

## **Supporting the sustainability of civil society: feedback from dialogues in West Africa and MENA**

### **INTRAC Webinar**

Wednesday 9 December 2015

*Summary of Discussions*

#### **Speakers and facilitators**

- Rachel Hayman, INTRAC
- Rowan Popplewell, INTRAC
- Suzanne Hammad, INTRAC
- Sarah Lewis, INTRAC

#### **Participants**

41 representatives from international NGOs and agencies, national and regional organisations, foundations, donor agencies, universities, as well as independent consultants attended the webinar. Participants were from a range of countries within East and West Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and Europe.

#### **Overview of the topic**

INTRAC believes that for civil society to be effective and achieve real social change (through its work in fields of economic development, poverty reduction, supporting the vulnerable/marginalised, social justice, human rights, democratisation and governance), it needs to be sustainable.

Aid dynamics and global power relations are changing, which is having a great effect on civil society organisations (CSOs) around the world. How to make organisations sustainable – financially and in terms of their structure, efficacy, legitimacy, and ability to operate freely – is a major topic of research and debate.

The purpose of this webinar was to provide feedback from two regional dialogues on civil society sustainability (at the Takaful conference in Abu Dhabi on 4-5 November 2015, and a workshop and meetings jointly organised with the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) in Ghana from 16-20 November 2015); as well as to identify and share emerging cross-regional themes and issues with a small group of key individuals interested in sustainability issues. The full presentations from the webinar are available in **Annex 1 – 2**.

#### **Key questions raised by participants**

A number of important questions were raised during discussions, which can be grouped under similar topics:

### Legal frameworks and shrinking space for civil society

- How do legal frameworks, the environment and/or particular legislations affect the sustainability of CSOs, especially when they impose limits to how CSOs can raise money in-country or access external funding?
- As restrictions on CSOs to receive foreign funding and spaces shrink, what can be done to support CSOs in complex contexts and fragile states?

### Social movements

- How can we engage with less structured, new “civilian/social movements” such as Balai Citoyen or 99%? How can / and should we find ways to support those movements and their sustainability in the long run?

### Understanding how different types of organisations are affected

- How do we define sustainability? Is it possible to categorise the ways in which sustainability affects different types of organisations? Can we think about how support should be tailored accordingly?
- Can we identify different degrees of how vulnerable CSOs are depending on context, sector or particular legal regimes?

### The private sector

- How can CSOs cooperate and engage with the private sector (and CSRs) more effectively? What other actors need to be engaged and are key when improving sustainability of CSOs?

### Capacity building

- Considering ‘capacity building’ is not a popular term in the MENA region, should we move away from it?

### Cooperating

- Do CSOs have a real interest in operating in coalitions (given, for example, the strong competitive context in MENA)?

### Social equality

- How are we considering social equality in relation to CSO sustainability?

## **Key points and suggested actions**

### Making a case

- Both the MENA and West Africa workshops highlighted the need for CSOs to “**make a case**”, document their experiences around sustainability and share the learning among themselves and with key actors such as donors.
- Overall, there is a need to move from discussion to creating evidence and demonstrating impact.
- Many of us are intermediaries. We need to ensure that the voice of those we care about are able to tell their stories, that we create spaces for dialogue, and build evidence-based research on how organisations are being affected but also about how they are adapting.

### Legal frameworks and shrinking space for civil society

- In order to overcome restrictive legal frameworks (e.g. access to external funding), we need effective and creative partnerships. Participants shared examples from Egypt and India.

### Social movements and social equality

- New “civilian/social movements” could be a relevant partner to involve as they have great abilities when it comes to campaigning and reaching out to people. Traditional CSOs haven’t been so successful in this area.
- We need to keep a focus on the next generation and work with youth organisations as contexts and tools keep changing.
- Sustainability is linked to social equality as our work on the topic evolves around, for example, the SDGs, youth organisations, women organisations, etc.

### Donors and the private sector

- We need to incorporate donors, both institutional and foundations (e.g. Rockefeller, Ford), in discussions around sustainability of civil society.
- When cooperating with the private sector and CSRs it is important to understand that collaboration is mutually beneficial and we should try to identify key lessons that we can learn from the sector.

### Conflict and post-conflict contexts

- Several participants suggested that a conference/event focused on CSOs working in conflict (and post-conflict) contexts would be very useful.

## **Next Steps**

INTRAC will undertake the following next steps:

- In December and January INTRAC will conduct a systematic review of the existing academic, practitioner and policy-focused literature on civil society sustainability. This work is being funded by Wilde Ganzen, and outputs will be used to support their Change the Game Academy as well as INTRAC’s broader work on civil society sustainability.
- INTRAC and WACSI are developing a concept note based on outcomes of the workshop and meetings in mid-November in Accra to advance work on civil society sustainability in West Africa. The programme, to be developed in partnership with other regional actors, will seek to build the evidence on sustainability and create spaces for multi-stakeholder dialogues at local, national and regional level. Potential funders are being identified and approached.
- INTRAC is developing proposals to obtain funding to deliver other parts of its Civil Society Sustainability Programme (2016-2020). A short summary of this programme is attached (**Annex 3**).
- INTRAC will follow up with workshop and webinar participants to discuss whether and how they would like to be involved with future work on civil society sustainability globally and at regional levels.

## Key resources shared

“Report on regional workshop on civil society sustainability in West Africa”, WACSI:  
<http://www.wacsi.org/en/site/publications/?tpl=11&tpid=32>

“The State of Civil Society Organisations’ Sustainability in Ghana”, WACSI:  
<http://www.wacsi.org/en/site/publications/2756/The-State-of-Civil-Society-Organisations%E2%80%99-Sustainability-in-Ghana-sustainability-civil-society-Ghana-STAR-Ghana.htm>

“Breakdown in Pakistan: how aid is eroding institutions for collective action”, Masooda Bano:  
<http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=21824>

Project by the International Civil Society Centre together with eight partners covering four continents: <https://icscentre.org/area/global-standard>

## Further resources

[Thinking like a business? Social enterprise and civil society sustainability in the Middle East](#)  
– Blog by Rachel Hayman on social enterprise, philanthropy and the Takaful conference

[It's not just how, it's why. An insight on sustainability in West Africa](#) – Blog by Rowan Poplewell on the regional workshop on civil society sustainability in West Africa

[Building a strong and sustainable civil society across Middle East North Africa: a collaborative approach](#) – Blog by Rachel Hayman prior to Takaful’s conference on philanthropy and civic engagement

[Building sustainability of civil society: Debates, challenges and moving forward](#) – Report from INTRAC conference, webinar and blog series on sustainability of civil society

[Building sustainability of civil society: Beyond resourcing. Reflections from INTRAC staff and associates](#) – Compilation of INTRAC special blog series on sustainability of civil society

[Models of INGO sustainability: balancing restricted and unrestricted funding](#) – Briefing paper by John Hailey.

[ONTRAC](#) - ONTRAC is an INTRAC publication that looks at different themes of interest to development practitioners, civil society actors and academics. The latest two issues (59-60) look at the role of NGOs and CSOs in complex contexts.

## Annex 1: Presentation - Feedback from 'Building Sustainability of Civil Society in West Africa' Workshop


**Feedback from 'Building  
Sustainability of Civil Society in  
West Africa' Workshop**

17 November 2015 in Accra, Ghana

**INTRAC 'Supporting the Sustainability of Civil Society'  
Webinar, 9 December 2015**


Rowan Popplewell, Researcher, INTRAC

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**1. Introduction**

- Jointly organised by INTRAC and WACSI (West Africa Civil Society Institute), and funded by Broederlijk Delen, CBM, Plan International and Wilde Ganzen.
- Attended by representatives from national and regional civil society groups, national and regional philanthropic foundations and grant-making organisations, INGOs and bilateral donors.
- Participants came from across the region and beyond, including Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo as well as Kenya, South Africa, Netherlands and UK.
- Included a number of groups that work across the region such as INADES Formation and those that work at a regional level, such as WACSOF (West Africa Civil Society Forum).



## 2. Workshop objectives

- To share findings from existing work and test the relevance of our ideas about civil society sustainability to the West Africa region.
- To identify specific obstacles to sustainability in West Africa, explore experiences of and responses to these challenges, and enable dialogue between different stakeholders.
- To contribute to broader joint initiative on civil society sustainability in West Africa through identifying priorities and developing plans to take forward work on this issue.
- To contribute to larger INTRAC sustainability programme.

## 3. Challenges and Opportunities in West Africa

Changing aid flows

Rising economic growth

Poverty, marginalisation & inequality

Philanthropy and new donors

Political space and legal & regulatory frameworks

- Rising economic growth and shifting donor priorities is leading to changes in aid flows, and in some cases aid withdrawal.
- Economic growth is unequal and pace is slowing. Poverty continues to be a big issue. Marginalisation and inequality are rising. Contribution of civil society to development outcomes challenged.
- There are new funders (e.g. philanthropists, corporate donors) and more opportunities for local resource mobilisation (e.g. social enterprise) but civil society not able to capitalise on them. In some places sustained poverty continues to limit scope for alternative sources of funding.
- In some countries restrictive political context means organisations can't operate as freely and openly as they would like. In others, weak or unclear regulatory frameworks undermine accountability. Particular issues around taxation.
- Donor dependency continues to be an issue. Many organisations have capacity constraints that are preventing them navigating this changing context.

#### 4. Experiences of and responses to sustainability challenges

We heard from four organisations about their experiences of responding to sustainability challenges – INADES, KCDF, CBM and Afrikids. Their experiences were very different but had many aspects in common:

- **Building sustainability over time** - Older organisations like CBM and INADES adapted to changing context throughout their history; younger organisations like KCDF and Afrikids have thought about sustainability from outset.
- **Changing organisational structure in response to sustainability challenges** – CBM moved from charitable mission to rights based organisation; INADES wants to move from association to citizen movement; while Afrikids is a more traditional NGO that adopted social enterprise model.
- **Finding sustainable resources** – All diversified their resources and increased local fundraising (social enterprise, microfinance, local philanthropy, local government funding, membership fees, payroll giving etc.). KCDF and INADES focused on generating long term income (endowment building, investment funds).
- **Sustainability about more than resource mobilisation** – Cases highlighted how becoming more sustainable also involves strengthening relationships with constituencies, navigating political context & regulatory framework, and improving organisational governance and strategic planning.

#### 5. Key debates and findings

- Sustainability a process. About responding to challenges and opportunities over time. There is no end point.
- Not just about how, its also about why. Need to make the case for which aspects of civil society should be sustained and why.
- Clarify social purpose and shout about contribution to development outcomes at the regional and national levels.
- Address accountability concerns. Improve regulatory and legal frameworks. Specific issues on tax, income generation etc.
- Occupying spaces at national and regional level. 'We need to knock on the door, knock hard and knock the door down'.

**BUILDING EVIDENCE & SHARING LEARNING AND GOOD PRACTICE**

## 6. Next steps

### In West Africa:

- Building the evidence base:
  - Examples of good and bad practice
  - Stories of innovation and failure
  - Studies of legal and regulatory frameworks
- Sharing and influencing:
  - Dialogues at the sub-national, national and regional level.

### And beyond:

- Contribution to broader programme of work around sustainability:
  - Sharing evidence and experiences and stories between regions
  - Telling a bigger, global story around sustainability
  - Influencing international, multilateral and bilateral actors



**Annex 2: Presentation - Civil Society Sustainability in Middle East and North Africa: feedback from the Takaful conference**

**Civil Society Sustainability in Middle East and North Africa: feedback from the Takaful conference**  
4-5 November 2015 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

**9 December 2015**

Rachel Hayman, Head of Research, INTRAC

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**Takaful Conference on Arab Philanthropy and Civic Engagement**

- Annual conference organised by the Joh D. Gerhart Center at the American University of Cairo
- 5<sup>th</sup> annual conference held this year in Abu Dhabi, bringing together academics, representatives from foundations and think-tanks, NGOs/CSOs.
- Emphasis on philanthropic giving in MENA (historical and new), social enterprise and support for youth engagement, work of foundations on social development, including with CSOs

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## INTRAC Round Table on 'Civil Society Sustainability and Philanthropy in the Middle East'

### Speakers:

- Rania Masri, American University Beirut, Lebanon
- Ghassan Kasabreh, NGO Development Center, Palestine
- Huda Hakki, King Khaled Foundation, Saudi Arabia
- Didi Alayli, INTRAC, UK

### OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the dynamics affecting CS sustainability in MENA
- To examine relationships and interactions amongst philanthropists and CSOs that impact upon sustainability
- To engage different actors in MENA in a conversation on this issue
- To reflect on the way forward for researchers, funders and practitioners

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## Four Questions for Debate

Q1. What is the current state of knowledge on sustainability in the region?  
How is sustainability viewed from different perspectives?

Q2. What challenges are civil society organisations facing and how are they responding to those challenges?

Q3. To what extent is sustainability built into support by philanthropists for civil society and social enterprise?

Q4. What capacities do CSOs need to tackle sustainability issues?

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## The Sustainability Challenge for Civil Society

- Absence of space for CS in governance and policy dialogue
- Dependency on donor financing and donor agendas, leading to CSOs being so donor-driven not mission-driven
- Competition not collaboration
- Poor networking and coordination within the sector
- Weak capacity, with capacity building also considered ineffective
- All this impacts on legitimacy and credibility of civil society

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## Responding to sustainability: the philanthropy perspective

- Some foundations do have sustainability as a core principle
- But philanthropic support is often short-term, project/programme focused, and sometimes focused on public relations
- Many foundations do their own programmes rather than supporting CS initiatives
- Growth in foundations but data is sparse and regulation is limited
- Not enough funding for grantee core and operational costs, yet concerns about organisations capacity
- Foundations are keen to avoid dependency
- Call for philanthropists to move from charitable giving to sustainable, strategic support

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## Building Capacity for Sustainability

- Regulatory frameworks that open space and incentives for good practice in CSOs
- Stronger internal governance
- Infrastructure and networks to encourage good practice and build stronger capacity at national and regional levels
- Robust platforms to enable CS to participate in policy dialogue and planning
- Knowledge sharing and learning within the sector and from others
- Different approaches to capacity development required
- Promote standards and codes of practice

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## Key Messages from MENA

- Sustainability is multidimensional and a process
- Focus on the mission and vision
- Break dependency ties
- Get beyond service delivery
- Demonstrate credibility, effectiveness and value
- Less competition and more collaboration
- Find ways to open up political space
- More learning and sharing
- Co-responsibility for sustainability required

 **Positive spiral: strong mission and effectiveness breeds credibility and access to local resources that assures sustainability**

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## Next Steps in MENA

- Share examples of organisational assessment tools
- Define sustainability for the region
- Map foundations and NGOs across the region
- Find and share best practice examples for sustainability
- Place sustainability more centrally in reports and proposals
- Exert pressure for alliances between CSOs

 **INTRAC: building network of potential partners on sustainability in MENA; finalising review paper on sustainability in MENA**

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## Annex 3: INTRAC Sustainability Programme

# From survival strategies to sustainable organisations: supporting civil society sustainability

Sustainability is one of the most critical issues facing civil society today. INTRAC's 2015-2020 Strategy commits the organisation to supporting sustainability of civil society through strengthening access to capacity development support and influencing policy makers, government regulators and funders. We are developing a four year global programme of work that will enable civil society roles and actions to remain sustainable within rapidly changing development contexts through influencing civil society policy and funding mechanisms and building capacity of national and regional civil society support.

## What is civil society sustainability and why is it important?

The international aid system has fostered the growth of CSOs, yet aid withdrawal is pushing CSOs that are dependent on external financing to find alternative resourcing models in many places. Elsewhere, restrictions on political and operating space are threatening civil society action on human rights, governance and accountability, voice and citizenship, and democracy promotion. Often these two dynamics coincide.

In this environment there are many organisations that will not survive. As economies grow stronger and assuming that governance improves, arguably some of the more service-oriented functions performed by CSOs should be taken over by public or private bodies. However, the roles played by civil society in developing shared solutions in their societies, in speaking up for the marginalised, and in holding those with power to account remain crucial. Global political and economic dynamics are threatening these.

INTRAC believes that for civil society organisations (CSOs) to perform well and have legitimacy in their communities requires clear purpose and good, progressive leadership as well as well-balanced accountability relationships with different stakeholders. Critically, in order to operate freely, effectively and sustainably, these organisations need resources: stable funding from a balanced set of sources, relevant skills and capacities, sufficient political space, and a conducive governance environment. Reliance on external funds has often undermined these conditions for success.

Organisations cannot fulfil their mission if they are focused on their own survival. Changes to civil society policy and funding mechanisms, as well as the provision of high quality capacity development support to help organisations tackle resource constraints, are critical to ensuring organisations are fit for the future and are able to turn civic energy into a durable, independent force for change.

## Who is doing what on civil society sustainability?

The issue of civil society sustainability is gaining prominence within policy and practice, as awareness about the challenges faced by civil society – particularly in relation to civil society funding and political and operating space for civil society – increase, yet significant gaps exist.<sup>1</sup> Within the academic community there are very few studies that directly address the issue, although relevant insights can be drawn from other areas of work on civil society.

INTRAC has been at the forefront of work on civil society sustainability, advancing thinking and learning on the issue through participatory research, evaluations and consultancy with specific organisations. We have opened up opportunities for collaboration through workshops and webinars, and shared our findings in accessible publications. We have raised the profile of sustainability through

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, ['What's next for the Ford Foundation'](#), 17 June 2015.

contributions to the work of other organisations. We are also building up a broad network of practitioners, researchers, consultants and decision-makers who care about civil society sustainability.

## What does INTRAC want to change and how will we do this?

From the activities INTRAC has done so far we can see three clear areas where change is required:

- **CSOs** need accessible, relevant and practical support to become more sustainable and less susceptible to vagaries of the economic and political climate.
- **INGOs** need to greatly improve how they support partners to become sustainable, while also addressing their own sustainability challenges.
- **Funders** need to rethink how they support civil society to ensure that sustainability is a central component of their policies and programmes.

Ultimately, INTRAC wants to enable civil society organisations, roles and actions to remain sustainable within rapidly changing development contexts in different countries around the world. In order to make these changes happen, INTRAC is developing a four-year programme of work that aims to:

- **Influence** civil society policy and funding mechanisms so they support civil society sustainability, through engaging with decision makers and funders in a targeted manner;
- **Build capacity** of national and regional civil society support sectors to provide high quality, contextually-relevant technical assistance on sustainability as well as strengthen the ability of individual civil society organisations to become sustainable within their own context.

In order to meet these aims INTRAC will:

- **Generate learning** from existing work on civil society sustainability through conducting a critical review of current and past work within INTRAC and other organisations, and ensuring that we incorporate learning from new commissioned work initiated during the programme period. Critically we need to ensure that organisations access and make use of learning.
- **Build the evidence base** on civil society sustainability through conducting empirical research within different contexts in partnership with relevant organisations and researchers.
- **Convene dialogues** at a national, regional and global level on civil society sustainability that will raise awareness, promote sharing and learning, and influence policy and practice within and between these contexts.

INTRAC is well placed to achieve these changes because our strong relationships with INGOs and funders mean we can influence policy and practice from within. Our expertise is widely recognised and organisations and funders turn to us again and again for advice. We have connections that span the civil society support sector, policy arena, research institutes and academia, and a vast array of INGOs and CSOs; relationships that can help us to critically engage with the question of how CSOs facing difficulties and use the knowledge and support available. We take an approach focused on context but actively promotes cross-regional learning.

## How much is INTRAC looking to raise to support this programme?

We are looking to raise **£900,000** over four years to support this programme of work. To enable activities to be built into small, medium or larger programmes or grant requests we have separated out the costs by the three main areas of work.

<b>Area</b>	<b>Cost</b> (excluding programme coordination)	<b>Cost</b> (including programme coordination)
Generating learning	£50,000	£60,000
Building the evidence base	£380,000	£450,000
Convening dialogues	£340,000	£390,000
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£900,000</b>

The core programme will take place over 4 years from 2016 – 2020. For the remainder of 2015 we are laying the groundwork through raising the profile of our work and ideas, building up our network of contacts, reaching out to funders, applying for grants and piloting dialogues in two regions: West Africa and MENA.

To find out more about our emerging programme on civil society sustainability and our pilot activities in 2015, please contact Rachel Hayman at [RHayman@intrac.org](mailto:RHayman@intrac.org).