS and the NCO the methodology used generated a mostly relevant assessment of the state of civil society in Montenegro. It is worth noting that having implemented a CSI-SAT, the NCO did not use any primary data gathering tools,

which would usually form part of the full CSI. As stated earlier, the project encountered challenges due to the lack of secondary data on civil society. Both CIVICUS and CRNVO commented that there were a few indicators that lacked exact secondary data and would require more research. Furthermore, some of the data generated was not consistent which created some confusion, e.g. the number of registered NGOs. CIVICUS also identified other challenges, e.g. the ambiguous status of Montenegro as part of Serbia which meant that some of the surveys were conducted only in Serbia which did not include Montenegro. Other areas identified as problematic by CIVICUS was the high turnover of SAG members. Furthermore, a member of CIVICIUS stated that “the process would have benefited if a mapping of the secondary data sources that exists for just Montenegro had been conducted and accordingly a decision be made on which indicators to keep in and which ones to keep out”.

Capacity Building

Have any specific skills been gained as a result of implementing the CSI project?

According to CRNVO, skills were built on most aspects including secondary data-gathering, data analysis and interpretation, report writing, as well as training, convening and networking capacities. The areas where capacity was not built included those that were not applicable (for example: participatory research and quantitative survey research methods).

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. Centre for Development of NGOs (CRNVO) expressed complete satisfaction with the overall support provided by CIVICUS. It was noted that the project was approached with a very high level of commitment and interest in a short time span. They also expressed satisfaction with the systems and procedures that were put in place. Particular areas of support that were considered as helpful by the NCO include the CSI-SAT toolkit, the methodology as well as the regular consultations, comments and advice on the project implementation process. CIVICUS evaluated the overall support to be mostly satisfactory. It was noted that the NCO was completely satisfied with the Country Support Person’s assistance and overall support.
2. CIVICUS was mostly satisfied with the project implementation in Montenegro. “The program coordinators who also doubled as the CSE did an excellent job on moving the project forward. The only area of difficulty was the time factor, e.g. the review of scores which took longer than anticipated”. The NCO was particularly lauded for convening the SAG and conducting scoring meetings as well as writing the country report.

Sustainability/Replicability

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

The NCO is of the view that it would be of great importance to implement the full CSI.

Project Resources

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

The financial resources were deemed to be somewhat adequate for the implementation of the project, as the finances were limited. The NCO stated as an example that “the translation costs were very high which ultimately forced us to do it on our own”. Furthermore, even though the Montenegro CSI team included as many volunteers as possible to cut costs, the project was still not able to stay within budget.

The human resources of the project were considered to be mostly adequate to successfully implement the project. The CSE and Project Coordinator role, which was undertaken by one person, was considered as essential for the satisfactory outcomes yielded on this occasion. The PC/CSE was sort of a team leader for authors (composed of two more local persons. CIVICUS was of the view that the human resources were between completely and mostly adequate to successfully implement the project. However, a member of the CSI stated that “it would have been useful if the NCO had hired an English native speaker to edit and draft the country report”. Another member of CIVICUS stated that “the head of the organization coordinated as well as wrote up the country report. The NCO drew on another CSI partner from Croatia to play an advisory role as a consultant to the project and assist in the SAG first meeting and the scoring meeting”.

CIVICUS assessed the time allocated for the project as completely sufficient. However, a member of CIVICUS again mentioned that the process could have been quicker, while the CSI-SAT team evaluated the time allocated for the project as not satisfactory at all due to the fact that the project required much more time than anticipated.

Short/Long Term Impact

What are the early signs of impact of the project? Have there been any unintended changes (negative and/or positive)?

- According to the NCO “the level of analytic skills of the organisation’s members is raised, as well as the interest for further research. In addition to this, new project ideas have been generated and initiatives started. For example the only score that received a 0 was the budget transparency, and this is exactly one of the things we will be dealing with in the coming period”.
- The NCO reports that media has shown an increased interest for their activities, particularly those that were involved through the NAG. The NCO further stated that “one of the NAG-members was a media representative and editor in one of the most influential daily newspapers. This brought lots of exposure in media and resulted in an increased interest in CSOs daily activities”.
- The NCO reports positive changes in the relations with Government, “Increased confidence in our programs as well as improved relations between CSO and Government has been identified”. The Macedonian Government adopted the Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Sector in January 2007. Since the whole

Strategy is based on the CSI findings it is considered to be a major sign of impact.

5. Recommendations

- To allow for other unpublished materials to be used in the CSI-SAT.
- To increase the number of NAG members from all sectors

6. Conclusion

In general, the findings of the evaluation are largely positive. The CSI in Montenegro was perceived as both comprehensive and accurate by all stakeholders. Even though the ambiguous status of Montenegro as part of Serbia posed some challenges in terms of availability of secondary data the report was evaluated as mostly relevant by all parties involved as well as by other organisations in Montenegro. According to the evaluation the CSI was widely received as both an action and as a learning tool. According to Centre for Development of NGOs (CRNVO) the early signs of impact include improvements in relationships with the media and government. Although it is still early to detect further impact of the CSI-SAT all parties involved agree that it would be of great benefit to implementing the full CSI in Montenegro as soon as possible in order to build on the momentum that has been established by this exercise.