CIVICUS Civil Society Index Shortened Assessment Tool (CSI-SAT)

A Summary of the Vietnam CSI-SAT Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the Vietnam Institute of Development Studies (VIDS), the CSI country partner in Vietnam 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 VIDS 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 VIDS 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 rationale for this assessment is the limited awareness generally in Vietnam of civil society as a concept. No precedent to the CSI's implementation can be pointed out where "the state of civil society has been […] identified quantitavely, based on a good methodology and with the participation of different stakeholders".

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

The SAG consisted of 12 members including Vietnamese NGOs, International NGOs, two governmental bodies, academia as well as one "expert on religious matters". Within the given scope of stakeholder discussions it was considered that this output, enabling a shared understanding of civil society, was considered as mostly achieved.

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

At this stage the self-understanding of the organizations and individuals that are part of civil society has been improved in as much as they were part of the SAG or National Index Team. Based on discussions of the SAG it was evident that many were unclear on the meaning of civil society and its role. This was improved throughout the debates generated in the three SAG meetings that were held. Therefore it was also perceived by the NCO that this output was mostly achieved.

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

Again, the NCO perceived that this output was mostly achieved. Once the CSI's indicators were scored, "long and frank discussions" helped identify civil society's strengths and weaknesses and to some extent priority areas for policy and action.

The NCO commented that "cooperation between stakeholders beyond the project is yet to be seen", but remains optimistic towards potential impacts.

Project Outcomes

Increase in knowledge based actions by civil society stakeholders

The NCO considered this outcome the main priority of the project. Some impacts can be seen as the report was launched on May 9th, and widely presented by the media. UNPD and SNV have taken the initiative to produce a shorter report based on the findings of the CSI-SAT report, including more focused recommendation.

Project Relevance

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

1. Three out of the four (75%) SAG members that completed the questionnaire indicated that the project was completely relevant, while the remaining member considered it as mostly relevant. The CSI is relevant mainly in the cases where the topic addresses the SAG members' work directly.
2. The SAG members mostly agreed (75%), considering the CSI-SAT completely relevant for the strengthening of civil society, yet one only perceived it as somewhat relevant in this respect. Strengthening civil society, one SAG member explains, would probably occur in the next five years.

Project Validity

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

The view of both NCO and CIVICUS is that the report had mostly depicts an accurate reflection of civil society in Vietnam, yet in one case this was regarded as only somewhat achieved. The argument for this opinion stated that a much more extended group of stakeholders than are used in the case of a CSI-SAT would need to assess the state of civil society in Vietnam.

Capacity Building

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

According to VIDS, skills were built on most aspects including secondary data gathering, data analysis and interpretation, report writing, as well as convening and networking capacities.

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. Particular areas of support that were considered as helpful by the NCO include the CSI-SAT toolkit, the methodology as well as the comments and advice on the project implementation process
2. It was noted that the NCO was mostly satisfied with the Country Support Person's assistance and overall support.
3. CIVICUS was between mostly and completely satisfied with the project implementation in Vietnam. It was noted that the project was approached with a very high level of commitment and interest in a short time span.

Sustainability/Replicability

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

1. Both the NCO and SAG members agree that it would be of importance to implement the full CSI. It was noted by one SAG member that the full CSI "should be implemented immediately considering that Vietnam is in transition and the government now engages its people to advocate and build policies with the government."

Project Resources

To what extent has the human and financial resources been appropriate for the implementation of the project?

1. The financial resources were deemed to be somewhat adequate for the implementation of the project. The reason advanced for this was the unexpected amount of time the final report required from both the Project Coordinator and Civil Society Expert. Nonetheless, the project did stay within the budgeted costs.
2. The human resources of the project were considered to be mostly adequate to successfully implement the project by all parties asked. Both CSE and Project Coordinator were considered as essential for the satisfactory outcomes yielded on this occasion.
3. There were some discrepancies in opinion about the time frame of the project. It was mentioned that the project was implemented in a relatively short amount of time as Vietnam started the project rather late if compared to most other countries implementing the CSI and CSI-SAT.

Short/Long Term Impact

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

1. Given that the SAG also included prominent researchers and members of funding organizations there are chances for continued action based on the CSI's findings.
2. Some of the SAG members have been very active to comments on the drafting of a law on association. This law is the first law that guarantees the right of organizations and the related procedures. So far only decrees and other decisions have guaranteed organizations. However, the frame in not considered enabling enough in the presents drafts, and VUSTA has prepared a different draft, as well as a group of VNGOS have given comments to the Ministry of Home Affairs.
3. The term civil society has not been discussed much publicly in Vietnam. Now it is written and talked about more broadly than before and helps to change the opinion of those who says that there is no civil society in Vietnam.
4. Strengthening civil society has become one to the key topics of VIDS research activities.
5. A few of VIDS' partner organizations have recognized the importance and value of research on civil society and are willing and interested in cooperating with VIDS on this work.
6. The project findings will be used by Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA). VUSTA is an umbrella organisation for many Vietnamese NGOs and professional associations, and VUSTA is very actively involved in improving the draft law on associations.