

PEACE
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Experiences and Learnings

from projects to rebuild civic space

Preface

The learning cases presented in this catalogue are based upon the experiences and learnings from organisations who have received funding from the **Rebuilding Civic Space Modality** administered by CISU.

The cases have been gathered through semi-structured interviews that have taken place physically or online between June and September 2022. As we have attempted to include partners where possible most interviews have been conducted online.

The intention with this catalogue is to let the cases speak for themselves. Therefore, there is only a brief introduction before the cases.

At the back of this learning catalogue there are some overall conclusions and a few recommendations.

This learning catalogue is developed by CISU in collaboration with external consultant Nicolai Houe. Questions, ideas, or suggestions may be sent to Anders Reimers Larsen, arl@cisu.dk, and Nicolai Houe, nhoue@hotmail.com.

Front page photo: Pernille Bærendtsen

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HOW TO USE THIS CATALOGUE

This catalogue presents 12 different learning cases from organisations and projects that were financed through the Rebuilding Civic Space Modality, administered by CISU, Denmark.

The learning cases are presented in short formats, including main learning from that project, a bit of background knowledge and information about the project.

The target group for this catalogue is civil society organisations that are working in contexts that have characteristics of shrinking space. This catalogue is based upon learning cases from partnerships between civil society organisation in various countries and their Danish counterpart. It is our hope that the cases are relevant beyond these partnerships and will be used by a broad spectre of civil society organisations (CSOs).

You should use this catalogue as inspiration. Reading case-stories focusing on what others have learned in their partnerships and programs, allow you to build upon their learnings and integrate relevant perspectives into your approach, projects, and context.

We hope that CSO's globally will be able to use the learning cases and find inspiration in learning, thinking and approach.



Photo: 19 LGBT+ persons were unjustified arrested in 2020 charged with spreading COVID 19. After 48 days they were released due to legal advice from AIDS-Fondets partner HRAPF. Photo credit Dr. Adrian Jjuuku/HRAPF.

Balanced And Flexible Approach To Working In Fragile Situations

Background

CONTRIBUTING TO INCLUSIVE CIVIC SPACE FOR LGBT+ PERSONS AND SEX WORKERS

In Uganda, AIDS-Fondet with local partners are working with LGBT+ persons and sex workers (SWs) who have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 control measures.

Approach

TRAINING IN DOCUMENTATION, SHADOW REPORT AND ADVOCACY

The objective of the intervention is to empower and increase the capacity of SWs and LGBT+ organisations to document evidence of human rights violations committed against them, and to increase organisations capacity to advocate for the respect, protection, and promotion of their rights during and post the pandemic period.

Main activities are research on implications of the COVID-19 directives on human rights, training of SW's and LGBT+ organisations in documentation of violations and advocacy; development of a shadow report to the UNHRC and related national and international advocacy, development of a national-wide SW-led COVID-19 resilience & recovery strategy and advocacy for the prioritization of SW interests, rights and needs.

Learnings

▶ BALANCED APPROACH TO WORKING IN FRAGILE SITUATIONS

Willingness to work in fragile situations should be balanced with flexibility in funding. We promote planning ahead for long term impact, but sudden changes in contexts can make the situation fragile. Flexibility regarding implementation shall be balanced with the "new" context. Donor agencies must be good at listening, responding to and promote flexibility in these situations.

▶ DOCUMENTATION USING INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

Partners have made a thorough study of the effects of COVID-19 documenting violations of Human Rights. After receiving training sexworkers and LGBT+ persons have documented violations in shadow reports submitted to the UNHRC as part of Uganda's Universal Periodic Review. The documentation was standardized according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which gave leverage to the report. In a collaborative effort the partners have managed to present findings at the UN level and advocate for rights here.

▶ USING SUPPLEMENTING FUNDING MODALITIES

AIDS-Fondet supplements their ongoing program with the Rebuilding Civic Space modality. The modalities supplement each other well, and the Rebuilding Civic Space modality has allowed focus on immediate needs with long term impact and effect. The synergy between modalities and dialogue between partners have yielded results that the program alone would not be able to.



Photo: Teko Kavi screen shot from information video about zoonotic diseases.

Indigenous Organisations Use Digital Communication To Amplify Voices

Background

AMPLIFYING INDIGENOUS VOICES TO ADDRESS HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND CIVIC SPACE

DIB works together with local partner Teko Kavi in Bolivia's lowlands to amplify voices of indigenous communities to counteract shrinking civic space. During the pandemic, indigenous populations have not had equal access to healthcare, monetary vouchers and food baskets. Authorities have not met their demands for these and other social services. What is more, the environmental issues that disproportionately hit indigenous populations more – e.g. contamination from illegal mining and forest fires - are increasing. The vulnerability for indigenous people, limitation in civic space and lack of inclusiveness have worsened and become more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approach

DEVELOPING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES THROUGH TRAINING

The intervention supports the indigenous populations Tacana and Monkoxi Bésiro in counteracting the shrinking civic space. Indigenous groups develop and expand their means of communication with other indigenous groups and their interaction with state institutions, government, and the public through strengthening communication strategies, systematizing experiences during COVID and informing about environmental hazards. The target group receives training in written, spoken and digital communication strategies and systemisation, and they are supported in the creation of networks to advocate for and promote democratic demands towards authorities and sensitize civil society and communities on challenges in their territories. The target group is 15 communities with 6004 members, 100 trained women and youth and 60 indigenous leaders.

Learnings

▶ STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS VOICES AND SYSTEMATISING DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Teko Kavi trained community representatives and leaders in the work with communication and use of digital communication tools in a strategic way, so that they can get their messages through to other communities, authorities and the public. They took advantage of the pre-existing use of Facebook and WhatsApp to include more indigenous communities in the communication. Furthermore, indigenous communicators were trained in interviewing, writing and sending out press releases. These communication efforts even reached regional media and politicians, and created connections to indigenous communities in other parts of the country.

▶ INDIGENOUS ORGANISATIONS USE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION TO AMPLIFY SUBALTERN VOICES

In Santa Cruz, an indigenous organisation has utilized Facebook and WhatsApp groups to communicate about issues of relevance to the communities, including health campaigns, cultural aspects, forest fires and illegal mining. Their communication is an alternative to the positive messages on mining that comes from some government representatives. The local voices are respected and heard, and they reach local communities and regional government offices alike.

▶ HEALTH MESSAGES FROM NEXTCAP PROJECT UTILIZES NEW COMMUNICATION FORMS

NEXTCAP, an intervention that focuses on diseases transmitted through animals, is collaborating with this intervention to address health issues in the communities and utilizes the digital communication forms to amplify reach of information material. Furthermore, a series of animated movies and songs about diseases has been disseminated in the communities and in schools.



Photo: CISU archive, Pernille Barendtsen

Use Of Flex Funds To Stimulate Youth Participation

Background

STRENGTHEN YOUNG PEOPLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR RIGHTS

In Zimbabwe, Dreamtown, with Justice for Children, is working with urban youth to stimulate their democratic understanding and participation. The project aims to strengthen young people's knowledge and understanding of their rights and to ensure that young people can participate in society. During and post COVID, the civic space in Zimbabwe has been limited due to COVID 19 restrictions resulting in limited service delivery, thus it is crucial to stimulate young people's understanding of their rights and participation in society to ensure that they are protected from violation of these rights.

Approach

COMBINING TRAINING, MENTORING AND FUND FOR ACTIVITIES

The project combines capacity building, training, mentoring, and coaching with the distribution of flex funds to stimulate engagement and participation among youth groups. 30 youth groups use the flex funds to support and enhance own activities and strengthen their networks. During the implementation a peer-to-peer learning group with all the youth groups has been established. An aim of the group has been to create a safe space, where the groups can share their experiences and build up their capacity to administer the flex funds. In addition, media campaigns are developed and distributed using online communication forms.

Learnings

▶ USE OF FLEX FUNDS TO STIMULATE YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The intervention has used flex funds to stimulate youth participation. By allowing youth groups to get funding for their activities when they participate in trainings and peer-to-peer mentoring, the project has stimulated the youth groups to become more motivated towards engaging in and understanding all their rights including socio-economic, and democratic processes in their country.

▶ TRAINING IN SAFE USE OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION

Training in safe use of online communication, has given young people knowledge of how to be able to engage in online communication forms, without the risk of being harassed or committing cyber-crimes. This has been a response to restrictions from online presence that young people otherwise may consider.

▶ YOUTH GROUPS VISITING DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS STIMULATE ENGAGEMENT

As part of the project, youth networks have visited democratic institutions. This has helped in demystifying the legal and political arena and its functions and stimulated engagement. For the young people visiting the institutions has made a big impact on their lives, and they have acquired valuable insights and knowledge that they have shared with young people in their respective communities.



Photo: NAGKAISA

Selecting, Presenting And Trying Representative Cases In Courts

Background

DEFENDING WOMEN AND WORKERS RIGHTS AMIDST COVID

In the Philippines, the Danish Trade Union Development Agency (DTDA) together with their local partner Federation of Free Workers (FFW), is implementing a project defending fundamental rights amidst the COVID pandemic. The project defends rights, and attempt to roll back legislations that restricted trade union rights, and fundamental human rights during the COVID pandemic. The hard lockdown in the Philippines affected the workers a lot. Not being able to work. Being sent home without pay. Finding it difficult to survive and secure food for the family while home schooling children. Some of the restrictions have now been lifted, but the effects are still there, and FFW are working to relieve these effects and prepare for situations like this in the future.

Approach

INFORMATION AND CAMPAIGNING TO DEFEND RIGHTS

The project has analysed effects of the implemented laws in relation to workers' and women's rights, trained and raised awareness among union workers and representatives, made campaigns to advocate for rights and collected cases for legal follow-up. The project provides legal advice, and ten cases are currently being tried in the legal system to test possible ways forward for workers. FFW use learnings and experiences to prepare for future situations like this.

Learnings

▶ COMBINING FUNDING MODALITIES TO TARGET ONGOING DIFFICULTIES

FFW has supplemented ongoing programs with Rebuilding Civic Space, which was fast to access, get approved and start implementing. This has worked well, to strengthen the long perspective while working on immediate needs. Fast and focused response is necessary in this context.

▶ SELECTING, PRESENTING AND TRYING REPRESENTATIVE CASES IN COURTS

FFW is currently trying 10 different representative cases. Either a solution is found with the employer, or the cases are settled in courts. The cases represent the violations of rights that workers have faced during COVID. The cases deal with issues such as: Illegit dismissal, repatriation without pay, and only accepting non-organised workers back to work.

▶ LEARNING FOR THE FUTURE

COVID is no longer as present, but the perspective of another crisis, where government use the context to implement legislation that violates rights of workers and people are likely to happen again. Therefore, FFW is now learning from the COVID experiences, attempting to gather promising practice about what to do in future situations like this one.



Photo: IAS, Nakuru, Kenya

Establishing Small Groups To Counter Violence Within Household And Community

Background

BUILDING CAPACITY TO PREVENT GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

In Nakuru, Kenya, International Aid Services Denmark, IAS DK, is implementing a project with a local partner, focusing on prevention of gender-based violence (GBV), and promotion of women's and girls' rights. During COVID the restrictions in movement hindered young people from going to school. Due to lack of other means of generating an income some girls began to be picked up from the highway for prostitution. With prostitution came abuse without the interference of the local government. IAS DK intervened to build capacity in local CBOs to be able to handle these challenges. Local CBOs would normally be present but were restricted from movement, leaving girls more vulnerable.

Approach

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR LOCAL ADVOCACY EFFORTS

The intervention worked with advocacy towards local and national government and institutions, build capacity in civil society organisations to respond to the needs of the target groups, and confronted the people abusing the girls and women. The project planned to establish groups, but ended up utilizing existing structures of i.e., women's CBOs and religious leader's groups.

Learnings

- ▶ **ESTABLISHING SMALL GROUPS TO COUNTER GBV WITHIN HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY**
During COVID with the restrictions to stay in the house, many people lost their jobs. The families were confined to the house, and in some families, this became a stress level, resulting in GBV within the families. To prevent the domestic GBV, IAS DK established small networks consisting of either men or women, who would be able to support one another, to avoid GBV. The groups that were established were very diverse. From faith based to business-oriented networks.
- ▶ **EARLY WARNING SYSTEM ESTABLISHED WITH TRADITIONAL LEADERS TO PREVENT ABUSE**
To prevent and limit the GBV taking place in the communities, they established an early warning system in collaboration with local chiefs, with whom arrangements were made regarding reporting and action upon these reports. If a case was reported the area chief had to respond. In this way the area chiefs were held accountable and contributing to reducing GBV.
- ▶ **LEARNING FROM THE REBUILDING CIVIC SPACE MODALITY**
IAS DK would have liked more time to implement. In future interventions IAS DK will integrate the group dimension in coming interventions to strengthen the impact in the community.



Photo: IWGIA, Cordillera, The Philippines

Setting Up A Rapid Response Mechanism Based Upon Local Needs And Decisions

Background

DEFENDING COMMUNITY LEADERS AGAINST POLICE AND MILITARY PERSECUTION

In the Philippines, IWGIA, with the local partner, CPA – Cordillera Peoples Alliance, is implementing a project to defend those who stand up for and defend the rights of Indigenous Peoples (IP's) and the right to their land. Usual strategies to protect the rights of defenders and prevent violations and killings were no longer as effective, due to a strict imposition of lockdowns. CPA members could no longer meet, mobilize, or organize people. CPA is working in the north of the Philippines, and the government believes that there is an armed opposition in the area. Everyone organizing people in the villages are accused of being a part of the armed opposition. In communities where there are mining or energy projects, battalions of military move into the villages and persecute local leaders. With the military comes large projects of mining or hydro-power – allegedly approved by the local communities. Some of the large projects are part of the government strategy “build build build”.

Approach

DOCUMENT, EMPOWER, ADVOCATE

CPA and IWGIA foster change by documenting IP's conditions and human rights breaches they experience, thus contributing to knowledge and awareness, by empowering IP's own organisations to act effectively and by advocating for change towards decision-making bodies at local, regional, and international level including engagement in international networks.

Learnings

▶ SETTING UP A RAPID RESPONSE MECHANISM BASED UPON LOCAL NEEDS AND DECISIONS

CPA and IWGIA have made an easily accessible rapid response mechanism, that allow them to rapidly help local leaders and families that are in immediate danger. Decision making for the rapid response is placed locally, is fast and accessible and that helps people in immediate danger.

▶ FILING PETITION FOR WRIT OF AMPAROS TO REDUCE HARASSMENT AND PERSECUTION

CPA has twice filed petition for Amparos to get protection for people in risk of repression or violence. In both cases the level of threats have gone down, and young IPs have been granted protection. It is new to CPA to actively use the justice system this way to utilise the protection offered by this system. IWGIA has used this strategy with other partners.

▶ CREATING A NETWORK OF LAWYERS

CPA has created a network of lawyers to help defend the community members and leaders. The lawyers help communities when they are in need of legal advice and counselling in their struggle against injustice. The network of lawyer's adds to the security of communities but are bringing themselves at risk.



Photo: LGBT+ Denmark

Fundamental Changes In Context Requires Reprioritizing What We Want As Community

Background

NECESSITY TO REBUILD LOCAL COMMUNITIES

LGBT+ Denmark and their partner aim to rebuild and contribute to the well-being of LGBTQ+ communities in rural Uganda following the COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions. COVID has been used as an excuse to further put pressure on the LGBTQ+ community. Nationally it is status quo. On the countryside where LGBT+ Denmark works the situation has become worse, and every week there are new cases of violations.

Approach

NEW CONTEXT REQUIRES NEW APPROACH

LGBT+ Denmark work with smaller organisations representing LGBTQ+ communities. In Uganda there are 14-16 partners. The Rebuilding Civic Space modality supplements an ongoing program focusing on mental health addressing for example self-stigmatizing.

After the lockdown was ended local organisations were shattered, with little capacity and starting from a new position and perspective. To work with the LGBTQ+ communities they went “back to scratch” to let the local organisations redefine what they wanted (vision) and how they wanted to achieve this (strategies). LGBTQ+ communities choose to address traumas in the communities through arts and humour. And to focus on documentation of violations and violence in communities to build the foundation for stronger advocacy and a stronger voice. A joint decision was to work in nexus between humanitarian aid, security/emergency support and development work. “We realised that rebuilding the communities was useless if the members of the communities could not pay their rent or have a meal”.

Learnings

▶ THE CONTEXT AND THE LOCAL PRIORITIES (RE)DEFINES THE APPROACH

Change in context influence our ongoing projects and programs. We must adjust accordingly, which sometimes, when faced with radical changes, requires going back to scratch and redefining vision, strategy, priorities, and approaches. Changes in context provides an opportunity to learn and make things better. We have begun to see changes as opportunities to learn.

▶ ADDRESSING IMMEDIATE NEEDS BUILD THE FOUNDATION FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

Resources from programs were allocated to food relief and rent. Though this is short term, it did build the foundation for continuation of local LGBTQ+ communities, and tomorrow’s work. Sometimes it is necessary with a service delivery approach, to build foundation for long term impact. Working in the nexus between humanitarian and development approaches, we have been able to integrate this into several programs.

▶ STRENGTHENING DOCUMENTATION AND LINKING TO NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

It requires resources and competences to document properly. To utilize the documentation, we must link to national organisations. With strengthened documentation as foundation for advocacy efforts they will address our challenges and we will see an impact in the rural communities.



Photo: CISU archive, Pernille Bærendtsen

Need To Strengthen Our Position As An Enabler Within Civic Space

Background

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR VIRTUAL CIVIC SPACES

ActionAid with partner Africans Rising is implementing a project with the purpose of giving support to capacity building of youth and civil society organisations to increase their opportunities to meaningfully tap into virtual civic spaces and organize innovatively around issues of human rights and governance. The project enables young people to organize themselves around issues of importance to them, despite restrictions and harassment that hinder all forms of organizing in many national post COVID contexts. The project is implemented in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Approach

USING DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT TO PROMOTE CIVIC SPACE

The project works through three mutually reinforcing components: Knowledge transfer, information sharing and skills development to enable young people to engage in promoting the defense, reclamation, and expansion of the civic space; Capacity building for dealing with civic space restrictions; and increasing digital security for individual actors, movements, and organisations to minimize risks that may arise from digital/online engagement.

Learnings

▶ **DEMOGRAPHIC, TECHNOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL SHIFTS AMONGST YOUNG PEOPLE**

The generation that we address, mobilize, and engage is significantly young. They have grown up in the digital age, where information—from pop culture to public affairs—is transmitted by the hour, rapidly, in large amounts, and across multiple channels. This demographic reality and technological shift have created cultural shifts in the way that young citizens relate to and interpret the world around them. As CSOs, we must adapt our communication to suit the times. We must consider how we present and frame ourselves and our messages depending on who we are and the target groups that we want to reach.

▶ **DIGITAL COMMUNICATION BRINGS SOME ORGANISATIONS ON BOARD AND LEAVES OTHERS OUT**

There is a divide in digital access, knowledge and skills. It is difficult for some organisations to use smartphones or other devices for learning and organising. Also, several countries led by repressive regimes have either mooted or passed legislation, such as the draconian Computer Misuse Act in Uganda, or administrative measures which have had a chilling effect on digital engagement. Digitalisation can easily change who we address and work with. We must make sure that we engage with target groups using their preferred and available means of communication including face-to-face meetings, to ensure that we do not leave anyone behind.

case continues on next page

▶ **UNDERSTANDING CONTEXTS WHICH ARE EITHER REPRESSED OR CLOSED**

Many contexts in which CSOs work are characterised by repressed or closed civic space. This is characterised by use of state-sanctioned violence, and arbitrary decrees to telecom service providers, for example, to switch off the internet, or denial of operating licenses and targeting of funding streams. It is “mandatory” for CSOs to understand the processes that are relevant in these contexts and actively establish programs, networks and organisations that push back on this to ensure sustainability beyond the project lifecycle itself.

▶ **WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN OUR POSITION AS AN ENABLER**

Enabling CSOs, networks and movements to navigate within a repressive civic space is as relevant as ever. In this respect, we need to invest more in movement building, supporting rooted groups wherever they exist, and provide space for convening purposes. We should play the role of a nerve centre that connects like-minded actors, institutions, practitioners and individuals, so that lasting and powerful synergies are built beyond the programmatic scope of the project. Complementary efforts like public interest litigation, provision of rapid legal response services, public dialogues and sensitisation drives should be supported whenever other actors in the civic space hold their own actions. This enriches the learning process, spreads the risks associated with this line of work and amplifies the voices of different actors.



Photo: NOAH, Brazil

Standing Together Will Carry Us Through The Crisis That We Are Facing

Background

FACING REPRESSION OF GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS

During COVID-19, NOAH together with local partners has strengthened the capacities of grassroots movements of environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs) in four countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to organize and defend civic space and human rights.

The intervention is implemented in the face of increasing repression and militarization from national governments during COVID-19. In some national contexts this level of repression and militarization have not been seen in 30 years.

The intervention builds capacity for national organizations and their affiliated communities to be able to successfully advocate for political change in their countries.

Approach

CAN MONITORING SAVE LIVES?

The project engages local communities in monitoring violations and repression of environmental and human rights. This monitoring has formed part of national studies, which again has formed part of regional studies, exchange of experience and an early warning – fast response mechanism to violations.

Learnings

▶ SYSTEMATIC AND STRUCTURED DOCUMENTATION AS FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE

As part of the program, partners have used systematic and structured monitoring, analysis, and discussion of violations, which feeds into/leads to more effective actions/strategies to confront democratic setbacks. The feedback loops between monitoring, analysis, action, and strategies must be more rapid and concise in a challenging context to form a foundation for strengthening the impact of the program.

▶ WE HAVE TO STAND UNITED DURING CRISIS

“By being proactive we have managed to reach new groups, engage with new communities, and strengthen our inter-regional and international collaboration amidst a crisis. These have been important results. The change though, in these difficult times, come when we remember to stand shoulder-to-shoulder and back-to-back and strengthen our local, national, and international solidarity. Then we can influence decision makers and make a difference.

Local organisation and international solidarity and cross-continental understanding and action is as necessary as ever. We are many who know this, we just must remind each other”, Local partner



Photo: COICA, Ecuador

Solutions And Perspective Already Exist In The Territories

Background

INCREASING THREATS AND VIOLATIONS AS MOVEMENT IS LIMITED FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

OXFAM IBIS and COICA, Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin, has had a partnership for years. Through the Rebuilding Civic Space modality, they are implementing a project in Ecuador and Colombia to improve protection of Indigenous human rights defenders in the Amazon Basin during and post the COVID pandemic. During COVID the movement and organisation of networks of indigenous people were limited due to restrictions. At the same time mining companies, oil companies, logging companies and drugs traffickers, have increased their presence, taking advantage of the general prohibition to move and organize. With increased activity and interest the level and nature of threats and violence have gone up.

Approach

CONSOLIDATING NETWORK AND FACILITATING PROTECTION

The project has focused on consolidating existing networks in the territories. On reporting on the human rights situation. And on uniting and exchange experiences between Colombia and Ecuador. Results so far in the project are good. Documentation is improving with trainings in how to document and an easy format for registration. The networks are organizing, and an emergency fund is established to be able to relocate people who are in risk of violent assaults. In Ecuador there is a movement to expel the extractive industries from the territories.

Learnings

► SOLUTIONS AND PERSPECTIVE ALREADY EXIST IN THE TERRITORIES

In the territories exist the knowledge and the solutions to solve ongoing challenges. Indigenous people know what to do. They are organizing and taking action to protect their practices and forms of life. They need the funds to be able to organize though. Which INGO's shall facilitate.

► STRONGER LOCALIZATION IN THE TERRITORIES

Many activities in the territories are based on our understanding. Our language. Our rationale and culture. We must build a stronger localization agenda and facilitate the organization and information by and for people in the territories, with their languages using their rationale.

► WE MUST FIND STRATEGIES TO END THE THREATS

Though organisation is going well, so far, there are no well-defined strategies to end threats. We continue to face the challenges and come up with day-to-day solutions of relieving pressure and threats towards individuals and families. It is time that we come up with and implement strategies to end the threats so that lives shall no longer be threatened or taken.



Photo: VIVA, Honduras

We Must Include Youth When Addressing Them

Background

SYNERGIES IN PROJECTS FOCUSING ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

VIVA is working in Honduras with Asociación Para Una Sociedad Más Justa (ASJ), to strengthen civic space and civic participation through capacity building and advocacy led by local civil society organizations and youth networks. This is the second intervention funded by the Rebuilding Civic Space modality. The first intervention focused on youth mobilization and participation in the 2021 presidential elections. This intervention started March 1, 2021, three months after the Youth/Election intervention. There have been great synergies between the two projects in terms of youth mobilization, but we had momentum in this project prior to the elections. Amongst others youth conducted social audits prior to the election.

Approach

STRENGTHENING INCLUSION THROUGH YOUTH LED ACTIVITIES

The project contributes to enhanced inclusion and participation through empowerment of local youth organizations. Key activities include youth led social auditing to disclose corruption in the health and education sectors locally, conducting youth to youth awareness campaigns and advocacy at municipality agencies and decision-makers. The intervention takes place in 5 cities in Honduras. The project has three goals: 1) Enhanced civic space for CSOs through civil society investigation, awareness raising, and advocacy. 2) Strengthened local civil society is organized and capacitated to promote civic participation, represent local populations, and conduct social auditing. 3) Enhanced transparency and civic participation through social audits and advocacy by civil society.

Learnings

- ▶ **VALUE IN COALITIONS, COLLABORATION AND FINDING A SHARED VOICE**
Through the project we have rediscovered how civil society coalitions have an inherent value itself. We often tend to emphasize value from a programmatic point of view. However, it is a key responsibility of civil society to be participatory and inclusive and to provide a united voice from below. This stipulates the need for broad civil society coalitions.
- ▶ **DEMOCRACY AND CIVIC SPACE COMES FROM LISTENING AND CONSTRUCTING TOGETHER**
We have strengthened our communication to citizens about why our work with civil society organizations is important. After the pandemic we have again talked to people in the territories, to hear and learn from their perspectives. In this way we have constructed the way forward together.
- ▶ **WE MUST INCLUDE YOUTH WHEN ADDRESSING THEM**
Youth have different perspectives than us. To strengthen our organization, our position, and our possibility to engage with and address youth we shall become better at including youth and young people in our organizations in ways that they find interesting and attractive.



Photo: CEJIS, Bolivia

Stimulating Inner Reflection And Free Decision Making

Background

STRENGTHENED DECISION MAKING AND ORGANISATION AMONG INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Forest of the World is implementing a project with CEJIS in Bolivia where they focus on strengthened decision making and improved organisation among indigenous people. Bolivia is going through the fifth wave of the corona pandemic. This wave is still affecting the people but the numbers of infected has gone down, and it is possible for most people to do their work and fulfill their daily obligations. The political situation in the country is complicated. The government limited movement and activities of Civil Society and is still enforcing some of these restrictions. The government and other stakeholders are using the crisis of the pandemic to propose and promote mining projects and other large scale infrastructure projects in protected areas. There are strict regulations and as much as 300 civil society organizations are currently working without the proper licenses of operation.

Approach

ORGANISING TO STOP INTRODUCTION OF GMO AND EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES

The program strengthens the ability to confront and address laws and decisions made during the COVID-19 lockdown. There is a need to make activities that bring people together to stop the mining, land grabbing for agriculture and exploitation of trees and forests. The program has advocated for informed decision making and has promoted more profound processes focusing on reflection to engage more people. The program promotes free, prior, and informed consent when new laws and actions with consequences for the indigenous population are made.

Learnings

▶ STIMULATING INNER REFLECTION AND FREE DECISION MAKING

When the context changed with COVID the program stimulated more profound data collection, analysis, and systematization. This combined with consultations and periods of reflection stimulated the indigenous communities' own perception of free decision making. It was a process of inner reflection. This strengthened our cause and the organizations and collaboration around it.

▶ CHANGE OF NORMS REQUIRES NEW STRATEGIES

During COVID the norms have changed. To succeed it is necessary to include everyone who is affected by the new norms. Indigenous people, women, farmers. We must include them all and through network and collaboration among CSO's we must confront the laws and decisions that are affecting us, and make sure that free, prior, and informed consent is the new norm.

Summary of learnings

Besides the learning points presented in the individual cases, we will briefly summarize some of aspects that have been mentioned by several of the projects.

THOROUGH DOCUMENTATION AS FOUNDATION FOR ADVOCACY AND CHANGE

Violations of human rights and persecution and violence towards specific groups has flourished under the COVID pandemic. Documenting the cases can form the basis for advocacy and possible lead to less persecution and violence. Thorough documentation is difficult and requires training, structure, and a systematic approach.

At the same time documentation needs to be made relatively easy, for people to be able to gather the necessary information and supporting evidence.

Documentation should integrate the local context and refer to international standards such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Getting the documentation right is a balance; Between getting the information that you need, in a structured and systematic way, and making the documentation process easy enough for people to participate and gather documentation.

AN ORGANIZED CIVIL SOCIETY ADDRESSING SHARED INTERESTS

During COVID many rights have been set-aside. Among others the right to organize and the right to meet. This has made it difficult for civil society to function and thrive and has been used by governments as an active way to repress civil society and its voices.

A well-organized civil society will be better able to address challenges of diminishing civic space. Structures and alliances in place before covid, could re-organise in the new context and there-through be well placed to retake a strong position as defender of rights and interests of the groups that it represents.

Alliances with like-minded organizations are necessary to learn from each other, share experiences beyond one's own organisation and to address issues of mutual interest.

RE-IGNITION OF INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

COVID was an opportunity for the whole world to stand united and show that we can address global issues from a global perspective. The global perspective was unfortunately "forgotten", and it was largely "every nation for themselves".

In the shadow of COVID there is a need to reignite international solidarity, and to organize and address issues beyond the national arena drawing on the possibilities that it gives when civil society addresses issues of mutual interest and concern at an international level.

In praxis this means that CSO's need to strengthen collaboration and become better at addressing mutual interests at an international level.

ENGAGING, REACHING AND COMMUNICATING THROUGH DIGITAL MEANS

COVID has made communication difficult because it has not been possible to meet and discuss. Digital communication has taken over on many aspects. Online meetings, discussions, trainings, and forums have been able to lift some of the gaps that we have had.

At the same time, these new forms of communication are leaving several groups behind, and from several of the cases that we have analysed, there are stories of how certain groups are being “left out” by these new forms of communication.

At the same time new forms of communication have been able to engage new groups in CSO’s and work for justice and human rights. Young people were already embracing these communication forms. Strengthening presence and voice here enables CSO’s to become relevant and strengthen communication with large groups of primarily young people. The use of digital communication forms will only grow from here.

Digital communication offers new opportunities for CSO’s. We must continue to develop our use of this, and at the same time make sure that we do not leave certain groups behind, in the effort to reach and engage new groups.

RAPID RESPONSE MECHANISMS FOCUSING ON PROTECTION AND EASY ACCESSIBILITY

During COVID the numerous violations and persecution of groups globally has made it more necessary than ever to protect defenders of human rights, indigenous rights, local communities, and environment.

Rapid response mechanisms have been set up in many contexts, to protect the front-line defenders who risk life and prosecution. The mechanisms are typically set up as temporary solutions for persons and their families, so that for a while they can be given safety.

The mechanisms work. But they are difficult to maintain, and it is difficult to find permanent solutions for the unjust and illegal persecutions. We must consider what permanent solutions can look like, and how we may be able to set up temporary solutions until we find long-term proper solutions.

LOCAL STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

In some contexts, COVID has meant a serious worsening of the reality for local communities and an increased threat from external stakeholders, such as mining companies, logging companies and large infrastructure projects.

Though the local communities have difficulty securing financing for their own solutions and implementing them, the local communities know how to respond, and what actions they should take. They need support though in facilitating the actions that they want to make. And this is an obvious role for CSO’s.

The agenda is in line with the localization strategy which is a focus area for INGO’s.

DOCUMENTATION, ORGANISATION, AND SOLIDARITY LEADING TO INCREASED SPACE FOR CSO'S

Experiences during COVID with documentation, organisation, and international solidarity points towards that CSO's can build up the foundation to enter dialogues and negotiate with governments and other stakeholders and present their perspectives and cases.

From the dialogues and cases, there is also indication that it is hard to come up with solutions to the challenges that CSO's are facing post-COVID. There are no "one size fits all" solutions, and limited experiences with rolling back the negative impact of laws and continuous persecution.

CSO's have difficulties finding the right strategies to "take back the space" that is still challenged by legislation and practices from under COVID.

USING THE CIVIC SPACE MODALITY AS SUPPLEMENT TO PROGRAM FUNDING

During COVID many CSO's experienced that the immediate needs and dramatic change in space for civil society was hard to include and integrate into existing programs.

The possibility to supplement ongoing activities with activities directly aimed at the diminishing space for civil action and participation, was welcomed. The civic space modality supplemented the ongoing interventions and allowed for focus to be put directly onto the new context in which organisations are operating.

Even though this kind of short-term, thematic funding was welcomed in this case addressing an immediate need, it is important to stress that most of the funding should be long-term and through more stable funding mechanisms.

CISU AS ADMINISTRATOR OF FUNDING MODALITIES

Should there be the need for future thematic funding mechanisms the feedback from participating organisations, large and small, is that CISU is an appropriate administrative partner.

There has not been any indication that the SPA – Strategic Partnership Organisations who have an agreement with the Foreign Ministry in Denmark – would prefer that Ministry should handle their part of thematic calls directly. Rather they appreciate that the funding goes through CISU who they describe as being easy to communicate with, listening and serious.

The Rebuilding Civic Space modality

The Rebuilding Civic Space modality was decided in a broad political agreement in Denmark, as a response to the shrinking of civic space that happened during and following the COVID pandemic.

“The purpose is to strengthen resilient and independent civil societies in the Global South, which has experienced a shrinking civic space, violations on human rights, rights at work, as well as disproportionate restrictions as an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.” (Rebuilding Civic Space Guidelines).

COVID rapidly changed the context under which many CSO's are operating. Limitations were put on movement and assembly rights because of the pandemic as well as there were witnessed harsh infringements on freedom of speech and rights to organize and many violations committed by both state actors and private sector. In many contexts the restrictions put on civil society ad citizens was not proportional to the challenges of the pandemic. Instead, the pandemic was used as an excuse to put unforeseen restrictions on civil society, violating human rights and using violent repression towards civil society organisations and specific population groups.

It is in this context that the Rebuilding Civil Space modality was made. To give CSO's an opportunity to work directly with the limitations that they have experienced in civic space, and to strengthen the foundation for a strong, independent, and vibrant civil society.

Grants

49 grants were given within the modality. A total of DKK 49.131.585 was granted to 24 Danish CSO's to implement projects in collaboration with their local partners. The projects were implemented in 27 different countries. There were six projects that were working in more than one country. The budget of the projects was between app. 100.000 DKK and app. 2.98 million DKK.

Region	Number of projects	% of spending
Africa	18	33%
Asia	9	20%
Latin America	14	42%
Middle East and North Africa	4	4%
TOTAL	45	49.131.585

Methodology

To make the learning cases we have selected 19 projects that we would like to interview. These projects are implemented by 16 Danish organisations. We have selected the projects with the intention of having different approaches and themes represented in the elected projects. We have also tried to have a geographical representation among elected projects, and a difference in the nature of the Danish organisations and their partnerships.

We have developed a semi-structured interview guide to make the interviews. The guide is made in English and Spanish, as several interviews have been in Spanish.

The interview guide allows us to cover the aspects that we want to address, and at the same time be open towards the aspects that comes up during the interviews. Some interviews have been with the Danish partner only, others have included the local partner, others yet have only been with the local partner.

Selection of learning focus in individual cases

Based upon the interviews we have identified learning points from the individual cases. It has not been possible to include all learning from each case, but we have included the most relevant aspects from each and tried to include learning points that covers a variety of different aspects from the cases.

Anonymity

Throughout the interviews we have asked whether there was need to anonymise the names of local partners and Danish partners. Where this was not necessary, we have included names, where there was a need for anonymization, we have of course done this.

Use of photos

We have attempted to get photos from the actual projects. Where this has not been possible we have utilized photos from CISUs database or photos taken by the external consultant.

Learnings from analysis

This analysis has focused on identifying learning points through analysis of cases from the Rebuilding Civil Space funding modality. In the following, we will try to draw out a few learnings from this process.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS – PROMOTING FLEXIBLE FUNDING

All the participating organisations have explained how the learning that they have made is currently influencing their future interventions. Thus, organisational learning takes place.

The organisations are also explaining how the modality supplements the ongoing interventions, thus addressing an immediate need.

A possible next step for CISU in relation to this, is to ensure that flexibility is promoted within existing programs, when the context changes drastically. Changes in context tend to be more profound and with a larger impact on CSO's now than earlier, and this requires a funding modality that is flexible enough to allow for reorientation of a program when there is need for this.

This in combination with thematic funding modalities when there is a sudden demand for this – like the Rebuilding Civic Space Modality may well be an ambition to pursue for CISU.

RESERVATIONS AND CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Some of the critical perspectives on this study are:

Input has come from different perspectives. Some interviews have included Danish organisations and partners, while others have only included the Danish partner. Learning thus becomes at different "levels".

The study has been initialised before the termination of some of the projects. Thereby there are some learnings that have not been reflected.

We have purposefully designed the learning cases to be short and easy to get an overview. However, that of course produces very short, condensed text with only few details. We have made this choice to aim for wider and quicker spread of these learnings.

It follows from this choice that this study is somewhat superficial and has not investigated the change theories behind them. That means that there are some learnings and experiences that this study has not been able to grasp.

As mentioned, CISU welcome any questions to this material that can further support you in your development of projects that address the shrinking of civic space.

Further readings:

Read more on civic space effects of COVID and post COVID: <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/news/how-covid-19-has-shrunk-civic-space>

Read the 2022 CIVICUS SOCS – State of Civil Society Report: <https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2022/CIVICUS2022SOCSReport.pdf>