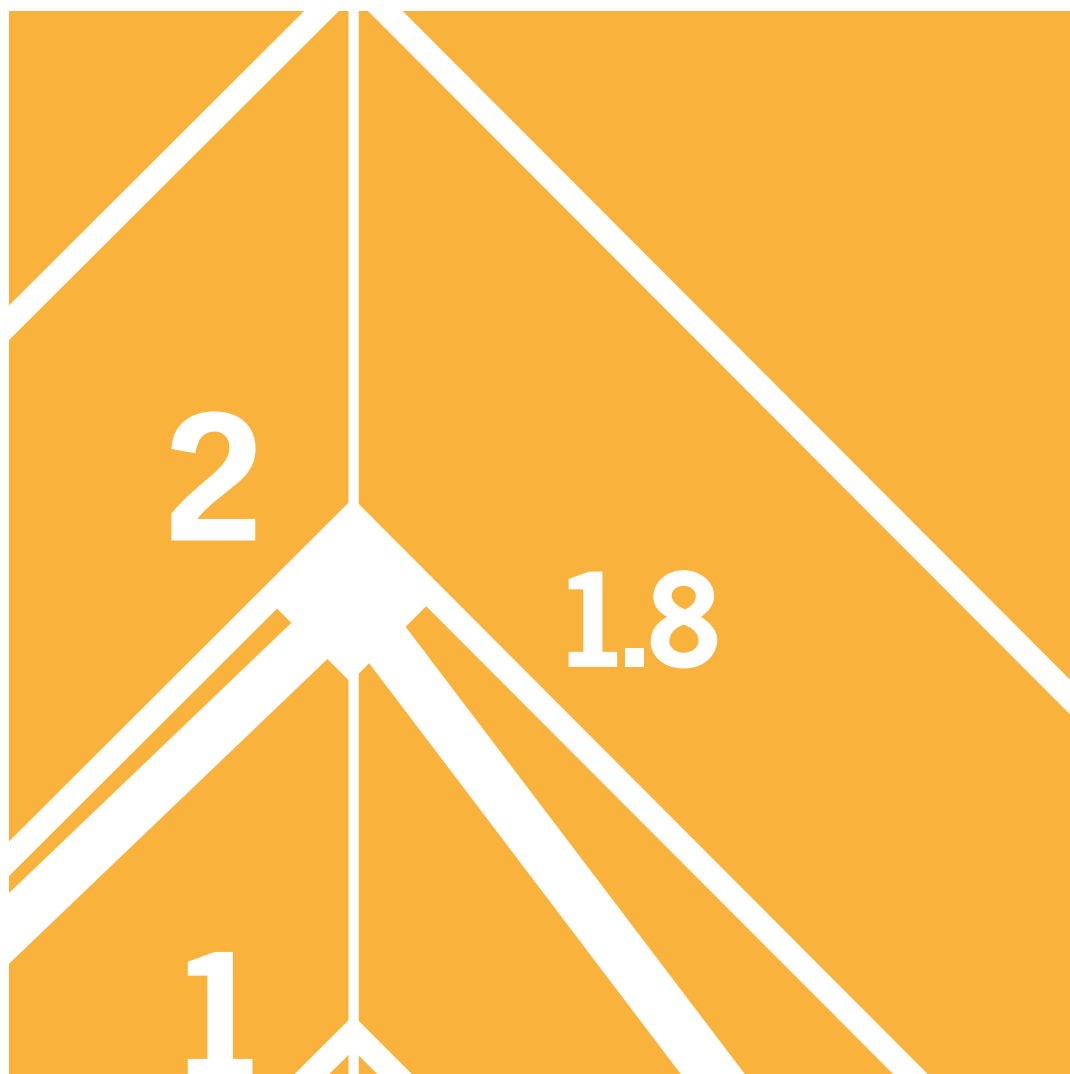


Documentation of seminar on CSI,
a participatory tool for strengthening
the civil society

Civil Society Index





DOCUMENTATION OF SEMINAR ON CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX At Sida, February 20, 2007

MODERATOR: **Tomas Brundin**, Civil Society Adviser, Sida, SEKA NGO Division

SPEAKERS: **Hannelore Wallner**, Programme Manager, CIVICUS CSI-programme

Janine Schall-Emden, Programme Officer for Latin America and the Caribbean, Civil Society Index, CIVICUS

Harriet Namisi, Programme Coordinator, Governance and Advocacy at the Development Network of the Indigenous Voluntary Associations, DENIVA

PARTICIPANTS: Representatives for Swedish NGOs and other parts of the Swedish civil society

PURPOSE OF SEMINAR: that CSI at CIVICUS:

- presents findings from the work during the last three years
- engages the participants in the discussion about the future challenges for civil society
- offers guidance and tools for how CSI can be made in Sweden or another country

FOREWORD | SVANTE SANDEBRG

SIDA HAS, since 2005 supported the international civil society network CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation, based in South Africa, in order to develop a new self assessment tool for the civil society: the Civil Society Index (CSI).

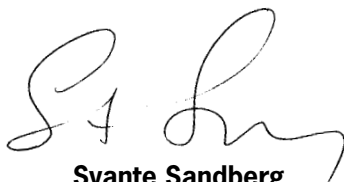
The CSI takes the pulse of civil society in a country. The interest for this new tool has been astonishing around the world, and more than 50 CSI processes in the North as well as in the South, have taken place. The CSI country reports are developed by the respective country partners of CIVICUS.

Its findings show that this crucial sector of today's societies flourishes in those places where democracy and social justice are upheld. Governments have a crucial role to play in providing civil society organisations with an enabling environment for their work in the name of the public good.

The CSI might very well become one of the most important tools in order to get a grasp of the values, structure, impact of the civil society as well as the surrounding environment in which the civil society develops and operate.

Hopefully civil society actors and official governmental agencies around the world discover this useful self assessment tool, for example as an input to a power and poverty analysis, in order to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the civil society in order to plan for actions to strengthening civil society in each given context. The CSI is important for increased self understanding, but also as a base line study about the civil society, which facilitates future result analyses.

Therefore Sida invited CIVICUS to Sweden to present the CSI tool and the findings from country reports for a Swedish audience to a seminar in Stockholm at the beginning of 2007. I hope this report can be of use and inspiration for Northern and Southern civil society actors, partners, policy-makers and analysts working with civil society related issues.



Svante Sandberg
Head of NGO Division
Sida, SEKA

INTRODUCTION | TOMAS BRUNDIN

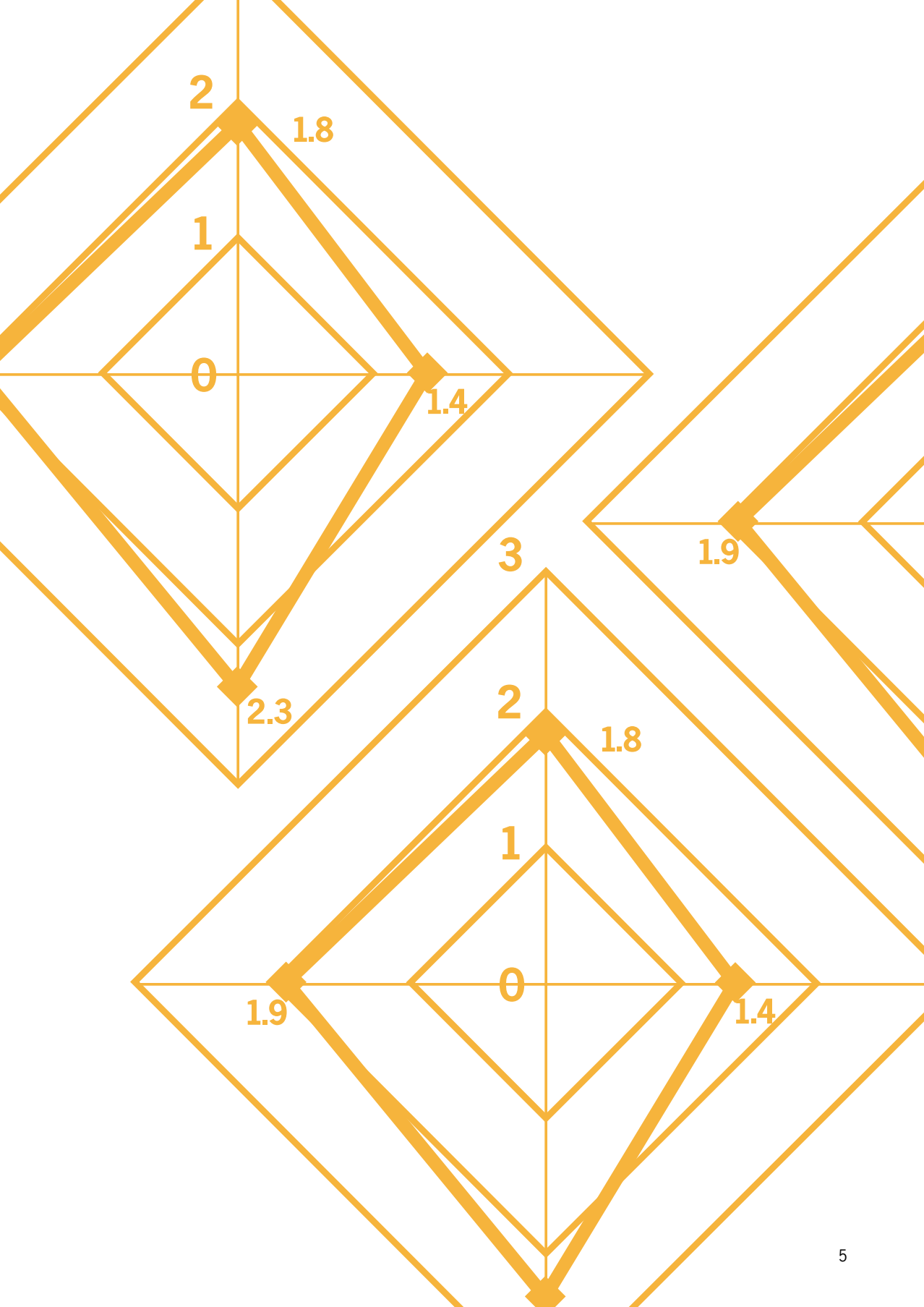
TOMAS BRUNDIN opened the seminar by asking the audience if they feel they have enough knowledge of what CIVICUS is and how the organisation works. Most of the participants declared that they have only a little knowledge of CIVICUS and its goals

CIVICUS is a global civil society organisation based in South Africa with some 1000 member organisations in more than 100 countries. CIVICUS brings together civil society organisations with donors, the private sector, universities, governments, etc, and is an important actor in putting civil society issues on the global agenda. Sida cooperates with CIVICUS and considers the organisation as an important partner for policy development and for strengthening civil society at global level.

It is important to have a clear understanding of the civil society in different countries. Donors such as Sida conduct analyses on poverty, economy, gender etc, but seldom map the civil society. Such analyses are also needed, as donors often count on and support civil society.

CIVICUS has come up with a useful method, the Civil Society Index (CSI) of analysing and measuring civil society in all countries, both rich and poor. This is the reason Sida has invited CIVICUS to Sweden annually since 2004, and also this year.

The CSI is an important self-assessment tool, Tomas Brundin concluded. It has been carried out in some 50 countries by now, and today we will get a report on how it works and the findings so far.





I. HANNELORE WALLNER

On the work of CIVICUS in general and the main objectives

CIVICUS IS A membership-based organisation with approximately 1000 members around the world. Work is focused on what is called the tree Es:

- Exist: defend rights of citizens to organise and act collectively for the public good
- Express: to amplify the voices of citizens and civil society
- Engage: enhance the influence citizens can wield on decisions that affect their lives

One of CIVICUS' programmes, Civil Society Watch, works with defending the existence of civil society. The programme focuses on countries where the existence of a civil society is under threat.

The other two Es, Expression and Engagement, are supported by other CIVICUS programmes and activities, such as the World Assembly. The World Assembly is an annual meeting for civil society organisations, and is this year held in Glasgow. Organisations from around the world come to discuss issues that are of importance. The focus this year is on accountability: delivering results.

Civil Society Index, CSI, is one of CIVICUS' largest programmes. CSI is a method of finding out how civil society works in different countries and different aspects of civil society. Thereby, the CSI provides important information about the civil society in a given country.

CSI is carried out by the civil society in the country with support from a CIVICUS team. It is also a way of strengthening the civil society in the country, by involving it in the process. The CIVICUS CSI team provides the national partners with support, training and capacity building, but the main job is carried out by the national partners themselves.

When the CSI was designed, the main focus was to create a methodology with global relevance which could be applied in a variety of countries. There need to be organisations in the country that can engage in this process.

The CSI can furthermore not be implemented in countries where

civic space is severely under threat, as it is based on principles of open consultation and participation. In such countries CIVICUS Civil Society Watch programme is more appropriate.

An important issue for the CSI is the contextual validity. The framework has a set of indicators and common core standards. Still, some flexibility is allowed when implementing the CSI, in order to adjust to the reality in different countries.

The CSI aims at reflecting all dimensions of civil society. Therefore, there are both research elements and activities to be carried out. Ideally, all the different corners of civil society in the country shall meet, engage in the process, debate with each other etc.

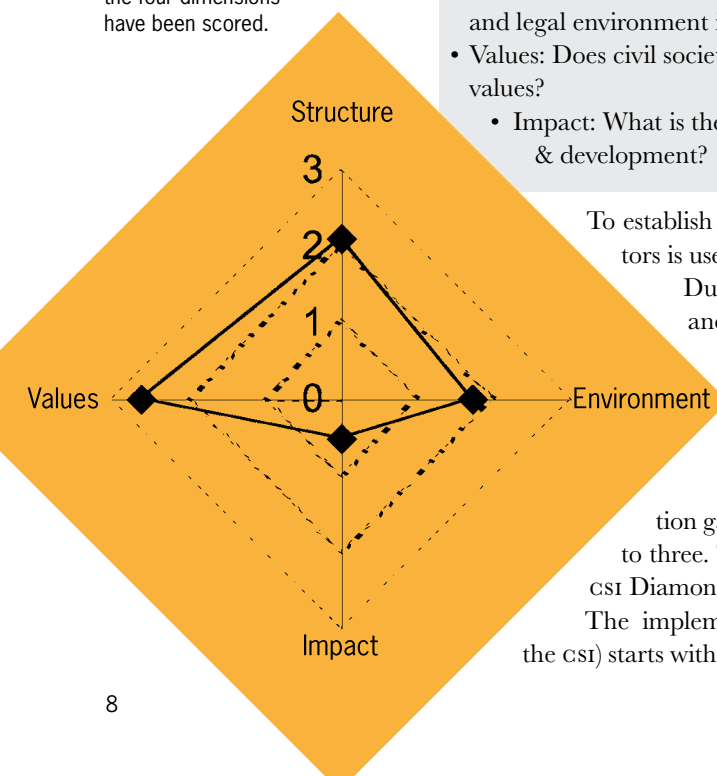
Another important aspect is that information from the whole of civil society in the country is to be gathered, not only from those organisations that are directly engaged in the CSI process. Also community based groups and loose groupings are incorporated, not only more established segments of civil society.

By allowing some flexibility in applying the CSI, we also strive to increase the local ownership and underline that the role of the CIVICUS' CSI team is chiefly to support the process, not to lead it.

The country report to eventually be presented with the findings from the CSI process will thereby be »owned« by civil society in the country and hopefully reflect all aspects of their reality.

The CSI methodology

The picture shows a diamond where all the four dimensions have been scored.



The CSI includes a framework with four dimensions:

- Structure: What is the internal make-up of civil society?
- Environment: What is the political, socio-economic, cultural and legal environment in which civil society exists?
- Values: Does civil society practice and promote positive social values?
- Impact: What is the impact of civil society on governance & development?

To establish those four dimensions, a set of 74 indicators is used.

During the research implementation, data and information are collected to support those 74 indicators. The information that has been collected is then validated by a National Advisory Group and civil society stakeholders in the country.

In the final step, a scoring of the information gathered takes place using a scale from zero to three. The final result is presented in a so-called CSI Diamond with four dimensions.

The implementation process (= implementation of the CSI) starts with a secondary data review and an overview

report. A national index team with the people selected by the civil society partners in the country receive training by CIVICUS staff on research steps and challenges. A National Advisory Group (with representatives for civil society) is selected, and a first meeting takes place.

The next step is primary research. It includes regional stakeholder consultations, a population survey and a media survey. Through all those steps, the CSI team in Johannesburg provides ongoing back up.

Initially, CIVICUS planned two years for the implementation, but the CSI team found that many countries needed less time than that. Still, some countries faced organisational and fund-raising challenges. The conclusion made is that there needs to be a flexible time line.

After the primary research is carried out, the data is to be analysed and a scoring meeting held.

During an open National Workshop the findings of the CSI are validated, strengths and weaknesses of civil society discussed and an action plan for ways forward defined. The discussions and decisions of the national Workshop are also included in the final Country Report which is then published.

At present, 54 countries are implementing the CSI, 38 countries have published their reports and the remaining countries are very close to finishing their reports. All country reports published so far are available on the CIVICUS web-site.

Question from the audience: How do you select the countries that take part in a CSI?

When the CSI started in 2003, there was a call for participation. A number of CS organisations and some research institutes expressed their interest in participating. CIVICUS carried out a selection process in order to find the ideal partner in a given country. A certain set of skills was needed, even though CIVICUS provided capacity building. The CSI is quite a long process and there needs to be some stability to carry it through.

Research elements

The CSI process has six steps and research elements:

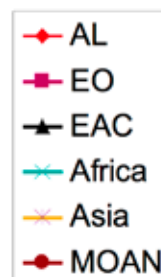
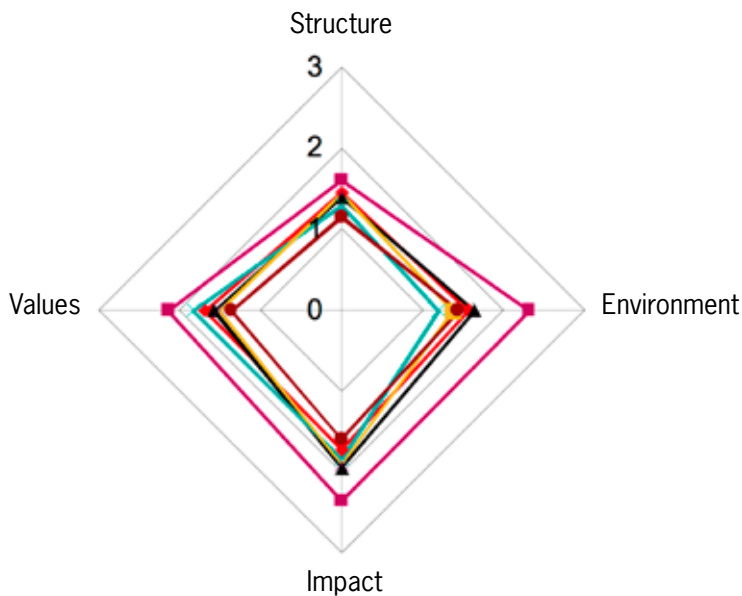
- Secondary data review and Overview report
- Training of national Index teams
- Meeting of National Advisory Group
- Primary Research: Stakeholder consultations, population surveys, media review etc
- Data analysis and scoring
- National workshop



After this process, a Country Report and Recommendations/Action plans are produced. The results are also presented in a CSI »diamond« visualising the different dimensions of civil society.

The picture shows »diamonds« from different regions, overlapping each other. The diamond representing Western Europe is the largest, Africa's among the smallest. Diamonds from different regions or countries cannot be compared, as the conditions and thereby also the scoring differ.

In this presentation, however, we would like to present the regional diamonds comparing them, for the sake of discussion whilst looking at the main findings and how they reflect the differences or similarities of the diamonds.



Question from audience: Does CIVIC select one or several CS organisations in a given country as the main co-partner?

This first time the index was used CIVICUS selected one organisation, also in those cases when several organisations in the country had shown interest in taking part. The organisations selected were those that were well respected in the society and had skills to carry out research as well as organising participatory activities with the different corners of civil society. It is quite difficult to find civil societies with the right mix of research skills and the capacity to convene on a broad scale. This is why the selection period was quite important. In a few countries, two organisations that could complement each other were selected as partners.

Question from audience: If you have two or more possible partners, how do you then make the choice?

There was seldom a choice between several possible partners, rather difficult to find one that had the skills needed. If there was a choice, organisations with the best research competence were selected.

Question from audience: How did you develop the methodology?

The CS diamond used by the CSI was developed by Helmut Anheier who was at that time at the Center for Civil Society, London School of Economics. Before selecting a methodology, CIVICUS scanned literature and research on civil society and methods for measuring civil society activity.

Tomas Brundin explained that there are several methods for investigating civil society. One big advantage with CSI is that it is a self-assessment tool implemented by civil society itself. Thereby it also contributes to strengthening cooperation and dialogue within civil society.

Question from audience: what organisations belong to civil society according to CIVICUS?

With regards to the diversity of civil society, CIVICUS uses a very wide definition. The standard definition is that civil society is the arena – not even an organisation – outside the state, the market and the family.

This definition includes not only large organisations such as trade unions but also small groups and entities. CIVICUS has taken the decision to also include organisations that are a negative social force. In order to embrace the full width of civil society those organisations also need to be taken into account.

Question from the audience: How do you score the indicators to form the »diamond«?

All the 74 indicators are scored from zero to three. For each score there is a written definition. To score zero, for instance, your findings shall be closest to the written definition for zero.

Some indicators are very clearly defined, for instance a socio-political context indicator with eight different conditions including the Gini coefficient and the ratio of external debt to GDP. Others are more perception based, such as the tolerance level of civil society in the country.

Question from the audience: you talk about the environment for civil society. What does »environment« stand for in this context?

It is the socio-political and cultural context and also the legal frames that can help or hamper civil society developing properly.

Question from the audience: how did the self-assessment work and what came out of it?

It has been a challenge! The self-assessment of the 74 indicators is conducted by the National Advisory Group. The ambition is to make the National Advisory Group as diverse as possible by including important stakeholders in the country, be it the market, business, government, media etc. The aim is for 80 per cent of the participants in the National Advisory Group to represent civil society and the rest other stakeholders.

In many countries it was a great challenge to come to an even understanding of what civil society is. But also the process of finding a common definition is important for the process as a whole. In some countries, civil society is a well-known concept but in others not recognised at all.

Also grassroots organisations are invited to get involved in the CSI process. They are a part of civil society but do not always think of themselves as such. This issue often raises many questions and provokes debate.

CIVICUS has identified two main trends that often occur when a country implements the CSI: In countries where democracy is not properly established, the discussions often concern how meetings shall be conducted and the concept of civil society and less about the actual results of the surveys and research. In established democracies like OECD countries, there is more focus on studying and understanding civil society.

CIVICUS is trying to capture civil society also in the Muslim world. The decision from CIVICUS is not to be value-neutral, instead to promote values as gender empowerment and democracy. This has caused some concern in the Muslim world and also in some other countries. Still, both CIVICUS and the organisations involved have tried to adapt as much as possible in the given context in all countries. The National Advisory Group has an important role adapting the tools to the national realities.

Question from audience: how do you now that the organisations you choose to work with are recognised by civil society in the country?

There are several methods to use, as peer appraisals from other organisations that CIVICUS know of and recommendations from donors that have experience of the organisation.

However, the selection process is complicated. Although the CSI process has worked well with the partners selected so far, there have been some problems. It is probably impossible to find a perfect selection process, for many reasons. One is that the organisations selected also change, get internal problems etc.



II. JANINE SCHALL-EMDEN

On general trends and CSI findings so far

CONSIDERING THE CSI in-country findings a few broad strokes and general trends for each region can be indicated; for Western Europe it can be stated that due to a rather enabling political environment in addition to stable and effective infrastructure, the state of civil society is comparatively the strongest.

In post communist Europe civic engagement is rather weak, although the work of environmental CSOs have recorded some success. Significant for Africa is lack of resources and infrastructure, coupled with complex societies. A fairly general trend in Asia is that the ties to the state are strong.

Civil society in Latin America galvanizes mobilization during periods of social conflict; this mobilization is however not sustained over time. It is diverse and has a strong role in influencing and defending human rights. In the Middle East and North Africa, the political conflicts affect the possibilities for civil society to develop and participation is generally quite low.

A surprising finding for CIVICUS was that as many as 66 per cent of the countries involved mentioned legitimacy and accountability as a main problem and 49 per cent the lack of financial resources. It could be expected to be the reverse.

The definition of civil society as the arena outside the state, family and market, was successful. But each country made some adaptations, so the definition is a bit different in different regions. Often the NGOs are defined as the civil society in a country, but CIVICUS' definition is much wider. In societies outside the Western world, NGOs are not so dominant in people's lives. Instead it is mostly small community based citizen's organisations that people know of, and they are often highly respected.

The CSI tools and forms that CIVICUS provided were used quite effectively, with some national variations.

Another finding was that a strong civil society does not always correlate with a high level of civil engagement.

The need for sustainability was yet another issue. All civil society organisations face financial and organisational challenges. Mobil-

ising people is difficult, of several reasons.

The relationship between civil society and the private sector is overall indifferent or even hostile. The interest among civil society organisations in strengthening this relationship is basically for using the private sector as a funding source, but also to find means of cooperating.

Again, accountability is one of the main challenges. Almost all countries highlighted it as a key issue.

The next issue is advocacy and policy issues. Many countries mentioned them as difficult to handle. Often NGOs and other civil society organisations engage in service delivery, but not to the same extent in policy advocacy and debate.

The legal environment also causes difficulties for some organisations. It is not a trend in all countries, but in some. In e g China, it is featured as one of the main problems for civil society.

One finding is also that weak states are a problem. Weak states are generally clientilistic or corrupt states that do not have the power or political will to fulfil its defined functions and responsibilities. It is a matter of attitude, competence, trust etc.

Generally, recommendations and action points that the CSI organisations have adopted to their action agendas are:

- Democracy is the key issue
- Citizen engagement need to be strengthened both individually and through associations
- The idea of citizen participation and civil society as a whole need to be connected
- More dialogue within civil society

Some of the steps that CIVICUS will take this year, 2007

Some of the main tools will be redesigned, after comments from the users. The remaining country reports will be published and the first of a two-volume series of the CSI's »Global Report on the State of Civil Society« will be launched.

2007/20

The last quarter of 2007, CIVICUS will open the call for applications for interested partner organisations and NGOs for the CSI 2008. The plan is to apply a looser model this time, so that countries and organisations can join when it suits them best.

Question from the audience: How can you make conclusions about regions when there are so few countries in some groups?

CIVICUS often receives questions about regional trends. Since the CSI is a study for and by civil society, the criterion for implementing it in a given country is local interest and need. This means that it is not part of CIVICUS objectives to generate regionally accurate assessments, as in some regions only a few, not necessarily representative countries are part of the project. Nonetheless, the international comparison remains important for CIVICUS and its partners as they are encouraged to share the results with one another and learn from one another's good and bad experience.

The background for this is that the studies are made for the civil society in the different countries, not for research or international organisations. If the purpose was to make international comparisons, one must choose a representative set of countries. Now there is an open call, all countries that are interested can take part.

Question from the audience: Are there also studies conducted on parts of countries?

South Carolina in US began a CSI but did not complete it. They first planned a US study, but as it is a vast country they did not have sufficient resources.

072007

A black and white photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark blazer over a light-colored patterned shirt. She is looking slightly upwards and to the right, with her hands raised in a gesturing motion. The background is a solid light color.

»Gender equality has improved as well as the legitimacy to meet social needs«

III. HARRIET NAMISI, DENIVA, UGANDA

On the Uganda Experience of CSI

HARRIET NAMISI is Programme Coordinator for Governance and Advocacy at the Development Network of the Indigenous Voluntary Associations, DENIVA, in Uganda.

DENIVA is an umbrella organisation for civil society organisations and has membership all over the country. Mostly national organisations are members, but also international organisations are welcome as associates. DENIVA was in charge of coordinating the CSI activities at country level.

Implementation of CSI in Uganda

The CSI process started in Uganda in 2004, but did not take off until 2005 as there were a number of challenges to deal with.

The Ugandan team that was trained by CIVICUS to work with the CSI process left just before the programme started so a new team needed to be introduced. This new team included DENIVA as a partner. A National Advisory Group with 12 members was constituted, among them NGOs and other civil society organisations, trade unions, lawyers associations and employers, and non-profit parts of the private sector.

After discussions and consultations only nine members remained. Trade unions, non-profit private sector and the professional associations were not regarded as part of civil society. The general view in Uganda is that civil society is basically the same as NGOs and in the end it was mainly NGOs in the National Advisory Group.

After constituting the National Advisory Group, the review of secondary data followed. It was very useful as it showed the gaps that existed in civil society and the information that was lacking in order to continue the process.

The next step was community surveys to collect primary data. In Uganda, they focussed on constituencies with civil society organisations. After this step, it was possible to assess the structure of civil society, its values and impact.

To compile this data, questionnaires were sent out to 1 000 civil society organisations. The feedback was very low, with only 150

respondents. Instead, students were sent out to interview the organisations down to community level. Some 500 forms were filled in.

In four of the five regions in Uganda the CSI team conducted regional consultations with civil society. In the fifth region, the efforts collapsed. However, in the four regions the consultations were successful. The organisations that took part were interested and wanted to know more about CIVICUS, CSI, the concept of civil society etc.

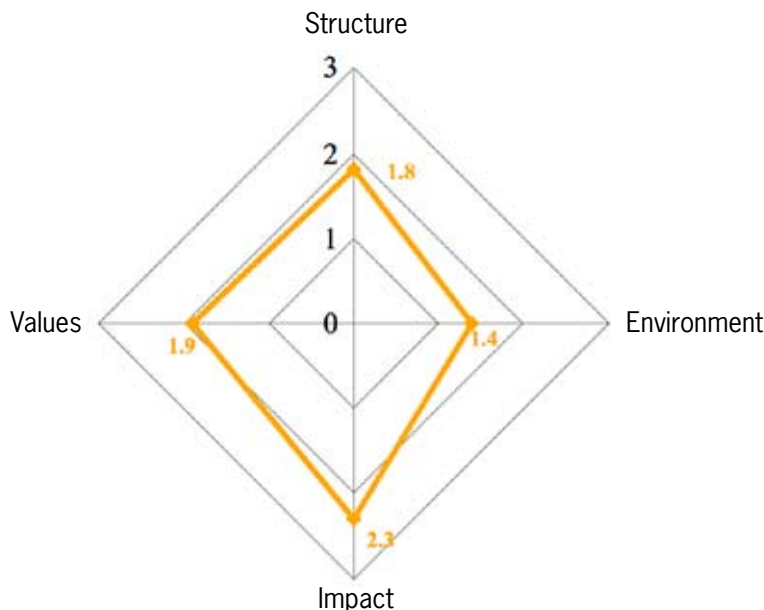
One problem was that neither trade unions, the non-profit private sector nor the professional organisations were allowed to take part even at regional level despite being mentioned on the invitation. Only NGOs and representatives for the government could attend.

The next step was a media review on how the media covers civil society. Unfortunately it was conducted during a period of political turbulence when the media mainly covered the political situation. Therefore, media covered very little of civil society issues. When they did, it was mostly about conflicts, not the »ordinary life« of civil society. In general, the media seemed very uninterested in the issue of civil society.

The CSI-team also did some factfinding on some other issues of importance, such as government support to civil society and the situation for street children.

All the findings were compiled into a report that was presented at a national workshop for civil society and other stakeholders. After the findings had been validated, action plans were made. The focus was on: Knowing the strengths and weaknesses and what can we do to improve and strengthen civil society?

The findings were also presented in a diamond shape. It showed e.g. that the impact of civil society often is high and that the level of democracy differs between organisations.



The Ugandan Diamond

An evident dilemma for civil society is the new NGO Act that was recently passed by the Ugandan parliament. It promotes extensive cooperation and collaboration between the NGOs and the government. It was passed without consultations with the NGOs or other parts of civil society. The CSI team developed an alternative NGO bill, but none of the views they presented were taken up.

The strengths of Civil Society in Uganda

The strengths of civil society in Uganda shown by the survey were e g service delivery, which scored very high. Civil society is sometimes doing what the government is supposed to do. They contribute to poverty reduction and are involved in peace talks.

Gender equality has improved as well as the legitimacy to meet social needs. When people were asked who they trust most, the government or civil society, most of them mentioned civil society organisations. It is normally those that people interact with on a daily basis, and most of them have never visited a community office or a governmental body.

The weaknesses of Civil Society in Uganda

Many people are afraid to speak out, especially on politics, of concern for their security. This fear might not be relevant, but because of the Ugandan history people are afraid. They would rather go to a civil society organisation than voice their discontent to the government.

The existence of paternalistic behaviour is another issue. It is not unusual for civil society organisations to be initiated by a single individual, often a man, who then runs it by himself for 20 years or more. Also, some politicians create their own NGOs in order to get funding from donors. These organisations have affected the credibility of civil society, which is often low.

Lack of communication and limited transparency were also listed as weaknesses. There is e g often competition among civil society organisations for donors, and the organisations do not want to inform about who supports them.

Lack of modern infrastructure such as internet, media restrictions, threats from criminal groups, lack of coordination are other weaknesses, and also too short donor project periods. Projects are normally for three years or less, but often a 15-year strategy is needed to really achieve substantial changes.

Recommendations from the Uganda CSI team

These are some of the main recommendations that came out of the CSI process in Uganda:

- Review the NGO Act: According to the government, the act was needed in order to minimise the misuse of donor funding. Civil society organisations want to find ways of regulating their activities themselves. The act also bans cooperation among civil society organisations on community, district and regional levels. This must also be changed, and cooperation allowed
- Reduce financial dependence. Almost 90 per cent of the NGOs depend on donors and not local or membership contributions
- Coordinate and implement policies for civil society organisations
- Protect the independence and integrity of civil society. The government sometimes pushes the NGOs to take responsibility for issues that should be solved by the government
- Combat corruption
- Strengthen co-cooperation within civil society
- Strengthen relations between NGOs, government, media and private sector

Question from Tomas Brundin: Is it a problem that you after an academic survey come up with recommendations on a political issue, to change the NGO Act? Are there NGOs that feel uncomfortable with this and feel that the CSI process has been politicised?

The NGO Act was identified by all actors as a key issue of great importance for civil society. It is difficult for single organisations to protest to the government about it. As an umbrella organisation, DENIVA can advocate this issue. The plan now is to go to the court if the government persists in keeping the law.

Question from audience: The methodology is very complicated, with 74 criteria. Is there no other, simpler method to use?

The methodology has been an effort for many users, not least the scoring process. Still, the process is useful as it reveals weaknesses and challenges within the civil society. The scoring also makes it possible to make global comparisons of the state of civil society.

If the number of indicators is reduced, you do not get the whole

spectra of civil society. But the CSI is not only about collecting and analysing data. It is an inclusive approach, built on involvement and engagement from civil society.

The process is extremely valuable, even though there are limitations and challenges.

There are other ways to identify ways of improving civil society. The unique thing about the CSI is the in-depth process, that civil society in a given country analyses their society together. Then the national networks also have a mandate to make those changes they have identified as necessary.

Question from audience: How has the implementation process changed civil society in Uganda?

Visible changes in the contacts with e.g. media and the government has not yet occurred. But within civil society there are some examples. For example, Care Uganda used the report in its planning process, and some other organisations have taken up the weaknesses that were identified and are now working on them. The ambition is to also use the report to bring about a change in the NGO Act.

Question from the audience: What does a CSI process cost?

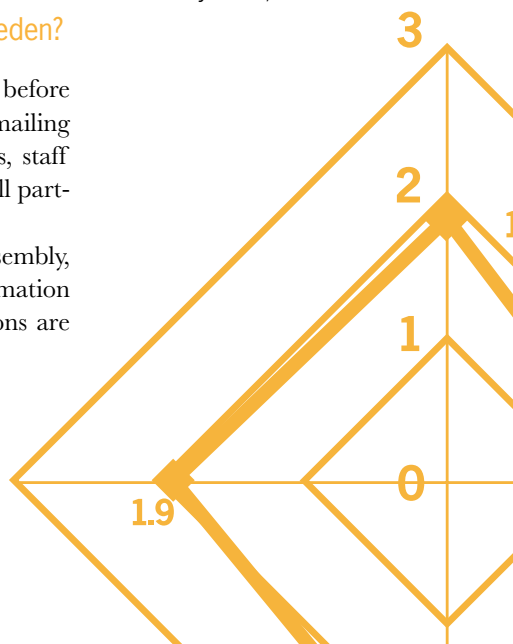
The average cost is USD 50,000–70,000. Depending on the situation in the country, it could be more. Countries that do not have the research capacity might need hundreds of thousands of dollars. It is also dependant on the vastness of the country, transportation possibilities, wages etc.

Question from Tomas Brundin: How can national NGOs or other civil society organisations initiate a CSI in Sweden?

There will be a call for participation by the end of 2007. Also before that, organisations can express their interest by writing or e-mailing to CIVICUS for preliminary information about budget issues, staff needed etc. One of the biggest efforts is the fundraising, as all partners have to fundraise themselves.

It is also possible to attend the annual CIVICUS World Assembly, which this year will be held in Glasgow on May 23–27. Information is available on CIVICUS' website. All civil society organisations are most welcome to take part!

Art. no.: SIDA36966en
Production: Global Reporting
Text: Agneta Carleson
Art Director: Cathrin Emdén
Photo: Kina Robberts
Printed by: Edita, 2007



Halving poverty by 2015 is one of the greatest challenges of our time, requiring cooperation and sustainability. The partner countries are responsible for their own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge and expertise, making the world a richer place.



SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION AGENCY

SE-105 25 Stockholm Sweden
Telephone: +46 (0)8-698 50 00
Telefax: +46 (0)8-698 56 15
sida@sida.se
www.sida.se