CIVICUS: WORLD ALLIANCE FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
2008 – 2012

Date: June 2008
Executive Summary

The growth of civil society in scale and importance over the last two decades has also increased its vulnerability. Civil society is challenged from three directions: internally, by the risk of losing public trust; and externally, by political threats to its right to exist and also by the general threats that face humankind as a whole, such as the impact of climate change, violent conflicts, poverty and inequality.

CIVICUS' mission is to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world. CIVICUS supports the right of citizens to organise, strengthens civil society organisations and fosters better terms of engagement with governments, the private sector and international institutions.

Recognising the challenges civil society faces and in support of CIVICUS' mission, the organisation has adopted three, mutually reinforcing Strategic Directions to guide its work over the next five years (2008-2012). The Strategic Directions are:

1. Protecting the rights of civil society actors
2. Strengthening good practice within civil society
3. Strengthening civil society’s ability to influence the policies and practices of governments, international institutions and the private sector

In selecting the main issues to be addressed in the Strategic Directions, CIVICUS considered a number of internal and external factors to identify the most beneficial approach given the needs of CIVICUS' stakeholders and its own niche, resources and capabilities. The factors taken into account included: an assessment of the organisation’s strengths and weaknesses; a scoping of the climate, infrastructure, operating environment and changing perceptions of global civil society; and an analysis of the most critical issues for civil society to address and of the key elements enabling (or disabling) civil society’s effectiveness. The process involved extensive consultations with CIVICUS members, partners, allies, critics and other stakeholders.

In all its work, CIVICUS' key programmatic approaches will be knowledge generation and analysis, communication, convening and multi-stakeholder engagement, and advocacy.

Drawing on CIVICUS' strength as a membership-based, global network, the organisation will act as a “knowledge broker,” providing members, partners, allies, the media and others with authoritative analysis to support campaigns and other interventions. In a limited number of cases, CIVICUS may co-operate with others in more sustained campaigns and interventions relating to specific regions, countries or issues, aiming to defend the rights of civil society, promoting its good practice, or focusing on specific challenges facing humanity. Implicit in this is a commitment to ensuring that the diversity of civil society voices are heard, especially those of the poor, women, and other traditionally marginalised groups.

In carrying out programmes and activities under these Directions, CIVICUS aims to be known and respected for:
- Its role in framing the challenges and promoting solutions for the issues facing civil society;
- Its role in forging solidarity in confronting injustice, oppression, marginalisation, and co-option, and in defending democratic processes and human rights;
- Its role in communicating the value, impact and tangible outcomes of the work of civil society;
- The quality and relevance of its information and analysis; and
- Its ability to collaborate and convene.
Section I: Introduction

In November 2006, the CIVICUS Board created a Task Force to develop new Strategic Directions to guide the organisation for the period 2008 to 2012. The Task Force, which included Board and staff members, was led by a Board member and supported by an external consultant.

The Strategic Directions were developed through the following process: a scan of the external environment to identify trends that confront civil society in general, and CIVICUS in particular, with significant threats and opportunities; an exchange of views on the strategic choices that CIVICUS should make; and an assessment of the organisational implications of these strategic choices.

Opinions and ideas were canvassed from a wide range of stakeholders – CIVICUS members, past, present and prospective Board members, staff, donors and “critical friends” in other international organisations and the academic world. They were asked five key questions about the challenges and opportunities facing civil society, the challenges to CIVICUS and CIVICUS’ strengths and weaknesses.

The Task Force and Board deliberated their responses and developed this document to set a course for CIVICUS over the next five years. Should the contextual assessment and goals for the organisation remain pertinent beyond 2012, the decision may be taken at a later date to extend the Directions for an additional period.

It was agreed that CIVICUS’ Mission and Vision will direct the organisation for the foreseeable future.

Mission:
CIVICUS’ mission is to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world.

Vision:
CIVICUS’ vision is of a worldwide community of informed, inspired, committed citizens engaged in confronting the challenges facing humanity.

CIVICUS recognises that for effective and sustainable civic participation to occur, citizens must enjoy rights of free association, assembly and expression and be able to engage all sectors of society. This understanding underpins the three major objectives that inform our mission:

- **Promote Civic Existence**, by defending people’s fundamental rights to organise and act collectively towards the public good;
- **Promote Civic Expression**, by strengthening the capacities of civil society organisations to freely amplify the voices of ordinary people; and
- **Promote Civic Engagement**, by fostering interaction between citizens, their associations and other institutions to ensure that public institutions reflect the will of the people and are accountable to them.
Section II: Challenges to Civil Society

The term “civil society” embraces innumerable groups, movements and organisations, ranging from the very small and informal to the very large and highly structured. They function at every level, from neighbourhood to global. They represent an extremely diverse range of interests, occupations and viewpoints; and, in some cases, they champion causes, take-up issues of public concern and seek to influence the policies and practices of governments, corporations and international institutions.

“Civil society occupies a position on the global policy stage that it has never had before. There is no reason to assume that it will lose its influence in the years to come. This is especially true if it can nurture its own internal growth. The challenges to this growth lie in the relations with other actors – corporate and governmental – as well as in the relations to the masses of people who rely on the ability of civil society actors to make their life and circumstances better. Civil society has every reason to continue to be a critical voice on the global policy stage, but its legitimacy will remain strong only as long as it is also self-critical and ready to deal with its own weaknesses as they arise...The best organisations in civil society are precisely those that build analysis into their work...Compared to governments and corporations, it is in this very area that civil society is weak. If it wants to compete more effectively, it is clear that its member organisations must acquire and nurture analytical expertise.”

The above quotation focuses on civil society’s role as an agent of social, political and economic change. It depicts civil society as being for an external purpose, rather than simply being a good thing in itself – as a vehicle to connect with others, create and influence the fabric of communities and societies. While the vast bulk of civil society organisations (CSOs) may not be concerned with policy advocacy and structural change, most of CIVICUS’ members and partners are, whether at the local, national or international level. Policy advocacy is now present on the agenda of many service-delivery oriented organisations in recognition of the importance of addressing the structural causes of problems that confront humanity.

People have always collaborated to meet their needs, protect their interests, promote their values, win support for their ideas and have fun. By doing so, they weave the social fabric that is the foundation of culture and society and that promotes peaceful resolution of conflict. Today, people can organise globally, beyond the restrictions formerly imposed by geographic location. Citizens have created institutions, the (nation) state and the market to increase human capacity and wellbeing. However, these institutions have overtaken their citizen founders in power. While people have more confidence in citizen organisations than in either markets or politicians, there is a risk that unless the relationships among state, market and civil society are improved, social progress and social cohesion are threatened. CIVICUS’ mission and its programmes support the right of citizens to organise, strengthen citizens’ organisations and foster better terms of engagement with governments, private sector organisations and international institutions. Implicit in this is a commitment to ensuring that the diversity of civil society voices, especially those of the poor, women, and gender, ethnic and religious minorities are heard.

Unless civil society is able to confront challenges to existence and expression, its capacity for engagement with governments, international institutions and corporations will be undermined. Civil society must strengthen and reform itself in order to thrive in its own right and in order to be able to effectively respond to the multiplying risks and threats that confront humankind: poverty; economic, social and gender injustice; the inadequacy of global governance to respond to people’s needs;

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violence and conflict; climate change and environmental degradation. Based on the feedback CIVICUS received from a very broad consultation with members, partners, others allies and critics; we believe that civil society faces the following important challenges during the coming period.\(^2\)

1. **Solidarity in the face of oppression, marginalisation and co-option:** Threats to any civil society group endanger the principle of citizen action and the security of civil society throughout the world. Such threats have become more pronounced in the context of anti-terror measures despite the fact that most governments have ratified human rights conventions which guarantee the freedom of expression, association and assembly. It would be unrealistic to expect small, local and under-resourced community groups to play an active role in monitoring the civil rights of others; but larger, national-level CSOs can play this role in addition to their specific mandates. This phenomenon has implications for information dissemination and for establishing stronger mechanisms for speedy and effective response to threats. Additionally, some view CSOs as service delivery agents in the reform of welfare states and as instruments for achieving improved governance in public institutions – as junior partners to governments. Civil society needs to re-assert its other role as a force for change, dialogue and dissent by promoting participatory democracy.

2. **Strengthen accountability and transparency of CSOs:** Demands that CSOs should pay more attention to their legitimacy, transparency and accountability cannot be ignored. Once perceived (by some) as the magic bullet for the failures of the state and the market, civil society’s real and imagined failings are now exposed to increasing public scrutiny. The expanding role of civil society in recent years has increased expectations and vulnerabilities. Attacks on CSOs are likely to increase as they engage with a growing range of public policy issues, amplifying the perspectives of marginalised citizens and demanding changes from governments, international institutions, corporations, and in certain cultural and social norms. Civil society needs to pre-empt the challenges by establishing and implementing credible and effective mechanisms for ensuring that organisations claiming the mantle of civil society are legitimate, transparent and accountable.

3. **Improve democratic participation among CSOs:** There is a need to create space for greater debate and discussion within the civil society sector and between its various levels – from the grassroots to large international organisations. Many actors within civil society express concern about the real or perceived danger of growing elitism within the ranks of CSOs. For instance, northern NGOs continue to be the most influential players within civil society and often fail to be sufficiently inclusive of marginalised or weaker voices. The doors should be open to a wider range of traditional forms of citizen voice and action, empowered to participate in and contribute to the global movement on equal terms, on a continuing basis and not simply at annual gatherings. There are also fears that anti-democratic movements and groups shelter beneath civil rights that they deny to others. Progressive and democratic civil society should be more willing to address these challenges and actively speak out against repressive and intolerant actions conducted by elements within civil society.

4. **Strengthen the evidence base of policy work:** Moral outrage is necessarily the basis of protest but, as CSOs play increasingly active roles in influencing public policies and

\(^2\) A fuller account of that feedback can be found in Annex 1, The Global Context for Strengthening Civil Society: What Our Members, Allies and Critics Told Us.
practices, there is a need to ensure that their policy advocacy is built on solid and credible evidence and that they can respond with facts and analysis to their critics and the interest groups they target. The fast changing context also challenges CSOs to keep up with new developments in many spheres – scientific, political, economic and social - straining their time and resources and intensifying risks of low quality work, which can result in decreased credibility and impact. There is a considerable need for CSOs to support each other and pool their knowledge and resources, when pursuing common interests or seeking to alter the policies and practices of the same institutions and players.

5. Strengthen global civil society infrastructure: While civil society infrastructure has developed at national levels in recent years, it is still largely absent at the global level. CIVICUS and projects by other organisations partially meet this need, but these efforts are fragmented and incomplete. “In theory, civil society can be a counterweight to the expanding influence of markets and the declining power of states, but in practice there are few formal structures through which this countervailing authority might be expressed, especially at the global level. The result is a growing democratic deficit in the processes of global governance...For citizens of non-democratic regimes, transnational civil society may provide the only meaningful avenue for voice and participation in decision-making.”

A coherent and comprehensive approach to creating a global infrastructure could draw creatively from Web 2.0 principles and functionality to enhance visibility and voice for a broader range of actors, expose groups that oppose progressive and inclusive values, adopt joined-up approaches to accountability, frame and advance debates and joint-responses to challenges facing transnational civil society and build civil society’s capacity to engage in global processes more effectively. Even though CSOs engaged in advocacy and campaigning may focus on different issues, the challenges and opportunities they face and the approaches they use have much in common. This provides an opportunity for CSOs to increase their effectiveness by sharing knowledge and experience, and through collective action.

6. Mobilise more resources for civil society: The funding base for CSOs in all parts of the world is inadequate in meeting the growing needs of civil society and can undermine its independence, legitimacy and autonomy. This is especially the case for Southern CSOs, where a reliance on funds originating from the North can create serious vulnerabilities and perpetuate unequal power dynamics. A strong effort is needed to convince governments, donor communities and the corporate sector in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Latin America that stable and prosperous nations need a strong and healthy civil society and that broad-based citizen action plays a constructive and peaceful role in addressing social and economic injustice. Promoting the diversification of civil society’s resource base can increase its autonomy and legitimacy in the eyes of the wider public.

7. Build alliances and make them work: The challenges facing civil society now and in the coming years far exceed the capacities of even the plethora of individual CSOs already working at local, national and global levels. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Jubilee 2000 and the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) have demonstrated both the necessity and the power of strong alliances. On the other hand, these campaigns highlight challenges associated with international coalition building with respect to ownership, governance and decision making structures, balancing the diverse needs and

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3 Michael Edwards and John Gaventa: Global Citizen Action, 2001
4 These points are drawn from: Srilatha Batliwala “Do we need a global infrastructure?” in Alliance, Volume 9, number 2, March 2004
capabilities of coalition partners, resource shortages, etc. Lessons from these experiences need to be analysed and drawn upon when building effective strategic alliances.

8. **Mobilise popular action**: Some CSOs are more skilled than others at influencing the terms of debate through research and advocacy on public policy issues and by commanding media attention with mass demonstrations. However, these processes are not always inclusive or translated into sustained action. Civil society needs to take more notice and leverage the potential power of individuals, share-holders, voters, employees, volunteers, members and other groupings to compel reluctant corporations and governments to implement their commitments and act in the public interest.

9. **Strengthen volunteer involvement at all levels**: Volunteerism is a vibrant and fundamental component of civil society, yet too often it is an under-recognised and neglected dimension of civil society. Volunteers have long been agents of change: whether advocating for the rights of the disabled, raising awareness about climate change, participating in campaigns to end gender violence, organising a community meeting, promoting peace and inter-cultural understanding, or as leaders and supporters of social movements, volunteers provide much needed skills, knowledge and networks on a scale that otherwise would be impossible. Despite these contributions, the potential for volunteer action to help overcome the challenges facing civil society has yet to be fully realised. Civil society needs to identify strategies to better harness volunteerism as a means for building greater social cohesion, mobilising resources, accessing valuable policy related information, deepening democracy and strengthening civil society more broadly.

10. **Campaign for good governance at all levels**: Civil society has gained a seat at the table in negotiations involving governments, international organisations and multi-national corporations. The challenge is to make more effective use of this access and expand it to a wider array of civil society groups. While reforming the UN and influencing the policies and practices of targets such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund will remain high on the agenda, a wider-ranging power analysis needs to include less prominent power-centres, for example regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). At the national level, decentralisation offers local civil society groups new opportunities to participate in and influence decision-making and monitor government accountability to its citizens and compliance to its commitments at the local, provincial and national levels. However, there remain challenges to fostering equal participation in these processes.

11. **Engage the state and market**: Given the still pervasive power of governments and the growing power of corporations, the state and market will continue to dominate and shape economic and social development. The same forces are also crucial in enabling or disabling civil society. While the debate as to whether, and if so how, civil society should engage with the state and business sectors continues, CIVICUS believes that creating and capitalising on opportunities for cooperation that protect civil society’s autonomy and further its interests is a crucial task for the coming years that will affect CSOs’ financial and operational sustainability. The trend toward inclusive government practices that lead to multi-stakeholder mechanisms offers civil society one important such opportunity.

12. **Communicate effectively**: Organised civil society must become more inclusive and responsive by reaching out to involve grassroots, citizen and community groups in communicating more effectively with the public and mass media. Civil society at an international level needs to improve its communication strategies, make much greater use of languages other than English and avoid jargon and acronyms that characterises much of
the literature. It must be recognised that Information Communication Technology (ICT) is not equally accessible.

The wider challenges to civil society described in this section are therefore, in a general sense, also the very challenges CIVICUS faces. Even though CIVICUS’ Strategic Directions for 2008-2012 narrow the organisation’s focus to a number of key areas, all the concerns outlined above informed the development of the Strategic Directions and will continue to shape the organisation’s broad agenda and approaches. In selecting the main issues to be addressed in the Strategic Directions for 2008-2012, CIVICUS was guided by a number of internal and external considerations that aimed at identifying the most beneficial approach given the needs of CIVICUS’ stakeholders and its own niche, resources and capabilities. The factors taken into account included an assessment of the organisation’s strengths and weaknesses; the scoping of the climate, infrastructure, operating environment and changing perceptions of global civil society; and an analysis of the most critical issues for civil society to address and of the key elements enabling (or disabling) civil society’s effectiveness. The outcome of the process, which involved extensive consultations with CIVICUS members, partners, allies, critics and other stakeholders was the adoption of three mutually reinforcing Strategic Directions, outlined in Section Three.
Section III: Strategic Directions for CIVICUS

CIVICUS occupies a unique place in global civil society. Its membership base spans a wide variety of civil society organisations, groups and movements, it has a global mandate and it combines research and analysis with campaigning and advocacy. In order to maintain and further develop CIVICUS’ unique contribution to global civil society, the organisation’s work in the coming five years and possibly longer will be guided by the following three Strategic Directions and a number of key approaches that will be employed in order to achieve these.

Strategic Direction 1
Protecting the rights of civil society actors

Strategic Direction 2
Strengthening good practice within civil society

Strategic Direction 3
Strengthening civil society’s ability to influence the policies and practices of governments, international institutions and the private sector

Activities under all three Directions will be mutually reinforcing. Each builds on the organisation’s achievements and current work, but also requires a refocusing of existing programmes and reconfiguring of the relationships between them. Activities may contribute principally to the achievement of one Direction and the objectives identified there under, but the outcomes and knowledge generated are expected in many cases to also support aspects of the other Directions.

1. Protecting the rights of civil society actors

Working with members, partners and other allies, CIVICUS will strengthen efforts to:
- promote the existence of adequate space for civil society to operate freely;
- protect CSOs and citizen action from oppression and marginalisation; and
- provide solidarity to civil society when under threat.

Programme objectives under this Strategic Direction include:
- ongoing monitoring and dissemination of information related to threats to civil society; and
- working independently and with others to achieve sustained improvements in legislation, policies and practices that directly affect the civil society sector, including traditional and grassroots movements and groups, as well as formal CSOs and NGOs.

2. Strengthening good practice within civil society

Working with members, partners and other allies, CIVICUS will strengthen efforts to:
- support initiatives to maintain and when necessary improve the accountability, transparency and legitimacy of CSOs; and
- encourage and support CSOs to comply with the highest standards of conduct in all aspects of their work.

Programme objectives under this Strategic Direction include:
- supporting CIVICUS members, partners and allies by developing and disseminating information about the principles and standards of good practice within CSOs;
• developing and disseminating tools for capturing and assessing the impact of civil society and the lessons drawn from their implementation; and
• promoting (and when appropriate coordinating and monitoring compliance of) self-regulatory and other suitable mechanisms aimed at improving civil society’s accountability, performance and impact.

3. **Strengthening civil society’s ability to influence the policies and practices of governments, international institutions and the private sector**

Working with members, partners and other allies, CIVICUS will strengthen efforts to:
• support civil society’s increasingly vital role in confronting the challenges to humanity that governments, international institutions and the private sector are failing to adequately address;
• build effective collaboration within civil society and strengthen the sector’s capacity to engage (collectively and individually) governments, international institutions and the private sector; and
• increase civil society’s hands-on experience of political processes.

**Programme objectives** under this Strategic Direction include:
• providing CIVICUS members, partners and allies with regular analysis and dissemination of lessons drawn from civil society engagement; and
• contributing to the establishment of networks and other mechanisms for civil society at various levels to engage with other stakeholders.

**Key Approaches**

The focus, level of intensity and duration of CIVICUS’ interventions will vary. At one level of intensity, CIVICUS will act as a “knowledge broker”. CIVICUS will provide members, partners, allies, the media and others with authoritative analysis to support campaigns and other interventions.

In a limited number of cases, CIVICUS may co-operate with others in more sustained campaigns and interventions relating to specific regions, countries or issues, aiming to defend the rights of civil society, promoting its good practice, or focusing on specific challenges facing humanity.

Focus countries and institutions will be set in annual operational plans, based on such factors as demand, strategic opportunities, research and regular environmental scanning, using the expertise and resources developed by the organisation. Progress towards achieving the Directions will be tracked through a monitoring framework, and it is recognised that progress will be influenced by a number of internal and external factors. These include the global state of civil society and relations with governments, the specific operating environments in which CIVICUS works and the availability of resources during the implementation period.

In both cases, the key approaches of CIVICUS’ programmes can be summarised as:
• Knowledge generation and analysis
• Communication
• Convening and multi-stakeholder engagement
• Advocacy


CIVICUS Attributes

Coupled with these key approaches, we envision that CIVICUS’ work will be known and respected for the following:

- Its role in framing the challenges and promoting solutions for the issues facing civil society;
- Its role in forging solidarity in confronting injustice, oppression, marginalisation, and co-option, and in defending democratic processes and human rights;
- Its role in communicating the value, impact and tangible outcomes of the work of civil society;
- The quality and relevance of its information and analysis; and
- Its ability to collaborate and convene.

The diagram below summarises CIVICUS Strategic Directions and accompanying key approaches.

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**Strategic Direction 1**  
Protecting the rights of civil society actors

**Strategic Direction 2**  
Strengthening good practice within civil society

**Strategic Direction 3**  
Strengthening civil society’s ability to influence policies and practices

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**CIVICUS Approaches**  
Knowledge generation and analysis  
Communication  
Convening and multi-stakeholder engagement  
Advocacy
Annex I

The Global Context for Strengthening Civil Society: What Our Members, Allies and Critics Told Us

As part of the process of developing these Strategic Directions, we asked our members, partners, past and present Board Members, staff and critical friends a range of questions relating to the external environment for civil society, priorities for action and roles for CIVICUS.

One area which inspired significant feedback that informed the development of the Strategic Directions was in assessing the external environment and in particular, the “significant ways in which the context for strengthening civil society is changing”. The responses received are summarised in this annex. It is important to bear in mind that those who responded are involved in civil society organisations, many of which are active in the public sphere. They are therefore more likely to be aware of and affected by public policy developments than the vast majority of the world’s civil society organisations and citizen groupings.

The concerns revealed by responses were diverse but were dominated by three sets of issues:

- Trends, threats and opportunities originating within civil society
- External trends, threats and opportunities directly affecting civil society
- Trends, threats and opportunities facing humanity, with which some civil society actors are engaging

(1) TRENDS, THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES ORIGINATING WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY

Although the optimism of the 1980s and early 1990s has declined, civil society continues to influence the terms of debate on a wide range of issues. Many of the policies which have now been adopted by governments and international institutions were originally campaigned for by citizen groups and CSOs: women’s rights, environmental protection and fair trade rules are only three examples where citizens coming together collectively have influenced public opinion and institutional action by governments and private sector firms. Politicians are increasingly reaching out to civil society to gain legitimacy for their policies. At this stage in its development, however, civil society risks becoming the victim of its own and others’ sometimes exaggerated expectations.

The internal issue most frequently-mentioned by respondents was the need for civil society to put its own house in order by adopting and applying rigorous standards for ensuring legitimacy, transparency and accountability. By doing so, civil society would greatly strengthen its position when holding governments, international institutions and corporations to account for similar self-regulation and regulation.

A particular problem arises in countries where regimes might be pursuing progressive causes (anti-poverty drives, land redistribution, mass health care), but suppressing human rights generally and civic rights specifically. External donors and some CSOs are tempted to turn a blind eye to these abuses, sometimes for the perceived greater good or because they fear repression. Related to this trend is the mixing of political or religious agendas with welfare roles by influential groups, some of whom use violence to enforce their policies. These extremist groups sometimes shelter under and discredit the banner of civil society.

Improving the quality and evidence-basis of civil society policy advocacy and building the capacity to demonstrate verifiable outcomes and impact is another important opportunity to strengthen the legitimacy of organisations engaged in policy advocacy.5

The emergence of civil society elites and the willingness of some CSOs to be co-opted just as service delivery agents for governments concerned many respondents. However, constructive

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5 See, for example: Julius Court et al. Policy Engagement: How Civil Society Can be More Effective. Overseas Development Institute, 2006
partnerships between civil society and public authorities are possible, as is engagement on governance issues: some bilateral and multilateral donors are now funding the involvement of CSOs in para-political work such as election monitoring and analysis of the ability of government programmes to deliver effective services to the poor. This is a window of opportunity that should be widened, with care taken to maintain the independent nature of civil society.

The proliferation of CSOs with varying levels of competence and integrity, especially in the relief and development sectors, is a threat to the reputation of the sector as a whole. External funding sources are unlikely to significantly increase, but there appears to be a growing number of non-state actors seeking official funding contracts, especially in the humanitarian response sector. This has led to unhealthy competition among CSOs.

Related to the elitism threat is the tendency for the concept of civil society to be equated with European philosophical models and Western organisational patterns. Some analysts have suggested that “…it is privileged Northerners who dominate global civil society and who therefore have the biggest say in determining what counts as global risk.” This means that many locally-grounded, traditional forms of citizen association and action are excluded from the mainstream. Largely informal, these groups range from sports clubs and parent associations to burial societies and mutual support groups. They create a dense network of social linkages that constitute social glue and contribute to opinion formation and problem-solving across class and other differences. Both marginalised traditional groups and Westernised CSOs are the losers in this situation, the former remain invisible and therefore lack voice and power, while the latter remain disconnected from local realities and energies. Some respondents reported a growth in “Southern networks and voices” but this perception was not widely shared and “Southern” does not guarantee immunity from elitism.

Civil society growth (in numbers and influence) has not been even. Civil society networks are weak in China, the Middle East, Central Asia and the former Soviet Union. Concern was expressed about organisations and movements that claim the rights and status of civil society but would deny these rights to others and are hostile to the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and which underpin CIVICUS’ vision and mission. A question for CIVICUS is whether the progressive values to which the majority of civil society subscribes could form the basis of a code of behaviour that would help expose and marginalise those who promote racism, religious fanaticism and other anti-social ideologies.

(2) EXTERNAL TRENDS, THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES DIRECTLY AFFECTING CIVIL SOCIETY

A 2006 study defined global civil society “as the medium through which consciousness and perceptions of risk are shaped and new methods of protection are promoted…[it] is the arena where risks are enunciated, exaggerated, discounted, debunked, assessed and debated. It is an arena that encompasses information, expert knowledge and reasoned deduction as well as fear, prejudice and superstition. And it provides a forum, albeit uneven and unequal, for expressing and communicating differential knowledge about risk.”

At the crudest level, more than half the world’s citizens, and therefore their associations, inhabit countries that are “not free” or “partly free”, as measured by Freedom House’s 2007 survey of Freedom in the World. This is only slightly down from the 66% level recorded in 1986. At the regional level the picture varies sharply. Most (77%) of Sub-Saharan African countries are “not free” or are only “partly free”; a proportion that rises to 94% in the Middle East. For Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union, 54% of the region’s 28 countries are “not free” or are “partly free”. All but ten countries in the Americas count as “free”, as do all but one among Western Europe’s 25 countries. However, there is growing concern that even in the countries designated as “free” by

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7 Glasius, Kaldor, Anheier, ibid.
organisations such as Freedom House, there is a growing democratic deficit, where regimes that are little more than elected liberal oligarchies exhibit the forms of democracy without the substance.

The successes and prominence that civil society has achieved in recent years have triggered a political backlash among some governments, academic circles and corporate interests. This is evident not only in such obvious examples as the Russian Federation, Egypt and Zimbabwe, but also in democracies such as the United Kingdom and the United States, where anti-terrorism concerns and measures have been used to clamp down on citizen action and suppress dissident viewpoints. This has increased in the post 9/11 era, where concerns about terrorism have been used to justify restrictive practices, including laws that directly target CSOs or more indirectly affect them such as restricting foreign funding.

Civil society lacks adequate global infrastructure to monitor and respond to the threats that confront CSOs in specific local, national and cultural contexts. Although organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International include collective civil rights in their ambit, it is not the central focus of their work. The need to address specific threats at a global level is clear: the opportunities to do so are less evident.

Decentralisation of government is changing the landscape for civil society. While this trend has created exciting possibilities, for example the strengthening of local self-government and possibilities of participation, such as India’s panchayati raj, in other contexts, such as Aceh Province in Indonesia, decentralisation has legitimised sectarianism and fundamentalism by freeing local authorities from national-level oversight. National governments need to ensure that the international treaties and conventions they have signed are implemented at all sub-national levels.

Southern voices and networks and Southern CSOs continue to depend on Northern aid funding, making them vulnerable to external agendas. The formation of NGOs is increasingly driven by economic considerations rather than a vision of citizen engagement - especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Corporate philanthropy is not new, but corporate social responsibility (CSR) as an explicit concept is a relatively recent phenomenon. Could it result in business people replacing ordinary citizens as leaders of CSOs? How deeply does commitment to CSR go or is it a token effort? In 2005, poverty, debt, climate change and equitable globalisation were the main issues addressed by the World Economic Forum, but the head of the Confederation of British Industry complained: “the pendulum is swinging too far in favour of the NGOs. The World Economic Forum is caving in to them. Davos has been hijacked by those who want business to apologise for itself.”

The harmonisation of bilateral and multilateral donor policies for development aid (the Paris Agenda) offers a new opportunity for civil society to be an effective agent of change, though the Paris Agenda addresses only the role of national and multilateral agencies and therefore has some limitations in scope. At the same time, it requires careful monitoring with regard to the quality of engagement with civil society in the process.

Finding adequate and sustained resources for CSOs is a major concern for respondents. To organise effectively, citizen organisations need funding and need rules for generating funding that reflect the complexity and sophistication of today’s world. Fundraising for civil society cannot rely on the power to tax, or the ability to generate a profit. Charity is a weak, and some say outdated, instrument for supporting citizen action in the 21st century. Investment in civil society has recently concentrated on strengthening local CSOs (usually for service delivery rather than activism) rather than regional and international organisations. The observed decline in financial support for global civil society infrastructure, which was previously available from foundations, poses a severe threat to organisations that wish to avoid becoming implementing agencies. The decline in funding from

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8 [http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/jan/31/uk.internationalaidanddevelopment](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/jan/31/uk.internationalaidanddevelopment)
North American foundations has not been adequately offset by new funding from philanthropists in the emerging economic powers – Brazil, India, China or South Africa.

Since the first World Social Forum in 2001, many types of social forums have been created, working at different levels. Global Civil Society 2005/6 estimates at least 74 local social forums existed just three years later; 23 national and 12 regional and thematic. New forums continue to be established in many regions.

There is growing scepticism about the integrity and competence of governments. This is creating space for civil society to demand higher standards in public governance, to put forward proposals for political and administrative reform and even to implement programmes which the state has abandoned, while continuing to campaign for states to fulfil their responsibilities.

There is a danger in over-reaching the legitimate space for civil society and attempting to replace political parties and state institutions. One Northern commentator has expressed the dilemma in very negative terms: “No wonder civil society is now an essential part of developmentalism: it sets up a strident competitive clamour between groups of the privileged. This creates an agreeable impression of diversity and democratic pluralism; but is designed to ensure that nothing challenges the destructive system of which civil society is both ornament and agent of control”.10

(3) TRENDS, THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING HUMANITY

In May 2001, the Board of CIVICUS adopted a Strategic Plan for the period 2002-2004. Its review of global trends, which was based on responses from a range of stakeholders, was perceptive and remains relevant, with some changes:

- The economic gap between wealthy and poor nations continues to grow, as does the inequality within nations. Civil society has continued its efforts to challenge global economic and social injustice. These efforts appeared to achieve success at the G8 Summit at Gleneagles in 2005. But according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) 2007 review, aid to tackle global poverty actually fell in 2006. The Gleneagles agreements seem to be unravelling.

- The strains and inconsistencies in the work of the UN system are even more evident today and the most influential multi-lateral organisations continue to be “neither transparent, nor democratically accountable, nor readily accessible to citizen interests”.11

- Although the 2002-2004 Plan was developed well before September 2001, its account of the crisis of democracy was farsighted: “Too many governments are hostile to citizen participation and have taken steps to reduce freedom of action”.12 In other words, many of the trends we see as we prepare these new Strategic Directions can be traced back at least to the start of the Millennium, and in some cases, much earlier; and all continue to shape our world.

- Global corporate power has increased at the expense of national sovereignty. The proliferation of inequitable bilateral trade agreements coupled with regulations protecting intellectual property rights and conditionality demanding privatisation are fast eroding the ability of national governments to protect their citizens from economic exploitation or to provide the public services on which the majority of the world’s people depend.

- According to the Millennium Project, over one billion people (30% of the world’s adults) are connected to the Internet. The digital gap continues to close, which could democratise the fast-approaching knowledge economy. But according to Freedom House, only 17% of the world’s people have access to free media. It should also be noted that the second Iraq War was launched despite the widespread opposition of many millions of people. While the growth and penetration of electronic communication infrastructure is clearly an asset for civil society, it is also fostering an individualistic culture of trivialisation and instant celebrity.

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9 Glasius, Kaldor, Anheier, *ibid.*
10 Jeremy Seabrook, The Guardian (London), 16 November 2006
12 CIVICUS 2001, *ibid*
Since 2001, two other major issues of concern have joined the list. Most of the world’s scientists and a growing number of politicians acknowledge the seriousness of climate change and the need for urgent action by governments, corporations and citizens. The last five years have also seen the continuation and spread of violent conflict in the Horn of Africa, Central Africa, Afghanistan and the Middle East and an increase in terrorist attacks in Europe, North Africa, Asia and the United States. Recent times have also witnessed a rise in religious fundamentalism, which is curtailing women’s rights.
Annex II
Guidance on Operational Implications of the CIVICUS Strategic Directions

This document captures the discussion of the CIVICUS Board with regard to operational implications of the proposed Strategic Directions. It is the intention of the CIVICUS Board to guide the Secretary General and the management with this document which will be considered in the development of the organisational annual Operational Plans and other strategies.

For all of the operational implications mentioned below, the Secretary General and the management will craft a phase-in plan, so that the key measures will be introduced without delay but at the same time without disruption to the existing grant commitments and programmatic responsibilities.

The broad guidance below is separated into the areas of a) organisational structure and b) programme structure of CIVICUS.

A. Organisational Structure

The new Strategic Directions will have broad implications for the organisational structure of CIVICUS. The CIVICUS Board anticipates that they will be manifest in governance, accountability, membership, funding, human resources, communications, and languages.

Governance
• In addition to its formal responsibilities and duties, the Board will take ownership of the Strategic Directions and hold the Secretary General and the management accountable for operationalising and implementing the Directions.
• The CIVICUS Board will continue to be elected by the membership. Elections will be staggered so as to ensure continuity of the Board.
• While members may be requested for input from time to time, the policies and programmes of CIVICUS are determined by the Board of Directors, which is elected by the members to reflect the diversity of the membership.
• The Board Nominations Committee should take account of the programmatic implications of the Strategic Directions and seek new Board members with relevant knowledge and expertise. The Board can also co-opt two additional people.
• Thought should be given to the functions of the committees of the Board and the inclusion of external advisors in the committees.

Accountability
• An organisation which projects itself as a champion of civil society legitimacy, transparency and accountability must itself set appropriate standards of excellence. Developing the monitoring and evaluation capacities and systems within CIVICUS should be a priority task for the first year of the Strategic Directions.

Membership
• CIVICUS should continue to be a membership-based organisation. The membership base adds legitimacy to CIVICUS’ work – especially to its advocacy and campaigning.
• CIVICUS encourages membership from all CSOs and individuals who explicitly support and sign up to its principles and values as expressed in the mission statement. CIVICUS will not primarily focus on the provision of services to its members.
• CIVICUS will actively recruit CSOs and networks willing and able to contribute to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Strategic Directions. Membership recruitment will be aligned with the new Strategic Directions and will work to increase membership in regions and among sectors that are currently under-represented.

Funding

June 2008
• The idea of encouraging like-minded donors to join in forming a consortium to provide flexible, general purpose funding to CIVICUS should be explored. Programme-based financing would probably continue in parallel to consortium funding, but the objective should be to ensure ever increasing amounts of flexible funding are available for the organisation.
• Decisions also need to be taken, in discussion with the CIVICUS Board Finance and Audit Committee, about the recommendations made by the Financial Sustainability Task Force.

Human Resources
• The focus on the Strategic Directions and related programmes will encourage and facilitate greater internal coherence between staff functions.

Communications
• In the communications area, a distinction needs to be made between corporate communication, whose function is to protect and promote CIVICUS’ name reputation, and programme communication, which is an integral tool for achieving the objectives of the programmes.

Languages
• The Anglophone dominance of civil society discourse is one of the factors contributing to the accusations of exclusiveness and elitism against conventional, mainstream civil society. While it is important for CIVICUS to retain its global focus and identity, there is also a need to open itself and its constituencies to a wider range of voices. For example, there could be an Arabic-language focus on programme developments in the Middle East; output of wider interest from this programme could then be translated into English and other languages for global dissemination.

B. Programme Structure

In order for implementation of the Strategic Directions to be as cohesive, effective and strategic as possible, current programmatic activities may need to be restructured and refocused. An important implication of the new Strategic Directions for CIVICUS’ programmes would be the strengthening and integration of the organisation’s capacities in the areas of:
• Knowledge generation and analysis
• Communication
• Convening and multi-stakeholder engagement
• Advocacy

Advocacy and convening capacities would need to be strengthened across the organisation, since these aspects of CIVICUS’ work are currently heavily dependent on the Secretary General’s office.

If CIVICUS is to take up a particular issue for campaigning and advocacy, the topic needs to be made concrete and specific in order to be communicable and manageable. This can be achieved by identifying specific “niches” which encapsulate and illustrate the essence of the broader campaign issue.

Respondents to the questionnaire sent to members, Board, staff and other stakeholders in the preparation of these Strategic Directions emphasised the need for CIVICUS to “do fewer things but better”. However, balancing the need to maintain a global vision against the need for CIVICUS to sharpen its focus and maintain sustained concentration on fewer but larger-scale priorities is easier said than done. CIVICUS has to work at several levels of intensity.

At the least intensive level, but most extensive, CIVICUS scans the whole world of civil society and responds (selectively) by sharing information – for example through e-CIVICUS, the CSW Newsletter or other means. This level of scanning and response clearly needs to be maintained.
At a more intensive level, CIVICUS works alone or with others to take up issues and engage in advocacy on particular countries. As CIVICUS lacks any significant monitoring and evaluation capacity, it is not possible to judge the effectiveness or efficiency of these interventions. Given the limited capacity of staff involved and the over-burdening of the Secretary General’s agenda, tighter criteria and structure, as well as additional resources, need to be applied to this level of activity.

Clear criteria also need to be developed for the selection of sustained campaigns and interventions. Such criteria should include:

- **Relevance and Significance**: to what extent will intervening on the issue advance work on any of the “challenges to civil society”? Is there a clear civil-society pay-off?
- **Feasibility**: are the objectives and indicators clear and how likely is the intervention to succeed?
- **Priority within the Operational Plan**: will the intervention support or disrupt other priority work already included in the annual Operational Plan approved by the Board?
- **Fit**: is CIVICUS the most suitable organisation to undertake this intervention and, if so, should it be done alone or in alliance? Does the issue and the proposed intervention have traction with members, potential allies and partners?
- **Resources**: are the human, linguistic and financial resources available?
- **Added Value**: are other organisations active in this area, and what would CIVICUS’ intervention add?
- **Demand**: have diverse constituencies been consulted and is there consensus that CIVICUS should become involved?

If all the criteria can be met, decisions on new interventions should be within the mandate of the Secretary General and the management. However, if the situation calls for interventions that are not anticipated in the Operational Plan and budget as approved by the Board and which would require additional human and financial resources, the proposed intervention should be presented to the CIVICUS Board Executive Committee for approval, in the form of a detailed and costed project proposal.

Such a process may sound overly bureaucratic but observations from internal and external stakeholders strongly suggest that CIVICUS needs this kind of protection from its own best intentions.