CREATING CAPACITIES AND BUILDING CAPABILITIES FOR THE CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

FINAL

POLICY PAPER

COMPLETED

BY

DEVELOPMENTAL, CAPABLE AND ETHICAL STATE (DCES) DIVISION OF THE HSRC

5 OCTOBER 2020

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1. SUMMARY

Civil society organisations (CSOs) of diverse types play an important role in the social, political and economic development of the country – and especially in poverty alleviation. This Policy Paper reviews existing literature and findings from a series of interviews conducted during 2020 to ascertain the most critical capacity needs of CSOs, and how best to enhance and create capacities and build capabilities for the civil society sector. Underpinning this Policy Paper's recommendations is the need for organs of state and the private sector to actively engage with CSOs around capacity building needs, such as via existing CSO forums, in order to enable more CSO-led processes for driving capacity building which actively involve smaller, community-based organisations. An important input for these engagements and decision-making would be a clearly articulated typology and mapping of CSOs as well as their requirements related to critical skills and services to inform the broad types of support that could be provided. In addition, this Policy Paper recommends – amongst others – developing and expanding CSO-tailored training for leaders and financial managers; increasing support for peer-learning and mentoring; and exploring independent structures and possible regulatory instruments for monitoring and handling or mediating of complaints. Whilst a broader decline in funding to the CSO sector has affected resources available for capacity building, consideration should be given to increasing the amount or proportion of support for sustaining 'core' CSO capabilities such as for retaining financial managers and leaders. Moreover, the processes by which CSOs apply for government funding and associated reporting can be simplified to reduce administrative capacity demands; additional awareness raising is needed to increase the public's understanding of the critical role that CSOs play within communities; and, finally, new approaches to funding and capacity building *partnerships* with government and the private sector should be explored.

2. ABOUT THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (NDA)

The National Development Agency (NDA) is an agency of government that reports to the National Assembly of the Republic of South Africa. The NDA is a public entity that

was formed in 1999 as government's response to the challenge of poverty and its causes in South Africa.

Under its Research and Development programme, the NDA focuses on action research and impact evaluation studies that are used to inform programme planning, implementation and management of NDA CSO development programmes. In addition, the programme promotes and informs national development policy debates and engagements with the CSO sector and state organs on issues relating to development and poverty alleviation in general. It also produces publications and standards for effective best practice in the CSO sector to promote sharing of lessons and good practice in the social development sector.

3. CSOS AS PARTNERS IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION

CSOs, including more formalised and well-resourced non-government organisations (NGOs) such as think tanks and research bodies, as well as less formalised and less well-resourced community-based organisations (CBOs) play an important role in the social, political and economic development of the country – and especially in poverty alleviation. They are expected to contribute to strengthening governance and transparency, and, therefore, to hold the state and private sector accountable. At the same time, they are crucial for influencing and advocating for the state and private sector to variously respect, protect and promote the public's rights and legitimate interests; whilst often playing a critical role in the delivery of basic social services to poor households. Ultimately, these CSOs are contributing to the realisation of all South Africans' right to social security, health care, education and access to information amongst other rights.[1]

Recognising the role of CSOs, Chapter 11 of the National Development Plan on Social Protection aims to 'develop an enabling environment [and] create conditions for social partners to contribute', and acknowledges the critical role of non-governmental or non-profit organisations in providing social welfare services, especially for improving the well-being of children.[2] Similarly, at a global level, in seeking to address the first of the Sustainable Development Goals to end poverty in all its forms, experts have called on

member states to create meaningful multi-stakeholder partnerships and an enabling environment for 'encouraging and engaging civil society in addressing the structural causes of poverty'.[3] These calls for a stronger partnership with CSOs as well as the increasing needs of society have underscored the requirement for CSOs to be appropriately capacitated with certain strategic and operational capacities to be able to address the demands of underserved populations and in holding the state accountable for its actions.

This Policy Paper reviews existing literature and highlights selected empirical findings from a series of interviews held with key stakeholders during July and August 2020 which sought to ascertain the most critical needs of CSOs, and how best to enhance and create capacities and build capabilities for the civil society sector. In so doing, this Policy Paper aims to inform training and broader capacity-building interventions that would strengthen constructive engagements between the developmental state and civil society, and thereby improve the quality of service delivery and assist with poverty alleviation.

Definition: What is a CSO?

In most definitions a CSO is a non-state actor (i.e. government is not part of its structures), self-governing, involves voluntary participation by members, is non-profit (i.e. surplus funds are directed back into its activities) and works in the public interest.[4] CSOs may also be referred to as non-governmental organisations (NGO), non-profit organisations (NPO) or companies (NPCs), community-based organisations (CBOs), and voluntary associations. CSOs may be categorised along a number of dimensions depending on their sector (e.g. health or education), focus of work (e.g. advocacy or welfare), mode of obtaining funds (e.g. donations or charging for services) or geographical focus (e.g. community-based, national or international).[5]

Definition: Capacity and capability building

The nature of capacity and capability building differs depending on CSO needs and who is providing the support, but generally involves building individual skills and organisational processes to achieve certain goals.[6] Although the distinctions are debated, *capabilities* are often associated with individuals, who contribute to improving the *capacity* of the organisation as a whole.[7] As a result, support to CSOs is often referred to as 'capacitation'.[8] An alternative explanation of CSO capacity building distinguishes between internal and external factors: Internal capacity is concerned with vision, leadership, resources, product, performance and management systems. External capacity speaks to a CSO's ability to navigate factors related to the political environment, legal compliance, socio-economic issues and social norms.[9] For this Policy Paper we use 'capacity building' in a more general way to include individual and organisational, external and internal capacity and capability building.

4. CAPACITY BUILDING PRIORITIES

As noted in the definition mentioned earlier, the development of CSO capacity is usually to achieve certain goals, or a 'mandate' as suggested in the interview extract. Whilst we may want to assume that CSO goals and associated capacity priorities are defined by CSOs themselves (reflecting community needs), it is often governments, external agencies and donors that shape the direction of capacity building towards certain goals. For example, these goals may include governance reforms,[10] promoting democratic values and government accountability,[11] or improving development effectiveness.[12]

Interview extract: What is capacity?

"Capacity talks to all the necessary resources that are required for an organisation to run, and when I say resources, it would be skills and expertise to run and implement whatever programmes deemed necessary for your mandate and

> organisation: capacity in relation to human resources needed to execute whatever mandate that your organisation seeks to reach" [A].

Nonetheless, there are specific areas which CSOs, government and other stakeholders have highlighted as critical for capacity building. One of these areas relates to the management sphere; including governance, leadership, reporting, financial management and fund raising.[13] However, funding for CSOs from donors and government agencies has become increasingly 'projectified'. This means that the focus of capacity building tends to be on 'content'-related skills relevant to delivering specific project outputs, rather than on building core organisational capabilities related to leadership, financial management and governance. These capabilities can help to sustain the activities of a CSO over a longer period of time.

This area of capacity building is especially important for CSOs which are often founded or led by passionate, charismatic leaders; which can lead to internal conflicts as well as a significant leadership vacuum when they decide to move on.[14] For leaders, the 'upward' relationship to the board *and* the need for board training, as well as the 'downward' relationship to staff and improvement of people skills are critical. These soft skills are vital in attracting and retaining skilled and experienced staff given the challenges of paying competitive salaries.

> **Interview extracts: Leadership skills**
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> "… civil society attracts people who are passionate about what they want to do and highly motivated with doing something that is close to their heart. The downside of it is that the passions lead to contradictions, [and] the conflicts at the workplace can be very intense. To be able to develop emotional intelligence in the leadership to deal with those conflicts, and how to ensure that the organisational culture does not interfere with the strategy of the organisation, that is the biggest thing for me for CSOs" [E].

> "Being able to harness and nurture those skills, including people management, is probably important in the sense that you do not want people who come and go, you know. The ability to retain people who work for NPOs" [B].

Capacity related to financial issues is a consistent theme. CSOs have challenges finding and accessing government funding sources. This contributes to a dependence on international donors in certain sub-sectors[15] which better equipped, 'elite' CSOs are able to access, although they often have weaker relationships with communities.[16] A related capacity need is then the significant skills and human resources needed for financial and performance management, especially in reporting to international donors.[17]

> **Interview extract: Fund raising and reporting**
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> "The reality is that most of the CSOs that have succeeded beyond twenty years depend on external funding, outside South Africa. Not government, unfortunately. Government becomes a burden when they are funding: they want all these detailed reports, without funding M&E systems or the kinds of management that is needed to respond to their complicated reporting" [E].

A growing concern relates to the limited use of digital technologies by CSOs, highlighted by COVID-19 lockdowns and the expectation that staff work from home. It is suggested that through partnerships with the private sector and social enterprises, CSOs can draw on ICTs to enhance their communication with stakeholders and improve monitoring and evaluation (including using 'big data'). At the same time, CSOs can play a critical role in shaping the policies and regulation around ICT in society, to ensure vulnerable people are not further marginalised in the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). [18]

Finally, previous studies in South Africa have identified additional nuances to the capacity building challenge, such as suggestions that government tends to focus on strengthening social service CSOs at the expense of advocacy organisations,[19] and that government is capacitating CSOs to deliver 'on their behalf' instead of

acknowledging CSOs' independence and ability to respond to constituency needs.[20] Supporting CSO independence is acknowledged as important by stakeholders, however, it is clear that managing a balance between independence, dependence and partnership will be a recurring challenge for CSO resourcing and capacity building.

5. RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUPPORTING CAPACITY BUILDING

Under South African legislation, a specific responsibility for supporting CSOs lies with the Department of Social Development (DSD) and the National Development Agency (NDA) as outlined in the Non-profit Organisations Act (Act No.71 of 1997, as amended) and National Development Agency Act, 1998 (Act No. 108 of 1998, as amended), respectively. However, the Non-Profit Organisations Act[21] also notes that 'every organ of state' must promote, support and enhance the capacity of CSOs to perform their functions.

Reflecting this call, many sector and provincial departments and entities provide their own support to CSOs, often in the form of funding for specific projects or services.[22] Along with funding, these organs of state and development partners often facilitate sector-specific capacity building. There is a large community of capacity building service providers drawing on donor and government funding to deliver generic and CSO-tailored support; from capacity building NPOs and NPCs to universities, private colleges and individual consultants.[23]

Government funding for capacity building is recognised as substantial and critical, particularly in developing countries,[24] and especially for retaining staff and providing training to individuals. However, reflecting an earlier interview extract, government engagement is affected by 'red-tape' and inaccessible public servants.

More recently there is an emphasis on encouraging greater private sector involvement and an acknowledgement that corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives do (and should) support capacity building, reflected in recent international reports.[25] However, CSR budgets are especially vulnerable to economic downturns and tend to be unpredictable.

In addition, there are potentially more nuanced forms of capacity building in which CSOs connect more directly to the core activities of government and corporates to increase both CSO and government or corporate impact. For example, CSOs could be developed and enrolled to assist with the monitoring of public-private partnerships (PPPs). Or, the Department of Social Development could include CSOs in their staff training programmes. However, engaging government to discuss partnerships is a challenge.

Interview extract: Government as partner

"Ideally, for government and the private sector, the best thing would be to strengthen the capacity of an institution through partnership, it does not have to be money only. It can be through capacity development. And it is broad. For example, I work with young people in this community who are involved in drugs. So, I am introducing new programmes to help get rid of drugs. If government comes on board, they can send these kids to a TVET college" [A].

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6. DELIVERING CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT

Capacity building support usually involves a range or 'blend' of activities – ideally aligned to CSO needs, such as: assessment of needs, information dissemination and sharing, technical support, co-management, field visits, shared experiences, strategic reflection, mentoring and training. The style of support varies but has tended more towards partnership-based, participatory peer-learning models in which local CSOs have a stronger voice and influence over what happens. [26]

Assessment of CSO needs is often a part of sponsors' financing agreements and can be used to inform capacity building plans. Whilst smaller CSOs rarely get around to capacity analysis and cannot afford external assistance in this area, larger CSOs typically assess their organisational capacity when they develop their annual plans or during strategic reviews. As an alternative or complementary mechanism, peer review is highlighted as supporting assessment of capabilities as well as learning. In this area

CSO connecting and information sharing platforms play an important role.[27] The potential benefit of peer engagement goes beyond just mutual learning to build solidarity.

Workshops and training are regarded as the main forms of capacity building support. Mentoring is identified as an ideal area for private sector corporates and larger CSOs to get involved, by supporting skills transfer to smaller CSOs. Mentoring is especially relevant to leadership development, and an earlier case study from South Africa discusses how it is more effective to mentor leaders in conjunction with either the core leadership group of three or four people, or the wider organisation, and only occasionally and informally with the leader alone.[28]

Interview extracts: Types of capacity building

"In terms of skills transfer, this is where mentoring is important. And many corporates have such, whereby they can go volunteer to NPOs and help them with skills development. This is where they are most important" [A].

"Mentorship is someone who is a content specialist, understands the work and has done the work. Really becomes your sounding board and supports you and walks with you – exchanging that knowledge and expertise. Coaching helps you to deal with yourself. To deal with your own personality, your patterns and your emotional intelligence. For me, investing in those is very invaluable. … The other one that is very invaluable is learning exchanges, where you take someone from a CBO and take them to a successful, bigger CSO for a week and let them see how they run things" [E].

"Coaching and mentoring are best suited mechanisms for capacity building [also] peer learning and support" [F].

A recurring point is that much of the existing training and organisational development support tends to be generic in seeking to serve the needs of both CSOs and non-CSOs. More targeted capacity building is needed to address the specific requirements of CSOs, including by drawing on people with experience in the sector, both locally

and from overseas. Whilst not all interventions from abroad are useful, the international providers are seen to be more attuned to the needs of CSOs, especially in being able to address the stringent financial management and reporting requirements of (in many cases international) donors.

> **Interview extract: Relevance of capacity building support**
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> "Some of the challenges with the courses being offered, sometimes even by business, is that they wouldn't speak to our contextual reality. […] we would go for courses in management that are being offered by skills development that would be great for private companies, but we would ask, 'but what does this mean for civil society?'" [E].

In South Africa, there are a range of capacity building providers, including CSOs, consultants and private service providers. A general concern is that capacity building is fragmented and disorganised, and that providers are more focused on things other than what CSOs need – such as money or politics. It is argued that additional coordination is needed between CSOs, government and the private sector to vet providers. At the same time, some of the non-accredited training for CSOs is regarded as excellent, given that much of the accredited training tends to be generic and less relevant.

> **Interview responses: provider availability, quality and accreditation**
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> "I think we need that coordination structure that is comprising of civil society, government and the private sector which will ensure that the service providers appointed would be agreed to by all. And I think we will be doing away with this fragmented and non-coordinated capacity building initiatives" [B].
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> "Those [capacity building providers] that do have the money and time to do the accreditation, don't have the understanding of the contextual nature of working in civil society, in CBOs" [E].

7. SUSTAINING CAPACITY AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The issue of funding or resourcing capacity building is critical for ensuring the sector can continue to build its own skill base. Part of this involves providing ongoing individual and organisational skills development support to CSOs, whilst there is also a need for more systemic interventions to attract and sustain available capacity – such as through changes to the funding of skills development and retention of staff. Attrition of skilled staff, especially to government and international NGOs, is recognised as a key challenge for the sustainability of capacity building.[29] Whilst there may be opportunities for specific monetary and non-monetary interventions to reward and recognise 'good people' and to create an attractive environment to work in; there is a broader need to change mindsets of government and (probably the wider public) to recognise that much of the work of CSOs requires highly skilled 'professionals' and better funding and support overall.

Interview extract: Funding for professional capacity

"[We] also need to professionalise our work and recruit professionals. We have struggled with that – for instance, we have not been able to get money from government to employ social workers ... 95% of our funding comes from international donors because in South Africa they think NGOs are voluntary organisations. But the truth is that we are doing very difficult work in a very difficult society, and you need highly skilled and professional people. So, there has to be that mind-shift to begin to understand what is needed" [E].

Finally, to address the fragmentation and exploitation of capacity building resources by better resourced and politically connected organisations, and to ensure that this support reaches smaller CSOs, there are suggestions that independent entities could play some kind of monitoring role, such as an 'Ombudsman for Civil Society' to handle complaints or CSO-led coalitions that can drive capacity-building initiatives.

Interview extract: Include smaller organisations
"You need a structure that is going to support the smaller struggling organisations, whether through formal and informal training programmes or peer review programmes" [B].

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Key recommendations are divided in two parts:

Capacity and capabilities
a) Government should develop a clearly articulated typology and mapping of CSOs as well as critical skills and services, to inform the broad types of support different CSOs may require.
b) Government and its entities should actively engage with CSO forums around capacity building needs in order to enable CSO-led processes for driving capacity building.
c) Government should prioritise the active involvement of a wider base of smaller CSOs in shaping the direction of capacity building in the civil society sector.
d) Government should assist in the expansion of CSO-tailored training on topics related to leadership, financial management, conflict resolution, fund raising and reporting.
e) Government should encourage mentoring and peer-learning-based models of capacity building as well as learning exchanges across the civil society sector to enhance diversified skills set.
f) Government should review the relevance of current capacity building accreditation and general funding application processes to determine whether these are not creating unnecessary red tape and affecting the sustainability of CSOs.
g) Government should work towards improving public officials' and the general public's understanding of the positive role that many CSOs are playing in communities, and the need for highly skilled individuals (and associated resources) to sustain these activities.

h) Government should develop a structured approach to Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), and extend monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to partnerships with civil society as part of the social contract, including identifying areas where government can partner with CSOs on their capacity building without necessarily providing funding.

i) Government should develop a database of all CSOs and a functional monitoring and tracking system to ensure that they are operating optimally and taken care of.

j) Government should consider establishing an Ombudsman for civil society to handle complaints and to assist with providing necessary interventions to build the capability and capacity of the civil society sector.

Financial sustainability and value propositions

a) Government should develop a regulatory framework for CSOs that provides for capacity-building and should set aside a specific budget for CSOs to enable them to be financially sustainable.

b) Government should review how funding is allocated to CSOs, especially to what extent it supports 'core' operational activities (beyond projects), including annual assessments of skills needs, and whether this enables them to retain leaders and skilled staff.

c) Government should promote the use of the SETAs' skills levy to support capacity building of the civil society sector.

d) Government should find ways to encourage the private sector to have CSR budgets dedicated to the funding of the civil society sector, not for stakeholder relations, but for social investment.

e) Government should ensure that every ministry has a set of corresponding CSOs to support.

f) Government should find ways to encourage the development of a stronger philanthropic spirit in South Africa and a deeper understanding of the role played by CSOs and their associated capacity needs.

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[1] Chapter 2 - Bill of Rights, Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996, as amended).

[2] National Planning Commission. Chapter 11 – Social Protection. National Development Plan. Pretoria: Republic of South Africa.

[3] Khadka, S. R. The role of civil society in accelerating global actions for a world free of poverty through partnerships. presented at Accelerating Global Actions for a World without Poverty, Inter-agency Expert Group Meeting on Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018-2027). United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Addis Ababa ECACC-AA, 18-20 April 2018.

[4] Broader definitions of CSOs include business associations which may have a narrower interest than the wider 'public'. See this report for additional discussion on the topic: NDA. 2008. Review of the State of the Civil Society Organisations in South Africa. Also refer to Kagiso Trust. 2020. Typologies of Civil Society in South Africa. A Critical Review and Analysis of the Characteristics of the Non-Profit Sector; and Van Leeuwen, M. and Verkoren, W., 2012. Complexities and challenges for civil society building in post-conflict settings. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 7(1), pp.81-94.

[5] See above: Kagiso Trust. 2020; and Cordery CJ & Sim D (2018) Dominant stakeholders, activity and accountability discharge in the CSO Sector. Financial Accountability & Management, 34(2).

[6] See p.22-23 in Yachkaschi, S.2008.Towards the development of an appropriate organisational development approach for optimising the capacity building of community-based organisations (CBOs): A case study of 3 CBOs in the Western Cape. PhD thesis, University of Stellenbosch; and Pieterse, E. & van Donk, M. 2002. Capacity Building for Poverty Eradication. Concept paper for Sedibeng Centre. Isandla Institute.

[7] Banks, N. and Hulme, D., 2012. The role of NGOs and civil society in development and poverty reduction. *Brooks World Poverty Institute Working Paper*, (171).

[8] See above: Pieterse, E. & van Donk, M. 2002.

[9] Antlöv, H., Brinkerhoff, D.W. and Rapp, E., 2010. Civil society capacity building for democratic reform: Experience and lessons from Indonesia. Voluntas: *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 21(3), pp.417-439

[10] See the EU's Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility – Regional Actions https://eapcivilsociety.eu/about/what-we-do

[11] See CIVICUS https://www.civicus.org/index.php/who-we-are/about-civicus

[12] See Inter-American Development Bank's Civil Society Engagement Strategy https://www.iadb.org/en/civil-society-v3/strategy%2C20951.html and Asian Development Bank projects https://www.adb.org/who-we-are/ngos/main

[13] See above: NDA. 2008 and Kagiso Trust. 2020; Antlöv, H., Brinkerhoff, D.W. and Rapp, E., 2010; and USAID. 2019. 2018 Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index: For Sub-Saharan Africa. 10th Edition - November 2019.

[14] See p.77 in Yachkaschi. 2008; and Hendrickse, R.F. 2008. Governance and financial sustainability of NGOs in South Africa. PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape.

[15] See above: NDA. 2016.

[16] Lange, S, Wallevik H and Kiondo, A.2000.Civil society in Tanzania. Research Report No. 6, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Development Studies and Human Rights, Bergen, Norway.

[17] See above: Antlöv, H., Brinkerhoff, D.W. and Rapp, E., 2010.

[18] See above ETDP-SETA. 2019 and Kagiso Trust. 2020. Also see World Economic Forum. 2019. Civil Society in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Preparation and Response.

[19] See above: Kagiso Trust. 2020.

[20] Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education Training Authority (ETDP-SETA). 2019. NGO Subsector Skills Plan: 2020-2021.

[21] See Section 3 of Non-Profit Organisations Act.

[22] NDA. 2016. South African Government Funding to Non-Profit Organisations: What is the Investment Value?

[23] For example, see Wits Business School. Finance for Social Enterprises and NGOs https://www.wbs.ac.za/executive-education/capsi-masterclasses/finance-for-social-enterprises-and-ngos/.

[24] Phlix, G., et al. 2010. Evaluation of NGO partnerships aimed at capacity development. Special Evaluation Office of International Cooperation: Brussels.

[25] CIVICUS. 2017. 2017 State of Civil Society Report. https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2017.

[26] Sorgenfrei, M. 2004. French Approaches to Capacity Building – INTRAC. https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Praxis-Paper-1-Capacity-Building-from-a-French-Perspective.pdf and Horton, D. et al. 2003. Evaluating capacity development: experiences from research and development organizations around the world. ISNAR, IDRC and CTA. https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/33404/IDL-33404.pdf. For extensive reviews of South African CSO capacity building interventions see: McKinley, D. 2012. Post-training survey: Capacity

building for CSOs. Foundation for Human Rights. and Turton, J. 2014. Evaluation of the FHR capacity building of Civil Society Organisations (2009 – 2014). Foundation for Human Rights

[27] There are several global, regional and national initiatives active in South Africa such as CIVICUS and SANGONET.

[28] Deans, F. et al. 2006. Coaching and Mentoring for Leadership Development in Civil Society. Praxis Paper No. 14, INTRAC. https://peaceinfrastructures.org/Home%20Documents/Coaching%20and%20Mentoring%20for%20Le adership%20Development%20in%20Civil%20Society/Intrac_CoachingMentoringCS_2006.pdf.

[29] See above NDA. 2008. Also see Crawford N.2014.Engaging with Syrian CSOs: How can the international community engage better with Syrian civil society organisations during the civil war?