Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF), the CSI country partner in Romania 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 CSDF 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 CSDF 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
This has been mostly achieved. The reason for this assessment is that CSI managed to bring out in a single report, issues about the civil society in Romania. The CSI report offers structured information and analysis on the overall state of the Romanian civil society and that further, the ‘structure of the report and the complexity of the methodology offer enough reasons for NGOs to want to use the report in their operational and policy oriented activities’. Some organizations (e.g. World Learning) have started quoting various parts of the report in their reports or programmes’ (CSDF). However, CSDF team singled out the challenge of having relevant data either not readily available and when available, it was not up to date in some instances, especially for the impact dimension that was said to be ‘the most problematic one

Shared understanding of the state of civil society among a broad range of stakeholders
This output has been mostly achieved. There were a wide range of stakeholders attending the National workshop and it offered a platform for different stakeholders to share their ideas, knowledge of the civil society in Romania.

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society
The evaluation reveals that this output, seen as the most important by the CSDF, was mostly achieved. The evaluation of the national workshop indicates that the stakeholders who participated in the consultations agreed on the need to act together in strengthening the civil
society in Romania and to collectively voice their needs and interests. Participants drafted a set of action plans that put in practice various ways of strengthening the civil society in the past year. CSDF is integrating these action plans into more complex activities with the aim of strengthening civil society.

**Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society**

This output has been mostly achieved. CSDF indicated that the conduct of the project and its activities provided an avenue where important issues concerning Romanian civil society were discussed. ‘The national conference and stakeholders meetings organized around the country allowed CS actors and stakeholders to share and exchange information, but most of all, created a framework for debate among them’. Despite some disagreements, the stakeholders were able to reflect on the state of civil society in their country.

CSDF further holds that, the consultative activities within the project (stakeholder consultation, National workshop, NAG meetings) were seen to have mostly helped in providing a space for civil society and stakeholders to debate and share information on issues concerning civil society in Romania. ‘Civil society actors and stakeholders have rarely had the opportunity to meet and talk about various issues of common interest for civil society as a whole’. These consultations resulted to development of partnerships among civil society actors at both local and central levels. However, ‘it is hard to assess if these partnerships were the results of the meetings that took place within CSI or other circumstances. Yet, the meetings facilitated the discussions and debates between actors that have never met before’.

**Outcomes**

**Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders**

This outcome has been mostly achieved. ‘The CSI Romania report represents the only study made in the last 4 years on the state of Romanian civil society as a whole’ (CSDF). The report is seen as a data source to inform actions and development of the civil society in Romania. The action agenda planned at the end of the national conference by the participants have been mostly implemented and are being integrated into more complex activities that are developed by CSOs with the aim of strengthening civil society. Examples to the implementation of these action agenda include Advocacy and lobby actions for changing legislations for NGOs initiated by a broad range of actors in the last year (CSDF included), actions to increase transparency and awareness of CSO actions.

Local (University of Bucharest) and international organisations (World Learning and USAID are utilising the CSI report to inform their own work.

**Increased collective voice of civil society in governance and development**

The project fairly achieved this outcome. While CSOs in Romania had in the last two years preceding the CSI started acting as a collective voice in raising common issues about civil society, ‘the issues brought into the attention of CSOs in Romania by the CSI national conference in regard with the regulatory framework contributed to a large extent to the development of the common actions in this area’ (CSDF). In this regard, roundtable discussions have been organized regarding the status of public utility and social accreditation of civil society organisations in Romania. Stakeholders who participated in the regional consultations agreed that they should act together and to collectively voice their needs and interests and towards the strengthening of the CS in Romania.
Increased receptivity of civil society by external stakeholders

This outcome was fairly achieved. While it is not easy for CSI to claim the full credit for increased dialogue between the government and the civil society, since ‘dialogue between government had already started increasing after the last elections in 2004 the CSI project stakeholders consultations allowed representatives of local government, NGOs and business to meet and discuss more about new opportunities of partnership’ (CSDF). The number of meetings between government and CSO has continuously increased in the last two years, and to a large extent, the CSI project contributed to this by bringing to the government attention during the national conference, the problems and issues raised by CSOs. The national conference as well as some of the stakeholder consultations at the local levels got wide coverage by the local and national print media.

Project Relevance

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

The seven NAG members who participated in the evaluation, rate the project as being either fairly (3), mostly (3) and completely (1) relevant to their work. Its relevance, it was explained, resides not as much in the content of the project, but mostly in its methodology and the various views presented from different standpoints by those involved in the project. Some stakeholders found the CSI project useful for their strategic planning and in designing and informing their projects. This assertion by the NAG members and CSDF is corroborated by participants of the Regional stakeholder consultations and the national workshop.

The project was seen as completely relevant to CSDF work. ‘While CSDF has been in a quest to support the development of NGOs in Romania, and has carried multiple research studies on various aspects regarding civil society, the CSI project is by far the most important study as it shows at large scale the level of development of CS from multiple aspects and helps CSDF to better respond to the need of the CSOs’ (CSDF).

43% of NAG members held that the project was completely relevant, another 43% held that it was mostly and 14% as fairly important to the strengthening of the civil society in Romania. This is because the CSI was able to add to the debates on civil society that have been developing slowly in the first decade of transition in Romania and secondly because it was able to point out to ‘donors as well as to the resource centres and other organizations working on strengthening civil society the areas where their involvement is needed and where they can be efficient’ (CSDF).

Project Validity

a) Secondary data review was completely, (CIVICUS) mostly (CSDF), and fairly (Civil society expert) able to generate data/information on the state of the civil society in Romania
b) Social Forces Analysis at 1st NAG meeting was completely (CSDF) and fairly able to generate data/information on the state of the civil society in Romania.
c) Regional Stakeholder Questionnaire & Consultations were Mostly (CSDF), and fairly (CIVICUS and Civil society expert) able to generate data/information about the state of the civil society in Romania.
d) **Community Survey** was completely (CSDF), and mostly (Civil society Expert and CIVICUS) able to generate data/information about the state of the civil society in Romania.

e) **Media review** was completely (CSDF) and mostly (CIVICUS and civil society expert) able to generate data/information about the state of the civil society in Romania.

f) **Fact finding studies (policy impact, corporate social responsibility)** were mostly (CSDF and Civil Society Expert) and fairly (CIVICUS) able to generate data/information about the state of the civil society in Romania.

g) **NAG scoring exercise** was mostly able to generate data/information about the state of the civil society in Romania.

h) **National Workshop** was mostly (CSDF and CIVICUS) and fairly able to generate data/information about the state of the civil society in Romania.

**Project Participation**

A wide range of participatory methods were used during the CSI implementation process and included consultations, debates, applying questionnaires and roundtable discussions. These methods worked fairly well.

**Capacity Building**

CSDF staff was able to gain capacities in participatory research methods such as moderating, mediating, consultations, data analysis and interpretation, training and facilitation skills as result of participating in the implementation of the CSI project.

**Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance and overall implementation**

According to CSDF, CIVICUS by and large provided complete and adequate support in the entire project implementation process through phone calls and emails. CSDF is completely satisfied by the systems and procedures (including the CSP support) put in place for the assistance of NCOs in the implementation of the project. The tool kit also offered complete guidance and when a need arose on further help for the project, it was always forthcoming from CIVICUS.

**Sustainability/Replicability**

CSDF and the seven NAG members who participated in the evaluation are of the view that the project should be implemented again in the future. ‘The need for this project is still exist as long as the Romanian civil society is developing and changing day by day. It is crucial for us to know the trend of civil society, the weak and the good parts of it, in order to make strategies and plans that involve civil society’ (NAG member). Further, the civil society in Romania is likely to undergo important changes after the integration of Romanian into the EU and thus the need to continue monitoring these changes especially every 2-4 years and specifically in regard to monitoring any substantive changes to the current results of the CSI project in Romania.

**Project Resources**

**Financial Resources**

According to CSDF the financial resources to undertake the project were fairly adequate. They were not sufficient for all activities though and some activities could not be implemented without supplementary financing of the costs by CSDF.
Human Resources
The CSDF team felt that human resources were fairly adequate for the project. The coordinator noted that the most important issue of concern during the implementation of the project was the fact that CSDF had quite a small team that was in charge of the project. Some of the team members left during the implementation and this had an impact on the project period. Apart from this, the coordinator was very satisfied with the work undertaken by the participatory researcher, and the civil society expert.
CIVICUS (CSP) on the other hand felt that there were mostly adequate human resources provided by the NCO, to successfully implement the project. The CSP was also mostly satisfied by the work done by the civil society expert in Romania.

Time
A concern raised by CSDF is the time period for the project which they felt even though it was mostly sufficient, the team did not always have sufficient time to involve in the project activities because of their involvement in other projects within CSDF.

Short/Long Term Impact

Unintended changes
The civil society actors (e.g. World Learning and Opportunity Associates) were very interested in the results of the CSI and considered the data available in the report as a baseline for many of their activities.

Changes within the organisation:
There are no changes within CSDF so far.

Changes within partner organisations:
Partner organizations are contacting CSDF more often to get data and information on various issues regarding the civil society. The report has already been presented or shared in many workshops and conferences not necessarily organized by CSDF.

Changes within media:
The media (for example newspapers and magazines like Saptamana Financiara) is contacting CSDF ever more often on important issues regarding civil society.

Changes within Government:
While no substantive changes have been registered thus far, there are possibilities of some impacts in this area as a government officer who was part of the NAG indicated that the CSI project is very important because it gives them an idea about the stage of development of civil society and on areas on need of improvement.

Conclusion
In general, the findings of the evaluation are largely positive with respect to most aspects. There are strong recommendations to continue implementing the CSI in Romania as a way to monitor anticipated changes in the civil society in Romania from the proposed Romanian integration into the EU. The current findings of the CSI should serve as a baseline for comparative purposes. The relevance of the project was also considered quite high given the interest the project has generated among the different stakeholders in Romania.