2 juni 2021

Dear partners and friends!

It is a great pleasure to provide you with the first edition of the Strengthening Civil Society Newsletter! The objective of this newsletter is to share information and ideas between all partners and colleagues involved in the implementation of the policy framework Strengthening Civil Society that started this year. We hope the newsletters will foster interlinkages and dialogue, and inspire us all.

Our common work on strengthening civil society is more urgent than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased shrinking of civic space and accelerated prevailing inequalities
and injustices. Freedom of association, assembly and expression are being curtailed, often by covert or overt violence. By combining efforts of civil society organisations, academia and the diplomatic community we can and need to push back, now and in the years to come.

At the Ministry we are developing a variety of activities that will help us on this journey: Dialogue sessions, a podcast series, internal and external meetings, learning events and a research programme. During this year you will hear more about these initiatives. We will also keep you updated on how we connect internationally: in the UN, the EU, OECD-DAC, the Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment, Community of Democracies and bilaterally. This newsletter will also introduce you to our knowledge partners that could offer support to your partnerships. There is much going on!

As diplomats we aim to be real partners in the partnerships: Providing added value with our tools and instruments to the important and often challenging work of activists in civil society. Activists that try to make our world a better place, that have the courage to stand up for those excluded, discriminated or marginalized, that are watchdogs to ensure the protection of human rights, that fight for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

We might not always succeed, we might be discouraged now and then, we might even disagree the coming years. Our aim is however to build up our partnerships together and provide a space where we can openly discuss our work and the opportunities and challenges that come with it, each from our own roles. A space where people feel comfortable enough to share.

This newsletter will hopefully find its place in this space for exchange. I hope you enjoy this modest first edition. I encourage you to provide us with your comments, input and ideas for the next newsletters. We send this letter to the first contact person of the consortia. Feel free therefore to forward these newsletter to all your consortium members and civil society allies.

Looking forward to working together with you!

On behalf of all involved at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Jeroen Kelderhuis
Head Civil Society and Education Division
In the spotlight: Knowledge partner CIVICUS

Kick-off: Power of Women

Dialogue Session: Southern Leadership and Local Ownership

Get to know: SRHR knowledge partner Share-Net

Communication shout-out: #KeepingUpWithOurPartners

Check it Out

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In the spotlight: Knowledge partner CIVICUS

The Netherlands is a committed donor of CIVICUS and the International-Center for Not-for Profit Law (ICNL) since 2016. We perceive them as two of our core knowledge and civil society strengthening power houses needed to protect civic space. They can support partners with advice and capacity building multilaterally and in the countries.

CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organizations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world. ICNL works to improve the legal environment for civil society, philanthropy and public participation around the world. Their websites contain reports, resources and toolkits concerning diverse topics related to strengthening civil society, such as trends affecting civic space, impact of tech, advocacy, stakeholder engagement, accountability, data and financial planning. Pleased to introduce to you this newsletter, the Secretary General of CIVICUS, Lysa John.

Lysa John, Secretary General – CIVICUS

www.civicus.org | @lysajohnCIVICUS

My name is Lysa John and I would describe myself, first and foremost, as an activist who has spent 27 years studying about and working towards democracy & human rights - the two principles that truly define progressive and humane societies. Currently, I have the privilege of serving one of the largest civic alliances in the world: CIVICUS, which has over 12,000 members across 175 countries, who represent many and diverse aspects of citizen action and civil society.
The nature of civic space has changed significantly since the start of the pandemic. The CIVICUS Monitor, which systematically tracks the status of fundamental freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly across countries, has shown that even in established democracies, governments have used the pandemic to disproportionately curtail fundamental freedoms.

We publish an annual State of Civil society report which is in its 10th edition this year. These reports have helped us analyse trends in civic action and social movements across the past decade. One indication that I find most inspiring in this regard is that social movements are more diverse, more connected and more mainstreamed than ever before.

At CIVICUS we believe that every country must put in place the infrastructure and investment needed for a strong, well-networked and fully empowered civil society. People of all ages and affiliations should have the means and resources to actively understand, influence and engage with public policies.

The old playbook of leadership that thrives on fear, hierarchy and control is, without a doubt, hopelessly insufficient today. 21st century activism is complex, persistent and all-pervasive; and governments will have to reinvent themselves to be more open, accountable, people-centered in the coming years.

Find more information on how the work of Civicus and ICNL could support you:

CIVICUS Monitor
New State of Civil Society Report 2021
International Centre for Non-Profit Law
ICNL COVID-19 Civic freedom tracker
Kick-off: Power of Women

Ready to start with your programme and highly motivated to strengthen women’s rights? Don’t forget to invest in a good working relationship. Read more about the Power of Women kick-off on the 11th of March and get inspired!

In times of COVID-19 it is more difficult to get to know each other well. Travel restrictions make it impossible to meet physically and having only online contact can create social distance. This while a good relationship, trust, and confidence are crucial components for a well-functioning strategic partnership.

During the informal and creative kick-off of Power of Women, the partners of the 7 Power of Women programmes and the focal points in the ministry got to know each other well through all kinds of questions and exercises. Central themes were ‘what do we have in common, what are our why’s, who are we at work and at play’. Inspiring and funny stories were shared, which led to a safe and familiar environment. Consortium partners were also invited to buddy up with partners of another consortium to jointly formulate one question for the learning agenda in the area of gender equality. A few of the comments during the meeting we are taking with us:

'It already feels like a family.'
‘Be conscious of the other consortium partners and keep our synergies in the frame as we focus on strengthening our own consortium.’

‘I get so much energy from sharing motivations with others.’

‘It would be great to have a platform where we can connect, share, learn from each of our programmes.’

We would like to encourage all partners to pay extra attention to the working relationship and to be mindful of synergies with other programmes. The Power of Women kick-off reminded us that information about each other’s background is a good starting point for a respectful, successful, and fruitful collaboration.

Ready to start?

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Dialogue Session: Southern Leadership and Local Ownership

As you are setting up your programmes, many of you might be faced with questions such as how to give shape to decision-making processes, how to address existing biases, how to
ensure a safe space for dialogue or how to express disagreement within your consortium or with external partners or funders. In order to start the programmes from the local context and with the greatest legitimacy, it is important to tackle these questions. In every partnership or collaboration, power dynamics play an important role in decision making processes or funding streams. However, these power dynamics do not have to remain undiscussed. We believe that by listening and learning from each other we can create positive changes in these power dynamics, and drastically improve our effectivity, complementarity and collaboration. Therefore in June, the Department for Social Development organizes an online dialogue session on this topic for all actors involved in the policy framework Strengthening Civil Society.

These dialogues will be held twice a year and not only serve as an opportunity to connect the global network of actors under this policy framework, but predominantly as a way to learn from each other by building on our collective knowledge, different perspectives and experiences with regards to the core elements underlying strengthening civil society. In this first dialogue, we intend to bring the key concepts of (local) ownership and shifting power dynamics to the forefront of the discussion and exchange on the roles, opportunities and challenges for each of us in shifting power dynamics. We hope the dialogue will build upon existing conversations, questions and insights, and as such will foster fruitful and equal partnerships.

We cannot wait to see you in June!

© Picture: Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Bonnie Dubois
Get to know: SRHR knowledge partner Share-Net

This year, seven sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) partnerships have joined the SCS policy framework. For these, Share-Net Netherlands will function as the knowledge partner. Share-Net Netherlands is part of Share-Net International, a knowledge platform on SRHR with established country hubs in four countries and three more starting up. Share-Net Netherlands has evolved into a platform with Communities of Practice on more than 17 SRHR topics. It focuses on strengthening knowledge in order to develop evidence-based policies and practice, and ensuring that resources are used strategically and to maximum effect.

For the partners, this SRHR-specific learning trajectory may help in discussing and exchanging experiences and learnings in the field. Representatives of each partnership have had a first meeting in mid-April to discuss the process and plans, and will continue to meet three times a year, addressing issues such as harmful social norms, dealing with opposition, creating youth-led advocacy and working together.

A kick-off event with new and previous SRHR partnerships took place on May 20, opened by ambassador Pascale Grotenhuis. To celebrate the results of the previous partnerships, Share-Net is currently hosting an online gallery with results and stories from the SRHR partnerships. If your partnerships is working on SRHR or gender in Jordan, Bangladesh, Burundi, Ethiopia,
Burkina Faso or Colombia, it is good to know that Share-Net country hubs are active in these countries.

For more information see: https://share-net.nl/ and https://share-netinternational.org/

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Communication shout-out: #KeepingUpWithOurPartners

As civil society and civic freedoms are under pressure worldwide, it’s time to build on a strong narrative. We would like to invite you to take the public on a story-telling journey on your small and large victories during the coming years. To raise extra awareness on your impact under the partnerships and the pivotal role of civil society, we are launching a new hashtag for our communication channels: #KeepingUpWithOurPartners. We will regularly place a different partnership in the spotlight.

Are you ready to shine? Please share (1) a tweet or Instagram-text and (2) rights-free visual material on your steps made, challenges faced and successes achieved to powerofvoices@minbuza.nl.
Do you have news about events on youth related issues that deserve coverage, interesting updates, personal stories or surprising (good) examples of projects on Youth, Education and Work? Please reach out to us! If you have youth-related news you’d like to share with a wider audience, we may include such stories on the Youth At Heart website.

Follow, like and share our Twitter channels and new Instagram page of Ambassador for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality and Director Social Development:

**Instagram:**
Ministry of Foreign Affairs: [@MinBZ](https://www.instagram.com/minbz/)
Ambassador for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality: [@Nlambassadorgenderequality](https://www.instagram.com/nlambassadorgenderequality/)
Ambassador for Youth, Education and Work: [@TijmenRooseboom](https://www.instagram.com/tijmenrooseboom/)

**Twitter:**
Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: [@DutchMFA](https://twitter.com/DutchMFA)
Minister of Foreign Affairs & Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation: [@ministerBZ](https://twitter.com/ministerBZ)
Civil Society Division: [@NLcivilsociety](https://twitter.com/NLcivilsociety)
Taskforce on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality: [@NLwomensrights](https://twitter.com/NLwomensrights)
Ambassador for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality: [@PMGrotenhuis](https://twitter.com/PMGrotenhuis)
Ambassador for Youth, Education and Work: [@Tijmenrooseboom](https://twitter.com/tijmenrooseboom)

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**Check it Out**

**Media:**
- **Podcast:** To seek new ways of engagement and learning, we have started a podcast series focusing on the core elements at the basis of strengthening civil society. You’ll hear the voices, experiences and opinions of academics, diplomats and activists. To what extent is civic space shrinking or shifting? What does this mean for activists on the frontline? And how could the international community influence this downward spiral? Join Jeroen Kelderhuis in the first episode of this podcast with UN special rapporteur Clement Voué, Secretary-General of CIVICUS Lysa John, expert researcher on civic space Thomas Carothers, and Egyptian gender and women’s rights activist Mai Abdel Hafez. Available on [Spotify](https://open.spotify.com/album/4YBtBQ3aEYuQWjZ5lmgw4Q) and [Apple Music](https://www.apple.com/music/).
- **5 tips for gender-sensitive online consultations:** The COVID-outbreak has drastically impacted peacebuilding approaches and accelerated the shift towards digital consultation. International Alert has created a helpsheet to support peacebuilding organisations, practitioners and networks to design online consultations in a way that mitigates some key gender and inclusivity challenges that are unique to the online world. Interested? Check it out via [this link](https://www.internationalalert.org/downloads/)!
• Development Aid Portal 2020: Are you curious to know what the Netherlands has achieved with Dutch development cooperation on strengthening civil society in 2020? Please visit the Development Aid Portal via this link and click here for the video message of Director General of International Cooperation Kitty van der Heijden!

Events:
• Dialogue Session: Southern Leadership and Local Ownership: On June 17, a dialogue amongst all actors involved in the policy framework Strengthening Civil Society will take place. You should have received a separate invite email for this event.

• DAC Civil Society Days: Join donors, civil society and governments from around the world to reflect on current challenges, drawing attention to the need for action to enable civil society to respond to crises and development needs, and for transformed and more effective partnerships with civil society. DSO will engage in a workshop on local leadership. We hope to see you there! Register to the high-level event ‘A Call to action: Enabling civil society in the context of Covid-19’ on 4 June and the technical workshop ‘Building forward better together: finding solutions to enable civil society’ on 2 June. Invitations to other meetings scheduled during the CSDs will be sent to relevant participants soon.

• SRHR and COVID-19: Inspiration for messaging: SRHR knowledge partner Share-Net invites you to the upcoming virtual meeting on SRHR messaging. Join the Community of Practice on SRHR Messaging on June 3rd, 2021 at 14.00 CET, as they present their recent knowledge product, SRHR & COVID-19: Inspiration for Messaging. Register here.

Do you have a link, resource or event that you would like to have included in our newsletter? Don’t hesitate to reach out if you want to share something in the next newsletter, which will be send around September!
Disclaimer: All rights reserved. We respect your privacy in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). You can unsubscribe from this newsletter by sending an email to DSO@minbuza.nl.

Colofon: Department for Social Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (DSO@minbuza.nl)