

Website report on ‘New roles of CSOs for inclusive development’, knowledge sharing conference: results from the literature review

Leiden, Thursday 17 May 2018

Introduction

After an [inception workshop](#) on 15 December 2017, the second meeting for the research programme ‘[New roles of CSOs for inclusive development](#)’ (the ‘Assumptions Programme’) took place on 17 May 2018 in Leiden. During this knowledge sharing conference, the six research teams presented their literature reviews to an audience of researchers, representatives of multiple CSOs and policymakers from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). In addition, the INCLUDE Secretariat presented a draft synthesis on the new roles of CSOs based on the literature reviews. The conference facilitated a dialogue between the different groups – academics, practitioners and policymakers – and gathered input from practice for the empirical phase of the project.

The Assumptions Programme investigates the assumptions, solutions and problems underlying the civil society policy framework ‘[Dialogue & Dissent](#)’ of the MFA. The research programme is a collaboration between the MFA, NWO-WOTRO and INCLUDE. The MFA will use the knowledge generated in the ongoing learning agenda with its partners in the Dialogue & Dissent framework (2016–2020) and as input to the design of the next civil society policy framework (from 2019 onwards). Under the programme, six groups are conducting research (a literature review and field work) on three core themes: CSOs and civic engagement; CSOs and the aid chain; and CSOs in an enabling environment. The studies are taking place in India, Ethiopia, Kenya and Ukraine. Currently the research teams have completed their literature reviews, which they presented on 17 May 2018, and are moving forward with the empirical phase of their projects.

Literature review summaries ‘New roles of CSOs for inclusive development’

[Summary literature review – Enabling rules for advocacy in Kenya](#)

[Summary literature review – CSOs in sustainable development in Ethiopia](#)

[Summary literature review – CBOs within the official development aid system in Kenya](#)

[Summary literature review – Civil society advocacy collaboration in India](#)

[Summary literature review – Civil society against corruption in Ukraine](#)

[Summary literature review – Civil society engagement with land rights advocacy in Kenya](#)

Goals of the conference:

- Share the outcomes of the literature reviews conducted by the research groups with CSO practitioners and policymakers
- Discuss and collate input into the draft synthesis literature review prepared by INCLUDE on the new roles of CSOs for inclusive development
- Obtain input from policymakers and CSO practitioners on the upcoming empirical part of the research

NOTE: This website report summarizes the main report of the knowledge sharing conference. If you are interested in the full report, send an email to ileen@includeplatform.net.

Harvesting insights from the literature

The conference was opened with a plenary session moderated by INCLUDE platform member and chair of the day, [Dr Sara Ruto](#). After her explanation of the day's purpose, [Prof. Jan Bart Gewald](#), director of the [African Studies Centre Leiden](#), explained how the conference is a valuable contribution to the broader goal of the [INCLUDE Knowledge Platform for Inclusive Development](#). Thereafter, Dr Jelmer Kamstra (Civil Society Division of the MFA) briefly explained the background of the Assumptions Programme and its direct relationship to the current *and* future 'Dialogue & Dissent' (D&D) policy framework. By critically scrutinizing the assumptions underpinning this framework, the Assumptions Programme not only helps improve policies, but also stimulates cross-sector learning and exchange.

After the introduction of the research groups, Dr Barbara Hogenboom (University of Amsterdam), Chair of the [NWO Programme Committee](#), introduced the members of the committee who are jointly responsible for funding and strategic decisions. After this, [Dr Saskia Hollander](#) (INCLUDE Secretariat) presented the draft synthesis of the literature reviews submitted by the research groups. The presentation highlighted the most important findings and key differences of the six projects, as well as the policy questions they raised. Additionally, Dr Saskia Hollander underlined that the synthesis document is a first draft. Feedback from the researchers, the day's discussions, and input from policymakers and practitioners will be taken on board to further sharpen and improve the final version.¹

After presentation of the synthesis, the participants moved into the first round of break-out sessions based on three core themes of the Assumptions Programme to exchange views and experiences on the draft synthesis. Main questions in the discussions included: *How do the synthesis findings correspond to the experiences and knowledge of CSOs? What aspects of the synthesis should be emphasized? What is still missing?* After the breakout round, some discussion points were shared by each group:

- Although the participants acknowledged the inevitability of losing nuance in the exercise of synthesizing, a number of researchers pointed out that the synthesis also **highlights the positive aspects and opportunities of the role of Northern CSOs, as stated in the literature reviews.**
- Input also came on the distinction made in the draft synthesis between inclusive processes and inclusive outcomes. CSO representatives explained their point of view, by emphasizing that **it is only by way of inclusive processes that inclusive outcomes can be reached**; it is not a matter of one or the other.
- Participants stressed that shrinking civic space remains an issue and **that it remains important to look at ways in which organizations circumvent obstacles.**

To close the morning, [Prof. Dirk Jan Koch](#) (Chief Science Officer at the Dutch MFA) once more underlined the importance of the Assumptions Programme for the Ministry. Recognising the complementary roles of science and diplomacy, Koch stated that the Ministry is counting on the input of this research programme to strengthen the next D&D policy framework.

Re-energised after lunch, participants were invited to join two rounds of discussion sessions focusing on one of the six research projects. In these sessions, the research groups briefly presented their

¹ In a few weeks, the synthesis report that formed the basis of this presentation will be made available on the INCLUDE website, as the input gathered during the Assumptions conference will be included in the final version.

findings, after which they engaged in a 45 minute in-depth debate with the attending policymakers and representatives of CSOs. Each of the research groups hosted two discussion sessions, giving participants the opportunity to reflect on the findings, share their experiences and make recommendations for the next phase of the project. The main questions in the discussion included: *How do experiences and knowledge from CSOs and MFA policymakers correspond to the findings from the literature review? What should be emphasized? What are the remaining questions? What are the implications for the empirical stage of the research project?* All literature reviews are summarized and can be found by following the link below for each research group.

Plenary reflection: take-home messages

In a final session led, by Dr Sara Ruto, researchers, practitioners and policymakers were asked for their take-home messages. A final message from CSO representatives was encouragement as well as a reminder: **to ensure that development is inclusive and sustainable; people need to be included in the process** – especially those who are often invisible, but no less valuable. It was emphasized that this message is not new (25 years ago this was called participatory appraisal), but that we need to keep reminding ourselves of its importance. The research groups explicitly mentioned how the Assumptions conference made them more aware of the **added value of their own work to the conceptual discussions and the D&D policy framework**. Additionally, they expressed their appreciation for participants' valuable contributions and comments, particularly those based on on-the-ground experiences of CSOs. A final reaction from the MFA was a reminder to put this event into a broader perspective: not only is it **important for the evaluation of the assumptions underpinning the D&D policy framework, it will also serve to inform the new policy framework**. Moreover, the day's debate has made clear once more **the importance of engaging with researchers and practitioners in dialogue and knowledge sharing** to sharpen and improve the MFA's policy framework, assumptions and, consequently, interventions.

Finally, Dr Saskia Hollander shared three insights taken from the day for the synthesis paper. The first point was that **the synthesis should better reflect the positive aspects and opportunities regarding the role of Northern CSOs, as stated in the literature reviews**. Secondly, it became clear that care should be taken with generalizations, as **the contexts in which CSOs operate are highly complex and various and organizations are far from homogenous**. How specific CSOs change and adapt to different contexts should be central to the research. Finally, feedback was given about the importance of paying specific attention to **the role of the private sector and other non-state actors** in determining the opportunities and strategies of CSOs.

This knowledge sharing conference will be followed by two more; the first is scheduled for January 2019, when the research teams will present their mid-term results based on insights from their fieldwork. Keep an eye on [the website](#) to stay up-to-date on the latest developments.

This report is based on the full report drafted by Yannicke Goris and Jacqueline Vrancken of [The Broker](#).