



Terms of Reference (ToR) for studying the impact of COVID-19 on Civic Spaces in Bangladesh.

Background:

Who is allowed a voice? What communities and individuals are recognised, which are deliberately silenced? These are key questions to be considered when discussing fundamental rights such as the freedom to assemble, to protest, to associate and to access information and justice. In the struggle for establishing and maintaining these rights, a vibrant and protected civic space is crucial.

Most scholars and development researchers agree on the following definition of civic space: **Civic space** refers to the structures, processes and legal instruments, and the absence of restrictions, that make it possible for citizens to associate, organize and act on issues of interest to them in the space outside the family, the state, and the market. Civic space is crucial for civil society to survive and flourish. If there is space, being part of civil society allows people to express and negotiate their interests, values, and identities; to claim their rights and hold power-holders accountable; to improve their own lives and influence developments in their societies; and to engage with others in a peaceful way. People can participate in civil society as, for example, an individual activist or independent journalist or in association with others in community-based organizations, NGOs, labour unions, religious associations, social movements, grassroots initiatives, and other groups.

Over the past decade, however, scholars, observers and activists have noted that we have seen a global shrinking of protected civil space. Although threats to and restrictions for civil society actors, both from states and from non-state groups, have always existed, the last decade has witnessed something that scholars like Buyse (ibid) and INGOs such as CIVICUS and Amnesty note, go beyond individual instances. This has significant implications, not only in general terms, but in crucial moments such as a global public health epidemic. The restrictions brought on as a necessity of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is argued, has further deteriorated the organising ability of civic spaces.

Purpose/ Scope of the work:

Objective: To understand how civic space has been further impacted by the restrictions brought on by Covid-19, how this has affected accountability and the freedom to mobilise in the countries that Christian Aid works in, and what impact this needs to have on our policy, advocacy, and other programmatic work.

The structure of the study will be as follows:

Understanding impact

- Understanding the specific impacts of Covid-19 in exacerbating civil and political as well as social and economic rights in specific countries where Christian Aid works.
- Understanding how Covid-19 has affected relationships between government, individuals, and civil society actors.
- Identifying the ways in which civil society is resisting/finding alternatives to civic spaces.

Using the findings

- Inform how CA can strengthen its ability to respond to a growing lack of govt accountability and help strengthen civil society actors pushing for greater State accountability.
- Identify issues and interventions that can speak to cross-cutting areas for Christian Aid, as well as the work of the 3Ps. Cross Cutting areas identified are: Gender equality and social inclusion, Climate Justice, Business and Human Rights, Accountability.
- Identify recommendations for other stakeholders involved in governance activities.
- Contribute to the work within the international development sector in documenting the impact of Covid 19 on civic space, as well as influencing advocacy for strengthening civic space, such as avenues for collective lobbying
- Identify a series of recommendations that could assist Christian Aid's national partner organisations to further develop their positioning and response to civil society influencing

Research questions:

1. What are the existing civic spaces?
2. What are the existing institutional channels that restrict civic space and what possibilities for contestation do they offer? Were these channels set up prior to the pandemic?
3. How has civic space changed since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic?
4. How did governments at different levels respond to the demands of the civil society of marginalized groups for support during COVID-19 and was there any outreach activities to engage them and consult for any potential support from development partners?
5. Were there any specific groups that were more impacted than others?
6. How has Christian Aid centred and supported programming and civil society actors who push for institutional accountability and advocacy?
7. In what ways are the civil societies finding alternatives to the restricted civic spaces?

Methodology:

This study is part of a larger study by Christian Aid spanning 3 countries: Nigeria, Colombia, and Bangladesh. The Bangladesh team will work with an external consultant to conduct their primary data collection. The suggested approach will be to collect secondary data via existent

reports and discussion papers. For Bangladesh, the impact of Covid 19 on civic spaces will be analysed in the urban and rural context. In rural areas, the study will aim to understand the effect on civic spaces from perspective of marginalized groups particularly Dalits, plainland indigenous, and transgender communities. The study location will be from 3 out of the 8 working districts in Khulna, Rajshahi, and Sylhet divisions. In urban area- mostly Dhaka city and peripheral urban areas- the study will be limited to understanding the impact on workers, particularly ready-made garments industry workers. The study will be qualitative and primary data will be conducted using key informant interviews and FGDs. The CSOs and garment workers are/were all beneficiaries of CA projects.

A consultant individual/organizational will be hired to propose a detailed methodology including sample size for the study. The consultant will be responsible for collecting all raw data and conduct secondary research as needed for the report.

Ethics

Each piece of data collection will be subject to a research ethics examination.

All consultants /research teams will be required to subject their research to scrutiny via the toolkits provided in section 3.2 of the “Doing Research Ethically” guide:<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/research/doing-research-ethically>

Consultants must ensure they think through the following questions in particular:

- Will the research ensure it is ‘sharing back’ with the communities it collaborates with?
- What knowledge on the issue is already being collated in the communities we will collaborate with?
- How do we ensure we are not simply being ‘extractive?’

Possible start date: August 10, 2021 for up to 45 working days

Deliverables:

The consultant/ organization is expected to provide the following in English

- Detailed methodology
- Data collection tools that comply with the CA research ethics
- Literature review
- Compiled FGD and KII transcription

Consultants Requirements:

The consultant is expected to have the following experiences

- Knowledge on social science research- design methodology, develop tools etc
- Knowledge on the political and socio-economic structures of Bangladesh

- Sound understanding of human rights- particularly pertaining to freedom of assembly, association and expression
- Sound experience of conducting FGD and KII

Reporting: The consultant will work closely with the CA Bangladesh team comprising Programme Manager, Economic Justice and MEAL Specialist.

Mode of payment: The payment will be made through account payee cheque in favour of Firm upon successfully completion of the assignments. Tax and VAT will be deducted at source as per govt. rules and regulations. Payment schedule will be as follows:

After receiving inception report- 25%

After receiving first draft- 35%

After approval of final draft- 40%