

CLAIMING CIVIC SPACES TOGETHER

ENLARGING THE SCOPE OF SUPPORT AND REACHING NEW ACTORS

ANALYSIS OF THE FIRST YEAR OF THE CLAIM YOUR SPACE RAPID RESPONSE FUND



The rapid response mechanism **Claim Your Space** was established to counter the negative trend of shrinking civic space and as a response to the fact that partners of Danish civil society organisations around the world were increasingly in need of emergency support when attacks on rights defenders occurred.

Through the first year of implementing Claim Your Space, the mechanism has proven strong in its ability to respond quickly to emergency requests for support as well as in its ability to provide funds for alliances of civil society actors collaborating on activities to counter shrinking civic space. As a rapid response mechanism, Claim Your Space functions both as a reactive and as a proactive initiative to help prevent crack-downs. This analysis presents the results and lessons learned through Global Focus' first year of the pilot-phase of Claim Your Space.

Recommendations

- Ensure locally anchored flexible funds
- Broaden the geographical scope of flexible funding mechanisms to include all ODA recipient countries
- Make core funding available through flexible funding mechanisms



VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINES:

“ In the last 6 months, security risks and threats by the military forces are much higher. Military seriously attacked civilians especially if they suspect [that you are an activist]. Many people got killed in the interrogation centers. While exposed to more risks, we experience increased difficulties to continue our non-violent movement because there were many people arrested everyday. Arranging different safe houses or relocating to different places with the support of CYS helped a lot to mitigate security threats and I was able to continue my work for the movement”.

- Anti-Coup activist in Myanmar

INTRODUCTION

Only 3.1 % of the world's population live in democratically open rated countries,¹ and even countries that currently find themselves struggling between democratic and authoritarian regimes now tend to tilt towards the latter.² From the re-emergence of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to the violent riots on Capitol Hill in the US, threats to democracy, freedom, and human rights continue to take new radical forms and shapes across the globe. In fact, 2022 marks the 16th consecutive year of declining global freedom. The world is now on a democracy level equal to that of 1989, which means that the last 30 years of democratic advances have been eradicated.³ This is a critical development, and it calls for immediate action.

On top of this, new data shows that the nature of authoritarian regimes is changing. These regimes are becoming more effective in circumventing norms and institutions traditionally in place to support democratic values.⁴ And tools of restricting civic space are multiplying and becoming increasingly advanced. This means an increased use of bolder actions such as full-fledged coups, toxic levels of polarisation mechanisms, and misinformation.⁵ On top of this, restrictive laws and violent crackdowns continue to limit activists and human-rights defenders' work across the globe. In fact, the no. 1 violation on civic space is detaining peaceful protesters.⁶ To make matters worse, the global pandemic has resulted in new waves of restrictions, and COVID-19 legislation enforced for unspecified periods of time has disproportionately limited basic human rights, adding to the democratic backsliding.⁷

A strong, vigorous and inclusive civil society is imperative to protect and enhance democracy and human rights, and to respond to the democratic backsliding anno 2022. This is why, we must innovate and improve the ways in which we facilitate funding in order to be able to respond to the diverse and ever-changing needs for solidarity. And we need to enhance the protection and work of civil society actors fighting for democratic change and human rights across the globe. There is a growing willingness among international donors to heed this call for more flexible

funding opportunities, and with the introduction of funding facilities, such as the rapid response mechanism Claim Your Space, Denmark is contributing to a current push for a new and improved resourcing landscape that is able to meet the needs of rights defenders situated at the challenging forefronts of the global fight for democracy and human rights.

Claim Your Space (hereafter CYS) was established to counter the negative trend of shrinking civic space and as a response to the fact that partners of Danish civil society organisations (CSOs) around the world were increasingly in need of emergency support when attacks on rights defenders occurred. Furthermore, partners in the Global South are increasingly in need of proactive support for rapid actions to counter signs of shrinking civic space. The pilot-phase of CYS was launched by Global Focus in January 2021 and since then, CYS has been able to support a wide range of civil society actors within the geographical scope of the mechanism.⁸

Through this first year of implementing CYS, the mechanism has proven strong in its ability to respond quickly to emergency requests for support as well as in its ability to provide funds for alliances of civil society actors collaborating on activities to counter shrinking civic space. As a rapid response mechanism, CYS thereby functions both as a reactive measure to respond when crackdowns occur and as a proactive initiative to help prevent crackdowns in the future. These activities are facilitated through the two-track model of CYS where Track 1 provides emergency assistance and Track 2 provides support for activities to proactively counter civic space, including enhancing alliance building among civil society actors locally and internationally.

This analysis will present the results and lessons learned through Global Focus' first year of implementing the pilot-phase of the Claim Your Space mechanism. The analysis will conclude with a set of recommendations for further development of flexible funding modalities.

1) <https://findings2021.monitor.civicus.org/in-numbers.html>

2) https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/FIW_2022_PDF_Booklet_Digital_Final_Web.pdf

3) https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf

4) https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/FIW_2022_PDF_Booklet_Digital_Final_Web.pdf

5) https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf

6) <https://findings2021.monitor.civicus.org/top-violations.html>

7) https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/FIW_2022_PDF_Booklet_Digital_Final_Web.pdf

8) Sub-Saharan African countries, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Palestine.

1. CYS SUPPORT AT A GLANCE

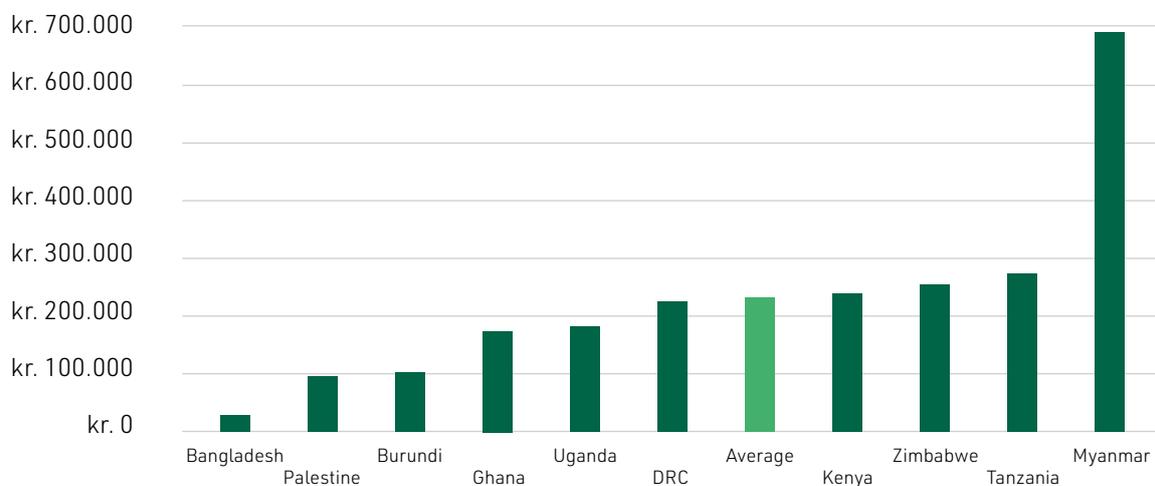
The following is a breakdown of the grants issued to local partners of Danish CSOs under Track 1 and Track 2 of the Claim Your Space Fund during the first year of the pilot-phase of the project.

TRACK 1 SPENDING 2021

Emergency assistance to individuals and groups under threat

SPENDING PER COUNTRY			YEAR ONE TOTAL	
Country	kr.	%	Total Number of Countries	10
Bangladesh	24.538 kr.	1%	Total Number of Grants	44
Palestine	93.252 kr.	4%	Total Number of Beneficiaries	127
Burundi	101.136 kr.	5%		
Ghana	171.799 kr.	8%	AGGREGATES (AVERAGE SPENDING)	
Uganda	179.228 kr.	8%	Spending pr. Country	224.436 kr.
DRC	223.423 kr.	10%	Spending pr. Grant	51.008 kr.
Kenya	236.364 kr.	11%	Spending pr. beneficiary	17.672 kr.
Zimbabwe	252.789 kr.	11%		
Tanzania	271.156 kr.	12%		
Myanmar	690.678 kr.	31%		
TOTAL	2.244.363 kr.	100%		

**Track 1:
2021 Spending pr. country
(DKK)**

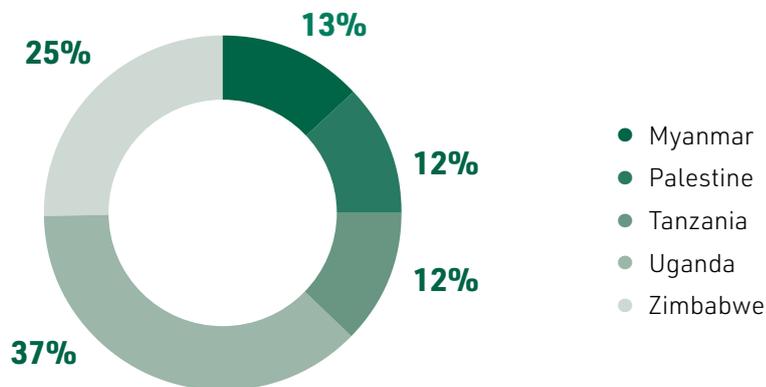


TRACK 2 SPENDING 2021

Grants to local CSO alliances to collectively counter civic space restrictions

SPENDING PER COUNTRY			YEAR ONE TOTAL	
Country	kr.	%	Total Number of Countries	5
Palestine	222.338 kr.	12%	Total Number of Grants	8
Tanzania	223.070 kr.	12%	Total Number of involved CSOs	25
Myanmar	243.806 kr.	13%		
Zimbabwe	461.158 kr.	25%		
Uganda	673.090 kr.	37%		
TOTAL	1.823.462 kr.	100%		
			AGGREGATES (AVERAGE SPENDING)	
			Spending pr. country	364.692 kr.
			Spending pr. grant	227.933 kr.

**Track 2:
Spending pr.
country (%)**



STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES – ZIMBABWE:

The organisation applied for funds to support three women human rights defenders who had been subjected to forced disappearance, torture, inhuman and humiliating treatment and subject to severe harassment and intimidation due to their work for women's rights. CYS supported the three women human rights defenders by covering the cost of: 1) Transport and communication costs involved in the weekly reporting to the police and communication with lawyers, 2) Physical and psychological recovery (all three women had obtained substantial traumas during their time in custody – both physically and psychologically), 3) Safe housing (as all women were subjected to continuing surveillance and threats), 4) Temporary livelihood support (as the women had lost their jobs as a result of their abduction).

STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES – BURKINA FASO:

This application was received from a civil society activist working to secure the rights of vulnerable children and women. The activist also provides support for family planning and contraception in rural communities for those afraid to leave their house. These activities made him a target of jihadist groups, who have been stepping up attacks in the area in recent years. The activist and his family were frequently receiving death threats. To mitigate the situation, CYS supported the relocation of the applicant and his family, including transport, rental of safe house, basic supplies, utilities and communication costs.

2. THEMATIC AND GEOGRAPHIC TRENDS

In the following, we will unfold some of the data presented in the graphs above. Within the geographic area that the CYS pilot-phase has covered, there have been some clear trends. Two geographic areas are worth highlighting: *Myanmar* and *East Africa*. Within these contexts, two thematic trends have been particularly prevalent. In Myanmar, CYS has provided a large amount of grants for activists and protest movements. In East Africa, a significant number of approved applications have been for people belonging to the LGBT+ community. In the following, we will dive into these geographical trends and seek to understand why CYS has been paramount to addressing the situations that civil society actors are faced with within these specific contexts. Lastly, we will present some of the trends in the thematic coverage that spreads across borders and we will unfold what these tendencies convey about the current state of civic space.



STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES – MYANMAR:

Due to his involvement as an organiser of protests in the anti-coup movement in Myanmar in the spring of 2021, the authorities placed this applicant on a warrant list, calling for his arrest. If apprehended, the applicant risked being placed in jail for up to 7 years for his activities, where he would be at high risk of torture. To respond to this situation, CYS support covered relocation of the applicant to a safe house for six months, as well as costs for communication, transportation, and a food allowance.

CIVILIAN-LED ACTIVISM IN MYANMAR

On the 1st of February 2021, one month after the pilot-phase of CYS kicked off, a military coup erupted in Myanmar, leading to a massive civilian uprising. Since the military coup brought the country into a violent whirlwind of potential change, civil society actors have mobilised to counter the military take-over despite violent, frequent and sometimes deadly crack-downs from the Junta. During this instance of sudden and immense upheaval and civilian engagement, we clearly saw the added value in having a quick and flexible funding mechanism in place to support rights defenders and changemakers who mobilise against authoritarian clampdowns on fundamental rights. To support democratic change, it is therefore imperative that we have flexible support mechanisms in place to support change when local momentum arises, as it did in Myanmar in 2021, and when crackdowns are experienced by civil society and rights defenders at the frontlines during these changing times.

Since the coup occurred in Myanmar, CYS has been able to support a wide range of civil society actors who have mobilised against the military take-over in the country. Myanmar became the first major test of the CYS-mechanism, and during year one, groups and individuals in Myanmar were the recipients of roughly 1/3 of the total funding issued under CYS' Track 1 for emergency assistance making it the sole country to receive the most support for emergency

VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINES:

“I am still in safety and security risks are reduced with the support of “Claim Your Space”. Therefore, the last 6 months, there are immediate outcomes and impacts, as I was able to continue to support the non-violence movement in Myanmar through fundraising, coordination, communication and logistical support. I provided this to different youth, civil society organisations and groups, civil disobedience movement of public servants, gun-wounded people and injured people and internally displaced peoples across the country”.

- Anti-Coup activist in Myanmar

assistance. Through Track 1, CYS has specifically provided emergency support for activists, human rights defenders and journalists. This support has to a large extent been granted for relocation and safe housing, as well as legal aid. Through Track 2, which covers activities that counter shrinking civic space, CYS has also been able to support an alliance of local civil society movements who applied for support to coordinate their efforts in optimising safety and exploring innovative approaches to organising protests. Through the support in Myanmar, CYS has thereby been able to enhance safety and alliance building among local changemakers in Myanmar. This has been done on local terms in response to local momentum arising for democratic change, and with limited involvement and interference from the CYS administration. This approach ensures that the initiatives carried forth on the basis of Danish support through CYS are anchored in local visions for a different future, thereby enhancing the likelihood of channeling funds into initiatives for sustainable democratic change.

By far the biggest single recipient country of CYS-support in 2021 was Myanmar. As mentioned above, this reflects the situation in the country, where a violent military coup took place in February 2021. At the same time, it reflects that a handful of Danish CSO partners were highly involved in disseminating the information about CYS to their local partners from day one of the coup and were also very active in helping partners apply.

Finally, the grants that were provided to applicants from Myanmar were often relatively large grants distributed among large groups of individuals (e.g., journalists, trade union activists) in acute need of relocation. The grant amounts were quite small when split per individual, but due to the number of individuals per application these

ended up being quite large. This is also part of the explanation for Myanmar's overrepresentation in the geographic breakdown of Track 1 support during year one.

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS BELONGING TO THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY IN EAST AFRICA

Throughout the period, since the launch of CYS in January 2021, the highest number of applications for support under both tracks have consistently been from applicants in East Africa, particularly Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya (and to a lesser extent Burundi). During year one, groups and individuals in East African countries were the recipients of more than 1/3 of the funding issued under Track 1 and almost half of the funding issued under Track 2. CYS support in East Africa has covered different types of actors and activities but there has been a clear overrepresentation of civil society actors belonging to the LGBT+ community.

At the time of writing, same-sex relationships continue to be illegal in the six African countries where CYS has provided support: Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Burundi. Defying restrictive laws, stipulating penalties of long prison-sentences, or sometimes even risking death, civil society actors working within these contexts continue to work tirelessly for the human rights of people belonging to the LGBT+ community. This is not a new phenomenon. Recent developments to the rights of LGBT+ people can therefore not be said to lie at the root of the high amount of LGBT+ applicants. Rather, we would argue that the large amount of support for the LGBT+ community that has been requested through CYS is due to a lack of other funding options for this group of civil society actors.



STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES - GHANA:

After opening their new office, this applicant's LGBT+ organisation came under serious attack and top officials called for the arrest of its key members. Some members had to run for their lives and abandon the new office when the building was stormed by police and mobs of homophobic individuals with the intent to arrest them. Following the attack, key members of the organisation were living in hiding for fear of reprisals and had to move between safehouses on a weekly basis. To respond to this situation, CYS provided funding for accommodation and food/living allowance for the human rights defenders in hiding and assisted with securing funding to support their safety beyond the CYS-grant.

VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINES:

“ This grant has helped [anonymous individual] be safe [after harassment and attacks due to his work for LGBT+ rights]. He no longer experiences challenges from neighbours and also attends the mosque without facing challenges. The lawyer has been very helpful to mediate with the mufti and others. [Anonymous individual] again actively joins organisations and the community, and conducts counselling for [Anonymous group]. We can see that weight has been lifted from his shoulders and he is able to breathe again”.

- Tanzanian partner CSO

Based on feedback from local grantees and their Danish partner CSOs, the overrepresentation of applicants belonging to the LGBT+ community reflects the fact that this type of civil society actor is often excluded from other funding opportunities, as they do not always fit within the traditional definition of what constitutes a human rights defender. For example, they are not always able to prove that they are being harassed or persecuted because of their work and/or activism and not because of their gender- or sexual identity. CYS provides more flexibility in this respect by recognising that for these types of groups, the personal is by definition political, as well as by accepting that in some contexts, a certain gender identity constitutes a political act in itself. This group of civil society actors is thereby subject to multiple layers of restrictions, as both their personal identities and their active engagement in civil society put them at risk of being subjected to crack-downs.

VOICES FROM DANISH PARTNERS:

“ LGBTQ issues and gender related issues receive very little support from other rapid response mechanisms. CYS meets this demand, which is unique”.

VOICES FROM DANISH PARTNERS:

“ It is a great added value that CYS supports “grey area” cases regarding gender and sexuality that are not supported elsewhere and that CYS recognises that gender identity and social activism are interlinked and cannot be regarded as separate issues”.

According to Danish partner CSOs and local grantees, another reason as to why these groups sometimes struggle to obtain rapid response funding elsewhere is that the threats they are exposed to can be mistaken for regular criminal attacks, rather than state oppression and persecution, which is usually the main focus for human rights-centered rapid response funding. In these cases, the threat often comes from groups of homophobic individuals, often spurred on by religious or community leaders, who are not formally organised or controlled by the state apparatus. Attacks often involve street harassment, verbal abuse, break-ins, vandalism, and burglaries/theft, and it can be difficult to document that these incidents are politically motivated attacks and not simply criminal acts. CYS's approach to these types of cases, which is that they are politically fueled attacks on intersectional groups, has resulted in a high number of applications from LGBT+ groups and individuals, who often experience being rejected for funding elsewhere, which is why this group makes up a considerable part of the support issued under Track 1. Similar challenges to achieving funding are encountered by other intersectional civil society groups; something we have also been able to observe through our facilitation of CYS. As it is the case for LGBT+ actors, indigenous peoples working for human rights or land rights also experience falling between categories in other funding options, as their civil society work and their personal identities intertwine. The same can be said for women human rights defenders. These two intersectional groups have also been significantly represented among CYS grantees.

LGBT+ persons are exposed to threats in many parts of the world. In addition to the above-described reasons behind the overrepresentation of LGBT+ cases supported in East Africa, it should also be noted that the Danish CSO environment has for many years been very active in a number of East African countries and has long standing ties to local partners that have been developed over years. This includes countries like e.g., Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya. This can explain why countries in this region are overrepresented, as CYS-support can only be given to local partners of Danish CSOs. Also, there is a natural snowball effect, which means that once an applicant receives funding, they share the information with colleagues and partners in their area, which in turn generates more applications from certain countries/regions.

THEMATIC TRENDS AT A GLANCE

The following presents an overview of thematic trends that we have observed in connection with the country contexts where they have been prevalent.

TRACK 1: EMERGENCY SUPPORT

This illustration shows a simplified overview of the thematic and geographic coverage under CYS' **Track 1** during the first year of implementation.

THEMATIC ISSUE	COUNTRY/REGION
LGBT+ groups	East Africa
Women human rights defenders	Southern and Central Africa
Indigenous peoples' rights & land rights	East Africa and Bangladesh
Journalists and Free press	Myanmar
Youth & student activism	Myanmar and Zimbabwe
Support for protest movements	Myanmar and Palestine
Trade union activism	Myanmar

Under **Track 1**, we have seen a high demand for support for specific activities such as relocation and evacuation of human rights defenders, safehousing of human rights defenders, legal support for human rights defenders, protection measures for human rights defenders, and digital security.

TRACK 2: ACTIVITIES TO COUNTER THE SHRINKING OF CIVIC SPACE

This illustration shows a simplified overview of the thematic and geographic coverage under CYS' **Track 2** during the first year of implementation.

THEMATIC ISSUE	COUNTRY/REGION
Support for protest movements	Myanmar, Zimbabwe, and Palestine
Youth & student activism	Myanmar, Zimbabwe, and Uganda
Indigenous people's rights & land rights	Tanzania and Uganda
Environmental activism	Uganda
LGBT+ groups	Uganda

Under **Track 2**, we have been seeing a high demand for support for specific activities such as projects aiming at legal reform, alliance building, advocacy to protect civic space, public awareness campaigns, protection measures for HRDs, capacity building for CSOs/HRDs.

DIGITAL SECURITY SUPPORT: A TRANSNATIONAL TREND

All the thematic trends indicated above present opportunities for interesting findings. We will not be able to unfold them all in this analysis. However, one thematic trend has shown to be represented broadly across the supported countries and thus particularly calls for separate mention, namely support for digital security measures.

Throughout 2021 and across the geographical spread of CYS, we have received applications from activists and civil society groups in need of support to optimise their digital security. All over the globe, digital technologies have long posed a severe threat to human rights and democracy through surveillance, criminalisation of online activism, internet shutdowns, misinformation etc. This is not nothing new. However, with the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in

2020, civil society actors were forced to move much of their work online underlining the need to ensure safe online spaces that protect the rights to freedoms of expression and association. CYS did not exist before the spread of the pandemic. For this reason, we can only presume that the immense demand for funds designated for digital security needs can at least in part be ascribed to spread of Covid-19 and the consequential spread of national lockdowns.

Requests for support to address digital security needs have been submitted by both individual actors, civil society groups, and organisations. Needs include developing secure back-up systems and putting up software and hardware protection and acquiring secure digital devices and secure internet connections. Others have applied for funds to conduct digital security trainings for staff or community members. The following textbox contains a common example of a request for digital security support.



STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES - DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO:

The activists working with [anonymous organisation] face continuous threats of reprisals from authorities. Moreover, these activists have to rely on internet cafés for communication, where intelligence agents attempt to gain access to their information, and security forces harass them. To protect [anonymous organisation] actors against surveillance and harassment, the organisation needs to establish secure digital spaces for communication and information sharing. For this, Track 1 support is requested to cover the following activities:

- Creating, launching, and hosting a secure online platform/website for the organisation,
- Obtaining a fast and secure internet connection service for the office (to prevent surveillance and hacking attempts by intelligence agents),
- Purchasing hardware and software to ensure secure data-handling,
- Training of 10 [anonymous organisation] members on digital security.

Applications for support to address digital security needs have often been very basic, compared to what one might think when hearing the technical term "digital security". In many instances the needs that people have sought to address are of a practical nature and arise from their limited access to resources that are necessary for them to conduct their work in a secure manner. This also comes across in the example from DRC in the textbox above.

The significant number of requests for digital security support can be seen as an expression of a global need to ensure that civic space is protected both offline and online. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to ensure that the digital space is inclusive and accessible to all.

3. LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH IMPLEMENTING CYS

In the following, we will present some of the lessons learned through implementing CYS in the first year of the pilot-phase. We will present challenges that we have encountered, as well as some of the ways in which we have sought to address them.

ENSURING INCLUSIVITY

Securing more flexible funding that is inclusive and within reach to a wider range of civil society actors is imperative to ensuring sustainable change. What we have been able to observe throughout this first year of implementing CYS is a great need for support among civil society actors, who do not operate on the basis of a bureaucratised system, and who thus have previously experienced funding options as inaccessible to them. Reaching new civil society actors who are to varying degrees excluded from funding due to bureaucratic barriers, such as stringent application and reporting requirements, has proven to be a key contribution of CYS.

A key learning point for us during the first year of the pilot-phase with CYS has been to understand and adjust to the significance of operating on the basis of local needs and challenges encountered by different types of civil society actors to make sure that our mechanism accommodates experienced needs on the ground. We have also learned that this effort to understand the unique situations of individual activists on the ground is imperative to ensuring the right to support and protection for all civil society actors who mobilise to defend human rights and democracy. It is not unusual that we will receive an application that does not provide all the information that is needed to approve the request. Rather than rejecting such an application, CYS staff has reached out to the applicant and the Danish partner organisation to understand the situation of the applicant better and assemble the information that is necessary for us to process the application.

The applications that we have received throughout this first year of implementing CYS have been vastly different

VOICES FROM DANISH PARTNERS:

“CYS has a good understanding of the local context and culture, and staff are willing to listen and learn where the context is new and adjust accordingly.”

in character. Although there have been clear indications of trends in the types of crack-downs that people are exposed to, as it comes across in the above break-down of CYS support, the ways in which people convey their situations and work are vastly different. Beyond bureaucratic barriers, this gives us an insight into another significant aspect of why some civil society actors have a harder time attaining support for their work.

In assessing applications submitted to CYS, it has been clear that cases are presented and framed in vastly different ways depending on what type of civil society actor the applicant is and where in the world they are situated. Differences in the use of language and cultural particularities manifested in the framing of cases has presented challenges in our processing of applications. CYS is shaped in a Danish context and it is facilitated by Danish staff. This is not insignificant as it unavoidably shapes our expectations of what an application should entail and how it should be phrased. This is a realisation that is an integral first step towards establishing funding modalities that are accessible to an inclusive civil society. Reaching civil society actors through CYS who have a harder time accessing funds has been a key ambition for us. For this reason, we have made great efforts to ensure thorough communication with applicants in order to understand their situations and needs and provide support in accordance.

VOICES FROM DANISH PARTNERS:

“ [There has been] rapid response in terms of very quick response to email requests and quick transfer of funds and approval mechanisms, [as well as] flexibility and contextual understanding, great, polite and encouraging communication, and good understanding for security and use of secure communication channels”

VOICES FROM DANISH PARTNERS:

“CYS is easier to access for Danish CSOs and their partners compared to international rapid response mechanisms. International rapid response mechanisms are often difficult for Danish organisations' partners to access and often do not result in support – CYS is more flexible and better at meeting the needs of our partners.”



It requires a flexibility in the design of a mechanism to be able to adjust and keep adjusting to accommodate different types of applicants. CYS' ability to do so is one of the main strengths of the mechanism.

REACHING BEYOND EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS

Throughout the first year of implementing CYS we have been able to observe a great need for support among civil society actors, who do not operate on the basis of a bureaucratised system, and who thus have previously experienced challenges in accessing funding. This has been made clear by the number of applications we have received from activists, civil society groups, and intersectional human rights defenders who have been unable to attain funding through other modalities. Reaching new civil society actors who experience being excluded from many other funding options due to bureaucratic hurdles,

stringent applicant requirements, or other barriers has proven to be a key contribution of CYS. However, it has not been without challenges along the way.

Our ambition of reaching new civil society actors has particularly been challenging to achieve due to our model of verification which is dependent on GF's member organisations being able to approve applicants on the basis of existing partnerships with the applicant. This excludes applicants who do not have established partnerships with a Danish CSO or Embassy. The verification model of CYS is what enables us to respond quickly to requests for support. It is also a significant factor in our ability to operate on a trust-based approach, as our member organisations already have established relationships with the applicants. In this way the verification model is strong and has worked very well setting CYS apart from other rapid response mechanisms. The success and effectiveness of the CYS verification model has also been noted by GF's member organisations, as seen in the textboxes below.

VOICES FROM DANISH PARTNERS:

“ Applications were very swiftly assessed. This was definitely faster than other emergency mechanisms we know of.”

VOICES FROM DANISH PARTNERS:

“ CYS has worked very well and in a fast, flexible, and non-bureaucratic way. The funds were made easily available.”

VOICES FROM DANISH PARTNERS:

“ The speed of the grant mechanism from application to grant payment was very high. The application process is simple and effective.”

In spite of the great success of the verification model, the excluding by-product of the verification model has been important to us to address.

During 2021, we received applications from many different organisations within the geographical scope of the mechanism. Some applied for support to address needs within their own organisations and interestingly some submitted applications on behalf of local activists and human rights defenders working independently in their environments. These independent civil society actors were unable to apply for themselves for a variety of reasons. A common reason was, that they were unable to demonstrate a formal direct partnership with a Danish CSO or embassy, because they did not operate as a registered NGO. This made us aware of the potential to reach individual civil society actors, who typically have a hard time accessing funds, by enabling local partner organisations to Danish CSO's to act as basket funds directly anchored within a local context.

Building partnerships with international allies is typically not a prime focus of independent civil society actors, as their focus is locally anchored and day-to-day survival is not a given, thereby tying their attention to emergent issues on-the-ground. To ensure that these actors were not left outside the reach of support options, due to the fact that they did not conform to larger and bureaucratic donor standards, CYS staff decided to ally up with trusted local partner organisations of Danish CSO's. Using local partner organisations as on-the-ground basket funds for channeling grants to independent civil society actors became a model that we employed in several locations throughout the first year of implementing CYS.

There are several advantages to employing this model. Firstly, CYS broadens its reach beyond existing formal Danish partnerships, thereby enhancing international alliance building and ensuring that the barrier of bureaucratic demands it lessened. Secondly, delegating funds to organisations who operate on the ground allows for a response that is quicker than any foreign based funding modality would be able to accommodate. This is crucial as the situations that have been supported in this manner have often been for actors in severely emergent life or death situations. Lastly, anchoring funds in local contexts encourages local leadership and self-determination, thereby heightening the possibility of sustainable change.

Facilitating flexible support for a diverse range of civil society actors in this manner also presents challenges. For one, it is a time-consuming task to build relationships of trust with applicants – something that is essential to the facilitation of flexible support. Significantly, it also requires us to make efforts to understand and adjust to local circumstances. This is a task where CYS staff has been dependent on our member organisations to help us navigate within different local environments. A key attention point for us has been to ensure that our support does not negatively

impact local power dynamics by channeling a disproportionate amount of funds into one interest group within a community. To avoid this, we have chosen to distribute CYS funds broadly amongst partner organisations who will act as local basket Funds. This contributes to ensuring that CYS support reaches a diverse range of civil society actors.

STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES – UGANDA:

Following the 2021 elections in Uganda, sex worker rights activists experienced increasing levels of attacks and harassment from police officers and hostile members of the public. Activists suffered violent arrests and physical and psychological abuse, which has left many with permanent injuries and have forced some to quit their activism altogether. The applicant, a local CSO that fights for the rights of sex workers, reported similar hostility towards their staff, one of whom had been attacked and murdered while at her place of work. To avoid similar fates for other activists, CYS funding was provided to cover emergency medical support, evacuation support, and psychosocial support to sex worker rights activists faced with attacks and threats to enable the applicant CSO to respond quickly in acute situations and thereby save lives.

SUPPORTING LOCAL CHANGEMAKERS IN TURBULENT TIMES

The eruption of the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021 brought with it the first major test of CYS' abilities to contribute with support during turbulent processes of change. The CYS model proved to be strong and as indicated above, we were able to support civil society actors in Myanmar in a variety of ways, strengthening local efforts for democratic change and human rights. However, supporting changemakers who are operating in a context undergoing chaotic change comes with challenges. In Myanmar, it proved a practical challenge to ensure that applicants received the allocated funds from CYS. Following the coup, the Junta took over control of the banks, which naturally made it impossible for us to make direct bank transfers to recipients. This meant that we had to come up with alternative ways of making sure that the needed support reached our colleagues on the ground.

To understand the viable transfer options specific to Myanmar, we had to consult with colleagues from GF's member organisations, as well as civil society organisations in Myanmar and Thailand. In the case of Myanmar, we learned that the safest way to ensure that CYS funds made their way to its recipients was to channel the funds through colleagues in Thailand. This meant that we had to identify

trusted civil society allies in Thailand, who would agree to receive the funds on behalf of their colleagues in Myanmar to then physically carry the funds across the border and deliver them to their final destination.

Identifying alternative methods of money transfer, such as this one, requires time and effort from funding facilitators. Both the task of identifying viable alternative options of transfer, in situations where standard methods are impossible, and the task of understanding and implementing systems of exchange that lie outside of our standard modes of operation also require flexibility in the framework of funding modalities.

There is no doubt that CYS has had life preserving impacts in Myanmar and contributed to alliance building and impactful initiatives carried out by Myanmar's civil society. There is also no doubt that the support that has been channeled into Myanmar through CYS has only been possible because the framework of this mechanism allows CYS staff to be creative and adjust the mechanisms modes of operation according to context specific situations. Due to the longer processing time, extensive application processes as well as set rules and regulations of many other funding options it would not have been possible for many other donors to support civilian led initiatives for democratic change in Myanmar, in the way that CYS has been able to. The significance of ensuring flexible funding modalities that are able to operate outside of the standard methods of transfer comes across in the reports from GF's member organisations and CYS applicants presented in the textboxes below.

VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINES:

“ We appreciate your support and your help with transferring the funding to the HRDs. Thank you for understanding Myanmar's situation and your flexibility for this.”

- Human Rights Defender in Myanmar

VOICES FROM DANISH PARTNERS:

“ The flexibility of the grant provider with regards to alternative transfer methods in crisis situations was key to making this work for us”.

The significance of flexibility in funding modalities reaches far beyond the need to be able to operate through alternative methods of transfer. For example, there has been a widespread tendency that applicants have needed to diverge from their original plans, presented in their applications, due to unforeseen changes to their situations. It is imperative to ensure flexible funding options that allows applicants to continuously apply changes to their planned activities, as the conditions under which they operate are constantly changing, often requiring constant re-evaluation of activities and implementation. CYS has approached all agreements with applicants on the basis of this understanding. Our decision to permit re-allocations of funds, has meant that we have not had to recall any of our allocated funds, as applicants have been able to re-distribute funds to other relevant activities, if conditions have meant that they have been unable to apply the funds in the intended ways. GF has developed a set of internal guidelines to ensure consistency in how this flexibility is applied. This approach is based on the following considerations:

- The acute nature of the situation that faces most Track 1 Grantees at the time of application makes it difficult for them to accurately calculate their budget and foresee their expenses. Thus, CYS-budget estimates are often characterised by some degree of uncertainty.
- The short-term grants provided by CYS most often only mitigates an immediate emergency situation. Grantees will most often still be in a fragile situation after the emergency grant has expired and being able to use remaining funding to maintain their situation may improve their situation onwards.
- Grantees are often still living in uncertainty and going to a bank to transfer remaining funds might expose them to further surveillance and risk.
- Allowing Grantees to spend remaining funds on relevant costs, as opposed to international bank transfer fees, increases the percentage of the overall funds made directly available to Grantees.

VOICES FROM DANISH PARTNERS:

“ Great flexibility, e.g., extension of a grant and reallocation of funds when something was unable to be done as planned”.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A strong democracy cannot exist without an active, diverse and independent civil society to keep power in check, represent the voices of society, and humanise political issues – particularly, in a world where polarisation, inequality, authoritarianism and conflict is on the rise. Democracy is built from the ground up and, equally importantly, democracy is built in different ways depending on the context. To work towards enhancing sustainable human rights-based democratic change through Danish foreign development aid, it is therefore imperative to ensure flexible funding options that are inclusive and within reach to a wide range of civil society actors working locally for human rights and democratic change. This is something the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognises, and it comes across clearly in the Danish Strategy for Development Cooperation “The World We Share”,⁹ when they write:

“We will maintain strong and targeted support for defenders of democracy who are subject to harassment and attack – both online and physically. These include human rights advocates, journalists, trade union representatives, faith-based actors, environmental activists, etc.”

Through the first year of implementing CYS, the mechanism has proven incredibly effective in securing rapid and flexible support for a large and diverse group of civil society actors within the current geographical scope of the mechanism. Based on our experiences facilitating support through CYS, we will conclude this analysis by presenting three recommendations for further development of flexible funding mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATION 1: ENSURE LOCALLY ANCHORED FLEXIBLE FUNDS

Throughout the first year of the pilot-phase of CYS, we have allocated funds to trusted local partner organisations who have then acted as local basket funds, channeling funds to activists and human rights defenders in their communities. Anchoring funds in local contexts enforces local ownership and broadens the reach of Danish funds. In addition, it enables immediate responses, as the funds are already in the country and ensures a safer deliverance of the funds, as the basket organisations have a greater

understanding of the local context. Lastly, by anchoring funds in local baskets, we have limited costs for international bank transfers and administration, as we have sent larger grants in one transfer.

RECOMMENDATION 2: BROADEN GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE OF FLEXIBLE FUNDING MECHANISMS TO INCLUDE ALL ODA RECIPIENT COUNTRIES

To support local initiatives for democratic change it is crucial that we are able to support local civil societies when momentum for change arises. This is unpredictable and our funding mechanisms must therefore be able to accommodate needs whenever and wherever they arise. We therefore recommend that flexible funding is made available for civil society actors in all ODA recipient countries, when transformative situations occur (e.g., civilian mass mobilisation, revolution, coups, periods of political transition, or war). In Myanmar, CYS has been able to support agents of democratic change effectively throughout 2021. Making this type of support more widely available would be beneficial to Danish international efforts for democracy and human rights.

RECOMMENDATION 3: MAKE CORE FUNDING AVAILABLE THROUGH FLEXIBLE FUNDING MECHANISMS

CYS has been able to accommodate almost all requests we have received for support throughout 2021. The ones we have had to reject have almost all been of the same nature: they have been requests for funding for organisational development in terms of capacity building, staff costs, and office equipment and facilities. This underlines the issue that while funding is becoming more accessible to a wider scope of civil society actors globally, many who operate outside the Western norms of bureaucratic standards still have very limited access to core funding. Making this type of funds more widely available is a crucial step in enabling a more diverse and equal civil society to work together towards common goals.

⁹) <https://amg.um.dk/policies-and-strategies/strategy-for-danish-development-cooperation>

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Global Focus is a platform of Danish development, environmental and humanitarian non-governmental organizations. Our aim is to strengthen and promote a diverse civil society and their capacity to promote a more just and sustainable world.