A CSO PLAYBOOK TO RECLAIM CIVIC SPACE: VERSION 1.0

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Amy K. Lehr

AUTHOR

Catherine Hyde Townsend

A Report of the
CSIS Human Rights Initiative

CSIS | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

iCON The International Consortium on Closing Civic Space

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CSIS is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. The Center's 220 full-time staff and large network of affiliated scholars conduct research and analysis, and develop policy initiatives that look into the future and anticipate change.

Founded at the height of the Cold War by David M. Abshire and Admiral Arleigh Burke, CSIS was dedicated to finding ways to sustain American prominence and prosperity as a force for good in the world. Since 1962, CSIS has become one of the world's preeminent international institutions focused on defense and security; regional stability; and transnational challenges ranging from energy and climate to global health and economic integration.

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INTRODUCTION

Attacks on civic space have escalated globally over the past decade. To increase the resilience of civil society and social justice advocacy to respond to these attacks, the Human Rights Initiative (HRI) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) created an international consortium (iCon) of scholars and practitioners from around the world. These experts conduct research and identify concrete recommendations on how civil society can protect and reclaim the ability to work and thrive.

Over the past four years, CSIS has published more than 10 reports, both thematic and country-focused, to identify new programmatic models, broaden domestic constituencies, strengthen transnational solidarity, and align security and civic space. In addition to problem analyses, the reports provide examples and policy recommendations aimed at governments, donors, and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) as well as national and local civil society organizations (CSOs) on how to push back against closing civic space. The suite of iCon reports provides a depth of insight and ideas, not fully captured in this brief, which readers can draw on to inform their analysis.

Civic space *is the physical, social, cultural, digital, and legal environment that determines how individuals exercise their rights, including the freedom of expression, association, and assembly.*

In an open civic space, civil society organizations—such as non-governmental organizations, labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, social movements, faith-based groups, professional associations, and foundations—claim their rights and engage with political and social structures without hindrance.

This brief consolidates key lessons from iCon's invaluable research. The main target audience is CSOs, though governments and donors should take heed of the recommendations as well. This brief focuses more narrowly on:

1. **Key ways in which civil society can act directly to build long-term resilience** to counteract repression by state and non-state actors alike. The brief identifies a road map of priorities moving forward, focusing on approaches that may be outside the traditional experience and expertise of civil society but grounded in real life examples, including:

   - Strengthening their constituency base;
   - Enhancing collaboration; and
   - Communicating with a broader audience.

2. **Emerging practices** that hold promise as tactics to both build resilience and resist attacks—and warrant additional exploration and research—such as:

   - Use of economic analysis;
   - Innovation in CSO "business" models; and
   - Informal organizing networks.

Governments have learned quickly from one another, replicating strategies such as restrictive NGO legislation, overbroad counterterrorism measures, and the harassment of activists. Civil society must develop its own playbook to share tactics and focus limited resources on approaches that not only protect civic space but also enhance the impact and relevancy of human rights groups. This brief seeks to build on existing efforts to develop such a playbook.

That said, this brief is based primarily on anecdotal evidence from particular contexts. As Hetz and Poppe note in the 2018 report *Responding to Closing Civic Space: Recent Experiences from Three Global Initiatives,* "Methodological limitations aside, providing general guidance for appropriate responses is challenging in its own right, considering

the diversity of context and actors that advocates for open civic space must engage."[1] Not only is more work needed to identify which approaches work best in specific contexts, but greater support must be given to longer-term efforts to shift social norms and narratives in support of human rights. The approaches in this paper are not a panacea but suggested priorities for action.

Brief Context

Much has been written on the extensive and growing attacks against civil society. In a November 2018 report, *People Power Under Attack,* CIVICUS notes that "repression of peaceful civic activism continues to be a widespread crisis for civil society in most parts of the world, with just four per cent of the world's population living in countries with open space for civil society (civic space)."[2] Their analysis shows that almost 6 in 10 countries worldwide have closed, repressed, or obstructed civic spaces. CSOs find themselves in a "suffocating environment," struggling to maintain operations and carry out their work.[3] On a positive note, this research has successfully raised awareness about the daunting problems faced by civil society around the world.

Governments and non-state actors have used a laundry list of approaches to restrict civic space and crack down on the ability of CSOs, particularly human rights and social justice groups, to continue their work. These include:

- Restrictions on freedoms of association, assembly, expression, and access to information;

- Legal restrictions and burdensome regulatory policies and practices for CSO registration and financial accounting;

- Funding restrictions and onerous administrative and reporting obligations, particularly related to receipt of foreign funding;

- Branding CSOs as unpatriotic, a threat to public order, or linked to terrorism due to foreign funding, peaceful dissent, and critiques of the government;

- Coordination of public smear campaigns to discredit the legitimacy of CSOs, human rights activists, and journalists as well as intimidation and attacks on human rights defenders; and

- Exclusion or excessive regulation of CSOs within the banking system under the guise of counter-terrorism or anti-money laundering measures.

CSIS and others have researched and compiled the diverse changes that multilaterals, states, INGOs, and national CSOs must make to protect and uphold the space for civil society work. These tactics encompass:

- Increased legal clarity around the definition of terrorism and foreign agents;

- Advocacy for alignment of counterterrorism laws with human rights standards;

- Stronger CSO capacity, particularly around digital and physical protection, financial accountability, and donor reporting;

- Greater donor support and training for these capacities, increased general support rather than restrictive project support, and strategies that emphasize local priorities;

1   Fabian Hetz and Annika Poppe, *Responding to Closing Civic Space: Recent Experiences from Three Global Initiatives* (Washington, DC: CSIS, October 2018), 2, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/181219_RespondingClosingCivicSpace_layout_v2.pdf.

2   CIVICUS, "New Report: 6 IN 10 Countries Now Seriously Repressing Civic Freedoms," *Monitor,* Last accessed December 12, 2018, https://monitor.civicus.org/PeoplePowerUnderAttack2018/.

3   Hannah Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies: Strategies for Standing Together* (Washington, DC: CSIS, June 2018), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180618_Smith_LocalConstituencies_FINAL.pdf?kw4byX-kA7u7g080qIGvmhEG0t1gZTZ34

- Alignment of national laws with international human rights standards and model language in areas such as NGO registration, foreign funding, and protection of human rights defenders; and

- Continued use of non-violent protest and resistance to demonstrate the resilience and power of civil society organizing as well as local support.

This paper will not explore most of these given the extensive research already done, the relatively weaker influence CSOs have on influencing these changes (e.g., donor flexibility), and the fact that many of these approaches reflect the longstanding priorities and expertise of human rights groups (such as normative work to align legal regimes with international human rights standards). Diplomacy and advocacy to directly contest these legal and administrative measures remain vital. Work by INGOs and funders to provide technical assistance, sample laws, cross-border learning, and peer support provides an important infrastructure and support network for national and local groups.

At the same time, CSOs' heavy reliance on foreign support, weak connections with local constituencies, and "business as usual" advocacy approaches have undermined the sector's ability and legitimacy to contest many of these attacks.[4] Coupled with limited capacity and a lack of unity, the momentum to further restrict civic space can seem insurmountable. But CSOs cannot simply continue advocating for stronger human rights standards. They must act to confront restrictions that are fueled by weaknesses in the sector itself so that human rights are seen as harmonious with local values, supported by the broader public and CSO sector, and communicated in accessible and localized ways. In the face of attacks against CSO authenticity, they must ground human rights in the strength of local power and legitimacy.

Figure 1: Playbook 1.0: A Visual Snapshot

- Use protest to unify communities
- Let the local take the lead

Stronger Constituencies

Deeper Collaboration

- Generate greater unity amongst CSOs
- Create novel coalitions with new allies

- Use economic analyses
- Explore new CSO "business models"
- Pilot or connect with informal networks

Emerging Practices

Compelling Local Narratives

- Connect messages with local values
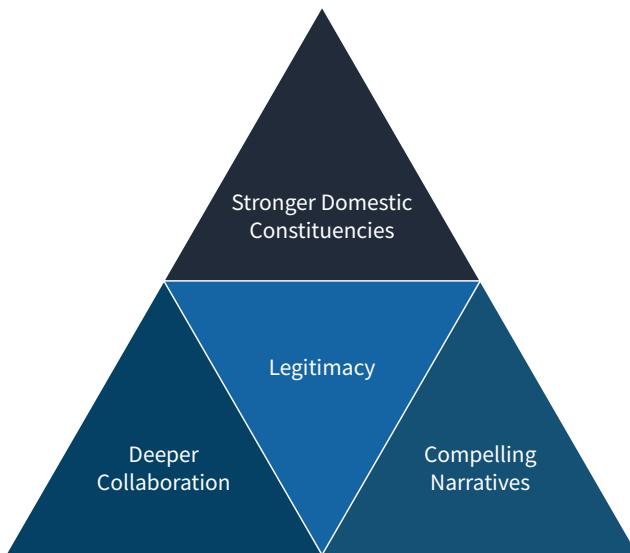- Produce accessible communications
- Develop pragmatic arguments

4   Lana Baydas and Shannon N. Green, "Counterterrorism Measures: Pretext for Closing the Space for Civil Society," *Commentary*, CSIS, March 24, 2017, https://www.csis.org/analysis/counterterrorism-measures-pretext-closing-space-civil-society.

THREE CORNERSTONES FOR CSO LEGITIMACY:
CONSTITUENCIES, COLLABORATION, AND NARRATIVES

Often underlying the attacks against civil society is a broad goal to delegitimize its work, claiming it is not representative or participatory of community members, accountable to the public, or compatible with economic growth and "public order." Counterterrorism measures conflating activism with terrorist threats, foreign funding laws allying CSOs with external influence, and burdensome NGO laws framed as imposing accountability all undermine the legitimacy of CSOs while simultaneously hamstringing their ability to operate. The targeting of "controversial" CSOs divides and conquers the sector while governments use the media to reinforce narratives that advocacy CSOs undermine national stability.

Figure 2: Paths to Legitimacy

CSOs seek to address structural discrimination and rights violations in their communities and now must also focus on structural weaknesses of the CSO sector, which undermine legitimacy and increase vulnerability to attack. While these approaches might not address the root causes—the political and economic structures giving rise to and enabling such attacks—they begin to address the drivers of CSO vulnerability. CSOs must develop hopeful visions and value-based alternatives that replace the familiar tropes of activists as violent extremists, corrupt elites, and foreign agents.[5] On top of their traditional work of strengthening normative human rights frameworks, CSOs must better reflect the priorities of the people, such as massive income inequality, and develop communications that harness public support. Local communities must drive their mandates through broad-based domestic collaborations. Donor priorities and criteria must better reflect these realities. Below we explore a draft playbook for CSOs to reclaim civic space through constituency building, collaboration, and local narratives in the "new normal."[6]

Build Stronger Domestic Constituencies

Many CSOs, particularly those based in urban capitals, lack a strong connection with and accountability to local communities. Accusations of foreign influence, allegiance to funders, or elitism lose potency when CSOs demonstrate their organic links with community members. "The ability of CSOs to rally support, mobilize their constituencies, and ensure civic engagement to back their campaigns is crucial, as they need the weight of citizen participation to substantiate and legitimize their claims and to gain leverage in their dealings with state authorities."[7]

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5   Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies*, 5.

6   Thomas Carothers and Saskia Brechenmacher, *Closing Space: Democracy and Human Rights Support under Fire* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2014), 31, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/closing_space.pdf.

7   Anique Claessen and Piet de Lange, "Lessons for Supporting Policy Influencing in Restrictive Environments," *Development in Practice* 26, no. 5 (2016): 549.

CSOs have used a number of approaches to foster domestic constituencies and build public support at national and local levels, including: (1) the use of protest to galvanize social movements, and (2) local participatory processes to develop consensus-driven priorities and positions. As Dwyer Smith notes, "strengthened ties provide CSOs the means to build upon existing spaces in society and also to create new ones; to nurture existing alliances, fortifying civil society across causes; and to attract new audiences, building momentum in the face of restrictions."[8] These approaches are most powerful when they give primacy to local knowledge and provide a broad platform inclusive of marginalized voices.

Protest as a Unifier: An example from Ecuador demonstrates how protest can reinforce legitimacy. To contest oil exploration in the Amazon basin, 300 indigenous women marched to the Ecuadorean capital of Quito. The march helped bridge the rural/urban divide and built solidarity among Quito residents. It attracted mainstream media coverage and created space for public dialogue.[9] Quito residents gave the women food, shelter, and discussion spaces, demonstrating public support. Moreover, the women-led march catalyzed participation of individuals, mainly women, who had not joined earlier protests. Given this broad public support, the government could not discredit the indigenous women's claims.[10]

"**Letting the local take the lead**": This is an often-expressed but seldom-followed mantra.[11] CSOs can put this into practice through community consultations, while also building their constituencies.

For example, in El Quiché, Guatemala, community consultations eventually drew 27,000 indigenous people to create a platform for overcoming cultural differences between indigenous groups and unify positions to reject proposed hydroelectric and mining projects. "Such activities can underpin the strengthening of civil society by increasing its reach and supporter base, as well as by creating space for the voices of women and minorities who may be excluded from traditional consultation processes."[12]

A program approach called, "Doing Development Differently" (DDD) uses an iterative process with community groups to develop solutions that develop through learning and adaptation,[13] allowing demand-driven priorities and organic partnerships to emerge. For example, in India, the INGO Trócaire worked with a partner, Jana Vikas, to engage with informal village-level CSOs called Traditional Village Committees (TVCs), which serve as participatory decisionmaking structures throughout India. The TVCs resolved conflicts between religious groups and unified community members to demand government action on electrification, infrastructure, and development. As genuinely local structures with broad participation, including women and Dalits, TVCs had an intimate understanding of the context and post-conflict dynamics, including the impact of external religious fundamentalists.[14]

The work of the Civil Society Innovation Initiative (CSII), a collaboration between major donors and INGO partners Counterpart International and CIVICUS, demonstrates what participatory processes

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8   Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies*, 2.

9   Ibid., 11.

10   Ibid.

11   Hetz and Poppe, *Responding to Closing Civic Space: Recent Experiences from Three Global Initiatives*, 16.

12   Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies*, 9.

13   Barbara Smith, *Donors' Perspectives on Closing Civic Space*, (Washington, DC: CSIS, June 2018), 11, https://csis-prod. s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180618_Smith_LocalConstituencies_FINAL.pdf?kw4byXkA7u7g080qIGvm-hEG0t1gZTZ34.

14   Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies*, 11.

can look like in action. CSII developed seven regional civil society platforms, or hubs, to support civic space. Rather than predetermining each regions' structure or priorities, the CSII used a "co-design" approach and held extensive regional consultations with more than 250 CSOs. This local-needs approach generated ground-up support for the work of the hubs, which developed and implemented diverse strategies to strengthen local civil society. Local leadership ensured greater community buy-in to the work of the hubs, just as the hubs better reflected local priorities and strategies.[15]

Caveats: Using protests to galvanize public support is an effective tool, but more research is needed on how to maintain that support over time. Moreover, community outreach is only viable when CSOs can maintain operations and interact safely with local constituencies and the public.[16] Additionally, it is vital that CSOs engage in participatory processes to build legitimacy and reflect community priorities and diversity. Donors should require their partners to do so and provide appropriate support, since such processes require time and resources. The CSII example above is a noteworthy example of donors implementing this philosophy. Lastly, community consultations should engage legitimate representatives who are accountable to the broader community while not reinforcing traditional power structures that might marginalize minority communities.

Deepen Collaboration Amongst CSOs

In most countries, government restrictions seek to divide and conquer. They initially and disproportionately target advocacy CSOs working on issues such as the environment, refugee and immigrant rights, land and indigenous rights,[17] or LGBTI rights—versus service providers. Rivalry over scarce resources only heightens the divisions.[18] Divisions between CSOs providing services and those advocating for democratic freedoms are common. As Mooney and Baydas observe about Cambodia, "civil society in Cambodia is fragmented, without a unifying agenda – and the attacks on civil society have only aggravated such fragmentation."[19]

CSO Unity: A collective front of domestic CSOs is vital as they can counter "the 'divide and rule' tactics of states and other actors, as well as [serve] to build solidarity and nurture domestic constituencies by bridging rural and urban divides."[20] The very threat of closing civic space offers an opportunity to create platforms for collaboration and generate more responsive, broad-based, and authentic movements working in solidarity.[21] For example, the Fund for Global Human Rights, an intermediary donor, deliberately connects LGBTI groups to local human rights communities to proactively bring CSOs together.[22]

There is a virtuous circle between deepening domestic constituencies and strengthening collaborations across CSOs whereby, "campaigning on a

15   Hetz and Poppe, *Responding to Closing Civic Space: Recent Experiences from Three Global Initiatives*, 12-14.

16   Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies*, 3.

17   Baydas and Green, "Counterterrorism Measures: Pretext for Closing the Space for Civil Society."

18   Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies*, 17.

19   Lana Baydas and Lauren Mooney, *Cambodian Civil Society at a Critical Juncture* (Washington, DC: CSIS, June 2018), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180625_Mooney_CambodianCivilSociety_v4.pdf?lC5eWUT-VconUlZ6Q.WlOIugNmTa5302v.

20   Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies*, 15.

21   Charles Kojo Vandyck, "Enabling Citizens to Expand the Frontiers of Human Rights in Africa," CSIS, May 18, 2017, https://www.csis.org/blogs/international-consortium-closing-civic-space/enabling-citizens-expand-frontiers-human-rights.

22   Julie Snyder, "Supporting the LGBTI Agenda: Why It Matters for Civil Society," CSIS, March 20, 2018, https://www.csis.org/blogs/international-consortium-closing-civic-space/supporting-lgbti-agenda-why-it-matters-civil.

shared message allows CSOs to reach wider audiences among the public and more effectively generate support."[23] Pragmatically, service delivery CSOs should support their advocacy peers since restrictions eventually affect them as well. Moreover, a restricted civic space breaks down accountability mechanisms, enabling more corruption, which then hinders the operation of all organizations. The rationale for and best approach to unifying service and advocacy CSOs, however, merits more research.

In Tunisia, when the government threatened to amend the Associations Law, CSOs put aside differences to form an informal "Working Group on Protection of Civic Space." The group encompassed diverse organizations—new and longstanding local CSOs and INGOs—to coordinate a robust and unified advocacy campaign against the amendment, spreading the effort beyond the capital.[24] Although they could not entirely thwart a new registry requirement for both business and CSOs, the group developed an innovative solution amenable to both the government and CSOs whereby a digital platform would make CSO registration less onerous. In retrospect, the group should have created stronger connections with the media and rural organizations. Nevertheless, "CSO coalitions . . . appear to be a potentially effective mechanism to pushback on laws in Tunisia."[25]

Novel Coalitions: In addition to working within CSO alliances, social justice and human rights CSOs must engage new actors, including faith-based organizations and, in some contexts, the private sector or even local celebrities. Just as stronger constituency building

provides a bulwark against attacks of foreign influence or lack of credibility, support and attention by actors outside the CSO sector reduce the isolation of targeted groups[26] and also provides additional resources.[27]

For example, in Mexico, CSOs formed a coalition in 2016 called UnidOSC to oppose certain provisions in anti-money laundering regulations and tax laws. In 2012, the government classified donations to charities as risky financial activities, responding to recommendations from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). In 2017, the government proposed tax reforms that would have threatened the financial survival of CSOs. UnidOSC worked with academics and the private sector to analyze the laws and develop convincing alternatives to present to the Mexican Congress. They also sought the support of legislators who found it politically beneficial to ally with civil society and helped the coalition hone and amplify their messaging. Linked to this broad coalition was a communications strategy that built public support, for example, by publishing concerns from more than 500 organizations about the tax law in major newspapers. The public pressure persuaded regulators to engage with the coalition. UnidOSC also participated in the Global NGO Coalition on FATF, learning about strategies successfully used elsewhere.[28] UnidOSC exemplifies the ways that deepening constituencies and collaboration can be mutually reinforcing.

Caveats: At times, governments have exploited collaborative networks to further restrict CSO activities. For example, in Cambodia in 2017, a coalition of 40 CSOs worked together to monitor communal elections. The government promptly accused the group of violating

23 Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies,* 16.

24 Yara Shahin, *Pushing Back against Narrowing Space for Civil Society in Tunisia: The Power of Coalition* (Washington, DC: CSIS, December 2018), https://www.csis.org/analysis/pushing-back-against-narrowing-space-civil-society-tunisia.

25 Ibid., 16.

26 Hetz and Poppe, *Responding to Closing Civic Space: Recent Experiences from Three Global Initiatives,* 2.

27 Linnea Sandin and Sarah Baumunk, *Mexican Civil Society: Reclaiming Space Amidst Impunity* (Washington, DC: CSIS, December 2018), https://www.csis.org/analysis/mexican-civil-society.

28 Ibid., 12.

the Associations Law. The collaborative essentially provided a "watchlist," only increasing the vulnerability of CSOs critical of the government.[29] Also, collaborations are most effective when formed early, before individual organizations experience disproportionate restrictions and some protect their own interests rather than communal CSO space.

Create Compelling Local Narratives

In this era of closing space, governments have successfully argued that human rights and democracy must be traded for national security, stability, and economic development and that the aims of civil society undermine these latter goals.[30] Exploiting the weakness of CSO constituency-building and collaboration, they have divided and discredited civil society by branding activists as "foreign agents," "enemies of the state," or opposed to development.

Meanwhile, human rights groups have failed to protect themselves by investing in stronger communications and messaging frameworks that establish public support. Erin McCarthy notes, "These campaigns are easy to propagate, as citizens cannot relate to many of the CSOs that are being targeted and do not understand their value or purpose." The accusations that these groups are merely 'western puppets' are becoming part of the common narrative, which reduces citizen support.[31]

CSOs seek to develop new narratives through a variety of strategies, including connecting messages to cultural norms, utilizing accessible communi-cations materials, and developing pragmatic arguments that demonstrate how human rights align with economic or security concerns.[32] The most effective messages are not presented as counter-narratives, which often simply reinforce existing beliefs, but rather as a new line of thinking. As noted above, efforts to develop stronger domestic constituencies that involve the public and local communities in CSO processes provide not only greater legitimacy but help ensure that CSO priorities reflect local needs. CSOs would benefit from involving other actors as they develop local communication strategies.

Local Messaging: CSOs often fail to translate human rights in ways that resonate locally or explain legal or technical language for domestic audiences, which in turn makes it harder to build constituencies. The term "civic space" itself may even be problematic.[33] CSOs must explain their work in locally relevant terms that carry weight with the public.[34] International efforts to advance civic space should be complimented by powerful localized narratives in order to weaken arguments that CSOs undermine local values.[35] "Considering what messages are important, what context they are heard in, and how it is possible to shift dominant narratives is key to making progress on individual human rights and social justice issues, but also to creating strong supporter bases among domestic constituencies and strengthening civil society as a whole."[36]

29   Baydas and Mooney, *Cambodian Civil Society at a Critical Juncture*.

30   Baydas and Green, "Counterterrorism Measures: Pretext for Closing the Space for Civil Society."

31   Erin McCarthy, "Invest in Citizens: The best way to push back against closing civic space in Europe and Eurasia," CSIS, October 1, 2018, https://www.csis.org/blogs/international-consortium-closing-civic-space/invest-citizens-best-way-push-back-against.

32   Hetz and Poppe, *Responding to Closing Civic Space: Recent Experiences from Three Global Initiatives*, 11.

33   Shahin, *Pushing Back against Narrowing Space for Civil Society in Tunisia: The Power of Coalition*.

34   Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies*, 17.

35   Hetz and Poppe, *Responding to Closing Civic Space: Recent Experiences from Three Global Initiatives*, 3.

36   Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies*, 20.

Publicly reconciling the perceived tensions between human rights and local values can weaken government claims that civil society represents foreign interests while also strengthening domestic support for their work. For example, a regional CSO network in Latin America worked with faith-based organizations and Catholic institutions to highlight how human rights standards reflect Catholic values, weakening perceptions that rights and Catholic beliefs are incompatible.[37] Such a narrative makes it hard for governments to isolate and stigmatize CSOs while also building a broader coalition.
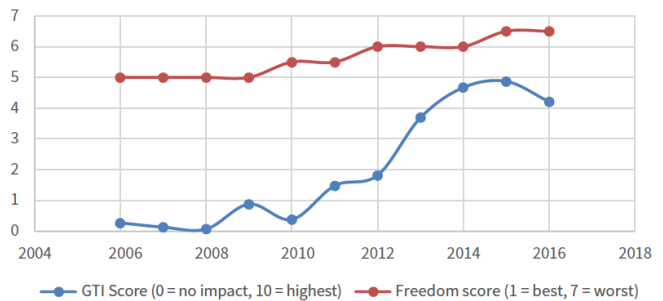
In Cambodia, a volunteer-run organization uses Facebook Live and other popular social media networks to catalyze public dialogue and engagement on fulfilling the Paris Peace Accords. By using the narrative of a healthy democracy, which has broad political support, it has generated support for its platform and cut across party lines.[38]

Accessible Communications Materials: Even if messages are locally relevant, they must also be delivered in locally relevant ways. To translate international norms to the local level, the World Movement designed innovative and accessible communication tools about access to resources and the right to foreign funding. Groups welcomed the move away from lengthy text-based materials and viewed the interactive online infographic and videos at much higher rates.[39]

In the Ukraine, local CSOs convinced parliamentarians to push CSO administrative reforms by distributing a small brochure featuring a simple graphic that contrasted burdensome CSO rules with relatively lax business regulations.[40]

Pragmatic Arguments: Arguments that harmonize human rights with economic, social, and counterterrorism objectives can be effective in some contexts. In an analysis of Bahrain, for example, Alma Abdul-Hadi Jadallahh compares data from Freedom House's *Freedom in the World Report* and Vision in Humanity's *Global Terrorism Index*. Figure 3 shows the relationship between restrictions on civic space and an increase in terrorist attacks from 2006 to 2015. CSOs should use such analysis to construct and frame narratives that demonstrate the ways restrictions on civic space might actually increase terrorism.[41]

Figure 3: Causal Link - Diminishing Freedoms and Increasing Terrorsm

GTI Score (0 = no impact, 10 = highest)   Freedom score (1 = best, 7 = worst)

Caveats: Extremely restrictive contexts may not allow CSOs to propagate new narratives or communicate publicly. Ideally, communications work begins before state or self-censorship has taken hold. CSOs must present a positive vision before attacks have diminished their legitimacy too far, suggesting that donors should proactively support such efforts. Communication strategies cannot take the place of building domestic constituencies. In fact, communication approaches would benefit from the same participatory processes that build local support. Lastly, some CSOs are highly technical in nature or address sensitive is-

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37   Hetz and Poppe, *Responding to Closing Civic Space: Recent Experiences from Three Global Initiatives*, 6.

38   Baydas and Mooney, *Cambodian Civil Society at a Critical Juncture*.

39   Ibid., 37.

40   Ibid.

41   Baydas and Green, "Counterterrorism Measures: Pretext for Closing the Space for Civil Society."

sues, which may mean they will never garner grass-roots support.[42]

EMERGING PRACTICES

Throughout the CSIS reports, authors collected innovative ways through which CSOs can develop new approaches, arguments, and tactics to protect their ability to work.[43] While the approaches in the above sections require new skills for CSOs, these emerging practices are truly groundbreaking and require new skills or partners to effectively implement. The limited evidence thus far seems promising for further piloting and exploration for CSOs and donors alike.

Use of Economic Analysis

One such promising practice is the use of economic analysis to demonstrate the ways that human rights and economic development can be mutually reinforcing and rebut arguments that human rights activism is a threat to economic development. Linked to their ability to develop compelling narratives, CSOs must test these approaches. For example, Barbara Smith explores research suggesting that the recent deterioration in Poland's economic outlook, including a drop in foreign investment of almost 50 percent from 2016 to 2017, correlates with the government's actions to undermine judicial independence and threaten independent media.[44]

Such attacks on civic space "undermine democratic standards and principles and make the country less reliable internationally, politically, and in terms of economic integration,"[45] and can contribute to corruption, which undermines investment. It is, however, still unclear when CSOs can effectively use such analyses, as Polish CSOs have not yet applied this approach in practice. Financial analysis might help make the agenda of closing civic space relevant for the business sector by demonstrating that greater civic space and economic growth are mutually reinforcing. This in turn might enable new alliances between CSOs and business. CSOs also might be able to obtain pro bono technical assistance from the private sector or academics to develop such an analysis, drawing on the Mexico example.

In a frequently cited example, CSOs in Kenya successfully used economic arguments in 2013. CSOs responded to government efforts to restrict access to foreign funding by citing the number of jobs that would be lost and the economic contributions of the CSO sector. By aligning its work with public and government support of a robust economy, the campaign helped others understand why the restrictions were misguided and must be withdrawn.[46]

Caveats: The use of economic analysis can be a double-edged sword. CSOs must have the capacity or partners to produce accurate data or risk further undermining their credibility. Moreover, economic analysis should complement, not undermine, values-based narratives about human rights. Economic arguments may help the general public understand why human rights

42   "Key Takeaways from Reclaiming Civic Space: Resistance, Resilience and Resources, Human Rights Funders Network," Human Rights Funders Network, https://www.hrfn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Key-Takeaways-from-Reclaiming-Civic-Space.pdf.

43   CIVICUS, "New Report: 6 IN 10 Countries Now Seriously Repressing Civic Freedoms."

44   Barbara Smith, *Polish Civil Society: Adapting to New Pressures* (Washington, DC: CSIS, December 2018), https://www.csis.org/analysis/polish-civil-society.

45   Bertelmann Stiftung, "BTI 2018 Country Report - Poland=," 2018, http://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-reports/detail/itc/pol/#management.

46   Charles Kojo Vandyck, "Enabling Citizens to Expand the Frontiers of Human Rights in Africa," CSIS, May 18, 2017, https://www.csis.org/blogs/international-consortium-closing-civic-space/enabling-citizens-expand-frontiers-human-rights.

matter and simultaneously reinforce economic rights, which community and grassroots organizations often support more vigorously.

Innovation in CSO "Business" Models

Another recommendation deserving further experimentation is greater innovation in CSO business models and creative funding strategies. Ed Rekosh proposes a suite of approaches, many of which build local legitimacy while simultaneously providing revenue, including:

- Membership models of fundraising or legal support and training;
- Social entrepreneurship that generates core revenue; and
- Engagement with large international companies to harness their influence and support local NGOs.[47]

For example, in Cambodia, one organization used a surplus of consulting fees to pay for activities that promote human rights and democracy.[48] Rekosh also shares several examples of how working with corporations can advance both human rights and compelling narratives. For example, Myanmar was considering a minimum wage in 2015. When local factory owners sought to oppose it, a consortium of Western apparel companies that sourced from Myanmar and INGOs jointly advocated for the minimum wage. In justifying its decision to establish a minimum wage, the government cited each letter from international companies supporting the measure.[49]

***Caveats:** CSO success with new models is likely to be context-specific, as some rely on robust cultures of local philanthropy or a collaborative global corporate sector, which sometimes is more foe than friend. Local philanthropists also may not be willing to support certain types of advocacy. Additional research and piloting of such approaches would help decipher whether they increase public support, in addition to the obvious benefit of diversifying funding and reducing reliance on the traditional foreign funding model.*

Informal Organizing Networks

As governments have clamped down on formally organized CSOs and restricted the "public square," some activism has moved online or into less formal organizing structures. CSOs also see increasing opportunities to align with social movements to generate greater domestic constituency support and take advantage of the promise of social media. Rekosh notes ways that CSOs can transcend traditional organizational structures to engage in peer-to-peer relationships amongst activists, allies, and beneficiaries and leverage social media organizing.[50] This is also a response to demographic changes as younger generations transform how and where people organize and collaborate.[51]

During the Gezi Park protests in Turkey, much organizing occurred through social media. Protesters turned to well-established CSOs as trustworthy online sources of logistical information.[52] The protests led to new alliances between CSOs and emerging social movements that helped sustain action over the longer term.

47 Edwin Rekosh, *Rethinking the Human Rights Business Model: New and Innovative Structures and Strategies for Local Impact* (Washington, DC: CSIS, June 2017), 22-23, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/170630_Rekosh_HumanRightsBusinessModel_Web.pdf.

48 Baydas and Mooney, *Cambodian Civil Society at a Critical Juncture*, 19.

49 Rekosh, *Rethinking the Human Rights Business Model*, 14.

50 Ibid., 18.

51 Ibid., 19.

52 Dwyer Smith, *Broadening Local Constituencies*, 12.

In Mexico, human rights defenders have created informal on-the-ground information sharing within communities to alert members of threats. Sometimes called "take care networks," they share important security-related information through secure social media platforms or encrypted texting. Activists not only report threats or advise others but also receive additional protection.[53] Such structures have the added value of reinforcing community engagement and support for human rights work.

In Egypt, a volunteer-based initiative to combat sexual harassment, HarassMap, uses crowd sourcing software to allow women across the country to report incidents, which are then displayed on a map. With limited funding, it "resourcefully engages in a wide array of partnerships with other organizations that provide in-kind contributions." Again, the approaches of collaboration and deepening domestic constituencies can often be paired with other strategies for significant impact.

Caveats: The use of informal organizing structures should not imply a ceding of the freedoms for CSOs to operate freely and formally. In addition, social media approaches may not always be easier or safer, as governments increasingly use surveillance and infiltration to target organizations and activists. In certain contexts, tools such as radio might be more accessible to grassroots constituencies. In short, informal organizing must always be deployed through culturally appropriate vehicles but is a promising approach to compliment the work of traditional CSOs, tap the power of social movements, and transcend regulation of more formal legal structures.

CONCLUSION

The wealth of writing and research on civic space has provided a clear and concerning picture about the working environment for CSOs and the challenges they face. CSIS's iCon is an innovative structure to deepen this research through a collective approach that provides practical recommendations to CSOs around the world. This brief focused on approaches to build CSO resiliency while simultaneously undermining attacks on their legitimacy. It adds to existing playbooks for CSOs to counter the restrictive spaces they must work in and find high-impact ways to move their agendas forward. The robust and reinforcing relationship between these approaches warrants additional research to better evaluate their impact, ideal sequencing, and contexual nuances. Additionally, several emerging practices deserve greater attention and experimentation. CSIS's hope is that by bringing the collective wisdom of iCon's work into this briefing paper, CSOs can find a practical path forward in these troubled times.

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53   Sandin and Baumunk, *Mexican Civil Society: Reclaiming Space Amidst Impunity,* 15.

ABOUT THE PROJECT DIRECTOR AND AUTHOR

Amy K. Lehr is the director of the Human Rights Initiative (HRI) at CSIS. The HRI was launched in June 2014 and is the only program of its kind in the Washington think tank community. From this unique position, HRI brings together key actors, catalyzing creative, game-changing solutions to the globe's most pressing human rights challenges through a cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach. Amy comes to CSIS after a decade with Foley Hoag LLP's unique corporate social responsibility (CSR) practice. In this role, she carried out groundbreaking work across sectors, engaging with international financial institutions, corporations, non-governmental organizations, and governments, to help them develop best practices and apply international law to address global human rights challenges. Her expertise includes labor rights, privacy and freedom of expression, security and human rights, and issues affecting human rights defenders. She has carried out field work across the globe, including conducting human rights impact assessments for large projects. Previously, Amy served as legal adviser to the UN special representative on business and human rights, John Ruggie, and in that role helped develop the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. She also served as a fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School's Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative. She previously worked for development NGOs in Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand, including Save the Children. She was a term member at the Council on Foreign Relations. Amy received her AB from Princeton University and her JD from Harvard Law School.

Catherine Hyde Townsend serves as an independent consultant—with over 20 years of experience—combining human rights expertise with strategic, leadership, and operational skills to advance social change. From 2006 until 2017, Catherine served as a human rights program officer at Wellspring Advisors, launching cutting-edge grant-making portfolios advancing disability rights and protecting human rights defenders with a focus on gender, and intersectional identities. Within Wellspring, Catherine created internal protocols to support grantee safety. Externally, she led donor learning and developed shared resources to guide private donors' efforts to address grantee protection. In 2007, she helped launch the Disability Rights Fund and continues to serve as a member of the Board of Directors there as well as a Director for Women Enabled International.

To advance the networking and learning of human rights donors, she coordinated programming for the International Human Rights Funders Group from 2004-2008. Prior to joining Wellspring, Catherine worked at the Mertz Gilmore Foundation and LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust. Between 1995 and 1999, Catherine began her career working for JP Morgan in several offices around the world. Catherine holds an MA from Yale University focusing on international human rights and law and a BA from Hamilton College.

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