# STUDY ON NGO SUSTAINABILITY INDEX USAGE PATTERNS

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NGO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NGO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia has been published annually by the US Agency for International Development [USAID] since 1997. The Index Report provides an overview of progress on NGO sustainability in the region and has chapters for each of 29 countries that include both numeric scores on 7 dimensions of NGO sustainability and narrative discussion of trends and developments in the sector.

Originally intended as an internal document to serve USAID audiences, over the years the role of the NGOSI has expanded to become a tool used by a broader policy and development community internationally and in the countries of focus. To date, there has been no systematic evaluation done to track the use of the Index however. To better understand the types of users, how they use it and their views on the NGOSI methodologyl and process, USAID commissioned a study to explore usage among different audiences. The study was carried out by a research team from Management Systems International [MSI] during August-September, 2010. This report presents the findings of that study.

To examine the question of how the NGO Sustainability Index [NGOSI] is used, the MSI research team conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with representatives of various audiences that were thought to have a high probability of using the Index Report. Interviews were completed with four categories of respondents:

- US Government officials based in Washington DC (USG-DC), primarily from USAID, as well as the State Department – 8 interviews.
- Panel Chairs[1]:
   o USAID Mission Panel Chairs – 4 interviews.
   o Partner Organization Panel Chairs – 9 interviews.
- Individuals with organizations which might find the NGOSI useful in their work: US and European donors, including foundations, US NGOs working in the region, local NGOs such as think tanks, and academics (hereinafter "Interested Organizations") – 11 interviews.

Findings are organized into three categories: Use, Methodology and Process.

## Findings on Use

Respondents were asked about a wide variety of potential uses for the NGOSI. These fell into two broad categories: **use to inform** and **use for specific managerial or programmatic purpose**.

Almost everyone who uses the NGOSI Report uses it first and foremost as a way **to inform themselves** about the NGO sector, primarily in a particular country of interest. The Index Report is also used by many to provide information about trends over time in the sector and about how the sector compares across countries. A greater percentage of respondents within USAID and who were Panel Chairs reported using the Report for these types of informational uses than did individuals from Interested Organizations.

The **specific managerial or programmatic uses** reported by respondents varied widely depending on the type of organization the respondent represented. USAID Panel Chairs who work in the missions tend to use the NGOSI in their Annual Reports or PPRs and in program design. A lower percentage of USG-DC

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[1] NGOSI scores and narrative report for each country are prepared by expert panels convened and chaired either by USAID mission staff or by representatives of local or international NGOs working in that country to whom it is outsourced.

staff tend to use the NGOSI for any of the specific purposes referenced in the interview guide; those who do use it reported that they use it to help determine funding priorities and in program design. Among Partner Panel Chairs, specific usage was also relatively low, though it was notable that a higher percentage of Partner Panel Chairs use it for M&E purposes (44%) than do USAID or USG respondents. Partner Panel Chairs were also significantly more likely than USAID or USG respondents to use the NGOSI to start dialogue with stakeholders. Not surprisingly, relatively low percentages of Interested Organization respondents report using the NGOSI for any of the specific use categories. Those that did use it indicated that they used it to inform program design, with a small handful also saying it plays a part in determining funding priorities.

A few unanticipated uses were noted, including partner organizations who reported having adapted the NGOSI approach to use as a tool to assess individual NGOs; other respondents indicated that process of creating the NGOSI in each country was itself valuable as it provided a unique opportunity to bring experts together to reflect on the sector in a way that would not otherwise occur.

The Index Report includes several different **components**, among these, most respondents cited the narrative country reports as the most useful. While some also noted that numerical scores were useful -- particularly in presentations and advocacy efforts, the scores were mostly utilized in combination with the narrative text. The executive summary and methodological overview components were also mentioned as useful, particularly to give a general trend overview, though by significantly fewer respondents. A handful of respondents said they found the topical essays helpful in illuminating important trends, while one suggested that the topical essays are of high enough quality and the topics of great enough interest that they might be better placed as a stand-alone article outside of the NGOSI publication in order to garner more readership and attention.

Respondents believe that the NGOSI is not as widely known or used as it might be and indicated that current outreach and dissemination efforts are ad hoc and dependent on the initiative of USAID missions or partner organizations. They suggested several ways that use might be increased.  These included:

- Providing funds for translating relevant portions of the Index Report into local languages. Respondents indicated that in most cases it would be sufficient to translate just the Executive Summary and the specific Country Report for each country. The need for translation is greatest in the countries of the former Soviet Union, with less need cited in Eastern Europe where English is increasingly widely used. Translating the report into Russian was not viewed as an appropriate substitute for local language translation in most countries of the former Soviet Union.
- Providing USAID guidance to Panel Chairs on publicizing the Index Report, including permission and encouragement to disseminate it, boilerplate language for a press release, tips on holding a press briefing, suggested distribution for both the press release and the Index Report itself, and making additional hard copies of the Report easily available.
- USAID undertaking additional efforts to publicize the report in Washington, DC, directly at missions and within targeted policy and donor communities.
- Providing USAID guidance on possible additional outreach efforts to raise the profile about the document, including holding roundtables where Report findings could be discussed by civil society, government and the media. Roundtables might potentially be broadcast and/or conducted in the regions as well as in the capital.
- Providing USAID support and guidance for using the Index Report as an advocacy tool.

Confusion over the purpose of the NGOSI and its intended audience was notable among respondents. A number of non-USAID respondents suggested that the NGOSI was a USAID tool and therefore not so relevant for them. Others saw it as something that might be useful for their work, but were unclear as to its intended use. Even within USAID, respondents had differing views. These mixed responses show that

there is not a broadly shared understanding of the NGOSI target audience and the purpose for the Index Report; and this may be contributing to its limited use.

## Findings on the NGOSI Methodology

As described previously, respondents were selected from among the audiences likely to be familiar with the NGO Sustainability Index. While most respondents were familiar with the Index Report, not all of them were familiar with the methodology. The majority of respondents were at least somewhat familiar with the methodology used for the NGOSI, though USG-DC and representatives from Interested Organizations tended to be less so.

Respondents were nearly universal in reporting that the primary strength of the NGOSI is that it exists at all, given the methodological challenges involved in putting it together and the lack of other available information on the sector; in particular, the fact that the Index has been produced annually over a long time frame in a way that allow for cross country comparisons is viewed as enormously valuable.

Respondents also noted significant weaknesses in the NGOSI methodology. In particular, there is a concern that the methodology may not be applied as consistently as it needs to be, as it depends on the Panel Chairs maintaining a consistent and equally objective and rigorous scoring process.

The second major issue identified by interview respondents is a concern that the methodology does not support accurate comparisons across countries very well, though comparisons over time within one country are adequate. Beyond the difficulty of keeping panels in different countries effectively calibrated, several other dynamics were highlighted which contribute to this concern. These included: a) path dependence and enforced lack of volatility by the Editorial Board, b) a dynamic where rising expectations make panels in more successful countries ever more critical, and c) political bias in the scoring. The path dependence issue was a particular concern mentioned several times; as currently designed, the methodology makes it very difficult for a panel to stray far from the ratings of the previous year's panel; scores are dependent on the precedent or "path" set by previous panels and this forces them to stray from the calibrated definitions of what each score is supposed to mean.

A third key issue involved the diversity of the NGO community which several respondents said they felt needed to be better addressed in the Index. In particular, several respondents raised the question of how to properly reflect the emergence of government affiliated NGOs [GONGOs]. Concerns about rural/urban issues and the fact that the Index does not capture broader civil society initiatives were also mentioned.

An additional concern that was noted by some interview respondents related to the paradigm that underlies the Index. Respondents questioned whether sustainability is a reasonable goal for the NGO sector, particularly "since the original 1990s era hypotheses about NGOs becoming sustainable have been disproven," as one respondent phrased it. A second element of the paradigm that was questioned by respondents is the framing of the Index around the idea that countries are all in the process of transitioning to democracy, which they indicated no longer makes sense as countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus do not appear to be on such a path. Respondents suggested that the underlying paradigm needed to be rethought and perhaps refocused around ensuring that social investments yield strong results.

Based on these concerns, six interview respondents said they think a full methodological review should be undertaken with a goal of "tightening up" the methodology. Respondents also provided a significant number of specific suggestions for improvement. These focused on five areas:

- <u>Suggestions on overall approach.</u> These focused on increasing rigor, including tightening definitions of each rating level and tying them to more objective criteria so that scores would be less perception based.

- Suggestions on broadening the vantage point to validate ratings and methodology. These included pulling in more observers who have a vantage point across countries such as individuals who work for other donor organizations.
- Suggestions to address the path dependency issue. One approach that was recommended would be to identify the handful of countries with significant path dependency issues and use a more in-depth expert panel process to re-score those countries' ratings over the full time series of the Index using a standardized, calibrated understanding of the definitions for each rating level. While a major effort, this would dramatically increase accuracy, while preserving the time series.
- Suggestions to strengthen scoring. These suggestions involved altering existing dimensions, particularly the infrastructure dimension which is somewhat confusing to respondents, or adding new dimensions such as how NGO's fit into the political context. Respondents also suggested several specific tweaks and clarifications to the questions the underlie scoring on each dimension.
- Suggestions to strengthen the country narratives. Respondents suggested various elements be added to the narratives such as the relative role played by GONGOs and a review of the economic environment within which NGOs are operating. Respondents also suggested that the Editorial Board allow the narratives to be longer so that more detail and explanation can be provided. A final suggestion was to present the narratives in point/counterpoint fashion or include minority opinions to better reflect panel debate rather than forcing every issue into a bland consensus.

The interviews also included an explicit question for respondents on the importance of continuing to include for Northern Tier countries (which no longer receive USAID assistance) in the Index, as this is a question USAID is considering. Almost 70% of respondents said they did think it important to keep the Northern Tier countries as part of the report, with many indicating that the NT countries are a particularly valuable model for other countries on what a more advanced NGO sector might look like.

## Findings on Process for Creating the Index

Many of the interview respondents chair NGOSI panels and they offered considerable feedback on how the process for creating the Index could be strengthened.

One particular set of issues involved questions of timing, timeliness and frequency. Panel Chairs expressed concerns about how panel meetings are timed in the year and some confusion about whether the timeframe of analysis is supposed to be the calendar year or US federal fiscal year (Oct-Sep). With panel meetings typically held in October, respondents indicated that things that happen in November and December are lost and suggested that panel meetings be shifted to a late Jan-Feb timeframe instead.

Respondents also expressed their disappointment and confusion at the long delay between panel meetings and publication of the report, which is sometimes 9 months or more; several said that this meant that the information was already somewhat outdated when it was published.

In terms of the frequency with which the NGOSI is undertaken, a strong majority (72%) of those interviewed said it was important to keep the Index annual as any less frequent publication would risk missing significant changes since the situation is so dynamic in many of these countries.

Another process related issue of concern to respondents is the question of who coordinates the panel. A few respondents indicated that they think it is preferable for domestic partner organizations to coordinate the NGOSI process in order to increase local ownership. A second concern about panel leadership related to conflicts of interest. In several cases referenced in the interviews, the partner organization coordinating the panel is also implementing USAID civil society programming in that country and has performance indicators based on the NGOSI. While respondents indicate that efforts are made to keep the NGOSI process separate from the civil society program, the conflict of interest was still considered an issue.

The question of who sits on the panels was also raised by respondents. Including public officials was seen as a way to help increase the perceived legitimacy of the panel's findings, though there was confusion about whether it is appropriate to include government representatives. There was also discussion of the value of including a wide range of different types of NGOs on the panels though it can be difficult to reconcile the very different perspectives of NGOs focused on advocacy and NGOs focused on providing services. Finding money to cover travel expenses so that NGO experts based outside the capital could participate was an additional concern.

Respondents also provided feedback around the issue of training for panel members, something currently handled independently by each Panel Chair. Most take pains to ensure that the initial materials and guidance sent out to panelists are as clear as possible, typically by including information in the cover letter that accompanies the packet of materials. Across 29 countries, preparation of these materials represents a great deal of duplicated effort. Panel Chairs also spend time at the beginning of panel meetings providing training and indicated that additional support, particularly in terms of guidance and examples of how different situations should be scored would be helpful. Most Panel Chairs felt that more needed to be done in terms of training, both for the panel members and themselves as Panel Chairs. An online forum where Panel Chairs in different countries could interact and post questions was suggested.

A final issue mentioned by Panel Chairs related to their interactions with the Editorial Board. Many of those interviewed indicated they appreciated the difficult task of the Editorial Board, however confusion over some Board questions back to the Panels and concerns over Board changes to the scores were noted.

Throughout the interviews, Panel Chairs shared numerous tips and techniques they use to effectively manage the panel process, particularly in terms of the types of materials they provide to panel members in advance and they way they compile the initial questionnaires completed by panelists in advance of the panel meeting itself. They also offered suggestions for improving the process including holding periodic conferences where Panel Chairs can share ideas and USAID soliciting feedback from panel members on a regular basis such as through a brief online survey after the process concludes each year.

## Conclusions from the Interviews

The interviews provided significant information regarding who uses the NGOSI and how, along with insight into users' views of methodological and process issues related to creating the Index. Interview data showed that the NGOSI is a valued tool in the niche community it currently serves. Its main use is to inform respondent's thinking about the NGO sector, and on a more limited basis, to support other specific programmatic and managerial uses such as program planning, making funding allocations, annual reporting, M&E and starting dialogue with stakeholders.

Respondents believe that the Index Report has potential to be useful in broader ways to broader audiences as well and several suggestions emerged to improve outreach, including many that would be relatively easy to implement. While respondents also suggested ways in which the methodology could be tightened, the majority of respondents felt that the methodology renders the Index "accurate enough to be useful," and is not a major barrier to increasing usage. Respondents also identified a handful of concerns and issues related to the process that is used to create the Index report each year, and again, while some incremental improvements were suggested, the sense was that the process does currently work fairly well.

Interview findings show that the NGOSI is viewed as a solid and helpful tool, but one that has a good deal of additional potential that could be realized with some additional focus. Most improvements that were suggested require more in terms of leadership and coordination than they do in terms of funding. Respondents indicated that questions of how to increase usage might best rest on a thoughtful and full articulation of the intended purpose and audiences for the NGOSI and that decisions on which suggestions for improvement should be implemented should rest on this foundation.

# BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

The NGO Sustainability Index [NGOSI] was developed in 1997 as a tool to assess the relative strength and sustainability of the NGO sector throughout Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia. Covering seven interconnected dimensions, the annual study combines a narrative with a numerical set of indicators to track sectoral progress and challenges in a given country and to provide for comparison on a sub-regional and regional level. It currently covers 29 countries of Europe and Eurasia.

On an annual basis, USAID works with its field missions and their partner organizations to bring together a set of civil society actors in each country to serve as an expert panel evaluating their sector based on the NGOSI methodology. In some countries the panels are coordinated directly by USAID mission staff that serve as Panel Chairs. In other countries, the work is contracted out to a partner organization, either a domestic NGO, often an umbrella NGO focused on broader NGO issues, or an international NGO currently implementing a USAID-funded project in the country. As USAID involvement has been phasing out in Eastern Europe, countries that no longer have USAID missions are all served by domestic NGO partner organizations. Even many countries that still have USAID missions are served by partner organizations since the time burden of coordinating a panel can be substantial. Panel findings provide the basis for each country's narrative chapter and numerical scores which are then finalized in conjunction with a Washington-based Editorial Board comprised of technical and regional experts.

The NGOSI was initially designed as an internal USAID tracking instrument to monitor the dynamics of NGO sector sustainability. Over time, the role of NGOSI has expanded and it has become a tool to inform a broad policy and development community internationally and in the countries of focus. The Index has also evolved in terms of coverage and scope.  Starting with a focus on 17 countries and five dimensions of NGO sustainability, it has since expanded to include 29 countries and seven dimensions.

The current dimensions of the NGO Sustainability Index are:
1. Legal Environment
2. Organizational Capacity
3. Financial Viability
4. Advocacy
5. Service Provision
6. Infrastructure
7. Public Image

The current list of 29 countries measured by the NGOSI in Europe and Eurasia includes:
1. The Northern Tier: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia.
2. The Southern Tier: Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia
3. Western Commonwealth of Independent States (W-CIS), and Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine
4. Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

Over the years there has been no systematic evaluation done to track the use of the Index Report. To better understand the types of users and how they use it, USAID commissioned a study to explore usage among anticipated target audiences. The study was carried out by a research team from Management Systems International [MSI] during August-September, 2010. This report presents the findings of that study.

# STUDY APPROACH

Study efforts focused on better understanding who is using the NGOSI, how it is being used and how usage could be improved. A secondary focus was on understanding any audience concerns with the quality of the methodology or the process by which the NGOSI is created each year.

The study used a semi-structured interview protocol administered to 32 individuals representing the types of audiences likely to be familiar with the NGOSI.[2] This method was selected in order to obtain the broadest range and depth of data in the brief period of time allotted for data collection.

## The Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Development of the semi-structured interview guide was based on answering the main questions posed in the overall evaluation: who uses it; to what purpose; how can this use be increased; and perceptions of quality. While primarily comprised of open-ended questions, the interview guide also included five (5) close ended questions, in order to allow for some quantitative analysis. As a whole, the interview questions were designed to gain deeper understanding of why audiences viewed the NGOSI in particular ways. A copy of the semi-structured interview guide can be found in *Appendix A*.

The interview guide was tested during the first series of interviews and was slightly modified twice based on experience during these interviews. Overall content was not significantly changed, but sequencing of the questions and probes was modified in order to streamline the guide and the conversations.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted by two MSI consultants in equal measure. Potential respondents were contacted by email to introduce the study and request their participation and interviews were conducted verbally via telephone or Skype and typically lasted 30-60 minutes. The consultants used a standardized protocol for interviewing and creating interview notes and were in frequent contact to ensure consistency of approach.[3] With one consultant based in Europe and one in the US, the interviewers were able to easily engage with respondents based in time zones from Central Asia to the US Both interviewers undertook interviews across all organizational categories and geographic regions, however a higher number of interviews for Central Asia went to the Europe-based interviewer and those that were DC-based to the interviewer in the US due to practical scheduling considerations.

Findings were synthesized and discussed in a workshop with USAID staff in early September, prior to finalization of this report.

### Selection of Interview Respondents

Selection of the universe of possible interview subjects was intentionally broad. In consultation with USAID, four categories of respondents were identified based on anticipated knowledge and/or use of the NGOSI; these included: 1) Washington DC based United States Government (USG) officials (primarily USAID as well as the State Department); 2) NGOSI Panel Chairs from USAID missions, 3) NGOSI Panel Chairs from Partner Organizations; and 4) donor organizations/foundations, NGOs, and academics

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[2] Additional research work was conducted directly by USAID during the same period to complement this study's efforts. USAID undertook a literature search and an online survey of USAID staff stationed in both Washington DC and the field. Findings from those efforts were retained internally at USAID and are not part of this report.

[3] Data collection deviated from this protocol on two occasions: for the first case, a respondent in Central Asia had such a bad phone connection that it was not possible to speak with her effectively and she volunteered to send written answers to the questions. And in a second case, a respondent unfamiliar with the NGOSI asked to postpone part of the interview until she had time to review the NGOSI in more detail, so her interview was conducted in two parts.

working in the Europe and Eurasia (E&E) region who might be in a position to find the NGOSI useful in their work ("Interested Organizations").

Selection of individuals for semi-structured interview from within the categories included geographic considerations. Approximately 3-4 Panel Chairs (USAID and/or Partner) were targeted from each of the four geographical regions of the Europe & Eurasia region: Northern Tier (NT), Southern Tier (ST), W-CIS and Caucasus (W-CIS/CAU), and Central Asia (CAR).

Selection of representatives from Interested Organizations focused on a collection of US and European donor organizations, including foundations, US NGOs working in the E&E region, E&E region local NGOs such as think tanks, and academics that had been identified as likely having a familiarity with the NGOSI. One of the US NGOs selected is currently the implementer of a USAID-funded program in the region, but is not involved in preparing the NGOSI.

The goal for the semi-structured interviews was to obtain at least 30 interviews. Given the short time frame and attempts to have as broad and deep sample as possible, this number was agreed upon as a realistic target for respondents. Initial thinking was that a significant number of interview requests would need to be sent in order to generate 30 completions. Interviews occurred over a four week period and by the end of the process, a total of 47 people had been contacted in three waves of interview invitations and 32 interviews were completed.

## Interview Response Patterns

The 32 completed interviews represented a 68% response rate. Their breakdown by category and region is shown in the tables below.

| RESPONDENTS BY ORGANIZATIONAL CATEGORY | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Completed | Contacted | Response Rate |
| Interested Organizations | 11 | 18 | 61% |
| NGOSI Partner Panel Chairs | 9 | 13 | 69% |
| USAID Mission Panel Chairs | 4 | 4 | 100% |
| Other USAID Field Staff[4] | 0 | 2 | 0% |
| USG-DC | 8 | 10 | 80% |
| *Total* | 32 | 47 | 68% |

Respondents from the Interested Organizations category tend to be less involved with USAID than NGOSI partners or USAID staff, and unsurprisingly Interested Organizations had the lowest response rate. Of the 18 Interested Organizations contacted, 3 declined to be interviewed citing unfamiliarity with the NGOSI as their reason, while 4 others did not respond at all to repeated requests. Response rates were robust for Panel Chairs from USAID Missions and USG-DC staff, but surprisingly 3 of the 13 NGOSI Partner Panel Chairs did not respond to repeated requests for interview and a fourth refused the interview.

| COMPLETED INTERVIEWS BY REGION | |
|---|---|
| NT | 3 |
| ST | 4 |
| W-CIS/CAU | 6 |
| CAR | 5 |
| US | 12 |
| Western Europe | 2 |
| *Total* | 32 |

In terms of regions, efforts were made to have a roughly even representation from the four regions that are the focus of the NGOSI and this was largely achieved, with the exception of Western-CIS/Caucasus where a higher percentage of interview invitations were accepted, leading to a higher number of interviews. Note that US based respondents

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[4] The category of Other USAID field staff was included only during the second wave of interview requests and scheduling considerations did not permit those interviews to take place.

include both USG-DC officials as well as individuals from Interested Organizations; Western Europe based respondents were all from Interested Organizations.

### Interview Respondent Familiarity with NGOSI

The majority of respondents said they were somewhat familiar or very familiar with the NGOSI. This is to be expected given efforts to target individuals who had some level of experience with the publication. Yet such results are not entirely predictable given that a number of individuals, particularly in the category of Interested Organizations were identified for interview partially as an exercise to map which organizations are familiar with the Index Report. Not surprisingly 100% of Panel Chairs said they are very familiar with the Index as well as the majority of USG-DC staff who were interviewed.

| | Interested Orgs (N=11) | NGOSI Partner Panel Chairs (N=9) | USAID Mission Panel Chairs (N=4) | USG – DC (N=8) | Total (N=32) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **HOW FAMILIAR BY TYPE OF ORGANIZATION** | | | | | |
| Not at All | 9% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 3% |
| Somewhat | 73% | 0% | 0% | 38% | 34% |
| Very | 18% | 100% | 100% | 63% | 63% |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

Familiarity, it should be noted, also is described by respondents in a number of different ways. Some have been regular readers and users of the Index for specific countries rather than involved with the study process, but of those interviewed, over half had been involved in some aspect of the NGOSI production such as serving on a panel or on the editorial board or as an outside reviewer, as shown in the table.

| EVER ON A PANEL | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 15 | 47% |
| No | 13 | 41% |
| Not on Panel, but Was on Editorial Board | 3 | 9% |
| Not on Panel, but Was Outside Reviewer | 1 | 3% |
| Grand Total | 32 | 100% |

# FINDINGS

Findings from the semi-structured interviews are organized by topic. Information related to the primary research question on how the NGOSI is used will be presented first, followed by findings regarding the methodology and process used for creating the Index.

## Use of the NGO Sustainability Index

Usage of the NGOSI was the primary research question of the study. The semi-structured interviews focused extensively on issues such as perceptions of usefulness, how it is used, which portions of the Index Report are used, perceptions of how others use the NGOSI and how usage might be increased.

## How the NGOSI is Used

Respondents were asked a multi-part question about how they use the NGOSI Report.  The sub-questions can be broken into two categories: use to be informed and use for specific programmatic or managerial purposes.

### Use to be Informed

Across all interview respondent groups, highest NGOSI use was for understanding the NGO sector in a specific country.[5] Almost equally high across all respondent groups was use of the NGOSI for understanding a specific country over time. Less frequent but still notable was use by respondents to compare countries and regions over time.

| USE TO BE INFORMED | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Percent Saying Yes** | **Interested Orgs. (N=11)** | **Partner Org. Panel Chairs (N=9)** | **USAID Mission Panel Chairs (N=4)** | **USG-DC (N=8)** |
| Understand NGO Sector in a Specific Country | 55% | 78% | 75% | 75% |
| Compare with Other Countries | 55% | 78% | 100% | 63% |
| Compare One Country over Time | 45% | 67% | 75% | 75% |
| Understand NGO Sustainability Across the Region | 45% | 67% | 25% | 50% |

### Specific Programmatic and Managerial Uses

Respondents were also asked whether they used the NGOSI for several specific purposes such as program planning, monitoring & evaluation, determining funding priorities and starting dialogues with stakeholders.

The interviews showed that specific use is quite varied amongst respondent groups. USAID Panel Chairs who work in the missions tend to use the NGOSI in their Annual Reports or PPRs and in program design. A lower percentage of USG-DC staff tend to use the NGOSI for any of the specific purposes listed; those who do use it reported that they use it to help determine funding priorities and in program design. Among Partner Panel Chairs, specific usage was also relatively low, though it was notable that a higher percentage of Partner Panel Chairs use it for M&E purposes (44%) than do USAID or USG respondents. Partner Panel Chairs were also significantly more likely than USAID or USG respondents to use the NGOSI to start dialogue with stakeholders. Not surprisingly, relatively low percentages of Interested Organization respondents report using the NGOSI for any of the specific use categories. Those that did report use indicated that they used it to inform program design, with a small handful also saying it plays a part in determining funding priorities. Specific uses within each group are more fully described below.

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[5] In the semi-structured interviews, if a respondent was based in an NGOSI country they were asked if they used NGOSI to understand their own country; if a respondent was not based in a NGOSI country, the question was modified to ask in relation to any specific country of focus.

*USAID Mission Panel Chair Interview Responses*

On the country level, USAID staff serving as Panel Chairs reported relatively high use of the Index for annual reporting, program design, and deciding funding priorities in the interviews. All the interview respondents are in countries where USAID has active civil society programming, and accordingly using NGOSI in these ways would appear to be in line with what might be expected.

| **USAID PANEL CHAIR SPECIFIC USE** | |
|---|---|
| **Percent Saying Yes** | **USAID Mission Panel Chairs (N=4)** |
| Use in M&E of Specific Program | 25% |
| Use in Annual Report or PPR | 75% |
| Use to Prepare Perf. Mgmt. Plan | 25% |
| Use in Program Design | 75% |
| Use in Determining Funding Priorities | 50% |
| Use in Starting Dialogue | 0% |
| I Don't Use | 0% |

However, even in highest use areas, applicability was sometimes more difficult than anticipated. One respondent described trying to use the NGOSI indicator for legal environment as part of the PPR and other annual reports. But the respondent realized that the score changes from year-to-year were based on many dimensions of legal environment, some of which their USAID programming did not cover; and accordingly they could not attribute them to their programs, so they stopped using the NGOSI dimension score for reporting.

*USG -DC Interview Responses*

The interviews showed lower percentages of DC-based USG staff reporting these types of specific use. Highest specific usage rate here was noted for deciding funding priorities. Here it was often less a case of funding specific countries, than in determining funding across sectors. As described by one respondent, use of the NGOSI informed thinking on civil society and priorities between media and civil society. Another described the

| **USG-DC SPECIFIC USE** | |
|---|---|
| **Percent Saying Yes** | **USG-DC (N=8)** |
| Use in M&E of Specific Program | 13% |
| Use in Annual Report or PPR | 13% |
| Use to Prepare Perf. Mgmt. Plan | 25% |
| Use in Program Design | 38% |
| Use in Determining Funding Priorities | 50% |
| Use in Starting Dialogue | 25% |
| I Don't Use | 0% |

Index as useful in establishing funding priorities between country x and y during interagency meetings.

These descriptions are illustrative of the manner in which the interviews showed how the NGOSI appears to generally be utilized in DC. Overall few interview respondents would say that the NGOSI was their definitive source of information on civil society in a given country or region. Rather, the commonly heard description was that the NGOSI was a tool to "inform their thinking" in a variety of different ways. Uses ranged from having the NGOSI as background reading for country visits or to give to colleagues or to more explicit use of the data as part of larger analytical and strategic planning documents; this included use in DG assessments and other country planning tools, as well as in roll out planning for an expansion of the NGOSI to African countries.

Use was also noted as a vehicle for a number of policy discussions, both interagency and with the governments of NGOSI countries. Here, for example, the emphasis was less on the specific details of the publication but for "substantiation of trends and substantiation of the fact that we have a problem and we need to make it a priority and need to advocate for this."

*Partner Organization Panel Chair Interview Responses*

The nine Partner Organization Panel Chairs who were interviewed included two representatives from US-based organizations that are implementing USAID civil society programs in the region and seven domestic NGOs. The two organizations implementing USAID civil society programs use the NGOSI in

ways that are similar to USAID missions. They tend to use the NGOSI data for program design and funding priorities and planning. One implementer for example, described how they use the NGOSI framework to ensure that they were covering all areas of programming that were needed by the NGO sector in their country. Similarly, they looked at the findings to identify where more program emphasis might be needed, in this case putting more funding emphasis towards public awareness programming.

However, one problematic use noted by both these partner organizations was the conflict of interest posed by the fact that they coordinate the development of the NGOSI and also serve as implementing partners for a USAID project where the NGOSI scores are part of the PMP. [This issue is discussed further in a later section].

| PARTNER PANEL CHAIR SPECIFIC USE | |
|---|---|
| **Percent Saying Yes** | **Partner Org. Panel Chairs (N=9)** |
| Use in M&E of Specific Program | 44% |
| Use in Annual Report or PPR | 22% |
| Use to Prepare Perf. Mgmt. Plan | 22% |
| Use in Program Design | 44% |
| Use in Determining Funding Priorities | 22% |
| Use in Starting Dialogue | 44% |
| I Don't Use | 0% |

The domestic NGOs who are the other NGOSI partner organizations use the NGOSI less often than the two organizations who implement USAID projects, though in some cases a few have found interesting and creative ways to use it. One organization has adapted the NGOSI methodology to serve as an NGO organizational diagnostic tool that can be used to assess an individual NGO's capacity. Similarly, another organization in Central Asia uses the NGOSI methodology to inform and guide the annual internal assessment of her own organization.[6]

Another Panel Chair indicated she uses the publication as an integrated part of her organization's various programs. The NGOSI serves as a basis for the organization to highlight domestic priorities in the media and policy circles and as a mechanism for convening civil society actors and their supporters around programming priorities. She said her organization is also expanding into multi-country programming and has used the NGOSI to begin to understand the NGO sector in the countries to which they are expanding.

One thing to highlight here is that all three of the domestic organizations described above which are undertaking these creative uses have been leading the NGOSI for several years in their country and have a multi-year relationship with USAID. Their high familiarity with the Index combined with having the time to test how to use it in their own work have probably resulted in higher use.

Also worth highlighting is the example of NGOSI use for expanding into multi-country programming outside of their country. As more partner organizations look to share their experience or develop multi-country approaches to problems, this use of the index could conceivably grow.

*Interested Organization Interview Responses*

| INTERESTED ORGANIZATIONS SPECIFIC USE | |
|---|---|
| **Percent Saying Yes** | **Interested Orgs. (N=11)** |
| Use in M&E of Specific Program | 0% |
| Use in Annual Report or PPR | 9% |
| Use to Prepare Perf. Mgmt. Plan | 9% |
| Use in Program Design | 36% |
| Use in Determining Funding Priorities | 18% |
| Use in Starting Dialogue | 9% |
| I Don't Use | 27% |

The category of Interested Organizations included US and European donor organizations, US NGOs working in the E&E region( including one currently implementing a USAID project in one of the NGOSI countries, but not involved in the development of the Index), E&E region local NGOs, and academics. The interviews showed this group had the least amount of specific use across all use sub-categories. Most common usage here

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[6] A USAID Panel Chair also indicated that several NGO resource centers in a W-CIS/CAU country also use the methodology as a basis for assessing sustainability of the NGO sector in specific regions of their country.

was to assist in program design. But it should be noted that most respondents described this use in terms of a general resource, and one of a number of resources that they use. These respondents were generally engaged in the country or region already and had their own methods of collecting information and receiving information about the NGO sector, either as donors, program implementers or researchers. For this group of respondents, the NGOSI served as a background reading tool that was used when needed. As described by one such respondent in relation to annual reporting, "a few ideas from it may percolate and find their way partially into other work of ours, one step removed." In addition, one of the Interested Organization respondents had used the NGOSI previously as part of a PMP for a USAID project for which she was Chief of Party.

For others in this group, the quality and or breadth of coverage of the NGOSI partly dictated it use (or lack of use: 27% indicated no use). One foundation respondent expressed accuracy concerns that resulted in less use than might otherwise be the case. He specifically questioned a number of comparative scores for his region of focus and also questioned why he or someone with his cross-country vantage point had not been part of the consultation process to validate the scores.

> I wouldn't say that I've read it cover to cover. We use it more as a reference document. We pick it up and try to look at information about a specific country or specific issue like legal environment or other issue around which we are programming." *US Foundation*

One of the respondents previously unfamiliar with the study said that information presented in the Index was welcomed as method for receiving a check on anecdotal information for a region that she still did not know well.

> When I read about one NGO (in the 2009 report) and that it is described as a GONGO, it is interesting to get the details, particularly since we are thinking about working with them. It helps me put this in perspective and to also help plan how we might do things. The problem with having a representative in country is that they might get too adapted to the circumstances and this (the index) in this case is a tool to get information for us to better 'control' our office. (*European foundation; previously unfamiliar with the NGOSI*)

Specific academic use was difficult to gauge partly due to the small number of academics who were interviewed. Efforts to engage with more academics were not successful, but feedback did provide some insight into scholarly use in the field. The three academic respondents who were interviewed indicated that they had reservations about using the NGOSI for scholarly purposes because, in their opinion, it is too general and the cross-country comparability issues render the scores less reliable. They did report some limited use for academic purposes however. One of the academic respondents mentioned referencing the NGOSI in an article on social capital last year in CAR. Another practitioner noted using the NGOSI data as part of her scholarly articles in a NT country. A third noted hearing references to the NGOSI in several academic conferences in CAR.

*Advocacy Use*

One of the distinct areas where interview respondents indicated that use was generally low was in the use of the NGOSI as an advocacy tool. Several respondents expressed interest in using it more for this type of purpose. Here interview findings showed that current use of the NGOSI to 'start a dialogue with stakeholders or policymakers' was markedly higher amongst Partner Organization Panel Chairs than by USAID Mission Panel Chairs. This was true for both types of partner organizations -- international organizations implementing USAID civil society programs and domestic NGOS. Respondents put forward examples of how they use the NGOSI to engage stakeholders: one partner organization in W-CIS/Caucasus used the publication as a general framing document for their engagement with the government. Others describe using the publication for general issue awareness and dialogue within civil society and policy makers. For example, one NT country respondent described using the NGOSI data to engage certain parliamentarians and civil society actors on specific issues.

Others stressed the advocacy potential. One ST Partner Panel Chair said that they were not currently using it for advocacy, but that they could plan to use it to engage the government if, for example, financial viability trends worsened.

In contrast, no USAID Mission Panel Chairs responded that they had explicitly used the NGOSI for dialogue within their country, even as several noted that it could be useful. One respondent suggested that if the Index Report would include recommendations on how a country could "improve" next years' rating, it would be useful for both civil society and for showing to the government as something that they need to "act on." Another noted that they had not directly used it, but that they reference it in some of their dialogue with civil society and the government. A third noted that dialogue over the NGOSI with their government would be uncomfortable at this point since no government officials had been part of the panel review process.

*Interview Responses Identify an Unanticipated Use*

Finally, one area of use that was not part of the question sub-categories, but heard in many of the interviews was the usefulness of the process of gathering, evaluating and engaging in the NGOSI analysis itself. As described by one USAID Panel Chair. "The Index was one of the rare times during the years when we didn't have civil society programming that I had the opportunity to hear opinions of others." A Partner Panel Chair describes the process of coming together as a "useful time to evaluate ourselves." Another Partner Panel Chair explained that the focus group process is the most important element of the whole process for them as they use the information and ideas for their own work beyond what makes it into the report.

## Which Parts of the NGOSI are Used

The NGOSI Report includes several components which have been generally consistent in recent years. These sections include an introduction and executive summary, sections that describe the seven dimensions of NGO sustainability and the scoring methodology, a section of topical articles on NGO trends in the region, country reports for each of the 29 countries, and a compendium of the statistical data with data from previous reports. Each country report includes scores for each of the dimensions of NGO sustainability, an overall sustainability score, and a narrative that describes changes in the past year for each of the dimensions. The interview guide included questions about which parts of the NGOSI respondents find useful, with findings described below.

### Narrative

The interviews showed that component usage to some extent corresponds with how one uses the publication. Given that a majority of the interview respondents used the publication for understanding their particular country, it is not surprising that most focused on the narrative component of the publication. While some criticized the depth of the narrative, most felt that in comparison with other sections of the publication the narrative was the most useful for their needs. In particular, respondents valued the narrative for offering descriptions of the "trends and nuances" behind the scores.

### Scores

Interview respondents indicated that numerical scores were the second most valued section. But here it should be noted that few used the numerical scores without the narrative. As one respondent described, "they are inseparable…the score without the narrative does not tell you much and good illustrative examples are very helpful."

For those interview respondents that used numerical scores, they served as a summary, not as a replacement of the narrative. "The scores are useful. They are good shorthand. You can give 5 numbers in a table and capture what would otherwise take 5 paragraphs of writing." Others mentioned the fact that

the scores were useful for correlating with different indices and indicators such as the IREX Media Sustainability Index.

Partner organizations in particular highlighted the fact that host country governments often care little about anything but the score. Having this score, which they then try to link to the narrative, accordingly gives them a way to catch and keep government attention.

Other respondents indicated they found the scores useful in serving as data for charts or graphs to use in presentations about NGOs in the region.

### Executive Summary and Methodology

Only a few respondents commented specifically on other parts of the NGOSI.  Of those that did, several indicated that the executive summary was very helpful for them to get a broad overview. Similarly, use of the methodology overview was indicated as beneficial for those that were relatively new to the NGOSI. However it was noted that a summary of the methodology needs to be part of all sections of the document in order for those just downloading individual country reports to have the needed information.

### Topical Essays

The topical essay section also garnered some positive feedback from respondents. According to USAID respondents, the essays were designed to bring attention to emerging trends. And in some cases this appears to have worked. One Partner Panel Chair identified specific essays that he had found interesting or used in his own work; these included the 2009 essay on the financial crisis and an earlier essay on GONGOs.[7] Others commented that the topical essays have provided grounding to their own thoughts on a particular trend and in some cases momentum to begin tracking a trend. Mentioned here were the essay describing the 1% tax rules to fund civil society and the 2005 essay on legal barriers to civil society, which now has its own policy community in USAID. One respondent suggested that the topical essays are of high enough quality and the topics of great enough interest that they might be better placed as a stand-alone article outside of the NGOSI publication in order to garner more readership and attention.

## Competing Sources of Information on NGO Sustainability in the Region

Interview respondents were asked about other sources of information they use to understand NGO issues in the country or region that they work in or on.  Overall, the NGOSI does well in comparison to other sources of information used by respondents.

In the interviews, Freedom House Nations in Transit (NIT) and Civicus Civil Society Index (CSI) reports were the most often cited other publications used by respondents to understand the NGO sector.  A few also mentioned the IREX Media Sustainability Index and Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI). However for Freedom House, a few respondents noted that the section on NGOs is less detailed than the NGOSI. For Civicus several noted that the report is more comprehensive, but that it is published significantly less frequently and does not cover all countries. As described by one respondent, "Civicus gives a much more long term perspective; NGOSI is like a strategic strike."

Others said that they also use various reports from domestic organizations and a number of country specific reports to follow the sector, as well as local media and ad hoc conversations with individuals working in the field. A general theme among many was the lack of any other consistent and detailed NGO and multi-country focused publication that is truly comparable to the NGOSI.

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[7] In relation to the 2009 essay, the respondent even noted that he contacted the author to correct what he believed was an error in the essay about his country.

## Interview Respondents Perceptions of How NGOSI is Used by Others

The interview guide included questions to gauge knowledge and use of the Index Report by other individuals or organizations. While the data gathered with these questions is all-second hand, some picture of usage and knowledge can be discerned.

### Knowledge in NGOSI Focus Countries

Overall knowledge of the NGOSI in NGOSI countries of the E&E region was considered low by interview respondents. Many cited knowledge of the NGOSI in the immediate NGOSI panels and NGO circles; a few mentioned a slightly wider circle including donors and some government officials, but few thought that a broader population was familiar with the Index. Even in NT countries where outreach has been more focused, awareness beyond a set niche is low.

> There are a few hundred people who by now have participated in the focus groups, so they have definitely heard about it… then there are people who read our press releases and usually like congratulate us for that score… so there is some kind of awareness, but not very wide (NT Partner Panel Chair)

However several respondents noted that their governments in principle pay attention to such comparative indices and reports.  This seems to happen in one of three ways:

- NGOSI partner organization presents the Index to the government – as is the case now only in a few countries
- Media covers the publication of the Index or picks up the Index as an easy model to compare against neighbors
- The government or its institutions uses the Index order to potentially 'manage' the impacts of the NGOSI in their country

Examples of the latter from Russia are particularly interesting. Use by the Federal Public Chamber and by the Ministry of Economics as an indicator to track government sponsored NGO development were noted as some but not necessarily all the ways that the government had engaged with the Index.

For a number of the countries, discussion also focused on how the European Union (EU) might use the report either for funding or policy priorities. There is very little evidence from these interviews to suggest much EU usage. ST respondents noted that they had given the report to EU officials and even seen the NGOSI referenced in at least one official Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) report, but overall use is unsystematic and mostly based on personal efforts by the NGOSI Panelists.

> "In relation to EU officials, I think that it is really only paid attention to if there has been a really bad critique and the government has done something wrong. But for EU officials in general, perhaps it is used by them only if they know the sector well," (NT Partner Panel Chair).

No EU officials were identified for these interviews so it is not possible to discern official knowledge of the NGOSI, but attempts to engage with one EU bilateral partner (Matra) who refused the interview based on lack of knowledge suggest that awareness of the NGOSI is likely low.

In responding to the question about whether they knew of others who use the NGOSI, interview respondents also offered scattered references to use in various USAID and USG inter-agency discussions, and in a number of casual references to other foundation or partner organizations. Several respondents indicated they believe that the NGOSI has far greater potential use.

USAID and USG respondents particularly noted that while they use the publication, they don't see it referenced to the extent that it could be within their respective agencies.  The fact that "no one at State is citing it…'' was offered as a statement of how things currently stand, but it could also be seen as an

opportunity for expanding the NGOSI user group. Within the State Department, Public Affairs sections, DRL's Program Office, and Desk Officers were among the anticipated audiences of interest.

## Current Outreach Processes

The interview guide included questions regarding current outreach efforts for the NGOSI. According to interview respondents, NGOSI dissemination and outreach has been relatively ad hoc to date. Respondent descriptions of dissemination suggest that the publication is getting around within foundations and organizations, in USAID and somewhat within the countries of focus, but it is mostly circulated only to close colleagues. Dissemination and outreach have not been actively pursued by many of the partner organizations that were interviewed. Press releases are generally issued in DC for the launch of the publication, but these are not sent to partner organizations.

Several things stand out from respondents' discussion of outreach issues.

### Dissemination

Overall, neither USAID nor non-USAID partner organizations reported investing much time in the dissemination of the NGOSI. Several said they distribute at least a few hard copies to panelists or immediate colleagues. However, distribution of hard copies appears to be somewhat problematic. Two Partner Organization Panel Chairs indicated problems with receiving hard copies from USAID. Another partner organization indicted that getting a timely and adequate supplies of books is a concern.

For those that had received hard copies, two partner organizations described circulating copies to libraries and universities. Several noted efforts to get copies to other donors in their countries and in at least one case to government officials. In one case, a USAID Panel Chair in the Southern Tier recounted how a Western European country Embassy called up asking specifically for a hard copy though previous engagement with that country on civil society issues had been, as the respondent described, little or nothing. Looking forward, one CAR partner organization described how they asked for more copies this year in order to begin to share with their government

Despite the interest in using the hard copies for increased in-country dissemination, no interview respondents noted having a broad mailing list; and none noted a formal dissemination strategy.

In relation to electronic dissemination, efforts, some interview respondents stated that they had included a description of the NGOSI on their website, of these only a few included a link to the actual report. In the few cases where electronic distribution of the report was mentioned, it was generally sent to an immediate set of panelists and or donors and those that ask.

### Outreach

Examples of outreach by partner organizations who were interviewed demonstrate that the NGOSI is currently being publicized, but only on a local and non-systematic basis.

- One partner mentioned that they had convened a round table
- Several partners undertook informal translations of their own country reports
- Two partners specifically mentioned doing a press release; both received some domestic media coverage.

Interview data show that outreach efforts to date have been driven by the initiative of individual USAID or Partner Panel Chairs. Lack of resources, lack of specific instructions and support or examples have all contributed to why few outreach efforts have been made at the country level. Lack of resources was cited by both USAID and partners as part of the problem, particularly lack of resources for local language

translation. Here some described efforts by partners to take on the translation themselves and/or contract it locally.

USAID Mission Panel Chairs also cited time and staffing constraints as problems. One respondent noted that she would like to do more, but simply could not manage more given all the demands on her time.

Lack of specific instructions was also cited by Partner Panel Chairs as a reason why they had not done more. One partner noted that he would have been done more if 'told to.' He also emphasized that since the end product is the property of USAID, he would not feel comfortable further publicizing the publication without USAID permission and instruction. Others were less concerned about copyright, but rather indicated the need for clear guidance, instructions and examples of how to go about outreach.

None of these challenges is necessarily insurmountable. Perhaps most critically here, all NGOSI partners who were interviewed expressed an interest and willingness to be more engaged in outreach and dissemination if USAID provided some guidance and assistance in this direction.

## Increasing Usage

Stepping back from the current system of outreach, respondents were asked how they would recommend increasing NGOSI usage. For the most part, respondents thought that increased usage was more dependent on improving the current system of publishing and outreach than it was on making major adjustments to the methodology or other substantial changes. Respondents did indicate specific methodology and content concerns which to some extent might affect outreach and also noted that earlier printing would make it more useful, but general impressions were that the current product is under-utilized primarily due to lack of awareness about the publication.

One very specific manner of increasing potential audiences is the option for local language translation. Translation was particularly stressed among interviewees based in W-CIS/Caucasus and CAR countries where English is less commonly used.[8] Feedback from NT and ST interviewees suggested that local translation was less important than increased outreach efforts in those regions, as knowledge of English is increasingly strong there. Several of the respondents who discussed translation indicated that just translating the country report and scores would be sufficient to allow broadened use in their countries.

| HOW TO INCREASE USAGE | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | Maybe | No | Not Answered | Percent Yes (N=32) |
| Translate | 16 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 50% |
| Print Earlier | 12 | | 9 | 11 | 38% |
| Improve Methodology | 7 | 1 | 10 | 14 | 22% |
| Improve Formatting | 4 | | 15 | 13 | 13% |
| Increase Outreach/Publicity | 20 | | 3 | 9 | 63% |
| Broaden Dissemination | 13 | | 7 | 12 | 41% |

Ideas for increased outreach focused around three issues:

- Efforts to publicize the report
- Efforts to create a conversation around the report findings
- Efforts to use the report as a specific advocacy tool

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[8] Several respondents in the West-CIS/Caucasus and CAR regions of the former Soviet Union indicated that while translating the Index Report into Russian would be helpful in their countries, it would be far preferable for translation to be into the local language instead.

Sending out local press releases, writing articles, and inviting press to a briefing on the NGOSI findings were areas highlighted as practical steps to improve NGOSI exposure. A number of Panel Chairs indicated that having a guide for such a rollout would help to clarify expectations and facilitate presentation of the publication. Greater publicizing of the report was also recommended in the US and within donor communities. Suggestions included writing editorials or articles to highlight findings. Donor respondents from Interested Organizations also suggested that more targeted dissemination of hard and electronic copies to their offices would allow them to distribute the tool to a wider set of potential users.

A second main set of suggestions focused on ways to increase dialogue about the report, thereby raising its profile. These suggestions differed in design. Some suggested a roundtable format for civil society to discuss findings after the report is published; others suggested that this format should also include government officials; at least one respondent suggested a more media-focused event facilitated by a local journalist and broadcast on television would be helpful. A few suggested taking such an event to the regions to expand exposure. Of particular note is the fact that six Partner Panel Chairs said that some type of event should be held in conjunction with publication rollout, though currently only one noted hosting such an event.

Finally, respondents also sought ways that the NGOSI could be used as a clearer advocacy tool. A few respondents explicitly suggested having action plans or recommendations as part of the Index Report, though other respondents stated they thought this would not be appropriate. Others focused their attention on how USAID could assist partner organizations to use the NGOSI for more advocacy activities. Here one partner organization expressed interest in a "joint presentation" of findings to their government. Others referred to interest in having USAID emphasize the policy and advocacy potential of the NGOSI both for civil society and governments in the countries of focus.

## Intended Purpose

Understanding and potentially expanding NGOSI user groups has at its base a question of who the actual intended audience is and what the purpose is for compiling the report each year. The relationship between actual use and intended use came up a number of times during interviews, and as a result, it became a discussion point for later interviews.

Confusion over the purpose of the NGOSI and its intended audience was notable among interview respondents in E&E countries. A number of respondents suggested that the NGOSI was a USAID tool and therefore not so relevant for them. Others saw it as something that might be useful for their work, but were unclear as to its intended use. Others noted that use had changed over time, even if the way the purpose is represented has not. For example a NT respondent noted that in the methodology description it states that the NGOSI is used by USAID to channel help to the specific countries, even though NT countries no longer receive USAID funds.

Interested Organizations also stressed that the objective of the Index was not clear. At least one foundation respondent noted that their organization does development while the Index focuses on policy, so the Index is less useful to them. Another foundation respondent in the region noted that the tool had seemed very 'internal' to USAID, but perhaps it could also be applicable for them.

USG respondents also had differing views. At least one USAID respondent suggested that primary use *was* and *is* for internal USAID purposes and that any other audience is secondary. Another USAID official said that the primary intended audience was not USAID, but rather civil society and government officials in NGOSI focus countries and academics.

These mixed response show that there is not a broadly shared understanding of the NGOSI target audience and the purpose for the Index Report; and this may be contributing to its limited use.

# Findings on NGOSI Methodology and Approach

As described previously, respondents were selected from among the audiences likely to be familiar with the NGO Sustainability Index. While most respondents were familiar with the Index Report, not all of them were familiar with the methodology, as shown in the table below.

| FAMILIAR WITH METHODOLOGY? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 20 | 63% |
| Somewhat | 6 | 19% |
| No | 3 | 9% |
| Not Answered | 3 | 9% |
| Total | 32 | 100% |

Panel members were, of course, all familiar with the methodology, but some USG-DC respondents, and particularly respondents from Interested Organizations tended to be only somewhat familiar or unfamiliar with the methodology.

Those interview respondents who indicated they were familiar or somewhat familiar with the methodology shared their opinions of it and in some cases, offered suggestions for how it might be improved.

| FAMILIAR WITH METHODOLOGY BY TYPE OF ORGANIZATION | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Category | yes | | Somewhat | | no | | not answered | |
| Interested Orgs (N=11) | 2 | 18% | 6 | 55% | 1 | 9% | 2 | 18% |
| Partner Panel Chair (N=9) | 9 | 100% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| USAID Mission Panel Chair (N=4) | 4 | 100% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| USG-DC (N=8) | 5 | 63% | 0 | 0% | 2 | 25% | 1 | 13% |

## General Views of Strengths and Weaknesses

There was strong consensus among interview respondents around the strengths of the Index Report, but a great deal of diversity in the types of issues identified as weaknesses. For strengths, interview respondents nearly universally cited the fact that the Index Report exists at all, given the lack of other available information on the sector; in particular, the fact that the Index has been produced annually over

> "It offers an in-depth summary of where civil society stands, both in a particular country and in comparison to similar countries that can inform activities and planning for donors and civil society."
> *Donor (Interested Organization*)

a long time frame in a way that allow for cross country comparisons is viewed as enormously valuable. Several respondents noted the methodological challenges involved in creating and managing this type of Index project and while acknowledging imperfections in the approach, expressed their appreciation for the NGOSI's continued existence, despite these imperfections.

Other strengths that were mentioned included:

- The Index provides a helpful summary and snapshot and adds context to other, more ad hoc, anecdotal sources of information;
- The exercise of civil society to self-evaluate is very helpful; and,
- Dimension scores generally match the areas within which assistance programs work.

Given the consensus around strengths, the divergence of opinions on weaknesses was somewhat surprising. Among the general types of weaknesses cited by interview respondents were concerns around the Index's subjectivity, the difficulty of generating robust enough information to support cross country comparisons, and the Index's lack of global coverage. Other

> "No matter how many participants [on the panel], it is still a collection of personal views rather than a reflection of society. My sense is that the report is less reflective of our country's civil society than it could be." *Respondent in CAR*

elements identified as weaknesses included the fact that the Index is published so long after the panels are held, concerns about the appropriateness of using it for M&E and a belief that the Index is not as widely utilized as it could be as it is not well known outside of USAID.

## Perceptions of Accuracy

Interview respondents were asked directly how accurate they believe the NGOSI scores to be; 85% responded that they believe it to be "good enough to be useful" or "very accurate." The remainder did not respond to the question or indicated they did not know. No respondents said that accuracy was so poor as to render the Index unusable.

| HOW ACCURATE? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very | 4 | 13% |
| Halfway between Very Accurate and Good Enough to be Useful | 1 | 3% |
| Good Enough to be Useful | 22 | 69% |
| Non Responsive/ Not Asked/Not Answered | 3 | 9% |
| Don't Know | 2 | 6% |
| Grand Total | 32 | |

Some of the interview respondents indicated that they understood that it is methodologically quite difficult to put together an Index like the NGOSI, and one noted that he generally takes ratings on democracy with a grain of salt given how difficult they are to construct. Several said that they think the methodology is quite good given the challenges inherent with the subject matter. Another respondent said that questions of accuracy are actually not terribly important for some users, particularly in the diplomatic world, where simply having the NGOSI contained in an official, published document offers enough credence to start an effective dialogue.

## NGOSI Methodological Concerns

The semi-structured interview methodology allowed for substantial exploration of respondents' perceptions of accuracy and confidence in the methodology. Interview respondents were able to go into a good deal of detail on those issues that concerned them about the methodology. A particular overarching issue mentioned by respondents was the concern that the methodology may not be applied as consistently as it needs to be, as it depends on the Panel Chairs maintaining a consistent and equally objective and rigorous scoring process.

Other concerns of interview respondents included:
1. Cross-Country Comparability: Greater Accuracy Across Time than Space
    a. Path Dependence and Enforced Lack of Volatility
    b. Rising Expectations Making Panels More Critical
    c. Political Bias in the Scoring
2. Accounting for Different Types of NGOs
3. Continued Relevance of the Underlying Paradigm
4. Weighting of Dimensions
5. Need for Review and Modification

### Cross-Country Comparability: Greater Accuracy Across Time than Space

A large number of respondents indicated a belief that the NGOSI is more accurate in terms of the longitudinal time-series of scores for a particular country than it is in terms of comparing scores across countries. They noted the

> "The scores are more comparable over time than over space; I do not think they can be very well compared between countries."
> *Domestic Organization Panel Chair*

inherent challenge of calibrating NGOSI ratings across countries; even with the use of experts on the Editorial Board who are familiar with the situation across the various regions, it can be tremendously difficult to ensure the accuracy of relative ratings across countries.[9] As noted previously in the section on Use, concerns about the lack of validity of the cross-country comparisons inhibit some users' willingness to give much credence to those comparisons, even if they appreciated the value of the country narratives and the relatively greater reliability of the time series within a particular country.

Several issues were identified that interview respondents said they thought added to the cross-country comparability challenges. These included: path dependence, dynamics of rising expectations and political bias in the scoring.

### Cross-Country Comparability, Path Dependence and Enforced Lack of Volatility

Several interview respondents identified dynamics within the methodology that they believe create path dependence issues, exacerbating cross-country comparability concerns. As currently designed, the methodology makes it very difficult for a panel to stray far from the ratings of the previous year's panel; scores are dependent on the precedent or "path" set by previous panels. The instructions to panel members indicate that in scoring each dimension, they are supposed to refer back to the previous year's score, and also refer to the description of what each rating level is supposed to reflect. There is also a practice of an enforced lack of volatility in the rating; the DC-based USAID Editorial Board requires that change of more than a few tenths of a point in a score be strongly justified and respondents indicated that it is their perception that changes beyond this amount are strongly discouraged.

> "I think that there is a conservative bias and I understand that USAID E&E likes to, as much as possible, limit radical swings . I think that misses a lot of variance and change, so within one country, certainly with our country, there were things that we felt warranted fairly substantial changes in 2006.  Our country in the early 2000s was a country that was very open and getting a lot of funding and 2006 was the beginning of the consolidation of its autocratic phase and if you look at the lines that basically things pretty much stayed the same from 2002 until now, [the score] has been straight lined and does not reflect the deterioration"  *USG-DC, former USAID Mission Panel Chair*

Thus panel members find themselves with a dilemma. If the baseline ratings made during the first year were too high or too low given the description of what each rating level is supposed to reflect, future panels are then trapped on that path and cannot adjust the score to re-calibrate it.  Said one respondent, "When people discuss in the panel they are already pressed by decisions made in previous years. For advocacy for example, it is difficult to change year to year, on one hand you cannot decrease the Index because the situation has not gotten worse. But perhaps it was too positive from five years back. This historical tracking problem makes it sometimes difficult."

Interview respondents who mentioned this issue indicated that they feel it is a more serious problem in some countries than in others. One Panel Chair says that she informally instructs her panel to base scores exclusively on last year's scores only and whether things have gotten better or worse, as there is no way to calibrate against the official definitions of what each rating level is supposed to reflect because they are so mis-calibrated after some scores in the early years of the Index were overly positive.

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[9] Two respondents who work for Interested Organizations that provide funding across several countries identified some particular cases where the NGOSI's ratings across countries appear to them to be mis-calibrated and fail their "sniff test".  The examples they cited included:
- Serbia vs. Kosovo, Macedonia and Bosnia; Serbia is viewed by the respondent as more similar to the other three countries than is demonstrated by its score.
- Slovenia scores worse than Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania and scores as equal to Kosovo; the respondent believes Slovenia scores should be higher.
- Georgia is scored lower than Kyrgyzstan which the respondent believes is not accurate.

Other respondents who noted this issue focused more on the enforced lack of volatility. They indicated that they feel the Index scores do not change enough to reflect how dynamic the situation is. One pointed out that in comparison to Freedom House's Freedom in the World (FiW) and Nations in Transit (NIT) index scores, the NGOSI scores showed much less range. All three indices use a 0-7 point scale, but on the NGOSI no 6s or 1s are typically seen, whereas Freedom House's indices use the full scale. Another noted that earlier in the life of the Index there was more movement and volatility of the scores; in early days up to 2 points change from year to year, and now typically there is only 1 or 2 tenths of a point change.

## Cross Country Comparability and Rising Expectations Making Panels More Critical

Another issue that interview respondents identified which contributes to the challenges of cross country comparisons relates to a dynamic several said they have observed where people in countries that have made a lot of progress have rising expectations and that tends to make panels more critical. "High performers have higher expectations," said one respondent. Another respondent indicated that he was surprised that scores for Hungary were not higher in recent

"10 years ago [our country] was very optimistic, after the end of communism, when we could have freedom to associate. But now they see the problems; it is not that the problems did not exist 10 years ago, but now they see them and they are not enthusiastic anymore. People do not remember older times so they are more demanding and more critical, because at the beginning people were happy to have the change, but now people got used to it. Democracy is taken for granted and they are more critical." *Panel Chair in Northern Tier*

years and thought that perhaps this dynamic was artificially depressing them. Respondents did not think it was possible to alter this dynamic significantly but one Panel Chair said that he works around it by focusing on the previous year's results, centering discussion on how the situation has changed and setting the score based on whether things are better or worse. The important role of the Editorial Board in counterbalancing this dynamic was also noted.

### Cross Country Comparability and Political Bias in the Scoring

Two respondents said that they believed political bias also colors the comparative scores of various countries. There is a "lacing of geopolitical views with the scores," said one. The other perceived a bias against Central Asia and in favor of the Caucasus, with Georgia appearing to be a particular darling: "the situation in Georgia is in a lot of ways worse than the situation in Kazakhstan; its just we [USG] like Georgia; they had a revolution." Concerns about this type of political bias were not specifically noted by any other respondents.

## Methodological Concern: Accounting for Different Types of NGOs

The NGO sector is quite diverse, and there are several different aspects of this diversity that interview respondents indicated they felt should be better captured by the Index. In particular, the question of how to properly reflect the emergence of government affiliated NGOs [GONGOs] was brought up by several respondents. While there was a topical essay in a recent NGOSI about GONGOs, how panels should handle them in determining scores for the NGOSI or compiling the country narratives is not clear.

"State social contracting is the biggest thing to happen to NGOs in the former Soviet Union in the past 15 years…. And this is ignored by the NGOSI. "*USG-DC*

Other issues related to the diversity of NGOs that were mentioned by respondents include urban/rural issues and the fact that NGOs are typically most highly concentrated in urban areas, while rural needs

tend to be served via less formal civil society and community based organizations. The overall distinction between NGOs and broader civil society was also mentioned by respondents, who indicated ambivalence about the Index missing out on unregistered civil society initiatives, but recognized that dealing with just registered NGOs already includes a huge degree of diversity. It was also noted that some types of registered organizations, such as trade unions, do not tend to be included as NGOs within the Index.

In reflecting on how best to approach this issue, a few interview respondents suggested that the types of NGOs and how they interact needs to be an added layer to the report. They indicated they would want to see a much more detailed picture of the different sectors within the NGO community, the different situations they face and how they do or do not cooperate.

## Methodological Concern: Underlying Paradigm

An additional concern that was noted by some interview respondents related to the paradigm that underlies the Index. One questioned whether it is reasonable to assume that sustainability should be the goal for the NGO sector in many of these countries, particularly with regard to NGOs that focus on advocacy in the area of human rights and democracy since they are unlikely to survive without some type of external funding. Another said that "since the original 1990s era hypotheses about NGOs becoming sustainable have been disproven," the question now is how to move forward in supporting civil society.

> "I think the organizing idea of sustainability probably made sense when it was created – policy makers, news media, etc… all focused on it, so it made sense. But that is one part of the equation and quality and effectiveness also need to be highlighted. [USAID should] mull over how to present it and get it updated to reflect these realities so that it does not feel stuck in 1990s Central Europe. " *US-based respondent from Interested Organization*

On a similar note, still another interview respondent suggested that the framing of the Index around the idea that countries are in the process of transitioning to democracy no longer makes sense throughout the region, as countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus do not appear to be on such a path. A fourth suggested updating the underlying paradigm so that it would focus more on whether NGOs have the ability to have quality impact. The general theme of these comments was that there is a need to rethink sustainability as the overall goal for programming that supports the NGO sector and instead focus on making social investments that have results as the goal. One respondent suggested that the "front matter" (executive summary and topical essays) in the NGOSI could be a forum for examining these questions and issues, and focusing on these issues would be a way to further strengthen that portion of the report.

## Methodological Concern: Weighting of Dimensions

Interestingly, one methodological issue that might have been expected, the relative weighting of the different dimensions that make up the overall score, was not on most respondents' radar screens.[10] Three USG-DC respondents mentioned that it had been discussed by USAID-DC in the past and shared their views of the pros and the cons of weighting dimensions equally vs. giving greater weight to dimensions viewed as possibly more important, such as financial viability. A fourth respondent who was formerly an academic also mentioned the issue and indicated she thought that some of the dimensions should be given greater weight. However, it is notable that no one who chairs a panel or is based in the region identified this as even a passing concern.

## Need for Methodological Review

Based on specific methodological concerns, six interview respondents said they think a full methodological review should be undertaken with a goal of "tightening up" the methodology. These

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[10] Currently, all seven dimensions have equal weighting and are averaged to reach an overall country score

respondents included both USG-DC representatives and non-USAID Panel Chairs. In advising such a review, these respondents echoed the issues mentioned earlier regarding the desire to move the Index towards a more objective basis where possible and the need to make sure the methodology is consistently applied. One respondent noted that such a review should at least help USAID identify the need to eliminate the conflicts of interest that occur when organizations that implement USAID-funded civil society programs and whose performance in implementing those programs is partially evaluated using NGOSI scores also chair the panels that put together the NGOSI.

> "I haven't had the time to really delve into the methodology; I'm hoping that E&E or others spend sufficient time tweaking to make sure it is appropriate." *USG-DC Respondent*

In conducting such a review, respondents suggested that the methodology be compared with that of other, similar indices and that a full assessment of how to strengthen the consistency with which the methodology is applied also be included.

## Modifications Suggested by Interview Respondents

Interview respondents offered a wide variety of suggestions on how specific details of the methodology might be strengthened. Some of these were directly related to the methodological concerns cited above, while other suggestions were driven by more minor issues related to details of scoring and creating the country narratives. Suggestions fell into five categories:

1. Suggestions on overall approach
2. Suggestions on broadening the vantage point to validate ratings and methodology
3. Suggestions to address the path dependency issue
4. Suggestions to strengthen scoring
5. Suggestions to strengthen the country narratives

It is important to note that at least two Panel Chairs mentioned having provided feedback and suggestions to USAID previously. They indicated that while they were thanked for sharing their ideas, no changes were made in response to this feedback which was discouraging and dissuaded them from making additional suggestions going forward.

## 1. Suggestions on Overall Approach

Most of the suggestions related to overall approach focused on increasing rigor, including tightening definitions of each rating level and tying them to more objective criteria so that scores would be less perception based. One respondent also suggested trying to triangulate information as much as possible, so that evidence for various ratings is drawn from a variety of sources, some of them quantitative or objective if possible. In contrast, another respondent suggested abandoning scores altogether and simply retaining the narratives as a way to get past the methodological challenges involved in scoring while retaining the value of the analysis and narrative portions of the report.

Other suggestions on overall approach included expanding the universe of countries covered by the Index, particularly to include more advanced western countries that could serve as role models for the Northern Tier.

## 2. Suggestions on Broadening the Vantage Point to Validate Ratings and Methodology

Several respondents suggested broadening the range of groups and individuals providing input on the NGOSI in order to validate the ratings and the methodology further. To help validate ratings, this would include pulling in more observers who have a vantage point across countries such as individuals who work for other donor organizations. Another suggestion was to hold town hall meetings with NGOs after the draft ratings are developed to gather additional feedback and validate the scores further. To help validate the methodology further and ensure it has the benefit of the latest academic thinking, one

respondent suggested that the NGOSI be better exposed to the academic community, through events like panels at the American Political Science Organization meeting or other opportunities for peer review.

## 3. Suggestions to Address the Path Dependency Issue

While lamenting the path dependency issue described previously, few of those who identified it as an concern were able to provide suggestions for how it might be addressed. One respondent did share two different options. The first option would be to identify the handful of countries with significant path dependency issues and use a more in-depth expert panel process to re-score those countries' ratings over the full time series of the Index using a standardized, calibrated understanding of the definitions for each rating level. While this would be a major effort, it would dramatically increase accuracy and eliminate the path dependency problem, while preserving the time series.

The other option that was mentioned would focus on improving the situation for countries trapped at the top or bottom of the scale by making finer gradations at the two ends of the scale to make it easier to score when one is close to the top or the bottom. To do this properly, one could convene a cross country calibration panel to review and revise descriptions based on experience in top performing, mid, and low performing countries. In addition to adding finer gradations at the two ends of the scale to make it easier to score when one is close to the top or the bottom, say by defining elements that must be present to obtain ratings to the tenth of a point, this would also improve the scoring reliability throughout all NGOSI countries.

## 4. Suggestions to Strengthen Scoring

Interview respondents offered numerous, detailed suggestions on how specific aspects of the scoring system could be strengthened. These suggested tended to focus on modifying or adding scoring dimensions or on adjusting the questions that underlie each sub-dimension. Most of the issues addressed in these suggestions are relatively minor and were not expressed as true "methodological concerns" by respondents. Rather they were typically offered as options for improving the details of the scoring process around the edges.

### *Altering Dimensions*

Several of the interview respondents who suggested modifying some of the scoring dimensions focused on the Infrastructure dimension. One felt that the Infrastructure and Organizational Capacity sections are somehow linked and perhaps need to be combined. Another said that the Infrastructure and Public Image categories overlap. While a third said Infrastructure and Financial Viability intersect and should be combined. These contradictory sentiments may indicate that the Infrastructure dimension merits revisiting and clearer definition.

A number of suggestions were made for new dimensions that might be usefully added to the Index. Some of these might be useful as actual categories, while others might be addressed just as well by ensuring they are included in the country narratives. Suggested additions include:

- External environment
- How NGOs fit into the country's political context and participate in political life (suggested by two different respondents)
- How NGOs fit into broader civil society
- How rural/urban dynamics affect the NGO sector
- How NGOs are using social and visual media (suggested since this had been added to the Africa NGOSI)
- Sub-dimension under Organizational Capacity on how well prepared NGOs are to contract with USAID or other donors

An additional idea shared by one respondent was that some dimensions tend to change more rapidly than others. Legal environment and infrastructure are slower to move; advocacy and service provision change faster. The respondent suggested that perhaps this should be accounted for in the Index.

One final comment from a Panel Chair in Central Asia was that her panel struggles every year to understand the 0-7 scale on which the scores are based. She indicated that the panel assumes that 0-7 reflects the way the US school system does things, but in her country, everyone's academic background makes them much more familiar with scales of 1-5 and they would prefer a more familiar, intuitive scale.

*Revisiting the Questions*

In providing suggestions to strengthen the questions that underlie each sub-dimension, interview respondents indicated their belief that the questions merit a fairly thorough review, either as part of the full methodological review described earlier, or as a stand-alone effort. Respondents stated that some questions are redundant and others are out of date, such as those focused on NGO resource centers. One Panel Chair also noted that her panel has traditionally had difficulty dealing with some of the multi- part questions, particularly where answers to the sub-questions are contradictory; she recommends that such questions be split up so that within each indicator questions are rated separately. Another respondent requested that the questions be revised to better take into account the fact that merely passing a law does not always mean it is fully implemented, such as by having separate questions on passage and implementation.

An additional issue mentioned by one respondent is that the Public Image dimension has questions that are difficult for civil society to answer; instead, external data is needed to determine the state of the public's image of NGOs. The respondent suggested that perhaps the dimension could be modified to focus on the question of whether NGOs have the internal capacity to do effective PR instead, viewing that as a topic that panel members from NGOs could comment on more knowledgeably.

Other, more detailed suggestions regarding the questions included requests to better define the following:

- Does service provision refer to the possibility of providing services or the types of services that NGO s provide?
- There are two kinds of advocacy relevant in the sector: a) advocacy for NGO sectoral issues like laws governing non-profit status and b) advocacy efforts undertaken by NGOs in support of specific public interest issues such as the environment. This respondent indicated that her panel is not sure which type of advocacy to score.
- Under financial viability how is tax income treated?

## 5. Suggestions to Strengthen the Country Narratives

Interview respondents also offered suggestions on how to strengthen the country narratives. It was noted that sometimes the narratives can be a bit dry and generic; some respondents suggested additional elements be added to strengthen them. For example, adding a section that discusses how independent the NGO sector is as a way of addressing the GONGO issue explicitly was suggested. Another possible addition would be a review of the economic environment within which NGOs are functioning, which would provide necessary context for better understanding financial viability and service provision dynamics. One addition mentioned by several respondents was a desire to include more statistics within the narrative: data on topics such as the portion of NGOs who are active and the proportion of NGO funding that comes from the government. Respondents recognized some of the comparability issues associated with including data collected differently in different countries, but felt that appropriate footnotes and explanations could be provided and that the value of the data would outweigh these concerns.

Other suggestions included a recommendation that the Editorial Board allow the narratives to be longer so that more detail and explanation can be provided; particularly if first drafts were allowed to be longer, it might reduce (though not eliminate) the need for Editorial Board questions back to panels about justifying scores. Text could then later be edited down if necessary. A second respondent also suggested the narratives be allowed to be longer, in this case to allow more analysis within the narrative, not just description.

A final suggestion that might represent a significant departure from the current approach was based upon one respondent's observation that there is actually a lot of contention and debate during panel meetings. He suggested that rather than focusing the narrative around a forced consensus, which by the nature of consensus becomes fairly bland, it would be preferable, and more informative, to present the narratives in point/counterpoint fashion, or at least to include minority opinions on key topics.

## Potential Modification: Eliminating Non-USAID Presence Countries

Interview respondents were asked a specific question regarding whether they believe it is important that countries in the Northern Tier (which no longer receive USAID assistance) continue to be included in the NGOSI, as this is a question USAID is considering.

| KEEP NORTHERN TIER? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 22 | 69% |
| No | 7 | 22% |
| Not Asked/Non Responsive | 3 | 9% |
| Total | 32 | |

Among interview respondents, 69% of said they felt it is important to keep the NT countries in the Index. A great number of them said that the NT countries are particularly valuable in serving as a model for

| KEEP NORTHER TIER, BY CATEGORY | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | | No | | No Answer | |
| Interested Organizations "(N=11) | 8 | 73% | 1 | 9% | 2 | 18% |
| Non-USAID Panel Chairs (N=9) | 8 | 89% | 1 | 11% | 0 | 9% |
| USAID Panel Chairs (N=4) | 2 | 50% | 1 | 25% | 1 | 25% |
| USG-DC (N=8) | 4 | 50% | 4 | 50% | 0 | 0% |

other countries on what a more advanced NGO sector might look like, and is a better model than Western Europe which is considered too distant and to have too dissimilar a history. Among the 22% who indicated it might be acceptable to drop the NT countries, there was a sense that they are more of a curiosity at this point and perhaps not as useful a model as others think since the paradigm of all countries being on the

same transition path is discredited.

Most of those interview respondents saying it would be ok to drop the NT countries were USG-DC staff. 8 out of 9 Non-USAID Panel Chairs and 8 of 11 Interested Organization representatives did not want the NT countries eliminated.

The breakdown by respondent location also shows that respondents located in the US viewed the possibility of omitting the NT countries more favorably than did those in the region. Some respondents indicated that the NT countries are of particular importance as an example for audiences in the West-CIS/Caucasus and Central Asia region which was

> "I do not know how much other organizations use this Index but on behalf of my own organization that is basically the only way I can get that kind of comparative overview of developments in these countries. The Index is very important in the sense of giving the continuous overview of the sector's development." *Partner Panel Chair in Northern Tier*

supported by the data; 83% of West-CIS/Caucasus respondents and 100% of Central Asia respondents favored keeping the NT countries in the NGOSI.

| KEEP NORTHERN TIER, BY LOCATION | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Yes | | No | | No Answer | |
| Northern Tier (N=3) | 2 | 67% | 1 | 33% | 0 | 0% |
| Southern Tier (N=4) | 3 | 75% | 1 | 25% | 0 | 0% |
| W-CIS/Caucasus (N=6) | 5 | 83% | 0 | 0% | 1 | 17% |
| Central Asia (N=5) | 5 | 100% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| USA (N=12) | 5 | 42% | 5 | 42% | 2 | 17% |
| Western Europe | 2 | 100% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |

# Findings on Process for Creating the NGO Index Each Year

The interview guide contained few explicit questions on the process for creating the NGO Index each year; however, as so many of the interview respondents chair NGOSI panels, they offered considerable feedback. Interview respondents who were Panel Chairs shared details of the approaches they take to managing the task of coordinating a panel and creating the narrative report and scores for their countries. Their comments reflected their vantage point on the front-lines of creating the NGOSI and the quantity and breadth suggest that soliciting their feedback on a more regular basis might provide helpful insights to continue improving and refining the process over time.

## Timing and Frequency

Interview respondents commented on three topics having to do with the timing and periodicity of the NGOSI:
1. Timing of Panel Meetings
2. Timeliness of the Release of the Report, and
3. Frequency with which the NGOSI is Undertaken

### 1. Timing of Panel Meetings

Several Panel Chairs who were interviewed commented on the timing of panel meetings. They are held in the fall, typically during October, but in some countries they were held last year during December due to some delays. Those who had held them during December felt that this was a difficult time of year to attempt to convene panels, given the demands of year-end reports and the holidays. Holding them during October also caused concern for some, as they believe the panel's ratings are supposed to reflect developments over the course of the entire calendar year and November-December can be a particularly active time in some countries, given their legislative and budget calendars. In contrast, one respondent said that from a practical point of view it is easiest to hold the panel meetings in September/October and then catch up on events at the end of the year rather than holding the panel later.

The vast majority of respondents, both Panel Chairs and USG-DC staff, indicated a belief that the NGOSI is supposed to focus on the calendar year rather than the fiscal year. One USAID Mission Panel Chair said she focuses her panel's work on the USG fiscal year (Oct-Sep). Interviewers also received other guidance from USAID-DC that the timeframe of analysis is intended to be the federal fiscal year; clearly there is confusion on this issue.

Other interview respondents indicated that the most important issue is to time the panel meetings around using the calendar year as the unit of analysis, and scheduling panel meetings accordingly, perhaps in late January or early February so that events occurring at the end of the calendar year can be taken into account. Individuals interviewed from Freedom House, which prepares similar indices, said that they hold their Freedom-in-the-World panels in November/December and try to release scores at a press event in January, followed by the published report 3-4 months later.

One respondent suggested shifting to a process that allows ongoing narrative updates to the Index online throughout the course of the year, wiki-style, with the panel then meeting once a year to validate and provide a more comprehensive update to the scores.

## 2. Timeliness of the Release of the Report

Numerous interview respondents indicated their disappointment and confusion at the long delay between panel meetings and publication of the report, which is sometimes 9 months or more. Several said that this meant that the information was already

> "I do not understand why it takes so long. Our reports are usually done by the end of October/November. I know there is an editing process, but it gets published only in August and then it is perhaps not that fresh to publish 2009 report near the end of 2010. It would be better if it were released more quickly." *Partner Organization Panel Chair*

somewhat outdated when it was published, making it less useful. Two respondents suggested consideration be given to releasing the scores earlier and then the report later, though one noted that Freedom House has been criticized for this practice since it means the narrative is dated by the time it is published.

## 3. Frequency

At USAID's request, both interview and survey respondents were asked a specific question regarding whether they believed it is important that the NGOSI continues to be published on an annual basis, as this is a question USAID is considering.

| KEEP ANNUAL? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | 23 | 72% |
| No | 7 | 22% |
| Not Answered | 2 | 6% |

The majority of interview respondents said that they do think it is important for the NGOSI to be published annually, but a sizable minority indicated that shifting publication to every other year might be adequate, particularly, said one Panel Chair, if other outreach efforts were strengthened to maximize usage.

Among those interview respondents who said they felt it was important to keep the NGOSI annual, several indicated that the situation is dynamic enough in their countries that to produce the report less than annually would miss significant changes. Others mentioned the value of the annual time series, which just gets more valuable over time, they said. One respondent said he never hears people asking for less frequent data.

> "Any less frequently would just make it less useful." *Western Europe Based Donor*

Among interview respondents, here was relatively little variance across categories of organizations regarding keeping the frequency annual. A slightly higher percentage of USG-DC staff were in favor of maintaining the annual schedule and a slightly higher percentage of Partner Organization Panel Chairs thought it might be acceptable to switch to an every-two-year schedule.

| KEEP ANNUAL, BY CATEGORY | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Category | Yes | | No | | Not Answered | |
| Interested Orgs (N=11) | 7 | 64% | 2 | 18% | 2 | 18% |
| Partner Org. Panel Chair (N=9) | 6 | 67% | 3 | 33% | 0 | 0% |
| USAID Mission Panel Chair (N=4) | 3 | 75% | 1 | 25% | 0 | 0% |
| USG-DC (N=8) | 7 | 88% | 1 | 13% | 0 | 0% |

## Process Concerns: Who Coordinates the Panel

Among interview respondents, five shared concerns about the issue of who coordinates the panels. One USAID Mission Panel Chair said that she would prefer to see the NGOSI prepared by a domestic partner organization instead so it was not seen as a USAID product. A USG-DC respondent said that she thinks the methodology is better when USAID contracts out with domestic partner organizations. Another respondent said he viewed the split approach of having USAID lead some and partners lead others as reflecting a lack of clarity as to ownership and purpose for the Index. He favored having NGOs in each country "own" the Index.

In three cases referenced in the interviews, the partner organization coordinating the panel is also implementing USAID civil society programming in that country and has performance indicators based on the NGOSI. Two of these Panel Chairs were interviewed and indicated they felt that this represented a conflict of interest, though in one case the Panel Chair emphasized that he takes pains to keep his role one of facilitating the process and not weighing in on the final scores. In neither case did the Panel Chair feel that USAID was concerned about the conflict. In the third situation, the USAID DG Officer co-chairs the panel with the organization implementing the USAID civil society program; that USAID panel co-chair was interviewed and also indicated that efforts are made to keep things as separate possible.

## Process Concerns: Panel Composition

Several interview respondents commented on panel composition issues. A particular issue of concern is that the panel be comprised in a way that is seen as valid locally, and some are not currently so comprised. In particular, there is confusion regarding whether it is acceptable to include public sector officials on panels; one Panel Chair whose understanding is that it is not appropriate to include government officials said that not doing so strongly limits the legitimacy of the panel's findings and prevents her from being able to use the NGOSI as an advocacy tool in her country

> "I feel uncomfortable approaching policymakers and sending them this Index, knowing that it has been prepared with no participation of government entities interested in NGO affairs. It is mainly NGO experts on the panel." *Panel Chair*

Other interview respondents talked about the value, and the difficulty, of including a wide range of different types of NGOs on the panels. Service providing NGOs have different perspective than advocacy focused NGOs. While including both is viewed as valuable, one respondent also noted that it can be difficult to reconcile the different perspectives. Another respondent talked about the value and importance of including NGOs from rural areas and smaller cities outside the capital, but indicated that it is difficult to find funding to cover travel expenses so this is not done very often.

In some countries, the one-panel model is replaced by a series of focus groups with NGO representatives and other experts and several focus groups are held in various locations. The Panel Chair from one country where this is sometimes done reported that in those years where they only hold one panel meeting, the results are not significantly different, particularly since efforts are made to ensure all voices are heard, so the value of doing holding more than one meeting is not that high in his view.

Another Panel Chair reported that he had recently started inviting a couple of Chiefs of Party from USAID Democracy and Governance programs to serve on the panel and their presence had proved quite valuable. Their international perspectives and familiarity with similar processes helped them serve as role models for other panelists on how to engage with the material, how to analyze and approach it, which lifted that burden from the Panel Chair's shoulders a bit.

Other interview respondents mentioned inviting other donors to sit on the panels.

## Process Concerns: Panel Training and Instructions

Panel chairs who were interviewed reported that little to no panel training is currently provided. Each Panel Chair handles this issue in his/her own way. Most take pains to ensure that the initial materials and guidance sent out to panelists are as clear as possible, typically by including information in the cover letter that accompanies the packet of materials. Many of the Panel Chairs reported that they spend time at the beginning of the panel meeting providing some informal training, particularly with an eye to calibrating scoring and ensuring panel members have a shared understanding of what each numerical rating is supposed to signify; they report that calibration along these lines can be quite difficult.

> "I don't know what the training looks like, but it needs to be rigorous."
> *Respondent from Interested Organization*

Most Panel Chairs felt that more needed to be done in terms of training, both for the panel members and themselves as Panel Chairs. One suggested an online forum where Panel Chairs in different countries could post notes and questions. "We have the same questions: what do you do with the outliers? Sometimes ratings are really high or really low from some panel participants. Also it would be good to discuss who should be on the panel, what is the best combination." Another Panel Chair suggested that it would be useful to include more explanation in scoring and give several examples, which was echoed by another who said there is a need for a clearer sense of overall scoring standards to give more validity to the report.

A few Panel Chairs noted that as the process has developed over the years and they have had some core panelists who have several years experience, the process has gotten easier. Still, even with improved seasoning and understanding on the part of the panels, one respondent said that sometimes confusion about the methodology is compounded when scores and the narrative at the end do not reflect the panel's consensus, but instead have been changed by the Editorial Board.

## Process Concerns: Editorial Board

Despite a few grumblings, most Panel Chairs who were interviewed indicated that they appreciated the difficult task of the Editorial Board and the valuable role they play, particularly related to editing text written by non-native English speakers and working to ensure scores are comparable across countries. Respondents also indicated that sometimes the questions asked by the Editorial Board can be helpful in getting the panel to clarify their findings.

In other cases, Panel Chairs reported that Editorial Board questions were sometimes difficult to understand, focusing on issues that seemed unimportant or were confusing to the panel. Panel Chairs were not always sure what to include in their responses to the Editorial Board since they believed the Board expects answers based on the panel discussion and sometimes specific issues the Board asks about were not covered in the panel discussion. There was frustration with questions being repeated and requests to clarify things that seem self-explanatory to the panel. One Panel Chair suggested that it would be helpful for the Editorial Board to provide more context for why they were asking particular questions; providing the reasoning behind asking about each issue might help to build better relationships and greater understanding of what the Editorial Board is seeking.

> "Sometimes their edits come back and the narrative is unrecognizable. Or they ask questions that are hard to understand, and thus hard to answer correctly. But in most cases I appreciate what the Editorial Board does " *Partner Organization Panel Chair*

Interview respondents did say that panel members are sometimes dispirited when the Editorial Board changes scores significantly and that sometimes good information is edited from the narrative because the Board cuts too much. As mentioned previously, there were also complaints about how long the editorial

process takes and the length of time between the panel meetings and publication of the final report, something which is viewed as the Editorial Board's responsibility.

One Panel Chair noted that in some years the Editorial Board is better than others and he had observed a really noticeable change in quality from year to year depending on who was staffing the Editorial Board.

One USG-DC official who has been a member of the Editorial Board noted that when partner organizations run the panels, they are less likely to push back on score changes made by the Editorial Board in comparison to USAID Mission Panel Chairs who do challenge those decisions more readily. It is not clear if this is because partner led panels tend to agree more with Editorial Board decisions or whether it is a result of the power differential that exists between USAID-DC and the NGOs that receive funding to coordinate the NGOSI in their countries.

## Tips/Best Practices for Handling Panel Process

Throughout the course of the interviews, Panel Chairs shared their lessons learned and tips on how best to coordinate the panel process.

Panel members are typically sent questionnaires to complete in advance of the panel meeting to help guide their thinking. Several Panel Chairs stressed the importance of making sure the cover letter that accompanies the advance materials is very clear.

One Panel Chair says he helps panel members better understand how to complete the questionnaire by including a copy of an exemplary questionnaire from a previous year as a model. Another mentioned translating the questionnaire into his country's local language to improve comprehension even though many panel members read English well. One Panel Chair said that he gives panel members an Excel version of the questionnaire that includes columns showing what was said the previous year and what the scores were so panel members see the history; panel members then complete their questionnaires directly in Excel which makes it easier for the Panel Chair to compile them in advance of the panel meeting. Another Panel Chair uses a blank questionnaire to compile questionnaire responses completed by panel members and then sends this compiled version out to panel members in advance of the meeting so they can see how their responses fit, or do not fit, with the rest of the group; he indicated that this helps to prepare panel members better for the discussion and helps them be more mentally prepared to shift their scores if needed.

In one country, the partner organization that coordinates the NGOSI monitors key events in the NGO environment during the year and keeps notes and media reports about them in a special file to reference during the analysis.

In another country, the Panel Chair noted that they were trying to overcome the financial challenge of funding travel for panel members from other regions by scheduling the panel meeting to coincide with another major meeting when many will already be in the capital.

## Suggestions for Improving Process

In addition to the tips provided above, several interview respondents offered specific suggestions for how the process for creating the NGOSI might be strengthened.

These included organizing a conference every few years for Panel Chairs to share ideas and having USAID regularly solicit feedback from panel members about the process, perhaps through a brief online survey every year after each country's narrative and scores are finalized.

Three respondents suggested that the process could be strengthened by holding session.ns where findings and scores could be shared with local stakeholders before being finalized. They said that this would legitimize the Index more in local eyes and allow for broader input than provided by the panel alone. It is not clear how such sessions would interact with the Editorial Board process however.

# CONCLUSIONS

The interviews provided significant information regarding who uses the NGOSI and how, along with insight into users' views of methodological and process issues related to creating the Index. Interview data showed that the NGOSI is a valued tool in the niche community it currently serves. Its main use is to inform respondent's thinking about the NGO sector, and on a more limited basis, to support other specific programmatic and managerial uses such as program planning, making funding allocations, annual reporting, M&E and starting dialogue with stakeholders. In general, a greater percentage of Panel Chairs reported using the NGOSI information for these types of specific purposes, while a lesser percentage of USG-DC and Interested Organizations did so. This is not surprising as Panel Chairs are all based on the ground in NGOSI countries, work in organizations which are closer to the front-lines of NGO programming and advocacy, and likely have more opportunity to use the NGOSI in these ways.

Respondents believe that the Index Report has potential to be useful in broader ways to broader audiences as well and several suggestions emerged to improve outreach, including many that would be relatively easy to implement. While respondents also suggested ways in which the methodology could be tightened and some recommended a full-scale methodological review, the majority of respondents felt that the methodology renders the Index "accurate enough to be useful," and is not a major barrier to increasing usage, though methodological improvements that increase confidence would not be unhelpful. Respondents also identified a handful of concerns and issues related to the process that is used to create the Index report each year, and again, while some incremental improvements around the edges were suggested, the sense was that the process does currently work fairly well.

Interview findings show that the NGOSI is viewed as a solid and helpful tool, but one that has a good deal of additional potential that could be realized with some additional focus. Most improvements that were suggested require more in terms of leadership and coordination than they do in terms of funding. Respondents indicated that questions of how to increase usage might best rest on a thoughtful and full articulation of the intended purpose and audiences for the NGOSI and that decisions on which suggestions for improvement should be implemented should rest on this foundation.

# APPENDIX A

## US Agency for International Development
## Study of Use of Non-Governmental Organizations Sustainability Index Report
## Discussion Guide

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**Background**

The US Agency for International Development [USAID] is conducting a study to explore *how the Non-Governmental Organizations Sustainability Index [NGO-SI] Report is used by different audiences.* Working under contract to USAID, our independent research team from the consulting firm, Management Systems International, is talking with representatives from organizations throughout Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to learn whether and how the Index Report is being used.  Our findings will be shared with USAID as they assess how to make the Index Report more useful.

We very much appreciate your taking the time to speak with us.  In our report, we will not identify any individuals or organizations by name without obtaining explicit permission.

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A.  **Introductions and Organizational Overview**

    1.  Personal introductions, overview of the study.

    2.  Can you give a brief overview of your organization and your role?
        [Note: for USAID respondents just about role; include name of interviewee and org here]]

B.  **Familiarity with the NGO Sustainability Index Report**

    3.  [*CLOSED ENDED*] How familiar are you with the NGO Sustainability Index Report?

        \_\_\_\_\_ Very

        \_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat

        \_\_\_\_\_ Not at all]

    4.  What has your experience been with the NGO Sustainability Index Report? (e.g. Have you read it? Have you used it in your work? Have you been involved in creating it? Etc…)

        a.  In what years have you had experience with it?
        b.  [If involved in creating it as implementer or USAID rep] Please describe the report development process?
            -   including composition of group – core vs changing
            -   Group's level of knowledge of process;
            -   manner of arriving at scores and final text;
        c.   [If ever involved in scoring] How were you approached to participate and why did you agree to do so?

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**C. Own Use of the NGO Sustainability Index Report**

5. How do you receive the Index Report?  In what form do you receive it (in hard copy, direct e-mail, website)?

6. How have you used the Index Report?

   Probes:
   - Have you read it?  Which sections?  What years?  Skim vs. read
   - Have you used the Index report to:

   *[CLOSED ENDED - highlight all that apply]*
   a) Better understand the NGO sector in the country that is the primary focus of my work
   b) Compare the country that is the primary focus of my work with other countries in the region
   c) Better understand how NGO sustainability in the country that is the primary focus of my work has changed over time
   d) Better understand NGO sustainability across the entire region
   e) Assist in monitoring and evaluation of specific civil society programs
   f) Preparing PPR or other annual reports
   g) Preparing performance monitoring plans
   h) Assist in Program design
   i) Determining funding priorities
   j) Starting dialogue with policy makers/NGO Stakeholders
   k) I don't use the information from the NGO Sustainability Index Report
   l) Other (please specify)
   - GET SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF TIMES/WAYS THEY HAVE USED IT

7. Which elements of the Index Report have you found useful and why?

   Probes:
   - Are the scores useful?  Is the write up in the text helpful?
   - Dimension scores vs overall score?
   - Comparisons over time?  Between countries?
   - Country narrative
     - My country?  Other Countries?
   - Supplementary articles on specific NGO topics
   - Executive Summary
   - Description of methodology
   - Are there other ways you would like to use the Index Report in the future?

8. What do you view as the strengths and weaknesses of the report?

   Probes:
   - How could the Index Report be more useful to you?
   - Timeliness?
   - Accuracy/validity concerns?
     - process by which the scores are derived
     - appropriateness/comprehensiveness of the dimensions
   - Broader use by others?
   - More in-depth narrative regarding conditions in each country?

9.  *[CLOSED ENDED*] Are you familiar with the methodology of how the NGO Sustainability Index scores and report are developed?

       _____ yes

       _____ somewhat

       _____ no

10. [If familiar or somewhat familiar]  What are your thoughts on the methodology used to create the Index Scores?

       Probes:
- Appropriate?
- Comparable over time?
- Training of panels?
- Amount of instruction/guidance given to panels?
- Objectivity of ratings?
- Rigor?
- Transparency?
- Appropriateness of underlying construction of index
- [for those on panels]
  - Role of editorial committee
  - Would you change the process

11. [*CLOSED ENDED*] How accurate do you feel the Index scores are for your country?  For other countries/in general?

       _____ very accurate

       _____ good enough to be useful

       _____ so poor that index is not useful

12. *Do you think the methodology needs to be changed in any way? Why?* [NOTE THAT THIS SHOULD BE ASKED OF ALL RESPONDENTS NOT JUST THOSE WHO DISCUSSED THE METHODOLOGY]


**Others' Use of the NGO Sustainability Index Report**

13. *What is the general level of knowledge about the NGO Sustainability Index report in your country?  [NOTE, for USAID and INGO respondents ask about knowledge in work group or organization]*

14. Do you think that the report has a role in shaping the agenda or priorities among those trying to improve NGO sustainability in your country?  Does it help identify specific actions or changes to make that would improve the sustainability of the NGO sector?  In what way?  Why or why not?

15. Have you ever passed the Index Report on to someone else?

    a. [If involved in preparing Index Report] Please describe the process of disseminating the report.
- Was there a press release?
- Were hard copies distributed? To Who?
- Were NGOs, donors, the government engaged in reviewing the findings?

16. Are you aware of any other individuals or organizations who have made use of the Index Report?

    Probes:
- Please describe the organizations and how they have used it
- What type of organizations? Donors? Gov't policy makers? Other INGO's interested in strengthening the NGO sector in the region? Other NGO leaders? Academics? Media?
- Did you ever see it mentioned in the media?
  - For example, does the media report on the country rating when the Index Report is released each year?
- Did you ever hear another organization mention it?

17. Do you have any suggestions for how usage of the Index Report could be increased?

- In thinking about how to increase usage, do you think it would be helpful to:

*[CLOSED ENDED - highlight all that apply]*

    a) Translate into local language
    b) Print the report earlier
    c) Improve the methodology of the scoring process
    d) Improve the presentation/formatting of the report
    e) Increase outreach/publicity about the report
    f) Broaden dissemination of the report
    g) Other (please specify)

- Can you help us think even a bit more about how to improve outreach and dissemination?

**D. Potential Modifications to the Index Report**

18. How important is it that the report include the northern tier of countries in Eastern Europe /new EU Members [Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia]

19. How important is it that the report is issued annually? Is there an optimal time of year for it to be issued?

20. Are there any ways that we have not already discussed that you would like to see the Index Report modified in the future?

**E. Wrap Up**

21. Thinking broadly about the community seeking to build the strength and sustainability of the NGO sector in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, do you think the NGO Sustainability Index Report is an important tool for this community?

22. What other sources of information do you use to understand NGO issues?  (e.g. Civicus or others). Why?

23. [ASK ONLY IF RELEVANT]  Can you share any documents or reports that would help us to better understand your approaches to using the NGO Sustainability Index Report as discussed today?

24. Is there anything else you would like to discuss about the NGO Sustainability Index Report?

25. Is there anyone else you would recommend we interview to better understand how the NGO Sustainability Index Report is used?


**Thank you for your time.**