



POLICY ACTION BRIEF

CIVICUS: CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX

2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Policy Action Brief is intended to provide recommendations to civil society, government and other key constituencies on ways to strengthen Georgian civil society in light of the 2008-2011 Civil Society Index (CSI) project.

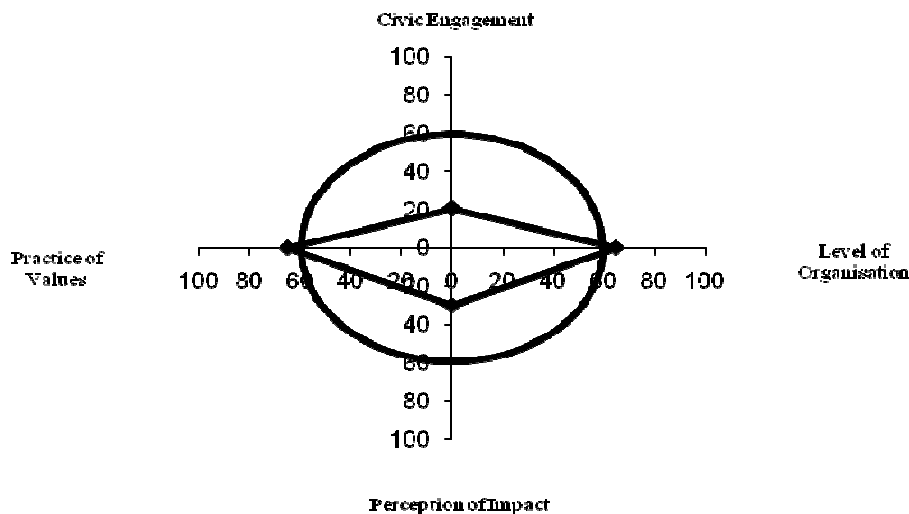
The CSI research shows that the areas needing the most improvement in Georgia are low levels of civic engagement and limited civil society impact on important areas of social life. It recommends actions focused on two main areas: activities that encourage citizens to participate more actively in social processes, and activities to persuade the government of Georgia to accelerate democratic reforms.

INTRODUCTION

The development of civil society is regarded as a crucial factor for the success of democratisation in any country. A strong civil sector deeply embedded in various strata of society will serve as an essential counterbalance to the pervasive forces of the state and market. However, there is still an important gap between the academic vision of this concept and the "reality" of civil society. In order for the development of civil society to proceed, we need to better understand its existing state and its most pressing needs.

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation coordinates the Civil Society Index (CSI) project. The CSI was developed as an action-research project to help relevant actors understand the conditions of civil society within national contexts and develop realistic plans for improving and strengthening civil society. The findings presented stem from a third phase of research implemented between 2008 and 2010 in over 40 countries, building on research undertaken in Georgia in the previous phase from 2003 to 2006. One of the most important elements of this project is its action-orientation. As such, it is based on the principle of large-scale participation and the involvement of various groups of civil society in every stage of the research. Knowledge generated as a result of the research will be used for the purpose of initiating discussions on the global state of civil society, and on ways to capitalise on the strengths and the weaknesses of civil society in Georgia.

The CSI's comprehensive methodology enabled the capture of detailed qualitative and quantitative information from organisations themselves, from experts outside the civil society and from members of the public, involving over 1,800 people in the process. The state of civil society was assessed through four main dimensions of the CSI Diamond as seen below: *Civic Engagement*, *Level of Organisation*, *Practice of Values*, and *Perceived Impact*. These were then analysed within the context of the fifth dimension, the *External Environment* in which civil society operates. The Civil Society Diamond below visualises the CSI findings in Georgia:



STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN GEORGIA

Below is a summary of the main research findings:

1. Civic Engagement

Strengths

- A significant part of Georgian society desires democratic development.
- Existing legislation is quite liberal and puts no serious constraints on civil society, except on financial matters.
- Georgian CSOs have good contacts with international organisations, which are considered strategic allies in the process of democratic development.
- Despite some setbacks, CSOs continue their activities and are indeed ready to widen their scope.

Weaknesses

- A significant majority of the population lives below the poverty line. Everyday struggle for shelter and food does not leave time for participation in civil society activism.
- A large majority of the population is indifferent and distrustful towards policies implemented in Georgia.
- Awareness among the population regarding civil society is quite weak, due to the fact that most sources of information are highly politicised.
- Civil society lacks pluralism, as there is a high degree of political partisanship.
- CSOs have closer relationships with international organisations than with the majority of Georgia's population.
- There is a low degree of civic education about democratic values.
- All of the above-mentioned factors hinder the development of volunteerism.

Despite many positive characteristics, the Georgian civil society community is not membership-oriented. Over the years, civil society in Georgia formed as a result of Western funding, creating a privileged class that is rather detached from the everyday concerns of citizens.

2. Level of Organisation

Strengths

- CSOs have better capacity for self-organisation than society in general.

- Despite the "brain drain," CSOs have fairly strong human resources.
- CSOs have a strong tradition of activism and decent material-technological resources, which are aging but still operational.
- Inter- and intra-sectoral contacts and relationships within civil society are quite strong.
- International donor organisations are reviving their interest in Georgian civil society.

Weaknesses

- CSOs are financially dependent on international donors; local funding is only available for politically loyal CSOs.
- Even then, relative lack of interest from donors during the last seven years created difficulties, especially in the field of organisational development.
- Tax legislation is one of the problems that hinder development of both business and civil society. Frequent changes in this area result in unstable and unpredictable environment which, in turn, creates little motivation on the side of civil society to participate in production of social services.
- Executive bodies often exist only as formal institutions, while decisions are made exclusively by organisation's leaders.
- A significant majority of CSOs lack labour regulations and have a poor working environment.
- The sector is still losing personnel to other sectors, and CSOs lack mechanisms for recruitment.
- There is need for the renewal of existing equipment.
- Connections and relationships with international organisations are still weak.

From the organisational point of view, CSOs, unlike other segments of civil society such as informal networks or social groups, have advantages in terms of management and financial and technological resources. However, they operate far from modern organisational standards. Written regulations are relatively rare, and where they do exist are usually not put into practice. There are no clear and efficient mechanisms for staff rotation.

3. Practice of Values

Strengths

- Civil society and CSOs in particular have a fairly strong sense of social responsibility.
- CSOs increasingly acknowledge their responsibility not only to their donors, but also to their beneficiaries, stakeholders and the general society.
- The sector shows itself to be fairly well informed and competent in its procedures.
- The country's difficult background provides an opportunity for CSOs to demonstrate a high level of determination and will in the process of building democratic values.

Weaknesses

- CSOs cite as a concern the high level of violence or desire for violence in society towards political and other opponents. Though most of this is only on the level of attitudes rather than acts, given the right conditions, this desire could have serious consequences.
- CSOs lack a sense of shared responsibility. As part of Georgians' post-Soviet mentality, people react harshly to restrictions on individualism.
- The level of CSO consolidation is fairly poor in everyday practice.

In terms of the practice of values, there is a range of challenges facing CSOs. Despite declared democratic mechanisms for decision-making, in practice their use is very limited. Decisions are non-transparent and are often made by small groups of managers. CSOs suffer under the lack of pluralism, as they are highly politicised and divided into "friends" or

"enemies." CSOs often lack tolerance towards different views. Nevertheless, CSOs increasingly acknowledge the need for change and consolidation around core values.

4. Perceived Impact

Strengths

- CSOs are still engaged in an extensive dialogue with the government. Given existing challenges, the government also tries to broaden existing forms of dialogue.
- In Georgia, as in other patrimonial societies, personal relations are quite important. As a significant part of the intellectual elite, CSOs have important contacts, which can significantly increase their chances for success.

Weaknesses

- The impact of CSOs on policy processes is rather weak, which is the reason the government has avoided cooperation with civil society over the last 20 years.
- Contacts and connections between civil society and the business sector are practically absent.
- Because of political polarisation, CSOs find it difficult to unite over particular political issues.
- There is a lack of awareness among society as a whole of the role of CSOs.
- Reduction of funding has led to a decrease in CSO activity across a number of fields.
- There is poor cooperation between the media and CSOs.
- CSOs lack experience in lobbying and advocacy.

Despite some successful cases, the impact of CSOs on the policy processes in the country is rather limited. Successful dialogue with the authorities concerns only those fields which do not limit their political and economic power. When it comes to demands regarding the division of power and transparency, the chances for success are nearly non-existent. Moreover, CSOs lack the support of broader sectors of society, as civic involvement in civil society is rather limited.

5. External Environment

Strengths

- Georgia's customs, multi-ethnic citizenry, diverse sub-ethnic cultures, tradition of high educational achievement, the traditional optimism of the population and the capacity of its people to adapt to a new reality increase the chances for success.
- Existing cultural values in Georgia, including openness towards Western values, increases the chances for achieving democratic changes.
- The geopolitical position of Georgia, and the high level of interest it attracts from developed democratic countries, also plays a positive role in the development of civil society.

Weaknesses

- Political instability and economic crisis has a negative impact on the development of Georgia and civil society in particular.
- Low political awareness among the population also hinders the rapid development of civil society.
- Another significant constraint for the development of CSOs is their lack of strong focus on social issues, which are the main concern of the population.

Severe social and economic environmental factors hinder a rapid growth of civil society. Further, Georgian officials are rather sceptical towards CSOs. But there are positive trends evident as well. Firstly, authorities seeking to improve their image in the international community, particularly as a result of decreased domestic popularity, have expressed

increasing interest in civil society and acknowledging alternative opinions. Secondly, a broad spectrum of society displays increasing demand for information and democratic values, which can be used by CSOs to enlarge their reach.

ACTION PLAN

Recommendations developed by participants in the CSI National Workshop seek to empower Georgian civil society, to act in the interest of broader society and to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their activities.

CSOs recognised two directions for further work: firstly, activities, which seek to "wake up" citizens to participate more actively in social processes, and secondly, activities to put pressure on the government of Georgia to commence and accelerate democratic reforms. In this work, international organisations working in Georgia are considered strategic partners of Georgian civil society.

A. Civic Engagement

General purpose: support an increase in the degree of civic engagement.

Specific objectives: increase CSO transparency; support social groups that have little experience.

Activities:

- Research CSO needs.
- Provide support for transforming informal networks into formal organisations.
- Develop local volunteerism.
- Participate in advocacy programmes with the media.
- Implement broad civic education programmes.

Actors: all types of CSOs, with the support of international organisations and other segments of Georgian civil society.

Increasing civil engagement is critical for guaranteeing further development of civil society and its successful operation. In order to achieve this goal, we suggest the following activities:

- Generate a unified approach regarding issues of concern and their promotion among society, in order to include in the action plan as many citizens as possible.
- Create campaigns to promote important issues of which many citizens are not currently aware.
- Build mutually beneficial relationships with the media for successful implementation of the activities listed above.
- Connect informal associations, which work on related issues, and create a broad network for the mobilisation of public opinion and public demands.

B. Organisational development

General purpose: develop CSO organisational skills.

Specific objectives: improve the association between human resources and financial sustainability.

Activities:

- Support social entrepreneurship for membership-based organisations.
- Increase accessibility of state orders (such as tenders).

- Adopt legislation supporting philanthropy.
- Develop and implement modern organisational standards.
- Participate in the policy-making of donor organisations.
- Broaden international connections (including international networks).
- Hold trainings on organisational development.

Actors: think tanks, donor organisations, training providers, overseas consulting organisations and the media.

It is crucial to ensure sustainable organisational development in order to achieve civil society's established goals and increase its role. To this end, we recommend the following activities:

- Develop and implement realistic internal regulations.
- Activate and enhance networking on the local as well as international levels, which should lead to more sharing of experiences and coordination of activities.
- Develop an ongoing training system and other capacity building endeavours for CSO personnel (especially in newly created organisations) in order to ensure sustainable development of human resources.
- Establish regular cooperation with donor organisations to facilitate the implementation of existing programmes and the planning process of new programmes. This will help to ensure consideration of any challenges facing CSOs; for example, supporting organisational development in priority fields and other such problems.
- Prioritise continuing efforts on the international level to expand the funding base and ensure local fundraising; first from central and local governments and businesses and then from civil, politically neutral financial sources in the future as economic conditions improve.

C. Practice of Values

General purpose: improve the practice of values.

Specific objectives: introduce democratic decision-making; revise civil society values and how they adapt to novel challenges; limit the influence of intolerant, coercive and corrupt forces.

Activities:

- Provide training, workshops and seminars in the field of civic education.
- Develop and implement realistic standards and action plans.
- Develop behavioural, ethical and professional honour codes.
- Involve various social groups (including those currently marginalised) into large programmes.

Actors: CSOs, government officials, various stakeholders, professional and open associations and donor organisations.

Without clearly defined internal values, CSOs consider the further development of the sector to be unrealistic. The following will be necessary for sustainable development of civil society:

- Develop a forum at the national level where CSOs working in various fields could share and exchange values.
- Develop a unified platform for CSO activity, which reflects basic shared values and principles for the sector.

- Develop standards for internal regulations, such as ethical and behavioural codes, based on this platform, which will be shared by the majority of civil society actors.
- Implement public awareness programs on value standards for CSO representatives.
- Implement democratic management mechanisms: increase the transparency of CSO management bodies (boards, committees) and exercise the rotation principle; develop effective mechanisms for informing and involving staff members in the decision-making process.

D. Perceived Impact

General purpose: increase the influence of CSOs on social, economic and political processes.

Specific objectives: achieve rapid impact in the policy areas where it is most possible (less politicised fields such as culture and sports). Achieve sustainable impact in fields which are more difficult to influence, including human rights protection, changing state fiscal policy in accordance with social demands, leading the dialogue in conflict regions, and adapting health, education and social policies to the needs of the country.

Activities:

- Develop CSO issue-based networks.
- Create informational campaigns to disseminate existing views.
- Develop educational activities (such as civic education programmes).
- Improve legislation.
- Support fundraising systems for financial security in implementing planned activities.
- Intensify consultations with international and donor organisations.

Actors: CSOs, government, international organisations, and other civil society actors (media, political parties).

The following activities should be implemented in order to increase the impact of CSOs on policy and social processes:

- ,Develop concepts, policies and action plans with the participation of think tanks and broad expert circles in order to address the existing challenges.
- Initiate potentially successful cases for quick decision making on easy-to-address issues, for example in less politicised fields, in order to decrease existing public frustration.
- For complex challenges (such as political issues, democratisation, increasing accountability of government, or human rights concerns), assist in building public support through public education programmes, which should seek to develop sustainable public demand for influencing authorities.
- For addressing the above problems, develop CSO issue-based networks with active CSOs assuming leading roles and other members of the civil society sector building support groups for informational campaigns, advocacy and lobbying.
- Collaborate with Georgian authorities and international organisations, including diplomatic corps present in Georgia, to improve civil society-related legislation and its relevance to the reality of CSOs.

E. External Environment

General purpose: enhance social, economic and political sustainability, integration into international organisations, empowering democratic institutions.

Specific objectives: improve Georgia's economic competitiveness; increase civil society awareness; promote institutional development at all levels; develop democratic political culture; encourage the involvement of citizens; implement the rule of law: develop a culture of environmental consciousness.

Activities:

- Implement joint (regional, international, and conflict area) projects.
- Promote multi-ethnic and diverse cultures.
- Support tourism.
- Support social and cultural integration of different social groups.
- Conduct professional training seminars for target groups.
- Develop and empower institutional mechanisms within democratic processes.

Actors: the entirety of civil society (within and outside the Georgia).

In order to have impact on the environment, all the above listed activities should be implemented. These actions should be complemented by activities directly focused on improving the environment. These are:

- Promote tolerance for the ethnic, cultural, social, political and other diversity that exists in Georgia.
- Integrate various social groups, especially marginalised groups, into national processes.
- Strictly uphold the rule of law and support watchdog organisations and networks with CSOs working in other fields, and focus on building and enhancing intra-sectoral solidarity.
- In coordination with international organisations, authorities and the business sector, implement programmes which aim to ease social and economic problems; for example, social support programmes, education, support of small business.
- Finally, throughout Georgia's reform process, continue to work on building sustainable public demand in support of key issues.