

JOHNS HOPKINS GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX

How healthy is your civil society sector?

Lester M Salamon We live in an era of performance and accountability. Increasingly, citizens, consumers and investors are demanding proof that their taxes, purchases and investments are really effective. Civil society is hardly immune from these expectations. To date, however, the civil society sector has lacked a convincing and reliable way even to demonstrate its progress, let alone gauge its impact. Judgements about its health and development have therefore had to rely on sketchy hunches and subjective guesstimates. But this situation is about to change.



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With the publication this coming summer of *Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector* Volume II, the civil society sector will gain a new tool for measuring its progress and demonstrating its capacity and impact in countries around the world.

Chapter 2 of this book presents a new Global Civil Society Index (GCSI), designed to pull together the significant body of data that has recently become available on the civil society sector around the world through the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector project and other efforts, and to express it in a meaningful and coherent way. Several features of this index are worth emphasizing:

- ▷ It focuses on the core of the civil society concept – the formal and informal associations that engage citizen energies in pursuit of public purposes.
- ▷ It seeks to meet basic social science norms of index construction, which stress the need for objective measures, clearly defined concepts, and cross-national comparability.
- ▷ It incorporates multiple dimensions, and multiple indicators for each dimension, to accommodate the diverse forms that civil society takes in different places.

More specifically, the GCSI measures the level of development of the civil society sector in different countries along three basic dimensions: (1) *capacity*, or the level of effort the sector mobilizes; (2) *sustainability*, or the ability of civil society to survive over time; and (3) *impact*, or the contribution that civil society makes to social, economic and political life.

To capture the complexity of the civil society sector, each of these dimensions is measured with a number of different indicators. Thus, *sustainability* is assessed in financial terms, in terms of the sector's popular support, and in terms of the legal environment in which it operates. Each country's 'score' on each indicator is then computed as a percentage of the maximum among all countries for which data are available. The resulting country scores are then averaged across the various indicators to get each country's score on each dimension. These dimension scores are then averaged for each country to produce a composite GCSI score.

The table opposite reports the results of this index construction for the 15 countries that scored the highest on the composite index among the 34 countries to which we have so far applied it. Several features of these results are worth noting:

- ▷ The US does not top the index. Both the Netherlands and Norway score higher.
- ▷ The index captures the multiple dimensions of civil society. Countries with small civil society sectors as measured in terms of paid

employment (eg Norway and Sweden) nevertheless score quite high because the index takes into account volunteer activity, informal movement activity, and expressive as well as service functions.

- No country achieves a score of 100 on any dimension of the GCSI or on the index as a whole. This index should therefore not foster complacency.
- The index demonstrates the varying levels of civil society development around the world. With a maximum value of 74, a minimum score of 19, and an average score of 40, the index should serve to stimulate efforts to promote civil society. Now, however, we have a way to measure the success of these efforts.

No doubt, the Hopkins GCSI will not be the last word on how to measure the progress of civil society around the world. On the contrary, we hope it will spur others to improve on what we have done as well as generate improvements in the basic data on which we can all rely. Our work with the UN to formulate a new *Handbook on Nonprofit Institutions in the System of National Accounts* should make an important contribution to this by making the collection of systematic empirical data on the civil society sector, philanthropy and volunteering a more explicit obligation of national statistical agencies. But countries must still

For a full account of the Hopkins Global Civil Society Index, see Lester M. Salomon and Wojciech Sokolowski, 'Measuring Civil Society: The Johns Hopkins Global Civil Society Index', in Lester M. Salomon, Wojciech Sokolowski and Associates (forthcoming 2004) Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the nonprofit sector Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press. For information on how to order, see p3.

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Civil society is too important to operate any longer in the dark. Hopefully, by indexing its progress from place to place and over time in a coherent and reliable way, we can focus more attention on its status and encourage its development. That, at any rate, is the goal of this new index. @

CNP goes where angels fear to tread

As Lester Salamon explains (see opposite), the Johns Hopkins Global Civil Society Index gives scores to 34 countries for the capacity, sustainability and impact of their civil society sectors. Any index that effectively ranks countries is bound to be controversial. Why did he and his colleagues decide to produce an index, and what purpose will it serve, Alliance asked Salamon.

'We had so much data,' he says, that it was becoming difficult for people 'to get their arms around it' – an expression that came up several times in the interview. The index is a way to pull the data together coherently, organize it, and make it understandable.

An objective index

'Perhaps the most important feature of this index is that it is based on objective data,' he stresses. 'This means that it meets the basic social science standard of reliability, which requires that different observers looking at the same reality will come up with basically similar results.' But doesn't this depend on accepting the definitions and indicators used? 'Yes, to some extent,' agrees Salamon, 'but these choices aren't arbitrary ones. There is a substantial body of social science advice about how to construct a reliable index. The advice is to focus on the central core of the concept being examined and to use indicators that are validly related to it, that reflect the diversity of relevant experience, and for which objective measures can be found.'

'So we focused on what is commonly considered to be the core of the civil society concept – namely associations of people, whether formal or informal, operating outside the market and the state. And we used a definition of this associational core that we have tested and found workable in more than 40 countries, North and South.'

The index focuses on several different dimensions of civil society and uses a variety of indicators for each one. 'This produces a much fairer and more balanced picture of the state of civil society in different

Copies of the Handbook can be obtained from the UN Statistics Division in New York or from the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies at cnp@jhu.edu

The Hopkins Global Civil Society Index Top 15

Country	Capacity Score	Sustainability Score	Impact Score	Overall Score
Netherlands	79	54	89	74
Norway	55	82	59	65
United States	76	54	54	61
Sweden	58	56	67	60
United Kingdom	66	60	50	58
Israel	70	42	50	54
Belgium	65	45	60	57
Ireland	64	45	52	54
Australia	51	46	49	49
France	56	46	44	49
Finland	48	42	50	47
Germany	47	45	47	46
Spain	54	37	30	40
Argentina	48	35	36	40
Tanzania	45	32	38	39
34-country average	45	39	36	40
Maximum	79	82	89	74
Minimum	23	19	12	19

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countries than any single measure can.' The team took particular care to capture not just the formal, service-oriented parts of the sector, but also the informal, expressive parts involving volunteers, advocacy, and members. 'This is why a country like Norway, with a relatively small number of civil society organizations with paid staff, could still score second highest of all the countries we examined.'

What is the purpose of the index?

'The index is intended, in the first place, to help focus attention on the civil society sector just as the Millennium Development Goals and the Human Development Index have helped focus attention on the need for development and poverty alleviation,' notes Salamon. It will also help civil society activists make the case for changes in law and policy in their countries by enabling them to compare their circumstances with those elsewhere. Finally, it is intended to provide a way to chart the effects of such changes. 'If you can't measure your progress, how do you know how well you're doing?'

Very similar claims are made for the CIVICUS Civil Society Index. How will the new index differ from this? 'The CIVICUS Diamond,' says Salamon, 'is a good-faith effort to create a diagnostic tool that local civil society leaders can use to structure an assessment of civil society in their own countries. But it relies heavily on the subjective judgements of local informants and can't really be used for comparisons among countries, or even within countries over time.'

Will there be criticisms?

'If you rank anything, there will be people who feel they were ranked too high or too low,' Salamon admits. 'Some people will quarrel with the basic definition or challenge particular indicators. So long as this remains on the level of substantive debate and doesn't degenerate into a squabble over the supposed motives behind the choice of this or that indicator, this can be healthy for the field.' But, Salamon emphasizes, there will always be room for improvement. In fact, he hopes the index will advance the debate about the basic meaning of civil society and stimulate improvements in the indicators and data available to depict it.

Is there a danger that low-scoring countries will become demoralized and high-scoring ones complacent? Salamon sees complacency as the greater risk, but given that no country scored the maximum of 100 per cent, and that all fell down on some

indicators, he hopes countries at the top won't be tempted to think they've got as far as it's possible to go.

He's less worried about demoralization. He hopes the index will spur countries that are ranked lower than they would like to take action to strengthen their sector. 'To the extent this occurs, civil society will be strengthened and the world will be better off.' @