

CIVICUS Civil Society Index

A Summary of the Orissa CSI Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the Center for Youth and Social Development (CYSD), the CSI country partner in Orissa 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 CYSD 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 CYSD 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.

According to CYSD this output has been mostly achieved. The CSI report is the first of its kind in Orissa and it has gone beyond the NGOs in comprehensively dealing with civil society. It has been successful in bringing out many insights on internal structure, values, and impact of CSOs. As such, the country report fairly provides very relevant information for organisations working to strengthen civil society.

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

For CYSD, this output-the first in priority for them- has been somewhat achieved. They noted that 'during the study process, unique opportunities were created for interaction between different categories of CSOs. However, these interactions were limited only to the shared understanding among all stakeholders on the complexities of CSOs in Orissa.'

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society

The evaluation reveals that this output was somewhat achieved. A session to share CSI findings with civil society stakeholders from various fields was held in May 2006 and this

forum discussed the strengths and weaknesses of CS in Orissa and proposed a set of guidelines to strengthen civil society in Orissa.

Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society

According to CYSD, this output has been mostly achieved. CYSD held that several consultations among civil society stakeholders were held during the research process, particularly during RSCs and fact-finding studies. Besides their information collection utility, CYSD used these forums to disseminate knowledge on health of civil society in other parts of Orissa. Moreover, the sharing session of final study findings among varieties of CS actors has been able to throw light on the overall health of CS in Orissa. These consultations between different stakeholders in the process of CSI implementation have resulted into cooperation between them especially in advocacy pertaining to Right to Information and National Rural Employment Guarantee Acts which have been a major highlight in the past one year.

Outcomes

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

CYSD assessed this outcome as somewhat achieved because the action agenda agreed in the national workshop has only been somewhat implemented. As such, there are no examples of stakeholders using the CSI findings to justify certain actions. However, the media has already shown a keen interest in the report since the national workshop and they are requesting for findings.

Increased collective voice of civil society in governance and development

CSI project somewhat achieved this outcome. They however noted that even though CSI study findings have not directly contributed to increased collective voice of CS, as various other developments at the state level are contributing to this, nevertheless, RSCs had to a great extent, been able to bring different civil society actors to a common platform.'

Increased receptivity of civil society by external stakeholders

CYSD assessed this outcome as fairly achieved. The NCO noted that 'government officials and donor agencies participating in different forums have acknowledged that the CSI project has been successful in initiating a process of critical self-evaluation among the CSOs. The NCO believes that this has brought in a change in the mindset of the external stakeholders and particularly that of the government officials who are now not very critical of CS action, rather in most of the cases they are seeking their cooperation.'

Project Relevance

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

CYSD evaluated the project as completely relevant to their work. The two NAG members who took part in the evaluation also held that the project was either mostly or completely relevant to their work. CYSD held that they 'have been working to strengthen

civil society in Orissa for a long time and that this study provided deeper insights to their work in civil society strengthening.' One NAG member held that CSI created a climate of self-reflection and therefore helped them to understand their own stand as well as the stand of other CSOs in the four CSI dimensions. It further helped them to identify like-minded entities that they could network with around common concerns to streamline approaches of CSOs towards positive social change. External stakeholders (e.g. government, donors, media, and academics) also perceive the project as mostly relevant to them. The media representatives in the national workshop and NAG consultation acknowledged the report as of the historic contributions.

Relevance of the CSI to civil society strengthening in Orissa

According to CYSD, the CSI project was perceived as completely relevant to civil society strengthening in Orissa because the findings with respect to diversified civil society actors, the environment in which they are operating and their strengths and weaknesses will help in plugging the loopholes and ultimately strengthening CS in Orissa. Moreover, no such comprehensive report has ever been produced at the state level.' The NCO continues to add that the understanding of CS all the CS dimensions provide a scope to the government to collaborate with the CS to bring about development in the society especially given that CSO are playing a critical role in the development process.

Project Validity

- a) **Secondary data review** was evaluated as somewhat to mostly (CYSD) and mostly (CIVICUS) able to generate data/information on the state of the civil society in Orissa.
- b) **Social Forces Analysis at 1st NAG meeting** was not implemented in Orissa.
- c) **Regional Stakeholder Questionnaire & Consultations** were evaluated as mostly to completely (CYSD) and mostly (CIVICUS) able to generate accurate information on the state of civil society in Orissa.
- d) **Community Survey** was evaluated as mostly to completely (CYSD) and mostly (CIVICUS) able to generate accurate and relevant data/information on the state of the civil society in Orissa.
- e) **Media review** was evaluated by both parties as fairly able to generate accurate and relevant information on the state of the civil society in Orissa.
- f) **Fact finding studies (policy impact, corporate social responsibility)** were evaluated by both parties as mostly able to generate accurate data/ information about the state of the civil society in Orissa.
- g) **NAG scoring exercise** was as mostly (CYSD) and fairly (CIVICUS) able to generate accurate data/ information on the state of the civil society in Orissa.
- h) **National Workshop** was evaluated by both parties as mostly able to generate accurate data/ information about the state of the civil society in Orissa.

Project Participation

According to CYSD, both the Regional Stakeholder Consultations (RSCs) and National Advisory Group (NAG) consultations were quite participatory. In both these methods, the survey findings were accepted after approval of the participants.

Capacity Building

The evaluation assessed whether the CYSD team members as a result of or in the course of implementing the CSI project gained any specific skills. According to CYSD, they were able to gain capacities in research and other skills such as the moderating, consultation and facilitation skills. They particularly learned a lot from the guidelines on how to use various tools in the project.

Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance and overall implementation

According to CYSD, CIVICUS provided mostly adequate support in the entire project implementation. 'CIVICUS has provided regular support in different stages of the project. Their support in developing the project, carrying out the tools of investigation, was very useful' (CYSD). As such, CYSD is mostly satisfied with the systems and procedures put in place by CIVICUS to support the NCOs especially the monthly calls by the CSP. The toolkit was found to be completely useful in giving guidance and directions in implementation. This area of support was found to be particularly helpful.

Sustainability/Replicability

The NAG members and the NCO are of the view that the project should be implemented again in the future in 2-3 years. They held that 'CSI mapping should not end with its study findings. It has to generate appropriate action to address the areas of concern. If so, the study becomes a tool to understand the changing scenario of CS sector, hence should be repeated after an interval of 2-3 years.' More so, CSI has informed current and future programmes for CYSD. CYSD is planning to share the study findings with Voluntary Association Network of India (VANI) to explore the possibility of replicating it at the national level or other in other state.

Project Resources

Financial resources

CYSD assessed the financial resources available to them to successfully implement the project as mostly adequate. However, they noted that at the initial phase, they had problem but they were able to mobilise resources from their regular donors and also received partial support from CIVICUS. They stayed within the budget.

Human resources

CYSD held that the team was fairly adequate to successfully carry out all the processes. CYSD is somewhat satisfied with the work undertaken by the participatory researcher (PR) as it was felt that the participatory researcher took longer time than required to complete the study. They are also fairly satisfied with the work done by the CSE. During the initial phases of CSI implementation, the CSE contributed substantial time to the process but towards the end of the project his submissions took a longer time owing to his engagements with other assignments.

CIVICUS on the other hand was of the view that the human resources available for successful implementation of the project were mostly adequate. They are mostly satisfied with the work done by the project coordinator.

TIME allocated:

CYSD assessed the time available for the implementation of the project as completely sufficient. However, this was dependent on the civil society expert giving time when required and same researcher's involvement from the beginning to end of the project. CIVICUS held that although the timeline was modified towards the end, Orissa finished in good time to be able to prepare a country chapter.

Short/Long Term Impact

Unintended changes

The NCO noted that during this process, they interacted with many CSOs, such as faith-based organisations, local groups, etc. which enlarged their understanding about them. They are planning to expand their work in order to work with the above named organizations.

Changes within your organisation:

Internally as a result of our own reflections in the course of CSI implementation, CYSD has identified three specific areas in need of improvement within their organisation. These are internal governance and accountability of the organisation, gender mainstreaming process and bringing in policy advocacy agenda into the future programmes of the organisation.

Changes within partner organizations:

Networking among CSOs of Orissa, particularly with reference to creating awareness on Right to Information and National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has been a major highlight in the past one year.

Changes within other institutions:

Non-NGO actors are showing interest to collaborate on common cause. As has been highlighted in the previous point, non-NGO actors, particularly the government has been seeking proactive cooperation from CSOs to create awareness on Right to Information and National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Conclusion

The evaluation finds that CSI implementation in Orissa provided rare opportunities and forums for different stakeholders to converge and discuss issues affecting the civil society. The fact that the exercise went beyond traditional NGOs has been lauded as an eye opener to the existence of other actors within the civil society that have a role to play in social transformations of the society in Orissa. This has elicited interest from the media as well. It is hoped that the implementation of the agreed upon action points will lead to greater collaboration between these different actors. Over and above these interactions and reflections, CSI has created a knowledge base of a hitherto unexplored area that can be widely useful to other organizations, institutions, individuals, and government in Orissa.