CIVICUS Civil Society Index Project

A Summary of Uruguay Evaluation Report

Background: Purpose and Objective

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide CIVICUS and ICDwith an assessment of the implementation of the Civil Society Index (CSI) project in Uruguay. 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. It is hoped that ICD will also gain out of this evaluation through the process of self reflection as well as gauging any important lessons learned.

The evaluation attempted to assess the outcomes and outputs the project as developed by ICD 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 output was indicated as ICD's first priority. According to the NCO this output has been mostly achieved, and ICD as well as CIVICUS were between very and mostly satisfied with the final product. One CIVICUS respondent noted particular satisfaction with the Spanish language version of the report, whereas another CIVICUS respondent observed that a "stronger focus on the participatory and consultative aspects of the CSI would have lead to a richer country report".

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

For ICD, this output was only fairly achieved and also ranked last in priority of the four outputs. It is considered by ICD that although most of CSOs have a shared understanding on the state of civil society "there are some sectors, particularly corporate associations and chambers, trade unions and co-operatives that are quite difficult to involve." This involvement was encouraged through different surveys and the composition of the NAG these groups were absent in the regional consultations and during the National Workshop.

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society

A set of strategies for civil society strengthening was ranked by ICD as their second priority and was mostly achieved. According to the NCO, this output was very important to help draw conclusions about civil society's weaknesses and provided some ideas on how they could be addressed. During the Regional Stakeholder Consultations and the National Workshop, participants agreed on the themes and areas that should to be strengthened, yet a specific action agenda with detailed activities was not defined.

Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society

The present output was fairly achieved. The consultative activities within the project were considered to provide a space for civil society and other stakeholderst to debate and share information on issues concerning civil society in Uruguay only fairly. An NCO member explained that "it is quite difficult to make people participate in discussion initiatives" due to their availability; furthermore it was problematic that some sectors were underrepresented or not at all represented. As of yet, no cooperation between stakeholders has resulted from these consultations.

Project Outcomes

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

This outcomes has been somewhat achieved as the final results have not yet been widely disseminated. Some presentations in academic settings and through the media have occurred and are considered by ICD to have had "great impact, especially in making actors thing and assess their role actions and objectives."

Regarding the action agenda agreed upon during the National Workshop, this is considered as only somewhat implemented as "organizations have not yet had the chance to analyze the results of the CSI". However, on a regional level, a project on transparency and accountability was spearheaded by ICD and involved nine other Latin American countries, five of which had also implemented the CSI project during this phase.

Increased collective voice of civil society in governance and development
This has as of yet not at all been achieved. As a rationale it was indicated that not enough time has lapsed to assess this outcome realistically.

Increased openness to civil society by external stakeholders (eg. Government, donors, business)
Similarly to the outcome above, this has as of yet not at all been achieved. As a rationale it was indicated that not enough time has lapsed to assess this outcome realistically.

Other Criteria:

Project Relevance
How relevant is the project for civil society, the NCO and other stakeholders in the country?
The project was deemed to be completely relevant to the work of ICD and to the strengthening of civil society in Uruguay, as this was expressed directly to the NCO by several CSOs. It was furthermore considered that the CSI has also complete relevance vis-à-vis external stakeholders (government, media, business etc); this is judged by the interest demonstrated mostly by academics and to a lesser extent by government and media representatives. The NAG members that responded to the questionnaires also highlighted the complete relevance of the project for both their organization and for the strengthening of civil society in Uruguay. It was suggested that the project should be re-implemented every five years, although ICD would have to assess if and when it would be appropriate to do so.

Project Validity
Did the project succeed in providing an accurate picture of the status of civil society in the country?
The NCO noted that the project had been a great challenge to implement "because of its innovative and complex methodology". Most research activities were however between mostly and completely achieved. The National Workshop, Regional Stakeholder Consultations and National Advisory group meetings were however noted as problematic due to participants' time constraints as well as practical/resource constraints. It was noted that due to the size of the country, conducting a national representative survey as opposed to a selected community survey would be more cost effective and is likely to yield more representative results.

A further suggested modification of the project was to conduct it separately in the different organizational categories (NGOs, trade unions, etc) as this would allow for deeper analysis and more accuracy.

Project Participation
Were all participatory elements implemented in Uruguay? How successful were they?
All participatory research activities were implemented by ICD, including the RSCs the National Workshop and the NAG meetings. As mentioned above, although the participatory aspect of the project is recognized as important it was likewise noted that conducting these meetings presented various challenges (see Project Validity).

Capacity Building
Have any specific skills been gained as a result of implementing the CSI project?
The evaluation assessed whether any specific skills were gained by team members of the ICD as a result of or in the course of implementing the CSI project. According to ICD, skills were gained in the area of research, data analysis and interpretation, as well as in report writing. Implementing

the CSI "was a challenge and several lessons learned can be extracted [from] the rigor of the CSI's methodology. […] This helped ICD to advance its own skills", as indicated by one member of the NCO. The project furthermore built training and facilitation skills, but did not enhance convening and networking capacities as these were already present within ICD. Of note however is that the methodology of an accountability project that was recently spearheaded by ICD in nine Latin American countries was based in many ways on that of the CSI. In this regard the institutional learning was reported to be especially high.

CIVICUS Assistance

What was the quality of CIVICUS's support to the NCO as well as the NCO's role in executing the project?

According to evaluations, ICD was completely satisfied with the overall support provided to it by CIVICUS. The systems and procedures put in place by CIVICUS were rated as mostly satisfactory; due to ICD being amongst the organizations that started the process early, some documents for process and analysis were only developed at a later stage, which necessitated adjustments to the methodology while the project was already underway. The toolkit provided completely satisfactory guidance, whilst the same was expressed regarding CIVICUS' assistance with fundraising activities and support provided by the Country Support Person (CSP). It was noted by one CIVICUS respondent that, in self reflection, the area of support that was considered as particularly effective was the drafting of the country report.

CIVICUS expressed being mostly to completely satisfied with the CSI implementation in Uruguay, and the systems and procedures put in place by the NCO were also deemed between mostly and completely satisfactory. It was noted that ICD had implemented all activities with very high standards while also always communicating regularly with CIVICUS.

Sustainability/Replicability

What is the NCOs perception regarding implementation of the project in the future?

ICD does not know whether they will implement the CSI again in the future. It is indicated that the state of civil society is not under great flux in Uruguay and it would thus not warrant implementing a next phase of the project in the near future, but rather utilizing the results of this phase of the CSI. In this vein, many of ICDs current projects are based on the findings yielded by the CSI.

Project Resources

To what extent have the human and financial resources and the time frame been appropriate for the implementation of the project?

- According to the NCO, the financial resources to undertake the project were only fairly adequate as the project was conducted on a comparatively low budget and substantial own contributions from the NCO.
- The human resources were deemed as completely adequate with complete satisfaction expressed on the participatory researcher and civil society expert by ICD and CIVICUS. It was however commented by one CIVICUS respondent that the "participatory research methods were not used to their fullest potential."
- The timeline allocated was deemed as completely sufficient for the satisfactory implementation of the project by both ICD and by CIVICUS.

Short/Long Term Impact

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

It was noted by ICD that the project implementation and its results highlighting internal accountability as a major challenge faced by civil society, a multi-country/ regional project was launched by ICD funded by the IADB.

Conclusion

The overall assessment of the CSI implementation in Uruguay was positive. A fluid cooperation between the institutions (ICD and CIVICUS) was evidenced in the timely and very positive implementation of project activities. On the other hand some difficulties were registered, such as the fact that tools and activities were still adapted by CIVICUS during the early stages of project implementation (considering that ICD was one of the 'early' countries in implementing the CSI), whereas the implementation of some research activities could in hindsight have been adapted further to gauge more effectively Uruguay's civil society. Furthermore it was noted that the CSI's validity in Uruguay is centred more around the assessment's output, and less on the convening and sharing elements of its objectives. This is due to the fact that as an established democracy the empirical reality of civil society is already rather well recognized and applied.