

CIVIL SOCIETY STRIKES BACK

"JOINT STRATEGIES
TO ENSURE DEVELOPMENT
AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION"



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INTRODUCTION

This report summarises and presents the ideas, recommendations and joint strategies which have been developed from the “Civil Society Strikes Back” initiative. An initiative which both took stock and reflected upon where civil society is at present, where we have improved and where we are still challenged. Whilst going forward, the initiative looked at how actors can work together across civil society, governmental, and private sectors to create a more open and enabling civic space.

“Civil Society strikes back” was initiated as a reaction to the challenges facing Civil Society today. Across the globe and across sectors, civil society is having to deal with a constantly changing and shrinking space. According to CIVICUS Monitor, only 4% of the world’s population live in countries where people fully enjoy freedoms of expression, association and assembly - or in other words, enjoy civic space. Although contexts and focus areas are different, many of the challenges that civil society actors across the world are facing are similar.

“Civil Society Strikes Back” was run by Global Focus’s Civic Space working group, a group consisting of Danish humanitarian and development organisations and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who regularly meet to coordinate work on civic space. “Civil Society Strikes Back” consisted of the following three steps:

1. SEVERAL LEARNING EVENTS

Throughout Fall 2018

As a first step, a series of Civic space learning events were held, with global inputs regarding counterstrategies to shrinking civic space and a discussion of how Danish Civil society, private sector and Danish government could better support these efforts.

2. A CIVIL SOCIETY MEETING

13 December 2018

As a second step, a Civil Society meeting from which tangible and concrete recommendation were formulated regarding Danish efforts to protect and enhance civic space globally titled: "Civic Space recommendations to Danish Actors".

3. AN INTERNATIONAL CIVIC SPACE CONFERENCE

4-5 March 2019

As a third step, an international conference on civic space was held in an effort to globally identify best practices and joint strategies to counter attacks on civil society and shrinking civic space. 10 Joint Strategies were formulated under the conference.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

As a result of the “Civil society Strikes Back” initiative, 10 Joint Strategies and Civic Space recommendations to Danish Actors have been formulated.

The Civic Space Recommendations to Danish Actors give specific recommendations to how Danish actors can support civil society from different Danish platforms.

The Recommendations to Danish Actors are formulated in a in depth document, with concrete and tangible elaborations of the main recommendations. The Recommendations document can be found in the annex to this report. The Joint Strategies set out how Danish civil society at the global level can collaborate with international civil society to ensure civic space globally, and their formulations are based on the input from the thematic sessions of the civic space conference (which are described in detail further down in this report).

Together, the Recommendations and Joint Strategies form an overarching framework for how Danish Civil Society with national and international partners can work together across civil society, governmental, and private sectors to globally “strike back” to create a more open and enabling civic space.

10 JOINT STRATEGIES

1.

NO GLOBAL GOALS WITHOUT CIVIC SPACE

The Global Goals (Agenda 2030/SDGs) cannot be achieved without civic space. Closing civic space has negative consequences for achieving all of the 17 goals and the key message is that if civil society working to achieve the Global Goals are not able to continue their work due to closing civic space, it will be impossible to reach the Global Goals. If governments are committed to the realization of the SDGs, this also entails a commitment to creating and protecting civic space and the discussion on civic space must be interlinked to the discussion on sustainable development.

2.

GO LOCAL: "NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US"

Civil society cannot simply rely on the mainstream channels, e.g. diplomatic means, of providing support and pushing policy change. There must be greater focus on engaging more directly with people at the local level in a language and manner that is easily understood and which makes people feel like equal partners. Local people must be at the front of the negotiating table when solutions are discussed. At the same time, we have to ensure that we do not co-opt our local partners, but instead provide support by creating a space for them and be inclusive to their perspectives. We have to focus on the people and the initiatives from the bottom up.

3.

SOLIDARITY PACT

Civil society can best protect civic space from a position of genuine solidarity, which must be intersectional, international, and flow from North to South and South to North. Actors will have to make an effort to understand and appreciate each other's unique situations, and strengths and weaknesses. It is about working from a mutual and respectful partnership on how we can learn from each other, where we see each other as equal partners. Solidarity also means understanding and recognizing that even though civil society actors are facing many of the same issues across sectors, some civic space restrictions are sector specific and some actors are facing double layers of restrictions.

4.

RAPID RESPONSE

We must enhance rapid response mechanisms and capacity for human rights defenders at risk and stand together to defend the defenders.

5.

DIGITAL RESILIENCE

The civil society sector needs to develop its capacity in understanding and using tech tools and data to a much greater extent, instead of merely regarding data as a tool of the “shrinkers” to curtail civic space and silence popular movements. A focus area must be to find safe ways of communicating, among other things, by sharing experiences on how to avoid being tracked when communicating, for example by using encrypted applications. Likewise, software has been developed which, for example, makes it possible to access websites that are in principle closed down. Organisations should be better at sharing this software and supporting others who are affected by digital restrictions.

6.

FUNDING FOR CIVIC SPACE

Civil Society and donor governments must continue to explore new long-term funding mechanisms for supporting civic space initiatives that do not place unnecessary burdens on local actors and enable organisations the flexibility to quickly be able to respond to crisis in an organisation. Likewise, civic space is not a permanent entity. The space is constantly changing, and civil society actors have to change with it otherwise NGO's risk falling behind and losing touch. As the space is changing, the needs of the actors in the space are also changing. Therefore, funding has to be able to accommodate a needs assessment to be iterative, ongoing and dynamic and not simply happen at the beginning of a project, but constantly.

7.

HOLDING SHRINKERS ACCOUNTABLE

Civil society should collaborate broadly across sectors and engage directly and actively with the “shrinkers”. Shrinkers can be in the form of authoritarian governments and their affiliated bodies such as government controlled national human rights institutions, military groups, as well as non-state actors such as GONGOS (government organised NGOs used to represent civil society). But should it happen that these collaborators infringe upon civic space, for example through laws that limit freedom of speech and press freedom and assembly, or by way of economic pressure, it is important that it is reacted upon and that the collaborators are held accountable to international human rights law.

8.

MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLICY COHERENCE

National governments must be encouraged to uphold civil and political rights and protection of human rights defenders when developing policies. Civil society should push for governments to involve them in multilateral institutions and ensure that the work that comes from the institutions includes a strong civic space focus, whilst ensuring that acts are not being adopted that violate civic space. When countries violate fundamental rights, action is then to be taken in multilateral institutions i.e. by making violating countries responsible in the Human Rights Council.

9.

FOCUS ON ACTORS AFFECTED BY SEVERAL LAYERS OF RESTRICTIONS

When talking about civic space, there must be greater focus on those actors who are exposed to several layers of restrictions. This can occur if the actors' opportunities to engage become limited both because of the actors' profession, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, whether they come from the city or the country in combination with that the actors are critical of issues in society. It is important that there is a delimitation of whether the restrictions affect freedom of expression, assembly and association or whether the restrictions in isolation affect, for example, religious freedom or LGBTI+ rights that are not covered by the civic space concept.

10.

COLLABORATION LITERACY ACROSS SECTORS AND THEMES: KNOWLEDGE AND RESPECT

There is a great need to develop a common language on civic space across sectors within civil society to increase understanding between the various actors. Specifically, there is a need to un-develop the sector-specific jargon and technical terms that only serve to create confusion between sectors and instead speak in plain and common language about the issues that actors across these sectors all have in common. Increasing understanding across sectors would also facilitate better collaboration and make this collaboration more effective across sectors.



THE THREE STEPS OF “CIVIL SOCIETY STRIKES BACK”

1. THE LEARNING EVENTS

Nine Learning Events about civic space were organised by Global Focus and member organisations in the fall of 2018. The goal of the events was to gather political analysis and understanding of civic space from a thematic issue and specifically receive inputs on how Danish civil society, the Danish government and the Danish private sector can support -and claim- civic space globally. At these events, partners and experts from different parts of the world gave their critical assessment of the problem from thematic perspectives and gave recommendations as to how Danish and international actors can improve their efforts to claim civic space. The events dealt with different important thematic aspects of the attacks on civil society, such as the double-layers of restrictions that child- and youth activists, LGBTIQ+ and women human rights defenders, religious minorities and humanitarian workers are experiencing. In the following, short summary of the events is given, and detailed summary of each individual event can be found here.

When 'Rule of Law' becomes 'Rule by Law' to Silence Civil Society

- David Moore, from ICNL, spoke about his organisations' findings from following government policies that influence the conditions of civil society around the world. They have witnessed an increase in legal restrictions on civil society and its ability to operate. Governments are converting the 'Rule of Law' to 'Rule by Law.' This transition from 'rule of law' to 'rule by law' can be described as a tendency where governments make laws that restrain civil society rather than laws to protect the rights of individuals and civil society. Frank Mugisha from SMUG, spoke about how his organisation in Uganda has experienced government policies that obstruct their work. However, SMUG has been able to form coalitions with other civil society actors to strengthen their political position in Uganda. In addition, SMUG has worked with national and governmental institutions in Uganda to train public employees to respect LGBT people as citizens with equal rights as any other citizens.

Civil Society under pressure in Sub-Saharan Africa:

What are the Effective 'Push Back Efforts'?

- Teldah Mawarire from CIVICUS argued that we need to call shrinking civil space what it is: a crackdown on civic freedoms. Charles VanDyck from WACSI shared some insight into the extent of the problem. According to CIVICUS monitor, only 6% of the populations in Africa live in countries which have open civic spaces. He pointed out how a strong civil society is characterized by a high level of trust and social and cultural cohesion, and when these qualities are combined with a strong awareness of civil and human rights, it transforms civil society into a force to reckoned with, and one which decision makers can not overlook. Mawarire and VanDyck both agreed that developing organizational resilience is of key importance for CSOs working within restricted civic spaces. CSOs in both international and local contexts need to be sharing experiences and strategies to counter government-led efforts to silence civil society. This includes seeking new ways of getting funding, since one of the most common measures imposed on CSOs are restrictions on international funding.

How LGBTIQ+ and Women's Rights Activists are Affected by Shrinking Space

- Azza Soliman, WHRD, Maryam Al-Khawaja, WHRD, Susanne Branner, LGBT Denmark, and Helle Jacobsen, Amnesty International and Henriette Laursen sat in a panel moderated by Lene Steffen, KVINFO. One of the recurring themes throughout the panel discussion was the growing tendency of governments applying double standards in their attitudes and actions concerning human rights. For example: although the Danish government has branded themselves as a champion of women's rights, they have multiple occasions has rejected asylum to LGBTIQ+ activist from countries where sexual minorities face harsh conditions and risk torture and killing. Another recurring theme was the lack of unitary action and solidarity in times when CSOs face crackdowns by governments. It was discussed that a way for civil society to mobilise such tangible solidarity would be to create an emergency fund that would permit other organisations within the country to channel funding to the partners of organisations who have been expelled from operating within that country.

Trade and Transnational Corporations: Attacks on Civil Society

According to Ali Chaucate, AAAJC, government and multinational corporations are the main agents of action which undermine the rights of both local community and civil society. Therefore, AAAJC has as its main mission to “defend the rights of affected communities through awareness-raising activities regarding the rights granted to them by law”. Caroline Bjerglund Andersen from Africa Contact pointed out that there is a “legislation gap” existing of two elements:

- 1) Transnational companies can “shop” between national legislation. There are no binding international obligations regulating transnational companies conduct.
- 2) governments rarely have any clear regulation or binding legislation towards companies, only voluntary guidelines. Sanne Borges, Amnesty International, pointed out that transnational companies are mainly held to account for their involvement in human rights violations by two ways self-regulation or incentive-driven mechanisms.

Protecting Civic Space: Canada’s Feminist Approach

Simeon McKay, Embassy of Canada to Denmark, gave his take on the key points of supporting international civil society through a feminist approach, which is a major focus for the Canadian government. They believe that the continuous fight for greater equality between genders will have a positive spill-over effect making it possible to get to the root cause of poverty. Jo Rodrigues has been part of the steering committee of the Women Peace and Security Network – Canada, which has been an important contributor to the consolidation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security from 2017-2022, which has prioritized empowering civil society, with a focus on women and women’s groups. According to Rodrigues, this plan has prioritized empowering civil society, with a focus on women and women’s groups. Which implies acknowledging civil society and arranging more activities, workshops etc. to educate and inform the population about the issue.

Nobody Should Die from Telling the Truth – Media & Freedom of expression

Tomasz Pjatek, a Polish journalist, Tom Heinemann, a Danish documentarist/journalist as well as Gulnara Akhundova and Henrik Grunnet, from IMS, spoke together in a panel debate. The speakers at the event underlined that media undertake an important role as the cornerstone of any democratic society. But media is to an increasing degree being targeted by authoritarian regimes and

illiberal democracies. “Foreign agents”, “traitors” and those with a “hidden agenda” are labels frequently used against them. Tomasz Pjatek explained how he had been exposed to harassment himself prosecuted for terrorism before a military court. Gulnara Akhundova, explained how restrictions to civic space can lead to discontent and extremist views, thus it is important that Western governments send a clear, synchronized message reaffirming the legitimate role of civil society. This can for instance be done by engaging directly with civil society during VIP visits to countries with restricted civic space, as well as standing firm on domestic and international declarations.

Civic Space in Humanitarian Action

Kate Moger, IRC, and Aung Kyaw Moe, CSI, participated at an event moderated by Nishanie Jayamaha (ICVA). ICVAs primary work is to help NGOs understand, engage and influence the humanitarian sector and beyond. According to ICVA, international humanitarian organisations lack expertise on how to cooperate with local governments and CSOs and this is where NGOs should focus their effort. The state of civic space is generally threatened in both Myanmar and in the African Great Lakes. Common for both regions is the fact that the international NGOs needs to be aware of the local situation and go to greater length to support and cooperate with the local CSOs and NGOs. According to Aung Kyaw Moe “International NGOs needs to be more present in the agenda. Large organisations have access to larger resource that smaller, local organisations do not. NGOs must localise as much as possible, but at the same time they must extend their capacity.”

How Can Young People Around the World Bring Down the Towers of Oppression and Raise the Banners of Freedom?

Speaking at the event was a panel of youth engaged in the agenda from around the world; Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, Faith Mvududu, ActionAid Activist Zimbabwe, Salimatou Moulaye Traoré from Youth Association for Active Citizenship and Democracy, and Natascha Skjaldgaard from the Danish Youth Council. The event was moderated by Sesheeni Joud Selvaratnam, ActionAid Denmark and Helle Gudmandsen, Save the Children Denmark. As a main point at the event, it was several times underlined how children and young people should not be seen as the leaders of tomorrow but the leaders of today. The positive role children and young people play as change makers in society should instead be valued and pro-actively supported by governments, NGOs and other powerholders. Around the world, children and young people are joining large movements in an act of solidarity and a willingness to change things.

The question is, how this momentum and progress is transmitted into the existing institutions. A way to rebuild trust between young people and institutions are for government donors and institutions to be more willing to consult youth leaders and to address the social and political issues that they may raise.

The Right to Freedom of Religion and belief in a Shrinking Space

Daniel Toft Jakobsen, Chair of Cross-party Network of Religious Freedom, Michael Suhr, Ambassador and Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Jonas Adelin Jørgensen, DMR, Jørgen Thomsen, DanChurchAid, and Vo Tran Nhat, Vietnam Committee on Human Rights, spoke at the event. The churches have used an advocacy approach to mobilise the local communities and raise focus on issues such as human rights, electoral processes and peaceful conflict resolution. There are however challenges that are important to address. Where faith actors are strong supporters of civic space in some places, they can be strong opponents in other areas. Especially LGBTQI+ activists and feminist organisations have faced restrictions and violations from religious actors. Speakers suggested that this ambiguity can be addressed by involving religious actors in finding a solution and for example channel resources to local faith groups to advance civic space through education and collaborate with activists and other civil society actors.

2. THE CIVIL SOCIETY MEETING

A Civil Society Meeting was held at Global Focus on 13 December 2018. Around 30 member organisations of Global Focus focusing on civic space were gathered to provide inputs and finalise a set of concrete recommendations to how Danish civil society, the Danish government and Danish private sector can protect and enhance civic space globally. The recommendations are strongly influenced by the political analysis made throughout the series of the learning events described in the above. The recommendations document takes stock of where civil society is at the present state, where Danish actors have played a strong role in enhancing civic space and where we are still facing challenges and the role Danish actors can play in this connection.

The political analysis describes how there is a necessity to act, as recent trends paint a picture where civic space restrictions also take place in historically strong democracies and at the moment authoritarian regimes gravely violate civic freedoms almost without consequences or international pressure. At the same time, current globalisation trends have also provided new challenges and risks towards the enjoyment of fundamental rights and civic freedoms, in recent years violations caused or contributed to by private sector actors have been on a global rise. Civil society partners throughout the world, receiving Danish development and humanitarian aid, particularly those working to enhance enjoyment of rights, are under particular pressure. Another important point is that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals can only happen if those working to reach the goals are allowed to do their job. Therefore, civic space is central to the SDG initiatives by Danish actors. This especially calls for interlinking goal 16 (peace, justice and stronger institutions) with other goals and for establishing inclusive multi-stakeholder review mechanisms and processes taking annual national stock of the SDG implementation.

The target groups of the recommendations are the Danish civil society sector, the Danish government and the Danish private sector. This is based on the realization that all three actors play an important role regarding civic space and can all act as important change makers to improve the situation. The three sectors are encouraged to commit themselves to the recommendations relevant for their work and to use this document as a guideline for future strategies on civic space.

The Recommendations document is structured into 10 main recommendations, with subsequent detailed recommendations under each of the main recommendations. The full political analysis and detailed set recommendations can be found in the annex to the report and here.

3. THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIC SPACE CONFERENCE

Global Focus, partners and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 2019 organized an international civil society conference in Copenhagen, Denmark under the heading *"Claiming Civic Space Together – Joint strategies to ensure development and humanitarian action"*. Over 300 people from over 40 countries around the world took part in the discussions with representation from civil society, government and the private sector.

The conference host was Teldah Mawarire, Advocacy and Campaigns officer at CIVICUS, and keynote speeches were given by:

- **Clément Voule, Special Rapporteur on the rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association:** SDG's and Civic Space.
- **Joenia Wapichana, Member of Parliament Brazil:**
Indigenous rights and civic space
- **Aya Chebbi, African Union Youth Envoy, Youth leadership:**
Gender and Civic space.
- **Anders Samuelsen,** Danish minister for Foreign Affairs.

There was, however many more speakers at the conference, and a list of both selected speakers as well as the conference program is to be found [here](#).

The conference was divided into eight thematic subgroups, linking civic space to various aspects of the global goals and double layers for certain groups. Each subgroup was tasked with identifying existing practices that should be continued and expanded, as well as with proposing concrete and tangible joint strategies to address gaps in current practices.

While thematic sessions, linking civic space to various aspects of the Global Goals, were the point of departure, the key objective was to find joint strategies and solutions across themes, areas and sectors to ensure civic space globally and acknowledge the importance of civic space to carry out development and humanitarian work worldwide. The 10 joint strategies formulated as a result of the conference were listed in the above key takeaways section, whilst the main points agreed upon in the different sessions are listed below.

#MediaToo: Shrinking Space for Independent Media and Freedom of Expression

Free societies depend on transparency and truth. In an era of disinformation and other forms of censorship, both online and physical – journalism is under siege. No sector – be it media, civil society, governments, private sector or academia - can go it alone, when it comes to responding to the grave challenges facing independent media and freedom of expression both on and off-line. They need to work together to ensure that people have access to information they can trust in order to make informed decisions and elicit positive change in their societies. The actors across sectors should work together to encourage quality journalism, a greater focus on ethics and self-regulation in journalism, as well as promote efforts across sectors to strengthen accountability, and increase transparency.

Going forward, we need to focus on:

- **Good journalism production and distribution:** Promote and support analytical and investigative journalism that holds governments to account, provides access to information and stories of public interest, and is an alternative to fake news.
- **Critical Thinking and Media Literacy:** It is vital to enhance and support information and media literacy programs in schools, communities and online that support the goal of having an informed citizenry that is constantly engaged in critical thinking. Solutions must be pro-active, rather than reactionary.
- **Educating the readership on alternative modes of online activity:** We must strive to create greater awareness of new alternative and innovative technologies, like Encrypted SNI or IPFS (the Inter-Planetary File System), to enable the readership to access news sites in countries where these are under censorship – the technology is there, just the knowhow is missing. The burden should not solely be on the content provider, it should be shared with the audience.
- **Digital resilience and safety:** Data security training must be provided to activists, journalists, and other civil society actors working on sensitive topics on how to keep their data secure when using online networks. Much of this data is extremely sensitive and any careless handling could in the worst of circumstances jeopardize people's lives.

Civic Space for Environmental and Indigenous Human Rights Defenders

We need increased awareness and recognition of the plight of indigenous civil society actors working for indigenous peoples' rights and on environmental issues. Indigenous people make up only 5% of the world's population but account for 50% of Human Rights Defenders (HRD) killed yearly.

Going forward, we need to focus on:

- **Protection:** There is a clear need to protect indigenous and environmental human rights defenders who flee their countries for safety concerns and re-settle in other countries. As well as those HRDs who choose to stay in their communities, especially those living in remote rural areas, who are very vulnerable and often less visible. We need to examine the barriers that exist to accessing existing protection mechanisms and consider whether it is time to create new mechanisms for protecting HRDs in their home communities.
- **Multilateral Efforts:** More international advocacy should be done in international fora, for example by increasing support for indigenous representation at the UN level. Moreover, an effort must be made to strengthen existing international rapid response mechanisms, such as those provided by the EU, and the outreach and volume of such mechanisms should be expanded.
- **Private Sector:** Civil society should push for the private sector to take responsibility for the rights of the indigenous population in the areas that they are working. Hereunder build better partnerships locally and better frameworks that guarantee that indigenous groups get a seat at the table alongside the business actors when new investment projects on their lands are discussed. Internationally recognized principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) must be applied, and the collectively based livelihoods and coping mechanisms of indigenous peoples should be respected.
- **Media:** Indigenous civil society actors are often vilified in their countries' local and national media. The media must be trained to also include the indigenous peoples' perspectives and provide them with equal opportunity to provide their input on news stories that concern their land and communities.

Engaging with Religious Actors in Building and Defending Civic Space

Religious actors are a diverse and ambiguous group and in many countries, religious actors exist under a different legal framework compared to other parts of civil society. In some countries they are often among the last to be silenced, which allows them to provide protection for others at risk. In other countries, they are the first to be discriminated against and marginalized due to their religion. Some religious actors strongly support a justice agenda, while others don't. We need to recognize that they are all part of civil society and their influence on people's values and actions makes it necessary to engage with all of them.

Going forward, we need to focus on:

- **Religious Literacy:** Civil society organizations need to include religion and religious actors in their context analysis and ensure that all new funding programs include the role of religion and press for state agencies to do the same. Likewise, we need to promote the importance of the business sector having a focus on diversity management and inclusion of people of different religions and beliefs, as well as non-religious groups.
- **Strengthening literacy on the freedom of thought, conscience and religion:** The fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion secures an open society where everyone can contribute based on their values. The specific protection of freedom of religion and belief, which can be used as an advantage to open doors for civil society when others are closed.

Private Sector and Civic Space

International coalition-building across sectors is crucial to create a stronger mandate to protect civic space and providing support for social movements. But it remains a challenge for Civil Society to establish the dialogue with the private sector. Currently, affected communities and stakeholders are not sufficiently consulted by companies, and companies need to take a more proactive stance on issues as labour rights, trade union rights and HRD.

Going forward, we need to focus on:

- **UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs):** We need to translate and further the spreading of existing guidelines and recommenda-

tions that already require companies to respect fundamental freedoms and consult rights-holders. Moreover, companies should be encouraged to support on-going UN process towards a binding Treaty on Transnational Corporation and Human Rights.

- **Mandatory frameworks:** Civil Society should press for regulatory frameworks, such as laws mandating companies to carry out human rights due diligence. This would be both helpful in ensuring that companies are respecting civic freedoms throughout their value chains whilst ensuring that companies respecting human rights are not placed at a competitive disadvantage.
- **Coalition building:** Civil Society should engage with businesses working with the “shrinkers” and encourage them to establish a direct dialogue with local communities in the areas where they are working, instead of just going through the government, as well as to establish and build up capacity of local partnerships. Initiatives like the Business network for civic freedoms and human rights defenders should be supported by civil society, and we should work for an expansion of the network. Civil society actors must at the same time work to hold these actors accountable when they fault on their promises or act counter to their stated intentions and policies.

Gender and LGBTIQ+ Specific Challenges and Responses

Civil society actors should start with their own organizations, including the upper levels and ask themselves: Does it reflect diversity?

Going forward, we need to focus on:

- **Listen!** Donors will have to accept that you cannot fit a feminist movement or a civic space movement into a pre-designed donor program. And should listen to those they want to support and encourage dialogue on how programs are designed rather than propose pre-designed programs.
- **Make it everybody's business:** We should increase the use of personal stories and avoid technical language to show how diversity challenges in civil society are everybody's business and not 'just' NGO problems. Similarly, we should establish a dialogue with media outlets to ensure that journalists use terms that respect individuals' rights.

- **Support bottom up coalition building:** LGBTIQ+ organizations, are often excluded from the broader human rights agendas, especially in countries where this type of work is criminalised. There is therefore a need for a genuine solidarity pact in order to be effective instead of competition.
- **Fluid forms of organizing:** Feminist and LGBTIQ+ actors must explore more fluid ways of organizing and operating, such as operating from private homes, as private businesses, or media entities in order to remain below the radar. Donors can help to enhance this flexibility by exploring new innovative systems of funding and reporting instead of the formalized procedures most North-South partnerships rely on.

Children and Young People as Civic Actors

INGOs, multilateral organizations and other actors can and should play a constructive role in supporting and amplifying children and youth engagement and empowerment in all spaces, national as international. This requires a bottom-up approach, where children and youth are listened to and not regarded as clients or beneficiaries.

Going forward, we need to focus on:

- **Physical Space:** We should ensure that children and youth have access to physical spaces where they can play, learn and express themselves safely to help them build the social, communicative, and problem-solving skills that will enable to claim and shape economic and political space.
- **Political Space:** To increase youth engagement politics, it is vital to create safe and inclusive platforms for political debate and engagement. By increasing children and youth engagement, the formal political actors will also get the benefit of being able to tap into new innovative solutions to major problems that only children and youth can approach in new ways.
- **Digital Space:** The digital space also serves as the main platform for social and political expression and activism and to enable youth voice and agency, it is important to secure access to online space combined with training on online safety.
- **Movements than Parties:** Rather than try to absorb youth into the formal political space, we have to embrace their informal approach to politics.

Youth political engagement happens more in informal networks and social movements based at the grassroots level, like the 2018-19 global student led climate strikes. As well as through informal and creative means, such as music, art, and design, which help youth grasp the everyday implications of high-level politics. It is important that it is the youth movements that invite political actors into their space and encourage them to listen and learn from these movements, not the other way around.

The Role of National Human Rights Institutions

Civil society actors should engage directly with National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) and use the formal complaint mechanisms of these bodies more frequently and systematically. Working with these institutions in countries with repressive track records could provide “a key to a door that would otherwise remain locked”. Yet although the NHRIs have a particular mandate to monitor the Human Rights situation in their respective countries, there is a need for them to enlarge this mandate to also protect and support civil society actors and Human rights defenders through various tools, whilst their accountability is at the same time ensured.

Going forward, we need to focus on:

- **Local Involvement:** The NHRIs have a particular mandate to monitor the Human Rights situation in their respective countries, but there is a need for them to enlarge this mandate to also be able to protect and support civil society actors. The NHRIs have to become more involved in engagement with local communities in cooperation with CSOs and have to play an active role in changing the discourse about CSOs with local and national authorities, emphasizing that they are partners for local development and not trouble-makers.
- **Rapid response:** The existing complaint handling process is currently not sufficient effective in many countries and bringing this up to speed should be a priority to increase the legitimacy of the NHRIs. Moreover, the NHRIs should aim to develop human rights observatories, which can investigate issues and push for inquiries at the national level.
- **Civil society role:** With their networks, eyes on the ground, and expertise, civil society actors can play the role as a watchdog for the NHRIs, which them-

selves play the role as a watchdog for their national governments, but with limited capacity. Civil society could thus play the role as watchdogs for the watchdogs.

- **Civic space assessment:** Civil society should also use the data available from the NHRI to a greater extent focus on and compare the legal aspects of civic space across countries of intervention, as well as across sectors and at the multilateral level.

Civic Space in Humanitarian Action

It should be a priority for the donor community to establish an incentive structure that is demand driven rather than supply-driven, which is informed by the needs and capacities of local people and CSOs. In practice, this would mean a transfer of power to national and local actors with the aim of strengthening organisations and networks including local capacities that are not determined by international compliance requirements and political interests.

Going forward, we need to focus on:

- **Go Local/New Actors:** We should push for program planning that to a greater extent is based on the input and perspectives of local civil society partners and organizations, who have locally established networks. Humanitarian INGOs should aim to transfer more agency and responsibility to these actors and their communities throughout the planning and implementation process. These local actors should be supported in defining the role they are able and willing to play themselves, and INGOs must work to create a protective space for them to freely conduct their activities, as well as serve as a platform for making the local voices heard internationally.
- **Tools:** Take stock of existing tools (development, humanitarian, civil society) and ensure complementarity across sectors and actors to ensure 1) that humanitarian programs include a civil society stakeholder analysis to better inform and support programming; 2) that there is a better understanding of humanitarian action and terminology, humanitarian principles, and normative legal frameworks (e.g. the Geneva Convention) in development/human rights based programming and 3) that all types of programming include a needs analysis that goes beyond their traditional sphere of influence and that leverage national actors, networks and participation.



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