

CSO MANIFESTO FOR ENABLING AND STRENGTHENING CIVIC SPACE IN THE PHILIPPINES

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

The current Marcos-Duterte government continues anti-people policies and measures of the previous administration. This includes the implementation of the Anti-Terror Act of 2020 and the Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012 which allowed for widespread red-tagging, harassment, violations and discrimination against human rights defenders (HRDs) and development workers. Expanding the definition of 'terrorism' to include advocacy work, humanitarian and development services, impacts civil society operations and work. This also undermines the contribution of civil society organisations (CSOs) to national development and closes or narrows the citizen participation in democratic governance. Such a situation creates challenges to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the country's international basic human rights obligations.



CSOs are important stakeholders in ensuring rights-based development and social justice. As a sector, CSOs are independent development actors playing a pertinent role in enabling the people to claim their rights and freedoms, including their right to participate in governance. CSOs also represent the needs and aspirations of citizens in spaces where decisions are made. The positive contributions of CSOs' participation in development discourse and governance are recognised at the national and international levels.

The Philippine Constitution and related laws guarantee basic rights and freedoms, including those relating to CSO operation and work. Democratic mechanisms were established to allow citizen participation in the development, implementation, and monitoring of policies. Such laws, policies, and mechanisms are the result of the people's continued assertion of their rights. These instruments also recognise the contributions of civil society to democracy and development.

However, the realisation of these instruments is affected by the prevailing neoliberal economic framework and the socio-political conditions in the country. The state destroys or attacks the country's democratic institutions, laws and human rights instruments, and mechanisms for citizen participation. Civic space is suppressed while state policies trample the rights of citizens to free assembly, organisation (or membership in associations or organisations), expression and movement.

Despite this situation, HRDs, development workers and their CSOs stand firm in their work. They resist the state's repressive policies and rhetoric. By working directly with the people and communities, CSOs continue to assert and defend rights and freedoms. They collaborate with other development stakeholders and expand their ranks to deliver services and assistance to those they serve.

International standards, such as the OECD-DAC Recommendation for enabling civil society and the UN goal on partnerships, serve as additional tools to demand that governments and other development actors reverse the narrowing and closing of civic space in the country. An enabling environment can further increase CSOs' contributions to people-oriented governance and development.

OUR KEY ASKS

Respect, protect, defend, and expand civic space to enable Philippine civil society's contribution towards people-centred development anchored in rights and social justice

KEY ASK 1

Uphold the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of the people

SUB ASKS

1.1. Promote and strengthen basic rights and freedoms according to the Constitution and international agreements

1.2. Ensure that CSO formation and citizen participation is voluntary, free from coercion and intimidation

1.3. Repeal or review laws, programs and projects that interfere with the rights of citizens and organisations, improve the justice system and ensure legal remedies to organisations under attack

1.4. Cease from using the law against the people and their organisations including censorship and discrimination

1.5. Support educational campaigns on people's rights and lesson-learning based on the collective experiences of various CSOs

1.6. Simplify requirements and the process for forming and sustaining the operation of organisations in all sectors including unions

1.7. Ensure the decisive voice of people's organisations in the national development framework

1.8. Respect the right of citizens and affected communities to participation and proper consultation process such as free, prior, informed consent (FPIC) for indigenous peoples and the Bangsamoro people

1.9. Respect CSOs as independent development actors performing various roles in development and governance

KEY ASK 2

Develop and implement policies and mechanisms that ensure the inclusive, independent, and decisive participation of CSOs in development and governance discussions, from the local to the national level

SUB ASKS

2.1. Recognise, without discrimination, CSOs and communities who want to participate in open discussions towards governance and policy development

2.2. Review existing participation mechanisms and policies, and remove discriminatory and repressive provisions and policies

2.3. Ensure that government agencies (e.g. Commission on Human Rights, Department of Labour and Employment) fulfil their mandate of developing independent reports and corresponding policy recommendations

2.4. Ensure full disclosure of consultation mechanisms and the outcome of CSO participation and recommendations in decisions and policies made

2.5. Recognise CSOs' right to initiative such as undertaking independent monitoring and investigations into human rights violations

2.6. Ensure the safety and security of CSO representations participating in discussions

KEY ASK 3

Support CSO efforts to improve their own effectiveness, transparency and accountability to the people and constituencies they serve through enabling policies, capacity development and financing

SUB ASKS

3.1. Affirm and protect the various initiatives of CSOs and communities in improving their conditions by formulating policies, ordinances or laws

3.2. Strengthen the people's capacity to participate in mechanisms established for advancing their development agenda

3.3. Launch continuous educational and informational campaigns on mechanisms for effective CSO participation at all levels

3.4. Support the efforts of CSOs and communities in improving their capacities and work

3.5. Provide CSOs with knowledge and skills related to the formulation of petitions, resolutions and bills for active participation in governance

3.6. Support the free and safe access and participation of organisations and citizens in digital space and advocacy

3.7. Provide simple mechanisms and systems (logistical and financial) to support and encourage CSOs in the continuous and genuine implementation of their programs and social development activities

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Assert Socio-Economic Rights Network (ASCENT)

Association for the Rights of Children in Southeast Asia (ARCSEA)

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Center for Development Programs in the Cordillera

Center for Environmental Concerns (CEC)

Center for Reproductive Rights

Center for Trade Union and Human Rights (CTUHR)

Center for Women's Resources (CWR)

Children's Rehabilitation Center (CRC)

Climate Change Network of Community-based Initiatives (CCNCI)

Coalition of People's Right to Health (CPRH)

College Editors Guild of the Philippines (CEGP)

Consortium for People's Development-Disaster Response

Council for Health and Development (CHD)

Defend Panay Network (Defend-Panay)

Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research (EILER)

Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND)

Federation of Free Workers
Foundation for Media Alternatives
IBON Foundation, Inc.
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Sibol ng Agham at Teknolohiya, Inc. (SIBAT, Inc.)
Street Believers / Kariton Coalition
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