The Civil Society Diamond: A Primer

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JULY 2001

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Part I

Civil Society Measurement and Policy Dialogue

Précis

This booklet introduces a new approach to measure, analyse and interpret civil society. This approach, called the Civil Society Diamond or CD, is oriented primarily at practitioners and policymakers, but it should also be of use to scholars interested in describing and analysing the empirical contours of civil society in a systematic way. The Civil Society Diamond is a tool, and its wider objective is to initiate and encourage a structured dialogue among those working in, with and for civil society organisations.[1] Once fully developed, the CD will entail a *civil society information system* making use of a wide range of indicators and data sources. Such a system would allow for the assessment of the state of civil society by providing indications of strengths and weaknesses as well as the impact or contributions of civil society at large as well as in particular fields, and with a view to suggesting policy options.

Background

Civil society has become an important concept in the social sciences, and has emerged as a central topic among policymakers and practitioners alike. Across academic disciplines as well as across the political spectrum, the topic has come to occupy much attention over the last few years. Civil society is now seen as an important element of society next to economy, polity and family. Indeed, while it is regarded as a major component of what makes social life possible, civil society is also increasingly seen as 'problematic' and fast-changing, and in many ways as something that can no longer be taken for granted. The recent debate about the decline in social capital and social engagement in the United States and Europe are indications of this trend.

With such prominence comes a need for information to position civil society and to locate its various dimensions. What are its contours and characteristics in terms of scale and scope, and how do these relate to actual and potential strengths and weaknesses? At present, we have no systematic way to answer such fundamental questions. This deficit seriously impedes our understanding of civil society, and ultimately discourages dialogue and constructive debate. Moreover, little is known about how policymakers and practitioners could anticipate, track and address trends in civil society over time, and how they could explore the impact of policies in the context of such changes and developments. Put simply, civil society is a term without much of the methodological and empirical underpinnings needed to make it a useful and fruitful concept in the long term. To provide this methodological infrastructure for researchers, practitioners and policymakers is the immediate goal of the approach summarised here.

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[1]A fuller presentation of the CD approach is presented in Helmut K. Anheier with Lisa Carlson, Civil society: Measurement and Policy Dialogue, Earthscan, London, forthcoming.

Objectives[2]

The CD is a basic measurement system for presenting and analysing the major contours of civil society in a systematic and user-friendly way. The ultimate aim of the system is to enable a structured dialogue to enhance the credibility and legitimacy of civil society nationally as well as internationally. This includes raising awareness about civil society across different stakeholders and the population at large; empowering civil society leaders and representatives through the promotion of dialogue, alliances and network-building; assisting civil society representatives in developing a vision and policy position; and improving standards of openness and accountability throughout. To this end, the information system is designed to:

• Describe the state of civil society along a number of core characteristics and major dimensions;

• Serve as an assessment and 'vision-setting' tool for policymakers and civil society representatives;

• Meet the interest of researchers in the field by encouraging systematic analysis that is empirically-grounded, conceptually-informed and relevant for policy purposes;

• Encourage constructive exchange among civil society representatives, policymakers and researchers;

• Lend itself to rich narrative interpretations, thereby contributing to the development of policy options and strategies; and

• Be useful for national, regional and local level applications as well as comparisons, and, if possible, also serve to empower single organisations to improve their operations and management, and to strengthen their impact.

The CD faces nonetheless several challenges. There are major conceptual and methodological issues involved in developing a measurement and assessment system applicable across countries that differ in terms of culture, economy and politics. Such issues include questions like: "what is meant by civil society, what characteristics are significant for measurement purposes, and how should relevant data be presented and analysed?" What is more, there are significant technical challenges in terms of data coverage and availability. Many of the data items needed for the CD are not readily available at the levels of quantity and quality needed. Yet while the task may face serious obstacles at first, there can also be little doubt that a systematic information and reporting system on civil society is very much needed.

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[2] Several caveats are called for at the very beginning. First, not all of what this report argues and proposes is new in the sense that nobody has dealt with it before, or that others have not made similar statements in the past. However, taken together, the overall concept and approach suggested is innovative, covers new ground, and ventures into methodological and data-specific areas that still require much work in the future. Specifically, some of the measures and tools presented in this report are in need of closer methodological scrutiny as data become available and as experience in using the Civil Society Diamond continues to be gathered. Obviously, while some aspects of the Civil Society Diamond are straightforward, others need more thought and exploration. For these reasons, it is best to think of the Civil Society Diamond as an evolving project, and none of its underlying premises and principles preclude changes and modifications over time.

Assumptions

Several assumptions form the methodological foundation for building the informational system on civil society proposed here. Specifically, the CD is based on a:

- **Holistic conception** in the sense that it makes allowance for different dimensions and orientations in assessing the state civil society as well as in measuring trends over time;
- **Normative platform** that includes not only descriptive aspects of the different civil society dimensions but also expectations and commitments to achieving specified goals; the index should enable civil society representatives to set their own standards and measure progress accordingly;
- **Strategic-developmental dimension** that views civil society as an evolving system, where separate dimensions can develop their own dynamics that frequently involve policy dilemmas and feed back to the larger society; and an
- **Operative dimension** that makes the system easy to use for policymakers and civil society representatives across diverse settings.

In contrast, the CD should NOT:

- Emphasize only one dimension of civil society, e.g., economic or legal aspects;
- Establish a rigid and fixed set of universal criteria against which all countries, regions and organisations would be judged;
- Be static in nature and neglect the importance of overtime developments in different aspects of civil society;
- Be equated with the 'naming and shaming' implicit in many 'report card systems' like the Corruption Perception Index, growth figures or human rights indices.

Instead, the approach embraces four essential qualities: it should be easy to use; easy to interpret; enabling to its users; and yet normative in its implications for policies and management

Definitions

Civil Society

Reaching a better understanding of **civil society** is a central part of the development of the CD. Not surprisingly, a phenomenon as complex and multifaceted as civil society invites a variety of definitions and attempts to capture its 'conceptual essence' across time and space. Even though the concept of civil society has become prominent in the social sciences, it remains somewhat unclear and even contested in terms of its actual meanings and uses. Ultimately, it may not be possible to develop a standard definition of civil society that would apply equally well to different settings. By contrast, an approach that views any *conceptual* definition as part, and indeed the outcome, of ongoing empirical efforts to understand civil society more fully appears as the more fruitful strategy.

Nonetheless, a working definition is needed that can serve as a platform for the methodological development and empirical applications of the CD. Therefore, we suggest the following formulation as the initial working or operational definition:

> *"Civil society is the sphere of institutions, organisations and individuals located between the family, the state and the market, in which people associate voluntarily to advance common interests."*

This is an operational definition of civil society for the purposes of the CD; it does not attempt to define all aspects of civil society, nor does it necessarily fit different perspectives and approaches equally well. What the definition does, however, is to list elements and components that most attempts to define civil society would identify as essential.

Civil and Uncivil Civil Society

The definition of civil society proposed for the CD does not establish any a *priori* and exclusionary emphasis on 'good' civil society. The definition also includes what could be regarded 'uncivil' institutions (e.g., encouraging disrespect of human rights), (advocating violence) or individuals (nurturing ethnic or religious prejudice). This is so because the definition only specifies voluntary action and common purpose as constituting characteristics, but establishes neither the limit nor the intent of such purpose, nor does it privilege some over others. In this sense, the definition does not distinguish among causes and objectives, and does not pass judgement on them.

In many instances, the 'moral blindness' of the definition should be rather unproblematic, but in some instances, the differences between 'good' and 'bad' civil society could be of central importance. Users may decide to measure, contrast and compare 'civil' and 'uncivil' parts in an effort to gauge the overall health of civil society in terms of size, legitimacy, impact or some other dimension. In such cases, users of the CD would have to establish some demarcation line to mark the inclusion or exclusion of such components from various 'camps.'

Unit of Analysis and Unit of Observation

The CD approach emphasises that civil society can be examined from different perspectives and with different orientations in mind. To help identify the level at which we approach civil society, we refer to the term 'unit of analysis'. The **unit of analysis** is that entity whose characteristics are of central importance for observation and interpretation. Specifically, for the purpose of the CD, there are three major units of analysis:
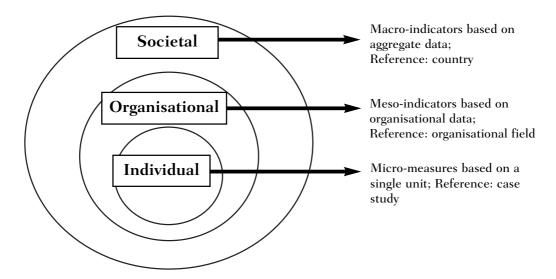
Macro-level. At this level, the CD is applied to countries, societies or regions. The perspective taken is that of civil society and its characteristics in the context of the larger society, perhaps even including the relationship between civil society, the economy and the state.

Meso-level. At this level, the unit of analysis is no longer civil society as such but a particular segment or sub-field like human rights or community development. Typically, the CD would deal with institutions, organisations and individuals of special relevance to the field of interest.

Micro-level. Finally, at the micro-level the CD applies to one organisation or one specific setting primarily. Here, for example, we would focus on one environmental organisation and compare it other environmental organisations in the context of the larger civil society and the parameters of environmental policies in the area in which it operates.

The distinction between different units of analysis is also important because each level draws in different types of indicators. Some indicators refer to the macro-level, e.g., the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2000); others are aggregate measures of organisations, e.g., the combined economic size of civil society organisations; while others yet are individual-level characteristics, e.g., value dispositions and attitudinal aspects such as tolerance or religiosity held among members of a given population. Significantly, within one CD application, all indicators must be at the same level or 'unit' of measurement. This is indicated in figure I, which shows the three units of analysis and the relationship among indicators.

Figure I. Units of Analysis and Indicators

Societal — Macro-indicators based on aggregate data; Reference: country

Organisational — Meso-indicators based on organisational data; Reference: organisational field

Individual — Micro-measures based on a single unit; Reference: case study

The Civil Society Diamond

At the core of the approach to develop an information system of civil society is the ***Civil Society Diamond (CD)***. The CD approach is based on the notion that civil society has four major dimensions: socio-economic or structural, legal or constitutional, normative or value-related, and functional or impact-related.

Box I: Grounding the Civil Society Diamond

STRUCTURE	VALUES
Key Question: How large is civil society in terms of institutions, organisations, networks and individuals; what are its component parts; and what resources does it command? Central Reference: **ORGANISATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE**	**Key Question:** What values underlie civil society; what values, norms and attitudes does it represent and propagate; how inclusive and exclusive are they; and what areas of consensus and dissent emerge? Central Reference: **VALUE SYSTEM**
LEGAL/POLITICAL SPACE	VALUES
Key Question: What is the legal and political space within the larger regulatory environment in which civil society operates; and what laws and policies enable or inhibit its development? Central Reference: **GOVERNANCE AND REGULATORY SYSTEM**	**Key Question:** What is the contribution of civil society to specific social, economic and political problems? Central Reference: **DEVELOPMENT AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

In more simple terms, the four dimensions describe (*Box I*):

• The make-up of civil society (**structure**);

• What 'space' it occupies and in what legal and cultural 'climate' it operates (**space**);

• What values civil society represents and advocates (**values**); and

• What the contributions of civil society are (**impact**).

An Enabling Tool

With **structure, space, values** and **impact** as the key dimensions, different indicators describe each dimension in more detail. For example, for **structure** there are various size indicators (e.g., paid and unpaid work relative to total employment; membership) and revenue/resource indicators

(e.g., share of philanthropic giving of non-profit sector revenue). Similarly, for **values**, one indicator would measure democratic inclusion (e.g., human rights values; democratic attitudes), but others are also possible such as the level of overall tolerance in a society. The **space** dimension would be represented by a measure for the degree of enablement provided by the overall fiscal and regulatory environment for civil society, or for the level of accountability required of, and met by, civil society organisations. Finally, **impact** could include an efficiency dimension (e.g., how efficiently civil society organisations operate in dealing with specific tasks), an effectiveness indicator (e.g., how effective they are in actually solving perceived problems), or a progress measure (e.g., to what extent set policy targets have been met).

Thus, civil society representatives and policymakers have the choice to select those indicators and dimensions they regard as most useful in the context of their culture, country or region for describing and assessing civil society. Indeed, the selection of dimensions and measures should be guided by the needs of those who use the CD.

What applies to the selection of measures also applies to the setting of standards. Civil society representatives and policymakers can set their own standards and measure their progress in relation to self-selected criteria rather then against some rule imposed from outside. For example, for the space dimension, policymakers may decide to improve levels of accountability from 30 to 50% over three years. The measure would show to what degree policymakers actually achieved the set objective. Moreover, for the structure dimension, policymakers may decide to increase levels of volunteering in society among the adult population from 30% to 40% over three years. Of course, finding a common metric for setting standards and measuring improvement over time represent a key challenge. Often such yardsticks involve normative judgements, and users are advised to be open about their assumptions and ground rules.

Repeated measures would then show to what degree this particular country or region achieved the objective policymakers set out initially. The CD would reveal how increases or decreases in volunteering relate to other changes in civil society by providing the values, space and impact dimensions as context. Of course, each of these dimensions, indicators and measures would need to be developed and tested most carefully. The CD combines these various measures into a common 'space,' as figure II shows.
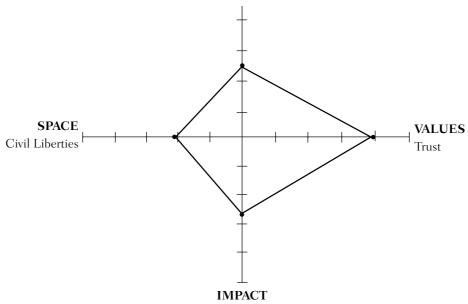
The figure shows the location of civil society in terms of four dimensions. The same figure can be generated at the national, regional, local, even international level, given adequate data availability. Moreover, the various 'diamonds' can be compared to each other, e.g., regional shapes can be compared to the national configuration to locate differences and commonalties. It is important to keep two possible presentations and interpretations of the CD in mind:

1. If we profile actual indicators and their relative values or rankings using some common metric, the interpretation of figure II would be as follows: a country with a medium-size civil society in terms of membership; relatively high levels of trust; fairly low levels of legal enablement in terms of civil liberties; and medium levels of fulfilled commitment.

2. If however, the data mapped into the CD are **degrees of achievement** or progress relative to a set of specific goals that would equal 100 at each of the four arrows, then we would come up with a very different reading, as indicated in figure III.

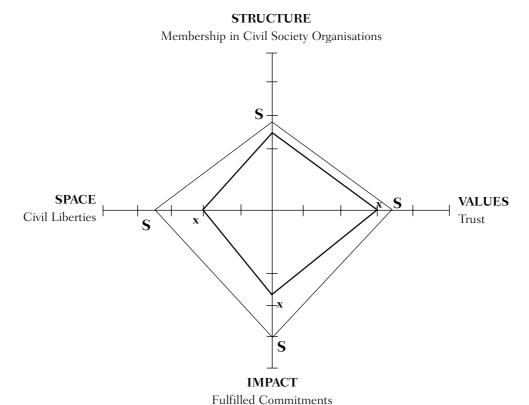**Figure II: Illustration of Civil Society Diamond: A Status Report**

STRUCTURE
Membership in Civil Society Organisations

SPACE
Civil Liberties

VALUES
Trust

IMPACT
Fulfilled Commitments

In figure III, we have a country or region that has made significant progress in the area of space (differences between 'x' and 'S' along each axis) and impact, but less so in terms of structure and values. In other words, this interpretation of the diamond is similar to a *progress report*, whereas the version in figure II above is more like a *status report*.

Figure III: Standard–Setting and the Civil Society Diamond: A Progress Report
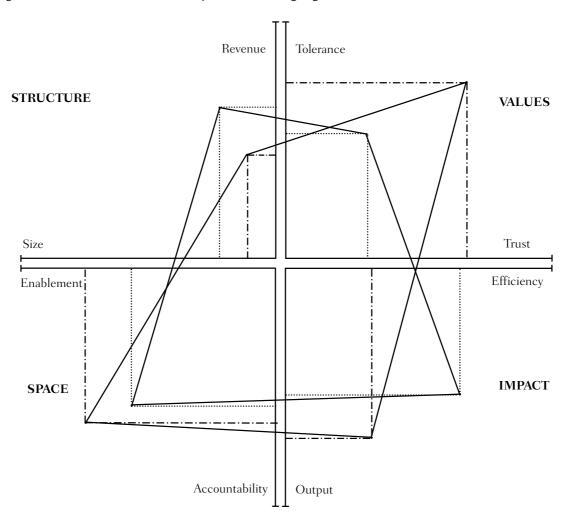
An Unfolding System

Clearly, the analysis can be carried out with each core dimension and with more than one sub-dimension in each. For example, one can focus on the structure dimension and look at how the various size and revenue indicators relate to each other. In fact, users can decide on the level of complexity and detail they want, provided data are available to carry out the analysis. By making it possible to 'unpack' civil society along various dimensions, the CD becomes a fertile tool for assessing the status and developmental trends of civil society at different levels of detail.

An example of a more elaborate Civil Society Diamond is shown in figure IV. We now have two indicators for each dimension: Size and Revenue for structure; Tolerance and Trust for values; Enablement and Accountability for space; and Efficiency and Output for impact. Figure IV shows the location of civil society in terms of four dimensions and eight sub-dimensions, and offers a more detailed picture than figures II and III above. As before, the same figure can be generated at the national, regional, local, even international level, given adequate data availability. Similarly, the various 'diamonds' can be compared to each other, even though the interpretation may be more complex as specific dimensions may pull in different directions. Note that indicators other than the ones selected above are also possible, and users can mine a rich repertoire of social, political and economic indicator models for this purpose. Of course, each of these dimensions, indicators and measures would need to be developed and tested most carefully.

Figure IV: Illustration of Civil Society Diamond Using Eight Sub-dimensions

A Comparative System

What comparative assessments will be feasible given that users can select their own indicators and set their own standards? Clearly, a comparative database for the cross-national and cross-regional assessment of civil society is needed. For this purpose, it will be necessary to seek agreement and build consensus about what set of indicators could be sufficiently standardised to allow for comparisons across a maximum number of countries while remaining flexible enough to accommodate significant regional and cultural differences. Yet such a consensus can only be reached over time and against the background of ongoing applications of the CD, and the experiences that have been made in a broad cross-section of countries.

Having a menu of options gives civil society representatives, researchers and policymakers the choice to select the indicators and dimensions they regard as most useful for their specific purpose. Indeed, the selection process is part of the structured dialogue the CD wants to encourage. In this context, users can select indicators that fit the context of their culture, country or region. This does not imply, however, that the choice of indicators and measures should be arbitrary and left to the convenience of users alone.

For this purpose, the CD distinguishes between different types or classes of indicators. Considerations of data quality and data availability next to the needs of those who use the CD guide the classification as well as the actual selection of indicators. Specifically, the CD differentiates between preferred, standard, optional and other indicators to strike a balance in indicator selection between the rigidity of universal criteria on the one hand and the seeming arbitrariness of national or local preferences on the other (*see Table I for a listing of indicators*).

- **Preferred Indicators** are those known for their comparability across countries and fields, with the understanding that any CD country or field comparisons should include some of all of the measures in the set of indicators selected (*see table I*);

- **Standard Indicators** have been proven useful, are used by, and are available for, many countries and organisational fields. At the same time, these indicators may not have the degree of potential universality as the preferred indicators above, and may involve higher data requirements.

- **Optional Indicators** include field and region-specific indicators that apply primarily in a particular context, e.g., developed countries or transition countries or country-specific indicators that may be relevant to one particular country only. This would also apply to organisation-specific indicators of individual groups or organisations primarily.

- **Other Indicators** cover specific indicators that users may chose to apply in given circumstances and applications, either as stand-alone measures or in combination with other measures.

Table I: Preferred Indicators

	Macro	Meso	Micro
Structure-size	• Paid employment in CSOs per 1000 employed	• Paid employment in CSOs per 1000 employed in field	• Paid employment in CSO relative to average size of CSO in field
	• Volunteering in CSOs as a percent of total adult population	• Volunteering in CSOs in field as a percent of total adult population	• Volunteering in CSOs relative to average size of CSO volunteer force infield
	• Membership in CSOs	• Membership in CSOs in field	• Membership held in CSO relative to average CSO membership size in field
Structure-composition	• (Paid) Employment in advocacy CSOs relative to employment in service-providing CSOs	• (Paid) Employment ratio of advocacy CSOs / service-providing CSOs relative to for-profit and public sector employment ratios in field	• Ratio of (paid) Employment in advocacy /service-providing activities in CSO Relative to ratio for field
	• Volunteering in advocacy CSOs Relative to volunteering in service-providing CSOs	• Volunteering ratio of advocacy CSOs / service-providing CSOs Relative to ratio of paid employment in advocacy CSOs / service-providing CSOs field	• Volunteering ratio of advocacy/service-providing activities in CSO Relative to ratio of paid employment in advocacy / service-providing activities in CSO
Structure-revenue	• Index of philanthropic giving (time, money, in kind)	• Index of philanthropic giving (time, money, in kind) in Field	• Index of philanthropic giving (time, money, in kind) for CSO
	• Value of volunteer input	• Value of volunteer input	• Value of volunteer input
	• Indicators of resource dependency: – Marketisation – Public sector dependency	• Indicators of resource dependency in field: – Marketisation – Public sector dependency	• Indicators of resource dependency for CSO: – Marketisation – Public sector dependency
Values	• Trust in people by CSO members Relative to adult population	• Trust in people by CSO members in field Relative to adult population	• Trust in people by CSO members Relative to adult population
	• Tolerance Levels among CSO Members relative to adult population	• Tolerance levels among CSO members in field relative to adult population	• Tolerance levels among CSO members in field relative to adult population

	• Increase in number of CSOs with explicit Code of Conduct/Ethics over previous year	• Share of CSOs in field with explicit Code of Conduct/Ethics	• Share of members aware of Code of Conduct/Ethics
Space	• **Measure of the degree of enablement of the overall fiscal and regulatory environment in civil society (focus: law)** - JHU Non-profit Law Index - USAID Legal Environment Indicator	• **Measure of the degree of enablement of the overall fiscal and regulatory environment for CSOs in field (focus: law)** - JHU Non-profit Law Index - USAID Legal Environment Indicator	• **Measure of the degree of enablement of the overall fiscal and regulatory environment for CSO/within CSO** - JHU Non-profit Law Index - USAID Legal Environment Indicator
	• Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International)	• Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International) as applied or ranked by CSO representatives in field	• Corruption Perceptions Index Transparency International) as applied or ranked by representatives of CSO
Impact	• **Fulfilled CSO commitment index as ranked by national representatives of CSOs (e.g., stakeholder survey)**	• **Fulfilled CSO commitment index as ranked by representatives of CSOs in field (e.g., stakeholder survey)**	• **Fulfilled CSO commitment index as ranked representatives of CSO (e.g., stakeholder survey)**
	• USAID NGO Sustainability Index	• Perceived impact survey by representatives in field	• Perceived impact survey by representatives or members in CSO
	• Media coverage of CSOs in given period as share of total coverage	• Media coverage of CSO in field-specific trade press / media (mobilisation measure) in given period	• Media coverage in given period/event

Using the CD

CD applications will typically involve a sequence of nine working steps. Of course, at each part of the sequence, users can go back and change some decision, and also correct any mistakes or misunderstandings they may have implemented in prior steps. For these reasons, it is best to think of the following sequence less as a very strict procedure and more as a set of guidelines for best practice. Figure V offers a summary presentation of the nine steps involved.

Step 1:

Identify the purpose of the CD application. Is it to describe civil society or some of its component parts, either as a status report, to track progress, or to put civil society in context? Or is the purpose an analytic one in which a particular fact or trend, relationship, problem or theoretical issue is to be examined? Or are policy considerations involved in the sense that policy issues are to be discussed with the help of the CD, and possible scenarios to be explored? Of course, applications can have multiple objectives, but there is a certain hierarchy: description is usually the first task, followed by conceptual analysis and, finally, analysis for policy purposes.

Step 2 :

Decide on the type of CD analysis to be performed: overtime, comparative, status or progress report, etc. This will guide the selection of indicators and will also point to the type of data to be collected. If the CD is to be applied over time, the relevant time periods need to be selected; if a civil society or some of its component parts is to be put in comparative context, users have to decide on what other cases to include. If the purpose of the CD is to set standards or to track progress, agreement must be reached over what the standards are and against what level of progress performance is to be measured.

Step 3 :

Set and clarify definitions, i.e., clarify what aspects of civil society are the focus of the CD application. This involves establishing a borderline for the inclusion and exclusion of some element or another, and dealing with grey areas that may require closer scrutiny and qualitative judgement. We recommend that users establish clear guidelines on how to apply the operational definition of civil society, civil society organisations and other central concepts in relation to available indicators4

Step 4 :

Identify the unit of analysis, i.e., the level at which the CD is to be applied. Users have to decide if the CD will be constructed at the macro-level (typically: country or region), meso-level (fields, industries) or the micro-level (organisational case study, scenario). This decision will determine what kind of indicators to select (see step 6).

Step 5 :

List the units of observation, i.e., types of entities covered such as organisations, individuals or events, and match them to the appropriate unit of analysis.

Step 6 :

Identify and select indicators by first listing the key characteristics or variables of interest. In a

second sub-step select indicators accordingly for each of the four dimensions. The stage of indicator selection is one of the most critical steps in applying the CD. Users are advised to examine a wide range of potential indicators and use multiple indicators for each dimension.

Step 7:

Collect data and information accordingly for each indicator. In many cases this will involve available as well as newly assembled data, particularly in the impact field, where stakeholder surveys are likely to provide crucial information. It is best to develop a database of indicators for easy reference and retrieval. It is useful to construct and fill in a data matrix table, with the indicators in the rows and the required data in the columns, organised by year or some other relevant time period.
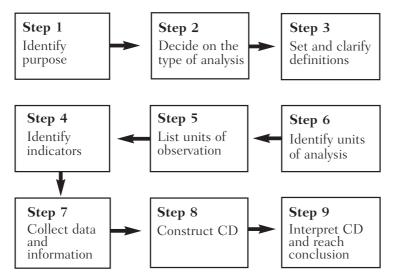
Step 8:

Construct the CD by using either a 'pencil and paper' approach or, preferably, appropriate software packages. Users may wish to explore a link between the indicator database and the software package capable of generating the actual coordinate system and graphics.

Step 9:

Interpret the CD, incorporating additional measures as needed, reach a conclusion and decide on actions to be taken, if any. This can involve a more structured debate among major stakeholders, the posting of the CD on a dedicated web site for comments and suggestions, or simply an individual or group exercise in data analysis and interpretation using flipcharts and other methods inviting debate and active participation. The use of dissemination strategies, if any, depends on the purpose of the CD application and the nature of the audience involved.

Of course, at the beginning, most of these steps will be rather time-consuming, and users are likely to encounter many methodological and practical difficulties. Upon repeated application, however, the use of the CD will become easier and less cumbersome. Users will undoubtedly gain experience in conducting the structured dialogue about civil society the CD wants to encourage, and the database available for CD application is likely to broaden in coverage and improve in quality over time.

Figure V: Steps in CD Application

Step 1 Identify purpose	→	**Step 2** Decide on the type of analysis	→	**Step 3** Set and clarify definitions
Step 4 Identify indicators	←	**Step 5** List units of observation	←	**Step 6** Identify units of analysis
Step 7 Collect data and information	→	**Step 8** Construct CD	→	**Step 9** Interpret CD and reach conclusion

The Way Ahead

In addition to the steps involved in particular CD applications, there are a number of 'infrastructure' tasks involved that go beyond what individual users can achieve. These tasks include first and foremost the design and development of an **indicator bank** for a wide range of CD uses and purposes. This indicator bank must be complemented by a corresponding **databank** for each indicator, including a full methodological assessment of data coverage and quality. Such an information system would also involve the design and dissemination of user-friendly software programmes to assist IT and Internet-based CD applications, including a dedicated user web site with key information online.

A second important infrastructure task is the development of a user-friendly toolkit that shows users how to apply the diamond methodology in different circumstances, and for a variety of purposes. This toolkit will also include instructions on how to set up the information system; set standards; select indicators and measures; analyse and interpret data; and translate results and insights into policies and other measures for improvement.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the need for an extended test phase of the CD methodology and approach developed in this book. Only if repeated and varied applications across different circumstances improve the information available on civil society; and only if this leads to a better understanding civil society and its component parts; and only if the end result is an improvement in policies—only then can we conclude that the system proposed here has been useful and worthwhile. The work undertaken by CIVICUS under its *Index on Civil Society Project* holds the promise to generate useful information and learning experiences in this respect.

Part II

Conclusion

Across the world, civil society has become a major item of the political agenda—in the developed countries of the OECD, in Africa, Latin America and Asia as well as in the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Yet political agendas change, and the 'seat at the policy table' may be more difficult to maintain for long unless civil society leaders have more and better information to support both their political positions and the policy arguments they wish to put forward. Information is part of the voice function of civil society, and without it, i.e., without a supporting pool of current and high-quality data, civil society leaders may find it ever harder to be heard where it matters, i.e., in the policy process.

In other words, civil society representatives must be able to demonstrate repeatedly and decisively how, where and for whom civil society matters. They must be able to examine its current strengths and weaknesses, and they must be able to point to policy options and future challenges. Engaging in a systematic, ongoing and structured dialogue is a vital part of this process. The CD approach proposed here represents one initial step toward this goal.