

# Resiliency+ FRAMEWORK

A Practical Guide for Civil Society to Thrive in Uncertainty





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# ABOUT PARTNERSGLOBAL



Resiliency+  
Framework

## THE PARTNERSGLOBAL MODEL OF SUSTAINABLE IMPACT INVESTING

**PartnersGlobal** was created in 1989 to build the sustainable capacity of civil society in response to the enormous changes in Central and Eastern Europe after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 90's. Through the organization's work, citizen-led organizations could contribute positively to a process of change and conflict management in that region. **PartnersGlobal** has been investing in local leaders, local organizations, and local solutions, cultivating a global network of change makers that work for peaceful and democratic change. Our approach to supporting local civil society leaders marries seed funding support with a process of organizational development. This sustainable impact investment model has yielded long-lasting results. Today, the **Partners** Network represents a rich diversity of 22 civil society organizations and functions as a global civil society platform whose members are among the most respected organizations in their home countries and regions. Network members have worked in over 50 countries amidst highly polarized political climates, weak civil society sectors, ethnic and social conflict, and post-war transitions.

**PartnersGlobal** and The **Partners** Network Centers have spent 30 years learning and adapting to the challenges of closing space. Through this, we have learned that even when a CSO can boast autonomy, financial viability, and programmatic excellence, it remains extremely vulnerable to a range of threats that can quite suddenly and violently destroy its future. In response, we have expanded our approach to organizational strengthening by incorporating an enhanced and nuanced set of strategies, tools, and tactics to increase organizational resiliency in the face of new threats posed by closing civic space. Now, more than ever, it is critical to share our successful experience with civil society organizations around the world.



# ABOUT CIVICUS

CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organizations and individuals dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society for a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world. The alliance works to protect fundamental civic freedoms by defending civic freedoms and democratic values; strengthening the power of people to organize, mobilize and take action; and empowering a more accountable, effective, and innovative civil society. CIVICUS strives to promote excluded voices, especially from the Global South, and has a growing alliance of more than 4,000 members in more than 175 countries. These three strategic goals guide CIVICUS's work, reflecting the belief that people-powered and collective action is at the center of transformative change.

## HOW WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Drawing on over 20 years of experience, CIVICUS consistently builds assets and explores new ways to strengthen citizen action and civil society by:

- Building solidarity among civil society across borders and at scale
- Supporting civil society to connect with others
- Producing timely and world-class knowledge and analysis
- Advocating for open spaces and systemic change
- Amplifying underrepresented voices
- Promoting resourcing of diverse and resilient civil societies
- Innovating and incubating bold initiatives
- Promoting, modeling, and disseminating civil society best practices

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The development of the **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK** would not have been possible without intellectual and financial support from CIVICUS and contributions by several PartnersGlobal staff members. We would like to give particular thanks to Alex Sardar and Patricia Deniz, both of whom offered thought-provoking questions, provided unfettered access to CIVICUS network members, and offered a constant source of encouragement when working through the development process. Thank you also to Julia Roig and Luis Gomez Chow, both of whom forced us to challenge our assumptions and pushed us to think critically and innovatively about why it is important for civil society to be resilient, what that means in the face of closing civic space, and how we at PartnersGlobal approach resiliency in a way that positively contributes to the peaceful transformation of conflict. And to Jeneva Kuhns for her excellent assistance with research, editing, and anything else we threw at her!

We would also like to thank the members of the Partners Network who continue to offer their thoughts, experiences, and concerns as they navigate these changing spaces and face a number of the threats and challenges noted in the **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK**. We are forever grateful for the convening support of May Nasr of Partners Lebanon, the team of Centro de Colaboracion Civica in Mexico City, and Partners West Africa Senegal for their support organizing and participating in focus groups that enabled us to truth-test our assumptions, refine our understanding of how to incorporate contextual factors from different geographies into the design and content of the framework, and recognize the sensitivities around terminology and definitions.

We are also incredibly indebted to all interviewees who take numerous risks on a daily basis—including contributing to the development of this framework—in order to promote a better, more inclusive world that provides for the basic human needs and rights of all people.

## INTENDED AUDIENCE

The primary audience of the **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK** is local and national civil society organizations and leaders. The secondary audience is the donor community, which is simultaneously developing a parallel Resilient Funding Framework that must be integrated with Resiliency+ for continuity and growth across the sector. Additionally, other civil society actors such as activists, community-based organizations, social movements, and other informal structures may also find the framework useful to adapt and apply to their respective realities and needs.

The **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK** is also a useful and necessary resource for international audiences to continue to learn and reflect on best practices and lessons learned from the application of the strategies, tools, and tactics.

## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

The main authors of the framework are Roselie Vasquez Yetter, Global Director for Civil Society and Alyson Lyons, Senior Advisor to Global Initiatives, both of PartnersGlobal. Patricia Deniz, Senior Research & Development Officer, and Alex Sardar, Chief Innovation Officer, both of CIVICUS, provided significant contributions.

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# THE CASE FOR RESILIENCY

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights:

“If space exists for civil society to engage, there is a greater likelihood that all rights will be better protected. Conversely, the closing of civil society space, and threats and reprisals against civil society, are early warning signs of instability.”

Civic space is the cornerstone of a healthy society that champions democratic principles and ideals, and an essential component for the promotion and advancement of human rights and fulfillment of basic human needs. A dynamic and participatory civic space ensures that the interests, needs, and concerns of civil society are heard and protected. An open and free enabling environment is essential for a vibrant civil society to take root, hold government accountable, advocate for positive change, and deliver critical services to the population. Therefore, states are responsible for creating and maintaining that safe space in which **civil society**—defined by CIVICUS as **the arena outside of the family, the state, and the market which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests**—can operate free from hindrance and insecurity.

The international community has recognized the important role of civil society participation in maintaining open and free societies. Yet despite international efforts to normalize the inclusion of civil society in decision-making and other processes, the ability for civil society to operate has, in reality, been shrinking at a rapid pace. The past decade has been marred by closing civic space, with governments applying pressures and threats to deter civil society from operating or being perceived as legitimate actors to hold governments accountable.

## Civic Space

The ability for civil society and individuals to organise, participate and communicate without hindrance, and in doing so, influence the political and social structures around them.

-CIVICUS

This issue is not new. The work of civil society has always been difficult in authoritarian regimes. Today however, democratically elected governments around the world increasingly resort to practices that hinder the work of civil society actors, particularly those promoting democracy, human rights, transparency, and civic participation. From historical mistrust of civil society getting involved in issues considered exclusive to the political realm, to direct attempts from government officials to consolidate their power by silencing critical voices or opposing views, this new trend manifests itself in a range of ways. From Egypt to Ecuador and Mozambique to Myanmar, civil society faces ever-growing challenges not only to their work, but also their own existence.

In 2016, **Partners**Global convened its annual **Partners** Network meeting to identify the common challenges across geographies to plan for collaborative action in 2017. The leading issue that emerged across all 22 Network Centers was **the impact of closing civic space on their ability to function freely and without threats to their operation or security**. The most troubling revelation was that this issue had as many drivers as countries assessed.

CIVICUS' findings within its Alliance and its *2017 State of Civil Society Report* (which identified several urgent trends that continue to emerge and threaten the space for civic participation) reinforced the outcomes of this meeting. Most critically perhaps, the report noted that just three percent of the world's population live in countries where civic space is fully open, with civic space being seriously constrained in over half of all United Nations member states. In short, **the restriction of civic space is now the norm rather than the exception**.

This stark reality pushed **PartnersGlobal** to action and through a strategic partnership with CIVICUS, embarked on the development of the **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK**.

Interestingly, counter to the global adoption of the SDGs, the shrinking of civic space corresponds to an overall decline in adherence to democratic principles and subsequent erosion of trust in democratic systems. Governments are further undermining democracy by adopting repressive tactics, justifying closing civic space and restricting citizens' rights.

### **The Road to the Resiliency+ Framework**

The **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK** was designed through a process of co-creation with the participation of experts and CSO practitioners around the globe. The **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK** draws upon research and insights from the latest academic and practitioner thinking on resiliency, complex operating environments and civic space threats, and civil society organizational models and capacities.

During the initial phase of data collection and assumption-testing, **PartnersGlobal** interviewed more than 45 civil society leaders, network members, donor representatives, and academic experts across regions, sectors, and varying degrees of closing and opening civic space to identify the key elements for strengthening resiliency efforts. Some of these included activists from Hong Kong and Uganda, service provision-oriented NGOs based in Kosovo and Mexico, human rights groups from Ecuador and South Sudan, CSO coalition and network representatives from Serbia and India, and members of the donor community including foundations and international aid agencies. This participatory method of data collection was complemented by compiling and synthesizing existing knowledge and tools on CSO sustainability and resiliency. Next, the resources were cross-referenced with recent

analyses and examples of how CSOs can individually and collectively protect their role in society to maintain effective operations while under threat. Then, **PartnersGlobal** truth-tested the findings and analysis by convening internal feedback sessions and external focus groups with diverse stakeholders from various geographic, political, and security contexts (including in Albania, Kazakhstan, Senegal, and Serbia), where the framework was presented, after which additional questions and thoughts informed the current version.

### **How Closing Civic Space Impacts Civil Society Organizations**

Civil society organizations (CSOs) fulfill many important roles, including fostering citizen participation, exercising accountability in governance, advocating for policy change, and delivering essential services to otherwise underrepresented and marginalized communities. Closing civic space manifests as impacts on civil society organizations' ability to function and operate in several ways. Throughout the research and interview process, the following set of civic space threats emerged consistently across geographic boundaries and civil society actors:

**FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS:** Constraints that are intentionally placed on civil society actors, organizations, and the sector to render it difficult, and at times impossible, for civil society organizations to be able to receive funding necessary for their operations and functionality. These constraints also influence many donors' ability to support civil society, requiring both to work in tandem to safeguard and contest the closing civic space.

**RESTRICTIVE AND POLITICIZED LEGAL ENVIRONMENT:** Increased restrictions and politicization of the legal sphere occurs when measures used by governments constrain CSOs from their efforts to engage communities in the social and political development

of their country. The tightening control over the enabling environment impacts all civil society groups regardless of their areas of work.

**HARASSMENT AND DIRECT ATTACKS:** The potential for or existence of violence perpetrated on individuals or property of civil society leaders, staff, and organizations.

**DIVISIVE NARRATIVES AND CONTROL OF MEDIA:** Government tactics that control messaging and shape public perception of civil society with the goal of delegitimizing and undermining the sector.

**FRAGMENTED AND ISOLATED CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR:** Government strategy to divide and conquer the civil society sector by singling out certain actors and/or organizations that represent political threats or whose work focuses on controversial topics. The result of this strategy is an inhibited ability within the sector to coordinate effectively, weakening collective response.

**STATE SURVEILLANCE:** When governments harness technology to monitor movements, transactions, and other aspects of an organization's operations, thereby instilling a sense of paranoia and fear into the psychology of an organization's staff and partners.

**EMERGING CONFLICT DYNAMICS:** The presence of factors that put the overall stability and security of the state and its citizens at risk, and render it difficult for an organization to carry out normal daily functions and actions.

While this list of the most common threats validates and expands upon existing research of peer organizations and research institutes, it alone does not answer **WHY** or **WHEN** civil society is susceptible. What emerged from the research was an additional list of internal threats that when present, renders an organization vulnerable to the impacts of civic space threats. The list of vulnerabilities is as follows:

**SUSTAINABILITY SOLUTIONS FOR RESILIENCY PROBLEMS:** When an organization engages in problem solving and planning from a mentality of “normal operations in conditions that are conducive to civic participation” rather than acknowledging that the environmental conditions are increasingly hostile which requires adaptive capacity to adequately prepare for and respond to the shocks of the changes.

**UNRESPONSIVE AND OUTDATED ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS:** When an organization adopts a rigid structure and operating model that is unable to adapt quickly and ensure the organization’s viability when civic space shocks pressure the organization to reduce or cease functioning.

**LACK OF ADAPTIVE, INCLUSIVE AND INTER-GENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP:** When the leadership structure is unable – or unwilling – to recognize the need to diversify, mobilize staff, make decisive changes, and reshape organizational norms and culture. This makes them unable to respond effectively and swiftly to shifts in civic space.

**WEAK ATTENTION TO STAFF WELL-BEING:** When the mental, physical and emotional needs of staff are not an organizational priority, leading to inadequate resources and/or mechanisms for staff in times of need.

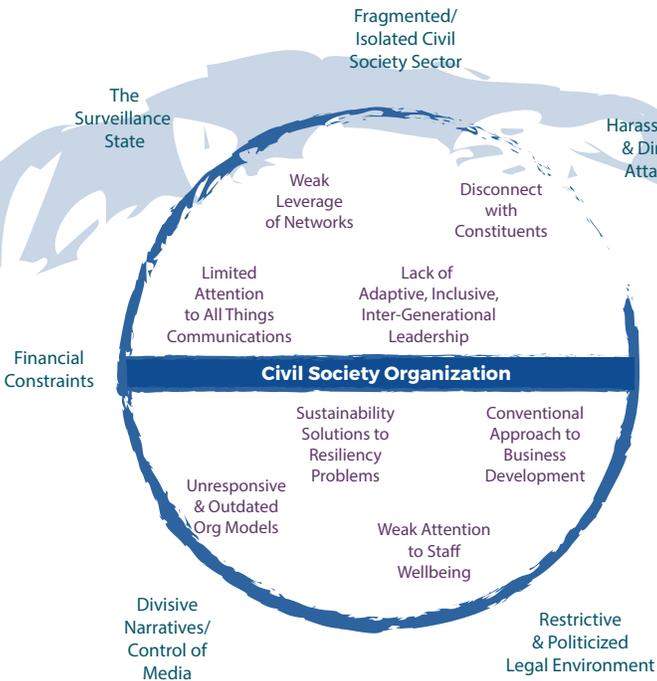
**WEAK LEVERAGE OF NETWORKS:** When an organization does not identify and harness the resources within its own networks of other civil society organizations, stakeholders, and/or constituents effectively to aid in the preparation and response to shifts in civic space.

**CONVENTIONAL APPROACH TO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT:** When an organization that relies on long-standing fundraising strategies centered on projects and traditional donors is at risk of financial insecurity because it is unable – or unwilling – to think creatively about revenue diversification, building strategic non-traditional partnerships, and exploring new avenues for income.

**DISCONNECT WITH CONSTITUENTS:** When an organization becomes more responsive to its donors than to the communities that it seeks to support or advocate on behalf of, resulting in a crisis of legitimacy and vulnerability to government attempts to undermine the organization during times of shifting civic space.

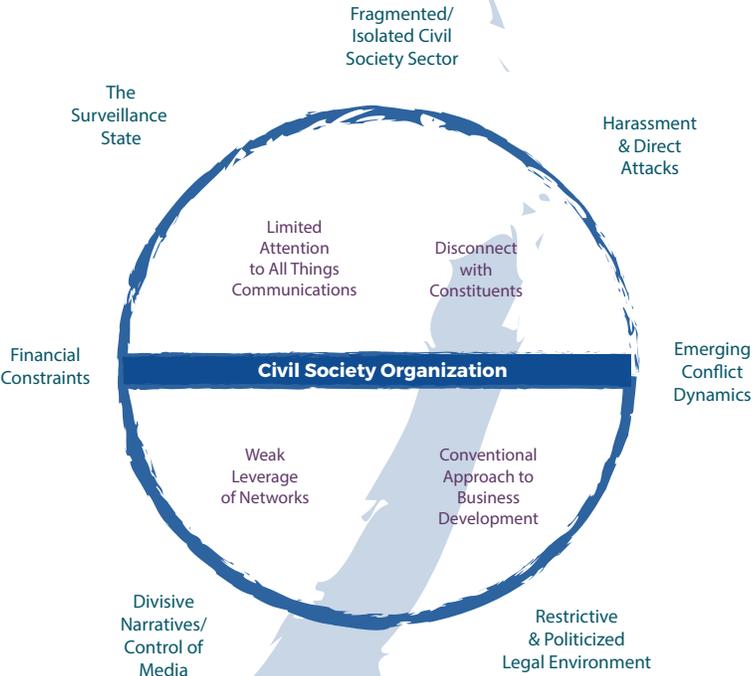
**LIMITED ATTENTION TO ALL THINGS COMMUNICATIONS:** When an organization does not invest sufficient time, energy, and resources into building a comprehensive and adaptive communications strategy that provides guidance on how to talk about the organization, its positive contributions to society, and its success at living up to its mission, both to internal and external audiences. The decreased attention or absence of a robust communications component can exacerbate the risks posed by the other vulnerabilities noted above.

The greater the extent of internal vulnerabilities, the more at risk an organization is in their increasingly hostile external environments (see graphic below). Therefore, in order to navigate civic space shocks, an organization must be adequately prepared and increase their level of resiliency.



Object 1: A civil society organization with all internal threats present is highly vulnerable to an operating context facing numerous external civic space threats

Object 2: A civil society organization with half of the internal threats is less vulnerable to an operating context facing numerous external civic space threats



# WHAT IS RESILIENCY?

The term “**resiliency**” (from Latin *resilire* = bounce off) has been used since the 1950s in natural science academic circles to describe the environment’s ability to adapt and respond to threats and changes to various ecosystems. In the 1970s, psychology and education spheres adopted the term to describe the human capacity to withstand the shocks and trauma of crisis situations. More recently, resiliency has been creeping into international development and peacebuilding spaces as a component of sustainability where “sustainability aims to put the world back into balance, and resilience looks for ways to manage an imbalanced world.” In other words, sustainability is the end goal, the perfect system, the vision that we seek to attain in a context that is conducive to operating under normal conditions. Resiliency is required in moving along the path towards sustainability and in facing changing dynamics in that environment. The essence therefore of “**resiliency**” is:

**an ability to adapt swiftly and purposefully to shocks or impacts in such a way as to not only survive, but also thrive in an uncertain environment.**

The rise of resiliency within the international development discourse and its integration as a concept across a variety of agencies and pillars led to a virtual explosion of resiliency-focused frameworks that seek to support civil society. They evolved in the context of disaster and risk reduction, climate change policy, food security, environmental sustainability, and livelihoods, among other topics. However, **none to date look at organizational resiliency in civil society in the face of closing civic space.**

## FROM ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCY

The idea of sustainability coincided with the emergence of organizational development for

civil society organizations in the late 90s/early 2000s. The goal of traditional organizational development was to capacitate CSOs to a level enabling them to be sustainable, or able to function beyond the project cycle with adequate human, material, and financial resources necessary to operate normally in **conditions that are conducive to civic participation**. Core capacities such as risk analysis, strategic planning, human-resource management, communications and business development, and establishing organizational and financial systems and protocols are key components to any traditional organizational development process.

This type of support remains critically important; however, traditional organizational development processes were not required to consider what the needs of CSOs may be if their operating environment continued to become increasingly inhospitable. The impacts of closing civic space demand rethinking traditional organizational development models geared towards sustainability and focusing not only on the idyllic end state of equilibrium, but what is necessary to navigate in the short-term the twists and turns on the road to reaching that end state. **Organizational resiliency enables civil society to adapt to the impacts of quickly changing external conditions in order to prepare and respond effectively.** Organizational resiliency requires looking at the entire system and understanding the interconnections, influences, and feedback loops between elements within that system in order to tackle issues more effectively from a preventive and responsive approach.

## DEFINITIONS OF RESILIENCY

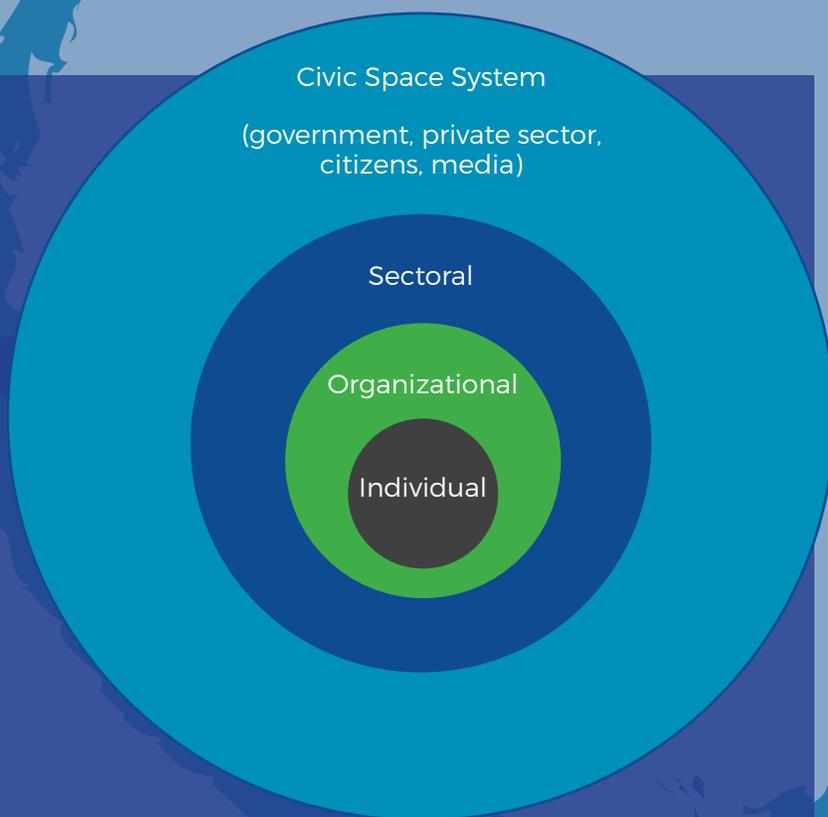
For the purpose of the **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK**, “resiliency” is understood on four different levels — individual, organizational, sectoral, and systemic.

**Individual Resiliency** is a set of behaviors, thoughts, and actions that promote personal wellbeing and mental health of an individual, whether part of an organization or not. People are able to withstand, adapt to, and recover from stress and adversity—while maintaining or returning to a state of mental health and wellbeing—by using effective coping strategies.

**Organizational Resiliency** is the ability of an organization to have the adaptive capacity necessary to prepare and recover quickly from the impacts of a dynamic and quickly changing external environment.

**Sectoral Resiliency** is the ability for civil society organizations, other civic groupings, and individual activists to effectively communicate and collaborate as a whole to both manage, adapt to, and overcome challenges in a changing environment.

**System Resiliency** is the ability for the civil society sector to identify various complex elements that exist within their realm of operations (people, institutions, attitudes, etc.), as well as the interconnections and interactions between those elements that lead to certain feedback loops, events, and behaviors (i.e. manifestations of threats) in order to determine what strategies and interventions work best to adapt to impacts of interactions.



# FACTORS OF RESILIENCY

How does an organization know when it is resilient? What are the overarching factors and more specific indicators that can be assessed to gauge an organization’s level of resiliency in the face of closing civic space? **Partners**Global and CIVICUS explored these questions while designing the framework.

Drawing upon previous studies and reports by McKinsey (organizational development), McManus (organizational resiliency in New Zealand); Lee, Vargo, and Seville (Developing a Tool to Measure and Compare Organizations’ Resilience); the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society); and others such as the indicators of closing space found in ICNL, CIVICUS, and Freedom House’s monitors, seven core factors were identified that contribute to organizational resiliency in the face of shifting civic space. The factors are defined as follows:



## SITUATION AWARENESS: SYSTEMS THINKING

Internally, organizations are complex systems. Simultaneously, they exist within even larger societal systems. Maintaining an awareness of the actors and dynamics at each of these levels and using that awareness to inform decision-making allows organizations to address threats and capitalize on opportunities.

### **RESILIENCE ETHOS: EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY**

Resiliency is a set of skills, a dedicated process and, more importantly, a mindset that allow an organization to embrace uncertainty and endure and recover from setbacks. Resilience requires a culture of creative planning, flexibility, continued learning, and self-care embedded across all levels. In this culture, resilience issues are key considerations in strategic planning and program implementation.

### **AGILITY AND FLEXIBILITY: PREPARING FOR THE UNKNOWN**

The ability to act in anticipation of or in response to threats, vulnerabilities, or opportunities within changing civic space is essential to organizational resiliency. This adaptive capacity is built by cultivating innovation, creativity, strong leadership, clear communication, positive working relationships, and a shared organizational vision.

### **CONNECTEDNESS: GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS**

Strong organizations are purposefully and actively connected internally, with constituents, within the sector and across sectors. This allows them to proactively manage change and build communication pathways to inform decision-making and increase preparedness.

### **BUSINESS ACUMEN: ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET**

To capitalize on new opportunities, create value, innovate, and effectively network, organizations must maintain an entrepreneurial mindset that enables access to diversified funding, strategic alliances, innovative service delivery, and quick recovery from civic space shocks.

### **LEGITIMACY: RADICAL TRANSPARENCY AND CONSTITUENT ENGAGEMENT**

Legitimacy is needed to ensure both domestic and international public support in order to endure sudden or extended changes in the civic space. A culture and processes to ensure transparency and accountability to both donors and constituents are indispensable elements to build connections and trust, solidifying an organization's legitimacy in the space.

### **CREATIVE COMMUNICATIONS: USING AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH**

To better connect with the public and other stakeholders in the civic space and to bring clarity about their work, organizations need to communicate creatively. Creative communications require an intentional effort to develop and diffuse appropriate messages for different publics, planning communication strategies in case of crisis, and leveraging new tools, technologies, and approaches to remain connected to the world.

The purpose of the **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK** is to accompany CSOs through a process of **identifying drivers of and threats to their viability (both internal and external) and proposing a menu of strategies, tactics, tools, and peer-to-peer assistance to increase their resiliency in the face of closing civic space.**

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCY

The **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK** adheres to a set of guiding principles that are essential to organizations that are experiencing closing civic space. They are:

- 1. ALWAYS LOOK AT THE ENTIRE SYSTEM & EMBRACE ADAPTATION.** An organization activates its adaptive qualities to prepare for and/or respond to present or emerging changes or threats by both regularly assessing the external environment and internal operational capacities and devising multiple strategies and tactics that apply to different possible scenarios.
- 2. ENCOURAGE ITERATIVE LEARNING.** Learning spurs creative problem-solving that can have a significant impact on an organization's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Even when results are counter-productive, the lessons gleaned from that experience can be harnessed and utilized in thinking through new solutions.
- 3. PRIORITIZE DO NO HARM.** Traditionally, the principles of Do No Harm have been applied to interventions and initiatives in any given context - namely, that an intervention will cause as little harm as possible on contextual dynamics - and various levels of beneficiaries of the intervention. In today's shifting political realities, it is critical that organizations apply a Do No Harm process internally at the organizational level so as to ensure the safety and security of staff and others working with or associated with the organization.
- 4. HARNESS THE POWER OF CONNECTEDNESS.** We are only as great as the sum of our parts. Harnessing connectivity—both horizontally across organizations and networks within the sector and vertically with other partners, stakeholders, constituents, and citizens—and maintaining an inclusive environment remain critically important in realizing the full potential of civil society resiliency.



# THE RESILIENCY+ PROCESS

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The **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK** describes how civil society organizations and actors adapt and thrive in response to multi-faceted changes to social, political, and economic dynamics. The **RESILIENCY+ PROCESS** offers strategies, tactics, and tools specific to the needs of each individual organization in order to increase their capacity to withstand the shocks of changes to the operating space. The process is comprised of four phases:

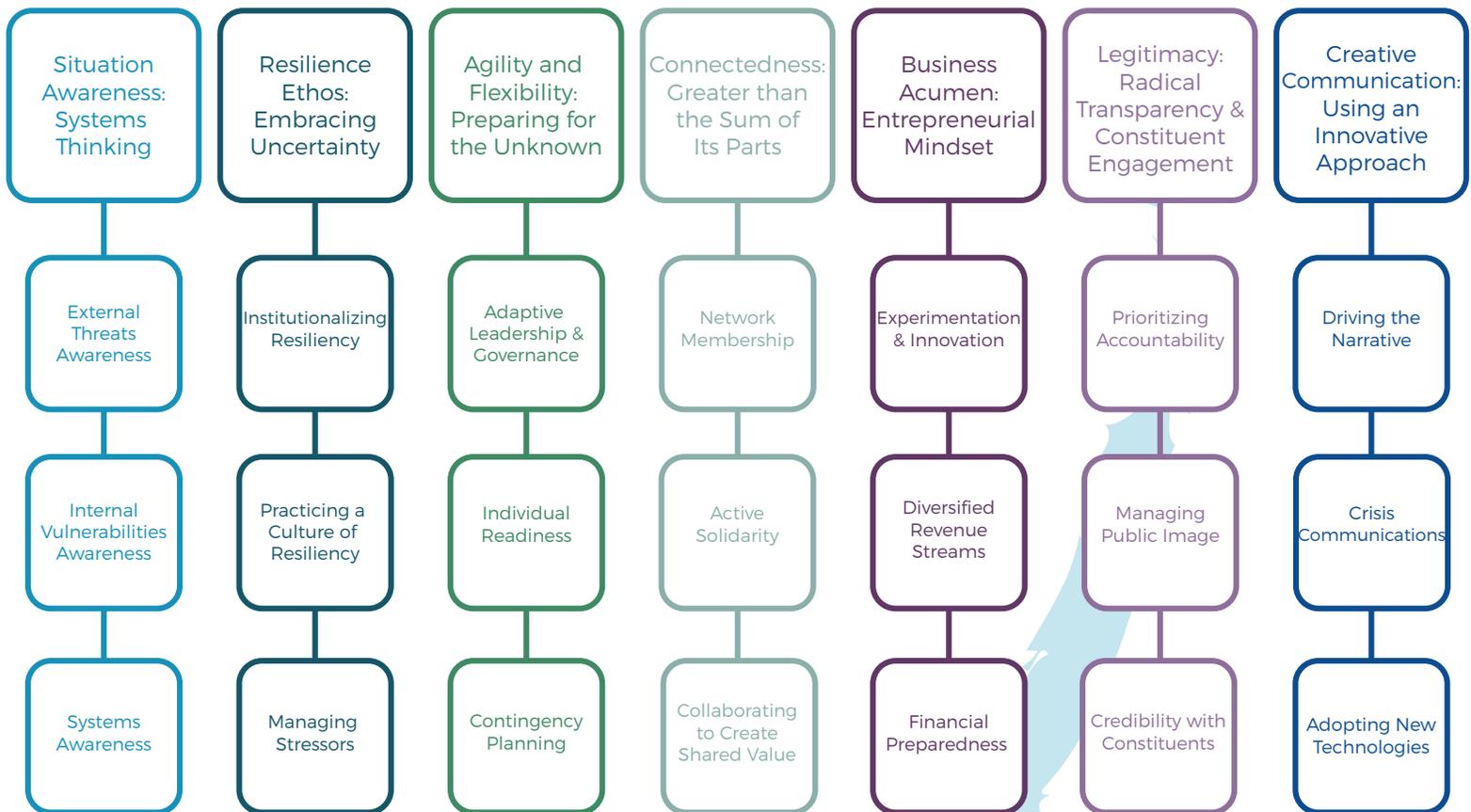
1. **Assessing Organizational Resiliency**
2. **Understanding the Civil Society Ecosystem**
3. **Building a RESILIENCY+ ROADMAP**
4. **Exploring New Routes Along the Way**

The following pages describe each phase in greater detail. Throughout the process, civil society organizations will be paired with a **Resiliency+ Coach** and a team of **Peer Mentors** from the **Resiliency+ Peer Mentor Network**. The **Resiliency+ Coach**, an expert in organizational needs assessments and participatory planning, will guide the CSO through the stages of the **RESILIENCY+ PROCESS**, both through virtual and in-person engagement. Once a **RESILIENCY+ ROADMAP** is devised, the coach will identify a team of Peer Mentors and Resource Partners to support the implementation of suggested interventions that will help CSOs increase their resiliency in one or more areas.

# PHASE ONE: ASSESSING ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCY

As a first step in the **RESILIENCY+ FRAMEWORK** process, civil society organizations will learn about their own level of resiliency by taking the **Resilient Organization in Changing Civic Space (ROCCS) Self-Assessment**. The **ROCCS Self-Assessment** measures the capacity of an organization to withstand and thrive in closing civic space contexts and elicits a deeper understanding of both context-specific external threats and the internal capacities of the organization going through the R+ process. The assessment tool is comprised of 3 indicator groups for each resiliency factor, depicted in the graphic:

Organizational Resiliency Factors and Indices



Each indicator group contains a series of questions and statements that when answered, generate a score that contributes to an overall level of resilience for each factor (see sample questions in the graphic below). The results of the assessment offer insights to the **Resiliency+ Coach** and enable them to delve deeper to seek clarifications and customize a mentorship and intervention program specific to the needs of the organization.

**ORGANIZATIONAL FACTOR / RESILIENCY ETHOS: EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY.** Resiliency is a set of skills, a dedicated process and, more importantly, a mindset that allow an organization to embrace uncertainty and endure and recover from setbacks. Resilience requires a culture of creative planning, flexibility, continued learning, and self-care embedded across all levels. In this culture, resilience issues are key considerations in strategic planning and program implementation.

RESILIENCY INDEX	RESILIENCY MEASUREMENT
<p><b>Practicing a Culture of Resiliency</b> The informal customs, behaviors, and beliefs that demonstrate a value for resiliency in an organization’s daily operations and decision-making.</p>	<p><b>Our staff discusses organizational challenges that increase our exposure to threats.</b> 1 (never) 2 (rarely) 3 (sometimes) 4 (always) I don’t know</p> <p><b>Individuals can openly discuss contentious changing space issues without repercussions.</b> 1 (never) 2 (rarely) 3 (sometimes) 4 (always) I don’t know</p>
<p><b>Managing Stressors</b> The prioritization of the psychosocial and physical well-being of staff working in volatile or destabilizing conditions.</p>	<p><b>Our organization periodically screens staff for psychosocial stress.</b> 1 (never) 2 (rarely) 3 (sometimes) 4 (always) I don’t know</p> <p><b>Our organization trains staff on the potential psychological effects of their work.</b> 1 (never) 2 (rarely) 3 (sometimes) 4 (always) I don’t know</p> <p><b>Our organization trains staff on the safety and security risks of their work.</b> 1 (never) 2 (rarely) 3 (sometimes) 4 (always) I don’t know</p>

## PHASE TWO: UNDERSTANDING THE CIVIC SPACE ECOSYSTEM

After organizations learn more about their own internal resiliency capacities, it is crucial to shift to an external mindset and analyze the operating context that they must navigate to survive. The next phase to the **RESILIENCY+ PROCESS** is therefore an exercise in discovering what and who makes the wheels of the system turn. Drawing upon systems mapping and political economy analysis, **Resiliency+ Coaches** will guide organizations through the creation of their “civic space ecosystem.”

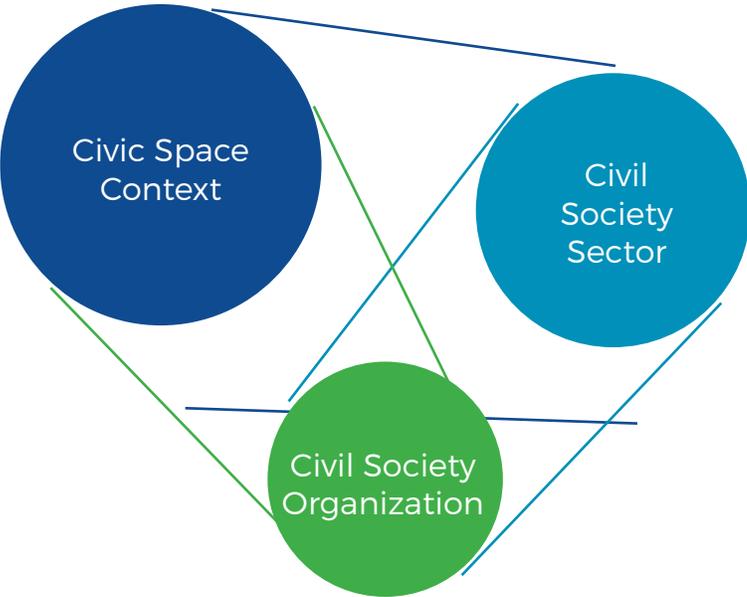
**Systems mapping** looks at the total sum of the parts of any given context and finds patterns and dynamic relationships that emerge and interact among various factors and actors that shape the way the context is structured.

**Political Economy Analysis** (PEA) examines the various power dynamics and economic and social forces that influence any given context.

Systems mapping and PEA are complementary to one another. After completing a systems mapping process, PEA can support exploring the dynamics within the defined system, the relationships, and incentives that are working among/between the actors. A PEA helps identify specific stakeholders and their networks, influences and interests, and other key characteristics of the system.

The civic space ecosystem is built around the question, “What are the forces and capacities (and what are the dynamics among them) that make civil society resilient and able to participate openly and freely in civic life?” Organizations begin to answer this question

by unpacking the civic space context, civil society sector, and organization/individuals within an organization (depicted in the graphic below). For civic space context (large circle), organizations explore factors related to history that shape the current norms and behaviors, institutions and laws governing civic space, culture and values of a society, and other dimensions that impact and/or influence civic space (i.e socio-economic factors, communications and technology, and security). This draws heavily on the categories found within a political economy analysis.



Within the civil society sector circle, organizations will be asked to think about the different types of organizations, movements, individuals, and networks that exist within the sector; where they are located geographically; what issues or themes they work and/or advocate for and why; who are the constituent groups; and what other stakeholders (i.e. journalists, universities, etc.) play an active role within the sector.

Within the civil society organization circle, the **Resiliency+ Coach** will take the results of the **ROCCS Self-Assessment** and facilitate a SWOT analysis to organize strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to an organization, both internally and externally.

For each circle, organizations engage in discussion about power relations and the norms and informal/formal rules governing each factor or set of factors. They also identify which factors are enablers or inhibitors; structural, attitudinal, or transactional; and upstream cause or downstream effect. From this, feedback loops begin to emerge and take shape, contributing to a visual depiction of the civic space ecosystem, only after which leverage or entry points present themselves as potential ways to increase one's resiliency.

### **JARGON ALERT!**

**ENABLER:** A significant force in the environment that supports, encourages, or increases the health and effectiveness of the civic space ecosystem.

**INHIBITOR:** A significant force in the environment that undermines or prevents the health and effectiveness of the civic space ecosystem.

**STRUCTURAL:** Physical and social environment in which people live, both the natural and built environment along with political, social, and economic institutions.

**ATTITUDINAL:** Widely held beliefs, values, norms, and intergroup relations that affect how large groups of people think and behave.

**TRANSACTIONAL:** Process used by and interactions among key people as they deal with important social, political, and economic issues.

**UPSTREAM CAUSE:** A factor or set of factors that cause or lead to another factor or set of factors.

**DOWNSTREAM EFFECT:** Factors or set of factors that are the result or outcome of upstream causal factors.

## PHASE THREE: BUILDING A RESILIENCY+ ROADMAP

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Equipped with an increased and nuanced understanding of the entire CSO ecosystem, the Resiliency+ Coach will facilitate a collaborative process to devise a customized package of interventions, or **RESILIENCY+ ROADMAP**, using the **RESILIENCY+ MATRIX** and cooperative planning principles.

The **RESILIENCY+ MATRIX** is comprised of strategies, tools, tactics, and approaches intended to increase civil society organizational resiliency. These are customizable based on the varying levels of threat presence and on each organization's internal capacities. For example, through Phase One, a CSO could identify the presence of "divisive narratives and control of information" as an emerging civic space threat, in addition to a high presence of "business as usual approach to connectedness" and "inability to communicate organizational values" within the specific organization. The **RESILIENCY+ MATRIX** would match these findings with a menu of options for the CSO to consider.

When the strategies, tactics, and/or tools have been identified, the **Resiliency+ Coach** facilitates an action planning process with the organization's staff to create the **RESILIENCY+ ROADMAP**. This process is as follows:

1. Capture the intended **goal** for each strategy, tool, and/or tactic by linking it directly with one or more of the resiliency factors;
2. Identify the individual **steps** required to implement each proposed strategy, tactic, and/or tool;
3. Decide **who** will be responsible, advised, consulted, and informed for carrying out each step;

4. Determine necessary **resources** to carry out each step, including human, financial, and time;
5. Consider the **involvement of others** based on the identification of actors and stakeholders in the systems analysis;
6. Set **targets** for each step to be completed - what time frame is reasonable;
7. Devise **benchmarks** or indicators that will assess the progress and successes of implementing each step along the Roadmap; and
8. Integrate "**pitstops**" along the way to pause, reflect, and evaluate intervention impacts and determine if the context has changed since the original analysis was conducted (see next phase for more information on what to do when a CSO reaches a checkpoint).

It is important to identify possible "**adaptive scenarios**" or alternative options that can be incorporated into the intervention plan should a shift in the enabling environment occur or upon assessment of the impacts of the strategies, tactics, and/or tools.

This facilitated and collaborative process can range from hours to weeks, depending on the extent of the previously prioritized internal and external threats that emerge. The ideal modality is in person, but is also possible using a virtual platform. Throughout implementation of the **RESILIENCY+ ROADMAP**, the **Resiliency+ Coach** will provide ongoing mentorship, support, and guidance to the CSO undertaking the process. S/he will also connect the organization to one or more of the **Resiliency Peer Mentors and Resource Partners** with specific technical expertise in one or more of the intervention areas to work directly with the CSO.

## PHASE FOUR: EXPLORING NEW ROUTES ALONG THE WAY

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As mentioned earlier, the essence of organizational resiliency is an ability to adapt to swiftly changing circumstances, in a manner that enables the organization to continue to function - and even thrive - in the midst of those changes. The **RESILIENCY+ ROADMAP**, therefore, intentionally includes a fourth phase of the process specifically focused on **iteration and adaptation**.

The points of iteration and adaptation in the **RESILIENCY+ ROADMAP** are called “**pit stops**.” **Pit stops** occur relatively frequently after initial actions or steps in the roadmap are taken (approximately every 2-3 weeks), and gradually become farther apart.

During a **pit stop**, the **Resiliency+ Coach** asks a series of questions to both individual staff taking part in the roadmap process and the group as a whole. These questions facilitate critical thinking and often lead to new ideas. Examples of the questions are:

- What have you done so far? Did anything new or exciting emerge?
- What have you learned? What did you find challenging? What worked and what didn't work?
- What changes, if any, occurred in the system and what are the impacts or consequences of those changes on the roadmap and/or the roadmap on the system?
- What's next? How should we move forward? Possibly revisit some of the alternative options identified in the previous phase.

### The Six Universal Lessons of Do No Harm Applied to a Resiliency+ Process

Imbedded also within this step are the **Do No Harm principles and process**, ensuring that all interventions mitigate to the greatest extent possible any potential negative impacts on those directly (and indirectly) touched by the intervention itself. See below for how this is accomplished throughout the **RESILIENCY+ PROCESS**, utilizing the six universal lessons of Do No Harm developed by CDA Collaborative Learning Projects:

1. **When an intervention of any kind enters a context, it becomes part of that context.** A **RESILIENCY+ ROADMAP** is a combination of interventions that correlate with strengthening one or more organizational resiliency factors. Therefore, when the roadmap is being implemented by a CSO in a dynamic, shifting civil society environment, the roadmap becomes part of the environment.

2. **All contexts are characterized by Dividers (factors that create division or tension) and Connectors (factors that unite groups together).** Embedded within the second phase of the **RESILIENCY+ PROCESS** is the identification of contextual factors. CSOs will identify which factors are dividers and connectors and how that may/may not influence one or more aspects of the Roadmap.

3. **All interventions will interact with both Dividers and Connectors, making them better or worse.** CSOs will revisit these classifications during the adaptation moments throughout implementation to determine whether interventions have any unintended impacts on the operating context and make any necessary changes.

4. **Interventions interact with Dividers and Connectors through their organizational actions and the behavior of staff.** Additionally as part of the adaptation moments, CSOs will reflect on how changes in their own staff behaviors and actions interact with the various dividers and connectors, assess whether these interactions have had any negative or positive unintended consequences/outcomes, and make any necessary changes.

5. **The details of an intervention are the source of its impacts.** When a **RESILIENCY+ ROADMAP** is being developed, the potential impacts of the intervention implementation plan will be discussed.

6. **There are always options.** In addition to thinking through the potential impacts of interventions, alternative plans are discussed to prepare for when something in the context changes or an intervention has an unintended consequence on the operating environment that requires an organization to shift course.

The typical **RESILIENCY+ PROCESS** lasts approximately 12-18 months from assessment to implementation of the roadmap. However, it is important to remember that **resiliency is fluid and change is constant**. The intentionality of your resiliency planning is what is important and critical to the viability of civil society in the face of closing civic space.



# ANNEX I: DEFINITIONS

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## GENERAL:

**CIVIC SPACE:** The ability for civil society and individuals to organize, participate, and communicate without hindrance, and in doing so, influence the political and social structures around them.

**CIVIL SOCIETY:** The arena outside of the family, the state, and the market which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests.

**CLOSING CIVIC SPACE:** Changes in legislation or government tactics that restrict, weaken, and/or delegitimize the ability for civil society organizations and individuals to operate.

**FRAMEWORK:** A structure of practices, concepts, ideas, and/or resources to assist with a plan or development of a system.

**INDIVIDUAL RESILIENCY:** A set of behaviors, thoughts, and actions that promote personal wellbeing and mental health of an individual, whether part of an organization or not. People are able to withstand, adapt to, and recover from stress and adversity—while maintaining or returning to a state of mental health and wellbeing—by using effective coping strategies.

**ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCY:** The ability of an organization to have the adaptive capacity necessary to prepare and recover quickly from the impacts of a dynamic and quickly changing external environment.

**RESILIENCY:** An ability to “adapt swiftly and purposefully” to shocks or impacts in such a way as to not only survive, but also thrive in an uncertain environment.

**SECTORAL RESILIENCY:** The ability for civil society organizations, other civic groupings, and individual activists to effectively communicate and collaborate as a whole to both manage, adapt to, and overcome challenges in a changing environment.

**STRATEGY:** A type of response that is an overarching plan to overcome a challenge or reach a goal.

**SYSTEM RESILIENCY:** The ability for the civil society sector to identify various complex elements that exist within their realm of operations (people, institutions, attitudes, etc), as well as the interconnections and interactions between those elements that lead to certain feedback loops, events, and behaviors (i.e. manifestations of threats) in order to determine what strategies and interventions work best to adapt to impacts of interactions.

**TACTIC:** Concrete and focused steps to achieve a goal, often involving specific planning as a part of a larger plan.

**TOOL:** A resource used to perform an action to achieve a goal or task.

**THREAT:** The possibility that an external person or event can cause harm as the outcome of an uncertain attack.

**EXTERNAL CIVIC SPACE THREATS:**

**DIVISIVE NARRATIVES AND CONTROL OF MEDIA:** Government tactics to control messaging and shape public perception of civil society to delegitimize and undermine the sector.

**EMERGING CONFLICT DYNAMICS:** The presence of factors that put at risk the overall stability and security of the state and its citizens, and render it difficult for an organization to carry out normal daily functions and actions.

**FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS:** Those that are intentionally placed on civil society actors, organizations and the sector by the state to render it difficult, and at times impossible, for civil society organizations to be able to receive funding necessary for their operations and functionality. These constraints also influence many donors' ability to support civil society, requiring both to work in tandem to safeguard and contest the closing civic space.

**FRAGMENTED AND ISOLATED CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR:** The outcome of a strategy, most often used by governments, to divide and conquer the civil society sector by singling out certain actors and/or organizations that represent political threats or whose work focuses on controversial topics. Lack of communication among civil society organizations and

individuals weakens collective response and inhibits the sector's ability to coordinate.

**HARASSMENT AND DIRECT ATTACKS:** The presence of the potential for or actual violence to be perpetrated on individuals or property of civil society leaders, staff, and organizations.

**RESTRICTIVE AND POLITICIZED LEGAL ENVIRONMENT:** Increased restrictions and politicization of the legal sphere occurs when measures used by governments constrain CSOs from their efforts to engage communities in the social and political development of their country. The tightening grip through controls upon the enabling environment is affecting all civil society groups regardless of their areas of work.

**STATE SURVEILLANCE:** When governments harness technology to monitor movements, transactions, and other aspects of an organization's operations, thereby instilling a sense of paranoia and fear into the psychology of an organization's staff and partners.

**INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL VULNERABILITIES:**

**CONVENTIONAL APPROACH TO BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT:** When an organization that relies on long-standing fundraising strategies centered on projects and traditional donors is at risk of financial insecurity because it is unable (or unwilling) to think creatively about revenue diversification, building strategic non-traditional partnerships and exploring new avenues for income to support the overall health of the organization.

**DISCONNECT WITH CONSTITUENTS:** When an organization becomes more responsive

to its donors than to the communities that it seeks to support or advocate on behalf of, resulting in a crisis of legitimacy and vulnerability to government attempts to undermine the organization during times of shifting civic space.

**LACK OF ADAPTIVE, INCLUSIVE AND INTER-GENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP:** When the leadership structure is unable – or unwilling – to recognize the need to diversify, mobilize staff, make decisive changes, and reshape organizational norms and culture to be able to respond effectively and swiftly to shifts in civic space.

**LIMITED ATTENTION TO ALL THINGS COMMUNICATIONS:** When an organization does not invest sufficient time, energy and resources into building a comprehensive and adaptive communications strategy that provides guidance on how to talk about the organization, its positive contributions to society, and its success at living up to its mission, both to an internal and external audience. The decreased attention or absence of a robust communications component can exacerbate the risks posed by other vulnerabilities noted above, further undermining the organization during times of shifts in civic space

**SUSTAINABILITY SOLUTIONS FOR RESILIENCY PROBLEMS:** When an organization engages in problem solving and planning from a mentality of “normal operations in conditions that are conducive to civic participation” rather than acknowledging that the environmental conditions are increasingly hostile which requires adaptive capacity to adequately prepare for and respond to the shocks of the changes.

**UNRESPONSIVE AND OUTDATED ORGANIZATIONAL MODELS:** When an organization

adopts a rigid structure and operating model that is unable to adapt quickly and ensure the organization's viability when civic space shocks occur and pressure the organization to reduce or cease functioning.

**WEAK ATTENTION TO STAFF WELL-BEING:** When the mental, physical and emotional needs of staff are not an organizational priority, leading to inadequate resources and/or mechanisms for staff in times of need.

**WEAK LEVERAGE OF NETWORKS:** When an organization does not identify and harness the resources within its own networks of other civil society organizations, stakeholders, and/or constituents effectively to aid in the preparation and response to shifts in civic space.

#### **RESILIENCY+ PROCESS TERMINOLOGY:**

**ATTITUDINAL DIMENSION:** Widely held beliefs, values, norms, and intergroup relations that affect how large groups of people think and behave.

**DOWNSTREAM EFFECT:** Factors or set of factors that are the result or outcome of upstream causal factors.

**ENABLING FACTOR:** A significant force in the environment that supports, encourages or increases the health and effectiveness of the civic space ecosystem.

**INHIBITING FACTOR:** A significant force in the environment that undermines or prevents the health and effectiveness of the civic space ecosystem.

**POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS:** A tool for analysis that examines the various power dynamics and economic and social forces that influence any given context.

**STRUCTURAL DIMENSION:** Physical and social environment in which people live, both the natural and built environment along with political, social, and economic institutions.

**SYSTEMS MAPPING:** A holistic approach to understanding any given context and finds patterns and dynamic relationships that emerge and interact among various factors and actors that shape the way the context is structured.

**TRANSACTIONAL DIMENSION:** Process used by and interactions among key people as they deal with important social, political, and economic issues.

**UPSTREAM CAUSE:** A factor or set of factors that cause or lead to another factor or set of factors.





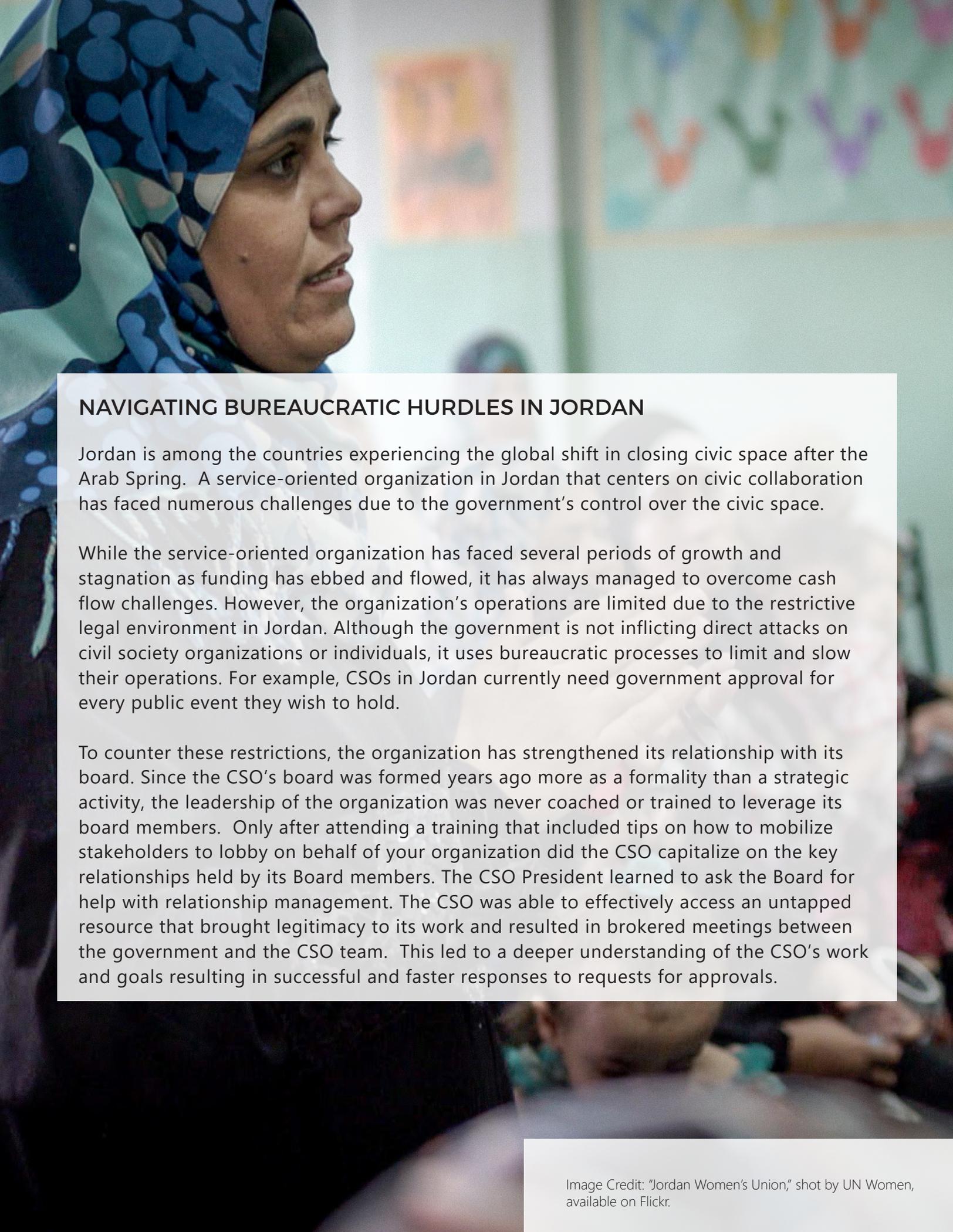
**CASE STUDIES:**  
**CIVIL SOCIETY RESILIENCY**  
*in the face of*  
**CHANGING CIVIC SPACE**

## NON-TRADITIONAL AVENUES FOR FUNDING IN CHINA

Financial constraints can challenge an organization's resiliency by limiting its ability to support staff and project operations. An activist from Hong Kong developed a strategic response to funding restrictions in China by drawing upon his years of experience in human rights.

The activist got his start during the land justice movement in Hong Kong, which protested elite control of land wealth in Hong Kong and the rapid gentrification of rural neighborhoods. After working with farmers to secure more robust land rights, the activist joined students protesting the country's lack of free elections and became a key figure in the 2014 Umbrella Movement, which drew thousands of concerned citizens to Hong Kong in protest for democratic elections. Following his involvement in the Umbrella Movement, the activist has been working for two organizations, one focused on protecting activists in Hong Kong and the other centered on human rights in China. His China-based organization primarily works in policy advocacy, lobbying, and capacity building.

Despite the organization's active work on advocacy for human rights and civil rights in China, it faced difficulties getting registered or even publicly fundraising. These limitations led the organization to seek alternative routes to remain active. The organization registered in the United States with a field office in China, which allowed it to receive foreign funds from an increased number of donors. It also developed an innovative funding strategy that involved the participation of individual activists. Even though the organization could not publicly fundraise, individual activists were able to raise funds for the organization. The activist explained that individual activists trusted by both the organization and communities in China became the carriers of funds for the organization. Citizens and communities who supported the organization's mission were able to donate to the organization by transferring their money to the trusted activist, who then transferred the money to the organization. The organization was able to remain financially resilient against the closing space through these trusted connections, while building its mission and narrative in communities.

A woman wearing a blue patterned headscarf is shown in profile, looking towards the right. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a classroom or meeting room with colorful posters on the wall.

## NAVIGATING BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES IN JORDAN

Jordan is among the countries experiencing the global shift in closing civic space after the Arab Spring. A service-oriented organization in Jordan that centers on civic collaboration has faced numerous challenges due to the government's control over the civic space.

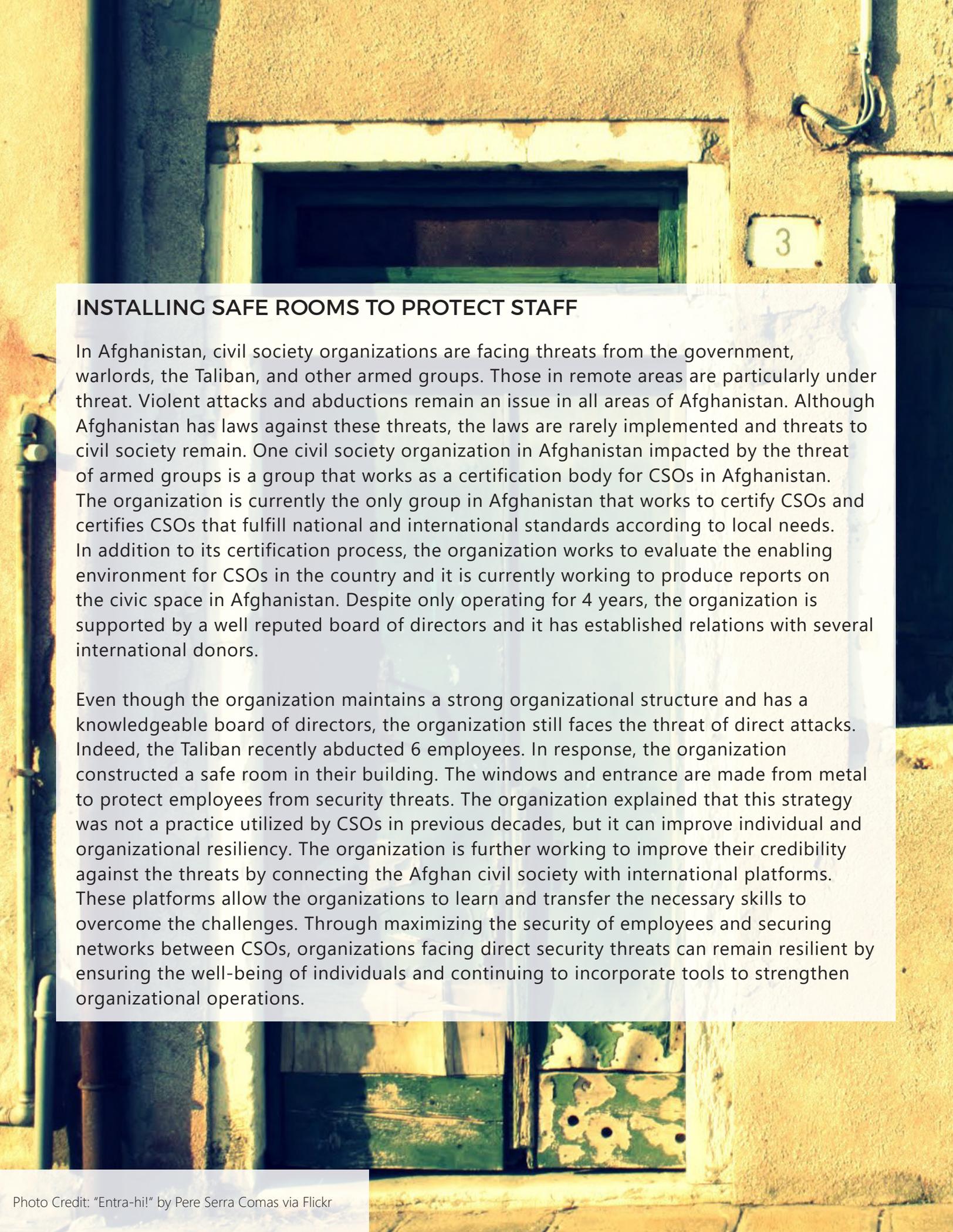
While the service-oriented organization has faced several periods of growth and stagnation as funding has ebbed and flowed, it has always managed to overcome cash flow challenges. However, the organization's operations are limited due to the restrictive legal environment in Jordan. Although the government is not inflicting direct attacks on civil society organizations or individuals, it uses bureaucratic processes to limit and slow their operations. For example, CSOs in Jordan currently need government approval for every public event they wish to hold.

To counter these restrictions, the organization has strengthened its relationship with its board. Since the CSO's board was formed years ago more as a formality than a strategic activity, the leadership of the organization was never coached or trained to leverage its board members. Only after attending a training that included tips on how to mobilize stakeholders to lobby on behalf of your organization did the CSO capitalize on the key relationships held by its Board members. The CSO President learned to ask the Board for help with relationship management. The CSO was able to effectively access an untapped resource that brought legitimacy to its work and resulted in brokered meetings between the government and the CSO team. This led to a deeper understanding of the CSO's work and goals resulting in successful and faster responses to requests for approvals.

## RELOCATING TO REMAIN RESILIENT IN SUDAN

The absence of ensuring the civil liberties and freedoms of citizens poses a threat to all levels of resiliency due to the harm that can be directed towards those operating in the civil society sector. Participants in civil society can find that by protesting and advocating for their freedoms, their own lives are put at risk. Sudan is one of many countries where CSOs have encountered the threat of the disrespect of civil liberties from their government. Throughout the 20th century, CSOs in Sudan experienced the closing civic space caused by the government's ban of various organized groups, including political parties, NGOs, and media outlets. These restrictions continue to create challenges for CSOs in Sudan to operate and during the past decade, CSOs have found it especially difficult to publicly operate within the limited civic space. In 2013, 200 protesters were killed by government forces and in the following year the government detained activists in opposition. In addition to the disregard of individual rights and civil liberties, the government began to heavily disregard the civil rights of CSOs in the country. The government raided organizations that were deemed as part of the political opposition and closed CSOs that were politically active. This disrespect of civil liberties has further expanded into the online space. In May of 2015, several Sudanese activists expressing their opinions online were arrested by the Sudanese government, demonstrating that the government is limiting their suppression of civil society not only in the traditional civic space, but also activism expressed over the cyberspace.

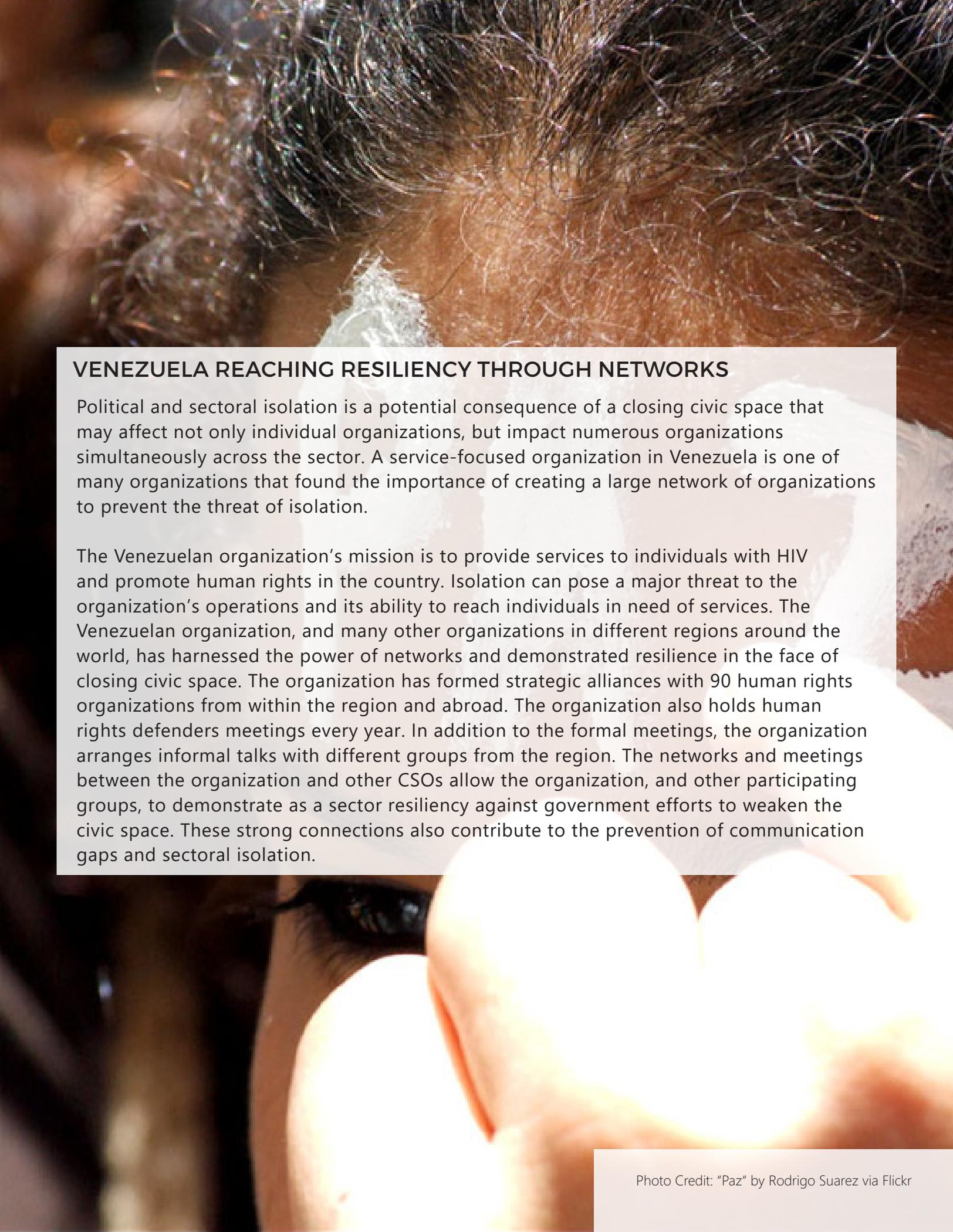
The lack of acknowledgment towards the civil liberties and freedoms of CSOs in Sudan has threatened the resilience of organizations and the civil society sector by creating an atmosphere where the organizations in Sudan feel unsafe to operate. Many organizations that remained resilient against the government crackdowns left Sudan to reestablish themselves outside the conflict zones. The organizations that remain in Sudan face an additional risk of decreased funds because the Sudanese government recently established government-led organizations in the region to compete for the funding that non-government CSOs seek in Sudan. Therefore, the lack of free participation allowed by the government, with the additional component of competitive funding, is a critical threat for the livelihood of organizations in closed civic space areas. These restrictions are making some organizations relocate as the only method to continue their work for civil society and remain resilient against government threats.



## INSTALLING SAFE ROOMS TO PROTECT STAFF

In Afghanistan, civil society organizations are facing threats from the government, warlords, the Taliban, and other armed groups. Those in remote areas are particularly under threat. Violent attacks and abductions remain an issue in all areas of Afghanistan. Although Afghanistan has laws against these threats, the laws are rarely implemented and threats to civil society remain. One civil society organization in Afghanistan impacted by the threat of armed groups is a group that works as a certification body for CSOs in Afghanistan. The organization is currently the only group in Afghanistan that works to certify CSOs and certifies CSOs that fulfill national and international standards according to local needs. In addition to its certification process, the organization works to evaluate the enabling environment for CSOs in the country and it is currently working to produce reports on the civic space in Afghanistan. Despite only operating for 4 years, the organization is supported by a well-reputed board of directors and it has established relations with several international donors.

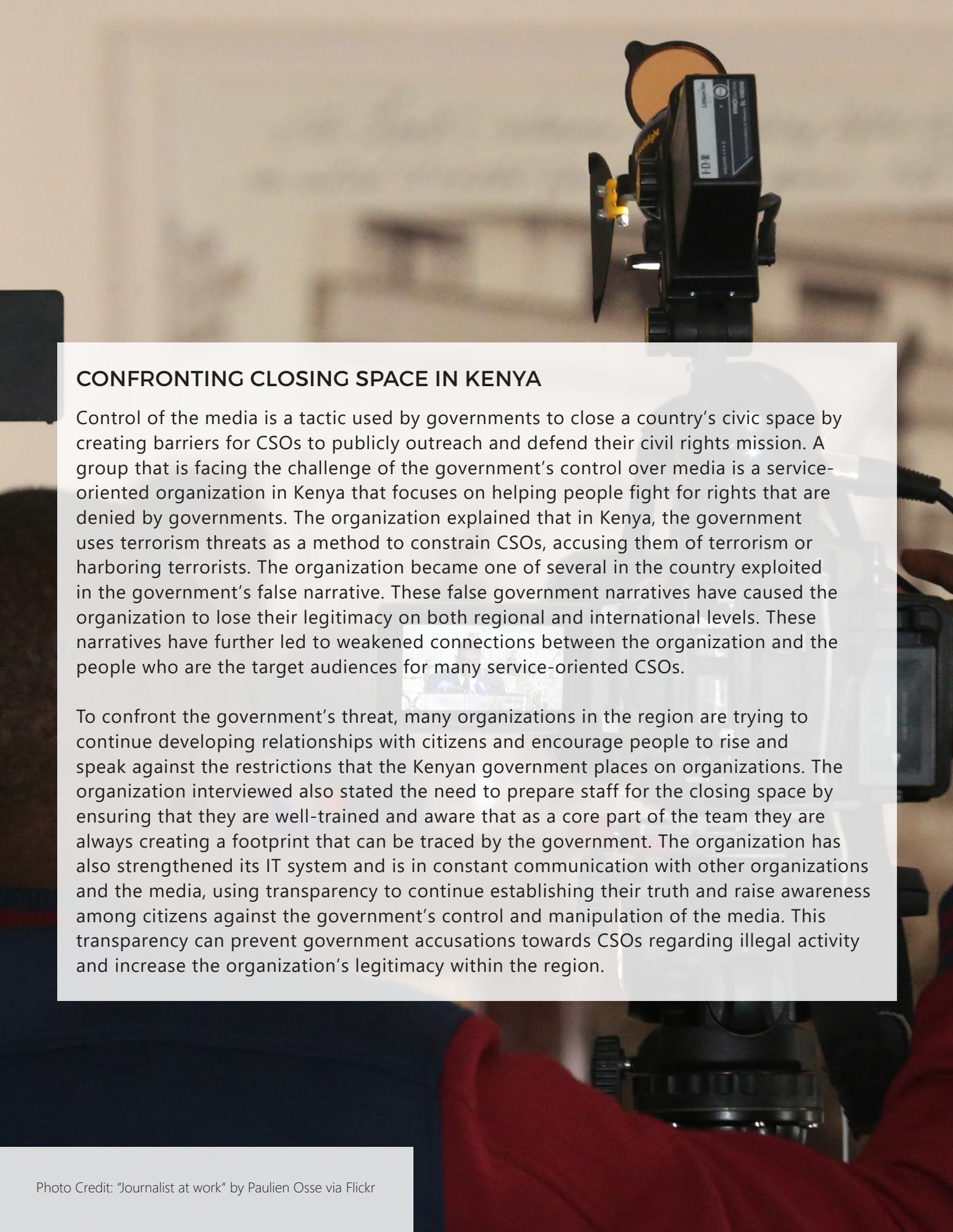
Even though the organization maintains a strong organizational structure and has a knowledgeable board of directors, the organization still faces the threat of direct attacks. Indeed, the Taliban recently abducted 6 employees. In response, the organization constructed a safe room in their building. The windows and entrance are made from metal to protect employees from security threats. The organization explained that this strategy was not a practice utilized by CSOs in previous decades, but it can improve individual and organizational resiliency. The organization is further working to improve their credibility against the threats by connecting the Afghan civil society with international platforms. These platforms allow the organizations to learn and transfer the necessary skills to overcome the challenges. Through maximizing the security of employees and securing networks between CSOs, organizations facing direct security threats can remain resilient by ensuring the well-being of individuals and continuing to incorporate tools to strengthen organizational operations.



## VENEZUELA REACHING RESILIENCY THROUGH NETWORKS

Political and sectoral isolation is a potential consequence of a closing civic space that may affect not only individual organizations, but impact numerous organizations simultaneously across the sector. A service-focused organization in Venezuela is one of many organizations that found the importance of creating a large network of organizations to prevent the threat of isolation.

The Venezuelan organization's mission is to provide services to individuals with HIV and promote human rights in the country. Isolation can pose a major threat to the organization's operations and its ability to reach individuals in need of services. The Venezuelan organization, and many other organizations in different regions around the world, has harnessed the power of networks and demonstrated resilience in the face of closing civic space. The organization has formed strategic alliances with 90 human rights organizations from within the region and abroad. The organization also holds human rights defenders meetings every year. In addition to the formal meetings, the organization arranges informal talks with different groups from the region. The networks and meetings between the organization and other CSOs allow the organization, and other participating groups, to demonstrate as a sector resiliency against government efforts to weaken the civic space. These strong connections also contribute to the prevention of communication gaps and sectoral isolation.



## CONFRONTING CLOSING SPACE IN KENYA

Control of the media is a tactic used by governments to close a country's civic space by creating barriers for CSOs to publicly outreach and defend their civil rights mission. A group that is facing the challenge of the government's control over media is a service-oriented organization in Kenya that focuses on helping people fight for rights that are denied by governments. The organization explained that in Kenya, the government uses terrorism threats as a method to constrain CSOs, accusing them of terrorism or harboring terrorists. The organization became one of several in the country exploited in the government's false narrative. These false government narratives have caused the organization to lose their legitimacy on both regional and international levels. These narratives have further led to weakened connections between the organization and the people who are the target audiences for many service-oriented CSOs.

To confront the government's threat, many organizations in the region are trying to continue developing relationships with citizens and encourage people to rise and speak against the restrictions that the Kenyan government places on organizations. The organization interviewed also stated the need to prepare staff for the closing space by ensuring that they are well-trained and aware that as a core part of the team they are always creating a footprint that can be traced by the government. The organization has also strengthened its IT system and is in constant communication with other organizations and the media, using transparency to continue establishing their truth and raise awareness among citizens against the government's control and manipulation of the media. This transparency can prevent government accusations towards CSOs regarding illegal activity and increase the organization's legitimacy within the region.

Foreign  
Foundations  
Who? Why?

## IMPROVING LEGITIMACY OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN RUSSIA

A group of organizations in Russia were facing strong public stigmatization in the early months of 2017. They decided that it would be in their collective best interest to communicate more clearly about their activities, the problems they address, how their work is linked to human rights, the role of human rights organizations, and the type of people that work in the human rights space. Many of these groups had been declared as “foreign agents” by the government. Some of them launched a web-documentary project that described their history and how they work. Many clips traced the daily work of human rights advocacy practitioners, including internal discussions about their work and challenges. They showed mundane activities like riding subways home and buying groceries after a long day. The video was published on a project website and was promoted extensively using social media. The goal was to shift the public perception of what it meant to be a “human rights defender” and to reclaim the word “agent” as agent of good, representing the interests of citizens, not foreign powers. This use of narrative has now been expanded and similar projects are being developed to redefine the public understanding of some of the vulnerable groups being served by this CSO, including the LGBTI community.