Resilient Roots: 2017 – 2020

Programme Evaluation

Mark Nowottny and Lois Aspinall

February 2020

Executive Summary

Between 2017 and 2020, the Resilient Roots initiative set out to test whether organisations that are more accountable and responsive to their primary constituents are more resilient against threats related to closing civic space.

Led by **CIVICUS,** in partnership with **Keystone Accountability, Accountable Now** and **ICD**, the initiative worked with **fourteen CSOs** around the world to **pilot new primary constituency accountability mechanisms** and approaches.

This evaluation, carried out in January and February 2020, is based on **analysis of over 57 documents** and **18 interviews** with partners, staff and stakeholders.

Key findings include:

- The Resilient Roots initiative was **unique, relevant** and **added value by exploring its hypothesis**
- Resilient Roots model helped many pilot partners **strengthen their accountability**, in some cases changing constituents' mindsets and relationships or cementing allies
- Pilot partners who **achieved the most** through Resilient Roots tended to be those who had the **most commitment to and understanding of accountability**
- In some cases, **greater recognition of the role of staff** in pilot projects' theories of change could have increased their impact
- Although it **proved difficult for Resilient Roots to test its hypothesis quantitatively**, it was **able to effectively explore the connections** between accountability and resilience against civic space threats

- There appears to be **limited uptake so far of findings** from Resilient Roots in the wider expert community
- Global partners ran the Resilient Roots initiative **effectively** and **professionally**, generally **"walked the talk" on accountability** to their primary constituents, and were **flexible** and **adaptive** in their support for pilot partners
- Resilient Roots **succeeded in creating a community of pilot partners**, and **sustainability** was **well-considered** from the outset, even though the community may not endure
- **Early-stage programme design** and implementation **could have been more thorough**
- Resilient Roots was **well aligned with other CIVICUS programmes and networks**
- The **theory of "Primary Constituent Accountability"** was **central** to Resilient Roots' hypothesis, but at times it became an **intellectual and terminological straitjacket**.

Key recommendations going forwards include:

- Partners should invest time and resources in a **second phase of Resilient Roots**
- CIVICUS should **separate out and step up** three streams of work:
  - **Investment** and **programming** to support CSOs with **accountability**
  - **Research** into the connections between accountability and resilience, including committing to and communicating its promising results.
  - **Thought leadership, advocacy** and **campaigning** to promote accountability.

About Resilient Roots

Background

The Resilient Roots (RR) initiative set out to test whether organisations who are more accountable and responsive to their primary constituents are more resilient against threats related to closing civic space.

The initiative, funded by the Ford Foundation between October 2017 and February 2020, was coordinated by CIVICUS. Keystone Accountability and Accountable Now provided technical and strategic support. Instituto de Comunicación y Desarrollo (ICD) provided additional regional support to partners in Latin America.

Objectives

Resilient Roots' primary objective was to test the following hypothesis: 'When organisations are more accountable and responsive to their primary constituencies, they are more resilient against external [civic space] threats'. A programme Theory of Change published in April 2018, and amended in January 2019, set out how programme activities and outputs would lead to this outcome. Secondary programme objectives included:

- Creating a community of partner organisations ready to implement the pilots
- Creating a research approach able to test the hypothesis and demonstrate the links between constituent accountability and resilience
- Influencing the wider civil society sector's approach to accountability

Activities

Through an application process, the Resilient Roots programme selected, in two cohorts, fifteen CSOs (one of whom subsequently left the project), working across a range of locations and on different issues, to roll out year-long projects to strengthen their accountability to primary constituents. Each organisation received financial and technical support for the design, implementation, and ongoing review of their project. Pilot partner organisations selected were Asociación Kusi Warma (Peru); Avanzar Asociación Civil por el Desarrollo Humano (Argentina); Climate Watch Thailand; Educo (Nicaragua); FemPlatz (Serbia); Jeunes Volontaires pour l'Environnement (Benin); Kyetume Community Based Health Care Programme (Uganda); Fundación MarViva (Costa Rica); OVD-Info (Russia); Palestinian Center for Communication and Development Strategies; Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (Zimbabwe); Project Jeune Leader (Madagascar); Solidarity Now (Greece); and Video Volunteers (India).

At the global level, Resilient Roots tested its hypothesis by developing methodologies for measuring changes in pilot partners' accountability and resilience, and by commissioning case studies and data analysis. The initiative also established mechanisms and tools for ongoing peer-learning between the pilot project organisations. As the programme progressed, it aimed to collate and share learnings to support other organisations to develop and adopt their own constituent accountability approaches.

About the evaluation

This evaluation was commissioned as an independent external evaluation in January 2020, and was carried out by Mark Nowottny, with support from Lois Aspinall, between 13 January and 28 February 2020.

Focus of evaluation

The overall purpose of the evaluation was to assess the extent to which Resilient Roots achieved its objectives. The evaluation aimed to explore four key questions:

1. Are Resilient Roots organisations more accountable and responsive to their roots?

2. How successful was Resilient Roots at testing the relationship between accountability and resilience against civic space-related threats?

3. Programmatically, what lessons are emerging?

4. How can programme partners enhance the initiative's outcomes in the future?

Methodology

Desk review: Evaluators analysed over 57 different internal Resilient Roots documents, relating both to activities at a global level (such as programme proposals, monitoring frameworks, research methodologies, feedback survey data, progress reports, and contractual documents), and also to country pilot partner projects (such as baseline, endline and final reports provided by pilot partners to CIVICUS, project summaries, and feedback survey data). Evaluators were provided full access to all documents that they requested.

Interviews: Evaluators carried out 19 interviews with partners, staff or stakeholders related to the Resilient Roots projects. These included 45-minute semi-structured interviews with 9 of the 14 country pilot partners, as well as 30-minute loosely structured interviews with 9 project partners, staff or stakeholders working at the global level with close familiarity to the programme. Interview participants were selected in consultation with Resilient Roots staff, and represented a range from low- to high-performing pilot partners. For those not interviewed, comprehensive information was available in the documentation.

Possible limitations

The evaluation was carried out across a relatively short timeframe, necessitating a relatively light-touch methodology.

There were some limitations to the availability of high quality quantitative data, especially relating to 'resilience'. An important study by Triskuel, commissioned by Resilient Roots in order to explore and test its hypothesis, was only concluded and shared with evaluators a few days before completion of the evaluation.

No attempts were made at any point by project partners to change or influence the substantive findings of this report.

Findings

1. The Resilient Roots initiative is both unique and highly relevant. Given the ongoing global trend of restricted civic space and threats to civil society organisations, the Resilient Roots programme added clear and unique value for global civil society. As one interviewee explained, CSOs "are faced with challenges of civic space, where governments keep saying 'you're not legitimate, you don't speak on behalf of anyone'… so testing out that relationship [between accountability and resilience to civic space threats] is really important". Another interviewee argued that Resilient Roots "is about moving beyond the words on accountability and into some really practical ways to help". Although many larger international NGOs are investing in their own accountability, there are only a limited number of initiatives similar to Resilient Roots that invest in practical solutions for small and medium CSOs in the global South to strengthen their accountability. Further, there do not appear to be other comparable initiatives exploring and testing the relationship between accountability and resilience to civic space threats.

The Resilient Roots model for strengthening accountability

2. In most cases, Resilient Roots pilot partners succeeded in establishing new accountability mechanisms, or strengthening existing ones. These included a diverse range of new techniques, approaches and tools, often innovative. For example, in India, Video Volunteers established a new Council to democratise decision-making and hand over control to primary constituents. In Madagascar, Project Jeune Leader adapted a regular magazine to communicate better with primary constituents. In Serbia, FemPlatz established regular new focus groups with primary constituents. In Russia, OVD-Info launched a new crowdfunding process to encourage primary constituents to shape priorities. In Zimbabwe, Poverty Reduction Forum Trust established new citizen report cards to measure their accountability with primary constituents.

3. In many cases, Resilient Roots pilot partners became more accountable and responsive to their primary constituents. Most pilot partners reported changes to their accountability and their relationship with primary constituents. Resilient Roots helped pilot partners to connect better with and listen to primary constituents. At times, projects shifted mind-sets within pilot partner organisations, with one interviewee describing the importance of a "space for mutuality". One interviewee explained that their organisation was now "mindful that all the decisions we take need to be rooted in what our constituents are actually saying, not just what we are assuming they want". This shift in mind-set helped some organisations refocus: another interviewee explained that better contact with primary constituents had "clarified our mandate … it helped people understand us and our mandate and what we do". Despite short timeframes, there is evidence of changes to long-term organisational culture and approaches (such as the attitudes of staff towards primary constituents).

4. Survey data suggests that perceptions of both primary constituents and staff/volunteers about the accountability of Resilient Roots organisations generally improved. Resilient Roots collected baseline and endline survey data (Net Promoter Scores) to monitor changing perceptions of primary constituents and

staff/volunteers about each organisation's accountability. According to external data analysis conducted by Triskuel, there were higher overall scores (see Figure 1). However, although primary constituent scores increased (from baseline to endline) in seven of the fourteen organisations, in two the score remained the same, and in five the score actually decreased (see Figure 2). However, only in two cases (Russia and Argentina) did accountability scores from both primary
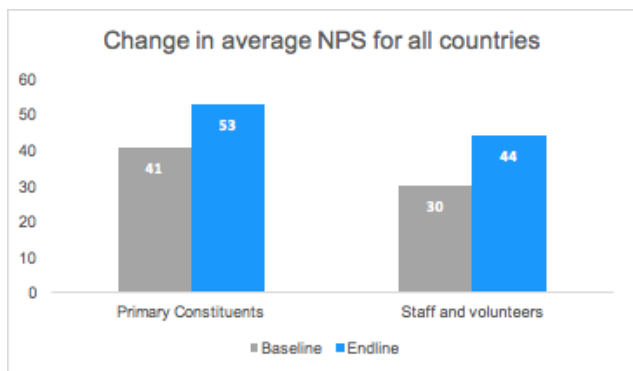

Figure 1: Overall changes in perceptions (Net Promoter Score). *Source: Triskuel data analysis*

constituents and staff decrease. According to Triskuel's research, accountability scores from primary constituents increased significantly (1) for small and medium organisations, rather than large ones; (2) for those organisations who made significant attempts as part of their project to close the "feedback loop" with primary constituents; and (3) for those organisations who mainstreamed accountability activities across different or all primary constituent groups. These conclusions should be treated with caution, in part because of a limited sample size of organisations and in part

because of limitations with the survey data itself (including the sampling of respondents). Nevertheless, the data available does suggest changes in perceptions overall.

5. Many Resilient Roots organisations are well-equipped to ensure changes are sustainable and long-lasting. Although it is too soon to evaluate the long-term sustainability of changes, many pilot partner organisations planned from the beginning for their changes to be long-term, deep-rooted and not dependent on future financial resources. On the whole, pilot partners seemed acutely aware of the challenges they might encounter in maintaining the direction of travel after the project's completion. Global Resilient Roots partners (CIVICUS, Keystone Accountability, Accountable Now) took important steps to reduce dependence on Resilient Roots, and emphasised sustainability in their advice and guidance throughout the programme.

6. Pilot partners who achieved the most through Resilient Roots tended to be those who had the most commitment to and understanding of accountability. Some of the partners who appeared to achieve the most impressive had either existing senior leadership intentions to practice accountability and drive organisational change, or otherwise a deep-rooted organisational alignment to some or all of the principles of primary constituent accountability. For example, one interviewee explained that
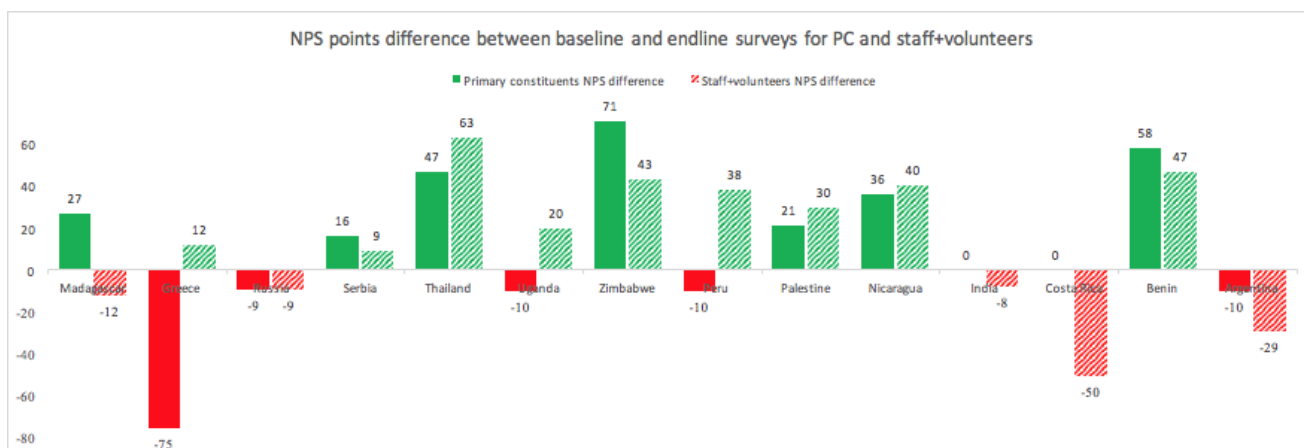

Figure 2: Changes in perceptions (Net Promoter Score) by country. *Source: Triskuel data analysis.*

"actually [our] feminist principles are in line with constituent accountability because it's what we talk about all the time - about listening, communicating, building trust and respect, the autonomy of women". Conversely, an interviewee working for a global partner suggested that there was a noticeable divide between two tiers of pilot partners, and that those organisations that came to the project with limited understanding of accountability, even if they had seen marked improvements through its duration, had required more coaching to achieve their improvements. This suggests an important caveat about what changes can be attributed solely to Resilient Roots, and about causation: it is possible that organisations undertook Resilient Roots because they were serious about accountability, rather than that they became serious about accountability because they undertook Resilient Roots. The project delivered value for all partners, but it suggests there are difficult choices (with no perfect answers) on which organisations should receive accountability programming support. Learnings here on how to target accountability support to different types of organisation should be used to directly inform any future phase of the initiative.

7. In some cases, greater recognition of the role of staff in pilot projects could have increased their impact. Several pilot partners described how the focus on primary constituent accountability had failed to recognise the challenge of first bringing the organisation's own staff (many of whom were the first point of contact with primary constituents) on board. One interviewee said that "next time, we should have involved our staff from the beginning – dynamic accountability has to include staff, not just constituents." Another explained that after initial challenges, in the second half of their project, "we decided to see our own team as 'primary constituents', and we worked with them on accountability [and] resilience". A third reflected that it would have been helpful to roll out materials and guides with all their organisation's staff. This suggests that it is important in practising primary constituent accountability not to treat organisations (especially larger ones) as homogenous entities. Future projects could place greater emphasis on the role of organisations' staff and people as key agents in primary constituent accountability. Explicitly recognising staff as a target for PCA training – and deeper attitudinal change – could help, and is in line with CIVICUS' other work around "dynamic accountability" and organisational transformation.

The Resilient Roots hypothesis

The primary objective of the Resilient Roots initiative was to test the hypothesis that 'when organisations are more accountable and responsive to their primary constituencies, they are more resilient against external [civic space] threats'. Resilient Roots deliberately discouraged pilot partners from seeking to strengthen their resilience. This was done in order to establish 'resilience against civic space threats' as an independent variable that could be tested and tracked against accountability.

8. Firm conclusions on Resilient Roots' hypothesis could not be reached. In the final months of the programme, the programme commissioned rigorous external data analysis on the hypothesis by Triskuel. According to Triskuel's report, "the statistical analysis offers a partial confirmation of the hypothesis in that it shows staff

and volunteer perceptions of the organisations' accountability are positively correlated with the same people's perception that the organisation is becoming more resilient. However, there are significant limitations in the existing data structure that need to be considered, and that urge caution at interpreting a causal relationship of accountability and resilience." The research goes on to conclude that "although the analysis above does provide a test of the central hypothesis concerning the relationship between accountability and resilience, it is worth noting some words of caution regarding the outcome variable of resilience in this case."

9. The early stages of programme design and implementation made it more difficult to test the hypothesis rigorously. The extreme complexity, breadth of variables, and short duration of the project meant that it may always have been too ambitious to test the project's hypothesis quantitatively. Nevertheless, programme partners could perhaps have done work at an earlier stage (including prior to proposal submission) to establish workable approaches for defining and measuring accountability and resilience. One interviewee said, "We focussed a lot on the accountability aspect, making sure that they rolled out their mechanisms properly." Another interviewee suggested that external help with the research component of the programme and data analysis could have been brought in earlier. One interviewee pointed out the difference between experimentation and scientific testing of a hypothesis, arguing that for the hypothesis-testing to work properly, it would have required a "larger, statistical sample" of similar organisations with similar baselines. As one interviewee put it, "we went into this with a hypothesis that we quickly realised was going to be very difficult to test".

10. Nevertheless, Resilient Roots <u>was</u> able to effectively explore the links between primary constituency accountability and resilience to civic space threats. In, the programme's Theory of

Change, "Final Outcome 1" was: "Improved understanding of connections/relationship (going both ways) between primary constituency accountability and resilience to civic space threats", and on this front the programme made significant progress. First, the initiative produced and collected excellent qualitative data and rich stories of significant change. Second, the initiative planned for, budgeted for and commissioned rigorous data analysis by Triskuel to explore in great depth the links based on all the quantitative and qualitative data available, for example capturing positive correlations between staff and volunteer perceptions about strengthened accountability and strengthened resilience. Third, this progress helped partners to know what they didn't know and to understand the difficulties of measuring links quantitatively and how to do it better next time. One interviewee believed Resilient Roots had given an important "glimpse" of the links between accountability and resilience, while another suggested that "even if we didn't manage to prove the hypothesis and have stone-cold data, the strides we've seen by each of these organisations has been incredible."

11. Several changes to factors that influence an organisation's resilience were observable. Triskuel's report cited qualitative evidence of several different types of observed changes to factors that influence an organisation's resilience, including: "connectedness to primary constituents and the wider community; networks and partnerships; legitimacy and transparency; funding diversification; staff mind-set and capacity; clarity and relevance of mission and focus; capacity to deliver the right services to the right people; capacity to communicate with clarity and creativity; situational awareness / systems thinking; adaptive capacity; legal and bureaucratic capacity". Interviewees for this evaluation also provided nuanced but rich examples: an organisation fearful of attacks from right wing groups said that although they would still need to defend themselves with legal action in the event of future

attacks, the support from primary constituents (who now understood and felt included in their work) had made a difference. An organisation facing community backlash for providing comprehensive sexuality education in schools said that there had been several incidences where school directors (their primary constituents, who their project had been working with) had – unprompted - defended and explained their work to parents. An advocacy organisation said that although they were no safer from physical or legal threats from the authorities, they felt that because their constituents and citizens had stronger links with their activities, it was less likely to result in misunderstandings that could create problems for the organisation. A human rights organisation operating in a repressive context explained that their relationship with their constituents helped to make them resilient against civic space threats: "[we] are really dependent on the number of loyal people – journalists, activists and so on – who care about us... we are already more resilient". Evaluation research therefore provides some validation for what Triskuel found, in particular around connectedness to roots; staff mind-set and capacity, and clarity and relevance of mission.

12. There may have been other ways to research and test Resilient Roots' hypothesis. Resilient Roots set out from the beginning to test its hypothesis by setting up a new experiment, with a new group of organisations running new projects. From a research perspective, however, there are other possible methodologies for understanding the connections and links between primary constituency accountability and resilience to civic space threats. For example, partners could have researched organisations who had over the past 10-20 years successfully navigated and responded to civic space threats, and then researched retrospectively the ways in which primary constituency accountability was (or was not) a factor. Different research approaches, of course, each come with their own merits and drawbacks. But the decision early in the programme design to

'research forwards', rather than 'research backwards', was in itself a major choice.

13. Resilient Roots developed important new resources on primary constituency accountability. Over the course of the project, Resilient Roots' global partners were able to successfully develop what one interviewee described as a "library of resources" based on the practical step-by-step experience of how pilot partners had developed new mechanisms for primary constituent accountability. This remains an important source of learning: CIVICUS, Keystone Accountability, Accountable Now and ICD should make sure to promote and share these resources widely going forwards.

14. However, given limited results from hypothesis-testing, Resilient Roots' research findings have so far had limited uptake within the wider global communities on global accountability and/or civic space. The initiative performed well in implementing its planned activities for sharing and learning research findings, including by participating in events like the Global Perspectives conference. Yet few interviewees believed that the initiative's findings had been taken up widely or contributed to the field so far, and there was limited evidence of research uptake. One interviewee pointed out that "there's a real demand for an evidence base around accountability and whether it is the right way forward and produces results". Another said it was "hard to say that there has been *influence*, but certainly lots of *interest*". Aside from the inconclusive quantitative results from the initiative's hypothesis-testing, reasons for limited uptake are unclear. However, it was pointed out that a communications strategy for the initiative was only developed in the second half of the programme. CIVICUS could have done more to use its main communication channels and spokespeople to advocate around the initiative's core messaging. Now that the programme is complete, if possible CIVICUS should publish Triskuel's findings on the central hypothesis, widely

and in an accessible format. It should also make the most of and publish parts of the rich qualitative data and stories of significant change that it has observed and collected, possibly as a second piece.

Programmatic lessons

15. The Resilient Roots programme was run effectively and professionally. In terms of the practical logistics of running a programme of this considerable complexity, the core project team at CIVICUS, as well as global partners Keystone Accountability and Accountable Now, brought a level of considerable rigour and maintained high standards throughout. As one interviewee put it, "we've not cut any corners… we've really invested in doing it properly – that's not always the case with these kind of projects". The challenges of coordinating four global partners and fourteen partners, working in three languages (English, Spanish, French), and matching strong intellectual and research rigour with pragmatic "hand-holding" on accountability mechanisms were significant. Yet the partners largely succeeded.

16. Global partners' approach of flexible, strategic advice, accompaniment and funding for accountability programming was highly valued. Satisfaction scores from pilot partners improved over the course of the programme. Almost unanimously, interviewees praised the global project team's approach. For example, one pilot partner welcomed the monthly partner coordination calls, while another described the project coordination as "serious, rigorous, collaborative, and efficient". A third suggested that the "personal consulting" was the best element of the project, and should be replicated and scaled up in future. A small number of partners did feel that at times the rigour and depth of support (for example in editing and commenting on documents) from global partners verged on micromanagement, adding unnecessary burden and making Resilient Roots into a time-consuming project. It is clear that the approach of the Ford Foundation and CIVICUS in adopting a strategic, flexible funding mechanism to invest in adaptable, long-term organisational accountability was considered by pilot partners to be rare, extremely welcome, and an example of good practice for funders. One interviewee explained, however, that an even greater appreciation of the funding and cash flow realities of small CSOs could have reduced delays in disbursing funding.

17. In general, global partners "walked the talk" and demonstrated the values of primary constituency accountability. One interviewee said that CIVICUS had worked hard to be "horizontal" in decision-making and consulting, and that "you felt that… it was very good indeed". One interviewee believed that "the core partnership just got along really well… when they see that you show up, it really creates a learning environment on both ends". Another agreed that "the human part of the project made it very smooth… I am thinking of working this way in other projects we are doing". Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was not always possible to meet the high expectations and standards set, and there were times when partners felt that decisions were taken "behind closed doors". One interviewee felt that the project ended somewhat abruptly, and that the Resilient Roots team could have done a better job of closing out the project with pilot partners at the end, beyond a conference call.

18. Roles and responsibilities of global partners were not always clear. A small number of pilot partners said they had found the division of responsibilities between CIVICUS, Keystone Accountability and Accountable Now confusing, especially at the beginning. For example, one interviewee said they had received multiple requests from different partners for information: "I didn't know who was who and why they needed that information". Staff turnover within organisations may have contributed to this. Perhaps more significantly, it took time and effort at the beginning of the

project for CIVICUS to establish clear roles, responsibilities, budgets and ways of working at a global level. This could perhaps have been better ironed out prior to the submission of the original programme funding proposal.

19. Early-stage programme design and implementation could have been more thorough.

The Resilient Roots initiative, and especially the quantitative testing of the hypothesis, were highly complex to achieve in a short two-year time frame. Given this, it would have been preferable to have hit the ground running with a full and polished programme design. Instead, it appears that at times the project team found themselves, metaphorically speaking, building the car while driving it. One interviewee pointed out that "a lot of time was taken up early on [just] defining what accountability was, and what resilience was". Another pointed out that the project had not properly gathered pace until a meeting in Fiji at the International Civil Society Week, three months in (December 2017). As a result, newly recruited staff found themselves in the early months

grappling with how to bring to life a challenging programme design and playing catch-up. Partly as a result of implementation delays, the initiative was required to operate under a no-cost extension from October 2019 until February 2020. However, these challenges are not exceptional for an initiative of this nature.

20. Resilient Roots was well aligned with other CIVICUS programmes and networks – but there is opportunity to leverage its approach further.

The project team, led by CIVICUS staff, were able to ensure that Resilient Roots at times collaborated effectively with other CIVICUS programmes and networks such as the Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA), CIVICUS' research on civic space, its Impact & Accountability Cluster, its SPEAK! campaign, and its Innovation For Change programme. Alignment with CIVICUS should be built on: if elements of Resilient Roots' accountability model were to be rolled out across CIVICUS' networks at scale and more systematically, it could represent a significant opportunity for smaller CSOs

Figure 1: Participants in a Partner Symposium in Madagascar brainstorm together to develop a new mechanism for pilot partner Projet Jeune Leader to connect with their primary constituents. *Credit: Projet Jeune Leader*

globally.

21. Resilient Roots succeeded in creating a community of pilot partners, but it may have limited long-term appeal. The initiative went to significant lengths, using innovative means, to create a community among the fourteen pilot partners, including setting up and facilitating an online tool (Workplace), peer learning calls, three in-person workshops, as well as one-to-one encouragement to learn from each other. There were some successes: one interviewee said that Workplace was "helpful" and found it positive that the team "was continuously posting material to reinforce the concept of accountability". There was at least one incidence of peer-to-peer learning, with Projet Jeune Leader (Madagascar) apparently trying an approach modelled by Asociación Kusi Warma (Peru). Nevertheless, most pilot partners felt only a limited sense of community: for example, one said, "I'm not sure we feel part of a community, but I know I can reach out to any of the organisations and I'll get some kind of response". Another felt that the peer learning calls allowed too little time for each participant to speak. Almost unanimously, interviewees felt that they should have met face to face in an initial global meeting far sooner than they did, and that this would have boosted the sense of community. Most pilot partners felt that the extremely diverse range of CSOs meant that the differences between organisations – in size, focus of work, geographic location, language, and accountability mechanisms – were simply too fundamental to overcome and the commonalities too few. Despite impressive efforts and some success in creating a community of partners, it therefore appears unlikely that this particular community of fourteen CSOs will endure unless there is continued (and resourced) facilitation. However, one interviewee hinted that important smaller sub-communities of like-minded partners may exist and endure beyond the end of the programme, explaining that "there are just a few members who I really understand and communicate with".

22. The theory of "Primary Constituent Accountability" (PCA) was central to Resilient Roots' hypothesis, but at times it became an intellectual and terminological straitjacket. The approach and theory behind PCA was central to the Resilient Roots programme, and it was important to the global partners that they could test it in action. Nevertheless, a significant number of interviewees suggested that it at times became prescriptive when theory inevitably collided with practice, and with limited prior knowledge. One interviewee said, "we completely overestimated how much knowledge there is out there about PCA". Another said that despite introducing the concepts of PCA and feedback loops, it became "a bit of a struggle... we assumed everyone would just jump aboard". As a third interviewee put it, talking about PCA could be seen as "navel-gazing or an intellectual activity", and risked leaving people feeling frustrated: "it's a bit like: 'you're talking about how you're going to change, but just get on and do it – just change!'" A fourth interviewee worried that PCA was "very theoretical... I would sometimes get lost in the theory of it", while a fifth guessed that "about 60%" of their primary constituents and staff/volunteers were very confused initially by the terminology. Nor was the concept easy to communicate: several of the Spanish-speaking partners explained that their primary constituents were initially uncomfortable because "accountability" had financial connotations when translated into Spanish. One interviewee worried that "we lose a lot from the diction that we use – we have to find ways of breaking it down and simplifying it." Several pilot partners articulated that they felt they were already doing elements of PCA under a different name, with one saying, for example, that "here it translates as 'keeping promises'". None of this is to suggest that Resilient Roots should have avoided a focus on PCA. But the significant pushback and confusion suggests that all partners could have done more to clarify, simplify and translate the PCA approach for wider audiences.

Recommendations

In its 2017-2020 phase, the Resilient Roots initiative was a highly relevant programme, effective both at strengthening the accountability of pilot partners and also at exploring the connections between accountability and resilience against civic space related threats. The programme made a significant contribution on a key challenge for global civil society: how to practically respond to civic space threats.

Looking ahead, this evaluation proposes a number of additional recommendations:

1. **Pilot partners** should make proactive efforts to **continue to share and learn** on accountability mechanisms with other like-minded pilot partners, outside of the supportive framework of the first Resilient Roots phase.

2. **CIVICUS** should create further space for **wrapping up the 2017-2020 phase of Resilient Roots**, including for example through a "six months on" reflection session to take stock of how long-lasting the programme's impact has been for pilot partners.

3. Global Resilient Roots partners and other **supporters of global civil society** should consider investing resources and time in a **second phase of Resilient Roots**, applying the learnings from this phase.

4. **CIVICUS** should **separate out and step up three different streams** from the Resilient Roots initiatives, as below (4.1 – 4.3).

4.1 Step up **investment and programming to support CSOs with accountability** (including

PCA), drawing on the Resilient Roots approach and learnings. This could be done through mainstreaming accountability into CIVICUS' core programmatic intervention model, as well as through ensuring uptake of the Resilient Roots approach in its other networks and membership. This is likely to achieve greater impact if additional dedicated resourcing is secured.

4.2 Step up **research into the connections between accountability and resilience**. This could be approached in different ways. Qualitative research could require fewer resources. CIVICUS could consider bringing in an external research institution to lead this work. CIVICUS could also consider integrating a strong accountability focus into its existing (and extensive) research on civic space.

4.3 Step up **thought leadership, advocacy and campaigning on accountability** (including PCA). CIVICUS should use its highest-impact communications channels to make the case not only to civil society, but also to donors to recognise and resource constituency voice and accountability as a key criteria for working with organisations.

5. To the extent that global Resilient Roots partners continue to promote PCA methodologies, they should consider how they can be spoken about in other ways, and should **prioritise the simplification, communication, persuasion and uptake of PCA over and above intellectual precision**.