CIVICUS Civil Society Index
A Summary of the Ecuador CSI Project Evaluation

Background: Purpose and Objective

This evaluation provides CIVICUS and the CSI Ecuador Country Partner Fundación Esquel (FE) with an assessment of the implementation of the Civil Society Index (CSI) project in Ecuador. 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 also expected that FE will gain from this evaluation through a process of self reflection as well as taking note of 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 FE and CIVICUS. In addition, it also assessed the project against other key criteria, such as relevance, validity, participation, capacity building, CIVICUS assistance, as well as 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. These questionnaires were reviewed bearing in mind the outputs and outcomes and the corresponding indicators. CIVICUS also administered short questionnaires with the FE CSI project team, which were reviewed by a member of the CIVICUS M&E team. This document presents a brief summary of the key findings of the evaluations undertaken.

Project Outputs

A body of knowledge on the state of civil society and civil society strengthening practices
According to the FE this output has been mostly achieved. The NCO explained that the CSI has provided a broad and comprehensive understanding of civil society in Ecuador. However, further questions arose through the course of the research. Indeed the CSI opened up many doors, but those doors need to be entered in order to build a comprehensive body of knowledge.

Shared understanding on the state of civil society among a broad range of stakeholders
According to FE, a shared understanding on the state of civil society among a broad range of stakeholders was mostly achieved. It noted that while the research was important to its audience (e.g. CSOs, NGOs, universities, the media, etc) it had not yet developed a comprehensive dissemination strategy.

A set of strategies for strengthening civil society
The evaluation reveals that this output was mostly achieved. FE held that the CSI project does not necessarily provide a set of strategies per se, but rather it provides a starting point for organizations working on CS-strengthening issues. Thus, organizations can build upon the recommendations outlined in the country report.
Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society
According to FE, this output has been mostly achieved. The NCO held that “the meetings, workshops, [and] interviews carried out [during] the investigation process were wonderful places to exchange ideas and knowledge.” The NCO was also able to build relationships through these forums. Indeed, CSOs became more familiar with each other by sharing their experiences and views on common issues.

In this regard, the NCO noted that the project consultative activities were mostly able to provide a space for civil society to debate and share information on civil society issues. As the NCO noted, “the high quality of the interventions and the willingness of participants to provide information contributed to the investigation. During workshops participants were able to share information and build trust among CS members.”

Outcomes
The NCO did not evaluate the project’s outcomes; FE held that it was too early to evaluate whether these outcomes had been achieved.

Project Relevance
Relevance of the CSI to the work of the NCO
FE evaluated the project as mostly relevant to their work. The NCO held that the CSI raised FE’s national profile and developed the organization’s capacity to strengthen CSOs in Ecuador.

Relevance of the CSI to civil society strengthening in Ecuador
The evaluation found the project to be completely relevant to civil society strengthening in Ecuador. FE held that “that the CSI is a powerful tool for long term planning and defining strategies. However, since the country report is not yet published, it is not possible to assess how relevant CSOs will perceive the CSI in strengthening civil society.

Relevance to external stakeholders
Although the NCO did not evaluate this particular question, it noted that “almost every donor, organization, or stakeholder that we approached during the research process found the CSI to be a very interesting project. Even though many donors were not able to contribute financially, they asked to be included in meetings and showed great interest in knowing the results of our work.”

Recommendations for improvement in the future:
• To have more debates and discussions about the civil society definition. The NCO noted that this proved to be a difficult task and that not all of the NAG members were satisfied with the CIVICUS definition. Two of the most controversial aspects were in regards to the inclusion of political parties and religious organizations.
• There is a strong tendency to equate civil society with NGOs. Although the CSI project attempts to go beyond this, there need to be more efforts taken to try to reach to other groups in order to be more representative of civil society.
• For the next implementation a more localized and practical approach should be used. This approach should take into consideration the project’s previous findings. Smaller, local and more grassroots CSOs should be included.
**Project Validity**

1. **Secondary data review** was evaluated by FE as somewhat to fairly able to generate data/information on the state of the civil society in Ecuador. The NCO noted that “there is little and insufficient research on Ecuadorian civil society; [thus] there is a scarcity of resources.” For CIVICUS, the secondary data review was mostly able to generate relevant and accurate data on civil society in Ecuador.

2. **Social Forces Analysis at 1st NAG meeting** was evaluated by the NCO as fairly to somewhat able to generate data/information on the state of the civil society in Ecuador. The NCO noted that it was a challenging exercise and that the group dynamics and debate were not well managed. CIVICUS held that the was never utilized in the country report.

3. **Regional Stakeholder Questionnaire & Consultations** were evaluated by the NCO as mostly to completely able to generate accurate information on the state of civil society in Ecuador. CIVICUS maintained that they were mostly satisfied with the RSCs.

4. **Community Survey** was evaluated as mostly to completely (FE) and mostly (CIVICUS) able to generate accurate and relevant information on the state of the civil society in Ecuador. The NCO held that the Community Survey was “very thorough and adequate. The questioners were carried out in a very professional manner and had an excellent sample. However due to logistical and financial restrictions, some key areas of the country were not well covered.”

5. **Media review** was not implemented in Ecuador.

6. **Fact finding studies (policy impact, corporate social responsibility)** were evaluated by FE as fairly to mostly able to generate data/information about the state of the civil society in Ecuador. The NCO recognized that this was a difficult activity due to the lack of secondary resources available on civil society. Moreover, it was difficult to access those resources that did exist. CIVICUS evaluated this as somewhat able generate data and information.

7. **NAG scoring exercise**. For both the NCO and CIVICUS, the NAG scoring exercise were mostly to completely able to generate data/information about the state of the civil society in Ecuador. The NCO noted that, group dynamics and discussions were well managed during the exercise.

8. **National Workshop** was evaluated as fairly (FE) and mostly (CIVICUS) able to generate data/information about the state of the civil society in Ecuador.

**Project Participation**

According to the PE, a wide range of participatory methods that included from the toolkit. In particular, the NCO identified the Regional Stakeholder Consultation and National workshop as the most important activities in terms of project participation. Moreover, the NCO noted that all of the methods worked well, except for the SFA which was noted previously.

**Capacity Building**

According to the Project Coordinator, they were able to gain capacities in research skills such as participatory research methods, quantitative survey research methods, data analysis & interpretation, and report writing. It was noted that the CSI project
strengthened the NCO’s research capacity. They also gained skills in training and facilitation and in convening and networking. The NCO also held that, “although those skills are part of the team’s assets, it was an interesting experience in managing inter-cultural and diverse groups.”

Evaluation of CIVICUS Assistance and overall implementation
According to FE, CIVICUS by and large has mostly provided support in the entire project implementation. FE noted that CIVICUS’ support in terms of capacity building during the first stages of the project and help in raising funds for the project were most helpful for the team. FE is also mostly satisfied with the systems and procedures put in place for the NCOs assistance. The NCO held that “in general the procedures were limited to reports and the demand for information.”

The NCO was also mostly satisfied with the guidance received from the CSI toolkit. Overall, they found the toolkit to be complete and very useful. FE is also completely satisfied with CIVICUS support on fund raising for the project. The NCO held that CIVICUS helped to strengthen their funding proposal and raise funds for the research activities. Without such support it would have been very difficult to implement the CSI in Ecuador because there is limited funding for research. Moreover, FE noted that the training that CIVICUS provided on the CSI process and methodology were particularly helpful. However, technical assistance in research and analysis was missing from the CIVICUS support and something that would have been helpful.

Sustainability/Replicability
The NCO has not discussed whether it wishes to implement the CSI again in the future. However, the NCO recognized that the CSI project has informed their current programme activities.

Project Resources

Financial Resources
FE assessed the financial resources to be fairly adequate for the CSI implementation. The NCO noted that there were not enough financial resources, and thus, the NCO had to rely on its local partners for technical and logistical support during the RSCs. The NCO did not stay within the budgeted costs

Human Resources
FE and CIVICUS rated the human resources available to successfully implement the project as mostly adequate. The NCO recognized that “given the budget limitations, most of the research staff combined their CSI responsibilities with others within the organizations.” Because of this it was difficult to coordinate agendas and set priorities.

Both FE and CIVICUS were completely satisfied with the work undertaken by the civil society expert (CSE). The NCO noted that the CSE worked in a very professional manner and was very committed to the CSI. He also went well and beyond his set of responsibilities for the project.
Time
FE assessed the time available for the implementation of the project as not at all sufficient. It was estimated that the project would be concluded in six months, however the research activities took almost 18 months, and the final Country Report is not yet published. While the toolkit is able to explain the step by step process of the project, the CSI process is actually quite complex and finding the relevant information took longer than expected. CIVICUS noted that the time allocated for the project was mostly sufficient.

Short/Long Term Impact

Changes within your organisation and the partner organisations:
• The NCO mentioned that it was too early to assess signs of impact in general. However, increased interest and understanding of CSOs was noted.

Conclusion:
The NCO, the NAG members as well a CIVICUS are mostly satisfied with the CSI process and outputs in Ecuador. While Fundación Esquel noted the difficulties in collecting and gathering secondary data on CSOs, they also recognized the importance of the CSI process, as there has never been a major project on civil society undertaken in Ecuador. The NCO also noted that the diversity of the population made it difficult to capture the true essence of civil society. However, the CSI project was assessed as a step in the right direction. The majority of the research methods were implemented and yield positive results. Some of the restrictions experienced by the NCO were related to budgetary constraints. For example, they would have liked to target different areas during the Community Survey and Regional Stakeholder Consultation, but had to rely on operational support from partners to carry out these activities. CIVICUS was also mostly pleased and satisfied with the systems and structures set up by the team in Ecuador.