



LEARNINGS

From issues raised by stakeholders during stakeholder interviews when asked about most significant outcomes from the 2017-2022 strategic period

CONTENTS

CONTENTS



CIVICUS

LEARNINGS FROM ISSUES
RAISED BY STAKEHOLDERS

METHODOLOGY

1

SHIFT 1) ONE OVERARCHING GOAL

2

SHIFT 2) EXPLICIT FOCUS ON GROUPS AFFECTED BY THE COMBINED IMPACT OF CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS AND STRUCTURAL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

3

A. Stakeholder engagement with target groups:

Learning from our work with youth

3

B. Coalitions and networks: A united civil society is influential

7

SHIFT 3) CLEARER ARTICULATION OF CIVICUS'S CONTRIBUTION TO LONG-TERM SYSTEMIC CHANGE

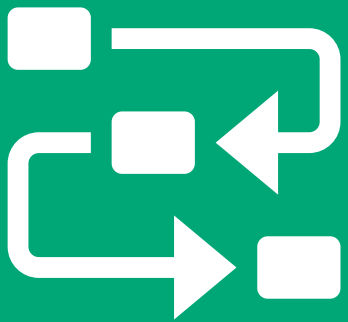
9

METHODOLOGY

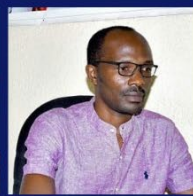
[CONTENTS](#)

CIVICUS

**LEARNINGS FROM ISSUES
RAISED BY STAKEHOLDERS**



Although not in the scope of the original terms of reference for the review of the CIVICUS 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, many learnings were shared with the consultant, Marie L'Hostis, during interviews with CIVICUS staff and partners. Although these learning should not be considered comprehensive, CIVICUS did want to ensure that they were captured and reflected upon, particularly how they inform the implementation of the new strategic plan and are grouped according to our three key strategic shifts. The following is based on the analysis of past reports and key program outcomes, as well as the recurrence of feedback provided by the interviewed stakeholders.



2022



STATE OF
CIVIL
SOCIETY
REPORT



L



E



N



S



SHIFT 1) ONE OVERARCHING GOAL

INTENT: One of the key shifts in the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan is the creation of one overarching goal across the work of the alliance – as opposed to three distinct goals in the previous strategy. This overarching goal, namely ‘to strengthen civil society and civic action for expanded civic and democratic space’, reflects CIVICUS’s desire to focus on actions that are not just defending but also improving civic and democratic freedoms through a combination of influencing, organising and solidarity interventions.

Continue and improve upon the following:

- **Strengthen¹ and further mainstream** the co-designing, implementing and monitoring of advocacy and programmatic strategies – especially ensuring those most impacted by civic space restrictions and democratic violations are engaged in the process and co-creating campaigns and advocacy plans to best respond to member needs and local contexts. *(Also relevant to Shift 2.)*
- **Strive for more cross-organisational collaboration** for more transversal connections across programs to leverage opportunities, ensure full support to members through the variety of resources the organisation has to offer (grants, pilot programs, launch of tailored advocacy and campaign plans, etc.) and better reflect member needs and contexts in the global, regional and national arenas.
- **Produce research and resources** in a timely manner that is **useful to those who need it most** – whether it is in countries with restricted and obstructed civic space or for less formal groups.
- **Amplify the voice of CIVICUS members** and civic space activists through the media, UN mechanisms, and leveraging CIVICUS networks.

¹ This was already highlighted as a key learning of the 2019-2020 annual report which encouraged CIVICUS to embrace “the power of radical collaboration. After extensive testing, co-design methodology should be adopted as CIVICUS’s standard programme design approach to encourage joint ownership and stronger relationships with key stakeholders.”

2



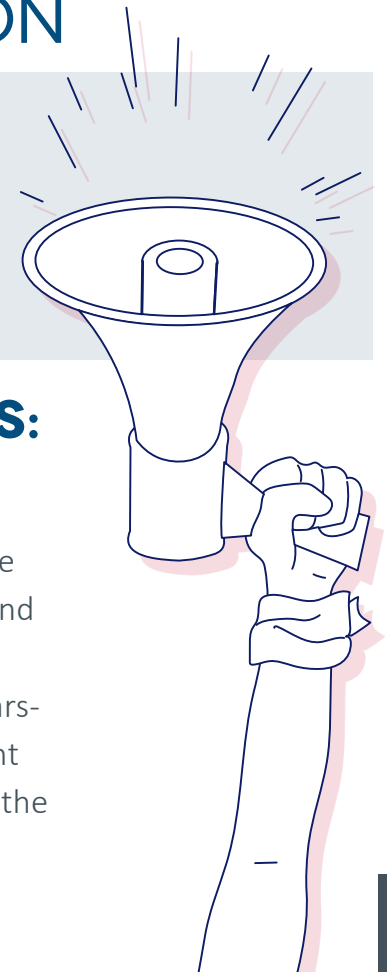
SHIFT 2) EXPLICIT FOCUS ON GROUPS AFFECTED BY THE COMBINED IMPACT OF CIVIC SPACE RESTRICTIONS AND STRUCTURAL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

19 —

INTENT: The 2022-2027 Strategic Plan has integrated an explicit focus across the strategy on working with and for groups affected by the combined impacts of civic space restrictions and structural forms of discrimination. This implies a greater emphasis on solidarity and alliance building across all levels of the alliance's work, including within the membership, and the stronger representation of issues of civic and democratic freedoms from a social justice lens.

A. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT WITH TARGET GROUPS: LEARNING FROM OUR WORK WITH YOUTH

The past strategic period showed how powerful it was to explicitly target an audience group as part of the organisation's strategic plan. As such, in 2016, youth became a strategic priority for CIVICUS and by the end of the 2017-2022 strategic period CIVICUS had secured US\$3 million for programming targeted at those under 30-years-old, and 43 percent of new individual CIVICUS members in 2021-2022 were under 30-years-old. As CIVICUS further engages the most marginalised and under-represented groups, it will be important to reflect on the key lessons learned from youth, grassroots and local civil society actors engagements in the past CIVICUS strategic plan. >>



**CIVICUS****LEARNINGS FROM ISSUES
RAISED BY STAKEHOLDERS**

Related considerations and learnings:

- **Direct² engagement is critical** and CIVICUS should not only rely on national organisations for meaningful participation.
- **Develop a clear engagement strategy** that clarifies the objectives and outcomes of working with each targeted group with clear expectations, roles and responsibilities for transparent partnerships, trusted relationships and work relevant and beneficial to all involved.
- **Clarify how partners and targeted groups will be able to integrate into CIVICUS's organisational structure** (for example opportunities for co-design and planning of core advocacy and campaign activities) and what support (funding, technical support, resources, etc.) they will receive for the work conducted.
- **Clarify the role of formal or more traditional CSOs and networks** – The 2022-2027 Strategic Plan does not clarify the engagement strategy and organisational expectations towards more formal CSOs and networks. To ensure CIVICUS's long-standing relationship with formal CSOs and networks does not diminish, it will be important to keep them engaged and reinforce the importance of this relationship through a clear engagement strategy and co-designed partnerships for collaboration.
- Complement inclusive spaces with **collective decision-making processes** and co-management structures with stakeholders in relation to programme strategy, implementation, etc. >>

² This was already highlighted as a key learning from the 2018-2019 annual plan implementation.



**CIVICUS****LEARNINGS FROM ISSUES
RAISED BY STAKEHOLDERS**

- **Compensation for engagement for the most marginalised groups** – Unlike staff from formal CSOs, youth, grassroots activists and frontline communities may need compensation for their time and ideas to ensure they can fully engage and participate in projects. Reaching grassroots takes more time, effort and resources and should be planned for accordingly.
- **Mainstream resourcing mechanisms that are** flexible and agile, so activists and most marginalised groups can easily join and engage without feeling overburdened by administrative, procedural and financial processes.
- **Organisational commitment to long-term partnerships with targeted groups** (not just one-off initiatives). Multi-stakeholder networks and initiatives need to be nurtured and feel that there is a long-term commitment for their well-being and functioning. >>
- **Integrate monitoring, evaluating & learning practices in all CIVICUS programming and pilot initiatives, and embed collective reflection moments and channels for candid feedback with the organisation's networks and various target groups.** Through monitoring and evaluation, you can review progress, identify problems in planning and/or implementation, and make adjustments so that the program is more likely to reach its stated objectives.





“ THE ORGANISATION HAS ALSO MADE EFFORTS TO SHIFT THE PARADIGM IN DONOR–GRANTEE RELATIONSHIPS FOR MORE EQUAL PARTNERSHIPS THAT FURTHER TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE NEED OF CSOS AND ACTIVISTS AROUND THE WORLD.

CONTENTS



CIVICUS

LEARNINGS FROM ISSUES
RAISED BY STAKEHOLDERS



SHIFTING THE ECOSYSTEM FOR MORE MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN CIVIC SPACE ACTORS:

CIVICUS’S KEY ROLE TO BE PLAYED UNTIL THERE IS A FULLY ROBUST ECOSYSTEM TO SUPPORT ACTIVISTS

During the past strategic period, CIVICUS led key research pieces and conversations for more funding and resources to civil society actors who are most impacted by threats or restrictions to the civic space where they operate. On that note, CIVICUS has been leading the way in sponsoring solidarity mechanisms within the alliance and re-shaping some of its programming and grant-making to better reach the people most exposed in the frontline. The organisation has also made efforts to shift the paradigm in donor-grantee relationships for more equal partnerships that further take into consideration the need of CSOs and activists around the world. While some donors are starting to show interest in changing their practices to better reflect the needs of frontline activists and grassroots communities, it takes time to change long-standing practices. Through this review, partners have highlighted the key role CIVICUS is playing in providing much needed solidarity funding to civil society and frontline activists who are protecting and advocating for protecting civic space. The large number of proposals received during the last round of funding from the CSF indicates a need for more funding, especially as attacks on civic space keep increasing worldwide. Feedback from this brief review suggested CIVICUS keeps working on improving on its grant-making process, building up agile funding mechanisms, avoiding burdensome contractual processes and ensuring sustainability for partners.



CIVICUS

LEARNINGS FROM ISSUES
RAISED BY STAKEHOLDERS

B. COALITIONS AND NETWORKS: A UNITED CIVIL SOCIETY IS INFLUENTIAL

Over the last strategic period, CIVICUS and the networks and coalitions it initiated (I4C, Vuka! and AGNA among others) have played a key role in rallying civil society forces by collating the experiences and unifying the positions of the many different types of groups affected by the closing of civic space and persecutions. The positive outcomes of such partnerships provided strong evidence that when civil society cooperates and works together, it has a powerful voice. Shared trust and shared vision were often cited as an important factor in successful efforts to respond to closing civic space. Building trust, commitment and solidarity takes time and interviews revealed that it often takes place within the confinement of cosy, known and trusted networks such as AGNA, I4C, Vuka! and CHARM.





Related considerations and learnings:

- **Coalitions strengthen the enabling environment for civil society.** They provide economies of scale through sharing resources such as technical expertise, joint strategies and coordinating responses by providing a unified voice across multiple groups. They also help to build and nurture a shared vision and trust, which are important factors for successful efforts to connect, share best practices, build solidarity and collaborate on joint initiatives.
- **Coalitions and network building involves investing time at the outset, but it also requires continued and long-term commitment.** The last strategic period revealed some tension and lack of clarification regarding CIVICUS's overall goal and objectives with some of the networks and coalitions it had launched over the past years. While some networks are becoming independent such as the I4C Regional Hubs, others clearly highlighted the key role CIVICUS is playing and how it would be important CIVICUS keeps playing that lead or convening role in nurturing these networks in the long-term for more coordinated action in the civic space arena such as Vuka!, Building Responses Together Network and AGNA.
- **Return to in-person meetings.** During this review, partners voiced concern of the fatigue from virtual meetings and convenings.
- **CIVICUS's Member Online Community.** CIVICUS needs to learn how to better leverage the Online Community for learning, connection and working together to co-create and launch locally relevant member-led projects and campaigns.

3

CONTENTS



CIVICUS

LEARNINGS FROM ISSUES
RAISED BY STAKEHOLDERS

SHIFT 3) CLEARER ARTICULATION OF CIVICUS'S CONTRIBUTION TO LONG-TERM SYSTEMIC CHANGE

INTENT: The 2022-2027 Strategic Plan aims at better capturing CIVICUS's contribution to long-term, systemic change through five outcome statements that connect and consolidate the impact of the work across all levels. The need to deeply understand CIVICUS's impact was already highlighted as a key recommendation of the 2017-2018 annual report, "As an alliance and as an institution, we are still learning how and where to make the most meaningful impacts to protect and defend civic freedoms, strengthen the power of people to organise, mobilise, and take action, hold decision-makers to account, strengthen capacity, and foster innovation and resilience across civil society world-wide." CIVICUS adopted a new Integrated Results Framework that monitors progress against the new strategic plan.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

DO YOU NEED
PERMISSION
TO HOLD AN
ASSEMBLY?

NO!

CAN YOU BRING
EQUIPMENT TO
ASSEMBLIES?

YES!

CAN YOU
WEAR A MASK
OR DISGUISES
AT A PROTEST?

YES!





CIVICUS

LEARNINGS FROM ISSUES
RAISED BY STAKEHOLDERS

Related considerations and learnings:

- Ensure the accompanying **Integrated Results Framework** to the new strategy is **embraced by all CIVICUS's core programs and pilot initiatives** to enable continuous learning, specifically prioritising cross-programmatic learnings. This will better equip the organisation to answer critical learning questions identified in the strategic plan.
- Invest in monitoring³, evaluation and learning resources and incorporate more programmatic evaluation to be able to better assess and guide the work conducted.
- Improve the integration of partner feedback into monitoring, evaluation and learning processes and consider embedding collective reflection moments and channels for candid feedback with the organisation's networks and various target groups.
- Prioritise and invest in learning, connecting and sharing of best practices across the alliance, through the curation of safe, trusted spaces, to build solidarity across geographies, language and organisational structures.

³ Monitoring and evaluation enable organisations and program managers to assess the quality and impact of their work against their action and strategic plans. Through monitoring and evaluation, they can review progress, identify problems in planning and/or implementation, and adjust so that the program is more likely to reach its stated objectives. Please refer to our Integrated Results Framework.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

DO YOU LOSE
YOUR RIGHT TO
ASSEMBLE IF
OTHERS COMMIT
VIOLENT ACTS?

NO!

DO YOU HAVE
THE RIGHT TO
MONITOR A
PROTEST?

YES!

DOES YOUR
RIGHT TO
ASSEMBLE APPLY
TO THE ONLINE
SPACE?

YES!





REFERENCES

CONTENTS



CIVICUS

**LEARNINGS FROM ISSUES
RAISED BY STAKEHOLDERS**

CIVICUS

CIVICUS 2017-2022 STRATEGIC PLAN REVIEW.
A selection of CIVICUS's contribution to change
over the last five years

2017-2022 Strategic Plan

2022-2027 Strategic Plan

Mid-term Strategy Review and
Consolidated management response

Accountability Reports

KEY PUBLICATIONS

State of Civil Society Report (SOCS)

Monitor Watchlist

People Power Under Attack (PPUA)

CIVICUS LENS

Know Your Rights Brief

Protest Support Phonebook

CIVICUS Monitor

Maximising Benefits: A recommended frame-
work for volunteerism and compensation for
young people

CAMPAIGNS

#StandAsMyWitness

Grassroots Solidarity Revolution and
Grassroots Changemakers

NETWORKS

Consortium for Human Rights and Media in
Africa (CHARM)

Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA)

Innovation for Change (I4C)

Vuka! Coalition for Civic Action (Vuka!)

Diversity and Inclusion Group for Networking
and Action (DIGNA)

CIVICUS Youth

Youth Action Lab (YAL)

CIVICUS Member Online Community

ADDITIONAL

International Civil Society Week (ISCW)

CIVICUS Solidarity Fund (CSF)

Crisis Response Fund (CRF)

Resilient Roots

CONTACT US



civics.org

CONTENTS



CIVICUS

**LEARNINGS FROM ISSUES
RAISED BY STAKEHOLDERS**

HEADQUARTERS

25 Owl Street, 6th Floor
Johannesburg, South Africa, 2092
Tel: +27 (0)11 833 5959
Fax: +27 (0)11 833 7997



info@civics.org

UN HUB: NEW YORK

CIVICUS, c/o WeWork
450 Lexington Ave
New York, NY 10017, United States



/CIVICUS

UN HUB: GENEVA

11 Avenue de la Paix
Geneva, Switzerland, CH-1202
Tel: +41 (0)22 733 3435



@CIVICUSalliance