

CIVICUS SOLIDARITY FUND CONVERSATIONS

X.Y*, IRAN

Tell us a little bit about your organisation/activism and what kind of support was requested from the CIVICUS Solidarity Fund (CSF)?

We are a group of women that are fighting against gender discrimination in Iran; particularly, we fight against women's ban in sports. In Iran, including during the COVID period, activists are under huge pressure from the State, and we cannot access proper information or training, mainly because of language barriers, so I came up with the idea to use translation as a tool for activism. As activists, we want to bridge the gap for Farsi-speaking activists or future activists by creating a learning tool and information system that would help them improve their skills while learning about opportunities. We, therefore, needed support from CIVICUS to keep a group of researchers and translators to continue working and sustaining our activities.

If you could summarize in one sentence what was most significant, in terms of learnings, from receiving funding (CSF and in general), what would that sentence be?

CIVICUS Solidarity Fund got our back!

Other than the financial support, has being part of the CSF been helpful in any way?

Yes, the life of an activist is usually very difficult because you care about your surroundings, so in countries like Iran, which has a lot of problems, your job is even more difficult and lonely. During the solidarity fund, I participated in most of their sessions, and I can say that the team and some of the grantee-members who are working worldwide and always tried to be present in these sessions were my close friends during these past months. I don't think I shared that much of my feelings with anyone else. The CSF sessions were a safe space, and the team was very understanding. They understood my pains and sadness and sent positive energy, which made our bi-weekly meetings the best place to share my passions and grief and get energy afterwards to work better. The CSF team also shared good opportunities with me whenever they found something related to the interest of my work.

What did you enjoy the most and the least from being part of the CSF? How can the CSF improve their engagement with future applicants/grantee-members?

As I mentioned above, this was the first time that the funding was not only financial but also considered the mental health of their grantee-members. I loved how I found a group of great friends, and I admire their work. The CSF team was also so supportive and caring, I didn't feel abandoned during this time. The thing I didn't like that much, however, was the gap until we received our second tranche of funding. I also did not like how it was in 2 instalments which made things a bit difficult. The contract was also very scary for me, to be honest. Several times I thought of not signing it because when you are an activist working underground your resources are very low, and sometimes you cannot collect proper invoices. When I looked deeper into the CSF contract, it was similar to other contracts, and it felt scary initially. However, I think the session we had with the CSF team explaining the contract made things clear for me.

How is your organisation's experience in mobilising resources?

In general, things are looking good, although we are near the end of the CSF funding, and I am a bit worried about how I should cover the next 1000\$ until we receive the next instalments as reimbursement. Iran's financial system is collapsing very fast, and daily life is getting very expensive. Considering the rising prices, I feel that the initial budget calculations and the amount we allocated as salary are insufficient. The inflation caused problems with groups' priorities too because they cannot give more time to our work, otherwise, they will face financial problems. Because of this and the pressure on civil society from the Islamic Republic, activists are being arrested, and we are seeing an increase in tragedies experienced by activists, making our work environment stressful. During these tragedies, it's difficult to talk or educate people about other things, therefore we need to wait so that people have time and mental space to focus on our educational materials.

What are the main barriers you face in seeking resources?

The biggest barrier is the lack of steady financial support. Sustaining ourselves as a group of activists without funds makes our work stressful and not sustainable., We hope we can have steady support for longer periods, for example, 2-3 years at least.



What types of resources (financial and non-financial) are most important to your activism/organisation?

Iranian women are so eager to learn and change their surroundings. I think if they can learn about opportunities or online courses, they will always be in the first row in fighting patriarchy and misogyny.

What would be your advice to donors to facilitate access to resources for small and/or informal organisations?

Through the CSF team, I had the opportunity to talk to some donors, which was great. For example, I explained how complicated it is for small or informal groups to provide references, and therefore it would be good for donors to know someone locally or do research about the potential applicant instead of always asking them for references.

1. Donors also need to know that while they are giving out funds, they can also be a great bridge between activists around the world, it would therefore be good for them to adopt the strategy CSF use regarding their bi-weekly group check-in.
2. Donors also need to collaborate with activists that don't have an international banking account or whose country is under sanctions.
3. Donors shouldn't think that if they are funding your work, activists should work tirelessly for unlimited time because they received funding. Funding ends.
4. In corrupted countries, it is very difficult to work because activists are facing threats and living in very stressful situations, so donors need to consider their mental health during the funding period too.

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