



ADVOCATING FOR INCLUSIVE SECURITY IN RESTRICTED CIVIC SPACES IN AFRICA

Lessons learned from Burundi, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Niger, Somalia/Somaliland, and South Sudan



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Civil society has a vital role in advocating for inclusive, people-centred security provision, which meets the everyday safety and security needs of all. This is especially crucial in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, characterized by high levels of insecurity. Yet restricted civic space shackles civil society's ability to do so. Despite this, civil society in Burundi, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Niger, Somalia/Somaliland, and South Sudan has developed strategies to navigate, maintain and open civic space to advocate for inclusive people-centred security and peace.

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Cover photo: Women pushing for change and gender equality in Juba, South Sudan, during a peaceful demonstration in December 2018. Photo: Samir Bol.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every day, women, men, girls and boys living in conflict-affected countries face extreme insecurities and often, even those who are meant to protect civilians, including the police and army, are implicated in violations of people's rights. In many countries, the security sector is based on a state-centric understanding of security which does not sufficiently reflect the security and safety needs of individuals, communities or marginalized groups, and reinforces gendered inequalities. There is an urgent need to ensure that security provision is gender-responsive, locally owned and people-centred. As recognized by the African Union, Africa's Regional Economic Communities and the United Nations, civil society plays a crucial role in promoting, designing and monitoring inclusive security sector reform (SSR) processes and holding states and other security actors accountable. However, the highly political and sensitive nature of security and SSR poses particular challenges and limitations for civil society to engage, even more so in conflict-affected countries with restricted civic space.

This paper explores some of the approaches successfully used by civil society organizations from Burundi, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Niger, Somalia/Somaliland and South Sudan to maintain and reclaim civic space around security issues by drawing on examples from each country, and particularly examines South Sudan and Niger as case studies. It is largely informed by a two-day learning event with civil society in February 2020, convened by Oxfam and the African Security Sector Network, and hosted at the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa.

This paper finds that influencing challenges for civil society mostly relate to:

- *Limited access to information and censorship*, which constrains the ability of civil society organizations (CSOs) and media to monitor and hold authorities accountable and poses safety risks when criticizing governments or other security providers;
- *A small pool of CSOs working on SSR and governance* due to the highly sensitive nature of SSR and the common view that the security sector is dealt with by security actors rather than civil society, which results in a lack of relevant knowledge and capacity;
- *Restrictive laws and regulations*, which can be abused to limit freedoms of assembly, expression, association and information – particularly in contexts where civil society is perceived as threatening – including their arbitrary implementation and administrative hurdles;
- *Discrediting of civil society* by governments, among others, which particularly affects women's organizations and more marginalized groups;
- A high prevalence of *threats, intimidation and arbitrary arrests* for civil society representatives, which poses elevated risks and requires CSOs to take precautionary measures;
- *Polarization and mistrust within civil society*, especially in contexts affected by conflict and violence, which creates fragmentation and a lack of support among CSOs;
- Tensions within civil society fuelled by competition over the *limited access to funding and resources*;
- *Non-state actors*, including armed groups, businesses and civil society itself, which can contribute to shrinking civic space for specific groups of people, for instance when women's groups are silenced by other segments of society.

Opportunities and strategies employed by civil society that have successfully contributed to navigating restrictions and maintaining and reclaiming civic space around security include:

- *Civil society establishing credibility as experts* and proving their added value through strong technical and thematic expertise, which enhances their credibility and influence;
- *Dialogue, consultation and trust-building between civil society and state actors*, by employing non-confrontational approaches and transparency, which is essential for building relationships and trust with authorities;
- Collaborating around shared issues and *building strong civil society networks and partnerships* across different sectors and segments of society, which can contribute to building trust and mitigates risks in context of threats and intimidation;
- *Building an inclusive, accountable and legitimate civil society*, which is diverse in nature, is reliable and transparent between organizations and towards their constituencies, the public and external actors, and is based on strong connections to communities;
- *Adaptable and localized conflict- and gender-transformative influencing strategies* and flexible and long-term commitment, particularly in conflict-affected countries with rapidly changing contexts where civic space can shrink suddenly;
- *Leveraging the influence and support of regional actors, international donors and other stakeholders* to push states and authorities for inclusive processes, political will for reform and civic space.

While civic space is essential for inclusive and people-centred security, conflict and fragility contribute to the shrinking and closing of civic space. Different regional and international stakeholders can support civil society to enhance the power of people's voices in the security sector as follows:

- The **African Union and Regional Economic Communities (RECs)** should strengthen institutional mechanisms and implement the Livingstone Formula¹ to support participation of a diverse range of CSOs, establish and strengthen CSO desks at the RECs level, develop mechanisms to support African Union members states with regards to participation of CSOs in national security structures, and support civil society in reclaiming restricted spaces.
- **International NGOs** should push for local ownership and create linkages between local initiatives and international donors and other stakeholders, including less formalized and grassroots organizations, and advocate for civic space, especially in countries with oppressive authorities.
- **Donors and international stakeholders** should provide systematic and diplomatic support for local civil society, including long-term and flexible investment as well as political support and protection in times of crises, use their influence to push for civic space, support CSOs in developing adaptive conflict- and gender-transformative SSR influencing strategies, and support states and regional institutions in designing inclusive, gender-responsive and context-specific SSR.



A group of people from the community of Gilo, Ethiopia, gathered to discuss the effects of drought. Photo: Pablo Tosco/Oxfam Intermón. -

1 INTRODUCTION

Every day, women, men, girls and boys living in conflict-affected countries face extreme insecurity, including the threat of death, abduction, forced recruitment by armed groups, and sexual violence.² In some cases, those who are meant to protect civilians, including the police and army, are implicated in violations of people's rights.³ Even in countries with ongoing security sector reform (SSR) efforts, civilian leaders, policy makers, state security providers and external donors too often favour a state-centric view of security, which does not adequately take individual and communal security needs into account. There is an urgent need to ensure that security provision and SSR processes work for those they are meant to protect and take into account specific threats for different groups, including women, children, youth, the elderly or persons with disabilities. Reforming the security sector is a decision that requires not only the recognition of the need for a change of will among security actors, but above all political will across government institutions.

Civil society has a crucial role to play in promoting, designing and monitoring security to ensure it is people-centred, gender-transformative and locally owned. National and sub-national civil society organizations (CSOs) across the African continent are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between citizens and their states, highlight people's everyday safety and security needs, demand accountability, and build trust between citizens, the government and security providers.

However, in many conflict-affected countries civic space is restricted, both in policy and practice, which limits the ability of civil society to influence for inclusive peace and security. CSOs, activists and journalists face restrictions, and even threats, due to their efforts to push for accountability and the rule of law. These include restrictive laws and

policies – or their arbitrary application – limited access to objective and reliable information, including independent media, and limitations on the freedom of assembly and legitimate protest. Due to the sensitive and highly political nature of security provision and SSR, civil society faces particular challenges when advocating for more inclusive processes and people-centred security.

Box 1: How is coronavirus (COVID-19) affecting civic space?

The coronavirus pandemic is creating new challenges for civil society and exacerbating others; for instance, restrictions on public gatherings are making it difficult to convene consultations with authorities and communities. Strict limitations on travel and events, as well as office closures, also disrupt ongoing peace processes⁴ and risk reducing civilian oversight of the security sector. There are also concerns that measures to contain the spread of coronavirus may be exploited to restrict civic space, for example, via declarations of states of emergencies and lockdown measures imposed by security forces.⁵ It is crucial to ensure all measures are proportional and eased as soon as possible and that any responses to the pandemic maintain a civilian character, ensuring prevention of abuses against civilians and upholding international standards of civil-military coordination.⁶

This paper explores some of the strategies used by CSOs in diverse conflict-affected countries in Africa to influence for inclusive security and navigate restricted civic space. It is informed by ongoing collaboration between Oxfam and the African Security Sector Network (ASSN),⁷ as well as CSOs from Central African Republic, Niger, South Sudan, and Somalia/Somaliland. In particular, the paper is based on a two-day learning event in February 2020, convened by Oxfam and the ASSN, and hosted at the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with the additional participation of CSOs from Burundi, Ethiopia and South Africa.

While the CSOs who participated in the workshop work in varied contexts, all have been affected by armed conflict, political instability and violence, and face challenges such as insecurity, weak protection of civilians and restricted civic space. An in-depth analysis of each context, including the differences often seen between francophone and anglophone security structures, and the uniqueness of each security sector and SSR processes, is outside the scope of this paper. Rather, it explores some of the shared challenges that CSOs face around influencing, as well as the strategies they have used to maintain and reclaim civic space on inclusive security. It further elaborates on case studies from South Sudan and Niger. The paper aims to share strategies that CSOs can use and adapt in their national and sub-national contexts, to maintain and open civic space, and continue their crucial work for more people-centred security.

Box 2: Why is civic space crucial?

‘Civic space’ refers to the structures, processes and legal instruments, and the absence of restrictions, that **make it possible for citizens to associate, organize and act on issues of interest to them in the space outside the family, the state and the market. Civic space is crucial for civil society to survive and flourish.** [emphasis added] [...] People can participate in civil society as, for example, an individual activist or independent journalist or in association with others in community-based organizations, NGOs, labour unions, religious associations, social movements, grassroots initiatives, and other groups.’

Source: F. Inga, et al. (2018). *Space to be Heard: Mobilizing the Power of People to Reshape Civic Space*. Oxford: Oxfam GB, p.4. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/space-to-be-heard-mobilizing-the-power-of-people-to-reshape-civic-space-620523>. DOI: 10.21201/2018.3095

2 INCLUSIVE SECURITY AND THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

From the 1990s onwards there has been a global normative shift from an approach to security that focuses exclusively on state security and the preservation and protection of national borders, to a greater recognition of the need to include a human security approach.⁸ This does not focus solely on the preservation and protection of national borders. **Rather, a human security approach provides a more holistic – people-centred – understanding of security, including wider political, social, economic and environmental security,⁹ and provision for the well-being and often differing security needs of women, men, girls and boys.**

This shift is crucial, especially in conflict-affected contexts such as Central African Republic where, since the renewed outbreak of conflict in 2013, thousands of people have been killed, over 1.3 million people have been displaced, livelihoods have been disrupted and 2.6 million people are in need of humanitarian support to meet their basic needs.¹⁰ In conflict-affected countries, the overlap of multiple forms of violence generates instability and insecurity for civilians. For instance, women and girls have been particularly affected by gender-based violence, including sexual violence, which is perpetrated systematically by a diverse range of actors, including security forces, armed groups and intimate partners.¹¹ In Central African Republic in 2019, more than one alleged incident of gender-based violence was reported per hour on average,¹² while the fact that such crimes are often not reported means the real figure is likely significantly higher.¹³ Fewer than one in four survivors of gender-based violence received some kind of legal assistance in 2018,¹⁴ and there is a widespread lack of protection of survivors from perpetrators.¹⁵

In theory, people-centred, inclusive security meets the needs of everyone, particularly those who have historically been marginalized or disadvantaged, and is crucial to promoting human security.¹⁶ Gender is a key determinant of risk, security and insecurity, and the ability to access both security and justice providers.¹⁷ Women, men and gender non-conforming people all face gendered threats¹⁸; for example, in conflict-affected contexts men are more likely to be forcibly recruited into armed groups, whereas women often experience high levels of gender-based violence, including sexual violence.¹⁹ However, security institutions as well as informal security governance structures often legitimize and reinforce gendered inequalities, despite the objective of integrating women into the security sector, women's active involvement in combat during conflicts²⁰ and the disproportionate burden that women and girls carry in times of conflict and hardship.²¹

Box 3: What is inclusive security?

Inclusive security can be broadly defined as the active and meaningful participation and structural inclusion of citizens, vulnerable groups, women and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in policies, structures and mechanisms for addressing basic security and protection.

Source: J. Kamminga and A. Zaki. (2016). *Women, Peace and Security in Afghanistan after Brussels and Warsaw: Setting the Scene for a Technical Research Agenda*. Bayan II Discussion Paper. Retrieved 10 May 2020 from https://www.baag.org.uk/sites/www.baag.org.uk/files/resources/attachments/Bayan_WPSJ_Discussion_Paper.pdf, p. 3.

SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

With the focus on more people-centred security came the emergence of the concept of security sector reform (SSR), a process of assessing, reforming and strengthening the effectiveness and accountability of security providers,²² and frequently done in tandem with justice sector reform. SSR often takes place in fragile and conflict-affected states, where security provision and governance are often weak, and where the police, military and non-state actors have been involved in human rights abuses. SSR provisions are regularly integrated with peace agreements between conflict parties and wider stakeholders, and effective SSR is an important step to reduce the likelihood of further outbreaks of violent conflict and ensure people's safety.²³ Local ownership is generally expected to be the cornerstone of SSR, which in principle means that all reform should be designed, managed and implemented by local actors.²⁴

Recognising that security and long-term development are deeply interlinked and mutually reinforcing,²⁵ the African Union (AU) has promoted SSR through its Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform, defining SSR as, 'the process by which countries formulate or re-orient the policies, structures, and capacities of institutions and groups engaged in the security sector, in order to make them more effective, efficient, and responsive to democratic control, and to the security and justice needs of the people.'²⁶

Box 4: The AU and the role of CSOs in peace and security

The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) was established in 2004 by the AU as an advisory organ to facilitate the relationship between AU Member States and CSOs, and enable CSOs to play an active role in contributing to the AU's principles, policies and programmes.

The Livingstone Formula was developed in 2008 to promote interaction between the AU's Peace and Security Council and CSOs on peace, security and stability in Africa.

Source: AU. (2008). *Conclusions on a Mechanism for Interaction between the Peace and Security Council and Civil Society Organizations in the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability in Africa*. Retrieved 3 May 2020, from https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/30974-doc-psc_conclusion_-_livingstone.pdf

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM

The crucial role of civil society in SSR and governance processes is widely recognized by the United Nations (UN),²⁷ the AU²⁸ and Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs). According to the AU's policy framework, CSOs have an important role in: promoting dialogue on security issues as a confidence-building measure; participating in the development, and monitoring and evaluation of security sector policies and legislation; promoting and upholding good governance, democratic principles and human rights; and promoting peace, security and stability.²⁹ They can also play an important role in ensuring that local needs are taken into account in SSR.

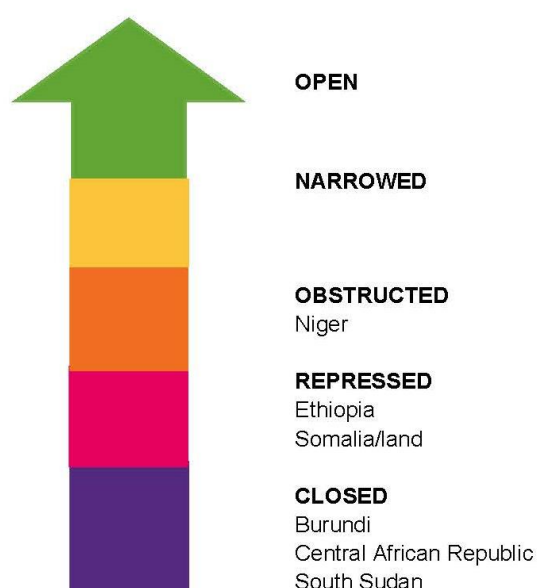
In contexts of widespread violence and instability, as well as impunity, there is often widespread societal mistrust, including between security providers and citizens, and civil society can play an important role in creating spaces for dialogue. Further, as actors independent from the state, civil society can take on a 'watchdog' role, ensuring that security provision meets principles of good governance and democracy, including local ownership and protecting and upholding women's human rights. They can also advocate

for genuinely gender-responsive reform which, at a minimum, meets gendered safety and security needs, but can also be more transformative, influencing gender norms, masculinities, power relations and inequalities beyond the security sector.³⁰

Despite growing attention on human and inclusive security in policy discussions, a paradigm shift from traditional security concepts has not prevailed.³¹ In many states the understanding of security continues to be state-centric,³² with citizens' needs relegated and civil society's participation neglected and even suppressed in peace and security processes. Although there is broad consensus that gender-responsiveness of the security sector is essential, this is often narrowly interpreted by being reduced to a box-ticking exercise that does not consider wider structural barriers. For example, when focusing on merely increasing the numbers of women through recruitment without creating enabling environments that strengthen women's influence within institutions or addressing gendered power relations and inequalities, women continue to be marginalized from SSR processes.³³ This severely limits the capacity of states to meet the safety and human security needs of all, and to uphold their human rights, which demonstrates that civil society has a crucial role to ensure security really is people-centred.

Despite international commitments, at the national level, civil society often remains excluded from SSR discussions and decision-making processes.

Box 5: Civic space ratings



Source: CIVICUS Monitor: Tracking Civic Space. <https://monitor.civicus.org>

In contexts of open civic space, there is freedom of assembly, free media and authorities are tolerant of criticism. This contrasts with narrow, obstructed, repressed and closed civic space, characterized by increasing levels of regulation, repression and attacks on civic space in law and in practice, and harassment, threats and violence against civil society.

For a full definition see: <https://monitor.civicus.org/Ratings>

CASE STUDY 1: INFLUENCING FOR INCLUSIVE PEACE AND SECURITY IN SOUTH SUDAN

Following the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in December 2013, civil society quickly mobilized to call for peace and engage in the country's peace processes, which were led by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Since then, civil society has continuously engaged in and influenced provisions of the 2014 and 2017 agreements on the cessation of hostilities, the 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS), and the revitalized agreement in 2018 (R-ARCSS). It is deeply engaged in the implementation of the current peace agreement.

Civil society has successfully lobbied for more people-centred, inclusive security, and has impacted related agreements in multiple ways, including:

- Influencing the development of Chapter II of R-ARCSS, which describes the permanent ceasefire and transitional security arrangements.³⁴ For instance, civil society was instrumental in ensuring that a provision on civilian disarmament was included in the agreement.³⁵
- Women's groups, in particular, pushing for their inclusion in the 2015 and 2018 peace agreements and the establishment of a Hybrid Court to address war crimes, including widespread sexual violence. Although to date the Hybrid Court has yet to be established, it was committed to in the 2015 peace agreement and women continue to call for it.³⁶
- Calling for an arms embargo,³⁷ thereby contributing to the adoption of UN Resolution 2428 (2018).

This was a huge accomplishment given the challenge of closed civic space in South Sudan,³⁸ where civil society faces threats, intimidation, and highly restrictive laws that make it difficult for non-government organizations (NGOs) to register as legal entities.³⁹ There are high levels of government invigilation and censorship, including the need to seek permission from the intelligence service, the National Security Service (NSS), before holding workshops and events, and to submit lists of participants and agendas in advance,⁴⁰ which can place participants at risk and limit discussion topics. According to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Office of the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, intimidating practices and the NSS' powers of detention have been used against journalists and civil society and contribute to self-censorship in South Sudan.⁴¹

Effective strategies

Through lobbying, civil society achieved **the structural inclusion of civil society in the peace process** and secured a place at the negotiation table. This enabled civil society to participate in the peace process negotiations as formal delegates and as technical experts in security governance in thematic working groups, and in the various commissions created to support implementation of the agreements, including the Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism in South Sudan (CTSMM). In addition, civil society developed position papers promoting inclusive peace and security and providing advisory and technical input. Civil society groups reinforced their key messages via lobbying national, regional and international stakeholders, calling for inclusive processes, and via media outreach and public campaigns.⁴²

In response to the conflict, **civil society mobilized and formed networks, alliances and coalitions across local and national levels**, such as the South Sudan Civil Society Forum (SSCSF), formed in 2017 and comprising over 200 diverse civil society actors,

including CSOs, women's networks, youth associations, community-based organizations (CBOs), academics, journalists and individuals. The **creation of coalitions that were able to present unified views on certain issues** was a major factor contributing to the inclusion of civil society in the peace processes. Despite differences of opinion, individuals and groups were often able to unify around particular topics, prioritizing an inclusive peace process which is responsive to citizens' needs. This also contributed towards **trust-building** within civil society. In addition, while civil society faces threats and intimidation from groups involved in the conflict, **shared civil society positions have helped mitigate risk** for individuals and particular organizations, making them less likely to be targeted, intimidated, arrested or accused of taking sides.

Civil society actors contributed **technical expertise on security**, thereby legitimizing their engagement, particularly for those sceptical about their role or participation. For example, during the ARCSS and R-ARCSS negotiations, women civil society delegates collectively reviewed the language of the agreements to ensure that it was gender-sensitive.⁴³ In the context of a highly charged and politicized environment, focusing on strengthening the language of provisions in the peace agreements and providing technical inputs enabled civil society to maintain a high level of legitimacy and respect. They drew on expertise developed throughout South Sudan's long history of conflict, and particularly through their involvement in SSR efforts following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. Between 2005 and 2013, civil society actors took on key roles, including facilitating dialogues between communities and the security sector and participation in a community oversight board with the police.⁴⁴

During these processes, legitimacy and accountability were key issues, including questions within civil society about who can provide legitimate representation. This was partly addressed through some form of collective selection process of **civil society representatives for specific roles**. Creating coalitions, developing joint recommendations, and having the ability to put forward representatives strengthened the legitimacy and accountability of civil society to the wider public.

This case study demonstrates the **clear value** of having technical expertise, and creating alliances and coalitions, which contributed to building a strong, resilient civil society, able to mobilize and rapidly respond upon the outbreak of the conflict and maintain influence despite civic space being closed. The international community also played an important role by often **reinforcing national-level civil society calls** for an inclusive process and agreement.⁴⁵



Mary fled from Malakal in South Sudan to Mangaten camp in Juba when the war broke out. Now she fights for a better future. Photo: Robert Fogarty/Oxfam.

CASE STUDY 2: STRATEGICALLY NAVIGATING CIVIC SPACE IN NIGER

The working environment for civil society in Niger is defined by widespread insecurity, high levels of lawlessness and the presence of multiple armed groups, including those affiliated with the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram.⁴⁶ Poverty and high unemployment contribute to insecurity and push youth to join such groups.⁴⁷ At multiple times throughout the country's history, the military – which has historically played an important role – has disrupted political development through the use of coups.⁴⁸ Civic space is volatile, with CSOs and government in constant conflict, which has led to the arrest of leaders of organizations advocating for transparency and accountability. For instance, between 15 and 17 March 2020, at least 15 people were arrested and detained after criticizing an audit report by the Ministry of Defence. According to the judicial police this was because of 'participation in a prohibited demonstration and aiding in arson'.⁴⁹ Despite the huge number of CSOs active in Niger and political will to transform the security sector,⁵⁰ civil society faces multiple challenges, including a lack of resources and at times insufficient collaboration.⁵¹ Furthermore, many local CSOs have been used as political instruments.⁵² Security issues in Niger are usually perceived to be a matter of the state, thus the engagement of civil society in these issues is rather weak,⁵³ although some organizations are engaged in peacebuilding work and the promotion of human rights.⁵⁴

Due to the deteriorating security situation in Niger, civil society involvement in SSR is becoming more important than ever. Recently, government institutions have been placing greater emphasis on collaboration with CSOs working on security issues, which increases the opportunities to influence for inclusive security. Despite the challenges, civil society in Niger has deployed multiple strategies to ensure more people-centred security provision and – due to high levels of diversity and solidarity among CSOs – has proven to be strong and resilient throughout its long-term engagement on democracy and human rights.



A conversation in a camp for internally displaced persons in Kindjandi, Niger in 2016. The community was forced to leave their islands as part of a government military strategy. Credit: Vincent Tremeau/Oxfam.

Effective strategies

Civil society in Niger has shown great levels of efficiency in the dissemination of information among its various actors, enabling them to **exchange knowledge** and to **mutually build the capacity of the civil society sector** in the country as a whole. This has been evident, for example, through regional and national trainings organized by ASSN, after which participating organizations connected to a larger group of local organizations to share their newly gained insights.

In 2017, a Security Sector Governance Observatory was set up to improve relations between civil society and security sector authorities and strengthen CSOs' role in security sector governance.⁵⁵ Through this collaborative network, local organizations were able to build expertise and **strong relationships** and coordinate with each other. For example, when ASSN organized a training workshop in October 2019, CSOs in Niger collectively ensured that organizations from across the country – including areas with high levels of violence and remote areas – were represented among the participants.⁵⁶ This framework was also a basis for mutual consultations between the state and CSOs on the security crisis the country is presently going through.

Indeed, CSOs in Niger not only built partnerships with other CSOs, but also **strengthened relations with the authorities**. In their engagement with state institutions, rather than seeing the state as a unitary actor, CSOs in Niger **strategically targeted important individual actors and institutions**, such as the Human Rights Commission, the High Authority for Peace Consolidation (HACP) and the National Centre for Strategic and Security Studies (CNESS). Although some institutions were initially reluctant to engage with civil society, due to the perception of CSOs as being overly critical and politicized, civil society was able to prove its added value and create resilient relationships and trust between the authorities and the civil society sector. This has been essential and has enabled collaboration, including at the community level. It also enabled CSOs to diversify their engagement with the authorities: for instance, during an advocacy tour of decision makers in the security sector in January 2019, CSOs met not only with institutions related to the rule of law and the Human Rights Commission, but also with the Ministry of Defence and high officials in the military and security establishment.⁵⁷

In particular, CSOs engage with the HACP and CNESS on the creation of community development plans and the National Security and Defence Policy.⁵⁸ The continuous engagement between civil society, communities and the authorities around specific issues creates confidence in each other and strengthens connections – important prerequisites for civil society to have a voice in security issues. Especially when engaging on sensitive topics, such as SSR, **having authorities as allies** has been beneficial for CSOs to advocate for more inclusive processes.⁵⁹ An important lesson learned from this engagement is the value of **resilient and personal relationships across different sectors of society and policy making**.

In their engagement with the authorities and state institutions, CSOs in Niger applied a **non-confrontational and balanced approach**, which allows for constructive criticism while also giving space to **establish trust and strong relationships**. Due to the particularly high level of insecurity for civil society in Niger (including from non-state groups) and the sensitivity of security issues, organizations have been most successful in their influencing work when working in ways which are perceived as both **non-partisan and professional**.

Similar to South Sudan, civil society actors in Niger have demonstrated their added value to authorities by **stressing their technical expertise** and thus **avoiding their engagement being seen as overly politicized**. Through open communication and sharing resources and information, for instance about human rights abuses, CSOs have demonstrated to the authorities their clear added value and created space for their participation in security matters.

3 INFLUENCING CHALLENGES

Influencing security stakeholders is a highly sensitive matter in any context, but conflict, post-conflict, fragility and instability impact civic space in particular ways, which require civil society to employ specific tactics to navigate such restrictions. Some of the key challenges and barriers experienced by civil society are outlined below.

LIMITED ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND CENSORSHIP

Where civic space is restricted, access to information, freedom of speech and independence of the media are severely limited. On the African continent, censorship is one of the most widespread assaults on civic freedom.⁶⁰ This has implications for the ability of CSOs to fulfil a watchdog function, and analyse and criticize policies, regulations, violations and actions by governments or other actors, as well as monitor the implementation of peace agreements. It also restricts opportunities for engagement and for formulating relevant recommendations on issues. In Burundi, for instance, media and journalists have been experiencing a crackdown since 2015 and many have been forced to flee into exile⁶¹ or self-censor. Earlier this year, four Burundian journalists working for the most popular independent newspaper, Iwacu, were sentenced to prison for attempted complicity in threatening state security.⁶²

Taking a public stance on any security-related issues or criticizing the government, state institutions, other security providers or non-state armed groups such as Al-Shabaab can put organizations at significant risk.⁶³ Journalists face likely arrest for expressing views that oppose these actors,⁶⁴ while bloggers and online reporters have had their accounts blocked for taking a stance against the authorities.⁶⁵ In Somaliland, by comparison, there is greater freedom of expression, but there are still risks associated with criticizing government views. Moreover, access to information about the security sector in Somaliland is largely inaccessible to CSOs.⁶⁶

To be able to engage in SSR, civil society and journalists must have access to relevant documents, including financial information and budgetary decisions relating to the security sector and arms trade. Moreover, the media must be free to investigate and report on issues such as corruption of security forces or human rights violations by security actors.

A SMALL POOL OF CSOS WORKING ON SSR AND GOVERNANCE

Local and national organizations working on SSR and security governance are thinly spread. A common view among both the authorities and CSOs is that the security sector is dealt with by security actors rather than civil society, and that the particularly sensitive nature of SSR makes it very challenging for civil society to create entry points for engagement.

Additionally, in some cases, there is a lack of interest and knowledge of SSR concepts among both civil society⁶⁷ and security actors, not least because developing the appropriate know-how requires scarce resources. For example, a recent needs assessment indicated that in Somaliland there is little expertise and capacity to engage in SSR, both among the government as well as civil society.⁶⁸

The limited number of CSOs, including women's rights organizations, working specifically on these issues poses challenges for organizations like ASSN when identifying partners for capacity building, collaboration and joint advocacy work around inclusive security. However, civil society can utilize its experience of advocating for causes closely interlinked with SSR, such as gender equality, human rights and good governance.

RESTRICTIVE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Legislative power can be abused by authorities to limit freedoms of association, expression, assembly and information. The draconian 2009 Law on Charities and Societies in Ethiopia – which was replaced by a more democratic and open proclamation drafted using a participatory process in 2019⁶⁹ – had legitimized violent oppression of civil society, specifically those working on human rights, democracy, peacebuilding and good governance. Research shows that oppressive laws often have a spillover influence on civic space in other countries.⁷⁰

It is not only the existence of restrictive laws that is problematic, but particularly their arbitrary use in contexts where states are suspicious of civil society.⁷¹ This was evident in Niger in March 2018, when 26 activists and civil society actors were arrested and prosecuted for peacefully protesting against a new finance law due to concerns that it would increase the burden on vulnerable communities.⁷² This shows how – rather than understanding protests as an essential form of dialogue – states often perceive civic engagement as threatening. In countries where civic rights are enshrined in legislation, the issue is rather the insufficient implementation of such laws⁷³ or the authorities' lack of awareness about the laws. This is the case in Somaliland, where civil society is very vocal in speaking out about legal violations and holds the authorities accountable based on their legal rights.⁷⁴

Administrative hurdles, such as applying for re-registration or time-consuming processes to obtain approval, are another common challenge faced by many CSOs. When international NGOs were suspended in Burundi in 2018, they were forced to submit information on the ethnicity of employees to re-register⁷⁵ – a request which was renewed in 2020.⁷⁶ Similarly, CSOs in South Sudan reported that the re-registration process has in some instances been abused by the government to scrutinize organizations that are perceived as opposing government policies.⁷⁷

MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

CSOs face being discredited from a number of different directions, with women activists and organizations in particular being purposefully marginalized or not taken seriously. For example, during the peace processes in South Sudan women delegates were often ignored, and experienced sexual harassment from male delegates, as well as threats and intimidation from actors involved in the conflict.⁷⁸ This shows that it can be a particular challenge for historically marginalized social groups, including women, to access and engage in security spaces, which are highly masculinized.

Security actors often lack understanding that engaging with a diverse range of civil society actors is essential to create societies that are safe and secure for everyone, and women in civil society, especially, are regularly overlooked.⁷⁹ But restrictions on civic space are not always the result of state action: women's organizations are often silenced even by other CSOs and experience disrespect, online harassment and defamation.⁸⁰ Internalized gender biases of both security actors and within civil society lead to the assumption that women and women's groups do not have the relevant expertise to engage on security issues.⁸¹

THREATS, INTIMIDATION AND ARBITRARY ARRESTS

Threats, intimidation or risk of physical violence force civil society to take cautious approaches, which can limit their effectiveness to impact change. Conflict and insecurity particularly impact civil society due to the increased need for protection that requires time and resources, which cannot be put to use for programming and influencing work.⁸² High levels of violence and insecurity also contribute to the fragmentation of civil society.⁸³ In South-Central Somalia, as mentioned above, a high level of fear effectively silences CSOs and prevents criticism of the government, security institutions or non-state groups like Al-Shabaab.⁸⁴ In Somaliland, where civil society is quite outspoken, journalists are at risk of harassment and intimidation⁸⁵, arbitrary detention⁸⁶ or trial without presence of a lawyer.⁸⁷

POLARIZATION AND MISTRUST WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society, including women's rights organizations, thrives on pluralism, inclusion and trust, but conflict polarizes societies and creates widespread mistrust.⁸⁸ In conflict and post-conflict contexts, societies are usually fragmented and polarized by divisions along the political lines of the conflict.⁸⁹ This is often characterized by tension and disputes about who the legitimate representatives of citizens' interests are, such as in Burundi, where there is friction between pro-government, pro-opposition and non-affiliated CSOs.⁹⁰ The political and security crisis since 2015 also led to a lack of trust and confidence in state actors and security forces such as the police.⁹¹

Mistrust between different civil society actors is particularly prevalent in South-Central Somalia, resulting in a lack of support among them. As a result of this fragmentation of civil society, different CSOs employ very different and sometimes contradictory approaches.⁹²

Mistrust and polarization of the civil society sector also arise from corruption. For instance, in Somaliland, where some leaders of well-established CSOs are seen to benefit from strong relations with government officials and where individuals move between the authorities and civil society, grassroots and other smaller organizations are said to be disadvantaged.⁹³

LIMITED ACCESS TO FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Tension and divisions within civil society can be inadvertently exacerbated by donor funding. For example, research on the role of women in South Sudan's peace processes that led to the peace agreements in 2015 and 2018 found that competition over limited funding and resources fuelled tensions between civil society actors.⁹⁴

Similarly, in Somalia/Somaliland, where the structure of civil society parallels the funding flows in the humanitarian system, international organizations have significantly more power and influence than local actors,⁹⁵ who take on roles such as subcontractors or service providers. This fails to recognize local civil society as legitimate actors in their own right, and their potential is curbed by the limitations on funding. Most tensions, mistrust and coordination challenges among local CSOs originate from competition over donor funding. Since the majority of resources tend to go to international NGOs, there is little left

for national and local organizations, which inhibits their capacity to develop their own strategic priorities.⁹⁶

Short-term funding cycles and the reporting requirements of international partners pose challenges for local CSOs in many countries and particularly marginalize local, grassroots and community-based organizations, women's rights groups, and other smaller and less professionalized initiatives.⁹⁷ The often limited availability of domestic funding adds another layer of complexity. In Somalia/Somaliland, donor dependency⁹⁸ negatively influences relationships between international and local actors⁹⁹ and prevents localization efforts.¹⁰⁰ In response, platforms comprising local and international organizations in Somalia/Somaliland have started advocating for aid localization.¹⁰¹

THE ROLE OF NON-STATE ACTORS

Non-state actors – including civil society – can knowingly or unknowingly contribute to the shrinking of civic space, for instance when religious leaders speak out against sexual and reproductive rights, when LGBTQIA+ activists face threats from conservative movements within society, or when women's rights defenders are silenced by other civic actors. For example, in Somali society, women's access to leadership and decision making is restricted due to cultural barriers.¹⁰² Private sector and business entities can also have negative influence, for example when engaging in corruption or human rights abuses.¹⁰³ In South Sudan, where the private sector is closely interlinked with government institutions, civil society struggles to engage with businesses.¹⁰⁴

In areas under the control of non-state armed groups, for instance in South Sudan and Central African Republic, civic space is largely determined by those actors. Decisions about engagement or disengagement with such groups is a high-risk dilemma for civil society actors, particularly in contexts where power dynamics are rapidly changing. For example, in South-Central Somalia, although the influence of Al-Shabaab has started decreasing, areas under their control remain largely inaccessible to humanitarian actors. Hostility towards CSOs associated with international and UN organizations, who are considered enemies, poses extremely high risks that could result in loss of life.¹⁰⁵

4 OPPORTUNITIES TO MAINTAIN AND RECLAIM CIVIC SPACE

Despite operating in challenging contexts, civil society is highly resilient and adaptable, pushing back against shrinking civic space, and maintaining or opening space. Across the different country contexts, CSOs have used different strategies to maintain and open civic space and to prevent the shrinking of civic space to influence for inclusive security.

Responses to shrinking civic space around security issues are heavily dependent on context and should be localized. However, the core strategies highlighted below were collectively identified by CSOs across the eight countries and can serve as adaptable starting points for civil society in other contexts.

CIVIL SOCIETY AS THE ‘GO-TO’ EXPERTS

The politicized, highly sensitive nature of security and SSR processes amplifies the need for knowledgeable, professionalized CSO engagement. Positioning themselves as thematic experts on topics related to SSR – such as human rights or gender equality – creates entry points for CSOs to engage in specialized and technical roles in the process and links security issues to other issues CSOs are regularly working on. When they have strong technical expertise and are able to provide substantial input on security processes, CSOs have been quite influential. This was evident during the development of the AU Operational Guidance Notes on SSR and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), when various CSOs were invited to consultation workshops to lead on particular aspects.¹⁰⁶ In countries where state institutions are weak, there may be additional space for civil society to bridge the gap and become the ‘go-to’ experts on SSR and governance, like in South Sudan. Experience shows that the position of local and national CSOs, including women’s rights organizations, can be strengthened considerably by mutual sharing of knowledge and best practices across national contexts, and engaging with regional and international organizations that have specific expertise, including thematic (SSR) and skills-based (e.g. advocacy or campaigning) know-how.¹⁰⁷ Yet, the professionalization of civil society can also lead to the exclusion of less formalized and grassroots initiatives. Thus, there is a need for all actors to be aware of and reflect on inclusivity and intersectionality in their work plans and advocacy strategies; for example, by actively collaborating with local groups.

DIALOGUE, CONSULTATION AND TRUST-BUILDING BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY AND STATE ACTORS

The experience of CSOs indicates that engaging authorities, promoting continuous and inclusive dialogue and getting their buy-in has been central to civil society’s participation in SSR processes. As highlighted in the case studies, this approach has been essential to civil society gaining recognition and building relationships and trust. Engagement with authorities can support civil society to secure a seat at the table in decision-making spaces and to challenge restrictive laws in safer ways. When civil society has engaged

via existing mechanisms, the likelihood for consultation processes to be institutionalized has increased.

CSOs have reported that engagement that is non-confrontational and transparent has proven to be most effective, but can be challenging in discussions around highly-sensitive issues. Civil society can maintain a 'critical friend' position through communicating critical input in a neutral manner, grounded in a strong evidence base and technical expertise. Engaging authorities in conversations early on can prevent negative reactions, for example when a critical report is published. In Somaliland, a study conducted by civil society with prior agreement from the police found that the police did not comply with the law on conditions in prisons and police stations. A resulting position paper calling for police reform that was published in the media led to a heavy police backlash. To mitigate the tensions and rebuild trust, civil society approached the authorities and the police to request open dialogue about the importance of police reform, referred to existing legislation and offered support for the reform processes. This open engagement contributed to the police sector accepting the report and continuing to engage with civil society despite its criticism.¹⁰⁸

Including the authorities in training activities is also an effective strategy to build trust and shared understanding of key issues and concepts, such as the role of civil society in SSR processes.¹⁰⁹

BUILDING STRONG CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Conflict undermines trust-building, dialogue and cooperation between different actors, but a pluralistic, inclusive civil society based on trust is essential for people-centred security. Creating strong and resilient networks and alliances – particularly across religious, ethnic or other identity lines – and working towards common goals can enhance the capacity and influencing power of civil society towards authorities and security institutions. This may also involve working with civil society actors across different sectors, such as the media and academia, as well as the private sector. In contexts where civil society faces threats and intimidation, working as a network reduces the likelihood of individuals or specific organizations being targeted.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, collaboration in networks provides opportunities for exchange of information and mutual learning. Collaboration between CSOs around shared issues of interest can contribute to building trust and help to overcome divisions within civil society across conflict lines.¹¹¹

The umbrella structure of civil society in Somaliland provides a good example of a strong alliance that enables close connections between a diverse range of civic actors. A few years ago, local civil society initiatives formed alliances of CSOs working on specific issues, including networks of women's and youth organizations. These networks come together regularly in a collective forum.¹¹² The forum provides opportunities for coordination, joint advocacy and influence on policies. The wide range of actors represented in the forum makes it influential and gives civil society increased leverage to be outspoken and commit the government to engage in conversations. This was essential when civil society faced a backlash from the police force in Somaliland after reporting on conditions in prisons and police stations.¹¹³

Similarly, CSOs in Somalia/Somaliland are engaged in alliances, for instance a recently created platform working towards aid localization. Civil society in Somalia/Somaliland holds monthly consortium meetings, but these are mostly at a director level and about strategic issues. The potential for closer collaboration between CSOs at subnational levels and including community leaders is currently underutilized.¹¹⁴

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE, ACCOUNTABLE AND LEGITIMATE CIVIL SOCIETY

Legitimacy is a key element in the development of strong and influential civil society networks and alliances. This means civil society actors need to be transparent and accountable both to each other as well as to their constituency, the wider public and external actors. Within networks, this may involve developing inclusive criteria for participation in decision making and consultations between security actors and civil society based on specific expertise, while ensuring the representation of a range of groups, such as women and youth. The first case study provides an example of how civil society addressed this in South Sudan's peace processes. In addition, civil society in South Sudan built alliances across national and local levels on SSR, allowing for mutual capacity strengthening and ensuring, for example, that security concerns at the community level informed national-level security discussions.¹¹⁵

CSOs have more credibility and influence when they have a strong constituency behind them and communities are connected with and informed about their work.¹¹⁶ This means bridging abstract and technical processes such as 'security sector reform' with people's everyday realities and needs, and the safety and security concerns of individuals and communities. Through closely involving communities, CSOs can ensure their input is based on the protection concerns of people and is well-evidenced, which strengthens their legitimacy both with communities and with governments and security actors. For example, in Somaliland, many CSOs were created from informal community groups and remain strongly associated with these, thereby facilitating connections between stakeholders from the grassroots to the national level.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, the main civil society consortiums and forums in Somalia/Somaliland are composed of a diverse range of actors, including CSOs and NGOs, but also community and religious leaders, clan elders, youth and women's groups and private sector representatives. Although a level of mistrust persists among CSOs, the inclusive structure allows for strategic coordination around shared issues and joint advocacy for inclusive SSR.¹¹⁸

Similarly, in Niger and Central African Republic, national CSOs have worked together with ASSN to establish civil society networks on SSR. Particular attention has been paid to ensure the networks are diverse and inclusive – for example, including women's organizations, which are often excluded from security decision-making spaces. In one training event, inadvertently only CSOs affiliated to a single religion participated. When this became apparent, the approach was quickly adapted to engage CSOs from other backgrounds. Ensuring diversity was not only essential from a conflict sensitivity perspective, but also helped to bring CSOs together, and to increase the legitimacy of the network towards security stakeholders.¹¹⁹

ADAPTABLE DEMOCRATIC CONFLICT- AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE INFLUENCING

Working in insecure and rapidly changing environments, where civic space can shrink suddenly, requires acceptance that delays and setbacks are inevitable. Particularly in conflict-affected contexts, civil society needs to adapt strategies quickly to mitigate risks. Periodic gender-responsive conflict analyses can be used to respond to changing situations – including changes in civic space – and adapt influencing strategies on security issues accordingly. Trust-building, both among civil society and with authorities and security actors, is time consuming and prone to setbacks, even more so on sensitive topics like SSR.¹²⁰ Therefore, flexibility with time planning is crucial, although this may

pose challenges given the political urgency often linked to SSR processes. Improving civil society capacity and influencing in such contexts requires a broader, longer-term commitment and funding.

Approaches to SSR and influencing security actors have a higher success rate when they utilize existing structures and are adapted to individual circumstances and locally owned, recognizing that what worked well elsewhere or even previously may not be or no longer be effective.¹²¹ Working with the clan structure in Somali society could be an opportunity to promote cultural tolerance, social cohesion and conflict resolution.¹²² For instance, during a dispute, clan elders can bring together different parties to negotiate an agreement.¹²³ While working within local structures can be effective, this should be underpinned by a gender and power analysis, to ensure structural inequalities and power imbalances are not reproduced.¹²⁴ Integrating gender perspectives into security sector reform processes can increase local ownership, thus women's organizations should be seen as key stakeholders.¹²⁵

LEVERAGING REGIONAL ACTORS AND INTERNATIONAL DONORS

The AU and regional economic blocks, including IGAD, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) are crucial actors in SSR processes. CSO engagement with them, via joint workshops and lobbying, helps to increase political will for the effective implementation of national, regional and continental SSR policies¹²⁶ and maintain civic space at the national level. For example, training provided for Somali CSOs by ASSN not only built their capacity and knowledge on inclusive security, but also provided valuable opportunities for these CSOs to create connections among each other as well as build relationships with IGAD. These connections provide entry points for influencing.¹²⁷

In Somaliland, civil society was previously excluded from SSR processes. Driven by a vision of human security and gender-responsiveness of the security sector, civil society approached international donors to advocate to government authorities for civil society's participation. Through aligning themselves with the donor community and strategically engaging their partners, civil society in Somaliland was able to not only push for inclusion, but now hosts the secretariat that manages SSR across Somaliland.¹²⁸

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Open civic space is essential for an inclusive and people-centred security, because it allows for different opinions to be voiced and heard, and increases the chance that these will then be taken into account. When citizens can speak out, their needs are more likely to be reflected in the design of security policies and governments, and the private sector can be held to account. Partnerships between civil society and governments can provide valuable entry points for constructive engagement and dialogue on more human-centred security. However, beyond including professionalized and formalized CSOs, there is an urgent need to recognize and value the diversity of civil society actors and meaningfully engage less institutionalized groups, such as community-based organizations, informal associations or social movements. As laid out in this paper, conflict, fragility and instability affect and restrict civic space in particular ways. This is especially true for highly sensitive and political issues, such as inclusive security and SSR processes. However, in many cases local and national CSOs across the African continent have successfully developed approaches and mechanisms to navigate restrictions strategically, open civic space and reclaim their positions in conversations on security issues. Yet, local and national civil society actors often cannot do this alone. International organizations, donors and other stakeholders can and should support them to more effectively influence national authorities towards more inclusive, people-centred security in contexts of shrinking civic space in Africa. The policy recommendations below provide specific suggestions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE AFRICAN UNION AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES

- **Strengthen institutional mechanisms such as ECOSOCC and implement the Livingstone Formula for the meaningful participation of diverse CSOs**, including women's and youth organizations, in the needs assessment, development, adoption, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the AU and regional SSR policy frameworks.
- Establish and/or strengthen **CSO desks at the RECs level** to drive the civil society agenda and their participation in regional SSR policy development and implementation processes. Build expertise among member states on the importance and crucial role of CSOs. Create and/or strengthen regional platforms for CSOs that connect them with the RECs and the AU.
- **Develop mechanisms to support member states** and monitor the meaningful participation of CSOs – including women's organizations – in national security structures, in line with the AU's SSR policy framework and the Livingstone Formula.
- **Support civil society in all its diversity in reclaiming restricted spaces**, by stepping in and actively challenging legislation in member states which restricts civic space. A strong and vibrant civil society is essential to the achievement of the AU's 2030 Agenda.¹²⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL NGOS

- **Push for local ownership and support linkages between local initiatives and international donors and other stakeholders**, such as through facilitating direct communication channels to reinforce local and national CSO's advocacy messages on inclusive security. Despite the fact that local ownership has been recognized as the cornerstone of SSR, international organizations often still have a larger say in programme implementation – resulting in part from funding streams that uphold power

imbalances. However, in order to strengthen the influencing capacity of civil society in fragile and conflict-affected environments, local ownership and equal partnerships should be the guiding principles. This includes the meaningful inclusion of smaller grassroots or less institutionalized organizations, women-led initiatives and youth groups and the creation of stronger linkages between local initiatives and international donors, while avoiding situations where local initiatives become isolated and disconnected from national-level processes. The capacity of local organizations and networks around security and justice sector reform, and to monitor actions by security providers, should be increased.

- **Advocate for civic space that allows for inclusive peace and SSR processes in countries with oppressive authorities**, especially in cases when local and national CSOs or activists face threats, intimidation, gender-based harassment or arbitrary arrest, and create awareness among donors on the crucial role of local and national civil society in ensuring people-centred security.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

- **Provide systematic and diplomatic support for local and national civil society.** This should include **long-term and flexible investment** in local and national civil society, such as capacity strengthening, supporting the creation of alliances and partnerships, and facilitating trust-building by playing a role in strengthening mutual understanding and respect between diverse CSOs – including women's groups – and government entities and/or regulatory bodies. It should also include **political support and protection in times of crisis**, and especially when CSOs are threatened by state authorities or armed groups.
- Engage with governments and **use their influence to push for civic space**, recognizing that local and national CSOs in particular represent community needs and voices. Work towards ensuring that financial resources benefit and are primarily invested in a diverse range of local and national organizations.
- **Support CSOs to develop adaptive conflict and gender-transformative SSR influencing strategies**, including digital campaigning and related digital protection support, and compile good practices for such strategies. **Support state and regional institutions to design inclusive, gender-responsive and context-specific SSR processes** that are locally owned, based on community needs, and address and effectively work to change power relations and gendered assumptions.



Yagana, 20, waiting to collect aid in an informal settlement of refugees and Nigeriens displaced by Boko Haram's violent attacks near Diffa in Niger. Violent Acts by Boko Haram and the military operations to counter them have displaced around 2.6 million people in the Lake Chad Basin region. Credit: Sam Tarling/Oxfam.

NOTES

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