

CIVICUS Civil Society Index

A Summary of the Scotland CSI Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), the CSI country partner in Scotland 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 SCVO 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 SCVO 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, 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 the NCO this output has been mostly achieved. SCVO explained that there were a number of gaps in the evidence when appraised at a holistic civil society level, as much of the data were fragmented to individual components of civil society such as the voluntary sector, trade unions, etc. It was rare to find comprehensive information for all parts of civil society for any one indicator.

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

For the SCVO, this output is only somewhat achieved as they have not yet managed to disseminate the findings to a wider audience. Based on a recent evaluation call, SCVO mentioned that they are planning to promote the results of the CSI between now and October this year after a post-committee meeting in their organisation.

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society

This output has been fairly achieved as, according to SCVO, the project provided a focal point for bringing together a number of ideas that were already there but were dispersed.

The project coordinator reported that “although they have launched the CSI at the Gathering¹, there was no further discussion on strengthening Scotland’s civil society based on the CSI as much of said discussions had already taken place at the national workshop held in April 2006.” However, the project coordinator from SCVO noted that it was apparent that “the term ‘civil society’ instead of ‘voluntary sector’ was being used at the main sessions of the Gathering far more than in previous years, although this may be attributed to the World Assembly as much as to the CSI.”

Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society

SCVO reported that this output has been somewhat achieved. The CSI, in itself, has “not stimulated a wider set of debates around Scotland, but had set the base to do so.” SCVO is positive that the World Assembly would add to the momentum and fuel interest among stakeholders. The NCO further commented that before the implementation of the project, the space for debates and discussions about civil society was rarely utilized; now there was renewed interest to engage. In particular, SCVO reported that the Carnegie Foundation has commissioned a study on the future of civil society with the hope of involving more stakeholders.

Outcomes

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

SCVO indicated that this has been mostly achieved. Although it is still too early at this stage to assess this outcome, the NCO reported that Scottish stakeholders have recognized the “need to operate from a well-informed perspective.”

Increased collective voice of civil society in governance and development

This has been mostly achieved. With the G8 Summit in 2005 and the CIVICUS World Assembly, the CSI has raised awareness of civil society-wide issues in Scotland. SCVO also noted that the government had shown interest in the project. Specifically, the Scottish Executive’s civic participation and voluntary issues unit and Scottish Parliament’s participation officer both expressed an interest in the project and met with NCO to discuss the “active citizenship aspect of civil society.”

Increased receptivity of civil society by external stakeholders

Based on the NCO’s assessment, this outcome has been fairly achieved. Government representatives have shown awareness and even attended the CSI interim launch. However, media coverage on the activities of CSOs is still very limited.

Project Relevance

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

¹ An annual platform for a large scale (around 2000) of Scottish Non-Profit Organizations to showcase their work.

Almost all (5/6) of the NAG members who responded to the evaluation, agreed that the CSI project is mostly relevant to their work while one member gave a fairly relevant rating. A NAG member commented that the project complements his job and that of the interest of the voluntary sector which is to evaluate the state of Scottish civil society. Another, who is a member of the Scottish Inter Faith Council, explained that one of the organisation's objectives is to encourage "faith communities" to be outward-looking and to be more fully engaged in civic processes and the CSI project has helped highlight the role of "faith-based groups" in helping the Scottish communities become more cohesive. The project, according to a NAG member whose organisation is working with the youth in public and voluntary sectors, provided a "national and international context" which is useful for their work. One member gave the project a fairly relevant rating although did not provide further details.

In SCVO's view, the project is fairly relevant to their work as they are involved in a "very wide range of issues" similar to the focus of the CSI.

Project Validity

For SCVO, the review of secondary data, the social forces analysis during the 1st NAG meeting, the disenfranchised community survey, the NAG scoring exercise and the National Workshop were the activities which mostly generated an accurate assessment of the state of civil society.

However, some aspects of the project methodology proved to be problematic such as the secondary data review which has to generate a general perspective on civil society based on "fragmented data." There were "no available civil society-wide studies apart from disenfranchised community study."

Based on CIVICUS' perspective, "due to the lack of primary research (community survey, and media review) the study did not bring out many interesting findings." There was not much deviation from the CSI toolkit, however, the NCO "used an outdated version of the model country report," which might not have been properly communicated by CIVICUS. This, unfortunately, caused more work for the NCO in terms of reformatting the draft report.

Project Participation

In implementing the CSI project, the NCO reported that they utilized disenfranchised stakeholders' consultation which "facilitated the emergence of new data and allowed access to same which would not have been possible through conventional survey or interview approaches." To further improve the participatory approach, the NCO suggested for the project to come up with a "more thorough and wide-ranging programme of activities" that are of interest to funders. A NAG member suggested that more people should participate in the NAG as in his view, the composition of the NAG was "too few to generate an outcome to be used for such an important piece of work."

Capacity Building

By implementing the CSI, SCVO reported that they were able to improve their training and facilitation skills through the conduct of NAG activities. Convening high level NAG meetings likewise enhanced their capacities in convening and networking.

Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance and overall implementation

According to SCVO, they were completely satisfied with the over-all support provided by CIVICUS in the implementation of the project. However, the systems and procedures were at times “a little bit confusing” and CIVICUS is “a bit too involved.” As regards the toolkit, SCVO commented that its format was “not always accessible and not adaptable” as expected. In terms of fundraising, the NCO reported that they were mostly satisfied with the assistance provided by CIVICUS.

CIVICUS reflected that the support and assistance provided to SCVO throughout the project was mostly satisfactory. In retrospect, providing feedback to the drafting of country report and CIVICUS’ participation in the National Workshop were the areas of support which CIVICUS regard as effective. However, CIVICUS admitted that it overlooked the preparation of NCO in terms of country report drafting which somehow affected the final output.

Sustainability/Replicability

On the one hand, all of the NAG members agreed that the project should be implemented again in the future. One member offered his view that even though the project was “not directly relevant for community council involvement, the information and thought process required was stimulating and opened up other avenues of interest.” Most members agreed that the CSI project should be replicated within a two to five year time period to “monitor the improvement (or lack thereof) of Scottish civil society” while one NAG member added that the project should be sustained as it would be futile to show support for civil society when it is “little understood and seldom assessed or measured.” Further, another NAG member expressed his opinion that the “background material produced and its sources are of greater interest in a wider sense and useful for future comparison” which necessitates the project’s continued implementation in Scotland in the near future.

SCVO on the other hand, indicated its uncertainty to implement the CSI again within a specified time period, however, suggested that it should be repeated with “updated activities each year and a comprehensive snapshot every five years.”

Recommendation:

- ? For the project to have a two-part format – first, self assessment against a limited number of core indicators e.g., legal status, resourcing, organisation, media and political accessibility, campaigning record – second, a more open report on recent developments. This would be less ambitious as an international comparison but probably more realistic. (NAG)

Project Resources

Financial Resources

According to SCVO, the financial resources to undertake the project were not at all adequate as there was “very poor interest among funders to support a project on Scottish civil society assessment.”

Human Resources

SCVO is of the view that the work entailed by the project was more than what the available human resource could handle, giving a mostly adequate rating to this aspect. CIVICUS seconded this, commenting that too much work has been delegated to the project coordinator who, at the same, was also the researcher and the country report writer. Despite the burden of handling too many tasks, CIVICUS was completely satisfied with the commitment of the project coordinator to the CSI. However, a stronger involvement by an external expert, according to CIVICUS, could have benefited the project.

With regard to the work undertaken by the civil society expert, SCVO reported that they were not at all satisfied as there was not much engagement from the same after accepting the project. CIVICUS was fairly satisfied saying that the quality of the country report could have been improved by stronger analysis from the CSE.

Time

SCVO and CIVICUS shared the same view that the time allocated for the project was completely sufficient.

Recommendations

- ? It is important to have sufficient human resource when implementing the CSI as the research activities entailed by the project require dedicated time and effort to be satisfactorily fulfilled. (SCVO).
- ? A stronger involvement from an external expert should be required. (CIVICUS)

Short/Long Term Impact

Changes within the organisation and with partner organisations:

The CSI has provided an opportunity for the NCO and its partner organisations to have “more focus on civil society.”

Changes within media:

The project has received “very little” attention from the Scottish media.

Changes within Government:

There is some interest from the government specifically in the “use of civil society language.” SCVO reported that they made contact with the Scottish Executive regarding a research initiative that will look into the future of NGOs in Scotland.

Changes within other institutions:

Carnegie Foundation UK, after learning about the project got interested in supporting a CS strengthening initiative as part of its democracy and civil society programme.

Conclusion

The implementation of the Civil Society Index Project in Scotland, based on the reflections of SCVO and the NAG members, provided a “common frame of reference” for those organisations working under the broad spectrum of civil society. Despite the project’s limitations such as fragmented secondary data and the NCO not being able to conduct primary research, there was a strong agreement among those who participated that the results were relevant especially in highlighting the weaknesses of Scottish civil society. Understanding these weaknesses and

operating from a “well-informed perspective” as mentioned by SCVO might enable CSOs to come up with plans of action and identify areas for collaboration among organisations working towards strengthening civil society in Scotland. SCVO, CIVICUS and the NAG members also came up with recommendations on how to improve the project and its implementation. Participation-wise, one of the proposals was for the NCO to encourage more civil society representatives in joining the NAG to gain a broader view of civil society in Scotland. For the project to be more sustainable, the NCO suggested that CIVICUS should encourage linkages among those countries implementing the CSI. With regard to future implementation, CIVICUS recommended that the NCO conduct more participatory research.

As for the early signs of impact, SCVO reported that the CSI project stirred up the interest of the government (Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive) and the Carnegie Foundation in active citizenship and civil society strengthening, respectively. However, the Scottish media had shown very little interest in the project. During the ICSI Conference, the project coordinator reported that the Scottish media is “one-step removed” from issues concerning civil society. He added that “the media does not care about the *process* of getting the results, but interested only with the *results*.”