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Civil Society in Action

A summary of two CIVICUS Civil Society Index training workshops at the Sida Civil Society Centre

Civil Society Index

Documentation of two Training Workshops CSI
in collaboration with Sida Partnership

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1. Introduction

The past few decades have witnessed the development of civil society as a major player in both national and international contexts around the globe. As the role and influence of the civil society sector increases, however, it is important to be able to measure and support civil society to ensure effective and relevant social development. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation (www.civicus.org) has developed the Civil Society Index (CSI) to do just this: to measure the state of civil society in countries around the globe, with the view to strengthening their capacity and influence nationally, regionally and internationally. By seeking to combine valid assessment, broad-based reflection and joint action, the CSI is a living example of how research can inform policy and practice.

This publication is the result of two CSI training workshops held at the Sida Partnership Forum (SCSC) in Härnösand, Sweden in September 2008 (<http://www.sida.se/scsc>). Sida is a long-time supporter of the CIVICUS CSI programme and graciously hosted the workshops at the SCSC, which is a residential and conference space created by Sida for generating discussion and capacity-building for civil society actors. CSI participants from a variety of regions, though mainly Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, descended upon the Center to immerse themselves in CSI's new methodology, which is aimed at researching and strengthening civil society around the world.

This publication has two purposes. First, it will present the revised CSI methodology, highlighting the main characteristics, activities and outputs of the project. Second, this publication will also serve to document the results of the trainings held at the SCSC and the experiences of participants as they learned about the CSI project at the SCSC.

2. The Civil Society Index: A Brief History

The history of the CSI project began in 1997 with the publication of the *New Civic Atlas*, which contained the profiles of civil society in sixty countries worldwide. The success of this publication and subsequent discussions led to a more structured framework for civil society analysis that would allow for cross-country comparison. After much debate, it was decided to develop a multi-dimensional model to measure the state of civil society in a country, and indicators were chosen to measure four major dimensions of civil society: the structure of civil society, the external environment in which civil society operates, the practice of values, and the impact of civil society in the country. These four dimensions then formed the axes for the visual representation of the data collected, the Civil Society Diamond, and a first version of the CSI methodology was born.

This new framework was put to the test in a pilot phase of fourteen countries in 2001. The implementation process and results were then evaluated and refined, and the first full implementation phase took place from 2003–2006 with fifty-three countries participating in the project, directly involving more than 7,000 civil society stakeholders. An interim phase using this methodology was also implemented in early 2008 and sponsored by UNDP to focus on the state of civil society in six African countries.

3. The 2008-2010 Phase of the CSI

Intent on continuing to improve this research-action tool for enhancing the strength and sustainability of civil society, the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) project embarked upon a rigorous self-evaluation and revision of its framework and methodology after the first phase of implementation (2003–2006). The CSI project, in partnership with Heidelberg University, based this revision on the findings of the end-of project evaluations and extensive feedback provided by the over fifty National Coordinating Organizations (NCOs) who took part in the implementation in the previous phase.

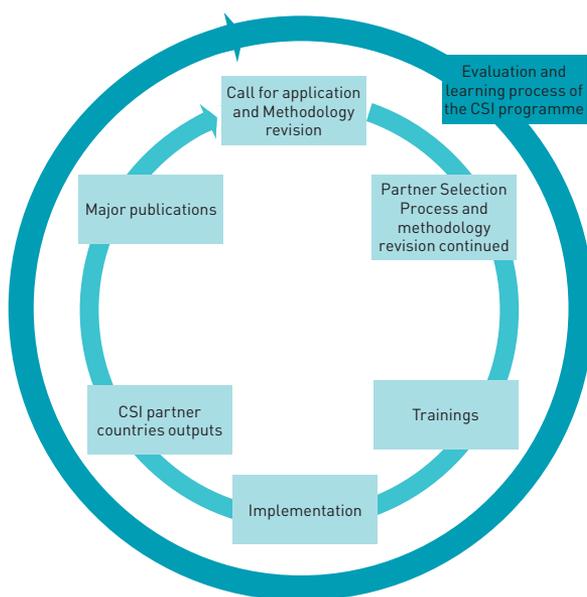


Figure 1. The CSI Implementation Cycle



The overall objectives of the revision were: to strengthen the link between research and action by explaining how evidence can serve a political impact, enhance comparability; and to streamline and better combine the quantitative and qualitative information collected during the implementation process.

As Figure 1 shows, each cycle of CSI implementation begins with a global call for applications. After a rigorous screening process, partner countries are selected and are then trained in the CSI methodology. The selection process for the new 2008–2010 Phase resulted in 55 successful applicants, nineteen of which met in Härnösand at the SCSC for intensive CSI training workshops.

Trainings highlight the steps and participatory activities that the country partners will be using during CSI implementation to gather data on the state of civil society in their country. After one year, the CSI country partners are expected to publish the major project outputs (Analytical Country Report and Policy Action Brief). The CSI programme can then start compiling and writing the comparative volumes on major findings across countries and prepare for a new phase of implementation.

4. The New CSI Methodology

As a result of the vigorous evaluation process mentioned above, some changes were made to the CSI methodology for the new 2008–2010 implementation phase. In terms of overarching methodological considerations, firstly the definition of civil society was altered so that it remains normative-free and functional, but is now more explicit about who is to be included in civil society (for example, civil society is no longer taken as a given that it exists. Rather, the new definition explicitly states that it is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interest).¹

Furthermore, the dimensions (the axes of the CSI Diamond) have also been redesigned for the new phase. As mentioned above, in the previous phase, the four dimensions measured the Structure, Environment, Impact, and Values of civil society in a particular national context. For the new phase, the dimensions now number five rather than four: the Structure dimension from the previous version of the methodology was divided into two separate dimensions- Civic Engagement and Level of Organization and join Practice of Values and Perceived Impact as the four axes of the diamond. The fifth dimension, the Environmental Context in which civil society must operate, is now represented by a circle surrounding the diamond. (Please see figure 2 below.)

A final significant methodological change involves the process of constructing the diamond itself. In the previous methodology, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and collated together into indicators and given a 'score' from 0 to 3 which was then plotted onto the diamond. This relatively subjective scoring

¹ In Phase 2008–2010, 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."

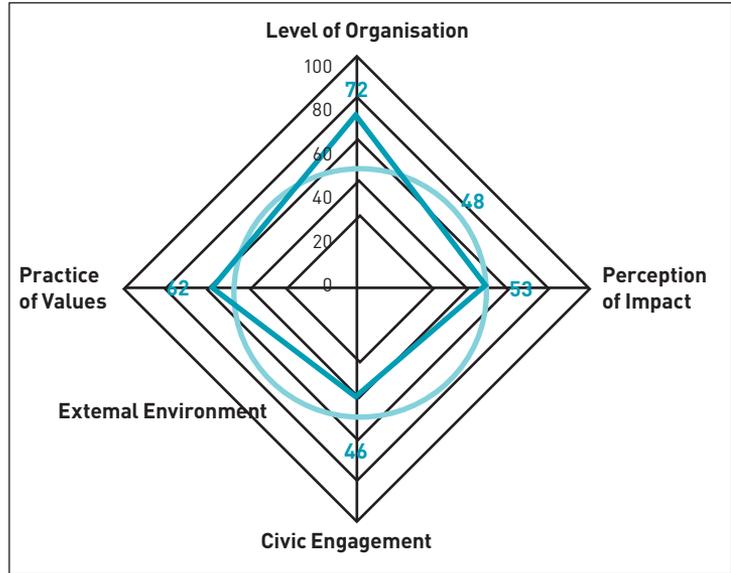


Figure 2. CSI Diamond: overview of civil society 'at a glance'

process was abandoned in favour of a more scientifically verifiable and valid process of constructing the diamond. The quantitative and qualitative data have been separated for the current phase, and the diamond is now constructed using only quantitative analysis. Specifically, data from three surveys are used in conjunction with a number of secondary data sources including statistics from World Bank, Union of International Associations, Social Watch, Freedom House and Transparency International. The quantitative data are aggregated into one score per dimension, scaled from 1 to 100, and plotted along each axis of the diamond.

Outside of these broader methodological issues, the main activities and data collection tools that feed the Diamond and the rest of the CSI project have also been changed. For instance, the community sample survey used in the previous phase has been redeveloped into a national population survey, the questions of which draw heavily from the internationally-recognized World Values

Survey². Furthermore, regional stakeholder consultations have been substituted by four focus groups (thematic and geographical) and an organizational survey. A new survey was also added to capture the perceptions of external stakeholders around the impact that civil society has had in the country.

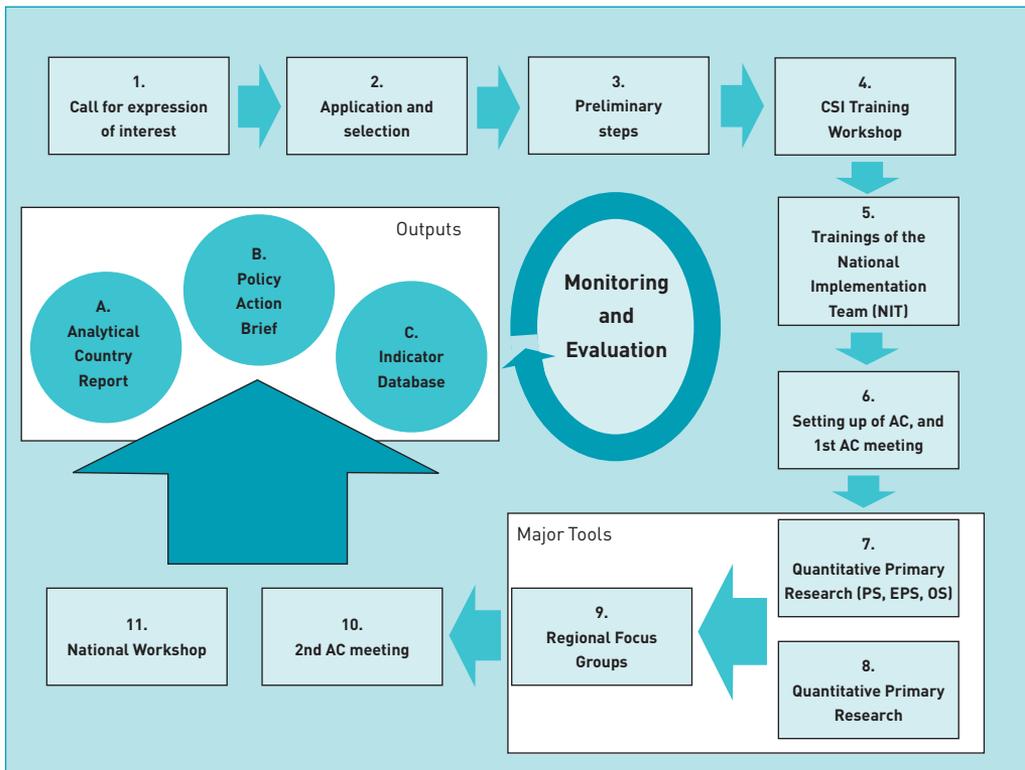


Figure 3: CSI 2008–2010 Phase Implementation Process.

These quantitative tools are complemented by qualitative data and analysis, provided by the completion of a number of case studies, one for each of the five dimensions. These case studies will focus on issues of importance to the specific country context in which they are being written, and provide a valuable way of ensuring the CSI exercise stays relevant for specific national policy contexts. These case studies will triangulate into the final country

² The qualitative data is now captured in a series of case studies, which along with the results of the quantitative analysis also feed into the major outputs of the project: the Analytical Country Report and Policy Action Brief.



report by pinpointing, specifying, and enriching the picture provided by the quantitative data. Figure 3, below, provides a summary of the main steps involved in implementing the CSI project in the 2008–2010 phase.

While the National Workshop and some other key activities have remained unchanged, the final outputs of the CSI process were also re-designed. For the 2008–2010 phase of the CSI, the two major outputs are: an Analytical Country Report, which will be much shorter than in previous phases and will focus on the analysis of the issues and information most relevant to each country; and the Policy Action Brief, which will summarize the main recommendations for building on the strengths and addressing the weaknesses of civil society in a country, and will have the specific purpose of targeting policy makers and other relevant stakeholders.

This new phase will be, and already is, an exercise in increasing the breadth of the CSI project by implementing in a number of new countries that have not previously participated. At the same time, we will be looking to increase the depth, richness and comparability of the data already gathered in the previous phase by re-implementing the project in a select number of countries that went through the CSI process in the 2003–2006 phase.

5. Overview of the CSI Training Workshops

In order to ensure that the CSI is successfully and consistently implemented in a variety of contexts and countries around the world, the project conducts three-day training workshops which all implementing partners must attend before undertaking the project in their countries. The focus of these workshops is for participants to become familiar with the major activities and research tools that will be used during the implementation process. The workshops are also designed to provide opportunities for networking with partners in the same region and establishing professional relationships and linkages that can act as a support throughout the implementation process.

These training workshops follow the agenda below in order to highlight the major points and activities that must be covered for a successful and effective implementation of the CSI in each country:

- Introduce the participants to CIVICUS and its programmes
- Outline the history, purpose and goals of the CSI and discuss a few of the important documents that the NCOs are meant to develop at the early stages of the project (ie: a social forces analysis, secondary data matrix, etc...)
- Provide an overview and examination of the individual indicators used to measure the five dimensions used to create the CSI Diamond
- Describe the formation and role of the Advisory Committee (AC) through the CSI process, including information for the holding the First and Second AC Meetings
- Present a detailed and extensive exploration of the quantitative and qualitative research tools (the population survey, external perceptions survey, organizational survey, case studies and focus groups)

- Discuss how to conduct the National Workshop
- Discuss how to develop and finalize the two main outputs: the Analytical Country Report and Policy Action Brief
- Discuss the relationship between the CSI team and the NCO throughout the implementation process, including the monitoring of the process by the CSI team and how it can support the NCO from the initial stages through to data gathering and the development of the final reports.

In order to provide regionally-relevant trainings that allowed participants to share and discuss issues of particular import or significance to them, the countries participating in the 2008–2010 phase of the CSI were divided into seven regions and trained together in a variety of locations around the world. The seven regions were: Anglophone Africa, Francophone Africa, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Central Asia, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Latin America, and the Asia Pacific Region.

The Sida Partnership Forum (SCSC) in Hårnösand, Sweden hosted two of these trainings: the workshop for the Central Asian regional partners from September 24–26, 2008; and for the Central and Eastern Europe region (along with Canada) from September 29 to October 1, 2008. The SCSC provided workshop organizers and attendees an all-inclusive and comfortable conference setting with ample training spaces, as well as on-site room and board facilities.

The National Coordinating Organizations (NCOs) who attended these two trainings are indicated in the table below, per country. To capitalize on the location in which the trainings were held, as well as to facilitate cross-organizational and regional linkages and interaction, the training workshops at the SCSC were also attended by several Sweden-based organizations, which are included at the end of the list for each training.

Central Asia Regional Training Workshop September 24 to 26, 2008:

Country	Organization	Website
Armenia	Counterpart International	http://www.counterpart.am/
	USAID Civic Advocacy Support Programme (CASP)	http://www.advocacy.am/en/
Azerbaijan	Civil Society Coalition of Azerbaijani NGOs	http://www.civil-soc.org/
	International Center for Social Research (ICSR)	
Bahrain	Bahrain Human Rights Society	http://www.bhrs.org/
Cyprus	The Management Centre of the Mediterranean	http://www.mc-med.org/
	NGO Support Centre	http://www.ngo-sc.org/
Georgia	Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development (CIPDD)	http://www.cipdd.org/
Kazakhstan	Public Policy Research Centre (PPRC)	http://www.pprc.kz/
Kyrgyzstan	Association of Civil Society Support Centers (ACSSC)	http://www.acssc.kg/
Turkey	Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TUSEV)	http://www.tusev.org.tr/
Sweden	Forum SYD	http://www.forumsyd.org/
Sweden	Palme Centre	http://www.palmecenter.org/

Central and Eastern Europe Regional Training Workshop September 29 to October 1, 2008

Country	Organization	Website
Albania	Institute for Democracy and Mediation	http://idmalbania.org/en/
Bulgaria	Open Society Institute Bulgaria	http://www.osi.bg/
Canada (Quebec)	Institut du Nouveau Monde (INM)	http://www.inm.qc.ca/
Croatia	Ceraneo	http://www.ceraneo.hr/
Kosovo	Kosovar Civil Society Foundation	http://www.kcsfoundation.org/
Macedonia	Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC)	http://www.mcic.org.mk/
Malta	The People For Change Foundation	http://www.pfcmalta.org/
Poland	KLON/JAWOR Association	
Serbia	ARGUMENT	
Slovenia	Legal-information centre for NGOs	http://www.pic.si/
Ukraine	Center for Philanthropy	http://www.philanthropy.org.ua/
Sweden	Swedish Mission Council	http://www.missioncouncil.se



Unlike most other CSI methodology training workshops at the SCSC hosted trainings allowed the participation of several invited Swedish organizations that were not necessarily partners implementing CSI in the country. Their presence and interventions contributed to the diversity of viewpoints at the workshops and added new perspectives to the discussions that ensued.

In addition, their presence contributed to several positive follow-up outcomes from the workshop. For example, there was a north south linkage created, where the Swedish representative from the Palme Centre, who also happened to be Iraqi, expressed interest in working to get the CSI implemented in Iraq, and is now liaising with contacts and organizations in the country to start laying the groundwork for an application for the next phase of the project.

Institutional partnerships were also established through the interaction with the invited Swedish organizations. For example, the Swedish representative from Forum SYD also expressed significant interest in incorporating some aspects of the CSI methodology into their country studies.

6. Frequently Asked Questions & Answers From the CSI Team

All CSI training workshops, including the two at the SCSC, were purposefully developed to be as engaging and participatory as possible in order to provide the opportunity for participants to become fully familiar and comfortable with the CSI project and implementation process. Therefore, questions were encouraged at all times. Over the course of the two trainings at SCSC, as well as the five other trainings facilitated by the CSI team, a number of common concerns and questions emerged from the discussions.

The following section highlights the frequently asked questions at the training workshops, as well as providing answers to these common queries.

Question: Can NCOs adapt the definition of civil society to their country's context?

Yes, in fact CSI encourages NCOs to take the time to reflect on the definition of civil society with their Advisory Committees, to ensure that the generic definition developed by the CSI team does indeed encompass the reality of their country contexts. However, adapted definition should be as broad as possible in order to capture as complete a picture of civil society as possible, and that any changes are made in consultation with the CSI team.

Question: If CSI was completed in a previous phase, what is the best way to use this information in the new phase?

One of the strengths of the CSI project is that countries can implement the project in more than one phase. By doing so, countries can take a 'snapshot' of civil society in a given period, and then can take that snapshot again every few years, a process which will enable the countries to track changes in the sector. For instance,

countries can compare the previous CSI results with the data from the new phase to measure impact and understand how the CSI process has aided civil society in bringing about changes in the country and the sector.

More generally, regularly tracking changes in civil societies enables stakeholders to constantly monitor and assess growth, impact and emerging weaknesses in their civil societies and make the necessary action plans to build on the strengths and counteract the weaknesses found within.

Just as Transparency International, Amnesty International's Human Rights Reports and a host of United Nations statistics are implemented at regular intervals, CSI is designed to be implemented in continuous phases because we believe civil society is a cornerstone of democracy and thus in need to be studied, supported and fostered as other fundamental democratic principles such as governmental transparency, accountability, human rights track records.

Question: What should NCOs do if they feel an indicator is irrelevant or a question used to measure the indicator is not applicable to the country's context?

Emphasizing the need for international comparability within the project, yet understanding the need to be able to be flexible and allow for individual county context variations, the CSI research tools are designed to be adaptable, within limits, to each country's civil society context. Therefore, it is possible, for example, to rephrase survey questions to accommodate national and regional variations, and to add new questions (coded differently) to collect information not captured in the standard questionnaires that is of particular import to a particular context, whether national or regional.³

However, in order to maintain a global comparability and ensure the overall reliability and validity of the project and the data collected therein, the CSI team requires that all changes to the surveys be sent to the CSI research team for approval before the questionnaires are used in the field.

³ Indeed, we have seen regional coordination when adding questions to the surveys, particularly from the Latin America region, the results of which will be instrumental in developing regional initiatives and conducting analysis of civil society in the region.

Question: Who should be in the Advisory Committee (AC) and what are their roles?

The AC plays a crucial role throughout the CSI project by providing insight and direction in many of the project activities. Their expertise and networks are pivotal to the success of the project. Therefore, it is vital to have a strong AC. With this in mind, CSI requires that each country's AC be representative of their respective civil society sector and stakeholders. The makeup of the AC should also take into account considerations such as gender, regional representation, urban and rural voices and ensure representation from the media, government and donors. Furthermore, because it is important that the AC members all be able to provide a firm time commitment to the project, NCOs must balance the benefit of having AC members with higher levels of seniority (thereby providing more expertise, networking and credibility to the AC) with the need to have a functional and accessible AC.

Question: What is the purpose of holding the National Workshop?

The National Workshop aims to bring together a broad range of civil society actors and stakeholders in government, the private sector, the media, the donor community and academia, all with an aim to discussing the CSI findings, identify strengths and weaknesses of civil society and to develop a concrete action plan for civil society strengthening and engagement in the country. It is meant to build a common understanding of the current state of civil society and at the same time to develop a joint action agenda for civil society strengthening initiatives.

Question: What is the relevance for a country to carry out the CSI?

As with most other participatory research exercises, the CSI's ultimate goal is not the generation of knowledge for its own sake but as mentioned above, as a stimulus for change. As the CSI programme continues with a new phase of implementation in its effort to strengthen civil society around the globe, signs of impact from the last phase on the medium term are increasingly surfacing and recorded in a broad range of countries:

- *Fiji* – the CSI initiative contributed to the establishment of the 'Social Leadership Training Institute' by bringing civil society

stakeholders together to find solutions to address the leadership gap in Fijian civil society.

- *Macedonia* – the Government adopted the ‘Strategy for Cooperation with the Civil Society Sector’ in January 2007 based on CSI findings and diligent work of CSOs involved in the CSI project.
- *Uganda* – from the CSI consultative process and findings, civil society stakeholders in Uganda mobilized and developed proposals in affecting change to government and Legitimacy, Transparency, and Accountability (LTA) policy.
- *Ukraine* – the CSI increased the interactions and strengthened relations between civil society and the Government and media in regards to the CSI report. It also facilitated the development and adoption of the “Concept of Government and Civil Society Cooperation in the Ukraine”.
- Many CSI partners have succeeded in employing the CSI as a stimulus for their own as well as its partners’ programmatic development. At the global level, the CSI tool and approach are used by an increasing number of institutions in their work on civil society issues, thereby contributing to the development of a ‘common language’ and ‘way of thinking’ on civil society issues among policy-makers, practitioners and researchers. Such agencies include civil society departments of SIDA, UNDP and EuropeAid.

Question: How can we interact with the CSI and CIVICUS?

The CSI programme is accessible in several online venues. You are welcome to visit the CSI website at www.civicus.org/csi. There you can find a variety of resources and information, including country reports from previous phases of implementation, access to CSI’s online indicator database, copies of the CSI newsletter and much more! You are also invited to contact the team by email at index@civicus.org with your comments, questions and queries.

Another way you can interact with the CSI team is through our blog: <http://civilsocietyindex.wordpress.com/>. This forum is updated frequently with programme developments, partner profiles of the week, as well as links to online news and media coverage from our implementing partners.



Finally, CIVICUS is online in a variety of locations on the web.

- You can check out the CIVICUS website at www.civicus.org
- CIVICUS is on Youtube:
<http://www.youtube.com/user/civicusworldalliance>
- Sign up to receive the eCIVICUS newsletter:
<http://www.civicus.org/subscribe-to-ecivicus>
- Follow the CIVICUS blog: <http://civicus.civiblog.org/blog>
- You can also interact with CIVICUS on Facebook by joining our Facebook group or becoming a fan of the organization!

7. Conclusion

The training workshops at the SCSC were some of the first workshops of the new phase, and some of the most successful. Partners left the workshops well prepared for the implementation of the new CSI phase, well-versed in the methodology and with new contacts and linkages established. The success of these workshops was due in part to the comfortable and open atmosphere established by the Sida Partnership Forum. The CSI Team would particularly like to thank Dag Jonzon and Magdalena Akerros for their excellent support during the planning of these workshops, and their ongoing commitment to promoting civil society dialogue around the world.

The trainings at Sida Partnership Forum provided a unique and important environment for the participants to network and establish fruitful relationships with each other and the CSI team. The experience gained and the relationships forged will prove a significant asset for all involved throughout the CSI implementation process and beyond.

Sida works according to directives of the Swedish Parliament and Government to reduce poverty in the world, a task that requires cooperation and persistence. Through development cooperation, Sweden assists countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Each country is responsible for its own development. Sida provides resources and develops knowledge, skills and expertise. This increases the world's prosperity.

Civil Society Index

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