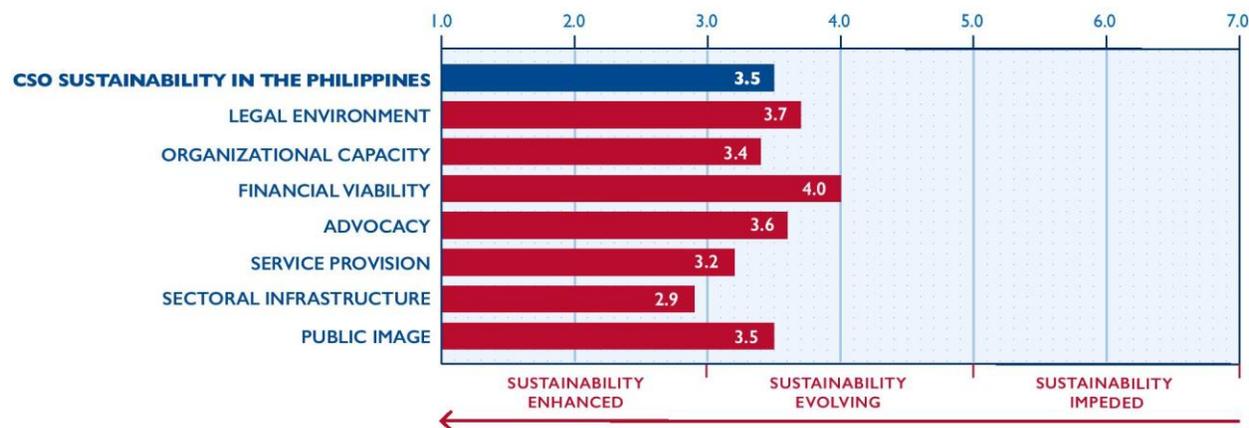


# THE PHILIPPINES

**Capital:** Manila  
**Population:** 105,893,381  
**GDP per capita (PPP):** \$8,400  
**Human Development Index:** Medium (0.699)  
**Freedom in the World:** Partly Free (62/100)

## OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 3.5<sup>1</sup>



The Philippines experienced unforeseen political events and devastating natural disasters in 2018. Although the 1987 Constitution states that a chief justice can only be removed through impeachment, in May, the Supreme Court voted to oust Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno based on a petition filed by Solicitor General Jose Calida that alleged that she did not submit all the required statements of her assets, liabilities, and net worth. This was seen as retaliation for the fact that Chief Justice Sereno had issued dissenting opinions on several decisions involving government actions. Typhoon Mangkhut, the planet's strongest storm in 2018, ravaged the northern regions of the Philippines in September, killing eighty-one people.

The Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index continues to classify the Philippines as a Flawed Democracy, meaning that while there are free and fair elections, the country is grappling with governance issues and an underdeveloped political culture. In the ranking released in early 2018, the country's rating declined slightly, in part due to the government's legal attacks against opposition figures.

By the end of 2018, killings linked to the government's so-called war on drugs had reached an estimated 20,000. According to the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), however, only approximately 5,000 suspected drug users and dealers died during police operations between July 1, 2016 and September 30, 2018. The rising number of deaths has overextended CSO capacities and resources for case documentation and psychosocial support for families of those killed, particularly in Metro Manila.

After decades-long peace negotiations between rebel groups in Mindanao and the Philippine government, the Bangsamoro Organic Law was passed by Congress and signed by President Duterte in 2018, leading to the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in 2019. In December 2018, the Philippine Congress voted to extend martial law in Mindanao until the end of 2019. In November 2018, President Duterte issued Memorandum Order No. 32 deploying additional police and military to some areas outside of Mindanao such as Samar, Negros Occidental, and Bicol to suppress "lawless violence" and acts of terror. Some CSOs expressed concerns that this memorandum could be a precursor to nationwide martial law. The administration has repeatedly threatened the declaration of a revolutionary government or the exercise of emergency powers, citing the alleged destabilization plot against the president and the need for greater authority to address increasing crime.

The 2018 International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Global Rights Index named the Philippines one of the worst countries for working people, as workers still struggle to associate freely and face violent repercussions by employers.

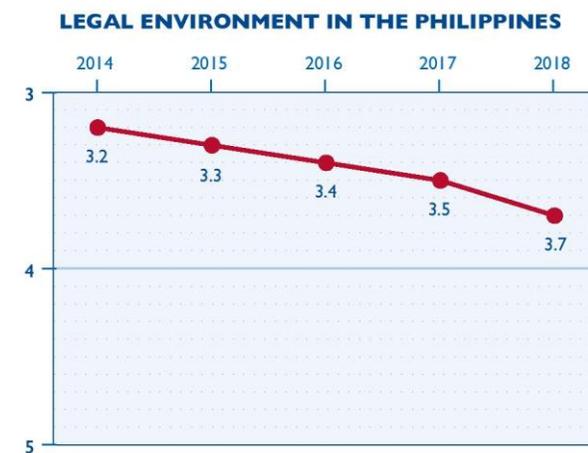
<sup>1</sup> The score for Service Provision was recalibrated in 2018 to better reflect the situation in the country and to better align it with other scores in the region. This resulted in a change in the overall CSO sustainability score, while in reality CSO sustainability did not change from the previous year.

CSO sustainability in the Philippines did not change notably in 2018, although the scores for the legal environment, advocacy, and public image dimensions all deteriorated. CSOs, human rights defenders, activists, and lawyers representing marginalized groups were subject to increased harassment, including extrajudicial killings. In addition, CSOs were subject to burdensome new reporting requirements. CSO advocacy declined due to continuing verbal attacks by President Duterte against critics of his policies and the increasing challenge of lobbying for key policy reforms. Moreover, extrajudicial killings of human rights lawyers, crackdowns on traditional and online media, and harassment of online critics of government policies have led to an increase in self-censorship and a reduction in the number of organized groups joining protests. The government's attacks on media outlets and CSOs also led to decreased coverage of CSOs and a decline in the sector's public image.

Philippine CSOs are generally categorized as either people's organizations (POs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or cooperatives. POs are membership organizations, and include unions and workers associations, farmers and public transport drivers associations, community-based organizations, homeowners associations, and many issue-based organizations. NGOs are non-membership based and typically engage in citizen mobilization, education, research, and other services to communities, other sectors, and CSOs. Cooperatives are organized based on international cooperative principles.

According to the latest available data, there were 208,963 registered CSOs in the Philippines in 2018. This represents a decrease of 70,536 from the previous year, mainly due to the fact that the registries eliminated duplicate or inactive entries during the year. Registered CSOs include: 101,843 non-stock, non-profit organizations, including NGOs, foundations, and some POs, registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as of 2017; 17,864 cooperatives that had filed their records with the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) by the end of 2016; 17,534 registered homeowners associations with the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board (HLURB) as of 2015; and 71,722 rural workers associations and labor unions registered with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) as of 2015. Many CSOs and sectoral organizations are members of provincial, regional, and national CSO networks or federations, either formally or informally.

## LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 3.7



The legal environment for CSOs further deteriorated in 2018 due to increasing reports of state harassment of CSOs, human rights defenders, activists, and lawyers representing marginalized groups, as well as the introduction of new reporting requirements.

Government harassment of CSOs was an increasing problem in 2018. For example, the office of Katotohanan, Pagkakaisa at Serbisyo (KPS, translated as Truth, Unity and Service), a land rights CSO in Mindanao, was raided by police, who allegedly found illegal firearms on their premises. The chairperson of KPS claimed that the firearms were planted. He was eventually arrested and detained in a hospital due to his age and frail physical condition. During the year, the military and police reportedly named several CSOs, most of which were in

the Cordillera, Mindanao, and National Capital Regions, as front organizations for the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA), which has been declared a terrorist organization. As a result, these organizations are susceptible to raids, arrests, searches, and seizure. According to Philippine media, two senior government officials alleged that some human rights organizations have become unwitting tools of drug lords to undermine the government's achievements in its war on drugs.

Extrajudicial killings have been an increasing problem, as well. Ben Ramos, a lawyer for land-claimant farmers in Negros Island, was murdered in November, making him the thirty-fourth human rights lawyer killed in the Philippines since 2016, according to Human Rights Watch. Several Catholic priests who criticized the government's war on drugs were killed in 2018, often by unidentified gunmen.

In November 2018, the SEC issued Memorandum Circular 15-2018 requiring all non-stock, non-profit organizations—both new and existing ones—to make a one-time filing with information on their funding sources, financial transactions, and program activities and to establish internal audit and governance systems. This new policy was prompted by the intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 8, which recommends heightened scrutiny of CSOs to ensure that they are not being used to finance terrorism. Based on these filings, the SEC will assign an Anti-Money Laundering/Counter-Terrorism Financing (AML/CTF) risk assessment rating to each individual organization, which could lead to tighter monitoring or possibly blacklisting of organizations deemed high-risk. Several CSOs criticized the Memorandum Circular for being developed with insufficient prior consultation with the CSO sector and for not laying out criteria or a process for the risk assessment. They also expressed concern that the security sector could misuse the tool to target members of the opposition by linking legitimate organizations to terrorism. The new requirements especially burden smaller organizations and those outside major cities since the SEC's local registration offices are only in regional centers. Also in 2018, the SEC issued Memorandum Circular 17-2018 requiring all corporations, both for-profit and non-profit, to declare information on their beneficial owners. Several CSOs challenged this requirement, arguing that the concept of beneficial ownership does not apply to non-profits.

CSOs continue to acquire primary registration through one of four regulatory agencies: non-stock, non-profit organizations, including NGOs, foundations, and some POs, register with the SEC; homeowners associations with HLURB; cooperatives with CDA; and labor unions and rural workers associations with DOLE. CSOs are generally able to register easily, with the process taking two weeks to complete and costing approximately \$34.

The regulatory environment for foundations, particularly those involved in public fundraising and grant making, is stricter than that for other forms of CSOs. Such foundations require one million pesos (about \$19,000) in capital to register, and have traditionally been required to submit more detailed annual programmatic and financial reports. With the issuance of SEC Memorandum Circular 15-2018, however, all CSOs registered with the SEC are now subject to the same detailed reporting requirements.

CSOs are allowed to earn income from services or social enterprises, as long as such activity is stipulated in their bylaws. CSOs can compete for government contracts and projects if they are accredited by the government agencies issuing those contracts. CSOs must register their public fundraising initiatives with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). CSOs can accept funds from foreign donors, although new AML/CTF regulations require banks to exercise further scrutiny of all financial transactions between domestic and foreign CSOs.

The Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law, which took effect in January 2018, reduced the tax on donations to individuals and organizations in amounts over 250,000 pesos (about \$4,800) from 30 percent to 6 percent. These taxes are paid by the donors and the reduction may therefore encourage more donations to CSOs. While CSOs are generally exempt from taxes on donations, revenue from income-generating activities are subject to tax, regardless of the disposition of the income.

Legal capacity on CSO issues remains limited. In 2018, the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), which unites twelve national and regional networks representing 1,600 NGOs, POs, and cooperatives, entered into an agreement with the MVGS Law Offices to provide pro bono corporate legal services to CODE-NGO members. This partnership is expected to fill a need among CSOs for free legal assistance and services on issues related to CSO regulation, taxation, and data privacy.

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## **ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.4**

The CSO sector's organizational capacity remained the same in 2018, although several CSOs claimed that their funding decreased in 2018, forcing them to either downsize or suspend operations. For example, within the CODE-NGO coalition, three regional (sub-national) networks and one provincial network downsized their operations by reducing personnel, with board members assuming voluntary executive roles. A few other CSOs reported similar situations. Human rights organizations, on the other hand, were able to improve their organizational capacity as they had access to more donor funding for their advocacy work in 2018.

Constituency building was stronger in 2018, particularly among advocacy CSOs, which mobilized thousands of supporters in mass protests during the president's State of the Nation Address and the ouster of Supreme Court

Chief Justice Sereno. Many CSOs continue to be community-centered and facilitate the participation of their local partners in the design and implementation of their programs and services. For example, St. Catherine Family Helper Project Inc., which operates on the islands of Negros and Siquijor in the Visayas, Central Philippines, educates its community partners on the protection and conservation of coastal and marine ecosystems; involves them in conservation projects such as mangrove replanting and establishing fish marine sanctuaries; and engages them in coastal law enforcement and lobbying for passage of local ordinances on the conservation of marine ecosystems.

Larger CSOs, CSO networks and associations, cooperatives, and trade unions generally undergo strategic planning; have more clearly defined missions, visions, and goals; and define processes to evaluate their performance against their objectives. On the other hand, smaller organizations only have annual plans and budgets or calendars of activities. Over the past few years, some POs and farmers' cooperatives have started to plan for their financial sustainability and develop mid- or long-term plans

According to the Doing Good Index 2018 conducted by the Center for Asian Philanthropy and Society, 100 percent of non-profit organizations in the Philippines have a board; 61 percent have board members with corporate experience; and 59 percent of organizations host volunteers. Larger CSOs with more complex programs, networks, and associations have more active or functional board members and more clearly defined roles for boards and staff. Labor unions also have governance and accountability structures.

A 2018 study by the Center for Leadership, Citizenship and Democracy (CLCD) of the University of the Philippines National College of Public Administration and Governance (UP-NCPAG) reported that CSO leaders often have numerous roles—including both governance and management functions, as well as office and field functions. The research also noted that it is difficult for various stakeholders to reach CSOs, either because leaders and staff are too busy, or organizations had dissolved or changed missions.

In 2018, former CSO staff continued to move to government agencies or private companies that offer better compensation. CSOs face an urgent need to develop a new generation of leaders, not just due to the loss of staff, but to succeed the current aging leaders.

CSOs in general have mainstreamed the use of technology. A growing number of CSOs use Facebook and Twitter to announce their events and activities, although few use paid services to “boost” their posts to reach a wider audience. Human rights groups, in particular, have started using ICT for data gathering and case documentation and have increased their physical and digital security protocols due to increasing threats and security risks.

**ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN THE PHILIPPINES**



## FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 4.0

Financial viability did not change in 2018. As in previous years, few CSOs had diversified sources of funding in 2018. According to the Doing Good Index 2018, 67 percent of Philippine service delivery organizations receive foreign funding, almost 50 percent receive government funding, and only 20 percent have worked on procurement contracts. Based on the same study, 80 percent of service delivery organizations said that individual giving is low; if Filipinos give, it is usually to churches or faith-based organizations (FBOs).

In mid-2018, the World Bank announced that the Philippines was approaching upper middle-income country status in the medium-term, which generally decreased the level of foreign funding available for development activities. Although no data is available on the overall amount of foreign assistance going to CSOs, Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the Philippines decreased slightly from \$15.60 billion in 2016 to \$14.77 billion in 2017. A few international NGOs (INGOs), such as Christian Aid in the Philippines and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy, also decreased their local grant budgets in 2018.

## FINANCIAL VIABILITY IN THE PHILIPPINES



partially a result of the pork barrel scandal that came to light in 2013, in which businesswoman Janet Napoles conspired with legislators to funnel government funds through fake NGOs. Government agencies more frequently work with CSO personnel as individual consultants or trainers through service contracts, rather than entering into agreements with their organizations.

Philippine cooperatives are generally able to generate their own income and, through their Community Development Funds, contribute to community programs where they operate. The newly-established Philippine Family Farmers' Agriculture-Fishery-Forestry Cooperatives Federation (AgriCoopPH), for example, has at least two member cooperatives with assets over one billion pesos (about \$19 million) that contribute to the federation's operations and the capacity development of smaller agriculture cooperatives.

CSOs acknowledge that they cannot depend on foreign grants in the long term and have begun exploring other means of raising resources, such as public fundraising activities, social enterprises, and training and consultancy services. The 2018 Doing Good Index reported that only 17 percent of the surveyed service delivery organizations engaged in crowdfunding, though 63 percent said they will explore this in the future. CSOs supporting the families of victims of the government's war on drugs, as well as disaster preparedness and response, continue to engage in local fundraising activities, but these initiatives do not yet provide sustainable income. In 2018, the Western Visayas Network (WEVNET) and Cordillera Network of Development NGOs and POs (CORDNET) increased their technical assistance to members that are setting up social enterprises. Some CSO networks such as the Philippine Partnership of Support Service Agencies (PHILSSA) and the League of Corporate Foundations (LCF) are starting to offer their training courses, which have traditionally been provided only to members at no cost, to more NGOs for fees.

Some local grantmaking foundations whose endowment funds are invested in the capital market were affected by poor market performance in 2018, decreasing their capacity to support partner CSOs and communities and to retain staff.

CSOs with more assets or those implementing more complex development programs and projects are more likely to have sophisticated financial management systems and professional staff, such as certified public accountants. Smaller organizations generally have simpler systems with administrative staff responsible for bookkeeping. CSOs registered with the SEC must submit annual audited financial statements, although CSOs with maximum annual financial transactions of PHP 150,000 (\$2,830) are only required to submit financial reports.

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## ADVOCACY: 3.6

CSO advocacy declined in 2018 due to continuing verbal attacks by President Duterte against critics of his policies and the increasing challenge of lobbying for key policy reforms, which led to an increase in self-censorship and a reduction in the number of organized groups participating in protests.

Despite these issues, CSOs continue to have some access to government decision-making processes. As provided in the Local Government Code of 1991, CSOs can participate in local decision-making processes as accredited

members of local development councils and special bodies at the village, municipal, and provincial levels. CSOs can also get accredited as members of regional development councils under the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) to participate in planning and monitoring national programs and projects being implemented at local levels. However, CSOs' influence on policies and programs varies depending on how well these councils function and how receptive the local chief executives of the councils are to CSO input.

The Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) continues to reach out to key CSOs and recognize their contributions to designing, implementing, and monitoring DILG programs at national and local levels. In June, the DILG issued Memorandum Circular 2018-89, which provides guidelines for engagement with CSOs and recognizes CSOs' roles in policy making, program implementation, and review of programs.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) continues to offer a space for CSOs to engage with various government agencies, although the country's latest OGP National Action Plan limits engagement to government-crafted commitments. In 2017, the government nearly suspended participation in the OGP, but the new Department of Budget and Management (DBM) Secretary decided to continue the initiative in 2018 following lobbying by DBM bureaucracy and key CSO groups. To help prepare the 2019-2021 OGP National Action Plan, CSOs developed a Citizens Agenda and presented it to government agencies for review in 2018.

The National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) did not convene the National Sectoral Assemblies of the Fourteen Basic Sectors—which includes women, children, youth and students, farmers and landless rural workers, indigenous peoples, and several other groups in society—in 2018 because of a lack of funding.

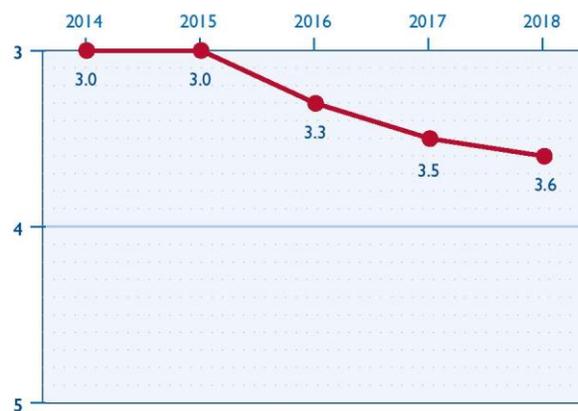
Despite the restrictive atmosphere, CSO advocacy initiatives still contributed to the adoption of several less controversial pieces of legislation in 2018, including the HIV and AIDS Policy Act and the National Mental Health Policy Act. The Bangsamoro Organic Law was also passed in 2018, after many years of advocacy. Other pieces of legislation promoted by CSOs, including the National Land Use Bill and Security of Tenure Bill, were still pending at the end of the year even though they were considered priorities by the executive branch. Despite advocacy by farmers groups and passage in Congress, the president vetoed the Coconut Farmers and Industry Development Fund (Coco Levy Fund Bill).

CSO advocacy tends to be more successful at the local level, because of the closer relationships between CSOs and local leaders. In addition, local policy advocacy tends to have a more direct impact on the lives of constituents. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives still depends on the openness to CSOs of local chief executives. Advocacy for policy changes at the national level, especially those requiring legislative changes, is more complex and takes more time.

Advocacy coalitions, social movements, and citizens groups organized numerous protests and demonstrations in 2018. According to police, about 15,000 Filipinos staged a protest action in Metro Manila and different parts of the country during President Duterte's State of the Nation Address in July 2018. The protest gathered diverse organizations representing women, students, indigenous peoples, farmers, workers, urban poor, religious groups, business leaders, and academics to express their opposition to the war on drugs, the TRAIN Law, job insecurity, China's intrusion in the West Philippine Sea, and government proposals to transform the system of government from presidential-unitary to parliamentary-federalist. In February 2018, the Walk for Life Campaign led by the Catholic Church gathered thousands of people to protest the killings linked to the war on drugs, a bill to re-impose the death penalty, and attempts to change the 1987 Constitution. However, some groups that used to join or lead such protests did not participate in these actions.

Protest rallies were also organized during the February 2018 commemoration of the People Power Revolution by social movements, advocacy coalitions, and citizens' associations such as Pambansang Kilusan ng Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA or National Federation of Farmers Association), Coalition Against Tyranny, Tindig Pilipinas (Stand Up Philippines), The Silent Majority, and others. In addition, various civic, political, religious, and professional

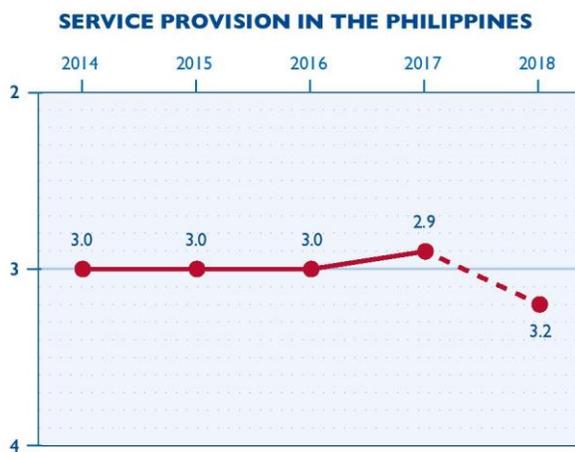
**ADVOCACY IN THE PHILIPPINES**



organizations issued statements criticizing the investigation and ouster of former Chief Justice Sereno in violation of the 1987 Constitution, which states that a chief justice can only be removed through impeachment. Various groups viewed the act as a political move and a dangerous precedent for the country’s democratic institutions and the rule of law.

In late 2018, the Philippines’ Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) issued a report on the risk assessment of the non-profit organization sector on money laundering and terrorism financing. This report, and the new SEC Memorandum Circular, are expected to generate discussions around regulatory policies affecting the sector in 2019.

## SERVICE PROVISION: 3.2<sup>2</sup>



CSO service provision did not change significantly in 2018. CSOs continued to provide a diverse range of goods and services including health, legal assistance, training and research, housing, environmental protection, communications, product development and marketing, and savings and credit. Some CSOs, particularly human rights groups, continued to provide case documentation, psychosocial intervention, and legal assistance, while a few started to provide forensic services for families of victims of extra-judicial killings arising from the war on drugs. Local organizations also started to better organize their responses to humanitarian crises, like the ongoing violence in Marawi City in Mindanao and Typhoon Mangkhut. These organizations increasingly observe the standards and principles developed by the international humanitarian community.

In 2018, more families of victims of the war on drugs cooperated with the documentation efforts of human rights organizations and referred other families of victims, especially after receiving training about their rights and the process of case documentation. CSOs also distributed educational materials explaining to people how to deter police scrutiny or arrests. For example, the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG) and the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) produced the pamphlet “Know Your Rights” and distributed it in communities where human rights violations were rampant, particularly the poor urban areas of Metro Manila.

Generally, CSO services continue to respond to community needs. Many CSOs employ participatory processes, such as organizing consultations or involving community leaders in developing, implementing, and evaluating their programs or projects. CSOs also usually provide briefings to and seek support (financial, material, or moral) from mayors or governors for their projects.

Most CSOs continue to rely on grants and donations to provide services. CSOs generally lack the capacity to identify who is willing and able to pay for their services. Only larger and well-resourced CSOs have the capacity to scale up their services, expand pilot projects, or participate in government or private sector development projects with nationwide scope.

Government appreciation of CSO services varies across government agencies and between local and national levels. While the president himself has verbally attacked human rights organizations, the Departments of Social Welfare, Health, Education, and Interior and Local Government continue to recognize the role of CSOs as service providers or watchdogs of government programs. However, government agencies are still wary of releasing

<sup>2</sup> The Service Provision score was recalibrated in 2018 to better reflect the situation in the country and to better align it with other scores in the region. The score does not reflect a deterioration in Service Provision, which remained largely the same in 2018 as in 2017.

funding to CSOs and are therefore more likely to contract with CSO personnel rather than entering into agreements with their organizations.

## SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 2.9

The infrastructure supporting the CSO sector in the Philippines did not change in 2018.

Lessons learned from typhoon Haiyan in 2013 continued to prompt further capacity development for disaster preparedness and response. In 2018, a consortium of INGOs including Plan International and Care International launched materials on community-based innovations related to disaster preparedness and response through their project TUKLAS (Discover), which began the previous year. In addition, in November 2018, CODE-NGO and the UK-based Humanitarian Leadership Academy (HLA) launched the Center for Humanitarian Learning and Innovation (CHLI), which offers innovative learning management systems on topics such as service continuity planning, and organizational development for local humanitarian and development CSOs. CODE-NGO has also developed modules and case studies on Philippine Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) and posted them online.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE PHILIPPINES



Local grant-making organizations include the Peace and Equity Foundation, Foundation for a Sustainable Society, Foundation for the Philippine Environment, Philippine Tropical Forest Conservation Foundation, and Forest Foundation Philippines. These organizations continued to support the programs and projects of local CSOs using the interest gained on their endowment funds. However, as a result of poor market conditions, most of these had less income in 2018, thereby reducing their portfolios of grants and loans to CSOs. CODE-NGO continues to use the interest earned on endowment funds to distribute grants through the Democracy Fund to people's organizations for their community-based advocacy campaigns.

CSO networks—such as CODE-NGO, League of Corporate Foundations, Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, Freedom from Debt Coalition, Philippine INGO Network, Pambansang Kilusan ng Samahang Magsasaka, and Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates—continue to provide services to their members in the form of trainings and events where they discuss and coordinate their advocacy to specific government agencies. Federations of labor unions also have strong support programs for members covering education and training, grievance systems, legal research, women, youth, and international affairs.

AgriCoopPH was established in 2018, with twenty founding members and twenty-four support organizations. Its goal is to support weaker agricultural cooperatives and to help farmers rise up in the value chain. AgriCoopPH started providing its members with services such as credit facilities, training on governance, internal controls, and entrepreneurship, and connections to the market. Also in 2018, networks of FBOs from several Christian denominations, such as the National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA Caritas Philippines) of the Catholic church, the Philippine Council of Ecumenical Churches (PCEC), the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) of the Protestant church, and World Vision, formed their own informal coalition called Philippine FBO Forum to coordinate their humanitarian actions during disasters.

CSOs continue to have access to training from key CSOs and networks. For example, the Venture for Fundraising provides training on resource mobilization; Fund Philippines provides training on professional public fundraising; and League of Accountants for Development (LEAD) and the Philippine Institute of Certified Public Accountants (PICPA) provide training on financial management for non-profits. These training opportunities, however, are generally only available in Metro Manila.

CSOs continued to engage actively in intersectoral partnerships in 2018. Leveraging the complementary roles of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and CSOs, a new human rights caucus called CSO-CHR Consultative

Caucus for Human Rights (C4HR) was launched in December. It aims to promote and defend human rights, uphold the 1987 Constitution, and endorse evidence-based data on human rights violations to the CHR and other law enforcement agencies. The initial multisectoral conveners of C4HR included human rights organizations, churches and faith-based groups, academia, and professional associations.

Partnerships between corporate foundations and government agencies increased in 2018. For example, BDO Foundation, a corporate foundation formed by the largest commercial bank in the Philippines, is implementing a program with the Bangko Sentral of the Philippines (the Philippines' Central Bank) and the Department of Education to train public school teachers to teach financial literacy. They plan on expanding these training programs in 2019 to include financial literacy programs for military personnel.

## PUBLIC IMAGE: 3.5



The public image of CSOs in the Philippines declined slightly in 2018.

The Philippines dropped six spots in the 2018 World Press Freedom Index to 133rd out of 180 countries. During the year, the president verbally attacked major media companies, such as Rappler, the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, and television network ABS-CBN, accusing them of bias in their coverage of government programs and the war on drugs. Following these events, the work of advocacy and service delivery CSOs received less national media attention, though they continued to access local media more easily. Toward the end of the year, media coverage started focusing on the May 2019 Philippine general elections and election campaigns.

Negative public perceptions of CSOs—started by the so-called pork barrel scandal of 2013—persist. However, donor organizations, government agencies, and communities supported by CSOs are now better able to differentiate between legitimate and fake CSOs.

Based on the most recent Philippine Trust Index (2017) conducted by the EON Stakeholder Relations Group, CSOs have the least trust among the six institutions covered by the index. Nevertheless, the level of trust in CSOs has increased from 40 percent in 2015 during the pork barrel scandal to 59 percent in 2017. Meanwhile, trust in the government improved dramatically from 30 percent in 2015 to 80 percent in 2017. The church and academia are the most trusted institutions, both with a 93 percent rating. Trust in media remains high at 78 percent, while the business sector follows closely at 75 percent. INGOs appear to enjoy higher trust than local NGOs because their names and brands are better known, and they have stronger visibility in traditional and new media. According to EON's social media listening tool Groundswell, among the 49 percent of Filipinos who have access to social media, 87 percent believe in CSOs' truthfulness and credibility.

The president perceives human rights activists and CSOs as critics of his public pronouncements and policies, particularly the war on drugs. The military and police have accused some activists and organizations of being "communists" or "leftists" and placed them on an official government list. Nevertheless, some key national government agencies, such as DILG and DSWD, and local government units continue to rely on CSOs as sources of credible information or contractors for government projects.

In general, only corporate foundations have the capacity to publicize their activities and promote their public image. While advocacy groups and social movements used to maintain relationships with journalists and receive media coverage, they received less media coverage in 2018 after the president attacked major media outlets. On the other hand, most service-providing CSOs do not prioritize or have the capacity to promote their public image. Many CSOs have started using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, but most have limited capacity to promote their work effectively, for example, lacking knowledge of how to use infographics or to boost the visibility of their posts.

Leading CSOs have codes of conduct and publish annual reports, including audited financial statements, on their websites or in print. Government regulatory agencies continue to recognize the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) as a model for the sector's self-regulation and transparency; however, only a few CSOs have adopted this system.

***Disclaimer:*** *The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or FHI 360.*