

CIVICUS Strategic Plan 2017-2022: Mid-Term Review

December 2019



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1. Executive Summary

This review, at the half way point of CIVICUS 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, assesses CIVICUS' progress and performance so far. The **methodology** is based on:

- Review of 26 documents
- Conversations with 11 interviewees and 9 focus group participants
- Results of the 2019 Annual Constituency Survey with CIVICUS Alliance members
- A joint action workshop with 100 members, staff and Board, and observation of staff-led Impact Reflection sessions
- Analysis using a four-tier scoring system, from Green to Green-Amber to Amber-Red to Red

Since CIVICUS developed its 2017-2022 Strategic Plan in 2016, the **external context** has changed:

- Attacks on civic space were as severe as ever, but changed in nature
- People power increasingly bypassed traditional CSOs
- The fight for civic freedoms became ever more digital
- The world's attention turned from development to people power

The **internal context** changed too, with rapid growth and a leadership transition also affecting CIVICUS' ability to deliver its strategy.

How successful has CIVICUS been in delivering its strategy?

In **Goal 1 (defending civic freedoms and democratic values)**, CIVICUS is awarded a **Green** score overall.

Strengths:

- CIVICUS is producing world class research
- CIVICUS is now a field leader on civic freedoms
- CIVICUS is contributing to real change

Opportunities for improvement:

- Sharpen the influencing approach
- Diagnose what will happen - not just what already has
- Work with media better
- Pivot towards defending digital civic freedoms

In **Goal 2 (strengthening the power of people to mobilise, organise and take action)**, CIVICUS is awarded a **Green-Amber** score overall.

Strengths:

- CIVICUS staff are passionate about putting members first
- International Civil Society Week is CIVICUS' biggest convening asset
- Youth engagement points the way to how CIVICUS can broaden its appeal
- Commitment to strengthening the power of people to organise

Opportunities for improvement:

- Ensure people power does not bypass CIVICUS
- Build alliances, not just a membership offer

In **Goal 3 (empowering a more accountable, effective and innovative civil society)**, CIVICUS is awarded a **Green-Amber** score overall.

Strengths:

- Testing and innovation
- Building effective national platforms
- Impact and accountability

Opportunities for improvement:

- Learn and act on lessons from testing and innovation
- Do more to build trust in civil society
- Resolve the tension between solidarity and sub-granting

In **Goal 4 (building a fit-for-purpose organisation)**, CIVICUS is awarded an **Amber-Red** score overall.

Strengths:

- CIVICUS has successfully managed rapid growth (and change)
- The foundations seem to be heading in the right direction
- Dedicated and committed people

Opportunities for improvement:

- Put stronger operational foundations in place
- Strengthen the second tier of management
- Maintain and strengthen organisational 'line of sight'

Is CIVICUS' approach effective?

The report identifies **five themes** cutting across the review, with corresponding interdependent **priorities and recommendations**:

- **Coherence:** Projects are a risk, and can inhibit coherence, focus and agility.
- **Systems:** It is time for CIVICUS to strengthen systems: structure can set staff free.
- **Leadership:** CIVICUS must unlock leadership everywhere - culture eats strategy for breakfast.
- **Simplicity:** CIVICUS' work requires the art of politics and persuasion - it should simplify, not complicate.
- **Metamorphosis:** CIVICUS is entering a new era of people power – so it should think outside its organisational configuration

Finally, the report sets out **eighteen specific recommendations** for consideration by management. Nine of the **most 'critical'** recommendations are to:

- Articulate CIVICUS' programmatic model for change and produce a manual to help future design
- Place 'cap' on the number of projects with their own identities and ring-fenced funding
- Prioritise strengthening of people power and working with new actors, rather than serving membership
- Ensure sufficient skilled human resources in place dedicated to building alliances
- Invest substantially in a stronger communications function
- Invest time in strengthening the second tier of management
- Develop internally one consolidated, ambitious plan for operational improvements during the remainder of the strategic period
- Embed a strong culture of simplification and "do less better"
- Take action to maintain a strong line of sight between members, staff, and Board.

2. Introduction

2.1 About the Review

In the year before 2017, CIVICUS Secretariat ran an extensive consultation and engagement process with members to develop the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. The process continued efforts to better engage members in owning, delivering and monitoring CIVICUS' strategy. This Review, at the midway point in that five year process, was commissioned by CIVICUS in July 2019. The Review was carried out by Mark Nowotny, acting independently as a consultant, between August and November 2019. A CIVICUS staff Task Team¹ acted throughout as a reference point and support to ensure a rigorous process.

The Review covers the first two years of CIVICUS' 2017-2022 Strategic Plan, from July 2017 until June 2019. Its Terms of Reference established that the Review's objectives were to:

- Test assumptions and provide recommendations for strategic decision-making on the implementation of the final 2 years of CIVICUS' Strategic Plan;
- Provide accountability to CIVICUS' stakeholders in terms of progress against the Strategic Plan;
- Support the ongoing learning and development of the CIVICUS alliance.

A priority of the Review, in line with CIVICUS' Accountability Framework commitment to 'dynamic accountability', was to engage CIVICUS stakeholders and staff actively throughout in developing subsequent actions to strengthen CIVICUS' impact in the remaining two years of the Strategic Plan. The Terms of Reference outlined that this Review report should be "light", and the Review serves as a snapshot of CIVICUS' strategic delivery rather than a comprehensive evaluation. This Review is structured around a number of agreed Key Review Questions, highlighted at the beginning of each section of this report.

In line with the Strategic Plan, this Review primarily assesses the strategy performance of the CIVICUS secretariat rather than the wider alliance. Many CIVICUS activities are carried out by and through members of the alliance, supported by the secretariat. However, although the contributions of the membership alliance therefore inform much of the analysis, the Review's assessments and scores, which are based on the evidence and performance data available, relate to the performance of the secretariat. Wherever this Review mentions the term "CIVICUS", it should therefore be understood to refer to the secretariat and, to a lesser extent, the activities of members over which the secretariat has strong influence.

The views and analysis contained within this report are those of the author as an independent consultant, and do not represent CIVICUS'.

¹ Cathryn Archibald, Lysa John, Tamryn-Lee Fourie, Merle Rutz, Amy Taylor and Jerusha Govender (external advisor).

2.2 Approach

The Review followed a three-phase approach:

- **Phase 1: Research - August-September.** After project inception, an extensive Desk Review was carried out, reviewing 24 internal and external documents provided by CIVICUS related to the organisation's implementation of its 2017-2022 strategy. A full list is included in Annex 7.2. Stakeholder research was carried out according to an agreed plan, including eleven one-to-one semi-structured interviews (thirty minutes each) and three semi-structured Focus Group Discussions (sixty minutes each) with a further nine participants. Stakeholders were selected in consultation with CIVICUS both for their variety of perspectives and, where possible, demographic balance, but were not intended to be representative as a sample of CIVICUS stakeholders. A full list is included in Annex 7.3. Further one to one interviews were also carried out with members of the Senior Leadership Team.
- **Phase 2: Joint Analysis – October.** Preliminary findings were presented to the Mid-Term Strategy Review Task Team, and were shared with CIVICUS' Senior Leadership Team. Ahead of a Strategy and Action Workshop, preliminary findings were shared with all participants and a staff online Workplace poll was carried out. The poll findings shaped the agenda and action areas to be discussed at the workshop.
- **Phase 3: Joint Action Planning – November.** A joint full day workshop was convened in Johannesburg on 6 November 2019, bringing together 100 CIVICUS staff, Board members, and members. Participants worked together to develop, discuss and identify possible actions based on the findings of the Review. These are summarised in Annex 7.4, and the thinking and content is reflected in some places in the recommendations contained within this report.

3. Changes in Context

3.1 External

Key Review Question:

“What key changes to the external context impacted CIVICUS’ ability to achieve its objectives?”

CIVICUS began formulating its 2017-2022 Strategic Plan from mid-2016. In the three years since the start of the Strategic Plan’s formulation, four key external trends have emerged or intensified.

1. Attacks on civic space were as severe as ever, but qualitatively different.

According to findings from the CIVICUS Monitor in CIVICUS’ People Power Under Attack 2019² report, just 3% of the world’s population live in countries that are properly respecting freedom of association, assembly and expression. The data shows that there are 24 countries with closed civic space, 38 countries with repressed space and 49 with obstructed space. Just 43 countries receive an open rating, and 42 countries are rated narrowed. These trends are certainly not new since the 2016/2017 period in which the current Strategic Priorities were developed. And on the other side in a number of countries civic space has opened up. Nevertheless, the trend may be worsening.

“Activists aren’t talking about how to defend civic space, but just about how to stay in the game and stop friends going to jail. It’s like they’ve taken a couple of uppercuts to the jaw”.

Interviewees and CIVICUS’ own State of Civil Society Report outline two perhaps more significant shifts. First, a new cohort of populist, nationalist “strong men” actively hostile towards civil society has emerged – with Trump, Bolsonaro, Johnson, and Duterte joining Putin, Modi, Orban and others. With global connections, evidence of

deliberate coordination, and a shared tactical playbook, this surge on the right arguably represents a qualitatively different threat to civil society around the world from that which existed prior to mid-2016.

Second, while attacks on civil society at country level are not new, since mid-2016 the global normative framework that once protected civic space has itself increasingly come under sustained attack. Anti-rights groups have had success in undermining international human rights standards, but key countries, such as the USA and UK, that once vocally defended civic space, have also stopped doing so. In turn, the relevance of global fora and mechanisms such as the UN have continued to be called into question.

“What has changed is how [authoritarian populist regimes] are now successfully shifting the normative framework. They are winning the argument on saying human rights are not important...The fundamental values of the French Revolution are being challenged for the first time since 1950. That’s a huge disruption.”

² p. 4, ‘People Power Under Attack 2019’: <https://civicus.contentfiles.net/media/assets/file/GlobalReport2019.pdf> New data and reports are released here: <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/reports-publications>.

How did this impact on CIVICUS' ability to achieve its objectives?

“Members want networks to do more to predict and prepare about what's coming up.”

For CIVICUS, this trend meant that from 2017 to 2019 its mission became as relevant as ever. Indeed, CIVICUS was well positioned to ride a wave of global concern about civic space, with diagnostic tools on the state of civic space in particular in high demand and donors willing to intervene and fund the protection of civic space. But expectations and demands rose too: first, for diagnostic tools that can increasingly predict, rather than only retrospectively describe, changes to civil society and; second, for proven actions and interventions to actually respond to these changes, rather than simply to diagnose them. The surge of a powerful and globally coordinated nationalist, populism also begs an obvious question: if opponents of civil society hold a new kind of power and are winning the argument in places, then can groups like CIVICUS raise their own game and match them? And if not, what might happen to civic space?

2. People power largely bypassed traditional CSOs.

CIVICUS has long sought to work more with new actors, and this was one central proposition of the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. It may not be new or surprising that a disconnect exists between more traditional, organised Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) on the one hand and, on the other, new social justice movements and groups. But in the past two years there have been further shifts. CIVICUS' 2018 State of Civil Society Report noted, amid ever-growing polarisation in 2017 in many countries, the emergence of a new popular-based resistance³. CIVICUS' 2019 State of Civil Society Report in turn charted the rise of popular street protests in 2018 in numerous countries, usually in response to everyday issues such as food prices, corruption, or housing⁴. In 2019, the global success of Extinction Rebellion and the school climate strikes were

“Bridging the gaps [between different types of civil society] is more important than ever. So for CIVICUS, how do you support and nurture the exciting parts of citizen action?”

“There is a deepening mistrust of the establishment, but [at the same time] progressive voices are aligning themselves with the liberal establishment and repeating their talking points.”

powerful reminders that where change is happening, it seems often to come from unexpected places. In turn, this posed significant questions to established civil society organisations: as one interviewee implied, rather than being agents for change, were they too often finding themselves defending the status quo?

³ P. 16, CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report 2018 Overview. https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2018/socs-2018-overview_top-ten-trends.pdf

⁴ Pp 22 – 60, CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report 2019. https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2019/socs2019-year-in-review-part1_everyday-issues-bring-people-to-the-streets.pdf

How did this impact on CIVICUS' ability to achieve its objectives?

This trend was hardly new or unexpected. In its own analysis, CIVICUS has documented for many years the changing nature of citizen action in this direction. However, this did not automatically translate into meaning that CIVICUS was organisationally or operationally well set up to strengthen people power. Regardless, the ongoing importance of new civil society actors made it increasingly important that CIVICUS did make significant strides forward in bridging and building alliances between different kinds of citizen action and, specifically within the context of its Strategic Plan, in achieving change under Goal 2.

“We are facing this security crackdown – from mass surveillance to Russian trolling networks hacking climate activists.”

3. The fight for civic freedoms became ever more digital.

CIVICUS' State of Civil Society Report 2019⁵ documents through multiple instances how in the past year civic freedom was both expressed and repressed online. Several interviewees and focus group participants highlighted that the contested frontline of the fight for civic freedom can increasingly be found in digital spaces, whether in efforts to organise or shut down popular protest, in efforts to counter or spread misinformation, or in efforts to encourage or restrict new forms of rapid, fluid organising. Just months into CIVICUS' new strategy, the Cambridge Analytica and Facebook privacy scandals asked fundamental new questions too on the role played by big technology companies in defending or undermining civic freedoms.

“Digital civic space is crucial and has become more central”.

How did this impact on CIVICUS' ability to achieve its objectives?

Digital civic space must be protected with the right laws, policies, frameworks and accountability mechanisms, but it is equally important that activists – whether operating primarily online or offline – are supported and equipped with the right skills, practical tools, and security to speak out and act. For an organisation with CIVICUS' mission and experience in supporting activists practically, this poses important questions for how they set about each of the four goal areas.

4. Development Arrested: a new era of people power

When CIVICUS formulated its Strategic Plan in 2016, new Sustainable Development Goals had just been signed amid much fanfare, underpinned by what looked like considerable political will from world leaders. Three years on, that picture has changed. Real concerns exist that the world is off track to deliver against many of the global promises, meaning a crucial 'decade of

“The development framework has been mutilated. Processes like the Sustainable Development Goals are closed to marginalised peoples' movements. They are implementing *their* framework for development.”

⁵ <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2019>

“CIVICUS emerged in the 1990s as a consequence of the new democracy and the end of the Cold War. Then, there was a period of consolidation, of liberal governments, of the Millennium Development Goals – its second phase. Now, it’s time for something completely different. Sometimes I wonder: what are we doing?”

delivery’ starting in 2020 will require new political will in the face of countless crises competing for attention.

Perhaps more fundamentally, crises in inequality and climate – although long in the making - have punctured the public consciousness in new ways and raised fundamental questions about whether the dominant economic development model is even taking people and planet in the right direction. In early 2018, sexual exploitation and abuse allegations also rocked trust in the aid sector, further undermining a key pillar of the sustainable development landscape.

How did this impact on CIVICUS’ ability to achieve its objectives?

For CIVICUS, with numerous members and partners working in sustainable development and as an incubator to the Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD) platform, these changes to the external context have required constant agility and adaptation in how it supports and champions civil society.

Yet these changes also raise questions about the longer-term identity of CIVICUS. CIVICUS’ identity, through from its emergence in the early 1990s until the early 2000s, could be seen initially as being tied to a post-Cold War ‘Era of Democratisation’. In the early 2000s, CIVICUS moved its headquarters to Johannesburg and secured new funding from donors concerned with civil society partnership in delivering the Millennium Development Goals, arguably tying its identity closer to an ‘Era of Development’.

Yet with a fast-changing context – surges in nationalist, authoritarian populism; popular resistance led by new civil society actors; and new question marks about the direction of development – it may be time for CIVICUS to consider if it is entering a new ‘Era’. That Era could be one of struggle between populists and civil society to define and own ‘People Power’. In any case, CIVICUS’ own identity may need to once again evolve so that it can stand alongside the civil society of 2020 and beyond.

3.2 Internal

Since CIVICUS’ 2017-2022 Strategic Plan was developed in 2016, a number of significant changes have taken place within CIVICUS. Many of these are discussed in later sections of this Review. However, two changes in particular shaped the entire context for CIVICUS, affecting the organisation’s ability to achieve its strategic objectives.

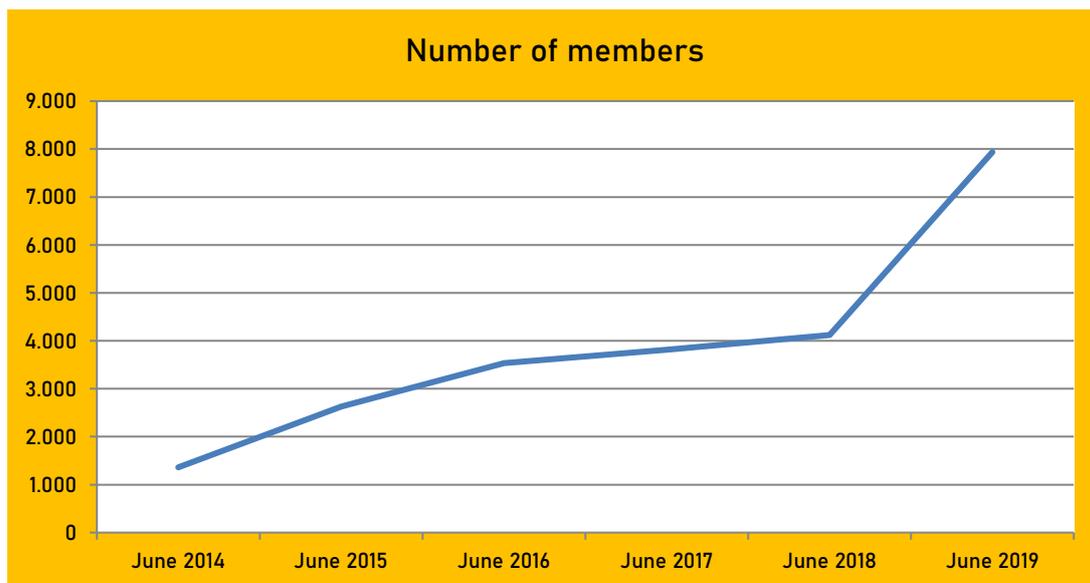
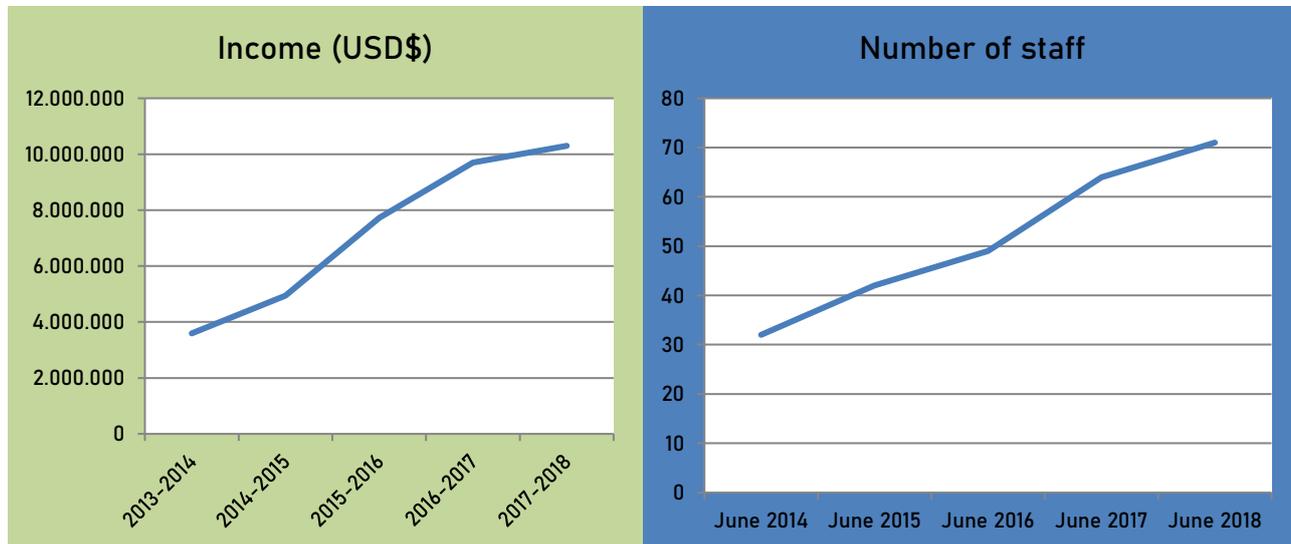
1. Leadership transition

In December 2018, Danny Sriskandarajah left the post of CIVICUS Secretary General in order to take up the role of CEO at Oxfam GB. The move followed six years in which he had transformed the organisation and overseen significant growth and innovation. Lysa John joined as CIVICUS’ new Secretary General in January 2019. As with any leadership transition, this meant that there was a period of change across several months (especially in the second year of the Strategic Plan’s delivery). At a governance level too, long-serving Board Chair Anabel Cruz ended her term, being

replaced by incoming Board Chair Julia Sanchez, and there was continuing turnover with the election of a new Board in 2019.

2. Rapid growth

CIVICUS has experienced dramatic growth in the past five years by any standard indicators, including in income, membership numbers, and staff numbers⁶.



⁶ Income, staff and member numbers are all those publicly reported in CIVICUS' Annual Reports and annual Accountable Now Accountability Reports, published on the CIVICUS and Accountable Now websites. Member numbers are totals and include both voting and non-voting/associate individuals and organisations. Data for 2019 is not available publicly yet for Income and Staff numbers. 2019 member numbers are based on latest internal data. Final numbers in all three categories are likely to have grown again for 2019.

4. Findings

4.1 Background

This section of the report explores to what extent CIVICUS has so far made progress in achieving the Strategic Goals set out in its Strategic Plan, and why. It is guided throughout by the Key Review Questions below.

The section is structured in two parts: first, the report provides important **background**. Second, the report assesses **progress against each of the commitments made under each Strategic Goal**. It also provides reflections on CIVICUS' Critical Learning Questions, which are questions which CIVICUS chooses to answer and explore regularly as an organisation as part of their commitment to organisational learning within CIVICUS' Accountability Framework⁷.

Key Review Questions:

- *To what extent have we achieved our Strategic Goals so far? What is the evidence for the outcomes we have achieved?*
- *What have been our successes, challenges, gaps and missed opportunities?*
- *What have been the unexpected results of our work, both positive and negative?*
- *To what extent have our approaches / working modalities allowed us to timely capture and be agile in response to changing context?*
- *What were our accelerators and blockages, and why?*

CIVICUS 2017-2022 Strategic Plan: the major shifts

In terms of the content and focus of CIVICUS' work, the [2017-2022 Strategic Plan](#) shares much in common with CIVICUS' previous strategy, the [2012-2017 Strategic Priorities](#). However, in each of CIVICUS' four goal areas, the current Strategic Plan clearly articulates a compelling end objective, whereas the previous strategy's three priority areas focused primarily on articulating what CIVICUS would do and how it would do it. Within each goal area, the Strategic Plan outlines a number of impressive changes that CIVICUS would expect to see by 2022. Taken together, they act as a formidable rallying call to global civil society.

The CIVICUS Board is responsible for setting strategy at CIVICUS, and oversaw the development of the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. According to former Secretary General Danny Sriskandarajah, who worked with the Board to develop the Plan, what was most significant about the new Strategic Plan

⁷ http://www.civicus.org/documents/CIVICUS-Accountability-Framework_updated_Nov2018.pdf

was an “innovative and exciting process that engaged members... ..the exciting bit was coming up with relevance and focus... ..We set ourselves the challenge of coming up with something that was sharper, and easier to communicate, about what we were trying to do”.

Throughout conversations with staff members and organisation-wide Impact Reflection Sessions, further views emerged about what is new and significant in CIVICUS’ 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. This included a major new commitment under Goal 2 to work with activists, movements, the broader spectrum of citizen participation (beyond organisations) and the forces of people power. It also included a new focus under Goal 3 on innovation and accountability, and the testing of tools.

Nevertheless, it was significant that out of the 20 external stakeholders taking part in interviews or focus groups for this Review, just one chose to highlight what they felt was new about the Strategic Plan. Despite some significant actual shifts in 2017 in the focus of CIVICUS’ work, it may be that they are not as widely or well understood among CIVICUS’ external stakeholders as CIVICUS would like. An evaluation by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)⁸ in January 2018, just six months into the strategy period, suggested that the new features of the strategy did not necessarily stand out as clearly as they could have. Since then, the management has undertaken significant effort to shift the structure, programming and ways of working to align it with the new strategy (especially in the first year), and it may be that changes to how CIVICUS operates are now becoming more visible.

Availability of evidence about outcomes and impact

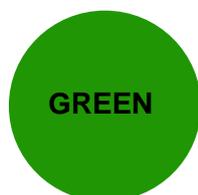
In recent months, CIVICUS has undertaken a stream of work to significantly improve the quality of its data- and evidence-gathering about what it does. CIVICUS’ new Developmental Evaluation Framework outlines a sophisticated and tiered approach to improving how different initiatives, projects and teams within the organisation improve the data they are collecting. The use across the organisation of another new monitoring and evaluation tool, called DevResults, is already starting to provide a decent picture of important activity and performance data. A high capacity Impact & Accountability team is focused in the future to stepping up the use of new tools and approaches, such as Outcome Harvesting (since June 2017), to capture better quality information and evidence about CIVICUS’ impact and outcomes. Nevertheless, it is an important caveat that, for the purposes of this review, at the organisational level evidence and data on CIVICUS’ impact and outcomes remains limited. It is therefore not possible to provide a rigorous, quantitative assessment of progress against the changes outlined under each Goal in the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. As a result, the following assessment is based on the evidence available, which includes stakeholder research and desk review undertaken for this review.

⁸ p. 13, SIDA Evaluation of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, 2018.
https://www.sida.se/contentassets/7abcc4b207e543fc87ccf5bff5a7c931/de2018_4_62129en.pdf

Scoring criteria

This review awards an overall score to each of the four Goal areas.

The scoring criteria, outlined below, are similar to and derived from those used by the UK Independent Commission for Aid Impact.



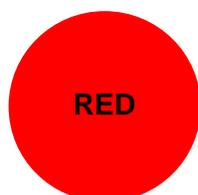
Strong achievement and on track. An area of good practice.



Decent achievement and on track in most areas, but room for improvement in others. An area in which CIVICUS is largely headed in the right direction.



Limited achievement and not on track in most areas, but with positive elements in others. An area in which CIVICUS needs to do more.



Poor achievement and off track across most areas, with urgent remedial action required in others. An area in which CIVICUS must take urgent action.

4.2 Progress against CIVICUS' Strategic Plan

Goal 1: Defending civic freedoms and democratic values

What CIVICUS' Strategic Plan said

STRATEGIC GOAL 1:

DEFENDING CIVIC FREEDOMS AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES

We will continue to defend the fundamental civic freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression in all countries, particularly when they are under threat. We will do this by providing activists and organisations targeted for their activism or operating in oppressive contexts with emergency and sustained support. We will track civic space trends globally and seek to better understand when, how and why crackdowns on civic space occur and the most effective ways to respond. We will incubate and share ways of creating early warning systems for threats to civic space as well as tools for supporting the safety of activists under attack. We will work to ensure that civic freedoms and civil society rights get the attention they deserve on national, regional and global agendas.

We will increase momentum in civil society to safeguard democratic values and strengthen participatory democracy in form and substance from the local to the global level. We will work to ensure that people have the opportunities and tools for full, effective and creative participation in the decision-making processes that affect them.

By 2022, there will be an improvement in civic space in countries where civic freedoms are under attack, improved recognition and protection of civic freedoms at the national, regional and global levels, and improved participation of people and organisations in democratic processes at all levels.

Changes we will seek to contribute to include:

- More people living in societies where civic space is open and fewer people living in societies where civic space is closed.
- Increased recognition of the importance of civic freedoms across the world, including in national parliaments and intergovernmental institutions.
- More and better quality participation by people in democratic and governance processes at all levels.
- Improved legal and regulatory environments for civil society in more countries.

CIVICUS' Critical Learning Questions for Goal 1:

- *Is CIVICUS' research, advocacy and analysis influencing perceptions among global publics and key stakeholders to spur change in policy and practice regarding civic freedoms and democratic values? Is this creating greater global solidarity among civil society?*
- *Which CIVICUS lobbying and engagement efforts are positively impacting attitudes and behaviours by decision-makers and activists to better protect civic freedoms and democratic values, and why?*
- *Are CIVICUS' membership and networks as well as individual activists satisfied with the level and quality of support (i.e. quality of partner, not quality of research) provided when civic freedoms and democratic values are threatened?*

Strengths

A. CIVICUS is producing world class research

In the first half of its strategy, CIVICUS has produced world class research on civic space, and been highly successful in using it to frame and shape the narrative and debate about civic freedoms globally. Stakeholders, including governments and decision-makers, regularly reference the research produced, and place high value on the role it is playing. CIVICUS has rightly become well known for its CIVICUS Monitor and State of Civil Society reports, which achieve noticeably greater “cut through” and recognition than other CIVICUS products.

“The State of Civil Society reports and CIVICUS Monitor are go-to bits of analysis that donors and funders are looking at to try and understand what’s going on.”

“CIVICUS has *so many* initiatives going on. It’s quite difficult from the outside to understand the core of its mission and its action. But CIVICUS Monitor is a key activity that everyone is picking up.”

B. CIVICUS is now a field leader on civic freedoms

Beyond its research, CIVICUS has established itself as a field leader on defending civic freedoms and civic space around the world. In the first two years of the strategy, the alliance grew and initiated new initiatives to respond practically to global attacks on civic freedoms and democratic values. These include, for example, the [Vuka!](#) Coalition, the [SPEAK!](#) campaign, and [Crisis Response Fund](#).

“They’ve really shifted the focus at the UN to take the issue of civic space seriously.”

“I think CIVICUS is one of the key organisations on the international stage for putting the issue of civic space on the map, whether it’s at the UN or with the private sector or the WEF. They have put it on the map – not just as a way of saying it’s a problem in and of itself, but also how it links to climate change, to human development, and to security.”

These initiatives are testament to CIVICUS’ success in demonstrating capability and expertise, building partnerships, and securing the additional funding needed to step up its response to global trends. With allies of civil society globally looking to support civil society in practical ways, CIVICUS is increasingly offering a compelling range of tools, mechanisms and projects for doing so, and is now doing significantly more (in terms of volume of activity, at least) to defend civic freedoms and democratic values than at the point of the designing the Strategic Plan.

CIVICUS is contributing to real change

CIVICUS is extremely active in defending civic freedoms. For example, in 2018-2019, the organisation led targeted public advocacy initiatives on specific restrictions in 55 different countries, as well as publishing 65 media statements and 58 opinion pieces⁹. As outlined above, evidence and data-gathering about organisation-wide

“The Universal Periodic Review process [at the UN Human Rights Council] was a really crucial space for us at a crucial time. CIVICUS’ support for the joint submission was an important contribution, and as a result several states made recommendations.”

⁹ p. 18, CIVICUS Annual Report 2017-2018: <https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/annual-reports/annual-report-2018-en.pdf>.

impact and outcomes is not currently strong enough, in a complex system of change, to attribute changes to CIVICUS alone. Nevertheless, there is some clear evidence of meaningful contribution towards changes in attitudes about civic freedoms and democratic values.

“We could really see an impact of the ICSW being held in Balkans, especially because Serbia was on the watchlist at the time. So it was used as an advocacy tool, helped raise awareness among donors and international participants, and showed Serbia that there was international solidarity.”

“When [CIVICUS’] International Civil Society Week went to Colombia, there was a very negative environment for civil society. But the Colombian government came out and explicitly gave their support for civil society around ICSW, and it marked a turning point in the country.”

Remarks made by stakeholders suggest that CIVICUS astutely made deliberate decisions to use its flagship event, International Civil Society Week, to shine a light on civic space issues (for example, just prior to the strategic period, in Colombia in April 2016, as well as in Fiji in December 2017, and in Serbia in April 2019). In the face of global attacks on civil society, CIVICUS has also made important contributions to defending the status quo (rather than changing it), for example through its ongoing provision of grants to civil society under attack. There is no doubt that CIVICUS is playing an important role in supporting national platforms and activists to organise and protect civic freedoms and democratic values.

Opportunities for Improvement

C. Sharpen the influencing approach

Despite the growth in the volume of projects and activity at CIVICUS dedicated to defending civic freedoms and democratic values, it is not clear that this has led to a sharper or more effective influencing model. It is not clear that CIVICUS’ advocacy and campaigning is always targeting where real change happens, or that it is always based on a clear theory of change. For example, CIVICUS continued in the first half of this strategy to dedicate much of its focus at the global level to the United Nations (in New York and at the Human Rights Council in Geneva), rather than with other global processes and spaces. CIVICUS has experimented with other fora - for example, working with Latin American and Caribbean states to adopt the Escazu Agreement¹⁰ to protect environmental defenders - and should now build on this strategically. At national level, CIVICUS’ energy and resources are often spent on countries where civic space is closed, rather than countries where influence could shift the situation. In terms of methods, CIVICUS puts energy into formal, evidenced, submissions and open media statements, but less into quickfire reaction in the media or digital campaigning. It is not that these decisions are necessarily wrong. But there is now a clear opportunity, in the remainder of the Strategic Plan, to review the organisation’s approach to influencing, to interrogate and test these assumptions, and to align the alliance’s considerable influencing resources with a clear theory of change.

¹⁰ See <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/op-eds/3601-latin-america-the-escazu-agreement-a-light-of-hope-for-those-standing-up-for-the-environment>

D. Diagnose what will happen - not just what already has

CIVICUS' research and diagnostic work on civic space through the CIVICUS Monitor and State of Civil Society reports may be world class, but there is growing demand for tools¹¹ to help activists and decision-makers better predict changes in countries and anticipate global trends. Forecasting the movements and leaders of tomorrow could also help CIVICUS add value in its other Goal areas (e.g.

“CIVICUS have nailed it with the CIVICUS Monitor from a structured indices perspective. But there's been no progress with real-time indices, and it wouldn't be that hard to come up with.”

Goal 2) by amplifying and catalysing the work of civil society activists well before they break through into mainstream national or global discourse. During the joint action planning workshop (see Annex 7.4), groups suggested developing an early warning system using new data on the ground to predict,

“Our members [from another civil society network, outside CIVICUS] want us to do more to predict and prepare about what's coming up.”

pre-empt and prevent changes in citizen action or civic space. After the first two years of the Strategic Plan, CIVICUS now has the research rigour, reach, credibility, track record and resources to take its research work to the next level by building and designing a prognostic tool to complement its existing products.

E. Work with media better

In the first half of its strategy, CIVICUS did not work as well with the media as it could have, in two respects. First, at a global strategic level, civil society and media face similar, overlapping attacks on their civic freedoms in numerous countries. CIVICUS has made some efforts to start to build bridges with media partners around a common, shared purpose (for example through joint events and discussions, and through a new consortium for human rights, civic freedoms and media development in Sub-Saharan Africa), but media partners suggested these have not always been as thoughtful or meaningful as they could have been.

Second, and although less strategic, equally important: CIVICUS is missing an opportunity to use the media as a key vehicle for getting its message out. SIDA's 2018 evaluation of CIVICUS found that “there is limited engagement with traditional media (newspapers, radio, tv) and CIVICUS has no structured “media engagement strategy”, which could make them proactive allies in the demand for civic space.¹²” While CIVICUS does achieve decent media coverage a few times a year around the launch of its flagship research products (the CIVICUS Monitor and State of Civil Society Report) and International Civil Society Week, the organisation is currently some way from having the agility required to manipulate the news cycle to its advantage, through reacting in advance of events, to ensure civil society's perspective is picked up in coverage. One positive counter-example is in September 2019, when CIVICUS called out the Gates Foundation¹³ for an award made to Narendra Modi, and managed to stay ahead of the news cycle with a clear, bold, position that avoided being over-engineered. CIVICUS could and should do more of this in future, but doing so will require

¹¹ For example, almost a decade ago, CIVICUS and ICNL had attempted to develop an effective Early Warning System to monitor attacks on civic space before they happened.

¹² P. 30, 2018 Evaluation of CIVICUS – World Alliance for Citizen Participation: https://www.sida.se/contentassets/7abcc4b207e543fc87ccf5bff5a7c931/de2018_4_62129en.pdf.

¹³ 23 September 2019, CIVICUS press release: <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/media-releases/4087-gates-foundation-award-to-india-s-modi-a-setback-for-civic-freedoms-and-democratic-values>

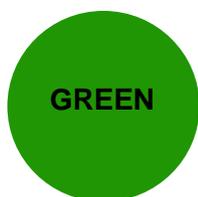
investing substantially in its communications function. The organisation may want to consider appointing a senior level Communications post.

F. Pivot towards defending digital civic freedoms

CIVICUS' own research¹⁴ outlines how the fight to defend civic freedoms and democratic values is increasingly centred on the battleground of digital human rights. This can include, for example, the introduction of restrictive new legislation, the shutdown of the internet, the targeting of online activists, and the effects of technology giants and misinformation on democracy. Yet few stakeholders felt that CIVICUS has yet sufficiently adapted to the growing demand for better support to civil society and activists in defending digital rights and civic freedoms. There is, however, a clear niche and added value for CIVICUS in doing more to intervene practically in this area. Part of that niche could include helping more traditional civil society organisations understand and navigate the discourse, the tools, the relevance of digital rights to them, and response mechanisms.

“Digital security is *the* main issue for activists.”

Assessment of overall progress



It is clear that CIVICUS' performance and progress against Goal 1 is well on track. The organisation is working hard, and with an increased level of activity, to respond to negative trends, and there is every reason to believe that CIVICUS is making significant contributions towards defending civic

freedoms and democratic values through its ongoing support for civil society under attack. Opportunities for improvement are suggested above, and in light of the global trends that have changed since 2016, there is certainly opportunity for scaling up the quality and quantity of CIVICUS' response further. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that this is an area of relatively good practice in terms of CIVICUS' overall 2017-2022 Strategic Plan.

“The world has got a lot crazier! The combination of Brexit, Trump, Modi, Bolsonaro, Orban and Putin means that the rise of strongmen autocrats is making everything much harder.”

“The trend right now is a resurgence of brazenly open sexist outbursts among state actors... there's a misogynistic stench around.”

¹⁴ See for example the State of Civil Society Report 2019: in reviewing country situations in the year in review, there are countless examples of how digital rights become the battleground for defending civic space. https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2019/socs2019-year-in-review-part3_state-of-democracy-in-2018.pdf

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

What CIVICUS' Strategic Plan said

STRATEGIC GOAL 2:

STRENGTHENING THE POWER OF PEOPLE TO ORGANISE, MOBILISE AND TAKE ACTION

We will strengthen the power of people to take collective action to realise a more just, inclusive and sustainable world. We will work in solidarity with change-seeking activists, organisations and movements on inequality, injustice, insecurity and climate change. We believe that there is much value to be unlocked by bringing together different types of progressive civil society actors to learn from each other. We will work more purposefully with and learn from activists, protest and social movements, and online and youth-led platforms. We will also work to support civil society to take the lead in mobilising and working in partnership with other stakeholders, including governments, the private sector and intergovernmental institutions, to catalyse transformative change.

We will invest in making global agendas relevant to local actors and bringing local voices to global fora. We will support people and their organisations to monitor progress and hold governments accountable for commitments that they have made nationally and internationally, including those on international human rights frameworks, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate change. At the global level, we will work to ensure citizens and civil society can influence global governance reform processes, demand spaces for citizens to advise decision makers, and push new and reforming international organisations to put people and their needs at the centre.

WE WILL WORK IN SOLIDARITY WITH CHANGE-SEEKING ACTIVISTS, ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS ON INEQUALITY, INJUSTICE, INSECURITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE. WE BELIEVE THAT THERE IS MUCH VALUE TO BE UNLOCKED BY BRINGING TOGETHER DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROGRESSIVE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER.

By 2022, there will be many and diverse examples of how people have organised and mobilised to drive positive change from influencing local actors to changing global policies.

Changes we will seek to contribute to include:

- More CIVICUS members reporting involvement in new and impactful initiatives made up of a diverse range of civil society actors that result in direct action to drive change for a more just, inclusive and sustainable world.
- More CIVICUS members leading multi-stakeholder initiatives.
- More civil society actors receiving support for training, collaboration and travel that strengthens their ability to build coalitions and catalyse change.
- More meaningful opportunities for citizens and civil society, particularly grassroots movements, to come together to participate in and influence global governance institutions and processes.

Goal 2 Critical Learning Questions

- *How effective are we at making connections, and how do these member/multi-stakeholder/other collaborations enhance our (collective) work? What is the impact of our convening role?*
- *Who constitutes the greater CIVICUS alliance and do we have the right composition of actors to deliver on our Strategic Goals?*
- *Are we engaging our audiences in the most strategic and impactful way possible (e.g. focusing on key actors, messages)? Are we targeting the right audiences?*

Strengths

A. CIVICUS staff are passionate about putting members first

CIVICUS staff appear to have a genuinely zealous commitment towards putting members at the centre of everything that the organisation does. This represents an important culture shift over the first two years of the strategy, and is increasingly evidenced in how projects are run, how activities are designed, and even how this review was conducted. A new membership approach and strategy based on solidarity, rather than a transactional benefits-based relationship, now puts CIVICUS members and CIVICUS staff definitively on the same side in working towards CIVICUS' goals. The doubling of the number of members during the review period to 7,935 (although there are multiple reasons for this) should be read as a sign of a positive direction of travel. Meanwhile, CIVICUS' Annual Constituency Survey¹⁵ (in itself an impressive commitment to maintaining a strong feedback loop with members) shows consistent Net Promoter Scores in the past two years that should be considered positive for a non-profit organisation like CIVICUS.

“CIVICUS is inclusive and involves members, but members should be able to come up with aspects that they wish to run with, peculiar to their country or region, and get secretariat support.”

“In terms of how the strategy has been delivered, there's been a real culture shift of engaging members and delivering it jointly.”

“Despite the challenges we face, CIVICUS is one of the most formidable membership organisations globally.”

¹⁵ Full details of CIVICUS' most recent 2019 Annual Constituency Survey findings are available here: <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/blog/4130-what-constituents-say-about-civicus-in-2019>

Annual Constituency Survey Results	2018	2019
Number of responses	434	705
Response rate	10.1% (out of 4302)	9.3% (out of 7935)
Net Promoter Score	+43	+42

B. The International Civil Society Week is CIVICUS’ biggest convening asset

Along with the CIVICUS Monitor and the State of Civil Society reports, International Civil Society Week is one of the three main entry points for most stakeholders into the work of CIVICUS, and is widely recognised and valued. Over 700 delegates attended the most recent 2019 ICSW in Belgrade, with a Net Promoter Score of +33 suggesting good satisfaction rates and that it is found to be valuable. Although the costs of the ICSW are significant (financial resources from CIVICUS and participants; CO2 emissions; organisational bandwidth and focus), the indications are that it remains a key global gathering for civil society and its supporters, and that it makes a significant lasting contribution to civil society in the host country. CIVICUS will rightly want to improve and evolve how it organises major convenings, but in the first half of this strategic period the ICSWs in Fiji (December 2017) and Serbia (April 2019) remained a notable strength for the organisation in Goal Area 2.

C. Youth engagement points the way to how CIVICUS can broaden its appeal

In its Strategic Plan, CIVICUS committed under this Goal to working with “youth-led platforms”. Although CIVICUS has gradually improved the quality of its youth engagement over a number of years, in this review period it has leapt forward. With 1,300 individual members and 1,000 organisational

“CIVICUS has been really successful in amplifying youth voice.”

“They’re opening doors for youth organisations to funding mechanisms.”

members in 149 countries and a major new initiative, the Goalkeepers Youth Action Accelerator, CIVICUS is increasingly shaped by youth voices. There is certainly further for the organisation to go, but as CIVICUS looks under Goal 2 to strengthen people power and connect with a wider range of movements, its experience of engaging youth should stand as an example of good practice.

D. Commitment to strengthening the power of people to organise

There is a strong understanding and shared commitment across the CIVICUS staff and Board to the new component of this strategy: strengthening the power of people to organise, and purposefully bridging more traditional civil society actors with powerful new movements and diverse sets of actors. This is reflected across CIVICUS’ plans and priorities, and emerged strongly as a sentiment during the joint workshop with members on 6th November 2019 as part of this review. Even if this has not yet translated into sufficient progress in this area (see below), the genuine commitment to this important component of the strategy is a strength for CIVICUS.

Opportunities for improvement

E. Ensure people power does not bypass CIVICUS

Despite the authentic commitment outlined above, CIVICUS did not find itself during the review period playing a critical catalytic role at the heart of any of the major global people power movements or moments, whether Extinction Rebellion, #MeToo, the Gilets Jaunes, the Umbrella Movement, or the indigenous peoples' movements challenging their governments on economic development and land rights. Nor is there evidence that CIVICUS succeeded in strengthening people power at critical junctures in lower key, less visible

“CIVICUS could do more to make governments listen when it comes to their national development plans. They could take a tougher line.”

settings. To be sure, there are examples of CIVICUS' projects

having supported people power in a number of ways, from support to protest leaders given by the Crisis Response Fund or CIVICUS' Middle East & North Africa (MENA) Hub through to the use of participatory research methodologies in reports on shifting the power to grassroots movements. Indeed, in the joint action workshop, groups proposed that CIVICUS should prioritise work streams to support people power (such

as the CRF, the Vuka! Coalition, and Resilient Roots) going forwards. But technical programming interventions alone, unless they are matched with meaningful political solidarity and alignment, may mean that people power and the big movements of the coming years continue to bypass CIVICUS.

This review does not have sufficient evidence to assess why this is the case. It could be simply that CIVICUS' identity, values, and decades of history working with organised civil society means it will take time. It could be that, without a shared common purpose (e.g. averting climate catastrophe), people-powered movements see little value in working with and through CIVICUS and its members. It could even be that CIVICUS and well-funded, organised, civil society organisations are seen as defenders of the liberal democratic status quo and part of the problem, rather than the solution, by social justice movements. Regardless of the reason, it is clear that CIVICUS has much more to do if it is to deliver on this part of its Goal 2 commitment. To do so, it will need to interrogate better why it has not succeeded so far.

F. Build alliances, not just a membership offer

CIVICUS has admirably strengthened its membership focus during the review period, as outlined above. The secretariat is now developing a

“CIVICUS is very much of the Sustainable Development Goals global jet set. That presence is great, of course, but you could argue it's problematic, and that it creates a dual echo chamber, overlaying a small network of members who know and love CIVICUS with the global 'circuit'.”

member-to-member platform which could transform and enrich CIVICUS' members' relationships with other members, making them more direct

rather than relying on the secretariat as an intermediary and convenor (fortunately, as the membership has now doubled). Yet CIVICUS faces important strategic decisions ahead about what its priorities are for stakeholder engagement. The organisation should remember that Goal 2 is about much more

“My worry about CIVICUS' effectiveness is that we tend to see the same [members'] faces all the time.”

than serving the membership: in order to deliver on its Strategic Plan, CIVICUS should consider stepping up its efforts to build alliances with movements that are not CIVICUS members and who do not necessarily share the same mission or cause. There are successful examples of CIVICUS convening different actors - for example, bringing development, human rights and climate activists together at the ICSW 2017 to produce a declaration on climate-induced migration, or convening a civil society resourcing community of practice. But convening others can be quite different to building alliances. Indeed, the political and diplomatic skills required to build alliances and bridges with other

“The big shift [in this strategy] was from working with traditional actors to working with new actors and reimagining civil society space around new digital groups, youth movements, and so on, rather than professionalised non-profit organisations. Building alliances is the path to the kind of people power that can combat anti-democratic trends. But Goal 2 has become too much about serving the membership.”

causes and movements, especially when they may be more powerful than CIVICUS, are quite different from that of nurturing and supporting a membership base or stakeholder group. It also requires compromise and clear policy positions. Indeed, CIVICUS may need to articulate more clearly exactly what it stands for when it comes to fighting the “inequality, injustice, insecurity, and climate change” that it mentions explicitly in its Strategic Plan. Unless CIVICUS can do more to build meaningful, broad-based alliances, it is unlikely to deliver on the ambition of Goal 2.

Assessment of overall progress



In Goal 2 (to strengthen the power of people to organise, mobilise and take action), CIVICUS is largely headed in the right direction, and is on track in most areas. Real advances have been made in how CIVICUS works with and through its members, and new programmes are certainly delivering tangible new forms of support to civil society actors. There appears to be near-universal appetite within the organisation to work more with new actors. However, if CIVICUS is to truly deliver across this Goal area, it will need to make a fundamental transition from a model of serving, convening and programming through its members and stakeholders to one of building alliances with others. This transition requires that CIVICUS asks and answers fundamental questions about what it stands for, beyond civic action and civic space; identifies its own position within the broader civil society ecosystem; and commits the resources, time and experienced, skilled staff needed to the complex and long-term political work of building alliances (which may in turn require removing them from other activities).

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

What CIVICUS' Strategic Plan said

STRATEGIC GOAL 3:

EMPOWERING A MORE ACCOUNTABLE, EFFECTIVE AND INNOVATIVE CIVIL SOCIETY

We will empower civil society to become more accountable, effective and innovative agents of change by encouraging collaboration among and the engagement of our diverse alliance members and partners. We will continue to provide opportunities for civil society actors to maximise their capacity in networked and sustainable ways by creating opportunities for shared learning. We will promote and advocate for the institutional architecture that supports and sustains civil society, including coalitions, umbrella bodies and networks, and invest in finding ways to make that architecture more adaptable and responsive. We will experiment with, learn from and share innovative strategies and technologies that position civil society at the forefront of change. We will explore new funding and operational models that shift more resources to the advocacy, accountability and human rights work of civil society actors in the global south that are often on the frontline of social transformation. We will strive to support a new generation of civil society leaders who have the skills, instincts and networks required to lead civil society and the world in the 21st century. We will challenge ourselves and ask our alliance members and partners to reflect on our diversity and take specific steps to be truly inclusive agents of change.

By 2022, civil society actors will have greater capacity to deliver their mandates, will be experimenting more often, will be taking calculated risks and will be more inclusive in the ways that they organise themselves and their work.

Changes we will seek to contribute to include:

- More civil society actors testing new tools and approaches that could transform the ways that they work, including the use of citizen-generated data and constituency feedback loops.
- Southern, smaller and informal civil society formations having better access to resources that support their resilience.
- Increased number of effective national civil society platforms across the globe.
- More CIVICUS members having designed and implemented appropriate diversity and inclusion policies and practices.
- Greater levels of public trust in civil society.

Goal 3 Critical Learning Questions

- *Which tools, resources and offerings are the most important in increasing impact?*
- *Which distributed organisational models work best in repressed and closed civic spaces, and why? What are the elements of these models that drive their effectiveness?*
- *How and when can citizen-generated data support civil society accountability, particularly to the people that civil society serves - and what are the challenges to transparency in restricted / closed spaces?*

Strengths

A. Testing and innovation

During the review period, CIVICUS demonstrated particular commitment both to innovation and testing. On innovation, impressive and far-reaching programmes such as [DataShift](#) and [Innovation For Change](#) have stepped up direct support for civil society globally, enabling organisations to access the tools, resources and skills needed to cultivate innovation. On testing, a great number of CIVICUS' programmes designed over the past five years feature strong components of testing a hypothesis or intervention, learning from it, and positioning it for wider uptake. For example, the [Resilient Roots](#)

“On digital transformation, CIVICUS is a global leader. I'm not sure of the results, but it's worth applauding.”

programme tests whether closer civil society accountability to constituents can help combat attacks on civic space. Programmes designed with possible wider uptake have, of course, proved particularly attractive to funders interested in understanding what interventions work best to support civil society. The breadth of CIVICUS' testing and range of 'bright ideas' means that it has started to develop a clear reputation for being an innovative organisation, and this should be considered a clear strength and success under Goal 3.

B. Building effective national platforms

In the Strategic Plan, CIVICUS explicitly sought to bring about an “increased number of effective national civil society platforms across the globe.” There is strong evidence to suggest that CIVICUS has been successful in making a very significant contribution to this change. CIVICUS' [Affinity Group of National Associations](#) (AGNA), its network of national platforms, has grown

“CIVICUS has placed real value on the [AGNA] network and on national associations.”

“CIVICUS took the decision to align its work streams with AGNA, which was very important... it uses AGNA as the wheel to drive other work. Opportunities come to members of AGNA, and it acts as an incentive.”

to 92 members in more than 81 countries, according to its website, and the AGNA Chair stated that this had increased substantially from previously having around 30 *active* national associations. Of perhaps greater significance is the depth and richness of CIVICUS' partnerships with AGNA national platforms: a decision taken several years ago to offer programme opportunities to national platforms means that several AGNA members now implement multiple flagship CIVICUS programmes and have a multi-faceted

relationship with the secretariat. New funding through an EC Global Exchange grant has also meant that, for the first time, CIVICUS was able to co-design and implement programmes specifically for national platform organisations. AGNA has become a truly vibrant network, acts as a key conduit for CIVICUS programmes and for global funders wanting to invest in the capacity of civil society around the world, and means that CIVICUS has much stronger relationships and intelligence about what is happening nationally than they would otherwise. This is a key success under Goal 3 (linked to Goal 2).

“You could sense [CIVICUS] had a real good feeling for what was going on on the ground. They are more aggressive and outspoken, in an eloquent way. They've set important agendas, including that too much aid is rooted in the North.”

C. Impact and Accountability

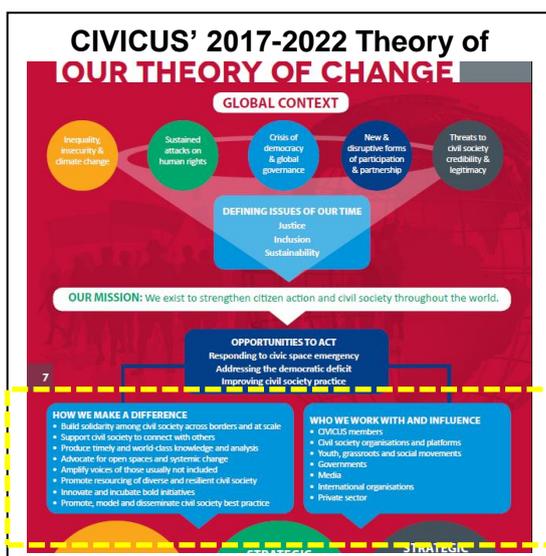
Leading by example in terms of its own internal effectiveness is important, and CIVICUS has made impressive strides forward in what it calls its 'Impact and Accountability' work in the first two years of the strategy period (also relevant for Goal 4). Particular successes include revising the organisation's

accountability framework (grounded in utilisation-focused evaluation, developmental evaluation theory, and the concept of dynamic accountability); adopting a Developmental Evaluation Framework; rolling out the use of a new data platform, DevResults; improving the quality of data that reaches the CIVICUS leadership and Board; and encouraging a culture of learning across the organisation. Although there is further to go, the sophistication of critical thinking and direction of travel are extremely positive, and CIVICUS is well on the way to having its own house fully in order as it seeks to support the wider civil society sector to do better on effectiveness.

Opportunities for improvement

D. Learn and act on lessons from testing and innovation

Despite testing and innovation increasingly becoming normalised into the design of CIVICUS' programmes, there is as yet little evidence that lessons are being taken up, either within or outside CIVICUS, or that successful models are being taken to scale. Given the level of resources being committed to such programmes, it will be important in the second half of the strategy that CIVICUS clearly and publicly documents and shares its learnings about what kind of interventions are most effective at supporting civil society. The Innovation for Change (I4C) initiative is working to test and exchange specific ideas across different regional hubs, and this could be learned from and built on. Constituents, members and funders should expect to be able to see results from such programmes in the form of accessible, publicly available learnings. At the joint action workshop (see Annex 7.4), groups suggested that CIVICUS could create a learning hub with real-time lessons in change-making that would help it hone its own theory of change, as well as learning lessons from its own programmes as they end. As importantly, CIVICUS should draw on these lessons in order to build and develop an integrated organisational model for change, deploying the most effective programmatic interventions in the right settings to achieve the greatest change possible for civil society and citizen action. CIVICUS' model for change should better articulate *how* CIVICUS effects change, and should be undertaken as an inclusive 6-12 month programme design process, resulting in a manual or tool to help staff design future programmes. At the joint action workshop (see Annex 7.4), groups started to sketch out what this process might look like.



CIVICUS' 2017-2022 Theory of Change (page 7, Strategic Plan)

Although CIVICUS does have a clear theory of change, there is an opportunity for CIVICUS to fully flesh out the highlighted sections on "how we make a difference". It should use the lessons learned from testing and innovation in the past two years to design a compelling, multi-faceted model to help guide how future programmes and interventions are built and taken to scale.

E. Do more to build trust in civil society

Parts of global civil society have recently faced a particular crisis in public trust, including especially the aid sector through sexual abuse and exploitation scandals. CIVICUS' members are well aware that attacks and restrictions on civil society are often preceded by smears, misinformation or, on occasion, well-justified breakdowns in public trust in civil society organisations. Several stakeholders felt that in the first half of its strategy, CIVICUS had not been as vocal or visible as it could have been in making the positive case for trust in civil society. CIVICUS does have an extensive

“I am worried by the lack of legitimacy of civil society because of internal problems, sexual misconduct, and so on. CIVICUS has to focus on accountability.”

“CIVICUS have challenged the role of the non-profit sector, and this has been really important.”

programming portfolio (Resilient Roots; Diversity & Inclusion work; and AGNA Global Accountability Weeks), but could consider how it could do more going forwards in its public messaging, speeches and communications to better champion trust in global civil society (while also challenging it to be better).

F. Resolve the tension between solidarity and sub-granting

During the review period of the first two years of the strategy, CIVICUS' role as an intermediary funder has evolved and grown (also relevant for Goal 4). As the 2018 SIDA evaluation noted, in the two previous years CIVICUS had supported members and partners with grants totalling just over USD\$3m, or around 10% of the organisation's total income. As CIVICUS' own income has grown substantially, the volume of funding it subgrants to other civil society organisations has also grown. At the joint action workshop (See Annex 7.4), groups proposed CIVICUS should consult ahead of its next strategy on how to step up and design investment in grassroots infrastructure further. Although CIVICUS fully recognise the risks that subgranting presents and has gone to great lengths

“CIVICUS is starting to be seen as a small donor, but that's not its role.”

“CIVICUS could create a target to look at the proportion of its resources that go to local partners... How do you make that commitment to support smaller, Southern civil society more meaningful?”

to handle their new role sensitively and in the right way, the introduction of widespread financial incentives necessarily changes the relationship that members and potential members have with CIVICUS. CIVICUS must make sure that this does not affect (and is not perceived to affect) the peer-to-peer solidarity that is the central guiding dynamic of the alliance. There could be various options for resolving this tension without abandoning the important role of

channelling much-needed resources to civil society in the global South, and it is clear that CIVICUS is committed to finding ways to move funds to actors working locally in a manner that is consistent with its principles and messages around civil society resourcing. CIVICUS should therefore make sure to communicate clearly on its approach to subgranting.

“Another observation I've heard is that little action is taken [by CIVICUS] to support actors directly. There is little that they do actually to support national actors.”

Assessment of overall progress



In Goal 3 (to empower a more accountable, effective and innovative civil society), CIVICUS is largely headed in the right direction, and is on track in most areas. On the one hand, CIVICUS is delivering programmes that both test hypotheses and intervention models, and also directly supporting innovation at scale. As a significant new area in the 2017-2022 strategy, this progress is significant and impressive. On the other hand, however, CIVICUS does not appear so far to have been able to share or enable wider uptake of learnings from this testing and innovation among other allies of civil society looking for effective intervention models. There is limited evidence to demonstrate how these learnings have impacted CIVICUS' own programme design. Separately, CIVICUS' long-term plan to build effective national platforms has reaped real dividends in the first two years of this strategy, and it should be considered a major success.

Goal 4: Building a fit-for-purpose organisation

What CIVICUS' Strategic Plan said

CIVICUS 2017-2022' externally published Strategic Plan was not explicit about its fourth strategic goal, which was primarily internally-facing and added subsequently. However, subsequent internal documents outline that CIVICUS intends in this Goal Area to contribute to the following changes:

- "CIVICUS is considered a credible, trustworthy and accountable organisation by all our stakeholders
- Increased ability of CIVICUS to be evidence-based and data-driven to allow for adaptive management and execution of our programmes
- Increased understanding of CIVICUS unique value to members and the sector by understanding the needs of stakeholders and impact of our approaches and theory of change in different contexts
- Greater levels of integration of our systems and processes across programmes and operations, supported by a collaborative and principle-based organisational culture."

Goal 4 Critical Learning Questions

- *Is CIVICUS' organisational model fit for purpose? Has the new model delivered its objectives (e.g decreased hierarchies, inclusive decision-making, cross-cluster collaboration etc.)? Are the new management forums (PMF, OMF) effective?*
- *Is CIVICUS sufficiently agile and adaptable i.e. are we quick enough in our reactions to real-time issues as they happen? Is this consistently applicable across the organisation?*
- *What types of decisions have changed as a result of critical learning and reflection, based on evidence, both internally and externally?*

Strengths

A. CIVICUS has successfully managed rapid growth (and change)

By any common organisational metrics, CIVICUS has grown enormously over the past five years, much of which fell in the two years of this review period. Over a five year period, membership numbers grew from 1361 to 7935. Staff numbers grew from 32 to 71. Income grew from USD\$3.6m to USD\$10.3m. The volume of activity and number of initiatives rose sharply. Change on this scale presents an enormous challenge for any organisation, and it is a major strength that CIVICUS has managed and absorbed this rapid growth so successfully. It has needed active and positive change management along the way: there have been changes of leader; of (many) staff; of staff locations (with the majority now based outside Johannesburg); of offices; of culture; of systems and of ways of working and connecting and, last but not least; of structure. Many of these have of course been painful. Yet CIVICUS has navigated these choppy waters extremely well, and now finds itself in a strong position as a stable and effective medium-sized organisation, supported by healthy reserves and a base of unrestricted strategic funding that would be the envy of most organisations. As well as a success in its own right, such resilience in the face of change suggests that CIVICUS is extremely well-equipped with the problem-solving skills, adaptability and agility needed to navigate further change when it inevitably happens. This should be considered a real asset for any organisation.

“CIVICUS’ size means it’s stable enough to be a solid presence, but not too big and bureaucratic to be preoccupied by its own presence.”

B. The foundations seem to be heading in the right direction

Although there is further to go (as outlined below), there appears to be strong awareness among CIVICUS leadership, Board and staff of the importance of building strong long-term operational foundations for the organisation. Many of these are reflected in organisational and senior management priorities, and it is clear that the new Secretary General places great importance on them. For example, CIVICUS is well underway in a process to improve and update its financial system and management. This should be completed in the coming months, and will be important to improve efficiency, the payments process, and the speed and quality of financial information. It will also serve as an entry point and litmus test of CIVICUS’ ability to improve its operational systems in other areas, and should therefore remain a top priority.

C. People

CIVICUS has established a strong pool of talented, committed, high capacity staff in the first half of this review period. There is further to go in the area of human resources, staff turnover may be too high, and more could be done to unlock leadership (see below). Nevertheless, for an organisation in CIVICUS’ position, it has a remarkably engaged and motivated staff that should serve as one of its biggest assets in strategy implementation in the remaining two years. CIVICUS staff believe fervently in the mission of the organisation and want it to become better, and this motivation is reflected in positive interactions with members and partners (as well as in the joint workshop on 6th November).

“Staff turnover has been so high! How do we retain them?”

“CIVICUS people are really accessible. You can talk to those in Geneva, New York, Johannesburg and working on the Asia-Pacific [region]. They’re very responsive and interactive. They really practice participatory democracy within their own organisation.”

Opportunities for improvement

D. Put stronger operational foundations in place

As noted above, CIVICUS may be headed in the right direction in putting operational foundations in place, but it has a long way to go. As a medium-sized organisation, CIVICUS now requires stronger and more rigorous systems in its basic operational functions, such as finance, human resources, and IT, as well as in its business-specific organisation-wide foundations (e.g. membership management tools, database/CRM). Although generally strong for an organisation of its size, CIVICUS' organisational policies & procedures may contain gaps and could benefit from being reviewed and communicated more clearly. For example, it is unclear how to report a specific confidential safeguarding or Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (PSEA) concern, and relevant policies and procedures are not publicly available online or, anecdotally, known about by staff.

“CIVICUS needs dramatic improvements in technology capability and knowledge.”

“Progress has been made but it has been too slow... CIVICUS is a difficult machine to shake up.”

This review did not carry out a detailed audit or analysis of CIVICUS' operations, policies and procedures. Indeed, CIVICUS has recently undergone audits of both its HR systems (in 2018) and also of its overall financial and operational systems (as part of its evaluation by SIDA in 2018), and has workplans in place to action their recommendations. Further

external audits may not at this stage therefore add value. Nevertheless, CIVICUS should strive not only for compliance but also operational excellence, and it would be useful to set out one consolidated ambitious plan for operational improvements during the remainder of the strategic period, and to ensure this plan is resourced and delivered properly. Currently, weak operational foundations risk effective delivery of CIVICUS' 2017-2022 strategy.

E. Strengthen the second tier of management

In the first half of the strategy, CIVICUS undertook a restructure. It is not the place of this review to assess the merits and drawbacks of the current organisational structure. However, one important effect is that it was widely perceived to have “flattened” the hierarchy and layers of management within CIVICUS. In theory, this made management more participatory and reduced the distance between junior staff and the Secretary General. In practice, however, although all staff are regularly able to participate in discussions, this does not always translate to being able to contribute to meaningful decisions. The second layer of management – embodied in two management teams, the Operational Management Forum (OMF) and Programme Management Forum (PMF), that currently meet monthly – plays an important role in theory, but in practice can on occasions appear as large, unwieldy and not well set up to solve the collective problems they need to. The second tier of management should be running the day-to-day business of the organisation, freeing up the top tier of leadership to focus on leadership tasks (such as strategy, partnerships/investment, external representation, and visible internal communication). That does not yet appear to be happening, and the current Senior Leadership Team are too often drawn into operational matters that can and should be picked up by an empowered, effective second tier of management. As a result, while discussion is broad-based, real decisions can be unnecessarily concentrated in the hands of and place excessive burden on just a few people at the top. This review

“Sometimes at CIVICUS, including everyone can be used as a tool to stop critical decisions.”

strongly recommends that the leadership strengthen the second tier of management as its top priority, including by reviewing, simplifying and reducing its structure; establishing and following clear ways of working and principles of subsidiarity (that decisions are always made at the lowest level possible); and by investing time in supporting the second tier of management to grow, both as a team and as individuals.

F. Maintain and strengthen organisational ‘line of sight’

CIVICUS has experienced rapid growth in staff and membership during the review period. More than half of all staff are now based outside of the Johannesburg head office, and come together only once a year for a staff retreat. These changes present a substantial risk for the organisational ‘line of sight’ – the extent to which the furthest apart members, staff or Board share the same vision and understanding of what is happening in the organisation and where it is going. CIVICUS leadership have been acutely aware of these risks, and have taken actions to mitigate them,

“CIVICUS is much more linked to its members and to reality [than it used to be]. Staff are much more decentralised. It has been talked about for a long while. But now it is reality.”

“Even though it’s based in South Africa, CIVICUS isn’t particularly rooted in African realities.”

including for example introducing a strong culture of working and connecting remotely with each other; strong annual ‘Impact Reflection’ and annual planning sessions that involve all staff; online communication tools such as Workplace to encourage cooperation; and a new commitment to co-creating the alliance’s direction with members and Board (as evidenced in the joint review workshop in November 2019). These actions have produced results, and some stakeholders felt there have been improvements in a sense of shared direction. Nevertheless, it is evident from observing various staff sessions, as well as in the workshop itself, that there remain very different levels of understanding about CIVICUS’ work and

direction. The risk of a weak line of sight is that perceptions could grow of disconnect, frustration, and strategic drift. The benefits are enormous: joined-up working, high satisfaction, and a culture of pulling in the same direction. CIVICUS should consider what it can do, as a medium-size organisation with geographically dispersed staff and members, to keep a strong line of sight.

Assessment of overall progress

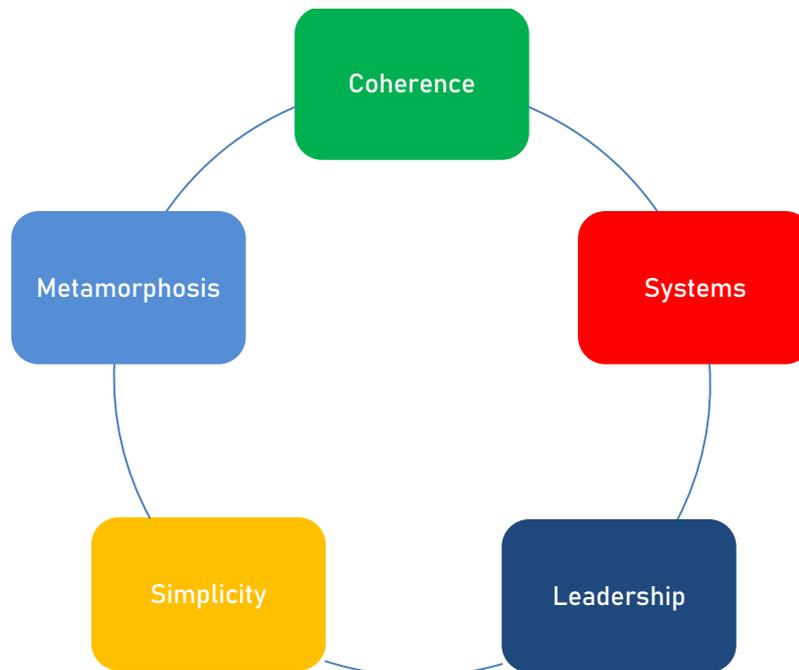


In Goal 4 (building a fit-for-purpose organisation), CIVICUS has made only limited achievement, and needs to do more in most areas to become a truly fit-for-purpose organisation. Putting stronger operational foundations in place across the board, strengthening the second tier of management, and taking steps to maintain a strong line of sight are all top priorities for the CIVICUS leadership. However, the direction of travel is positive, and CIVICUS’ successful management of rapid growth during the past five years and the review period suggests that the organisation has the skills, agility and resilience to make significant progress in this goal area in the remaining two years of the strategy.

5. Priorities

Based on themes from across the findings, this section of the report outlines five cross-cutting priorities for CIVICUS in the remaining two years of the strategy period. Specific recommendations from throughout the report are summarised in a table.

Based on this review, it is recommended that CIVICUS focus on five interdependent priorities going forwards: Coherence; Systems; Leadership; Simplicity; and Metamorphosis.



A. Coherence

Projects are a risk, and can inhibit coherence, focus and agility.

As it has grown over the period in review, CIVICUS has taken on a significant number of new programmes and projects. The benefits are clear: CIVICUS' impact and footprint is far greater. However, organisationally, it presents a real risk. Each project has its own identity, its own centre of gravity and often its own constituency of partners. The primary accountability of staff and implementing partners/members has in cases become to the success of the project, rather than to the success of CIVICUS' mission and the bigger picture. At times, this is demonstrably contributing to a loss of coherence, focus and organisational agility, and it consumes CIVICUS' bandwidth to programme and intervene proactively and creatively. The dynamic is not a new one for CIVICUS, but the organisation's own success and growth into a medium-sized organisation means that CIVICUS must now find ways to ensure that project priorities and identities are subservient to organisational direction and vision. CIVICUS' partners and donors have a role to play in recognising this too. CIVICUS may want to consider a 'cap' on the number of

“CIVICUS continues to struggle with a lack of focus when it comes to strategy. They work on many issues in many geographies, and they're constantly putting fires out. It limits a proactive approach to their programming, and they could do with greater clarity about their priorities.

projects with ring-fenced funding and identities that it supports, meaning it might refuse to take more on until others are completed. As already outlined, CIVICUS should also step up efforts to maintain a strong line of sight between staff, members and Board.

B. Systems

It is time for CIVICUS to strengthen systems: structure can set staff free.

As outlined above, CIVICUS has more to do to build a fit-for-purpose organisation. But doing so is far from being a challenge for the operations team alone. Across all functions and areas, the growth of CIVICUS into a medium-sized organisation requires stronger systems and processes, for everything from policy and communications sign-off for statements and reports through to systems and tools for managing member relationships. CIVICUS should set out one consolidated ambitious plan for operational improvements during the remainder of the strategic period, and ensure this plan is resourced and delivered properly. CIVICUS should rebalance its working culture to ensure effectiveness has equal footing to participation (for example in how it runs meetings, in the authority and mandate given to middle managers, and in monitoring and tracking accountability for actions and progress). Ultimately, an investment in creating structures that work makes it easier, rather than harder, for staff and members to set about achieving the change that CIVICUS wants.

C. Leadership

CIVICUS must unlock leadership everywhere - culture eats strategy for breakfast.

The CIVICUS alliance is bursting with talented staff and motivated members. The organisation has taken significant steps in the review period to boost participation among staff and members, but this does not always translate into unlocking leadership. That requires authority to be conferred in the short-term; accompanying and encouraging in the medium-term; and, in the long-term, an organisational culture of coherence (and clear direction); systems and structure; and simplicity. In two years' time CIVICUS will change its strategy again, but organisational culture, even though it may take longer to shift, can be more important for shaping CIVICUS' impact. In the immediate future, CIVICUS should start unlocking leadership by strengthening and empowering a refreshed second tier of management (as outlined above), and ensuring that this second tier then starts to work with the rest of the organisation in the same way.

D. Simplicity

CIVICUS' work requires the art of politics and persuasion - it should simplify, not complicate.

There are powerful reasons why CIVICUS should always seek to simplify what it does. If it wants to scale up its impact, strengthen the power of people, and reach new audiences and allies, then it must learn to speak 'human'. Its message must be far more accessible, 'punchy', and concise. Currently, there is a risk of CIVICUS being seen by the very people and movements it wants to work with – however unfairly - as being of and for a liberal, middle class, educated elite. Internally, a

“The CIVICUS strategy is spot on – we just need more of it.”

strong line of sight within the alliance also depends on simplicity, and is put at risk by overcomplication. Like any organisation, CIVICUS' internal processes on occasion substitute bureaucracy for effectiveness. In projects, unnecessary technical jargon and acronyms abound. There may be different drivers of this tendency to overcomplicate: among staff, it may be a by-product of debate, deliberation and a healthy culture of participation, or it may be a result of new staff wanting to prove their expertise. Organisationally, it may be that the expectations of donors, who are currently primarily from a development background, affect and set how CIVICUS implements its projects. But regardless of the causes, if CIVICUS wants to achieve even more in the next two years of its strategy, then it should strive across the board – in every communication, in every meeting, in every project design, and in every internal process – for simplification. The leadership and Board should lead by example, establish simplicity as a marker and criteria of success, and celebrate effective simplification when it happens. As one group put it in the joint action workshop, it is time for CIVICUS to consistently “Do Less Better”.

E. Metamorphosis

CIVICUS is entering a new era of people power – so it should think outside its organisational configuration

Throughout this review, stakeholders and the evidence raised existential questions about CIVICUS' identity. Specifically, changes to the external context (outlined above – “Development Arrested: a new era of people power) and CIVICUS' challenges in delivering, under Goal 2, against the commitment to strengthen people power and work with new actors (rather

“The downside of new funding was that it moved CIVICUS into the ‘development industrial complex’.”

“CIVICUS likes to say that it’s based in the global South, but mentally it’s based in the global North.”

than just serve the membership) suggest that the coming two years are an opportune moment to reflect on CIVICUS' long-term identity and values.

The chart below sets out one (provocative and perhaps crude) interpretation of CIVICUS' organisational journey so far.

Era of Democracy (1993 - 2003)

- Driven primarily by global demand to support civil society post Cold War
- Headquarters in Washington DC



Era of Development (2003- 2017/22)

- Driven primarily by global demand to support civil society to fight global poverty
- Headquarters in Johannesburg



Era of People Power? (2017/22 - ?)

- Driven primarily by global demand to strengthen civil society, not populists, to shape and build people power
- Staff & power increasingly decentralised globally?

The analysis can and should be debated. But if the central premise is correct - that CIVICUS now finds itself operating in an era of people power rather than one of development - then it has major implications for what CIVICUS does next. This review stops short of recommending exactly how CIVICUS should change in the long-term, but it does recommend that the CIVICUS Board should use the coming year to assess (a) what the organisation can immediately learn, for its current Strategic Plan, from other, non-development based, organisational configurations (for example, how International Trade Unions Congress or the World Scouts Movement mobilise and organise their potential members, or how political parties and cabinet spokespeople use the media to influence change) and (b) what options exist for changing their own organisational configuration in the next strategy beyond 2022 and (c) what CIVICUS stands for in the era of people power, in terms of its beliefs and policy positions. During the joint action workshop, groups suggested undertaking an 'identity analysis survey' with external stakeholders to understand how CIVICUS' identity is currently perceived. These options could be assessed in a scoping paper, and could help CIVICUS as it inevitably metamorphoses in one form or another into its next strategic period.

“There is deepening mistrust of the establishment, but [at the same time] progressive voices are aligning themselves with the liberal establishment and repeating their talking points.”

6. Summary of recommendations

Recommendation (additional context provided in corresponding text throughout the report)	Criticality (red = most critical)	Feasibility (red = least feasible)	Suggested Timescale	Section of report for additional context
Programmes and projects				
Design and articulate CIVICUS' programmatic model for change, drawing on lessons learned and lived experience, and produce a manual or tool to help CIVICUS' future design	Red	Green	End 2020	4.2 Goal 3, D Annex 7.4
Review influencing approach, interrogate and test assumptions, and align resources to a clear theory of change	Yellow	Green	End 2020	4.2 Goal 1, D
Design and build a prognostic tool or 'early warning system' to anticipate changes to civil society	Green	Yellow	End 2021	4.2 Goal 1, E Annex 7.4
Increase work to defend digital rights and civic freedoms	Yellow	Yellow	Mid 2020	4.2 Goal 1, G
Consider placing a 'cap' on the number of projects with their own identities and ring-fenced funding	Red	Yellow	Mid 2020	5 A
Ensure existing project priorities and identities are aligned and subservient to organisational priorities	Yellow	Yellow	Ongoing	5 A
Alliance building and people power				
Prioritise strengthening of people power and working with new actors in Goal 2 in next annual plan, rather than serving membership	Red	Green	Mid 2020	4.2 Goal 1, E, F
Ensure there are sufficient skilled human resources dedicated to building alliances	Red	Yellow	Mid 2020	4.2 Goal 1, F
Communications				
Invest substantially in a stronger communications function, including a senior level post	Red	Green	April 2020	4.2 Goal 1, F
Step up media work, both in creating meaningful partnerships and in better use of the news cycle	Yellow	Yellow	Ongoing	4.2 Goal 1, F
Make public interventions to build trust in civil society	Yellow	Green	Ongoing	4.2 Goal 3, E
Leadership, strategy and identity				
Review and simplify the structure of the OMF and PMF, establish and follow new ways of working, and invest time in strengthening the second tier of management in order to run the day-to-day business of the organisation, free up the Senior Leadership Team, and unlock leadership of non-management/junior staff	Red	Yellow	Mid 2020	4.2 Goal 4, E 5 C
Produce a scoping paper for Board discussion on the organisational configuration and identity in an	Green	Green	End 2020	5 E

era of people power, including an external perceptions or 'Identity Analysis' survey. The paper should help identify options for short-term learning from others; changing organisational configuration in the next strategy; and CIVICUS' positions, beliefs and what it stands for				Annex 7.4
Articulate internally the parameters of CIVICUS' position on "inequality, injustice, insecurity and climate change"			End 2020	4.2 Goal 2, F 5 E
Systems				
Develop internally one consolidated, ambitious plan for operational improvements during the remainder of the strategic period, and ensure this plan is resourced and delivered properly			Mid 2020	4.2 Goal 4, D 5 B
Identify a clear way forward to resolve the tension between solidarity and sub-granting			Mid 2020	4.2 Goal 3, F
Culture				
Embed a strong culture of simplification, including by following a mantra of "Do Less Better", and lead by example wherever possible			Ongoing	5 D Annex 7.4
Take action to maintain a strong line of sight between members, staff, and Board			Ongoing	4.2 Goal 4, F

7. Annexes

Annex 7.1: Terms of Reference

Introduction to CIVICUS

The [CIVICUS alliance](#) spans the spectrum of civil society, bringing together individuals and organisations at the local, national, regional and international levels. As well as civil society organisations (CSOs) engaged in advocacy, accountability and service delivery work, our 7,000+-strong membership across 175 countries includes trade unions, faith-based groups, professional associations, capacity development organisations and philanthropic foundations. We deliver our programmes and advance our strategic goals primarily by working with the members of our alliance.

In 2017, we launched our new [Strategic Plan](#) that takes us up to 2022, following consultation with a diverse range of members and partners around the world.

Our Strategic Goals 2017-2022 state that we will contribute towards our mission to strengthen citizen action and civil society toward a more just, inclusive and sustainable world by:

3. Defending civic freedoms and democratic values.
4. Strengthening the power of people to organise, mobilise and take action.
5. Empowering a more accountable, effective and innovative civil society.
6. Building a fit-for-purpose organisation.

Consultancy Background

CIVICUS is now almost halfway through its current strategy period 2017-2022 and would like to take the opportunity to reflect with our key stakeholders on progress against our Strategic Plan 2017-2022, document lessons and learnings and decide what or how we may want to adapt our ways of working/approaches to improve our impact in the second half of this strategic period.

Objectives of the Mid-Term Strategy Review

- The mid-term review should assess the overall performance of CIVICUS, in line with our [Accountability Framework](#), with a view to identifying options to deepen impact in the last two years of its current [Strategic Plan 2017-2022](#).
- The mid-term review should provide an opportunity to hear how we are doing, as an alliance, from our key external stakeholders (members, partners, donors and other), i.e. not a self-assessment.
- The mid-term review should be facilitated through a learning process by which we use our critical learning questions to better understand our niche role in the sector.

The mid-term review serves three purposes: (a) test assumptions and provide recommendations for strategic decision-making on the implementation of the final 2 years of our Strategic Plan, (b) provide accountability towards our stakeholders in terms of progress against our Strategic Plan, and (c) supporting the ongoing learning and development of the CIVICUS alliance.

The audience for the mid-term review will be the CIVICUS Secretariat staff and management, the CIVICUS Board of Directors, alliance members, donors and partners. The “light report” of the review will be made available on the website and shared with members and partners. This will be accompanied with an infographic or visual output for wider appeal and digestion.

Questions for the Review

The review will aim to answer (where possible) the following questions, which will also aim to guide our direction of inquiry:

A. Progress against Strategic Plan 2017-2022:

- To what extent have we achieved our Strategic Goals so far? What is the evidence for the outcomes we have achieved?
- What have been our successes, challenges, gaps and missed opportunities?
- What have been the unexpected results of our work, both positive and negative?
- What have been the key changes to the external context that have impacted (both positively and negatively) on our ability to achieve our objectives?
- To what extent have our approaches / working modalities allowed us to timely capture and be agile in response to changing context?
- What were our accelerators and blockages, and why?

B. Critical Learning Questions per Strategic Goals (See Annex)

Review Principles

The approach for this mid-term Strategy review will be guided by the following **principles**:

- The review will be framed around **CIVICUS’ critical learning questions** that will help provide insights for each of our 4 Strategic Goals.
- We will look at our **successes, challenges, investment focus (as far as possible), gaps** etc. within our Strategic Goals to help inform our focus for the next 2 years.
- We will not be revisiting our overall direction and strategic goals, but rather take this opportunity to **show evidence of where/what our contributions are to the outcomes and impact of our work, testing our accountability framework**.
- We will focus on gathering **new data/insights from external stakeholders** (members/partners/donors etc.).
- We will draw on **existing internal and external reflection processes** such as the annual impact reflections (for 2017/2018 and 2018/2019) to gather staff perspectives.
- We will **spend our internal energy on joint analysis and solutioning** (rather than data sourcing) emphasising joint agreement, ownership and clarity on decision making on changes/actions/projects for implementation.

- We will focus on **specific, actionable solutions**¹⁶ for **2020-2022** (rather than general recommendations) that can be incorporated into our annual plans and that we can share with our stakeholders to hold us to account.

Deliverables:

The key deliverables for this consultancy include the following:

- Conduct a short **desk review** of existing reflection documentation from the past 2 years
- Conduct and document **focus group discussions and interviews** with members, partners and other stakeholders
- **Analyse content/feedback** (both from a consultant perspective as well as engaging internal stakeholders to include their reactions to the feedback)
- **Facilitate/co-facilitate a joint Member/Board/Staff workshop** on 6th November for solutioning
- Prepare **final light report** which includes an action/implementation plan

¹⁶ With measures of success and the expectations that targets will be set during planning.

Annex 7.2: Desk Review documents

1. Strategic Plan 2017-2022
2. SIDA Organisational Evaluation – January 2018 and Management Response
3. SIDA Efficiency Audit and Management Response
4. 2019-2020 Organisational Priorities Summary
5. 2019-2020 Annual Plans (Clusters and Projects)
6. Trends from DevResults (performance data platform) – Q2 and Q3 2018-2019
7. Performance Story 2017-2022
8. Course Correction Action Plans
9. Secretary General Monthly Updates
10. Organisational Chart (staff positions)
11. CIVICUS Employee Handbook
12. Accountability Framework
13. Developmental Evaluation Framework
14. Impact Reflection Sessions Synthesis – August 2018
15. Impact Reflection Sessions Synthesis - April 2019
16. Impact Reflection Sessions Reports – September 2019
17. Annual Constituency Survey 2018 – Results and Data
18. Annual Constituency Survey 2019 – Results and Data
19. Membership Advisory Group Interview Learnings
20. Membership Target Groups analysis
21. Membership Engagement Spectrum analysis
22. Youth Engagement Progress Report 2018-2019
23. Programme Proposal: CIVICUS Solidarity Fund
24. Programme Proposal: Strengthening 21st century citizen action
25. Programme Proposal: Diversity & Inclusion
26. Evaluation Report – International Civil Society Week 2019

Annex 7.3: Interview and Focus Group participants

Interview Participants

- **Amitabh Behar**, Oxfam India and CIVICUS Board Vice Chair
- **Anabel Cruz**, Communication and Development Institute (Uruguay) and former CIVICUS Board Chair
- **Cristina Palabay**, Karapatan (Philippines)
- **Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah**, Oxfam GB and former CIVICUS Secretary General
- **Jacqui Howard**, Mobilisation Lab
- **Jelmer Kamstra**, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
- **Magda Toma**, Forus International
- **Nada Josimovic**, Free Press Unlimited
- **Sebastián Vielmas**, individual CIVICUS member, former CIVICUS Board and Youth Action Team member
- **Sophie Kange**, Uganda National NGO Forum and Chair, Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA)
- **Tonu Basu**, Open Government Partnership

Focus Group Discussion Participants

- **Bwalya Pascal**, Zambia Council for Social Development
- **Chan Pheakdey**, Cooperation Committee for Cambodia
- **Emily Nevins**, Amnesty International
- **Ilina Nesikj**, Balkan Civil Society Development Network
- **Monica Aleman**, Ford Foundation
- **Noel Dickover**, Counterpart International
- **Oli Henman**, Action for Sustainable Development
- **Thomas Hansen**, Danida, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
- **Walter Veirs**, CS Mott Foundation

Key Staff Conversations

- **Amy Taylor**, Chief Strategy Officer
- **Claire Nylander**, Chief Operating Officer
- **Lysa John**, Secretary General
- **Mandeep Tiwana**, Chief Programmes Officer

Annex 7.4: Joint Strategy & Action Workshop Outcomes



On 6 November 2019, over 100 CIVICUS staff, members and Board members came together in Johannesburg to understand the preliminary findings of CIVICUS' 2017-2022 Mid-Term Strategy Review and to co-create joint actions that CIVICUS could take in response to the findings. The workshop was creative and collaborative, rather than being a space for making decisions. Participants read the Preliminary Findings and activity data in advance. After interacting and engaging with the Preliminary Findings during the morning, in the afternoon participants agreed five action areas to explore in greater detail and broke up into ten "Action Tables" (around the five themes below). Each action table built out a plan and a pitch for a specific idea under that theme.

Notes from discussions in each of the five themes are captured below, and some specific ideas from each of the pitches are reflected in the recommendations included throughout the Review report.

It was agreed that CIVICUS' Senior Leadership Team will develop a management response to the Review Report in January 2020, and will use the report and the discussions and ideas from within the workshop as input to decisions and actions going forward. One group suggested that the new inclusive approach to planning could include joint review of the actions/interventions linked to the Mid-Term Review. It was agreed that the Report will be published and shared back with the entire alliance.

1. Action to identify what CIVICUS' identity will be in the era of people power: The Costume Makers

Groups discussed whether CIVICUS' current identity was understood and perceived very differently, even around the table. It was suggested that CIVICUS' current identity may be confusing, perhaps because of doing too many things at the same time to meet the wide variety of demands and needs. It was recognised that CIVICUS does already have streams of work, such as the Crisis Response Fund, Vuka! and Resilient Roots, that aim to strengthen people power.

Specific suggestions for action included:

- Beginning with **taking a snapshot of how CIVICUS' identity was currently perceived** to inform strategic thinking, perhaps through a '**Identity Analysis Survey**'
- After any strategic shift around CIVICUS' identity, **prioritising streams of work within CIVICUS linked to supporting people power**, and establishing a clear communication of what CIVICUS stands for

2. Action to manage growth and mitigate risk: The Gardeners

Groups discussed how CIVICUS should manage growth. It was suggested that the organisation will need to continue to evolve its systems and policies as it grows and changes to make sure that they are fit for purpose. It was also suggested that in terms of its work, the focus should shift from quantity to quality, and that this could require even more flexible funding (and by implication a reduction in restricted/projectised funding). Groups discussed the importance of 'growth through the alliance's membership' and using members as the platform for the alliance's work.

Specific suggestions for action included:

- Embedding a mantra of "**Do Less Better**" across the organisation in everything it does
- Consider insisting on **caps or set percentages for flexible/unrestricted funding/overheads** (e.g. 60%) within new proposals to donors to ensure that new funds contribute to rather than restrict the organisation's ability to do high quality, agile, flexible work
- Consider adopting a **new approach to planning**, bringing members into regular joint reviews of the major actions linked to the CIVICUS strategy and how resources are targeted towards deliverables.

3. Action to build CIVICUS' core model for effecting change: The Modellers

Groups discussed how CIVICUS could set about developing its core model for intervening to strengthen civil society and citizen action. It was suggested that it was important in doing this to listen to what was happening on the ground in terms of lived experience, rather than off-the-shelf expertise. While one group set out a proposal for how CIVICUS might do this, the other group set out a proposal for how partners might access CIVICUS' support.

Specific suggestions for action included:

- As part of CIVICUS' work to articulate its core model for effecting change, this should be **informed by lived experience** from around the world of how social change happens generally. Rather than using established experts, CIVICUS could **embed students, young people or activists within particular movements, organisations or groups** that they think they can learn from, and task them with documenting how change happened. This real-time evidence could benefit the host movements, the embedded individual, and also help CIVICUS refine its own model.
- CIVICUS could develop an **Alternative Resourcing Model (ARM)** for civil society, focussing on a means for strengthening civil society partners. This could articulate different types of support, and help partners access it.

4. Action to help CIVICUS become a true alliance and movement builder: The Builders

Groups discussed the importance of mobilising and organising, and stressed that that should include creating space for members to engage, interact and work together; listening; and creating space for momentum to develop organically rather than being engineered. Both groups focussed their discussions primarily on CIVICUS' building of a movement with its own members and constituents (rather than building alliances with others), and found it difficult to work up or articulate complete ideas for action. However:

Some **specific suggestions** for action included:

- Over the remaining two years of the strategy, **consulting and listening to partners to find out how to design more grassroots infrastructure** and how to invest in the grassroots as a significant part of the next Strategic Plan.
- In line with CIVICUS' emerging member-to-member network platform approach, CIVICUS should develop more spaces for CIVICUS members to engage and connect with each other. For example, CIVICUS could create a **shared learning hub**.
- CIVICUS could facilitate **regional People Power groups** as common spaces for different actors to come together.
- Any process going forwards should remain **organic and agile**, rather than highly structured.

5. Action to start building a diagnostic that anticipates change in civil society: The Fortune Tellers

Groups discussed what a new tool to anticipate change in civil society could look like, suggesting its purpose should be to predict, pre-empt and prevent attacks on civic space. Groups discussed the merits and drawbacks of using members to gather data, recognising that they are not always well positioned to see the entire picture. It was suggested that CIVICUS does not currently have access to enough data to produce such a tool.

Some **specific suggestions** for action included:

- Using the coming year (by December 2020) to establish a hypothesis for a new prognostic tool that could operate as **a predictive or early warning system**.
- It would need to draw on a new model and **new types of data from the ground**, which would need to be tested to see whether or not they become good predictors of change. For example, social media data could potentially be used to anticipate changes in protest or restrictions on civic space.
- Any tool would have to **establish trust that its findings and data are being fed into decision-making**, in order to get traction and credibility. (This of course presents the conundrum that taking action based on foresight could feasibly then affect the outcome, meaning it doesn't happen).