



Baseline, Monitoring and Midterm Evaluation Strengthening Civil Society

**Strengthening Civil Society in the Occupied Palestinian
Territories and other fragile contexts**

Client: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands, Management Board Social Development

Rotterdam, 22 July 2024

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Draft report

Client: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Netherlands, Management Board Social
Development

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List of abbreviations

ADA	Austrian Development Cooperation
AWRAD	Arab World for Research and Development
BF	Burkina Faso
CBOs	Community-Based Organisations
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DQA	Data Quality Assessment
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FCS	Fragile, Conflict and otherwise challenging Situations
INCAF	International Network on Conflict and Fragility
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisations
IQ	Iraq
L&A	Lobby and Advocacy
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer plus
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MTR	Mid-Term Review
MZ	Mozambique
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPT, PS	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PMEL	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
RNE	Royal Netherland Embassy
RoL	Rule of Law
SCS	Strengthening Civil Society
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SS	South Sudan
ToC	Theory of Change
TPM	Third Party Monitoring
WRGE	Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Executive Summary

Background

The Ecorys, Beyond Group, and AWRAD consortium implements an evaluation assignment for the Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Due to conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), the MFA has requested the consortium to reconfigure the planned Mid-Term review (MTR) to a more general study of the assumptions underlying the SCS Theory of Change and their validity in countries affected by conflict and fragility. As already found in workshops and stakeholder interviews in the context of the evaluation assignment, many of the assumptions underpinning the ToC cannot be taken for granted in fragile and conflict settings (FCS). There is a need to better understand how the ToC can be adapted to achieve the desired impacts of the SCS policy framework. The main objective of this study is therefore to provide insights for the adaptation of the SCS ToC to FCS.

Approach, methodology and limitations

Our study approach takes the Theory of Change and underlying assumptions of the SCS policy framework as a starting point. The study is forward-looking and aimed at establishing what can be done if underlying assumptions do not materialise. The evaluation team has developed a research matrix, which presents the main research questions, indicators and data collection and analysis methods. The main data collection tools included a global-level desk review and five country-level case studies.

The desk review included 78 sources ranging from peer-reviewed academic sources, policy briefs and evaluations to a limited number of informal sources. They were collected and published from different stakeholder perspectives, including research institutions, CSOs, INGOs and donor organisations. The countries selected for case studies are Burkina Faso, Iraq, OPT, Mozambique, and South Sudan. For each country, a national-level desk research was complemented with interviewing stakeholders including civil society organisations (CSOs, NGOs, INGOs), donor organisations and independent experts. In total, 49 interviews were held. Data was first analysed per source and then synthesized per case study country and globally. A presentation of preliminary findings was held for the MFA and a validation workshop with interview participants took place before the development of the final draft report. This was reviewed by the Reference Group and revised accordingly.

Challenges and limitations that apply to this study include:

- The scope and size of the study, being a modest review rather than a comprehensive and thorough research. This limits the generalisability and robustness of findings but allowed for a relatively quick overview of findings and recommendations for the MFA to use in the short term.
- The ongoing conflict in the OPT, limiting the data collected for OPT to mostly secondary and earlier collected sources (prior to 7 October 2023).
- Potential biases from team members and interview respondents, mitigated by careful interview set-up and data triangulation.
- Dominance of Northern-based organisations in literature sources, although they often include the voices and perspectives of Southern-based organisations, communities, and individuals.

Definitions used

In this study, we have used the concept of civil society as uncoerced human association or interaction by which individuals implement individual or collective action to address shared needs, ideas, interests, values, faith, and beliefs that they have identified in common, as well as the formal,

semi-, or non-formal forms of associations and the individuals involved in them. Civil society organisations represent civil society in these activities. Civil society plays different roles: our different roles: educational (internal & external); communicative (linking state & society); representational role (voice & resistance); and cooperative role (subsidiarity & coordination). We assess civic space as the space where people can securely exercise their rights to freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, and expression.

In this study, fragility refers to how vulnerable or exposed a state or region is to shocks and stressors, such as economic crises, political upheaval, natural disasters, or social unrest, and the coping capacities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks. Equally important is the nuance that no context or country is the same and that while countries may be categorised as FCS, this does not mean that all such countries face the same vulnerabilities or experience the various dimensions of fragility similarly.

Civil society in a shrinking civic space

Civil society - in FCS and elsewhere - is experiencing significant changes, especially where civic space is restricted. Traditional, formal activism is being replaced by more fluid and community-oriented initiatives, particularly among youth. The distinction between civil society organisations (CSOs) and the private sector is increasingly blurred and so is independence from the state. CSOs in FCS are frequently focused on service delivery rather than advocacy due to weak state presence and resources. Service delivery can provide entry points for advocacy and policy engagement as well as additional legitimacy to organisations. Educational roles of CSOs are emphasized, focusing on awareness and peacebuilding. CSOs also facilitate communication between citizens, governments, and other stakeholders, despite restricted civic space. In representing vulnerable groups, CSOs combine advocacy with protection and legal assistance. Addressing shrinking civic space is challenging; efforts to reclaim space through protests often face severe repression. However, coalitions and support from international NGOs have sometimes successfully opposed restrictive legislation.

Lobby and advocacy and its effectiveness

A central assumption in advocacy is that pressure from informed CSOs can influence changes in laws, policies, and norms. This assumption holds partially, somehow more at the local level, while it is less evident nationally. Effective advocacy often depends on conditions like aligning with government priorities and avoiding challenging government legitimacy. Advocacy success is also influenced by adapting to local contexts, leveraging informal channels, and collaborative efforts. In humanitarian contexts, INGOs and international agencies can become advocacy targets as well. Advocacy towards the private sector can succeed with transnational networks. CSOs often couple advocacy with service delivery and awareness-raising to navigate restrictive environments. Advocacy strategies must mitigate risks of backlash, focusing on education, preparation of policy reforms, and collaboration with authorities. Successful advocacy requires continuous effort, contextual sensitivity, and evidence-based approaches to maintain credibility and influence. However, limitations include restricted focus on non-controversial issues and the temporary impact of local improvements.

Legitimacy and representativeness of CSOs

CSOs in FCS derive their legitimacy from various sources, including reputation, specialisation, professional frameworks, and evidence-based practices. Established CSOs with strong governance and accountability are more credible in donor-funded environments. Local presence and tangible results also enhance legitimacy, particularly at community/constituency level. Collaboration with government and access to decision-makers are crucial, although these associations can sometimes backfire if the government is mistrusted. Donors often value formal representation mechanisms and

accountability, which can be challenging for smaller CSOs/CBOs. Donor expectations can lead to a focus on donor agendas rather than local needs, in turn affecting local legitimacy. Successful CSOs manage to balance legitimacy with both donors and local communities. CSOs often rely on traditional, informal methods to represent marginalised groups, which may not meet donor expectations for formal processes. Advocacy on women’s rights and gender equality (WRGE) gains more support when it is context sensitive and involves collaborative, realistic approaches. Gaining support from powerholders and working with all main societal actors is crucial.

Capabilities of CSOs

Key capabilities for CSOs active in FCS include producing credible evidence, building trust with powerholders, networking, effective communication, and context-specific advocacy methods. Technical skills like remote monitoring, financial management, and understanding donor systems are also crucial. In fragile contexts, continuous context analysis, flexibility, and security measures are vital. Combining robustness and adaptability is essential for CSO effectiveness.

Capacity strengthening enhances CSO advocacy effectiveness if it considers contextual realities and promotes sustained efforts. Effective strategies include collaboration, evidence-based lobbying, and forming coalitions. Shifting CSO roles from humanitarian aid to advocacy highlights the need for capacity building of these skills. Sustained mentorship and a realistic focus on specific areas are recommended to ensure lasting impact. However, capacity strengthening alone is not always sufficient due to potential resistance from the civic space environment, including authorities.

Where there is limited societal support for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), forming coalitions can be risky. Local, community-based initiatives and digital campaigns are more effective in those cases. Networking with local, national, and global movements can be beneficial if aligned with local contexts, providing legitimacy and shared resources. However, overly confrontational approaches can lead to adverse consequences.

Types of Support and delivery set-up

Good donor practices in FCS are those that strengthen the durability of CSOs, target also informal civil society and CBOs, enable flexible responses, and mitigate risks of donor dependency as well as CSOs being targeted for receiving external aid. Most suited support is a mix of financial and non-financial support, not imposing external agendas and supporting CSO platforms or networks on the development of their own strategic plans on a multi-annual period. A delivery set-up based on coupling external support - financial support and access to information/knowledge - with peer-to-peer technical assistance and capacity strengthening would be the most suitable option.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study concludes that the SCS ToC is relevant to some extent, but its underlying assumptions are only partially validated in presence of certain characteristics of FCS, as per the table below. A similar assessment has been conducted also on the thematic ToC on WRGE and SRHR.

Table 1: Validation of selected assumptions and fragility and conflict aspects involved

Origin of assumption	Selection of Assumptions	Level of validation	Fragility and conflict aspects involved
SCS ToC	The voices and needs of the most marginalised groups/persons within a society are effectively voiced by Civil Society/Civil Society organisations.	●	Authoritarianism, conflicts and insecurity
	When pressured, informed, and/or persuaded by CSOs, states, companies and societal actors change their laws, policies and/or norms, and their	●	Non-linear and untransparent policy processes, lack of elected legislative bodies

Origin of assumption	Selection of Assumptions	Level of validation	Fragility and conflict aspects involved
	practices to be more sustainable, equitable and inclusive.		
	External aid by the Ministry and (mainly Northern) CSOs can strengthen CSOs in low-income, lower-middle income and higher-middle income countries.	●	Authoritarianism, hostility towards foreign interference
	Capacity strengthening of CSOs can enhance the effectiveness of their lobby and advocacy.	●	Authoritarianism, conflicts and insecurity
	CSOs are in a position to protect or expand civic space.	●	Authoritarianism, non-linear and untransparent policy processes
SRHR ToC	Lobby and advocacy by CSOs can effectively contribute to improved SRHR for all people.	●	Government fragility, non-linear and untransparent policy processes, lack of elected legislative bodies, sectarianism
	A strong voice of civil society in the global south can increase accountability of government vis-à-vis its citizens, for the development of inclusive health systems.	●	Government fragility, lack of accountability mechanisms
	Organised opposition against sexual and reproductive rights can be best countered by strengthening existing coalitions and networks.	●	Sectarianism, hostility towards foreign interference
WRGE ToC	Women's rights organisations play a crucial role in empowering women and girls and in setting in motion structural processes of change geared to gender equality.	●	Government fragility, conflicts and insecurity
	To create an enabling environment for gender equality and to bring about the structural transformation of institutions that perpetuate gender inequality, it is essential to gain the support of and work with government authorities, the private sector, civil society, and knowledge institutions.	●	Government fragility, sectarianism, non-linear and untransparent policy processes
	To bring about structural transformation, links to local, national, regional, and global women's and other movements are central.	●	Sectarianism, hostility towards foreign interference

Recommendations for implementation within the current SCS policy framework include:

- SCS partnerships and MFA should recognise and value (also in terms of monitoring, evaluation, and learning) any intermediate steps towards policy or legislative change, when the latter is not achievable in the programme time frame. This also applies to local-level changes if and where national-level change is hampered by restricted civic space.
- SCS partnerships and MFA should continue supporting CSOs in lobby and advocacy towards Dutch/multinational private actors that can benefit from transnational networks.
- In WRGE and SRHR, MFA should encourage contextualised approaches and adaptation of proposed agendas by INGOs and SCS partnerships, to increase effectiveness and relevance of actions; MFA and partnerships should also encourage knowledge exchange between similar sociocultural contexts on strategies adopted to make actions more context-sensitive.
- MFA should increase coordination between Royal Netherlands Embassies (RNEs) and CSOs supported under the SCS framework to strengthen coherence and coordination at country level.

- MFA should encourage RNEs to join forces with other development partners to engage in dialogue with governments to expand civic space, where the government recognises development partners and vice versa.
- MFA, INGOs and SCS partnerships should adopt a low profile and provide discrete support to CSOs where association with western donors is perceived negatively.

Recommendations for future policy making in fragile contexts include:

- MFA should continue supporting civil society even where governments are not considered partners, however paying attention to avoid negative repercussions on CSOs.
- MFA should commit to the long-term partnerships, with some flexibility in authorising activity changes to adjust programmes to new realities.
- MFA and SCS partnerships should support CSOs on their own agendas and not on agendas defined globally or in the Netherlands.
- MFA should strengthen contextualisation of projects and programmes and discourage implementing partners to adopt one-size-fits-all global approaches to lobby and advocacy.
- MFA should consider different modalities than alliances between INGOs and CSOs to provide capacity strengthening support, such as country level programmes providing direct support to national CSOs.
- MFA should strengthen southern leadership also in terms of more direct support to national CSOs.
- MFA should consult more local CSOs and RNEs in the design of programmes for SCS to increase coherence with bilateral programmes.
- MFA and RNEs should include more actions targeted to the full civil society landscape (CSOs/CBOs, media, powerholders, service providers, etc.) rather than CSOs only.
- MFA should allow for a mix of service delivery and advocacy in projects funded, to enhance legitimacy and effectiveness of CSOs in conflict and humanitarian contexts.
- MFA should apply more consistently the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus approach¹, and support advocacy which takes the form of protection in humanitarian contexts, and of conflict resolution in the context of conflicts. Advocacy towards INGOs and multilateral organisations can also be encouraged and included in supported advocacy activities.
- MFA should mainstream civil society support in sector programmes by supporting civil society-led social accountability activities to improve the quality of service delivery.
- MFA and SCS partnerships should continue to search for ways of ensuring that smaller partners at the 2nd and 3rd tier and individual human right defenders and activists are burdened as less as possible with administrative requirements.
- MFA should revise the ToC of the SCS policy framework:
 - At the level of medium-term impacts, formulate impacts from the point of view of rightsholders and what they will obtain (increased access to social, economic, civil, and political rights), rather than what will be changed (policy, legislation, practices) to allow for more flexibility in strategies to achieve those impacts.
 - At the level of outcomes, include different less "public" forms of influencing; protection, legal defence of individuals; dialogue and collaboration with duty bearers (accountability sessions).
 - At the level of intermediate outcomes, include the assumptions that CSOs preserve themselves in the shrinking civic space, to support also inward-looking activities such as the creation of safe spaces for marginalised groups and resilience building.

¹ The 2019 OECD DAC Recommendation on the HDP nexus calls for "strengthening the coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts" with the aim of "effectively reducing people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities, supporting prevention efforts and thus, shifting from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending need" (P.3) <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf>



Introduction

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The Ecorys, Beyond Group, and AWRAD consortium implements an evaluation assignment for the Policy Framework for Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (see chapter 3 for more information on the SCS policy framework). The assignment focuses on Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) (Lot 3 Middle East and North Africa (MENA)) and is composed of three parts: a Baseline Study; Third-Party Monitoring (TPM) and Data Quality Assessment (DQA); and a Mid-Term Review (MTR). The present situation in OPT does not allow to carry out the MTR as envisaged by the signed contract. Considering the situation, also likely affecting progress of several projects, it is not feasible or ethical to conduct data collection in the country as initially planned whilst partners within the OPT are not able or willing to contribute to this study.

Therefore, the MFA has requested the consortium to reconfigure the planned MTR within OPT with:

- a larger focus on desk study of academic literature and research on SCS;
- an enlarged focus on the assumptions underlying the SCS Theory of Change (ToC) and their validity in the context of the OPT;
- the addition of case-studies on other fragile and conflict settings (FCS) to establish the validity of the assumptions underlying the SCS ToC in these contexts.

The main objective of this study is **to provide insights for the adaptation of the SCS ToC to FCS countries**. As already proven by the ToC workshops conducted in OPT and Lebanon and confirmed in stakeholder interviews in the context of the SCS Baseline, Monitoring and Mid-Term Evaluation (in Lebanon), many of the assumptions underpinning the ToC cannot be taken for granted in FCS. Several of the concepts and approaches used in the SCS policy framework have been developed in contexts in which there is a counterpart (government, private sector, etc.) which is able and willing to make decisions and implement them. In FCS, such counterpart may not exist, or be extremely weak or unwilling to respond². Strengthening civil society in such contexts requires a different understanding of the influencing role and the related capabilities needed by CSOs, taking into account their diversity. There is therefore the need to better understand how the ToC can be adapted to achieve the desired impacts of the SCS policy framework.

1.2 The SCS policy framework

The SCS policy framework 2021-2025 of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a focus on CSOs to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The framework intends to contribute to poverty reduction and strengthen people's voice in both fragile and stable contexts. Within the broader SDG agenda, the MFA focuses on SDG 5, aiming at promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The MFA identified this as a goal of all components of its Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (BHOS) policy. Also, youth empowerment is considered a priority throughout the framework³.

² In this report, the concept of FCS is broadened to "otherwise challenging" contexts, including authoritarian regimes that are unwilling to engage constructively with civil society; this is why we also often refer to "shrinking civic space" as a phenomenon encompassing both fragile and conflict settings and authoritarian settings.

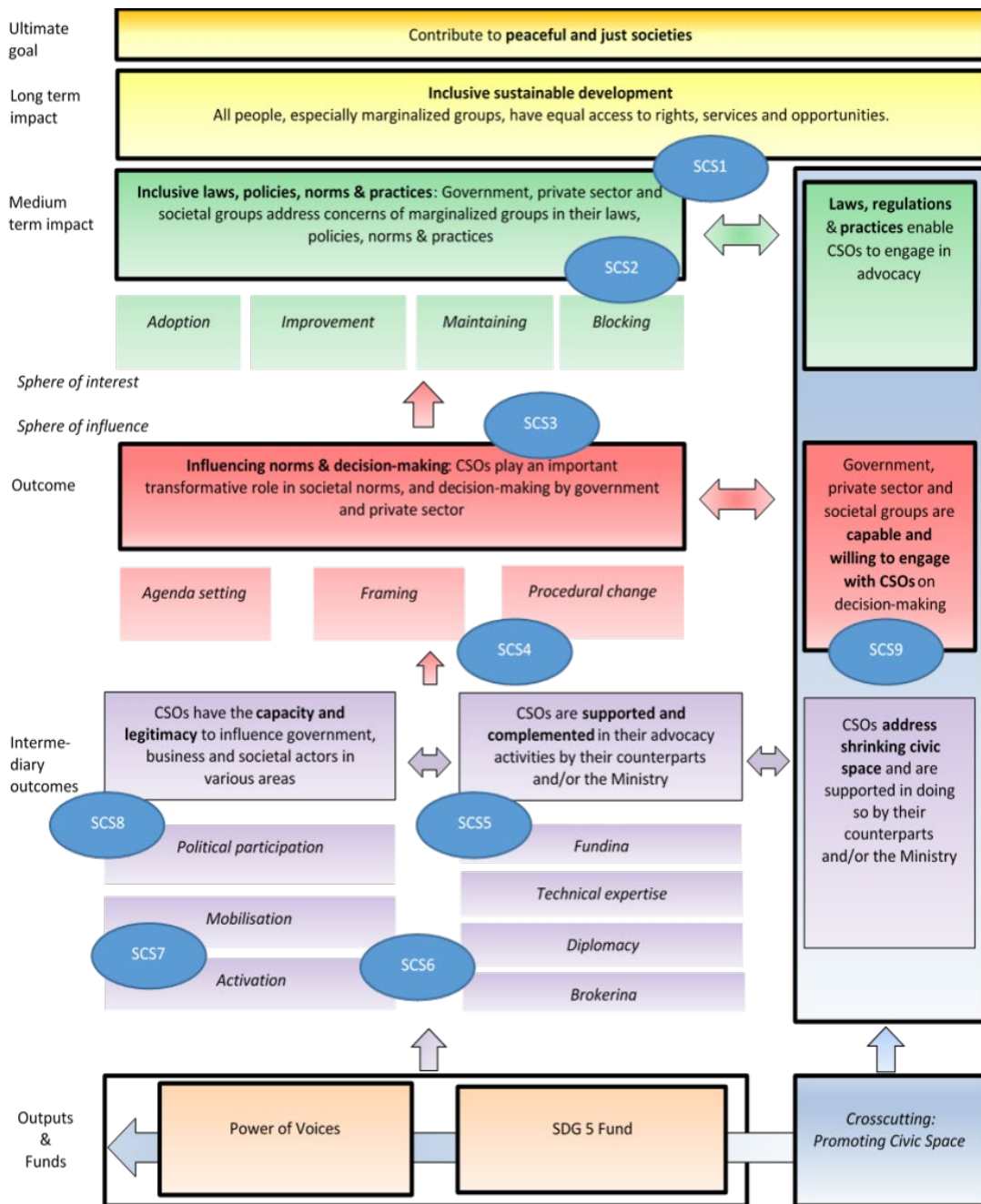
³ The Framework finances in total 42 strategic partnerships and 4 Leading from the South funds around SCS worldwide between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2025. The SCS Policy Framework is divided into two grant instruments (Power

The ToC underlying the SCS framework is presented on the next page. It summarises the more direct results of the outputs or policy instruments (mobilisation, funding, diplomacy, technical expertise etc.), as well as short and long run outcomes, and visualises nine SCS indicators. Support for civil society is based on the principle that a diverse and pluralist civil society is both a goal in itself and a means for sustainable and inclusive development, good governance, and responsible citizenship. It shows that in the long run, the SCS policy framework is expected to contribute to sustainable inclusive development for all and fight against poverty and injustice by promoting civil society's political role. Compared to previous policy frameworks, this one presents a shift in focus from aid aimed directly at combating poverty through service delivery to aid aimed at tackling the root causes of poverty and (gender)inequality through lobby and advocacy⁴.

of Voices and the SDG 5 Fund), and again into six sub-grant instruments. For the topics of SRHR and WRGE, separate ToCs and assumptions are made that provide more details to the overall SCS ToC. The instruments related to WRGE and SRHR are:

1. Power of Women (PoW): The PoW grant instrument aims to strengthen CSOs so that they are capable of lobbying and advocacy, with a specific focus on further implementing the Dutch Action Plan 1325.
 2. Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR) Partnership Fund: The SRHR Fund aims to strengthen SRHR including enhanced knowledge, greater availability of modern contraceptives, increased use of SRHR services, and reduced maternal and AIDS mortality.
 3. Women, Peace, and Security (WPS): The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) grant instrument aims to strengthen civil society organisations so that they are capable of lobbying and advocacy, with a specific focus on further implementing NAP1325
 4. Leading from the south (LFS): The LFS grant instrument provides direct support to Southern feminist women's organisation, movements, and networks, through four regional women's funds.
- ⁴ Executive summary Strengthening Civil Society Theory of Change Supporting civil society's political role, December 1, 2019.

Figure 1: MFA's Strengthening Civil Society Theory of Change



The ToC for the SCS policy framework is based on several assumptions, of which the main ones – selected by MFA for review through this study - can be summarised in the table below. In addition, the table includes related assumptions from the ToCs of the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and Women Rights and Gender Equality (WRGE) policies. These are relevant for some partnerships that are funded under thematic instruments within the SCS policy framework.

Table 2 – Prioritised assumptions of the SCS, WRGE and SRHR Theory of Change

Origin of assumption	Selection of Assumptions
SCS	The voices and needs of the most marginalised groups/persons within a society are effectively voiced by Civil Society/Civil Society organisations.

Origin of assumption	Selection of Assumptions
	When pressured, informed and/or persuaded by CSOs, states, companies and societal actors change their laws, policies and/or norms, and their practices to be more sustainable, equitable and inclusive.
	External aid by the Ministry and (mainly Northern) CSOs can strengthen CSOs in low-income, lower-middle-income and higher-middle-income countries.
	Capacity strengthening of CSOs can enhance the effectiveness of their lobby and advocacy.
	CSOs are in a position to protect or expand civic space.
	To bring about structural transformation, links to local, national, regional, and global women's and other movements are central.
SRHR ToC	Lobby and advocacy by CSOs can effectively contribute to improved SRHR for all people.
	A strong voice of civil society in the global south can increase accountability of government vis-à-vis its citizens, for the development of inclusive health systems.
	Organised opposition against sexual and reproductive rights can be best countered by strengthening existing coalitions and networks.
WRGE ToC	Women's rights organisations play a crucial role in empowering women and girls and in setting in motion structural processes of change geared to gender equality.
	To create an enabling environment for gender equality and to bring about the structural transformation of institutions that perpetuate gender inequality, it is essential to gain the support of and work with government authorities, the private sector, civil society, and knowledge institutions.

1.3 Study questions

The present study has both a theoretical focus on concepts and assumptions underlying the current SCS policy, and an empirical focus on current practices and policies, challenges and solutions found by CSOs, and other actors active in this field in FCS. The main research questions are listed below, and the full list of research questions and sub-questions can be found in the evaluation matrix in Annex 1.

Overarching question

1. To what extent is the SCS ToC relevant and are its assumptions valid in OPT and FCS?

Context

Civic space and the role of civil society

2. How do the nature, the influencing power, and the role of civil society in pursuing sustainable development goals change in different types of FCS? (Educational role (internal & external); Communicative role (linking state & society); Representational role (voice & resistance); Cooperative role (subsidiarity & coordination).

Outcome/impact

Lobby and advocacy and its effectiveness

3. To what extent is it a validated assumption for FCS that:

- When pressured, informed and/or persuaded by CSOs, states, companies and societal actors change their laws, policies and/or norms, and their practices to be more sustainable, equitable and inclusive?
 - **(SRHR)** Lobby and advocacy by CSOs can effectively contribute to improved SRHR for all people?
 - **(SRHR)** A strong voice of civil society in the global South can increase accountability of government to citizens, for the development of inclusive health systems?
4. How is the concept of advocacy (re-)interpreted in fragile and conflict situations by CSOs, other actors (donors, UN, local/national dignitaries) and academic literature and research?

Intermediary outcome

Legitimacy and representativeness of CSOs

5. What sources of legitimacy do CSOs draw on and which ones are for them most effective and important to achieve their goals (e.g. expertise, donor support, government support, representativeness, and constituency support)? (*distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs*).

Capabilities of CSOs

6. Which capabilities are more important, and which are less important for which types of CSOs and CSOS roles (educational, communicative, representational, cooperative...) to operate in FCS? (*distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs*).

Output and input/funds

Types of support and delivery set-up

7. What type of support is best suited for the development of the most important capacities needed by civil society in FCSs?



Methods

2 Methods

Our study approach takes the Theory of Change and underlying assumptions of the SCS policy framework as a starting point. The study is forward-looking and aimed at establishing what can be done if such assumptions do not materialise. The next paragraphs describe the research steps taken and the evaluation matrix can be found in Annex 1. The methodology included desk research at global level and country case studies based on remote interviews with key informants and consultation of documents and literature. The case studies were supported by national experts Judith Otieno (South Sudan), José Jaime Macuane (Mozambique), Noor Al-Hatem (Iraq), and Youssouf Ouattara (Burkina Faso). In the following sections we provide more detail.

2.1 Data collection

Global-level desk review

Desk review has included a number of different sources, including:

- Literature (academic, studies) on CSOs, social movements, lobby and advocacy, with a focus on the global south and fragile and conflict situations;
- Strategic and policy documents of selected donors for SCS with a focus on FCS;
- Strategic and policy documents of international CSOs engaged in FCS.

To focus the desk review, we have only considered sources with the following cut-off criteria:

- Academic literature published from the year 2000 onwards, with exceptions only for conceptual definitions that might have been produced in earlier stages;
- Grey literature⁵ published in the past ten years;
- Grey literature providing evidence and containing information and factual examples of civil society activity - abstract, opinion-based texts like declarations, manifestoes, etc. were considered with caution only at the level of country case studies to illustrate specific stakeholders' positions and not as sources of findings and conclusions per se.

This has resulted in the following sources being used for the global-level desk research:

Table 3: Global desk research sources

Number	Sources
8	Peer-reviewed academic articles
67	Policy briefs/evaluations, of which:
10	• Academic sources (research platforms);
5	• CSO sources;
7	• INGO sources;
45	• Donor/government sources.
3	other informal sources
78	Total

The full list of sources is available in Annex 2. The case studies have each included a country-level desk research as well, the sources of which are listed in the case studies.

⁵ Materials and research produced by organisations outside of the traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels including reports, working papers, policy documents and evaluations.

Country Case studies

The case studies have focused on five countries, to which all research questions were applied to the extent possible. Case studies included:

- Desk research on context, CSO activity and donor country programmes (including SCS MFA-funded partnership activities when existing).
- Remote interviews with key stakeholders (CSOs, RNEs, other donors, human rights institutions, UN agencies, academic experts, government officials when it is sensible, etc.).

A purposeful sampling approach was adopted, ensuring a balanced representation of the different types of stakeholders in the countries and a mix of CSO and non-CSO points of view.

Countries for case studies were chosen according to the following criteria: i) focus country of the Dutch development cooperation policy; ii) identified as FCS according to OECD/World Bank⁶; civic space “Repressed” or “Closed” according to the Civicus Index; and iii) availability of contacts/expertise in the team. Furthermore, data collected during the MTR of the SCS policy framework in Lebanon was used as input for the study (document review reference 69). Based on the above criteria and the limited study size we have selected one country per region as follows:

- 1 West Africa: Burkina Faso;
- 1 Horn of Africa: South Sudan;
- 1 Central and Southern Africa: Mozambique;
- 1 Middle East/North Africa: OPT;
- 1 Asia: Iraq.

The case study interviews – 49 in total - were distributed as follows:

	Burkina Faso	Mozambique	Iraq	South Sudan	OPT	Total
Royal Netherlands Embassy	1	1	1	2	0	5
Other donors	2	2	2	1	0	7
UN	1	0	1	1	0	3
Experts	1	1	2	3	1	7
INGOs	1	0	3	2	1	7
NGO	4	8	3	3	0	18
CBO	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	10	12	13	12	2	49

For anonymisation purposes, the names of organisations and interviewees involved are not included in this report. In addition to the primary data collection interviews, the findings of the baseline study and the data quality assessment for the OPT and the mid-term review findings for Lebanon were used, both based on several interviews. For OPT, the prior discussions with partners for the DQA and the baseline study already assessed the ToC validity and as such compensate for the small number of interviews that, in the circumstances, could be conducted for this study.

⁶ See Annex 3 for further detail on the concepts of fragility according to OECD and the World Bank. The team is aware that these classifications are made by international agencies and fragile countries include very diverse situations; furthermore, countries can enter or exit from these lists from one year to another.

2.2 Data analysis and synthesis

Data was first analysed at the level it was collected (global vs. case study level). More specifically, we have conducted:

- **Literature analysis:** we have summarised according to research questions literature findings from different sources (development partners, academic literature, NGOs);
- **Within-case analysis:** triangulation of evidence from various sources and elaborating findings according to the research questions per country, identifying examples of success/unsuccess, good and bad practices. Country case study reports have been drafted for Burkina Faso, Iraq, South Sudan, and Mozambique;
- **Cross-case analysis:** we have compared the validity of the selected assumptions of the SCS ToC across country case studies;
- **Global analysis/synthesis:** we have synthesised literature findings and case study findings, to draft preliminary findings and recommendations.

Presentation of preliminary findings

A presentation of preliminary findings to the MFA took place on 30 May 2024. Eight policy officers participated in the meeting, which also provided inputs on items to clarify and expand on for the report.

Validation workshop

A validation workshop was held online on 10 June 2024 with interviewees and experts from different countries to review findings and collect further suggestions and recommendations on the findings, theories of change assumptions and recommendations for the MFA SCS policy. Eleven interviewees joined, together with one academic expert and three of the local experts connected to case studies. Each case study country was represented, and so were the different types of stakeholder perspectives (Royal Netherlands Embassies, INGOs with national representation, CSOs).

Ensuring consistency

To reduce bias and ensure consistent approaches to data analysis we used standardised analysis tools:

- Interviews were conducted based on an indicative list of questions, distinguishing between CSOs and external stakeholders/experts. Interview notes were analysed according to a grid based on the research matrix shared by all involved researchers.
- Literature was also analysed based on a detailed coding grid based on the research matrix. The global level literature review was conducted by two researchers only, who compared methods and approaches and clarified doubts about the interpretation and use of the grid.

In the report, sources are referred in two manners: with numbers in bracket, when they are desk sources listed in Annex 2; with the ISO code of the country (BF, MZ, IQ, PS, SS), when the source is the country case study.

2.3 Limitations and potential bias

The sensitive subject of the study involved potential risks and possible bias of data sources as well as within the team. The inclusion of national experts for each case study helped to understand the countries' contexts and to get access to different stakeholders. We have explained our independence to interviewees to ensure a safe space for providing their perspectives and have anonymised the findings to prevent any consequences for them. We have used consistent

approaches to literature review and interviewing, guided by research tools and guidelines, to prevent bias in the data analysis.

Nevertheless, a few limitations to the study remain and potentially impact the outcomes:

- The study is a quick scan and not an in-depth study of the countries chosen as case studies. A thorough answer to the research questions would require a much more extended desk research and consultation in each country. Desk research was used largely as a basis and increases robustness, but it is also itself probably non-exhaustive.
- With the support of national experts, we have been able to include a diverse set of desk research resources from both Southern-based and Northern-based organisations and perspectives in the case studies. In the global desk research, however, it was more difficult to achieve a balance in perspectives, especially at an academic level. Resources published by Northern-based organisations dominate the global desk research, although they have often included the voices and perspectives of Southern-based organisations, communities, and individuals. The interviews with in-country professionals have mitigated this imbalance to some extent.
- Interviews were conducted remotely and in limited numbers. Although we covered a range of stakeholders, their perspectives may not be exhaustive of the CSO landscape. Especially the inclusion of CBOs was limited (in part, this was expected, as it would not have been possible to reach out to a representative sample of this type of organisations). Accounting for gender diversity and marginalised voices or intersectionality in a broader sense was not fully achievable given the limited study size and selective approach to interviews.
- More generally, respondents from the different categories (CSOs, experts, development partner representatives, etc.) might have brought their own biases, which have been mitigated to the extent possible by ensuring triangulation, also with documentary evidence.
- As already mentioned, data from the OPT stems mainly from secondary sources and from the prior ToC workshop conducted during the SCS baseline (prior to 7 October 2023) and updates during the DQA exercise (post 7 October). Fewer interviews could be done due to the ongoing conflict circumstances. We cannot say that we have a completely updated picture of the relevance of the ToC in the OPT given the daily worsening of the security situation in Gaza but also the institutional developments with the new Palestinian Authority government in place.
- Triangulation was undertaken, but in some cases, examples would come inevitably from one source only and there was no time or opportunity to double-check every single fact mentioned. We have tried to include only reputable sources from the international community, so we trust that what is reported is validated. We also validated findings with local experts and with several interviewees in a final validation meeting.
- Potential bias may come also from international and national experts' respective views. Despite these biases possibly being reflected in the findings of this study, it was hard for the research/evaluation team to estimate what the effects of these biases are on findings. To mitigate for this, each case study was conducted jointly by an international and a national expert who compared views and cooperated in writing and revising the reports.

All this leads to the conclusion that although the questions sound very broad and far-reaching, the findings need to be relativised to the context of a rapid study to be used by MFA for rethinking the SCS policy framework – timeliness of the study was prioritised over going very much in depth.



Definitions

3 Definitions

In this chapter, we present some definitions of civil society, civic space, and advocacy in FCS, some of which are operationalised in the SCS policy framework. Furthermore, we discuss the concept of fragility and fragile and conflict-affected situations as used in this report.

3.1 Definitions of civil society, civic space and advocacy

As per the DAC Recommendations on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance:

- **Civil society** refers to uncoerced human association or interaction by which individuals implement individual or collective action to address shared needs, ideas, interests, values, faith, and beliefs that they have identified in common, as well as the formal, semi-, or non-formal forms of associations and the individuals involved in them. Civil society is distinct from states, private for-profit enterprises, and the family.
- **Civil society organisations (CSOs)** are an organisational representation of civil society and include all not-for-profit, non-state, non-partisan, non-violent, and self-governing organisations outside of the family in which people come together to pursue shared needs, ideas, interests, values, faith and beliefs, including formal, legally registered organisations as well as informal associations without legal status but with a structure and activities.
- **Civic space** is the physical, virtual, legal, regulatory, and policy space where people can, among other things, securely exercise their rights to the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, and expression, in keeping with human rights⁷.

According to the SCS policy framework, “*civil society is understood to mean not only non-governmental organisations (NGOs) but also community-based organisations (CBOs), social movements, trade unions, religious organisations, interest groups, diaspora organisations, cultural organisations and informal networks*”⁸.

The concepts of lobby and advocacy (L&A), but also those of legitimacy and capacity, are used at various levels in the ToC of the SCS Policy Framework and are operationalised as follows in the SCS Results Framework:

CSO roles

Civil society plays a range of different roles:

- a. Educational (internally, by developing information, civic virtues and political skills of CSO members, and externally, by informing state officials and citizens);
- b. Communicative (by establishing channels of communication between state & society);
- c. Representational (by giving voice to and representing specific groups of citizens directly or indirectly);
- d. Cooperative (according to a principle of subsidiarity whereby the state only intervenes where society does not arrive, and coordinating with state institutions and other organisations on service delivery).

⁷ OECD/Legal/5021.

⁸ <https://www.government.nl/documents/policy-notes/2019/11/28/policy-framework-strengthening-civil-society> - Annexe 1: List of terms.

CSO advocacy

In the SCS framework, it is often spoken of Lobby and Advocacy (L&A), but actually advocacy is the key concept. In fact, advocacy includes all activities aimed at influencing attitudes and policies, while lobby is a key advocacy tool aiming to make decision-makers take a specific stand on a specific issue⁹.

CSOs activate and educate citizens, mobilise support, and employ advocacy initiatives. This shows in:

- Political participation - CSOs advise, pressure, and persuade state officials, private sector representatives, societal actors, multi-stakeholder platforms and the wider public to address the issues and claims of excluded or marginalised groups.
- Mobilisation - CSOs mobilise support and create networks necessary for collective advocacy.
- Activation - CSOs inform and educate citizens, interest groups and other CSOs on issues and claims¹⁰.

CSO legitimacy

The SCS framework does not provide a general definition of legitimacy. In principle, legitimacy refers to an authority or a regime, and civil society organisations do not have to legitimate themselves. However, given the increasingly important role played by CSOs in governance, the concept has started to be applied to civil society as well¹¹. Legitimacy can be in the eyes of rightsholders, in the eyes of duty bearers/powerholders; and to some extent even in the eyes of the donors, the three not necessarily overlapping. Legitimacy is to be seen in the SCS ToC as a factor that should strengthen the effectiveness of advocacy, adding credibility to the claims of civil society organisations. In this respect, it is assumed that CSOs improve their legitimacy to lobby and advocate for the claims of societal groups through:

- Changes in power dynamics following the various phases of the programmes they implement in partnership with improved participation of each partner in decision-making;
- Active consultation and participation of members/ constituency in formulation and implementation of advocacy strategies;
- Establishing credibility to L&A for the issues/ claims based on knowledge, position, experience, or independence¹².

CSO capacity

Capacity strengthening is at the core of the SCS policy framework. Capacities and expertise are developed for performing political roles and implementing advocacy strategies. In the policy framework it is assumed that organisations capable of implementing L&A at a minimum need to have:

- Capable staff including leadership;
- Structure, systems and processes including planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (PMEL);
- Sustainable revenue streams;
- Strategies and evidence for L&A.

Reference is also made to eight core capabilities relevant for L&A (not specific to FCS):

1. Produce evidence;
2. Inspire trust among power holders;
3. Represent constituency interest;

⁹ <https://www.itcilo.org/lobbying-and-advocacy>

¹⁰ SCS Results framework.

¹¹ Jagadananda, L. David Brown, *Civil Society Legitimacy and Accountability: Issues and Challenges*, NGO Management, Routledge, 2011.

¹² *Ibidem*.

4. Analyse the political arena;
5. Produce tailored messages;
6. Work collectively;
7. Build rapport with power holders;
8. Adapt to ongoing environmental changes¹³.

According to the typology of advocacy strategies presented in the SCS policy framework, the tactics of claim can be confrontational or non-confrontational. Non-confrontational tactics imply non-violent cooperation and persuasion of duty bearers, through dialogue, production of evidence, suggestion of solutions, etc. whereby powerholders are *persuaded*. Confrontational tactics aim to produce change through immediate *pressure* on decision makers based on demonstrations and rallies, press conferences exposing to the public their failure, litigation, etc.

3.2 Fragility and Fragile and Conflict Affected Situations.

Fragility refers to how vulnerable or exposed a state or region is to shocks and stressors, such as economic crises, political upheaval, natural disasters, or social unrest, and the coping capacities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks. Not being able to manage risks can weaken the state's structure, undermine the social contract, and result in poor outcomes in terms of human development and security. Institutions in fragile contexts often struggle to provide basic services, protect human rights, and secure justice and economic stability. Fragility is complex and multidimensional, and it occurs in a spectrum of intensity across several dimensions, where fragility in one area can exacerbate vulnerabilities in others.

In the frameworks used by organisations such as the OECD and the World Bank¹⁴, fragility is assessed across multiple dimensions, whereby via the use of indicators an assessment is made on the balance between risks and coping capacities. Different dimensions help identify specific vulnerabilities per country or context, as no context is the same, and so guide targeted interventions. The dimensions¹⁵ are economic, environmental, political, security, social, human.

The World Bank annually publishes a list of Fragile and Conflict States, which include countries that face (violent, active) conflict¹⁶ and countries facing high levels of fragility. The term Fragile and Conflict Affected Situations or sometimes Fragile and Conflict settings is used to identify specific regions or areas where fragility and ongoing, recent, or imminent conflict are experienced. It is important to note that while fragility can exacerbate violent conflict, at the same time, 51 of the 60 identified fragile contexts were not in a state of (internal or international) war in 2021. However, 80% of deaths due to conflict were in fragile contexts¹⁷. This reflects the nuanced linkages between fragility and conflict.

Equally important is the nuance that no context or country is the same and that while countries may be categorised as FCS this does not mean that all such countries face the same vulnerabilities or experience the listed dimensions of fragility similarly. For example: in some states there may be a functioning government with control over the entire country, in other countries the government may

¹³ Willem Elbers & Jelmer Kamstra (2020) How does organisational capacity contribute to advocacy effectiveness? Taking stock of existing evidence, *Development in Practice*, 30:5, 599-608, DOI: 10.1080/09614524.2020.1779664.

¹⁴ See, for example: OECD, 'What is fragility?', <https://www.oecd.org/publications/states-of-fragility-fa5a6770-en.htm>, and World Bank <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview>

¹⁵ OECD, <https://www3.compareyourcountry.org/states-of-fragility/overview/0/>

¹⁶ Based on a threshold of number of conflict-related deaths relative to the population.

¹⁷ OECD, States of Fragility Report 2022, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c7fedf5e-en/1/2/6/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/c7fedf5e-en&_csp_=ed992425c7db5557b78226a6c98c6daf&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book

only have control in the capital, or a functioning government is fully missing. Power can be held by military groups or by a contested or legitimate political group. The absence of a transparent policy-making process can be due to the absence of an elected legislative body, but also to sectarianism and the influence of conservative forces. Other examples could be security threats posed by internal divisions and conflict versus security issues due to external (terrorist) groups and infractions. Massive displacement can be caused by conflict, but also due to natural disasters or food insecurity. Relations with Western countries may vary, from mutual recognition and cooperation to open hostility. This is also clear when looking at the countries this review examines: Burkina Faso, Mozambique, Iraq, South Sudan and OPT. While all are classified as FCS, the context of these countries varies significantly. This is also why actors such as the World Bank and OECD, but also donors, use dimensions of fragility to tailor (development) programmes and policy recommendations to the specific needs and challenges of a context.



DECAPITIVATING.

Civil society in a shrinking civic space

4 Civil society in a shrinking civic space

4.1 Civil society and its roles¹⁸

In this section, we answer the following research questions:

2. How do the nature, the influencing power, and the role of civil society in pursuing sustainable development goals change in different types of FCS?

2.1. How are its various roles affected by fragility and conflict?

- Educational (internal & external);
- Communicative (linking state & society);
- Representational (voice & resistance);
- Cooperative (subsidiarity & coordination).

Summary answer to the research question: The nature of civil society in most FCS remains diverse, not only based on their current size and status (INGO, national CSO/NGO, CBO) but also based on its stratification over time, related to its colonial and independence struggle past and more recent developments including donor aid.

Overall, all the relevant roles mentioned in the SCS policy framework are played by civil society organisations in FCS, however some of these roles become more important or take different forms. Service delivery represents a larger part of CSOs activities, while their role in communication and representation (advocacy) becomes less pronounced. The educational role remains important, and communication is fostered not only or not so much between state and citizens but also between citizens and local authorities or even humanitarian actors. Representation becomes less vocal and confrontational and more linked to day-to-day protection of vulnerable groups. These differences in the nature, power and role of civil society in FCS have implications for the SCS policy framework focus on advocacy support in terms of the type of advocacy action that is expected (see also section 9.3. with recommendations).and the related capabilities to be strengthened.

Some changes in the nature of civil society

Globally, and even more where there is a restricted civic space, certain phenomena regarding the nature of civil society can be noticed or emphasised in comparison to other contexts. First, one can notice a trend of more fluid, informal and community-oriented activism replacing the “old” civil society (46). This is especially known when looking at youth activism (OPT).

Another aspect regularly observed with CSOs which is typical although not exclusive of FCS is the blurred distinction between CSOs and private sector. In contexts of weak law enforcement and government oversight, the civil society landscape can get occupied with commercially oriented organisations with a non-profit status to take advantage of tax exemptions or funding opportunities (44).

In some FCS, especially where authoritarian aspects are more apparent, even the independence of civil society from the state becomes more uncertain to establish. In Burkina Faso, for instance, it has been possible to see the rise of a so-called “pro-government” civil society, mobilising people in the streets in support of the military junta.

¹⁸ In this and the following chapters, sources are referred in two manners: with numbers in bracket, when they are desk sources listed in Annex 2; with the ISO code of the country (BF,MZ,IQ,PS,SS) , when the source is the country case study.

Despite these developments, all the FCS included in this study keep a stratified and diverse civil society, developed in the last decades in the colonial and postcolonial context (MZ, SS, OPT, IQ, BF).

A shift towards service delivery

It is acknowledged by literature and stakeholder input from FCS that civil society tends to take up a stronger role in service delivery than in L&A in fragile and conflict settings (18, 31, 51).

Where the presence of the state is weak (like in countries where the territory is not completely under state control) or where its resources are scarce (in most FCS), CSOs have often stepped up to fill in the service gap. The government often encourages such partnership in sectors such as health, education, social protection where CSOs can work under the umbrella of the line ministries at the local level, contributing to maintaining the visibility of the state (51).

In addition, where the government is more authoritarian and as such unwilling to accept a watchdog role for CSOs, service delivery may be less sensitive. Especially in conflict-affected states governments tend to dislike advocacy and advocacy-focussed organisations, and delivery of basic services is generally less controversial in these situations. Furthermore, where there is a humanitarian crisis, the reasons for engaging in service delivery is often a clear urgency to fill gaps; providing services becomes a (necessary) source of legitimacy for CSOs, including in the eyes of the population, also reflecting positively on other CSO roles.

Service delivery and advocacy are therefore not fully separated activities, and in many cases especially in FCS, service delivery provides entry points for engaging with stakeholders in coordination, policy and decision-making arenas and becomes intertwined with advocacy actions³⁵ (35, MZ, SS, IQ).

More emphasis on the educational role

Especially human rights organisations, when advocacy is impossible due to a repressive regime, tend to emphasise their educational role, focusing on awareness-raising among the population and marginalised groups (OPT, IQ). The educational role is often also exercised towards policymakers, for instance on human rights law (BF) but also health and education (SS), gender equality, environment and land management, governance and the functioning of institutions (MZ). Recreational activities with the community are also sometimes used as entry points for raising awareness of important psychosocial support topics such as child marriage, child protection, positive parenting techniques, health and wellbeing (SS, 45). This is especially helpful in FCS contexts where societal conservatism opposes CSO action.

An important area of educational activities of CSOs in conflict situations is peacebuilding through the training of local CBOs on conflict resolution and/or the direct implementation of community activities strengthening social cohesion (BF, SS).

The communication role extends to communication between stakeholders and local groups

The role of civil society in favouring communication between citizens and government manifests itself in a different way in FCS. A restriction of civic space also implies less openness to civil society input by authorities and the absence of fora for participation. However, even in authoritarian regimes there are often still some opportunities for influencing and consultations on specific public policies, when not related to controversial subjects.

In some FCS contexts where civic space is not totally closed (e.g. MZ), there are still “invited spaces” (e.g. consultative fora or committees) for civil society to exercise control/watchdog roles

through engaging in monitoring public policies (health, education, land, natural resources, agriculture, etc.), public services (health, education), and the political processes (including electoral monitoring). In contexts where proper democratic processes are not in place like in a "transitional" military regime such as the one in Burkina Faso (BF), those opportunities may be limited to the consultation of "selected" CSOs in preparing important policy reforms in areas of interest of authorities.

Furthermore, both where the government has weak control over remote areas, and where there is a strong government with authoritarian tendencies, communication is often possible with local authorities even when it is not encouraged at national level (BF, IQ). In remote, conflict-affected areas, the communicative role of CSOs is also exercised horizontally, between different social groups in conflict (e.g. farmers and herders – BF) and takes the forms of peacebuilding initiatives (SS). Communication with non-governmental duty bearers, such as INGOs/humanitarian agencies, also becomes more frequent as these agencies are often responsible for service provision in entire sectors.

Representation through protection and not only through "voice and resistance"

Overall, the role of representing vulnerable or marginalised groups and citizens' voice in general, is still played by CSOs in FCS, but in different forms. "Voice and resistance" - as they are named in the SCS policy framework - are not the most appropriate terms for defining how CSOs perform their advocacy role in FCS. Representation goes hand in hand with protecting the rights of individuals and groups, safeguarding those that have already been acquired, or providing legal assistance to those who cannot afford it (OPT). Again, this happens in the context of a blurring distinction between advocacy and service delivery.

4.2 Addressing shrinking civic space

In this section, we answer the following research question:

2.2. To what extent are CSOs FCSs in a position to protect or expand civic space? (SCS ToC assumption; distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs)

Summary answer to the research question: The assumption that CSOs are able to expand civic space is key to the SCS policy framework. We find, however, that CSOs have limited ability to do so in FCS. They cannot easily "claim space" as they might be subject to attacks and accusations, leaders might be arrested and imprisoned. INGOs can sometimes do more because they are more protected by international status (Iraq, Mozambique), but they can also be made ineffective by being discredited and accused of foreign interference (Burkina Faso, South Sudan). CBOs and informal civil society are more agile at the local level, less affected by rules and regulations. They can perhaps better escape repression, but they are too weak to expand the civic space as such. This is a crucial finding, limiting the potential impact of capacity strengthening and of the SCS policy framework. When restrictive measures of civic space have been contrasted it was often thanks to broad coalitions and with INGO and donors' support.

It is very challenging and sometimes impossible for CSOs to "address shrinking civil space"

In the five case study countries, civic space is defined as "obstructed" (Burkina Faso), "repressed" (South Sudan, OPT, Mozambique) or "closed" (Iraq) by the Civicus Index¹⁹, an international scoring system focusing on freedom of expression, association and assembly and the state's duty to protect civil society²⁰.

¹⁹ <https://monitor.civicus.org/>

²⁰ <https://civicusmonitor.contentfiles.net/media/documents/MethodologyPaperFebruary2024.pdf>

The SCS policy framework envisages that CSOs, with Dutch support, are enabled to address shrinking civic space. From the case studies, it emerges that CSOs have limited ability to do so in FCS. “Claiming space”, for instance through demonstrations and rallies, when there are no “invited spaces” from authorities, is often heavily repressed.

- In Iraq, during the Tishreen protest movements in 2019 and 2020, civil society activists leading and participating in anti-government protests were subjected to intimidation, arbitrary detention (many of whom remain forcibly disappeared)²¹, and torture, as part of a broader crackdown on dissent. This crackdown left at least 487 protesters killed and thousands injured²².
- In Mozambique, there was a violent repression of peaceful protests that took place to commemorate the death of artist Azagaia (March 2023) and the repression of protests claiming the irregularity of local elections (October 2023).

National NGOs/CSOs and their staff are heavily exposed to retaliation when they behave too confrontationally. Retaliation can include public discreditation with accusations of supporting terrorism (OPT) or being the longhand of foreign governments (BF). Sometimes, organisations can be shut down by the government via restrictive NGO legislation (SS). Leaders of CSOs may be subject to arbitrary arrests and detentions (SS, MZ, OPT), or even conscripted, like in Burkina Faso, where opposition leaders and critical civil society leaders are being sent to the battlefield to combat jihadists as a punishment²³. Repression takes a heavy toll on individual activists also from the mental health point of view (IQ) and it is not surprising that there is frequent turnover among NGO staff (MZ).

INGOs can be more protected by their international status (IQ, MZ), but can also be discredited and put in conditions that prevent operating. This can be done through public accusations of being bearers of foreign agendas and interests (BF, IQ) up to being declared *personae non gratae* (SS). All sorts of operational restrictions can be put on the work of humanitarian agencies by imposing bans on imports, border checks, requests for authorisation (OPT).

CBOs or the so-called “informal civil society” are more agile and less affected by rules and regulations concerning associations compared to NGOs, especially when they are non-registered organisations. They can better escape repression, but on the other hand, they are too weak to contrast the restriction of civic space. Sometimes, repression also affects digital activism, and it is still possible to target individual activists (OPT, MZ).

Some restrictive measures of civic space have been contrasted thanks to broad coalitions and with INGO and donors’ support

Despite restrictive measures, in three of the case study countries it has been possible to avoid at least the passing of legislation imposing additional burdens and restrictions on the registration and on the funding of NGOs. In the OPT, an advocacy campaign – which saw the donors on the side of CSOs – was successful and permitted in 2021 to stop the attempt by the Palestinian Authority to revise the Law of Charitable Societies introducing prior government approval for receiving funding (OPT)²⁴. In Mozambique, a similar successful campaign was organised. In Iraq, it was also possible to avoid restrictive legislation for some time.

²¹ Human Rights Watch, ‘Four Years On, Peaceful Iraqi Protesters Remain Missing’, 2 October 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/02/four-years-peaceful-iraqi-protesters-remain-missing> and Amnesty International, ‘Iraq: Four years after Tishreen protests, no justice for state and militia violence’, 27 September 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/iraq-four-years-after-tishreen-protests-no-justice-for-state-and-militia-violence/>

²² ‘Update on Accountability in Iraq’, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), June 2022, page 3.

²³ <https://www.hrw.org/fr/news/2024/02/27/burkina-faso-les-autorites-ont-recours-des-enlevements-pour-reprimer-la-dissidence>

²⁴ Baseline report, SCS – OPT.

Coalitions against restrictive NGO legislation in Mozambique and Iraq

In **Mozambique**, in September 2022 the government proposed a restrictive new law for non-for-profit organisations, potentially increasing control on the organisations' access to funds, based on alleged risk of money laundering and funding terrorist organisations²⁵. The implication of this is stigmatisation and delegitimisation of NGOs, which can be a government strategy to restrict civic space. The law proposal approved by the Council of Ministers, was criticised as it would: impose excessive requirements for the establishment of organisations; grant government officials' overbroad discretion in deciding whether to authorise the creation of organisations; impose burdensome and unjustified reporting requirements; impose excessive civil liability on the officers and members of the organisation; and allow for the arbitrary dissolution of organisations. While the law proposal demonstrated a strong intention for closing civic space, it led CSOs in Mozambique to join hands in a campaign against the restrictive bill²⁶. The campaign included advocacy activities, technical analysis, the organisation of national and international debates and the organisation of a two-day meeting with relevant parliamentary working committees which resulted in a broad consultation with citizens and social organisations in all ten provinces, held in February 2023. The new law eventually was not approved (MZ).

In **Iraq**, coalition building led to successful mobilisation and coordinated approaches to advocate for legal reforms regarding the 2010 NGO Law and the 2011 Kurdistan NGO Law. Conferences helped to build coalitions across various CSOs and facilitated a unified approach to advocate for laws more consistent with international standards. Iraqi CSOs also worked closely with international NGOs to advocate for the new NGO laws. These partnerships provided Iraqi CSOs with technical expertise and international best practices that enhanced their advocacy efforts. The international NGOs also played a supportive role in mobilising resources and providing platforms for Iraqi CSOs to voice their demands (IQ). Unfortunately, this has not arrested the current trend of shrinking civic space.

Even where restrictive legislation regulating CSOs is not in place and attempts to approve it are prevented, civic space is reduced **by the direct restrictions to civil society mobilisation**. In Burkina Faso, there has been a "communiqué" from the military junta after the coup banning political party activities and civil society activities which is interpreted and applied loosely by authorities. Furthermore, as mentioned before, repression affects civil society leaders who become too vocal. In Mozambique, civic space is not only reduced through attempts by the government to limit CSO action and access to support, but also by the persistence of threats, violent reactions to CSO action and violent repression of civic action. The weakness of public authorities (including the judiciary) in front of political power limits the possibility for CSOs to find protection through the law. In the OPT, smearing campaigns by the Israeli NGO Monitor, the unsubstantiated accusations towards six organisations in 2021 to be linked to terrorism, as well as the physical decimation of INGO infrastructure²⁷ and loss of staff in the context of the Gaza war, represent only examples of the multiple forms of repression heavily restricting civic space without the need of NGO legislation.

²⁵ <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/government-further-tightens-the-screws-on-civic-space-with-restrictive-draft-law-on-non-profit-organisations/>

²⁶ Campanha de contestação à Proposta de Lei das Organizações Sem Fins Lucrativos (Campaign to challenge the Proposal of the Law on Non-Profit Organisations).

²⁷ <https://monitor.civicus.org/watchlist-march-2024/>



Lobby & advocacy and its effectiveness

5 Lobby & advocacy and its effectiveness

5.1 Understanding of advocacy, risks of advocacy and adaptation strategies by CSOs

In this section, we answer the following research question:

3. To what extent is it a validated ToC assumption for FCSs that:

- When pressured, informed and/or persuaded by CSOs, states, companies and societal actors change their laws, policies and/or norms, and their practices to be more sustainable, equitable and inclusive?
- (SRHR) Lobby and advocacy by CSOs can effectively contribute to improved SRHR for all people?
- (SRHR) A strong voice of civil society in the global south can increase accountability of government to citizens, for the development of inclusive health systems?

Summary answer to the research question: Changing laws, policies and norms is more difficult in FCS, but public-decision makers can still be influenced if the subject does not touch upon the government's legitimacy and action, and if the legislative/policy change fits into the policy priorities of the government. Changes can be obtained when authorities are "informed" and "persuaded" but not so much when they are put under pressure as this triggers repression. Lobbying towards the private sector is sometimes done with support from transnational networks. Changing attitudes of societal actors is hard and it does not happen during the time span of a project, although work with youth is considered encouraging. As such, the first of these assumptions of the SCS policy framework is mostly not validated.

Contributing to improved SRHR and increased accountability of government to citizens, for the development of inclusive health systems, seems an ambitious objective in FCS given the different priorities and the poor governance of and limited resources for basic service provision. Furthermore, inclusion of LGBTIQ+ people faces both state and societal acceptance issues. Some improvements to health care can be obtained by working with health workers and citizens through social accountability initiatives at local level and protecting SRHR in humanitarian settings. In sum, the second and third assumption of the SCS policy framework are partially validated.

As one evaluation of the Swedish support to CSOs in Mozambique put it, assessing results of advocacy is not like assessing results of service delivery. While outputs of advocacy are easily traceable to activities, outcomes are often only indirectly related to them and can be seen only after several years (56).

Duty bearers can still be influenced under certain conditions

A key assumption in the SCS policy framework is that *'When pressured, informed and/or persuaded by CSOs, states, companies and societal actors change their laws, policies and/or norms, and their practices to be more sustainable, equitable and inclusive'*.

The IOB evaluation of Dutch support to fragile contexts had already found that this assumption is partially true. Particularly at the local level, interventions would have helped improve engagement between government institutions and citizens, but at the national level, there would have been no visible improvements in the three country cases, and the space for civil society would have continued to shrink (1).

Also in this study's case studies and desk review, it was found that this assumption only partially holds true in FCS, and it does so under a number of conditions and limitations. **States and public authorities may still listen to civil society** or even look for their contribution:

- **If the subject does not touch upon the government's legitimacy and action** (democracy, fundamental rights, etc.); in this respect, it can be noted that WRGE/ SRHR might (PS, IQ), but also might not (e.g. MZ/BF/SS) be controversial for governments to support.
- **If the legislative/policy change fits into the policy priorities of the government** – for instance, in Burkina Faso topics like anticorruption or the functioning of justice are part of the “transition” discourse and civil society action in this field still finds room to operate as long as it does not touch sensitive human rights issues (BF).

It is also clear that **some changes can be obtained when authorities are “informed” and “persuaded” but not so much when they are put under pressure**; public exposure of human right violations or policy failures is easily perceived as a threat to power, and governments can respond negatively and with repression.

It also must be noted that the decision-making process is often less transparent and linear. Decision-making power may be concentrated in the executive, or in the head of state, with limited or no involvement of an elected legislative body. It is therefore less clear whom to target. For example, in OPT there is no legislative body, and laws are approved by Presidential Decree. In Lebanon, the sectarian and clientelist political system makes so that issue-based politics is not as important as sectarian identity in determining voting behaviour (69). In Burkina Faso, the parliament is now replaced by a Transition legislative assembly whose 71 members are appointed by the Head of State, the security and defence forces, CSOs, representatives of the regions and political parties; these members are not elected so they do not have an independent mandate giving them the legitimacy to freely take positions on specific issues. In all these situations, **having the right channels to get to the real decision-makers is key for CSOs, including personal contacts and informal channels.**

INGOs and international agencies can become duty bearers and target of advocacy

In FCS, often the delivery of basic services and protection of the population is entirely entrusted to humanitarian agencies. It is worth noting that, in their context, the approach called Accountability towards Affected People (AAP)²⁸ is being developed and expanded. While various forms of participation are tested by agencies themselves, there seems to be room for bottom-up advocacy by CSOs and CBOs towards humanitarian agencies. In Gaziantep (Syria), national CSOs were involved in cluster coordination, and it came out that there is need for capacity building in order for them to get involved into AAP feedback mechanisms (77).

Lobbying towards the private sector requires transnational networks

The evidence of advocacy towards the private sector which could be collected in this study is limited. However, literature shows that it has been sometimes possible to achieve some successes with transnational networks, particularly in natural resource management and in questions involving foreign investments, also mobilising companies in their home countries. In Mozambique, local and international CSOs achieved a provisional shut-down in oil production near Africa's oldest national park, through advocacy on multiple levels, and engaging with many actors and using a range of tactics, from media training, to awareness raising and film (54). There were also multiple campaigns against fossil fuel extraction by multinational companies that are benefitting from international mobilisation²⁹.

²⁸ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/strengthening-accountability-affected-people-aap>

²⁹ <https://stopmozgas.org/campaign/confronting-the-industry/>

Changing attitudes and practices is challenging and change is often reversible

Because of the fragility or unresponsiveness of governments, CSOs in some countries are **searching for other societal actors to whom address advocacy activities**. In Lebanon, for example, the legitimacy of government actors as counterparts is limited (69). CSOs are therefore striving to find different societal actors that can promote the adoption of new norms and practices that address the concerns of marginalised groups. These include, among others, religious groups, alternative political groups, and the newly elected reformist Members of Parliament (MPs) who represent them, as well as international actors and donors.

A **change in the practices of societal actors**, in the case study countries has been possible sometimes at the local level, in terms of **conflict resolution**, for instance by supporting community-based dispute resolution or agropastoral mediation to resolve conflicts between farmers and herders (BF). However, the duration of the agreements made in these attempts is often temporary as practical issues arise (e.g. the farming host community badly needs land back for its own survival). Another area where conflict resolution by local CBOs/NGOs works is the reduction of tensions related to the presence of IDPs in areas already affected by food insecurity and poverty. Even in this case, access to land is sometimes assured for IDPs through informal negotiations, but due to lack of formalised agreements, land is successively claimed back by the host communities (78).

The **attitudes of societal actors** and communities are often the target of civil society actions on **SRHR and WRGE**. Implementing partners maintain that working with young people, women and girls, has a “multiplier effect” because young people talk to their peers, and will bear fruits in the future (69), but impacts can hardly be measured over the time span of a project. It is also sometimes possible to change the practices and behaviours of health workers, particularly in the humanitarian context. Overall, attitudes towards WRGE and even more on sexual orientation and gender identity are difficult to change, and in all country case studies there seems to be an ongoing slowing down in progress or even a backlash on these issues (see also section 5.2. below).

In this section, we answer the following research questions:

4. How is the concept of advocacy (re-)interpreted in fragile and conflict settings by CSOs, other actors (donors, UN, local/national dignitaries) and academic literature and research?
 - 4.1. When L&A towards a counterpart (government, private sector, or societal group) is ineffective or made difficult because of civic space restrictions, which alternatives are available to CSOs to generate change to contribute to more peaceful and inclusive societies?
 - 4.2. Based on existing successful and unsuccessful examples, which good and bad practices, strengths and weaknesses, factors of success or failure affect the effectiveness of CSOs while adjusting to a restricted civic space?

Summary answer to the research question: CSOs in FCS tend to use a **broad concept of advocacy**. The distinction between advocacy and service delivery, on the one hand, and between advocacy and awareness raising, on the other hand, becomes blurred. Advocacy can be found under different names such as “protection” or “social accountability” and is often shifted at local level when national authorities have limited control over the territory or limited openness to CSO claims. When advocacy is constrained, CSOs shift to **alternative strategies** to generate change such as focusing on awareness raising and education of public authorities or collaborating with them in preparing policy reforms. Advocacy is often done in confidentiality and collaboratively and is less vocal and public. CSOs representing marginalised groups preserve their energies shifting to awareness raising and education on human rights, creating safe spaces, and supporting livelihoods.

Good practices characterising successful advocacy include taking advantage of policy windows, contextual sensitivity, targeting duty bearers at different levels and engaging in collaborative advocacy. Particularly important is to gather and use evidence and expertise to back claims, as authorities may appreciate being helped with solutions to issues and because this also reduces risks of persecution. Identifying allies in the public administration and resorting to informal communication channels with powerholders is also key. Conversely, confrontational approaches combined with lack of backing evidence can lead to **failure** especially the smaller and less resourced organisations.

The **strengths** of adaptation strategies include the collaborative approach, the alignment with existing policy agendas, the focus on practical solutions and the long-term view on educational activities generating results tomorrow. The **weaknesses** include the avoidance of controversial issues, the risk of becoming too close to powerholders through co-optation and the limited or temporary impact of local level improvements.

These findings are relevant to the SCS policy framework as lobby and advocacy are seen as the key activities of civil society, which is thus also central to the SCS ToC. We have seen that lobby and advocacy are adapted and implemented in distinct ways in FCS, complemented by other activities such as service delivery.

A blurred distinction between advocacy, awareness raising and service delivery

CSOs in FCS tend to use a broad concept of advocacy. **The distinction between advocacy and service delivery, on the one hand, and between advocacy and awareness raising, on the other hand, becomes blurred.** Examples of this include:

- In Mozambique, some CSOs combine advocacy with service delivery. The focus on advocacy is relevant for reaching the overall and long-term objectives of putting CSOs and right-holders in a position to hold central government and the private sector accountable. It is also relevant for the objective of freedom of expression, press freedom and diversity (56).
- In the case of interventions of CSOs led by South Sudanese refugees in the West Nile, Uganda, it was shown that the **‘voice and access’ and direct support strands can go hand in hand.** For instance, CSOs distributed hygiene kits and thanks to this action were invited to join coordination meetings with decision-makers (45).
- In Burkina Faso, it was important to **couple awareness raising and conflict resolution with advocacy to obtain practical solutions to disputes.** In the Centre-North of Burkina Faso, an international NGO has organised mobilisation and awareness-raising actions with *Fulani* traditional and religious leaders on the prevention and resolution of farmer-herder conflicts. Besides creating awareness, successful lobbying led to the marking of 80 km of transhumance trails where cattle can be brought by herders (BF).
- In the Swedish program in support of CSOs, strategic partner organisations seek to **balance shorter term service provision and longer-term empowerment and advocacy work.** When assessing applications, it is considered whether plans for service provision is part of a strategic approach also involving advocacy and other support, in which case it might be justified. Other strategic partner organisations similarly apply a rights-based perspective to service provision, which may involve working with both rights holders and duty bearers. Service provision seems to be more common in humanitarian contexts (e.g. in Somalia and the MENA region) (56).

This trend is not devoid from criticism from interviewees. Particularly one representative of a RNE pointed out that some organisations applying under the SCS policy framework claim they conduct advocacy besides service delivery, but it is not clear in what such advocacy consists beyond organising events. On the other hand, in the country “pure” advocacy seems to be only possible to larger organisations, which have the expertise and resources, while CBOs being closer to the local

population do not have the tools and methods to do it (SS). In some programmes supported by the EU CSO-LA (civil society organisations-local authorities) budget line, **whilst service provision and economic development created entry points, these were not always exploited fully**; in particular, it was often difficult for CSOs to shift from service delivery, sometimes of a humanitarian nature, to the even more difficult role of holding local government to account and bringing about enhanced transparency and accountability (51).

Advocacy under different names: protection and social accountability

Sometimes advocacy can be found under **different “names”** in FCS. In the humanitarian context advocacy is often conducted in the context of **“protection”** work, as a mix of individually focused activities and collective action. An example of such work is legal assistance to IDPs to access housing, land and property, or to obtain IDs.

Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance: between protection and advocacy

Under the label of ICLA (Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance) an INGO well known for its operations in favour of refugees conducts activities enabling people affected by displacement to claim and exercise their rights. Legal assistance is delivered to individuals, but ICLA programmes may engage in public interest cases, if this will lead to a direct positive effect for a greater number of individuals or create legal precedents that can generate positive structural changes. Such activities have concerned among other finding lasting solutions to land disputes in Congo, obtaining birth certificates for refugees in Lebanon, and securing personal ID for IDPs in Mubi, Nigeria³⁰.

In both humanitarian and development interventions that are focused on basic services (education, health, WASH, etc.) some CSOs are involved in a range of **“social accountability”** related practices and methods³¹. These envisage citizens monitoring the working of services and having interface meetings with service providers to collaboratively establish action plans to address service gaps (MZ). These service providers can be governmental but sometimes also INGOs and international agencies (IQ).

The work on protection and accountability also has the advantage of **shifting advocacy to the local level** where authorities are closer to citizens and the influence of politics is (sometimes) less strong. Even there, advocacy requires strong adaptation capabilities in situations where local government is weak, or government authorities are unrepresented or displaced in different locations.

Doing advocacy when even local authorities are displaced

In Pama (BF), a member CBO of the national Network for food security has lobbied towards local authorities, to increase the supply of toilets in commercial centres, as the lack of toilets was causing diarrhoea in the community. The organisation had to go to a different location to meet the government representative who was himself displaced, and still retain the connection with citizens on site; despite this challenge, it was possible to conduct the advocacy successfully. The latrines and access to drinking water were planned and realised. One key success factor was the ability to coordinate the activities at national level with those of local organisations. This was possible thanks to the existence of a network involving both types (BF).

CSOs adopt alternative strategies to generate change

When advocacy is not possible, because of the restrictions of civic space, CSOs in the case study countries and the literature adopt different strategies in the hope that they might contribute, one

³⁰ <https://www.nrc.no/what-we-do/activities-in-the-field/icla/>

³¹ For instance, Citizen Report Cards, Community Score Cards or Socia Audits.

day, to generate change. Some of these strategies have been adopted by human rights CSOs in Burkina Faso:

- **Focusing on awareness raising and education of public authorities** - A human rights organisation trains members of the legislative body on “what human rights are”; two organisations organise debates with decision-makers on how to improve the “social contract” between the population and the state to improve security.
- **Focusing on preparation of policy reforms** - A national network against corruption has worked on drafting a piece of legislation to protect whistleblowers. The network has submitted the draft to other civil society members through a workshop before soliciting the government and the parliament to include the subject into the policy agenda. The text has gone through all the preparatory and expert validation steps and is now in the pipeline for adoption by the legislative body.
- **Collaboration with authorities on legislative reforms and administration** - An international organisation with an office in the country has supported the ministry of justice in the revision of the criminal code. They also have conducted meetings with the prisons’ administration to discuss how to prevent radicalisation of detainees.
- **Resorting to confidential advocacy** (no public denunciation) – An organisation collects evidence of HR violation and provides it to trusted parties in e.g. foreign embassies or engages confidentially in dialogue with the concerned authorities (BF).

The rationale behind these activities, as reported by some interviewed CSOs, is that decision-makers which come to power through means different from a democratic process often lack the technical knowledge to address policy issues, and do not appreciate their inability and lack of competence to be exposed through public denunciation. Vice versa, when they are ‘offered solutions’ and ‘included’, or even ‘trained’, they are more open to address certain issues in the direction wished for by CSOs. Accepting this collaborative approach is of course not without risks, as it continuously poses challenges to CSOs willing to keep their autonomy from powerholders.

The strategy often chosen by organisations representing marginalised group who cannot go in the open because of societal backlash is often inward-looking and **aimed at empowering and strengthening the target group** while awaiting better times. This is done, for example, by:

- **Focusing on educational and awareness raising activities with the constituency** - A LGBTIQ+ organisation has become clandestine and conducts mainly training and education activities for young people while still looking for some channels to get audience from authorities (BF); a CSO trains girls on leadership and political participation and on women, peace and security even if a peace process is not in sight (PS).
- **Creating safe spaces for dialogue and networking** – A CSOs has created a safe space for youth and LGBTIQ+ people by supporting so called Communities of Action. These communities provide the opportunity for members to advocate or talk about sensitive topics (LB).
- **Generating revenue for organisations and individuals for survival** – An organisation working with LGBTIQ+ youth has trained them to set up small business to support their socioeconomic inclusion, mitigate exclusionary process they suffer in society and empower them economically and socially (BF).

Different practices are adopted to enhance effectiveness

Successful advocacy in FCS always implies mitigating the risk of backlash and retaliation against individuals and organisations. Therefore, some of the success factors are also related to their risk-mitigation value. Among success factors that the interviewees from the different case study country mentioned there are:

- **Taking advantage of policy windows**, meaning that campaigns capitalise on the most opportune moments in the policy cycle.

- **Ensuring contextual sensitivity** to ensure advocacy efforts are tailored to (local) cultural or religious context.
- **Collaborative advocacy and joint efforts** by organisations of various size and level of operation (UN, INGOs and CSOs); in situations of restricted civic space, a coalition of CSOs can be more hardly neutralised than an individual CSO.
- **Community engagement** to ensure both local support and inclusion of grassroots voices.
- **Sustained and continuous advocacy** that is consistent over time and builds on potential momentum created; this can be a challenge for smaller organisations and organisations that are more subject to staff turn-over and lack resources to participate continually in advocacy efforts.
- **Targeting advocacy to different governance levels** (government, ministries, political parties, individual leaders, embassies, governors, local administrators); engaging with traditional and religious leaders is especially important for WRGE.
- **Identifying allies in the public administration:** when the political power is not open to CSOs claims, it is often still possible to identify technical people to work with on specific policy issues.

Particularly important for risk mitigation are:

- **Adapting language** (e.g. not using “gender”, “negative masculinity”; using “wellbeing of youth” for LGBTIQ+).
- **Using selective/safe communication channels** – this has been seen e.g. in the use of Telegram instead of more controllable social networks.
- **Keeping integrity, enhancing transparency and accountability** as often repression of CSOs happens in the form of accusations of fraud and corruption, or misbehaviour of board members. CSOs need to have their governance in order. This is of course also a challenge when requirements for compliance with rules are made harder.

Overall, a key good practice found across the board as mitigating measure and success factor at the same time is the use of **evidence and research to support advocacy**. While evidence is not sufficient to obtain results, lack of evidence to substantiate advocacy claims will backlash on CSOs. According to Burkina Faso interviewees, in the context of an authoritarian regime, national organisations working on corruption, justice, governance can still operate thanks to their credibility obtained through thorough evidence collection, while smaller organisations with less capability that make unsubstantiated claims on social networks are easily discredited and attacked. The same applies also to other case study countries.

Successful campaign to abolish the death penalty in Burkina Faso

An example of successful advocacy in Burkina Faso before the recent regime change is the campaign that led to the abolition of the death penalty in 2018. It was taken forward by a coalition of human rights defenders with support from some international organisations. A key factor in the success was lobbying with certain actors, notably members of parliament, who needed to adopt the penal code, and work with technicians in the government. Another factor was the good quality of the document which was the basis for the coalition, encouraging several CSOs to adhere to it and the government to take it seriously (BF).

A failed advocacy attempt in Mozambique

One example of failed advocacy is that of the attempt to stop the “ProSavana” project, a trilateral cooperation project between Japan, Brazil and Mozambique, fostered since 2009 and implemented since 2013, in the so-called Nacala Corridor, in the North of Mozambique. In this case, the CSO action suffered of both **inability to identify the evidence** that the project was actually a “land grabbing initiative” producing damages to both local and national interests, and of the **inability to set up an alliance between the national CSOs** – adopting a critical position towards the corridor

project – **and the local CSOs** – potentially taking advantages from being involved in the project implementation.

The adaptive approach to advocacy has strengths and weaknesses

The adaptive approach described so far has advantages and disadvantages that can be considered strengths and weaknesses of the CSOs who adopt it.

a) Among key advantages and **strengths** there are, in the team's view:

- **The cooperative approach** – focusing on sharing knowledge with public authorities despite the governance situation, and involving them at all levels in a constructive manner, can lead to small but useful changes using the available civic space.
- **The focus on subjects that are already in the policy agenda** and where therefore it is more likely that there will be positive follow-up.
- **The focus on concrete improvements in living conditions** of the population and practical solutions to issues rather than ideological or political confrontation.
- **The long-term view** that education and awareness-raising of constituencies and authorities will generate some changes tomorrow.

b) Among the disadvantages and **weaknesses** of the approach there are:

- **The restriction of L&A to non-controversial issues**, which fit into the agenda of power holders, and a general reduction of the transformative impact of advocacy.
- **The risks of civil society capture**, with the power holders selecting organisations that are co-opted in consultative bodies, and excluding other ones.
- **The limited or temporary impact of local-level improvements** in a volatile security situation where services and infrastructures can be destroyed or damaged, or in the absence of central government financing of health or education services, for example.

5.2 Advocacy on SRHR and WRGE

In this section, we answer the following research question:

4.3. WRGE/SRHR: *To what extent and how is it possible for CSOs to draw attention on SRHR and WRGE and influence social norms when such issues do not have priority vis à vis basic humanitarian needs and/or where broader/general (internal and/or external) conflicts monopolise societal attention? (distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs)*

Summary answer to the research question: The best way to address these two thematic areas which are pursued under the SCS policy framework is to link them firmly to the current local/national context and priorities. For instance, when there is a security threat, this largely affects women, but women can also become actors of improved security. Where there is a high level of displacement, the needs of displaced women and girls need to be safeguarded. SRHR require contextualisation and reframing to gain acceptance and it is important to focus on SRHR in humanitarian settings. For the SCS policy framework, this means that contextualisation of ToCs is highly important.

Many of the practices listed in the previous section also apply to advocacy on SRHR and WRGE. However, advocacy on these topics can be additionally difficult as in FCS often other issues dominate the public discourse, ranging from security and safety from conflict and terrorist threats, to devastating humanitarian crises. So, one research question asks about the way CSOs can still address these topics when they risk not being considered a priority or even be considered as part of an “imported agenda” (BF, PS, 69).

The expected impacts of the WRGE result framework are already suitable for adaptation to FCS

One key finding is that **these topics to raise attention and appear relevant need to be firmly linked to the current local/national context**. For instance, when there is a security threat, this largely affects women, but women can also become actors of improved security by taking up roles in community safety planning or peacebuilding. Where there is a high level of displacement, the needs of displaced women and girls need to be safeguarded.

When looking at the **thematic results framework on WRGE**, it appears well possible to do so, given that **the impact areas are quite relevant to FCS**. We did not test them systematically, but we can easily link some of the findings obtained from interviewees in the case study countries to these impacts:

- *Impact area 1: All women and girls enjoy the right to a life free of violence* – in conflict areas, or where there are security threats, women are often the first victims of general violence besides gender-based violence and security is their main concern (BF).
- *Impact area 2: Women influence decision-making and take leadership positions in public, private and civic sphere and their voices are heard* – even in conflict situations, there are always local and informal decision-making bodies where the presence of women and youth can be advocated, at local level and even in the humanitarian crises context (e.g. shelter committees – PS).
- *Impact area 3: Women's economic rights, empowerment and entrepreneurship is strengthened* - livelihoods of vulnerable women, including IDP women, is a primary concern of women's organisations and solidarity networks need to focus on concrete help to these women (BF).
- *Impact area 4: Women participate meaningfully and equally in conflict prevention, peace- and state-building and women's and girls' rights are protected in crisis and (post-)conflict situations* – women and women's rights organisations can play a key role in expanding safety and security, in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, in local peace committees (BF), as well as in preparation of not yet ongoing peace processes (PS).

Adapting the WPS programme to the dire reality of the Gaza war: humanitarian work, advocacy and protection

One SCS partnership in the OPT focuses on women, peace and security, training young people, women and girls in lobby and advocacy and aiming to contribute to the improvement of legislation protecting women's rights. After 7 October, the Mid-term review of the partnership programme already highlighted that the objective of changing laws and policies would be too ambitious. Then the situation worsened, with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza becoming more and more dramatic and all attention shifting to it. The advocacy needs of women and girls changed, one priority becoming the safety of women and girls in camps in the south of Gaza. The situation worsened also in the West Bank: women are exposed to settler violence and increasingly harassed at checkpoints, for instance requested more than before to strip in front of soldiers. Some marginalised Bedouin communities do not have access to food and hygiene products. Partners adapted their activities, including by taking up humanitarian work such as distributing hygiene kits, and reframing some work foreseen with youth in terms of "youth leading humanitarian processes". One partner based in Gaza and specialised in SRHR had to relocate its office from Jabalia to Rafah and reorganised all its work on support to women and girls in shelters. Another partner hosted thousands of refugees in their premises during the early stages of the war. Despite the situation or perhaps because of it, there is still high interest in advocacy in Gaza. The lead partner was ready to postpone some trainings on documenting human rights violations, but Gaza young activists insisted to have the training and appreciated becoming able to document violation of human rights and international humanitarian law through video productions. This is a dangerous activity, four documentarists of one of the partners lost their life during the war. In this complex and challenging context, the whole

alliance, involving 2nd and 3rd tier partners, engaged in an exercise of revising the partnership Theory of Change in the light of new developments. The conclusion was that most assumptions of the ToC remained true, but a few did not. Those assumptions were pertaining to changing laws and policies related advocacy, and awareness-raising activities targeting young diplomats (OPT).

What **seems more problematic is the way the WRGE thematic result framework translates impacts into outcomes focusing on the “enabling environment”, and outcome indicators mentioning “laws, policies and strategies blocked, adopted or improved**. The problematic nature of this formulation that assumes a functioning and transparent policy-making process has been already discussed above.

SRHR require contextualisation and reframing to gain acceptance

The **thematic result framework on SRHR** includes **impacts that are somehow more problematic** in case study countries:

- 1. Better information and greater freedom of choice for young people about their sexuality.*
- 2. Improved access to SRH and HIV/AIDS medicines and commodities.*
- 3. Better public and private health care for family planning, pregnancies and childbirth, including safe abortions.*
- 4. The sexual and reproductive rights of all people, including those belonging to marginalised groups, are institutionally respected & protected.*

Particularly impact 3 on abortion and contraception, as well as impact 4 on the SRHR of LGBTIQ+ people appear to be controversial. Impacts 1 and 2 appear to be easier to work on especially if **embedded in a context of “youth work” or “health care improvement”**. For this thematic area, **merging advocacy with service delivery** appears particularly effective to gain acceptance.

In all case study countries, it also emerged that successful actions in SRHR and WRGE strongly depend on the capacity of CSOs to **involve religious leaders** as most resistance comes from the (most conservative) parts of society. Two examples from Mozambique are meaningful in this framework:

- the current – incipient – cooperation between an organisation focusing on LGBTIQ+ rights, and an organisation linked to Evangelical Churches, actively involved in advocacy and governance actions;
- the action fostered by the country main women’s organisations platform to support the implementation of the law on the abortion in health services, which only succeeded when women’s organisations engaged with traditional and religious leaders, using as key argument medical evidence (MZ).



Legitimacy and representativeness of CSOs

6 Legitimacy and representativeness of CSOs

6.1 Self-legitimation, perceived legitimacy and delegitimation of CSOs

In this section, we answer the following research question:

5. What sources of legitimacy do CSOs draw on and which ones are for them most effective and important to achieve their goals (e.g. expertise, donor support, government support, representativeness, and constituency support)? (distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs)

Summary answer to the research question: CSOs derive legitimacy from various sources, including their reputation, track record, specialisation, and professional operational frameworks. Effective governance, accountability, and the ability to produce evidence enhance their credibility, particularly with duty-bearers. Local presence and tangible community impact increase legitimacy locally, for example when advocacy is linked to providing urgent services. Association with donors, authorities, or international networks can either support or undermine legitimacy depending on the context and reputation of these stakeholders. Considering these sources of legitimacy can help finetune the approach to strengthening civil society in FCS.

CSOs draw their legitimacy from a variety of formal and informal resources

When asked about the sources of legitimacy CSOs draw on, many interviewees have indicated that general reputation and track record are crucial (IQ, MZ, BF). Especially in contexts where many new CSOs arise in connection with donor funding, being an established and credible organisation becomes important (IQ). Being specialised in a specific field also enhances legitimacy (PS, 3). Lack of specialisation can be a factor limiting an organisation's legitimacy, when NGOs are found to be doing 'a little bit of everything' (SS, 44). Being a professional organisation with robust operational frameworks (IQ), strong governance and accountability practices (BF) and the ability to produce evidence (MZ, BF, SS) was seen as key, especially in relations with duty bearers. The systematic use of evidence and having access to data was also found to be important in literature sources (3, 44, 54). Yet, when CSOs are acting in line with government regimes, it was seen that evidence and research are less needed and that governments are more likely to support them even without using evidence (BF). Moreover, having good access to decision-makers (BF) and the ability to engage and collaborate with them (SS) was a common source of legitimacy, especially for formalised, national CSOs.

Another source of legitimacy is presence on the ground, especially when this is more difficult in FCS that are sometimes also located in remote areas, far from the capital and the main cities. Such presence gives the advantage of being able to verify developments and understand the context better (45, 48). Organisations with local presence also often get involved in service delivery, and this involvement can give them access to decision-making. For example, by being part of the 'doing', organisations get invited to coordination meetings and eventually participate in decision-making because of their first-hand expertise and access to information (45). Being locally present, addressing community concerns and achieving tangible results in the eyes of rightsholders supports legitimacy from their perspective (SS, 1, 56). In addition, international presence and/or international connections can be a very important legitimacy source to put pressure on a national government (7).

Context matters in building legitimacy from association with others

The following factors were seen to improve legitimacy in some cases, but not in every context:

- Both the case studies and literature have shown that being tied to donors, national authorities and international networks – through funding, collaboration, joint implementation or expression of support – can enhance or decrease legitimacy based on the context. Some powerholders can feel threatened and mark CSOs funded by international donors as ‘foreign agents’ (13) or accuse them of working on behalf of the political opposition (54). In this case, managing the visibility of donor support can be advised.
- Access to government authorities and working in collaboration with them is often seen as a legitimacy factor and advised from the perspective of state building, strengthening institutions and contribution to sustainability of effects. There are, however, also accounts of adverse effects of association with authorities, for example when communities have little trust in a government or are highly opposed to its position. In this case, CSOs may experience backlash and opposition from communities that are not in support of the government (3).
- Traditional CSOs or INGOs may not always have a lot of legitimacy - or ‘street credit’ - with younger generations. An informal tone of voice and the use of new/social media channels can support connecting to those target groups and building legitimacy with them (46). The inclusion of youth and women and including a diversity of staff in general can contribute to building representativeness, which in turn enhances legitimacy with different groups of rights holders (7, 48, IQ).

In this section, we answer the following research question:

5.2. How are legitimacy and representativeness of CSOs assessed and/or questioned by relevant actors in the CSOs context (donors, UN, local/national authorities, private sector, other CSOs....) and how do CSOs respond? (distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs)

Summary answer to the research question: Donor interpretations of legitimacy regularly differ from local views. While international donors emphasise formal constituent representation and democratic mechanisms, CSOs in FCS may not always prioritise these norms and values. Donors furthermore value strong fiduciary procedures, capacity assessments, and international network membership, which can be a challenging commitment for organisations with limited staff capacity, often being CBOs and national NGOs/CSOs. Working with donors can shift accountability upward, reducing connection to local constituents and potentially decreasing local legitimacy. CSOs often have legitimacy either locally or with donors, rarely both. Successful CSOs act as intermediaries, balancing different stakeholder expectations and roles, enhancing overall legitimacy.

Donor interpretations and assessment of legitimacy are not always similar to local interpretations of legitimacy

The legitimacy of an organisation needs to be valued in the eyes of others, and this may vary from the perspectives of for example constituencies, donors, different government levels. In the eyes of international partners and donors, representation of constituencies and other organisations is often considered important, but it is not emphasised as much by CSOs themselves (MZ, BF). Donors often expect formal procedures for representation, such as meetings and other moments to provide inputs, whereas such ways of working might not be standardised in FCS, especially for CBOs or smaller organisations in general. The ideal of freedom of speech and democratic mechanisms has been seen to receive backlash in many FCS (66).

Donors are furthermore seen to appreciate good fiduciary procedures (44), having undergone capacity assessments (43) and being a member of international networks (44). The administrative requirements this frequently brings along can be a challenge for smaller organisations with limited staff capacity, which often applies to CBOs and national NGOs. A risk of capacity assessments (when shared/published) is exposing CSOs to reputational damage when scores are low or misinterpreted, also having a negative effect on the legitimacy of civil society in general (43).

Working with international donors is also seen to lead to more accountability towards the donors, focussing on their agendas and rules, and less downward accountability and connection to constituents, which may decrease local legitimacy (1, 13, SS). Organisations often have either local or international/donor legitimacy, not both, because of different norms and values related to legitimacy (12). Those CSOs that do have legitimacy towards both donors and citizens were seen to be intermediaries between different stakeholders, enabling greater agency and broader outcomes (1).

Successful CSOs can combine legitimacy in the eyes of different stakeholders and combine different roles to enhance their legitimacy (e.g. service delivery and advocacy).

6.2 Advocating for WRGE and powerholders' support

In this section, we answer the following research question:

5.1. WRGE: To what extent is it a validated ToC assumption for FCSs that:

To create an enabling environment for gender equality and to bring about the structural transformation of institutions that perpetuate gender inequality, it is essential to gain the support of and work with government authorities, the private sector, civil society, and knowledge institutions¹.

Summary answer to the research question: The assumption under review was mostly validated. Finding alliances and working with the widest possible range of stakeholders has proven crucial to address gender inequalities, although it is not always sufficient to create structural transformation.

Liaising with stakeholders to advocate for WRGE is effective in the majority of cases

The case studies have shown different forms of civil society gaining support from and working with governments, private sector and knowledge institutions in advocating for WRGE, generally validating the assumption made. It was found that there is space for advocating for WRGE especially when the legitimacy of the regime is not questioned, when a collaborative approach is adopted and when advocacy is realistic about what can be achieved in the context it is performed, in line with general findings on advocating for other topics (BF, 36, 56).

In multiple cases of limited civic space to advocate for WRGE, advocacy was seen to shift to awareness-raising and educational programmes. Building networks and alliances still proved essential (IQ). Finding allies to work with proved more effective than trying to convince opponents (PS). Including women as active agents of change and not only as beneficiaries was also seen to be effective in bringing about structural transformation (22). In Mozambique, a strong linkage with government and public entities successfully influenced legislation. There are, however, challenges in working with other entities with more influence on practice and behaviours (MZ).

In this and more cases, creating or claiming civic space proved possible to some extent but did not always successfully lead to structural transformation. Overall, we do see most cases confirming the assumption that it is essential to gain the support of and work with government authorities, the private sector, civil society, and knowledge institutions.

6.3 Representativeness and consultation of constituencies and target groups

In this section, we answer the following research question:

5.3. To what extent and how do CSOs operating in FCS endeavour to be representative of marginalised societal groups, and how do they do it? (*distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs*)

Summary answer to the research question: CSOs often rely on culturally dependent, informal methods for citizen engagement, which are not always systematic or formalised. Donors and INGOs on the contrary encourage the use of surveys and other more explicit feedback processes. In FCS, democratic procedures and active citizen engagement are more difficult to implement, and efforts to enforce Western constructs of civil society may not align with local practices and values, but also constraints (e.g. security constraints). Collaboration between better-resourced INGOs/national CSOs and trusted local organisations is recommended for effective consultation. While citizen engagement does not guarantee representation, it is the most commonly used activity to increase representativeness. It should also be noted that not all CSOs take a representative role for granted, some may choose to be very selective in whom to represent and whom not to. Representation of marginalised groups is relevant to the ToC assumption assessed in the next section.

Representation of marginalised groups by CSOs does not necessarily happen through formal mechanisms

A culture of active citizen participation, engagement and representation may take different forms. Regarding representation of marginalised groups, many CSOs rely on traditional ways of consulting local communities and personal networks. Their approaches are often not very detailed or formalised (IQ, SS) and the process could often not be determined. Some examples gathered include methods like community gatherings (IQ) or establishing local focal points or regional committees (BF), often aligned with cultural habits. Donors and INGOs commonly have other ideas about ensuring representation, for example they encourage the use of surveys. Interviewees, however, note a risk of fatigue of answering surveys (IQ). Some interviewees recommend collaboration between INGOs/national CSOs who have greater financial and technical resources for constituent consultations and CBOs/local grassroots organisations who often have relationships and are trusted at the local level (SS).

One other factor that might further limit the tendency of CSOs to actively seek representation of marginalised groups is that being representative is not a key source of legitimacy in the eyes of some powerholders. As such, there is less incentive for CSOs to invest in it.

In literature, inclusion and representation is found to be less established in FCS in general, including for civil society (54). Civil society striving to be democratic, inclusive and representative is an assumption that does not always hold true in FCS and the operationalisation of representation is also criticised in literature as it can be viewed as trying to enforce a Eurocentric/Western construct of civil society, not matching local values or practices (2, 7). Some organisations may choose to only represent their own members/staff. Another limiting factor for representation described in literature is the limited availability of infrastructure and processes facilitated by government (3); for example, public consultations on policy/law changes and collection of public data (including opinions) which could also inform CSOs about the views of their constituents/target groups.

In this section, we answer the following research question:

5.4. To what extent is it a validated assumption for FCSs that:

- *The voices and needs of the most marginalised groups/persons within a society are effectively voiced by Civil Society/Civil Society organisations.*

Summary answer to the research question: CSOs generally raise voices and needs of marginalised groups, but due to risks and negative consequences some of the most marginalised voices and needs are not raised. A focus on donor agendas and access to remote/insecure areas can also limit consulting the needs of constituents. This assumption was thus partially validated, which implies some reservations to the extent to which the SCS policy framework can represent the most marginalised groups/persons.

- *WRGE: Women's rights organisations play a crucial role in empowering women and girls and in setting in motion structural processes of change geared to gender equality¹*

Summary answer to the research question: This assumption is mostly validated, with case studies showing the effectiveness of WROs on legislation affecting women and girls, as well as societal changes, given that the environment (civic space, government, society) is open enough for these changes. As such, this confirms the potential for impact of the SCS policy framework for WRGE by working with WROs.

Civil society does not always voice the most marginalised groups in a society, based on backlash and donor agendas

In all case studies except one (MZ - validated), the first assumption posed above is *partially* validated. It is generally seen that civil society reflects voices and needs of some marginalised groups, but that there are also marginalised groups linked to topics such as LGBTQI+ (IQ, SS, PS) that are too sensitive to advocate for. Advocating for those topics is avoided due to heavy backlash and opposition. Another concern raised in Burkina Faso and Lebanon is that civil society is oriented more towards donor agendas than collecting needs of communities (BF, 69). A final challenge in this regard is representation of groups geographically, with remote areas being harder to consult by CSOs, especially those that are centrally/internationally organised (MZ). Partial validation of this assumption is also based on the findings on research question 5.3 above.

WRGE organisations play a crucial role in advocating for change for women and girls, but an enabling environment is a precondition

The assumption on WRGE organisations playing a crucial role in empowering women and girls and in setting in motion structural processes of change geared to gender equality, is *mostly* validated. Examples of successful changes in all case studies illustrate an important role of presence and dedication of WRGE organisations, with effects ranging from legislative to behavioural and local changes. An important nuance to this assumption, however, is that the role of WRGE focused CSOs is *necessary* but not *enough* to elicit structural change. Civic space and a collaboration with the government and society are preconditions that also need to be in place (IQ, SS, 69).



Capabilities of CSOs

7 Capabilities of CSOs

7.1 Relevance of capacity strengthening for advocacy

In this section, we answer the following research question:

6.1.a To what extent is it a validated assumption that: *Capacity strengthening of CSOs can enhance the effectiveness of their lobby and advocacy?*

Summary answer to the research question: This assumption has been validated. Commitment to capacity strengthening seems particularly relevant in FCS and especially in contexts where the civil society is gaining more opportunities for lobby and advocacy. Adapting to the context, for example understanding when there is the need for confrontational or collaborative approaches, is a key capability. Another key ability is to collect and use evidence and data for lobby and advocacy. This provides insights into if and how capacity strengthening is a successful approach to reaching the objectives of the SCS policy framework.

Capacity strengthening can enhance the effectiveness of lobby and advocacy when applied in a contextualised, realistic and sustained way

An important strengthening factor for CSOs is the increase of their ability to take into account the current context so as to influence the country's policies in smart ways (BF, SS, IQ). This means for example identifying appropriate collaborative methods not to cause negative unintended effects with a confrontational approach (67). Another key ability is to collect and use evidence and data for lobby and advocacy. Capacity strengthening via the increased formation of coalitions and networks was also observed to be effective (MZ). In Iraq, it was observed that strengthening L&A capacity of CSOs is particularly timely now that the role of civil society is moving away from humanitarian aid and there is more opportunity for lobby and advocacy, although not on all topics (IQ). A limitation to the validity of this assumption reported by interviewees was that strengthened L&A capacity of CSOs is not always sufficient to guarantee advocacy effectiveness, as duty bearers might still block changes (PS). Furthermore, the definition of lobby and advocacy is sometimes stretched to 'tick boxes' for donors who require them - an example is organising an event with at least some policy-makers, without follow-up or a clear advocacy strategy (SS).

In desk research sources, it was acknowledged that capacity strengthening of CSOs is effective and that FCS contexts require a higher commitment to capacity development than other contexts, as the landscape of CSOs can be less developed and established, and there is more brain drain from the country (19). Linked to this, there was a call for realism and selectivity, to be aware of current and past situations and selectively choose where to focus capacity strengthening on; this would increase chances of success and encourage further learning and development (20). A bottleneck observed was to institutionalise capacity strengthening tied to projects, as the effects are not always easily carried over to a programme/organisational level (51, 52). Providing sustained mentorship rather than one-off training is one way that could prevent this lack of sustainability (19).

In addition to organisational capacity strengthening, studies highlight the importance of seeing civil society as a public sphere rather than (only) the collection of a set of organisations. This includes activities that focus on increasing civic space for public debate and civic action and an increased attention to government-citizen interaction as an enabling factor (12).

7.2 Most important capabilities needed to perform CSO roles

In this section, we answer the following research question:

6. Which capabilities are more important, and which are less important for which types of CSOs and CSOS roles (educational, communicative, representational, cooperative...) to operate in FCS?

Summary answer to the research question: CSOs in FCS need to build a robust internal organisation and adapt to rapidly changing or threatening environments. Key capabilities include producing and using evidence, building trust with power holders, forming partnerships, effective communication and technical skills such as monitoring or financial management. Additionally, context-related skills such as undertaking continuous context analysis, dealing with security threats or identifying opportunities for influence are crucial. Combining these capabilities is essential for CSOs to remain relevant, effective and resilient, and focusing the SCS policy framework on these skills can help increase its effectiveness in FCS.

Important capabilities for CSOs are building a robust internal organisation as well as analysing and adapting to rapidly changing or inhibiting/threatening circumstances

Both in desk research and in the interviews, it proved difficult to select capabilities that are more or less important for CSOs operating in FCS. Many capabilities are regarded as highly important and especially in performing different (and changing) roles, capabilities each have their advantages. Specialising in one role or a narrow set of capabilities was sometimes regarded as less effective than using the complementarity of different roles and different capabilities (MZ).

A few capabilities that were most focused on as being important are (MZ, SS, BF, IQ, 15):

- **Producing and using evidence**, so that organisations cannot be discredited based on their knowledge and information sources.
- **Inspiring trust and building rapport with powerholders**. This can include for example finding likeminded allies in the government, being able to analyse the political space and understanding policy and budgetary cycles.
- **Forming relationships and partnerships with similar organisations**, which can help increase visibility and credibility. Networking also provides opportunities to exchange knowledge, share opportunities for influence and funding and implement joint actions, although competition among CSOs can limit these opportunities.
- **Effective communication and awareness-raising**;
- **Advocacy methods** effective in local contexts, which are usually collaborative. This means being able to present civil society as a constructive force, proposing solutions and perspectives;
- Technical capabilities and expertise such as:
 - Monitoring of projects in remote areas or areas that are not easily reachable for security reasons. This is particularly challenging where there is internal displacement, as even local authority representatives might not be present in certain areas.
 - Financial management, especially when small organisations manage to increase funds quickly.
 - Fundraising and diversifying funding to increase the organisation's sustainability.
 - Understanding the international aid system and donor procedures.

Additional capabilities that are more specific to FCS contexts include:

- Conducting continuous context analysis (past, current, and future perspective). An overwhelming number of sources emphasise the need for context-specificity, the need to have very sensitive antennas for context changes, including political and economic factors and having the awareness and flexibility to adapt to volatile and rapidly changing circumstances (3, 7, 13, 15, 21, 32, 56, 65).

- Dealing with security threats and government repression, including safeguarding staff and safeguarding (digital) information (15, BF).
- Identifying opportunities for influence in presence of untransparent/nonlinear government processes (28).

While the first set of capabilities helps a CSO to become or stay robust in an environment of many changes and threats, context analysis and flexibility skills help an organisation to adjust. A combination of these types of capabilities seems to be essential for CSOs in FCS. As discussed in paragraph 5.3, the capability to be representative of constituents was not frequently mentioned by interviewees as a core capability. Likely this is because many organisations take it for granted and because it is not often requested or required as a source of legitimacy by powerholders.

7.3 Importance of networking, coalition building and movement building in SRHR and WRGE

In this section, we answer the following research questions:

6.1.b: SRHR: *To what extent is it a validated assumption that SRHR: Organised opposition against sexual and reproductive rights can be best countered by strengthening existing coalitions and networks.*

Summary answer to the research question: Strengthening links with international coalitions for SRHR advocacy in countries with limited civic space is often impossible or ineffective and can have negative consequences for CSOs and their staff. Links to local, national, regional, and global women's and other movements can be useful, but only when there is alignment with the sociocultural context, which is easier at the local and regional level. Local initiatives that engage more accepting communities are seen as more effective. CSOs increasingly focus on providing safe spaces to marginalised groups such as LGBTIQ+ people rather than public advocacy. Overall, this assumption of the SCS SRHR ToC is not validated.

6.1.c: WRGE: *To what extent is it a validated assumption that: To bring about structural transformation, links to local, national, regional, and global women's and other movements are central.*

Summary answer to the research question: WROs have seen success in peace processes and political representation through networks and linkage with other movements, but face challenges when global agendas clash with national priority concerns, making localised networking safer and sometimes more effective in those cases. This assumption of the SCS WRGE ToC is thus partially validated.

With very limited civic space for SRHR, strengthening existing coalitions and networks is not effective and can lead to adverse consequences

In most case study countries, civic space to advocate for and work on SRHR topics is very limited or non-existent. Confrontational approaches and coalition/network building is opposed and can have negative consequences for CSOs and their staff (IQ, SS, BF), although on certain occasions there is also a positive effect of providing 'safety in numbers' when voices are joined and amplified (SS). It is found that local initiatives with communities which are relatively more open towards SRHR topics are more effective (MZ). In Lebanon, digital and more anonymised campaigns for SRHR have been possible (69). A trend is seen in CSOs representing or working with marginalised groups such as LGBTIQ+ people focussing more on providing a safe space to members rather than exposing themselves in public advocacy (BF).

Links to local, national, regional, and global women’s and other movements can be useful, but only when there is alignment with the local sociocultural context

There are a few examples of successes of WROs working in networks and using linkages to other movements to establish effects in for example peace processes (SS), representation in parliament (IQ) or societal influence (MZ). In other cases, the national focus on security seems to leave little space for the global feminist/women empowerment agenda (BF). In this case, WROs are seen to be more effective when they align with contextual issues, such as women’s exposure to insecurity or opportunities for women’s contribution to security. Some interviewees also report having had a backlash when working with international agencies on sensitive topics considered part of an “imported agenda” from the West (69), in which case a national networking orientation is safer than linking to global movements. On the other hand, membership of a network can provide legitimacy to others, access to shared resources, security from operating jointly (54) and especially donors may request it for funding (44). CSOs that position themselves as network specialists/brokers were seen to bridge gaps in social structures and across political, economic, social and cultural arenas (6). In summary, the assumption of bringing about structural transformation with links to local, national, regional and global movements was partially validated.



Types of support and delivery set-up

8 Types of support and delivery set-up

In this section, we answer the following research questions:

7. What type of support is best suited for the development of the most important capacities needed by civil society in FCSs?

Summary answer to the research question: A mix of financial and non-financial support, not imposing external agendas and mitigating the risk of creating vertical relationships among CSOs, but rather supporting CSO platforms or networks on the development of their own strategic plans on a multi-annual period. Support can allow a mix of advocacy activities and service delivery that contributes strengthening the CSOs' legitimacy and position. It can integrate grants and technical assistance and can include the provision of in-kind support for the implementation of actions or for the participation in events/activities. Appointing an external actor to manage granting can minimise the risk of producing or strengthening the vertical/hierarchical relationships among CSOs; moreover, it can limit to some extent the risks of political interference in the management of funds. Open calls for proposals should be minimised. Pooling donor funding presents both advantages and disadvantages, coupling the easier management of grants with a higher backlash risk, related to the possibility of governments to act against the beneficiary CSOs or the granting mechanism itself.

7.1. Which are the good/bad practices and the pre-conditions for successful donor support according to literature?

Summary answer to the research question: Good practices are those approaches that strengthen durability of CSOs, target also informal civil society and CBOs, enable flexible and responsive approaches and mitigate risks of donor dependency as well as CSOs being targeted for receiving external aid.

7.2. To what extent is it a validated assumption that: External aid by the Ministry and (mainly Northern) CSOs can strengthen CSOs in low-income, lower-middle income and higher-middle income countries and stakeholders?

Summary answer to the research question: The assumption is validated partially. Aid can strengthen CSOs in FCS and help them coping with restrictions of civic space, becoming crucial to sustain their existence and autonomy. Yet external aid also creates dependency and poses certain risks to organisations, which need to be mitigated.

7.3. What type of delivery setup is best suited for the development of the most important capacities needed by civil society in FCSs? (local/national/regional/international partnership, types of partners....)

Summary answer to the research question: A delivery set up based on coupling external support - mainly financial support and access to information/knowledge - and peer-to-peer technical assistance and capacity strengthening - mainly based on the involvement of local NGOs or regional and international networks/platforms, within the framework of long duration (5 to 7 years initiatives) - would be the most suitable option. Core grants and support to strategic plans/activities is a basic requirement for supporting actual capacity strengthening, for both large well-structured NGOs, and the smaller ones. To support social movements and CBOs delivery of in-kind support, including

access to media and communication, access to information, access to equipment, access to legal services, etc. is more suited than financial support.

8.1 Donor financial and non-financial support

Support to CSOs takes different forms and delivery setups. The desk review and country case studies allowed to identify a variety of support approaches practiced by donors in FCS. The experience of the analysed countries shows that rather than a single approach, mixed approaches are better suited to support CSOs and their advocacy capacities and engagement. Adopting a single approach can be dangerous, as it would not allow for mitigating the side effects that almost all approaches have. Important elements that can make a difference in the delivery of support are: a) the possibility for local civil society actors to be sustained in the development and implementation of their own development strategies or strategic actions; b) the long duration of support (which minimises the organisational stress related to project-based funding and allows organisations to engage in a permanent way on policy/societal issues); c) the involvement of local CSOs as mentors and non-financial support providers; d) the possibility for informal entities – CBOs, social movements, etc. - to access non-financial support. Specific “emergency support” can be needed in countries where the civic space is close or rapidly shrinking.

Financial support is provided to CSOs in a variety of set-ups:

- Project-based financial support to CSOs and CSO consortia, based on calls for proposals (ex. under EU civil society-related thematic programmes, EU grant schemes on human rights and democracy, etc.).
- Project-based financial support through INGOs (or to NGOs from the supporting country), that channel resources towards local CSOs or local initiatives (a widespread practice of most EU Member States).
- Financial support to organisational development strategies (project-based or programme-based).
- Core support focusing on organisational development strategies or long-term strategies (project-based, or based on a pluriannual programme).
- Programme-based support, involving one or more large INGOs or national NGOs channelling resources to support local NGOs or local initiatives, based on local call for proposals or on the direct identification and selection of supported initiatives (examples include the AGIR and the Aliadas programmes in Mozambique).
- Programme-based support focusing on platforms and on supporting their strategic plans (as in the case of the EU PAANE Programme in Mozambique, or as in the case of Framework Partnership Agreements stipulated with NGOs/NGO Platforms by the EU, at international and at country level).
- Open-end funding schemes based on the expression of interest or project proposals presented by CSOs.

Non-financial support includes technical assistance, training and knowledge production and is delivered through service contracts, or political and diplomatic support and protection through:

- Training, mentoring and technical assistance activities focusing on “basic capacities and capabilities”.
- Mentoring by other (international and national) CSOs.
- Capacity strengthening on financial management to adapt to international standards;
- Targeted training and capacity strengthening for advocacy (including on evidence-based advocacy, M&E, policy analysis, etc.).

- The production of knowledge input and support to evidence-based advocacy, by conducting legal analyses, by assisting with the monitoring of public policies and actions, etc. (according to situations and capacities, knowledge can be produced by the CSOs targeted by the actions or by external service providers: the focus is on CSOs' access to high-quality knowledge to support advocacy and policy actions).
- The support to public authorities, including training, provision of equipment, support to consultation and "participatory democracy" initiatives (e.g. consultative councils, events on SDGs, etc.).
- The provision of "in-kind" support, normally within the framework of specific programmes aimed at supporting informal organisations, movements, and CBOs (including the provision of support for registration and legalisation).
- The provision of security-focused support (facilitating access to information, setting early warning systems, access to legal services, etc.).
- The "political" or diplomatic support, through the intervention of the embassies for fostering the interests or for defending CSOs, particularly in case of specific issues and conflicts.
- The support to CSOs for their participation in meetings and events, focusing on knowledge sharing, coalition setting, advocacy, etc..
- Support to "human rights defenders" and the development of protection mechanisms (including the facilitation of migration to safe areas, of political asylum and the provision of legal services).
- Support to international advocacy actions (as for instance support to Civicus³² and actions carried out in the framework of international organisations - such as the UN, the African Union – and of the international judiciary system), through INGOs (an example being the development of "Framework Partnership Agreements" between the EU and a number of international CSO platforms, mainly focusing on sector-based advocacy at global level).

These approaches are adopted in all the countries analysed in the study, based on the consultation of key informants and literature (including among others the mapping studies conducted for the formulation of the EU Civil Society Roadmaps in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Bangladesh, OPT, Somalia, and at Pan-African level). In some cases, they are applied individually, but in many cases, they are applied together in the framework of integrated programmes. It is usual to couple financial support (grants) with some kind of non-financial support (training, mentoring, technical assistance, etc.). The use of integrated approaches was observed in Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Iraq.

Support through basket funds: pros and cons

In some countries, several donors pool resources to set up "basket funds". Based on literature (70), basket funds present two major **advantages**:

- The simplification of CSOs' access to funds: there is no need to explore different opportunities and to formulate different proposals, often using different formats;
- The simplification of grant management work by donors.

On the other hand, basket funds also present some **disadvantages**, some of which can be very relevant in FCS:

- In most cases they do not solve the shortcomings of Call for Proposals (competition among CSOs, project-based grants, funding accessible only to legally established organisations);

³² CIVICUS is an international civil society platform, including CSOs and individuals from all over the World. CIVICUS fosters the strengthening of civic space and the protection of civil society organisations. CIVICUS key actions include the monitoring of civic space at the country level, the analysis of civil society dynamics – especially focusing on the relation between CSOs and governments – and civil society support actions, the development of capacity strengthening and support activities, the development of an emergency-fund to support CSOs facing threats of different nature (<https://www.civicus.org/>)

- They can produce a reduction of the overall opportunities for CSOs: while different CSOs – with their different agendas, functioning mechanisms, structures, policies and orientation – are often able to find support by navigating in different ways among different opportunities, when basket funds are established, the opportunities are less differentiated and reduced in number.
- They can be vulnerable to government pressure (while blocking the actions of all different donors can be difficult for government, blocking the functioning of a basket fund can be relatively easy, as it was experienced in Uganda and Ethiopia, just before 2020).
- The visibility of supports provided by the basket funds is normally higher than that of the support provided by each donor, therefore supported CSOs can be more easily targeted by governments' repressive actions.
- The effectiveness of the financial support to key organisations and networks can be reduced by "basket funds", as beneficiary CSOs are likely to have less autonomy and flexibility than they have by being supported – separately, with different timings and criteria – by several donors.

Receiving external aid can strengthen CSOs if measures are adopted to foster their self-sufficiency

The **SCS ToC assumption that "External aid by the Ministry and (mainly Northern) CSOs can strengthen CSOs in low-income, lower-middle income and higher-middle income countries" is partially confirmed**, by the desk review and the case studies. In case study countries, the assumption is mostly validated, and the importance of aid is stressed as this is the only source of funding for CSOs which are otherwise unable to raise funds from their members or the public. Financial support allows CSOs to maintain their independence.

Dependency of CSOs on external aid in FCS is a reality and a perhaps unavoidable risk, especially when aid becomes volatile. In many fragile countries it is not realistic to define sustainability strategies based on domestic support and namely support from the private sector, because of several reasons: a) private sector is often weak; b) private sector is often supporting the government (this is particularly true when it has influence on public power holders); and c) particularly when the "rule of law is weak, private sector entities would not risk being associated with CSOs that are perceived or labelled as "opposition", or as "foreign agents". It appears from interviews that donor support is **most effective in fostering autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency of CSOs** when it involves:

- the adoption of mitigation measures, such as the joint engagement of donors to increase resources through setting up in a coordinated manner different opportunities, targeting the same CSOs, the same activities or the same geographic areas, so as to facilitate the access to resources by organisations in a more continuous way and reduce the negative effects of the intermittency of funding.
- the adoption of long-term support strategies and support to long term activities, reducing the stress produced by the project support modality.
- the adoption of support modalities that do not oblige CSOs to become "professional" organisations, but support them in playing their roles by remaining "informal", voluntary or social mobilisation-based, focusing on participatory governance, rather than the delivery of services or the implementation of projects, characterised by the detailed definition of activities and timing, and by an inflexible allocation of resources.
- Better targeting of capacity strengthening, avoiding fostering the proliferation of NGO-type organisations, and increasing the legitimacy and recognition of CBOs/movement-based actions.

Some already tested good practices to mitigate donor dependency and help CSOs achieve stability and self-sufficiency include (SS, MZ, BF, PS, 71, 72):

- **Providing core funding**, on the long term, to increase the stability of CSOs and allow them to concentrate on long-term strategic issues.

- **Providing multi-year grants to increase the ability of CSOs to engage in networks** and to work with others to achieve a common goal (South Sudan, Mozambique, Burkina Faso).
- **Avoiding short term funding**, that risks generating indirect effects such as the proliferation of small organisations created only to receive funds, and prompts CSOs to recruit activists for “project implementation” rather than for strengthening the permanent activity.

External aid while strengthening coping capacities can expose CSOs to additional risks

In FCS support can help increase the coping capacities of organisations to face (political, judicial,³³ societal) threats, but also represents an important risk factor: receiving external support can not only create dependency, but also influence CSOs’ legitimacy, their ability to represent their constituencies, and their capacity to mobilise societal resources to engage in long-term transformative processes. Finally, as already mentioned, external support exposes CSOs to specific political and judicial threats: from being publicly labelled as “foreign agents”, to being subject to criminal investigations about financial resources management and international linkages.

Lebanon’s CSOs between reduction of donor support and growing accusations of being “foreign agents”

An example that is worth considering is that of Lebanon. In this country, external aid is generally recognised as an important source of funding and as a critical tool for most Lebanese CSOs to reach a relative financial stability and sustainability. However, for the organisations regularly funded by external aid, important changes have been observed after October 7, 2023, including a reduction of support. Donors have lost credibility as well among CSOs and have been associated – more than in the past – with foreign agendas. The representation and perception of donors as pursuing their own agendas, which are far from needs and demands of local actors and local civil society, has been even stronger in relation to sensitive topics, such as SRHR and LGBTIQ+ issues. Receiving support from external donors appears also an issue when considering the specific economic crisis of Lebanon: being recognised as an entity which receives funds in USD or Euro (and being recognised as an activist paid in USD or Euro) has become a reason for losing legitimacy to engage on advocacy and policy processes. (69)

The Lebanon situation is to some extent an extreme one, however it is not too different from those of other fragile countries. It is not very different from the situation in OPT, where support from some donors – USAID – was already considered delegitimising for CSOs, as it was the engagement of projects with Israeli (peace) organisations for the risk of “normalising” the occupation. The situation is also to some extent similar in other countries, where – according to consulted key informants and CSOs, as well as from research literature (73) – international support has decreased over the last few years (because of COVID pandemics the emergency situation in Ukraine), while CSOs engaging in governance, policy and advocacy have been growingly labelled as foreign agents.

Specific risks and challenges emerge in relation to the **donor practice of supporting CSOs working under authoritarian regimes which operate without any relationship to the state**, and refuse to share any information with the government, so as to avoid its influence and pressure. This was perhaps the reason for the EU to initiate the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights³⁴, as a completely independent line of funding from the European Development Fund, managed according to the Europe-ACP Agreement rules and thus necessarily negotiated with partner states. Supporting CSOs avoiding any relationship with governments can – at least partially

³³ In fact, it can provide to CSOs access to legal services, to communication and media, to information and can increase the possibility to recovery from the disruption caused by societal and political threats to the possibility to access local support, including those that can in many cases be provided by private actors, by academic institutions and by local authorities, in autonomous way from governments.

³⁴ European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. Briefing, 2015 ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/568332/EPRS_BRI\(2015\)568332_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/568332/EPRS_BRI(2015)568332_EN.pdf))

– allow these CSOs to resist and keep on playing a social role (linked to information, to education or to “voice” the perspective of excluded social groups). However, it also fosters the development of parallel structures, fosters a sense of resignation towards the possibility to influence the political processes in the short and medium term, further widens the gap between state and CSOs and weakens the public trust of citizens towards both. Examples can be provided regarding Mozambique, Egypt, Tunisia, and Bangladesh: as shown in the evaluations of the EU interventions in these countries based on Country Roadmaps³⁵, even in situations characterised by the closure of civic space and by limited or no political democracy, CSOs continued to implement some actions focusing on democracy. Taking advantage of the existing spaces at local level and in relation to the governance of public services, CSOs have been able to promote social accountability and civic participation. Even in the extreme case of Russia, CSOs continue to find opportunities to act, within the space of specific policy areas (as waste management for instance) (74).

Enabling CSOs to pursue contextually relevant agendas instead of donor agendas helps mitigating risks

Conscious of the risks associated with receiving external aid and of the importance of context sensitivity, international development partners have already adopted a range of good practices:

- **Providing support to CSOs based on the recognition of their own agendas, strategies, and priorities** rather than by asking them to engage on international agendas (for instance by formulating proposals based on priorities defined in international strategies or policy documents) or to engage in the management of sub-granting schemes/financial support to third parties based on global programmes; this can also include allowing a **mix of advocacy and service delivery activities that strengthen the legitimacy and position of organisations** (SS, MZ, BF, 71, 72).
- **Provide flexible funding supporting programmes and strategic priorities rather than pre-set activities and projects**, to allow CSOs to pursue the (advocacy) priorities that are most relevant to their constituencies rather than pre-determined advocacy agendas set by donors (SS, MZ, PS, 71, 72).
- **Strong involvement of local organisations in the formulation of projects/proposals**, avoiding late engagement with them, possibly leading to limited relevance of actions and non-realistic expectations (IQ).
- **Strong engagement of the local offices of Aid agencies and Embassies in the definition of actions** supporting CSOs, particularly advocacy and policy-focused actions, to mitigate the tendency to impose “global topics” or global agendas without the necessary adaptation to local contexts (IQ, MZ, BF, SS).

Supporting informal civil society, platforms and networks remains a challenge

Access to funding does not happen on an equal footing for all types of CSOs. CBOs and grassroots organisations receive limited support, even those with strong grassroots constituencies. INGOs and some national CSOs known as “usual suspects” – i.e. organisations characterised by established connections to donors, strong presence in the capital cities, a trained and well-educated staff and leadership – have privileged access to funding, despite their sometimes limited or just short-term linkage with constituencies and smaller CSOs.

A critical issue in this context is **how to support CSOs that are not formally registered**, such as – on the one side – **community-based organisations and civic/social movements** – and on the other side – **platforms and networks**. These two sets of entities – as already discussed – are key actors in policy change processes, in fostering social and cultural change and in fostering people participation at local level, however, they are difficult to directly reach with funding, as they cannot have bank accounts and they normally do not have a financial infrastructure allowing for adequate

³⁵ https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/groups/public-governance-civilsociety/library_en

accountability on the use of public funds. Identified experiences, including the EU and EU Member States' programmes in Mozambique and Burkina Faso, as well as in other countries³⁶ – including the implementation of sub-granting schemes and the use of “financial support to third parties” through intermediating NGOs – did not always prove effective. In fact, channelling resources through one or more legally established entities risks creating artificial leaderships, neither based on the capacity to define agendas, to identify issues or to find solutions, nor based on social legitimacy, but just due to the control of resources. While the above issues are particularly apparent when related to financial support and funding, they also apply to non-financial support, such as the delivery of training, technical assistance, mentoring, in-kind support, political backing and the involvement in international networks and fora.

Good practices to improve support to smaller CSOs/CBOs

Despite all the challenges above, the key informants consulted in the implementation of the case studies mentioned that several practices have been already adopted by donors to improve their ability to target smaller CSOs, CBOs and informal civil society:

- **Diversifying funding streams with different funding windows that target different typologies of CSOs**, including providing grants of variable size based on the capacities of recipient organisations and providing non-financial support (assistance, training, etc.) for organisations that cannot receive grants, because of legal or capacity issues (SS, MZ, BF, 71).
- **Provide support to recently established CSOs**, based on their proposals and on their capacity to represent/reflect constituencies, rather than only well-established CSOs (or the usual suspects) (SS, MZ, PS, 71, 72).
- **Supplementing capacity building actions with grants** (to strengthen CSOs ability to manage grants, by putting new skills learned into practice) (SS, BF, MZ).
- **Information and knowledge sharing among CSOs**, with the active support of donors (SS);
- **Support to information production and research** to provide data and evidence supporting advocacy when organisations do not have the capacity to collect evidence independently (SS).
- **Joint initiatives focusing on advocacy**, involving international agencies and INGOs as well as local/national CSOs, and providing small organisations with an umbrella that reduces the risks to be targeted by authorities or other actors (SS).
- **Support to CSOs for attending important regional meetings**; thus, allowing also CSOs that would not otherwise have the resources to attend such events, to build alliances and to share knowledge and experiences (SS).

8.2 Partnership set-up and Southern Leadership

INGOs are considered a resource for developing CSOs

Alliances and partnerships with “Northern NGOs” are normally seen in a positive way, as well as the participation in international coalitions, networks, and platforms. Interviews highlighted the following advantages in relation to different lobby and advocacy processes (SS, MZ, IQ, BF):

- The access to information and knowledge.
- The access to capacities, and the possibility to foster capacity strengthening, mentoring and the transfer of knowledge and know how.
- The legitimisation of CSOs, as internationally recognised.
- The launching and implementation of “international advocacy” actions, both for influencing national governments (as in the case of the opposition and resistance to the shrinking of civic

³⁶ In this framework is worth mentioning, for Mozambique, the “Aliadas” and the “AGIR” Programmes (supported by a group of EU Member State), the PAANE 1 and PAANE 2 Programmes supported by the EU; and the PDU - UE in Burkina Faso. FSTP actions were evaluated as providing limited support to CSO strengthening also in the case of ReLOaD programme (UNDP in the Western Balkans), of the GIZ programme on supporting local democracy in the Republic of Moldova, of the EU TACSO Programme in the Balkans.

space) and for influencing international policy framework (as for instance on issues such as conflict management, migrations, economic and trade agreements, regional integration);

- Access to financial and non-financial support.
- The mediation of conflicts among local actors (as they can play a third-party function).

Partnerships with “Northern NGOs” and INGOs are recognised as a key factor in the development of many national CSOs, particularly in countries like those of Western Africa (BF, 71), where in some cases Northern NGOs established long-term cooperation, which is not based on presence, but on “remote” support and mentoring.

Even in countries where they can operate and play important functions, INGOs may be vulnerable to governments’ actions and reactions. This proved to be the case of South Sudan, where INGOs can easily be stopped by authorities (SS), and is frequent in countries where public administrations are strongly influenced by political power. Being vulnerable to government’s reactions leads INGOs to avoid engaging on politically sensitive issues. This prevents them from playing a strong role in supporting national and local advocacy actions.

...but sometimes they are also seen as competitors

While the support of INGOs and Northern NGOs is considered precious, their presence in the countries and their “indigenisation” (e.g. increasing use of national staff) is sometimes considered a threat as well. In some cases, INGOs are perceived as unfair competitors on access to donor resources (MZ, BF, PS) and in other areas: staff recruitment and co-optation of leaders; visibility and communication; access to international dialogue and consultation opportunities; engagement with beneficiaries, etc.

The perception of INGOs and Northern NGOs as a threat finds a major cause in the fact that often INGOs get funds from international donors, but then engage with national/local CSOs for acting in the field (SS, MZ, BF, IQ). In some cases, national and local CSOs describe partnerships as a form of neo-colonialism or imperialism (BF). Moreover, they are often perceived as fostering agendas that do not always reflect local needs. A key factor in these perceptions is the **limited engagement with national/local CSOs in project/programme formulation**. Partnerships are therefore seen as imposed, and as a means to access resources, rather than as a way to foster shared goals.

Southern leadership and regional cooperation considered helpful to foster relevance

Based on the above, the development of partnerships between INGOs and national CSOs is not always suitable for supporting CSOs and their engagement in advocacy work. A **more positive picture emerges in relation to regional organisations and regional platforms**, and more in general with partnerships led by “Southern NGOs” that are seen as partners in innovation, in the production of knowledge, and in supporting local actions. Peer-to-peer cooperation appears to CSOs as more suitable for fostering relevant and adapted actions. Key informants have mentioned a few examples, such as that of WANEP network and the Western Africa Civil Society Forum in Western Africa, and that of the LGBTIQ+ and women’s network in Austral Africa.

The possibility to have effective partnerships has been linked by the consulted key informants to the adoption of a set of principles, including the following ones:

- equality and mutual respect, transparency, and accountability;
- local ownership;
- fostering the autonomy of local CSOs;
- equality in the use of resources and in the staffing processes (including equal salaries);
- fostering capacity strengthening and knowledge transfer;
- sharing of knowledge, information, and opportunities;

- amplifying the voice from the ground and sharing visibility;
- co-creation and joint design and implementation;
- long-term partnerships and actions, rather than short term engagement;
- adapting approaches and methodologies to the local context.

Compliance with these principles has been considered easier in the case of partnerships involving Southern CSOs as leaders, according to interviewees.

Southern leadership is also seen as an important element for effective partnership (as in the case of SCS partnerships in Mozambique and in Burkina Faso), and it could be fostered through the involvement of national NGOs as leading partners or through the cooperation among regional/national partners (as in the case of FASOVEIL³⁷ in Burkina Faso).

Channelling aid through national NGOs in Mozambique

External support to CSOs has been increasingly channelled through large national CSOs. Mozambique constitutes an interesting example of such practice, as both the EU and other donors engaged in granting schemes based on intermediary NGOs providing funding and non-funding support to local, smaller CSOs. The experiences of programmes like AGIR, PAANE, Aliadas, etc. show that this practice, while facilitating the access to funding for a large number of organisations, risks to have also negative effects. It can increase **the tendency to develop vertical networks**, where local/national CSOs have dependent financial relations with particular INGOs, sometimes to the expenses of horizontal linkages with other NGOs. Larger national CSOs, normally the most capable of conducting advocacy actions may **become more and more grant makers for third parties instead of being engaged** in advocacy themselves; even the **focus of their capacity strengthening activities towards small regional/local CSOs** may shift **from advocacy, participation and democracy, to “grant management”**. In fact, channelling financial support produces a risk situation that can only be managed by increasing control over the beneficiary organisations and improving their project-management and administration capacities.

The ability of donors to put pressure on authorities to expand civic space heavily depends on the leverage they have on governments

As discussed, several kinds of non-financial support can be provided by international donors for supporting the expansion of civic space and to protect CSOs. These include the direct provision of support to the CSOs that face threats by public authorities, including access to legal support and services, access to media and to international forums where it would be possible to advocate, and access to international judicial institutions (such as the African Court of Justice) and to regional bodies (such as the ECOSOCC of the African Union and similar institutions) (75). In some cases, the support to CSOs can imply direct pressure towards the government (BF, MZ). Such pressure can focus on specific issues, such as the facilitation of bureaucratic procedures concerning the registration of organisations or the elimination of bureaucratic, administrative and security-based obstacles to the action of specific entities (including access to specific territorial areas and the relationships with local authorities). Donor advocacy can also address more general issues, such as the formulation of a Civil Society Law, or ask the government to have a wider dialogue on new legal initiatives with Civil Society or to avoid adopting specific measures.

³⁷ FASOVEIL: Faciliter la Redevabilité et la VEILLE citoyenne avec la Société civile is an initiative of the Civitac regional platforms – involving CSOs and local authorities in Burkina Faso. FASOVEIS was promoted by the national NGO “Laboratoire Citoyennetés” with support from a variety of donors including the European Union, the Swiss Cooperation. The project has a duration of 4 years and budget of over 8 million EURO. CIVITAC is supported in the management of the project by the EU based NGO “Foundation Hirondelle” (https://www.facebook.com/FASOVEIL/?paipv=0&eav=Afarwolo-LrZ1XPGCgNoPPpctcEmzC0ORgPoQLSDOYSAwlaYh_JjxgXzLnyRmUVS6eA&_rdr; <https://civitac.org/>)

In this case, two elements emerge:

- The action of donors is more effective when it comes not from only one donor but from a group of likeminded countries.
- The action is only effective when donors have leverage on governments, and when mutual recognition exists between the two parties on the legitimacy of their respective actions (there is limited possibility to undertake such a kind of action when the government is not recognised as a partner by the donor country).

Constructive support to reform CSO legal frameworks did not always reach its objective

In some cases, donors can play a constructive role, by providing the government with technical assistance for the formulation of new more supportive legal frameworks. This has been adopted by the EU as a common action since 2012 in all partner countries (the 2012 EU Commission Communication on the Roots of Democracy identifies the legal framework as a key area for supporting the development of civil society) (76).

As discussed with key informants, in some countries – like Iraq – such a constructive approach succeeded. In many other countries, however, this constructive approach did not lead to the desired results (MZ, 71, 72). In these cases, several factors influenced the (in)effectiveness of the action, including:

- The **length and complexity of the legislative process** (for example, laws can be formulated at ministry level, but then they need to be included in the government agenda, discussed and approved by the Council of ministers, and then taken to the Parliament and included in the Parliamentary agenda, or be approved through different processes in absence of a functioning parliamentary body).
- The presence of a **real political will** at government level, for the whole period of the legislative process: the change of a minister, and the immediate interests of the government (for instance related to political elections, or to the need to avoid “public pressure” on specific decisions – such as those on natural resources) can easily lead to changes in the agendas and to the blocking of legislative processes; or the presence of a “state of emergency” following a coup d’état ends up justifying extended “temporary” limitations of political and civil society activities (BF).



Conclusions and recommendations

9 Conclusions and recommendations







9.1 Relevance of the SCS ToC in fragile and conflict-affected areas

At the end of this report, we can answer the overarching question concerning the relevance of the ToC: *1. To what extent is the SCS ToC relevant and are its assumptions valid in OPT and FCS countries?*

We can conclude that the ToC is relevant to some extent, but its underlying assumptions are only partially validated. In the following table, we provide an overview of the validity of the selected assumptions from the SCS, WRGE and SRHR Theories of Change introduced in chapter 1 (section 1.2). The validation assessment is based on the findings presented in Chapters 4-8, where some of these assumptions were already discussed. Together with the level of validation, we specify which characteristics of FCS affect most the validity of assumptions (see also section 3.2). These characteristics range from authoritarianism, often associated with the prevalence of non-linear policy processes, lack of elected legislative bodies and lack of government accountability mechanisms, through conflict and insecurity issues affecting all of the territory or some remote areas, to political influence of conservative views through sectarianism and hostility towards foreign interference.

Table 4: Validation of selected assumptions and fragility and conflict aspects involved

Origin of assumption	Selection of Assumptions	Level of validation	Fragility and conflict aspects involved
SCS ToC	The voices and needs of the most marginalised groups/persons within a society are effectively voiced by Civil Society/Civil Society organisations.	●	Authoritarianism, Conflicts and insecurity
	When pressured, informed, and/or persuaded by CSOs, states, companies and societal actors change their laws, policies and/or norms, and their practices to be more sustainable, equitable and inclusive.	●	Non-linear and untransparent policy processes, lack of elected legislative bodies
	External aid by the Ministry and (mainly Northern) CSOs can strengthen CSOs in low-income, lower-middle income and higher-middle income countries.	●	Authoritarianism, hostility towards foreign interference
	Capacity strengthening of CSOs can enhance the effectiveness of their lobby and advocacy.	●	Authoritarianism, conflicts and insecurity
	CSOs are in a position to protect or expand civic space.	●	Authoritarianism, non-linear and untransparent policy processes
SRHR ToC	Lobby and advocacy by CSOs can effectively contribute to improved SRHR for all people.	●	Government fragility, non-linear and untransparent policy processes, lack of elected legislative bodies, sectarianism
	A strong voice of civil society in the global south can increase accountability of government vis-à-vis its citizens, for the development of inclusive health systems.	●	Government fragility, lack of accountability mechanisms
	Organised opposition against sexual and reproductive rights can be best countered by strengthening existing coalitions and networks.	●	Sectarianism, hostility towards foreign interference

Origin of assumption	Selection of Assumptions	Level of validation	Fragility and conflict aspects involved
WRGE ToC	Women's rights organisations play a crucial role in empowering women and girls and in setting in motion structural processes of change geared to gender equality.		Government fragility, conflicts and insecurity
	To create an enabling environment for gender equality and to bring about the structural transformation of institutions that perpetuate gender inequality, it is essential to gain the support of and work with government authorities, the private sector, civil society, and knowledge institutions.		Government fragility, sectarianism, non-linear and untransparent policy processes
	To bring about structural transformation, links to local, national, regional, and global women's and other movements are central.		Sectarianism, hostility towards foreign interference
 Mostly validated assumptions  Partially validated assumptions  Mostly not validated assumptions			

Assumptions of the SCS ToC

Mostly validated assumptions

The assumption that *Capacity strengthening of CSOs can enhance the effectiveness of their lobby and advocacy* is **mostly validated**. Adapting to the context, for example understanding when there is the need for confrontational or collaborative approaches, is a key capability that can be strengthened when a wider repertoire of L&A techniques is developed through capacity development. Another key ability which benefits from strengthening is to collect and use evidence and data for lobby and advocacy.

Partially validated assumptions

The assumption that *External aid by the Ministry and (mainly Northern) CSOs can strengthen CSOs in low-income, lower-middle income and higher-middle income countries* is **partially validated**. External aid to CSOs in FCS for conducting advocacy in association with service delivery is vital despite the high risks and challenges associated with it for both donors and CSOs. This is because there is often no other way of maintaining organisations alive and independent. In FCS support can help increase the coping capacities of organisations to face (political, judicial, societal) threats. However, in certain context it also represents a risk factor: receiving external support can not only create dependency, but also influence legitimacy, the ability to represent constituencies, and the capacity to mobilise societal resources. Also, the assumption that *the voices and needs of the most marginalised groups/persons within a society are effectively voiced by civil society/civil society organisations* is **partially validated**, as sometimes it does not hold true. CSOs generally raise voices and needs of marginalised groups, but due to risks and negative consequences some of the most marginalised voices and needs are not raised. A focus on donor agendas and difficult access to remote/insecure areas can also limit consulting constituents on their needs.

Mostly not validated assumptions

Concerning the assumption that *When pressured, informed and/or persuaded by CSOs, states, companies and societal actors change their laws, policies and/or norms, and their practices to be more sustainable, equitable and inclusive*, this is found as **mostly not validated**. The non-linear and non transparent decision-making process make so that changes in laws and policies are hard to obtain. Concerning the attitudes of societal actors, they hardly change over the timespan of a project. Private sector can also be influenced only to a limited extent. However, this does not mean that these actors are never influenced. States/governments can be influenced if the subject does

not touch upon government's legitimacy and action (democracy, fundamental rights, etc.) and if the legislative/policy change fits into the policy priorities of the government (e.g. anticorruption). But this happens when they are "informed" and "persuaded" (through collaborative approach, evidence, expertise) and not so much when they are "pressured" (confrontation). Also, the assumption that *CSOs are in a position to protect or expand civic space* is **mostly not validated**. CSOs cannot easily "claim space" as they might be subject to attacks and accusations, leaders might be arrested and imprisoned. INGOs can sometimes do more because they are more protected by international status (Iraq, Mozambique), but they can also be made ineffective by being discredited and accused of foreign interference (Burkina Faso, South Sudan). CBOs and informal civil society are more agile at the local level, less affected by rules and regulations. They can perhaps better escape repression, but they are too weak to expand the civic space as such.

Assumptions of the thematic ToCs

Mostly validated assumptions

Concerning the **WRGE Theory of Change**, the two assumptions that *Women's rights organisations play a crucial role in empowering women and girls and in setting in motion structural processes of change geared to gender equality* and that *To create an enabling environment for gender equality and to bring about the structural transformation of institutions that perpetuate gender inequality, it is essential to gain the support of and work with government authorities, the private sector, civil society, and knowledge institutions* are **mostly validated**.

Partially validated assumptions

Conversely, the assumption that *to bring about structural transformation, links to local, national, regional, and global women's and other movements are central* is only **partially validated**. In fact, links to local, national, regional, and global women's and other movements can strengthen organisations, however, they do not necessarily make organisations more effective locally. Particularly issues coming from global movements and agendas can be taken forward only when contextualised and not overly sensitive, otherwise there will be a backlash.

Concerning the **SRHR Theory of change**, the two assumptions that *Lobby and advocacy by CSOs can effectively contribute to improved SRHR for all people* and that *A strong voice of civil society in the global south can increase accountability of government vis-à-vis its citizens*, for the development of inclusive health systems are only **partially validated**. In fact, their validity depends much on which aspects of SRHR are under consideration. L&A has contributed to positive change in areas such as gender-based violence or fighting child marriage, but certain topics that are highlighted in the SRHR MFA results frameworks, such as access to health by marginalised (LGBTIQ+) groups and abortion, are highly controversial.

Mostly not validated assumptions

It is **mostly not validated** that *Organized opposition against sexual and reproductive rights can be best countered by strengthening existing coalitions and networks*. Many SRHR topics are extremely sensitive, L&A can generate backlash and risks for activists; awareness raising, dialogue and local engagement are more suitable. Enforcement of existing law can be an entry point and a long-term approach is needed to change sociocultural attitudes.

9.2 Further lessons learned

Further general lessons we draw from the study are as follows:

- In FCS, all relevant roles continue to be played by CSOs, however some of these roles become more important or take different forms. With service delivery taking a larger part of CSOs activities, their role in communication and representation (advocacy) becomes less pronounced. The educational role remains important, and communication is fostered not only or not so much between state and citizens but also between citizens and local authorities or even humanitarian actors. Representation becomes less vocal and confrontational and more linked to day-to-day protection of vulnerable groups (see section 4.1).
- Advocacy cannot be easily separated from service delivery, especially in a humanitarian context, and service delivery is a legitimacy source for CSOs who want to engage in advocacy, because it shows their understanding of the needs and priorities of the population and of vulnerable groups; activities such as resilience building by creating safe spaces for marginalised groups and awareness raising are also often integral part of preserving constituencies and civil society in a shrinking civic space (see section 5.1).
- In FCS, advocacy sometimes takes different names and can be “mainstreamed” into wider programmes. It can be found in the context of protection of vulnerable groups which mixes individual support and collective action to uphold human rights (e.g. access to land, housing and property rights and personal IDs for IDPs); It can also be found in the form of social accountability programmes led by CSOs, aiming to the improvement of the quality of basic services through citizen monitoring and interface meetings between citizens and service providers to discuss concrete plans of action; this represent a pragmatic approach which can be accepted in a variety of FCS (see section 5.1).
- CSOs in FCS need to adapt to rapidly changing or threatening environments. Key capabilities include producing and using evidence, building trust with power holders, forming partnerships, effective communication, and technical skills like monitoring including remote and not easily accessible areas and financial management. Additionally, context-specific capabilities such as conflict and context analysis, dealing with security threats, and identifying opportunities for influence in non-linear decision-making processes are crucial (see section 7.2).
- Especially in the areas of WRGE and SRHR, country contextualisation of programming and consulting local actors and embassies in the design phase is key to maintain relevance and not to undermine the legitimacy of CSOs which receive external support; being linked with global movements does not necessarily translate into local effectiveness; networking in the regional or subregional context might be more interesting, although not where there are tensions within subregions (see sections 6.2 and 7.3).
- Addressing the shrinking civic space is difficult for CSOs and is possible only if donors also engage directly through policy and political dialogue with governments; however this is only possible when donors have some leverage to the government and consider it as a partner; if there isn't such mutual recognition, donors interventions can backlash on CSOs. Addressing the full civil society landscape, i.e. also media, trade unions, platforms, as well as government and other players, is crucial to restore civic space and help civil society organisation preserve their autonomy; in some cases of restricted civic space, working on a local level and finding allies there leads to more results than the national level (see sections 4.2 and 8.1).
- INGO – CSO alliances have advantages and disadvantages; other forms of support including direct support to national organisations are possible and should also be considered based on their suitability to the context. Adopting a single form of support can be dangerous, as it would not allow for mitigating the side effects that almost all approaches have. Important elements that can make the difference in the delivery of support are: a) the possibility for local civil society actor to be sustained in the development and implementation of their own development strategies or strategic actions; b) the long duration of support (which minimises the organisational stress related to project-based funding and allow organisations to engage in a more permanent way on policy/societal issues); c) the involvement of local CSOs as mentors and non-financial support providers; d) the possibility for informal entities – CBOs, social

movements, etc. - to access non-financial support. Specific “emergency support” can be needed in countries where the civic space is closed or rapidly shrinking (see section 8.2).

9.3 Recommendations

In this section, we answer the following research questions:

7.4. Which recommendations can be formulated for the remainder of the policy framework in fragile contexts?

7.5. Which recommendations can be formulated for future SCS and thematic policy making, in fragile contexts?

In the following paragraphs, based on our findings and conclusions, we provide a few suggestions for the continuation of the implementation of the SCS policy framework and for future SCS and thematic policy making in FCS, respectively. They are based on the recommendations collected from stakeholders as well as the team’s own reflections and conclusions.

Recommendations for the implementation of the current SCS policy framework in fragile contexts

- SCS partnerships and MFA should recognise and value (also in terms of monitoring, evaluation and learning) any intermediate step towards policy or legislative change, when the latter is not achievable in the programme time frame. This also applies to local-level changes if and where national-level change is hampered by restricted civic space.
- SCS partnerships and MFA should continue supporting CSOs in lobby and advocacy towards Dutch/multinational private actors that can benefit from transnational networks.
- In WRGE and SRHR, MFA should encourage contextualised approaches and adaptation of proposed agendas by INGOs and SCS partnerships, to increase effectiveness and relevance of actions; encourage knowledge exchange between similar sociocultural contexts on strategies adopted to make actions more context-sensitive.
- MFA should increase coordination between RNEs and CSOs supported under the SCS framework to strengthen coherence and coordination at country level.
- MFA should encourage RNEs to join forces with other development partners to engage in dialogue with governments to expand civic space, where the government recognises development partners and vice versa.
- MFA, INGOs and SCS partnerships should adopt a low profile and provide discrete support to CSOs where association with Western donors is perceived negatively.

Recommendations for future SCS and thematic policy making in fragile contexts

- MFA should continue supporting civil society in fragile and conflict situations even where governments are not considered partners, however with the precautions flagged above to avoid negative repercussions on CSOs.
- MFA should commit to long-term partnerships, with some flexibility in authorising activity changes to adjust programmes to new realities.
- MFA and SCS partnerships should support CSOs on their own agendas and not on agendas defined globally or in the Netherlands.
- MFA should strengthen contextualisation of projects and programmes and discourage implementing partners to adopt one-size-fits-all global approaches to lobby and advocacy.
- MFA should consider different modalities than alliances between INGOs and CSOs to provide capacity strengthening support, such as country level programmes providing direct support to national CSOs.
- MFA should strengthen Southern leadership also in terms of more direct support to national CSOs.

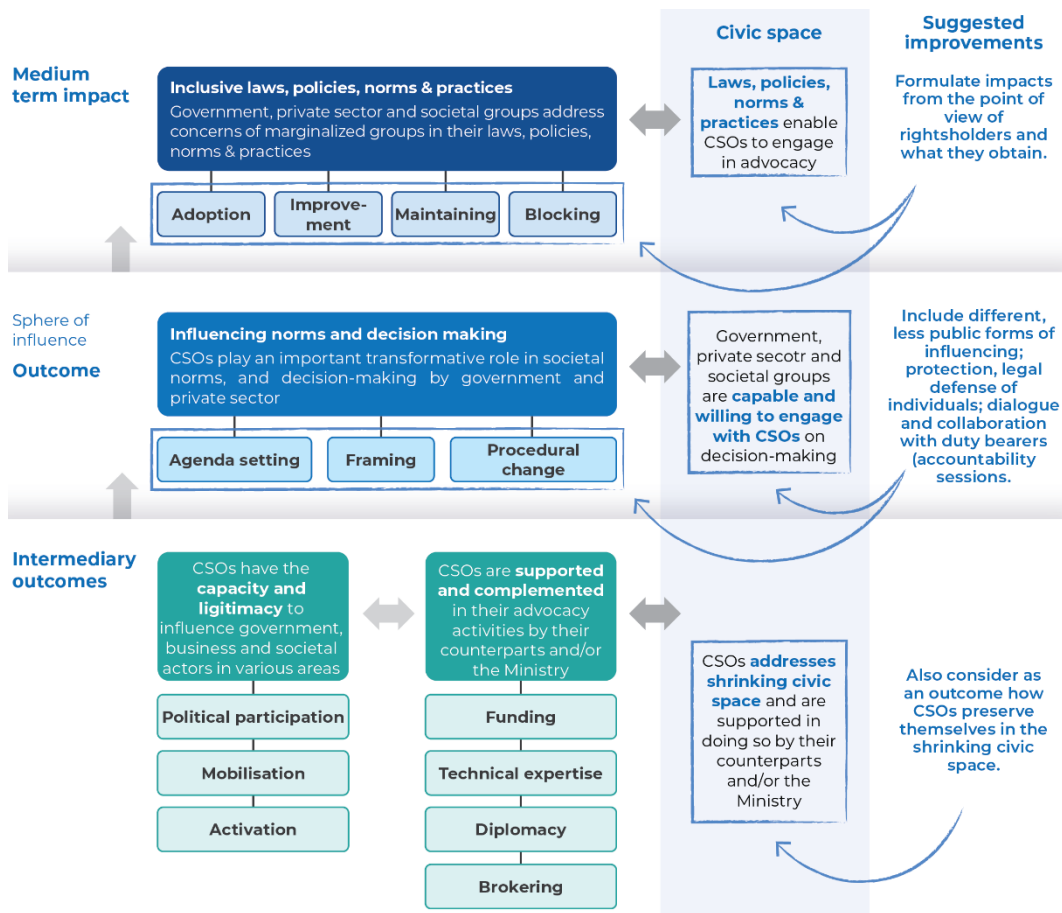
- MFA should consult more often local CSOs and RNEs in the design of programmes for SCS to increase coherence with bilateral programmes.
- MFA and RNEs should include more actions targeted to the full civil society landscape (civil society, media, power holders, service providers, etc.) rather than CSOs only.
- MFA should allow for a mix of service delivery and advocacy in projects funded, to enhance legitimacy and effectiveness of CSOs in conflict and humanitarian contexts.
- MFA should apply more consistently the HDP nexus approach³⁸, and support advocacy which takes the form of protection in humanitarian contexts, and of conflict resolution in the context of conflicts. Advocacy towards INGOs and multilateral organisations can also be encouraged and included in supported advocacy activities.
- MFA should mainstream civil society support in sector programmes by supporting civil society-led social accountability activities to improve the quality of service delivery.
- MFA and SCS partnerships should continue searching ways of ensuring that smaller partners of the 2nd and 3rd tier and individual human right defenders and activists are burdened as less as possible with administrative requirements.

MFA should revise the ToC of the SCS policy framework:

- at the level of medium-term impacts, formulate impacts from the point of view of rightsholders and what they will obtain (increased access to social, economic, civil and political rights), rather than what will be changed (policy, legislation, practices) to allow for more flexibility in strategies to achieve those impacts.
- at the level of outcomes, include different less "public" forms of influencing; protection, legal defence of individuals; dialogue and collaboration with duty bearers (accountability sessions).
- at the level of intermediate outcomes, include the assumption that CSOs preserve themselves in the shrinking civic space, to support also inward-looking activities such as the creation of safe spaces for marginalised groups and resilience building.

³⁸ The 2019 OECD DAC Recommendation on the HDP nexus calls for "strengthening the coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts" with the aim of "effectively reducing people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities, supporting prevention efforts and thus, shifting from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending need" (P.3) <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf>

Figure 2: Suggested improvements on the Strengthening Civil Society Theory of Change, based on findings from studying fragile and conflict settings



Annex 1 Research matrix

	Indicators	Data sources and methods	Data analysis methods
Overarching question			
1. To what extent can the foundational/prioritised assumptions underlying the SCS policy framework be validated through desk-study on academic literature, and interviews with relevant stakeholders, with regards to CSOs capacities in FCSs?	<p>Combination of answers to relevant sub-questions on ToC assumptions</p> <p>Overall judgement of the relevance of the ToC by CSOs involved in the SCS policy framework in some case study countries</p>	<p>See below</p> <p>Validation workshop</p>	<p>Synthesis of responses to prior questions</p> <p>Analysis of workshop notes</p>
Context			
<p>Civic space and role of civil society</p> <p>2. How do the nature, the influencing power, and the role of civil society in pursuing sustainable development goals change in different types of FCSs?</p> <p>2.1. How are its various roles affected by fragility and conflict?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational (internal & external); • Communicative (linking state & society); • Representational (voice & resistance); • Cooperative (subsidiarity & coordination). <p>2.2. To what extent are CSOs FCSs in a position to protect or expand civic space? (<i>distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs</i>)</p>	<p>Evidence-based literature accounts of the (changes in the) attitude (conflictual/cooperative), position and role of CSOs in FCS</p> <p>Level of engagement of CSOs in educational, communicative, representative, cooperative activities in case study countries according to country stakeholders</p> <p>Examples of CSOs from case study countries performing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education/self-education activities; • Linking state and society through communication; • Voicing grievances and concerns of constituencies and other groups; • Taking part in coordination structures involving other NGOs and ministry stakeholders; • Taking up roles in service delivery (subsidiarity to the state). <p>Extent to which CSOs were able to contrast measures shrinking civic space in the case study countries and strategies adopted</p>	<p>Literature review global level</p> <p>KII and literature at country level (case studies)</p>	<p>Desk research</p> <p>Analysis and coding of interview notes and literature</p> <p>Triangulation of data sources</p>

<p><i>Overarching question</i></p> <p>Lobby & advocacy and its effectiveness</p>	<p>Indicators</p>	<p>Data sources and methods</p>	<p>Data analysis methods</p>
<p>3. To what extent is it a validated assumption for FCSs that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When pressured, informed and/or persuaded by CSOs, states, companies and societal actors change their laws, policies and/or norms, and their practices to be more sustainable, equitable and inclusive? • (SRHR) Lobby and advocacy by CSOs can effectively contribute to improved SRHR for all people? • (SRHR) A strong voice of civil society in the global south can increase accountability of government to citizens, for the development of inclusive health systems? 	<p>Examples of successful/unsuccessful advocacy campaigns in the country case studies in the areas of SCS (SRHR, WRCE, RoL, PSD):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes of laws and policies obtained; • Changes of social norms and practices obtained (including implementation of policies and norms); • Power holders and social groups targeted; • Reactions of power holders or social groups to pressure, information, and persuasion activity; • Reasons behind negative/positive response by powerholders and social groups according to CSOs and stakeholders. <p>Structural reasons for inability of states to change laws, policies and/or norms and practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control over the territory, over private actors, etc. • Anomalies and lack of functioning legislative power <p>Strategies put in place by CSOs to work around unresponsiveness</p>	<p>Literature review global level KII and literature at country level (case studies)</p>	<p>Analysis and coding of interview notes and literature Triangulation of data sources</p>
<p>4. How is the concept of advocacy (re-)interpreted in fragile and conflict situations by CSOs, other actors (donors, UN, local/national dignitaries) and academic literature and research?</p> <p>4.1. When L&A towards a counterpart (government, private sector, or societal group) is ineffective or made difficult because of civic space restrictions, which alternatives are available to CSOs to generate change to contribute to more peaceful and inclusive societies?</p> <p>4.2. Based on existing successful and unsuccessful examples, which good and bad practices, strengths and weaknesses, factors of success or</p>	<p>Formalised definitions of advocacy used in research & policy and strategic documents in general vs. in FCS</p> <p>Elements of traditional advocacy approaches which work and do not work in FCS according to UN and INGOs</p> <p>Risks and (potential) unintended negative effects on individuals/CBOs/NGOs/INGOs/UN actors of advocacy campaigns in FCS</p>	<p>Literature review global level KII and literature at country level (case studies)</p>	<p>Analysis and coding of interview notes and literature Triangulation of data sources</p>

<i>Overarching question</i>	Indicators	Data sources and methods	Data analysis methods
<p>failure affect the effectiveness of CSOs while adjusting to a restricted civic space?</p> <p>4.3. WRGE/SRHR: To what extent and how is it possible for CSOs to draw attention on SRHR and WRGE and influence social norms when such issues do not have priority vis à vis basic humanitarian needs and/or where broader/general (internal and/or external) conflicts monopolise societal attention? (distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In theory (analyses); • In practice (examples). <p>Examples of adaptation of advocacy strategies (in target groups, modalities, purposes, etc.) to FCS by UN and INGOs who also operate in non-FCS (including conflict-sensitive approaches) by local CBOs/CSOs</p> <p>Existence of advocacy elements embedded in other types of CSO activities (e.g. service delivery, awareness raising) in FCS to circumvent repression by UN and INGOs who also operate in non-FCS situations (including conflict-sensitive approaches) by local CBOs/CSOs</p> <p>Strengths and weaknesses (limitations) of already applied adaptation strategies of advocacy concepts and approaches to FCS by INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs</p> <p>Examples of successful/unsuccessful advocacy on SRHR or WRGE in humanitarian crises (purpose, targets, approach, modalities, outcomes)</p> <p>Examples of successful/unsuccessful advocacy on SRHR or WRGE in conflict situations (purpose, targets, approach, modalities, outcomes)</p> <p>Data on the evolution of attitudes, behaviours and social norms regarding WRGE and SRHR in FCS in the context</p>		

	Indicators	Data sources and methods	Data analysis methods
Overarching question			
	<p>of worsening humanitarian crises and/or conflicts in the country case studies</p> <p>Priority of SRHR and WRGE and how they should be reconciled with broader conflict/humanitarian issues according to key country stakeholders</p>		
Legitimacy and representativeness of CSOs			
<p>5. What sources of legitimacy do CSOs draw on and which ones are for them most effective and important to achieve their goals (e.g. expertise, donor support, government support, representativeness, and constituency support)? <i>(distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs)</i></p> <p>5.1. WRGE: To what extent is it a validated assumption for FCSs that: <i>To create an enabling environment for gender equality and to bring about the structural transformation of institutions that perpetuate gender inequality, it is essential to gain the support of and work with government authorities, the private sector, civil society, and knowledge institutions</i>³⁹.</p> <p>5.2. How are legitimacy and representativeness of CSOs assessed and/or questioned by relevant actors in the CSOs context (donors, UN, local/national authorities, private sector, other CSOs....) and how do CSOs respond? <i>(distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs)</i></p> <p>5.3. To what extent and how do CSOs operating in FCSs endeavour to be representative of marginalised societal groups, and how do they do it? <i>(distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs)</i></p> <p>5.4. To what extent is it a validated assumption for FCSs that:</p>	<p>Sources of legitimacy sought by national CSOs/CBOs in FCS and their relative importance in achieving success according to their experience and perceptions as well as perceptions of external stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expertise; • Donor support; • Government support; • Representativeness and constituency support; • Support from INGOs/UN agencies. <p>Successes and limitations of non-cooperative, confrontational approaches to WRGE advocacy in FCS</p> <p>Extent to which CSOs were able to induce change in WRGE in absence of support from powerholders</p> <p>Perception of legitimacy of CSOs by donors, UN, local/national authorities, private sector, other CSOs – what makes a CSO claim legitimate and worth listening</p> <p>Cases of delegitimisation by power holders of CSOs efforts in FCS and their effects and responses by CSOs</p>	<p>Literature review global level KII and literature at country level (case studies)</p>	<p>Analysis and coding of interview notes and literature Triangulation of data sources</p>

³⁹ Interpreted this as a legitimacy question, but it might be also an effectiveness question that would go above.

	Indicators	Data sources and methods	Data analysis methods
Overarching question			
<p><i>The voices and needs of the most marginalised groups/persons within a society are effectively voiced by Civil Society/Civil Society organisations.</i></p> <p><i>WRGE: Women's rights organisations play a crucial role in empowering women and girls and in setting in motion structural processes of change geared to gender equality⁴⁰.</i></p>	<p>Efforts, methods, and approaches to consulting their constituency/marginalised groups/the citizenry by different types of CSOs (distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs)</p> <p>Sociological background of CSO members (distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs) and how this affects their representativeness (and legitimacy)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific case of WRO 		
Capabilities of CSOs			
<p>6. Which capabilities are more important, and which are less important for which types of CSOs and CSOS roles (educational, communicative, representational, cooperative...) to operate in FCS? (<i>distinction between INGOs, national NGOs/CSOs and CBOs</i>)</p> <p>6.1. To what extent is it a validated assumption that:</p> <p><i>Capacity strengthening of CSOs can enhance the effectiveness of their lobby and advocacy.</i></p> <p><i>SRHR: Organised opposition against sexual and reproductive rights can be best countered by strengthening existing coalitions and networks.</i></p> <p><i>WRGE/all: To bring about structural transformation, links to local, national, regional, and global women's and other movements are central.</i></p>	<p>Perceptions of CSOs/external stakeholders on:</p> <p>Most important capabilities for CSOs to perform an <u>educational role</u> toward their members or outside social groups / any difference in FCS (or in the country case study)?</p> <p>Most important capabilities for CSOs to perform a <u>communicative role</u> (linking state & society) / any difference in FCS (or in the country case study)?</p> <p>Most important capabilities for CSOs to perform a <u>representational role</u> (voice & resistance) / any difference in FCS?</p> <p>Most important capabilities for CSOs to perform a <u>Cooperative role</u> (subsidiarity & coordination) / any difference in FCS (or in the country case study)?</p> <p>Examples of added value in advocacy campaigns of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coalition building and networking 	<p>Literature review global level</p> <p>KII and literature at country level (case studies)</p>	<p>Analysis and coding of interview notes and literature</p> <p>Triangulation of data sources</p>

⁴⁰ Interpreted this and the previous question as representativeness question and legitimacy questions but they might be also effectiveness questions or also input questions is - is working with WRO the best way to achieve GE, so is it worth supporting them?

	Indicators	Data sources and methods	Data analysis methods
Overarching question			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Links to local, national, regional, and global women's and other movements 		
Types of support and delivery set-up			
<p>7. What type of support is best suited for the development of the most important capacities needed by civil society in FCSs?</p> <p>7.1. Which are the good/bad practices and the pre-conditions for successful donor support according to literature and stakeholders?</p> <p>7.2. To what extent is it a validated assumption that? <i>External aid by the Ministry and (mainly Northern) CSOs can strengthen CSOs in low-income, lower-middle income and higher-middle income countries</i></p> <p>7.3. What type of delivery setup is best suited for the development of the most important capacities needed by civil society in FCSs? (local/national/regional/international partnership, types of partners....)</p> <p>7.4. What (additional, including non-financial) support to CSOs is most useful in FCSs to counter the shrinking of civic space or to enlarge the civic space?</p> <p>7.5. Which recommendations can be formulated for the remainder of the policy framework in fragile contexts?</p> <p>7.6. Which recommendations can be formulated for future SCS and thematic policy making, in fragile contexts?</p>	<p>Donor practices in supporting CSOs in FCS that are perceived as good or bad by CSOs and external stakeholders</p> <p>Added value, advantages, and limitations of alliances with Northern CSOs/ INGO as perceived by southern CSOs (national NGOs / CBOs) in FCS</p> <p>Advantages and disadvantages of partnerships of various size: global/international, regional, national</p> <p>Added value of alliances of INGOs and national CSOs</p> <p>Added value of alliances including Southern CSOs in activities in other countries</p> <p>Nonfinancial support received by CSOs in FCS vis-à-vis their expectations</p> <p>Cases of successful cooperation with donors in policy dialogue to contrast shrinking civic space in FCS</p> <p>Recommendations collected from stakeholders for the remainder of the current SCS policy framework and future SCS and policy making in fragile contexts</p>	<p>Literature review global level</p> <p>KII and literature at country level (case studies)</p> <p>Validation workshop</p>	<p>Analysis and coding of interview notes and literature</p> <p>Triangulation of data sources</p>

Annex 2 List of documents reviewed

Ref	Title	Author / Source	Stakeholder perspective	Type of source
1	Civic Agency in Governance: The Role of Legitimacy with Citizens vs. Donors	Randall Puljek-Shank	Academic	Academic article (peer-reviewed)
2	Deconstructing Civil Society Actors and Functions: On the Limitations of International Frameworks for Fragile States	Simone Datzberger, Tam Nguyen	Academic	Academic article (peer-reviewed)
3	Strengthening civil society? Reflections on international engagement in fragile states	European Centre for Development Policy Management (Frauke de Weijer and Ulrika Kilnes)	INGO/platform organisation	Policy brief/evaluation
4	EU development cooperation in fragile states: challenges and opportunities	DG for external policies - policy department	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
5	Between Development and Security: The European Union, Governance and Fragile States	Wil Hout, International Institute of Social Studies	Academic, Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
6	Brokerage, power and gender equity: How empowerment-focused civil society organisations bolster women's influence in rural Indonesia	Rachael Diprose	Academic, CSO	Academic article (peer-reviewed)
7	Civil society in fragile and conflict-affected states	Oxfam	INGO/platform organisation	Policy brief/evaluation
8	Reflections on Building CSO Capacity to Integrate Gender and Diversity Equality	INTRAC - International NGO training and research centre	Academic	Policy brief/evaluation
9	Politics and civil society	Randall Puljek-Shank	Academic	Academic article (peer-reviewed)
10	German development cooperation in fragile contexts	Deutsches Evaluierungsinstitut der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (DEval)	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
11	The Role of Civil Society in Promoting Political Accountability in Fragile States: the case of Tajikistan	INTRAC - International NGO training and research centre	CSO	Policy brief/evaluation
12	Civil society in fragile contexts	Willemijn Verkoren, Mathijs van Leeuwen	Academic	Academic article (peer-reviewed)
13	Advocacy in Constrained Settings. Rethinking Contextuality	Margit van Wessel	Academic	Academic article (peer-reviewed)
14	Civil Society organisations in situations of conflict	Civicus, for the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness	CSO	Policy brief/evaluation
15	Partnerships In Conflict: How violent conflict impacts local civil society and how international partners respond	International Alert, Oxfam	CSO, Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation

Ref	Title	Author / Source	Stakeholder perspective	Type of source
16	Safeguarding Inclusivity and the Role of Civil Society in Conflict Affected States: Lessons from the New Deal for SDG Implementation	Civil society platform for peacebuilding and statebuilding	Academic	Policy brief/evaluation
17	Supporting Civil Society Engagement at times of contested spaces	Civil society platform for peacebuilding and statebuilding	INGO/platform organisation	Policy brief/evaluation
18	Working with civil society in fragile states	INTRAC - International NGO training and research centre	INGO/platform organisation, Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
19	Building Civil Society Capacity in Fragile and Conflict Affected States	British council, Active citizens (partnership with INTRAC)	Government donor organisation(s), INGO/platform organisation	Policy brief/evaluation
20	Capacity Development in Fragile States	Derick W. Brinkerhoff, European Centre for Development Policy Management	Academic	Policy brief/evaluation
21	Hitting the target, but missing the point? Assessing donor support for inclusive and legitimate politics in fragile societies	OECD INCAF International Network on Conflict and Fragility	Academic, Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
22	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations: A Review of Donor Support	OECD	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
23	Conflict and Fragility: Do no harm - International support for statebuilding.	OECD	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
24	How fragile contexts affect the well-being and potential of women and girls	OECD INCAF International Network on Conflict and Fragility	Academic, Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
25	Within and Without the State: Strengthening civil society in conflict-affected and fragile settings	Oxfam	Government donor organisation(s), INGO/platform organisation	Policy brief/evaluation
26	Advocacy in Fragile contexts	Margit van Wessel	CSO	Opinion/informal
27	Capacity development for advocacy. An analysis of capacity development for advocacy in the 'Dialogue and Dissent' programme documents – and its implications for objectives	Nienke Sijtsma	Government donor organisation(s), INGO/platform organisation	Other
28	Advocacy in Context	Cordaid & Wageningen University	CSO	Policy brief/evaluation
29	Focus: Development cooperation in fragile states and regions	ADA Austrian Development Cooperation	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation

Ref	Title	Author / Source	Stakeholder perspective	Type of source
30	Operationalizing Experience: Donor Approaches to Service Delivery in Fragile States	ADB Asian development bank	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
31	Framework for working in fragile and conflict-affected states- Guidance for staff	Australian AID	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
32	Danish development cooperation in fragile states	Erik Lundsgaarde, DIIS	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
33	The EU as a stable partner in fragile states	DANIDA	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
34	Use of country systems in fragile states	ODI Overseas development institute	Academic, Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
35	EU aid in fragile and conflict-affected countries	EU	Government donor organisation(s)	Other
36	Inconvenient Realities: An evaluation of Dutch contributions to stability, security and rule of law in fragile and conflict-affected contexts	Dutch MFA, IOB	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
37	Development aid to fragile states: greatest need, highest risk	Norad	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
38	Action in fragile states: sustainable support for governments and populations	SDC	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
39	Fragility, conflict and violence overview: Context	World Bank	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
40	Fragility, conflict and violence overview: Partnerships	World Bank	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
41	Fragility, conflict and violence overview: Results	World Bank	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
42	Fragility, conflict and violence overview: Strategy	World Bank	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
43	A Users' Guide to Civil Society Assessments	UNDP	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
44	Engaging Civil Society Organizations in Conflict-Affected and Fragile States	World Bank	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
45	Thematic Evaluation Number 2 Strengthening Civil Society in the Global South Annex C: Case Studies	Nordic Consulting Group, INTRAC	CSO, INGO/platform organisation	Policy brief/evaluation
46	Study On Danish Support to Informally Organised Civil Society and Social Movements in Developing Countries	DANIDA	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
47	Evaluation of The Danish Support to Civil Society Thematic Evaluation 1: Public Engagement in Denmark	DANIDA	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
48	Evaluation Of the Danish Support to Civil Society Thematic Evaluation 2:	DANIDA	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation

Ref	Title	Author / Source	Stakeholder perspective	Type of source
	Strengthening Civil Society in the Global South			
49	Evaluation Of the Danish Support to Civil Society Thematic Evaluation 3: Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus	DANIDA	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
50	Women's Voice and Leadership Program Formative Evaluation	Global Affairs Canada (GAC)	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
51	Evaluation of the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities thematic programme (2014-2019) Main Report – volume 1	European Commission (ADE consortium)	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
52	Effects of Development Aid to South Sudan 2008 – 2021. Part 1: summary paper	Dutch MFA, IOB	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
53	Addressing the reproductive health needs and rights of young people since ICPD - The contribution of UNFPA and IPPF.	United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
54	Civil society under pressure: Synthesis study of evaluations of Civil Society Organisations' democratisation and human rights work in Southern and Eastern Africa	Norad	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
55	Chasing civil society? Evaluation of Fredskorpset	Norad	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
56	Mid-term Evaluation of Swedish government funded Civil Society Support through the AGIR II Programme in Mozambique 2014–2020	Sida	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
57	Guiding principles for Sida's engagement with and support to Civil Society	Sida	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
58	Digital security as strategy for resilience	Sida	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
59	Evaluation of the Strategy for support via Swedish civil society organisations 2016-2022	Sida	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
60	End-of-projects evaluation of international civil society centre's 2018-2020 extension programmes	Sida	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
61	End of project evaluation of 'Strengthening Civil Society Effectiveness in Promoting Good Governance and Increasing Citizen's	Sida	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation

Ref	Title	Author / Source	Stakeholder perspective	Type of source
	Awareness and Demand for Human Rights in Zambia' (CSSP)			
62	Evaluation du programme de gouvernance démocratique et de redevabilité dans la gestion des affaires locales au Mali	Sida	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
63	Evaluation of Sida's support to the Balkan Civil Society development network 2019-2022	Sida	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
64	Mapping and capacity assessment of Civil Society Organisations (CSOS) in Darfur	UNDP	Academic	Policy brief/evaluation
65	International Engagement in Fragile States: Can't we do better?	OECD	INGO/platform organisation	Policy brief/evaluation
66	Challenges of Civil Society Organisations in Fragile States: Introducing reflective instrumental theory	WARA, Yusuf Abubakar	Academic	Academic article (peer-reviewed)
67	Civil Society and Regional Peacebuilding in the Horn of Africa: A review of present engagement and future opportunities	Life & Peace Institute	INGO/platform organisation	Policy brief/evaluation
68	Localization Advocacy Report	DANIDA, WATAN Foundation	INGO/platform organisation	Policy brief/evaluation
69	Mid-term evaluation Lebanon, as part of Baseline, Monitoring and Mid-term Evaluation Strengthening Civil Society	Ecorys, commissioned by the Dutch MFA	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
70	Civil Society Mapping Study, Roadmap Implementation and Programming Recommendations	G. Costantini, commissioned by EU delegation Bangladesh	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
71	Programa Ianda Guiné – Djuntu, Quadro legal relativo a intervenção das OSC na Guiné-Bissau	Instituto Marquês de Valle Flôr (IMVF)	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
72	Évaluation finale du projet d'appui à la société civile au Tchad: société civile; dynamique et concertation pour la gouvernance au Tchad (PASOC) FED/2015/037542 et Formulation d'un projet dans le cadre du nouveau Programme Indicatif Pluriannuel 2021-2027	Ecorys, commissioned by EU delegation Tchad	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
73	Government funding of CSOs in a rapidly changing world	HIVA-KU Leuven	Academic	Policy brief/evaluation
74	How do civil society organizations communicate in an authoritarian setting? A narrative analysis of the Russian waste management debate.	Caroline Schlauffer, Marina Pilkina, Tatiana Chalaya, Tatiana Khaynatskaya, Tatiana Voronova, Aleksandra Pozhivotko	Academic	Academic article (peer-reviewed)

Ref	Title	Author / Source	Stakeholder perspective	Type of source
75	Sectoral Mapping of Pan-African Civil Society Organisations	G. Costantini, commissioned by EU delegation to the African Union	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
76	Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in External Relations	European Union, External Action Services (EEAS)	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation
77	Accountability to Affected People Assessing NGO engagement with the Collective AAP Framework	LSE Department of International Development	Academic	Policy brief/evaluation
78	Evaluation de l'approche résilience de l'UE – Sahel et Lac Tchad	Ecorys	Government donor organisation(s)	Policy brief/evaluation

Annex 3 Context of case study countries

Introduction

Civic space refers to the physical, virtual, legal, regulatory, and policy space where people and groups (or civic actors) can securely exercise their rights to the freedoms of peaceful assembly, association, and expression, in keeping with human rights. In doing so these actors can meaningfully participate in political, legislative, economic, social and cultural parts of society to share interests, concerns and shape and influence their society. Civic space requires an open, secure and safe environment that is free from repression and unlawful restrictions⁴¹. Vital in this are civil society organisations (CSOs) that support such expression of interests and concerns towards stakeholders and decision-makers. Civic space can be faced with a variety of challenges that limit or restrict it. This is especially the case in FCS, where civic voices are often seen as a risk or challenging the ruling parties or groups. This can be seen in several of the fragility dimensions. For example⁴²:

- **Security:** governments in countries faced with (perceived or real) security threats may restrict civic freedoms, claiming to do so to maintain order and national security. Measures seen here include restrictions on public gatherings, censorship of media, and surveillance of CSOs. In addition, controlling the narrative is often seen as crucial by governments whose legitimacy may be questioned. Restricting civic space allows governments to control information flows, manage public perception, and suppress critical voices that might challenge the official state narrative or expose corruption.
- **Political:** In contexts of political instability, there is often a high level of distrust towards opposition groups, activists, or dissenting voices. Governments might suppress civic space to suppress opposition and maintain control, especially around elections or during intra-state power struggles. Moreover, fragile states often have weak legal frameworks and law enforcement institutions that are either incapable of protecting rights or are themselves complicit in rights violations. A lack of legal protection enables state or non-state actors to infringe upon civic freedoms.
- **Information control:** Controlling the narrative is often seen as crucial by governments whose legitimacy may be questioned. Restricting civic space allows governments to control information flows, manage public perception, and suppress critical voices that might challenge the official state narrative or expose corruption.

Important to note is that not all civic space restrictions stem from the explicit intent to suppress; they can result from a lack of state capacity to manage and facilitate civic engagement in a manner that support dialogue while maintaining public order. This can then lead to overregulation or bureaucratic hurdles that stifle civic activities.

Restricting civic space has several negative impacts in FCS. It limits the ability of civil society to hold governments accountable, contribute to public policy, and represent diverse (and differing) interests. This can erode trust in authorities, further fuel grievances and tensions, and potentially lead to more instability and conflict.

⁴¹ United Nations Guidance Note - Protection and Promotion of Civic Space, September 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf, <https://fra.europa.eu/nl/cooperation/civil-society/civil-society-space>, <https://civic-forum.eu/civic-space>

⁴² United Nations Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space, September 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf and Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, Preventing Civic Space Restrictions, January 2019, https://www.prif.org/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk_publicationen/prif0119.pdf

In the following table, we provide an overview of the countries chosen for case studies, based on the Civicus civic space index, the presence in the lists of fragile countries (World Bank and OECD), the type of cooperation had with the Netherlands.

Table 5 Classification of case study countries (FCS and civic space)

Country	Civicus civic space index ⁴³	FY23 World Bank List of Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations ⁴⁴	Type of cooperation ⁴⁵
Burkina Faso	Obstructed	Conflict	Broader cooperation
OPT	Repressed	Institutional and social fragility	Broader cooperation
South Sudan	Repressed	Conflict and OECD extremely fragile	Broader cooperation
Mozambique	Repressed	Conflict	Broader cooperation
Iraq	Closed	Conflict and OECD extremely fragile	Specific Goal Cooperation

Burkina Faso:

Burkina Faso is characterised by security challenges, political instability, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Since 2015, Burkina Faso has seen a significant security deterioration due to the spread of jihadist groups linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, which have exploited local grievances and inter-communal conflicts, particularly in the northern and eastern regions. These groups have launched attacks against civilians and state forces, causing displacement. Politically, Burkina Faso also experiences considerable instability. The ousting of the president in 2014 set off a series of political transitions, culminating in two military coups in 2022 within 10 months of each other. These coups reflect frustrations with the government's inability to effectively address the terrorism related security issues and socio-economic challenges⁴⁶. The political turmoil has also weakened state institutions, undermined governance, and limited the government's capacity to deliver basic services and uphold the rule of law, further eroding public trust and social cohesion.

Economically, Burkina Faso is among the poorest countries in the world. It is heavily reliant on subsistence agriculture, which is vulnerable to weather patterns and climate change. The security situation has added to a prolonged climate change induced food security crisis. High population growth and limited job opportunities further contribute to economic fragility. The security crisis has strained economic resources. The social context is affected by the mass displacements following violence and insecurity, placing pressure on communities and resources in safer areas⁴⁷. This displacement disrupts social networks and exacerbates challenges in accessing basic services. Moreover, the presence of armed groups has led to human rights abuses, including killings, sexual violence, and the recruitment of child soldiers. The central government's presence extends to the whole territory, however conflict with the mentioned terrorist groups especially affects eight regions which are in a state of emergency. A decentralisation process was ongoing, with the transfer of several services to local authorities but the last coup prevented municipal elections and delegates from the government were appointed to run local authorities. Due to security threats, many of them do not reside in their municipality's area making it difficult to find interlocutors.

⁴³ <https://monitor.civicus.org/about/how-it-works/methodology/>

⁴⁴ The World Bank classifies FCS in two groups: "conflict" and "Institutional and social fragility". OECD uses a multidimensional approach leading to classification as "fragile" and "extremely fragile" country.

⁴⁵ <https://www.government.nl/topics/development-cooperation/partners-in-development#:~:text=digitalisation%20and%20sustainability,-,The%20Netherlands%20has%20a%20broad%2Dbased%20development%20cooperation%20relationship%20with,%2C%20Sudan%2C%20Uganda%20and%20Yemen.>

⁴⁶ <https://lens.civicus.org/la-fievre-des-coups-detat-gagne-le-burkina-faso/>

⁴⁷ According to the Humanitarians Needs Overview, 2023 one out of 5 Burkinabè totalling 4,7 million of people needed humanitarian aid.

Civic space has seen severe restrictions since the last coup of September 2022. In the aftermath of the coup, the government suspended political parties' activities as well as civil society activities⁴⁸, although it was later clarified that the latter were not prevented from operating, especially in the humanitarian field. Recently, the government started to use conscription against opposition leaders and critical civil society leaders⁴⁹. There is also pressure on the media, and some foreign media outlets were banned or restricted in their operations. Restrictions on freedom of opinion apply mostly to direct criticism of the government, but discussing social and economic rights, and topics such as gender equality or sexual and reproductive health rights, is acceptable to authorities.

Mozambique:

Mozambique, despite having a stable government with functioning political and administrative institutions, is considered a weak state driven by a combination of political instability, economic vulnerabilities, and recurrent conflict, particularly in the northern regions. Since end of 2017, the province of Cabo Delgado has seen escalating violent extremism, linked to the Islamic State, causing widespread insecurity, disrupting economic activities, and displacing large groups of people. The insurgents capitalise on social and economic grievances, including high youth unemployment, regional wealth disparities, and limited access to basic services. This is exacerbated by the discovery and mining of offshore gas reserves that have not benefited the local population.

Politically, Mozambique has been marred by tensions between the ruling party and the opposition which consists of a former rebel group. Although a 2019 peace deal marked some progress, sporadic violence and distrust continues. The country's political fragility is compounded by corruption and a lack of transparency, particularly in managing its natural resources. Disputed election results have also resulted in lacking legitimacy of elected authorities. Economically, Mozambique is one of the world's poorest countries. It is heavily reliant on agriculture and vulnerable to climate-related shocks – recent natural disasters have devastated large areas, destroyed infrastructure, and displaced communities.

In Mozambique there have been attempts by the government to limit and control CSOs access to resources, violent repression of public demonstrations, a lack of security for journalists and CSO leaders, and the establishment of de facto – illegal – restrictions to CSOs' access to information. The Civicus Monitor rates civic space in Mozambique as repressed, while Freedom House rates Mozambique as "Partly Free" with an overall index of 44/100 (and a Political Rights index of 14/40 and Civil Liberties index of 30/60). During 2023, some specific events illustrated the restriction of civic space, including:

- Violent repression of peaceful protests and repression of protests that claimed irregularity of local elections.
- Harassment to journalists and reduction of the media's freedom of expression.
- Threats and harassment of CSO leaders and local civic activists, and arrests of political and CSO leaders.

Iraq

Iraq is deeply influenced by its recent history of conflict, political instability, and economic challenges. The country has experienced significant turmoil since the 2003 U.S-led invasion, leading to new prolonged periods of violence. The rise of the Islamic State further contributed to Iraq's fragility, causing massive displacement, destruction of infrastructure and a humanitarian emergency. The political landscape in Iraq is unstable. The government is marked by factionalism,

⁴⁸ <https://www.africanews.com/2023/02/15/burkina-faso-the-upc-is-challenging-the-ban-on-its-activities-in-court/#:~:text=The%20Union%20for%20Progress%20and,etat%20of%2030%20September%20last>.

⁴⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/08/burkina-faso-emergency-law-targets-dissidents>

a lack of effective governance, and struggles to provide basic services and security. Corruption is pervasive and significantly undermines public trust and institutional accountability. Economically, Iraq relies heavily on oil revenues, making it vulnerable to economic instability. These challenges impact development and limit economic diversification, making it difficult to address high unemployment rates, especially among youth.

Socially, Iraq is fragmented along ethnic and sectarian lines, leading to tensions. Efforts to reintegrate displaced populations and rebuild areas affected by conflict are ongoing, but progress is slow and often hampered by inadequate funding and coordination. Furthermore, Iraq faces environmental and climate challenges, including water scarcity and land degradation, which exacerbates agricultural decline. The Iraqi government has been unable to effectively change laws, policies, and norms due to a number of structural issues. Iraq's governance system is based on a power-sharing arrangement among the country's major ethnic and sectarian groups, which leads to deadlocks as factions prioritise personal interests over national ones. Other issues include the influence of armed groups and external (international) actors of Iraq's political landscape, and traditional or restrictive social and cultural norms.

The attitude of the Iraqi government towards civil society has been characterised by both support and restriction depending on the political climate and the nature of civil society's activities. For example, Iraq has a regulatory framework that governs the operation of civil society organisations, which seemingly supports the functioning of NGOs and CSOs by providing a legal basis for their existence, it also imposes significant bureaucratic hurdles and can impact effectiveness and independence.⁵⁰ These regulations often serve as tools for government control and are applied arbitrarily to pressure or restrict organisations viewed as politically inconvenient. CSOs that engage in advocacy or politically sensitive areas may face pressure or outright opposition from government entities and political groups. There are several reported instances where activists and civil society have faced harassment, surveillance, and even arrest⁵¹. As Iraq is transitioning from an active humanitarian emergency to a post-emergency setting, there was an expectation that the role of civil society would shift and new spaces for civil society intervention could emerge. The stance of the government towards civil society has however limited their growth and reach⁵².

South Sudan

South Sudan's context is deeply influenced by its protracted history of conflict, governance challenges, and socio-economic underdevelopment. Since achieving independence in 2011, South Sudan has struggled with continuous internal conflict, primarily due to political rivalry, which escalated into a full-scale civil war in December 2013. The conflict exacerbated ethnic divisions and hindered development of robust state institutions. Governance in South Sudan is impacted by weak institutions, lack of rule of law, and widespread corruption. The transitional government has been slow in implementing reforms and maintaining peace, reflecting deep-rooted political and ethnic divisions. The security and conflict situation in South Sudan is complex and volatile, marked by ongoing violence despite the signing of peace agreements aimed at ending the civil war. Although the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was signed in 2018, implementation of this agreement has been slow, and clashes continue between various armed groups and government forces. In addition to political and military conflicts, there is significant inter-communal violence, which frequently escalates into large-scale confrontations.

⁵⁰ Update on Accountability in Iraq', United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), June 2022.

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch, 'Four Years On, Peaceful Iraqi Protesters Remain Missing', 2 October 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/02/four-years-peaceful-iraqi-protesters-remain-missing> and Amnesty International, 'Iraq: Four years after Tishreen protests, no justice for state and militia violence', 27 September 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/iraq-four-years-after-tishreen-protests-no-justice-for-state-and-militia-violence/>

⁵² Iraq civil society assessment Final Report, February 2012, USAID.

These clashes are typically rooted in historical grievances, competition over resources, cattle raiding, and retaliation cycles. Such conflict is exacerbated due to the widespread availability of small arms amongst the civilian population.

Economically, South Sudan is highly dependent on oil revenues. This dependency on a single resource leads to price shock vulnerability and economic instability, which in turn affects the government's ability to fund essential services and development. The humanitarian situation is one of the most challenging globally, with millions of people in need of humanitarian assistance. The population faces massive food insecurity, largely due to displacement, disruption of agricultural activities, and the conflict's economic impact.

CIVICUS rates South Sudan's civic space as 'repressed', with a score of 25 out of a possible 100². There is restricted situation, characterised by restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and association. There are numerous examples of repression, intimidation and harassment of protestors, journalist and civil society actors in South Sudan.⁵³ Some stakeholder sources (both international donors and from international and national NGOs) state that the government's resistance to democratic processes and an increasing civic space is due to the government fears that dissent, debate and protests such as seen in other countries will topple their regime and it thus pro-actively tries to prevent and suppress civic mobilisation.

The Occupied Palestinian Territories

OPT exemplifies a complex and protracted fragility situation deeply rooted in ongoing conflict, restricted economic development, and severe political divisions. The Israeli occupation, which began in 1967, has led to a highly restrictive control over Palestinian land, movement, and resources, critically undermining the Palestinian Authority's capability to effectively govern. The occupation has facilitated the expansion of Israeli settlements and imposed a segmented legal and administrative regime that significantly limits Palestinian self-determination and leads to recurrent tensions and violence. The political landscape within the Palestinian territories is sharply divided between the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza. This internal political fragmentation hampers effective governance and complicates any potential peace process with Israel. Attempts to reconcile the two factions have repeatedly failed and have so weakened the Palestinian political system. The divide also affects security, as each government faces challenges in maintaining order within their territories, further complicated by frequent Israeli military operations, especially in Gaza – which result in significant civilian casualties and destruction of infrastructure.

Economically, OPT suffers from severe constraints imposed by the occupation, which include limited access to natural resources, imposed control over borders, and restrictions on movement. This results in high unemployment rates, especially in Gaza, where economic conditions are severe due to a longstanding blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt, supposedly to reduce Hamas' military capabilities. Even before 7 October 2023, the blockade had devastated the local economy, leading to a major humanitarian crisis and dependence on international aid. The Gaza war besides killing thousands of civilians has damaged most of the existing infrastructure and given the uncertainty on the future governance it is not possible at the moment to establish if and how Gaza will possibly recover one day.

In the OPT, the Israeli attacks and patent violations of HR and IHL in Gaza as well as the increased settler violence and movement restrictions in the West Bank add further enormous challenges to

⁵³ 'Entrenched repression: systematic curtailment of the democratic and civic space in South Sudan', UN Human Rights Council, Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, October 2023; 'Systematic harassment of civil society, journalists, private sector and critics by South Sudan's intelligence agency', Amnesty International, July 2020; 'Civil Society, Democratisation, and the Closing of Civic space - Experiences from South Sudan', Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law', April 2020.

the already shrinking civic space for Palestinian CSOs. A OHCHR report had already shown that Palestinian organisations were working under “increasingly restricted civic space through a strategy of delegitimising and silencing civil society⁵⁴. This includes criminalising Palestinian civil society organisations and their members by labelling them as “terrorists,” pressuring and threatening institutions that give a platform for civil society discourse, actively lobbying donors, and implementing measures intended to cut sources of funding and support”. On the legislative side of things, a Non-Profit Companies (NPCs) law was approved in September 2022 obliging NPCs to submit periodic technical, financial, and administrative reports to the relevant authority every three months, seek and obtain prior approval of the Cabinet before accepting donations, contributions, grants, funding, and aid, obtain prior authorisation from the Registrar of Companies before raising or making contributions in cash or in kind inside or outside the OPT, and limit operational expenses to 25 percent of the NPC total budget. This law has been fiercely opposed by CSOs as potentially restricting the civic space⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/06/rights-civil-society-members-are-being-violated-all-entities-israel-and>

⁵⁵ <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/tougher-restrictions-for-csos-and-right-to-information-amid-new-law-and-draft-law/>

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