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CIVICUS

RESILIENT ROOTS:

HOW CONSTITUENT ACCOUNTABILITY HELPS ORGANISATIONS TO COUNTER CLOSING CIVIC SPACES



The Resilient Roots initiative, coordinated by [CIVICUS](#), in collaboration with [Keystone Accountability](#) and [Accountable Now](#), will test whether organisations who are more accountable and responsive to their primary constituencies are more resilient against external threats.

To do so, we will join forces with organisations in various countries to design and rollout innovative accountability experiments staggered over a two year period. These experiments will explore the factors which increase public support and trust in civil society organisations (CSOs), in order to identify different pathways to greater, longer-lasting efficacy and legitimacy.

THE CHALLENGE

While there is growing recognition amongst CSOs of the need to become more accountable, too often this focuses on pleasing donors rather than meaningfully engaging and responding to the people and communities these organisations are created to serve in the first place. This is even true at the local level, where working closely with the community does not necessarily translate into a consistent, people-responsive accountability.

At the same time, an increasing number of governments are seeking to curtail civic action through challenging the legitimacy of CSOs, demonising them as disconnected special interest groups. What's more, the typical ways CSOs demonstrate their accountability – through compliance with regulatory requirements and donor reporting – are unlikely to be sufficient to convince sceptical politicians or members of the public.

ARE ORGANIZATIONS WHO ARE MORE ACCOUNTABLE AND RESPONSIVE TO THEIR PRIMARY CONSTITUENCIES MORE RESILIENT AGAINST EXTERNAL THREATS?

THE IDEA

We believe that a more constituent-facing and accountable civil society, when under political or structural attack, will be more able to rely upon its base to come to its defence, bridge resourcing gaps, and ultimately safeguard its long-term sustainability.

Therefore, we will work with a number of CSOs across a range of locations and issues to help them design and rollout year-long accountability experiments. These pilot projects will involve meaningful dialogue with their primary constituencies to drive organisational decision-making and action.

Simultaneously, we will examine the relationship between accountability and resilience, to demonstrate that greater constituent accountability can counter false government narratives used to delegitimise CSOs and close civic space.

In addition, by enabling these organisations to continuously share experiences and learn from one another, we will create a community of accountability advocates uniquely placed to champion the adoption of effective approaches by other CSOs. These experiments will form an evidence base used by CIVICUS and other collaborators to actively support many more people-powered accountability initiatives. It will also demonstrate to donors the need to provide more time and resources for these efforts. In doing so, the initiative strives to make a contribution to how the civil society sector as a whole views and practices accountability.



WHAT DOES AN ACCOUNTABILITY EXPERIMENT ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE?

[LIFT](#) is a US nonprofit dedicated to ending intergenerational poverty. By fostering relationships between low-income parents and caregivers of young children and dedicated volunteers, LIFT helps families build the personal well-being, social connections, and financial strength to secure basic needs and achieve long-term goals, like a safe home, living wages, or a better education. Keystone Accountability worked with LIFT to set up a system where members answered a very short survey on an iPad as they left a LIFT meeting. LIFT shares the results of these surveys via TV screens in waiting areas and runs focus groups to better understand why people gave the responses. These focus groups created a space where LIFT staff could have a conversation with members about how better they could meet their needs. By analysing the data, LIFT has been able to establish a positive correlation between members who gave high scores to questions about their relationship with LIFT and their ability to make progress against their goals. Member feedback is now used to improve all LIFT's programmes and even in the design of new ones.

HOW WE WILL DO IT

Our bold approach will involve prioritising innovation, taking calculated risks, and embracing failure. We will employ an agile, developmental ethos to monitoring, learning and course correction, and share what we learn from the pilots with a broader community of interested stakeholders early and often. More specifically, the project will consist of three main components:

1 IDENTIFY AND SUPPORT PILOT PROJECTS

Through an open call, we will identify a diverse range of organisations with a strong will and feasible idea to build more accountability to their primary constituents. Each organisation will receive financial and technical support for the design, implementation, and ongoing review of their pilot project. This includes interventions to develop capacity where needed.



2 BOOST ACCOUNTABILITY AND TEST THE RESILIENCE LINK

Work with the pilot projects to explore the factors and pathways which increase public support, build trust and increase legitimacy. This will involve continuously assessing progress and adapting approaches as required. The pilots will also examine how these efforts affect their ability to deal with threats, thereby enabling us to develop a better, more nuanced understanding about the relationship between accountability and resilience, in multiple different contexts.

3 FOSTER PEER-LEARNING AND WIDER UPTAKE

Create mechanisms and tools for ongoing peer-learning between the pilot projects and collate the lessons learned from across the experiments. This evidence base will enable the production of resources that support other organisations to develop and adopt their own constituent accountability approaches, to achieve scale far beyond the original pilots.



WHO WE ARE

Resilient Roots is a two-year initiative coordinated by [CIVICUS](#), World Alliance for Citizen Participation, and funded by the [Ford Foundation](#). Technical and strategic support is provided by [Keystone Accountability](#) and [Accountable Now](#).



CIVICUS is the only global network of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world. The alliance constitutes an influential network of individuals and organisations at the local, national, regional and international levels, and spans the spectrum of civil society. It is proudly based in the global South and has nearly 4000 members in more than 170 countries. CIVICUS seeks to amplify the voices and opinions of ordinary people.



Keystone Accountability is a not-for-profit organisation that helps social-change organisations understand and improve their performance by harnessing feedback, especially from the people they serve. Keystone has developed a method called Constituent Voice™, a rigorous feedback system that gathers the experiences of those most affected by an organisation's work. This quantifiable and comparative data is used as the basis for learning dialogues, relationship building, and course correction to improve the organisation's performance.



Accountable Now is a global platform that supports CSOs to be transparent, responsive to stakeholders and focused on delivering impact. The platform has 27 Member Organisations, including development, humanitarian, environmental, rights-based and advocacy organisations, which are active in more than 150 countries. It has played a central role in the development of the Global Standard for CSO Accountability, an initiative which provides the ideal frame to further advance the implementation of dynamic CSO accountability worldwide.