Background: Purpose and Objective

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide CIVICUS with an assessment of the implementation of the Civil Society Index (CSI) project in South Korea. The findings of 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. Another primary goal of the project was to train the South Korean implementing partner, Third Sector Institute (TSI), on how to implement this type of project for possible replication in the future.

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to assess the project’s success against the original outcomes and outputs set forth in the planning phase. It should be noted that many outcomes will only become visible in the future and will be evaluated in more depth at a later date. Therefore, in this evaluation, planned outcomes have been assessed against any relevant preliminary changes taking place due to the project.

Key Findings

Outputs

A body of knowledge on the state of civil society and civil society strengthening practices

This output has been rated by the National Coordinating Organization (NCO) as having only been somewhat achieved as TSI considers that the concept of civil society in South Korea is focused mostly on democratization, whereas CIVICUS adopts a broader definition of the sector. Thus, although the ‘body of knowledge on the state of civil society’ was created some NAG members voiced disagreement with the focus of some of the CSIs indicators. That said, both CIVICUS as well as TSI were satisfied with the quality of the South Korea country report.

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

For the NCO, this output has been mostly achieved. The CSI process has contributed to a increased mutual understanding not only between civil society stakeholders and researchers, but also between regional stakeholders and civil society leaders as well.

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society

The evaluation reveals that this output was only somewhat achieved. The NCO documented that the Third Sector Institute will conduct a research on ‘democratic governance’ for improving the partnership between NGOs, government and the market. This is based on the findings of the CSI in South Korea that show a weak relationship between government, the market and the civil society. The study on democratic governance thus explores in greater depth avenues for increased civil society activities to democratize the governance system and practice.
Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society
According to TSI, this output has been somewhat achieved, due to the difficulty of “calling civil society leaders from all different – even hostile - sectors together in one place for the workshop.”

Outcomes
Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders
TSI evaluated this outcome, prioritized as the second most in importance, as being mostly achieved. At the time if this particular evaluation, the country report had not yet been published. Nonetheless, as pointed out by the NIT, “the CSI project helped us look at the entire ‘empirical’ dimensions of civil society for the first time in Korea. The Third Sector Institute had some opportunities to introduce CSI results to major media and governmental agencies.”

Increased collective voice of civil society in governance and development
Rated as the last priority of the 3 outcomes, the NCO evaluated this not at all achieved. It was perceived by the NCO that the CSI did not provide ‘new’ conclusions that could ultimately contribute strengthening the collective voice of the sector. In addition, TSI indicated that “NAG members were aware of the importance of this project, but generally had no time to review the results of the project, discuss and then reach a consensus with each other.” Arguably, this output was scored so low because of the difficulty of reaching consensus and simply finding time to implement the project according to CIVICUS standards.

Increased openness to civil society by external stakeholders (e.g. Government, donors, business)
The NCO assessed this outcome as mostly achieved. It was ranked as the first priority of the 3 outcomes. In South Korea, knowledge and information on the civil society have been shared mainly among civil society actors and a few external stakeholders. In this context, the CSI findings might be helpful for external stakeholders to understand the state of civil society.

Other Criteria
Project Relevance
The Third Sector Institute rated the CSI project completely relevant to their work, an obvious response since civil society in South Korea equated with the “third sector.” However, when asked how relevant do CSOs perceive the project for civil society strengthening, the response was only fairly. And finally, when asked how relevant do external stakeholders (e.g. government, donors, media, academics etc…) perceive the project, TSI responded mostly. It is perceived that the research itself aided to increasing the level of communication between regional stakeholders and national level civil society leaders. The project is considered as relevant due to the avenues for exchange it created between key players.
Project Validity
It was considered by both CIVICUS as well as TSI that the project methodology generated a fairly to mostly accurate assessment of civil society in South Korea. The methodology presented some difficulties for the NCO, as the indicators were considered to be too complicated for stakeholders that are not so familiar with the concept of civil society. In addition, reaching consensus amongst themselves was often trying as the NAG was not familiar with how the ‘jury system’ for scoring the indicators worked. In consequence the project proved to be often time consuming. CIVICUS also raised a general difficulty in communicating with the NCO as the original project coordinator, which had been trained to implement the project, was replaced. Furthermore, regular communications schedules were not followed, making a constant support from CIVICUS side more difficult.

Project Participation
According to the NCO, several participatory methods were used during the CSI implementation process. These included the regional stakeholder consultations as well as the NAG meetings. The NCO had six regional stakeholder consultations, before and after each RS survey. Three participatory researchers visited each region and hosted individual consultation with the help of a regional facilitator. According to the NCO evaluation, participatory organizations were very open and inclined to participate because this type of participatory research had never been conducted in South Korea before. In addition to the survey, NAG meetings were also held to discuss the civil society definition and resolve some of the controversial issues regarding NAG scoring result.

Capacity Building
The evaluation assessed whether any specific skills were gained by the implementing partners as a result of or in the course of implementing the CSI project. According to the NCO, skill transfer took place in the area of secondary data gathering, participatory research methods, and report writing.

Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance
The South Korean NCO was fairly satisfied with the overall support provided by CIVICUS. “CIVICUS provided us with toolkits and overall guidance, but it was unfortunately not set up at the beginning stage. The CSI toolkit had been changing a few times before it was completed.” According to CIVICUS the support and assistance provided to the NCO throughout the project was also fairly satisfactory. According to the CIVICUS, lack of communication almost led to a termination of the project. CIVICUS perceives that in part the change in Project Coordinator after the project had begun led to some confusion and delay in actual implementation as this also resulted in non-constant communication.

Sustainability/Replicability
According to the NCO evaluation, at this point TSI has no plan to implement the CSI again. However, after the report is published, TSI will monitor the response from CS activists, researchers, and other participants and if there is a positive reaction TSI will
consider replication. According to TSI, the project is so resource intensive and comprehensive that it’s not likely to be conducted without fundraising and active participation from many other CSOs.

**Project Resources**
According to the NCO, the financial resources to undertake the project were only fairly adequate. Apparently TSI ran out of funds early on and this limited the research. TSI also pointed out that it is difficult, and expensive, to find workers equipped with English skills, a knowledge of civil society, research skills, and professional knowledge of ‘global standards.’ The budget did not cover all the expenses. Additional and intensive fundraising would be necessary for replication. The CIVICUS CSP was not satisfied with the work undertaken by the NCO until late in the project when TSI appointed a different coordinator and communication between the organizations improved. With respect to the time allocated to implement the project, neither CIVICUS nor the NCO felt that this was sufficient for the proper completion of the project.

**Short/Long Term Impact**
One unintended outcome that was identified was the use by a conservative media group of some findings of the CSI to discredit the civil society sector. Generally speaking however, the NCO evaluation showed that the major benefit of implementing the project was the opportunity to work with an international organization. This allowed the NCO to learn new research methods (esp. participatory research method) and become better acquainted with international standards. Furthermore the relationships created between stakeholders engaged by the project as well as information for further research were highlighted as preliminary signs of impact of the project.

**Conclusion**
In general, the findings of the evaluation are adequate with respect to most aspects. There were definitely problems with communication during the first part of the project, although things did seem to improve toward the end. Ultimately, a final report was produced that participants agreed was representative of the current state of civil society in South Korea. Depending on the reaction of all implementing partners, the project may be replicated in the future.