CIVICUS Civil Society Index Shortened Assessment Tool (CSI-SAT)
A Summary of the Russia CSI-SAT Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and St. Petersburg Center for Humanities and Political Studies 'Strategy', the CSI country partner in Russia 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 Strategy 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 Strategy 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

Strategy is of the view that this output has been somewhat achieved. The rationale for this assessment according to the NCO is that there was no full CSI undertaken in Russia. CIVICUS is rather satisfied with the country report, mainly due to methodological limitations within the CSI-SAT in large and complex countries such as Russia

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

Civil society in Russia is very broad and diverse. The NCO therefore believes that it is virtually impossible to achieve a common or shared understanding of the state of civil society in Russia. Thus, Strategy evaluates this output as somewhat achieved. 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). The Russian SAG consisted of 18 members from a wide range of sectors.

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

Strategy evaluates this output as mostly achieved. The rationale according to Strategy is that "this self understanding required a much broader scope of the project all across Russia, and one report is not enough. A series of following up activities, as well as through field studies are required". The follow-up activities are planned by various stakeholders and project participants on their own initiative, but, as a rule, are not coordinated with "Strategy" Center. Among them are the initiatives to set up working groups to monitor legal environment of Russian CSOs, including "Strategy" Center, Russian coalition "We, Citizens!", members of the Policy Association for an Open Society (PASOS) and the Baltic NGO Network under the auspices of the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

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

According to the NCO this study brings together an overall picture of the strengths and weaknesses of Russia's civil society. It has given Strategy valuable information from which conclusions has been drawn. Strategy is therefore of the view that this output has mostly been achieved. Nevertheless, in a large country such as Russia, it is crucial to also analyse the regional dimension, however due to lack of regional data and field research this was not possible, according to the NCO.

Project Outcomes

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

Strategy assessed this outcome as somewhat achieved. The reason for this rating according to the NCO is that it is yet too early to assess any outcomes, as the country report is still to be finalized. The early signs of impact that have been identified have mostly taken place on the inter-organizational level. The CSI-SAT has also contributed in awareness-raising on the need for comprehensive research of civil society. Secondly, it has to this date increased the cooperation between stakeholders beyond the CSI project,

particularly between the organizations within the research team e.g. students and think tanks that assisted in the research. However, the numbers of stakeholder that the CSI-SAT project could accommodate were far too little compared to the scope of stakeholders that do exist in Russia, which has limited the scope of the country report. Apart from this it is premature to draw any outcomes of the CSI-SAT in Russia at the time of this evaluation.

Project Relevance

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

Although the project was considered very relevant by all stakeholders it was assessed as mostly relevant by the NCO. Despite this it is stated in the evaluation that the CSI-SAT research team struggled to get enough resources to implement the project. The CSI-SAT also contributed to the general strengthening of civil society in Russia as well as for external stakeholders such as government, donors, media and academics.

Project Validity

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

Both CIVICUS and Strategy held that the project's methodology was able to mostly generate an accurate assessment of the state of civil society in Russia. As mentioned above, the NCO evaluates the country report to be mostly accurate on an overall national level. Then again, regional dimensions are not captured in this report, according to Strategy. Provided the funds would have been made available, Strategy would have made a separate study in each of the regions, selected as sample (pilot regions). It would have made sense to prepare a separate conclusions, including strengths and weaknesses and the diamond for each region separately and then for the purpose of international comparability only to put them together in an overall national picture. A member of CIVICUS states that "given the nature of the CSI-SAT, the information is less comprehensive, however, given the vast amount of studies on CS in Russia, the existing information has not been fully exploited".

Strategy also tried some new and innovative methods in their implementation of the project, e.g. organizing primary research in five towns. Unfortunately, these elements proved to be very difficult to integrate in the CSI-SAT indicator system, creating more problems for the research team. Despite this, some of the data retrieved was used to substantiate the country report.

Capacity Building

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

According to Strategy, skills were gained in the area of secondary data gathering, participatory research methods, data analysis and interpretation as well as report writing.

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. Strategy was completely satisfied with the support provided by the Country Support Person within CIVICUS.
2. An area that posed major challenges for the CSI-SAT team was fundraising. According to Strategy, CIVICUS should give fundraising more prominence in the future, as the support given was assessed as not adequate. Centralized fundraising carried out by CIVICUS for and together with NCOs was expected and missing.
3. CIVICUS reported being mostly satisfied with the overall implementation of the CSI-SAT in Russia. According to a member of CIVICUS "there was a strong commitment by the project coordinator (PC)," however, CIVICUS expressed uncertainty as to the "commitment of the NCO as a whole and the SAG, which might have resulted in not getting funding for the study," which was the major impediment in implementing the project. According to the NCO no Russian donors were interested to fund such a comprehensive research project, with the exception of those initiated and owned by them selves.
4. Regarding the systems and procedures put in place by the NCO to implement the CSI, CIVICUS assessed that the NCO did not have an organisation wide system in place to assist with the project implementation. "There is a need for a greater buy-in to the project from the NCO and civil society at large, if a large scale project such as the full CSI should work in Russia," according to CIVICUS.

1. Sustainability/Replicability

What is the NCOs perception regarding implementation of the project in the future?
According to Strategy it is relevant to implement the full CSI, now that the CSI-SAT has been implemented in Russia. It is also suggested that the full CSI should be implemented every 3 years.

Project Resources

To what extent has the human and financial resources been appropriate for the implementation of the project?
The financial resources for the project were evaluated by Strategy as not adequate for the implementation of the project. Hence, there was no field work undertaken in the implementation and furthermore not enough resources to publish the findings. The project ultimately did not stay within the budget, even though several cut downs had been made.

According to Strategy, the human resources were mostly adequate, while CIVICUS assessed human resources to be fairly adequate. This, according to the latter was in mainly due to the lack of support from NCO and civil society at large. However, the NCO contests CIVICUS assessment on this issue. Regarding the role of the Project coordinator, CIVICUS assessed the work undertaken as mostly satisfactory.

Short/Long Term Impact

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

- Regarding the impact that the CSI-SAT had had on Strategy's own work, it was found to be helpful in developing their program on public policy.
- Other signs of impact that have been identified thus far have mostly taken place on the inter-organizational level according to the NCO such as the increase in cooperation between stakeholders beyond the CSI project. The CSI-SAT has also contributed to awareness-raising amongst CSOs. Strategy has also identified a greater attention to research such as the CSI. The CSI-SAT findings have also been used in other similar research projects. Apart from this it is still premature to draw any outcomes of the CSI-SAT in Russia at the time of this evaluation.
- Moscow University-Higher School of Economics modified parts of the methodology to carry out own regional research of the state of civil society and to this end published a book and several articles. Research on civil society also attracted the interest of students, which started making course papers and discussions at the summer school on CSI-SAT and civil society development in general.
- A member of the NCO also stated that 'The Eurasia Foundation and USAID integrated parts of CSI-SAT methodology in their research projects and tools.
- Organizations from Russia's regions, participants in the project, placed regional civil society studies on their agenda.
- Overall, the awareness was created of all major donors operating in Russia, as well as many civil society networks about CSI-SAT.

5. Recommendations

- In the future it should be recommended that the project team fundraises prior to the implementation.

6. Conclusion

In general, the findings of the evaluation are largely positive with respect to most aspects, despite the limitations of the CSI-SAT as it focuses only on secondary data gathering. There are strong recommendations to continue implementing the full CSI in Russia with a greater regional focus, especially since the CSI-SAT reveals lack of data and field research on the regional level. The current findings of the CSI-SAT should therefore serve as a baseline for further research. The relevance of the project was also considered as between very and mostly relevant, mainly due to Russia being an extremely large and diverse country. Thus it is difficult for a research such as the CSI-SAT, to capture Russia's considerable diversity. The first signs of impact revolve mainly on awareness-raising and inter-organizational relationship building among Russian CSOs.