



2020 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

THE PHILIPPINES
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2020 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

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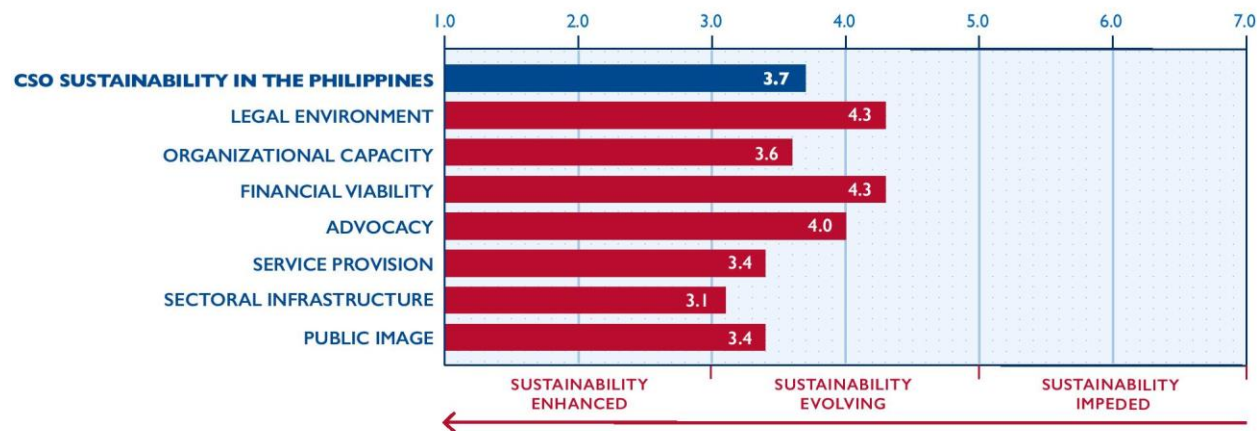
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THE PHILIPPINES

Capital: Manila
Population: 110,818,325
GDP per capita (PPP): \$8,908
Human Development Index: High (0.718)
Freedom in the World: Partly Free (56/100)

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 3.7



The first cases of COVID-19 were reported in the Philippines in February 2020. In early March, the government implemented a nationwide lockdown to control population movement and limit the spread of the virus. In the National Capital Region (NCR), Quezon City and Manila City—the largest and most dense cities, respectively—reported the highest number of cases. As the year progressed, restrictions and lockdowns were adjusted based on the number of cases. By the end of 2020, approximately 474,000 cases of COVID-19 had been confirmed in the Philippines and 9,200 people had died of the virus.

In March 2020, the government declared a state of public health emergency, which authorized the deployment of the national police and other law enforcement agencies to provide assistance in addressing COVID-19. This was followed by the proclamation of a “state of calamity” for six months, unless lifted or extended, and an enhanced community lockdown throughout the island of Luzon, including the capital Manila, from mid-March to May 15.

The government also approved Republic Act 11469, or the Bayanihan to Heal as One Act, which included economic stimulus measures, extensions for submitting documents and paying taxes and fees, and a moratorium on debt payments. The act introduced the Social Amelioration Program to provide subsidies to poor and vulnerable households, encompassing 70 percent of the population. The act further warned that “spreading false information regarding the COVID-19 crisis on social media and other platforms” would be punishable by up to two months in jail and fines of up to PHP 1 million (\$19,500). In September, Republic Act 11494, or the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act, was enacted to further support COVID-19 relief interventions and to accelerate economic recovery. Over the course of the year, the Department of Labor and Employment also issued various measures to assist workers. These included grants of PHP 5,000 (approximately \$100), implementation of flexible work arrangements, and clarification of establishments that were allowed to operate during the lockdowns.

In addition to the devastation of COVID-19, the country dealt with a prolonged wet season and a string of typhoons in 2020 that severely decreased agricultural employment. The three most destructive typhoons—Typhoon Molave (Quinta), Super Typhoon Goni (Rolly), and Typhoon Vamco (Ulysses)—affected a combined total of 9.3 million Filipinos, severely damaged Region 5, and caused floods in Metro Manila and Region 2. By October 2020, the unemployment rate reached 8.7 percent, equal to 3.8 million jobless Filipinos. While the gradual reopening of the economy in June 2020 provided some relief, labor groups reported that the number of those who had returned to work paled in comparison to those who lost their jobs. Initial studies from the Zero Extreme Poverty PH Movement and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) confirm that increased unemployment brought with it increased poverty rates, heavily impacting communities in the NCR and other megacities like Cebu and Davao, where the pandemic and lockdowns hit hardest.

In July, President Rodrigo Duterte signed into law the Philippine Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (ATA), amending the 2007 Human Security Act. The ATA’s vague definition of terrorism covers virtually all advocacy activities, including speeches, publications, and banners in public places. Thirty-seven petitions to the Supreme Court were filed in

2020 in opposition to the ATA, claiming that it infringes on rights guaranteed by the constitution. Former justices and legislators, CSO networks, lawyers' organizations, journalists, bloggers, humanitarian groups, faith-based organizations, and women's groups all joined in the effort to defend the continuously shrinking civic space in the Philippines. Oral arguments on the petitions were scheduled for early 2021.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported a dramatic increase of extrajudicial killings related to Duterte's war on drugs during the pandemic. HRW and official statistics of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) show that 155 people died in PDEA's operations between April and July 2020, an increase of more than 50 percent over the previous four-month period. According to official government figures, a total of 5,903 individuals were killed during anti-drug operations between July 1, 2016, and September 30, 2020. However, other sources, including the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), put the death toll at 8,663, while domestic human rights groups believe the real figure could be three times the number reported by OHCHR.

The government continued its relentless crackdown on independent media and journalists in 2020, as highlighted by both Amnesty International and HRW. In June, Maria Ressa, journalist and CEO of the news website Rappler, was convicted of cyber libel; the case rested on the retroactive application of the 2012 cybercrime law to an article that had been published before the law was enacted. In July, the Philippine Congress voted not to extend the franchise of ABS-CBN, the country's largest television and radio network, effectively shutting it down. Both cases gained worldwide attention for clearly infringing on freedom of the press.

The overall sustainability of the Philippine CSO sector moderately declined in 2020, with negative developments in all dimensions except public image. The most significant declines were in legal environment and advocacy, largely due to the restrictive context described above and increased state harassment. Though sectoral infrastructure remains the strongest dimension, it also deteriorated in 2020 due to challenges stemming from the COVID-19 restrictions and limited access. Financial viability and organizational capacity similarly deteriorated due to the pandemic-induced economic decline, which impacted both sources of funding and overall operations and staffing capacities. These deteriorations spurred a decline in service provision as well, primarily due to challenges in the delivery of regular services. However, CSOs' work to provide relief in times of crisis gave them increased visibility at the local level, and thereby moderately improved the sector's public image in 2020.

According to various national government agencies, there are around 362,000 CSOs registered in the Philippines, including 172,747 non-stock, nonprofit organizations as of 2020, 22,850 homeowner's associations as of 2021, and 18,065 cooperatives, 64,933 workers' associations, and 84,278 labor organizations as of 2018. While these figures combine to show an increase over the previous report, the various agencies that register CSOs are not consistent in their reporting.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 4.3



The legal environment for CSOs continued to decline in 2020 for the sixth year in a row. In 2020, that decline was extreme, as state harassment intensified, and the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant delays and difficulties in CSO registration.

Most CSOs, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, and some people's organizations (POs, a form of membership organization), register and annually update their registration with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Cooperatives register with the Cooperatives Development Authority, while homeowners' associations register with the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board. Labor organizations and workers associations register with the Department of Labor and Employment.

In 2020, the pandemic greatly affected regular government functions, including the annual renewal of registration mandated by SEC. The release of registration documents and the renewal of SEC registration were delayed for

months, negatively impacting CSO operations. There were also delays in acknowledgement replies from SEC and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR). Between March and May 2020, SEC and BIR issued several guidelines to adapt to safety protocols, particularly in response to the lockdowns imposed beginning in mid-March. The Association of Foundations (AF) then issued a guide to assist CSOs in complying with those guidelines, including requirements for board meetings and annual assemblies and filing annual financial statements, General Information Sheets, and Mandatory Disclosure Forms.

At the sub-national level, the accreditation process for CSOs and government engagement with CSOs continue to be regulated by memorandum circulars (MCs) issued by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) to local government units (LGUs) in 2018 and 2019. According to the DILG-Support for the Local Governance Program, LGUs have accredited 33,719 CSOs since the issuance of MC 2019-72 in May 2019; there was no aggregate data from the government regarding CSOs accredited by LGUs in 2020. Following calls for clarification of several MCs in 2019, in January 2020, a coalition of CSOs successfully worked with SEC to clarify submission requirements and ease the submission process.

The July 2020 enactment of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 (ATA) poses a potential legal challenge to all CSOs. The law provides for the creation of an Anti-Terrorism Council that has the authority to identify organizations or individuals as terrorists, a power previously limited to the courts. The law further allows authorities to conduct surveillance of suspected terrorists and freeze assets under suspicion of probable cause. The government has justified its adoption of the ATA, at least in part, as necessary to comply with Financial Action Task Force's anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism regulations. The vague provisions of the ATA—including “inciting to commit terrorism” by means of speeches, proclamations, writing, emblems, and banners—enable actions that effectively dissolve or immobilize CSOs for political reasons, adding to a growing atmosphere of fear among some CSOs. For example, the Linoan Farmers Integrated Cooperative (LIFICO), a Mindanao-based member of the National Federation of Peasant Organizations (Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka, PAKISAMA), disassociated itself from the federation after threats from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The AFP's threat had implied that PAKISAMA supported communist terrorists; therefore, if LIFICO remained associated with the federation, it would not be able to access government funding for agricultural programs. Thirty-seven petitions have been filed with the Supreme Court in opposition to the act. In June and July 2020, police arrested seven activists protesting the ATA in Cebu and another eleven in Laguna. Oral arguments on the petitions were scheduled for early 2021.

Cases of state harassment also intensified as government security forces continued to label specific CSOs as communist terrorist groups, a method of blacklisting known in the Philippines as “red-tagging.” The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), an intergovernmental body created in 2018 by Executive Order 70, is mandated to end insurgencies by addressing poverty, which is identified as the root cause of these conflicts. Sub-regional task forces were formed to implement the plans of NTF-ELCAC and aid in identifying organizations that were seen as communist terrorist groups. For example, in April 2020, social media posts from the 303rd Infantry Brigade of AFP branded human rights organizations and other CSOs as terrorists, so dangerous that they should be avoided like COVID-19. The posts explicitly identified the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) and the Medical Action Group (MAG) as terrorist groups.

CSOs that are red-tagged and other human rights defenders and activists continued to face threats, harassment, and worse in 2020. Randall Echanis, a peasant movement organizer and a vocal opponent of the ATA, was murdered in his apartment in Quezon City in August. A week later, an unidentified gunman shot and killed Zara Alvarez, a legal worker for the human rights group Karapatan, in Bacolod City. Following Alvarez's killing, other Negros Island-based activists reported receiving threats through social media accounts warning that “You're next.” Also in 2020, Maria Ressa, journalist and CEO of the news website Rappler, was convicted of cyber libel for an article published before the Cybercrime Prevention Law was passed. Given Rappler's ongoing scrutiny of the Duterte administration, the retroactive application of the law was seen as a government attempt to silence critics.

Donors are eligible for tax exemptions for donations to CSOs with tax-exempt certifications, a recognition provided by BIR. However, not all CSOs know of or apply for tax-exempt certification. While CSOs' income is generally tax exempt, revenue from income-generating activities is subject to tax, regardless of the disposition of income.

CSOs are permitted to earn income from a broad range of activities including the provision of goods and services, fundraising campaigns, and receiving grants or funds from foreign donors, as long as the activities are stipulated in

their bylaws. CSOs may also compete for government contracts, but the requirements to bid are quite stringent and difficult for CSOs to comply with, especially for small local CSOs with limited staffing and capacity. CSOs also often lack the information they would need to effectively bid on and implement contracts for the government. While CSOs may accept funds from foreign donors, anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regulations require banks to exercise scrutiny over all financial transactions between domestic and foreign CSOs.

CSOs' need for legal services remains high and continued to rise in 2020 due to difficulties in registration and increasing harassment. Legal services for CSOs are mostly available in larger cities. CSO networks at the regional level facilitate legal services for rural CSOs when needed.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.6

The organizational capacity of CSOs moderately deteriorated in 2020, as CSO operations, staffing, and financial sustainability were all negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some NGOs continued to work with their partner POs in 2020 to assess community needs and identify interventions for support. For example, the Partnership for Philippine Support Service Agencies (PHILSSA) used innovative tools to facilitate community assessments of the impact of COVID-19, alongside its PO network, Action for Preparedness for Disaster and Climate Change (Aksyon Para sa Kahandaan sa Kalamidad at Klima, AKKMA). Those assessments then informed PHILSSA's programming to best meet the needs of its constituents. However, in the virtual environment of 2020, CSOs struggled to maintain contact with those constituents who had little to no access to mobile phones or the internet, particularly indigenous and isolated rural communities.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN THE PHILIPPINES



Health concerns and restrictions on mobility prevented many CSOs from implementing programs in partner communities during the prolonged lockdown. Regular programming and other scheduled activities from strategic plans were largely postponed or cancelled. CSOs instead focused on short-term organizational plans to survive and respond to the immediate needs of their staff, members, and partner communities. The majority of cooperatives' operations were also impacted by a reduction of revenue in 2020 after the imposed lockdown and provisions of the Bayanihan Heal as One Act resulted in decreased collection of loan payments. While many CSOs struggled to implement their traditional missions and strategic plans in 2020, the challenges presented by the pandemic led some cooperatives and NGOs to develop business continuity plans to safeguard their operations moving forward.

Larger CSOs, cooperatives, and corporate foundations typically have more sophisticated internal management systems, including detailed governance, human resources, financial management, and fundraising systems, policies, and processes. Smaller CSOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) have simpler systems, including board elections and terms of office, that still allow them to practice appropriate decision-making processes.

In 2020, the majority of CSOs held their staff and board meetings remotely due to lockdown restrictions. They also conducted their annual meetings online, allowing members and partners to participate from afar. However, some CSOs decided not to hold annual meetings, which they were able to do as long as they properly notified their members and SEC.

Typically, larger CSOs have clear human resource policies and are able to maintain regular staff, while smaller NGOs and POs have lean staffing structures and are supported largely by volunteers. In 2020, CSO staffing became an increasing concern throughout the sector. Budget constraints forced many CSOs to downsize, defer hiring new staff, or ask current staff to take on additional responsibilities. Some staff continued to work as volunteers while others left to join academia, government, consultancy groups, major development organizations, or the private sector.

As the pandemic and lockdown required a shift to online work, CSOs demonstrated resilience and agility, immediately shifting to online platforms for meetings and training and learning to utilize technologies and tools to continue working from home. However, most CSO staff use their personal laptops or mobile phones for work and experienced poor internet connections in 2020, especially given limited bandwidth as online work increased.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 4.3



CSOs' financial viability deteriorated significantly in 2020 as the Philippine economy plunged, shrinking by 9.5 percent. According to the "Survey on the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Implementation of the Government-Mandated Community Quarantine on CSOs," conducted by the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO) and PHILSSA in February 2021, 70 percent of CSOs and CSO networks reported that they had fewer funding opportunities in 2020. Earned income dropped as training centers, technical consultancies, and exchange programs were cancelled, and social enterprises were forced to slow or halt production and the provision of services. CSOs that had invested funds also saw declines in their investments, while cooperatives suffered financially as members could not repay their loans and labor union membership

declined due to layoffs.

Major sources of funding, both international and national, changed their priorities and diverted resources to humanitarian work and COVID-19 relief in 2020. Some donors provided one-time support for relief operations during the pandemic, for survivors of the Taal Volcano eruption in January 2020, and in response to the destructive typhoons during the year. This consequently limited funding opportunities for many CSOs that did not work in these areas. The Doing Good Index 2020 Report, covering 2019, found that foreign funding was already being diverted away from the Philippines, which is now classified as a middle-income country. Still, 54 percent of the social delivery organizations surveyed for the index received foreign funding. Though it is declining, support from bilateral and multilateral organizations remains a significant source of funding for CSOs.

Numerous initiatives successfully generated local support in 2020. The TOWNS Foundation and UP Medical Foundation, for instance, relied primarily on local philanthropy for their COVID-19 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Donation and Delivery campaign. The campaign raised funds from individuals, corporate foundations, and companies and distributed PPE to 560 public hospitals, thirteen correctional facility health centers, and five quarantine facilities across the nation. CSOs and corporate foundations formed other temporary coalitions to provide food for communities most affected by the pandemic and fund livelihood opportunities for the urban poor.

However, this type of local philanthropy was almost entirely focused on emergency and humanitarian work, in which most of the funds raised went directly to the beneficiaries. CSOs continued to struggle to raise funds for core programs and operational costs, even as they successfully supported their beneficiaries most in need.

Local funding institutions and CSOs with endowments also largely reduced their loans and grants to CSOs in 2020 due to the increasingly poor market performance. This forced small CSOs to work intermittently or to rely on volunteer support. According to the "COVID-19 Impact Survey on the Philippine Non-Profit Sector," conducted by Venture for Fund Raising Foundation in December 2020, local fundraising ranked among the top three impacts, with 52 percent of surveyed nonprofits reporting that they received fewer donations in 2020.

A few organizations have explored alternative funding sources, but as noted above, earned income from fee-based training or social enterprises all but halted because of the lockdown and rapidly shrinking economy of 2020. CSO funding strategies primarily focused on grant writing, corporate partnerships, and online fundraising through websites, emails, and crowdfunding. Some CSOs and CSO networks reported that they doubled their efforts in submitting project proposals or joined consortium projects with other CSOs. Most CSOs implemented cost-

cutting efforts, stretched internal fund reserves, or temporarily stopped operation. Some also reported taking out loans to meet operational costs in 2020.

Larger and more established CSOs, corporate foundations, and cooperatives generally have good financial management systems and certified public accountants as finance managers. Small organizations have simple systems, relying on bookkeepers or administrative personnel to manage their finances, and others have outsourced their financial management systems. Few organizations publicly post their annual financial statements. Smaller CSOs submit audited financial statements to SEC and other government agencies but do not publish them.

ADVOCACY: 4.0

Advocacy deteriorated to an extreme degree in 2020, as both the pandemic restrictions and intensified state harassment made it difficult for CSOs to engage in advocacy work.

Lockdowns and health protocols hampered the usual processes of participation in government decision making in 2020. The government and CSOs alike grappled with new ways of deliberating, engaging stakeholders, and implementing policies. Committee meetings, demonstrations, and forums moved online where possible, and phone calls, SMS, messaging applications, and online meeting platforms and protests slowly became the tools of the trade for advocacy.

However, these trends limited CSOs' opportunities to deliberate about national advocacy issues or engage in broader political or multi-sectoral dialogues, especially impacting those with poor digital access. As a result, pressure from policy advocacy groups diminished and major legislation that was passed in 2020—exemplified by the ATA of 2020—lacked or did not include consultative processes.

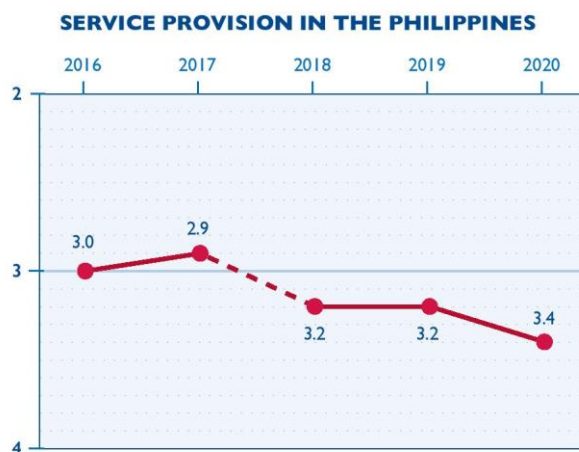


A number of CSOs and CSO coalitions monitored the government's COVID-19 response efforts and advocated for efficiency. For instance, the Right to Know Right Now (R2KRN) coalition utilized the government's Freedom of Information (FOI) online portal to gather information on government programs addressing the pandemic, including those on food security, social amelioration, distribution of PPE for frontline workers, and social security cash assistance. R2KRN ran its FOI Request Tracker for four months and publicized its findings in an online forum in August 2020. A parallel effort by concerned citizens called the COVID-19 Budget Tracker monitored budget allocations and government spending as part of the pandemic response. The creators of the COVID-19 Budget Tracker have since joined and become active members of the R2KRN coalition.

The hostile environment spurred many CSOs to engage in self-censorship in 2020. Some CSOs critical of the government, for instance, acknowledged the need to limit their public criticism in the interest of maintaining relationships and engagements with local government officials and executives who were supportive of the Duterte administration. The crackdown on independent media and the passage of the ATA in 2020 added to this chilling effect, discouraging advocates from expressing their dissent. Under the ATA, the definition of terrorism covers virtually all advocacy activities, including speeches, publications, and banners in public places. According to HRW, since 2015, 208 human rights defenders have been killed in the Philippines. The fourth quarter 2020 Social Weather Survey by Social Weather Stations emphasized the public's perception of danger in publishing anything that was critical of the administration, and 65 percent of Filipinos agreed that "It is dangerous to print or broadcast anything critical of the administration, even if it is the truth."

In 2020, Congress continued to deliberate the proposed Social Welfare and Development Agencies Act, which addresses regulation of CSOs. The current bill would entrust a centralized government agency with the process of assessing CSOs' capacity and integrity. NGOs and foundations instead favor the version of the bill filed by Senator Leila de Lima, which respects the mandate of the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) and CSO self-regulation, rather than strengthening government control over the process.

SERVICE PROVISION: 3.4¹



In 2020, CSO service provision moderately deteriorated, as the COVID-19 pandemic restricted the mobility of CSOs in delivering their services and some CSOs were forced to let go some of their staff due to budget constraints. CSOs traditionally offer a diverse range of services, encompassing areas like training and education, health and nutrition, livelihood development, cooperative development, social services, and lending and microfinancing. In 2020, however, many CSOs encountered difficulties in implementing their regular programs and services to partner communities. Instead, they pivoted to focus their efforts on COVID-19 prevention and emergency relief. CSOs remained broadly responsive to community needs, though few have evaluative measures to determine the adequacy of their planning and programming.

According to the survey conducted by CODE-NGO and PHILSSA, CSOs indicated that their programs, projects, and services were moderately to significantly affected by the implementation of government-mandated community lockdowns. The projects most affected were related to capacity building, advocacy, community organizing, and disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Communication and coordination with community partners and stakeholders was also difficult, and many activities were either shifted online or suspended. A few CSOs temporarily stopped their operations altogether. Because members could not always afford to buy the technology required to shift operations online, some POs resorted to face-to-face meetings while ensuring that they followed necessary health protocols.

Despite setbacks in their operations and staffing, CSOs—including cooperatives, faith-based organizations, and corporate foundations—were at the forefront of COVID-19 response initiatives. According to a survey by AF, at least ninety organizations provided immediate relief services. This included fundraising; distributing food for their staff and members, communities, and frontline workers; providing PPE, health care, and psychosocial support; and conducting information campaigns and coordination. Cooperatives provided similar relief efforts to their members, non-members, and frontline workers, and donated to LGUs from their Community Development Fund.

CSOs often went beyond their traditional clients and services in order to contribute to food security as the lockdown cut community links to the market. CSOs, farmers' cooperatives, and volunteers linked consumers to farmers' groups, consolidated farm produce, or established systems for direct purchases from farmers, fishermen, and other suppliers. The Naga City Urban Poor Federation, for example, established a mobile market, supported by the Naga City LGU. Bukluran, a national network of indigenous people's (IPs) organizations defending their sacred territories, also shifted from providing grains and seeds to IP farmers to marketing their surplus supply of farm goods and ensuring fair prices. All profits from the market were used to purchase distance learning equipment for 200 IP scholars.

CSOs organized new online fundraisers for the benefit of frontline health workers and communities. For example, the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), the largest business-led NGO, ran the Bayanihan Musikahan online campaign with the National Artist for Music, Ryan Cayabyab. More than eighty artists performed live on Facebook or YouTube for two and a half months, raising more than PHP 122 million (approximately \$2.5 million) in cash and in kind to help vulnerable groups and communities. Youth group volunteers and others like Lawyers for Doctors Philippines also worked to raise funds and direct resources for frontline workers through CSOs.

¹ 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.

Cost recovery continues to be a challenge for many CSOs, especially those that are dependent on donor funding. CSOs were already reluctant to charge fees for their services or engage in consultancy services, and the financial impact of the pandemic further limited those opportunities and pushed many CSOs into survival mode.

Some government agencies, particularly DILG and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), continued to recognize CSOs as sources of credible information and reliable service providers.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 3.1

The infrastructure supporting CSOs in the Philippines moderately deteriorated in 2020. Given lockdown restrictions, intermediary support organizations (ISOs) and resource centers transitioned to online training, meetings, and other activities. While this was an innovative response for some, many CSOs and CSO staff lacked access to these online opportunities, and the shift hindered networks' abilities to enhance CSO capacities and contributions. This challenge was particularly detrimental for rural CSOs. Funding from local grant-making organizations was also significantly reduced in 2020.

ISOs and CSO resource centers shifted to online mechanisms to provide training activities and other support services to the sector in 2020. For example, the Center for Humanitarian Learning and Innovation (CHLI) offered online business and service continuity planning workshops to cooperatives, small NGOs, and government agencies. The Venture for Fundraising continued to build the fundraising capacity of CSOs and created a compilation of COVID-19 fundraising campaigns that aims to help frontline workers and marginalized groups and communities, thereby enabling the public to more readily find and donate to those campaigns.

Several CSO networks and coalitions also provided online capacity-building activities to their members and partners. CODE-NGO, Philippine Misereor Partnership Inc., and other alliances offered technical assistance in managing online meetings, digital security, and data privacy to cope with the shift to online work. AF continued its Lead2Serve program by conducting online training workshops with its member foundations. Agriterra's Generating Rural Opportunities by Working with Cooperatives project tapped larger cooperatives such as AgriCoop as local resource organizations to develop and enhance the capacities of smaller cooperatives on financial management, governance, and business management. Together with Investing in Women, the Foundation for a Sustainable Society Inc. (FSSI) and its consortium partners, the National Confederation of Cooperatives (NATCCO) and PBSP, started an initiative to increase the capacities of women-led small and medium-scale enterprises on cooperative management, governance, building community enterprises, and marketing.

Local funding institutions such as FSSI, Peace and Equity Foundation (PEF), and international NGOs like Oxfam, Save the Children, and CARE Philippines extended limited support to CSOs and partner communities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters in 2020. Overall, however, funding from local grant-making organizations was significantly reduced due to the ongoing economic decline in the country.

Collaboration among CSOs and between CSOs and other sectors evolved to meet new needs in 2020, especially as CSOs were no longer able to provide their regular programs and services. Coalitions worked together on pandemic-related health issues and livelihood and economic challenges and developed more accurate data on the pandemic's impact. New alliances also emerged in 2020. For instance, many of the thirty-seven petitions against the ATA were jointly filed by various groups. The COVID-19 PULSE survey, assessing the pandemic's impact on Filipino households, also came out of a joint initiative by UNDP, the Zero Extreme Poverty 2030 movement, AI4Gov Philippines, and other local CSO partners. PROJECT ARK was formed to provide affordable COVID-19 testing through the combined effort of Go Negosyo partners, the Philippine Red Cross, and the Department of Health.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE PHILIPPINES



PUBLIC IMAGE: 3.4



Even as the government perception of CSOs remains an obstacle, the public image of CSOs moderately improved in 2020 due to the increased visibility of CSOs at the local level.

Because media coverage predominantly focused on COVID-19 and there were limited in-person events, CSOs were less visible in the public eye and in the media in 2020. Media coverage was further limited by ongoing crackdowns on free press, prominently highlighted by the cases against Maria Ressa of Rappler and the effective shutdown of ABS-CBN after criticism from President Duterte. The resulting information gap limited the dissemination of critical updates, especially around COVID-19 and the impact of natural disasters, thus reducing the public's awareness of CSO activities.

At the local level, however, CSO activities gained greater visibility and community support. A brief survey conducted as part of the Philippine Trust Index in early 2021 reported that the public is increasingly aware of both NGOs and foundations, and that that awareness often translates to an increase in trust. CSO aid to those in need during the pandemic also increased visibility and support for CSOs and NGOs in 2020. CSOs' advocacy against the ATA also seemed to have a positive impact on public perceptions at the national level, generating a certain degree of support from the private sector as well.

The military and police forces continued to red-tag some CSOs, especially advocacy groups and activists critical of government policies, accusing them of being communist and therefore terrorist groups. Red-tagging caused some LGU officials to avoid partnerships or project implementation with CSOs. However, other government agencies, such as DILG and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), continued to recognize CSOs as sources of credible information and reliable service providers. More CSOs were trusted and approached by LGUs and communities to be their partners in development, as CSO activities were most visible at the local level.

Some CSOs successfully shifted to online platforms and social media for advocacy, education, and awareness-raising activities. However, few CSOs regularly posted news articles or updates online, and many lack the funds or capacity for online awareness campaigns. Many CSOs do not have websites or designated communications officers, and they require further training to promote their organizational image and activities.

CSOs practice transparency by submitting project reports to donors and reporting to partner communities or their members. Larger CSOs publish their annual reports in print or post them online. CSO networks and other membership-based organizations have developed their own codes of ethics.

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.*

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