



MESSAGE FROM THE CIVICUS SECRETARY-GENERAL

Once again, this year's State of Civil Society Report makes for bittersweet reading. The following pages are full of glimpses into the amazing work being done by our colleagues in civil society to address some of the most urgent global issues. From humanitarian response to long-term peacebuilding, civil society is often at the frontline of the world's challenges. But the pages are also full of worries, especially when it comes to the political space in which civil society operates and vital resourcing for its activities.

When I talk to CIVICUS members about their concerns, civic space and resource base almost always feature, regardless of where they come from (we have members in 165 countries) or how big they are (from the biggest international NGOs to the smallest community organisation). This year's report is aimed not just at mapping the nature of the challenges in these two areas but also acts as a guide for our members – and others – to come up with their own responses. You will see that we have made actionable recommendations after each section.

DEFENDING OUR SPACE

The scale of the threats to civic space should not be underestimated. CIVICUS' analysis suggests that, in 2014, there were serious threats to civic freedoms in at least 96 countries around the world. If you take these countries' populations into account, this means that 67 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guaranteed our freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly and association, 6 out of 7 humans live in countries where these freedoms were under threat. And even the most mature democracies are not exempt. In the United States, there were heavy-handed responses to protest, environmental groups in Australia and Canada have come under attack from their governments, and, as I write, friends in Indian civil society are trying to resist a cynical raft of measures to shut them up and shut them down.

For me, these developments suggest a renewed period of contestation about the acceptable bounds of civil society, the latest manifestation of the battle to protect citizens against state power. It would be foolish to see this phenomenon as somehow about the 'West versus the rest' or indeed that civic space can be saved or funded from outside. Instead, every polity needs to arrive at its own settlement about the role of and acceptable limits on civil society. And all of us who believe in a healthy, independent civil society have a responsibility to make our case again and again, whether it is in stressing the universal principles around civic freedoms or rolling up our sleeves to win hearts and minds in the political debate. It is our space; we need to reclaim it.

As the global civil society alliance, CIVICUS is busy working on a series of measures to defend our space. On the research front, we are developing new tools – notably the Civic Space Monitor and Civic Pulse – that will generate new, real-time information on trends affecting civil society. We hope that these will be ready to go live when next year's State of Civil Society Report is published. On the international front, we are working within a number of mechanisms – from the Community of Democracies to the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation – to make sure that global commitments to protect the enabling environment for civil society are adhered to. CIVICUS is also involved in the design of a series of new regional hubs aimed at supporting civil society. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we are working with our own members to build solidarity across civil society. Only by standing together – regardless of whether we are service deliverers or change-seekers – can we be effective in the contestation for civic space.

LESS MONEY, MORE PROBLEMS

This year's thematic essays make for required, albeit sometimes depressing reading, for anyone interested in the future of civil society. You will not find a fundraising toolkit with all the answers, rather, taken together, these essays paint a strategic and provocative picture of the challenges *and* opportunities around resources. If you're pressed for time, have a look at the CIVICUS essay and then dig deeper into the guest essays.

As for me, I drew one scary conclusion: those of us who work in change-seeking civil society organisations, especially in the Global South, are facing a triple whammy.

First, many of our donors are suffering from 'logframitis'. They want us to package the long-term and systemic change we are passionate about into neat little fundable projects that fit their programme and timelines. They work through complex chains of 'fundermediaries' who channel ever-smaller chunks of money with ever-larger relative reporting requirements. Many in civil society are good at playing this game but many of the most innovative, most ambitious initiatives rarely involve project proposals.

Secondly, in many countries civil society is caught between measures that make it more difficult to access foreign funding and the fact that domestic funders are not yet able or willing to support change-seeking activities. And the situation is most acute in countries that have apparently 'graduated' into middle income status and have therefore fallen off donors' priority lists.

Thirdly, despite all the promises about 'funding the front line' and investing in the capacity of Southern civil society, very little resource actually reaches those who need it most and, arguably, could spend it best. Out of the \$166 billion spent on official development assistance (ODA or aid) by OECD-DAC countries in 2013, only 13%, or \$21 billion, went to civil society. Although current data is hard to obtain, the latest estimate from 2011 suggests that Southern-based NGOs get only around 1% of all aid directly. The rest of civil society's allocation goes to Northern organisations that pass on an unknown share of their funding to CSOs based in developing countries. The picture is even bleaker when it comes to humanitarian activities, where the proportion of funds that go to local civil society organisations has actually fallen from 0.4% in 2012 to 0.2% in 2014. Private funders are generally better but I would argue that they are nowhere near where they should be in terms of funding the frontline.

GO BRAVE

What is also striking in this year's report are the links between civic space and resourcing trends. It is not surprising that domestic civil society does not have the capacity to defend itself against attacks on civic space if donors have systematically underinvested in local organisations. In my experience, the situation is particularly woeful when it comes to support for civil society platforms, the 'scaffolding' that helps strengthen civil society's collective voice when it is threatened.

At CIVICUS, we will work with donors where we can to encourage them to be braver; to curb the excesses of what one of our contributors calls the 'tyranny of donors'. One practical way we will do this is to add a new category for 'brave philanthropy' to our Nelson Mandela - Graça Machel Innovation Awards. From next year, our members will be able to nominate examples of donors who have been prepared to take risks to support civil society, particularly in the Global South. We will then take the nominees to a vote and announce the winners at our next International Civil Society Week, to be held in Bogota, Colombia in April 2016.

The onus is also on civil society to change some of its behaviours, from weaning ourselves off grant/contract funding, to exploring new ways of raising resources, to designing activities that do not need financial support. We also need to be braver when it comes to speaking out when others in civil society are targeted. Many of us have been too busy filling out forms that we have failed to notice that the science of delivery is killing the art of social transformation. Ultimately, we also need to be brave enough to go beyond our log frames and work plans, to engage in the politics of social transformation and protecting our space.

Throughout this report you will see examples of civil society challenging political and economic elites, of people making their own politics. I hope you are inspired to think about how we in civil society can work together to protect our civic space and create a more sustainable resource base.

Dr Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah