

# Assessing the impacts of changing civic space on development outcomes: a methodological discussion

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## Summary

This paper explores the methodological options for assessing or measuring the impacts of closing civic space on development. It summarizes a review of literature on the forms and spread of efforts to restrict civic space, and its impacts on civil society actors and their contributions to development. It briefly discusses the conceptual framework developed, which focuses on understanding the nature of the fit between states and civil society actors in relation to development, and on how this differs according to the distribution of political power, and the degree of elite commitment and state capacity to deliver broad-based development. The paper then discusses methodological options for assessing or measuring the impacts of changes in civic space for development, noting the challenges of cross-national regression analysis, including the mixed record of research on the relationships between growth or development and democracy or other political variables. It explains the rationale for in-depth country case studies of episodes of contention in areas of civic activism that are most likely to impact on frontline development outcomes (poverty, hunger, etc). It then discusses the methodological learning from two country case studies in Pakistan and Ethiopia. The paper concludes with a discussion of the nature and limitations of available data sources, and sketches suggestions about two approaches to tracking and analysing the impacts of changes in civic space for development. The first is qualitative comparative case analysis across a set of 12-20 countries, to analyse the effects of specific episodes of contention around civic space in relation to development outcomes, using longitudinal tools and rigorous comparative techniques to establish with confidence the causal mechanisms through which closures of civic space impact on development outcomes.. The second is building NGO/CSO capacity to track the impacts of new restrictions on their activities and contributions in a grounded, locally-relevant way.

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## 1. Introduction: the problem of closing civic space for inclusive development

This paper discusses methodological challenges and options for assessing or measuring the relationship between changing civic space and development outcomes. It is part of a larger effort to build a robust conceptual framework and explore the possibilities, including data sources, for robust empirical analysis of this relationship.<sup>1</sup> The present paper starts with a discussion of the nature of closing civic space and the mechanisms through which it is likely to shape development outcomes. It discusses the options for analysing the relationship between closing civic space and development outcomes using a) rigorous, cross-national analytical techniques, and b) in-depth case studies. It then reflects on the lessons from case studies that explored the possibilities of assessing the developmental impacts of changes in civic space empirically, through case studies undertaken in Ethiopia and Pakistan. The paper concludes with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the different approaches reviewed, and then offers suggestions regarding data sources, the sectoral and thematic focus, and comparative and other methodological approaches to the assessment of how changes in civic space are likely to impact on development.

### 1.1. Changing civic space<sup>2</sup>

The past decade saw a growing number of governments in developed and developing countries, spanning the range of political systems from open and democratic to closed and authoritarian, restrict the activities of civil society. Civil society refers to all forms of voluntary organization that mediate between the state, market, and societal actors and interests. In developing countries, civil society is often taken to refer to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs), often aid- or foreign-funded, involved in service delivery or undertaking a 'watchdog' function by holding government and other actors to account. However, civil society is generally viewed as a broader category of actors that includes the media and human rights defenders, professional associations, academia and thinktanks, and social movements such as land and indigenous people's rights groups, women's and peasant movements, labour organizations, and environmental activists.

Many developing countries have long traditions of civil society, but formal organisations in the specifically liberal democratic tradition proliferated worldwide after the end of the Cold War. This was linked to the rapid growth in aid financing to civil society, particularly during the 1990s and 2000s, and particular to service-providing actors. A first wave of restrictions on civil society, including in developed countries, were introduced during the War on Terror, almost two decades ago. The recent wave of restrictions on civic space, dating to the past five years, must be understood in the context of the relatively recent growth of such organisations in most developing countries. New restrictions on the space for civic action have taken formal legal, political, and administrative forms, as well as informal and extra-legal – but no less potent - tactics such as violence, threats, and the domination of public space to de-legitimize and stigmatize civil society actors (Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014; Dupuy, Ron, and Prakash 2016; Howell and Lind 2010; Hayman et al. 2014; Rutzen

2015; KIOS Foundation 2015; ICNL 2016; van der Borgh and Terwindt 2012; Van der Borgh and Terwindt 2014; CIVICUS 2016, 2015, 2017).

Efforts to shrink civic space aim to preserve, consolidate or increase the power of state or political actors (Mendelson 2015b; Hayman 2016; Poppe and Wolff 2017), pushing back against a real or perceived expansion of civil society power (Mathews 1997). Such efforts are often framed in terms of assertions of national sovereignty against the imposition of foreign (or Western liberal democratic) values, for instance in relation to the promotion of gender equality or the rights of sexual minorities. Not all new regulations on civil society have been unwelcome, even by civil society actors; without effective regulation, the rapid earlier expansion enabled inefficiencies and abuses. And in principle, new regulations purport to strengthen the governance and accountability of civil society, and to assert national sovereignty over the development process. In practice, new restrictions are often a heavy-handed mixture of stigmatization and de-legitimization, selective application of rules and restrictions, and violence and impunity for violence against civic actors and groups, motivated by the concentration or consolidation of political power.

These restrictions have not affected all civil society actors equally. Their objects are typically groups and organizations from a liberal and human rights tradition, usually aid-funded and with strong transnational links, as well as their allies in social movements, the media and academia. For these groups, civic space has undeniably shrunk. However, the emergence of new types of actors and forms of civic action mean that it is more accurate to conceptualize civic space not as closing or shrinking overall, but as changing, in terms of who participates and on what terms (Hossain et al. 2018). Changes in the past decade include the rapid growth of the digital public sphere, and a rise in 'uncivil society', in the form of both rightwing, extremist, and neo-traditionalist groups, as well as 'unruly' protest groups and movements. That civic space is changing rather than shrinking also fits with the observation that many civil society actors report co-optation and pressure to align politically. Apparently liberal new laws on civil society and the media may be accompanied with strong political pressure to align with the party in power, so that civic space may be wider in theory than in practice.

There is an important transnational dimension to much contention over civic space. The targets of closing civic space are frequently supported by international aid, while their critics accuse them of promoting foreign values and interests. At the same time, case study findings indicate that the shift in the normative atmosphere in the development climate with the rise of Chinese investment licenses ruling elites to constrain their civil societies when politically convenient. So while efforts to restrict civic space are part of struggles over national political power, they are also strongly shaped by transnational forces, as these shape relations between state and civil society.

### 1.2 Civil society, development and the SDGs

Changes in the civic space are likely to impact on development in numerous ways, because of the contributions civil society does, or has the potential to, make to development. The role of civil society is an important aspect of theories of democratization and development (G. White 1994), but the principal focus here is on the contributions of civil society to

economic and sociocultural, rather than to the political, dimensions of development. From the literature review, we can summarize these as:

- Institution-building: most notably, enabling the historical emergence and regulation of institutions and values such as trust that underpin economic growth and ensure its sustainability; this includes enabling the management of discontent and difference in relation to the nature and distribution of growth
- Partnership- and alliance-building: civil society has played an important role in generating international and cross-sectoral support and financing for development
- Accountability: ensuring governments and other actors face scrutiny and are answerable for their policies and practices, helping prevent corruption, abuse, and other failures of governance
- Empowerment and inclusion: raising and amplifying voice among marginalized and disempowerment groups; enabling such groups to mobilize to claim rights and recognition
- Protection: defending human rights; protecting vulnerable groups against poverty, violence, or exclusion; advocating for and providing humanitarian, emergency or welfare services
- Information and communication: gathering evidence and undertaking analysis of the development process; monitoring and evaluating development policies and programmes; investigating and documenting governance failures, corruption etc; raising questions about governmental performance and business practices; wider public communication and education regarding development policies and practices.

A substantial literature has been generated on each of these aspects of the contribution of civil society to the development process (Hossain et al. 2018).

Yet while civic space may be ‘essential to the healthy functioning and development of any society’, and ‘an essential precondition for human rights, social justice and accountable governance’ (Malena 2015, 11), there may be no simple or direct relationship between civic space and measurable development outcomes. Measurement of these contributions to development is complicated by the different times, levels and parts of the system, often at several removes from measurable frontline development outcomes such as poverty or human development, through which these mechanisms operate. Development thinking has tended to emphasise the complementary role of civil society, but civic action can also be at odds with public policy on development, slowing or creating friction in the implementation of government policies opposed by particular groups. Civil society may not always be ‘civil’, and it may not work towards what development partners view as the public good. Its activities are frequently contentious, and friction between states and civic actors is as likely as cooperation and partnership.

While civil society as often brings contention as it complements development policy, ‘development’ is itself a contested term. While often used as a shorthand for economic growth or the social and economic transformations that measurably increase human capabilities, the emphasis within the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is on the quality of processes of change, and on the extent to which they are inclusive and equitable, environmentally sustainable, and ‘leave no one behind’. Restrictions on civil society may ultimately contribute to declining economic growth or worsening public service

delivery, yet more immediate impacts are likely for the equity, inclusiveness, or sustainability of growth and change. Theory and past experience suggest that civil society can have a ‘civilizing’ effect, tempering a tendency that may otherwise prevail for exploitative forms of capital accumulation and dispossession that enable growth and enrichment, but only for those with the power to shape the institutions and processes governing development.

Despite its complexities, then, the range of activities and functions ascribed to civil society supports the view that the space for civil society to operate is essential to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular the injunction to ‘leave no one behind’ (HLPE 2013; PartnersGlobal et al. 2017). The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda Resolution notes the role of civil society in establishing priorities and goals, and in fostering development partnerships (UN 2015). Civil society played a prominent role in the achievements of the MDGs, and is assumed to be equally important in deliberating over, delivering, and monitoring the SDGs (Alliance and CIDSE 2014). A preparatory forum for the 2017 High-Level Meeting of the Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation concluded that Governments should ‘improve the policy, legal and regulatory environment so civil society and business can maximize their contribution to development’, and that Development Partners should support the capacity of governments to establish and carry out multi-stakeholder partnerships (Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation 2017).

Of the SDGs themselves, SDG 16 aims to ‘promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’. SDG 16 is the SDG on which efforts to restrict civic space are likely to have the most immediate and measurable first-order impact, as it provides measures of the capacities of NGOs, CSOs, human rights defenders and other actors in the civic space to perform their functions and roles in safety and security. However, SDG 16 by no means exhausts the pathways through which development outcomes are likely to be affected. SDG 16 can provide some key measures of a) how changes in civic space impact on what civil society actors do, but our knowledge of how civil society impacts on development entails in addition assessing b) how such restrictions impacts on how development policies and programmes are made and delivered. In addition, c) it is necessary to trace impacts through to the services and protections different people receive and their capacities to enjoy the benefits of development. SDG 16 includes indicators of a) and aspects of b), but a comprehensive measure of the development impacts of closing civic space will need to connect the functions and activities of civil society and the policy and programmatic bases of development with c) the frontline impacts on human development, including poverty and hunger, gender equality and health and education outcomes. This entails connecting SDG 16 with the frontline development outcome indicators of poverty and hunger, gender inequality, health, education, etc.

Despite the clear sense that changes in civic space are likely to impact on development outcomes, efforts to track or monitor these changes have been limited to date. CIVICUS has been monitoring the effects of changes in civic space for SDG 16 through the CIVICUS Monitor, which includes several SDG 16 Targets, including 16.7 (‘ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels’) and 16.10 (‘ensure

public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements’) (CIVICUS 2016). However, as an indicator of developmental impacts of closing space, SDG 16 has some limitations. First, the adoption of the SDG 16 goal was contentious, with countries resistant to the imposition of liberal democracy goals within the SDG framework; it may therefore not be a strategic focus for efforts to track or measure the impacts of changing civic space on development. Second, while restrictions on civil society may work directly against the achievement of SDG 16, most visibly in relation to the safety of human rights defenders (Target 16.10), it is less obvious how such restrictions work their way through to impacting on other frontline human development outcomes, such as poverty or hunger reduction, as noted above. While SDG 16 offers a valuable set of measures of some of impacts on civil society functions and activities, then, it needs to be analysed together with other SDGs for an integrated analysis of what restrictions on civic space are likely to mean for both development processes and human development outcomes.

### 1.3 Conceptualizing impacts within the politics of inclusive development

Restrictions on civic space impact on different actors, levels and stages of a development process that is itself shaped by broader political economy forces and power relations, including the nature of the relationship between civil society, political actors and the state. How power is distributed, and how successfully civil society and the state engage on processes of inclusive development is likely to lead to systematically different outcomes.

#### The ‘developmental state’ argument against civic space

The strong economic growth and human development performance associated with countries with neither a strong tradition of independent civil society organizations or liberal civic space, such as China, Vietnam, Rwanda and Ethiopia, have challenged the view that such conditions are necessary for rapid, broad-based development. The ‘developmental state’ thesis - that ruling elites may need to silence critics and repress dissent to buy the long-time horizons needed to kickstart economic and social transformations – is used to justify controls on civic space across a variety of political-economic settings, including unequivocally predatory authoritarian regimes.

One response to this argument is to note that the quality and sustainability of development in settings where civil society has been restricted is questionable, because civil society has been unable to play its ‘civilizing’ role with respect to the pattern of development. High growth and rapid social policy gains aside, minority and marginalized groups tend to be excluded from or dispossessed or exploited in the development process. Lucrative economic investments often take place under conditions that ignore human rights and environmental concerns, while grand corruption thrives under conditions of secrecy and a cowed press, and can lead to economic and political crises that undermine or even reverse rapid progress. While economic ‘take-off’ is not always associated with good governance, the histories of episodes of growth and development show that sustaining growth over time depends on the establishment of laws and regulations, and pathways to inclusive or shared development, which often entail a more open society and wider civic space.<sup>3</sup>

### Development as inclusive development that 'leaves no one behind'

How the impact of shrinking civil society space on development outcomes is assessed thus depends substantially on what is meant by 'development'. In the interests of analytical consistency, quantitative analysis of the relationship between democracy and development has tended to equate development with economic growth (Barro 1996; Doucouliagos and Ulubaşoğlu 2008; Heo and Tan 2001; Minier 1998; Plümper and Martin 2003; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). A richer and more human-centred conception of development such as the Agenda 2030 Declaration frames development as a matter of tackling inequalities of power and resources, with the SDGs aiming to:

end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources (UN 2015).

In its efforts to assess the impacts of shrinking civic space on development, SDG 16, (to 'promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'), provides a useful starting point, as it draws attention to how changes in civic space affect the functions and activities of key civil society actors. SDG 16 emphasises the need for development decisions to be made in ways that are inclusive and accountable in order for peaceful and just outcomes to ensue, assuming that the process through which development comes about will shape the extent to which its outcomes will be inclusive, equitable, and sustainable. The greater challenge is to trace these impacts further downstream, onto development policy and programme processes, and then onto frontline development outcomes such as ending poverty (SDG1) or hunger (SDG2); improving health and wellbeing (SDG3), enabling quality education (SDG4), tackling gender inequalities (SDG5), and ensuring water and sanitation (SDG6). In addition, in line with the SDG framework, development performance can be judged against the extent to which it is inclusive, sustainable, addresses inequality, and 'leaves no one behind', that is, in terms of the quality of the development achieved.

### Political settlements and the 'fit' between civil society and the state

The developmental state argument draws attention to the underlying political rationale for restrictions on civic space. The literature on the politics of inclusive development helps us conceptualize how changing civic space may impact on development outcomes, by emphasising how political power is distributed, and how that distribution of political power shapes the development agenda of ruling elites. (Houtzager 2003) theorizes that civil society may be most effective in contributing to inclusive forms of development not to the extent that it is autonomous or free from state interference or regulation, but to the extent that civic groups enjoy a good 'fit' with actors and agencies in the state. A 'good fit' means not that state-civil society relations are always smooth, but that states can call on civic support for their inclusive policies, and anticipate contestation over decisions that unjustly favour elites or powerful groups. Contestation is integral to effective civic activism, whereas a lack of contention may signal a welfareist role in which civil society poses no effective challenge to the state and political power. But relations can be accommodating and inclusive, notably



during democratization, and operationally close, as when social and state actors collaborate in the 'co-production' of services (Joshi and Moore 2004).

The degree of autonomy, influence, and 'holding power' of civic actors in relation to the state is closely shaped by the nature of the state and the political regime itself, which structure the conditions for political inclusion and empowerment (Houtzager 2003). So while civil societies make demands for inclusion and empowerment, they do so in conditions not of their own making. Recognizing the centrality of political power in this 'polity approach' places state and political institutions at the heart of the explanation of how civil society contributes to inclusive development:

Development is not simply about what needs to be done, but, perhaps more importantly, about how it is done. Politics, power and the interactive dynamic between actors and structures shape institutions and give them substance and meaning (Rocha Menocal 2017, 560).

Political settlements, or the 'balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and classes, on which any state is based' (Di John and Putzel 2009, 4) help us make sense of how civil society shapes the development process. This balance of power draws attention to whether ruling elites have the stability to undertake reforms needed for long-term growth and development, but also on how the nature of ruling coalitions shape elite commitment and state capacity to deliver inclusive development, including whether they incorporate interests in redistributive policies and programmes (Hickey, Sen, and Bukenya 2015).

Political settlements are rarely static, and the distribution of power and its implications for development may shift for a number of reasons. Other than in the most closed states, civil society actors have the potential to play a role in both the stability of institutional arrangements and the nature of ruling coalitions. Episodes of democratic transition and revolution in the past two decades have seen prominent civic engagement with larger political struggles. By empowering excluded or marginalized groups, throwing light on corruption and holding politicians and officials accountable for failures, violations or abuses of power, civil society activity is inescapably political, without necessarily being partisan (Gaventa and Barrett 2010; Gaventa and McGee 2013).

Yet there is no automatic relationship between more distributed, democratic arrangements of national political power and inclusive development. Rwanda and Ethiopia have combined rapid poverty reduction and improvements in human development in closed civic spaces where power is dominated by a single party or coalition (Hickey, Sen, and Bukenya 2015; Khan 2010), while in more open, democratic and pluralist systems such as Brazil and India, social and economic inequalities are wide and intractable (Rocha Menocal 2017; Menocal 2015). National power struggles are also shaped by transnational influences, ideas and resource flows. Both civil society strategies and strategies for shrinking civil society space have strong transnational influences (Mendelson 2015a), possibly reflecting the narrowing of civic space within the global North and in a multipolar world system (Poskitt, Shankland, and Taela 2016). A methodology for measuring the implications of closing civic space for

development needs to take into account the different likely mechanisms through which these varied struggles play out.

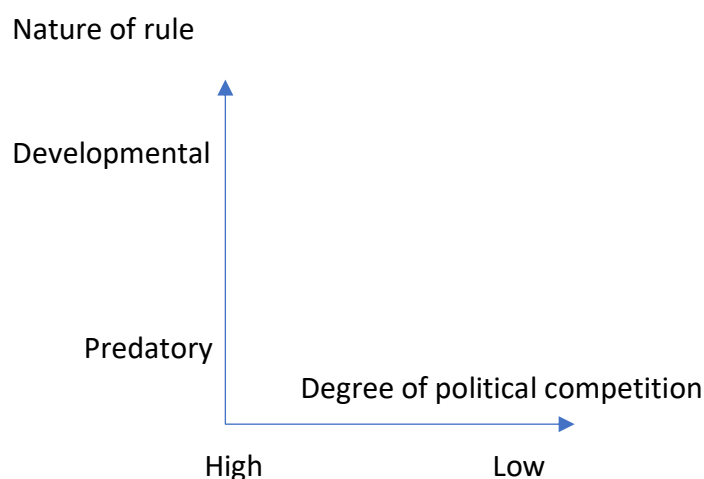
### 1.4 Mechanisms of impact on inclusive development

Based on the literature review, several mechanisms through which changes in civic space were likely to impact on inclusive development under different conditions of state-civil society ‘fit’ and political settlements were proposed (Hossain et al. 2018). These propositions drew on a typology of political settlements developed under the Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESiD) research programme at Manchester,<sup>1</sup> and assumed that the impacts of closures of civic space would vary according to

- the extent to which political power is distributed under relatively competitive conditions, or dominated by a single party or coalition
- the presence or absence of state capacity and elite commitment to foster inclusive development, including whether ruling elites deploy state capacity to advance predatory or developmental agendas.

Figure 1 depicts the key dimensions of the conceptual framework, highlighting the possibilities of comparisons across different types of political settlement. Most countries can be ranked along the horizontal axis, according to their degree of political competition, although that may sometimes be unsettled, or in moments of transition. Most countries can also be ranked along the vertical axis marking the nature of that rule, whether it is, broadly speaking, developmental and broad-based, or whether power is chiefly used for predatory purposes, to enrich ruling elites with impunity. Again, while countries’ development policies may be mixed and change over time, medium-term patterns of growth, inequality, poverty reduction and human development indicate regimes which are more and less predatory.

*Figure 1 Conceptual framework for assessing impacts on development of closing civic space*



<sup>1</sup> For more information, see <http://www.effective-states.org/>.

Within this broad typology of countries, we expect specific outcomes for inclusive development to depend on how effectively civil society had been engaging with the state and political actors on key issues of the economy, social provisioning, or governance.

Overall, it is reasonable to expect that efforts to restrict civic space, even where motivated by genuine concerns about fake NGOs or malign foreign interference, are likely to be detrimental in the medium- to long-term to the equity, inclusiveness, and sustainability of the development process. Where civil society groups have been neutralized, controlled or co-opted in the interests of an elite project of rapid development, the adverse effects may be offset in part by faster growth, poverty reduction, or human development. In such settings, civil society actors may be forced to stop, curb, or change their activities, in order to align with the state's agenda. However, marginalised and powerless groups such as the very poor and ethnic or other minorities tend to gain least and lose most when high growth is achieved under greatly unequal initial conditions. If civic actors are unable to mobilize disempowered groups to demand their rights to livelihoods or public services, or to hold state or market actors to account for corruption, land- or resource-grabbing or incompetence, patterns of development are likely to be unequalizing and environmentally as well as socially unsustainable. Such exclusions, inequalities and rights abuses are characteristic of 'developmentalism' under conditions where political power is highly concentrated.

In states where power is more distributed and pluralistic, efforts to restrict civic space are likely to be widely viewed as illegitimate efforts to concentrate political power, to provoke resistance and unrest, triggering further unruly or 'uncivil' action. Such events tend to deepen political polarization and distrust, particularly where associated with violence against protestors or activists. In more established democracies with longer traditions of independent civic actions, efforts to limit, control or coopt civil society are likely to be difficult to sustain over time because civil society tends to become embedded in the political process. Such struggles may not materially affect development processes overall, despite their evident harm to civil society groups and actors. Nevertheless, countries that are formally democratic seem highly likely to attempt to de-legitimate civil society on grounds that it is unrepresentative, elitist, or foreign, and to demonstrate their power over NGOs and CSOs through heavy-handed restrictions that limit their resources or scope of work.

Predatory authoritarian states often rely substantially on foreign-funded NGOs or CSOs to deliver services, in particular the emergency and humanitarian services that are associated with many such developing countries. Restrictions on civic space are unlikely to influence policymaking or the quality of public service delivery because civil society plays no important advocacy or watchdog role to begin with. They may exacerbate economic or environmental crises by preventing the free flow of information or services. In all developing country settings, it is reasonable to expect that restrictions on civil society will primarily affect the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, and that in the absence of formal space for civic engagement, mass and popular protest will be more important.

These assumptions can be stated as a series of propositions about the politics of inclusive development, how restrictions on civic space may be reconfiguring the fit between state and civil society, and likely outcome areas:

- A. Political settlements presided over by a political system where power is highly concentrated in a ruling coalition, and in which the state has capacity and elites are committed to fostering faster growth and human development gains (China, Vietnam, Rwanda, Ethiopia). Efforts to restrict civic space under such conditions seek to bring civil society closer to political power, into alignment with state policies, and to silence critique. This may impact adversely on
  - a. the rights and needs of marginalized and excluded groups, possibly through a rise in rights violations with impunity, or a loss of service access or quality
  - b. accountability for macroeconomic performance, as scrutiny and checks by the media and civil society are weakened or disabled, possibly leading to impacts on the business environment and political trust
  - c. environmental sustainability, across a wide range of potential areas and sectors, but particularly in relation to land- and resource-grabbing.
  
- B. More competitive political systems, where power is distributed and contested (democracies such as India, Brazil and Colombia, and newer or more fragile systems such as Kenya, Nepal, Ghana, or Pakistan). Efforts to restrict civic space are generally ineffective efforts to silence political opposition to improve electoral chances, and are unlikely to change the generally good fit between the state and civil society in terms of service delivery. Security and sovereignty are key framings of efforts to control civil society, and ‘Western values’ CSOs are stigmatized, losing their legitimacy (and state protection) in the civic space. Implications for development process and outcome include:
  - a. narrower civic space may limit the representativeness and inclusiveness of democratic dialogue, resulting in exclusionary policy debates or elections run on a narrow range of issues, excluding important concerns emerging from within in civil society and social movements
  - b. less powerful groups - women, workers, small farmers, displaced persons, minority groups – tend to be properly incorporated within the political settlement, so under closing civic space their political expressions are likely to include direct action or resistance to policies they view as unfavourable. However, the democratic distribution of power would mean we would not in general expect direct or significant adverse impact on development policies and programmes for such groups
  - c. civil society may become organized along ethnic or partisan lines, so that closing space brings it too close to the state to provide effective scrutiny or effective accountability over equitable and sustainable development, or too hostile to powerholders for constructive engagement.

‘Dominant’ political settlements, where power is concentrated but the ruling elite and the state can be characterized as mainly ‘predatory’ (eg Zimbabwe, Mozambique, to some extent Cambodia, and until their recent democratic

transitions, Burma/Myanmar and Pakistan). In these settings, the fit between civil society and governments is mutually tactical, with much reliance on humanitarian aid. The fit is also shaped by the fact that domestic civil society is frequently weak and vulnerable, aid-dependent, and disconnected from grassroots organizations or movements. In such settings,

- a. excluded and marginalized groups are likely to suffer most through a lack of voice or political traction with political elites
  - b. struggles against powerful ruling elite interests (land-grabbing, extractives, monopolies) are likely to fail
  - c. we would expect no major protest movements, instead of which people would be more likely to exit/migrate where possible, and/or to engage in extremist politics and violent resistance.
- C. All types of political settlement and civil society-state relations. Closing civic space impacts on development through the following:
- a. freedom of speech and association may be seen as direct threats to state power, particularly with the growth of cyberspace; efforts to constrict entry to this space are as likely as efforts to tap its potential for development
  - b. contestation over ‘foreign’ norms promoted by human rights defenders and civic actors is politicized and deployed to rationalize restrictions on civic space motivated by political power struggles; such contestation is particularly likely to affect women’s rights struggles and other purportedly Western or liberal-democratic value systems; and
  - c. wage, resource, and commodity price struggles are likely in each kind of political system, reflecting the volatilities of global economic integration.

We turn next to a consideration of possible approaches to testing these propositions empirically in cross-country, quantitative and in-depth case study and comparative analysis.

## 2. Cross-country analysis & quantitative approaches<sup>4</sup>

Cross-national regression analysis of the relationship between changes in civic space and inclusive development outcomes is the first methodological choice. Testing propositions across a large number of countries and over time has the potential to uncover patterns and variances that may confirm, refute, or generate new propositions worth testing. The phenomenon of closing civic space has been established beyond doubt. And the theoretical and empirical literature on the roles of civil society in development provides sound foundations for assuming a relationship between these closures and development outcomes. However, the record of quantitative analysis of the effects of changes in institutional conditions on development outcomes is mixed. Efforts to explore such relationships have been made, notably to identify causal connections between democracy and growth, political and economic freedoms and economic growth (Dawson 2003; Gwartney and Lawson 2003), human rights and development (UNDP 2000), civil society and development (Roy, 2008; Tusalem, 2007), and aid and development (Acht, Mahmoud, and Thiele 2015; Dutta, Leeson, and Williamson 2013; Dutta and Williamson 2016a, 2016b;

Reinsberg 2015; Young and Sheehan 2014). However, empirical efforts to settle these debate conclusively have generally failed to do so (see Acemoglu et al., 2005, 2014; Brückner and Ciccone 2011; Gründler and Krieger 2016). With respect to the quantitative measurement of the impacts of closing civic space on inclusive development, there are three main challenges: (1) identifying adequate measures of civic space; (2) identifying suitable measures of inclusive development; (3) inferring the relation between the two sets of measures.

## 2.1 Measures of civic space

The first challenge is to quantify the degree of civic space openness in its multiple dimensions by building accurate and comparable indicators. The aim for this exercise is to gauge the changes in those indicators through time. This challenge has been met by various attempts, building sets of indicators or indexes that seek to convey how each country is performing, regarding the public space, in multiple or partial aspects, be they economic, political (here focusing especially in political actors), civic (with some overlap with the previous) or other. Some others focus on political violence and terror, be it enacted by the State, criminal or militarized political actors. Notable examples of these initiatives are

- *Bertelsmann Stiftung Foundation's Transformation Index* (BTI; Bertelsmann Stiftung Foundation) biannual reports from 2006 to 2016
- *Cingranelli-Richards Human Rights Data Project* (CIRI; Cingranelli, Richards, & Clay, 2014) covering the years from 1981 to 2011
- *Civil Society Organisations Sustainability Index* (CSOSI, USAID), with regional reports since 1997
- *Fragile States Index* (FFP), produced since 2005
- Freedom House's yearly *Freedom in the World* (FH a), reporting since 1972, including *Freedom of the Press* (FH b), since 1980 and, the more recent, *Freedom on the Net* (FH c), produced yearly since 2009
- *Global Barometer Surveys* (GBS), a set of surveys of political attitudes from a large number of countries, in several rounds from early 2000s onwards
- *Global Integrity Index* (GI), intermittent, from 2004 to 2011,
- *Institutional Profiles Database* ((CEPII) tri-annually updated since 2001,
- *Media Sustainability Index* (IREX), irregularly from 2001
- *Open Budget Index* (IBP), from 2006 to 2015
- *Political Terror Scale* (Mark Gibney et al.), with a dataset spanning from 1976 to 2015
- *Press Freedom Index* (RSF), starting in 2014
- *Women, Business and the Law Database* (WB), bi-annual from 2010, and
- *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (World Bank), from 1996 to 2016.

Full descriptions of these sources can be found in the Dataverse Project (2017), Gründler & Krieger (2016) and Malena (2015).

These indexes and datasets comprise multiple indicators, including some quantitative indicators. Nevertheless, most rely on the yearly construction of categorical variables, more precisely of scales between lower and higher degrees of experience of social values (freedom, empowerment, accountability, rule of law, consensus building, democratic stability, women's rights, etc) or scales listing higher and lower levels of violence or

deprivation of rights (torture, political violence, political imprisonment, etc). To produce consensual indicators, the initiatives bring in the collective shared knowledge and judgement of experts. In the production of country indexes of its CSOSI, USAID recommends that a group of 'not less than 8 representatives of civil society organizations' is carefully selected, with a precise indication of the required typology. In the production of the BTI, the Bertelsmann-Stiftung Foundation supplies the selected experts with a precise and complete standardized codebook. Their classifications are reviewed by another expert and then normalized between reports to offer comparable international indicators. The Fragile States Indexes draw on quantitative socio-economic statistics sourced from international and multilateral institutions (the World Bank and various UN agencies); each is standardized and a qualitative assessment is also undertaken by a team of social science researchers. All these processes, rely, therefore, on judicious assessments conducted by qualified experts, to generate synthetic indicators that appear in numeric form. They depend, therefore, on continuous judgement, by teams whose composition changes over time, and whose members learn and evolve their views of how to assess the realities they are observing.

To study changes in civic space, indicators must agree on the description of civic space for each given year and country, and have values for each country of interest and for the time period under analysis. The examples nominated already show that this can be a challenge. Very few initiatives produced indicators before the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and there are gaps in for some of the indicators, with some produced every two or three years. The challenge of quantitative analysis of changes in civic space openness mirrors that faced in the effort to measure democracy. Producing a single indicator for civic space openness would have to follow steps similar to those recommended by Munck and Verkuilen (2002) on the construction of a 'democracy index', namely the choice of a single definition; designing a number of instruments able to describe the properties of the theoretical concept chosen; and computation of said index through the combination of the selected instruments. Gründler and Krieger (2016: 88) found the majority of existing democracy indicators suffered from a low level of detail and precision, 'subjectivity and arbitrariness in the conceptualization and the selection of the instruments', with a major concern being 'the fairly low level of sophistication with regard to the aggregation process and the way in which the underlying components are weighted'. Of one widely-used democracy index, Saez (2017) noted that indicators showed little variance between countries, and over time were likely to lead to common econometric problems and 'highly distorted and biased results'.

## 2.2 Measures of inclusive development

The second challenge is to conduct a similar exercise for indicators of development. Measures and indicators of development are inherently difficult, because of the multiple dimensions to be captured. For SDG 16 alone (<http://www.sdg16.org/map/>), the Sustainable Development Goal which most directly measures the direct impacts of closing civic space on civil society actors, entails 12 targets, to be measured through a total of 23 global indicators. Some indicators of SDG 16 are available from human rights defenders and other credible sources, including in the governance indicator sets discussed above. SDG 16 outcomes by no means exhaust the pathways through which development is likely to be affected, because of how the functions and activities of civil society, as protected by SDG 16, impact on how development policies and programmes are made and delivered, and through that to the services and protections different people receive and their capacities to enjoy the benefits

of development. So to measure the impacts of closing civic space, it is necessary to trace the direct impacts on civil society actors and functions through to the frontline impacts on human development, including poverty and hunger, gender equality and health and education outcomes.

The World Bank's comprehensive Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) dataset within the World Development Indicators framework (WB, 2018) helpfully sets out the agreed SDG indicators as available for all countries since 1960. However, SDG datasets are an upgrade of those used to monitor the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and reflect the fact that 'inclusivity' was one of the weaknesses of the MDGs, and remains poorly covered by current statistics. Progress is rapidly being made on these dimensions of development.<sup>2</sup> As the SDG principles of equity, inclusiveness and 'leaving no one behind' appear, from the literature review, to be at greatest risk from closing civic space, these weaknesses in the current datasets are significant problems for any quantitative measures of this relationship.

### 2.3 Measuring the relation between changes in civic space and changes in inclusive development

Where data are available with which to construct the relevant variables, quantitative analyses can be rigorous methodologies for identifying or exploring the statistical significance of relationships between social indicators. Depending on the methodology and data availability, it may in principle be possible to assess relations between closing civic space and development outcomes, including to identify associated or correlated outcomes. Depending on data availability and a running theoretical hypothesis that econometric methods can test, a quantitative analysis can contribute for a better understanding of the relationships between civic space and development outcomes. However, data availability is a key constraint. With limited data, a great many assumptions must be made, all of which reduce the empirical validity of the statistical relations found. As with the measurement of civic space, data availability, and the capacity to construct valid indicators are significant constraints. Any effort to quantitatively assess or measure the impacts of closing civic space on inclusive development through the construction and comparison of summary indexes on both sides would, therefore, double the taskload of the 'Democracy and Growth' type of analyses and accrue the challenges from both sides of the equation.

The challenges of quantitative cross-national analysis also include the time dimensions of these processes of change. From our literature review, it is clear that the current wave of restrictions on civic space has mostly occurred in the past five years, and followed two decades of rapid expansions in the numbers and scope of civil society organizations following the end of the cold war. In many instances, these events are too recent for it to be reasonably expected that effects will show up in measurable development outcomes.

In addition, as noted above, it is less the freedom of civic space than the nature of the fit between state and civil society that is likely to shape the impacts on development

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the Group-related Inequalities Database developed by Save the Children: <https://campaigns.savethechildren.net/grid>.



outcomes. Civil society does not only need free space in which to operate, but also the capacity or power to engage the state and political actors when needed. Where important parts of civil society and the state are aligned behind common development goals, restrictions on civic space may have limited short-term impacts on development progress. Conversely, civil society may have the space and freedom to act, but be too weak, divided, or disconnected from the challenges of development or from government to act as either an effective counterpart or an effective critic. The fit between civil society and the state may not always be smooth, and friction is a sign that civil society may be performing its necessary roles of empowering or holding to account. It is not clear that cross-national analysis is well-suited to capturing the national political dynamics of these struggles in the civic space, and how they may play out in the development process or its outcomes.

For these reasons, efforts to assess or measure the impacts of closing civic space on development do not indicate the development of composite indices for cross-country statistical analysis, but instead imply the need for comparative analysis of detailed case studies of contention over selected sectors or policy domains in selected countries that set out to analyse the interaction of the political settlement and development policy domain with changes in civic space, in order to trace the impacts downstream to SDGs 1-6. Statistical data can be used to support the case study development by mapping the temporal path of civic space openness and development indicators over time in countries of interest, in part to help identify interesting case and to aid case selection. It can also help establish statistical relations (dependent on data availability and quality) between civic space and development outcomes in a smaller number of cases, using more specialized and country-specific datasets to enable comparative analysis across cases; and by providing quantitative empirical richness to the analysis of the scale and distribution of development impacts in each case. Such data analysis primarily makes sense within an in-depth analysis of the fit between civil society and the state in relation to the development process. This in turn points to the analysis of specific episodes of contention around policies and programmes relevant to frontline development outcomes, as will be discussed below.

### 3 In-depth country case studies

#### 3.1 Rationale

The conceptual framework developed from the review of the literature pointed to the need to situate analysis within an understanding of the nature of the fit between states and civil society, rather than focusing on the size and freedom within the civic space itself. It also highlighted the importance of the political settlement, or the balance of power, in shaping the mechanisms through which changes in civic space may influence processes and outcomes of development. As briefly discussed above, the complexity of the variables under consideration mean that even where fairly straightforward cause-and-effect relationships or other correlations are indicated, data of the necessary objectivity and detail are not available for most developing country contexts over the relevant time periods.

The nature of the problem of changing civic space indicates the need for in-depth analyses of how such changes are situated within national political and development processes, while remaining attentive to the transnational influences, particularly ideas and finances, on

such processes. In-depth analysis tracing processes of change will be necessary to capture the complexities of these relationships as they unfold in their specific country settings.

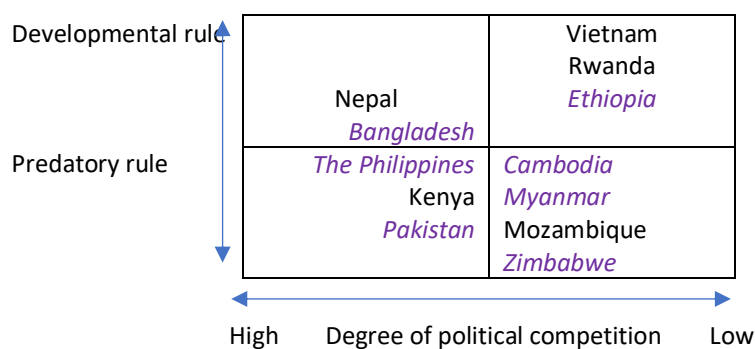
Rather than broad comparisons of quantitative indicators of civic space and development, we propose case studies to focus on areas where civic space has been in overt contention. That is, case studies should centre on countries, sectors, issues and time periods in which civil society actors and the state have been in active mutual confrontation or dispute over the rightful roles and responsibilities of civil society and the rights of sovereign states or national political actors to determine those, and/or the impunity of attacks on civil society actors by non-state actors. These should focus on areas or policy domains that are most likely to have significant frontline human development impacts in the short- to medium-term, such as on poverty, hunger, gender equality, or health and education.

Country case studies may draw on quantitative and qualitative data to develop a ‘thick description’ of the contexts within which civic space enters into contention, and to trace the impacts of efforts to control civic actors on their ability to contribute to development. These contributions can be traced through to broad national functions, for instance, holding governments to account over policy issues such as budgetary allocations or fiscal plans, or to more sectoral or domain-level matters, such as their capacities to monitor the effectiveness or efficiency of public service delivery in particular sectors. The approach will combine subjective with objective data on the relationships between civic space and development outcomes. As the issues involved are highly politicized and often substantially emotive matters, it is important for the case studies to maximize rigour by being designed to refine or test pre-specified hypotheses or propositions, and to do so by collecting multiple types and sources of data to enable triangulation.<sup>5</sup> Case studies will need to include:

- Analysis of the political settlement and power relations within which the contention over civic space has emerged; this should analyse the nature of the coalitions over which ruling elites preside, and how those are shaped or influenced by actors in the civic space, including those supported by aid
- Evidence of the nature and scale of civil society in that country and domain or sector; it should be possible to assess the nature of the fit between state and civil society, and of the contributions of civil society to development processes, including service-delivery, performance monitoring, and a watchdog or accountability role
- Analysis of the nature of the development challenge, nationally and in relation to specific sectors or domains in contention; this should, as far as possible, go beyond descriptive statistics or trends, to provide an account of the issues of equity, inclusiveness and sustainability, and of the politics of inclusive development, including elite incentives for performance legitimacy in each context
- Process-tracing of events surrounding episodes of contention relating to closures of civic space, featuring before-and-after time-bound analyses of policy making and actual practice within the sectors/domains; analysis of firsthand accounts of key actors and informants regarding the motivations and effects of such closures; and quantitative and qualitative analysis of the impacts on civil society capacities to perform its functions in relation to development, with a focus on the implications for equality, inclusiveness, sustainability, and groups at risk of being left behind.

Country case studies tracing impacts following specific instances of contention around civic space in frontline development domains may provide credibly detailed and robust accounts of how changing civic space shapes development outcomes at the country or sector level. In order to arrive at more generalizable rigorous assessments of the wider implications of closing civic space for development, a comparative case methodology is indicated. This implies sets of 12 or more case studies using mixed methods, to be selected on the basis of criteria derived from the conceptual framework and the variables it proposes. In the present case, we would propose a typology of the kind set out below. This typology would enable the testing and refinement of the propositions derived from the conceptual framework as set out above through comparative analysis, making it possible to identify mechanisms recurring across contexts, in order to provide a strong causal analysis of the relationship between closing civic space and development outcomes. This could then in turn enable the development of theory and further empirical work to test these relationships.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 2 Indicative typology for comparative country case selection



### 3.2 Methodological learning from two country case studies

In 2017-18, case studies were conducted in Pakistan and Ethiopia in an effort to:

- test some of the propositions set out in the conceptual framework, as relevant to the countries’ respective political settlements and state-civil society relations
- explore the methodological prospects, including data sources, for investigating the relationships between changes in civic space and development outcomes
- where possible, to generate data and analysis to inform advocacy and programming in relation to civil society in each country.

For each, a national researcher with knowledge of the issues, setting, and civil society actors was commissioned to work with a UK-based researcher with expertise in relation to civic space and development issues in the country. Each case study involved preliminary literature and data reviews, somewhat over a week worth of key informant interviews and meetings involving the UK researcher, and where possible, further interviews, focus group discussions and meetings with civil society actors in each country.

The case studies were rapid activities, involving experienced researchers in a short country visit, interviews with key informants, and secondary data collection and literature review. To

optimize resources and sharpen analytical focus, the study focused on specific episodes when civic space had been in contention in areas likely to impact on development; it then analysed the development impacts in line with an understanding of the 'fit' between civil society and the state, derived from debates about the politics of pro-poor or inclusive development. The research was politically sensitive, required great caution and trust, and could be subject to delays due to political changes.

In each country, the researchers identified specific episodes of contention around civic space in which development outcomes were likely to have been affected. The focus was on episodes in which service-providing NGOs had faced new restrictions, as instances of direct links to frontline inclusive development outcomes of poverty and hunger reduction, and gender equality in particular. The selection of these episodes had the advantage of enabling analysis of before-and-after scenarios and development outcomes in terms of service-delivery, and to explore wider implications, in terms of the loss of civil society influence over policy processes, development monitoring, or accountability.

One limitation of such direct measures of development impacts, even assuming comparatively robust data systems, is that they may cover only some of the potential impacts of programme closures. Individual services may have unintended or multiplier development impacts not assumed by the theory of change with which a particular NGO is working. Several important likely sources of impact could not be measured. Civil society actors adapt their activities and/or mutate into different kinds of actors or organizations altogether; to analyse this resilience would require organizational life histories to track the trajectories of individual civic actors across key moments of change.<sup>7</sup> Many NGOs and CSOs are adept at managing threats from governments and responding in ways that enable them to keep to their mandate without crossing official lines, so that the assessments generated by these case studies may be overly negative about the measurable effects on development outcomes, or overstate the magnitude of the loss of services provided or received. On the negative side, the unmeasured costs of coping with closing space include a high degree of stress and personal and organizational costs in coping with restricted civic space. The actual risks of violence against civic actors, particularly in relation to land, resource, indigenous, women's and LGBTQI rights defenders, are documented by human rights monitors, but the broader personal and organizations costs of civic activism under such conditions are not.

While some figures of expected impacts were available in Pakistan, it was difficult to assess these in a robust way, partly because of a 'general atmosphere of uncertainty and fear within which the organisations are currently operating' and because '[o]rganisational finances and expenditure have become sensitive issues both because the government has targeted these as part of their criticism (specifically the allegation that INGOs [international NGOs] may be spending more on staff salaries than on projects), and because INGOs are worried about how their current situation may be perceived by donors for ongoing or future projects.'<sup>8</sup> It seems likely, in addition, that donors and INGOs would develop strategies for adapting to, or working around these restrictions, where possible, and that service cuts would not be as swingeing as the wholesale closure of the NGOs suggested.

In Ethiopia, the NGO law was long enough in the past to have played out in development outcomes, yet the situation with respect to civil society remained sensitive and ambiguous,

even under the new leadership. The Ethiopia case study periodized the phases in which civic space had been opened and closed, and matched these against relevant development indicators. Several important correlations were suggested by this process tracing, but the lack of data, as well as sensitivities about the issues and the limited nature of the interviews undertaken meant that it was difficult to validate these in any robust way. Data regarding service provision of NGOs no longer operational, or which had substantially changed their focus or framing of their work, was in short supply.

Nonetheless, the Ethiopia case study also produced several valuable methodological insights. The first was the challenges of undertaking counterfactual analysis, and of making assumptions about who might have received which services if civic space had not been closed down. It was also the case that the legal changes happened several years ago, and civil society organizations have adapted, personnel have moved on, and no detailed records exist of the loss of NGO service delivery capacity or the number of citizens affected. We do know that 1,741 NGOs closed entirely, and that others were forced to withdraw from service provision in crucial areas. Only a small number of these individuals could be interviewed, although many of these provided evidence of substantial reductions in service delivery capacity and development impact.

A key concern in the Ethiopia case is that the short time-frame, and its overlap with the State of Emergency made it travel outside the capital impossible. Key informants suggested that it is in relatively remote regions that civil society organisations are often most valuable, and NGOs reported that the restrictions on their work make it harder to travel and engage with marginalised ethnic minorities and other groups in remote rural areas. More extensive research would be necessary to measure the nationwide impact of reductions in NGO service delivery among these groups at risk of being left behind. Nonetheless, the closure of NGOs and their field work and travel restrictions to the most remote regions mean that the most geographically marginalized people are likely to be hardest hit.

The atmosphere of fear and secrecy also presented methodological challenges. Fieldwork was delayed by widespread demonstrations, killing of protestors and mass arrests that culminated in the imposition of a second state of emergency. Obtaining a visa proved difficult and protracted. The state of emergency raised very real ethical and security concerns about asking Ethiopians to comment on government policies at a time when they were rounding up and jailing their critics. After ministerial intervention a visa was eventually obtained. The fieldwork was carried out during the state of emergency but after the appointment of a new Prime Minister had reduced tensions. Nevertheless, the suspension of freedom of speech and jailing of government critics might reasonably be expected to limit the candour of interviewees to questions about government policies. Two interviewees declined to comment directly on the government, although most were open in both their criticism of government policies and acknowledgement of its achievements.

Despite the fact that the NGO restrictions dated back several years, the research findings concluded that there were clear signs that NGO services in key areas relating to some of the Ethiopian government's core poverty and hunger reduction priorities, in terms of reaching vulnerable populations, had been adversely affected at scale. Programmes delivering legal aid and advocacy for women and children were cut significantly, and 1,741 NGOs providing

a range of services to the poor and hungry had closed completely. Many of the remaining NGOs had significantly reduced service delivery capacity, especially in the areas of advocacy for women's and ethnic minority group rights. People in entire regions were being neglected because of strict limits on travel costs which mitigated against rural outreach, inclusion and participation of the hardest-to-reach. Upstream policy influencing work, research and advocacy had been generally abandoned, in favour of direct service delivery, in particular of food aid or welfare programmes.

Coping and adapting to narrower civic space is likely to impact adversely on the quality, efficiency, and possibly also the transparency and accountability of aid financing to civil society. In addition, the costs of shifting activities from mobilization or empowerment and advocacy to service-delivery are likely to be significant in terms of the accountability of government policy and the inclusiveness of development. Comparative analysis of periods of relative civic space using mixed methods can help measure the impacts on the inclusiveness of development in particular periods. Cross-country comparative analysis would similarly highlight the contributions of civil society to important development functions such as building trust in economic institutions; holding the government, the military, or market and external actors to account; empowering disadvantaged and marginalized groups and protecting the vulnerable; and monitoring development progress.

## 4 Conclusions and lessons

### 4.1 Methodologies for measuring the implications of closing civic space

Two different approaches to assessing the relationships between development outcomes and changes in civic space were explored. Cross-national regression analysis has the potential to identify and help explain patterns across large datasets and over time, but the weakness of the available data and the need for unverifiable assumptions in the construction of key variables prevent any robust cross-national analysis of the relationship between closing civic space and development outcomes. There may be opportunities to undertake more focused quantitative analyses on a smaller number of variables or within a wider case-based comparative analysis, but experience with democracy and development analysis discourages cross-national analysis of the complex and multiple relationships between civic space and development outcomes.

Instead, the conceptual framework indicated the need for in-depth analysis at country level, focusing on mixed method data to analyse recent episodes of contention around civic space in which frontline development outcomes are clearly implicated. Rapid country case studies in Ethiopia and Pakistan focussed on episodes in which NGOs were targeted with new laws to restrict or stop their activities. The case studies traced processes through which restrictions on civic space led to or were associated with losses of or changes in service provision for particular groups and in selected sectors. Each aimed to set these processes within an analysis of how the political settlements, development challenges and traditions of civil society shaped the mechanisms of impact.

This paper summarized some of the more clear and measurable adverse impacts, both potential and actual, on people living with poverty and marginalization and other potential

beneficiaries of aid, such as women and children. Quantifiable numbers of NGOs did or would have had to close down, cut services, or limit their outreach in geographical terms. A shift from rights advocacy, empowerment and accountability functions towards welfareist service provision was also obvious. The methodological limitations of these case studies were also discussed, including the inability to measure the effects of NGO and CSO strategies to cope with or adapt to the new circumstances, and the sensitivity of the issues being discussed, which led respondents to be cautious or to avoid interviews at all. Even well-networked researchers familiar with the context found the issues difficult to research, and the ethics of potentially endangering the personal security of interviewees and research partners remained a key concern throughout.

#### 4.2 Longitudinal case studies and qualitative comparative analysis

What real-time tracking cannot do is help understand the wider implications and longer-term institutional consequences of curbing policy advocacy and restricting efforts to prevent corruption or strengthen accountability. Analysis of these wider effects would require longitudinal and rigorous comparative analysis across episodes of contention within carefully selected sets of countries. Longitudinal and comparative case analysis would also make it possible to arrive at a robust and generalizable assessment of how civic space shapes development outcomes, based on close reading and systematic analysis across selected cases. This would include taking seriously the possibility that ‘developmental’ motivations for closing civic space reflect elite commitment to inclusive development, and authentic concerns about national sovereignty in the development process. Yet it should also involve a clear-eyed investigation of which groups or voices are excluded or marginalized by the closures associated with such ‘developmentalism’, and the risks entailed by the neglect or suppression of discontent or difference in the medium-term.

Longitudinal analysis would enable a more systematic assessment of the roles of civil society actors in restraining – or failing to – major destabilizing episodes of corruption or economic crisis. Some cross-national qualitative-quantitative analysis of this may also be possible, with existing datasets and a strong theoretical framework of the mechanisms.

One example of why comparative analysis is important is in the uncovering of transnational influences on the relationship between civic space and development. Both of the rapid country case studies highlighted the significance of the influence of Chinese development investments on the normative environment. But while individual country case studies are valuable for gaining insights into the impacts on development in each country, assessing the larger geopolitical forces shaping civic space and the development process requires comparative and cross-country research across a larger sample of cases. The preferred methodological approach for doing so would be qualitative comparative analysis using the in-depth case study methodology described above, across a set of between 12 and 20 cases. These would need to be selected on the basis of a theoretical framework, again, as described above, and to be selected in order to answer key questions by comparing contrasting and similar political settlements and conditions of civic space.<sup>9</sup>

### 4.3 Data needs and strategies for further analysis

The data available for measuring the impacts of changing civic space at the country level are likely to be variable, but in general, aid-financed NGOs and CSOs appear to maintain reasonably good records of their individual activities and outreach (beneficiaries reached, services provided, etc), as part of the push to demonstrating results. However, as the Pakistan case study discussed here found, there can be sensitivities and fears regarding sharing such data. From our reviews of the data and literature, it seems that few countries or sectors have civil society or NGO networks that have compiled and collated credible data across organizations and/or sectors, and/or which make these readily available. Pressures on civic space are only likely to make such data even less accessible. Smaller grassroots organizations in areas where contention is particularly high may be at greatest risk of losing of funding from restrictions on civil society, but also may be least well-equipped to maintain authoritative records of their beneficiaries, activities and outreach. As the Ethiopian case suggested, these are also groups in areas where services are first to be dropped, and where restrictions on travel mean researchers are least likely to visit.

#### Civil society tracking

The challenges of measuring the full extent of the impacts on NGO service provision are, therefore, significant. Despite this, some measures of the short-term impacts on some parts of development activity were found to be available, and credible. While these are not exhaustive of all impacts, even within a single sector, several point to major losses of important services for particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups. They also indicate that it should be possible to make informed, evidence-based claims about potential or actual losses to development progress resulting directly from restrictions on NGOs.

The fragmented nature of the available data may tempt aid donors to make more stringent data and documentary demands of potential and actual recipients of funding, including of their networks or associations. However, the costs of doing so, and the sensitivities about sharing such data mitigate against a stronger emphasis on data collection. Instead, and as noted above, because NGO networks and associations appear to maintain patchy, at best, data of their members' activities. We would propose that it would make more sense for donors to encourage their partners to develop their own systems for tracking the impacts of closing civic space on their programmes and activities, and to do so in a collective way, to enable civil society actors to arrive at a group understanding of the scale and nature of the challenge, rather than coping and adapting individually and separately.

Civil society could track the impacts on their own activities by systematically recording the various efforts, formal and informal, with which governments seek to restrict their activities, and their own responses to them. Civil society actors can log their own decisions about how they respond to or cope with such restrictions, as well as changes in their own policies and practices, arriving at estimates of how these impact on their work with beneficiaries, as well as where and how they work, and the quality of their programming. In particular, civil society actors should be encouraged to document the responses they feel constrained or prevented from making to development policies and programmes, to help track the weakening of accountability mechanisms or monitoring systems. In addition, and in the interests of achieving a proper balance, civil society actors should also be encouraged to



reflect on ways in which new regulations have improved their own practice or performance, if any, as well as that of the sector more widely.

Encouraging partners to reflect on the impacts as they unfold will help to build a stronger, grounded case against restriction on civic space with which to advocate with governments in-country. It should be possible to engage civil society actors and NGOs in particular countries in developing a suitable framework for assessing and monitoring these effects that will fit the conditions and capacities in different contexts and speak to domestic political and development concerns.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> This section summarizes the conclusions of an extensive literature review undertaken as part of this research (Hossain *et al.* 2018).

<sup>3</sup> For a useful summary of these arguments, see (Hickey, Sen, and Bukenya 2015).

<sup>4</sup> This section, and the review of datasets on which it was based, was undertaken by Ricardo Santos.

<sup>5</sup> On the value of theory-based small 'n' impact evaluation, see (H. White and Phillips 2012)

<sup>6</sup> On mechanism-based causal analysis, see (Demeulenaere 2011; Hedström and Ylikoski 2010)

<sup>7</sup> See for instance, (Lewis 2008)

<sup>8</sup> From the Pakistan country case study, April 28 draft.

<sup>9</sup> Tools and for the analysis of contentious political episodes and for robust qualitative comparative analysis have been widely tested in the relevant literatures. See, for instance (Tilly 2008; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Marx, Rihoux, and Ragin 2014; Schneider and Wagemann 2010).