



# 2020 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

FOR MEXICO

3rd EDITION – OCTOBER 2021





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## Developed by:

United States Agency for International Development

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Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance

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**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.

Cover Photo: A team deliberates during Mexico's Anticorruption Datathon. With support from USAID's Transparency Rapid Response Project, the Datathon gathered Mexican data scientists, programmers, software developers, and civil society members to analyze data on federal public contracts from different databases in the National Digital Platform in order to detect corruption risks. This activity contributed to USAID's efforts to encourage citizen participation and promote stronger accountability and transparency in Mexico through innovation and machine learning solutions.

Photo Credit: Manuel Silva Coache, Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc.

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# INTRODUCTION

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is pleased to present the third edition of the *CSO Sustainability Index for Mexico*, covering developments during the unprecedented circumstances of 2020, during which the COVID-19 pandemic affected all aspects of life around the globe.

The *CSO Sustainability Index* is an important tool that allows local civil society organizations (CSOs), governments, donors, academics, and others to understand and monitor the sustainability of the CSO sector. The Index addresses both advances and setbacks in seven key components or “dimensions” of the sustainability of civil society sectors: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image.

The Index’s methodology relies on CSO practitioners and researchers, who in each country form an expert panel to assess and rate these dimensions of CSO sustainability during the year. The panel agrees on a score for each dimension, which ranges from 1 (the most enhanced level of sustainability) to 7 (the most impeded). The dimension scores are then averaged to produce an overall sustainability score for the CSO sector of a given country. A Washington, DC-based editorial committee composed of technical and regional experts reviews each panel’s scores and the corresponding narrative reports, with the aim of maintaining consistent approaches and standards to facilitate cross-country comparisons. Additionally, an electronic survey was carried out among active CSOs in the country in order to increase the representativeness and quality of this report; 359 CSO representatives completed the survey. Further details about the methodology used to calculate scores and produce narrative reports, including information on the electronic questionnaire, are provided in Annex A.

The overall sustainability of Mexican CSOs deteriorated slightly in 2020, due to both the impact of COVID-19 and the stark lack of support for CSOs from the current federal administration. The legal environment for CSOs witnessed the most significant decline in 2020, spurred by increasingly intrusive government oversight, restrictions, and administrative burdens. The virtual disappearance of federal funding for CSOs, combined with the economic decline and disruption of services caused by the pandemic, caused the sector’s financial viability and service provision capabilities to weaken. These same factors drove a deterioration in the organizational capacity of CSOs, though it was offset somewhat by their resilience and effective use of technology. Advocacy declined in 2020 as CSOs were hesitant to engage in campaigns in an environment that is largely hostile to collaboration with the sector; those that did engage in advocacy efforts typically saw limited success. Public image remained unchanged; while CSOs continued to be subject to negative rhetoric from the government, CSOs were better equipped to adapt to the environment and media coverage of the sector’s work improved slightly. The infrastructure supporting Mexican CSOs not only withstood these obstacles but saw a slight improvement in 2020 as networks, coalitions, and support services continued to grow.

The *CSO Sustainability Index for Mexico* complements similar publications covering other regions. The various regional editions of the *2020 CSO Sustainability Index* assess the civil society sectors in seventy-three countries, including thirty-two in Sub-Saharan Africa; twenty-four in Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia; eight in Asia, and eight in the Middle East and North Africa.

A publication of this type would not be possible without the contributions of many individuals and organizations. We are especially grateful to the individuals who participate in the expert panel. Their knowledge, perceptions, ideas, observations, and contributions are the foundation upon which this Index is based. We would also like to thank Santiago Sordo Ruz, who led the project’s efforts at Centro de Investigación y Estudios sobre Sociedad Civil (CIESC), our local implementing partner.

In addition, special thanks goes to Eka Imerlishvili from FHI 360, the project manager, Jennifer Stuart from ICNL, the report’s editor, and Christina Del Castillo from USAID, who provided critical support for this edition of the *CSO Sustainability Index*. A full list of acknowledgements can be found on page 7.

Happy reading,

Michael Kott

Department Director, Civil Society and Peace Building Department, FHI 360

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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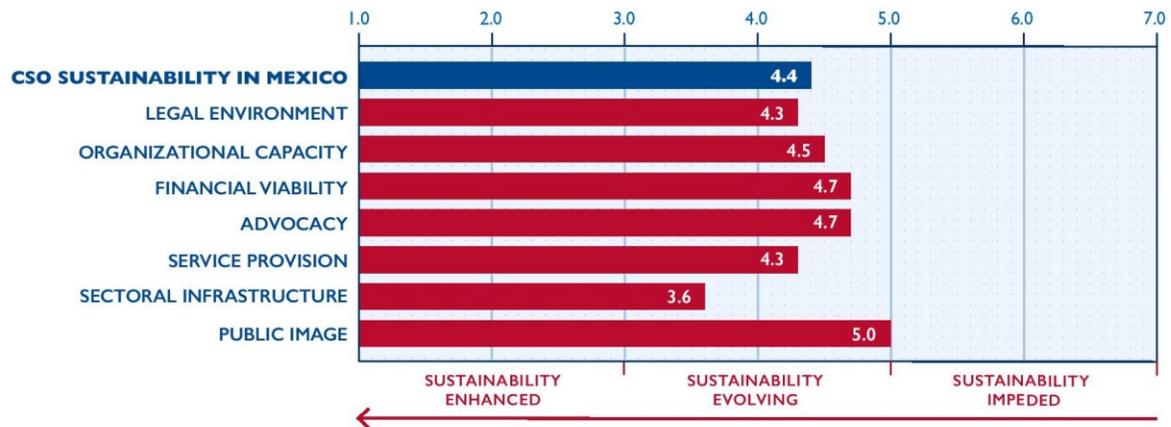
# EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Erica Vasquez, Claudia Guadamuz, Jennifer Stuart, Edward Gozalez, Christina Del Castillo, and Hector Vazquez

# MEXICO

**Capital:** Mexico City  
**Population:** 130,207,371  
**GDP per capita (PPP):** \$19,796  
**Human Development Index:** High (0.779)  
**Freedom in the World:** Partly Free (61/100)

## OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 4.4



On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Mexico was harshly hit, with the crisis having a catastrophic human toll and overwhelming socio-economic consequences. According to the country’s department of health, by December 31, 2020, there had been 125,807 deaths in Mexico due to COVID-19, the third highest official death toll in the world. The pandemic also had a devastating impact on the economy: according to the International Monetary Fund, the country’s real gross domestic product (GDP) experienced an 8.2 percent plunge, its worst result in at least forty years. The unemployment rate reached 4.4 percent, up from 3.5 percent in 2019. According to Mexico’s central bank, after hitting an all-time low in April 2020, the Mexican peso (MXN) closed the year with a 5.6 percent depreciation against the United States dollar (USD). The federal administration did not adopt any major economic or fiscal stimuli to mitigate the economic effects of the health crisis.

On March 30, the federal government mandated the suspension of all non-essential activities to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. This measure affected most workplaces—including CSOs, as well as businesses and educational centers. On June 1, 2020, a four-color “epidemiological traffic light system” was launched to provide guidance on restrictions in each of the country’s states. The federal government also encouraged voluntary social distancing among the general population, but it did not impose nationwide stay-at-home orders or mask-wearing mandates. Despite these measures, the president was criticized for downplaying the crisis, refusing to wear a mask in public appearances, and not following his own government’s recommendations. Perhaps most importantly, he misleadingly claimed the pandemic was under control at numerous stages of the crisis.

The challenges brought by COVID-19 aggravated an already difficult environment for CSOs that began in 2019, when the new López Obrador administration announced its intention to cut all federal funding to CSOs. This was the first of several measures that brought about a new paradigm for CSO-state relations in Mexico.

The security situation in the country remained grim in 2020. Official figures indicated a total of 34,584 murders in 2020, roughly even with 2019 levels. While most of these were related to organized crime, 937 were recorded as femicides. According to a 2016 survey by Mexico’s official statistics agency (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y

\*Capital, population, and GDP for all country reports are drawn from the Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, available online at <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>. Human Development Index data available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>. Freedom in the World data available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world>.

Geografía, INEGI), two-thirds of all women fifteen years of age and older had experienced some form of violence during their lives. Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, a human rights advocacy CSO, estimated that between 2006 and 2019, at least 346,945 people had been internally displaced by violence; the severity of displacement is particularly high among indigenous communities. Weakened state presence, violence, and crime continued to complicate the work of CSOs in several regions of the country. To maintain their safety, CSOs must use discretion when publicizing grant values, donation recipients, and fundraising results, or engaging in other routine activities; some CSOs refrain from such publicity altogether.

Violence also affects the sector directly, and activists, movements, and CSOs continued to be the targets of direct attacks in 2020. Frontline Defenders reports that nineteen human rights defenders were murdered in Mexico in 2020, a slight decline from twenty-three in 2019. However, a document coordinated by the U.S.-based Center for Justice and International Law, with input from several local CSOs, placed the figure at twenty-four as of October 2020. Activists and CSOs hope for increased protections following Mexico's November 2020 ratification of the Escazú Agreement, the first legally binding regional instrument to guarantee the rights and protection of environmental defenders; the agreement came into force in April 2021.

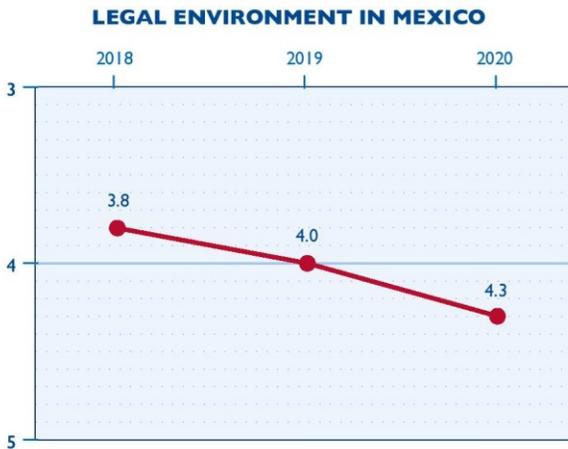
According to Reporters Without Borders, Mexico remained the deadliest country for journalists in the world in 2020, with eight of them killed—twice the number recorded in the next deadliest countries. At least two of these were murdered while under police protection, exposing the inefficacy of the protection mechanisms available to threatened media professionals. ARTICLE 19 reports that there were 406 attacks against journalists and the media in Mexico in the first half of 2020, a staggering 45 percent increase compared to the same period in 2019. The organization also recorded thirty-nine instances of legal harassment of journalists and activists, several of whom are members of CSOs, almost twice the number of cases identified in 2019.

With deteriorations in five dimensions, the overall sustainability of Mexican CSOs worsened slightly in 2020, due to both the impact of COVID-19 and the stark lack of support for CSOs from the current federal administration. The legal environment for CSOs witnessed the most significant decline out of the seven dimensions in 2020, spurred by increasingly cumbersome government oversight, restrictions, and administrative burdens. The virtual disappearance of federal funding for CSOs, combined with the economic decline and disruption of service provision caused by the pandemic, caused the sector's financial viability and service provision capabilities to weaken. These same factors drove a deterioration in the organizational capacity of CSOs, though it was offset somewhat by their resilience and effective use of technology. Advocacy declined in 2020 as CSOs were hesitant to engage in campaigns in an environment that is largely hostile to collaboration with the sector; those that did engage in advocacy efforts typically saw limited success. Public image remained unchanged; while CSOs continued to be subject to negative rhetoric from the government, they were better equipped to adapt to the environment and media coverage of the sector's work improved slightly. The infrastructure supporting Mexican CSOs not only withstood these obstacles but saw a slight improvement in 2020 as networks, coalitions, and support services continued to grow.

The Mexican civil society sector is relatively small in relation to the country's population and economy. Estimates indicate a total of approximately 60,000 CSOs registered in the country at the end of 2020; this figure includes an unknown number of dormant organizations. Growth in the sector is believed to have stagnated in 2020. The largest CSO inventory in the country is the federal CSO registry (Registro Federal de las Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil, RFOSC). Being listed in the RFOSC is a prerequisite for most federal grants. The number of organizations in the RFOSC grew by only 1 percent from 2019 to 2020, the lowest growth rate since its inception, reaching a total of 43,196 CSOs by the end of the year. The dramatic reduction in federal funding and the impact of the pandemic are believed to account for this decreased growth rate. The RFOSC does not include unions or religious, trade, and political associations, which are listed in separate registries. An unknown number of unregistered organizations also operate in the country.

INEGI estimates that private nonprofit institutions—which are primarily CSOs—contributed MXN 318 billion (approximately USD 15.8 billion) to the Mexican economy in 2019, or 1.38 percent of the country's GDP. This contribution, which includes the economic value of volunteers in the sector, increased by 2.14 percent from 2018, outpacing the growth rate of the economy as a whole.

## LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 4.3



The legal and regulatory environment governing the Mexican civil society sector experienced a significant deterioration in 2020, largely due to cumbersome oversight measures, new restrictions on self-generated income, and increasingly complex requirements that hinder compliance. While the new provisions do not affect the sector as a whole, they increased the burdens on tax-exempt CSOs, known as *donatarias autorizadas* (authorized donees, DAs), and mostly stem from changes to the income tax law (*Ley del Impuesto Sobre la Renta, LISR*).

The vast majority—more than 90 percent—of CSOs incorporate as *asociación civil* (civil association), one of several legal forms available. While registering under this form is a rather straightforward process, it must be

carried out before four different authorities: a notary public, the Mexican tax authority (Servicio de Administración Tributaria, SAT), the department of foreign affairs, and a state-level property registry. Registration for other legal forms, such as those reserved for religious or political associations, involve different but similarly lengthy processes. The second most common legal form, *institución de asistencia privada* (private assistance institution, IAP), is available in half the states of the country. In addition to federal regulations, IAPs are governed by laws and oversight bodies in the state in which they register. These bodies—known as *juntas de asistencia privada* (private assistance councils)—are charged with supervising the fulfilment of IAPs’ charters and supporting their development.

At incorporation, a CSO is required to establish a governing board and designate a legal representative. Beyond these specifications, CSOs had until recently enjoyed full autonomy over their internal governance. Lobbying activities may require registration with the federal or state legislatures, but most other forms of advocacy are unrestricted.

The watershed 2004 federal CSO promotion law (*Ley Federal de Fomento a las Actividades Realizadas por Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil, LFFAROSC*) serves as the legal framework for CSO promotion at the federal level and contains provisions for the participation of CSOs in the social development of Mexico. Among other mechanisms, the LFFAROSC created the RFOSC. Registration with the RFOSC is considered an indicator of institutional capacity and involves a relatively simple process that is accessible to most organizations. The registry is managed by the country’s institute for social development (Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Social, Indesol), which until recently was one of the most important government funders of civil society in Mexico. Notwithstanding its diminished role and budget, Indesol remained the single most important interface between the federal government and the sector in 2020.

Despite the growing scrutiny and administrative burdens imposed on these CSOs by the López Obrador administration, the number of DAs increased in 2020. According to SAT, 9,603 organizations held this status by the end of the year, a growth of 2.5 percent. While DAs constitute a small proportion of the Mexican CSO sector—approximately 16 percent of all registered CSOs—these tax-exempt organizations are some of the most impactful in the country. Donations to DAs are tax-deductible, providing an incentive for donors to contribute. Although any CSO that carries out at least one activity designated in the law can apply for DA status, the application process is resource-intensive and confusing for many organizations. One of the most significant hurdles is obtaining documentation proving the CSO is devoted to the aforementioned activity. Consequently, only the more formal, capable, and better-funded organizations obtain this coveted status.

A 2019 rule stated that a DA could have its authorization revoked if its members were connected to a second organization that had already lost this status. The rule’s ambiguity raised concern within the sector that it could be used selectively. In perhaps the only positive development for DAs in 2020, the provision was limited to members with specific roles within a DA that lost its authorization due exclusively to tax evasion. Though CSOs still consider the rule to be a transgression of their autonomy, some consider the change an advocacy success.

Several legal provisions introduced in 2020 imposed new restrictions and administrative burdens on DAs. For instance, one new rule forces a DA to transfer its assets to another DA if its authorization is revoked or expires. The gradual rollout of this rule will be completed in 2021; by that time, all DAs must have included a section to this effect in their articles of incorporation. Sector experts consider the measure unjustified and verging on expropriation, as it affects all assets and not only those acquired with tax-exempt gifts. Moreover, any such modification to a CSO's founding documents entails costs for the already underfunded sector, and some organizations have already been fined for failure to comply.

While most CSOs are considered tax-exempt under the LISR, changes to this law now require specific kinds of organizations to obtain DA status to enjoy the benefit. CSOs devoted to scientific and technological research, in particular, have been left in a precarious situation by the new measure, as the agency charged with vetting their focus on research has ceased issuing certifications to this effect. This has caused some of these DAs to preemptively change the activity under which they are authorized for the tax exemption and has prevented other CSOs from obtaining this status.

Although DAs are already required under penalty of revocation of their status to account for every donation received by filing special donation invoices, a new ordinance redundantly requires them to file additional dedicated reports on all donations earmarked for COVID-19 relief. Amidst widespread confusion about the specifics of the new requirement, the deadline for filing these reports was extended to January 31, 2021. Another new provision limits DAs' individual petty cash operations—those for which no fiscally-valid receipts are filed—to MXN 2,000 (USD 100) and taxes any excess. This is considered exceedingly restrictive since informal businesses—those not registered with SAT and thus not able to provide these receipts—are common in the country. Many CSOs work in remote and disadvantaged regions where these establishments are the norm, thus rendering this requirement particularly onerous.

Even more damaging for DAs is a new 50 percent cap on income from activities unrelated to the activity for which the organization received DA status. This provision, set to enter into force in 2021, presents a real threat to the sustainability of these CSOs by restricting income from fundraising events, which are lifelines for several DAs. CSOs that exceed the income cap risk the revocation of their tax-exempt status altogether.

While the full impact of these new provisions has yet to be assessed, analysts agree that DAs are being excessively burdened by an overly complicated legal framework that even the largest, better-funded and -staffed organizations have trouble remaining up to date with, understanding, and complying with. Moreover, some observers warn that the often-ambiguous language and lack of procedural clarity could be used as a tool for harassment of CSOs. Worryingly, many DAs have refrained from seeking legal protection from the new measures or bringing public interest litigation to have the rules thrown out and opted for self-censorship instead, as they fear unwanted attention from the authorities or retaliatory scrutiny.

The intricacies of the legal environment, especially for DAs, have created a spike in demand for legal and fiscal services. While these are still not widely available, several qualified experts and CSOs attempt to meet the needs of the sector. Though legal services are especially limited in smaller cities and towns, remote workshops, webinars, and consultations were increasingly available in 2020. Some organizations, like Centro Mexicano Pro Bono and Appleseed México, also offer high quality pro bono legal advice to CSOs.

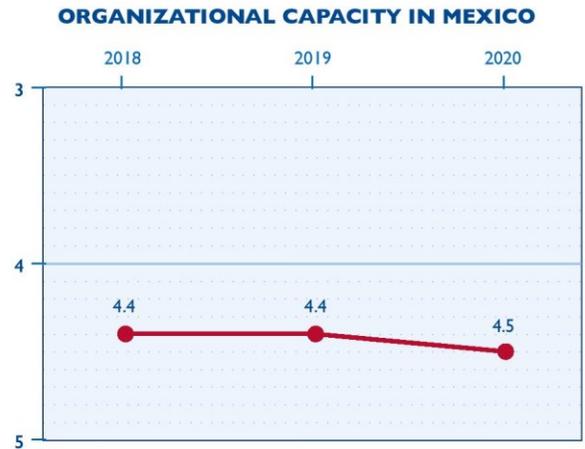
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## **ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 4.5**

The organizational capacity of the CSO sector deteriorated slightly in 2020 as a result of the pandemic's manifold consequences on operations and finances and the extinction of federal funding. These challenges, however, were somewhat offset by the sector's resilience and enthusiastic adoption of technology.

Several studies assessed the pandemic's impact on the CSO sector in 2020. While their findings should not be considered representative of the sector as a whole, they provide valuable insights into how the sector is weathering the crisis. For instance, Pulso OSC (PO), a group of twelve donors and CSOs, launched an online self-assessment tool to gauge CSO vulnerability using a four-dimension index. While the tool is an ongoing effort, a report on 2020 results indicated that 77 percent of respondent CSOs exhibited a "medium" level of vulnerability, implying a precarious equilibrium that can deteriorate quickly.

In accordance with the epidemiological traffic light system, most CSOs migrated to remote work in 2020 to minimize the spread of the virus. According to PO, only 4 percent of surveyed organizations suspended operations, while the rest found alternatives: 60 percent switched entirely to remote work and the rest employed a hybrid format of working. Causas Ciudadanas (CC), a group of twenty-one CSOs seeking to improve the sector's enabling environment, also conducted a survey to assess the extent of the pandemic's impact. That study found that 53 percent of CSOs had migrated to virtual operations, while 7 percent were forced to close temporarily or permanently. Both analyses found that, despite the sector's resilience and the unrelenting stamina of its members, the single largest obstacle to the sector's adaptability was insufficient resources.



Constituency-building efforts suffered a setback in 2020 as many CSOs struggled to maintain effective communication with their beneficiaries. Many CSOs rely on face-to-face interactions to serve the needs of their beneficiaries and cultivate relationships. The pandemic made this difficult, as CSOs were forced to turn to online forms of interaction. The digital divide proved an obstacle in reaching some constituents. According to INEGI, only 44 percent of Mexican households own a computer. While more than 76 percent of urban dwellers are internet users, this portion drops to approximately 48 percent in rural areas.

The pandemic also forced CSOs to reconsider their goals and priorities. CC's survey found that 40 percent of organizations decided to reorient their programs and 24 percent created entirely new programming in order to best serve their constituencies in 2020.

Precarious management structures remain the norm among Mexican CSOs. Smaller organizations with modest operations frequently lack a division of responsibilities, with staffers fulfilling several roles at once and boards only existing on paper. As most organizations struggle with understaffing and underfunding, they do not prioritize the development of internal management structures or protocols. Fiscal rules disincentivize investment in administrative capacity and overhead costs, and donors seldom prioritize this kind of investment, instead focusing on project-based support.

While they offer considerably different figures, both the CC and PO appraisals confirm that the pandemic had a detrimental impact on CSO staffing. CC's survey found that 44 percent of their respondent CSOs had to let go of at least one staff member in 2020. According to PO's findings, 16 percent of CSOs reported some degree of downsizing and 19 percent reported having to reduce salaries. The PO survey also found that CSO workforces were directly affected by COVID-19, with 9 percent reporting that employees had contracted the disease. While there is no data on staff deaths due to the virus, the loss of life within organizations has not been rare.

Volunteers remain a fundamental component of the Mexican CSO workforce. According to INEGI, in 2019, 2.1 million volunteers participated in the sector in some capacity. However, this figure constitutes a severe 8.8 percent contraction from 2018, its worst year-to-year change in a decade. While data on how the pandemic affected volunteer activity in 2020 is not yet available, the shutdown of face-to-face activities put on-site volunteers on hold. At the same time, some CSOs tapped into the possibilities offered by teleconferencing technologies to mobilize virtual volunteers.

According to CC, two-thirds of CSOs reported that the majority of their staffers had access to a computer; only 4 percent reported that no one within the organization had access to this kind of equipment. Internet access, however, was more varied. Though 75 percent of responding CSOs indicated that they had sufficient access to software platforms in order to collaborate remotely, 15 percent reported no access at all. Only 40 percent of CSOs reported they had adequate cybersecurity measures in place to safeguard their work.

Social TIC, a CSO devoted to furthering the strategic utilization of technology for social change, reported increased interest in the use of digital technologies in 2020. At the onset of the pandemic, CSOs, activists, and other actors approached the organization to learn about videoconferencing and messaging tools. As these technologies became more widespread, the sector's lack of cybersecurity precautions became clear, with webinar

hijacking, uninvited participants in messaging apps, phishing, social media trolling, and identity theft all increasing. Social TIC and its partners provided guides, instructive webinars, and examples to support the sector’s mass migration into the digital world.

Other forms of technical advancement, such as customer relationship management software, remain rare in the sector. Awareness—let alone adoption—of the cost-cutting, planning, and decluttering possibilities of these technologies is very low and, especially in a year of competing priorities, they are still considered unaffordable luxuries by most CSOs.

## FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 4.7



The financial viability of the CSO sector deteriorated moderately in 2020. Dwindling revenue, the virtual disappearance of federal funding, and the reorientation of donor priorities towards pandemic prevention and relief left the sector reeling. At the same time, the prospect of a cap on fundraising and earned income left DAs bracing for continued challenges.

CC’s survey reveals the extent to which the pandemic affected the financial situation of the sector. More than 70 percent of CSOs reported dwindling funds, with 16 percent considering their operations to be at risk. Donations—particularly individual giving—were the most affected source of income, followed by sales, recovery fees, and fundraisers. One-third of the CSOs in the survey reported receiving donations specifically

earmarked for pandemic relief, the vast majority (87 percent) of which were provided by private actors. No such contributions from the federal government were reported.

Mexican CSOs are authorized to access various sources of funding, including philanthropic contributions and self-generated income, with different types of organizations subject to varying levels of taxation and exceptions. The annual reports of CSOs in the RFOSC are the only source of detailed financial information encompassing a large swath of the sector. While they may not reflect the sector’s current situation, 2018 figures still shed some light on the makeup of the sector’s income. According to this data, 41 percent of CSOs’ income was generated through membership dues, cost-recovery fees, the sale of goods and services, and activities such as donation drives, while 27 percent of their resources were contributed by federal, state, or municipal governments. Foreign sources accounted for less than 4 percent of CSOs’ income. The rest of their funding came from domestic sources like foundations and corporations. Organizations relying solely on federal funds accounted for 8 percent of those reporting income in 2018.

Domestic sources of funding have typically included support from the three levels of government, other CSOs (including foundations), and private corporations. However, in 2019, the first internal memorandum issued by the incoming administration called for the withdrawal of all federal funding of CSOs, citing discretionary allocation, opacity, and corruption in the process. Despite this, the federal government still reported the distribution of MXN 1 billion (approximately USD 52 million) in grants and donations to CSOs in 2020, indicating a 40 percent reduction from 2019 and an 84 percent decline from the amount allocated by the previous administration in its last fiscal year. However, most of these funds are believed to have been disbursed to government-organized non-governmental organizations such as sports federations or other entities registered by the government as CSOs.

In the past, one of the most important distributors of federal resources to CSOs was a program implemented by Indesol (Programa de Coinversión Social, PCS), which tendered grants using a matching-funds scheme. In 2019, PCS received only MXN 107 million (approximately USD 7 million), its lowest allocation in fifteen years, while in 2020, the program ceased to be funded altogether. As part of broader austerity measures in 2020, Congress also approved the dissolution of 109 public trusts, some of which directly or indirectly funded CSO activities.

Fifteen state administrations, or roughly half of all state governments, funded CSO programs in 2020. The state of Nuevo León budgeted MXN 158 million (approximately USD 8 million), almost triple the amount funded by Guanajuato, which had the second largest allotment at MXN 56 million (approximately USD 2.8 million). Only three states headed by the president's coalition had programs in place to fund CSOs and none were in the top five state funders, reflecting the high level of politicization of governmental support for CSOs. Some municipalities allot resources to CSOs, although these are rare and limited to state capitals or large cities. For example, Torreón launched a fund of MXN 6 million (approximately USD 300,000) to aid CSO operations through monthly subsidies. Xalapa allocated MXN 1.8 million (approximately USD 90,000) to eighteen CSO projects in 2020, selected through an annual solicitation. Other municipal administrations such as Juárez, Mexicali, and Querétaro also granted resources to CSOs.

While official figures for 2020 are not yet available, 2019 data suggests that financial donations to DAs had already begun to stall. The department of finance's report to Congress indicates that these donations grew by just 2.43 percent in 2019, down from a 5.53 percent increase in 2018, for a total of MXN 44 billion (USD 2.3 billion). The vast majority (88 percent) of these funds originated within the country. In 2018, the three most important sources of funding for DAs were all domestic: private entities like foundations and corporations provided 57 percent of funding, individuals accounted for 18 percent, and government entities 15 percent. The impact of the new federal policies will only become clear when the breakdown by funding source becomes available for 2019 and 2020.

Some groups of domestic donors reacted to the pandemic by jointly contributing to relief efforts. For example, Centro Mexicano para la Filantropía's (Cemefi) Foro de Donantes, a group of grantmaking foundations and corporations working to maximize the impact of their strategic social investments, donated MXN 691,533,338 (over USD 34 million) between March and September. The group supported 168 initiatives to provide food security, health care, and the resources for CSOs to continue operating. While this provided much needed assistance, analysts fear that the non-pandemic work of CSOs suffered from the diversion of these resources.

The most recent RFOSC data indicates that in 2018, 3.8 percent of CSOs' income originated outside the country, similar to proportions in 2017 and 2016. These funds supported a very small number of organizations, usually larger and more established CSOs: out of 17,372 CSOs reporting data, only 5 percent reported receiving foreign funding. In 2018, foreign private entities accounted for 9.2 percent of all donations to DAs, a proportion that has remained largely stable over the years.

According to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Mexico received USD 536 million in official development assistance in 2019, down from USD 540 million in 2018. Some of these resources supported CSOs and their programs. Private philanthropic grants for development, most of which were allocated to CSOs, amounted to USD 37.6 million in 2019, a 10.5 percent decrease from 2018.

The United States (U.S.) is one of the most important sources of foreign aid for Mexico, and the Mexican CSO sector also benefits from these resources. Partial reporting by USAID indicates that in 2020 Mexico received USD 61 million in foreign aid disbursements from the U.S., only 13 percent of 2019's total. The agency itself funded activities and programs in the country amounting to USD 46 million in 2020, with USD 9 million earmarked for civil society. According to the OECD, Mexico's single largest source of private grants in 2019 was the U.S.-based David & Lucile Packard Foundation, which gave a total of USD 10 million to initiatives in Mexico.

Foreign funding of CSOs became controversial in 2020 as President López Obrador accused nine organizations of receiving foreign support in exchange for opposing the Tren Maya railway project in the Yucatan Peninsula. Those CSOs had voiced concerns about the socioeconomic and environmental threats posed by the project. Observers perceive this as an ominous development for yet another pillar of the sector's financial viability and an attempt to silence criticism.

The cap on fundraising and earned income for DAs, which entered into force in January 2021, threatens to severely complicate the financial viability of these organizations. The provision's ambiguity about what constitutes unrelated income presents a significant risk to DAs, as they will have to carefully plan their income to avoid surpassing the cap. While no 2020 information is yet available, the generalized economic slump caused by the pandemic is believed to have impacted both CSOs' external and self-generated revenue streams.

Professional financial management and accounting remain the exception among CSOs. Most organizations lack the resources and expertise to meet their current financial obligations, let alone those required to successfully apply

for grants from large international donors and obtain their DA status. While qualified and pro bono fiscal advice is becoming more widely available, knowledgeable accounting services remain rare. As even experts and relatively well-resourced organizations struggle to comply with administrative requirements, many CSOs face costly consequences for simple and innocuous errors, such as filing inaccuracies.

## ADVOCACY: 4.7

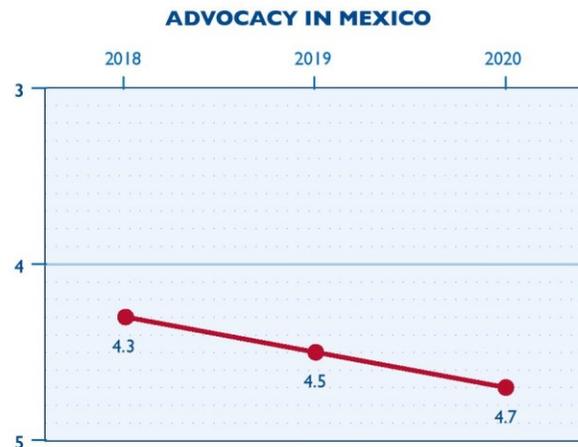
CSOs' ability to influence governance and policy-making processes and public opinion suffered a moderate deterioration in 2020. Observers fear that Mexico's incipient culture of CSO participation in decision-making processes is declining under the López Obrador administration. Policy advocacy and lobbying efforts, including those to achieve CSO law reform, are generally undertaken only by a handful of CSOs based in state capitals, and protracted processes that deliver scant results remain the norm. The feminist movement was perhaps the only force within civil society that was able to proactively place its demands on the public agenda in 2020.

The degree of CSO participation in policy making varies across the regions and levels of government. However, analysts agree that since 2019, Congress, state governments, and local representatives that are part of the president's governing coalition have been significantly less open to engaging CSOs in their decision-making processes than their counterparts in the opposition. According to the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute, Mexico's CSO consultation indicator—which gauges the extent to which CSOs are routinely consulted by policymakers on policies relevant to their members—suffered an 80 percent decline in 2019 and remains near an all-time low. The CIVICUS Monitor has rated the country's civic space as repressed for several years in a row.

Perhaps the most relevant institutional mechanism for CSO participation at the federal level is the LFFAROSC's consultative council (Consejo Técnico Consultivo, CTC). The CTC is a collegiate body devised to allow CSOs, authorities, and other actors to share their views and recommendations on the application and fulfillment of the LFFAROSC. In 2019, the council experienced a series of setbacks, including the absence of an operating budget, lack of participation by legislators and other authorities, and a selection process for the executive secretary that violated the standing bylaws. Several members of the council successfully sought external funding for the council's operation and worked to salvage this important space, despite its diminished role and influence, and the fact that its interactions with the authorities remained tense. In 2020, despite once again lacking a budget and other aspects of its operations not being carried out according to bylaws, the council remained active, and its new representatives improved communication with government officials. Its commissions fulfilled their work plans, which included drafting a system of indicators to evaluate CSO promotion policy in a more technically rigorous fashion. However, several current and former council members have suggested that the body continues to operate only because of the resilience and commitment of its members: representatives from civil society, academia, and scientific and cultural institutions.

While several CSOs are registered as lobbyists in Congress, the extent of their influence and nature of their work is not well documented. No salient policy advocacy or lobbying efforts were recorded in 2020, and the participation of the sector in other CSO-government interfaces remains largely unknown. According to a database that used to be maintained by the department of the interior, in 2018 there were 329 such mechanisms in place, including committees, councils, roundtables, and working groups. Most of these were consultation councils overseeing activities in different sectors at the national or regional levels. However, the database, created in 2017 with CSO intermediation, has not been updated since 2018.

The feminist movement was the most visible segment of civil society in 2020. On March 8, International Women's Day, the movement made headlines by organizing demonstrations across the country. Individuals, collectives, and CSOs joined the demonstrations to demand an end to violence against women and justice for victims and their



families, calling attention to ongoing safety and gender equality concerns. Energized by the Latin American movement for women's reproductive rights known as Marea Verde, the Mexican feminist movement also successfully advocated to achieve the groundbreaking decriminalization of abortion in Oaxaca. The state is one of the poorest and most conservative in the country, and only the second to enact such legislation. While the reforms were formally passed in late 2019, the movement remained on alert in 2020 to guarantee real access to reproductive rights in the state and across the country.

Safety remains an ongoing concern for both activists and the journalists who cover their demonstrations. For instance, Amnesty International documented five cases of illegal use of force and sexual violence to repress demonstrations against gender-based violence and femicides in 2020. In one case, local police donning riot gear and brandishing assault rifles violently dispersed approximately 2,000 women protesting a wave of femicides in front of Cancun's town hall. The police fired live rounds, injuring two reporters and a protester, and beat several others. Eight demonstrators were detained, and two female protesters were sexually assaulted by police officers. The case drew widespread national and international condemnation.

The CSO sector has its hands tied when it comes to policy advocacy and reforms, as legislators in the president's coalition have an absolute majority and vote along party lines. This was the case in October 2020 with the bill that introduced the 50 percent cap on earned income and various other provisions damaging DAs. Several groups of CSOs and other stakeholders launched advocacy campaigns in an attempt to stop the bill from passing. A group of seven CSOs known informally as Grupo Fiscal was one of the most vocal and active. The group wrote a letter to Congress requesting a hearing, held and participated in webinars, and launched a social media campaign. Efforts to stop other policies regarded as damaging to the sector suffered similar fates. For instance, Espacio OSC, a network of more than one hundred CSOs and other institutions working to protect human rights defenders and journalists, called for the government to walk back its intention to dissolve public trusts that funded protection mechanisms. Though these campaigns raised awareness within the sector, the bill was written into law and the trusts were terminated regardless.

Several initiatives provide the sector with expertise to inform their advocacy efforts and promote eventual CSO law reform. In a booklet published in 2020, for instance, the International Civil Society Centre recounts the challenges and lessons learned by UnidOSC, a coalition focused on defending CSO rights. The group conducts technical research and provides a capacity-building and learning community to support the sector's efforts to defend civic space.

There are some positive signs of progress in the adoption of CSO laws at the state level. By the end of 2020, twenty-one states had CSO promotion laws, some of which included budgets aimed at supporting the sector and participation or consultation mechanisms. Hidalgo is the latest state to adopt this sort of legislation, with a law passed in December 2020 that, among other provisions, creates a state registry of CSOs and lays the groundwork for a call for projects. With varying levels of progress and support, eight states were discussing similar bills in their respective congresses during the year. These developments, as well as municipality-level initiatives, have civil society experts advocating for a local, bottom-up approach to CSO advancement.

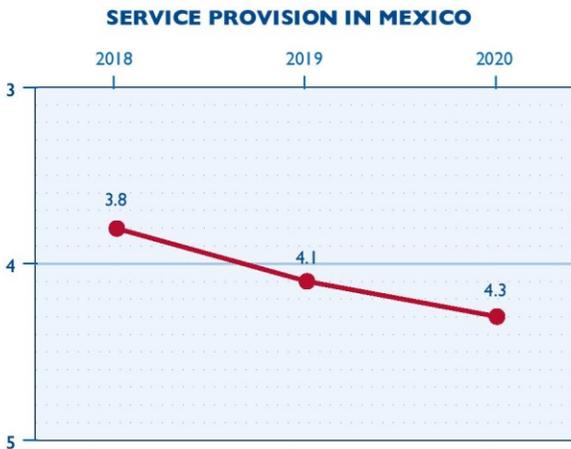
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## **SERVICE PROVISION: 4.3**

The ability of Mexican CSOs to provide goods and services to their constituencies deteriorated moderately in 2020. While the disappearance of federal funding and partnerships with the government continued to impact CSOs' capacity to cater to their constituencies, the COVID-19 pandemic was the most damaging factor affecting this dimension.

Mexican CSOs provide a diverse range of services to the communities they serve. CSOs in the RFOSC must carry out at least one of nineteen possible activities to be listed in the registry. In 2020, the five most common focus areas remained educational, cultural, artistic, scientific, and technological promotion; social assistance; community development; indigenous people's development; and economic development. For DAs, social assistance; education, culture, and social development; and grantmaking were the most important activities.

Access and adaptability to technology proved to be fundamental factors in determining how CSOs weathered the pandemic. The growing use of teleconferencing tools allowed numerous organizations to migrate to remote and virtual service provision formats. In the process, many realized they were not restricted by their traditional



geographical coverage and some even expanded their reach across borders. However, unequal access to the internet and suitable hardware allowed only better equipped CSOs and constituencies to tap into the benefits of remote interaction.

While those CSOs with services that are suitable for remote delivery, such as training and legal counseling, saw an expansion of their clientele and coverage, most organizations struggled to serve their constituents in 2020 due to the nature of their programs. For example, social assistance and education, two of the most important service areas of Mexican CSOs, entail intervention models whose quality and impact rely on face-to-face interaction. While states such as Yucatán imposed curfews, most disruptions in service provision

were caused by self-imposed measures intended to safeguard the health of employees and constituents, rather than government mandates.

The situation of Fundación EDUCA illustrates the diverse impacts of the pandemic on service-rendering organizations. EDUCA is a CSO working to improve the education of disadvantaged children and youth in partnership with a network of more than fifty schools, all of which are also CSOs. By the end of 2020, the network estimated that the pandemic had forced up to a quarter of the students participating in its programs to drop out of its schools. While EDUCA continued to interact with most of its students virtually, the quality and intensity of these interactions was worryingly deficient in some cases, as some students were hard to reach, others took part in virtual classes and submitted work only sporadically because of connectivity issues, and others were weakly engaged despite being virtually present. The digital divide has aggravated pre-existing inequalities, as more financially stable schools and students have had less trouble going virtual. Cybersecurity threats also presented obstacles for the schools.

Most schools in EDUCA's network were gradually forced to let go of non-essential staff and services, reducing their operations to the bare minimum. This meant the loss of services that had provided parents and their communities with much needed support, including cafeterias, doctors' offices, psychological counselling, and transportation. The schools also reported a worrisome COVID-19 infection rate among teachers. Many of the network's schools had to stretch their waning resources to complete the school year, with some closing permanently after the academic term finished.

CSO services continue to be responsive to the needs of their beneficiaries. Half of the respondents to PO's self-assessment indicated that they were providing new services to their constituencies to better serve their needs during the pandemic. These emerging services responded to a wide array of needs, but the three most important ones were food security, health, and mental well-being. The CC survey found that, by adapting to the restrictions and needs around the pandemic, 40 percent of CSOs reoriented their existing programs and 24 percent created brand new schemes to serve their constituencies. However, 15 percent were forced to shut down their operations, with small CSOs disproportionately affected in this way. While these figures suggest an important level of resilience, both studies mention limited funding as the largest obstacle to more responsive and flexible service provision.

In 2018, cost recovery fees accounted for 11 percent of the income reported by CSOs in the RFOSC; no data is available to indicate whether this changed in 2020. CSOs charge these fees to cover the expenses incurred in carrying out programs or activities. It is not yet clear how this will be impacted by the new cap on income unrelated to a DA's mission. While these fees are usually associated with a CSO's core work, the new provision does not include clear criteria to determine what constitutes related or unrelated activities.

Though government recognition and support vary across regions and levels of government, one trend is clear: the federal government, Congress, and state administrations and legislatures led by the president's coalition have stopped partnering with CSOs to deliver services, despite CSOs' expertise, experience, and capacity. At the same time, some observers see a renewed interest on behalf of opposition-led state administrations and legislators in partnering with CSOs and funding their initiatives.

Some local governments disbursed funds to assist CSO operations in 2020, recognizing that CSOs serve the needs of the public in unique and critical ways. For example, citing the importance of CSO services, the municipality of Juárez in Chihuahua granted funds to three organizations serving senior and disabled citizens. Likewise, the municipality of Querétaro provided local CSOs with small donations towards their monthly operating expenses. The municipality also furnished CSOs with personal protective equipment and sanitized their facilities.

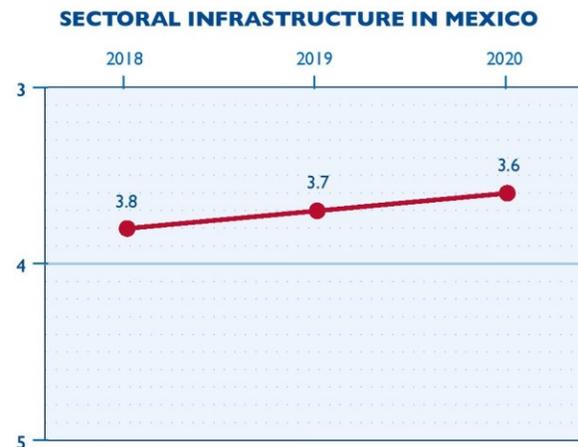
While these examples are encouraging, they remain rare. Nearly one-third of CSO respondents in the CC survey noted that the government had not taken any measures to support or collaborate with them during the crisis.

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## SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 3.6

The infrastructure supporting Mexican CSOs continued to improve slightly in 2020. To overcome the challenges presented by the pandemic and dwindling funds, the sector increasingly formed networks and coalitions, while CSO support services continued to expand.

A growing subsector of civil society provides intermediary support, resources, and training to CSOs in Mexico. According to an early 2020 study by Centro de Investigación y Estudios sobre Sociedad Civil (CIESC), a CSO devoted to research on civil society, this subsector is composed of at least 292 agents known as *fortalecedoras* (strengtheners). Half of these are CSOs, and a quarter are consultants. These *fortalecedoras* offer a wide array of training opportunities; the five most widely available focus areas are strategic planning, networks and alliances, fundraising, project monitoring and evaluation, and organizational affairs. While infrastructure remains highly concentrated in Mexico City and state capitals, the pandemic spurred the rapid and widespread adoption of videoconferencing technologies. This in turn led to a surge in available training and other forms of strengthening and capacity-building opportunities for CSOs. The study estimates that 55 percent of CSOs recently underwent strengthening and capacity-building processes.



Some government entities act as intermediary support organizations (ISOs) and resource centers. In previous years, the most important ISO at the federal level was Indesol. However, as described above, the entity's flagship CSO initiative, PCS, was not allocated any funding in 2020, and analysts believe the shutdown of Indesol is imminent. At the state level, IAPs are supervised by dedicated government boards that closely scrutinize their work but also promote, develop, train, and, to a lesser extent, provide them with funding; fifteen of these boards exist presently.

Though official data for 2020 is not yet available, grantmaking organizations inevitably suffered from the economic repercussions of the pandemic and were forced to divert resources otherwise earmarked for CSOs. While there were only 311 DAs authorized as grantmaking organizations—one of the activities eligible for the status—in 2019, another 2,850 DAs not classified as such reported making at least one grant or donation. According to SAT, these DAs donated MXN 12.4 billion (approximately USD 615 million) in 2019, a decline of 59 percent from the previous year. Although this figure varies significantly from year to year and requires more analysis, at face value, the decline is the worst in publicly available records.

Community foundations have emerged as a fundamental component of the infrastructure of the Mexican CSO sector. These organizations harness the expertise, resources, and energy of local organizations, collectives, grassroots movements, and leaders to generate solutions to the most pressing issues faced by the communities they serve. The Community Foundation Atlas identifies twenty-eight community foundations currently operating in Mexico, with programs that cover nearly half of the country. According to a 2019 study by CSO Alternativas y Capacidades, this is the largest number of such foundations in Latin America and the Caribbean. The study further found that these entities have become leaders of their local CSO sectors, capable of mobilizing resources, facilitating intersectoral partnerships, and advocating for the sector.

Formally established in 2011, Comunalía is an alliance of sixteen community foundations focusing on community development and strategic social investment, with presence in fifteen states. Comunalía is charged with engaging in collective action to increase its members' reach, impact, and results. In 2019, the alliance mobilized over MXN 140 million (approximately USD 7 million) to support more than one hundred communities and serve more than 24,000 beneficiaries.

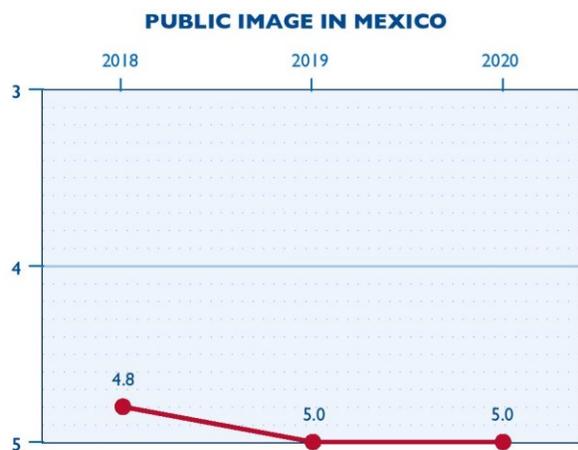
Driven by threats from the pandemic and the federal government's anti-CSO stance, CSO networking and partnering surged in 2020. A number of diverse collective initiatives within the CSO sector contributed to pandemic relief efforts in 2020. Several initiatives provided virtual resources and services to match demand for relief assistance with supply, increasing the visibility of the sector's work in the process. México x México, an online platform showcasing stories and opportunities to volunteer, donate, and support economic recovery, was organized by a partnership that included corporations, foundations, and other CSOs. In another example, Cemefi set up an online platform serving as a marketplace for donors and recipients to find each other and mobilize relief.

Cemefi, perhaps the largest ISO in the country, implements a program that encourages collective work and learning among its member CSOs through thematic networks that operate under its umbrella. Their members take part in collaborative strengthening activities and work together on advocacy initiatives. In 2020, Cemefi saw a spike in participation in these networks, partly enabled by videoconferencing. In addition, a new network focused on food security was initiated in response to the health crisis and its economic consequences, bringing the total number of thematic networks to six.

The pandemic amplified the trends in intersectoral partnerships that were exhibited in 2019, the first year of the López Obrador government: dwindling cooperation with government authorities and increased partnering with the private sector. The current administration has excluded CSOs from any federal programs, making partnerships between CSOs and the federal government out of the question. Most state-level governments controlled by parties in the president's coalition have adopted a similar policy of CSO exclusion. Opposition governments, however, seem more open to collaboration with the sector.

CSOs' most productive intersectoral alliances are with the private sector, which taps into CSOs' established capacity and expertise to implement social investment and other initiatives, including pandemic relief efforts in 2020. A notable example is Ensamble, a group of foundations, corporations, and organizations that originally came together to provide relief in the aftermath of the 2017 earthquakes. In 2020, the group worked with the government to strategically optimize the flow of donations and coordinate relief efforts to maximize their impact. In one of its initiatives, Ensamble coordinated the deployment and operation of a field hospital serving COVID-19 patients amidst the saturation of Mexico City's hospital system.

## PUBLIC IMAGE: 5.0



The public image of the CSO sector remained unchanged in 2020 and continued to be marked by the government's negative statements and anti-CSO stance that began in 2019 as well as declining public perceptions. However, CSOs seemed better equipped to adapt to that environment and enjoyed a somewhat higher level of media coverage in 2020, mostly centered around pandemic relief efforts and the controversies related to the president's negative rhetoric about the sector, thereby balancing out these negatives. The relatively limited media coverage devoted to CSOs is typically reserved for the most public advocacy campaigns, but the work of service-oriented organizations enjoyed comparatively heightened attention in 2020.

The feminist movement enjoyed increased media coverage in 2020. The movement made headlines with its national strike on International Women's Day that mobilized hundreds of thousands of supporters to demand an end to violence against women and justice for victims and their families. Similar tactics, such as the occupation of the headquarters of the country's national

human rights institution (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos) in September, successfully propelled the movement to the spotlight and afforded it national and international attention. More importantly, the movement forced the president to publicly acknowledge the legitimacy and urgency of its demands, perhaps the only CSO actor to accomplish this.

While the movement's demonstrations were predominantly peaceful, there were some instances of rioting. Media outlets and the authorities were criticized for focusing on these and not addressing the core issues put forth, or the several instances of repressive action by security forces in response to the demonstrations.

As its multiple partnerships with the private sector attest, the CSO sector's relationship with this sphere of society is in good health. The government perception of CSOs, however, varies significantly among municipal, state, and federal levels, frequently showing differences along party lines. While official agencies charged with promoting CSOs, such as Indesol, maintain a cordial relationship with the sector, the negative rhetoric of the López Obrador administration has damaged CSO-government relationships. For example, the executive cast doubt on the CSO sector and its funders during the aforementioned Tren Maya controversy. Experts fear that this attitude and other factors, such as increased fiscal scrutiny, have pushed many organizations to censor themselves and limit public engagements.

The president continues to use his daily press conferences to single out those he considers adversaries of the government, including CSOs. While López Obrador often states that those he alludes to in his conferences may use their right of reply anytime, there are no mechanisms in place to provide them with equally impactful airtime. This asymmetry results in uneven media coverage and, while the affected CSOs always put out statements through other means, any damage done is widely considered irreversible.

CSOs have never enjoyed particularly high levels of trust among the Mexican public. A survey on government quality and impact by INEGI measured trust in CSOs for the first time in 2019, finding that 32 percent of respondents distrusted these organizations. The Edelman Trust Barometer found that trust in NGOs in Mexico has decreased: 67 percent of respondents stated they trusted these entities in 2020, down from 73 percent in 2019. The public perception of CSOs' involvement in pandemic relief activities is mixed. A survey by CIESC found that while 55 percent of respondents believed individuals had provided more help than CSOs during the pandemic, 52 percent believed the same to be true of CSOs when compared to the government.

CSOs with strategic relationships with the media are far from the norm, but there are some signs of improvement in this area. While some mainstream newspapers reference CSO leaders and experts, electronic outlets such as Animal Político afford the sector an emerging but impactful presence. Touching on diverse issues, the online magazine regularly publishes articles written by CSOs, providing the sector with the opportunity to advocate for its causes with a wider audience. These advances notwithstanding, social media remains the best avenue for the public relations efforts of the vast majority of CSOs, and they used these platforms to promote their pandemic-response efforts and counter the federal administration's negative rhetoric during 2020.

A 2020 paper by Díaz, Titova, and Arellano concludes that transparency measures among CSOs continue to be fairly weak. Based on an analysis of organizations' online presence (websites, social networks, etc.) and public records dating back to 2014, the researchers found that only 50 percent of CSOs in their representative sample published funding information and a mere 5 percent disclosed detailed donor lists with grant values. Most organizations failed to have even the most basic online presence: 76 percent of public benefit organizations and 46 percent of mutual benefit CSOs had little or no online presence. Less than 10 percent of CSOs published some form of annual report online.

Several factors are believed to drive this, but budgetary constraints remain a key obstacle to the regular publication of annual reports and other transparency initiatives. Confío, a CSO working to advance transparency and accountability in the sector, finds that CSOs are focused on their daily operations, and areas of opportunity such as transparency and governance are usually not prioritized. Instead, both human and financial resources are focused on the day-to-day tasks required to run programs and few resources are available for more strategic activities, let alone the production of meaningful performance indicators or quality annual reports.

Because federal grants had been a primary incentive for registering with the RFOSC, some organizations have begun to question the usefulness of filing their annual reports with the registry. This trend away from submitting annual reports would both undermine transparency and limit access to one of the few reliable, systematic sources of information about the sector.

# ANNEX: CSO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX METHODOLOGY

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## INSTRUCTIONS FOR CSOSI IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

### 2020 CSO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

#### I. INTRODUCTION

USAID's Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (the Index or CSOSI) reports annually on the strength and overall viability of CSO sectors in Africa, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, and Mexico. The CSO Sustainability Index is a tool developed by USAID to assess the strength and overall viability of CSO sectors in countries around the world. By analyzing seven dimensions that are critical to sectoral sustainability, the Index highlights both strengths and constraints in CSO development. The Index allows for comparisons both across countries and over time. Initially developed in 1997 for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, the CSOSI is a valued tool and methodology used by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments, donors, academics and others to better understand the sustainability of the civil society sector. USAID is continually striving to ensure the cross-national comparability of the Index scores, and to improve the reliability and validity of measurements, adequate standardization of units and definitions, local ownership of the Index, transparency of the process of Index compilation, and representative composition of panels delivering the scores.

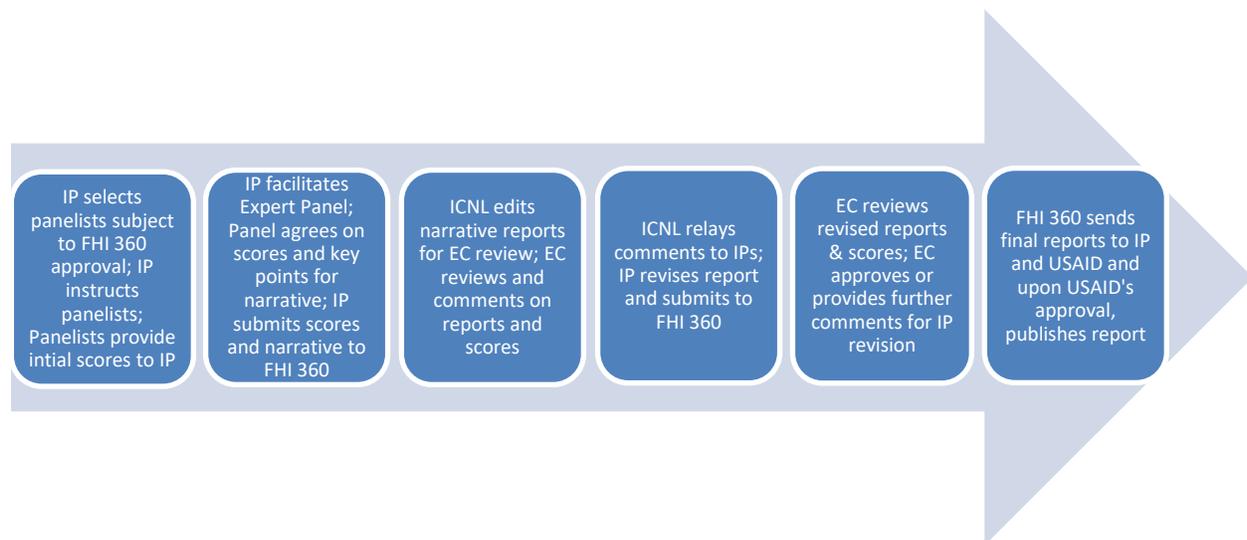
Beginning with the 2017 Index and for the following four years, FHI 360 and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) are managing the coordination and editing of the CSOSI. A senior staff member from both FHI 360 and ICNL will serve on the Editorial Committee as will one or more senior USAID/Washington officials. FHI 360 will provide small grants to local CSOs to implement the CSOSI methodology in country, while ICNL will be primarily responsible for editing the reports. Local Implementing Partners (IPs) play an essential role in developing the CSO SI and need a combination of research, convening, and advocacy skills for carrying out a high quality CSOSI.

#### **Local Implementing Partners should please remember:**

- Panels must include a diverse range of civil society representatives.
- Panelists should formulate initial scores for dimensions and justifications individually and in advance of the Panel Meeting.
- Discuss each indicator and dimension at the Panel Meeting and provide justification for the proposed score for each dimension.
- Compare the score for each dimension with last year's score to ensure that the direction of change reflects developments during the year being assessed.
- Note changes to any indicators and dimensions in the country report to justify proposed score changes.
- The Editorial Committee will request additional information if the scores are not supported by the report. If adequate information is not provided, the EC has the right to adjust the scores accordingly.

## II. METHODOLOGY FOR THE IMPLEMENTER

The following steps should be followed by the IP to assemble the Expert Panel that will meet in person to discuss the status of civil society over the reporting year, determine scores, and prepare a country report for the 2020 Civil Society Organization (CSO) Sustainability Index.



**I. Select Panel Experts.** Carefully select a group of at least 8-10 civil society representatives to serve as panel experts. Panel members must include representatives of a diverse range of CSOs and other stakeholders, such as:

- CSO support centers, resource centers or intermediary support organizations (ISOs);
- CSOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), and faith-based organizations (FBOs) involved in a range of service delivery and/or advocacy activities;
- CSOs involved in local and national level government oversight/ watchdog/ advocacy activities;
- Academia with expertise related to civil society and CSO sustainability;
- CSO partners from government, business or media;
- Think tanks working in the area of civil society development;
- Member associations such as cooperatives, lawyers' associations and natural resources users' groups;
- Representatives of diverse geographic areas and population groups, e.g., minorities;
- International donors who support civil society and CSOs; and
- Other local partners.

It is important that the Panel members be able to assess a wide spectrum of CSO activities in various sectors ranging from democracy, human rights and governance reforms to the delivery of basic services to constituencies. CSOs represented on the panel must include both those whose work is heavily focused on advocacy and social service delivery. To the extent possible, panels should include representatives of both rural and urban parts of the country, as well as women's groups, minority populations, and other marginalized groups, as well as sub-sectors such as women's rights, community-based development, civic education, microfinance, environment, human rights, and youth. The Panel should to the extent possible include an equal representation of men and women. If two or more representatives of the same CSO participate in the Panel, they can only cast one vote. It is recommended that at least 70 percent of the Expert Panel be nationals of the country that is being rated.

In countries experiencing civil war, individuals should be brought from areas controlled by each of the regimes if possible. If not, individuals from the other regime's territory should at least be contacted, to incorporate their local perspective.

In some instances, it may be appropriate to select a larger group in order to better reflect the diversity and breadth of the civil society sector in the country. For countries where regional differences are significant, implementers should incorporate, to the greatest extent possible, differing regional perspectives. If financial constraints do not allow for in-person regional representation, alternative, low cost options, including emailing scores/ comments, teleconferencing/Skype, may be used.

**If there is a USAID Mission in the country, a USAID representative must be invited to attend the panel.** USAID representatives that attend are welcome to provide some words of introduction to open the event, as it is funded by USAID, and they are welcome to observe and participate in the discussion. However, they will not have the ability to cast their vote in terms of scores.

**Please submit to FHI 360 for approval the list of the Panel members who you plan to invite at least two weeks before the meeting is scheduled to occur using the form provided in Annex A.** It is the responsibility of the IP to ensure that the panel composition, and the resulting score and narrative, are sufficiently representative of a cross-section of civil society and include the perspectives of various types of stakeholders from different sectors and different areas of the country.

**2. Prepare the Panel meeting.** Ensure that panel members understand the objectives of the Panel, including developing a consensus-based rating for each of the seven dimensions of civil society sustainability covered by the Index and articulating a justification or explanation for each rating consistent with the methodology described below. We encourage you to hold a brief orientation session for the panelists prior to the panel discussion. This is particularly important for new panelists but is also useful to update all panelists on methodology and process changes. Some partners choose to hold a formal training session with panel members, reviewing the methodology document and instructions. Other partners provide a more general discussion about the objectives of the exercise and process to the panelists.

**Definition of CSO:**

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

*- Toward an Enabling Legal Environment for Civil Society, Statement of the 16th Annual Johns Hopkins International Fellows in Philanthropy Conference, Nairobi, Kenya. The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law, Volume 8, Issue 1, November 2005.*

The overall goal of the Index is to track and compare progress in the sector over time, increasing the ability of local entities to undertake self-assessment and analysis. To ensure a common understanding of what is being assessed, the convener shall provide a definition of civil society to the panel members. The CSOSI uses the enclosed definition to ensure the report addresses a broad swath of civil society.

In order to allow adequate time to prepare for the panel, distribute the instructions, rating description documents and a copy of the previous year’s country chapter to the members of the Expert Panel a minimum of three days before convening the Panel so that they may develop their initial scores for each dimension before meeting with the other panel members. It is critical to emphasize the importance of developing their scores and justifications before attending the panel. It is also important to remind panel members that the scores should reflect developments during the 2020 calendar year (January 1, 2020, through December 31, 2020).

We also recommend you encourage panelists to think of concrete examples that illustrate trends, since this information will be crucial to justifying their proposed scores. In countries with closing civic space, the IP should

take initiative to ensure that expert panel members do not self-censor themselves, including by taking whatever measures possible to build trust. The confidentiality of all members must be ensured and participants must be protected against retaliation; to this end, the IP can choose to enforce Chatham House Rules.

Lastly, it is highly recommended to compile and send to panelists data and information sources to guide them as they score. Recommendations of information sources are listed below under #4.

We are very interested in using the preparation of this year’s Index to track lessons learned for use in improving the monitoring process in upcoming years. We would appreciate implementers recording and submitting any observations they might have that will increase the usefulness of this important tool. In addition, we will solicit feedback through regional debriefs, and will continue to maintain an online forum where IPs can share best practices, ask questions, and submit their comments or suggestions. These methods will be supplemented by brief satisfaction surveys that will be used to help evaluate the success of methodological and process innovations.

### 3. Convene a meeting of the CSO Expert Panel.

**3.a.** We do not require panelists to score individual indicators but only overall dimensions. For each dimension, allow each panel member to share his or her initial score and justification with the rest of the group. (Note: If two or more representatives of the same CSO participate in the Panel, only one vote can be cast on their behalf.) Although scoring will not take place at the indicator level, please be sure that panel members discuss each indicator within each dimension of the CSOSI and provide evidence-based, country-relevant examples of recent or historical conditions, policies, and events within each of the dimension narratives. Please take notes on the discussion of each indicator and dimension, detailing the justification for all dimension scores, in the template provided. These notes must be submitted to FHI 360 with the first draft of the narratives (they do not have to be translated to English if not originally written in English).

At the end of the discussion of each dimension, allow panel members to adjust their scores, if desired. Then, for each dimension, eliminate the highest score and the lowest score (if there are two or more of the highest or lowest scores, only eliminate one of them) and average the remaining scores together to come up with a single score for each dimension. Calculate the average or arithmetic mean<sup>1</sup> of these scores for a preliminary score for the dimension. Please keep all scores on record, making sure that personal attribution cannot be made to individual panel members. Use a table similar to the one provided below to track panel members’ scores without personal attribution.

Panel Member	Legal Environment	Organizational Capacity	Financial Viability	Advocacy	Service Provision	Sectoral Infrastructure	Public Image
1							
2							
3							

**3.b. Once a score is determined for a dimension, please have panel members compare** the proposed score with last year’s score to ensure that the direction and magnitude of the change reflects developments during the year. For example, if an improved score is proposed, this should be based on concrete positive developments during the year that are noted in the report. On the other hand, if the situation worsened during the year, this should be reflected in a worse score (i.e., a higher number on the 1-7 scale).

Please note that for countries where a democratic revolution took place in the previous year, the panelists should be conscious to avoid scoring based on a post-revolution euphoria. The score-change framework should be closely followed to avoid panelists scoring based on anticipated changes, rather than the actual level of change thus far.

<sup>1</sup> Arithmetic mean is the sum of all scores divided by the total number of scores.

A change of 0.1 should generally be used to reflect modest changes in a dimension. Larger differences may be warranted if there are more significant changes in the sector. The evidence to support the scoring change must always be discussed by the panel and documented in the dimension narrative. See **CSOSI Codebook – Instructions for Expert Panel Members** for more details about this scoring scale.

In addition, for each dimension score, review the relevant description of that dimension in “CSOSI Codebook – Tiers and Scores: A Closer Look.” Discuss with the group whether the score for a country matches that rating description. For example, a score of 2.3 in organizational capacity would mean that the civil society sector is in the “Sustainability Enhanced” phase. Please read the “Sustainability Enhanced” section for Organizational Capacity in “Ratings: A Closer Look” to ensure that this accurately describes the civil society environment.

If the panel does not feel that the proposed score is accurate after these two reviews, please note this when submitting proposed scores in your narrative report, and the Editorial Committee will discuss whether one or more scores needs to be reset with a new baseline. Ultimately, each score should reflect consensus among group members.

**3.c. Discuss each of the seven dimensions of the Index and score them in a similar manner.** Once all seven dimensions have been scored, average the final dimension scores together to get the overall CSO sustainability score. Please submit the table with the scores from the individual panelists together with the narrative report. Panelists should be designated numerically.

**3.d. Please remind the group at this stage that reports will be reviewed by an Editorial Committee (EC) in Washington, D.C.** The Editorial Committee will ensure that all scores are adequately supported and may ask for additional evidence to support a score. If adequate information is not provided, the EC may adjust the scores.

**4. Prepare a draft country report.** The report should focus on developments over the calendar year 2020 (January 1, 2020, through December 31, 2020).

The draft report should begin with an overview statement and a brief discussion of the current state of sustainability of the civil society sector with regard to each dimension. In the overview statement, please include an estimated number of registered and active CSOs, as well as a description of the primary fields and geographic areas in which CSOs operate. Also include a brief overview of any key political, economic, or social developments in the country that impacted the CSO sector during the year. If this information is not provided, the editor will request it in subsequent rounds, which will require additional work from you.

The report should then include sections on each dimension. Each of these sections should begin with a summary of the reasons for any score changes during the year. For example, if a better score is proposed, the basis for this improvement should be clearly stated up front. These sections should include a discussion of both accomplishments and strengths in that dimension, as well as obstacles to sustainability and weaknesses that impact the operations of a broad range of CSOs. Each indicator within each dimension should be addressed in the report.

The report should be written based on the Panel members’ discussion and input, as well as a review of other sources of information about the CSO sector including but not limited to analytical studies of the sector, statistical data, public opinion polls and other relevant third-party data. Some international sources of information and data that should be considered include the following:

- CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report - <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2019>
- CIVICUS Monitor -- <https://monitor.civicus.org/>
- World Giving Index - <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications>
- Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) - <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/CountryGraph/>
- Media Sustainability Index - <https://www.irex.org/projects/media-sustainability-index-msi>
- Nations in Transit - <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/nations-transit#.VdugbqSFOhI>
- Freedom in the World - <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019>
- Freedom of the Press - <https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-press>

- ITUC Global Rights Index: <https://www.ituc-csi.org/rights-index-2019>
- ITUC Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights: <https://survey.ituc-csi.org/?lang=en>
- U.S. Department of State Human Rights Report: <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/>
- ICNL Civic Freedom Monitor: <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/>
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: <https://carnegieendowment.org/regions>
- Afro-Barometer: <http://www.afrobarometer.org/>

Please limit the draft reports to a maximum of **ten pages in English**. Please keep in mind that we rely on implementers to ensure that reports are an appropriate length and are well written.

While the individual country reports for the 2020 CSO Sustainability Index must be brief, implementers may write longer reports for their own use to more fully describe the substance of the panel meetings. Longer reports may include additional country context information or examples and could be used for a variety of purposes, including advocacy initiatives, research, informing project designs, etc.

Please include a list of the experts who served on the panel using the form provided. This will be for our reference only and will not be made public. Also, **please remember to provide the individual panelists' ratings for each dimension** (with the names replaced by numbers).

**Submit the draft country reports** with rankings via email to FHI 360 by the date indicated in your grant's Project Description.

**5. Initial edits of the country report.** Within a few weeks of receiving your draft report, FHI 360 and its partner, ICNL, will send you a revised version of your report that has been edited for grammar, style and content. As necessary, the editors will request additional information to ensure that the report is complete and/or to clarify statements in the report. Please request any clarification needed from the editor as soon as possible, then submit your revised report by the deadline indicated.

**6. Editorial Committee review.** In Washington, an Editorial Committee (EC) will review the scores and revised draft country reports. The EC consists of representatives from USAID, FHI 360, ICNL, and at least one regional expert well versed in the issues and dynamics affecting civil society in the region. A USAID representative chairs the EC. If the EC determines that the panel's scores are not adequately supported by the country report, particularly in comparison to the previous year's scores and the scores and reports of other countries in the region, **the EC may request that the scores be adjusted, thereby ensuring comparability over time and among countries, or request that additional information be provided to support the panel's scores.** Further description of the EC is included in the following section, "The Role of the Editorial Committee."

**7. Additional report revision.** After the EC meets, the editor will send a revised report that indicates the EC's recommended scores, and where further supporting evidence or clarification is required. Within the draft, boxes will be added where you will note whether you accept the revised scores or where you can provide further evidence to support the original proposed score.

The report should be revised and returned to the editor within the allotted timeframe. The project editor will continue to be in contact with you to discuss any outstanding questions and clarifications regarding the scoring and the report's content. Your organization will be responsible for responding to all outstanding comments from the EC, as communicated by the project editor, until the report is approved and accepted by USAID.

**8. Dissemination and promotion of the final reports.** After the reports are approved by USAID and final formatting is conducted, the country reports will be grouped into regional reports. Each Implementing Partner will be responsible for promoting both the final, published country report and the regional report. Your organization will conduct activities to promote the Index's use and its visibility. This may include organizing a local public event, panel discussion, or workshop and by making the report available electronically by web posting or creating a social network page for the country report and through the other methods described in your Use and Visibility Plan. Documentation that you have conducted these activities as described in that Plan must be submitted to FHI 360 before it will authorize the final payment.

### III. THE ROLE OF THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

As an important step in the CSO Sustainability Index process, all country reports are reviewed and discussed by an Editorial Committee composed of regional and sector experts in Washington, DC, and an expert based in the region. This committee is chaired by a USAID Democracy Specialist and includes rotating members from USAID (past members have included experts from regional bureaus, the USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance’s Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DCHA/DRG), the USAID Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and the Environment’s Local Solutions Office, and USAID Democracy, Human Rights and Governance foreign service officers). The committee also includes civil society experts from FHI 360 and ICNL.

The Editorial Committee has three main roles. It reviews all reports and scores to ensure that narratives are adequate and compelling from the standpoint of supporting the proposed score and to determine if the proposed change in score is supported by the narrative. A compelling narrative demonstrates that a score results from evidence of systematic and widespread cases and is not based on one or two individual cases. For example, a country environment characterized by a growing number of CSOs with strong financial management systems that raise funds locally from diverse sources is a compelling justification for an elevated financial viability score. A country in which one or two large CSOs now have the ability to raise funds from diverse sources is not. The Editorial Committee also checks that scores for each dimension meet the criteria described in “Ratings: A Closer Look,” to ensure that scores and narratives accurately reflect the actual stage of CSO sector development. Finally, the Editorial Committee considers a country’s score in relation to the proposed scores in other countries, providing a regional perspective that ensures comparability of scores across all countries.

CSOs are encouraged to remind their panels from the outset that the Editorial Committee may ask for further clarification of scores and may modify scores, where appropriate. **While implementing partners will have the chance to dispute these modifications by providing more evidence for the scores the panel proposed, the USAID Chair of the EC will ultimately have the final say on all scores.** However, by asking panels to compare their scores with last year’s scores and “Ratings: A Closer Look” (which is essentially what the Editorial Committee does), it is hoped that there will be few differences between proposed scores and final scores. Ensuring that the narrative section for each dimension includes adequate explanations for all scores will also limit the need for the Editorial Committee to ask for further clarification.

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# INSTRUCTIONS FOR CSOSI EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

## Introduction

USAID's Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (the Index or CSOSI) is a tool developed by USAID to assess overall viability of civil society organizations (CSOs) in a particular country. By analyzing seven dimensions that are critical to sectoral sustainability on an annual basis, the Index highlights both strengths and constraints in CSO development.

The Index allows for comparisons both across countries and over time. Initially developed in 1997 for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia, the CSOSI is a valued tool and methodology used by CSOs, governments, donors, academics and others to better understand the opportunities, challenges and sustainability of the civil society sector in a particular country or region. In 2020 the CSOSI was implemented in 73 countries.

For the period of 2017-2022, FHI 360 and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) are managing the coordination and editing of the CSOSI. To develop the Index each year, FHI 360 provides small grants and technical support to local CSOs who serve as Implementing Partners (IPs) responsible for leading the in-country process to prepare the annual country report, using the CSOSI methodology. ICNL oversees the editing of the country reports once they are drafted by IPs. A senior staff member from both FHI 360 and ICNL serves on an Editorial Committee that reviews all reports, as do one or more senior USAID/Washington officials.

The Expert Panel (EP) members for whom this Codebook is designed participate in in-country panel discussions on the seven dimensions of sustainability covered by the Index. The IP convenes these panel discussions annually to assess the situation of civil society in their countries and determine scores based on an objective analysis of the factual evidence.

The CSOSI management team is continually striving to ensure the cross-country and cross-year comparability of the Index's scores, as well as to improve the reliability and validity of measurements, standardization of definitions, local ownership of the Index, and transparency of the Index's methodology and processes.

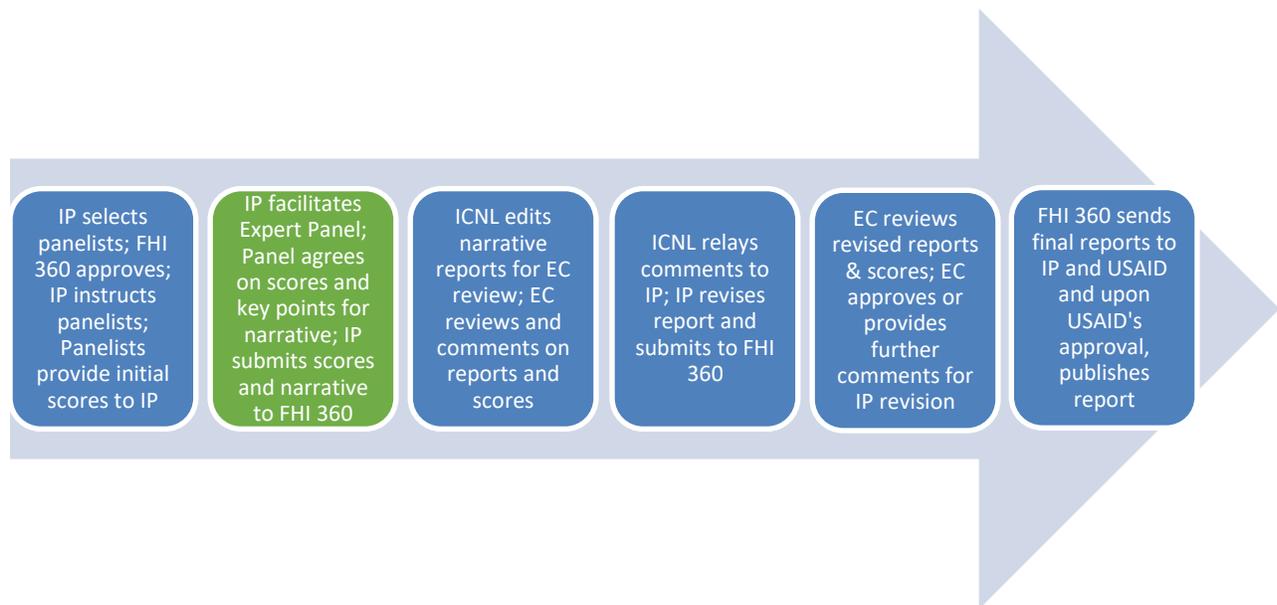
Therefore, FHI 360 has created this Codebook to inform and guide expert panel members through the scoring process. The Codebook provides definitions of the key concepts used to assess the overall strength and sustainability of the civil society sector in a given country, explains the scoring process, and standardizes the scale to be used when proposing score changes.

This document is the first part of the Codebook, providing an overview of the concepts and processes that guide the expert panel members' role in the CSOSI's methodology. The second part of the Codebook provides descriptions, or vignettes, of each score for each dimension, to standardize expert panel members' understanding of the scoring scale and to assist them in ensuring that scores are accurate.

## CSOSI Methodology

The CSOSI measures the sustainability of each country’s CSO sector based on the CSOSI’s seven dimensions: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. Its seven-point scoring scale used not only by CSOSI, but also variety of well-known reviews such as Freedom House in its publications “Nations in Transit” and “Freedom in the World.”

The IP in each country leads the process of organizing and convening a diverse and representative panel of CSO experts. EPs discuss the level of change during the year being assessed in each of the seven dimensions and determine proposed scores for each dimension. The IP then drafts narratives that document the rationale for each score. The scores are organized into three basic “tiers” representing the level of viability of the civil society sector: *Sustainability Impeded*, *Sustainability Evolving*, and *Sustainability Enhanced*. All scores and narratives are then reviewed by a Washington, D.C.-based Editorial Committee (EC) for consistency, completeness and methodological adherence, assisted by regional civil society experts. The graph below summarizes the approach and process.



### Definition of Concepts

The overall goal of the Index is to track progress or regression in the CSO sector over time, increasing the ability of local entities to undertake self-assessment and analysis. To ensure a common understanding of what is being assessed, panel members need a shared understanding of the key concepts underlying their assessment.

### Civil Society Organization

Civil society organizations are defined:

*“...As any organizations, whether formal or informal, that are not part of the apparatus of government, that do not distribute profits to their directors or operators, that are self-governing, and in which participation is a matter of free choice. Both member-serving and public-serving organizations are included. Embraced within this definition, therefore, are private, not-for-profit health providers, schools, advocacy groups, social service agencies, anti-*

*poverty groups, development agencies, professional associations, community-based organizations, unions, religious bodies, recreation organizations, cultural institutions, and many more.”<sup>1</sup>*

This definition of CSO includes informal, unregistered groups and movements, but to be included in the CSOSI, the movement must possess the structure and continuity to be distinguished from a single gathering of individuals and from personal or family relationships. In many countries political parties and private companies establish and support CSOs, but these entities are usually either public, for-profit, or not self-governing.

#### Civil Society Sector

The CSOSI defines the CSO sector to include all of the following: non-governmental organizations (focused on advocacy, oversight, or service provision), social movements, community-based organizations and faith-based organizations, trade and labor unions, women’s groups, youth groups, resource centers and intermediary support organizations, research institutes and think tanks, professional associations, cooperatives, and natural resource users’ groups, recreational organizations, cultural institutions, social enterprises, and informal movements, networks, and campaigns.

Throughout the report, please address differences between these different types of CSOs and note where trends and developments have affected specific types of CSOs.

### Seven Dimensions of Sustainability

The CSOSI measures sustainability across seven dimensions by analyzing a series of indicators related to each dimension. (see **Scoring: Dimensions and Indicators, provided as Annex A, for the full list of questions to guide your analysis of each indicator**):

**1- LEGAL ENVIRONMENT:** The legal and regulatory environment governing the CSO sector and its implementation.

<i>Registration – Legal procedures to formalize the existence of a CSO</i>
<i>Operation – The enforcement of the laws and its effects on CSOs</i>
<i>State Harassment – Abuses committed against CSOs and their members by state institutions and groups acting on behalf of the state</i>
<i>Taxation – Tax policies that affect CSOs</i>
<i>Access to Resources – Legal opportunities for CSOs to mobilize financial resources</i>
<i>Local Legal Capacity – Availability and quality of legal expertise for CSOs</i>

**2- ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY:** The internal capacity of the CSO sector to pursue its goals

<i>Constituency Building – Relationships with individuals or groups affected by or interested in issues on which CSOs work</i>
<i>Strategic Planning – Organizational goals and priorities for a set timeframe</i>
<i>Internal Management – Structures and processes to guide the work of CSOs</i>
<i>CSO Staffing – Quality and management of human resources</i>
<i>Technical Advancement – Access to and use of technology</i>

**3- FINANCIAL VIABILITY:** The CSO sector’s access to various sources of financial support

<i>Diversification – Access to multiple sources of funding</i>
<i>Local Support - Domestic sources of funding and resources</i>
<i>Foreign Support – Foreign sources of funding and resources</i>
<i>Fundraising – CSOs’ capacity to raise funds</i>
<i>Earned Income – Revenue generated from the sale of products and services</i>
<i>Financial Management Systems – Processes, procedures and tools to manage financial resources and operations.</i>

<sup>1</sup> Toward an Enabling Legal Environment for Civil Society, Statement of the 16th Annual Johns Hopkins International Fellows in Philanthropy Conference, Nairobi, Kenya. *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, Volume 8, Issue 1, November 2005.

**4- ADVOCACY:** The CSO sector’s ability to influence public opinion and public policy

<i>Cooperation with Local and Central Government – Access to government decision-making processes</i>
<i>Policy Advocacy Initiatives – Initiatives to shape the public agenda, public opinion, or legislation</i>
<i>Lobbying Efforts – Engagement with lawmakers to directly influence the legislative process</i>
<i>Advocacy for CSO Law Reform – Initiatives to promote a more favorable legal and regulatory framework for the CSO sector</i>

**5- SERVICE PROVISION:** The CSO sector’s ability to provide goods and services

<i>Range of Goods and Services – Variety of goods and services offered</i>
<i>Responsiveness to the Community – Extent to which goods and services address local needs</i>
<i>Clientele and beneficiaries – People, organizations and communities who utilize or benefit from CSOs’ services and goods</i>
<i>Cost Recovery – Capacity to generate revenue through service provision</i>
<i>Government Recognition and Support – Government appreciation for CSO service provision</i>

**6- SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE:** Support services available to the CSO sector

<i>Intermediary Support Organizations (ISOs) and CSO Resource Centers – Organizations and programs that provide CSOs with training and other support services</i>
<i>Local Grant Making Organizations – Local institutions, organizations or programs providing financial resources to CSOs</i>
<i>CSO Networks and Coalitions – Cooperation within the CSO sector</i>
<i>Training – Training opportunities available to CSOs</i>
<i>Intersectoral Partnerships – Collaboration between CSOs and other sectors</i>

**7- PUBLIC IMAGE:** Society’s perception of the CSO sector

<i>Media Coverage – Presence of CSOs and their activities in the media (print, television, radio and online)</i>
<i>Public Perception of CSOs – Reputation among the larger population</i>
<i>Government/Business Perception of CSOs – Reputation with the government and business sector</i>
<i>Public Relations – Efforts to promote organizational image and activities</i>
<i>Self-Regulation – Actions taken to increase accountability and transparency</i>

## How to Score

The CSO Sustainability Index uses a seven-point scale from 1 to 7. **Lower numbers indicate more robust levels of CSO sustainability.** These characteristics and levels are drawn from empirical observations of the sector’s development in the country, rather than a causal theory of development. Given the complex nature of civil society sectors, many contradictory developments may be taking place simultaneously. The levels of sustainability are organized into three broad clusters:

*Sustainability Enhanced (1 to 3)* - the highest level of sustainability, corresponds to a score between 1.0 and 3.0;

*Sustainability Evolving<sup>2</sup> (3.1 to 5)* - corresponds to a score between 3.1 and 5.0;

*Sustainability Impeded (5.1 to 7)* – the lowest level of sustainability, corresponds to a score between 5.1 and 7.0.

Sustainability Enhanced	Sustainability Evolving	Sustainability Impeded
1.0 – 3.0	3.1 –5.0	5.1 –7.0

<sup>2</sup> The ‘Sustainability Evolving’ categorization does not assume a direct or forward trajectory. Dimension and Overall Sustainability scores that fall within this category may represent both improvements and regressions.

## Scoring Process<sup>3</sup>

The primary role of the EP is to provide an assessment of the CSO environment based on the seven dimensions mentioned above. During the panel discussion, panel members are tasked with analyzing each dimension and any recent developments, identifying and discussing initial scores for each dimension, including their evidence for these scores, and determining their final proposed scores for each dimension. The overall score for the country will be an average of these seven scores.

Each expert panel member is asked to follow the steps below:

**Step 1:** Please start by reviewing last year's report and other sources of information about sectoral developments from the last year of which you are aware related to each dimension and its indicators. Then, based on the evidence, rate each dimension on the scale from 1 to 7, with a score of 1 indicating a very advanced civil society sector with a high level of sustainability, and a score of 7 indicating a fragile, unsustainable sector with a low level of development. Fractional scores to one decimal place are encouraged. See "Scoring based on Level of Change" on page 6 below for guidance on how to determine proposed scores.

When rating each dimension, please remember to consider each indicator carefully and make note of any specific, country-relevant examples of recent or historical conditions, policies, or events that you used as a basis for determining this score.

**Step 2:** Review your proposed score for each dimension to ensure that it makes sense in comparison to last year's score and narrative. Please carefully consider the importance of any developments and weigh more heavily those changes that have had an impact at the sector level, especially in cases when there have been both positive and negative changes. In determining the level of change, including the incremental change over the past year, look at the evidence of change, the various factors over the year being assessed that led to those changes (events, policies, laws, etc.), the durability of the change and the extent to which the change impacts the sector as a whole.

**Step 3:** Once you have scores for each dimension, average these seven scores together to arrive at an overall CSO sustainability score and provide all these scores to the IP before you attend the expert panel discussion.

**Step 4:** Attend the EP discussion. Listen to other experts describe the justification for their scores. After discussing each indicator in a dimension, you will have the opportunity to revise your proposed score. Should the panel achieve consensus regarding the scores, the consensus scores will be the panel's final proposed scores. If consensus is not reached among the panelists, the IP will average the panelists' scores, removing one instance of the highest and lowest scores each, to arrive at the final scores that will be proposed to the EC.

It is very important that the discussion includes specific examples and information that can be used to justify the Expert Panelist's scores. Therefore, please come prepared to share specific evidence to support trends you have noted during the year. **If adequate supporting information is not provided, the EC has the right to adjust the scores accordingly, to ensure objectivity and methodological consistency in scoring.**

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<sup>3</sup>NOTE: For countries in which the CSOSI is being implemented for the first time, the below scoring process does not apply. Instead, please refer to the document Scoring Process for Setting Country Baselines. For countries discussing baseline score recalibration, please use the Recalibration Guidance Sheet.

**Important Note:** In countries with disputed territories or areas (e.g., self-declared states, breakaway states, partially recognized states, declared people’s republics, proto-states, or territories annexed by another country’s government), panelists should score based only on the area under the national government’s control. However, these territories’ contexts should be discussed, to be referenced briefly in the introduction of the country report.

In countries experiencing civil war (political and armed movements that administer parts of the country, regions governed by alternative ruling bodies), panelists should balance the situation in each of the territories when determining all scores, and discuss trends and developments under each regime.

In countries where a great deal of regional autonomy is recognized (e.g. Iraqi Kurdistan), expert panelists should take those areas into account when scoring and compiling examples, and IPs should ensure the situation in these areas are well-integrated into the scoring decisions and narrative report.

For countries with closing civic space, sufficient data and informational sources should be discussed to both acknowledge the changes in civic space and consider its impacts on dimensions. The panelists should respond to published sources and present their evidence to ensure balance between positive and negative developments affecting civil society in their country. To avoid self-censorship and ensure the confidentiality of and non-retaliation against any expert panel member, the IP could choose to enforce the *Chatham House Rule*. When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the *Chatham House Rule*, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

In countries where a democratic revolution took place in the previous year, the panelists should still closely follow the score-change framework when determining the new dimension-level scores to justify the changes, avoiding exaggerated score increases that may be due to a post-revolution feeling of euphoria. The proposed scores should always measure the actual changes thus far and not anticipated impacts in the near future.

## Scoring Based on Level of Change

The level of change in a dimension from one year to the next is determined by assessing the impact of multiple factors including new policies and laws, changes in implementation of existing policies and laws, various organization-level achievements and setbacks, changes in funding levels and patterns, as well as contextual political, economic, and social developments. While individual examples may seem impactful on their own, ultimately a sector’s long-term sustainability only changes gradually over time as the implications of these positive or negative developments begin to be felt and their long-term effects take hold. Therefore, dimension-level score changes each year should not in normal circumstances exceed a 0.5-point change from the previous year<sup>4</sup>.

When determining what weight to give different trends and developments in how they affect the scores, consider the relative scope of the changes and the duration of their impacts. Those trends and developments that will have larger and longer-term impacts on the sector as a whole should be weighted more heavily compared to those that affect only limited parts of the sector and are more likely to change from year to year. For example, a demonstrated increased capability to mobilize domestic resources (e.g., through corporate philanthropy or crowdfunding) broadly witnessed throughout the sector, or a new mechanism for long-term funding of CSOs (e.g., through a basket fund or a tax designation mechanism) would signal a longer-term change in a sector’s financial viability than a one-year increase in donor funding to CSOs such as during a year of national elections or following an emergency.

In determining how the level of change in the dimension of sustainability should translate into a change in score, the following scale can be used to assist expert panel members’ decision making:

*What was the overall impact of the change(s) on the dimension?*

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<sup>4</sup> **Note:** This scale has been adjusted for the 2018 CSOSI to more accurately reflect the scale at which trends and developments should impact a score given the definitions of the scoring scale above.

<b>Deterioration</b>	<p><b>Cataclysmic deterioration:</b> Trends and developments have had a completely transformative negative effect on at least one or two indicators in the dimension and significantly affected other dimensions as well.</p> <p>Example: Legal Environment – A law has banned all international CSOs and their affiliates from the country, as part of the government’s systematic crackdown on civil society organizations.</p>	0.5 or greater
	<p><b>Extreme deterioration:</b> Trends and developments have had very important negative effects on at least one or two indicators in the dimension.</p> <p>Example: Organizational Capacity – Economic depression and instability have led donor basket funds to close abruptly, leaving many major CSOs without funding for their activities. Outreach efforts to constituencies have been halted due to funding shortages and many major CSOs have lost their well-qualified staff members.</p>	0.4
	<p><b>Significant deterioration:</b> Trends and developments have had important negative effects on at least one or two indicators in the dimension.</p> <p>Example: Public Image – The government conducts a relentless media campaign to discredit the image of CSOs by calling them agents of foreign actors seeking to destabilize the country. At the same, the government intimidates media outlets and threatens them with retaliation should they partner with or cover CSO activities without prior approval by the government.</p>	0.3
	<p><b>Moderate deterioration:</b> Trends and developments have had a somewhat negative impact in at least one or two indicators in the dimension.</p> <p>Example: Legal Environment – In an effort to increase public revenue, the government has decided to increase fees by 100% for some types of government services, including CSO registration renewal fees, which were already very high according to many CSOs. As a result, some CSOs, particularly community-based organizations (CBOs), had to delay or suspend their activities.</p>	0.2
	<p><b>Slight deterioration:</b> Trends or developments have had a slightly negative impact on a at least one or two indicators in the dimension.</p> <p>Example: Legal Environment – The government has decided that CSOs should submit their financial statement and annual activity report to the registration agency every year. This may have a long-term positive effect but in the short-term it has increased bureaucratic hurdles and the possibility of harassment by overzealous government officials.</p>	0.1
	<b>No Change</b>	<p>The country has not encountered any significant trends or developments in the dimension or developments have been both positive and negative in equal measure.</p>
	<p><b>Slight improvement:</b> Trends or developments have had a slightly positive impact on at least one or two indicators in the dimension.</p> <p>Example: Legal Environment – To facilitate CSO registration, particularly for those in rural areas, the government has decided its registration agency will allow the agency to take applications locally and process registration directly at the district level. Now, CSOs in rural areas are not required to travel to the capital to apply. However, this measure is accompanied with a small increase in the registration fee.</p>	0.1

<b>Improvement</b>	<p><b>Moderate improvement:</b> Trends and developments have had a somewhat positive impact in at least one or two indicators in the dimension.</p> <p>Example: Service Provision – To improve the effectiveness of public service delivery, the central government has decided that at least 10% of local government contracts for basic service delivery will be set aside for CSOs. The law is lacking in specificity, particularly around the application process, but it reinforces CSOs’ image as credible partners.</p>	0.2
	<p><b>Significant improvement:</b> Trends and developments have had important positive effects on at least one or two indicators in the dimension.</p> <p>Example: Public Image – There has been a net increase of CSO partnerships with businesses. CSOs have also agreed to and published a general code of conduct for the sector, reinforcing a positive trend of greater transparency and accountability.</p>	0.3
	<p><b>Extreme improvement:</b> Trends and developments have had very important positive effects on several indicators in the dimension.</p> <p>Example: Organizational Capacity – The government and international donors have launched a five-year multi-million-dollar basket funds to support CSO-led activities and to strengthen CSO capacity, with a special focus on skills training for CSO staff members, particularly those from CBOs.</p>	0.4
	<p><b>Transformative improvement:</b> Trends and developments have had a completely transformative positive effect on at least one or two indicators in the dimension and will potentially affect other dimensions as well.</p> <p>Example: Legal Environment – A nonviolent revolution that toppled an authoritarian regime and installed a more democratic regime has produced sudden political and legal changes that will protect basic freedoms and human rights.</p>	0.5 or greater

# Instructions for Baseline Recalibration

## Background

To enhance its methodology, the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) incorporated several activities into its annual process. These activities respond directly to the methodological issues identified through consultations conducted with stakeholders in 2018 and 2019.

One of these activities to strengthen the CSOSI methodology is to reset dimension-level scores which are not accurate, either because their baseline scores were inaccurate or because they have not moved significantly enough over time to reflect structural changes in the sector's sustainability. The goal of resetting these scores is to improve the cross-country comparability of scores and to increase the analytical usefulness of the CSOSI to its target audiences.

There are two scenarios in which a score can be recalibrated:

- Scenario 1
  - FHI 360 informs the Implementing Partner (IP) about the dimension score(s) that the Editorial Committee (EC) has flagged for needing recalibration
- Scenario 2:
  - A majority of expert panelists flag the score for recalibration at the panel discussion.

## Scenario 1: EC recommended recalibration

### Instructions

1. **Inform participating expert panel members about the scores flagged for recalibration** – When the IP sends the expert panelists the annual CSOSI package of relevant materials, it also communicates to them the purpose of baseline score recalibration and the dimension scores that have been selected by the EC, in consultation with regional experts, for recalibration.
2. **To determine the new score(s), use *Sustainability Categories and Scores – A Closer Look* and a comparison to other scores in the region** – Instead of using the scoring guidance whereby proposed scores are determined by analyzing the level of change from the previous year, the scores identified for recalibration are determined by analyzing where they should fall on the one-to-seven scoring scale, as well as a comparison with the other countries' CSOSI scores for that dimension in the same region. The expert panelists should review the vignettes and illustrative examples in *Sustainability Categories and Scores – A Closer Look* to familiarize themselves with how various levels of CSO sustainability should correspond to the CSOSI's scoring spectrum. Scores should be proposed to the tenth decimal point based on how well they match the descriptions of the various full-point scores listed in this codebook. To help narrow proposed scores to the tenth decimal point, experts can review other countries' scores listed for that dimension in the most recent CSOSI regional report.
3. **Discuss evidence for recalibrated scores, as well as trends and developments in the past year that led to improvements and deterioration in the dimension** – The narrative report should be drafted the same as in the other dimensions, reviewing the current situation and discussing what has changed over the previous year. A note will be included into the final report that clarifies that the new score for that dimension is based on a recalibration and should not be compared with the previous year's score to make assertions about improvement or deterioration.
4. **Prepare and submit a recalibration justification note to FHI 360** – To justify a proposed baseline recalibration, or to disagree with the EC's recommendation to recalibrate a score, the IP should prepare a justification note to be sent to FHI 360. The note should summarize the panel members' decision to accept or reject a requested recalibration. It should also outline the evidence and examples provided by the panelists related to each and every dimension being recalibrated, justifying the new score specifically in relation to the vignettes in *Sustainability Categories and Scores – A Closer Look*.

5. **The Editorial Committee will decide to accept or reject the proposed score** – As with scoring decisions based on the level of change, the EC will make a final decision on the proposed baseline recalibration. If EC rejects the proposed new score, it will propose an alternative score for the dimension.

## Scenario 2: Expert Panel (EP) recommended recalibration

### Instructions

1. **Inform participating expert panel members about the changes in methodology regarding recalibration** – When the IP sends the expert panelists the annual CSOSI package of relevant materials, it also communicates to them the purpose and the process of optional baseline score recalibration. If expert panel members believe that one or more dimension-level scores are significantly out of place, they should attend the panel discussion about a proposed score recalibration, bringing supporting evidence for the score(s) to be recalibrated.
2. **To determine the new score(s), use *Sustainability Categories and Scores – A Closer Look* and a comparison to other scores in the region** – Instead of using the scoring guidance whereby proposed scores are determined by analyzing the level of change from the previous year, the scores identified for recalibration are determined by analyzing where they should fall on the one-to-seven scoring scale, as well as a comparison with the other countries' CSOSI scores for that dimension in the same region. Expert panelists that want to propose a recalibration should review the vignettes and illustrative examples in *Sustainability Categories and Scores – A Closer Look* for the relevant dimension(s), to familiarize themselves with how various levels of CSO sustainability should correspond to the CSOSI's scoring spectrum. Scores should be proposed to the tenth decimal point based on how well they match the descriptions of the various full-point scores listed in this codebook. To help narrow proposed scores to the tenth decimal point, experts can review other countries' scores listed for that dimension in the most recent CSOSI regional report.
3. **Discuss evidence for recalibrated scores, as well as trends and developments in the past year that led to improvements and deterioration in the dimension** – If a majority of expert panelists want to recalibrate a score, the dimension(s) should be discussed in the context of what the recalibrated score should be. The narrative report should be drafted the same as in the other dimensions, reviewing the current situation and discussing what has changed over the previous year. A note will be included into the final report that clarifies that the new score for that dimension is based on a recalibration and should not be compared with the previous year's score to make assertions about improvement or deterioration.
4. **Prepare and submit a recalibration justification note to FHI 360** – To justify a proposed baseline recalibration, the IP should prepare a justification note to be sent to FHI 360. The note should summarize the panel members' decision. It should also outline the evidence and examples provided by the panelists related to each and every dimension being recalibrated, justifying the new score specifically in relation to the vignettes in *Sustainability Categories and Scores – A Closer Look*.
5. **The Editorial Committee will decide to accept or reject the proposed recalibration** – As with scoring decisions based on the level of change, the EC will make a final decision on the proposed baseline recalibration. If EC rejects the proposed new score, it will propose a score for the dimension(s).

### Tips

If FHI 360 informs the IP that certain dimension scores have been identified for recalibration by the EC, the IP should communicate with the expert panelists which dimensions have been selected for baseline recalibration at least one week in advance of the panel discussion. This advance notification will give the panelists an opportunity to prepare evidence about the status quo in the country under this dimension to inform their selection of a new baseline score.

If the local EP decides to recalibrate the score unprompted by the EC, the IP should ensure that the panelists present evidence during the panel discussion to justify the change and to include in the recalibration justification note.

In either case, the IP should be prepared to respond to the EC's questions about the justifications for recalibrated scores.

# Instructions for Electronic Questionnaire

## Background

To enhance its methodology, the Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) has incorporated several activities into its annual process. These activities respond directly to the methodological issues identified through the feedback and consultation process conducted with project stakeholders in 2018 and 2019.

One of these activities to enhance the methodology's implementation is to disseminate an electronic questionnaire or e-questionnaire to a larger group of individuals. The questionnaire allows a larger, more diverse group of individuals to contribute their perspectives and insights on the CSOSI dimensions, strengthening the representativeness and inclusiveness of the process and data, enhancing Expert Panel (EP) deliberations, and providing Implementing Partners (IPs) more evidence to improve report quality. Dissemination of the questionnaire also helps to improve visibility of the IP and Index, and foster engagement with stakeholders who are the most likely to subsequently use the Index when completed.

## Instructions

- **Identify approximately 50 participants to whom to send the questionnaire** – The IP selects individuals who will expand the scope and diversity of inputs into the process. The selected individuals should include representatives of or specialists in specific sub-sectors of civil society organizations (CSOs), such as labor unions, capacity building organizations, organizations representing marginalized and vulnerable groups, informal movements, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, intermediary support organizations, resource centers, and research institutes. Emphasis should be placed on selecting individuals who are in other localities of the country and those located in rural areas. The objective is for the IP to select a group of people who would add new perspectives on various aspects of the sector on which the in-person panelists might not have deep expertise, as well as individuals who have broad knowledge but would be unable or available to attend the in-person panel discussion. FHI 360 and the local USAID Mission may request additions to the list of questionnaire recipients from their own network of contacts.
- **Design your e-questionnaire** – Look at the mandatory and optional questions shared by FHI 360 to design an e-questionnaire that best responds to the needs of the civil society sector in your country. You can translate the e-questionnaire into the principal local language(s) of the country. The country-specific questionnaire should be brief and should take no more than 10-15 minutes to complete.
- **Disseminate the electronic questionnaire to your selected additional participants** – The IPs can disseminate electronic questionnaire on the online platforms of their choice or consult with FHI 360 on setting up the e-questionnaire on SurveyMonkey, to be distributed to the IP's selected additional participants. The IP can use snowball sampling to disseminate the questionnaire to both increase the number of responses as well as to diversify them. To reach larger audiences, the IP can work with local CSO umbrella organizations to tap into their mailing lists, social media pages and other sector-specific online platforms to share the questionnaire link. The IP should ask the additional participants to complete the questionnaire within a period of two weeks or less.
- **Compile analysis of the questionnaire's results**– After the e-questionnaire deadline that the IP identified has expired, the IP compiles the quantitative and qualitative data received. In cases when FHI 360 supported the IPs to set up the e-questionnaire on SurveyMonkey's CSOSI account, FHI 360 collects the electronic questionnaire results and submits to the IP.
- **Incorporate the findings into the panel discussion** – Statistics and examples that are raised through the questionnaire responses should be presented to the in-person panel to serve as an additional data source for the scoring process and the discussion around the relevant indicators. When responses are not conclusive or do not align with the experts' opinions, the IP should still present them at the panel discussion for the panelists' consideration.
- **Write the conclusions reached into the narrative report** – While panels should analyze the questionnaire results and use them to inform their discussions, the e-questionnaire responses do not directly translate into scoring decisions. The data received from the electronic questionnaire should be incorporated into the narrative report in the same way that the expert panelists' insights are incorporated

-- justifying scores, sharing without attribution to a particular individual or reference to the questionnaire. Instead, the inputs should simply be mentioned where relevant as evidence of what has changed positively or negatively in ways that affected the sustainability of the CSO sector in the relevant year. Anecdotal evidence, specific examples, and references to events through open-ended questions may provide IPs necessary data to strengthen their narrative reports.

### Tips

- When selecting additional participants, please keep the following points in mind:
  - Sending the e-questionnaire to people with whom you already have a working relationship may increase the response rate, so consider sharing it with organizations and individuals in other areas of the country with whom you have worked;
  - Sharing the e-questionnaire with donor agencies operating in your country and allowing them to propose individuals to receive the e-questionnaire can be a useful way of reaching new experts and perspectives outside of your own organization's network;
  - Sharing the e-questionnaire with civil society networks and allowing them to forward it to their member organizations' leaders, or other experts with whom they work, is a useful way of maximizing circulation outside of your network;
  - When sending out the e-questionnaire, it may be useful to commit to send participants a copy of last year's final country and regional reports, so they feel a sense of participation in the larger process of developing the CSOSI;
  - When preparing your distribution list, consider whether the situation in the country is such that individuals may try to manipulate the e-questionnaire results. If that is a possibility, consider steps to target distribution, establish specific time frames or other measures to address the concern.
- When disseminating an e-questionnaire, inform your audience about the survey deadline, and send a reminder few days before the last day.
- As a best practice, the IP can compile a written overview of the conclusions and evidence of the additional participants and send it to the EP members before the panel discussion, so they can review it. If a written overview is sent out before the panel discussion, the IP can ask the expert panelists at the discussion which findings stood out most to them, to spur discussion.
- When e-questionnaire findings are not conclusive, the IP should ask the expert panelists to analyze the results to better understand the data.
- Pay special attention to geography – if your country has breakaway regions, is experiencing civil war or has regions' that may be unrepresented or marginalized, make extra efforts to reach people in all the relevant areas.
- Convincing the participants that their inputs are confidential is key to obtaining a high participation rate and meaningful findings. Especially in countries where self-censorship might be an issue, be very clear that only your organization and FHI 360 will see their inputs, and no comments made will be personally attributed under any circumstances.
- The IPs can use any online platform of their choice to disseminate the electronic questionnaire. In the past, FHI 360 used SurveyMonkey while some other IPs reported using Google Forms.
- The IPs should take relevant measures to ensure data privacy.

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