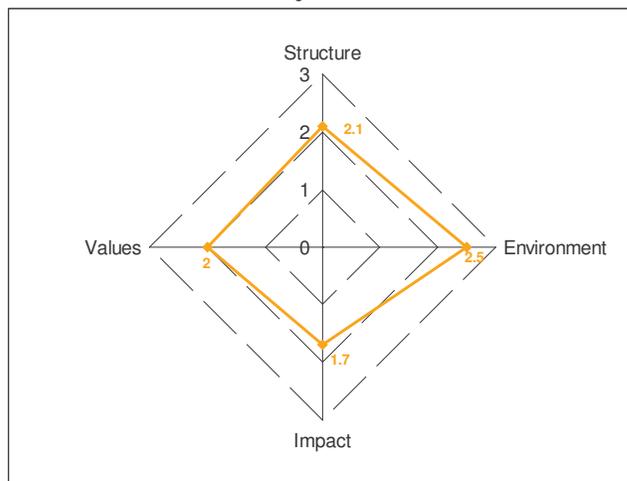


CIVICUS CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX REPORT FOR THE NETHERLANDS

Executive Summary

The Civil Society Index - Shortened Assessment Tool (CSI-SAT) is a comprehensive participatory needs assessment and action-planning tool for civil society actors at country level. This report presents the results of the CSI-SAT conducted in the Netherlands. *De Nieuwe Dialoog* implemented the project from January to June 2006. Using a relatively broad definition of civil society, the CSI-SAT examines civil society along four main dimensions: Structure, Environment, Values, and Impact. A Stakeholder Assessment Group (SAG), comprising mainly activist-oriented Civil Society Organisation (CSO) representatives, scored the Civil Society Index (CSI) indicators, which were grouped in subdimensions, which in turn, were aggregated in four dimensions. In figure I below, the results of the four dimensions are visualised. The results for the Structure, Values and Environment dimensions are quite satisfactory, with scores above two on a zero to three point scale. However, the assessment of civil society's impact is rather disappointing at 1.7.

FIGURE I: Civil Society Diamond for the Netherlands



Although overall a quite positive picture of the state of civil society emerged from the assessment, some indicators that negatively affected the scores within the Impact dimension indicator are worth mentioning: 4.1.3 shows low impact (1) on the national budgeting process, responsiveness to priority social concerns (4.3.1) received a low score of 1, in particular regarding the issues of a multicultural society and integration.

Civil society also scores low (1) on empowering marginalised people (4.4.3), supporting livelihoods for poor people (4.4.6) and meeting the needs of marginalised groups (4.5.3), but for the latter two it was noted that the Dutch state provides ample services. The scores didn't reveal any particular strong aspects (scores 3), hence a relatively low overall score resulted for the Impact dimension

In the other dimensions there are also remarkable scores. In the Structure dimension for example, collective community action (1.1.5) scored low (with a 0), as did charitable giving (1.2.1) and diversity in CSO leadership (1.3.2). However, there are also several very strong aspects on citizens participation, including breadth of citizens participation (other than collective community action) (1.1), time spent by volunteers (1.2.2) and distribution, international links and resources of CSOs (1.3.3, 1.4.5 and 1.6.3, resp.).

As for the, overall favourable, Environment dimension, political rights (2.1.1) scored a 2 instead of 3 for two reasons. First, new developments in anti-terrorism legislation may endanger civil liberties (in particular of minority groups), and second, non-Dutch citizens in the Netherlands lack some fundamental political rights, such as voting. Furthermore, state decentralisation (2.1.6) is found to be low (0). Despite the high scores of 3, there was a heavy debate on allowable advocacy activities (2.5.2) and autonomy (2.6.1). The issue here is that the state has been moving away from subsidising a broad range of CSOs to attaching stricter conditions on CSO funding, such as demanding that they not criticise government. Corporate philanthropy (2.7.3) scored low with a 1, partly because their sponsoring is perceived as advertising. Despite these critical points, the environment is generally very positive, including a strong rule of law and freedom (2.1.3, 2.2 and 2.5), little corruption (2.1.4), socio-economic circumstances (2.3), trust (2.4.1) and state support for CSOs (2.6.3).

In the Values dimension the low scores of 1 for both diversity within civil society and action to promote tolerance at the society level (3.3.2) require attention. In the Values dimension the SAG inserted an indicator 3.8 “Diversity”, with respect to ethnicity, culture and sexual preference, in addition to the CIVICUS standard set, which is analogous to its “Gender diversity” indicator. The strongest aspects of the Values dimension are transparency and non-violence in the CSO sector (3.2 and 3.4).

Next Steps

De Nieuwe Dialoog will publish the findings of this study and popularise this publication among CSOs and that part of the public which is less familiar with the topics discussed here, including the government, civil servants and politicians, both at the national and local level. This publication could also serve as a useful introduction for students of civil society and related themes. *De Nieuwe Dialoog* will also initiate meetings with those members of civil society who are interested in being involved in building on the findings of the CSI project. In its English version, this publication will also serve as the basis for international comparisons within the framework of the Civil Society Index project as a whole.