

# CIVIL SOCIETY ASSESSMENT TOOL (CSAT)



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## ACRONYMS

AB	Afrobarometer
ACVFA	Advisory Committee for Voluntary Foreign Assistance
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CSAT	Civil Society Assessment Tool
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSOSI	Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
DO	Development Objective
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSN	Foreign Service National
GONGO	Government-organized NGOs
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICNL	International Center for Not-for-Profit Law
ICS	Integrated Country Strategy
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFTF	Institute for the Future
IP	Implementing Partner
ISO	Intermediary Support Organizations
J2SR	Journey to Self-Reliance
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAPOP	Latin American Public Opinion Project
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, and/or Intersex
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPI	Organizational Performance Index
PAD	Project Activity Designs
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
RAI	Resurgent Authoritarian Influence
RFP	Request for Proposal
SAF	Strategic Assessment Framework
TWP	Thinking and Working Politically

USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USG	U.S. Government
USIP	United States Institute for Peace
VAT	Value Added Tax



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT) is to help strategic planners and program designers at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to assess the state of local civil society in a particular country or countries to determine whether or how USAID can engage with civil society to promote long-term development objectives. The CSAT identifies the primary gaps, strengths and weaknesses, needs, and opportunities for supporting civil society to achieve USAID development goals. Final CSAT strategic recommendations serve as a diagnostic tool to help Missions determine where investments in civil society will lead to achievable results and have the most impact.

This CSAT includes analysis of a range of civil society actors and entities, including formal and informal, member-serving and public-serving organizations, and emerging categories such as “pop-up” organizations, decentralized organizations, or virtual organizations, among others. The CSAT highlights the importance of understanding the country context, including from a political economy analysis (PEA) perspective and accounting for emerging trends, the civil society sector and its challenges, and how civil society may contribute to democratic reforms and sustainable self-reliance.

USAID and U.S. government (USG) interests, country context, and examination of potential new emerging and cross-cutting trends set the stage for an in-depth examination of the state of civil society in a given country to help identify strengths and weaknesses, gaps, needs, and opportunities. Key considerations such as Mission strategic priorities, funding levels, the Mission’s relationship with the civil society sector, and other donors’ efforts guide prioritization of analysis and recommendations to determine how USAID can best support civil society. Trends to be considered when conducting the CSAT include challenges arising from politically restrictive environments, resurgent authoritarian influences from countries such as China and Russia, the changing role of emerging technology, increasing engagement by marginalized groups, and a global rise in mass social movements.

## A. KEY ELEMENTS TO EXAMINE



### **Legal and regulatory environment**

For civil society to flourish, favorable legal and regulatory frameworks must be in place and fairly implemented, including laws and regulations enabling formal civil society organizations (CSOs) to form, have legal personality, communicate, access information, and generate and seek resources. Onerous registration requirements, intentionally vague laws, selective enforcement or arbitrary interpretations of laws, criminalization of failures to comply, and laws limiting freedoms of association or assembly can cripple civil society’s ability to operate. An assessment should look in detail about the state of the legal and regulatory environment.



### **Organizational and technical capacity**

Civil society, including local CSOs, informal entities, and other actors, may face challenges in terms of organizational capacity and the technical skills needed to carry out their various missions. The assessment team should explore the extent and sustainability of these capacities as well as the state of a support



infrastructure that provides services to civil society and facilitates access to information and other resources.



### **Socioeconomic, political, and cultural environment**

An examination of these factors, including the public, private sector, and governmental attitudes toward civil society, may help to identify potential obstacles and opportunities for supporting the civil society sector. Private-sector interest could help strengthen financial viability of the sector as well as amplify messages of civil society, as private-sector actors seek to enhance their image as socially responsible or socially conscious. Public perceptions of legitimacy can encourage higher levels of citizen engagement. In authoritarian environments or countries emerging from conflict, pursuit of such activities may be seen by the State as anti-governmental or threatening.



### **Democratic culture and values: Level of civic awareness**

The extent to which citizens are aware of how government works, their level of awareness of their rights and willingness to oppose government actions affecting those rights, and level of participation in opportunities to address the government all indicate potential areas for CSO support. Civic education not only leads to higher awareness and understanding but may also serve as a stepping stone to increased engagement in civic and political activities and help to develop democracy-oriented leaders.



### **Effectiveness and impact**

Effectiveness and impact are good measures of civil society capacity levels and should be carefully assessed. At the same time, a lack of effectiveness or impact can result from underlying causes that may be unrelated to capacity, including authoritarian governments or other barriers to effectiveness beyond an organization's control. It is important to understand the underlying reasons for any lack of effectiveness to address them.



### **External influences and emerging trends**

Potential resurgent authoritarian and malign state and non-state actors attempting to influence public opinions through a variety of avenues, including media, underscores the urgency of combating social media manipulation and disinformation, as well as the necessity of resisting efforts to intimidate and silence criticisms of the state.

The CSAT provides guidance for an assessment team to identify primary needs or opportunities to support civil society as revealed by its analysis. The team can then apply this analysis to USAID and USG policy and development interests, budget realities, other donors' activities, and existing comparative advantages to develop realistic and achievable programmatic suggestions to respond to identified opportunities and needs. The CSAT annexes in this document include key questions as well as illustrative activities to address opportunities, recognizing that supporting democracy, human rights, and governance through CSOs promotes fundamental USAID and USG values and advances core national institutions in global security and prosperity.



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The Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT) provides guidance to USAID and its partners on how to identify primary needs and opportunities to support civil society. Analysis from the CSAT can also identify development interests, budget realities, other donors' activities, and existing comparative advantages for realistic and achievable programmatic suggestions.

**1**

## Purpose

**Help** USAID and partners to assess the state of a country's local civil society

**Determine** potential USAID engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs), civic actors, and informal civic entities to promote long-term development objectives

**Serve** as a diagnostic tool for making decisions about civil society investments that lead to sustainable results and impact



**2**

## Identifies

**Primary** gaps, strengths, and weaknesses in the civil society sector

**Emerging** needs and opportunities for supporting civil society to achieve USAID development goals



# CSAT: Key Elements to Consider

**5**

## Trends

**Consider** new and emerging trends that affect civil society functioning and impact, including but not limited to:

**Challenges** from politically restrictive environments

**Authoritarian** influences (e.g. China and Russia)

**Emerging** role of technology

**Engagement** of marginalized groups

**Global** rise in social movements

**4**



## Considerations

**Strategic** priorities, funding levels, USAID's relationship with the civil society sector, and other donors' efforts

**Prioritize** analysis and recommendations that best support civil society



**3**

## Areas of Analysis

**Country** context, including a political economy analysis (PEA) perspective

**Assessment** of the capacities and interrelationships of a range of civil society actors and organizations, including formal and informal CSOs, member- and public-serving, emerging social movements, and "pop-up", decentralized, or virtual organizations, and how effectively they are able to achieve desired results

**Challenges** and opportunities in the legal, socio economic, political, civic, and cultural enabling environment

**Impact** and contributions to democratic reforms

## Legal and Regulatory Environment

**Assess** CSO laws and regulations, and determine if they encourage CSO formation, operations, communication, access to funding, and access to information

**Ascertain** onerous registration requirements, vague laws, selective enforcement, arbitrary interpretations of laws, criminalization of failures to comply, and laws limiting freedoms of association, assembly, or expression



## External Influences and Emerging Trends

**Identify** obstacles to and opportunities for civil society functioning and effectiveness

**Assess** technology-related issues, including social media manipulation and disinformation



## Organizational and Technical Capacity

**Identify** civil society actors' and organizations' level of capacities, challenges, and opportunities



# CSAT: Key Elements to Consider

## Democratic Culture and Values

**Determine** levels of civic education and awareness, and societal democratic culture and values

**Examine** citizens' awareness of how government works, and their rights and abilities to engage with government actors, institutions, and processes



## Effectiveness and Impact

**Assess** effectiveness and impact of civil society actors, organizations, and/or activities



## Socio-economic, Political, and Cultural Environment

**Examine** potential obstacles and opportunities for civil society related to citizens', societal, public sector, private sector, and government perceptions, attitudes, and norms, and power dynamics

**Assess** public perception of citizen engagement and the civil society sector



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# Deploying the Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT)

Supporting civil society and robust civic engagement promotes USAID's and the U.S. Government's fundamental values, and advances core democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) objectives. The CSAT helps identify primary needs and opportunities to support civil society to develop viable strategic and programmatic approaches.

## Determine when to conduct



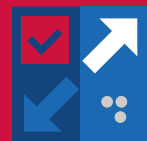
- For Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) or Project Development Documents (PDD)
- As part of a strategy design or policy realignment
- When rethinking or adapting Mission's approach to civil society
- After a political transition or aftermath of conflict
- When preparing to design a new programmatic activity

## Specify objectives



- Strengthening of the civil society sector as an end in itself (intrinsic)
- Engaging civil society as a means to address various other development objectives, including promoting DRG (instrumental)
- A means of supporting the country on its Journey to Self-Reliance (J2SR)

## Decide scope of the assessment



- Assess available resources
- Select assessment team
- Define methodology
- Identify relevant stakeholders
- Create implementation plan and timeline



## I. INTRODUCTION

Photo: ©2019 Internews; Bentiu, South Sudan

### A. PURPOSE OF THE ASSESSMENT TOOL

The purpose of the Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT) is to help USAID strategic planners and program designers assess the state of local civil society in a particular country or countries to determine whether or how USAID can engage with civil society to promote long-term development objectives.

A civil society assessment is most valuable as a first step in designing new civil society programs, updating existing programs, or formulating integrated development strategies. It can also provide useful contextual information for USAID Missions developing Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCSs) or new Project Activity Designs (PADs).

There are various definitions of civil society developed by those working in the sector. The definition from the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project at Johns Hopkins is the one used in USAID’s Civil Society Sustainability Index (CSOSI). It defines CSOs broadly as:

“Any organizations, whether formal or informal, that are not part of the apparatus of government that do not distribute profits to their directors or operators, that are self-governing, and in which participation is a matter of free choice. Both member-serving and public-serving organizations are included. Embraced within this definition, therefore, are private, not-for-profit health providers, schools, advocacy groups, social service agencies, anti-poverty groups, development agencies, professional associations, community-based organizations, unions, religious bodies, recreation organizations, cultural institutions, and many more” (ICNL, 2005, p. 9).



**Figure 1** provides other definitions of civil society. This CSAT does not restrict itself to any one definition but defines civil society in very broad terms. Civil society can include associations, foundations, membership organizations that serve their members, and public-benefit organizations, often entitled to additional tax benefits that seek to do public good, e.g., the Red Cross.

## Figure 1. Definitions of Civil Society



“Civil society is the arena outside the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations, and institutions to advance shared interests.”

*CIVICUS*



Recognizing the evolution, nuances, and growing diversity of civil society: “an ecosystem of organized and organic social and cultural relations existing in the space between the state, business, and family, which builds on indigenous and external knowledge, values, traditions, and principles to foster collaboration and the achievement of specific goals by and among citizens and other stakeholders.”

*Center for Strategic and International Studies*



A “community of citizens linked by common interests and collective activity; a broad term to encompass individuals and organizations (community groups, non-governmental organizations, labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, social movements, and foundations) that are independent of government and the public sector.”

*The World Economic Forum*

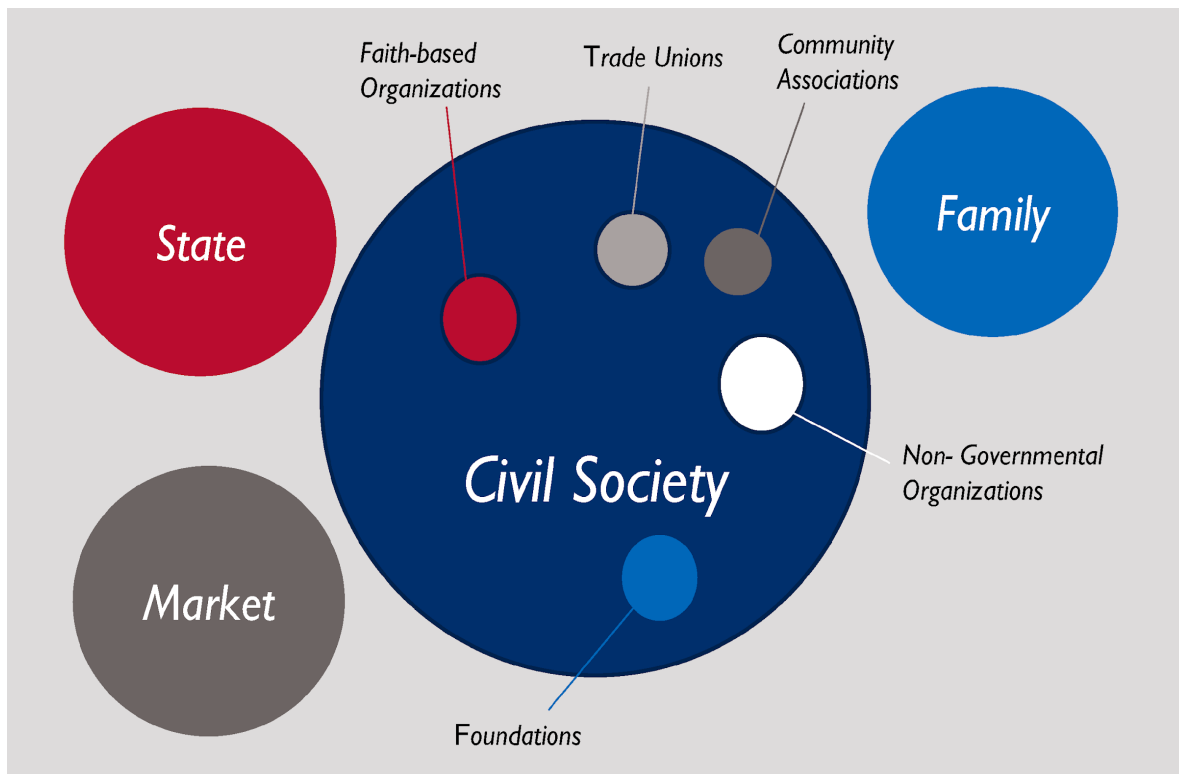


“The term ‘organization’ means any organization of workers or of employers for furthering and defending the interests of workers or of employers” (art. 10), which “shall have the right to draw up their constitutions and rules, to elect their representatives in full freedom, to organise their administration and activities and to formulate their programmes.” (art. 3).

*The International Labor Organization, C. 87 on Freedom of Association*

This tool’s primary focus is on local CSOs. The CSAT may also be appropriate to assess the role of U.S. and international CSOs in overall development strategy for a country. Laws and regulations that make it more difficult for international CSOs to register or work in particular countries and contexts, or restrictions on their activities and funding sources, are important considerations for USAID to explore in its assessment and subsequent programming decisions. **Figure 2** shows the different actors in the civil society ecosystem.

**Figure 2. Civil Society Ecosystem**



Source: USAID DRG Fundamentals Training

The CSAT highlights the importance of understanding the country context, the civil society sector and its challenges, and how civil society may contribute to democratic reforms. Key considerations such as Mission strategic priorities, funding levels, the Mission’s relationship with the civil society sector, and other donors’ efforts serve as filters for prioritizing assistance.

Since USAID developed the initial CSAT in 2014, the contextual landscape and the state of civil society programming has changed considerably. This revised version includes increased emphasis on applied PEA, an analytical approach to help understand the underlying reasons why things work the way they do and identify the incentives and constraints impacting the behavior of actors in a relevant system. By identifying these influences—political, economic, social, and cultural—PEA supports a more politically informed approach to working, known as “thinking and working politically” (TWP) (Menocal, 2018).

In addition, the twin accelerants of resurgent authoritarian influence and autocratic aid are amplifying challenges to civic space (V-DEM 2020),<sup>1</sup> along with the changing role of emerging technology. Further, the CSO landscape is changing under increasing civic engagement by youth, women, and marginalized groups. There is a growing gap in legitimacy for “formal” registered CSOs as compared to grassroots organizations with respect to citizen engagement and ties to their constituencies. Finally, social movements, including mass protest movements such as those that recently brought down authoritarian governments in Armenia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Algeria, and Bolivia, and others that have raised awareness and political engagement on specific issues, are on the rise.

<sup>1</sup> The V-Dem Institute reports that there are now more autocracies than democracies in the world for the first time since 2001, with 92 countries, home to more than 54 percent of the global population, on the autocratic rather than democratic side of the scale.



## **B. CONNECTION TO USAID’S STRATEGY ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND GOVERNANCE**

USAID seeks to integrate democracy programming throughout its core development work with a focus on strengthening and promoting human rights, accountable and transparent governance, and independent and politically active civil society. Earlier, USAID programs to support civil society focused on developing civil society capacity and improving legal frameworks to allow CSOs to exist and operate, particularly in the new democracies in Eastern Europe in the 1990s. Civil society strengthening and improving the legal enabling environment remain important objectives in themselves in many developing countries. At the same time, civil society plays an important role in effective implementation of USAID programming across the board—not only with respect to democracy programming but also with respect to nearly all areas of USAID’s work in the health, agricultural, environmental, educational, and other sectors, including service delivery and also engagement in policy advocacy related to these sectors.

The *USAID DRG Strategy* (USAID 2013) reflects USAID’s overall goal to “support the establishment and consolidation of inclusive and accountable democracies to advance freedom, dignity, and development.” Civil society has a critical role to play in achieving these goals. The *2017 National Security Strategy* also makes it clear that respect for human rights and democracy is more likely to produce peace, stability, and prosperity at home and abroad and is therefore integral to our national security (The White House, 2017): “The United States will support democratic advancement on the part of governments and stand with citizens, civil society, and the private sector to hold their governments to be more responsive and accountable” (USAID, 2013).

The USAID *Journey to Self-Reliance* (J2SR) strategy introduced in 2018 seeks to achieve greater development outcomes and work toward a time when foreign assistance is no longer necessary. It does this by working with host country governments and partners to achieve locally sustained results, mobilize public and private revenue sources, strengthen local capacities, and accelerate enterprise-driven development. The J2SR Roadmap, an analytical tool to measure country progress across various dimensions of commitment and capacity, specifically measures civil society capacity as an important indicator for success (USAID, n.d.-c). Civil society is a pillar of a healthy democracy and a pluralistic society. A vibrant civil society sector contributes to a country’s J2SR.

Civil society also figures prominently in other aspects of USAID and USG strategy, e.g., in the *Local Systems Framework* (USAID, 2014a) vision of locally owned, locally led, and locally sustained development. Both the *New Partnership Initiative* (USAID, n.d.-d) and the *Effective Partnering and Procurement Reform* (USAID, n.d.-b) aim to foster self-reliance through supporting local partners, often CSOs, that the assessment may help identify. These initiatives encourage Missions to tap into the in-depth knowledge and experience of local organizations and their deep connection to the people and communities that USAID serves. For CSOs to play the role envisioned for them within these USG strategies, the sector must be strong and independent and CSOs must be capable of sustaining their efforts.



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## II. CONDUCTING A CIVIL SOCIETY ASSESSMENT

### A. WHEN SHOULD AN ASSESSMENT BE CONDUCTED?

Civil society assessments are frequently conducted under the following circumstances:

- ✓ As a contribution to the Mission's CDCS or PAD development
- ✓ After a DRG Assessment has identified that the civil society sector should be more carefully assessed as part of a strategy design or policy realignment process
- ✓ Prior to designing a new civil society activity or as the Mission is rethinking and adapting its approach to civil society
- ✓ After an unanticipated political transition or in the aftermath of conflict

### B. WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE SCOPE OF AN ASSESSMENT?

The Mission should determine what its objectives are in seeking the assessment. Its development objectives can include the strengthening of the civil society sector as an end in itself, or engaging civil society as a partner in the implementation of various other development objectives including promoting democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG), or as a means of supporting the country in its J2SR. These objectives are not mutually exclusive. For example, a Mission can strengthen civil society capacity through engaging CSOs to implement programs while providing training and oversight to fortify their organizational and technical skills, thus engaging civil society as a partner and strengthening its capacity at the same time. The Mission can decide to focus the assessment only on particular areas or seek a broad overview to help narrow down its focus or determine priorities later.

## C. WHO SHOULD CONDUCT AN ASSESSMENT?

The composition of a civil society assessment team may vary depending on resources and the scope of the assessment, e.g., a comprehensive sector-wide assessment or a more targeted and narrowly focused assessment. Missions may conduct an assessment themselves, with support from USAID/Washington, or opt to contract with an outside organization to lead the assessment, generally via a Mission purchase order or a Request for Proposal (RFP) or a USAID/Washington central mechanism, such as an analytical services contract (USAID 2019a). Even if an outside implementing partner conducts the assessment, USAID staff should remain involved in the assessment team's activities, reviewing documents, providing suggestions for key informants, and contributing a staff member to participate in the field work, if possible. The team often consists of two to three members, including a political or social scientist with extensive experience in civil society and other DRG issues; a technical expert with in-depth knowledge of USAID civil society-related programming; and a country expert with extensive knowledge of the country's civil society sector and political economy. The latter may be a local consultant or a USAID Foreign Service National (FSN).

## D. HOW IS AN ASSESSMENT CONDUCTED?

The CSAT is linked to the Agency's DRG Strategic Assessment Framework (SAF) (USAID 2014c). The SAF provides a framework for conducting a political analysis of a country and developing a strategy to advance DRG and help inform integrated development approaches (USAID, 2014c). Ideally, the mission will have already completed a DRG assessment, providing the assessment team with a DRG analysis to inform its work, including a specific section on civil society outlining key areas that may require additional analysis. In cases where a DRG assessment has not been conducted, the assessment team may choose to begin the civil society assessment with a rapid analysis of the key DRG challenges and opportunities.

It is important to employ a variety of methods to gather, compare, and analyze information, including conducting a document review, key informant interviews (KII), and focus group discussions (FGD). The first stage is a desk review of relevant literature, which helps to frame the areas of focus for the subsequent field work. Depending on the region, the team may consult existing surveys and indices such as the *Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)*, *Afrobarometer (AB)*, the *Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)*, the *CSOSI*, *Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report*, the *CIVICUS Monitor*, the *International Center for Not-for-Profit Law's (ICNL) Civic Freedom Monitor*, and *V-Dem's Annual Democracy Report* as a part of its initial desk review, along with other documents the Mission may identify as useful or relevant.<sup>2</sup> If a public opinion survey is administered, for example, in connection with CDCS preparation, it could be framed to include relevant civil society questions. Otherwise, such information can often be gleaned from a review of media, including social media, and can be a part of FGD.

In conducting its field work, the assessment team should engage a wide array of stakeholders, including key government officials, private-sector actors, media outlets, and CSOs and other actors. The civil society actors should include a diverse range of civil society, including formal (registered) organizations as well as informal groups and networks, such as religious groups, grassroots organizations, youth-led groups, social movements, and social influencers, among others. Additionally, worker organizations are often key CSOs that act in the economic realm (improving the pay, benefits, and conditions of employment), in the political realm (promoting democratic

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<sup>2</sup> Documents to be reviewed may include programmatic reports, evaluations, and monitoring data as well as evidence in the sector from the country in question.



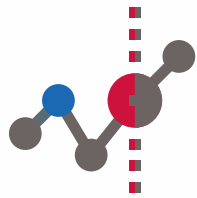
change), and in the governance realm (improving legal frameworks and government institutions protecting worker rights). The assessment team should reach beyond organizations that operate within urban areas and engage citizen groups and movements across the country and must ensure that the views of vulnerable and marginalized groups also are taken into account, including those of women, children and youth; those with disabilities; Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, and/or Intersex (LGBTI) people; and minority and indigenous populations, among others. Focus groups and key informants must understand that the assessment team is applying a broad definition of civil society, not only registered and formal organizations.

Below is a description of the main analyses to be undertaken when conducting a Civil Society Assessment and the areas of inquiry that USAID, in its experience, has determined to be most relevant.

**Annex A: Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT) — Illustrative Questions** provides an extensive list of key questions to guide the assessment team.

# Conducting the CSAT

Illustrative steps to consider, dependent on scope and resources available



## 1) Current State

- Analysis from DRG assessment or other related assessment (e.g. civil society, gender, youth, media, political economic analysis (PEA)) informs the CSAT scope
- Mission priorities inform the CSAT scope



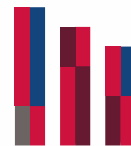
## 2) Literature Review

- Conduct desk review to frame areas of focus
- Consult evaluations, program reports, assessments, surveys, and indices



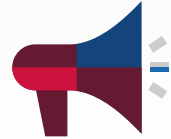
## 3) Data Collection

- Conduct consultations with relevant expert and local stakeholders through key informant interviews (KII), focus group discussions (FGD), and multi-stakeholder workshops
- Conduct quantitative research, such as administering surveys



## 4) Analysis and Assessment Report

- Triangulate findings from literature review and data collection steps
- Prepare Assessment Report, identifying strategic opportunities and programmatic recommendations



## 5) Dissemination

- Share conclusions with the Mission, Embassy, and relevant stakeholders
- Refine and prioritize recommendations based on additional feedback and any relevant changes since the onset of the assessment



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### III. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT



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This section addresses the context in terms of USG and USAID interests as well as the overall country context, using a PEA, and a short introduction to emerging and cross-cutting trends. Context as it relates more specifically to civil society is included as an assessment category in Section IV below.

#### A. PURPOSE AND INTERESTS

It is important to understand the underlying goal of the USAID Mission or operating unit in conducting a civil society assessment, as well as broader USG and USAID policy goals and interests. The purpose of the assessment defines the main questions that the study seeks to address. **Figure 3** provides illustrative examples of Mission Goals when planning for a CSAT and considerations the Mission might examine to achieve that goal.

**Figure 3. Illustrative Goals for USAID Missions**

Mission Goal	Considerations
Strengthen the civil society sector writ large	 Explore <i>factors and players</i> that influence the dynamics within the civil society sector, including its legal enabling environment and general capacity level within the country context, to identify the best avenues to improvement.
Strengthen the democracy-focused elements of the sector to meet USAID DRG objectives	 Focus more on <i>civil society relationships</i> with government, the public, and other stakeholders, along with its potential overall capacity to implement USAID activities and promote sustainable development. Missions will need to be sensitive to issues unique to democracy-related CSOs if the purpose of the assessment is to develop DRG programming.

Mission Goal	Considerations
Determine the extent to which the Mission can work with CSOs and actors as implementing partners for health, education, agriculture, and other development programs	 Focus on overall <i>capacity levels</i> , including the appropriate areas of technical capacity. Non-DRG organizations in some countries often have an easier time working with the government.

These different lines of inquiry are not mutually exclusive, and unless the Mission already knows it wants to focus on one particular path, there may be no need to limit the purpose of the assessment in advance.

It is important for the Mission to specify in its scope of work the purpose of the assessment, what its expectations are from the assessment team, and whether it's an in-house USAID team or contracted to an outside organization. Is the purpose of the assessment to achieve a better understanding of the sector and provide recommendations on priorities for the Mission to consider? Or is the Mission looking for a draft concept paper or program design along with illustrative activities and end goals?

USAID's overarching goal is to work with partner countries on their J2SR towards a time when foreign assistance is no longer needed, so a review of the country's J2SR *Country Roadmap* is critical. If the assessment is not to inform development of a new CDCS, then alignment with the existing CDCS would be important. The assessment team should also take into consideration the Integrated Country Strategy (ICS), which is a multi-year plan that articulates USG priorities in a given country. There may also be particular USG or USAID development strategies to keep in mind. For example, if the Mission has a strong interest in supporting LGBTI groups or promoting human rights, or it has particular concerns with respect to addressing closing space or a particular shortfall in the country's J2SR, the assessment team should factor in these priorities to determine the assessment approach.

See illustrative questions and primary sources of information included in **Annex A, Table I. USG and USAID Policy, Program, and Assessment Goals, Objectives, and Interests.**

## B. COUNTRY CONTEXT

The country context analysis reviews factors that impact:

- ✓ A nation's overall character
- ✓ Its socioeconomic and power structures
- ✓ Formal and informal institutions
- ✓ Current events and circumstances influencing behaviors

If the review has already been conducted in connection with CDCS development or otherwise, the assessment team may draw on those conclusions and focus in more detail on the factors more directly relevant to its civil society questions. Under USAID's PEA Framework, a country context analysis includes three main pillars:

- I. **Foundational factors.** These are deeply embedded, longer-term power structures that shape the nature of a given political system and why it works the way it does. Areas to examine may include power structures, any patterns of inclusion/exclusion, geographical factors, and the historical evolution of civil society.



2. **Political landscape, major players, and rules of the game.** These include formal and informal institutions (rules and norms) that shape the quality of governance and influence actors' behavior and their incentives, relationships, and power dynamics, including distributions of power, access, and influence. Actors likely will include government officials; political, religious, cultural, and economic individuals and organizations; and civil society actors and organizations. This may also include discussion of resurgent authoritarian influence by other countries.
3. **Relevant events and circumstances.** These are events or circumstances that have an impact on or influence key stakeholders, such as natural disasters, human-made hazards, leadership changes, political scandals, and the like. These events are often current or recent but also may include historical events with a persistent legacy on the political context.

Finally, the assessment team should consider how these various contextual factors affect each other, including the kinds of alliances that can overcome resistance, potential champions and spoilers, and key incentives or disincentives for change.

See illustrative questions and primary sources of information included in **Annex A, Table 2. Country Context: Foundational Factors; Political Landscape, Major Players, and Rules of the Game; Current Events and Circumstances.**

## C. EMERGING AND CROSS-CUTTING TRENDS

Depending on the context, the assessment team may want to specifically consider emerging and/or cross-cutting trends, including (as noted above) how these trends affect each other or other key factors.

1. **Closing Civic Space.** One trend is an increasing closing of the space within which civil society and individuals organize, participate, and communicate in order to influence the political and social structures around them (CIVICUS, n.d.-b). USAID uses the terms “closing civic space” and “politically restrictive environments” to describe the same phenomenon<sup>3</sup>. “Closing civic space” encompasses a broad spectrum of countries that vary from those with authoritarian governments where the executive, judiciary, and security forces often serve to maintain the power of the regime, to those where citizens and CSOs can exercise their rights to freedoms of association, assembly, and expression, but full enjoyment of those rights can be impeded by harassment or restrictions by authorities.

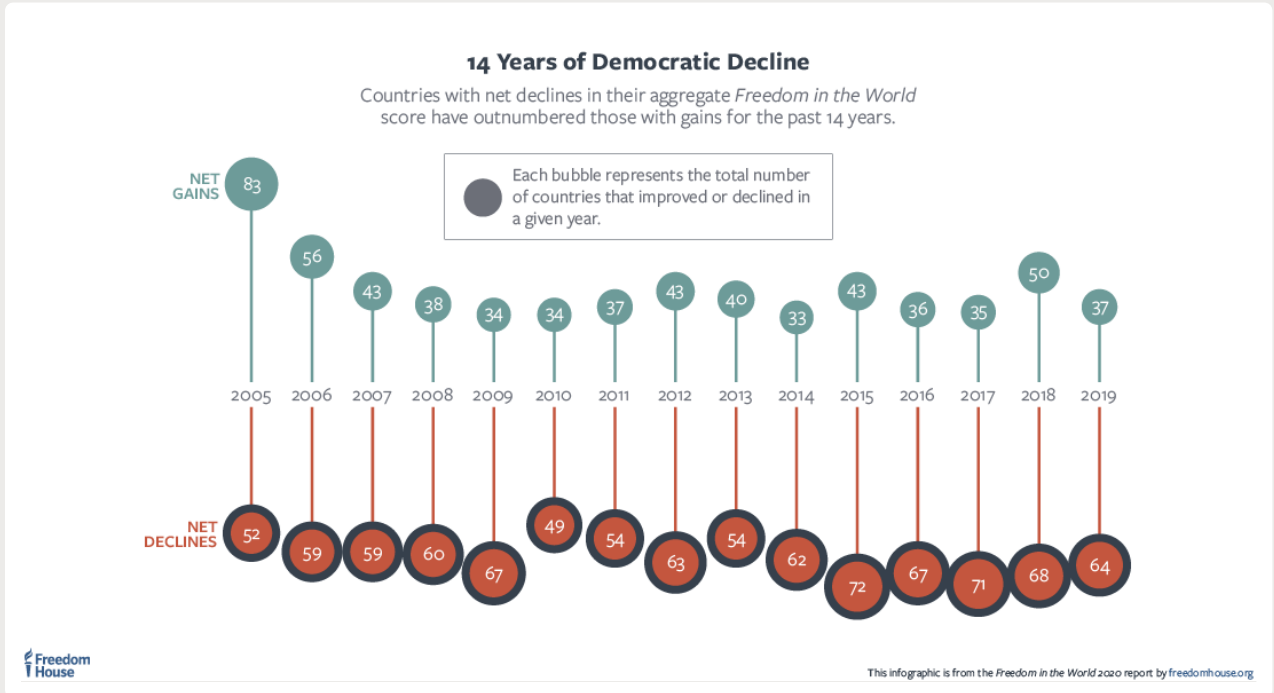
**Figure 4** shows notable sources that report a decline in civil society. Closing civic space manifests itself in a variety of ways, including oppressive legal frameworks and registration requirements; limits on external funding; restrictions on freedoms of expression and assembly; and even criminalization of, defamation of, and government takeovers of organizations, as well as violence and intimidation. An illustrative chart of examples is attached as **Annex B: Closing Space—Tactics and Examples** (CIVICUS 2020; CEPPS 2020; V-DEM, n.d.). The assessment team should be sensitive to tactics to close civic space in the different areas it explores while conducting the assessment and include appropriate counter-measures to help civil society respond to this increasing challenge.

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<sup>3</sup> Notably, though the term “politically sensitive environments” has a different connotation. According to USAID’s ADS 201, this refers to a country that has explicitly rejected USG assistance and/or USG cannot partner with them.

## Figure 4. Decline of Civil Society?

Freedom House in its 2020 *Freedom of the World* report notes the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom, including civil liberties, political rights, and freedom of association (meaning more countries with declining scores than improving ones) (Freedom House, 2020).



Source: Freedom in the World 2020 (Freedom House, 2020)

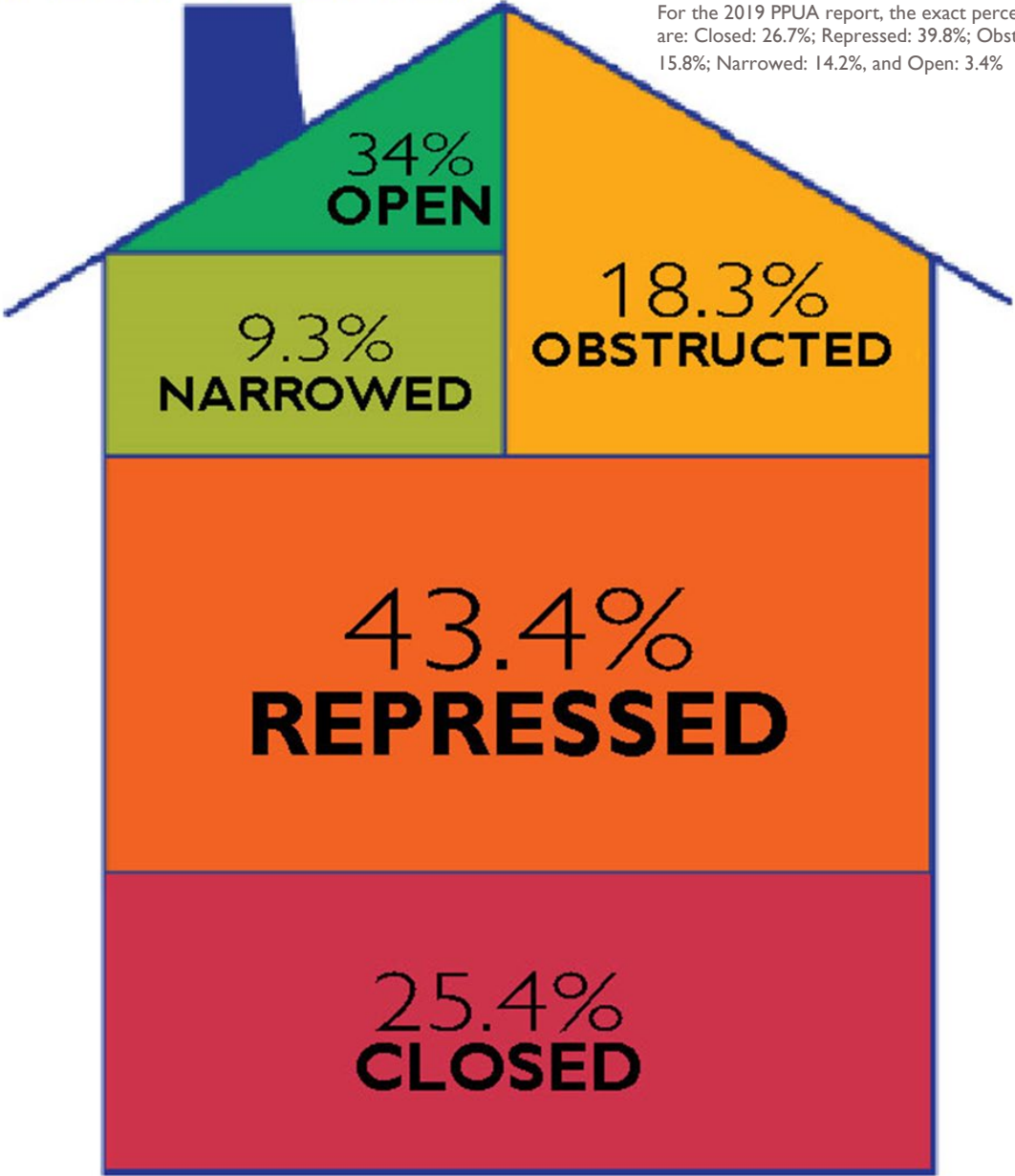


The CIVICUS Monitor's 2020 *People Power Under Attack Report* notes that space for civil society is now under serious attack in 114 of the world's countries—well over half—with only 3.4 percent of the world's population living in countries where fundamental freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression are respected (CIVICUS, 2020).

# WHERE DO PEOPLE LIVE?

BASED ON WORLD BANK POPULATION DATA 2019

For better accuracy and comparison over time, this year we added a decimal point to the percentages. For the 2019 PPUA report, the exact percentages are: Closed: 26.7%; Repressed: 39.8%; Obstructed: 15.8%; Narrowed: 14.2%, and Open: 3.4%



Source: 2020 CIVICUS Monitor *People Power Under Attack* (CIVICUS, 2020)

More authoritarian powers are now banning opposition groups or jailing their leaders, dispensing with term limits, and reducing the ability of any independent media that remain. Meanwhile, many countries that democratized after the end of the Cold War have regressed in the face of rampant corruption, anti-liberal populist movements, and breakdowns in the rule of law. Most troublingly, even long-standing democracies have been shaken by populist political forces that reject basic principles like the separation of powers and target minorities for discriminatory treatment (Freedom House, 2019a).

Civic space globally is now increasingly influenced by two accelerants—resurgent authoritarian influence and emergent technology—that further restrict democratic and civic space, which may be key considerations to assess at the country or specified assessment focus level. This autocratic aid is an accelerant of shrinking civic space through political capture, corruption, reduced quality of local governance, socioeconomic cleavages, and the loss of donor policy leverage. USAID’s approach presents developing countries with a model of self-reliance to build up their capacity to be citizen-responsive, as contrasted with the “long-term costs of alternative models that saddle countries with unsustainable debt, lead to the forfeiture of strategic assets, and further the militaristic ambitions of authoritarian actors” (Written Statement of Administrator Mark Green, 2019).

2. **Digital Technology.** A second trend is that of increasing use of digital technology, including social media, by civil society as well as by malign forces seeking to surveil, disrupt, and impede CSOs from carrying out their missions. The explosion of social media tools in the past decades has allowed CSOs, even small ones operating on shoestring budgets, to reach large audiences at little or no cost. At the same time, these tools offer an inexpensive platform for malign influences to promote division, disseminate falsehoods or inflammatory messages, and even manipulate and influence political outcomes. Digital technology increasingly allows authoritarian governments to control citizens through technology, collecting unbridled amounts of personal data, surveilling activities and opinions, and poisoning the public sphere through disinformation and propaganda.

It is important for the assessment team to understand the extent to which social media is available in a given country; to whom; how widely it is used—in particular which age groups and segments of society; types of technologies (mobile phones, most common platforms, distinctions by age or societal groups); and for what purposes. It is also important to consider the extent to which the government may be using digital technology to surveil CSO activities, block or filter certain content, or even shut down or partially shut down the Internet. While social media platforms and digital technology can be effective tools for civil society to communicate with its constituencies, CSOs must also be prepared to effectively counteract cyber-attacks and malign influences attempting surveillance, hacking, and the use of social media to distort messages.<sup>4</sup> Social media manipulation and abusive data collection are particularly dangerous in the lead-up to elections, with rampant disinformation, censorship, and arrests of government critics on the rise.<sup>5</sup>

3. **Mass Social Movements.** Finally, there is an emerging “mega-trend” of global mass protest movements, sometimes coming seemingly from nowhere and other times encouraged or orchestrated by civil society, which may be relevant to the assessment context. Mass social

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<sup>4</sup> Disturbingly, the Freedom House *Freedom on the Net 2019* report notes that 65 percent of the 3.8 billion people with Internet access live in countries where, since June 2018, individuals have been attacked or killed for online activities. These threats present risks to CSO leaders and activists in the 47 out of 65 countries assessed by Freedom House, which reported arrests of users for political, social, or related exercises of speech.

<sup>5</sup> A detailed discussion of this can be found in the Freedom House report *Freedom on the Net 2018: The Rise of Digital Authoritarianism* (Shahbaz, 2018): <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/rise-digital-authoritarianism>

movements, despite their informal or grass-roots nature, are a part of the broader definition USAID and others in the field use for civil society. These social movements often have a wide range of actors—youth, minority groups, trade unions, non-unionized workers, women, students, pro-government and anti-government groups, formalized organizations, informal organizations, the population writ large, and so on.







Historically, non-violent social movements have played a strong role in promoting equality and democracy, e.g., the U.S. civil rights movement and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. In the past decade, the number and intensity of such movements has increased exponentially, affecting every major populated region in the world. In the decade between 2009 and 2019, mass movements increased an annual average of 11.5 percent with size and frequencies eclipsing historic eras, including the late 1960s (Vietnam War) and the late 1980s and early 1990s (the fall of the Berlin wall). The largest increases have been in the Middle East and North Africa, at over twice the average rate of increase worldwide. There were mass protests in 114 countries last year, 37 of those in the last few months of 2019. The movements have also been massive in size— 2 million of Hong Kong's 7.4 million citizens turned out to protest, as did 1.2 million of Santiago's 5.1 million residents (CSIS, 2020).

Some of these movements have been highly effective, e.g., heads of government in 2019 either resigned or offered to resign in Lebanon, Iraq, Bolivia, Algeria, Sudan, and Malta as a result of these movements. Evo Morales in Bolivia resigned after 19 days of mass demonstrations, while similar demonstrations in Sudan triggered a military coup unseating Omar Al-Bashir's 30-year regime (CSIS, 2020). Others, however, resulted in protracted violence and sometimes heavy casualties, e.g., Hong Kong and Iran. Other government responses also included cutting off the Internet to stifle communication and quell unrest.

Supporting mass social movements may or may not be appropriate and fit in with the overall programming strategy in a country for USAID and could be counterproductive. Yet in view of the expanding of this trend and its potential impact, consideration of mass movements and advance preparation can position USAID to respond to opportunities that may arise.

Examples of how mass social movements may be supported are included in **Figure 5**.

## Figure 5. Ways to Support Mass Social Movements

-  Work through traditional CSOs who have community and government trust and can serve as “honest brokers” to provide access to information, raise awareness of rights, and push to widen democratic space.
-  Support CSOs or umbrella groups whose efforts underpin and complement social movements to provide and manage micro-grants, “surge” grants to take advantage of unanticipated support opportunities or to provide access to information and capacity development (ICNL, 2018).
-  Encourage CSOs to share their skills, resources, and convening spaces for social movements and serve as conduits for more agile means of funding, legal assistance, or specific kinds of training. For example, well-respected CSOs during Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak uprising were able to offer office space and other in-kind support to movement organizers (Stephan et al., 2015). Canvas, an organization that grew out of the Otpor movement to overthrow Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia in the 1990s, developed specific training methodologies to train activists of social movements (CANVAS, n.d.).
-  Provide “solidarity support” for mass movements by communicating with activists, disseminating translated statements of their goals, or providing convening space to bring government officials, CSOs, and movement activists into contact with each other (Stephan et al., 2015).
-  Encourage local philanthropy efforts, such as crowd-source or other e-philanthropy. The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) paper “Aid to Civil Society: A Movement Mindset” suggests identifying local change agents involved in mass movements to support, through local staff or local consultants (Stephan et al., 2015).
-  Use models such as the regional civil society innovation hubs that are supported by USAID, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and other donors could create unique platforms to advance relevant goals of mass social movements (CSII, n.d.).

Illustrative questions and primary sources of information an assessment team may use are included in **Annex A, Table 3. Emerging and Cross-Cutting Trends.**





## IV. ASSESSING THE STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Photo: ©2017 Carla Chianese, IFES

Once the assessment team has an overall understanding of the primary purposes of the assessment, USAID/USG goals, the country context, and potential emerging trends, it should then assess the current state of civil society in a given country to determine whether and how USAID can support civil society as well as the role civil society may play in achieving overall development goals. This section provides a guide to assessing the state of civil society, including the legal and regulatory environment; its overall capacity, both organizational management and the technical skills needed to carry out its missions; the socioeconomic, political, and cultural environment as it relates to civil society; levels of democratic culture and values; overall effectiveness and impact of CSOs; and external influences and emerging trends.

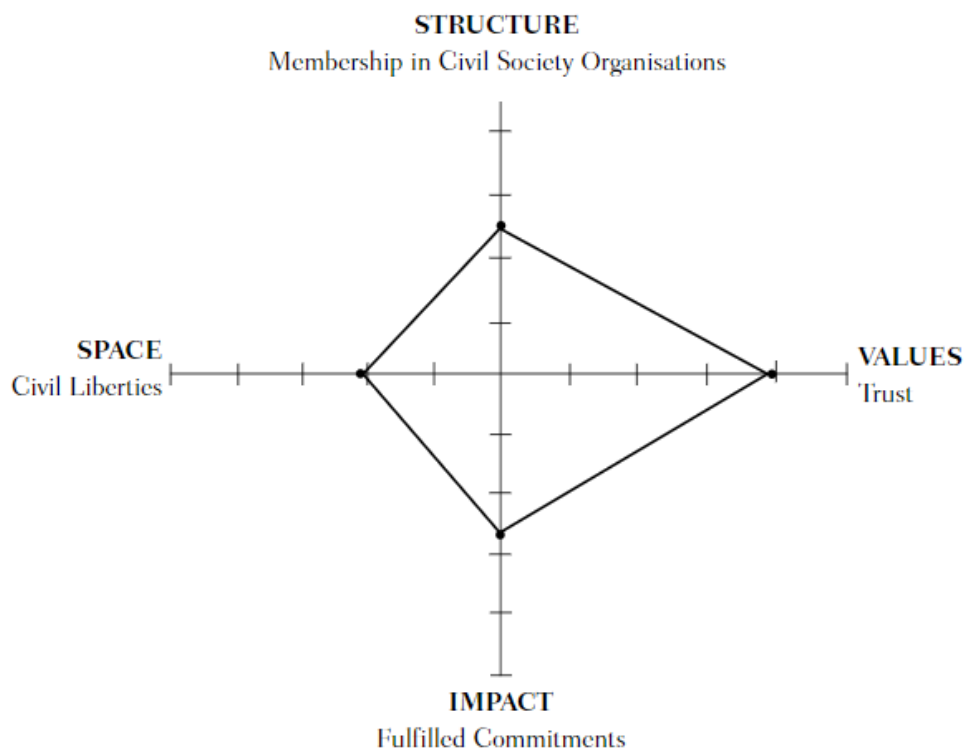
Giving a unified, coherent assessment of civil society in any country is challenging, so results will depend upon the factors examined. There are various frameworks and approaches available depending upon the underlying purpose and focus of the assessment.<sup>6</sup> Each method has its own set of standards for measuring civil society, sometimes through a review of international standards, others through consultations with CSOs themselves. The various methods are valid in their own context, in accordance with their objectives. One of the best-known methods is the CIVICUS “Diamond” tool (See **Figure 6**) underlying its global civil society index, which seeks to identify strengths, weaknesses, and impact of CSOs to inform policy-making.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the CIVICUS Diamond approach: <http://www.civicus.org/view/media/CDMethodologyPrimer2.pdf>; the UNDP’s CSO Capacity Assessment Tool: <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/capacity-building/undp-capacity-assessment-supporting-tool.html>, and prior approaches developed by USAID for its Civil Society Organizations Sustainability Index.

<sup>7</sup> A somewhat dated but extensive outline of various methodologies can be found in UNDP’s “A User’s Guide to Civil Society Assessments,” available at [https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/civil\\_society/a\\_users\\_guide\\_tocivilsocietyassessments.html](https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/civil_society/a_users_guide_tocivilsocietyassessments.html)




**Figure 6. Civil Society Diamond**




Source: *The Civil Society Diamond (CIVICUS 2001)*

The CSAT approach outlined below combines the CIVICUS Diamond approach with various other approaches used by USAID and others. It focuses on the areas USAID over the years has found to be most directly relevant and useful to determining potential engagement with CSOs. This purpose contrasts somewhat with the aim of some of the global indices that seek to compare countries or regions, assess the general capacity or sustainability of CSOs, or identify areas ripe for making policy changes. **Annex D: Illustrative Approaches** provides a brief comparison of the CSAT dimensions to those used by other illustrative indices to achieve varying purposes. The analytical approach proposed below should help USAID strategists and program designers determine whether and how they might engage with civil society for purposes of development programming. Throughout the analytical process, the team should be aware of and address relevant gender gaps and evaluate the impact of gender dynamics in defining gaps and challenges.


The following sections are divided into these subsections:

-  **Key Question:** Why focus on this dimension?


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-  **Rationale:** Why is this dimension included in the assessment?


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-  **Background:** What is covered under this dimension?

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-  **Assessment Topics:** What topics should be covered during the assessment?

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-  **Assessment Tactics:** How do I obtain the best information on these topics?



## A. LEGAL AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT



**Key question.** How, and to what extent, does relevant law and regulation as written and practiced foster a conducive and open space for civil society?



**Rationale.** Whether the laws and regulations governing civil society are generally favorable, or if they exist at all, is a good indicator of whether a country's civil society sector is in a healthy or unhealthy state. Generally speaking, CSOs are governed by legislation on NGOs while worker and employer organizations are governed by labor laws.



**Background.** For civil society to flourish, favorable legal and regulatory frameworks must be in place and properly implemented, including laws and regulations enabling CSOs to be able to form, have legal personality if desired, operate, communicate, access information, and generate and seek resources. Most countries in the world (173 to date) have ratified the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*, which protects, among other things, the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association—all of which are often contained in a country's constitution. Laws guaranteeing freedom of the press and freedom of information also help ensure that civil society and citizens have access to the information needed to effectively engage in public policy debates and decision-making processes and in government monitoring and oversight. Technology or online-related aspects of laws and regulations remain quite nascent across USAID partner countries. Coupled with the fact that few robust and universally accepted frameworks governing online and digital rights exist at the global level, these areas require dedicated focus and attention. USAID has supported the civil society legal enabling environment in numerous countries globally for over 20 years and recognizes that it is fundamental to local CSO activities and sustainability.



### Assessment Topics

The assessment should consider addressing the following topics:

1. **Registration requirements.** While recommended best practices make registration optional and not mandatory,<sup>7F7F8</sup> most countries have a process through which CSOs can register and acquire legal personality. In some cases, registration is mandatory, with penalties for carrying out activities prior to registration—for example, in Rwanda or Honduras. This legal personality enables the organization to enter into contracts to rent or buy office space, open a bank account, hire staff, and conduct many of the activities inherent in carrying out their missions while generally shielding the founders from individual liability. Whether the registration process is straightforward and easy, or complex and difficult, is an indicator of the relationship between civil society and the government. It can also be an

<sup>8</sup> Laws that mandate registration and prohibit any activity conducted by unregistered associations and CSOs could result in groups of individuals who gather together with differing levels of frequency and perform any kind of group activities, such as hiking clubs, bird watching, or other activities, to be acting in violation of law. See ICNL, *Global Trends in NGO Law*: <https://www.icnl.org/resources/research/global-trends-ngo-law>

indicator of closing civic space, such as when registration laws are arbitrary or onerous, require high fees, or restrict funding sources.

2. **Law and regulatory application.** Laws and regulations are increasingly used as a tool to control or suppress civil society, as described above in Section III-C: Emerging and cross-cutting trends. More restrictive laws require prior government approval of activities or give the government a role in organizational management. The assessment team should look for onerous registration requirements, intentional vagueness of laws leading to selective enforcement, arbitrary interpretations of laws, laws limiting freedoms of association or assembly, and criminalization of any failures (however unintentional) to comply with CSO laws.<sup>9</sup> Another indicator is whether those laws and regulations are fairly and uniformly implemented. The assessment team will need to look beyond the written laws. If CSOs providing noncontroversial services such as health care or poverty reduction can register without problems while human rights or other advocacy organizations that might be critical of the government encounter obstacles and delays, which indicates issues with fair implementation of what might be an objectively appropriate written framework.
3. **Financial Resources and Funding.** Some countries provide tax benefits for CSOs or for individuals and organizations donating funds to CSOs, particularly those operating for the public benefit, while others exempt CSOs from paying Value Added Taxes (VAT). This can indicate higher levels of public acceptance of CSOs or improved possibilities for philanthropic support from individuals or the private sector. Some laws authorize the carrying out of commercial or business activities for financial sustainability.



### Assessment Tactics

The assessment team should consult available resources in advance, such as the ICNL's *Civic Freedom Monitor* and *Digital Legal Library*, available on its website (<https://icnl.org>), and review the country's ranking in the CIVICUS *Civil Society Monitor* (<https://civicus.org>) to get an overview of the legal framework, then carefully review the written laws and regulations governing CSOs, as well as unwritten rules or practices, using the appropriate illustrative questions for key informants or focal groups included in **Annex A, Table 4. Assessing the State of Civil Society—Legal and Regulatory Environment**. Keep in mind that laws and regulations as written are one thing, and actual practice may be quite another. The assessment team should explore actual practices through KIs and FGDs.

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<sup>9</sup> For other examples of legal and regulatory practices that indicate potential restrictive space issues, see: M. Afrasiabi and M Shualy, *Supporting Civil Society in the Face of Closing Space*; available at <https://www.afsa.org/supporting-civil-society-face-closing-space>. A chart summarizing examples of government actions that restrict civic space is included in Annex B: Closing Space—Tactics and Examples.



## B. ORGANIZATIONAL AND TECHNICAL CAPACITY



**Key Question.** What types of organizational and technical capacity constraints and opportunities does civil society face?



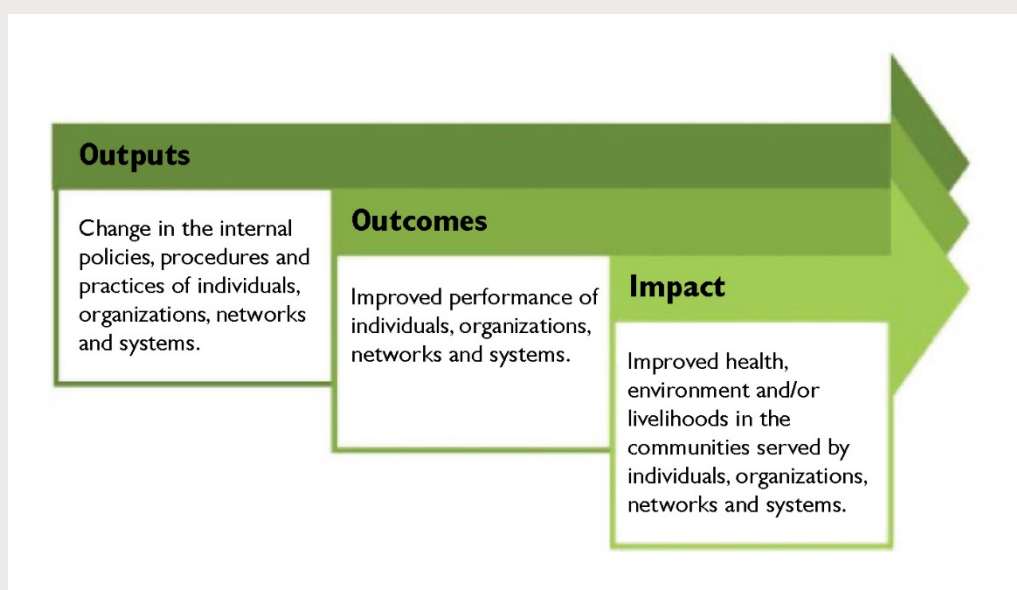
**Rationale** This analysis will help USAID determine whether and how it may be able to support the sector, including capacity-development activities or other relevant programming, through CSOs. The scope of the assessment team’s task may vary depending on the Mission’s purpose, e.g., a focus on strengthening the civil society sector *per se* may require a broader overview of various types of organizations, as compared to a more specific focus on democracy-related organizations or on other sector-specific CSOs. But generally, the team should seek to assess the civil society sector as a whole, understanding that individual organizations will be at varying capacity levels.



**Background.** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines capacity as “the ability of people, organizations, and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully.” Organizational skills include financial management, strategic planning, human resource management, internal governance, and the like, while technical skills relate to the area in which the organization works, e.g., experience in human rights observations and reporting, training skills, advocacy approaches, and understanding immunization processes for health care service delivery. Local CSOs may face challenges both in terms of their organizational capacity and the technical skills needed to carry out their various missions. If the country’s civil society sector is relatively nascent, few CSOs may have the capacity to promote citizen participation in public affairs, manage public outreach, or use technology. More experienced organizations will know how to use mobile phone applications, social media, and engage in advocacy campaigns. There will also likely be a difference between the capacity levels of urban versus rural organizations. How long the civil society sector has existed in a country, its ability to represent various groups, and its reputation among citizens as well as government are also factors in determining its strengths and potential needs regarding capacity. **Figure 7** describes performance indices the evaluation team may consider.

## Figure 7. Performance Measures: Effectiveness, Efficiency, Relevance, and Sustainability

Pact's Organizational Performance Index (OPI) (PACT 2017) includes effectiveness (the ability to carry out high-quality programs)—along with efficiency (the ability to plan and budget in a successful and cost-efficient manner); relevance (the ability to respond to actual needs of beneficiaries); and sustainability (the ability to ensure services are supported by a diverse base of local and international resources)—as a performance measure. The focus of the OPI is on individual organizational performance in the context of assessing improvements over time, whereas here the task of the assessment team is to get a current snapshot of overall civil society sector performance. Nonetheless, some of the measures espoused in the OPI are included as illustrative areas for inquiry in **Annex A: Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT)—Illustrative Questions**. If the sector is not performing effectively, the team should look for the underlying reasons why and determine whether there are areas in which USAID can provide assistance.



Source: Pact OPI (PACT 2017)



### Assessment Topics

The assessment should consider addressing the following topics:

1. **Organizational Capacity.** The overall ability of CSOs to manage their financial, human, and other resources; engage in strategic planning; and exercise good internal governance and the like are important factors to assess in determining whether there are ways to help them to improve in this area.
2. **Technical Skills.** Assessing the level of technical capacity skills will vary depending on the underlying mission of the CSO. For example, health-related CSOs need different technical skills than human rights organizations. Democracy-related CSOs may need support to develop better advocacy skills.

The Mission may be interested in closer examination of the capacities of particular kinds of organizations, *depending upon its primary purposes*.

- 3. CSO Infrastructure.** Capacity at the organizational level needs to be considered with reference to the wider system that surrounds an organization. The assessment team should explore the extent to which there is a support infrastructure that provides services to CSOs, including training and mentoring, and facilitates access to information and other resources. Support structures include intermediary support organizations (ISOs), such as CSO resource centers and innovation hubs that provide capacity development and other services to nascent CSOs, as well as CSO umbrella bodies, networks and coalitions. The latter are essential for facilitating information sharing among CSOs, strengthening horizontal and vertical linkages, and facilitating the organizing of collective action effort across various levels of society. They also play a key role in bringing development efforts to scale and serving as a bridge between local innovators and national-level policymakers and systems.

The assessment team should also look at the extent to which the networks and coalitions are mutually supportive rather than undermining and competitive. Sometimes umbrella organizations that claim to advocate on behalf of their members will assign the best projects to themselves rather than distributing them among the members. USAID and other donors need to determine whether the CSO infrastructure is operating in a fair and transparent manner for the benefit of the sector and not out of self-interest or the interest of only selected CSOs.

- 4. Organizational Results.** Another way of assessing the capacity of the civil society sector, both technical and organizational, is to examine whether CSOs are achieving good and measurable results from their work and demonstrating impact. Some indices have effectiveness as a specific category for assessing capacity. If CSOs have not been effective, an examination of the underlying reasons may help to identify areas where both technical and organizational capacity skills may benefit from efforts targeting improvement. While effectiveness often has a direct correlation with capacity, there may be reasons unrelated to capacity for an organization's inability to have impact. For example, an organization may have high levels of capacity, but it is unable to accomplish much because of political constraints or hostile government actors. In such cases, the problem to be addressed is not strengthening capacity but addressing the issues preventing effective accomplishments of goals. The need to examine other potential reasons for a lack of effectiveness is discussed in more detail in Section IV-E below.
- 5. Political Economy Analysis (PEA).** There are other less-quantifiable aspects to assessing civil society capacity as well. A PEA with respect to the players and powers both in and interacting with the civil society sector may be revealing. Things such as leadership qualities of CSO leaders, their ability to articulate needs and represent their constituencies, their adeptness in using technology to convey their messages, and their ability to interact effectively with political leaders may all contribute to the overall effectiveness of the sector in a given country.



### Assessment Tactics

To assess this assessment domain, it may be particularly useful to convene an FGD among a variety of civil society representatives and beneficiaries to review the illustrative questions set out in **Annex A: Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT)—Illustrative Questions Tables 1–9**, in addition to questioning key informants who are closely involved in the sector. The illustrative questions in **Annex A: Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT)—Illustrative Questions** are taken from a variety of tools available for assessing both the technical and organizational capacity levels of CSOs in a given country.



## C. SOCIOECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT



**Key Question.** How does the socioeconomic, political, and cultural environment influence and inform the state of civil society?



**Rationale.** Socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors may have an impact on both the viability of the civil society sector and its potential effectiveness as implementers of development priorities.



**Background.** The social-economic, political, and cultural environment can shape and be shaped by civil society. Understanding the most important influences on perceptions and attitudes, economic incentives, and overall levels of support can help identify potential opportunities or obstacles in developing programs.



### Assessment Topics

The civil society assessment should consider examining the following topics:

1. **Attitudes.** Examining relevant attitudes to civil society remains an important element to understanding perceptions related to civil society. These include public attitudes toward CSOs, which can be determined through public opinion surveys or through a survey of media and social media content and as a focus group line of inquiry. Is the population well educated and informed, or is illiteracy an issue and reliable information difficult to come by? The more public support for CSOs, the better the odds of successful engagement. The team should also examine government attitudes toward the sector: Do political leaders see CSOs as threats or as potential partners? Relationships between civil society and the State often vary depending on the level of democratic development in the society, the level of government (national versus subnational), and the type of issues involved (service delivery, policy advocacy, human rights reporting). The sensitivity of the issues, the type of civil society activities supported, and whether the regime is authoritarian, democratic, post-conflict, or somewhere in-between will also make a difference. Some types of CSOs, like those providing needed social services, may be welcomed by, and sometimes funded by, the government, whereas those promoting human rights or taking on advocacy functions may struggle to survive. In more democratic and developed societies, the State may support a broad range of civil society functions, including policy advocacy and citizen outreach. In authoritarian



environments or countries emerging from conflict, pursuit of such activities may be seen by the State as anti-governmental or threatening. Government efforts to control CSOs—for example, by barring foreign funding or requiring prior government approval of work plans before CSOs can undertake activities—would tilt the political environment away from being supportive.

2. **Financial Sustainability.** On the socioeconomic front, long-term sustainability of the civil society sector depends on the ability of CSOs to become financially viable. In some developing countries, international and bilateral governmental donors provide nearly all the funding for local CSOs, particularly in the poorest countries and those emerging from conflict, where local funding is not a realistic option. In countries where the local economy is robust enough to generate local philanthropy and support CSO self-financing efforts, the sector will be more sustainable.
3. **Local Systems.** USAID's *Local Systems Framework* encourages participation in development efforts by all parts of society at the local level, including the private sector (USAID, 2014a). Concepts such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) and partnerships between corporations and civil society—e.g., Hanes teaming up with the Salvation Army to distribute socks to homeless shelters in the United States; Dannon yogurt teaming up with Grameen Bank to develop yogurt factories to promote micro-financing and better nutrition in Bangladesh,<sup>10</sup> or Starbucks supporting local coffee farmers in Rwanda by providing technical assistance to improve their coffee crop to ensure high-quality coffee for its own supply chain—have become more common in the past 15 years. Cooperatives, social venture capital, and social enterprises are also a part of this landscape (USAID, 2018b). Business associations, chambers of commerce, or individual corporations could share common objectives with CSOs, such as an interest in policy reforms and improved governance, and thus be potential partners in advancing democratic and other development reforms. Private-sector interest in engaging in DRG issues through their bottom line and corporate philanthropy could help strengthen the financial viability of the civil society sector, or at least parts of it. There may also be levels of community philanthropy toward particular causes or philanthropy on the part of private citizens that could help to support civil society.
4. **Regulatory Influence.** The regulatory environment explored in the Legal and Regulatory Environment section above may also be an important factor. If laws and regulations provide for tax benefits that encourage private donations or allow CSOs to undertake income-generating activities in support of their missions, that reflects a more receptive socioeconomic environment.

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<sup>10</sup> See these and other examples at <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/7-surprising-pairs-of-nonprofits-and-corporations/>

5. **Cultural Impact.** The cultural environment *vis-à-vis* civil society in a country is also useful to consider. Have CSOs been a part of the landscape for some time? Has the acceptance of CSOs improved or deteriorated over time? Ultimately, the values and attitudes of citizens toward civil society and democracy generally affect the odds of CSOs' success. To the extent the public perceives them to be legitimate, supports their efforts, and engages with them, the more effective their work and the more viable their survival become. The more trusted the CSO sector is in a country, the better the chances of success.



### Assessment Tactics

Illustrative questions to help the team explore the socioeconomic, political, and cultural environment are included in **Annex A, Table A6. Assessing the State of Civil Society—Socioeconomic, Political, and Cultural Environment**. The answers to those questions may help identify potential opportunities and obstacles to keep in mind when preparing recommendations for programming.



## D. DEMOCRATIC CULTURE AND VALUES: LEVEL OF CIVIC AWARENESS



**Key Question.** How do the democratic culture of the society and population norms including civic awareness influence civil society? How does civil society in turn shape the democratic culture?



**Rationale.** Overall levels of civic awareness among citizens, and the extent to which democratic culture and values are demonstrated by the actions of both citizens and CSOs, are indications of a country's path toward achieving *strong democratic institutions, respect for human rights, and participatory, accountable governance that are crucial elements for improving people's lives*, as referenced in USAID's DRG Strategy.<sup>11</sup> Promoting civic engagement in governmental decision-making or providing civic education to help citizens better understand how government works and what their potential roles and contributions can be is an important function for CSOs. The extent to which civil society undertakes civic education or promotes higher levels of citizen engagement can be an important factor in promoting a stronger relationship with the public and more support for the sector.



**Background.** Where opportunities for civic engagement do not exist or where they may be ineffective, mass social movements may be demonstrations of a desire for a democratic culture. As described in Section III C3 above, mass social movements, in both countries with and without strong democratic cultures, have been steadily increasing across the globe. Mass social movements or uprisings, such as the one seen following August 2020 elections in Belarus, are often the result of citizens believing their voices are not otherwise being heard or of citizens' basic needs not being met. They can stem from perceptions of unfair treatment, discrimination, systemic suppression or brutality of groups of people, a lack of opportunity, increased costs of living, global public sector corruption (particularly

<sup>11</sup> Refer to the complete strategy here: [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID-DRG\\_fina-6-24-31.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID-DRG_fina-6-24-31.pdf)

with respect to the police and the judiciary), economic stagnation, stresses from climate change (crop failures, droughts, etc.), and unemployment, particularly youth unemployment (43 percent of the world’s population is under the age of 25, while in developing countries that figure is 60 percent) (Robinson, 2011).

Experts have identified three particular factors serving as catalysts for the increase in mass social and political movements: 1) the expanding use of technology by both protesters and governments (as discussed to an extent in the two preceding sections); 2) tensions between traditional democracies and increasingly authoritarian governments; and 3) the need to improve understanding and responsiveness between governments and their citizens. These movements often go forward through informal groups mobilizing on social media and without impetus from organized civil society in situations where people have a lack of ties to CSOs or do not see civil society as caring about or promoting their concerns.<sup>12</sup> **Figure 8** provides examples that emphasize the importance of civil society.

## Figure 8. Importance of Civil Society

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USAID’s Policy Framework has noted global trends point to an alarming closure of civic space as many countries experience a weakening of democratic institutions and a resurgence of authoritarianism (USAID 2019b).



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Civil society has a critical role to play in educating citizens on government processes, in encouraging citizen participation in government decision-making, in promoting transparency, and in holding government and institutions accountable.

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A 2020 document prepared by the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, a consortium of large international CSOs, stresses the importance of civic engagement and a strong citizen-state compact as critical to promoting development and democracy, with a focus on the role of local civil society.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Formalized or “elite” CSOs often do not spend much time or energy engaging with or mobilizing citizens around particular issues, focusing instead on their donors and funding sources. This lack of public support can make them vulnerable to government criticism or being labeled as agents of foreign governments, and it can also lead to issues of legitimacy or create animosity between grassroots groups and more formalized CSOs.

<sup>13</sup> See Principles and Recommendations for a Strategy on Engaging Local Civil Society, Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network, available at [www.modernizeaid.net](http://www.modernizeaid.net)



## Assessment Topics

The assessment should consider addressing the following topics:

1. **Civic Awareness.** The team should explore whether citizens are generally aware of how government works, whether they believe they have a role to play in developing government policy, their level of awareness of their rights, their willingness to oppose government actions affecting those rights, and their level of participation in public fora or other opportunities to address the government. Civic education not only leads to higher awareness and understanding, but it also serves as a stepping stone to increased engagement in civic and political activities and helps to develop democracy-oriented leaders. If awareness levels are low, the team should look to reasons why. Civil society can play a very important role in promoting higher levels of civic awareness and citizen participation in government decision-making.
2. **Areas of Engagement.** The assessment team should explore whether there are formal and informal mechanisms to facilitate citizen and CSO participation in public policy dialogues and decision-making processes.<sup>14</sup> In many countries, the degree of openness of government institutions and the ability of civil society to effectively engage them will depend on the administrative level (national or sub-national). In many authoritarian environments where national-level engagement is not possible, CSOs have been able to successfully engage at the sub-national level. It is therefore important to carefully examine potential windows of opportunity and target programming accordingly. Even in politically restrictive environments, some activities to strengthen the levels of civic engagement may be possible.
3. **Role of Media.** A review of the state of the media and how the media covers government activities can also help determine the level of democratic culture. CSOs, like members of the public, often rely on media to access information that can shape their activities, inform the public about their work, generate support for their efforts, and expand the reach of their activities. Laws and practices that give the media, and the public, access to information about governmental decisions and activities can go a long way in providing communications essential to initiatives that require broad bases of informed citizen participation and support. Independent media and independent civil society often go hand in hand, and countries that suppress one are likely to suppress the other.



## Assessment Tactics

Illustrative questions to help the assessment team explore the extent to which democratic culture and values are present, along with levels of civic awareness, are included in **Annex A, Table 7. Assessing the State of Civil Society—Democratic Culture and Values: Level of Civic Awareness**. The team may find it helpful to assemble a focus group for this purpose.

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<sup>14</sup> In Rwanda, for example, the government has established Sector Working Groups in areas such as local government, the justice sector, and the health sector. These groups include government officials, donors, and CSOs discussing policies and priorities in those sectors.



## E. EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT



**Key Questions.** How effective and impactful is civil society? What factors enable and constrain effectiveness and impact?



**Rationale.** As discussed briefly in the Organizational and Technical Capacity section above, effectiveness and impact are often good measures of civil society capacity levels. At the same time, a lack of effectiveness or impact may result from other underlying causes, including authoritarian governments or other constraints beyond an organization's control.



**Background.** As stated in Section B above, the capacity of CSOs can often be measured by their effectiveness in representing their constituencies or their impact on influencing public policies or attitudes. At the same time, civil society can be very capable but stymied for myriad reasons from reaching the results it seeks. The assessment team must first understand the underlying reasons for a lack of effectiveness in order to develop recommendations on how to remedy it.



### Assessment Topics

1. **Ability to influence policy or accomplish goals.** The assessment team should explore the extent to which the civil society sector (including mass movements, where applicable) has been able to *influence* government policy, make a difference in people's lives, or otherwise accomplish their goals. The CIVICUS Diamond tool, used to assess civil society, looks at the effectiveness of CSOs, measuring outputs, outcomes, and impact of their work. The question of legitimacy is crucial to effectiveness; if ordinary citizens feel their needs are being met, the relationships between the public and civil society will be positive.
2. **Leadership qualities of CSO leaders.** Relationships developed with the government, media, private sector, donors, stakeholders, other CSOs, and the public can be another indicator of effectiveness.

Things such as leadership qualities of CSO leaders, their ability to articulate needs and represent their constituencies, their adeptness in using technology to convey their messages, and their ability to interact effectively with political leaders can all contribute to the overall effectiveness of the sector in a given country.



### Assessment Tactics

As in the Organizational and Technical Capacity section of the assessment, this line of inquiry lends itself well to FGDs among CSOs and stakeholders, as well as individual key informants and relevant documentary evidence that may be available.





## F. EXTERNAL INFLUENCES AND EMERGING TRENDS



**Key Question.** What is the impact on civil society of external influences and emerging trends?



**Rationale.** The awareness of the role and influences of external authoritarian actors has increased in recent years, along with a corresponding adverse impact on civil society's ability to function and attain its goals.



**Background.** As described in Section III-C above, the assessment team should watch for and take account of potential resurgent authoritarian influence (RAI), led mostly by China and Russia but also by other countries such as Saudi Arabia and Venezuela (Resurgent Dictatorship Project, n.d.), are actively projecting an alternate model of development that preys upon institutionally fragile democracies by disregarding governance standards, manipulating favorable arrangements with elites, feeding corruption networks, eroding human rights, disregarding privacy laws, and disturbing information flows. An article published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine (Thorsten, 2017) describes this authoritarian influence as playing out in three main areas—public opinion (e.g., through media and civil society organizations); political parties (such as Russian ties with right-wing European groups); and business (e.g., China's Belt and Road infrastructure project, through which it seeks to gain leverage over host countries as much as to make profits). This discussion focuses on the first area, authoritarian influence on public opinion, and the need to understand the role social media and digital technologies play in a given country with respect to the civil society sector, assessing potential opportunities and risks, and determining whether or how USAID or USG policy interests may be served through supporting related CSO efforts.

A July 2018 report prepared by the Oxford Internet Institute, *Challenging Truth and Trust: A Global Investigation of Organized Social Media Population*, found that “in emerging and Western democracies, data analytics and political bots are being used to poison the information environment, promote skepticism and distrust, polarize voting constituencies, and undermine the integrity of democratic processes.” The number of countries where formally organized social media manipulation occurs increased from 28 in 2017 to 48 in 2018 to 70 in 2019. A similar study by the Institute for the Future (IFTF) (2018) defined the increasing phenomenon of state-sponsored trolling as “use by states of targeted online hate and harassment campaigns to intimidate and silence individuals critical of the state.” In autocracies, this state-sponsored trolling is often a function of government, generally a military unit. In democracies, it is becoming increasingly a tool in political campaigning and lobbying. The primary challenge to democracy is that because such social media manipulation heightens fractures and polarization in society, it threatens deliberative processes—namely, elections—that are a part of the democratic process. So while the use of social media as a means for coordinating civic engagement has grown, so too has its use as a “computational tool for social control,” increasing the dynamics of and challenges facing civil society.

Additional background information can be found in V-Dem’s Digital Society Project (V-DEM, n.d.), which provides a set of 35 indicators on topics such as online censorship, polarization, and politicization of social media, misinformation campaigns, coordinated information operations, and foreign influence in and monitoring of domestic politics.



### Assessment Topics

This section focuses primarily on closing civic space, cyber-attacks, and other adverse influences on civil society coming from external sources. There will necessarily be some overlap of this section with some of the emerging trends highlighted in Section III-C, so the assessment team should also review the illustrative questions from that section (**Annex A: Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT)—Illustrative Questions, Table 3. Emerging and Cross-Cutting Trends**), including recognizing closing civic space, digital technology, and mass social movements, to use as appropriate.

1. **Resurgent authoritarian influence.** The assessment team should explore the extent to which potentially malign actors such as Russia and China are involved in the civil society and other sectors in the country, along with the tactics they are using, such as financial influence or promoting corruption or anti-governmental influences and disinformation campaigns.
2. **Cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, misuse of social media.** It is important to consider the extent to which the government may be using digital technology to surveil CSO activities, block or filter certain content, or even shut down or partially shut down the Internet. Another important thing to learn is whether the host country’s government has a unit (often housed in the military) to specifically create disinformation messages and identify individuals or organizations to surveil. Some questions that may be helpful in determining whether RAI is a potential issue in the host country are included in **Annex A: Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT)—Illustrative Questions Table 9. Assessing the State of Civil Society—External Influences and Emerging Trends**. In that case, public awareness campaigns through civil society may be a course of action to consider.



### Assessment Tactics

The assessment team should review open source media reports regarding topics including closing civic space, digital technology, social movements, and external influence (including financial influence) and then conduct interviews with relevant civil society and media organizations to understand the type of emerging issues and external influences and how they influence and impact civil society. The V-Dem Digital Society Project cited above is a useful source. Focus groups also are a useful way of exploring this area, with the caveat that in some repressive countries, individuals may be reluctant to speak out in group settings. In such circumstances, focus groups could be more dangerous for participants and less productive than individual interviews.



## V. PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Photo: ©2018 Musfiq Tajwar, Solidarity Center

The final step is to pull all analyses together and develop a set of recommendations in accordance with the Mission’s primary interests and purposes in seeking the assessment. The steps below are provided to help an assessment team develop those recommendations.

**Annex A: Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT)—Illustrative Questions** includes illustrative questions an assessment team should consider as they implement corresponding components of the CSAT.

**Annex B: Closing Space—Tactics and Examples** identifies, describes, and provides illustrative examples of tactics and examples of closing spaces.

**Annex C: Mission Priorities, Budget, Collaboration, Gender, and Comparative Advantages** provides ideas for Mission staff to consider when making decisions regarding priorities, funding levels, potential collaboration opportunities, gender considerations, and comparative advantage.

**Annex D: Illustrative Approaches** provides examples of activities Missions can consider when addressing challenges identified by the CSAT.

## **A. IDENTIFY PRIMARY GAPS, OPPORTUNITIES, OR AREAS NEEDING ATTENTION**








When using the CSAT, the assessment team should first summarize the purpose of the assessment, the country context, and any emerging or cross-cutting trends, such as closing political space or mass social movements, as described in Section III above. The team should review all information gathered in accordance with the areas of Section IV and prepare an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, or challenges with respect to the civil society sector, including opportunities or needs identified by representatives of civil society themselves. The team may choose to prioritize certain opportunities or concerns, with those priorities subject to change based upon the application of other factors described in Section B below.

As described in USAID's SAF (USAID 2014c), the degree of political openness in a country not only affects the challenges but also the opportunities. The overall country context described in Section III B above can illustrate dynamics that show where the country lies generally along a continuum of freedom, human rights, and governance and should be considered alongside the more sector-specific findings explored in Section IV. Indications of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian behaviors, progressive compared to stagnating policies, potential backsliding, presence or absence of conflict, and other characteristics, will have different implications for analysis, recommendations, and potential future activities.

## **B. APPLY MISSION PRIORITIES, BUDGET, AND COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES**

This step of the assessment considers opportunities and constraints posed by USAID's operational and programmatic environment with respect to the assessment's findings and helps ensure that the assessment strategic and programmatic recommendations are practical and can be implemented. This step is not meant to be determinative; constraints can be overcome, and interests may change. The assessment team is in a position to propose alternative options if the underlying conditions, interests, or resources change.

The team should consider the following elements, including as articulated in the assessment scope of work:<sup>15</sup>

-  U.S. foreign policy and broader USAID development interests
-  Relevant USG and USAID policies and strategies
-  USAID's current DRG program, in particular activities relating to or affecting civil society
-  Other USAID and USG assistance programs that may relate to or affect the civil society sector, including media, labor, human rights, among others
-  USAID's resources
-  Activities undertaken or anticipated from other donors in the civil society sector, along with levels of donor coordination
-  Practical constraints on the recipient side

Additional detail for considering priorities, funding levels, potential collaboration opportunities, gender considerations, and comparative advantages are further elaborated in **Annex C: Mission Priorities, Budget, Collaboration, Gender, and Comparative Advantages**.

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<sup>15</sup> These factors are taken from and described more fully in *USAID's Strategic Assessment Framework*, pp. 50–52.



## C. DEVELOP REALISTIC AND ACHIEVABLE PROGRAMMATIC SUGGESTIONS RESPONDING TO IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES AND NEEDS

The CSAT ultimately serves as a diagnostic tool to help Missions determine where investments in civil society will lead to achievable results and have the most impact. The goal of the assessment team is to provide independent analysis with strategic recommendations that flow from that analysis. After completing the analysis, the team should prepare an Assessment report, identifying strategic opportunities and programmatic recommendations.

**Table I** below provides recommended strategic components to include in the assessment report.<sup>16</sup>

**Table I. Strategic Components to Include in Assessment Report**

Component	Description
1. Summary	Summarize analysis from Sections III and IV.
2. Civil society development objective (USAID 2019c)	Develop a civil society objective or objectives, stated as a result.
3. Development hypothesis	If appropriate, formulate a development hypothesis.
4. Priority subsectors	If appropriate, identify priority subsectors or note subsectors to avoid.
5. Scenario-based planning	Include a discussion of scenarios or notable contingencies that may be helpful in countries experiencing instability or undergoing a transition and where proposed strategy and programming may be highly dependent on factors outside of USAID's control.
6. Gender and inclusion considerations	Address relevant gender gaps and evaluate the impact of gender dynamics on defining the civil society challenge(s) throughout the analytical process. The Assessment team should identify key gender issues that relate to the identified challenge(s) or opportunities and integrate attention to gender dynamics and other inequalities, including related to potentially marginalized groups such as youth or ethnic or religious minorities, throughout its analysis and recommendations. Missions may then conduct more detailed analyses of key gender or other issues as needed.

<sup>16</sup> This list is drawn from, but not identical to, the recommendations contained in the *Strategic Assessment Framework (SAF)* Chapter 5, pp. 53–55: <https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1866/democracy-human-rights-and-governance-strategic-assessment-framework>

To the extent possible, local organizations must be engaged if development efforts are to be sustainable over the long term. This can include strengthening local CSOs as an end in itself but can also include using local CSOs in carrying out certain development activities to provide “learning by doing” opportunities, thus contributing to “building skills, knowledge, institutions and incentives that make development processes self-sustaining,” as described in USAID’s *Local Systems Framework*, leading to development that is “locally owned, locally led, and locally sustained” (USAID, 2014a).

**Figure 9** describes this learning-by-doing approach.

## Figure 9. Learning by Doing

If the Mission wants to strengthen CSO technical capacity in particular areas as part of achieving certain development goals, the assessment team may wish to recommend a “learning by doing” approach to address capacity gaps in local organizations. Local CSOs may lack the capacity to receive direct funding, and the Mission may lack the staff needed to adequately mentor and monitor them. Using international CSOs as primary partners tasked with developing the capacity and ensuring the performance of local CSOs through sub-grants or grants under contracts may be a viable path to explore. This can be an effective means of contributing to “building skills, knowledge, institutions, and incentives that make development processes self-sustaining,” as described in USAID’s *Local Systems Framework*, leading to development that is “locally owned, locally led, and locally sustained” (USAID, 2014a). For example, if the Mission is interested in undertaking activities such as access to justice, combating gender-based violence, or reducing trafficking in persons but realizes local organizations do not have the required technical capacity, the assessment team could recommend that an international IP assume oversight responsibility and also provide training and support to local CSOs to carry out many, if not most, of the on-ground activities.





## VI. FINAL STEPS

Photo: ©2019 Amunga Eshuchi

In its final steps, the assessment team should prepare a final report summarizing its analyses and findings as detailed above, sharing its conclusions with the Mission, Embassy, and other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate.

In the end, supporting democracy, human rights, and governance through CSOs promotes fundamental USAID and USG values and advances core national institutions in global security and prosperity. The hope is that this CSAT can help those committed to doing so find a viable path forward.

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## VIII. ANNEX A: CIVIL SOCIETY ASSESSMENT TOOL (CSAT)—ILLUSTRATIVE QUESTIONS

This annex offers illustrative questions the assessment team may wish to consider in conducting its background research and fieldwork, depending on the context of the assessment. This is not an exhaustive list of potential areas to examine; the assessment team should feel free to add or delete questions as appropriate. This annex generally follows the same order as the CSAT text above.

**Table AI. USG and USAID Policy, Program, and Assessment Goals, Objectives, and Interests**

The questions in **Table AI** correspond to the text in **Sections III-A: Purpose and interests; V-B: Apply Mission priorities, budget, and comparative advantages;** and **V-C: Develop realistic and achievable programmatic suggestions responding to identified opportunities and needs.**

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Assessment Purpose/Goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the purpose of the assessment?</li> <li>▪ Is the Mission interested in supporting civil society as an end in itself, or in using civil society partners to implement development projects?</li> <li>▪ Is the goal to guide development of DRG programs, or is the Mission seeking a more general assessment of civil society as part of a broader overview of development options?</li> <li>▪ Does the Mission see a particular role for civil society in advancing its CDCS, ICS, or DRG strategy?</li> <li>▪ Are there specific questions the Mission would like the team to answer? Are these questions at the country-wide or sector level? Are there specific problems or issues the Mission is particularly interested in exploring?</li> </ul>	Assessment SOW; meetings with Mission
USG and USAID Policy Goals/Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What are the broader USG and USAID policy goals and expected outcomes relevant to the assessment (e.g., CDCS, ICS, USG geopolitical or economic interests in the country/region)?</li> <li>▪ What is the current role and influence of USAID and the USG?</li> <li>▪ Does the Mission have a DRG strategy?</li> <li>▪ Are there other policies or strategies that need to be taken into consideration? (e.g., State Department policy on civil society support in different contexts, including restrictive environments; USAID’s Youth in Development Policy;<sup>16F16F17</sup> the Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy;<sup>17F17F18</sup> LGBTI Vision;<sup>18F18F19</sup> Indigenous Peoples Policy;<sup>19F19F20</sup> and Advancing Disability-Inclusive Development<sup>20F20F21</sup>)</li> </ul>	CDCS, ICS, and other Mission documents; USG and USAID strategies and policies; Mission interviews

<sup>17</sup> See: <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/youth>

<sup>18</sup> See: <http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/GenderEqualityPolicy.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> See: [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1874/LGBT\\_Vision.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1874/LGBT_Vision.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> See: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID-IndigenousPeoples-Policy-mar-2020.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> See: <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/democracy-human-rights-and-governance/protecting-human-rights/disability>

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Existing and Previous Civil Society (CS) Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are there any existing USAID CS programs? What is successful or unsuccessful about the program(s)?</li> <li>▪ Are there previous CS programs relevant to this assessment? Are there evaluations or relevant lessons learned?</li> <li>▪ What work is being/has been done in other sectors (i.e., media, labor, human rights) that may be relevant to the current assessment? Are there synergies that may increase effectiveness?</li> </ul>	Mission interviews (across sectors); other team and donor reports
Program-related Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What level of funding is expected for a new CS program, if there will be one, and over what timeframe?</li> <li>▪ Is the program expected to contribute to one or more development objective (DO)? Will funding come from different sectors/teams?</li> <li>▪ Is there a particular geographical area in which the Mission would like to focus?</li> </ul>	SOW; CDCS; ICS; Mission interviews
Coordination with other Donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are other donors supporting CS or planning to support CS? If so, which ones, and what are their project goals? Have they been successful?</li> <li>▪ Are other donors providing capacity development or core support to CSOs?</li> <li>▪ To what extent does the Mission coordinate with other donors/stakeholders working on CS?</li> </ul>	CDCS; Mission interviews; interviews with other donors (as appropriate)
Key Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Has a DRG assessment been conducted? When? What were the results?</li> <li>▪ What key challenges to democracy generally or to CS specifically have been identified?</li> </ul>	DRG assessment; CDCS; Mission interviews; general background review

**Table A2. Country Context: Foundational Factors; Political Landscape, Major Players, and Rules of the Game; Current Events and Circumstances**

The questions in **Table A2** seek a PEA and should be considered in conjunction with **Section III-B: Country context**. A more specific focus on the landscape vis-à-vis civil society also is included and correlates with **Section IV-C: Socioeconomic, Political, and Cultural Environment**.

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Power Structures and Other Foundational Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the evolution of state/state–society relations, and underlying factors (including political settlement(s), power structures, ideas, and values) that have shaped the country or a given sector over time?</li> <li>▪ How do the current political dynamics shape opportunities and challenges?</li> <li>▪ Are there patterns of inclusion/exclusion within state and society in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, geography, religion, age, ability, and others?</li> <li>▪ What is the reach, authority, and legitimacy of the state?</li> <li>▪ What is the impact of geographical factors and political borders? Are neighboring states stable? Are there border conflicts?</li> <li>▪ What is the impact of natural resources or the lack thereof (i.e., mineral wealth contributing to conflicts, oil reserves, fertile agricultural land, repeated drought risk)?</li> <li>▪ Are there deeply ingrained class structures, such as caste systems?</li> <li>▪ How are power and wealth distributed within the society?</li> <li>▪ What are the primary DRG issues affecting the country? (Consider areas outlined in the DRG SAF.)</li> <li>▪ What is the historical evolution of CS and its relationships with the state and the general public?</li> </ul>	<p>KIs; general desk research (e.g., CIA reports, Wikipedia); DRG assessment (if done), CDCS.</p> <p>Further examples included in USAID’s SAF,21F21F<sup>22</sup> PEA22F22F<sup>23</sup></p>

<sup>22</sup> See: [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Master\\_SAF\\_FINAL%20Fully%20Edited%209-28-15.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/Master_SAF_FINAL%20Fully%20Edited%209-28-15.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> See <https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1866/thinking-and-working-politically-through-applied-political-economy-analysis>



Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Political Landscape, Major Players, and Rules of the Game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are there formal written rules governing the political system or a particular sector (constitution, laws, regulations)? To what extent are such rules respected or consistently applied?</li> <li>▪ What informal understandings and arrangements exist (e.g., informal deals to maintain political support or stability; gender norms; clientelism or the exchange of favors and other benefits for political support)?</li> <li>▪ How do formal rules and informal norms or understandings interact to drive behaviors?</li> <li>▪ To what extent do state and society actors operate within both formal and informal “rules of the game”? Are their actions predictable and routinized?</li> <li>▪ What is the distribution of power, access, and influence among different groups in both state and society (e.g., religious, ethnic, regional, racial, gender)?</li> <li>▪ Is the space for reform opening or closing? Why?</li> <li>▪ What is the nature and quality of competition for political power and relations between and among political actors?</li> <li>▪ What kind of influence might different international factors and actors have to contribute toward (or to undermine) sector reform and why?</li> <li>▪ What is the nature and quality of competition among social actors? Are there power struggles between political and social actors? Among social actors?</li> <li>▪ What is the nature of social networks and their influence? Are there ideological, religious, and cultural forces at the country, sector, or problem level?</li> <li>▪ What may be unintended consequences of change processes?</li> </ul>	KII; background desk research
Current Events and Circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What are the main sources of support or opposition to the current government and why?</li> <li>▪ To what extent is this support or opposition affiliated with civil society?</li> <li>▪ What new pressures (e.g., climate change, COVID, refugees, emergent technology, demographic transition, state influence by foreign actors) have come to the fore? How do these pressures influence existing actors, structures, and institutions?</li> <li>▪ Are there issues and/or policy-reform processes prominent in the political agenda (e.g., tax, service provision, corruption, environmental concerns, gender issues)? Which groups are supporting or opposing them? What are the potential implications?</li> <li>▪ What is the current state of the economy at the macro and micro level? How does this impact the state’s ability to perform key core functions, including the provision of crucial services at different levels?</li> <li>▪ Who are the main leaders both for and against progressive change in the state (e.g., reformers, elected politicians, political parties in parliament) and in society (e.g., women, youth, business) that are emerging?</li> <li>▪ What is the current role and influence of USAID and the USG?</li> <li>▪ How do the current political dynamics shape opportunities and challenges?</li> </ul>	General background desk research; country reports; DRG assessment; PEA report; KIIs

### Table A3. Emerging and Cross-Cutting Trends

The questions in **Table A3** correspond with the text included in **Section III-C: Emerging and cross-cutting trends**. The evaluation team should also review **Section IV-F: External Influences and Emerging Trends**. Because these trends are cross-cutting, relevant illustrative questions may also appear in other sections of this annex.

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Recognizing Closing Civic Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are CSO registration requirements onerous, discriminatory, or arbitrary?</li> <li>▪ Are failures to comply with NGO laws criminalized?</li> <li>▪ Do the laws mandate prior approval from government officials for activities?</li> <li>▪ Do laws restrict freedom of speech, expression, or assembly?</li> <li>▪ Are there restrictions on local CSOs receiving foreign funding?</li> <li>▪ Are international CSOs allowed to register and operate?</li> <li>▪ Have there been incidents of Internet shutdowns or partial shutdowns to stop CSOs from communicating with citizens or each other?</li> <li>▪ Are there instances of retaliation or attacks for CSOs' positions that may conflict with government perspectives?</li> <li>▪ Has there been any interference with CSOs' ability to conduct activities by state security services?</li> <li>▪ Does the host country government have a unit (often housed in the military) to specifically create disinformation messages and identify individuals or organizations to surveil?</li> <li>▪ Have there been instances of assault, arbitrary arrest, disappearance, torture, or killings of human rights defenders and other CSO activists?</li> <li>▪ Have there been government claims that CSOs receiving foreign funds are "foreign agents"?</li> <li>▪ Have international CSOs been accused of being "foreign agents"?</li> </ul>	Background desk research, including the CIVICUS Civil Society Monitor, Freedom House's Freedom of the World reports, CEPPS IRI Closing Space Barometer, V-Dem index; KII; focus groups. See also Annex B: Closing Space—Tactics And Examples for ways to identify closing civic spaces.

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Digital Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent is social media available and to whom?</li> <li>▪ Which age groups or segments of society use social media (e.g., aggregate by age, gender, ethnicity, others)</li> <li>▪ What types of technologies (mobile phones, social platforms) are most commonly used and for what purposes?</li> <li>▪ How media literate is the population? Do they understand the ways in which social media can be used to manipulate and mislead?</li> <li>▪ How media literate is civil society in the host country?</li> <li>▪ Do CSOs have the technical capacity and means to use social platforms to improve their effectiveness, expand their outreach, and enhance communications?</li> <li>▪ To what extent is the government using digital technology to surveil CSO activities? To what extent does the government have the capacity to block or filter certain content on the Internet?</li> <li>▪ What is the extent of social media manipulation?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs equipped to protect their networks from electronic intrusion?</li> <li>▪ Are there safe places for on-site and off-site data storage?</li> </ul>	Background desk research, including Freedom House’s Freedom on the Net, V-Dem, CIA World Factbook; KII; focus groups.
Mass Social Movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Has the country experienced mass social protests or movements in the past several years? If so, what have been the results?</li> <li>▪ Do key informants believe there is a potential for mass social movements in the future? Why?</li> </ul>	Background desk research; KII

### Table A4. Assessing the State of Civil Society—Legal and Regulatory Environment

The questions in **Table A4** correspond with text in **Section IV-A: Legal and regulatory environment**, as well as the subsections on Closing Space and Digital Technology, included in **Section III-C: Emerging and cross-cutting trends**.

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Registration and Operations of CSOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is there a law regulating CSO registration and permitting legal personality? Is the registration process straightforward with clearly defined requirements? How cumbersome are the requirements? Is the law evenly applied?</li> <li>▪ Is registration mandatory? Are informal associations permitted?</li> <li>▪ Are international CSOs allowed to register? Are the regulations any different than for local CSOs?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs (broadly defined) penalized for carrying out activities prior to registration?</li> <li>▪ Are fees charged to register? Are there initial capitalization requirements? If yes, are they reasonable?</li> <li>▪ If registration is denied, are specific grounds for denial required? Is there a time limit within which to approve or deny registration? Is there an appeal process for denial?</li> <li>▪ Can a CSO be dissolved by the government? If so, are there specific grounds required? Are they reasonable? Are they fairly and transparently applied?</li> <li>▪ Are laws and regulations evenly applied to all CSOs, or are certain types of CSOs (e.g., human rights organizations or advocacy groups) subject to stricter or different treatment?</li> <li>▪ Are there local lawyers trained in and familiar with CSO law?</li> </ul>	Background desk research including <i>NGO Law Monitor</i> , ICNL’s <i>Civic Freedom Monitor and Digital Legal Library</i> , CIVICUS <i>Civil Society Index (CSI)</i> , Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI); KIs, FGDs with respect to actual practices and application of the laws
Potential Restrictions and Impediments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is prior government approval required for activities, work plans, etc.?</li> <li>▪ Is authorization or notification required for public gatherings?</li> <li>▪ Are there restrictions on funding, such as foreign funding?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs able to address matters of public debate and express criticism without repercussions?</li> <li>▪ Are specific groups (e.g., youth, LGBTI, indigenous populations, etc.) adversely impacted by the legal framework? If so, how?</li> </ul>	Same as above

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Other Relevant Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are freedoms of association, expression, and assembly protected in law and in practice? Are all citizens free to exercise these rights equally?</li> <li>▪ Do the laws permit CSOs to earn income from commercial activities?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs exempt from VAT or sales tax on purchases? Are donations taxed? Do individual or corporate donors receive tax deductions for donations made to CSOs?</li> <li>▪ Is there a freedom of information law? If so, does the government comply with it? Are journalists and members of the public able to access public information? Is it something they do often?</li> <li>▪ Are there laws or regulations providing for public input into governmental decision-making processes? If so, how are they implemented?</li> <li>▪ Are there laws regulating privacy, particularly with respect to digital technology or social media?</li> </ul>	Same as above

### Table A5. Assessing the State of Civil Society—Organizational and Technical Capacity

The questions in **Table A5** correspond to the text in **Section IV-B: Organizational and Technical Capacity** of the CSAT, as well as **Section IV-E: Effectiveness and Impact**.

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Organizational Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the overall level of experience of CSOs in the country? Is the sector relatively nascent, or is there a long history of civil society?</li> <li>▪ Have CSOs been able to receive donor funding? If yes, has that been limited to a small group, or is donor funding more widely spread out?</li> <li>▪ To what extent do CSOs have financial management plans in place?</li> <li>▪ Do CSOs overall plan and budget for interventions?</li> <li>▪ Do most CSOs have mission statements? Do they regularly develop annual or longer-term workplans?</li> <li>▪ How able are CSOs to develop and implement strategic plans? How much participation by members is there with respect to strategic planning?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs adequately staffed? Are human resources well managed? Are CSOs able to maintain permanent, paid staff?</li> <li>▪ Do CSOs have adequate human resources practices for staff, including contracts, job descriptions, payroll software, and personnel policies?</li> <li>▪ Do CSOs generally have monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans in place?</li> <li>▪ How able are CSOs to revise projects to respond to changing conditions?</li> <li>▪ What is the average longevity of CSOs in the country?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs based exclusively in the capital, or do they have broader regional or national reach?</li> <li>▪ What do CSOs view as their most significant challenges with respect to organizational management?</li> <li>▪ How is the sector funded and resourced? How does this shape accountability dynamics across stakeholders? (e.g., accountable to donors vs. beneficiaries)</li> <li>▪ To what extent have international actors (donors, international organizations, international CSOs) contributed to the sector?</li> <li>▪ Does the government fund CSOs?</li> <li>▪ Have CSOs been able to attract diverse sources of funding, including local sources?</li> </ul>	Background desk research including CSOSI, CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI), Pact’s Capacity Solutions Platform; KIIs; FGDs (focus groups especially pertinent in gathering information on overall sector capacity issues)



Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
CSO Support Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are there CSO resource centers, innovation hubs, umbrellas, or coalitions that CSOs can turn to for information, training, technical assistance, or other support? If so, are such resources respected and viewed as fair and even-handed, or do they instead cater only to specific favored organizations?</li> <li>▪ What are the primary umbrella organizations or coalitions? Are they effective? Representative? What issues do they cover? Are they independent? To what extent are there intermediary support organizations such as CSO resource centers or innovation hubs that provide training or other services to CSOs?</li> <li>▪ Are there local community foundations or intermediary support organizations that provide funding? Are the selection processes generally viewed as fair?</li> <li>▪ What is the general nature of relationships among CSOs? Are they mutually supportive, or do they undermine and compete with each other?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs active in advocating for the sector? For example, have they developed voluntary codes of conduct or advocated for changes in law or regulations impacting on CSOs?</li> <li>▪ Have CSOs formed issue-based coalitions or conducted broad-based advocacy campaigns? If so, to what effect?</li> </ul>	KII, and, particularly, FGDs consisting of a variety of CSOs
Technical Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent do or can CSOs use digital technologies? To what extent is technology integrated into the organizations?</li> <li>▪ Do CSOs use social media, and if so, have social media strategies? Do they have websites, blogs, social media accounts (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram)?</li> <li>▪ Does CSO staff have adequate technology capacity to use computers, office software, communications software, data storage, etc.?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs aware of information security risks? Do they employ good digital hygiene to keep themselves and their data safe?</li> <li>▪ For democracy-oriented CSOs, have they been able to conduct broad-based advocacy campaigns? Have advocacy campaigns been successful?</li> <li>▪ For democracy-oriented CSOs, have they been able to effectively interact with media organizations? Mobilize citizens?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs able to adequately represent interests and concerns of citizens, particularly marginalized populations, to local or national government officials?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs able to efficiently provide services that meet the needs of their constituents? Do they have the professional skills required for the sector in which they work?</li> </ul>	Same as above

**Table A6. Assessing the State of Civil Society—Socioeconomic, Political, and Cultural Environment**

The questions in **Table A6** should be considered in conjunction the text in **Section IV-C: Socioeconomic, Political, and Cultural Environment**, and help provide contextual information relevant to obstacles or opportunities that may impact the viability and effectiveness of the civil society sector.

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Political Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is the regime authoritarian, democratic, post-conflict, or somewhere in between?</li> <li>▪ What is the general nature of the relationship between civil society and the state? Do political leaders view CSOs as threats or as potential partners? Does that attitude vary depending on the type of CSO (i.e., service delivery vs. advocacy)?</li> <li>▪ Historically, who have been the most significant international actors (donors, other governments, etc.) involved in the civil society sector? How have they contributed to the sector’s evolution and to what effect? What influence do they have to drive change?</li> <li>▪ How closely does the government control the media?</li> <li>▪ To what extent does the government allow or encourage citizen participation in government decision-making?</li> <li>▪ Is the space for reform opening or closing? Why?</li> <li>▪ Do government officials and institutions rely on CSOs as a community resource or a source of expertise or credible information? Does this vary at subnational vs. national levels? Does the sector or issue involved make a difference (e.g., health, education, human rights)?</li> <li>▪ Are there formal or informal mechanisms that facilitate CSO/public participation in dialogue and government decision-making processes?</li> <li>▪ Are parliamentary hearings open to the public?</li> <li>▪ Are there organized roundtable discussions that include government, CSOs, and members of the public? Are invitations to participate open to all CSOs or only to those seen as favoring government policies?</li> <li>▪ Are opportunities for public input available at the local as well as national levels?</li> <li>▪ Are citizen inputs seriously considered by the government, or are the open fora primarily for show?</li> <li>▪ What are government’s expectations of civil society? What does civil society expect from engagement with the government?</li> <li>▪ What are the key elements—legally and institutionally—that remain as barriers to CSO engagement on reform?</li> <li>▪ What risks do CSOs face as they navigate involvement with the government? How can those risks best be managed?</li> </ul>	Background desk research; KIIs; FGDs

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Socioeconomic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the overall economic situation of the country?</li> <li>▪ What is the general attitude toward philanthropy (i.e., Do citizens view it as primarily a government responsibility? Do citizens or companies have the habit of donating to charitable causes?)</li> <li>▪ Have CSOs been able to develop partnerships or relationships with the private sector? Have they been able to mobilize funding from private sources?</li> </ul>	Same as above
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How long has there been a civil society sector?</li> <li>▪ What is the public attitude toward civil society? Has this attitude improved or deteriorated over time?</li> <li>▪ Are there strong leaders in the CSO community? Are they seen by government or the public as insiders or outsiders?</li> <li>▪ Is the media generally free to report on things, or subject to censorship or self-censorship? What is the government's attitude toward the media?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs effective in interacting with media? Is media reporting on the sector generally positive? If not, why not?</li> <li>▪ What is the country's history of informal social movements or mass movements?</li> </ul>	Same as above

**Table A7. Assessing the State of Civil Society—Democratic Culture and Values: Level of Civic Awareness**

The questions included in **Table A7** correspond to the text in **Section IV-D: Democratic Culture and Values: Level of Civic Awareness**.

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Democratic Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent are citizens aware of how government works?</li> <li>▪ Are citizens generally aware of their rights? Is there a history of citizens opposing government actions affecting those rights?</li> <li>▪ Do citizens believe they have a role to play in developing government policy? Do they believe their involvement will make a difference?</li> <li>▪ Does the government encourage citizen participation in government decision-making, either through public fora or government/citizen committees? If so, what is the level of citizen participation?</li> <li>▪ Are there other means available to engage in public policy dialogue, e.g., community radio or television call-in programs, university events?</li> <li>▪ How do citizens get information, e.g., traditional media, social media, radio, word of mouth, religious institutions?</li> <li>▪ Are there elections? If so, are elections generally free and fair? What is the level of citizen participation in elections?</li> <li>▪ How democratic (participation, tolerance, inclusion, etc.) are citizens' values and attitudes? Are there gender, demographic, geographical differences? Does this vary depending on the issues involved?</li> <li>▪ Which societal institutions or actors are promoting or have the capacity to promote democratic values, attitudes, and/or behaviors (e.g., civil society, media (including traditional and social media), national and/or local government, parliament, the private sector, influential individuals, etc.)? How successful are they? Can their efforts be enhanced?</li> <li>▪ Are there societal institutions or actors promoting undemocratic values, attitudes, and/or behaviors? How successful are they? Can their impact be mitigated?</li> </ul>	Public opinion surveys if available, democracy-focused barometers (AB for Africa, LAPOP for Latin America; donor and other reports; KIs, FGDs)
Civic Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is civic education a part of school curricula in primary and secondary schools? How supportive is the government with respect to civic education?</li> <li>▪ What opportunities are there outside of school for learning about rights and government processes?</li> <li>▪ How active is civil society in informing / educating citizens about public issues? To what extent does this include human rights issues, including more sensitive topics such as LGBTI rights?</li> <li>▪ Do CSOs advocate for or encourage greater citizen participation in governmental processes?</li> <li>▪ How receptive have citizens been to efforts to increase civic participation? What is the level of participation in public fora or events that provide the possibility of input into governmental decisions?</li> </ul>	Same as above.

**Table A8. Assessing the State of Civil Society—Effectiveness and Impact**

The questions in **Table A8** correspond to the text in **Section IV-E, Effectiveness and Impact**, and provide contextual information relevant to obstacles or opportunities that may impact the viability and effectiveness of the civil society sector. Some questions also are relevant to **Section IV-B, Organizational and Technical Capacity**.

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Effectiveness and Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are CSO leaders able to articulate needs and represent their constituencies?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs’ social media messages effective, e.g., influenced by public attitudes on issues or toward the CS sector?</li> <li>▪ What has been the track record for CSOs implementing projects or carrying out activities? How successful have they been in achieving their goals? What explains their degree of success? If not successful, why not?</li> <li>▪ Have advocacy campaigns been able to influence government policy? If not, what may be missing?</li> <li>▪ If there have been mass social movements, have they resulted in the desired change?</li> <li>▪ Have CSOs been able to establish good relationships with the government? Can they interact effectively with political leaders? With the public? If not, why not?</li> <li>▪ Do CSOs effectively represent interests, needs, and concerns of all socioeconomic, political, religious, ethnic, gender, or other groups? Are any groups excluded? If so, why?</li> <li>▪ Have CSOs been able to promote stronger citizen involvement in governmental decision-making processes?</li> </ul>	Public opinion surveys if available; democracy-focused barometers (AB for Africa, LAPOP for Latin America; donor and other reports; KIIs; FGDs)

**Table A9. Assessing the State of Civil Society—External Influences and Emerging Trends**

The questions included in **Table A9** correspond to **Section IV-F: External Influences and Emerging Trends of the CSAT**.

Area to Be Examined	Illustrative Questions	Primary Sources of Information
Resurgent Authoritarian Influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How active are actors such as China and Russia in development or other activities in the country? What sectors are they involved in?</li> <li>▪ What are Mission or State Department staff impressions (unclassified) of the level of risk?</li> <li>▪ To what extent have actors such as China or Russia engaged in financial support to fringe political movements, disinformation campaigns, or use of corrupt networks and economic dominance to exert influence over government policy?</li> </ul>	Background desk research; KIs; interviews with Mission or USG officials
Cyber-attacks or Disinformation Campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent are the government or authoritarian powers using digital technology to surveil CSO activities? To what extent does it have the capacity to block or filter Internet content?</li> <li>▪ Is state-sponsored “trolling” occurring in the country?</li> <li>▪ Have there been instances of Internet shut-downs or partial shutdowns that prevent civil society actors from communicating with each other or with citizens?</li> <li>▪ What is the extent of social media manipulation?</li> <li>▪ To what extent is the public of the civil society community aware of and able to recognize social media manipulation?</li> <li>▪ Are CSOs equipped to protect their networks from electronic intrusion?</li> <li>▪ Are there safe places for on-site and off-site data storage?</li> </ul>	Same as above



## IX. ANNEX B: CLOSING SPACE—TACTICS AND EXAMPLES<sup>24</sup>

Tactic	Description	Country Examples
Loose or Vague Legal Frameworks	Governments intentionally obscure the legal permissions required for civil society actors and organizations. CSOs can be dissolved under thin pretense, with the uncertainty driving self-censorship and undercutting long-term planning.	Cambodia enacted a new Law on Associations and NGOs in August 2015 that, among other provisions, bans unregistered organizations while vaguely defining which groups are required to register, requires “political neutrality” of CSOs and gives the Ministry of Interior full control over registration.
Burdensome CSO Registration	Governments impose odious registration requirements, impeding the establishment and operation of organizations.	In South Sudan, a 2016 law imposes substantial and costly registration renewal, documentation, and hiring requirements. It prevents CSOs from engaging in activities other than those agreed on in advance with the government; requires expatriates to secure work permits before arriving in South Sudan; and removes some legal recourse for CSOs appealing government decisions.
Denial of Registration	Broad provisions give restrictive governments’ license to deny registration to any viable organization they view as a potential threat.	The government of Azerbaijan has lost at least five cases before the European Court of Human Rights, which has found denials of registration to violate the freedom of association.
Approval for Activities	Governments require organizations to screen individual activities, allowing government agents to closely monitor activities and filter any unfavorable actions.	In Ethiopia, charities and societies raising more than 10 percent of their income from foreign sources may not engage in activities listed in Article 14 (j–n) of the <i>Charities and Societies Proclamation</i> , including advancement of human and democratic rights; promotion of equality and rights of the disabled and children; conflict resolution; and promotion of efficiency in judicial and law enforcement services.
Unfavorable Taxes and Fees	Governments have taken a variety of approaches to drain organizations’ resources, such as denying tax benefits, levying fees, and imposing stiff bureaucratic penalties for any noncompliance.	In Zimbabwe, some CSOs are forced by local authorities to pay exorbitant fees (up to \$1,000 per year) to carry out their work. If an organization refuses, no Memorandum of Understanding is granted, and the CSO’s activities are not allowed to proceed.
Limits on External Funding	Foreign funding can be a critical source of revenue for civil society, whether from diaspora groups, bilateral donors, or multinational organizations. Governments have hampered civil society by taxing, diminishing, or blocking such funding.	In October 2016, Bangladesh enacted the Foreign Donations Regulation Law, which includes new administrative hurdles and penalties for foreign-funded NGOs for vague offenses such as “making derogatory statements against the Constitution and constitutional bodies.”

<sup>24</sup> The examples and tactics are from The Foreign Service Journal article “Supporting Civil Society in the Face of Closing Space” (Afrasiabi & Shualy, 2018)

Tactic	Description	Country Examples
Restrictions on Freedom of Expression and Assembly	Authoritarian regimes continue to stifle opposing voices; as activists have turned to the Internet and social media to communicate, repressive governments have kept pace with online censorship and digital attacks.	Since 2012, Russia has intensified a crackdown on freedom of expression online, threatening user privacy and secure communication, and instituting greater controls over content. Measures such as local data storage laws make it easier for the authorities to identify users and access personal information without judicial oversight. While these measures are in the early stages of implementation—and the extent to which they can and will be enforced remains unclear—the message about greater state control is clear.
Criminalization	Some countries have criminalized failure to comply with certain CSO law provisions, such as registration and reporting.	In Egypt, a new, extremely restrictive NGO bill ratified by the president in May 2017 gave a legal role to security and intelligence officials in deciding on the registration of NGOs and their ability to access domestic and foreign funding. Under the bill, violations carry very harsh penalties ranging from one to five years' imprisonment in addition to fines ranging from 50,000 Egyptian pounds (approximately \$3,125) to 1 million Egyptian pounds (approximately \$62,500).
Government-sponsored Competition	To maintain a pretext of civil society without risking opposition, regimes frequently establish government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) that act as proxies for the ruling regime, mimicking official positions while crowding out other civil society actors.	Russia provides grant funding to NGOs through the Presidential Grant Foundation for the Development of Civil Society. Though it is possible to interpret these grants as a concession to restrictions on NGOs receiving foreign funding, the majority of the available resources went to pro-government groups. For others, the presidential grants represent possible cooptation by the state, particularly as other funding options decrease in the face of legislative and other pressures. These groups must weigh whether accepting public financing places them at risk of becoming GONGOs.
Defamation	Regimes resort to smear campaigns to undercut CSOs' legitimacy and popularity; labeling groups as puppets of foreign powers is common, as are defamatory claims against oppositional individuals.	President Duterte's public statements in the Philippines against critics of his war against illegal drugs, including human rights groups, are seen as attempts to silence dissent.
Violence and Intimidation	Governments employ techniques such as attacks on peaceful demonstrators, threats to CSO personnel, arbitrary detention, arrest and prosecution with draconian sentences, forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, digital surveillance, and the criminalization of civil society Internet use.	In Iran, more than 700 human rights defenders and political activists, such as Abdolfattah Soltani, remain in prison for their peaceful activities. In May 2016, a revolutionary court sentenced prominent Iranian human rights activist Narges Mohammadi, who had been detained for a year, to a total of 16 years in prison on charges of "membership in the banned campaign Step by Step to Stop the Death Penalty" and meeting with the former E.U. High Representative for Foreign Affairs.

## X. ANNEX C: MISSION PRIORITIES, BUDGET, COLLABORATION, GENDER, AND COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES

This annex provides ideas for Mission staff to consider when making decisions regarding priorities, funding levels, potential collaboration opportunities, gender considerations, and comparative advantages.

**Priorities.** To further analyze these components, the assessment team should first consider any overarching political, economic, or other interests in the country from a U.S. foreign policy perspective. There may also be conflicting interests within the USG, particularly in countries where U.S. political interests are high. These conflicting interests and the trade-offs involved in prioritizing one interest over another should be highlighted in the strategy recommendations. The Mission should consider particular interests, such as support for youth or LGBTI groups, prior and current civil society programming, as well as other USAID or USG assistance programs that may relate to or affect civil society, such as media, labor, or human rights.

**Budget.** The assessment team should then consider the realistic levels of funding available. If funding is limited, the team may wish to select very strategic and targeted interventions that address the Mission's highest priorities or the most critical concerns revealed from the assessment. It may be worth considering multi-donor or multilateral strategies to combine funding and efforts of other donors, the government, international agencies, or the private sector to maximize impact.

**Collaboration.** In addition to identifying potential opportunities for collaboration, the assessment team should examine what is already being done by other stakeholders, including other USAID or donor programs, both to avoid duplication and determine how new programming could complement or strengthen those efforts, if appropriate. In many countries, particularly in restrictive environments, USAID may be the leading donor or be in the strongest political situation to support reform-oriented CSOs. In such situations, USAID's added value can be a significant factor in promoting a stronger, more resilient, and effective civil society.

**Gender.** Gender considerations are important, as are considerations relating to other vulnerable or marginalized groups. The assessment team should be aware of USAID's Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment, USAID's Policy on Youth in Development, USAID Policy on Countering Trafficking in Persons, the US Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence, and the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.

**Comparative Advantage.** The Mission may choose to integrate civil society components into other programs rather than procuring stand-alone civil society programs, while still elevating the voice of civil society actors and ensuring they are equal partners in the development effort.

The assessment may have revealed practical constraints on the part of the potential recipient(s) with respect to the ability to absorb assistance, effective fund management, personnel resources, potential risks in authoritarian states, receptivity to U.S. assistance, and so on; these will need to be taken into account.

## XI. ANNEX D: ILLUSTRATIVE APPROACHES

This annex offers some ideas for activities that may help to address the challenges identified through the assessment team’s analysis of the factors examined under Section IV. This is, of course, not a comprehensive listing, and each country’s contextual factors and USAID Mission priorities will be different, but they are offered as illustrative options. Restrictive environments, a country’s level of development, the extent to which a democratic culture exists, and other factors will impact on available options.

### A. LEGAL AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

If the assessment team concludes improvements are needed with respect to the legal and regulatory environment within which civil society operates, or with how regulations are implemented, the team should explore ways in which the Mission, as well as other USAID operating units and USG agencies, can work together to engage in and promote an improved policy environment for civil society, roll back restrictions in constrained environments and prevent new restrictions from being enacted, and seek new and innovative ways to improve the regulatory framework. Additional guidance is also available in *ADS 201MAY: “Key Considerations for Programming in Politically Sensitive Countries.”* Options include:

#### Supporting CSO coalitions or umbrella groups to advocate for legal changes

- ✓ Transparent and equitable laws enabling CSOs to register and carry out activities
- ✓ Laws to improve the financial enabling environment, such as tax provisions to encourage donations or allowing CSOs to undertake commercial activities
- ✓ Laws improving access to information, regulating data protection and privacy, and combating internet misinformation
- ✓ Platforms and learning hubs for CSOs to exchange knowledge and information to further their advocacy, as well as to ensure appropriate technical assistance to local CSOs leading reform efforts

#### Empowering civil society to better engage with government, parliaments, or regulatory bodies

- ✓ Support efforts to develop better working relationships among CSOs, officials, legislators, regulators
- ✓ Provide technical assistance to CSOs and governments (where receptive) to develop or revise legislation in keeping with international best practices
- ✓ Create cross-sectoral coalitions to promote an improved regulatory environment
- ✓ Support processes prioritizing inclusion and cross-sectoral approaches to legislative drafting and policy development, thus giving CSOs opportunities to work with government or parliamentary colleagues early in the process (ICNL, 2018)

Because laws and regulations are often used to control or suppress civil society in politically restrictive environments, as discussed in Section III-C, activities to address the legal environment can be combined with other approaches to respond to politically restrictive space as set forth in **Figure DI**.

## Figure D1. Potential Programming for Politically Restrictive Environments

Many resources exist offering guidance and suggestions for specific programming that may be effective for supporting CSOs in closing space.<sup>24F24F25</sup> Two excellent resources include ICNL's *Effective Donor Responses—Donor Responses to the Challenge of Closing Civic Space*,<sup>25F25F26</sup> and Transparency and Accountability Initiative's *Closing Civic Space: Grantee Challenges and Funder Responses*.<sup>26F26F27</sup> USAID's DRG Center has available other helpful resources:

- ✓ Advisory Committee for Voluntary Foreign Assistance (ACVFA) Sub-Committee on Working in Closed and Closing Spaces: Programmatic and Operational Approaches and Guidance<sup>27F27F28</sup>
- ✓ USAID's 3-day Supporting Civil Society In Politically Restrictive Environments Training
- ✓ USAID Essential Resources on Supporting Civil Society in Politically Restrictive Environments
- ✓ DRG Center's Election Credibility Framework and ADS 201 Reference—Key Considerations for Programming in Politically Sensitive Countries<sup>28F28F29</sup>

USAID also supports preventive programming to increase CSO resilience to address threats of financial constraints, restrictive and politicized legal environment, harassment and direct attacks, divisive narratives and control of media, fragmented and isolated civil society sector, state surveillance, and emerging conflict dynamics.<sup>29F29F30</sup>

## B. ORGANIZATIONAL AND TECHNICAL CAPACITY

The Mission may have identified a desire to strengthen the civil society sector in itself, or it may have expressed interest in strengthening civil society capacity in particular areas, such as those relating to democracy or to areas identified in the country's J2SR roadmap. The assessment team has likely identified various capacity gaps, keeping in mind Mission and other priorities. USAID's traditional approach of training to build specific skills such as financial management, human resource management, and planning has undergone a major shift in thinking in recent years to a wider systems-based approach that seeks to increase engagement and communications between and among organizations, tailored to their individual contexts. Building on the traditional focus on transferring knowledge and skills through training and consulting, the Capacity 2.0 approach emphasizes improving communication and collaboration along with adaptive approaches to meet changing circumstances.<sup>31</sup> It measures success of the training by actual performance, not by numbers of staff trained or financial systems put in place.

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<sup>25</sup> Lifeline's *Toolkit: Advocacy in Restrictive Spaces*: <https://www.csolifeline.org/advocacy-toolkit>

<sup>26</sup> See: <https://www.icnl.org/post/report/effective-donor-responses>

<sup>27</sup> See: <https://www.transparency-initiative.org/civic-space-compendium/>

<sup>28</sup> See: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/ACVFA-Sub-Committee-DRG-Report-I-20-2020.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> See: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/201may.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> See: <https://www.inspiresconsortium.org/resiliency-plus> and [https://www.partnersglobal.org/yes-to-resiliency-but-how-does-civil-society-become-more-resilient-in-these-uncertain-times/?utm\\_source=iContact&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Julia+Roig&utm\\_content=](https://www.partnersglobal.org/yes-to-resiliency-but-how-does-civil-society-become-more-resilient-in-these-uncertain-times/?utm_source=iContact&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Julia+Roig&utm_content=)

<sup>31</sup> The Capacity 2.0 approach can be found at <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/capacity-20>

Sector-strengthening activities, depending on the team's analysis, could include activities to:

- ✓ Improve and support organizational management skills, including human resources, capacity and talent management, financial management, and staff motivation and retention
- ✓ Promote improved strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation
- ✓ Strengthen trust by promoting inclusion of under or non-represented groups such as youth, women, persons with disabilities, and minority groups
- ✓ Improve communications and outreach
- ✓ Build coalitions and increase networking skills

Technical capacity-building in democracy related or other areas could include activities to improve CSO capacity to:

- ✓ Conduct policy research and analysis and promote policy reform
- ✓ Monitor for human rights violations
- ✓ Mediate conflicts
- ✓ Engage in public outreach and advocacy
- ✓ Improve service delivery
- ✓ Increase access to justice
- ✓ Promote women's participation in electoral processes

With the increased use of social media, the assessment team has likely examined whether CSOs have the technical capacity and means to use social platforms to improve their effectiveness, expand their outreach, and enhance communications. At the same time, there is a need to be mindful of the potential for leaving marginalized populations even further behind by over-reliance on digital technology. CSOs may need technical training and financial support to obtain and safely use computers, servers, anti-virus software, and other information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure. In politically restrictive environments, it may be critically important to improve CSO capacity to protect themselves and their constituents from digital technology abuse, including surveillance, hacking, and the use of social media to distort messages.

Other programming ideas relating to capacity building can be found in USAID's Capacity Development 2.0: A Systems Approach to Capacity Development.<sup>32</sup>

### **Socio-economic, political, and cultural environment**

The assessment team's analysis of the socio-economic, political, and cultural environment is relevant to identifying contextual opportunities and obstacles to supporting the civil society sector overall, but it may have revealed particular areas in which USAID could focus programming:

- ✓ Activities to help improve public attitudes towards the civil society sector;
- ✓ Activities to improve relationships with the government, parliament, or local officials; and,
- ✓ Activities to increase involvement of and relationships with the private sector to promote improved financial sustainability.

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<sup>32</sup> Available at <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/capacity-2.0>



## Democratic culture and values; level of civic awareness

If the assessment team noted low levels of citizen awareness of their rights, of government processes, or of ways to get involved in governmental decision-making, USAID has resource materials that may be helpful in forming recommendations for responding. Promoting stronger awareness of democratic values and attitudes may be particularly fruitful over the long term with respect to youth. Some illustrative activities include:

- ✓ Formal and non-formal activities that promote knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors desired of citizens to increase political participation and civic engagement
- ✓ Civic education and engagement activities targeting youth, women, or other groups
- ✓ Promoting partnerships, coalitions, and networks between media organizations and civil society for engagement with actors including government
- ✓ Encouraging active participation of young people in age-appropriate activities that advance social and civic outcomes
- ✓ Activities to promote greater public awareness of government activities through community radio stations, particularly in countries where radio is the primary source of information
- ✓ Promoting policy changes to reduce barriers to information, create opportunities for citizen participation in government decision-making
- ✓ Promoting civic education in schools or through CSOs to instill knowledge of political systems, individual rights and responsibilities, and democratic values
- ✓ Activities to support information literacy among citizens, CSOs, and government stakeholders
- ✓ CSO/media partnerships to improve media and social media literacy so that citizens can apply critical thinking to distinguish between reliable and “fake news” sources

If mass social movements are a part of the country’s landscape, the assessment team may wish to recommend options for support. Supporting movements seeking nonviolent change may be critical to preventing violent conflict and may also encourage democratic development. Although social movements fall under the overall umbrella of civil society, they are often fluid, diverse, decentralized, and loosely organized, thus very different from the traditional CSOs that USAID supports.

Supporting civic movements requires creative new approaches and a willingness to take calculated financial and political risks, particularly in countries whose governments are close allies of the United States. At the same time, USAID must be mindful of the fact that foreign aid could delegitimize local grassroots movements and leave them susceptible to charges of being foreign government tools. It is a tricky path to navigate, but it may be important to do so. Some suggestions are also found in

**Figure 5. Ways to Support Mass Social Movements** located above in **Section III-C: Emerging and Cross-Cutting Trends**.

## Effectiveness and impact

If the assessment team determines that the civil society sector has not been effective in a particular country, any proposed programmatic recommendations to address the lack of effectiveness necessarily depend on the team’s analysis of the underlying reasons. If it is due to a lack of capacity, some ideas are proposed in the Organizational and technical capacity subsection above. If the underlying reasons relate to governmental interference, an onerous legal enabling environment, public mistrust of the sector, or other reasons, the team should review potential solutions from subsections of this CSAT addressing the underlying cause.

## External influences and emerging trends

In responding to adverse external influences and politically restrictive environments, the first consideration is “do no harm.” Among other things, this means taking precautions to avoid putting local civil society leaders or organizations in danger, keeping in mind that the CSOs themselves may be in the best position to gauge the risks they may incur and decide whether to take those risks. Providing emergency legal or other assistance or support for enhancing physical, digital, and psychological security of human rights defenders or other vulnerable CSOs, along with providing access to local and international networks, may be crucial. Authoritarian regimes typically present challenges in understanding dynamics within the regime, thus making it more difficult to understand the opportunities for and barriers to political change. Care must also be taken to ensure programs do not inadvertently shore up a repressive regime or put USAID in the position of being seen as supporting repressive regimes.

Civil society has a large role to play in ensuring that digital technology serves the public good, through reform, improved governance, and as equal partners in the design and implementation of emerging technology. To the extent possible, they should be involved in Internet governance, regulation, and regional and global discussions—engaging with regional groups and advocating for national, regional, and international guidelines. Illustrative activities to respond to digital technology threats, politically restrictive environments, and efforts by adverse external influences may include:<sup>33</sup>

- ✓ Providing training and tools for civil society to defend against cyber-attacks, surveillance, social media manipulation, abusive data collection, and the like
- ✓ Supporting organizations to enhance their physical security, psycho-social health, and otherwise increase resilience
- ✓ Building the capacity of a wide range of civil society actors to safeguard civic freedoms within digital environments through policy and advocacy (ICNL, 2020)
- ✓ Providing training for civil society, particularly human rights communities, to expand digital technology skills to better engage on issues of digital authoritarianism and respond to state-controlled domains
- ✓ Supporting CSOs to ensure a democratic, multi-stakeholder model (government + civil society + private sector) of the Internet at local, regional, and global levels
- ✓ Developing campaigns on best practices to protect internet freedom, using civic education to alert the public to dangers and opportunities
- ✓ Providing media literacy programs on how to evaluate credibility of online media sources and identify disinformation
- ✓ Educating voters on how to spot political disinformation or flag misleading social media content and develop strategies to counter potential interference tactics (possibly through engagement with election commissions)
- ✓ Providing activities to raise public awareness of government censorship and surveillance efforts
- ✓ Providing activities, possibly in partnership with the private sector, to promote fact-checking with respect to government and other communications and serve as watchdogs regarding

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<sup>33</sup> Additional recommendations are provided in Advisory Committee for Voluntary Foreign Assistance (ACVFA), “Democracy, Rights and Governance Sub-Committee on Working in Closed and Closing Spaces: Programmatic and Operational Approaches and Guidance,” <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/ACVFA-Sub-Committee-DRG-Report-1-20-2020.pdf>

government collaboration with hostile regimes, particularly China, that may be actively promoting methods of social control and surveillance

- ✓ Partnering with the private sector to work on Internet governance issues where there are shared interests in protecting freedoms of association, assembly, and expression online
- ✓ Considering locating activities off-shore with reach-back to local partners if international implementing partners (IP) cannot register or operate in the country<sup>34</sup>
- ✓ Supporting CSOs to work remotely and travel abroad for exchanges, conferences, and learning
- ✓ Providing flexible funding through small grants and rapid response funds that can be directed for different purposes within broad program objectives as the landscape of threats and opportunities shift
- ✓ Provide short-term emergency response funding for legal defense, relocation, psychological counseling, or provision of protective digital technologies to counter government surveillance efforts

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<sup>34</sup> In 2016, when a USAID implementer for a civic engagement project in Rwanda was unable to register after 10 months of effort, USAID moved similar activities to international implementing partners' regional offices in Nairobi. From Nairobi, they were able to work with local partners in Rwanda.