

MAIN FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS OF EVALUATION OF THE PILOT PHASE OF THE CIVICUS INDEX ON CIVIL SOCIETY PROJECT

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Executive Summary

This evaluation was begun in September 2001, with the main objective of providing CIVICUS with a thorough assessment of the pilot implementation of the Civil Society Index, so that CIVICUS could develop a stronger project design in the next phase of implementation.

The evaluation canvassed all the key constituents involved in the design, coordination and implementation of the project with a specially developed set of questions. Of the 39 persons canvassed, 22 (or 56%) responded; more importantly, all the 11 National Lead Organizations that have completed the project in their countries responded, with very detailed comments.

The evaluation has found that the Index project is an innovative, contextually flexible, empowering and uniquely participatory tool for self-assessment by civil society stakeholders of the state of civil society in their countries. Where it has been implemented fully, it has been largely empowering to its participants, and enabled a new kind of dialogue and reflection process that transcends the narrower interests of specific sectors of civil society, or specific social or policy issues. In many of the pilot countries, it has helped stakeholders build new agendas for advocacy and action, and initiated a new kind of interaction both amongst themselves and with government and the private sector.

The Index as currently designed, however, has certain weaknesses in methodology that must be modified before it is further applied. It is not entirely effective in terms of going beyond the better-organized and visible civil society entities such as NGOs and trade unions. It has not adequately encompassed, engaged and reflected the views and priorities of informal citizen associations. The research methodology has proved problematic. Greater clarity is required about what is being assessed and why, and what the results mean. The Index relies too heavily on the opinions and perceptions of stakeholders, and needs to gather more objective, verifiable data to provide its users with a stronger basis for analysis and action. This also weakens it as a basis for both intra- and inter-country comparisons, which could be useful to further mobilize and empower civil society. Although the instrument has the potential to influence social change agendas, and some of the Pilot Phase participants have already identified areas for action through it, the current indicators are inadequate for assessing civil society's impact on social change. Organizational arrangements for implementation of the project at the national level and within CIVICUS itself need to be reconsidered and strengthened.

These flaws are largely amenable to remedy and re-design. Revising the approach involves enhancing clarity about the purpose and applications of the Index, making related modifications in the sequence of steps in implementation, and designing a more convincing, rigorous and streamlined research methodology. This can be achieved through a re-design process that involves all the Pilot Phase national teams, Advisory Group and Core Team members, and carefully selected research experts. More detailed recommendations and suggestions are made in the report.

The key findings and recommendations of this evaluation are presented below:

KEY FINDINGS:

Based on the evaluation of the Pilot Phase of The CIVICUS Civil Society Index, three findings emerge clearly:

1. The Index has demonstrated great potential to generate collective action for strengthening the positive role of civil society, though such action could not fully manifest itself in the short time frame of the Pilot Phase. However, the quality and impact of such action can be strengthened through a stronger and less subjective methodology.
2. As a process the Index appears to be very successful as a creative and concrete instrument to mobilize civil society stakeholders, focus attention on the state of civil society, and create a basis for collective action. There does not appear to be any other comparable process that has as effectively achieved this. It has great potential to energize and inform social change efforts.
3. As a methodology, The Index is a creative and innovative instrument, but attempts to capture too many complex phenomena. It has fundamental flaws in concept and design, and needs major simplification and re-designing. Such re-design is possible.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Index project should be continued. It should be called the Civil Society Assessment Project, rather than an Index.
2. The Assessment methodology should focus on creating a sound diagnostic tool for the current status of civil society, and move away from normative concepts such as “healthy” civil society. Clarity about “healthy” civil society should emerge from the action agendas that the assessment helps generate.
3. The assessment tools need to be overhauled and revised based on the experience of the Pilot Phase. While the Diamond can be retained, its components, and the indicators for assessing each, need to be revised. This should be done by a group of experts and the leaders of the NLOs involved in the Pilot Phase.

