

THE COVID-19 RECOVERY AGENDA FOR THE PHILIPPINE CSO SECTOR

An agenda to put forward to government and other stakeholders for the recovery and rebuilding of the Philippine Civil Society Organizations (CSO) sector.

The Civil Society Organizations (CSO) sector plays a critical role in addressing the historical and existing social inequalities exacerbated in a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite health risks and community quarantine restrictions, CSOs persevered, adapted, and innovated to provide emergency response and services to vulnerable communities in 2020 and 2021. However, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted CSOs likewise, causing the sector to struggle to recover or survive, in some cases, to continue its operations, employment of its staff, and programs and services in partner communities. Hence, the CSO sector must forward its own agenda to address its needs for immediate recovery and the continuation of its development work.

We present the following agenda to the government, private sector, media groups, academe, and development partners, and other CSOs with the aim that they will adopt or support specific provisions herein to assist the CSO sector.¹

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¹CSO sector refers to non-government organizations, people's organizations, cooperatives, labor unions, and homeowners associations.



AGENDA 1: Engage the government and call for further assistance in complying with regulatory requirements.



AGENDA 2: Remind the government to protect civic spaces for CSO operations, participation, and communication.



AGENDA 3: Encourage the government and private sector to support the digital transformation of our operations.



AGENDA 4: Maximize resource generation mechanisms to sustain operational costs and programs.



AGENDA 5: Engage the government, fellow CSOs, and the private sector to provide mental health and psychosocial support services.



AGENDA 6: Strengthen the collaboration and partnerships among CSOs and other stakeholders to respond to community needs along common thematic areas.



AGENDA 7: Increase the visibility of CSOs and our work.

AGENDA 1

Engage the government and call for further assistance in complying with regulatory requirements.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant delays and difficulties in the annual updating of CSO registration or submission of requirements with various government agencies.



Securities and
Exchange
Commission
PHILIPPINES



CSOs continue to face challenges with new and additional administrative procedures, particularly those that are online, despite the measures implemented to ease the processes.



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ACTION POINTS



Reconsider the penalties/fines imposed on CSOs.



Set up mobile or "pop-up" offices around the provinces.



Enable the CSO Desk Officers to provide competent, technical assistance.



Assign online facilities in LGU offices to enable submission of requirements electronically.



Ensure timely processing and smooth operability of the electronic system.

Despite the measures implemented by most regulatory agencies to ease the requirements and processes for CSOs, some CSOs continue to face challenges with new and additional administrative procedures, particularly those that are online.

Related to these challenges, CSOs request the agencies to reconsider the penalties/fines imposed on CSOs. To address the challenges, the agencies may set up mobile or "pop-up" offices around the provinces to deliver the assistance. In addition, CSOs request the DILG and the local government units to enable their CSO Desk Officers to provide competent, technical assistance to CSOs and to assign online facilities in the LGU offices which CSOs can use to submit requirements electronically. The issuance of Department/ Administrative Orders will be facilitative. Generally, CSOs find it effective if regulatory agencies ensure timely processing of requirements, regular review of regulatory requirements, and smooth operability of the electronic system.

AGENDA 2

Remind the government to protect civic spaces for CSO operations, participation, and communication.



The 1987 Constitution of the Philippines promotes and protects the rights of CSOs for "effective and reasonable participation at all levels of social, political, and economic decision making."

The Local Government Code of 1991 and the annual General Appropriations Act highlight the need to provide spaces for citizen participation in governance at the local level.



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ACTION POINTS

CSOs



Participate in civic spaces like the Local Special Bodies in the LGUs.



Document and tell stories about their participation in national/local governance and community development.

Government



Acknowledge the vital role of the CSO sector in the nation's recovery from the pandemic.



Commit to the principles and values of Open Government Partnership.



Provide more platforms to inform citizens regarding the state of national and local governance.

Open civic spaces are integral to the recovery of the CSO sector, for then, it is able to peacefully assemble, freely associate, and fluently express its views. The CSO sector can then help improve the government's functions on service delivery and governance, especially for the marginalized sectors.

National and local levels of government can acknowledge the vital role of the CSO sector in the nation's recovery from the pandemic. Both levels of government can also commit to the principles and values of Open Government Partnership. When CSOs are wantonly red-tagged or subjected to misinformation/disinformation, there are grievance and redress mechanisms at both levels of government.

While CSOs advocate to local government units (LGUs) to provide more platforms to inform its constituents regarding the state of local governance, CSOs can "occupy" civic space in LGUs, like the Local Special Bodies, to engage with government and to further respond to the pandemic and its aftermath.

AGENDA 3

Encourage the government and private sector to support the digital transformation of our operations.



During the pandemic, many CSOs adopted new ways of working with partner communities and other CSOs by utilizing digital platforms. However, internet access remains difficult for many rural communities.



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ACTION POINTS

CSOs



Adopt institutional policies on digital security, data privacy, and internet cyber crimes, as necessary.

Provide capacity-building programs on digital advocacy, digital literacy, data privacy, digital security, and other relevant areas of concern.

Government and the Private Sector



Invest in technology and infrastructure to expand digital access in the communities.

Media Companies



Provide training on digital/broadcast content creation and use of internet broadcasting platforms.

Government and the private sector can invest in technology and infrastructure to expand digital access in the communities. Majority of CSOs lack the capacity to utilize digital tools and applications to achieve effectiveness for its internal and external communications.

Government agencies such as DOST, DICT, DTI, State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), private sector, accredited centers of the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), and CSOs specializing in information and communication technologies (ICT) can provide capacity-building programs on digital advocacy, digital literacy, data privacy, digital security, and other relevant areas of concern. CSOs need to adopt institutional policies on digital security, data privacy, and internet cyber crimes, as necessary. Media outfits can provide training on digital/broadcast content creation and use of internet broadcasting platforms and the like.

AGENDA 4

Maximize resource generation mechanism
to sustain operational costs and programs.



Because grants from international and national entities and philanthropic initiatives shifted to pandemic response and humanitarian work, funding opportunities for many CSOs became limited.



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ACTION POINTS

Government



National and local governments can supply CSOs with lists of unutilized government funds, such as the People's Survival Fund and Climate Change Adaptation Fund, that align with CSOs' programs or advocacies, and provide information or technical assistance on how to access these.

Similarly, the government can supply restricted funding opportunities to CSOs for devolved services.

Discussions regarding CSO participation and public financial management of LGUs may be organized with national government agencies like the DBM, DILG, DOF-BLGF, and NEDA. Government can develop better incentives for the donor community to invest and work with CSOs with good internal governance practices.

CSOs



CSOs can band together to research new or upcoming development financing models or schemes.

CSOs can reprioritize fundraising strategies or diversify funding sources. For example, CSOs can develop fee-based services for the private sector, government agencies, LGUs, and academic institutions.

International Development Partners



International development partners can reconsider their policy on mandatory "cash counterpart/contribution," and provide flexible funding mechanisms to support operational costs of CSOs.

AGENDA 5

Engage the government, fellow CSOs,
and the private sector to provide mental
health and psychosocial support services.



Mental health and psychosocial support
services should be provided for CSOs.

The COVID-19 pandemic heightened the risks that would affect the mental health of frontline workers in health facilities, professionals and non-professionals in health and allied professions, nursing aides, janitors, barangay health workers, etc. and the poor population. The pandemic also significantly disrupted the delivery of health services, including mental health services.



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ACTION POINTS

Government



Integrate mental health and psychosocial support services (MHPSS) to its social protection programs.



Fully implement Republic Act No. 11036, known as the Mental Health Act (DOH).

Develop guidelines to promote community- and recovery-based approaches, and culturally-appropriate

CSOs



CSOs can conduct awareness-raising campaigns on mental health and well-being to target publics. CSOs can partner with other CSOs, academic institutions, or professional associations which already have the resources, and expertise to deliver MHPSS in the communities, Organizationally, CSOs can provide mental health training for its staff and volunteers, & develop better healthcare programs/packages.

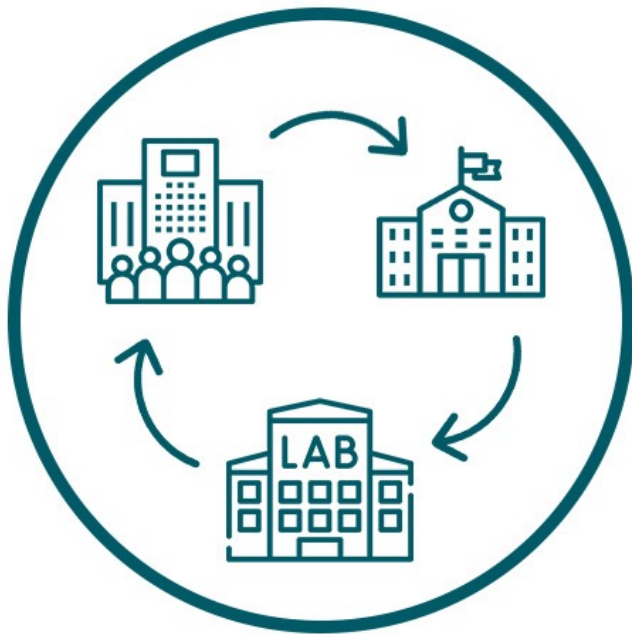
AGENDA 6

Strengthen the collaboration and partnerships among CSOs and other stockholders to respond to community needs along common thematic areas.



During the pandemic, CSOs and other stakeholders organically or spontaneously collaborated to monitor the government's COVID-19 response efforts, budget allocations and spending, to address pandemic-related health, livelihood and economic challenges, and to build accurate data on the pandemic's impact.

ACTION POINTS



CSOs can explore more opportunities for collaboration and partnerships with the private sector, academe, and scientific communities for network building, knowledge-learning-information sharing, and convergence of efforts in order to optimize or scale-up the reach and impact of programs and projects to vulnerable populations.

AGENDA 7

Increase the visibility of CSOs and our work.

Because of its timely and continuing pandemic response and humanitarian work, the CSO sector garnered increased public trust as people and communities felt their active presence since the pandemic struck the Philippines in March 2020.

Increased awareness of CSOs translates to increased public trust, which may result in increased financial support.



ACTION POINTS



National and local governments, private sector, and academic institutions can publicly recognize their engagements and partnerships with the CSO sector. CSOs can engage the Philippine Information Agency and media groups to feature and amplify the advocacies and programs of CSOs.



Related to the public image building efforts, CSOs can strategically and more actively begin or continue its participation in the Local Special Bodies.

The development of this COVID-19 Recovery Agenda for the Philippine CSO Sector resulted from a desk review of the local studies conducted by the Association of Foundations Philippines, and the Partnership of Philippine Support Service Agencies on the impact of COVID-19 on Civil Society Organizations in 2021; CSO Sustainability Index-Philippines Reports 2020 and 2021 written by the Caucus of Development NGO Networks for the FHI 360 and USAID; roundtable discussions with a panel of CSO leaders and experts and the Project Steering Committee; and a series of validation workshops conducted with 104 CSO leaders from 12 CSO networks based in six major geographical areas (as of Oct 28, 2022).



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