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# REFERENCES TO THE NGO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX IN USAID DOCUMENTS

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**Taryn Anderson**, Program Analyst, USAID/Washington

**L. Jerome Gallagher**, Monitoring and Evaluation Analyst, USAID/Washington

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# INTRODUCTION

For thirteen years, the NGO Sustainability Index (NGOSI) for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia has reported on and scored the strength and viability of NGO sectors in countries of the region. Covering seven interconnected dimensions, the annual study currently combines a narrative with a numerical set of indicators to track sectoral progress and challenges in 29 countries and to provide for comparison on a sub-regional and regional level.<sup>1</sup>

Initially developed in 1997 as an internal tracking instrument, the role of NGOSI has expanded over time and has become a tool to inform a broad policy and development community internationally and in the countries of focus. USAID staff members in both Washington and the field who work on NGO sector issues remain a core audience for the NGOSI.

Recent survey and interview-based assessments of NGOSI report that USAID staff members use the NGO Sustainability Index for a variety of purposes, including program design, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, etc.<sup>2</sup> In order to verify with documentary evidence the information presented in these reports and to further examine possible uses of the NGOSI at various levels of USAID, this review examines selected USAID documents and USAID document databases for references to the NGOSI.

## Methodology

Two methods were used to review USAID documentation for references to the NGOSI. First, to better understand the extent of NGOSI use in planning and reporting we examine a set of purposively selected USAID documents for strategic planning and reporting at the agency level, bureau level, and mission level.<sup>3</sup> Nearly all of these documents fulfill key roles in Congressional or Agency planning and reporting requirements. While most of these documents are produced on an annual basis, only the most recent document was examined. Each document was searched for references to the NGOSI to determine if it is currently being used to inform planning or to report on progress. Second, in order to understand how the NGOSI is used more broadly at USAID, we searched USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) for references to the NGOSI from 2005-2010. Each of the documents that mentioned NGOSI was examined to determine what type of document it was and how it used the NGOSI.

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<sup>1</sup> The current dimensions of the NGO Sustainability Index are: 1) Legal Environment, 2) Organizational Capacity, 3) Financial Viability, 4) Advocacy, 5) Service Provision, 6) Infrastructure, and 7) Public Image. The current list of 29 countries measured by the NGOSI in Europe and Eurasia includes: 1) the Northern Tier: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia; 2) the Southern Tier: Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia; 3) The Western Newly Independent States (W-NIS) and Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine; and 4) Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

<sup>2</sup> *Study on NGO Sustainability Index Usage Patterns*, Management Systems International, and *Survey of NGO Sustainability Index Usage at USAID*, USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia.

<sup>3</sup> At the Bureau level, only the Europe and Eurasia Bureau documents were reviewed. Similarly, at the mission level, only documents from missions under the Europe and Eurasia Bureau were reviewed. Documents from the Asia bureau (which oversees the USAID missions in the Central Asian Republics) and documents from the Central Asian Republics were not reviewed.

## Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this approach. First, the documents purposively selected for review are not exhaustive of all USAID documents relevant to this review. Survey respondents and interviewees mentioned, for instance, using the NGOSI for program design. However, program design documents such as activity approval documents were not available for review. Similarly, one of the most likely avenues for NGOSI usage is in the mission Performance Management Plans, but these documents were also not available for review. Finally, only five of the 13 missions in the E&E Bureau had country strategic plans completed in the past five years, limiting review to only these documents.

The search of the DEC is limited in other ways. First, the search of the DEC only reveals the number or documents that reference the NGOSI, not the number or documents of a similar nature that do not reference the NGOSI. Consequently it is difficult to determine what percentage of the total number of relevant documents within each category of document type (such as progress reports, evaluations, etc.) references the NGOSI. Second, although USAID policy requires a wide variety of documents to be submitted to the DEC, there is a well-known lack of enforcement of submitting documents to the DEC, and the degree of compliance with the policy is unknown.

## REVIEW OF PLANNING AND REPORTING DOCUMENTS

### Agency Level Strategic Planning and Reporting

The U.S. Foreign Assistance community, USAID, and USAID's operating units produce a variety of strategic planning documents which guide programming planning and resource allocation. At the highest level of planning, USAID, in collaboration with the State Department, produces "several key planning and reporting documents that define the primary goals and progress of U.S. foreign policy, development and humanitarian assistance."<sup>4</sup> These documents, which fulfill Congressional reporting requirements, currently include:

1. The Joint Department of State and USAID Strategic Plan (JSP): 2007-2012
2. The FY2011 Annual Congressional Budget Justification (CBJ)
3. The USAID Performance Trends Spreadsheet
4. The FY2009 Foreign Operations Performance Report and FY2011 Performance Plan
5. The FY2009 Joint Summary of Performance and Financial information
6. The Agency Financial Report for FY2009

Of these six documents, four of them reference the NGO Sustainability Index: the CBJ, the Performance Trends Spreadsheet, the Foreign Operations Performance Report and Performance Plan, and the Agency Financial Report. In each of these documents, the NGO Sustainability Index is used as the basis for two performance indicators – a Europe average NGO Sustainability Index score and a Eurasia average NGO Sustainability Index score. Both indicators are used to measure progress of USAID in the Civil Society program area of the "Governing Justly and Democratically" foreign assistance objective. In the USAID Performance Trends Spreadsheet, the NGOSI indicators are two of only three performance indicators focused on the civil society program area, out of a total of 38 performance indicators selected for reporting on progress across all foreign assistance objectives.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/>

## E&E Bureau Level Strategic Planning and Reporting

Of the 29 countries included in the NGOSI, 11 no longer have a USAID mission presence, 13 are served by USAID missions under the USAID Europe and Eurasia Bureau and five are served by USAID missions under the Asia Bureau.

The Europe and Eurasia Bureau's current strategic priorities and objectives are described in the "Development Planning Framework for Europe and Eurasia (2007-2012)." In this document, "sustainable and constituent based NGOs" are noted as part of the institutional foundations of democracy that need to be developed and strengthened in Eurasia and Southeastern Europe; the NGO Sustainability Index is then cited as a means for measuring success in strengthening democracy. The document also proposes NGO Sustainability Index benchmarks for achievement by 2012 for both Eurasian countries and Southeastern Europe countries.

The Europe and Eurasia Bureau also supports and uses a variety of tools for monitoring and reporting on macro-level progress in the countries of Europe and Eurasia. The primary Bureau tool for doing so is the Monitoring Country Progress (MCP) system, which compiles mostly third party data for five composite indicators used for monitoring, scoring, and analyzing country progress and transition region trends.<sup>5</sup> The four most recent MCP annual reports were examined (*Monitoring Country Progress in Eastern Europe and Eurasia* Nos. 8-11), and each of them includes references to and analysis of NGOSI data. However, the primary composite indicator of democratic reforms in the MCP relies solely on Freedom House's Nations in Transit indicators, including its indicator of civil society. NGOSI data is not included in this composite indicator but is often presented as a source of comparison and further detail on NGO trends.

## Country Level Strategic Planning and Reporting

USAID field missions also produce an array of planning and reporting documents at the country level, only some of which are reported to USAID/Washington. Five of the most significant and available types of strategic planning and reporting documents recently produced from countries in the Europe and Eurasia region were reviewed. Each of these planning and reporting documents provide background country information, information on USAID or USG foreign assistance objectives in aid recipient countries, as well as information on anticipated or achieved results. Consequently, each has potential for including the NGOSI for measuring progress of civil society programming.

### I. USAID Country Strategic Plans Created since 2005

Country strategic plans are USAID-only plans that set longer-term priorities and expected results, typically over a three to five year period. Only five missions in the E&E Bureau have completed official plans since 2005: Armenia, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia. While all five address civil society issues, only three cite the NGO Sustainability Index in their strategic plan. These Missions – Armenia (for FY 2010-2013), Macedonia (FY 2011-2015) and Serbia (FY 2011-2015) – all use various NGOSI scores as indicators for measuring progress of an intermediate result (IR) or sub-IR. Armenia relies on the 2008 NGOSI score for advocacy to measure the IR, "Informed citizens influence public affairs and policy." Macedonia cites both the 2007 and 2008 editions of the NGOSI in its list of democracy and governance sector references. This Mission uses combined NGOSI scores for advocacy and legal environment for measuring progress on the IR, "Civil society promotes democratic reform." Serbia uses the NGOSI to measure progress of the sub-IR, "Civil society and independent media strengthened."

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<sup>5</sup> The five composite indicators include: Economic Reforms, Democratization, Macroeconomic Performance, and human capital.

Georgia addresses civil society issues through an Assistance Objective (AO) focused on democratic reforms, and Kosovo addresses civil society issues through two AOs focusing on youth and democracy. However, neither Georgia nor Kosovo reference or measure progress based on the NGOSI.

## **2. Joint USG Country Assistance Strategies Created since 2007**

Country Assistance Strategies (CAS) also set longer term country foreign assistance priorities and expected results, but from a whole of government perspective. They were piloted in a small number of countries starting in 2007, two of which were in the E&E region: Armenia and Bosnia. The NGOSI index is cited in both of these documents. It is noted as a resource in the Bosnia CAS, and it is used in Armenia's to measure progress of attaining the priority goal, "Bolstering those institutions that effectively promote democracy."

## **3. Joint USG 2012 Mission Strategic Resource Plans**

The Mission Strategic Resource Plan (MSRP) is a country-specific three-year planning document that initiates an assistance budget for a fiscal year. The most recent (2012) versions of the MSRPs for each of the 13 E&E mission presence countries in the NGOSI were available for review. Out of these 13 plans, only two (Serbia and Ukraine) cite the NGOSI. In both cases, the country level NGOSI score is used as a performance indicator for measuring progress of democracy and governance objectives.

## **4. Joint USG 2009 Performance Plan and Reports**

The Performance Plan and Report (PPR) reports on operating unit results achieved during the fiscal year. The most recent (2009) versions of the PPRs for each of the 13 E&E mission presence countries in the NGOSI were available for review. Out of the 13 reports, only two make reference to the NGOSI. It appears as a custom performance indicator in Ukraine's report and it is referenced in the evaluation annex of Bosnia's report, which notes that it uses the NGOSI to design programs, in its strategic planning, and as part of its impact assessments.

## **5. Joint USG 2010 Operational Plans**

The interagency Operational Plan (OP) describes the proposed allocation of an Operating Unit's budget by programmatic activity for a given fiscal year. The most recent (2010) versions of the OPs for each of the 13 E&E mission presence countries in the NGOSI were available for review. Out of the 13 reports, only Georgia's report references the NGOSI as background information on the country's NGO sector. For comparison, a few other indices are mentioned in these OPs: The World Economic Forum's Competitiveness Index is mentioned in two country OPs, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index is also mentioned in two countries' OPs, and the Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom is mentioned in one country's OP.

# **REVIEW OF USAID DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE CLEARINGHOUSE**

The Development Experience Clearinghouse, or DEC, is USAID's online repository for documents produced by USAID staff, contractors, and grant recipients. The DEC is regulated by agency policy which stipulates who should submit documents to the system and which documents are required to be submitted. This definition of required documents is very broad, including program policy and strategy planning documentation; development activity analyses and design documentation; program reviews and assessment documentation, program and development activity performance, results and evaluation

reports, and a variety of other informational products. However, enforcement of the requirement to submit documents to the DEC varies across USAID and its missions and the extent to which required documents are actually added to the DEC is unknown.

The DEC was searched using the complete phrase, “NGO Sustainability Index” for documents submitted to the DEC between 2005 and 2010. The search results produced 64 unique documents, excluding the NGOSI reports themselves. The table below provides further information on the types of documents retrieved from DEC.

<b>NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS IN THE USAID DEC REFERENCING THE NGO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX, 2005-2010</b>	
Agency Strategic Planning and Reporting Documents	13
E&E Regional Planning and Reporting Documents	3
E&E Country Planning and Reporting Documents	13
Analytical Reports and Guidance	21
Contractor and Grantee Project Reports	11
Other Miscellaneous Documents	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>

The agency, regional, and country planning and reporting documents in the DEC that reference the NGOSI include many of the same documents mentioned in the earlier section, such as congressional budget justifications, agency financial reports, and country assistance strategies. In these documents, the NGOSI is typically employed as an indicator of progress in civil society or the NGO sector at the country or regional level. The index was also used, though only occasionally, as an indicator for a particular dimension, such as advocacy or legal framework. Although the previous sections of this report examined only planning and reporting documents for countries in the E&E Bureau, the search of the DEC allowed for the possibility of reporting and planning documents from the Central Asian Republics to be counted. However, only E&E country documents appeared in the search results.

The category of Analytical Reports and Guidance includes an array of knowledge products produced by both USAID (primarily DCHA and the E&E Bureau) and contractors, including country level assessments, such as a civil society assessment in Azerbaijan and democracy and governance assessment in Bosnia; a smaller number of civil society project evaluations; and regional analysis, such as Monitoring Country Progress annual reports and working papers. These documents more often cited the NGOSI for context or background on the state of the NGO sector. As with the planning documents, none of the country specific assessments or evaluations focused on projects in the Central Asian Republics. However, some of the geographically broader analytic documents did include coverage of the Central Asian Republics, such as the Monitoring Country Progress Reports.

The guidance documents in this category were primarily produced by DCHA and included multiple editions of the User’s Guide to DG programming as well as other guidance documents, such as a report on designing evaluations of DG programs. In these guidance documents, the NGOSI was often suggested as an assessment tool that could be used to measure NGO sector progress.

The contractor and grantee project reports include semi-annual, annual, and final project reports. Among the miscellaneous documents, the NGOSI was once referenced in a story published in FrontLines, the USAID news publication.

## CONCLUSION

The limitations of the documentary data sources in this review make it difficult to fully determine the extent of NGOSI usage by USAID. However, some narrow conclusions can be made about the extent of usage of the NGOSI and how it is being used.

Regarding the *extent* of usage, there is evidence of extensive use of NGOSI indicators in agency reports, although there is certainly room for further usage, particularly at the country level. The review of available documents reveals that the NGOSI is used in the highest level agency reporting documents - four out of six key congressionally mandated documents for reporting on Agency progress. In one of these documents NGOSI is used for two out of only 38 agency wide performance indicators selected for reporting agency wide performance over the past five years. At the Bureau level, both the E&E Bureau's strategic five-year planning framework and the E&E Bureau's primary country monitoring tool (the Monitoring Country Progress system) refer to the NGOSI for tracking progress.

At the country level, the documentary evidence reveals a fair amount of use of the NGOSI to track progress of the NGO Sector. Six of the 13 USAID missions/offices in countries under the E&E Bureau have referenced the NGOSI in at least one of the five most recent country level planning and reporting documents reviewed for each country.<sup>6</sup> However, the most likely planning documents for referencing the NGOSI either were not available for all countries (the country strategic plan) or not available for any countries (the Performance Monitoring Plan).

In addition to planning and reporting documents, a search of NGOSI references in the DEC reveals that it is also cited to a limited extent in various analytical reports and guidance, such as evaluations and assessments and contractor program reports.

Regarding *how* the NGOSI is used, the documents reviewed here suggest that it is primarily used as a means for quantitatively tracking progress of the NGO sector at the country or regional level based on the NGOSI scores or, secondarily, to provide narrative background information about a country NGO sector, based on the NGOSI country narratives. Other uses appear less prominent, including using it to guide civil society programming decisions, set NGO programming priorities, or facilitate discussion and dialogue on NGO issues. While it may nonetheless serve these purposes, there is little evidence from the documentation reviewed here to support that the NGOSI is used in these ways.

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<sup>6</sup> Armenia, Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia, Ukraine, Georgia.

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