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Navigating the Shrinking Space for Civil Society

Problems and Solutions from the Field

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Acronyms

CO	NCA country office
CIDSE	Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité
CSO	Civil Society organization
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
INGO	International non-governmental organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SCS	Civil Society

Introduction

The shrinking space for civil society

In the last decades, there has been a global trend towards a shrinking space for civil society (SCS) and civil society organizations (CSOs). Political opposition to SCS and its work, new legal obstacles, funding restrictions, and even physical attacks are some of the many threats that are increasingly restricting SCS from operating freely. In many parts of the world, speaking out on sensitive topics is becoming increasingly dangerous for SCS actors. Stricter regulations, laws, and requirements for funding has also it much more difficult for SCS and CSOs to operate and work towards their mission. This trend is widely recognized by governments, international organizations, NGOs, and donors alike. In their 2019 report, CIVICUS considered that the space for SCS was ‘under serious attack’ in 111 countries.¹

Between 2016 and 2019, NCA saw a rapid shrinking of the space for their partners in many parts of the world. Many governments became less tolerant of critical voices, restricted the access of SCS, and imposed new laws and regulations to limit their freedoms. The result of these changes is that the important functions performed by SCS become threatened as well, such as holding governments to account and defending human rights.²

Although the reasons behind this trend vary from country to country, many observers see it as a reaction to the expansion of support for civil society, human rights defenders and democracy advocates, particularly in the 1990’s. Partly as result of this expansion, authoritarian governments have pushed back against what they perceived as a threat, and

what is often blamed as interference by foreign governments. As a the EU report Shrinking Space for Civil Society put it:³

‘Most often, the closing space is the result of a combination of defensiveness and proactive assertiveness on the part of regimes – a curious mix of strength and weakness, of confidence and paranoia.’

Regardless of the underlying reasons, perhaps the most concerning aspect of this trend is that appears to be getting worse over time.⁴ A 2018 survey of 89 NGOs and INGOs by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) found that 53% of respondents considered that closing space challenges for civil society had ‘increased substantially’ in recent years (the highest score possible in the survey question).⁵

As pointed out in a report by the ACT Alliance and Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (CIDSE),⁶ *‘the picture, however, is not entirely negative.’* In response to this shrinking space, SCS has invented new and innovative strategies to meet these challenges. International organizations, NGOs, and donors have also increasingly responded to this trend by devoting more resources to protecting and expanding the space for civil society. As a result, although the threats facing SCS are greater than before, so is the capacity of SCS and their supporters to meet these threats.

¹ CIVICUS and Pousadela 2019, 6

² NCA’s Norad Results 2016-2019, p.43

³ Youngs Richard and Echagüe Ana 2017, 12

⁴ For more details on the trend of shrinking space for civil society, see: Trócaire 2012, Carothers and

Brechenmacher 2014, Youngs Richard and Echagüe Ana 2017.

⁵ International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) 2019, 1

⁶ ACT and CIDSE 2014

Aims

For NCA, the strengthening of SCS is a key strategy to achieve lasting change in all aspects of its work. NCA also sees SCS as crucial to preventing conflict and sustaining peace. This is central to NCA's strategy on peacebuilding, in particular sub-goal number five in NCA's programme framework 2020 – 2030, called **Protection of Social Action for Peace**. NCA's teams and their partners around the world experience the threats facing SCS first-hand. They therefore have a good understanding of the challenges facing SCS, and what actions need to be taken in response. However, NCA's country offices (COs) have highlighted the need for more training and technical resources that can help them navigate these challenges. This is the main goal of this report.

This report gathers the experiences and lessons learned from NCA COs, partners, and sister organizations, as well as expertise from other actors working on similar issues. With this, the aim is to present a practical report to understanding and navigating the threats facing CSOs, which can help the NCA and their partners in their mission. In summary, the goals of this report can be summarized as:

1. Understanding and diagnosing the threats faced by the NCA and their partners
2. Suggesting tools, strategies and resources to navigate and manage these threats

Structure of this report

This report is structured in four main sections that each deal with the different kinds of threats facing CSOs and how these can be managed:

1. Political opposition (p.3): section 1 discusses restrictions and challenges imposed by political actors such as governments, opposition groups and other actors.

2. Legal threats (p.8): section 2 discusses legal obstacles to CSOs, such as NGO laws, regulations on CSOs, and restriction on press freedom.
3. Physical threats and intimidation (p.11): section 3 discusses physical threats, such as attacks or kidnappings, as well as intimidation.
4. Economic threats (p.15): the final section discusses restrictions on the funding of CSOs, particularly foreign funding.

Each section draws from interviews with **6 NCA COs in: The DRC, Tanzania, Palestine, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan**. These COs were chosen to provide a representative sample of the diversity of topics that the NCA engages in, the regional contexts in which they work, as well as the different challenges they are faced with.

Throughout this report, each section highlights the various challenges the COs and their partners have faced, what strategies they have adopted in response, and what lessons can be learned from them. Each section also includes resources and best-practices from NCA partners and other actors working with SCS actors. **In particular, the NCA draws on the expertise of their sister organizations in the ACT Alliance, and their newly formed task group *Shrinking Space for Civil Society*.** See appendix 1 for an overview of the key informants behind this report. Appendix 2 includes an overview of additional resources that readers can use to find more information on various topics. Finally, appendix 3 includes a list of rapid response mechanisms that can be used by SCS actors.

1. Political opposition

How political groups limit the space for civil society

Many governments and political groups have become increasingly critical towards CSOs and their supporters. This growing opposition is one of the main causes behind the shrinking space for civil society seen around the world. This opposition manifests itself in different ways, from strict regulation, intolerance to criticism, or harsh fines and punishments, to attacks on the reputation, rights, and even physical security of SCS and their partners. Political opposition may therefore in many cases lie behind the other threats to SCS that will be discussed in this report. Beyond navigating the *official* laws and regulations, however, SCS actors and their partners often have to navigate the *unofficial* political realities, such as: what topics are seen as sensitive; which government institutions and political officials you can cooperate with and how; as well as how political leaders can be influenced and held to account. The problem of how to navigate local political realities was a very common topic raised by NCA COs interviewed for this report, and something that they all have to navigate to some extent.

Although political positions vary, it is clear that issues related to rights and freedoms are those generating the most opposition towards SCS and their supporters. The recent UN report 'Civil Society Space' (2020, p. 9) describes how restrictions on SCS mostly target the rights of women, young people, sexual and reproductive rights defenders, as well as freedoms of expression and press, particularly against reporting on counter-terrorism activities and LGBTQ rights. An EU report⁷ noted that opposition to 'political' topics such as democracy and human rights had led donors to shift focus to less sensitive, development

related issues. In authoritarian states, or in states where the opposition is very weak, any criticism of the government may be sensitive. As one source explained, such regimes may treat SCS actors as part of the opposition, which significantly limits their political space.⁸

Governments often accuse CSOs and their partners of being 'foreign agents' that work against the state, or by using other negative messages in an attempt to delegitimize CSOs. Countering such messages can be difficult, particularly since they are often spread via third party media outlets or even NGOs through government support. A number of NCA COs report that these smear campaigns have had a negative impact on their ability to work with communities as well as international actors, and that combatting these messages takes significant time and resources. Although there seems to be a conscious effort to damage the reputation of SCS actors, negative views can also arise from misunderstandings that political actors have about the role of SCS and their partners. As raised by several COs, governments often believe that CSOs compete for the same donor funding, or that the role of NGOs is only to deliver services, not in defending rights. Another common misconception is that support for democracy and rights issues are inherently threatening to governments.⁹

Although governments and political groups often restrict SCS, they can also be necessary for SCS actors to carry out their work, and can even become allies. This complex reality was something that many NCA COs described. One CO explained that, although they had many issues with their government, "*it is not that they are necessarily against us*". Rather, they saw that cooperation with certain parts of the government, such as local public service providers, was important for them. Other times, cooperating with the government or

⁷ Youngs Richard and Echagüe Ana 2017, p. 26

⁸ Kambale Kahongya, United Evangelical Mission

⁹ For more information, see: Youngs Richard and Echagüe Ana 2017

other political groups is a necessary condition to be able to work. For example, one CO had to work with both local authorities as well as local armed opposition groups in order to gain access to their partners. Several COs have also testified that losing the support of political groups risks leading to repercussions, such as losing licences, access, or even being expelled from the country entirely.

Although maintaining some level of cooperation with local political groups may therefore often be necessary, this comes with its own problems. Some COs report that they have to express themselves carefully or even redact their own internal reports in order to maintain the support of their governments. Naturally, this may limit independence and ability to criticize governments and political groups. Other COs have reported that some communities saw them as being associated with the government, and that this made them less willing to cooperate. Working with political groups therefore requires walking a fine line between cooperation and maintaining independence.

Strategies for dealing with political threats

1) Use tactical approaches and entry points

As several COs have also reported, rights-based issues are usually considered to be the most sensitive by political actors, and usually generate the most pushback. The ICVA **advises NGOs to be tactical about when and how they discuss sensitive topics and rights-based approaches**. They warn against making ‘tactical mistakes’ around sensitive topics, such as discussing them in contexts where they can be perceived as more suspect; failing to use alternative, less sensitive ways to describe them; acting outside of legal or administrative procedures; failing to take political realities into account; or acting without prior discussion

with authorities.¹⁰ In a report for the Carnegie Foundation, the authors argue that it is sometimes necessary to use a ‘**tactical pullback**’.¹¹ This means scaling back or stopping activity that risks leading to pushback, in order to protect other work that may be closed down in this case. Doing so is controversial and requires careful consideration, but avoiding sparking hostility may protect future programme efforts.

Another approach for how to approach sensitive issues is to reframe them in a less sensitive way. In this way, a number of NCA COs have used innovative strategies to get around barriers that would otherwise prevent them from working on sensitive topics, what one CO called ‘**entry points**’. For example, one CO found it difficult to work with the government on peacebuilding issues (their belief was that the government did not like the implication that such measures were needed in the country). **Instead, the CO reframed their objectives around the widely accepted themes of culture, climate, and religion, which won them the support of the government, and also helped bring together different religious actors**. For example, the CO was able to engage in peacebuilding objectives with the support of the government by framing these objectives as building cultural cohesion. Artistic expressions can also be an effective way to reframe sensitive issues and challenge duty bearers. One source used the example of groups that used art works and humour to transmit critical messages about the government. As the source explained, such expressions can be effective ways of spreading messages, and because of their artistic nature, they are also difficult for governments to punish or prosecute.

Beyond how issues are framed, it is also important in what contexts they are expressed. Academic, cultural, religious, and media

¹⁰ International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) 2019

¹¹ Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014, 46

institutions are examples of institutions whose status usually gives them a special ability to communicate about sensitive issues. This makes them good avenues for CSOs to spread messages about sensitive topics. One source used universities as an example of what is often considered as a 'neutral space' even in repressive regimes. To the source, using this neutral space allows SCS actors, and particularly younger students, to challenge political power-holders.

2) Coordinate and build coalitions

Challenging or otherwise approaching political actors is often extremely difficult in restricted spaces for SCS. Governments and other political actors may not be interested in listening to SCS actors, and may even retaliate against perceived criticisms. One of the most common recommendations for CSOs is therefore to coordinate with other organizations and to form coalitions when approaching political actors. As one source reported, *'it is very dangerous to be alone in opposition'*.¹² Several COs seconded this opinion. One CO described how they found it much easier to meet the government as a coordinating body, rather than as a single organization. **Approaching political actors as a coordinated group increases the perceived legitimacy of the group's demands, makes them harder to ignore, and leaves individual organizations and activists less exposed to push-back and repercussions.** The importance of taking a coordinated approach is one of the main recommendations in a report by ACT and CIDSE.¹³ **Helping SCS actors to have the capacity to expand and maintain their networks and coalitions is core to this.** The report highlights several ways in which this can be done, including helping CSOs with: planning and budgeting; facilitating knowledge sharing and collaborations; supporting their ability to

debate issues in the media and on the ground; assisting in creating documentation systems; supporting collective research, publication, advocacy and campaigning; as well as coordinating with regional networks. NCA in South Sudan is a good example of how coordination can achieve results. Here, NCA cooperated with national church networks as well as international NGOs (INGOs) to set a shared advocacy agenda and goals for peacebuilding. This cooperation helped them gain the support of the national government as well as opposition groups.¹⁴

When it comes to building networks and coalitions, religious groups can make excellent partners. Religion plays a major role in many societies, and is often a respected source of authority, also among political actors. This can help give legitimacy to associated SCS actors and their demands. Religious organizations also tend to have well-established networks both locally and internationally, which can greatly help SCS actors in expanding their own networks. Although religion can sometimes be a source of conflict, it also has a particular ability to unite. When harmful narratives are reframed, and interfaith dialogue is promoted, religion can be a powerful force for change.¹⁵ Working with or being seen as representing a religious organization can sometimes raise concerns or doubts, particularly among groups of different religious affiliations. As one CO explained, it is therefore important to emphasize to partners that cooperating with a religious organization does not equal advocating their religion.

Interfaith cooperation may also help build trust and promote cooperation among religious groups. **The importance of engaging in interfaith as well as intercultural dialogue and cooperation was a common theme throughout the interviews with COs.** Such

¹² Kambale Kahongya, United Evangelical Mission

¹³ ACT and CIDSE 2014, 70

¹⁴ For more information on NCA's work to strengthen civil society in South Sudan and Zambia, see: Fabra-Mata and Coffey 2019, 42

¹⁵ NCA 2019b, 11

cooperation is crucial for building the broad coalitions that are necessary to tackle societal challenges such as inequality, climate change, and conflict. To this end, NCA's office in Pakistan called for more insight into how different religious traditions and cultures think about key issues such as climate change and peacebuilding. Similarly, NCA in the Democratic Republic of Congo worked with interfaith groups to promote religious reasons to oppose gender-based violence. Interfaith and intercultural cooperation can also be an effective way to approach and challenge political actors in a coordinated way. One CO successfully allied with an inter-religious group on the national level as a way to challenge the government, and as a way to counter attempts by the government to create divisions among religious groups.

Finally, **regional cooperation with organizations of neighbouring countries can also be an effective strategy.** Neighbouring countries often experience similar challenges, which provides opportunities for learning and cooperation. Allies from outside the country may also be able to put pressure on political groups, and to spread information about relevant events without the same risk of repercussions. Therefore, regional allies may be able to assist in ways that may be difficult or impossible to do from within the country itself.

3) Mobilize international support

Most of the COs have raised the importance of mobilizing international support in facing political actors, particularly governments. **Foreign governments and international organizations are often effective at leveraging the demands of CSOs, and also reduce the risk of repercussions.** One CO recounted an example where equipment that had been donated to a CSO by a foreign government was confiscated by government forces as reprisal against the CSO. Rather than approaching the

government forces directly, the CO encouraged the foreign government to take action in recovering their donations, which proved effective in putting pressure on the government in question. Another CO reported using the help of UN agencies to negotiate with armed opposition fighters to gain access to the areas where they operated. In cases such as these, international organizations can often act as neutral mediators between CSOs and political groups. As discussed further on the following page however, it may be strategic for CSOs to maintain a low profile when using such assistance to avoid accusations of cooperating with foreign agents.

COs also report making use of some of the many support structures available through donor governments, international organizations and NGOs. **Organizations like the ICNL, CIVICUS, and Transparency International, or international organizations like the EU's Protect Defenders initiative can provide guidelines, tools and support that can help CSOs in their work as well as in monitoring new developments.**¹⁶ Rapid response mechanisms such as the EU Protect Defenders initiative can also provide emergency funding, relocation of threatened personnel, and other direct forms of assistance on short notice.

Religious organizations often have wide international networks that can also be used to gather support for CSOs. One source used the example of when CSOs in Colombia successfully put pressure on their government using representatives of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the UN. As the source argued, although such contacts can provide very useful support in such cases, religious organizations are often not aware of the full extent of their networks, and therefore do not always take full advantage of them. Taking advantage of the international networks that

¹⁶ ICNL: www.icnl.org,
Protect Defenders: protectdefenders.eu,

CIVICUS: www.civicus.org
Transparency International: transparency.org

religious organizations have access to can be a great advantage for associated CSOs trying to manage and challenge political opposition.

4) Approach the right political actors

As mentioned previously, political actors can also be necessary or even useful to SCS in their work. The ICVA argues that NGOs often have a poor understanding of the changing views of the political actors that they work with. NGOs also do not always know when they should work with the political actors and how to do so.

Many NCA COs interviewed for this report have developed innovative strategies for how to approach political actors that can serve as good examples for this. One CO found that inviting the right government officials to their public events made the government more accepting of them, and helped cooperation overall. **Several COs have also highlighted the importance of working with the rights levels of government as well as the right political actors.** In one case, NCA's contacts with the government at the national level did not have the right competencies in order to assist them in their work. Instead, the CO found that local level government authorities had better expertise and ability to cooperate. Similarly, CSOs that involve people of different political affiliations often find that this creates more space for their work.¹⁷

Finding the right political actors to cooperate with, and staying updated about new developments can be difficult, however. The ICVA therefore stresses the importance of training, research, capacity building and coordination in this area.¹⁸ Political context analysis, using tools such as the National Democratic Institute's Context Analysis Tool,¹⁹ can help to better understand and approach political actors.

5) Maintain low visibility and work through independent partners

International actors that assist SCS are highly stigmatized in many countries. When SCS actors cooperate with such actors, they therefore risk repercussions. SCS actors that are seen working closely with NGOs risk being delegitimized or persecuted, and the cooperation may make their work more difficult. It is therefore important for SCS actors to maintain low visibility when working with international actors. International actors working with CSOs should also allow them to work independently as much as possible to avoid potentially harmful attention. Another reason to grant CSOs more independence is that they are more knowledgeable about local realities than international actors can be, and they can therefore be more effective. NCA's partner-based approach is well-suited for this, and several CO's have emphasized the importance of enabling CSOs to carry out their work, rather than directing it themselves. **This can be done by providing SCS actors with tools, resources, and capacity building necessary to act independently.** For example, one CO helped its partners to use new technologies, communication tools, and other strategies to help them reach out to communities. Another CO explained how they help coordinate local peacebuilding structures that could intervene in cases of human rights violations against activists. This can contribute to helping SCS actors without exposing the CO, thereby risking to create unintended negative consequences for both the CO and their partner.

¹⁷ ACT and CIDSE 2014, 21

¹⁸ International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) 2019

¹⁹ www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_ContextAnalysisTool_proof_f.pdf

2. Legal threats

How laws and regulations limit the space of civil society

Laws and regulations are one of the main ways in which governments have limited the space of SCS. This is usually done through the introduction of so-called NGO laws, limitations on funding, complicated regulations, banning election observers, as well as deregistering or outright expelling NGOs. Similar measures are common across the world, indicating that authoritarian governments are learning from each other in this area. Such laws are not only found in authoritarian regimes, however. A 2017 report by the European Parliament found the laws restricting CSOs were present in over one hundred countries.²⁰ A 2018 survey of 89 NGOs and INGOs by the ICVA found that legal restrictions were some of the most important challenges facing humanitarian workers.²¹ A recent internal survey by the NCA also found that COs consider legal and physical threats to be the highest priority challenge that needs addressing. All of NCA's COs interviewed for this report had also been impacted by similar laws and regulations to some extent.

As pointed out in a Carnegie report, allowing NGOs to work on rights and democracy advocacy has been a way for authoritarian governments to improve their image abroad. However, as these governments come under increasing pressure, these governments are now 'closing the tap' on such operations.²² The wave of new laws targeting CSOs may therefore also in one way be a sign that their work is succeeding in putting pressure on governments.

New laws and regulations are usually framed by governments as legitimate ways to combat issues such as corruption, terrorism or national security.²³ As a report by the European Foundation Centre (EFC) explains, there are indeed cases where these laws and legislation are legitimate. However, examining them usually reveals that they are not legitimate nor justified, rather *'a gap emerges between the motivations given and the measures taken'* with these laws. The EFC uses the example of Kenya after an Al-Shabaab terror attack in 2014, after which the government shut down or deregistered hundreds of NGOs for supposedly having ties to the terrorist group.²⁴ In other words, **claimed threats are often used as pretexts by governments to impose new restrictions.** In 2020, many countries around the world used the COVID-19 pandemic as another such pretext.²⁵ Crises such as COVID-19 can drastically reduce the ability of SCS to operate, making it easier for governments to push through harmful legislation unopposed. In such situations, SCS actors and CSOs require rapid assistance to protect their rights and keep them operating.²⁶

In addition, new laws and regulations are usually vague, burdensome, and complicated. This makes them difficult to follow and leaves very few opportunities to challenge or overrule them. This also makes it easy for governments to manipulate them in politically motivated ways in order to target specific groups.²⁷ This points to the most concerning aspect of such laws, that they are **generally created for political purposes and do not follow principles of rule of law.** They are often created precisely to make it difficult for CSOs, INGOs, and donors to operate, and to be used pretexts to restrict them. Because such laws are often found in

²⁰ Youngs Richard and Echagüe Ana 2017

²¹ International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) 2019, 7

²² Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014

²³ United Nations, General Assembly 2020, p. 9

²⁴ European Foundation Centre (EFC) 2016, p. 12

²⁵ CIVICUS 2020

²⁶ For an example of how African CSOs responded to COVID-19, see: @AfricanNGOs and EPIC-Africa 2020. See also Christian Aid's response, at: www.christianaid.org.uk/emergencies/coronavirus-response-south-africa

²⁷ ARIADNE 2015

countries that have weak rule of law in general, governments can easily manipulate laws and regulations against their perceived opponents, or to avoid their own legal responsibilities. Trying to adhere to the law in such contexts is therefore extremely difficult, and knowing how to navigate the political landscape may be at least as important as navigating the law. However arbitrary and politically motivated these laws are, SCS actors and CSOs should still take them seriously and carefully plan how to navigate them.

Strategies for navigating legal threats

1) To challenge legislation or not?

There are widespread calls from SCS actors and rights-defenders around the world to halt and reverse legislation targeting SCS. Although there are good reasons to oppose such legislation, whether and how SCS actors should participate in this opposition themselves is a difficult question. Opposition or non-compliance with laws and regulations can be effective in challenging attacks of civil space. However, doing so also risks escalating conflicts with the government and can result in legal action or other threats against SCS actors. **Deciding whether and how jurisdiction should be opposed or not depends on a several contextual factors and requires careful consideration.**²⁸

Although fighting restrictive legislation may be difficult for smaller SCS actors to do alone, there are a large number of international organizations fighting for rule of law and against laws that restrict the space of CSOs.²⁹ Collaborating with these organizations and informing them about developments on the ground can ultimately help both parties challenge and navigate legislation.

²⁸ For a thorough discussion on this topic, see: International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations (INCLIO) 2017

²⁹ The World Justice Project contains a directory of organizations fighting for rule of law around the world. See: worldjusticeproject.org

Collaborating with other local actors may also be effective in challenging restrictive legislation and political opposition. One successful example of this is the campaign that halted a 2013 amendment of a Kenyan law which would have restricted foreign funding of CSOs. SCS launched a coordinated opposition involving legal analysis, press statements, social media campaigns, and public rallies. The campaign successfully used a data driven approach which highlighted the great contribution that civil society brings to the Kenyan economy. **Both governments and donors may be particularly receptive to messages that are based on data and that highlight the economic benefits that civil society can contribute to.**³⁰ Strategic use of opposition tactics and messages, effective cooperation and coalition building, as well as considering potential repercussions are some of the key factors to consider if restrictive legislation is to be challenged.

2) Adaptation and capacity building

Most of NCA's COs interviewed for this report described having to navigate laws and regulations like those discussed above. One of the main challenges facing NCA COs and their partners is managing the administrative burden of acquiring and renewing licences, the difficulty in keeping track of complicated laws and regulations, and how to deal with the disruption caused by them. Doing so requires significant accounting, tax, and legal expertise which can be difficult to maintain with limited resources.³¹ This can be all the more difficult for smaller CSOs, and CO's report that NCA's partners often reach out to them for help about legal issues. Meeting these demands can go beyond the capacity of CSOs to deal with alone. It is therefore important to **make use of the legal and technical expertise that is**

³⁰ USAID 2014, 7

³¹ For more information, see: European Foundation Centre (EFC) 2016, p. 15

available on these issues. One example is the **ICNL's Digital Legal Library**, which contains a large amount of knowledge on domestic and international laws, reports, treaties, and court decisions that affect civil society.³² Another important tool is to reach out to the many free legal services available for CSOs, such as **TrustLaw from the Thomas Reuters Foundation**,³³ or the **Advocates for International Development (A4ID)**.³⁴ A strategy developed by one CO was to create a **referral programme**, which they use to refer partners with legal issues to organizations that can help them.

New laws and legislation may also mean that SCS actors will have to adjust their normal working methods in order to not violate the law. For example, one CO reported that new laws passed in their country means that NGOs can only use statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics, which forced NCA's CO and others to adapt their working methods. Similarly, laws and regulations regarding press freedoms, financing restrictions, licences and other issues can mean that CSOs have to go through a significant amount of adjustment. For example, one CO found that new press restrictions meant that media outlets often stopped reporting about their events. This meant that they had to find new ways of working with media outlets that was compatible with the new legislation, as well as finding other outreach methods. Therefore, capacity building also means ensuring that SCS actors have the necessary resources to adapt.

3) Monitoring

The last decades have seen a rapid rise in the number of restrictive laws. A 2019 Amnesty

International report found 40 new pieces of legislations just in the two years prior to publication, and that the increase of new laws was accelerating.³⁵ **The sheer number of new laws and regulations can make it difficult to stay up to date.** In addition, these laws are often formed in non-transparent ways. This can make it difficult for CSOs to prepare for the impact of new legislation, and take action against alarming developments. **Monitoring new developments is therefore key to navigating the legal environment.** There are several organizations that are devoted to doing exactly this. The ICNL's Civic Freedom Monitor,³⁶ or CIVICUS' Monitor provides information on new country-specific developments around the world.

4) Ensure secure communications and digital privacy

One of the more common legal obstacles for SCS actors are restrictions and censorship on freedom of expression, social media, and press freedoms. This legislation can be far-reaching and very open to interpretation by the authorities. For example, in 2019, Bahrain enacted a law which forbids any support of *'promoting, glorifying, justifying, approving or supporting acts which constitute terrorist activities.'* This can even include following what are considered 'anti-government' pages on platforms like Facebook.³⁷ It is therefore important for SCS activists and CSOs to be cautious about their social media activity, how they communicate publicly, and to ensure that they have proper data protection. Using technical tools that can protect privacy, such as VPN services, or the communications tool Telegram, can greatly help in this regard.

³² ICNL's Digital Legal Library available at: www.icnl.org/resources/library

³³ TrustLaw: www.trust.org/trustlaw

³⁴ A4ID: www.a4id.org

³⁵ Amnesty International 2019

³⁶ ICNL's Civic Freedom Monitor available at: <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor>

³⁷ Lisa Barrington, Reuters, June 3, 2019. uk.reuters.com/article/uk-bahrain-security-socialmedia/bahrain-says-following-opposition-social-media-could-result-in-legal-action-idUKKCN1T30WE

3. Physical threats and intimidation

Security threats facing civil society

The closing space for civil society has not only made it more difficult for SCS actors to operate, but it has also made it more dangerous. Physical or sexual assault, torture, kidnappings and outright killings, as well as other extra-legal measures such as threats and surveillance, are all too common among CSOs. It is hardly surprising that, as previously mentioned, surveys among NCA COs find physical threats to be the challenge given highest priority. Similarly, the ICVA's 2018 survey of 89 NGOs and INGOs found respondents considered intimidation and harassment of staff to be common problems facing humanitarian workers.³⁸

Some CSOs and activists are particularly exposed to these threats. As described in a report by Trócaire,³⁹ **those that work on sensitive topics such as human rights issues, anti-corruption, or extractives and natural resource management, tend to be particularly exposed to these dangers.** Work that exposes corruption, political patronage structures, or powerful corporate actors in the natural resource extraction industry tends to be particularly risky. Contextual factors, such as situations when political parties are weak, or when elections or other significant political changes are happening, can also make political actors more likely to lash out at CSOs. The report also describes how CSOs with weak internal governance structures and grassroots support can also become more vulnerable to attack. Finally, donors have a responsibility to speak out against repression of CSOs, and failure to do so can also embolden attackers. As described in NCA's peacebuilding

programme guidance, issues surrounding peacebuilding and human rights defence are by their very nature particularly exposed to the risks facing CSOs, and therefore require special consideration.⁴⁰

NCA COs have testified how partners that work on sensitive issues can become targets of serious threats. Among the more common situations they faced were religious leaders that challenge established beliefs. CSOs that were in conflict with government actors also experienced intimidation. NCA COs sometimes find themselves in a challenging position with respect to the security of their SCS partners. For example, one CO described a situation where a partner had engaged with a religious group trying to challenge certain beliefs, after which he was forced to go into hiding after receiving threats. The situation demonstrated the risks of advocacy work around sensitive topics, as well as the challenges that can arise when SCS supporters like NCA collaborate with SCS actors on such issues. Careful consideration to risk analysis and management by both SCS actors and their supporters can reduce and mitigate such risks. There are also other strategies and tools that can help minimize risks for SCS actors working in high-risk environments.

Guarding against physical threats

1) Risk analysis and management

Risk analysis and management is at the core of risk reduction efforts. Part and parcel of this is ensuring proper context and risk assessment/analysis. There are several INGOs and intergovernmental organizations that provide monitoring of potentially dangerous developments, including on the local level. Notable examples include **ICRC Safer Access**,⁴¹ **Front Line Defenders**,⁴² **Protection International**,⁴³ and **Making Sense of**

³⁸ International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) 2019, 7

³⁹ Trócaire 2012, 17

⁴⁰ NCA 2019a

⁴¹ saferaccess.icrc.org

⁴² www.frontlinedefenders.org

⁴³ www.protectioninternational.org

Turbulent Contexts.⁴⁴ Risk analysis and management is highly context dependent, and although there are a set of common practices and strategies that all SCS actors can adopt to help improve security, they should adapt these to local realities and needs. As explained in the Front Line Defenders Workbook on Security:⁴⁵

‘Security management is partly about setting up procedures. But procedures will only be effective if they are an appropriate response to the risks you face. The challenge, therefore, is to identify correctly the threats and vulnerabilities in your environment at any given time...’

One useful risk analysis framework is **Front Line Defenders’ risk formula**,⁴⁶ using three factors: threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities. This risk analysis applies for individuals on a case-by-case basis, for example when attending a demonstration. Threats can include factors such the presence of mobs, riots, or individuals acting in hostile ways. Vulnerabilities can include finding oneself alone, in an antagonistic community, or in the presence of targeted groups such as LGBTQ individuals. Capacities can include having mobile phone access, being accompanied by friends and allies, or having an advance plan of action. These three factors together determine the overall risks in a given situation. **Organizations and groups should also have a long-term risk analysis strategy that is integrated into how they work.** For example, risk management can include context analysis, standard operating procedures, contingency plans, safe communications, and office security.⁴⁷

Certain circumstances may require particular risk analysis and management strategies. Humanitarian crises and disasters can pose risks and otherwise affect the work of CSOs. Using Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) tools and monitoring, like the European Commission’s INFORM programme,⁴⁸ or the NGO ALERT Project⁴⁹ can help monitor, prepare against, and mitigate crises and disasters. Activities that surround certain topics may also require topic-specific risk analysis. Examples include topics surrounding counter-terrorism,⁵⁰ resource extraction industries,⁵¹ or digital security.⁵² Annex 2 of this report has a number of recommended sources for risk analysis and management strategies that can be adapted to the needs of your organization.

2) Work with rapid response groups

When individuals are under immediate threat of violence or harm, it may be necessary to ask for emergency assistance. In an interview for this report, DanChurchAid testified how they have had to resort to rapid response mechanisms to remove CSO partners from immediate danger. As they explained, such mechanisms can provide immediate help as well as an increased sense of security for CSOs and their partners. The EU’s Protect Defenders initiative is one such mechanism. Protect Defenders has an emergency helpline, and can also help relocate individuals facing immediate risks.⁵³ **Rapid response and emergency assistance groups can provide emergency grants so that CSOs can meet costs relating to security, medical costs, or legal representation.** Organizations such as

⁴⁴ participate-mstc.net

⁴⁵ Front Line 2011, 3

⁴⁶ Front Line 2011, 12

⁴⁷ Davis 2015

⁴⁸ INFORM: drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu

⁴⁹ ALERT Project: portal.alertpreparedness.org

⁵⁰ See the Norwegian Refugee Council’s toolkit for managing counter-terrorism risks at:

www.nrc.no/toolkit/principled-humanitarian-action-managing-counterterrorism-risks/

⁵¹ Trócaire 2012

⁵² See AccessNow’s Digital Security Helpline at:

www.accessnow.org; or Front Line Defenders’ Digital Protection initiative at:

www.frontlinedefenders.org

⁵³ protectdefenders.eu

Lifeline⁵⁴ can also provide capacity building for more general programme activities such as advocacy, campaigns, and training. Annex 3 contains a list of different rapid response mechanisms that SCS actors can turn to depending on their needs.

3) Prioritize high risk groups and topics

Groups that work on sensitive topics such as those described above may need particular protection from physical threats. Human rights defenders, democracy advocates, or government critics are notable examples. Marginalized and vulnerable groups in society such as minority groups or LGBTQ individuals may also have special needs and security concerns. It is therefore important that security management is inclusive.⁵⁵ The risks facing the above groups may also become elevated under particular circumstances, such as during elections, demonstrations, or other situations when a government is under pressure.

Individuals who have been exposed to risks or even been the victims of attacks also need special attention. **Well-being and stress management involves helping individuals with risks, threats, and traumatic experiences they may have faced in their work, and which can also affect their personal lives outside of work.** Prolonged stress can make individuals become careless of danger, negatively affect their decision making and ability to cooperate with others, or lead to harmful behaviour such as alcohol abuse. Stress in itself can therefore have a negative impact on security. It is therefore important that SCS actors use strategies and resources to manage stress and well-being. This includes continually monitoring the health of activists and staff; recognizing stress indicators and risks;

screening new members about stress preparedness; providing ongoing support to individuals in need; as well as maintaining policies in support individuals who cannot work. There are several strategies for how to support individuals affected by stress, such as reassigning them to less stressful tasks, referring them for therapy, or using peer support groups. Individuals that experienced violence or trauma may also need help to recover, and special assistance may be needed for victims of sexual assault and gender-based violence.⁵⁶

4) Report human rights violations

Reporting human rights violations is a key part of global efforts to keep human rights violators accountable. **Even in cases where human rights violations cannot be prosecuted, reporting and shining a light on violations can restrain perpetrators.** For example, one source used the example of a human rights defender who was being detained by the government. By reporting and creating publicity around his detainment, his supporters were able to successfully put pressure on the government, who eventually released him. Sharing information between SCS actors and international organizations can also help them cooperate and provide improved knowledge for advocacy. In a report by ACT and CIDSE,⁵⁷ they describe a case where CSOs cooperated to create accurate data on human rights violations and repression, which they passed on to INGOs. There are several organizations to report to, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and others.⁵⁸ The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has a comprehensive online guide on best

⁵⁴ www.csolifeline.org

⁵⁵ Oxfam International and African Security Sector Network 2020

⁵⁶ For more information on stress and well-being management, see: Antares Foundation 2012; Frontline Defenders website, at:

www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/programme/risk-analysis-protection-training

⁵⁷ ACT and CIDSE 2014, 27

⁵⁸ For more information and organizations to report to, see: humanrights.com/take-action/report-human-rights-abuse.html

practices for reporting human rights violations.⁵⁹

5) Ensure digital security

As more and more advocacy and communications are carried out online and using technical tools, this can become a potential security vulnerability. SCS activists and CSOs often store sensitive information on phones, computers, and on the internet which potentially hostile actors can exploit to attack them. Political actors, corporations and other groups can use surveillance, cyber-attacks and other means to reach this information. Some sources for this report have already experienced cyber-attacks against them, and other are concerned about their activities on social media and political actors' ability to track them online. **Adopting data protection best practices such as using safe passwords, storage solutions, and communication methods is therefore essential to protecting the safety of activists.** Working safely with different technologies without exposing sensitive information, risking cyber-attacks, or other forms of abuse, may require special training and skills. Sources have highlighted that SCS actors often lack training on these issues, which can leave them vulnerable to attack. There are several guides and resources tailored for different SCS actors on how to ensure data protection that should be a key priority for those working in closed spaces.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See: searchlibrary.ohchr.org/record/4835?ln=en

⁶⁰ For useful data protection resources, see: Frontline Defenders (frontlinedefenders.org/en/programme/digital-protection), Security In-a-Box (securityinabox.org), or Georgetown Law

Library's resource base on data protection methods (guides.ll.georgetown.edu/c.php?g=363530&p=4783483)

4. Economic Threats

How economic factors shrink the space for civil society

The shrinking space for civil society trend has also meant that SCS actors are finding it increasingly difficult to support themselves economically. Governments have increasingly imposed various funding regulations and restrictions on CSOs as well as INGOs. These regulations often come with registration requirements as well as heavy demands on record-keeping and inspections, particularly on sources of foreign funding. **This can allow governments to conduct significant surveillance and oversight on SCS.** Therefore, these regulations may infringe on both international and domestic laws on the freedom of association and expression.⁶¹ This is often a result of a common strategy used by governments to negatively frame SCS actors as partisan ‘foreign agents’, that do not have the best interest of the country in mind. Some regulation targets particular topics that governments regard as sensitive, such as political issues.

By restricting funding and by labelling SCS and international organizations as foreign agents, governments try to delegitimise, isolate, and take away their independence. SCS and its supporters are increasingly forced to look for alternative, domestic sources of funding. Since funding for sensitive topics is usually more difficult to get approved, both donors and grantees are incentivised to focus on less sensitive topics such as service delivery and aid. As a result, foreign funding for sensitive topics has not only become more difficult for SCS to get approved by their governments, but it is also less likely to be offered by donors. Several NCA COs have testified that finding funding is becoming increasingly difficult,

particularly for work on sensitive topics. A report by ACT and CIDSE⁶² similarly describes how some CSOs fear that:

‘...the funding crisis will ultimately push CSOs into service delivery and away from work on governance and democracy, thus weakening their role and purpose.’

Although the funding challenges facing civil society were usually initiated by governments seeking to restrict the space for civil society, international donors also bear some responsibility for this. An EU report describes how with both EU agencies and member states, the ‘temptation’ has been to respond to other countries’ civil society restrictions by concentrating on less sensitive issues. As a result, the report describes how funding is increasingly pulled away from democracy support towards development aid.⁶³ In some cases, however, there has been an opposite effect. As reported by ACT and CIDSE⁶⁴, CSOs working in Zimbabwe reported a sharp rise in donor funding for civic and political rights work after the country experienced a governance crisis. However, this increased funding came with a corresponding decline in funding of issues at the grassroots level. As the report goes on to argue:

Donors are part of these dynamics, channelling their resources and energies into particular areas, to the neglect of others.

In response to these challenges, civil society and their supporters not only face tighter funding restrictions, but may also have to devote more energy to complying with complex government regulations, as well as navigating the funding trends of donors. Civil society has therefore been forced to look for new strategies to navigate a more restricted financial space.

⁶¹ American Bar Association Center for Human Rights 2015

⁶² ACT and CIDSE 2014, 21

⁶³ Youngs Richard and Echagüe Ana 2017, 26

⁶⁴ ACT and CIDSE 2014, 22

Managing economic threats

1) Adapting, restructuring, and capacity building

Most of civil society living in restricted spaces have had to adapt in to economic threats in some way. Perhaps the most immediate effect of economic restrictions is the administrative burden of complying with several complicated laws and regulations. Similar to what was described previously about legal threats, complying with funding regulations may require significant time and energy, as well as legal and accounting expertise. It is therefore not surprising that many organizations will struggle to meet regulatory requirements, particularly smaller CSOs. **It may therefore be necessary for CSOs to seek external help to navigate regulations.** Turning to some of the several sources for pro-bono legal advice and technical assistance that were outlined in the section 'Strategies for navigating legal threats' above may therefore be necessary.

CSOs may also have to work with donors to ensure that they have the necessary resources to meet with regulatory demands and administrative burdens. Large NGOs often work with large funding contracts from governments or international organizations that are subcontracted to smaller CSOs. These contracts often come with a number of conditions which make them inflexible, and unable to account for local conditions and the extra time and cost required to meet with regulations. NGOs and their donors may therefore have to build more flexibility into their funding to be able to adapt to local realities. This should also include pooling resources to cover unexpected costs arising from threats to civil society as well as to fund appropriate responses.⁶⁵ For example, Christian Aid reported that their partners in South Africa were able to quickly adapt to

challenges surrounding COVID-19 thanks to flexible funding arrangements.⁶⁶

One of the strategies that has already been mentioned is the option to restructure operations to better suit local regulations and political climate. This usually involves shifting towards service delivery, livelihoods, or a social enterprise model.⁶⁷ A 2017 Carnegie report outlines how this was achieved in Ethiopia, including the benefits and drawback of this approach.⁶⁸ The report cites a survey of NGOs carried out by the Taskforce for Enabling Environment for Civil Society in Ethiopia, which found that:

...70 percent of development organizations and 44 percent of human rights organizations [in Ethiopia] changed their organizational mandates and activities in order to preserve their access to foreign funding.⁶⁹

This can sometimes circumvent legal obstacles, or make political actors more positive towards allowing the funding of civil society activities. As some COs experienced, political actors will often encourage them and their partners to work with service delivery projects, which they see as more useful and less sensitive than rights-related topics. Doing may mean making difficult compromises such as cutting down on other activities, and may not be an option for everyone. An alternatively approach is to reframe or rebrand existing activities to be more compatible with the political and legal regime, as discussed on page 4 above. This may make it possible to continue working for rights-related objectives in some form. The above-cited Carnegie report found that, for some Ethiopian organizations, this simply meant rephrasing their reports and changing the language they used around sensitive topics. For other organizations, it meant a more

⁶⁵ International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations (INCLLO) 2017, 25–26

⁶⁶ For more information, see: @AfricanNGOs and EPIC-Africa 2020

⁶⁷ Transparency and Accountability Initiative 2020

⁶⁸ Brechenmacher 2017, 80

⁶⁹ Cited in Dupuy, Ron and Prakash, 'Hands Off My Regime!', 16

fundamental restructuring of their mandates, goals, activities, and even names.⁷⁰ Whether and how organizations should restructure their operations depends on the local context and the organization in question.

2) Finding alternative sources of funding

When restrictions make it difficult to use normal sources of funding, it may be necessary to find alternatives. **For some, one option is to establish for-profit enterprises that provide goods and services that private individuals can purchase to support the organization.** Organizations such as Oxfam and Greenpeace have successfully adopted such social enterprise models that provide goods and services that are aligned with their mission. Other strategies include working with donations, social media, crowd-funding, and branding. Adapting to changing realities may require organizations to be flexible and try different approaches and ‘business models.’ The International Civil Society Centre provides a comprehensive guide on different approaches that organizations can use to adapt and secure funding.⁷¹

A second option is using **online brokerage models.** These models link people who are looking to support particular issues and projects with the CSOs work on them. This can provide direct funding sources for CSOs both within and outside the country they operate in, with limited need for physical infrastructure and management.⁷² GlobalGiving.com is one notable example of such a platform, connecting private and corporate funders with CSOs in 150 countries and over 10,000 projects.⁷³

Finally, working with other branches of the government may be a successful option to avoid national level restrictions. Many post-colonial countries are highly decentralized, and local government structures may therefore have their own partnerships with local CSOs. Cooperating with local governments can contribute to more trust and accountability between them and CSOs. For example, USAID’s BALADI programme (Building Alliance for Local Advancement, Development and Investment) in Lebanon encourages CSOs to submit community project funding applications together with local municipalities.⁷⁴

3) Seek international support

There are several international organizations and initiatives that work to assist CSOs that face economic threats, and to oppose restrictive legislation. These organizations and initiatives can provide important assistance for CSOs trying to challenge restrictive legislation. The UN Human Rights Council⁷⁵ and other international bodies have defended civil society’s right to seek funding, and rejected the lawfulness of legislation that tries to restrict this right. Such decisions can help make legal arguments against restrictive national legislation. Bodies such as the Council of Europe’s Expert Council on NGO Law⁷⁶ can also assist with legal advice regarding both domestic and international law. **Organizations such as Lifeline Embattled CSO Defense Fund can also provide emergency funding to CSOs facing economic threats.** For more information on other international initiative and organizations that can assist with economic threats facing CSOs, the ICNL has made an extensive mapping of available sources.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Brechenmacher 2017, 80

⁷¹ International Civil Society Centre 2014

⁷² Transparency and Accountability Initiative 2020

⁷³ www.globalgiving.org

⁷⁴ Transparency and Accountability Initiative 2020

⁷⁵ ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/23/39

⁷⁶ www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/expert-council

⁷⁷ International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) 2014

Summary

The NCA commissioned this report to support civil society (SCS) actors who are challenged as a result of the shrinking space for SCS. The report aims to suggest tools, strategies, and information that can help SCS actors navigate these challenges. The report mainly draws on the experiences of NCA personnel working in six countries across the world, collected through interviews. It also draws on interviews with experts on shrinking space issues from the ACT Alliance, as well as a review of external expertise from organizations working on the protection of SCS.

The threats facing SCS are many. This report highlights four main types of threats: 1) political opposition; 2) legal threats; 3) physical threats and intimidation; and 4) economic threats. Although SCS faces serious challenges, SCS actors have found innovative strategies to navigate these threats. There is also a great amount of support and expertise available to support SCS actors in how to navigate these threats. The following is a summary of the main strategies for navigating threats to SCS that were identified throughout the report that are relevant for most of the threats they face.

Strategy	Description	Resources
Adapting and capacity building	Many of the restrictions imposed on SCS force them to adapt their working methods and organizations. Complex laws and regulations may require legal, financial, and administrative expertise that may be difficult for smaller actors to maintain. It may also be advisable or necessary to adapt mandates, activities, and financing to remain legal and economically viable.	- ICNL Digital Legal Library; - TrustLaw; - Transparency and Accountability Initiative ⁷⁸
Coordination and coalition building	SCS actors are stronger together. Broad, inter-religious, inter-cultural, and regional coalitions improve the outreach of SCS actors as well as their ability to cooperate with and challenge political actors. Making use of the broad networks and outreach of religious organizations is an effective strategy.	- ACT Alliance & CIDSE; - International Association of Professional in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection (PHAP) ⁷⁹
International support	Support from international (non-) governmental organizations can increase the outreach and effectiveness of SCS, and help challenge restrictive legislation and/or political opposition. It can also provide crucial operational and emergency support, funding, and advice.	- CIVICUS; - Protect Defenders; - Lifeline ⁸⁰
Navigating political actors	Knowing which political actors and institutions to approach, and how to navigate sensitive topics such as rights issues is crucial for SCS in closed spaces. Strategically approaching sensitive topics involves careful framing of how issues are addressed, reputation management, as well as knowing when and how to challenge political actors while minimizing the risks.	- International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) - International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations (INCLO) ⁸¹
Risk analysis and management	Maintaining a risk analysis and management strategy is crucial. This includes continuous context analysis of political and security related developments, and topic-specific preparedness on issues such as data security, and disaster preparedness	- Front Line Defenders; - Protection International; - Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts ⁸²

⁷⁸ www.icnl.org/resources/library; www.trust.org/trustlaw; Transparency and Accountability Initiative 2020

⁷⁹ actalliance.org; ACT and CIDSE 2014; phap.org/themes

⁸⁰ www.civicus.org/documents/toolkits/civil-society-support-mechanisms-directory.pdf; protectdefenders.eu; www.csolifeline.org

⁸¹ www.icvanetwork.org; www.inclo.net/pdf/gaining-ground.pdf

⁸² www.frontlinedefenders.org; www.protectioninternational.org; participate-mstc.net

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Annex 1: Key informants

Name	Title	Affiliation
Canisius Sovis	Country Director	NCA Afghanistan
Muzhgan Jalal	Program Coordinator	
Gisèle Baraka Bashige	Programme Officer	NCA DRC
Mustafa Abdulrahman Abdalla	Social cohesion coordinator	NCA Iraq
Anne Masterson	Country director	NCA Pakistan
Rizwan Ali	Programme Coordinator	
Shahnaz Jubran	Programme Officer	NCA/DCA Palestine
Ihab Barakat	Programme Officer	
Manal Shehade	Programme Officer	
George Zeidan	Programme Officer	
Nidal Hamdouna	Programme Officer	
Reem Al Sharif	Programme Officer	
Pauliina Parhiala	Country Director	NCA Tanzania
Gwamaka Mwakyanjala	Programme Officer	
Sarah Shija	Programme Manager	
Karina Pultz	Advisor to HRBA and Civic Space	DanChurchAid, Copenhagen
Kristine Vadskær	Team Leader	
Kambale Kahongya	Advocacy Officer	United Evangelical Mission
Lorenzo Vargas	Manager, Communications for Change Program	World Association for Christian Communication (WACC)
Charles Gay	Governance Advisor	Christian Aid, UK
Gerhard Buttner	PPA Programme Officer	

Annex 2: Additional resources

The following sources provide additional detailed resources and guidance on particular topics. See the description column for details on each.

Source	Description
Access Now ⁸³	Provides a secure communications channel as well as tools and resources for digital security
CIVICUS - Civil Society Support Mechanisms: A Directory ⁸⁴	Comprehensive list of global, regional and agency specific CSO support mechanisms
Freedom House - Advocacy in Restricted Spaces: A Toolkit for Civil Society ⁸⁵	Detailed list of working methods, strategies, and further resources for working in restricted spaces
International Association of Professional in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection (PHAP) ⁸⁶	Provides resources on security, legal issues, and trends, as well as actor and programme specific guidance on a wide range of topics
International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) ⁸⁷	Provides analysis, tools, and monitoring regarding the legal environment of CSOs
International Civil Society Centre - Changing ICSCO Business Models: Diversify, Adapt and Innovate (2014) ⁸⁸	Handbook providing comprehensive advice and additional resources on how CSOs can secure funding
International Network of Civil Liberties Organizations (INCLO) - Gaining Ground: A Framework for Developing Strategies and Tactics in Response to Governmental Attacks on NGOs ⁸⁹	Provides strategic advice on how to navigate restriction on civic space, particularly relating to legal threats
Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts ⁹⁰	Comprehensive guide on risk analysis and assessment methods
Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF) ⁹¹	Training and information on security management, including topic- and region-specific advice in multiple languages.
Transparency and Accountability Initiative's Civil Space Compendium	Provides information, tools, strategies, and further resources on a number of topics surrounding reduced civil space, including: political opposition, legal issues, physical security, and funding

⁸³ www.accessnow.org

⁸⁴ www.civicus.org/documents/toolkits/civil-society-support-mechanisms-directory.pdf

⁸⁵ freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/2020_Lifeline_Advocacy_Toolkit_v11_10272020.pdf

⁸⁶ phap.org/themes

⁸⁷ www.icnl.org/resources#resourcecollections

⁸⁸ icscentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/14_09_12_Diversify_Adapt_and_Innovate_web.pdf

⁸⁹ www.inclo.net/pdf/gaining-ground.pdf

⁹⁰ participate-mstc.net/

⁹¹ gisf.ngo/resources/

Annex 3: Rapid response mechanisms

The following is a selection of rapid response mechanisms provided by DanChurchAid. The mechanisms provide funding and support for civil society actors of core activities, emergency/disaster relief, protection of threatened activists, and more. The list is included to provide examples of mechanisms that can be used by civil society organizations/individuals, and should be used at their own discretion. More information can be found in the provided links, via DanChurchAid, or NCA.

Organization – mechanism	Description	Website
Agir Ensemble Pour Les Droits de l’Homme – Emergency Fund for Human Rights Defenders	AEDH has been running an emergency fund for human rights defenders in danger since 1999. The fund aims to protect the Human Rights Defenders and to respond rapidly to their calls for help when they are threatened or persecuted.	agir-ensemble-droits-humains.org
American Jewish World Service – Humanitarian and disaster response	AJWS responds to disasters rapidly - reaching out to their partners on the ground and mobilizing financial support from their donors. This is a humanitarian response to disasters such as earthquakes and epidemics but the organization also works to support communities and movements that speak out against injustice, hold governments accountable and recover from civil wars and other conflicts.	www.ajws.org
Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York – Protective Fellowship Scheme for HRDs at Risk	Visiting human rights defenders form the core of the Centre's work in terms of providing training for defenders, conducting research and incorporating the visiting defenders as an integral part of the MA and LLM programmes.	www.humanrightscolumbia.org/sites/default/files/Protective%20Fellowship%20Scheme%20Nomination%20Overview_Feb%202020.pdf
CISU – Civil Society in Development: An Association of Danish CSOs Working in Development	Offers several grants aimed at small-scale development activities, promoting citizen participation, and for emergency relief during humanitarian disasters	www.cisu.dk
CIVICUS – Crisis Response Fund; Civicus Solidarity Fund ⁹²	Support to national CSOs for them to run advocacy or resiliency activities. The CIVICUS Crisis Response Fund monies will be used in cases that require immediate action – either to	www.civicus.org/crf

⁹² www.civicus.org/crf

	forestall imminent threats (through resiliency grants), or to address new restrictions (through advocacy grants).	
Digital Defenders – Incidental Emergency Grants	The Incidental Emergency Grants respond to urgent needs such as a website or email being hacked, or the theft or loss of sensitive data and equipment. This type of grant could, for example, provide a safe internet connection, replace damaged or stolen equipment, or a security training. Journalists, human rights defenders, NGOs, activists and bloggers who come under threat because of their online activities can apply for this grant.	www.digitaldefenders.org/
Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders – EMHRF Urgent Grants	Grants are allocated to human rights defenders in difficulty or at risk, for the specific purpose of allowing them to protect their safety and pursue their activities, as well as to small human rights organisations or groups with the aim of strengthening their operational capacities to implement innovative activities in the region.	emhrf.org/urgent-grants/
Environmental Defender Law Center – Giving Grants	The Environmental Defender Law Center (EDLC) is a non-profit organization that works to protect the human rights of people in developing countries who are fighting to protect their environment. EDLC identifies cases where environmental defenders need and want legal assistance, and helps them without charge by finding lawyers, providing resources, and giving grants.	www.edlc.org/about/about-the-environmental-defender-law-center/
FIDH – EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE GRANT	FIDH manages a support fund to strengthen the capacities of local human rights defenders organisations to prevent and respond to developments adversely affecting the human rights and the human rights defenders situations. Objective is to strengthen and sustain sensitive initiatives by local HRDs organisations (incl. unregistered groupings) aimed at preventing and responding to developments adversely affecting the human rights defenders' movements at the local level, especially in the most difficult countries and working on behalf of vulnerable communities.	www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/financial-support/grant-application-for-human-rights-defenders-at-risk
Forum Asia – Protection Plan for Human Rights Defenders at Risk	The Protection Plan aims to further strengthen protection and provide timely and efficient assistance to HRDs at risk in Asia, through temporary relocation and other types of urgent assistance as well as trial observation missions. It must be stressed that the assistance under the Protection Plan is temporary in nature.	www.forum-asia.org/?p=7302
Free Press Unlimited – Reporters Respond	Reporters Respond is an emergency fund for journalists managed by Free Press Unlimited. The fund is meant to help journalists who have been confronted with vandalism or intimidations and to get them started again as soon as possible. This international emergency fund provides direct assistance to journalists enabling them to resume work as quickly as possible when faced with local obstruction.	www.freepressunlimited.org/en/projects/reporters-respond-emergency-funding-for-the-media

Freedom House (Lifeline) – Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund	Provides emergency financial assistance to civil society organizations (CSOs) under threat or attack, short-term advocacy grants to push back against threats to freedom of association and assembly, and resiliency grants to support CSOs in shoring up their ability to prevent and mitigate threats and attacks.	www.csolifeline.org/
Freedom House (consortium lead) – Dignity for All: LGBTI Assistance Program	The Dignity for All: LGBTI Assistance Program provides emergency assistance; security, opportunity, and advocacy rapid response grants (SOAR grants; and security assessment and training to human rights defenders and civil society organisations under threat or attack due to their work for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex human rights.	freedomhouse.org/program/dignity-all-lgbti-assistance-program
Frontline Defenders – Frontline Protection Grants	Protection grants can pay for provisions to improve the security and protection of HRDs and their organisations including, but not limited to: improving physical security of an individual or organisation, digital protection and communication security; supporting legal fees for HRDs who are being judicially harassed; paying for medical fees; providing family assistance for imprisoned HRDs or family members.	www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/programme/protection-grants
Fund for Global Human Rights – Fund for Global Human Rights	Human rights organizations persistently face danger and hardship. Our Emergency Fund gives us the flexibility to make grants outside of our regular funding cycle. These grants can help protect the security of activists under threat.	globalhumanrights.org/
International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – ESCR-NET: System of Solidarity	The System of Solidarity (SOS) is a vehicle to harness the collective letters, outreach via social and mainstream media and sharing resources and tools - to increase protection for human rights defenders under threat and prevent imminent human rights violations from taking place.	www.escr-net.org/sos
International Center for not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) – Lifeline, Embattled CSOs	Lifeline rapid response advocacy grants give local CSOs the resources to push back against closures of civic space as they arise. Lifeline resiliency grants are meant to provide support to CSOs at high-risk to avoid or mitigate the threats they face.	www.csolifeline.org/emergency-assistance-1
ILC Land Defenders Fund – Land Defenders Fund	As part of ILC's commitment to protect and support land and environmental rights defenders, as fund has been made available to the full spectrum of land and environmental defenders within ILC's membership. The purpose is intended to respond to emergency situations.	www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/documents/resources/led_infonote_web_0.pdf
IMS – Journalist Safety Fund	The Safety Fund provides immediate support for journalists who are victimised as a direct result of their journalistic work.	www.mediasupport.org/what-we-do/safety-for-journalists/#safety-fund
IUCN Netherlands – Emergency Fund for Environmental Defenders at Risk	As part of the programme work of IUCN NL they support environmental human rights defenders. It is one out of four programme areas.	www.iucn.nl/en/solutions/environmental-defenders

Justice and Peace Netherlands – Shelter City	Human rights defenders will be offered a shelter for 3 months in one of the Shelter Cities in the Netherlands, during which they can rest, continue their work in safety, build up capacity (including a one-week compulsory training on security), extend their network and raise awareness about the situation in their country.	www.justiceandpeace.nl/shelter-city-netherlands-call-for-temporary-relocation-in-sept-2019/
OMCT – OMCT material assistance and emergency support	OMCT material assistance and emergency support aim at responding to emergency requests for assistance submitted by human rights defenders and organisations at risk. These can cover medical support (including psycho-social support and rehabilitation); legal support; social assistance (including family support); physical security; digital security; communications; capacity building in security; secure transportation; support to temporary relocation where necessary; etc.	www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/links/2015/10/d23598/
ProtectDefenders (consortium lead) – EU Human Rights Defenders Mechanism	Provide urgent support to all Human Rights Defenders around the world, especially those within the most vulnerable and targeted groups.	www.protectdefenders.eu/en/supporting-defenders.html#
Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights	Urgent Action Fund's Rapid Response Grants support the resilience of women's and trans* movements by providing flexible and responsive support to women's and trans* human rights defenders who face immediate threats and by supporting advocacy when unanticipated opportunities emerge to set new legal or policy precedents.	urgentactionfund.org/what-we-do/rapid-response-grantmaking/