



# Broadening civic space through voluntary action: Lessons from 2011



**CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation** is an international alliance of civil society working to strengthen citizen action and civil society throughout the world, especially in areas where participatory democracy and citizens' freedom of association are threatened. CIVICUS has a vision of a global community of active, engaged citizens committed to the creation of a more just and equitable world. This is based on the belief that the health of societies exists in direct proportion to the degree of balance between the state, the private sector and civil society. CIVICUS seeks to amplify the voices and opinions of ordinary people and it gives expression to the enormous creative energy of the burgeoning sector of civil society.

The **United Nations Volunteers (UNV)** programme is the UN organization that contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide. Volunteerism is a powerful means of engaging people in tackling development challenges, and it can transform the pace and nature of development. Volunteerism benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens, and by purposefully creating opportunities for participation. UNV contributes to peace and development by advocating for recognition of volunteers, working with partners to integrate volunteerism into development programming, and mobilizing an increasing number and diversity of volunteers, including experienced UN Volunteers, throughout the world. UNV embraces volunteerism as universal and inclusive, and recognizes volunteerism in its diversity as well as the values that sustain it: free will, commitment, engagement and solidarity.

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*“Truly lasting development results can be achieved only by broad-based partnerships – not just among traditional development actors, but including all those who have a stake – and that includes primarily the people for whom development is intended and by whom development can be achieved.*

*We must encourage and support individuals to become actors in their own development. Our individual destinies are interlinked and depend on the engagement of every one of us.”*

- Flavia Pansieri, Executive Coordinator, United Nations Volunteers  
speech at United Nations General Assembly, 5 December 2011



*“From ministering to the sick to curating knowledge and challenging despots, collective voluntary action continually makes our world a better place. Today we face an unprecedented opportunity to channel those energies and impulses towards re-inventing our societies in favour of greater justice, equity and peace. Never before has it been clearer that without co-existence we risk no existence. Each of us in government, business, media, academia and civil society can and must seize this moment to protect, nurture and amplify the voluntary impulse in our communities and around the world.”*

- Ingrid Srinath, Secretary General  
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation







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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This publication explores how non-formal voluntary action outside of formal organisations can lead to greater citizen participation in governance; serves as a resource to help civil society organisations (CSOs) explore the opportunities for engagement this presents; highlights recent examples of how socially-oriented volunteerism has connected to more change-oriented activism; and suggests how both non-formal voluntary citizen action and social activism within CSOs can be strengthened.

Voluntary citizen participation is an essential part of civil society, which in turn is a key enabler of development, human rights, good governance and social justice. At the culmination of 2011, the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers, and a year which saw new and prominent people's activism in many countries, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme seek to advance the debate on how volunteering, in its many forms, helps build people's participation and offers pathways for people's activism to improve societies. CIVICUS sees volunteerism as a crucial way in which the effectiveness, capacity and governance of CSOs can be enhanced and in which the voice of citizens can be heard in public life. UNV believes that volunteerism is a powerful force that engages people in addressing peace and development challenges by purposefully creating opportunities for participation.

This publication builds on an earlier study (CIVICUS, 2008) in which CIVICUS, UNV and the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) began to explore volunteerism's relationship with participatory governance and sustainable development. That study argued that volunteerism and social activism are both points on a spectrum of citizen participation, with the implication that there is potential to support an increase in the level and diversity of participation to confront the difficulties and development challenges of our time.

***“Voluntary citizen participation is an essential part of civil society”***

This study also draws from the findings of the CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI) project, a participatory, self-assessment exercise on the state of civil society carried out in 38 countries between 2008 and 2011, summarised in CIVICUS' 2011 report, Bridging the Gaps. The CSI data enables an exploration of the dynamics and trends of volunteerism in partner countries.



Finally, this publication is informed by a consultation process that collected the views of around 65 informed civil society stakeholders including:

- participants in two workshops and two plenary discussions at the 2011 CIVICUS World Assembly, a global gathering of civil society leaders, practitioners and stakeholders
- interviews with civil society leaders
- a roundtable of international volunteer-involving organisations held in the margins of the World Assembly
- the 2011 annual meeting of the Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), an international network of NGO umbrella bodies
- a broad range of CIVICUS and UNV staff.

As the culmination of this research and consultation process, this publication will:

- reflect on the experiences of volunteerism and views of civil society practitioners and citizens
- explore trends in voluntary action, especially the prevalence of non-formal action witnessed in 2011, including large scale voluntary mobilisations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Europe, USA and Sub-Saharan Africa
- help CSOs to explore the valuable contribution of non-formal volunteerism and ways of engaging with it
- suggest how non-formal volunteerism can be better supported and synergies achieved between it and organised civil society
- highlight potential pathways to connect social forms of volunteerism to more change-oriented expressions of civic activism for improved governance.



## 2. PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE, ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM

First, there is a need to provide an explanation of some of the key terms and concepts, and the linkages between them.

### DEFINITIONS

In keeping with the CSI project, this publication uses the term **civil society** to mean ‘the arena, outside of the family, the state and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests’. Organised civil society refers to independent, not-for-profit associations and organisations that have some form of structure and formal rules of operating, together with the networks, infrastructure and resources they utilise, as a collective.

In this publication, **participatory governance** is understood as ‘empowering citizens to influence and share control in the processes of public [as opposed to private] decision-making that affect their lives’ (Malena 2009).

Participatory governance is often directly linked with **active citizenship** to mean approaches aimed at helping citizens engage in processes of public deliberation, decision-making and service delivery. That said, although active citizenship is a necessary component of participatory governance, the term active citizenship is also used to describe citizen action outside of state processes, e.g. where people take initiatives within their communities. References to ‘citizens’ are not constrained by





legalistic definitions of what constitutes citizenship in any particular context, but are meant broadly to imply 'one who has a share in both the ruling and being ruled' (Aristotle).<sup>1</sup>

The term **social capital** is also used in this publication to refer to the value of connections within and between social networks, the extent of social relations and the level of cooperation and confidence to achieve collective results. In general, social capital is 'the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures' (Portes 1998).

The notion of volunteering is conceptualised and valued differently across the globe. For example, the Guinea CSI report<sup>2</sup> defines volunteering as 'assistance to a neighbour or a member of the community without expectation of being paid in return', while the report from Jordan elaborates that 'volunteering is a national duty... a religious duty... and a way to get a job'. The Senegal CSI report highlighted the challenges here, noting that, 'it is very difficult to realistically calculate levels of volunteering since for most Senegalese people, the definition of volunteerism is unclear, and indeed, counting the time spent doing something is also unusual'.

In Albania, volunteerism is viewed negatively because of compulsory volunteering under the communist dictatorship, while in Armenia, 'the act of volunteering can refer to providing services, organising political action, caring for the poor, reaching out to the disadvantaged, providing education, ensuring equality and civil rights for all citizens, and generally working for change'.

For clarity, this publication will use the UN definition of **volunteering, volunteerism** and **voluntary activities** as "a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor" (UN 2001). This definition encompasses both formal and non-formal volunteering.

**Formal volunteerism** means volunteering activities carried out under the auspices of formal volunteer- involving organisations, which could be CSOs, public or private sector entities - that is to say organisation-based volunteering. This type of volunteerism is planned and structured, and the volunteer generally acts according to the direction, rules and regulations of the organisation. She/he is not independent but operates within the structures, and supports the mission, of the organisation. Formal volunteerism can be face-to-face or online.

**Non-formal volunteering**<sup>3</sup> is a strand of action and engagement that exists worldwide, but is often not fully recognised or valued. Non-formal volunteering refers to the spectrum of voluntary activity that is undertaken outside any formal organisation, with people acting either as individuals or in groups, on either a periodic or on-going basis. Non-formal volunteering could, for example, take place within a neighbourhood or faith-based community, online using social media, or as part of spontaneous protest, but is not directly associated with, or on behalf of, a formal organisation. CSI findings in the 2008-2011 phase suggest that this is the most common and preferred method of volunteering.

In practice, this distinction between formal and non-formal volunteering can be blurred, for example where action is initiated by a CSO but then continued independently by enthusiasts or trained community volunteers, or where the ad hoc action of a group of individuals develops into

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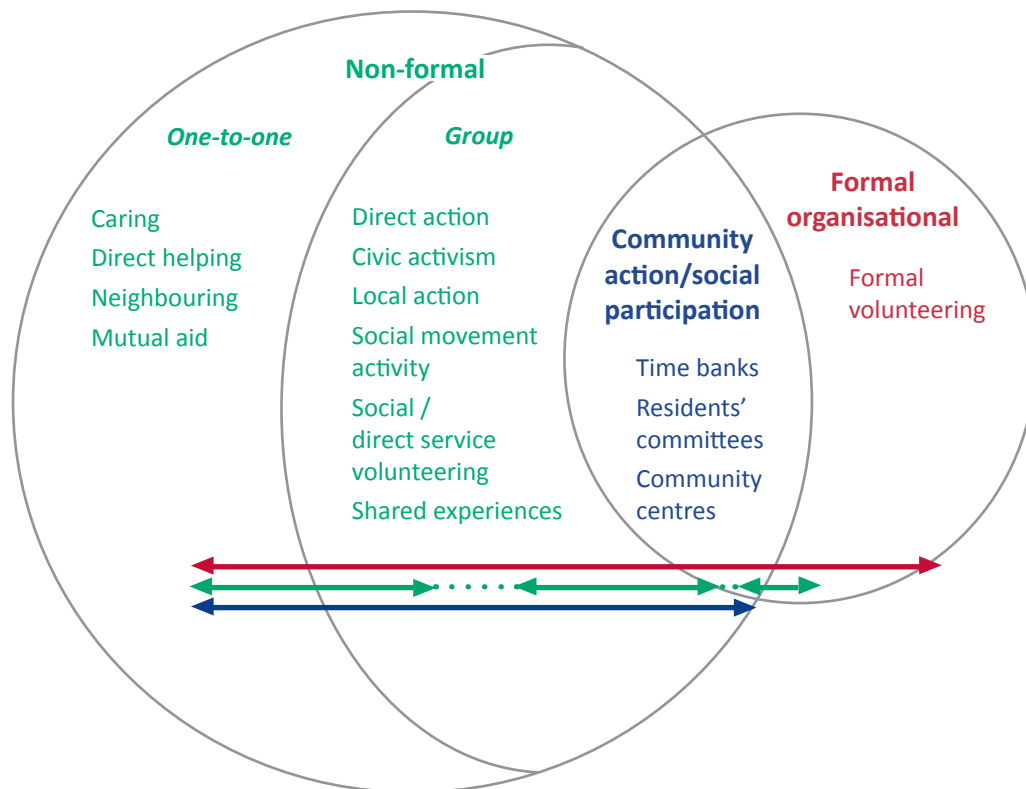
1 As quoted by Institute of Citizenship - [www.citizen.org.uk/What\\_is\\_Citizenship.htm](http://www.citizen.org.uk/What_is_Citizenship.htm).

2 All CSI country reports cited in this publication are available at [www.civicus.org/news-and-resources/reports-and-publications/csi-reports](http://www.civicus.org/news-and-resources/reports-and-publications/csi-reports).

3 The term 'non-formal' has been chosen rather than 'informal', which could be perceived as implying trivial, marginal or disorganised activity.

a network which acquires rules and procedures. Indeed, this area of overlap may be the most promising one for connecting between different forms of action.

The diagram below helps illustrate some of the distinctions and overlaps between formal and non-formal volunteering.



(Based on Woolvin 2010)

Finally, in making a distinction between **social and change-oriented volunteering**, change-oriented volunteering implies addressing the interactions and relationships of power, and attempts by people to achieve influence in what happens in their lives, their communities and their countries, for example through participation in environmental groups and trade unions, as opposed to activities which focus on association in its own right, such as in sports and culture societies.

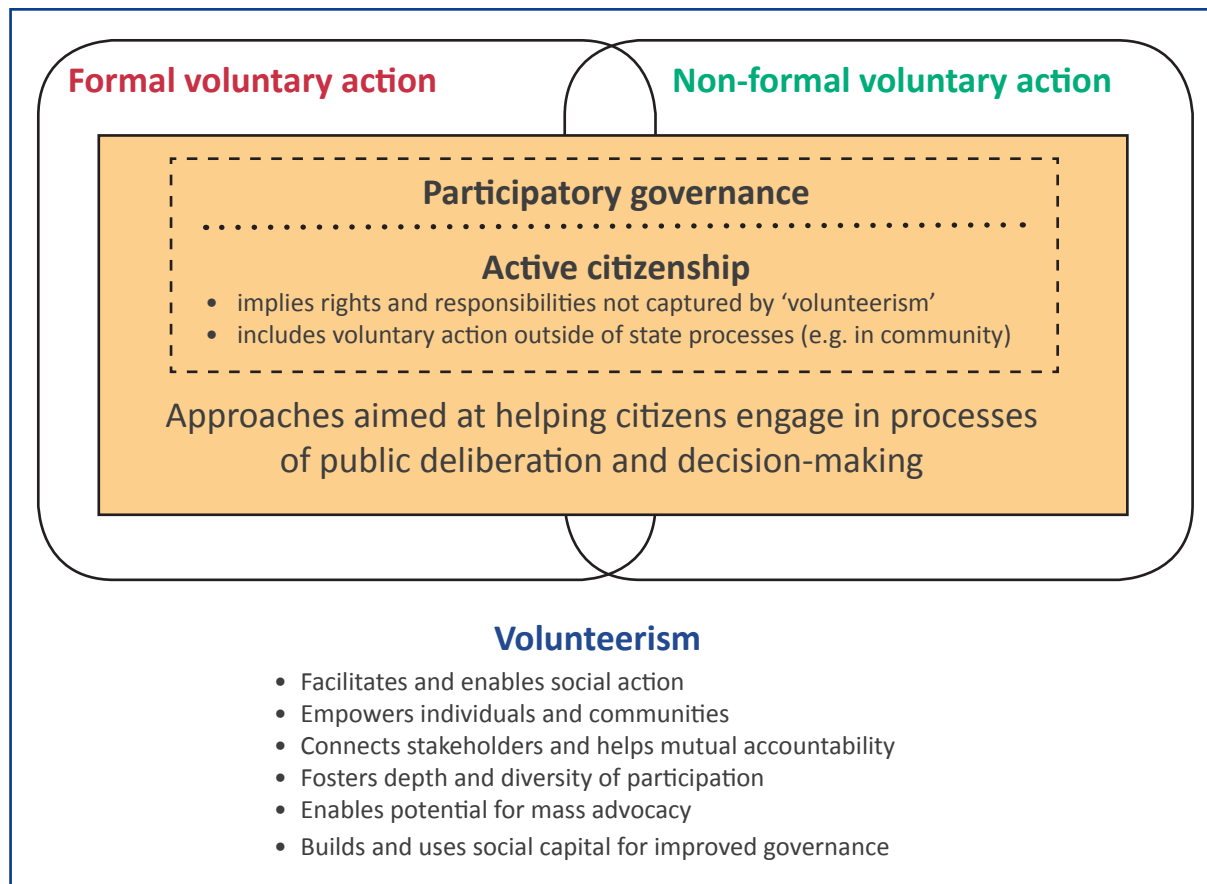
## HOW PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE, ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM INTERACT

Although voluntary action both facilitates and enables action for participatory governance and active citizenship, the latter is perhaps a stronger and more meaningful term as it implies a set of respective rights and responsibilities among and between state and non-state actors that is not captured by the concept of volunteering. That said, “civic participation is fuelled by volunteers” (Duituturaga-Jale 2011), whether it be on a formal or non-formal basis.

An important aspect of participatory governance is establishing an equitable, appropriate and effective division of labour between state and non-state actors. This raises some interesting questions for volunteering. For example, when governments insufficiently fund social sectors, volunteers often take action to fill gaps. In cases like this, it is important to reflect on what kind of volunteer action may be most appropriate and strategic, in both the short- and longer-terms. Is it more effective for volunteers to focus on filling gaps (e.g. supplementing inadequate public



social services) or should they concentrate their energies on holding governments accountable for inadequate service delivery and demanding improvements? The danger is that volunteering in service roles may potentially lessen the likelihood of radical change, but there is also evidence that volunteering in social provision can help develop people's capacity for change-oriented activism. In reality, individuals and groups focus their voluntary action according to what suits their particular context, abilities and availability.



"Active citizenship is essential to achieving democracy, development and an equitable society, and these goals cannot be realised by the actions of CSOs alone as they require a much broader mobilisation of ordinary citizens engaging and contributing in different ways, and at different levels on issues that they are passionate about" (Malena 2011).

"By participating in community meetings, and interacting with local government officials on development needs, for example, engaged citizens help build cohesive communities and strengthen democratic governance... A clear appreciation of [volunteerism's] benefits is apparent with the understanding that [it] empowers individuals, encourages civic participation and enhances social cohesion. Time and time again, volunteers have supported action on a scale that would not have been possible without their involvement, and education and awareness campaigns gain a reach that would be impossible if it were not for voluntary contributions of time, skill and energy, to achieved broad-based social change." (CIVICUS, 2008)



## 3. WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT TODAY?

There are three main reasons that add urgency to this debate:

- the changing political and social landscape brought about by recent economic, environmental and political crises, and states' responses to these.
- the changing scope and nature of people's activism, as seen in the events of the Arab Spring and the various examples of direct action taken across the globe in 2010/11, such as the mass protest movements seen in Spain, Greece, Malawi and Chile, among many others; India's anti-corruption movement; the direct democracy of Iceland's constitutional drafting; and the Occupy movement in the USA and internationally.
- the findings of the 2008-2011 phase of the CSI project that questions the extent to which organised civil society offers the leading model for voluntary action.

All of these come together to pose challenges that require new civil society responses.

Over the last few years, the world has experienced a series of economic, environmental and political crises that have significantly changed, and continue to change, the conditions of people's lives. These crises have increased and revealed inequality, brought larger parts of the population into positions of vulnerability and poverty, and seen social provisions cut back.

The Arab Spring, even though it has uncertain outcomes in many countries, caught the imagination of the world and inspired new movements elsewhere. The challenge for CSOs comes with the realisation that non-formal rather than organised civil society was often the most crucial force for social and political change.

Depending on your point of view, the way that the Tahrir Revolution played out can be seen either as a victory for a new form of civil society or proof that civil society had been largely side-lined by the Mubarak regime's oppressive tactics, necessitating a new approach. The revolution was not led by any of the civil society groups supported by the donors, but by a [non-formal] group of highly committed young activists. ... The movement had little official organisational presence beyond its Facebook page.



...The most promising development for civil society in Egypt to come out of Tahrir is not the formal dialogue but the new-found spirit of activism epitomised by the dozens of citizen-watch groups that sprang up spontaneously to guard homes and families when the police melted away... The teams of young volunteers who came together to clean Tahrir Square carried out a truly revolutionary act in the context of Egypt, asserting the public's ownership of public space. (Bremer, 2011)

At the same time, worrying potential parallels with the experiences of former Soviet and Yugoslavian countries are suggested by the CSI findings. In such countries the research found a tendency that, after the euphoria of post-civic revolution faded, CSOs struggled to root themselves locally, with low levels of public trust and participation, because they had largely been shaped by donor priorities and according to western models.

For example, Georgia reports that participation in CSOs, especially CSO volunteering, is noticeably low, with a worrying apparent trend of decreasing volunteering. The euphoria and enthusiasm witnessed during the 2003 Rose Revolution gradually faded in the post-revolution period, giving way to widespread public frustration and disillusionment. Kosovo reports similarly that "the high political motive of that time no longer exists following liberation and independence, and the resources and energy of that time are long spent."

In many former communist countries, revolutionary levels of activism have given way to passivity, and CSOs have not been the vehicles of choice for sustained participation for most. This suggests a disconnect between CSOs and citizens, and sounds an urgent warning to ensure that this experience, where the CSO model failed both as a vehicle for participation and as a bulwark against repressive governments, is not repeated in other parts of the world, such as the MENA countries.



## 4. TRENDS IN VOLUNTEERING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

This section provides an overview of initial findings from the 2008 to 2011 CSI on volunteerism, participation and governance. One area of focus of the CSI is the strength of participation, while a second is the health of CSOs. Both of these areas offer fresh information on aspects of the state of volunteering.

### TRUST

Encouragingly, in many countries, CSOs are recorded as enjoying higher levels of trust than the state and other public institutions. For example, in the Philippines “...there has been a generally positive association with civil society groups given the sector’s role in democratic restoration”, and in Guinea “the trust in civil society, and the track record it has begun to demonstrate over the last few years, proves that civil society is capable of acting more as a two-way interface between the government and the population.” However as mentioned above, there is also evidence from some countries, such as some ex-Soviet countries, of low levels of trust towards CSOs, where these were seen as an imported model. Trust is also consistently varied by organisation type, with environmental and women’s CSOs scoring strongly, while human rights CSOs tend to enjoy less public trust. In almost all countries, there is very high trust in religious institutions. Issues of trust appear to have some influence on levels of participation in civil society, but the significance and direction of that influence is generally context specific.

### EXTENT AND DEPTH OF VOLUNTEERING

There is powerful evidence from the CSI findings that people want to associate, improve social conditions and participate in civic life. Yet, it could also be said that they want to do so on their



own terms. Most notably, the public surveys undertaken as part of the CSI show consistently low levels of volunteering in the structures and activities of CSOs. The CSI makes a distinction between participation in socially-oriented CSOs, such as cultural, religious or sports associations, and politically-oriented CSOs such as advocacy groups, environmental and human rights CSOs, and trades unions. It therefore covers a wide range of CSO types beyond established, traditionally structured NGOs. However, although the research finds greater rates of volunteering in socially-oriented CSOs than politically-oriented ones, in both areas, levels of formal volunteering remain low globally at 25% and 14% of people respectively. Further, according to the CSI research, only 25% of those who volunteer in CSOs do so for more than one organisation.

## NON-FORMAL VOLUNTARY ACTION

Encouragement is however offered by other CSI findings on non-formal participation, which in the main show higher levels of participation in activities taking place outside the organisational sphere, for instance at community level, often around religious or cultural identities. In Jordan, for example, “people prefer to involve themselves in socially-based activities without being bound by an institutional framework”.

At this level people volunteer for each other’s activities, and this is often reciprocal and mutually supporting. Sometimes non-formal voluntary action is spontaneous, in response to significant events. The CSI reports capture several examples of such action being sparked as a response to experience of natural disasters.

“This was demonstrated in 2010 with the spontaneous voluntary response to the unprecedented summer fires in Russia... the rapid increase of such non-formal citizenship initiatives... demonstrates not only effective civil self-organisation, but also self-regulation and actual self-government... The atmosphere of working for a common cause was unique in modern Russia.”

As noted above, 2011 saw significant change in some MENA countries driven by a rise of mass-based citizen action. Yet it was in this region that the CSI reported the lowest levels of membership and volunteering in CSOs, suggesting that participation in CSOs is not by itself an accurate barometer of the potential for activism.

Turning to other forms of non-formal activism, many countries report a rise in mass demonstrations and other types of more spontaneous action. For example, the Venezuela CSI report notes that 3,297 demonstrations were held in 2009, and goes on to contrast this to the low rate of formal participation, suggesting that this indicates a lack of adequate institutional channels for dissent.

### CHILE: GROWING THE PROTEST FROM STUDENTS TO UNIONS

Education in Chile is mostly privately provided and expensive, with many educational establishments focussing on profit-making. Hence inequality in education is being deeply entrenched, and the quality of education is directly connected to family wealth. In response to this student protests began in May 2011, and almost 90% of the population has indicated in polls that they support the student protests. It is through the student movement, rather than established CSOs, that the population has become aware of what is happening and proposals for change.

While the student movement is entirely a voluntary force, the protests have since broadened, both in the participants, with increasing numbers of union members and teachers joining, and in the demands. Union officials estimate that 600,000 people were involved in protests in August.

Protestors are explicitly making a connection with demonstrations elsewhere, from Wall Street to Athens, with Chile’s student leaders travelling to Europe to seek solidarity. These connections have led many students in Chile to say that they now feel part of a wider, international expression of discontent. In Latin America, the ‘Chilean Winter’ has also inspired others to express dissent: in Colombia students have been spotted waving Chilean flags during marches.

The apparent trend of increased activism, often driven by rising food and fuel prices, poor public services, inequality and corruption, is also demonstrated by protests in such diverse places as Uganda, where a pressure group calling itself Activists for Change (A4C) organised mass “walk to work” marches designed to sidestep a ban on protests, and Chile (see box).

The implications for established CSOs are interesting and challenging. It suggests that in conditions where there is limited institutionalised civil society, participation and activism can find other forms. However, it also suggests there is a constituency, and potential social capital, ready to be mobilised which established CSOs have had limited contact with.

## CSO HUMAN RESOURCE BASES

### EPISODIC AND MICRO-VOLUNTEERING, AND ONLINE ACTIVISM

Whether it is formal or non-formal volunteering, a crucial element of voluntary action is that people act in ways that suit them best. For example, many CSI reports identify lack of time as a barrier to volunteering, yet there is also evidence that people are finding ways to break down voluntary action into manageable chunks.

Episodic or micro-volunteering consists of ‘small, quick, low commitment actions that benefit a worthy cause’ ([www.i-volunteer](http://www.i-volunteer)). The actions might be a task that could be accomplished as a whole unit from start to finish by one person within a short time period or it might be an action that could be broken down into its component parts where an individual is just one of many people performing part of task to achieve a result. The location could be a person’s own home through online volunteering, or a specific site, and similarly those who benefit from the voluntary act could be close to home or anywhere in the world, with interventions being anything from collecting a medical prescription or providing a micro loan to supporting an advocacy group.

One way that people are able to shape voluntary action to suit their own circumstances is through greater use of new technology and social media. An example of this is given in the Bulgaria CSI report:

“A new trend in civic engagement deserves attention. Some types of non-formal activism seem to enjoy larger public support than the traditional CSOs. The new faces of civil society (activist groups, such as students and environmentalists) and the faces of the transition (such as pensioners) represent a significant percentage of the whole... A positive case here is the change within Bulgaria’s environmental movement observed since the last phase of the CSI. It evolved from individual protests to an organised movement with political representation. It is based on voluntary actions, flash mobs, online mobilisation, online petitions and social networks, which ensure sustained individual civic engagement. Its supporters are primarily young, educated people who live in bigger cities.”

Evidence from UNV’s Online Volunteering service showcased at the 2011 CIVICUS World Assembly shows that online activism can be long-term as well as episodic. A large pool of volunteers, mostly from the global south (62% in 2010), provide technical expertise, project management, knowledge development, communications and networking assistance remotely to CSOs across the globe. This resource is flexible and fast, enhances organisational resource capacities, and extends networks.

The second way in which the CSI considers volunteering is by looking at the sustainability of CSO human resource bases. For example, in Morocco the view is that “voluntary work is crucial, especially since a vast majority of CSOs do not have any salaried employees. The development of civil society therefore strongly continues to rely on voluntary workers’ contributions. With CSOs lacking in their own financial resources, voluntary workers are a vital source to the development of civil society.” Likewise, in Zambia, 70% of CSOs surveyed report that they depend on volunteers to function.





While recognising volunteering in CSOs as a vital part of how civil society develops, refreshes and lives its values, as well as being essential for its daily work, the research suggests that many CSOs need a core of paid permanent staff to function adequately. The CSI considers an ideal scenario as one where no more than 75% of a CSO's human resource base is provided by volunteers. However, the findings show that only 10-30% of CSOs operate at this level, and between two-thirds and 90% rely on volunteers for more than 75% of their human resource capacity.

Despite their crucial role in maintaining the existence of CSOs, in many countries concern emerges about the quality and content of the volunteering experience being offered by CSOs. Volunteers are often seen to have low status within organisations, and receive limited training and support. For example, CSI consultations in Croatia highlighted the problem of limited capacity within organisations to accommodate and manage volunteers: "CSOs often lack good quality and sustainable programmes for volunteers and, as one participant noted, volunteers in an organisation need to be managed, someone has to organise their work, and organisations often lack human resources for that".

## THE LOCATION OF ORGANISED CIVIL SOCIETY

Concerns are also expressed in CSI reports that formal volunteering is more of an urban and elite phenomenon, with several national partners citing rural poverty and the location of many CSOs in urban centres as inhibitors of formal volunteerism. Many CSI reports show CSO centralisation in capital cities and weak connection between urban and rural CSOs. It can be argued that in many contexts CSOs merely reflect patterns of capital-centric state bureaucracies. Nevertheless, there have to be concerns about what this means and says about CSO values, areas of focus and leadership.

## DISCONNECTS AND GAPS

The CSI research tells us that the sources of participation may be traditional and conservative, for example, in community, village and faith structures, but that this overlooked, under-acknowledged civic participation should be seen as quietly generating social capital. Alongside this, there are the new forms of participation enabled by increasingly available technology and the rise of social networking. Both of these forms of association have one thing in common - they can bypass organisations as they are traditionally understood.

The CSI 2011 summary publication Bridging the Gaps concludes that there is:

"...nothing less than a participation deficit which undermines the credibility and reach of established CSOs. Could it be said that, with high levels of trust but low levels of participation, people want to believe in CSOs, but do not trust their reality? Perhaps it could even be said that citizens like the idea of civil society, certainly in contrast to their lived political reality, but experience a gap between their expectations and the organisations they come into contact with which are held to represent the sector. CSOs are emerging as not representing a satisfactory vehicle, as they stand, for participation and realisation of citizens' aspirations. People may be rejecting conventional politics, but they are not necessarily turning to find a home in CSOs.

A picture [emerges] from the CSI of CSOs as constrained, financially challenged, short-staffed and struggling to demonstrate impact. They are also facing challenges of perceptions of being urban, elitist, remote from people, and disconnected from



the values expected of them. A consistent portrait is emerging of two gaps: one between CSOs and other sectors, such as the state and the market, and one between CSOs and citizens. These invite us to question our assumptions about what CSOs can and cannot do, how they are organised and set themselves up, and what additional relationships and connections may be required.”



## 5. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

It should be clear that civil society means so much more than the traditional typology of NGOs and CSOs, and CSOs cannot be treated as a proxy for civil society in its entirety. One of the dangers of doing so is to fail to understand the richness of participation, and of people's motivations for participating.

CSI findings also suggest that the varied forms of participation and citizen action are presently amorphous and diffuse. As such, they cannot be considered to be achieving their full potential. And in the extreme case of a revolution, the question of what happens when euphoria fades and politics as usual attempts to reassert itself is critical, as the dismal experience of post-revolutionary Egypt in late 2011 suggests. Arguably, this is when effective, well-connected and legitimate CSOs are most urgently needed if they are to play a watchdog role over the new wielders of power, to ensure that change is progressive and transformative.

*"The most important point to come out of the CSI is that organised civil society is way behind those [participation trends and] processes – it cannot be activism as usual, we need to change, and we need the best policies, structures and governance."*

(Naidoo, K, 2011)

Given these various disconnects, and at the same time this wealth of non-formal and social volunteering, how can CSOs work to increase their and volunteers' impact, build synergies and mutual support for improved governance? What could CSOs do differently?

### OPPORTUNITIES

The findings suggest an opportunity to mobilise people from non-formal, localised types of participation into participation on a broader scale that makes a more significant impact on social change. The CSI research suggests that countries with high levels of non-formal associational activity are, in the main, countries that also show the higher levels of more formal activity, including volunteering. The implication seems clear: countries with a high level of non-formal, local volunteering have the widest pool to draw from for more organised, focused and change-oriented activity. This suggests there is potential to locate non-formal volunteering on a spectrum of participation in which people can be brought into more systematic and long-term CSO action.



By volunteering, people start on a pathway that can lead in many directions, with some individuals becoming more directly activist in nature... While social activists can play a major role in creating opportunities for people to get involved, thereby swelling the mobilisation of people, we also see the indispensable value of the work carried out by volunteers on the ground when they provide services, respond to moments of humanitarian crisis and generate the information on which social activism depends. (CIVICUS 2008)

Non-formal volunteers and activists may not see themselves as part of civil society, but it is up to civil society stakeholders to recognise that they are, and to find ways of being more inclusive. CSI research suggests that many CSOs are not currently connecting with and nurturing this constituency of potential social activists as well as they could.

So what is the case for trying to bridge these disconnects and gaps? Why should established CSOs consider increased engagement with non-formal volunteers and activists, and vice versa?

***What benefits could accrue for different stakeholders from closer collaboration?***

For civil society in general	For CSOs	For non-formal voluntary action
Better post-change outcomes	Enhanced inclusiveness	Policy support and access to government
Improved sustainability	Greater access to local intelligence, skills and established relationships	Access to organisational skills and experience
Greater exposure and promotion of core social values	Improved legitimacy and accountability	Less narrow groups, values and arenas
Larger scale, greater coordination and impact of citizen participation	Access to new ideas and energy from multi-generational volunteers	Improved legitimacy and accountability
Stronger, more inclusive communities	Flexibility	Opportunities to broaden and deepen individual participation

Discussion at the 2011 CIVICUS World Assembly on the ramifications of the Arab Spring, and lessons from previous experiences of people power and revolutions, highlight opportunities for, and benefits, from improved collaboration between non-formal citizen participation and organised civil society. For example, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Managing Director of the World Bank Group, Indonesia, highlighted learning from experience in Indonesia:

*“Toppling the unpopular leader is only the start”*

*“Revolution is anarchy, not democracy”*

*“Civil society needs to identify / map what institutions can help with what”*



*“There’s a window of opportunity when new governments want to be seen as credible and establish trust – don’t underestimate civil society power”*

*“You can get transparent government finances and processes but who can / will use the information?”*

*“Don’t pass problems to anyone else – civil society must keep ownership of change itself”*



Based on lessons from South Africa, Jay Naidoo, Former Minister for Reconstruction and Development, highlighted key issues around positive collaboration between CSOs, volunteers and activists, and warned organised civil society of the need to step up to the plate:

*“Are you leading the streets, or are the streets leading you?”*

*“It’s easier to fight for power than to exercise it”*

*“Social media are only tools – people and the organising of people remain central”*

*“Governance and leadership are key”*



More fundamentally, it could also be said that greater engagement with volunteers offers an opportunity for many CSOs to challenge and shift their existing power dynamics. CSOs often seek resources externally, with all the challenges of accountability and prioritisation towards donor and state funders rather than citizens that this can entail. At the same time many CSOs target state institutions as the main levers to achieve social and political change, with the risk that CSOs make diplomacy-driven compromises, distance themselves from citizens, or become vulnerable to accusations of clientelistic relationships. Both of these challenges could in some way be averted through a closer connection with those who CSOs are expected to serve and stand for - citizens - through an engagement with non-formal volunteers, both as a resource, enabling CSOs to become less reliant on the need for external funding, and as agents of change, seeking change through public mobilisation and the enabling of mass action.

*“We are operating in a very resource constrained environment, with CSOs worried about whether they will cease to exist soon. However, perhaps CSOs have their gaze wrong? We focus on the people in power, which sucks our energy. If we want change and to act, maybe we should be looking downwards? ... CSOs have become so dependent on funding, and not retaining the voluntary capacity is what’s killing them. ... Massive donor funding is now going into Tunisia, which will kill the activist spirit as everyone will want to be an NGO.” (K Naidoo, 2011)*

## CHALLENGES

But what are the challenges in bridging these disconnects? When is non-formal volunteering likely to remain that way, and what are some of the strengths of this? There will always be social relationships, community interaction, and therefore voluntary action, and there will always be non-formal voluntary action, which remains valuable. As mobile and social technology becomes an even more significant aspect of more people’s lives, there will inevitably be more remote or online relationships and voluntary action associated with these. Spontaneous protest will no doubt also remain as a non-formal means of self-expression and dissent. The challenge is of course not to formalise everything but to make connections which offer greater combined impact and more opportunities for sustainable voluntary action that drives positive social change.

In attempting to build bridges between CSOs and citizens, we need to consider the different characteristics, special natures and ways of working of various forms of participation. The danger is of inhibiting the energy, flexibility, and social capital-building abilities of non-formal participation. Instead, mechanisms need to be developed for mutual engagement and coexistence that provide a menu of different and flexible opportunities for citizens to participate in whatever way suits them.

However, non-formal space can be even more vulnerable, fragile and volatile than the formal space that organised civil society has managed to claim and defend. There are significant risks if the enabling environment for civil society and participation is weak, and if the fundamental human rights of freedom of expression, association and organisation are suppressed, as has been seen for example in 2011 in several countries when governments shut down communications services to try to limit dissent.

While formalising participation routes may help protect non-formal action, that same formalisation may also create limitations by requiring even loose groupings to formally register and adhere to burdensome rules. In short, there are trade-offs, and they need to be negotiated carefully so as to protect and nourish all forms of citizen engagement.

A final but key challenge to consider is how CSOs can satisfy the legitimacy, transparency and accountability demands so often made of the sector by funders and governments, while remaining nimble and flexible enough to better connect with and serve vibrant voluntary communities of activism?

A response to these challenges is to promote the notion of voluntary participation as a spectrum, and of civil society as a multi-stranded arena, while positioning CSOs as playing a continuing key role, as the organised, accountable face of civil society, but with greater emphasis on reaching out to latent activists and offering them easier pathways for participation and social activism.



## 6. POTENTIAL PATHWAYS FOR INCREASED PARTICIPATION THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

Having considered how volunteerism, and non-formal voluntary action in particular, can build participatory governance and strengthen citizen action, this section provides examples of some apparently new ways of working that seem to have produced positive outputs and which draw from varied strengths such as local community voluntary participation, new online activism and the institutionalised standing of CSOs. The examples illustrate how non-formal volunteerism can be engaged with and synergies achieved with organised civil society. Additionally, potential pathways to connect socially-oriented forms of volunteerism to more change-oriented expressions of civic activism are highlighted.

In general, the most successful participatory governance initiatives are seen to be those in which voluntary citizen action is at the centre and CSOs play an active enabling role, helping to:

- create spaces and mechanisms for citizen-state engagement;
- facilitate and mediate citizen-state relations;
- nurture political will for participatory governance approaches;
- strengthen the capacity of citizens to act and advocate on their own behalf.

*“For many CSOs, this implies working in a slightly different way - with less emphasis on being the advocate and increased emphasis on informing and empowering citizens, nurturing political will, and working with government counterparts to create spaces and mechanisms for systematic interaction with and accounting to citizens.”*  
(Malena 2011)

## COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN ESTABLISHED AND NON-FORMAL CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS

The following are examples of successful collaborations between formal and non-formal civil society groups for improved participation and governance.

### ESTONIA: TECHNOLOGY AND NETWORKING TO FACILITATE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

My Estonia offers one example of CSOs enabling non-formal citizen action. Following a one-day action in 2008 called 'Let's Do It!' when over 50,000 people volunteered to clean up over 10,000 tonnes of illegally dumped waste in just five hours, CSOs sought further opportunities to develop this latent activism.

In 2009, the Network of Estonia NGOs (NENO) helped create a new short-term network of CSOs, volunteers and community activists, together with IT and telecoms companies, which offered a strong IT platform for use by over 400 local citizens' groups to develop ideas for joint activity. These autonomous and independent groups had not existed before the My Estonia initiative, and they were able to use the platform to register their participation and focus on local issues through interactive mapping of their local communities.

Most communities have acted on at least some of the ideas generated in 2009. By providing and publicising opportunities for engagement that enabled village-level citizens' think tanks to be initiated, formal CSOs have created a bridge for more active citizenship and social capital building, without creating a new organisation or over formalising matters.

### NORWAY: PROVIDING THE ENVIRONMENT AND SPACE FOR INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION

Norway has a huge array of social, cultural, religious, and sporting organisations that people participate in, and these also provide opportunities for people to act more politically through both formal and non-formal voluntary action. The Association of NGOs in Norway, Frivillighet Norge supports the latent activism and power of these groups that mostly comes to the fore for local issues but also can respond to national threats, such as Norway's 2011 experience of domestic terrorism. While social and cultural groups may not make explicit reference to politics in their governing documents, they can utilise the trust in the group and the space this creates to act politically. A church choir might become active in response to a threat to withdraw public transport on which they rely, or a theatre group may make political choices in the themes and content of the material they perform.

In the aftermath of the July 2011 terrorist attack in Norway, a remarkable moment occurred. Citizens took to the streets carrying flowers to demand that their open and tolerant society remained that way, with no new restrictions being imposed in reaction to the attacks. An estimated one third of Oslo's 600,000 population voluntarily participated. Based on previous experience of CSOs facilitating peaceful demonstrations and the trust in CSOs this had developed, the government allowed the protests to take place if CSOs acted as organisers and stewards. Trust in CSOs and their proven capacity to organise were essential for enabling many thousands of citizens to participate constructively.





## INDIA: COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING, TECHNICAL KNOW-HOW, AND ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT

Like the capacity-building that was achieved through open space technologies in Estonia, an example from India shows how local volunteers and citizens can be supported by CSOs to participate in governance processes on an independent and sustainable basis.

Samadhan Citizens Action for Governance is a new initiative to strengthen governance accountability by bringing citizens and government together through the use of technology. It is supported by a citizens' monitoring hub (CMH), delivered jointly by South Orissa Voluntary Action, VSO India, the UN Millennium Campaign and the Government of Orissa.

Samadhan bridges formal and non-formal action that strengthens the voice of poor and marginalised citizens in development processes through:

- Mobilising 900 community volunteers from all the 226 village-level local administrative bodies in Koraput district.
- Training volunteers on the technology interface, along with other skills including community mobilisation and leadership.
- Disseminating information on MDG-related rights to the poor and marginalised
- Mobilising citizens to participate in governance and development processes by using text and voice technology.
- Advocating for the rights of poor and marginalised people to ensure they receive their entitlements and quality of service delivery.

Besides the ability to register and track a complaint through SMS, Samadhan's distinguishing features include geographical mapping of complaints, making it possible to identify the location of a complaint, and the ability to analyse data and information to allow citizens, CSOs, government and media to highlight systemic challenges in public service delivery. Since Samadhan is an open-access platform, information on complaints is in the public domain and can be viewed easily. It can therefore be seen to be offering a platform, supported by CSOs, government and multilateral agencies, to encourage voluntary action and directly link this to social accountability.

## LESSONS FROM MASS PROTEST

Recent mass protest movements have added additional dimensions to participatory governance by developing social relationships and mechanisms into more change-oriented voluntary action; creating loose but powerful networks; and using social media and public spaces

For instance, alongside protests in response to economic crisis in Iceland (see below), disenfranchised people in Iran took to the streets over disputed election results in 2009, and although protest was bloodily suppressed, it can be seen to have inspired the Arab Spring of 2011, which in turn fed the protests which have taken place in many countries during 2011.

The 15 October Global Day of Action protests in more than 950 cities in 82 countries brought together many of the mass protests of 2011 and earlier. Many of the protests showed bridging between social networks and some formal CSOs, such as NGOs, unions and community groups, thereby offering frustrated citizens a semi-organised means of participation, and a feeling of empowerment to act collectively on their grievances.



## OCCUPY: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LINKING THROUGH PUBLIC SPACE, SOCIAL MEDIA AND CO-BRANDING

Occupy Wall Street, which started in the United States on 17 September 2011, explicitly takes inspiration from the Arab Spring, with organisers asking US citizens “are you ready for a Tahrir moment?”<sup>4</sup> and committing to use the “revolutionary Arab Spring tactic” to achieve their goals of curbing corporate power and inequality.<sup>5</sup> Initiated by Canadian activist group Adbusters, the movement also draws inspiration from the Spanish Indignados (mass protests, begun mostly by young people frustrated by high unemployment, that broadened to include over 6.5 million citizens and union members in at least 58 cities).

By 9 October Occupy protests had taken place in over 95 cities across 82 countries and in over 600 communities in the USA. In addition to the use of web technologies and social media to mobilise and organise, and brand and make connections between different protests, the movement is also attempting to practise direct democracy, with many of the movement’s decisions taken by working groups composed of whoever turns up, with more important decisions taken at general assemblies.

Such movements also operate without traditional donor funding, with active people tending to donate time and expertise, and large amounts of others donating small amounts of money or in kind support, highlighting the power of non-formal voluntary action to circumvent traditional resource constraints that hamper civil society.

4 <http://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-blog/occupywallstreet.html>

5 <http://occupywallst.org/>

The above examples show that levels of volunteerism are not necessarily universally low, and there are ways of realising the potential for voluntary action around flashpoints, and key moments which involve both organised civil society and citizens together.



## 7. OPTIONS AND ISSUES FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

Between them, the examples in this publication demonstrate a rich variety of options and potential models for connecting non-formal and formal voluntary action, and for connecting between social and more change-oriented action. To stimulate discussion further, the following options and issues are offered for consideration.

### SPACE, MOBILISING AND NETWORKING

Expanding opportunities for citizen activism is a key CSO role, and CSOs have benefits to offer the less organised and non-formal parts of civil society, such as policy support and access to decision-makers, but, as discussed earlier, some possibilities are being missed. Lessons from experiences of significant social and political change suggest that the formal organisation and policy support of CSOs can be crucial for ensuring that gains achieved by citizens through mobilising dissent are not lost. Effective broad-based coalitions, which often work best when forming around a particular interest, perhaps temporarily, offering different roles at different moments for different actors, are one way forward.

Potential does not exist only in post-revolutionary or post-political change contexts. There are also opportunities to support non-formal volunteerism in less turbulent circumstances. For example, CSOs can advise, link and network local groups to strengthen their action, and CSOs and local activists can draw from the things people are passionate about to broaden and deepen active citizenship, and also strengthen civil society sustainability. In exchange, CSOs are likelier to be recipients of local intelligence, and be able to draw more on local skills and trusted relationships. Additionally, by connecting with the passion and energy of citizens, CSOs can build their own reach and advocacy power.

## BUILDING BRIDGES WITH FAITH ORGANISATIONS

Building bridges with faith organisations and structures can provide an excellent opportunity for widening voluntary participation and improving governance, as faith structures often provide protected space that can be used for discussion of social issues and act as mobilisers of participation and generators of social capital. Faith-based organisations have played a role in every successful social movement and there is evidence from a range of countries, including difficult contexts such as Zimbabwe and pre-change Libya, that governments tend to respect more and interfere less with faith-based institutions.

One way of improving participation in governance is for CSOs to mobilise more active citizens and volunteers. The challenge here is not just to increase the overall numbers of volunteers, but also to expand participation in voluntary action which is change-oriented. This could be done by:

- engaging the 'buffer groups' – those people currently taking part in non-formal types of association, participation and activism outside the formal structures or those with the potential to do so (i.e. not those who form the core of civil society or those who are not prepared to engage in civil society, but those in the middle, who have some engagement but perhaps lack knowledge about structures and opportunities for participation);
- offering expanded options for participation to attract and accommodate a broader range of volunteers - especially women, young and retired people - and widely publicising these.

## EGYPT: DEVELOPING THE SOCIAL TO POLITICAL THROUGH THE POWER OF NETWORKS, SOCIAL MEDIA AND PUBLIC SPACE

"If we learned anything from the Arab revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt it was the power of networks. People did not assemble in the streets to espouse their political views nor to demonstrate solidarity with political parties or the gatekeepers they trusted. Instead, they mobilised for two other reasons, the first being the pain they shared due to difficult socio-economic conditions, political deprivations, corruption, and social repressions that are ubiquitous among most Arab countries and represent the motivating factors for these revolutionary actions. The second reason, as important as the first, is the flow of networks to which people belong: networks of friends, family, work, school, [faith] and others of interest (e.g. the media). These networks create a space for interaction and strong reciprocity. The Arab movements proved the motivating power of social relations for social activism... Members of networks created revolutionary content on their mobiles and digital media, and they distributed this same content to their friends, families, and members of other networks... Suddenly, old and young found or discovered themselves to be both patriotic and in revolt. Some did so through the power of the communication technologies they used for informing and freeing themselves; others by responding to the call for taking to the streets." (Allagui and Kuebler 2011)

A key way of building synergies between formal and non-formal voluntary action is through the promotion of both structured and less formal networking opportunities at the same time. Organised and non-formal civil society groups could better achieve their aims and ensure they are sufficiently engaged with the social and political issues of most importance to citizens by networking to establish relationships and build trust that can be called on and used in future. Options could include CSOs identifying groups of relevance to themselves, especially those which offer something complementary; building broader constituencies around a common issue; and promoting alliances between networks of 'on the ground' volunteers and service-users, and advocacy organisations.

## TECHNOLOGY

Many of the examples show that increased and improved use of information and communications technology (ICT) is one of the most important mechanisms for bridging gaps between CSOs and citizens, and better connecting formal and non-



formal voluntary action. ICT is changing how views are expressed and heard, creating new online space for the expression and organisation of dissent and participation, and challenging the very notions of what civil society is and how it works. ICT can help CSOs to share policy-related information; support local action, citizen monitoring and social accountability; publicise opportunities for participation; campaign; network; and deliver capacity building activities. The note of caution here is that CSOs should ensure they make use of the technologies and online spaces that their communities are using, and be careful not to exacerbate digital divides, such as those between urban elites and rural poor.

## SUSTAINABILITY

While the sustainability of volunteering in CSOs is called into question by CSI findings, non-formal volunteerism presents both an opportunity and a challenge for sustainability. The opportunity is offered by its ability to build social capital, and utilise ICTs, across almost all parts of every community, that can help sustain civil society as a whole. However, due to its lack of formal organisation, the short-lived nature of much activity, a constantly changing supply of volunteers, and the vulnerability of the space it occupies, there are significant challenges for the sustainability of non-formal volunteerism. As much is done in relatively small and irregular chunks of time and activity, it is also difficult to monitor and demonstrate impact. Added to this, the ability of non-formal volunteerism to sustain the long-term advocacy effort that is necessary to achieve sustained change is also questionable.

All of this points to the need to more effectively link formal and non-formal volunteerism so that civil society as a whole becomes stronger than its constituent parts. From CSOs' perspectives, they would gain greater access to the pool of non-formal volunteers, including young people with new ideas and energy, and techniques for using ICTs. In exchange, CSOs could assert pressure on decision-makers to fully recognise, protect and promote non-formal volunteerism. All parts of civil society need to work together to improve volunteer management to ensure sustainability.

## ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

"Participation helps foster trust and accountability between citizens and states, while creating the conditions for social inclusion and the achievement of national development goals". (CIVICUS, 2008) For this and many other reasons, governments can and should play a key role in improving participation in governance. For example, governments can:

- ensure policy frameworks and legislation are in place to promote and protect civil society and formalise space for both formal and non-formal voluntary action;
- make certain civil society has a full stakeholder role, and that participatory governance methodologies are fully adopted, including in post-crisis settings, at all levels of government;
- support the delivery of civic education and capacity building for active citizenship through both civil society and public education channels;
- assist dissemination of information about opportunities for participation in participatory governance processes, and through CSOs and non-formal volunteerism, so that citizens are properly informed;
- support volunteerism award and recognition programmes.

## ICELAND: NEW MODELS OF PARTICIPATION AND INNOVATIVE USES OF ICTS

The Icelandic protests occurred in the wake of the country's financial crisis where the stock exchange, currency and banks crashed in October 2008.

Concerned with the state of the economy, Hördur Torfason staged a one man protest in a main public square and invited people to speak. The following Saturday a more organised demonstration occurred, and participants established Raddirfólksins (Voices in Action), which then met every Saturday in the public square until March 2009 when their desire for the government to step down was achieved.

In January 2009 the protests intensified, with demonstrators banging pots and honking horns to disrupt parliament and demand early elections, which were held in April 2009. The Citizens' Movement, formed after the January 2009 protests, won four seats.

Parallel to the protests and parliamentary process, citizens developed their own discussion forums, including a national citizens' assembly, organised in November 2009 by a group of grassroots movements called the Anthill group, with most participants chosen at random.

Taking its cue from protests and lobbying efforts by CSOs, the new coalition government agreed that Iceland's citizens should be involved in creating a new constitution.

In June 2010 parliament passed the Constitutional Act which created a forum that brought 950 random participants together to prepare a document that would form the basis for constitutional changes. A seven-person Constitutional Committee, appointed by parliament, supervised the forum, while organisation and facilitation was undertaken by the Anthill group.

The process continued with the election in October 2010 of 25 people of no party affiliation to the Constitutional Council, which was ordered to draw on the results of the forum, and to advertise extensively for proposals from the public. The Council made heavy use of social media and adopted a wiki approach to enable people to directly work on the constitution's draft. This generated ideas such as the public ownership of Iceland's natural resources, information rights, and an attempt to enshrine parliament's role in the supervision of financial management.

On 29 July 2011 the draft of the new constitution was presented to parliament, prior to a proposed public vote alongside the presidential elections in June 2012.



## 8. CONCLUSIONS

This publication has identified a need for new responses, driven by lessons from recent mass citizen actions, the CSI research findings and trends in volunteerism, and has suggested possible pathways for strengthening both non-formal voluntary action and organised civil society.

It has shown that civil society means so much more than NGOs and CSOs, and proposed the notion of participation as a spectrum, with civil society as a multi-stranded arena, but one in which CSOs play a continuing vital role as the organised, accountable face of civil society. However, CSOs must also build closer connections with those they are assumed to serve and stand for, citizens, who are both a resource and invaluable agents of change. Also required is a greater emphasis on reaching out to latent activists to strengthen non-formal voluntary citizen action; achieving synergies between this and organised civil society; and enabling social forms of volunteerism to grow into more change-oriented expressions of civic activism.

Examples of bridging between socially-oriented and change-oriented, and non-formal and formal voluntary action, have demonstrated the viability of flexible, collaborative working based on loose networks, but it has also been highlighted that non-formal space is delicate and evolving, and requires a sensitive touch and engagement that respects the particularities of any situation. Furthermore, a range of mechanisms for selective engagement and coexistence between the formal and non-formal have been suggested that provide different ways to engage.

To conclude, the following are suggested principles for civil society practitioners to connect formal and non-formal voluntary action appropriately and better:

- consider which timescales and mechanisms are most appropriate for any particular country or organisational context
- be motivating, empowering and inclusive
- do not squash citizen action through over-formalisation or trying to assert too much control
- assess and work with the technological tools and spaces that people are already using
- focus on processes which build trust
- build in flexibility
- consider the roles formalised CSOs can play in addressing legitimacy, transparency and accountability issues.

Although the latter principles can be seen as a work in progress, to be tested and developed in future collaborations, the benefits of bridging disconnects and gaps, and the wide range of opportunities that have been identified, offer positive and under-explored paths in our shared quest for broader volunteerism and participation, better outcomes and impact, and more positive social and political change.

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