



## OVERVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CSI

## **PART I: OVERVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CSI**

PART I provides an overview of the main elements of the CSI as well as its key underlying features, including an operational definition of civil society. These features are framed within the CSI's goals, outcomes and objectives. Part I comprises two chapters, each with several sections as follows:

### **I.1. Overview**

#### **I.1.1 What is the CSI?**

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## PART I: OVERVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CSI

### I.1. Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the CSI project and its key constituting elements. It is divided in three sections:

- 1.1. What is the CSI?
- 1.2. CSI Value Orientation
- 1.3. Goal, Objectives, Outcomes and Outputs

#### I.1.1 What is the CSI?

The CSI is an action-research project that aims to assess the state of civil society in countries around the world.

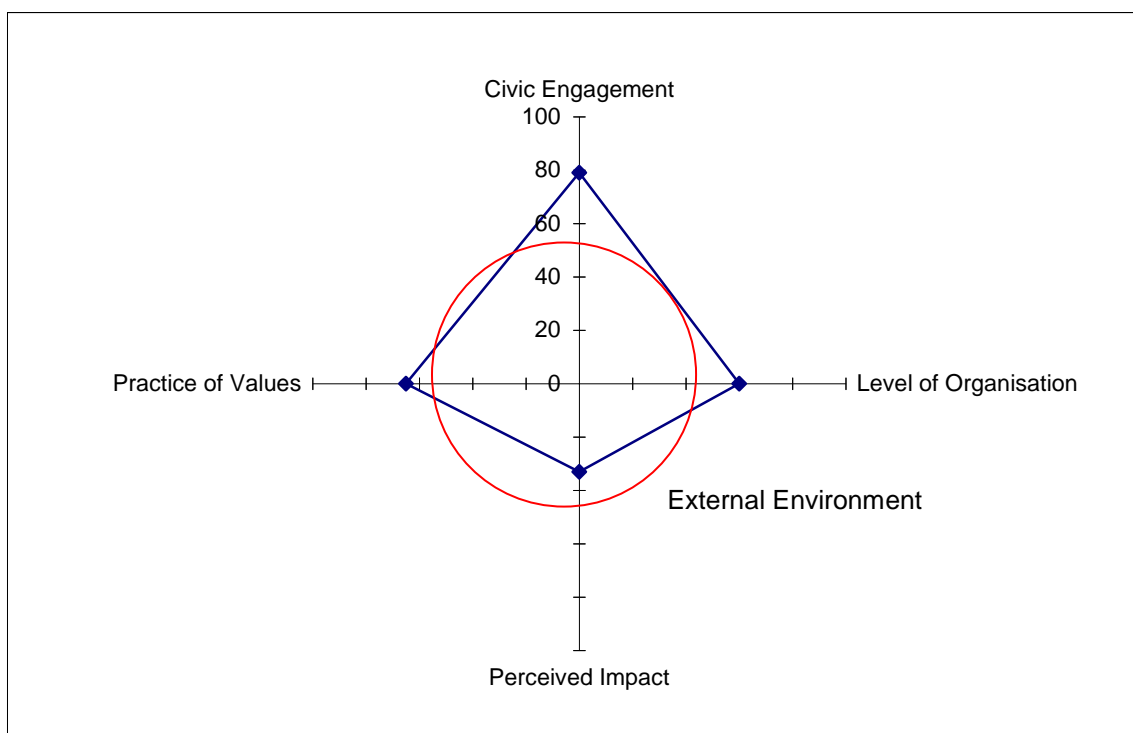
Between 2003 and 2006 the CSI was implemented in over 50 countries worldwide, and during 2007-2008 an intermediary phase-focusing on six African countries-was implemented. In early 2008 the project's methodology was revised, based on the results of various evaluations and comments of stakeholders and experts. This toolkit presents the revised methodological and structural setup of the CSI.

The CSI is designed to measure the following core dimensions:

1. **Civic Engagement:** The extent to which individuals engage in social and policy-related initiatives.
2. **Level of Organisation:** The degree of institutionalisation that characterises civil society (measured through an analysis of civil society organisations).
3. **Practice of Values:** The extent to which civil society practices some core values.
4. **Perceived Impact:** The extent to which civil society is able to impact the social and policy arena, according to internal and external perceptions.
5. **External environment:** The above four dimensions are analysed in the context of a fifth dimension that the CSI calls the '**external environment**', which includes the conditions (e.g. socio-economic, political and cultural variables) within which civil society operates.

Each dimension is captured with a range of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative indicators are used to construct the Civil Society Diamond, one of the key components of the CSI, which is divided into sub-dimensions that in turn, are made up of

quantitative indicators. By assembling the quantitative data, the CSI generates the Civil Society Diamond (from a 0-100 scale, shown in Figure I.1).



**Figure I.1: Civil Society Diamond**

To render the abstract concept ‘civil society’ useful for empirical research, the Civil Society Diamond attempts to graphically represent the operational concepts (dimensions) that the CSI tries to measure.<sup>1</sup> The Civil Society Diamond does not collapse the various indicators into one single measure, number or score. Rather, it combines indicators to provide a visual display of different dimensions and their respective values in a common space, using the same or comparable metrics. The Diamond’s size seeks to portray an empirical picture of the state of civil society, covering structural and normative manifestations, but also encompassing the conditions that support or inhibit civil society's development as well as the consequences of civil society's activities for society at large.

The context or environment, represented visually by a circle centred around the axes of the Civil Society Diamond, is not regarded as part of the state of civil society but rather as a crucial element for its development. Broadly speaking, the larger the circle is, the more conducive the external environment is to the health of civil society. However, care should

<sup>1</sup> The initial research framework, known as the Civil Society Diamond, was developed by Helmut Anheier, who also participated in the 2008 CSI project redesign process.

be taken not to over-interpret the details of its size and shape, however. Although the radius of the circle gives a broad indication of the state of the external environment, no particular meaning should be attributed to whether the points of the diamond fall within or outside it; the circle and diamond are simply two graphics, one superimposed on the other. Note also that the environment measure is always circular, never elliptical. Even though it is conceptually plausible that the environment may foster or restrain individual dimensions of civil society differently, it is simply too complex to capture this with empirically valid summary variables.

The Civil Society Diamond is also intended to enable useful comparisons. It can be used to track developments over time and can also serve to compare one particular case (country, region or field) to another. This comparison can involve two countries, a region within a country relative to the country as a whole, or a particular field of civil society in contrast to civil society at large.

However, it is important to emphasise that the indicators and sub-dimensions that make up the dimensions of the Civil Society Diamond in the current project methodology differ from those used in the 2003-2006 phase principally by their *measurability*. In this regard, and as explained in later sections of the toolkit, the methodology also requires the implementation of case studies, i.e. systematic, in-depth analyses of selected topics, for each dimension. These case studies are important: they will allow the identification of key factors affecting the overall state of civil society in a country and pinpoint areas where some form of action should be promoted. The case studies should seek to answer at least one question for each dimension. The following are some suggestions:

### **1. Civic Engagement**

- What are the patterns of participation and civic engagement? Who participates and why?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of volunteering?

### **2. Level of Organisation**

- What is the geographical and sectoral distribution of civil society? Is civil society representative of all regions of a country? Does the capital city hold the lion's share?
- From local to global: what are the connections and linkages with international networks?

### **3. Practice of Values**

- How transparent and accountable is civil society?

- What is civil society's 'carbon footprint' that is, its impact on the environment?

#### **4. Perceived Impact**

- When is civil society effective in impacting public policy (i.e. social policy, human rights, national budget, the environment)?

#### **5. Environment**

- What is civil society's relationship to the State?
- What is civil society's relationship to the Private sector?

Both quantitative and qualitative data are generated by a comprehensive set of research tools and consultations, which are detailed in the annexes. Furthermore, the findings of the case studies will be used to develop recommendations and an action agenda in a participatory fashion towards the culmination of the project. The revised methodology allows for a 'building-block' approach; that is, the various research methods contribute to different elements of the project so that NCOs can adapt to the country-specific needs and objectives.

The process through which the research is conducted and the analysis carried out is extremely important in its own right: implementing the CSI is an opportunity for civil society actors to network, raise awareness around critical issues, promote participation and reflection and, last but not least, build capacity for civil society.

### **I.1.2 CSI Value Orientation**

CIVICUS envisions a worldwide community of informed, inspired, committed citizens who are engaged in confronting the challenges facing humanity. To pursue this vision, CIVICUS promotes civic existence, expression, and engagement. Inherent in CIVICUS' work is a set of critical values that flow from this vision: accountability and transparency, democracy, inclusiveness, non-violence and peace, participation, and tolerance. These values underpin the CSI's approach and research methodology.

At the same time, the CSI seeks to portray not only the part of civil society that shares and practices these values, but its entirety. As such, the CSI uses a definition of civil society that can be applied in different contexts:

*The arena – outside of the family, the state, and the market – which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests.*

This definition and the value orientation of the project's approach are discussed in greater detail in Chapter II of this toolkit.

### I.1.3 Goal, Objectives, Outcomes and Outputs<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of the CSI is to enhance the strength and sustainability of civil society in order to intensify its contribution to positive social change.

The CSI's goals and objectives as well as the corresponding outcomes and outputs are as follows:

#### Box I.1: Goals, Objectives, Outcomes, Outputs

##### Goals

Existence of *active* and *effective* national and international platforms for knowledge-based actions for the strengthening of civil society

##### Objectives

Through the CSI process:

- knowledge is *generated* and *shared* among civil society stakeholders
- civil society's *capacity* and *commitment* are increased

##### Outcomes

1. *Increased* and *shared* body of knowledge on the state of civil society
2. *Shared* understanding and dialogue on the state of civil society among a broad range of stakeholders
3. *Continued efforts* to share knowledge on civil society by a diverse set of stakeholders
4. Increased *knowledge-based actions* by civil society stakeholders
5. Strengthened *capacity* within civil society to conduct and disseminate *action-oriented research*

##### Outputs

1. Research Outputs
  - a. Analytical country report
  - b. Action brief
  - c. Research activity reports
  - d. Indicator repository/database
2. Shared understanding of the state of civil society among project participants
  - a. Definition
  - b. Common understanding of civil society's strengths and weaknesses
3. Forums for sharing knowledge on civil society within participating countries
  - a. Advisory committee meetings
  - b. Focus group meetings
  - c. National Workshop
  - d. Task forces for the implementation of recommendations

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to 'Further Reading' for the CSI Logical Framework.

4. A set of actionable recommendations for strengthening civil society
  - a. Recommendations from National Workshop
5. Research capacity built among project participants
  - a. Capacity-building trainings
  - b. Project implementation process support
  - c. Toolkit

During the implementation of the CSI, the NCO will need to adopt strategies not only to produce the outputs and outcomes of the project, but also to achieve the broader objectives and goals. Part III will outline some suggested mechanisms that will help combine 'reflection' and 'research' with 'action'. Indeed, it cannot be taken for granted that generating knowledge will lead to collective reflection and that the latter will then trigger collective action.

**Recap Box :**

- √ The CSI is a value-normative tool measuring the state of civil society in a given country context.
- √ The CSI is a tool that assists in enhancing the strength and sustainability of civil society in order to intensify civil society's contribution to positive social change.
- √ The quantitative information gathered throughout the process yields the Civil Society Diamond.
- √ The qualitative information qualifies and explores issues in depth and will be crucial for the development of policy strategies and recommendations at the end of the process.
- √ Participation and reflection are important to the CSI's overall goal and objectives.

## **I.2. CSI Conceptual and Analytical Framework**

Civil society is a complex concept. The task of defining and operationalising the concept, identifying civil society's essential features and designing a strategy to assess its state is, in itself, an intricate and potentially controversial process. The purpose of this chapter is to describe key features of the CSI's conceptual and analytical framework and to explain some of the underlying guiding principles and decisions that shaped its design.

This chapter is divided into four parts:

2.1 Guiding principles for the CSI conceptual framework

2.2 Key features of the CSI conceptual framework

2.3 Definition of civil society

2.4 CSI analytical framework

### **I.2.1 Guiding Principles for the CSI Conceptual Framework**

The following principles inform the CSI in generating an assessment of civil society that meets the basic criteria of scientific rigor and cross-country comparability, as well as providing civil society stakeholders with practical knowledge and mechanisms for strengthening civil society.

**Globally relevant and applicable framework:** Both the concept and the reality of civil society vary greatly around the world. Given the global nature of the CSI, the framework seeks to accommodate cultural variations in understandings of civil society and its diverse forms and functions as observed in different countries. In particular, the CSI attempts to avoid 'Western' bias in its definition of key concepts and choice of indicators.

**Cross-country comparability:** The CSI seeks to generate information about civil society that can be compared across countries. While there is strong interest at the international level (especially among policy makers and academics) to have access to such cross-country data, cross-country comparability has also been deemed of interest by national civil society partners. There is a tension, however, between seeking 'standardised' information that can be compared across countries and maintaining adequate flexibility to ensure that country-specific factors can be taken into account. The CSI is specifically designed to achieve an appropriate balance between these two opposing demands.

**Inclusive:** Debates around how to operationalise and measure the concept of civil society and how to strengthen 'real civil societies' are still in their infancy. Given the current lack of consensus around the concept of civil society, the CSI framework seeks to accommodate a

variety of theoretical viewpoints and interests by identifying and generating knowledge about different features and dimensions of civil society. Thus, the CSI project approach is an inclusive and multi-disciplinary one in terms of civil society indicators, actors and processes.

**Reflection of the reality of civil society:** A major dispute about civil society concerns its normative content. There are some who argue that, in order to belong to civil society, actors have to be democratic (e.g. Diamond, 1994), oriented towards the public good (Knight and Hartnell, 2001) or at least adhering to basic civil manners (Shils, 1991; Merkel and Lauth, 1998). The CSI holds that such definitions and concepts are useful in defining civil society as an ideal, but are less useful in seeking to understand and assess the reality of civil society in countries across the globe. Since the CSI seeks to assess the state of civil society, this assessment would be pre-determined to yield a particular result if, from the outset, any undesirable or ‘uncivil’ elements were by definition excluded from the investigation. The CSI, therefore, adopts a realistic view by acknowledging that civil society is composed of peaceful as well as violent forces that may advance or obstruct social progress. It also acknowledges that civil society is not a homogenous, united entity, but a complex arena where diverse values and interests interact and power struggles occur. These issues are discussed further in Section 2.3 Definition of Civil Society, below.

**Action-orientation:** In contrast to some research initiatives, the principal aim of the CSI is to generate information that is of practical use to civil society practitioners and other primary stakeholders. Therefore, the CSI framework seeks to identify aspects of civil society that can be changed, and generate information and knowledge relevant to action-oriented goals.

### **1.2.2 Key Features of the CSI Conceptual Framework**

Some key features of the CSI conceptual framework are:

**Explicit normative stance:** In selecting certain indicators and framing certain questions, the CSI necessarily makes normative judgments as to what the defining features of civil society are, what functions civil society should serve, what values it should embrace, etc. These judgments are based on a set of values that flow directly from CIVICUS’ vision into its work: accountability and transparency, democracy, inclusiveness, non-violence and peace, participation, and tolerance (see [www.civicus.org](http://www.civicus.org)).

**Context specificity and cross-country comparability:** Cross-country comparability of the CSI findings is sought, but the priority is to understand and respect country-specific features of civil society. CIVICUS proposes a common definition, conceptual framework, research method and scoring procedure that allows for considerable flexibility. CIVICUS encourages NCOs along with the Advisory Committee to adapt or redefine these as necessary. Where modifications are possible this is highlighted in the toolkit and technical annexes, which make clear what is essential in the CSI framework and approach to ensure comparability of results across countries. Where modifications are considered necessary and the research methodology needs to be adapted, NCOs are requested to consult with CIVICUS.

**Core indicator set:** In order to balance context specificity and cross-country comparability, the set of proposed indicators (see Annex I.1) represents a core of generally applicable indicators to assess the state of civil society. In many countries, additional country- or issue-specific indicators (e.g. civil society's role in peace-building, crisis management or emergency relief) may be added so that the indicator set covers all main features of civil society. Please note that these indicators should not be included when calculating the CS Diamond for comparative purposes. Furthermore, if adding an indicator, the NCO needs to include the same question in all the relevant research tools and questionnaires. Recognising the immense variety of social, cultural and political contexts of civil society across the world, the CSI is not striving for *identical*, but *equivalent* assessments of civil society (van Deth, 1998; Przeworski and Teune, 1966-1967).

**Embracing complexity:** In the interests of easy measurement and understandable results, the CSI could be composed of a small number of proxy indicators and create a simple ranking of countries (analogous to UNDP's Human Development Index). However, it was reasoned that it would be counter-productive to over-simplify the concept of civil society in this way. First, it was considered impossible to capture the complex reality of civil societies across the globe with a small number of indicators (no matter how carefully chosen). Such a ranking would have limited practical value: a low score, for example, would indicate that 'something is wrong' but would not detect strengths and weaknesses or illustrate underlying causes. Therefore, instead the CSI uses multiple indicators and strives for a comprehensive assessment that is able to identify civil society's major strengths and weaknesses and explore their causes. That said, CIVICUS acknowledges that no amount of indicators would represent civil society in its entirety, so choices were made by the team conducting the methodology redesign in early 2008. It is important to note that the CSI's assessment of civil society is *not* reduced to a single numerical score, but rather assesses

and scores multiple dimensions of civil society, accompanied by a detailed description and analysis.

**Disaggregating data:** To the extent possible, research methods are designed to allow for optimal disaggregation of findings. They aim to gather information that is as detailed as possible. In the case of a number of indicators and variables, the disaggregation of research findings by crucial demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, socio-economic status, geographic location, CSO sector) is strongly encouraged.

**Building on existing knowledge:** In designing the framework (and especially in defining dimensions, sub-dimensions and indicators), CIVICUS has attempted to draw as much as possible on existing concepts, scales, indicators and operational tools. This eases the task of conceptualisation and data collection, and facilitates engagement within the field of civil society research and related themes, such as democracy, governance and development research.

### **I.2.3 Definition of Civil Society**

The CSI defines civil society as:

**The arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests.**

Below the key terms of this definition are described.<sup>3</sup>

**Arena:** In conceptualising civil society as an arena, the CSI emphasises the importance of civil society's role in creating public spaces where diverse societal values and interests interact. The term arena is used to describe the particular realm or space in a society where people come together to debate, discuss, associate, and seek to influence broader society. CIVICUS strongly believes that this arena is distinct from other arenas in society, such as the market, state or family. Based on the CSI's practical interest in strengthening civil society, it therefore conceptualises civil society as a *political* term (rather than in *economic* terms as a synonym to the 'non-profit sector'). This is because we are interested in collective public action in the broader context of governance and development and not primarily in the economic role of non-profit organisations in society. This political

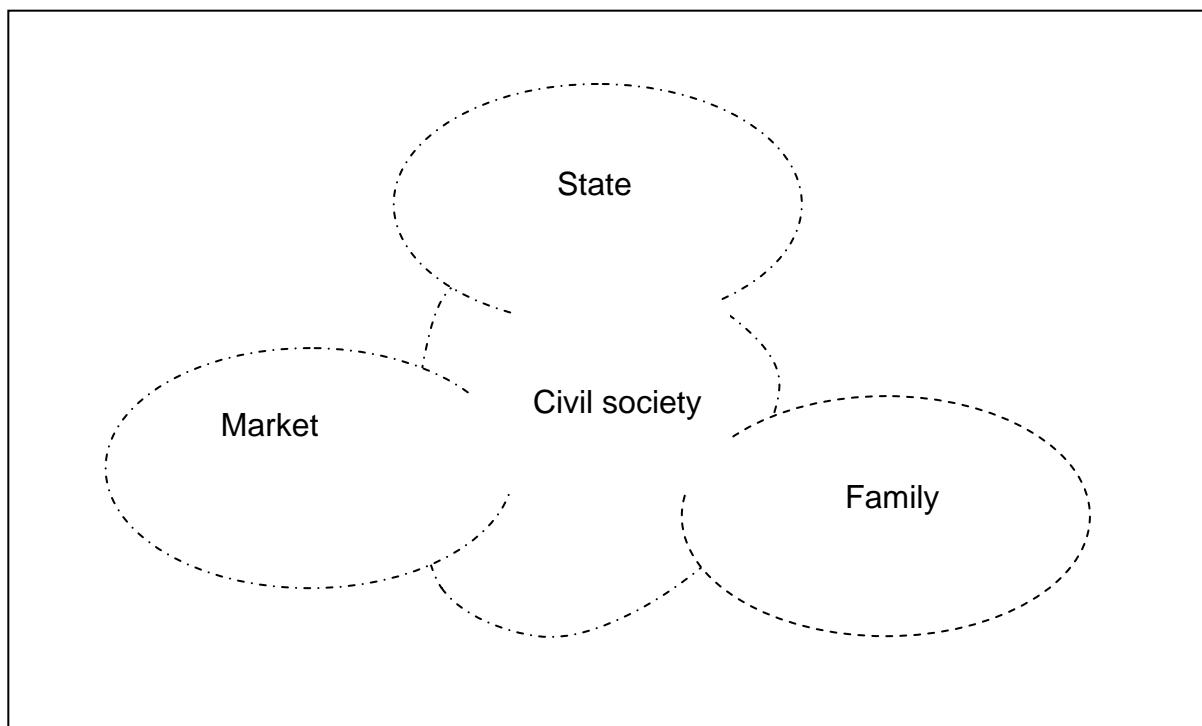
perspective of civil society leads the CSI to focus on issues of power, both within the civil society arena, as well as between civil society actors and the institutions of the state and the private sector.

**‘Fuzzy’ boundaries:** While acknowledging theoretical boundaries between civil society, state, market and family, these are in reality ‘fuzzy’. First, as illustrated in Figure 1.2, there can be overlap between the different spheres. For example, cooperatives (that have both profit- and value-based goals) might be seen to occupy the overlapping space of civil society and market.<sup>4</sup> Second, the CSI defines ‘membership’ in civil society according to function (what activity or role an actor undertakes) rather than organisational form. This means that actors can move from one arena, sphere or space to another, and even inhabit more than one simultaneously, depending on the nature or function of their action – namely collective public action. This framework places less emphasis on organisational forms and allows for a broader focus on the functions and roles of informal associations, movements and instances of individual and collective citizen action. Such a definition may make the identification of who ‘belongs’ to civil society and who does not more difficult than one that defines civil society by its organisational form (e.g. non-profit, independent of state). However, only such an action-oriented definition can take account of the full range of civil society actors.

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to ‘Further Reading’ for the implications of and rationale for excluding some often-used criteria and terms.

<sup>4</sup> For example, parastatals represent a borderline case between government and the market; political parties are sometimes cited as an example of a borderline case between civil society and government.



**Figure I.2: Civil Society Arena's Fuzzy Boundaries**

**Family:** As the CSI is concerned with public action of individuals, due to its private nature, the family is generally not regarded as part of civil society. However, the CSI acknowledges the public role of family associations or clan groups in certain societies and, based on their public activity, would include them as part of civil society.

**State:** The state is distinct from civil society in that it alone possesses the monopoly over the legitimate use of force in society (Gerth and Mills, 1946). In instances where the state is failing and/or disintegrating, civil society may *temporarily* take on a partially coercive role (e.g. some revolutions or state-failure situations such as in Somalia). This does not deflect from this fundamental difference between civil society and the state. In certain contexts, where local governance institutions are largely citizen-controlled and/or traditional organisations are assigned certain authorities at local level, these institutions are sometimes seen as part of civil society. It is the view of the CSI, however, that the authoritative power of local government to make binding decisions for the locality makes local government a component of the state.

**Market:** The market (or private sector) is another space in society where people associate to advance their interests. However, due to their profit motive, the interactions that take place in this sphere are excluded from the definition of civil society. Market actors can however participate in civil society. As explained above, participation in civil society is

determined on the basis of its 'function' and not its organisational 'form'. This means that market actors, when engaged in 'public', not-for-profit or philanthropic acts, can be seen as acting within civil society. Therefore, market-related organisations, such as chambers of commerce and professional associations, which advocate for their shared interests, are members of civil society.

**Individual and collective action, organisations and institutions:** Implicit in a political understanding of civil society is the notion of agency, i.e. that civil society actors have the ability to influence decisions that affects the lives of ordinary people. The CSI embraces a broad range of actions taken by individuals and groups. Individual actions might include writing a letter to a newspaper, signing a petition, demonstrating, taking part in a boycott, participating in neighbourhood or community meetings, joining an online-discussion forum or media debate, volunteering at a local school or clinic, or giving money to charity. Collective actions might include advocacy campaigns, providing assistance and information, organising citizens' juries, lobbying officials and parliamentarians, hosting public debates, or mounting protests. Many of these actions take place within the context of organisations or institutions ranging from small informal groups to large professionally run associations. Some examples of such organisations are provided in Box I.2 and in Annex I.2.

#### **Box I.2: Organisations and Institutions**

Organisations and institutions that engage in the civil society arena, and through which citizens engage in civil society action, range from local sports clubs to international human rights organisations, from parents' associations to labour unions, from mutual savings groups to grant-making foundations, from self-help groups to social service and health care providers, from local choirs to national orchestras. A broader list of possible types of organisations and institutions covered by the CSI is included in Annex I.2.

**Advance shared interests:** The term 'interests' should be interpreted very broadly, encompassing the promotion of values, needs, identities, norms and other aspirations. Some examples of such shared interests are provided in Box I.3. These are promoted when civil society actors - individuals, organisations and institutions - come together, or 'associate', in public spaces. This ability of people to bond and relate to one another, whether under the umbrella of an organisation or in a spontaneous demonstration, is a key characteristic of civil society and one of its basic building blocks. 'Where, by contrast, such bonds of affinity and cooperation are lacking, we speak of mass society, in which people stand alone, atomized and unconnected to each other' (Hadenius and Ugglå, 1996: 1621).

### **Box I.3: Shared Interests**

They encompass the personal and public, and can be pursued by small informal groups, large membership organisations or formal associations. The emphasis rests however on the element of *sharing* a recreational or other interest within the public sphere. Personal shared interests might include hobbies such as dancing, attending a book club, wildlife-spotting, singing, and playing a musical instrument within a band. Personal interests would also embrace any sporting activity practiced on an amateur basis, whether it is kite-surfing, football, hockey, swimming, martial arts, mountain-biking, skateboarding, athletics, table-tennis or jogging. Broader societal shared interests might include an equally broad spectrum of concerns such as: environmental issues, protection of human rights, democracy promotion, HIV/AIDS awareness, employee rights, anti-war or peace movements, prison reform, crime prevention, disaster or emergency relief, civic concerns and volunteering.

## **I.2.4 CSI Analytical Framework**

The CSI uses 55 indicators to analyse the state of civil society and 12 indicators measuring the external context. Each indicator assesses what is considered an important, specific aspect of civil society. The indicators are grouped into 24 sub-dimensions which, in turn, are grouped into four core dimensions – Civic Engagement, Level of Organisation, Practice of Values, and Perceived Impact. These dimensions are then circumscribed by the External Environment, which is in turn composed of three sub-dimensions.

### **Indicators**

In selecting and designing the indicators, the following guiding principles were applied:

- **Relevant:** The CSI aims to assess the state of civil society in a comprehensive manner while taking into account practicalities. There are an infinite number of issues, questions and features that one could be interested in regards to the state of civil society. However, the CSI seeks to assess the key relevant features of civil society. Principles of both practical manageability and scientific parsimony demand a focus on a limited number of crucial issues.
- **Measurable:** There are features of civil society that are relevant but not observable in reality and/or on which it is very difficult to gather data (particularly those related

to evaluations and internal CSO issues). CSI indicators are based on what information is attainable within reasonable time and resource limits, as well as what is already available.

- **Clearly defined:** The CSI's goal of cross-country comparability necessitates that all indicators be clearly defined with a view to minimising ambiguity and leaving as little as possible open to interpretation.
- **Actionable:** The indicators and other data gathered by the research provide much of the information on which the analysis of civil society's strengths, weaknesses and subsequently, any action points, is based. Therefore, the selected indicators are amenable to change; they are those on which specific interventions can be designed to improve the indicator score and thereby the state of civil society.

### Dimensions and Sub-dimensions

As described above with regard to the quantitative component of the CSI, all indicators are grouped into 24 sub-dimensions and four dimensions, with 'Environment', composed of three sub-dimensions, placed as an external dimension circumscribing the state of civil society. Each dimension and sub-dimension is described below. Please note that individual indicators are described and explained in Annex I.1 of the toolkit.

<b>Box I.4: Dimensions and Sub-dimensions</b>			
<i>Civic Engagement</i>	<i>Level of Organisation</i>	<i>Practice of Values</i>	<i>Perception of Impact</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extent of socially-based engagement</li> <li>• Depth of socially-based engagement</li> <li>• Diversity of socially-based engagement</li> <li>• Extent of political engagement</li> <li>• Depth of political engagement</li> <li>• Diversity of socially-based engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal governance</li> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Sectoral communication</li> <li>• Human resources</li> <li>• Financial and technological resources</li> <li>• International linkages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic decision-making governance</li> <li>• Labour regulations</li> <li>• Code of conduct and transparency</li> <li>• Environmental standards</li> <li>• Perception of values in civil society as a whole</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsiveness (internal perception)</li> <li>• Social impact (internal perception)</li> <li>• Policy impact (internal perception)</li> <li>• Responsiveness (external perception)</li> <li>• Social impact (external perception)</li> <li>• Policy impact (external perception)</li> <li>• Impact of CS on attitudes</li> </ul>
<i>Environment:</i>			
Socio-economic context/ Socio-political context/ Socio-cultural context			

The CSI is designed to assess and score the following four dimensions:

## Dimension 1: Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is one of the core components of the CSI's definition of civil society as it describes the formal and informal activities undertaken by individuals to advance shared interests at different levels, from recreation to social and political interests (see Box I.3 and below). The 'active citizenship' element<sup>5</sup> is therefore a crucial defining factor of civil society. Participation within civil society is multi-faceted. It is therefore useful to distinguish between socially-based engagement and political engagement.

- **Socially-based engagement** refers to those activities of citizens that include exchange within the public sphere to advance shared interests of a generally *social* or *recreational* nature. Examples range from participating in food kitchens to running sport clubs or cultural centres. These activities are extremely important not only because they promote mutual care and offer ways of spending one's spare time, but also because they build social capital.
- **Political engagement** refers to those activities through which individuals try to advance shared interests of some *political* nature. These activities might include participation in demonstrations or boycotts, signing petitions, etc. and are often dependent on the country's context. As a defining factor, these activities aim at impacting policies and/or bringing about social change at the macro-level.

Within each of these two areas, three specific sub-dimensions are measured:

- **Extent of engagement** of individuals both as members and/or volunteers of organisations and associations.
- **Depth of engagement**, which assesses how frequently/extensively people engage in civil society activities.
- **Diversity or inclusiveness of civil society**, given the fact that the CSI regards civil society as an arena where conflicting interests and power relations are played out. In this context, the presence of different social groups (especially traditionally marginalised groups) should not be taken for granted but rather seen as an important empirical element to assess. Therefore, this sub-dimension examines the distributions of gender, age, socio-economic background, ethnicity, and geographical region of those participating in civil society by comparing the levels within civil society with those in society at large.

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<sup>5</sup> Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007): The Concept of Active Citizenship. Available from [http://www.activecitizen.ie/UPLOADEDFILES/Mar07/Concept%20of%20Active%20Citizenship%20paper%20\(Mar%2007\).pdf](http://www.activecitizen.ie/UPLOADEDFILES/Mar07/Concept%20of%20Active%20Citizenship%20paper%20(Mar%2007).pdf), consulted on 16 April 2008.

To the extent possible, a common set of indicators for all six sub-dimensions was sought to guarantee a high level of comparability between them.

### **Dimension 2: Level of Organisation**

The Level of Organisation dimension looks at the organisational development of civil society as a whole. In order to do so, it assesses the level of complexity and sophistication in a carefully selected sample of civil society organisations.

The sub-dimensions examined in this case are:

- **Internal governance**, assessed by the percentage of CSOs that have a formal governance and management system (e.g. a Board of Directors or Trustees or a Steering Committee, and the categories of groups included in the Board if it exists) with clearly defined roles and a clear system for their selection.
- **Infrastructure**, i.e. the level of support within the sector, measured by the percentage of CSOs that belong to a federation or an umbrella body of related organisations, considering that as a general rule the level of networking and connections among civil society organisations is a sign of strength. This might not be true for all country contexts, considering that the existence or high level of registration under umbrella groups can be seen as a common trait within some non-democratic political environments. In this case it would fall under the Advisory Committee's remit to adapt the indicator.
- **Sectoral communication**, exploring examples of information-sharing and alliance-building to assess the extent of linkages and productive relations among civil society actors.
- **Human resources**, which assesses the sustainability of civil society's human resources by measuring the ratio of volunteers to paid employees within the organisation.
- **Financial and technological resources**, including both the various sources of funding (e.g. membership, service fees, grants and donations) and the regular access to or availability of telephones, fax, internet or email and computers.
- **International linkages**, encompassing membership in international networks and participation in global events.

### **Dimension 3: Practice of Values**

An assessment of the state of civil society cannot avoid considering the internal practice of values within the civil society arena. Since the CSI does not assume that civil society is *by*

*definition* made up of progressive groups, nor does it take for granted that civil society is able to practice what it preaches, it is paramount for this project to treat the practice of values as an empirical question that must be tested.

In order to do so, CIVICUS identified some key values that are deemed crucial to gauge not only the endorsement of certain progressive values, but also the extent to which civil society's practices are coherent with their ideals. As a consequence, the following sub-dimensions are considered:

- **Democratic decision-making governance**, i.e. how and by whom decisions are taken within CSOs.
- **Labour regulations** includes the existence of policies regarding equal opportunities, staff membership in labour unions, training in labour rights for new staff, and a publicly available statement on labour standards.
- **Code of conduct and transparency**, i.e. whether a code of conduct exists and is available publicly and whether the CSO's financial information is available to the public.
- **Environmental standards**, i.e. to what extent do CSOs adopt policies upholding environmental standards of operation.
- **Perception of values within civil society**, i.e. how do CSOs perceive the practice of values such as non-violence, democracy, trustworthiness and tolerance in the civil society within which they operate.

This dimension, therefore, focuses both on the internal, measurable praxis of values as well as the values that civil society, within its diversity, portrays and represents as a whole towards society at large.

#### **Dimension 4: Perception of Impact**

The level of impact that civil society has on policy and social issues as well as on attitudes within society as a whole is analysed from the perspective of *perceived* impact, as recounted by both observers within civil society (internal perception) as well as external stakeholders belonging to the state, private sector, media, academia, international governmental organisations, or donor organisations (external perception). This perceived impact is assessed along the following sub-dimensions:

- **Responsiveness (internal and external)**, i.e. civil society's impact on the most important social concerns within the country.

- **Social impact (internal and external)**, i.e. civil society's impact on society in general.
- **Policy impact (internal and external)** covers civil society's impact on policy in general, the policy activism of CSOs, and the impact of CSO activism on selected policy issues.
- **Impact on attitudes** includes trust, public spiritedness and tolerance, among society as a whole, as well as the level of public trust in civil society.

### **Context Dimension: External Environment**

In assessing the state of civil society it is crucial to give consideration to the social, political and economic environment in which it exists. Some features of this environment may enable the growth of civil society – for example, the prevalence of social values such as trust and tolerance among the general population may foster associational activity. Conversely, some features of the environment hamper the development of civil society – for example, restrictions on freedom of association, legal framework, but also socio-economic factors such as an economic depression might impact civil society negatively.

Three elements of the external environment are to be captured:

- **Socio-economic context** is depicted by Social Watch's basic capabilities index, which is a simple indicator of a country's level of social development, combining information on infant mortality, health care resources, and access to basic education. Measures of corruption, inequality, and macro-economic health complement the basic capabilities index to portray the socio-economic context that can have marked consequences for civil society, and perhaps most significantly at the lower levels of social development.
- **Socio-political context** is represented by five indicators. Three of these are adapted from the Freedom House indices of political and civil rights and freedoms, including political rights and freedoms, personal rights and freedoms within the law and associational and organisational rights and freedoms. Information about CSO experience with the country's legal framework and state effectiveness round out the picture of the socio-political context.
- **Socio-cultural context** utilises interpersonal trust – the level of trust that ordinary people feel for other ordinary people – as a broad measure of the social psychological climate for association and cooperation. Even though everyone experiences relationships of varying trust and distrust with different people, this measure provides a simple indication of the prevalence of a world-outlook that can

support and strengthen civil society. Similarly, the extent of tolerance and public spiritedness also offers clues regarding the context in which civil society unfolds.

**Recap Box :**

- √ The CSI balances comparability with context specificity and adopts a general and flexible approach to the definition of civil society within a normative context.
- √ The research is intended to be coupled with, and generate action for, the strengthening of civil society.
- √ Civil society is seen as an arena (as opposed to an actor) that is actively created through citizen and organisational engagement, that is, including organised and non-organised civic engagement.
- √ The chosen dimensions, sub-dimensions and indicators allow for the formulation of a policy agenda.
- √ The Civil Society Diamond is characterized by *civic engagement*, *level of organisation*, *practice of values* and *perceived impact* and is encapsulated within the *external environment* in which civil society functions.
- √ The calculation of the Diamond uses quantitative indicators; in addition, a qualitative study forms an integral part of the CSI's implementation and will be described in greater detail later in this toolkit.