Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index – Asia

Overview The Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (CSOSI) regional report for Asia, produced by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in partnership with FHI 360, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), and an implementing partner in each participating country, assesses the status of CSO sectors in nine countries in South and Southeast Asia. The CSOSI provides a comprehensive assessment of the capacity of civil society to serve as both a short-term partner in implementing development solutions and a long-term actor in ensuring development outcomes are sustained. The CSOSI empowers local civil society to collectively assess not only the environment in which they are operating, but also their own capacities to advocate, operate sustainably and communicate with citizens. Allowing local civil society to self-identify their development challenges is the first step in promoting resiliency and long-term self-reliance.

This year’s Asia Index reports on the strength and overall viability of the CSO sectors in Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. It addresses both advances and setbacks in seven key components or “dimensions” of the sustainability of civil society sectors: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, sectoral infrastructure, and public image. The Index is intended to be a useful source of information for local CSOs, governments, donors, academics, and others who want to better understand and monitor key aspects of sustainability in the CSO sector.

Results During 2017, more than half of the assessed countries—Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka—reported overall deterioration in CSO sustainability. Many of the score changes were results of heightened government harassment and declines in foreign funding. Only one country, Indonesia, recorded an overall improvement in CSO sustainability, with advances noted in the advocacy, service provision, and public image dimensions. While all the assessed countries have overall sustainability levels falling within the Sustainability Evolving category, there remain great variations across the assessed countries. The Philippines continues to have the most sustainable CSO sector, followed closely by Bangladesh. Despite concerns about closing civic space since the Duterte administration came to power, CSOs in the Philippines continue to benefit from easy registration and a generally free environment to operate and engage in matters of public interest. Thailand, which remains under the rule of a military government that suppresses dissent, continues to have the weakest level of sustainability, with Sri Lanka, Burma, and Cambodia only faring slightly better.

2017 CSOSI Reports can be found at https://www.fhi360.org/resource/civil-society-organization-sustainability-index.