

United Nations Development Programme



# UNDP COUNTRY-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY:

## A GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

May 2009

## Acronyms

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| CBO           | Community-based Organisation  |
| CPR           | Crisis Prevention and Recovery  |
| CSO           | Civil society organizations   |
| GEF/SGP       | Global Environment Facility/ Small Grant Programme                            |
| INGO          | International Non-Governmental Organisation                                   |
| LTA           | Long Term Agreement   |
| NGO           | Non-Governmental Organisation   |
| PRSP          | Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper  |
| SGP           | Small Grants Programme (of the Global Environment Facility)                   |
| SNV           | Netherlands Development Organization (Stichting<br>Nederlandse Vrijwilligers) |
| UNCT          | United Nations Country Teams  |
| UNDP Bureaux: |   |
| BCPR          | Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery                                     |
| BDP           | Bureau for Development Policy   |
| CSOD          | Civil Society Organizations Division  |
| OGC           | Oslo Governance Centre, Bureau for Development Policy                         |
| PB            | Partnerships Bureau   |
| RBA           | Regional Bureau for Africa  |
| RBAP          | Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific                                      |
| RBAS          | Regional Bureau for Arab States   |
| RBEC          | Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of<br>Independent States      |
| RBLAC         | Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean                           |
| RSC           | Regional Service Centre   |
| SURF          | Sub-Regional Resource Facility  |

### Acknowledgements

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### Disclaimer

The survey was conducted in the first quarter of 2008. Given the evolving social, economic and political situations at the local, regional and global level, UNDP programme support in some countries might have changed from that indicated in this document.

## A snapshot of global engagement

This paper presents an overview of UNDP engagement with civil society.

UNDP Country Offices around the world have thousands of programmes and partnership agreements with civil society organizations (CSOs), including with national, international, and community-based organizations. In monetary terms, this relationship is worth well over \$100m. Added to this is a heavy investment in capacity development found in every Country Office, worth tens of millions more.

Yet much of UNDP partnerships with civil society cannot be measured in dollars: Country Offices engage national partners to develop and strengthen legal and regulatory environments for civil society; they bring civil society actors to the table in key national development processes like Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers; and they foster civil society relationships across borders. Country Offices engage with civil society actors in all thematic areas, including democratic governance, the environment and energy, crisis prevention and recovery, HIV/AIDS, and more.

This paper presents a 'snapshot in time' of country-level engagement, and draws on responses from 102 Country Offices (72% of all offices) to a 2008 global survey that asked about present engagement. As such, the snapshot illustrates and explains key features of country-level engagement as it is, rather than as it should be.

The paper is also indicative rather than exhaustive: it does not necessarily reflect the experience of every UNDP Country Office, nor does it attempt to record the entire history of country level engagement with civil society.

Areas addressed here include findings on:

- The [volume of partnerships](#) with civil society, in which 102 Country Offices channel over \$100m through CSOs for project implementation and service delivery.
- The [many types of UNDP initiatives](#) to strengthen civil society, through capacity development, legal and regulatory reform, civil society assessments, and networking.
- The rich variation of [sectoral](#) and issue-based engagement with civil society.

## Partnerships for development

UNDP uses an array of contractual modalities to partner with civil society organizations, each depending on the development challenge and the nature of the relationship. Yet irrespective of the technical aspects of contracting, UNDP views all of these as [partnering for development](#). Whether related to contractors, executing agencies or grantees, all agreements formalize a relationship in which the development of the capacity of the CSO is a programmatic goal in addition to the specific service being delivered. Moreover, UNDP frequently benefits from the existing presence and strength of CSOs. Depending on the development context, therefore, UNDP either seeks to leverage or develop civil society capacity by partnering with CSOs in development interventions. Projects whose primary goal is civil society capacity development are treated in the next section.

The survey elicited responses from 102 Country Offices, which reported an estimated combined total of over \$100m being channelled through civil society:

- § Over 1,500 NGO implementing/executing agency agreements, worth almost \$60m.<sup>1</sup>
- § Over 1,000 contractor agreements, worth almost \$33m.<sup>2</sup>
- § 1,500-2,400 grant agreements, with 45 Country Offices reporting a combined value of about \$30m.<sup>3</sup>
- § At least 18 Country Offices delivered more than five per cent of their total 2007 programmatic expenditure through CSOs, eight of which were in the Europe-Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region.<sup>4</sup>

An important development challenge faced by all actors, including UNDP, is in moving towards longer-term engagement. Currently, country-level engagement tends to be short-term, tied to the project cycle, and directed towards organizations that deliver programmatic services. In some contexts, such as Iraq or Afghanistan, long-term engagement can be difficult. In the context of “One UN,” UNDP is also tasked with the challenge of enhancing collaboration with other UN agencies on issues related to civil society engagement.<sup>5</sup> The country survey suggests greater energy has yet to be applied in this area, with about half reporting ‘strong’ or ‘some’ and one-fifth reporting ‘little or none.’

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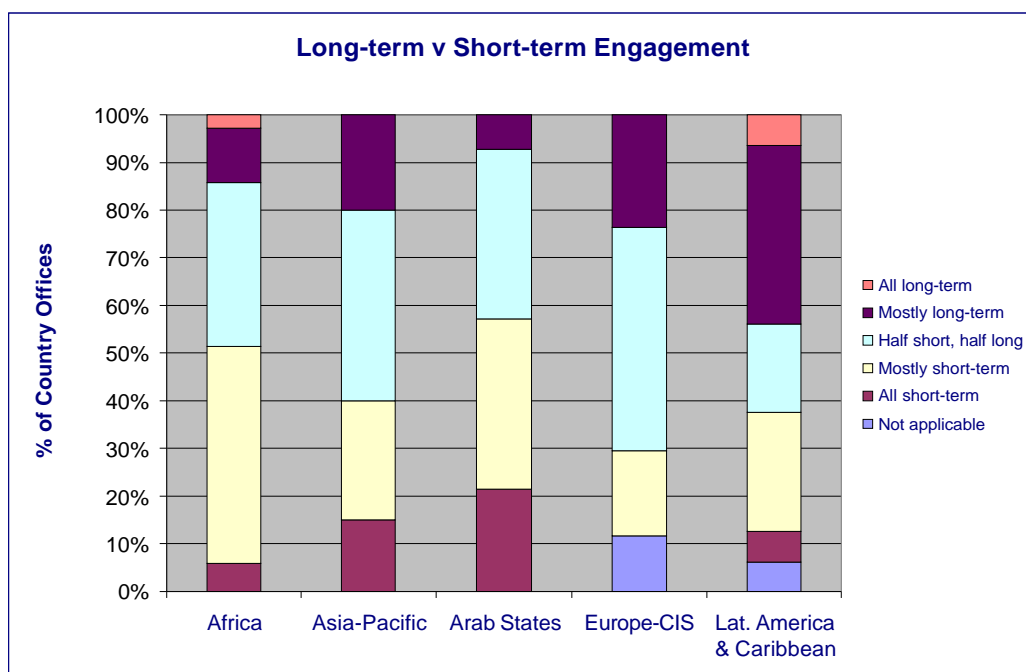
<sup>1</sup> In countries with harmonized programming procedures, the NGO would be an Implementing Partner, or an Executing Agency in countries that have not yet harmonized.

<sup>2</sup> Procurement procedures and contracts apply when services are being procured.

<sup>3</sup> When there is no procurement, and UNDP supports an NGO initiative.

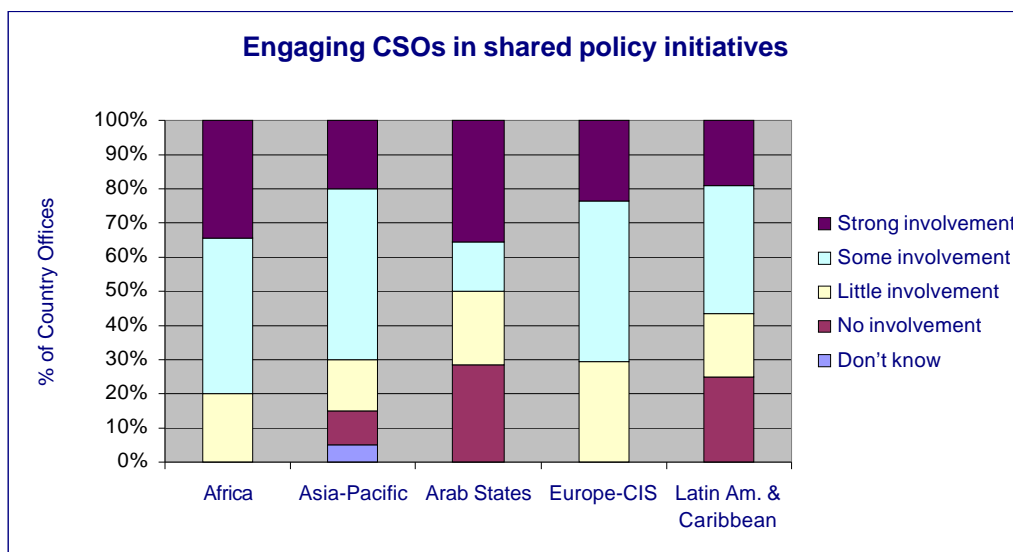
<sup>4</sup> When there is no procurement, but UNDP and a partner declare their mutual interests in working together. UNDP has such agreements with donors, governments, INGOS, regional development banks, UN agencies, etc.

<sup>5</sup> ‘One UN’ refers to the piloting of an integrated UN approach to development, in which the many diverse UN agencies act in a coordinated way under one budgetary framework, with one leader, one country programme, and one office. See more at <http://www.undg.org/?P=7>



Partnering with CSOs also extends beyond a contractual relationship, and involves activities such as participation in, and monitoring of, [national development frameworks](#) and processes. Two-thirds of Country Offices report engagement in shared policy initiatives such as macro-frameworks like Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Engagement appears to be strongest in the Africa, Europe-CIS, and Asia-Pacific regions.

In [Benin](#), for example, UNDP in partnership with SNV Netherlands Development Organization has involved Social Watch to facilitate civil society participation in the development of the second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Social Watch Benin collaborated with a wide range of CSOs to organize data collection in all 77 municipalities, focusing on communities' perception of poverty and their main development needs. The data was used to influence the drafting of the PRSP-II. Once the first draft of the PRSP-II was ready, Social Watch Benin went back to the communities to include their perspectives in the document. In total more than 700 CSOs participated in the process. This initiative was part of a larger UNDP-SNV programme implemented in 15 countries (2005-2008) with a \$2m budget. This programme works with CSOs and local authorities to strengthen their capacity to participate in Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and PRSP processes.



As part of country-level attempts to make civil society engagement less ad-hoc, about one-fifth of Country Offices reported having [civil society strategies](#) as a means to plan for long-term partnership and capacity development. In addition, half of all Country Offices reported having civil society [consultative bodies](#), with one quarter reporting that there were plans for such bodies.

#### Civil Society Advisory Committees

National Civil Society Advisory Committees (CSAC) – distinct from general thematic groups or consultative bodies involving civil society – have been established by 13 UN Country Teams, to provide the UN and civil society actors with a forum for dialogue and exchange at the country level. CSACs strengthen and support the ability of the UNCT to understand and analyze the role and contributions of civil society in the changing development process of a country. The overall goal is to facilitate a synergistic relationship:

- § The committee provides UNCT with feedback on policies and programmes to improve development effectiveness; and
- § UNCT provides the committee with a space in which civil society can engage in dialogue with the United Nations system. Together, the committee and UNCT help to generate discussion and joint initiatives on national development priorities.

As of 2008, CSACs to the UNCT have been established in Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Mozambique, Malawi, Pakistan, Philippines, Senegal, Tanzania, Bolivia, and Kenya (for indigenous peoples).

### WHO ARE THE CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS?

On average, Country Offices reported that national CSOs with which they engage are 50% community-based and 50% national.<sup>6</sup> This suggests an impressive ability for an organization of the size of UNDP to 'reach beyond the capital' – a positive development because, in the words of one respondent, "you can get an output from a consultant, but an outcome that leads to real change only comes from a local partner."

International NGOs typically constituted about 25% of all CSOs with whom UNDP engages, with Country Offices in the Asia-Pacific region appearing to deal with INGOs the most (35%) and those in Europe-CIS the least (17%).

In addition, while 73% reported some or strong focus on working with CSOs that represent minorities, indigenous peoples and/or vulnerable groups, regional data showed that such engagement was weaker in the Arab States region. This may be attributed to the nature of the political environment, and possibly also to the absence of a vibrant civil society active in a range of areas in the region.

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<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to accurately estimate this data, as many CBOs are in fact engaged through the GEF Small Grants Programme, active in over 100 countries ([sgp.undp.org](http://sgp.undp.org)). It is also likely that there are sectors with very little CBO engagement.

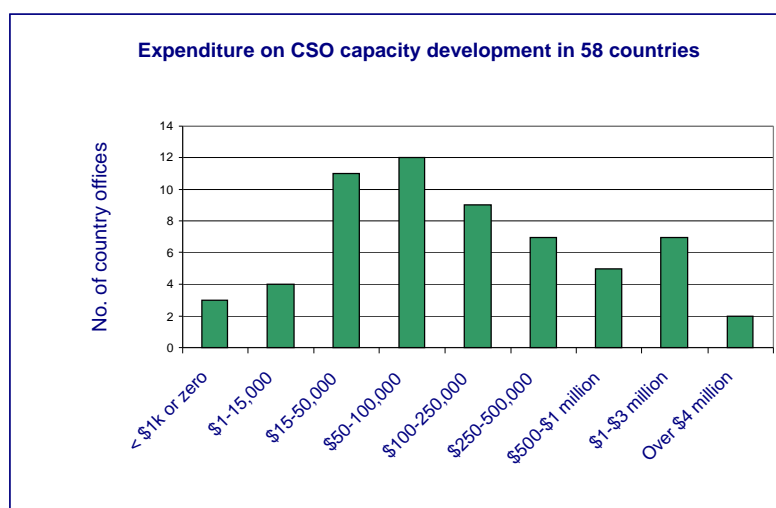


## Working towards a stronger civil society

### DEVELOPING CAPACITY

Almost every Country Office engages in capacity development activities, with half spending more than \$100,000. Capacity development goes beyond training seminars. It includes the 'hands-on' experience gained by CSOs when they partner with Country Offices to implement projects and deliver services. When one factors in the several thousand NGO implementing/executing agency, contractor, and grant agreements worth a combined total of over \$100m, the volume of engagement with civil society becomes clear, in particular since NGO implementation is typically viewed by a number of Country Offices as a means to develop NGO capacity.

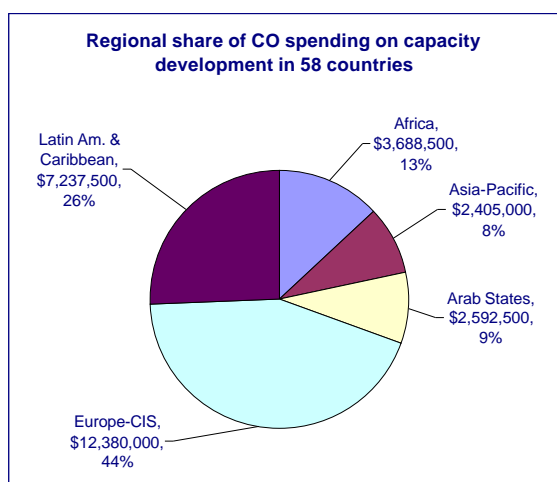
Illustrating the [overlap between partnering and capacity development](#) is the experience of UNDP in [Sri Lanka](#), in which a \$1m programme (STRONG PLACES) developed the capacity of local community-based organizations (CBOs), women and communities to participate in reconstruction following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, because their 'staying power' relative to international organizations made them key to sustainability. The project gave small grants and trained up to 700 CBOs in eight tsunami-affected districts. Capacity development included support for the enhancement of management skills, provision of administrative support, infrastructure such as information resource centres, and community leadership and outreach.



Country Offices in Europe-CIS appear to spend the most on capacity development (44%), followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (26%), while Africa, Asia-Pacific, and the Arab States combined account for only 30% of expenditure. In the [Russian Federation](#), for example, UNDP is developing civil society capacity in the areas of:

§ Environment, through four projects that seek to build local NGO and Government capacity to mitigate the effects of environmental degradation and improve development planning in Altay, Bryansk, Kamchatka, Kemerovo, Lower Volga, Moscow, Vologda, and Tomsk.

§ HIV/AIDS, by developing the capacity of civil society networks to respond to the epidemic, and by supporting the prevention and palliative care initiatives of faith-based organizations.



Although the quantity of engagement is not in doubt, an important challenge for UNDP, as with all development practitioners, is how to measure success. Those Country Offices that do measure success typically do so by measuring project outputs (workshops held, etc) rather than project outcomes (stronger enabling environments, etc). Successful measurement remains an important challenge, but there are important exceptions. In [Liberia](#), as the UNDP Country Office

moves from an emergency to a long-term development focus, a distinct monitoring and evaluation unit is being created to house capacity assessments of implementing partners being produced by an independent consulting firm. The unit will also assess the impact of all the trainings conducted by the Country Office programme units.

Related to this issue is the question of baseline assessments. Roughly half of all respondents reported providing either some or strong support to [participatory civil society assessments](#)— a figure well above the number of Country Offices that have carried out the CSI. In [Cyprus](#), UNDP supported CSI activities in Greek and Turkish Cyprus in 2005. Despite having to undertake two separate exercises, UNDP achieved positive results and used the CSI to develop a comprehensive civil society programme to promote civic engagement by encouraging authorities to create better mechanisms for CSO participation.

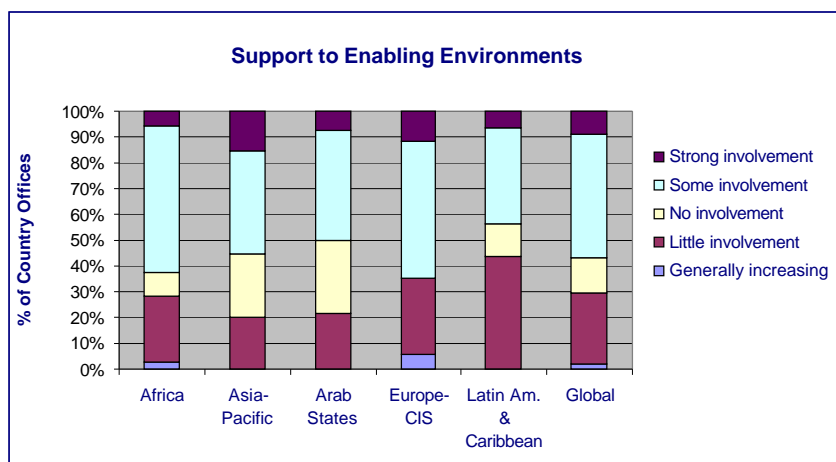
#### **The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI)**

“CSI is a participatory needs assessment and action planning tool for civil society around the world, with the aim of creating a knowledge base and momentum for civil society strengthening initiatives. The CSI is initiated and implemented by, and for, civil society organizations at the country level, and actively involves, and disseminates its findings, to a broad range of stakeholders including: government, donors, academics and the public.”

[www.civilsocietyindex.org](http://www.civilsocietyindex.org)

## STRENGTHENING ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS

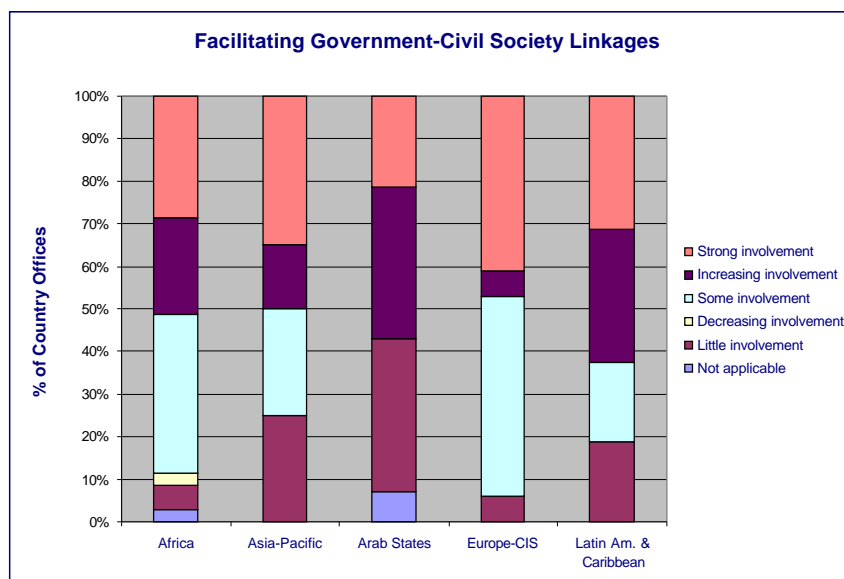
Globally speaking, most Country Offices report that they engage in the area of support to [enabling environments](#). This means that UNDP actively works to enhance the legal and regulatory regimes in which civil society operates. An 'enabling environment' is one that minimizes formal obstacles to the establishment and operation of a CSO. Yet global data masks significant regional divergence, as many Country Offices in the Asia-Pacific, Arab States, and Latin America and Caribbean regions report little or no engagement in the area of enabling environments. However, analyses using several development indices found no evidence that in countries with the least conducive legal and regulatory environments UNDP Country Offices were more or less likely to have activities addressing this issue.



In [Lao PDR](#), for example, UNDP began to support the drafting of a Decree on Associations through a two-year project beginning in 2007 with a budget of \$200,000. It focused first on raising the awareness of Government officials of the benefits of enabling civil society, since there were only a few domestic organizations active and the concept of CSOs was not well understood. UNDP also facilitated interactions between the Government and international experts, from South East Asian countries and from the International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law, on the development of a Decree on Associations. The Decree, signed into law in April 2009, allows CSOs to officially register themselves and receive funding from donors. Importantly, UNDP, working with the Government, involved CSOs in the discussion through conferences and workshops. It is key that CSOs be involved in processes of legal and regulatory reform, as they are the intended beneficiaries and must also ensure that new or revised laws do not atrophy.

## LINKING STAKEHOLDERS

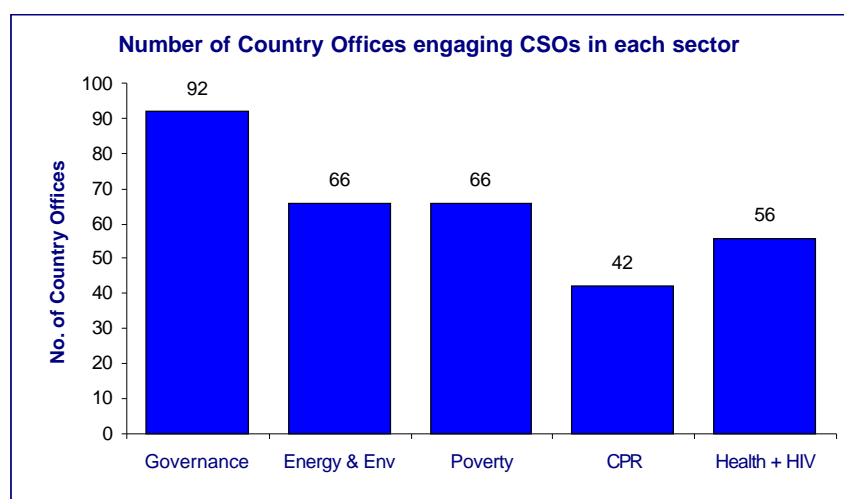
Country Offices overwhelmingly play a strong role in [facilitating linkages between government and civil society](#), including through means such as policy advice on strengthening communication structures between government and CSOs, as in the case of [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#).



Similarly, half of all Country Offices reported using [South-South](#) arrangements strongly or occasionally. Country Offices typically reported the use of information exchanges through workshops and study tours, and to a lesser extent the use of 'Southern' technical assistance. UNDP sponsored a network of independent think-thanks in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and South Eastern Europe countries, and in 2004 the Economic Policy Institutes Network was established. In many countries of Eastern Europe and CIS independent policy research capacities are not fully developed. As a result, economic and social debates are dominated by government agencies and multilateral organizations. The network comprises member institutes from 14 different countries, including the [Russian Federation](#), [Azerbaijan](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#) and [Moldova](#). The purpose is to strengthen independent policy research capacities, and in doing so to strengthen the ability of civil society to participate in national debates on social and economic policy.

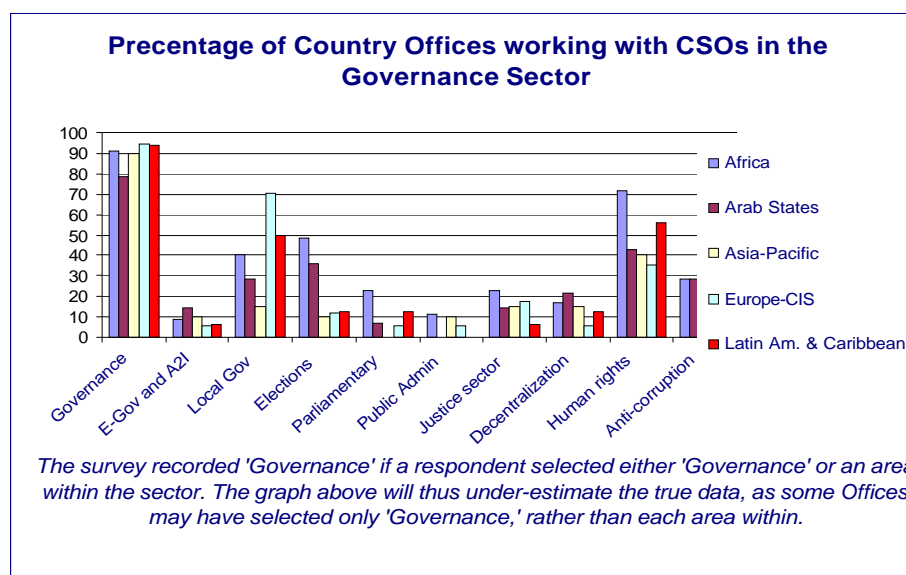
## Sectors of engagement

UNDP Country Offices engage with civil society actors across a range of sectors.



### GOVERNANCE

More than 90% of responding Country Offices reported engaging with CSOs in the governance sector, a higher percentage than any other sector. Within this sector, human rights, local governance, elections, and anti-corruption, respectively, were the four areas in which UNDP most engaged with civil society.



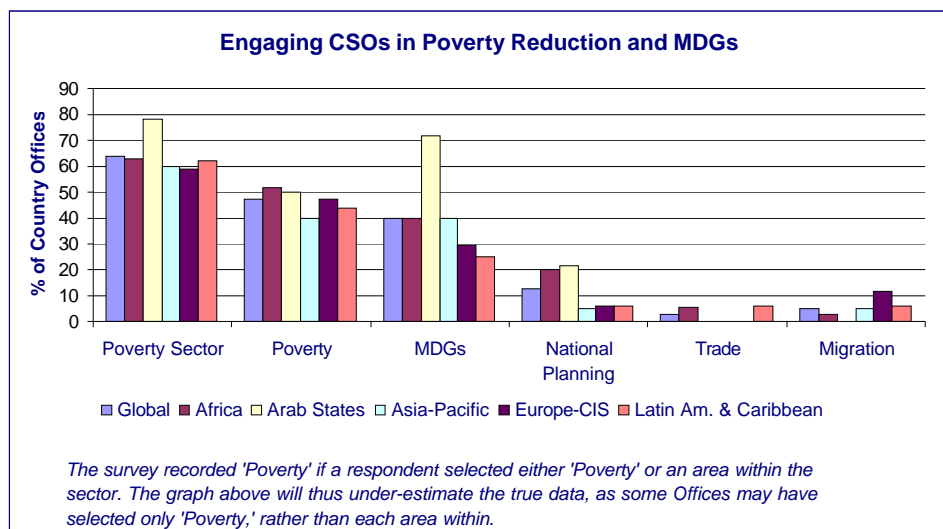
Country Offices in Africa appeared significantly more likely than other regions to work with CSOs on elections, parliamentary development, public administration reform, and anti-corruption. For example, while ten out of 35 Country Offices in Africa mentioned anti-corruption as a focus area for civil society engagement, only one out of 16 Country Offices in the Latin America and Caribbean region did so. Using several development indices, the survey demonstrates little correlation

between development indicators and reported Country Office engagement. This is intuitive, as the mere presence (or absence) of a development challenge alone does not determine UNDP engagement.

In [Gambia](#), for example, UNDP has a \$300,000 four-year project (2007-11) to develop the capacity of media houses and CSOs to promote human rights and good governance. This strengthens the capacity of CSOs to monitor and respond to policy decisions taken at national and local levels through: capacity assessment, the development of a strategic plan, followed by training or institutional strengthening, including sensitization of CSOs on international human rights and gender issues/instruments, the rights-based approach to development, the Gambian Constitution, the Local Government Act, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and equipping CSOs with the skills to build effective local partnerships to advocate for efficient service delivery and greater participation of marginalized and vulnerable groups in local governance.

### POVERTY REDUCTION

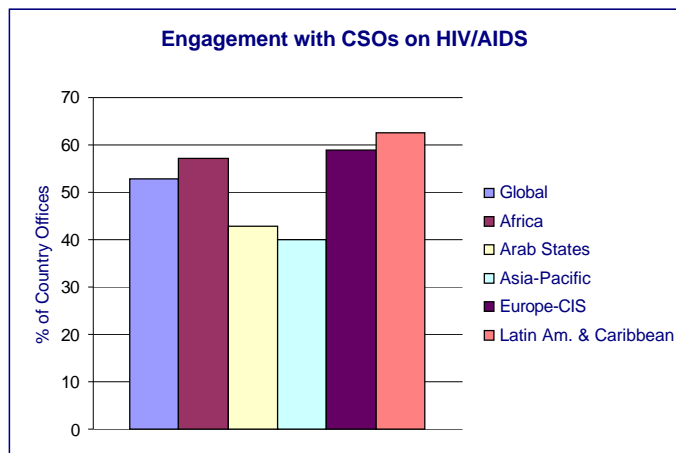
Most Country Offices reported engaging CSOs in the area of poverty reduction, with Country Offices in the Arab States region reporting the highest such engagement (79%). While Latin America and the Caribbean reported the least civic engagement on MDGs (25%), Africa and the Arab States had a significantly higher percentage of Country Offices engaging CSOs in national planning, though globally this figure was very low (20% in the case of Africa).



There are many good examples of engagement in this sector. In [Zambia](#), a civil society MDG campaign organized a media workshop and produced a radio programme called “Fight against Poverty in an Election Year” to link poverty debates with the 2006 elections. In [Egypt](#), CSO MDG coalitions were established at the sub-national level to raise public awareness, create opportunities for citizens to participate in local decision-making, and to provide a basis for joint programming by CSOs using training packages developed by NGOs for community development agencies involved. In [Samoa](#), MDG consultations/seminars, funded by the Office of the Resident Coordinator and implemented by NGOs, were held in remote villages.

## HIV/AIDS

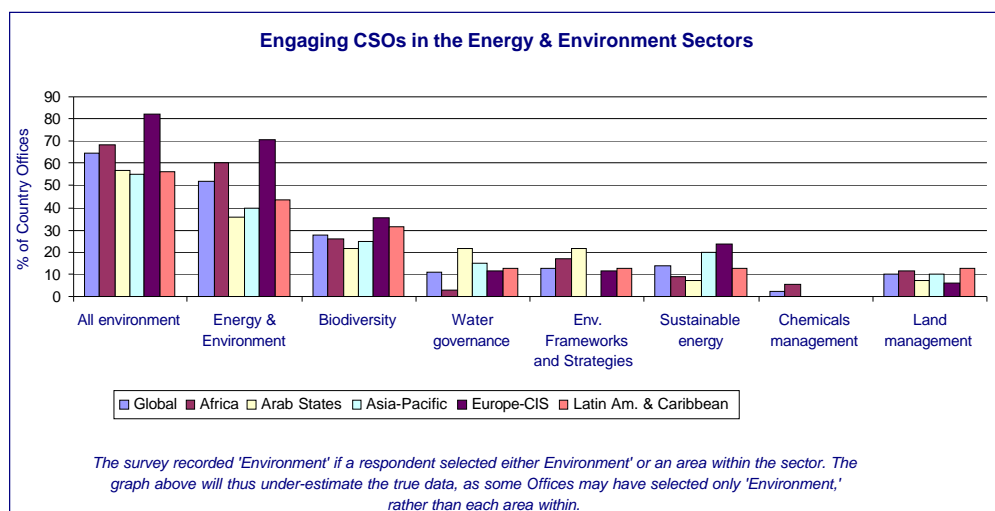
The majority of Country Offices reported engaging CSOs in the area of HIV/AIDS, with expected regional variations. Perhaps surprisingly, a slightly lower percentage reported engaging CSOs in Africa (about 57%) than in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the highest regional average at just over 60%.



In [Burkina Faso](#), PAMAC, a network of CBOs of people living with HIV/AIDS and supported by UNDP, provides CBOs and NGOs with technical and financial support to coordinate the fight against HIV/AIDS. In 2006, it supported 142 community networks and trained 403 community volunteers in voluntary testing and counselling, access to communal care and treatment, and prevention and organizational management skills. Through this, 20,256 people living with HIV/AIDS and 8,000 orphans and vulnerable children received support; 195,000 have access to voluntary testing and counselling; and 350,000 receive support, treatment, education, or access to training and information. In [Eritrea](#), UNDP has strengthened the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers as a means to complement UNDP efforts to tackle HIV/AIDS, while in [Lithuania](#), UNDP has engaged with NGOs in national HIV/AIDS prevention and control programmes since 2003.

## ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

Most Country Offices reported engaging CSOs on environment and energy issues, a finding that broadly approximates the number of countries in which the Global Environment Facility's [Small Grants Programme](#) (GEF-SGP) is active, although UNDP's engagement with civil society in this area goes beyond the SGP. All regions reported over 50% engagement, but the percentages were significantly higher in Europe-CIS (over 80%).



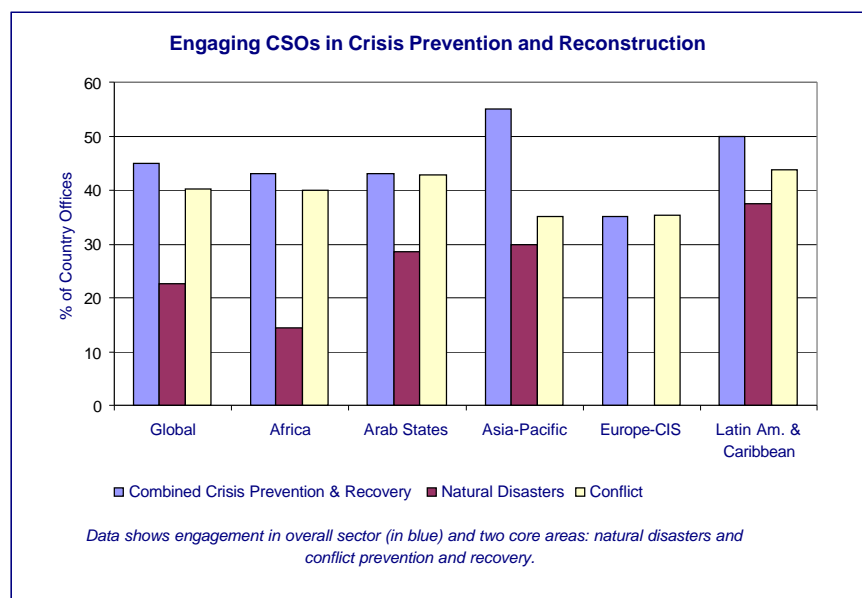
The SGP provides CSOs, primarily CBOs, with funding for projects that protect the environment. It is mainly funded by the Global Environment Facility, and implemented by UNDP. SGP provides grants of up to \$50,000, and since 1992 has funded an estimated 9,500 projects through more than 6000 NGOs and CBOs, and is now active in 104 countries. In a number of countries with over 200 projects (mainly those in the programme since 1992), advanced civil society networks have begun to form into regional groupings, as in the case of [Sri Lanka](#) and [Senegal](#), or thematic groupings as in the case of [Costa Rica](#) (community-based ecotourism), [Mexico](#) (apiculture producers), [Brazil](#) (fruit and nut producers), and [Mongolia](#) (pastoralists).

All projects are approved at the national level by a National Steering Committee (NSC) made up of a cross-section of national experts and civil society representatives. A key condition for the NSC has always been that a non-governmental majority is maintained, although government, private sector, indigenous peoples' organizations, NGOs and international donors are also represented.

### CRISIS PREVENTION AND RECOVERY

Just under half of all responding Country Offices reported engaging civil society in crisis prevention and recovery. When this is disaggregated, there is a higher percentage of engagement on themes related to conflict prevention than on natural disasters, with about one-fifth of survey respondents selecting natural disasters and about one-third selecting conflict prevention.





UNDP has built a wealth of experience in post-conflict and post-disaster environments. In [Grenada](#) after Hurricane Ivan in 2004, for example, UNDP led a national consultation process with ministries, CSOs, the private sector, academia and other stakeholders to determine priority recovery needs, build general consensus among all stakeholders, and establish an on-going feedback mechanism. In [Burundi](#), UN activities from needs assessments right through to project implementation are inclusive of CSOs, such as women's groups, youth movements, and human rights groups.

## Towards greater engagement

The 2008 global survey revealed country-level UNDP-civil society partnerships that are quantifiably deep, complex and evolving. To begin to understand the institutional changes and resources required to fulfil these burgeoning partnerships, the survey also assessed the obstacles considered by Country Offices to stand in the way of greater engagement with civil society. Some of the most salient responses were:

- Challenges for civil society
  - Domestic CSOs frequently have weak staff capacities, which are exacerbated by frequent turnover.
  - Many domestic CSOs suffer from a legitimacy deficit, in part because of the perception of having ties to the state.
  - Lack of a conducive legal environment creates operational difficulties for CSOs, limits opportunities for participation in decision-making processes.
  - Lack of self-regulation mechanisms among CSOs also limits their ability to influence government on policy issues and / or gain credibility as policy interlocutors.
- Challenges for UNDP
  - Greater inter-agency collaboration and measurement of success in capacity development are required.
  - Limited financial resources frustrate Country Office flexibility in seizing potential partnerships.
  - Close relationship with partner governments may hinder the ability to forge better civil society relations.
- Challenges for national governments
  - Limited knowledge of the function of civil society in a democratic system inhibits governments' engagement with CSOs (this is also a challenge for UNDP, given its close relationship with governments).
  - Lack of resources and capacity to develop mechanisms for engagement and partnerships, as well as mutual suspicions, are also impeding factors for governments.

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