Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the De Nieuwe Dialoog, the CSI country partner in Netherlands with an assessment of the implementation of the Civil Society Index - Shortened Assessment Tool 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 De Nieuwe Dialoog 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 De Nieuwe Dialoog 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, and 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 De Nieuwe Dialoog this output was somewhat achieved because 'much of the information gathered was already known and gathered in a more scientific way.' The country report was evaluated as fairly comprehensive, accurate and relevant.

Shared understanding of the state of civil society among a broad range of stakeholders
De Nieuwe Dialoog evaluated this output as mostly achieved because 'good discussions on the many indicators resulted in more understanding, e.g. of each others perceptions.'

Improved self-understanding of civil society and better appreciation of its roles
De Nieuwe Dialoog evaluated this output as somewhat achieved because some insights have been gained.

An assessment of civil society’s strengths and weaknesses as well as priority areas for policy and action
De Nieuwe Dialoog evaluated this output as somewhat achieved because 'more specificity is probably needed besides this, priority setting is yet to be done (and agreed).’ The NCO further held that the consultative activities within the project (SAG, scoring meetings etc.) did not necessarily provide a space for civil society and stakeholders to debate and share information even though these consultations resulted in cooperation between stakeholders beyond the CSI project especially through the Dutch social forum meeting.

Project Outcome

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders
According to the NCO, the CSI project is yet to achieve this outcome because 'follow-up actions are currently under discussion.

Project Relevance

How relevant is the project for De Nieuwe Dialoog, the civil society and other stakeholders in the country?

De Nieuwe Dialoog evaluated the CSI project as somewhat relevant to their work. They held that they were able to get a ‘better insights in weaknesses of civil society in the Netherlands and hence opportunities for improvement.' The NCO further held that the project was perceived by external stakeholders as somewhat relevant but more was yet to come. Academics were however very sceptical of the value of the exercise.

The NCO also held that the project was somewhat relevant to the goal of strengthening the Dutch civil society even though most of this was still to come and would only happen 'when the report is discussed in broader fora that will explore options for action.'
Project Validity

Did the project succeed in providing an accurate picture of the status of civil society in the country?
De Nieuwe Dialoog held that the project’s methodology was somewhat able to generate an accurate assessment of the state of civil society in Netherlands. The methodology validity was undermined by ‘limited representation in the SAG and the generality and the unspecific nature of many indicators. CIVICUS on the other hand was of the view that the project methodology was mostly able to generate an accurate assessment of the state of civil society in Netherlands.

According to De Nieuwe Dialoog ‘several indicators and criteria were ambiguous, hence difficult to score. On the other hand, CIVICUS held that the 'CSI SAT in Netherlands was implemented in a very short time frame, therefore not allowing extensive data collection.

Capacity Building

Have any specific skills been gained as a result of implementing the CSI project?
The university students involved in the project acquired skills on research as a result of implementing the CSI-SAT project. No skills in training and facilitation and networking were acquired by the team.

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. Overall, De Nieuwe Dialoog was of the view that they were mostly satisfied with the support given by CIVICUS. They singled out support on both scoring and on report writing as well as the editing of the report by the CSP as areas that were particularly helpful as well as with the guidance received from the CSI-SAT toolkit. They were also mostly satisfied with systems and procedures put in place by CIVICUS to assist them in the project implementation.
2. CIVICUS was mostly satisfied with the project implementation in Netherlands as well as with the systems and procedures put in place by the NCO to implement the project. All activities were carried out well except for the collection of some secondary data. The only concern relates to the lack of in-depth data and analysis in the country report.

Sustainability/Replicability

What is the NCOs perception regarding implementation of the project in the future?
De Nieuwe Dialoog does not intend to implement the full CSI in the future because they doubt ‘whether the full CSI would be the best means to further improve insights in the functioning of Dutch civil society as it is not context specific enough.’ As such, they consider it much more important to define and implement improvement actions other than to do much more study.
Project Resources

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

1. The financial resources were deemed to be completely adequate for the implementation of the project.
2. The human resources of the project were considered to be mostly adequate to successfully implement the project by all parties asked. Both CSE and Project Coordinator were considered as essential for the satisfactory implementation of the project.
3. The time allocated for the project was evaluated as somewhat adequate by all interviewed even though 'the project took much longer than originally planned.

Short/Long Term Impact

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

1. The NCO reported that there have been unintended changes on the negative side as 'the scientists involved have become quite sceptical about the value of the exercise. They questioned the validity of the exercise because of the combination of a limited representation of civil society making the assessment and the inclusion of several ambiguous indicators.
2. For all organisations involved, the exercise was good to increase mutual understanding.

Conclusion

In general, the findings of the evaluation are largely moderate with respect to most aspects. The evaluation, however, reveals that there seems to have been little real value added to the Dutch civil society as a result of the CSI-SAT implementation yet. In the perception of the De Nieuwe Dialoog an important part of the exercise is still underway and the evaluation would perhaps have yielded more impacts had it been done later. It is likely that the CSI exercise and report will provide a useful basis for discussions and joint critical reflection within the Dutch civil society and hopefully increased cooperation for improvement. The fact that scientists are sceptical about the exercise would not hinder this.