



# CIVICUS 2017–2022 STRATEGIC PLAN REVIEW

A selection of CIVICUS's contribution  
to change over the last five years

Published March 2023



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# A TILTED SCALE: COUNTRIES BY CIVIC SPACE RATING

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**CIVICUS**

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Countries per ratings category

OPEN

NARROWED

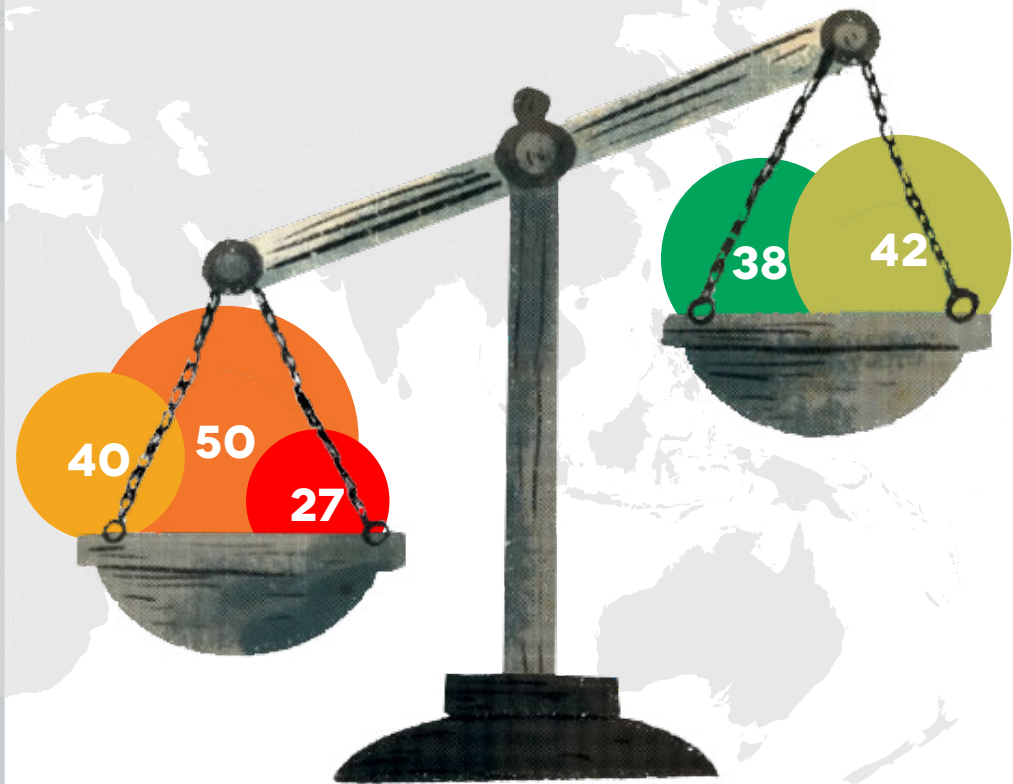
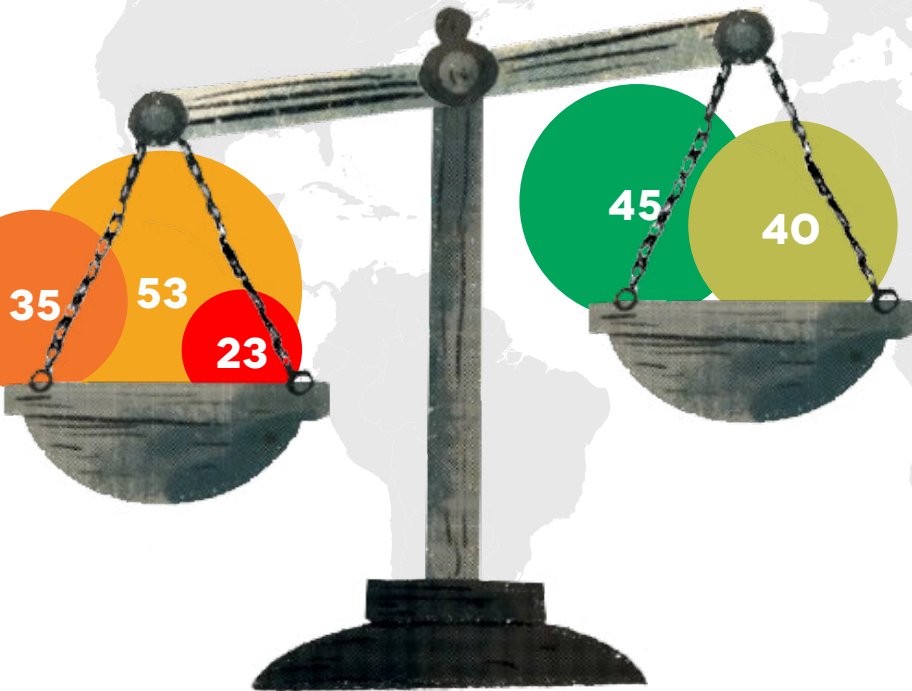
OBSTRUCTED

REPPRESSED

CLOSED

**2018**

**2022**





# WHERE DO PEOPLE LIVE?

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CIVICUS

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2018

36.6%  
**OBSTUCTED**

19.1%  
**REPRESSED**

26.8%  
**CLOSED**

3.7%  
**OPEN**

13.8%  
**NARROWED**

2022

42.2%  
**REPRESSED**

28.5%  
**CLOSED**

3.2%  
**OPEN**

14.9%  
**OBSTUCTED**

11.3%  
**NARROWED**



# INTRODUCTION TO THIS REVIEW

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## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The past strategic plan period (2017-2022) tested civil society. At the time the strategy was developed, CIVICUS observed increasing and coordinated attacks on democracy and civil society. The strategic plan's ambition was to test new approaches and forge new partnerships to enhance the impact of citizen action and civil society. It centred on three goals:



**GOAL 1:**  
Defending civic freedoms  
and democratic values



**GOAL 2:**  
Strengthening the power of  
people to organise, mobilise  
and take action



**GOAL 3:**  
Empowering a more  
accountable, effective and  
innovative civil society

This report aims to present the key findings of the review through an overall impact narrative with details of a selection of the most significant outcomes of the implementation of CIVICUS's past strategic plan with compelling stories of change to illustrate the work done over the last strategic period. Key learnings and their implications for the current strategic period are published separately.

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## METHODOLOGY

Considering the extensive work CIVICUS had already conducted to review its 2017-2022 Strategic Plan as part of a thorough mid-term strategy review and to prepare for the elaboration of its 2022-2027 Strategic Plan, this review was not designed as a full-extent evaluation to assess the details of what worked well and what could have worked better in the implementation of the strategic plan. Instead, this review aimed at identifying a selection of the most significant outcomes of the implementation of the plan and the areas where CIVICUS's institutional strengthening work was also out of scope for this review. Please refer to CIVICUS's annual reports and mid-term strategy review for extensive details. Learnings captured but out of scope of this review have been published separately.

All research data on civic space presented in this report is directly extracted from CIVICUS's research and reports and does not reflect the viewpoint or analysis of the consultant in charge of this review. This review focuses on the analysis of the work conducted by CIVICUS over the 2017-2022 strategic period for an assessment of its most significant outcomes. To reach this goal, a two-phase review was undertaken by the consultant, Marie L'Hostis, with: 1) an in-depth review of key strategic documents, CIVICUS's annual plans and reports, annual constituency surveys, programme evaluations and reports, raw datasets, outcome reports and impact reflections from CIVICUS staff, and 2) 50 interviews with selected CIVICUS staff, alliance members and external partners to corroborate the information collected and assess the most impactful stories<sup>1</sup>.

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1 Twenty interviews were conducted with selected CIVICUS staff members and 30 interviews with external stakeholders (CIVICUS alliance members, key programmatic partners, donors and enablers).





CIVICUS

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NEARLY TWO BILLION LIVE IN COUNTRIES WHERE CIVIC SPACE IS CLOSED, MEANING THAT ARE DENIED THE RIGHT TO SPEAK OUT AND FACE INTIMIDATION, DETENTION AND VIOLENCE IF THEY DO SO.

## EXTERNAL CONTEXT

Since CIVICUS developed its strategic plan in 2016, new and intensifying trends have marked the world and affected the conditions for civil society. The COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread disruption, plunged millions into poverty, exposed vulnerable groups to increased discrimination and enabled countless human rights violations. Many governments saw in pandemic regulations an opportunity to further restrict basic freedoms.

Conflicts and crises have burgeoned, causing human rights abuses and driving displacement within and across borders. In many countries, authoritarian political turns have led to increased attacks on civil society and the rights of excluded groups. Climate change and environmental degradation have continued largely unabated, with extreme weather events accelerating, impacting worst on the poorest people and those with the least power. Powerful authoritarian states have further extended their international influence, and the international multilateral system has been the subject of increased contestation, with universal human rights called into question.

## WATCHLIST



### CHAD

Chad has seen a rapid decline in the state of civic freedoms. Citizens took to the streets to protest of a military takeover following the death of long-term President Idriss Déby on 20 April 2021. At least 16 protesters have been killed, while over 700 have been arrested. Authorities have also shut down regular internet access.

CIVICUS MONITOR RATING: **REPPRESSED**

## WATCHLIST



### ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia has seen a rapid decline in the state of civic freedoms. There have been shutdowns of the internet, messaging services and other forms of communication as the government is engaged in an armed conflict in the Tigray region. Journalists have also been arrested and killed, while political opponents have received threats ahead of national elections.

CIVICUS MONITOR RATING: **REPPRESSED**



**CIVICUS****CIVICUS 2017–2022  
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CLIMATE-HARMING PROJECTS HAVE BEEN STOPPED, UNJUST ECONOMIC POLICIES HAVE BEEN REVERSED AND GAINS HAVE BEEN WON IN RECOGNISING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND LGBTQI+ PEOPLE.



Against this backdrop, attacks on civic space and democratic freedoms have increased. In 2021, the CIVICUS Monitor reported nine out of 10 people now live in countries where civic freedoms – freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression – are severely restricted. Only around three per cent of the world’s population lives in countries where civic space is fully open. Nearly two billion live in countries where civic space is closed, meaning that are denied the right to speak out and face intimidation, detention and violence if they do so. But the experience has not been solely one of regression: immense waves of civic action have risen to defend human rights and democracy and demand fundamental change. All around the world, people have taken to the streets to demand climate action, economic justice and more progressive social policies. New protest and social movements have emerged, often led by young people forging new forms of organising and mobilising and bringing people together across deep-seated social divides. Their efforts have yielded victories: climate-harming projects have been stopped, unjust economic policies have been reversed and gains have been won in recognising the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people.





DURING THE FIVE-YEAR PERIOD, THE NUMBER OF CIVICUS  
**MEMBERS MORE THAN TRIPLED** FROM 4,121 TO 13,427.



## INTERNAL CONTEXT

Internally, the CIVICUS secretariat saw leadership transition, rapid growth in membership, a thorough mid-term strategy review and institutional strengthening of its policies and systems. In December 2018, Danny Sriskandarajah left the role of CIVICUS Secretary General and was replaced by Lysa John in January 2019. At the governance level, long-serving board chair Anabel Cruz ended her term in July 2019 and was replaced by Julia Sanchez.

There were also CIVICUS board elections in 2019 and 2020. During the five-year period, the number of CIVICUS members more than tripled from 4,121 to 13,427. From August to November 2019, CIVICUS conducted a mid-term strategy review. The CIVICUS senior leadership team responded in March 2020 with a consolidated management response with clear follow-up steps for implementation of the review's key recommendations in the short, medium and long-term.

Alongside the implementation of the mid-term strategy review actions, CIVICUS continued to work on its institutional strengthening commitments including improving organisational systems and practices. CIVICUS shifted to a cloud-based financial management system, transitioned to an online monitoring and evaluation platform, enabled all staff to work remotely during the pandemic and strengthened data and digital security protocols and processes. >>

**CIVICUS****CIVICUS 2017–2022  
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Additional advancement of institutional strengthening in the period under review, CIVICUS developed and implemented its first institutional resourcing and sustainability strategy, which aims to grow and diversify its supporter base, and completed a human resources audit and an organisational race and racial justice review that led to a new remuneration policy, and a comprehensive conditions of employment framework.

These internal processes and alignment to labour law as well as core fundings fluctuations, contributed to some fixed-term, core-funded, contracts not being renewed and some programs experiencing a reduction in staff numbers,

which further stretched capacity. For example, the Diversity and Inclusion Group for Networking and Action (DIGNA) closed which came as a surprise to several partners. These lessons and others on program transitions and sustainability are being actioned through our strategy implementing frameworks such as programme, quality and innovation and integrated results framework etc.

And as part of its ongoing commitment to accountability, CIVICUS also submitted its yearly accountability reports to Accountable Now, a global membership platform supporting CSOs in being transparent and responsive to stakeholders, throughout the strategic period.



AS PART OF ITS ONGOING COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY, CIVICUS ALSO SUBMITTED ITS YEARLY ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTS TO ACCOUNTABLE NOW, A GLOBAL MEMBERSHIP PLATFORM SUPPORTING CSOS IN BEING TRANSPARENT AND RESPONSIVE TO STAKEHOLDERS, THROUGHOUT THE STRATEGIC PERIOD.

# OVERALL SUMMARY OF IMPACT AGAINST CIVICUS'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2017–2022

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Through the implementation of its strategic plan, the organisation produced timely and world-class knowledge and analysis, shifting from retrospective research to regular up-to-date data and analysis on global events and the state of civil society and civic and democratic freedoms around the world. This has enabled the organisation to position itself as a field leader and trusted partner in civic space, referenced by media, academics, activists and decision-makers around the world. CIVICUS's research and advocacy is building a strong basis to help inform and guide the work of civil society organisations (CSOs) to advocate for expanded civic and democratic space. CIVICUS has contributed to international norm setting by supporting the United Nations Human Rights Committee in crafting General Comment 37 (GC37) on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. The organisation has also started making significant progress in advocating for open civic space and systemic change at

regional and national levels with direct support to members through initiatives such as the Consortium for Human Rights and Media in Africa (CHARM) and through a strong network of partners of regional CSOs dedicated to jointly mapping global civic space conditions through the CIVICUS Monitor. With the launch of the #StandAsMyWitness campaign in 2020, CIVICUS expanded its work on defending the release of imprisoned human rights defenders (HRDs) around the world. But as attacks on civic space keep increasing globally, activists and CSOs are feeling the strain and further need support to maintain and intensify their work to protect and promote civic freedom. There is also room for improvement in involving members in these efforts and tailoring campaigns to local needs.

CIVICUS has also made a significant impact through its efforts to connect CSOs, providing opportunities for networking and learning through online and in-person training activities





THE ORGANISATION HAS ALSO BEEN A LEADER IN PROMOTING AND DISSEMINATING BEST PRACTICES IN CIVIL SOCIETY, POSITIONING ITSELF AS A PROGRESSIVE AND INNOVATIVE GLOBAL SOUTH LEADER IN CO-CREATION, CO-DESIGN AND THE PROTECTION OF CIVIC SPACE AND DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS.

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and events, joint research projects, networks such as the Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA) and DIGNA and innovative initiatives such as Innovation for Change (I4C) and the Vuka! Coalition for Civic Action (Vuka!) that have brought partners closer together, building connections across civil society that transcend issues, geographies and organisation types. Through this work, CIVICUS has successfully built solidarity, fostering a sense of community and collaboration even in the face of challenges such as the pandemic and crises in countries including Afghanistan and Ukraine. While there is still a need for better evaluation

of the impact of these initiatives, partners have expressed appreciation for the role CIVICUS plays as a network enabler that creates connection and a sense of belonging to a community for joint action and advocacy for civic space.

The organisation has also been a leader in promoting and disseminating best practices in civil society, positioning itself as a progressive and innovative global south leader in co-creation, co-design and the protection of civic space and democratic freedoms. CIVICUS has led the way in sponsoring solidarity mechanisms within the alliance and reshaping some of its





CIVICUS HAS WORKED TO BUILD CAPACITY WITHIN CSOS, INCREASING ITS GRANT-MAKING AND NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO ORGANISATIONS AND ACTIVISTS AROUND THE WORLD.

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programming and grant-making to better reach the people most exposed on the frontline of civic space repression.

Since 2017, the organisation has also made efforts to shift donor-grantee relationships towards more equal partnerships that better 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 reflect the needs of grantees more strongly, it takes time to change longstanding practices and get donors and enablers (intermediary funders, more formal CSOs and advocates for civic space) to understand what it takes to fight for civic freedom on the ground and the support needed. Until then, CIVICUS probably still has a key role to play in channelling funds and resources to civil society, including grassroots activists who are battling against civic space restrictions. CIVICUS has worked to build capacity within CSOs, increasing its grant-making

and non-financial support to organisations and activists around the world. But as attacks on civic space are increasing, the need for support continues to grow.

Overall, CIVICUS has made a significant contribution to the strengthening and support of CSOs around the world to promote and defend civic space. As attacks on civic and democratic freedoms increase and movements continue to demand social, climate and economic justice, CIVICUS's goal to 'strengthen civil society and citizen action for expanded and democratic space', is only becoming more relevant. It will require even more support from the broader donor and enabling community to keep driving positive change in the years to come.

**What follows are a series of outcomes and stories that aim to provide examples of evidence of the above impact narrative. >>**



# MOST SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT STORIES

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## THEME:

Defending civic freedoms and democratic values -

Building from world class research to trusted partner, facilitator and field leader to successfully influence policies and practices in civic freedoms.

## OVERARCHING OUTCOME:

CIVICUS's timely and world-class research and analysis has positioned the organisation as a field leader and trusted partner in civic space and enabled civil society to advocate for expanded civic action and democratic freedoms.

### OUTCOME 1: SHIFTING FROM RETROSPECTIVE RESEARCH TO CONSTANT UP-TO-DATE ANALYSIS OF GLOBAL EVENTS

CIVICUS produced timely and world-class knowledge and analysis, shifting from retrospective research to regular up-to-date data and analysis on global events and the state of civil society and civic freedom around the world. Since 2011, it has published its annual State of Civil Society Report that analyses how contemporary events and trends are impacting civil society and how civil society is responding. CIVICUS also produced several thematic reports and briefs

on contemporary issues such as civil society responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of anti-rights groups, democracy for all, civic space for migrant workers and refugees, crackdown on environmental activism and notably, on civic space restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2016, CIVICUS launched the CIVICUS Monitor, a collaboration with 21 research partners that provides constantly updated information and analysis on civil society and citizen activism for 197 countries and territories (all United Nation member states and Hong Kong, Kosovo, Palestine and >>



A selection of the media outlets mentioning CIVICUS's research.

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Taiwan). The CIVICUS Monitor also publishes the Watchlist every four months that identifies countries where intervention is still possible to prevent further deterioration in civic freedoms. In 2018, CIVICUS began publishing a yearly report called People Power Under Attack that takes a closer look at trends and significant restrictions on fundamental freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression.

Over the past year, data from the CIVICUS Monitor was referenced by numerous governments and featured in over 1,000 media outlets and academic journals, including Al Jazeera, El País, Reuters, The Economist and The Guardian. As country updates from the CIVICUS Monitor were recognised as an official news source by Google, country updates now automatically appear in the ‘news’ tab of Google search services. In January 2022, CIVICUS also launched CIVICUS LENS, a rolling commentary and analysis initiative that provides timely analysis of global events related to civil society and citizen activism. Through its various initiatives and resources, CIVICUS has established itself as an authoritative resource on civic space.



## **OUTCOME 2:** SUCCESSFULLY INFLUENCING POLICIES TO SAFEGUARD DEMOCRACY AND PROTECT CIVIC SPACE AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL AND MAKING PROGRESS AT REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

Leveraging the data collected and analysis provided by CIVICUS's research team as well as its close engagement with members and partners, CIVICUS has been able to advocate locally and globally to safeguard democracy, protect civil space and hold decision-makers accountable. The organisation has started making significant progress in advocating for open civic space and systemic change,

securing key wins at the global level with the adoption of the GC37 and at regional and national levels with direct support to members through regional advocacy with coalitions of civil society in different regions of the world and initiatives such as CHARM and follow-ups with partners engaging with the CIVICUS Monitor. But as attacks on civic space keep increasing worldwide, activists and CSOs are feeling the stretch and further need support to keep up or increase their work to protect and promote civic freedom. There is also room for improvement in terms of involving members in these efforts and tailoring campaigns to local needs.

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### **IMPACT STORY:** POLICY CHANGE AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL: THE RIGHT OF PEACE ASSEMBLY GC37.

At a time of global unrest and restrictions to civic and democratic space around the world, CIVICUS and its allies led a successful advocacy campaign to expand the definition of the right of peaceful assembly. After 60 years with only two sentences defining the right to peaceful assembly, the United Nations released in 2020 an 18-page document, known as GC37, detailing the rights and protections of people to gather, voice their opinion and challenge authority. Through Vuka!, CIVICUS released the Know Your Rights Brief to translate the complex language of GC37 into accessible insights and the Protest Support Phonebook for a directory of contacts to support protestors and the public.

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CIVICUS

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**IMPACT STORY:** ADVOCACY: DEFENDING CIVIC SPACE AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL: SLOVENIA.

Since 2020, CIVICUS had been closely monitoring the developments on civic freedoms in Slovenia, which was increasingly under attack from the Prime Minister, heightened during the pandemic. Protesters in Slovenia took part in creative anti-government protests staged during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, CIVICUS worked closely with the Centre for Information Service, Co-operation and Development of NGOs, a national CSO umbrella network in Slovenia, the European Civic Forum and other local partners, to strengthen the CIVICUS Monitor outputs and share new research, which included updates, research briefs for the CIVICUS Monitor Watchlist on the state of civic freedoms in Slovenia and on pre-election violations. In collaboration, they released press statements and opinion pieces that were driven by partners' needs and recommendations. This consistent monitoring of the situation, together with a ratings downgrade and a flag on the Watchlist, when declines in civic freedoms started in the country, led to creating more attention in the country about these developments. All this work was picked up by local and global media.

# CIVICUS MONITOR



SLOVENIA





CIVICUS

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HODA ABDEL MONEIM



KHURRAM PARVEZ



CHOW HANG TUNG



KAMIRA NAIT SID



KENIA HERNANDEZ



BAKDE HABYA AND MTHANDENI DUBE



MARÍA ESPERANZA SÁNCHEZ GARCÍA



BUZURGMÉHR YOROV

TATSIANA LASICA  
VALENTIN STEFANOVICH  
ULADZ LABKOVICH  
LEONID SUDALENKA  
ALES BIALYATSKI  
MARFA RABKOVA  
ANDREI CHAPYK

ABDULHADI AL-KHAWAJA



MEDARDO MAIRENA &amp; PEDRO MENA



NASRIN-SOTOUDEH



AHMED MANSOUR

VIASNA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

# STAND AS MY WITNESS

## ADD YOUR VOICE. TAKE ACTION AND CALL FOR THEIR RELEASE.

### OUTCOME 3: SUPPORTING HRDS FACING PERSECUTION IN COURT AND AT PROTESTS

In 2020, CIVICUS reviewed its influencing approach and explored how to complement its advocacy with the United Nations with new campaigning tactics like #StandAsMyWitness,

increasing its advocacy for the release of HRDs behind bars. The campaign saw the successful release of several HRDs, contributed to the lifting of emergency laws targeting protesters in countries like Thailand and the international rejection of threats to journalists and NGOs in Nicaragua.

HELP SET THEM FREE!



Guapinol Water Defenders, Honduras

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## IMPACT STORY: HONDURAS – A CIVIL SOCIETY TRIUMPH: GUAPINOL DEFENDERS RELEASED

Eight HRDs were released after the Honduran Supreme Court ruled that their constitutional rights had been violated. Ewer Alexander Cedillo Cruz, José Abelino Cedillo Cantarero, José Daniel Márquez, Kelvin Alejandro Romero Martínez, Porfirio Sorto Cedillo, Orbin Nahuan Hernández, Arnol Javier Alemán and Jeremías Martínez, all members of the Committee for the Defence of Common and Public Assets, were held in pre-trial detention since 2019, after being arrested for protesting against mining activities that threatened the safety and livelihood of thousands of people. To help set them free, CIVICUS complemented the work of human rights lawyers and legal organisations with targeted advocacy and large-scale campaigns. CIVICUS featured them on the #StandAsMyWitness campaign while also helping to amplify other campaigns for their release. In an interview to CIVICUS on 10 May 2022, Edy Tábor, director of the law firm Justicia para los Pueblos (Justice for the Peoples) and coordinator of

the group of defence lawyers of the eight Guapinol HRDs, said, “CIVICUS’s and Amnesty International’s campaigns, for example, allowed us to reach wider audiences. When the trial came, the case was widely known, and less than 24 hours after the end of the trial, in which our comrades were convicted with two thirds of the court’s votes, the Supreme Court of Justice annulled the whole process and ordered them to be released.”

**Context note:** Preceding the trial, a new government came to power in January 2022 and brought several positive changes including: 1) a decree of an amnesty that resulted in the closure of most legal proceedings against defenders, but not the Guapinol defenders, 2) an end to the state’s stigmatisation of land struggles, which had used information obtained by state security forces and 3) respecting the freedom of peaceful assembly and protest.





**THEME:**  
Strengthening  
the power  
of people  
to organise,  
mobilise and  
take action  
for a more  
accountable,  
effective and  
innovative civil  
society.



**OVERARCHING OUTCOME:**

CIVICUS's extensive work to connect and support civil society actors and stakeholders working on civic space, as well as the launch of key pilot programs to strengthen civil society and activists, is helping the organisation to move from a formal alliance to more of a network enabler that creates connection and empower people to organise, mobilise and take action.



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## **OUTCOME 1:** POSITIONED ITSELF AS THE GO-TO NETWORKING AND CONNECTING PLATFORM FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND STAKEHOLDERS ON CIVIC SPACE, ESPECIALLY THROUGH ITS NETWORKS AND CONVENINGS

CIVICUS is highly valued for its ability to connect change-makers. One of the key outcomes as the most significant and relevant to members and partners is the organisation's networking and connecting abilities, providing opportunities for interacting and learning through online and in-person trainings and events, joint research projects, subnetworks like the Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), DIGNA, CIVICUS Youth and through innovative networks like I4C and the Vuka! that have brought partners closer together, building connections across civil society that transcend issues, geographies and organisation types. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, CIVICUS provided support, learning and networking opportunities to its alliance with unwavering strength and leadership. The International Civil Society Week is a key event for CIVICUS and is valued by partners for its ability to provide an opportunity to meet and connect

with peers and experts. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, member engagement has remained high within the alliance through various tools and programs including training, workshops, regional meetings, mentoring programs, joint research projects and peer networking groups. CIVICUS staff is also appreciated for doing a great job at connecting partners with experts. An important change in CIVICUS's work to connect civil society actors is the effort for better linguistic inclusion of French and Spanish-speaking members as well as the organisation's efforts to strengthen its feedback loop mechanisms during the period in review. In response to members' requests, CIVICUS launched the new peer-to-peer virtual platform called the Online Community in 2021. While there are now more than 600 members who have joined the Online Community, created regional and thematic groups, enabled spaces for self-paced and instructional learning, and held community-building and networking sessions, the Online Community is just beginning its efforts to reinforce member-to-member engagement and further leverage direct communications amongst members and the most affected groups.

# WHAT IS THE CIVICUS SOLIDARITY FUND?

The CSF is a member-led and member-resourced fund that aims to promote civil society diversity and resilience and seeks to provide meaningful resources and support to members in need through flexible grants.

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## OUTCOME 2: HELPED MANY PARTNERS MOST IMPACTED BY THREATS OR RESTRICTIONS TO THE CIVIC SPACE CONTINUE THEIR WORK TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT CIVIC SPACE AND FREEDOMS THROUGH FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

While CIVICUS is not a traditional grant-making organisation, during the past strategic period, the CIVICUS secretariat leveraged several mechanisms to support CIVICUS members and partners. One of these is the CIVICUS Solidarity Fund (CSF), established in 2019, which provides grant support to members who struggle to access resources due to civic space restrictions or other structural barriers. Membership fees fund it, and members decide who will receive funds through the membership advisory group. In this way, the CSF's approach, together with CIVICUS's interventions, are more accessible to those at the frontlines of civic space restrictions, while also learning how to shift and advocate for a donor-grantee dynamic that focuses on a more equal partnership. The CSF has enabled CIVICUS to innovate around participatory grant-making and work with grantees to make each cycle more inclusive and participatory. Throughout the

last strategic period, the CSF provided financial support to 59 members, including in countries like Afghanistan, Colombia and Zimbabwe and includes mentorship to strengthen resource mobilisation capacities. Another funding mechanism is the Crisis Response Fund (CRF), which provides emergency funding to civil society actors facing restrictions on freedoms of association or assembly to conduct advocacy activities or support their resilience. During the period of the pandemic, the CRF provided funding to more than 50 CSOs in the form of advocacy and resiliency grants totally more than US\$500,000. In addition, CIVICUS worked with partners like TechSoup to provide in-kind support and tried to also address the non-financial resourcing needs identified by applicants through other means (e.g., data and digital security training). CIVICUS also strengthened capacity within CSOs by offering organisational development training opportunities. But as the attacks on civic space are increasing around the world, the need for support is growing too, which can be seen by the 3,781 applicants for the latest round of CSF funding. All applicants needed urgent funding, yet there were only seven available grants to award.



IT 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.  
GRANTEE-MEMBER FROM IRAN.

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## **IMPACT STORY:** IRAN: GOING BEYOND FUNDING TO SUPPORT ACTIVISTS' WELL-BEING AND THEIR PROMOTION OF CIVIC SPACE

As part of the CSF, CIVICUS supported a group of women that are fighting against gender discrimination, especially against women's ban in sports. To support activists access to information, the grantee worked with a group of researchers and translators to create a learning tool and information system that would help activists – especially Farsi-speaking activists – translate key resources for them to gain access to information and training. The CSF grant funds helped support these efforts and create a community providing solidarity and comfort as well as opportunities for grantee-members to connect, learn, share and build relationships. The grantee said, "It 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." To continue the work, the grantee highlighted that the

biggest barrier is the lack of steady financial support. The lapse of time to receive funding after the signature of the contract made it difficult to ensure payments in due time in the difficult context in which activists operate in Iran. The lengthy and complicated contract for the CSF subgrant was also a scary barrier for funding and something to focus on if the organisation wants to better support frontline activists in the future.



# DONORS

## Are you really supporting grassroots activists?



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### **OUTCOME 3:** CHAMPIONED INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS TO BETTER FORGE ALLIANCES AND CONNECT INNOVATORS AND CHANGE-MAKERS ACROSS COUNTRIES AND CONTEXTS

Under Goal 2 of the strategic plan, CIVICUS committed to a new and significant objective to work with activists, movements, the broader spectrum of citizen participation (beyond formal CSOs) and the forces of people power. The strategy plan states, “We believe that there is much value to be unlocked by bringing together different types of progressive civil society actors to learn from each other. We will work more purposefully with and learn from activists, protest and social movements, and online and youth-led platforms.” The strategic plan also included a new focus under Goal 3 on innovation and accountability and the testing of tools. Over the last strategic period, CIVICUS validated new ways to support activists and organisations through improved funding and non-financial support mechanisms. CIVICUS made youth a strategic priority since 2016 and has grown the number of individual members under 30 years-of-age in its alliance, increasing youth membership from 10% to 21.4%. Through partnerships,

member outreach and major initiatives targeting youth and grassroots activists, CIVICUS has been working to better understand the resourcing realities and needs of grassroots groups and advocate for changes in the way resources for civil society are assigned and delivered. CIVICUS also invested in the promotion of resiliency, diversity and inclusion initiatives through the launch of DIGNA from 2019 to the end of 2020 and the Resilient Roots pilot project in 2017. CIVICUS also continued supporting key networks like I4C and the Vuka! to connect partners, enhance learning and collaboration across regions and among civil society actors. Through these various programs and networks, CIVICUS has been able to forge alliances and connect innovators and change-makers across countries and contexts, to empower them to drive change in their communities and to provide resources, mentorship and support to help them increase their impact and advance human rights and democracy. While there is still a need for better evaluation of the impact of these initiatives, CIVICUS has been recognised by partners for its important role as a network enabler that creates connection and a sense of belonging to a community for joint action and advocacy for civic space.





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## GRASSROOTS CHANGEMAKERS

Sam

Naro

Nawa

Dahlia

Tina

"We want to promote spaces where grassroots organising and resourcing realities are recreated for hope and empowerment."

## IMPACT STORY: SHIFTING THE POWER TO GRASSROOTS ACTIVISTS: GRASSROOTS CHANGEMAKERS TAKE THE LEAD IN CAMPAIGNING.

The Grassroots Solidarity Revolution campaign has provided grassroots activists a space to strengthen their understanding of the international funding system for civil society, build skills and confidence around resourcing matters and engaging with national and international donors and enablers, and directly advocate for their own resourcing needs and views in their own words and building their own narrative with the following call to action, "Now more than ever, we must break down barriers that separate us. We need to build radical solidarity, release the flow of resources and care for activists on the frontlines and work together to drive positive social change." The activists who co-created the campaign, known as the Grassroots Changemakers, rated the experience of co-creating and participating in the campaign with a 100 Net Promoter

Score, a perfect score, showing how they found this experience highly valuable and empowering. They reported increased confidence, gaining skills and understanding of the resourcing landscape, as well as acquiring experience to engage with national and international donors and enablers. Activists shared that they were able to deepen their thinking about questions affecting them in ways they had not considered before (e.g., decolonisation, patriarchy, etc.) and how these issues affected their role, their work and the sector. As such, one of the Grassroots Changemakers said, "I have become more confident on issues relating to advocacy for grassroots resourcing. I am also able to speak with authority and to make decisions on what to let go of with funders. I feel my advocacy has gone global now because of this campaign." Through these efforts, donors and enablers have also become more cognisant of and demonstrate a greater awareness of the depth and breadth of issues faced by grassroots and youth activists.



## **IMPACT STORY:** YOUTH: ADVANCING MEANINGFUL INCLUSION AND STRENGTHENING YOUTH POWER

In 2016, youth became a strategic priority for CIVICUS. Over the strategic period, CIVICUS has significantly grown the number of individual members under 30 years-of-age in its alliance, increasing youth membership from 10% to 21.4%. Launched in 2020, the Youth Action Lab (YAL) is a co-creation lab for grassroots youth activists based in the global south, which works to support their movements to become more resilient and sustainable in their pursuit of a more equitable world. YAL has supported two cohorts of young activists (10 in 2020, 11 in 2021). It is an innovative, safe, active, inclusive, collective, representative and connected space, online and physical for grassroots activists, which thoughtfully considered diverse contexts and ecosystems to better resource them to flourish with their communities. YAL participants worked to build political solidarity and networks, strengthen capacities in engaging with policy processes, and access resources to support their movement. Following their engagement in the program, participants became more empowered and confident to trust themselves and their decision-making, resulting in

strengthened capacities to deliver more meaningful and sustainable work for their respective organisations. CIVICUS facilitated knowledge exchange (bi-weekly check-ins), collective care sessions, a sustainable leadership course, a learning partnership programme, and (generally) a safe space where they could benefit from the energy, moral support, empathy, trust and flexibility of peers and allies. YAL 2021 had a dedicated five-month journey to practise and learn collective-care tools and methodologies for their own well-being and that of their groups. Participants in YAL have been increasingly recognised for the work they are doing in their communities with their organisations or movements. As such, Ñañaykuna, one of the youth collectives that participated in YAL, was recognised by the Organisation of American States in the category of good practices for its project supported by CIVICUS. The learnings from the experience of the first cohort of activists have informed both the next iteration of YAL and CIVICUS's approaches and practices for supporting movements and activists more generally. YAL acted as a hub for testing new ways of working within civil society and mobilising learnings from across sectors in support of youth-led movements.



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موارد ومصادر



المهارات، والخبرات

### OUTCOME 4: LEVERAGED ITS NETWORKS AND COALITIONS TO PROMOTE, MODEL AND DISSEMINATE CIVIL SOCIETY BEST PRACTICES

As an alliance, CIVICUS has always been eager to advocate, model and share best practices for civil society as a member alliance, and the strategic plan spoke to the ambition to create "a learning culture throughout the secretariat and alliance and foster partnerships and practices that use collective resources to boost civil society influence." CIVICUS has leveraged its regular communications, meetings and events with members to foster the promotion and

sharing of learning and best practices. Many mentioned the International Civil Society Week as an opportunity to learn about what others are doing, as well as the calls and regular meetings organised with their peers as part of CSF grant-funding or network interactions. In the meantime, some of the most revealing stories of best practices shared among members and partners come from the networks such as AGNA, Vuka!, I4C or CHARM where partners have been able to create a close-knit community where they can co-develop projects and learn across regions and feel comfortable to share learnings with transparency, trust and confidence.





## IMPACT STORY: SHARING BEST PRACTICES AND LEARNING FROM NETWORK INNOVATION AND INTERACTION: COMUNIDAS /MENATABADOL.

Through I4C, organisations working through the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Hub realised that they could better leverage each other's strengths, knowledge and know-how through an online platform that would enable them to swap skills including information analysis, training in creating and disseminating videos, strategic communication, fundraising and political advocacy, among other topics. The online platform ComuniDAS was thus created in 2019, offering users the possibility to search for services with the assumption they would give back to the community afterwards. Julissa Guerra, from LAC Hub, said that ComuniDAS has helped to spark solidarity and collaboration among CSOs and greater engagement with broad groups of citizens, which is vital in the region. "Almost 80% of Latin Americans say that a third party cannot be trusted, according to the Latin America Open Data Barometer," she pointed out. Gerardo Torres, also from the LAC Hub, said that ComuniDAS is giving an opportunity to NGOs in LAC to consider alternative funding models, so they're not so dependent on traditional

donors. The platform won the popular vote at the Society for International Development-Washington Chapter Innovation Competition held in Washington, D.C. in June 2019, for innovative solutions from civil society. Following this success, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Hub developed an Arabic version of the platform. The I4C MENA Sharing Economy platform (MENATadol) is an online open-source platform that enables CSOs, activists, journalists, start-ups, and young talents in the region to create value through the sharing and the exchanging of services and digital products using the I4C MENA digital coin.





**THEME:**

**Working for  
a shift in the  
ecosystem  
for more  
solidarity,  
effective and  
sustained  
civil society  
resourcing and  
infrastructure  
for meaningful  
partnerships**

**OVERARCHING OUTCOME:**

CIVICUS's extensive work to connect and support civil society actors and stakeholders working on civic space, as well as the launch of key pilot programs to strengthen civil society and activists, is helping the organisation to move from a formal alliance to more of a network enabler that creates connection and empower people to organise, mobilise and act.

**OUTCOME 1: SUCCESSFULLY BUILT  
SOLIDARITY, FOSTERING A SENSE OF  
COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION  
ACROSS BORDERS AND AT SCALE**

Building solidarity among civil society across borders and at scale has been a key objective. This has been done through the hosting of programs and activities, exchanging knowledge and resources, joint advocacy initiatives, building trust and supporting networks. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, CIVICUS continued its work to strengthen civil society resilience, which

included improving the data and digital capabilities of the alliance, advancing civil society resourcing reforms and emphasising the role and relevance of civil society in guiding communities through the pandemic and contributing to a more just, inclusive and sustainable world post-pandemic. CIVICUS reached out to members to survey their financial situation amidst the pandemic and used the results, as well as extra research conducted with partners, to advocate for more support to civil society by publishing open letters to donors. Through regional >>



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and global advocacy, CIVICUS also mobilised 659 CSOs at the start of the pandemic with concrete calls to governments to lift restrictions that hampered civic space in policy and practice. This was picked up by media outlets all over the world, including Newsweek which featured CIVICUS's advocacy work for the first time at that point. More recently, CIVICUS responded to the crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine as an organisation and as part of networks such as Vuka! and I4C, leveraging the strength of global networks and its advocacy work for rapid response mechanisms. Through its variety of networks and pilot programs, CIVICUS enhanced cross-sectoral understanding, solidarity and collaboration – leading conversations with donors and enablers to shift the paradigm for more horizontal and beneficial partnerships, collaborating with research and academic centres through the CIVICUS Monitor and other research projects, working with media and civil society through networks like CHARM to boost understanding and collaboration across parties, and change the narrative on current reporting on civic space and civil society work as well as initiating conversations with the private sector through initiatives like Vuka!.

## IMPACT STORY: SOLIDARITY IN TIMES OF HARDSHIPS – THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Responding quickly to the needs of the CIVICUS alliance following the pandemic, CIVICUS published two open letters to donors- in March 2020 and in April 2020 calling for more flexibility, certainty and stability to support the resilience of grantee partners and for much needed support to local organisations in the global south. Both letters had significant resonance within the funding community and with CIVICUS >>



People distribute food boxes outside Taqwa mosque in New York, USA

Photo Credit: Stephanie Keith/Getty Images



Taliban members ride in a pickup truck  
Photo by Nava Jamshidi/Getty Images



members. Sixty percent of surveyed members reported finding them useful in negotiations with donors and other enablers. Respondents appreciated that the letters created awareness amongst the donor community to the challenges faced on the ground, especially by grassroots groups, and prompted funders to take action and apply more proactive measures. Some reported gaining more knowledge and confidence on how grantees and donors can be mutually accountable. Priscilla Nyaaba from the Youth Harvest Foundation reported, “The recommendations to donors in these letters gave us the courage to include certain requests including the purchase of personal protective equipment for staff when we had the opportunity to send a budget amendment to our donors, which was approved.”

## IMPACT STORY: SOLIDARITY IN TIMES OF CRISES, LEVERAGING GLOBAL COALITIONS TO FOSTER JOINT ACTION FOR CIVIC SPACE IN AFGHANISTAN AND UKRAINE.

CIVICUS responded to the crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine as an organisation, through its advocacy work at regional and global level, and as part of networks such as Vuka! and I4C. Following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, many HRDs, representatives of civil society and journalists’ lives were at risk. CIVICUS’s advocacy cluster moved quickly to pre-emptively target the Australian government because its research showed many Afghans were likely to flee there and the government did not have a good record dealing with large numbers of refugees. CIVICUS worked with AGNA members in Afghanistan to draft a joint statement and demonstrated the power of its alliance when it mobilised more than 390 civil society groups to call for the government of Australia to exercise international solidarity with civil society and the people of Afghanistan. In September, CIVICUS received a letter from the Australian government saying Afghan citizens will be prioritised for processing within Australia’s offshore >>



humanitarian program, and “priority will be given to persecuted minorities, women, children and those who have links to Australia.” In the letter, the government also asserted that it values CIVICUS’s “commitment to protecting human rights and supporting durable migration outcomes and for advocating for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.” In November, the government announced that it would provide permanent protection to Afghans staying in Australia on temporary visas. On another front, Vuka! mobilised its allies to support Afghans remaining inside the country, and the I4C South Asia Hub reacted quickly and offered two physical safe spaces in Pakistan to Afghan activists at risk where they could stay with their families until they could find other safe spaces. The I4C South Asia hub also worked with Facebook, Google and Twitter to get activists’ sensitive online data removed. Similarly, when Russia invaded Ukraine, CIVICUS members co-signed a letter of solidarity with Ukrainian members. The letter was shared with diplomats in Geneva and in several countries around the world. Collective efforts by civil society and its allies led to an overwhelming vote at the UN to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council. The letter was



also used to advocate with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe to trigger its Moscow Mechanism and assess the humanitarian and human rights impact of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Subsequent conversations with members of the Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund consortium, which CIVICUS is just one of several partners, resulted in emergency assistance grants provided to 12 CSOs providing assistance to the people of Ukraine.





**IMPACT STORY:** BUILDING SOLIDARITY AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND JOURNALISM – CHANGING THE NARRATIVE AND STRENGTHENING JOINT WORK AND SOLUTIONS Through CHARM, Fojo Media Institute and Wits Centre for Journalism have been developing a new concept of sustainable journalism as a discipline of media development. This new concept entails 1) The production and publishing of news that generates revenue to the media and contributes to environmentally, socially and economically sustainable societies, 2) Sustainable and viable business models, 3) Environmentally sustainable production and distribution of news, and 4) Innovation. A partnership for sustainable journalism was formed in May 2022. By the end of June 2022, 118 people had indicated online that they were interested in becoming members of the partnership. Colleagues from WITS Centre for Journalism have highlighted the role CIVICUS has played in this initiative as “an eye-opener on the richness of the continent and helped see the potential of not just covering South Africa but growing networks, partnerships and relationships across the region [for a more sustainable world and increased

recognition of the role played by civic actors].” CHARM funding also allowed Wits Centre for Journalism to strengthen and expand its program on African Investigative Journalism, increase initiatives aimed at supporting networking for journalists and civil society on the continent and expand its annual Radio Days Africa Conference. The conference provides an avenue for stimulating learning, engagement, conversation and thinking around the various aspects of media freedom and media landscape in Africa. Speakers grapple with issues of governance, media regulation and are exposed to new ideas and narratives from the continent and abroad. As one officer at the WITS Centre for Journalism explains, “We have been able to improve the networking between different groups on the continent. I mean we have been able to strengthen our African investigative journalism conference as well as our Africa conference. These two events have been running for some years, but they benefited from being strengthened through the consortium.” Working together in a coalition has allowed them to provide better project delivery and reach a large number of beneficiaries that could not have been reached by working individually.



## OUTCOME 2: TRUSTED ENTITY FOR FACILITATING MORE MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS AND SOLIDARITY MECHANISMS WITH YOUTH AND GRASSROOTS ACTIVISTS

**CIVICIUS positioned itself as a progressive and innovative global south leader enabling the network to lead and facilitate conversations with donors and enablers for more meaningful partnerships and horizontal relationships with civil society actors and grassroots activists, but these conversations take time and partners note 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.**

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 sponsored solidarity mechanisms within the alliance and re-shaping some of its programming and CSF grant-making to better reach those facing civic space restrictions and structural discrimination. The organisation also worked 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. Until then, CIVICUS probably still has an important role to play in channelling funds and resources to civil society actors and grassroots activists working against shrinking of civic space and restrictions of democratic freedoms. CIVICUS has worked to build capacity within CSOs by increasing its grant-making and non-financial support to CSOs and activists around the world. But as the attacks on civic space are increasing around the world, the need for support is growing as well and there is still a need for further support in this area.



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## IMPACT STORY: YOUTH LEADING THE WAY IN THE IDENTIFICATION AND PROMOTION OF INCLUSIVE POLICIES FOR ENGAGEMENT.

Directly inspired by CIVICUS-Restless Development's publication, "Maximising Benefits: A recommended framework for volunteerism and compensation for young people," Global Fund for Children (GFC) made a significant shift in their youth volunteer compensation practices. Previously, young people who engaged in volunteer activities were not provided compensation for their time and ideas. Now, GFC provides a stipend to young people and has itemised this practice in their budget. GFC Director of Innovation and Influencing, Vanessa Stevens, explained that she made a list of reflection questions for the team regarding youth compensation based completely on the publication's framework. GFC sees this more inclusive and equitable resourcing as a means to open up more opportunities for young people who could not have participated in events or initiatives before. While GFC is already well underway in providing compensation in practice, they are also in the process of finalising a formalised organisational compensation policy that refers to the publication's framework. The impact of the compensation on the young people it reached is already being seen. For example, one young person said the stipend enabled her to buy medicine for an operation and another said it was helping to pay her college tuition.

**RESTLESS  
DEVELOPMENT**

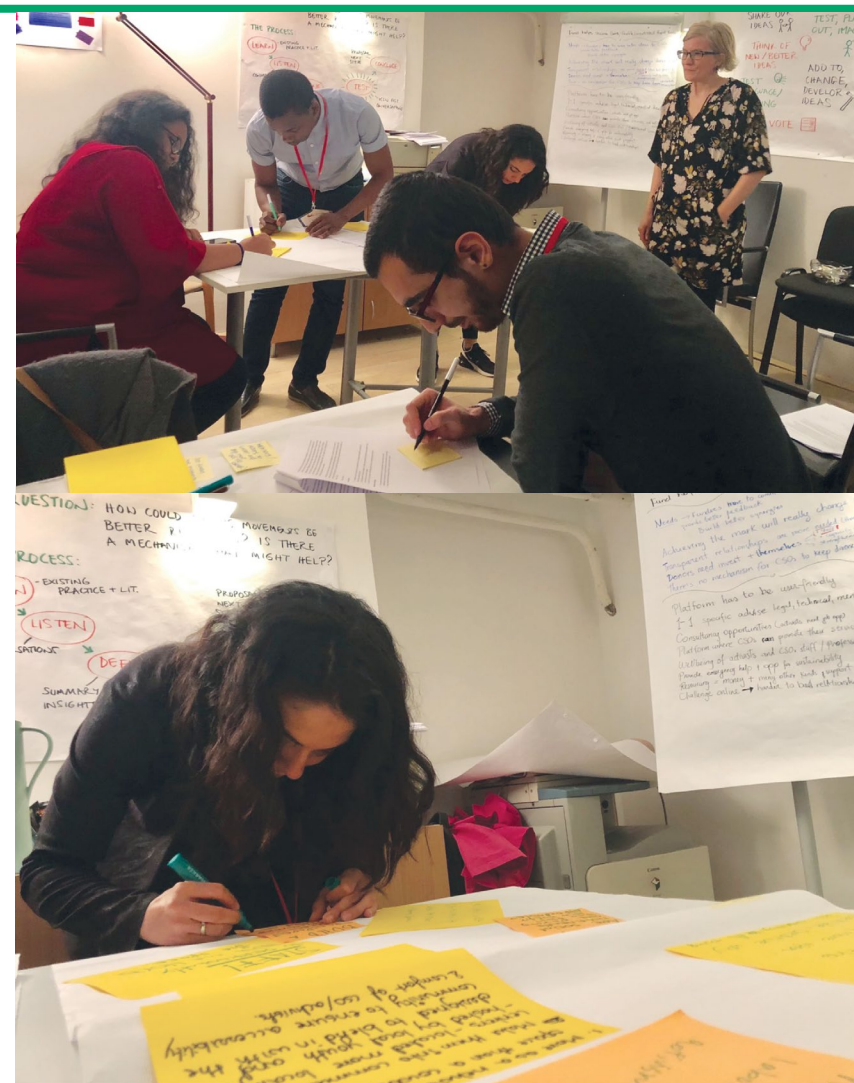
# MAXIMISING BENEFITS:

A RECOMMENDED FRAMEWORK  
FOR VOLUNTEERISM AND  
COMPENSATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLECRISTINA BACALSO &  
DR. DAN MOXONCollaborating Organisations:  
Civics and Restless  
Development



## IMPACT STORY: SHIFTING ENABLERS' PERSPECTIVES ON PARTNERSHIPS: FROM TRANSACTIONAL AGREEMENTS TOWARD TRANSFORMATIVE, STRATEGIC AND SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS.

CIVICUS was the only non-funder member of the Shift the Power UK Funders Collective (2018-2019). Global Greengrants Fund decided to co-organise the group because of the evident need to continue talking about shifting power and strategy setting in philanthropy. CIVICUS was invited to contribute as a civil society ally and purveyor of 'outside' knowledge to the donors. All of the work coming out of the research conducted by CIVICUS to strengthen citizen action, including the 4 Prototypes/Concepts, which were possible mechanisms that would increase the scale and quality of resources for grassroots groups and movements, was shared and viewed, influencing donor strategy and collaboration at that time. This contributed to the then UK Big Lottery Fund (now The National Lottery Community Fund) bringing their call for proposals to the group meetings to solicit feedback. Participating funders have undertaken concrete efforts to identify lessons and boundaries for working with local grassroots groups and how to better talk to their trustees about impact and return on investment.







# REFERENCES

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

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 framework 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



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