

NRGI Civil Society Assessment

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Background

The Natural Resource Governance Institute (NRGI) operates with the belief that an informed, strong civil society is essential to effecting transformative and sustainable change in natural resource governance. The organization’s theory of change articulates the need to enable civil society to “produce or drive reform ideas, participate in meaningful dialogue and hold their governments accountable.”

In pursuit of that goal, NRGI has worked with a broad spectrum of civil society actors since the founding in 2006 of its predecessor organization, the Revenue Watch Institute. NRGI’s work with civil society is strongly anchored in the realities of the different contexts, resulting in diverse engagement models across NRGI’s countries of operation. Since 2013, NRGI has concentrated its work in 11 priority and 10 limited engagement countries.

Despite working in this space for a decade, NRGI has not yet systematically drawn lessons from its engagement (except for targeted reviews of training and grant-making practices). This assessment seeks to document the theory and practice of NRGI’s work with civil society and understand that work’s impacts. Its key findings will inform the strategy that guides NRGI’s future work with civil society.

The methodology for this assessment was drafted and reviewed by two advisory groups – one internal and the other external.¹ Both advisory groups generously provided advice on what types of questions to ask, how to gather data and what themes they saw in the initial data. NRGI collected data through internal and external document reviews, 27 staff interviews, 5 case studies and 131 online survey responses. The assessment was designed to take into account many opportunities and tradeoffs NRGI staff identify in their work, such as: fishing versus teaching to fish;

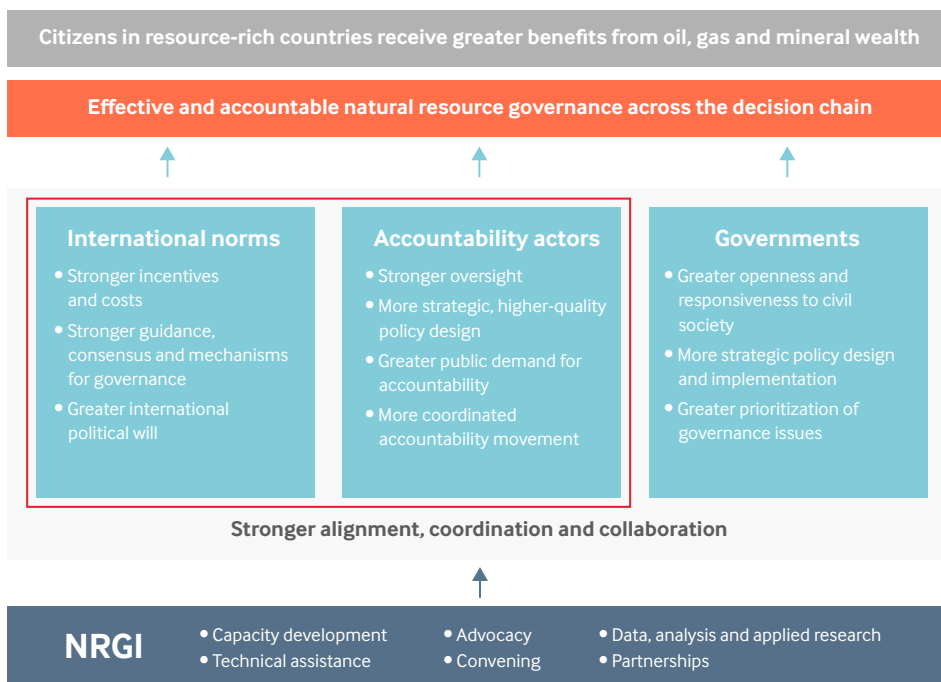


Figure 1. NRGI theory of change
Civil society role boxed in red.

1 The internal advisory group included: Carlos Monge, Erica Westenberg, Katarina Kuai, Matteo Pellegrini, Lairy Haytayan, Galib Effendiev and Wiem Melki. The external advisory group included: Martin Tisne (Omidyar Network), Joseph Asunka (Hewlett Foundation), Elisa Peter (Publish What You Pay), Emerson Sykes (International Center for Not-profit Law), Gavin Hayman (Open Contracting), Jonathan Fox (American University) and Elena Panfilova (Transparency International).

technical specialization versus broad responses; organization versus movement engagement; working with coalitions versus organizations; and politically neutral versus politically active positioning.

This document describes what NRGi has been doing with civil society; the ways civil society has and has not changed as a result of NRGi's work; and how civil society has and has not played a role in influencing change in resource governance. Lastly, it considers at how NRGi's program design allows for scaling and replication. The author submits it with gratitude for the advisory groups, everyone who donated their time for interviews and the civil society partners who filled out surveys.

Inputs: What NRGi does with civil society

Since its inception, NRGi has viewed working with civil society as central to its mission.² This section outlines the approaches NRGi takes toward civil society work; the tools NRGi uses; what contextual factors tend to influence the use of different approaches or tools; and barriers to engagement with civil society.

Varying relationships with civil society

NRGi fosters the following types of relationships with civil society:

- *Implementing programs through civil society.* NRGi often seeks out country-based organizations to implement program objectives that have been primarily conceived by NRGi. The form of partnership can range from activity implementers (e.g., NRGi asks a civil society organization for logistical support to implement a particular event) to relationships that build local capacity to respond to programmatic and contextual needs (e.g., local media development organizations conducting extractive governance trainings). NRGi usually gives the organization funding that is coupled with technical or programmatic support. This relationship seems to happen most often when an organization has expertise or positioning that NRGi does not (such as an academic institution that facilitates regional courses) and NRGi has a very clear idea of how it wants programs implemented.
- *Working jointly with civil society.* NRGi also works alongside civil society to conduct policy analysis, programming and advocacy. For example, in Myanmar NRGi staff are collaborating with a local organization to produce analysis about subnational resource management. Occasionally, NRGi will provide partnering organizations grants to fund their staff time on these projects (in addition to allocating NRGi staff time). Such a relationship is often conceived jointly and formalized with a memorandum of understanding that defines roles and responsibilities for NRGi and the partner. Staff reported using this dynamic when they want to add legitimacy and local ownership to their work, while ensuring quality control.
- *Supporting civil society's parallel programming.* In these cases, the design of the project is owned by the civil society organization, but may have strong input from NRGi staff. This approach is used most often when a strong local partner is deemed better placed or equipped than NRGi to identify and independently lead in areas of work that it deems important. The aims of the project can vary from data analysis to public dissemination of resource governance good practice. For example, in Colombia NRGi provided funding to Fundación Foro Nacional por Colombia to support engagement with civil society in resource-rich regions and represent the aggregation of subnational views at the national-level multi-stakeholder group (MSG). Usually the funds for these programs are coupled with formal and informal NRGi staff advice. These relationships are most often formalized in the form of a grant.

² NRGi is the result of a 2013 combination of the Revenue Watch Institute and the Natural Resource Charter.

- *Informing and influencing civil society's work.* NNGI often seeks to inform or influence the work of civil society without being directly involved in the resulting advocacy or research and with no funding. NNGI's primary vehicle for such support is its portfolio of online and in-person courses. It also influences civil society through its publications—both formal research and summarization documents (such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) portal and the primers). NNGI staff also spend considerable time networking and meeting with civil society influencers at the international and national levels.
- *Participating as a civil society actor.* One of the ways NNGI influences civil society is by being an active participant within it. At the international level, this involves advocacy campaigns to enshrine global transparency standards in law. NNGI's role as a civil society actor differs depending on the context at the national level, but often includes producing policy analysis, convening stakeholders and facilitating capacity development. While NNGI does conduct direct policy advocacy with government officials in many countries, it does not spearhead public policy campaigns at the national level. It also occasionally serves to help coordinate networks of civil society organizations within a country or between the national and international levels.
- *Learning from other civil society groups.* NNGI staff stay abreast of the work and research of its peers to learn from their approaches. For example, NNGI sought out the advice of Resource Equity—a gender-focused land rights organization—to learn how to better incorporate gender angles into its own work. In countries where NNGI has a small staff presence, it often leans on the experience and knowledge of local civil society partners to inform their analysis of political and economic dynamics.
- *Acting as a bridge between stakeholders.* A relatively unique aspect of NNGI's work is that it often tries to introduce stakeholders to each other and create platforms for multi-stakeholder engagement. This can take the form of country staff inviting civil society to attend meetings with government officials; building multi-stakeholder trust and collaboration through its courses; or organizing events to build dialogue geared toward policy reform. NNGI has also created data platforms—like country versions of resourcecontracts.org—that make it easier for government officials to share information with civil society actors. In some countries, NNGI has helped to bridge the gap between different civil society groups by focusing on areas where there is consensus for resource governance reform.
- *Protecting civic space.* NNGI's theory of change rests on the existence of space for civil society to be able to monitor stakeholders and advocating for reform. NNGI does limited international and national advocacy to support the continued existence of this space in some NNGI priority countries. The most prominent example is NNGI's advocacy for civic space in Azerbaijan through interventions at the Open Government Project (OGP) and EITI global meetings. NNGI was also instrumental in defining how to assess civic space in international forums through supporting the development of the EITI civil society protocol.³

NRGI staff often must balance the degree of NNGI control over a project with the degree of local ownership.

NRGI staff often must balance the degree of NNGI control over a project with the degree of local ownership in selecting which form of relationships to use for an activity with civil society. Figure 2 on the next page provides a rough mapping of how NNGI's different interventions represent a balancing of these tensions. As discussed in the section on sustainability below, recognizing these trade-offs leads to important questions about how and when NNGI prioritizes the value of local ownership.

³ <https://eiti.org/document/eiti-protocol-participation-of-civil-society>



Figure 2. Balancing NRGi control and local ownership

NRGI’s full arsenal of tactics deployed for civil society

NRGI employs all of the tactics in its theory of change when working with civil society, including policy analysis, capacity development, technical assistance,⁴ data and analysis, financial support, and convening key actors. NRGI aims to integrate across these tactics, with research and analysis underpinning capacity building, technical assistance and policy advocacy.

The scale and reach of the tactics differ. In 2016, NRGI provided USD 1.6 million in grants to civil society organizations. (See table below for a breakdown by level of NRGi engagement.) NRGI’s main training vehicles for civil society include global online and in-person courses, regional hubs and country-specific events. In 2016, 14 representatives of civil society organizations participated in the advanced global course at Central European University; approximately 100 participated in the intermediate regional training hub courses; nearly 2,000 signed up for the massive online course; and at least 115 participated in country-specific courses.

Previous evaluations pointed to the importance of integration and prioritization. A 2014 evaluation of NRGI’s grant-making saw increased effectiveness when grant-making was coupled with other forms of engagement, such as technical assistance. A 2014 assessment of training found that though participants rated the events highly and experienced increased capacity to do their work after the event. NRGI’s trainings could be improved by being better integrated into other NRGI work; resisting one-off workshops; prioritizing/reducing content; and allowing ample time for trainer preparation.

Grant location	Amount (USD)
Priority countries	\$572,979
Limited engagement countries	\$388,204
Regional (includes training hubs)	\$248,664
Other countries (includes G8 and global courses)	\$444,402

⁴ NRGI defines technical assistance as being distinct from capacity development, but both are used to build knowledge and skills of partners to conduct resource governance work.

Integrating civil society work into engagement with other stakeholders

NRGI aims to integrate its civil society work into its engagement with other stakeholders. Whether on the national, subnational or international level, NRGI rarely pursues a policy objective with civil society without at least consulting or working in some manner with other stakeholders. This is in line with research that indicates transparency and accountability work is more effective when it includes engaging both supply and demand actors.⁵

How NRGI selects its level of engagement with civil society versus other stakeholders varies on a country, issue and resource basis. Since 2015, NRGI has developed country strategies that include sections with political, economic and stakeholder analysis. In most cases, these country strategies then inform how NRGI engages with different stakeholders in pursuit of different policy goals, which are supposed to be updated at least annually. Staff often mention being alert for “openings” or receptive government officials and trying to link civil society actors with these openings.

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How NRGI adapts what it does to context

This assessment identified a few contextual elements that seem to influence NRGI’s approach and tactics:

- *Civic space.* NRGI adapts its approach and tools based on the civic space available. For example, when civic space was severely restricted in Azerbaijan and NRGI was prohibited from directly providing grants, staff found creative ways to support research through regional training sessions. In other countries with restricted civic space and conflict—such as Libya and Iraq—NRGI has had periods when it has not provided direct programming or funding to civil society but instead maintained relationships through regional training programs, the Resource Governance Index (RGI) and informal networking.
- *Capacity of civil society.* NRGI works in countries where civil society ranges widely in technical and organizational capacity. Everything from the level of oversight required for grants to the amount of time necessary to provide feedback on research varies based on these capacity differences. In Tunisia, for example, NRGI ran a grant-writing workshop before asking civil society organizations to apply for grants because the capacity was so low. In contrast, NRGI’s civil society partner in Mexico, Fundar, is among the leading think tanks in the world and manages a budget of nearly \$2 million.⁶
- *Coordination.* In many cases, NRGI seeks to select its points of engagement based on the existing work of civil society and other donors in each country. Civil society survey respondents confirm that NRGI works to coordinate with local groups: 39 percent of respondents who work closely with NRGI agree or strongly agree that NRGI’s work is well-coordinated with civil society in their country (mean 4.01). When asked the same question about other international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), the rate drops to 22 percent (mean 3.69). Coordination seems to improve more in priority countries, where the rate of those agreeing or strongly agreeing that NRGI coordinates well jumps to 51 percent (mean 4.41) while the rate for other INGOs remains at 22 percent. This perception of coordination, however, seems to be strongest from those respondents working at international NGOs and weakest for those from community-based organizations (CBOs) or faith-based organizations.

NRGI adapts its approach and tools based on the civic space available.

5 Jonathan Fox and Brendan Halloran (eds). *Connecting the Dots for Accountability: Civil Society Policy Monitoring and Advocacy Strategies* (Transparency and Accountability Initiative February, 2016).

6 James McGann. 2015 *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*. Available at http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=think_tanks

- *Funding availability.* NRGi also responds differently to the funding availability for civil society in different countries. For example, in Ghana (where there is a great deal of donor support for resource governance issues) NRGi has not provided civil society grants for several years. In Latin America, where staff say it is harder to attract foundation support for resource governance, NRGi provides grants.

Limiting factors: internal coordination and resources

NRGI's internal processes and funding structures also influence what approaches and tactics it utilizes when engaging with civil society organizations.

Staff emphasized unpredictable year-to-year programmatic funding as an issue in managing civil society partners' expectations and relationships.⁷ Because NRGi is a non-profit reliant on donor funding itself, it is not always possible to know what funding is available from one year to the next. NRGi staff had to limit the scope of their engagement with partners to one-year increments, though research projects and policy goals often warranted multi-year planning.

Global and regional staff alike repeatedly reported challenges on creating realistic expectations around the time involved in technical assistance with civil society. Many staff said they felt that they did not always have the time or expertise in country to respond appropriately to the needs of civil society partners. One global staff member explained: "We'd never make government create their own law without working with them hand-in-hand; but civil society actors have fewer technical skills and resources and so they need as much hand-holding." Staff expressed that they often don't have the space in their work plans to allocate sufficient time for civil society support, which sometimes leads to more *ad hoc* or limited partnerships.

⁷ Many of the grants NRGi receives are on an annual funding cycle and thus NRGi approves programmatic work on an annual budget cycle.

Intermediate outcomes: What civil society does or becomes because of NRGIs work

This section considers whether and to what extent NRGIs engagements have changed civil society’s knowledge, skills and attitudes. It then discusses some external and internal factors that seem to influence the extent to which NRGIs involvement has sway over these changes.

The good news: civil society has improved because of NRGIs

Civil society individuals who work closely with NRGIs reported that their experience with NRGIs improved their abilities in a number of important areas.⁸ The most relevant effect was in their ability to train others (75 percent agree/strongly agree, 5.04 mean), conduct research about their country or region and connect with other civil society in the region. NRGIs impact was nearly double for those who worked directly with NRGIs versus those who had just read NRGIs reports, attended trainings or followed NRGIs on social media. (See Figure 3.) Similarly, civil society from NRGIs priority countries reported greater impacts than those from non-NRGI countries.⁹

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Impact doubles when individuals work closely with NRGIs

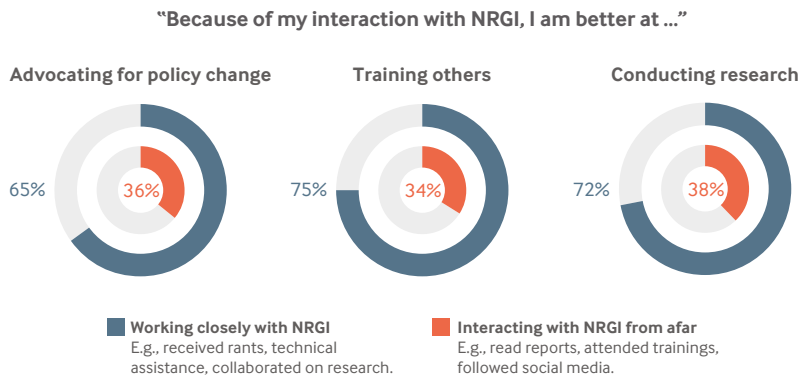


Figure 3. What happens to civil society because of NRGIs work?

Staff interviews and case studies correlate with this data; when NRGIs staff are engaged with civil society, civil society tend to produce more reports, advocacy, trainings or dialogue. The quality of these outputs can vary greatly. For example, the EITI international secretariat reported that analysis produced by civil society in Azerbaijan—with NRGIs technical and financial support—was among the best they had seen around the world. On the other hand, despite years of trainings and financial support, civil society in Guinea were not able to produce commentary on a mineral law when invited to do so.

8 Survey respondents were asked to characterize their relationship with NRGIs as “I’ve never heard of them; I’ve heard of them but not worked with them directly; I have worked with them directly; or I work for NRGIs.” Civil society organizations are referred to as “near” to NRGIs if they answer that they worked with NRGIs directly. Staff respondents are excluded from the survey except when noted otherwise.

9 There were small numbers of respondents from limited engagement countries, so they were excluded.

Factors that seem to influence civil society organizations' improvement

NRGI has proven itself to be very versatile—civil society actors with different capacities and from different types of organizations, civic spaces and regions report big improvements because of their interactions with NRGI. Though staff are often concerned about the time and resources required to work with some organizations, and the limited quality of outputs, the organizations themselves report improvement. The bullets below highlight the evidence for NRGI's versatility:

- *Those who perceive less civic space, report less change in capacity.* The survey considered how civic space impacted respondents in two ways: 1) by asking them about their perceived civic space and 2) indexing their responses based on the World Governance Indicators for Voice and Accountability (WGI-VA). Civil society actors who perceive themselves to be in a place with low civic space report less change in ability as a result of NRGI's interventions. The correlation is not as strong for those working in countries that rank low on the WGI-VA. Staff in relatively closed countries (like Myanmar) report persistent and increasingly professional outputs from civil society. It is possible that those reporting lower levels of improvement in areas with perceived low civic space may be also inferring the lower potential for immediate policy impact into their assessment of their own change in ability.
- *A low baseline capacity of civil society actors doesn't affect capacity changes, except in the growth of multi-stakeholder relationships.* Those from countries where USAID's CSO Sustainability Index rates civil society capacity as low reported a greater improved capacity for having effective relationships with multiple stakeholders than those in countries with more institutionalized civil society. There was no statistical difference between these groups for how they felt they improved in terms of research, advocacy and training.
- *A low baseline capacity may, however, involve more effort from NRGI to elevate civil society's capacity to a point at which it can be impactful.* Staff repeatedly warned of the need to manage expectations internally for the quality of outputs from some countries (such as Guinea) compared to those that have more advanced civil society capacity (such as Colombia). The concern from staff is that while there is relative growth, the output from civil society does not meet the quality expectations of what NRGI believes is necessary to achieve impact.
- *Results are generally similar across regions, except regarding advocacy.* Even though programming differs greatly across regions, the survey respondents reported consistent capacity growth across regions. The exception was the capacity to advocate for a specific policy goal; the Middle East and North Africa reported the most enthusiastic improvement (5.25, 88 percent agree/strongly agree) and Francophone Africa reported the least (4.32, 32 percent agree/strongly agree).
- *Women report less impact than men.* Women report less improvement due to NRGI's support than men for all but two factors. The gender gap is not always statistically significant but is worth investigating further because there is not a noticeable pattern of gender difference for other aspects of the survey. Neither case studies nor interviews with staff shed light on why this might be, but many staff noted uncertainty about what tactics that would lead to better gender inclusion or impact.
- *No difference in impact based on type of organization.* The survey showed no statistical difference in growth based on types of organization (INGO, NGO, CBO, faith-based institution, academic institution, think tank) where the respondent works. Staff noted the large differences in efficiency when working with the

Women report less improvement due to NRGI's support than men.

academic institutions or think tanks versus small community organizations.

Mirroring the issue above about capacity, the type of desired civil society output (e.g., a formal report to government or an informal assessment) seemed to have a big impact on staff's experience with different types of organizations.

- *No difference based on age.* There was no statistical difference, even related to questions about data, based on age.

Going forward, NNGI must consider the extent to which it values growth within civil society organizations versus a particular standard of output—such as an event or policy outcome. NNGI may also need to more carefully consider how its civil society programming may inadvertently be having differing impacts along gender lines.

The importance of the multi-pronged approach

NNGI staff were not able to identify trends in the types of tools or approaches that were most effective. Instead, most staff noted the need to be responsive to the capacity of civil society and context in designing their approach, and the need to allocate resources accordingly. The survey results are consistent with a previous review of grant-giving in finding that civil society report greater impact when they receive grants coupled with technical assistance, as opposed to grants by themselves. The few survey respondents who received technical assistance but not grants rated their improved capacity to train, advocate, and conduct research significantly higher than those who just received grants without technical assistance.¹⁰

The case studies amplify the importance of a multi-pronged approach. In Colombia, Azerbaijan and Bojonegoro, Indonesia, NNGI combined financial support to civil society with one-on-one technical support and invitations to group trainings. NNGI seemed to have less success in countries where it funded civil society remotely with few opportunities for NNGI to provide technical advice.

The limited comfort and use with big data

NNGI's increasing attempts to foster uptake of data use and analysis with civil society has shown less progress than other areas. Only 9 percent of survey respondents agree/strongly agree that civil society in their country is able to use and analyze data they have about natural resource governance to monitor the government and companies (mean 3.20). This response is consistent across the board, regardless of whether they worked directly with NNGI, organization type, gender, age or availability of civic space. The last two points are somewhat surprising, as often young people are perceived to be more confident in data analysis, and those in more closed countries might have less access to data analysis tools. The confidence in civil society's use of data does seem to vary across regions: Asia-Pacific (mean 3.63); Francophone Africa (3.42); Anglophone Africa (3.42); MENA (3.11); and Latin America (2.80). This corresponds with staff reporting that a few innovative organizations in Southeast Asia adopted strong data analysis techniques.

Paradoxically, at the same time, 68 percent of participants say that one of the mechanisms they use to promote change in their country is analyzing data related to extractive industries, and 41 percent say they use data to make informational materials like infographics. This varies dramatically with distance from NNGI, with 78 percent of the respondents who work directly with NNGI say they analyze data to impact change, compared to only 48 percent of those who do not. Analyzing data is

¹⁰ This data is caveated by the small sample involved at this level of disaggregation and the recognition of different organizational needs.

also where there is the biggest difference in mechanisms used to effect change across gender (73 percent male to 57 percent female). This seems to suggest that individuals, particularly those with close relationships to NNGI, use data to impact change but have low confidence in civil society's general ability to do so.

Protecting civic space: viewed as critical, but unsure of NNGI's ideal role

NNGI understands that civic space is necessary for civil society to operate effectively. It also views increased civic space as one of the long-term outcomes of its work.

NNGI's most prominent work to protect civic space takes place through its participation in international mechanisms like EITI and OGP. In these initiatives NNGI advocates for protection of civic space and consequences for countries that fail to offer such protection. NNGI was instrumental in helping to define EITI's civil society protocol, which provides guidelines for how to assess whether a country has ensured sufficient civic space to meet the EITI standard. Though NNGI occasionally issues press releases about particular activists, it does not do so consistently with respect to any particular case or country.

Azerbaijan is illustrative of this inconsistent approach. In 2014, NNGI advisory council member Ilgar Mammadov was arrested on dubious charges. Behind the scenes and in international forums, NNGI was very active in the response. NNGI advocated strongly within the EITI board and OGP steering committee to ensure that the government of Azerbaijan faced consequences for its restrictions on civil society. NNGI's response in-country was also proactive; it supported Mammadov's family and was one of the few international organizations to maintain connections with local civil society. In contrast, NNGI's outward response appears intermittent. In 2015, NNGI staff wrote four blog posts about Azerbaijan. The posts were timed to coincide with OGP and EITI meetings or civil society events and included both a NNGI position and a call to action. In 2016, however, unlike other international organizations protecting civic space, NNGI did not systematically publish posts before and after key MSG meetings, nor did it publish any editorials in news outlets of influence to MSG stakeholders. None of NNGI's six blog posts related to Azerbaijan that year stated a clear position or articulated what the government of Azerbaijan must do to gain NNGI's support. Instead, at most, they summarize the challenges some civil society organizations face and the steps that have been taken at various international forums to address these challenges. Other organizations advocating for civil society in Azerbaijan—like Human Rights Watch and Article 19—report being unaware of NNGI's position or role in providing ongoing support to civil society in Azerbaijan. At the same time, there are countries where NNGI operates where civil society actors working on issues related to extractives have been jailed or killed without any public reaction from NNGI.¹¹

Civil society actors in resource-rich countries seem to believe that NNGI's work does help them access space to operate.

While staff generally think civic space is important, many of those interviewed did not have a clear understanding of when NNGI engages on issues related to civic space and what security and information protocols they should use. They wondered whether engagement was limited to NNGI priority countries or limited to extractive industries.

Civil society actors in resource-rich countries seem to believe that NNGI's work does help them access space to operate. Forty-four percent of those who work directly with NNGI agree/strongly agree that NNGI helps civil society access and maintain the space to work effectively (mean 4.15). When asked the same question about

¹¹ See e.g., Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, "Peru: Following killing of protester against mining project, govt. & civil society examine contracts between mining firms & police; includes company statements" (2016). Available at <https://business-humanrights.org/en/peru-following-killing-of-protester-against-mining-project-govt-civil-society-examine-contracts-between-mining-firms-police-includes-company-statements>.

other INGOs, the comparable response rate was only 29 percent (mean 3.92). NRGI staff mention informal alliances that help foster space, such as introducing civil society actors to government officials, or sequencing public discussion of topics so that discussions will be better received by the government. Civil society and media partners interviewed also voiced skepticism that more traditional civic space approaches, like press releases or targeted advocacy on freedom of expression issues in country, would constitute a large value addition from NRGI.

NRGI is seen as more helpful with civic space in countries that are rated as more closed by the WGI-VA (the same is true for other INGOs). NRGI is also seen as slightly more likely to understand the country's resource governance challenges and civil society challenges when the respondent is from countries in the bottom quarter of the WGI-VA. This bears out, as NRGI staff also showed creative approaches to operating in closed or closing civil space (even when other INGOs were not allowed to operate).

It is difficult to assess NRGI's impact regarding civic space because NRGI's ambition in this arena is not clear. Going forward, it would be helpful for NRGI to articulate whether its role protecting civic space is limited to voicing concerns in global initiatives' boards or also consistently opting to take on additional responses.

Outcomes: Civil society's role in promoting change

NRGI's theory of change states that its work with civil society is focused on enabling civil society to:

- Produce or drive reform ideas
- Participate in meaningful dialogue
- Hold their governments accountable

This section outlines some areas where civil society has been able to achieve these outcomes and notes places where there is a disconnect between NRGI's intermediate outcomes (e.g., improved research capacity) and the outcomes that they target (e.g., better laws).

The early wins: transparency and a seat at the table

Transparency policy is the clearest arena where civil society and NRGI staff can point to policy change influenced by their interventions. In the past 10 years, there have been important gains in transparency at the international, host-country and home-country level that were unlikely without the work of civil society.

At the international level, the existence, numerical growth and substantive reach of EITI was in large part because of the strong, consistent participation of civil society. Numerous EITI board members and the EITI secretariat reported that NRGI's role in EITI is critical because of its coordination of civil society, intellectual leadership and commitment to building consensus with other stakeholders. NRGI's credibility with other stakeholders allows it a legitimate voice in board discussions that is distinct from the voices of other civil society organizations. For example, when beneficial ownership became a heated discussion at the EITI international board, NRGI was able to coordinate the civil society voice and negotiate with country and company representatives to achieve consensus.

When asked about the issue most central to their work, 49 percent of civil society survey respondents cited EITI or transparency. Similarly, when asked about civil society's biggest gains over the last 3 years, 56 percent cited either EITI or transparency. While NRGI cannot claim causality in all cases, there are links between NRGI interventions and strong inputs from national-level civil society organizations. In Colombia, civil society was critical to encouraging the national EITI to include disclosure of social and environmental payments. NRGI partially funded civil society organizations' role in Colombia's EITI process and provided frequent consultation during their participation. Civil society in the Philippines, empowered by NRGI research and financial support, helped foster the creation of subnational transparency mechanisms in resource-rich districts.

Despite international and national gains, the work related to transparency is not complete. Sixty-one percent of survey respondents still report not having access to the information that is necessary to monitor the government's extractives-related work (the rate is 68 percent for monitoring companies). Only 17 percent agree/strongly agree that the government produced more information about resource governance because of the work NRGI does (mean 3.15 on 1 to 6 scale). NRGI staff observe that there is simultaneously a deluge of data in some countries and several countries where civil society's pleas for transparency have yet to be realized. In Ghana, for example,

NRGI's credibility with other stakeholders allows it a legitimate voice in EITI board discussions that is distinct from the voices of other civil society organizations.

inroads have been made into increasing transparency in oil revenue and contracts, but the majority of mining contracts remain unpublished. The question for NRGi moving forward is whether it views the general transparency gains as sufficient to propel further gains, and whether it needs to adjust interventions to ensure national transparency matches advocates' needs.

Initial signs of resource governance policy reforms beyond transparency

Civil society actors who work with NRGi see transparency gains as just one component of what is necessary to foster lasting change. Only 18 percent of those who work directly with NRGi say that transparency or the EITI is the most important resource governance issue in their country going forward. Instead, civil society point to a variety of policy issues, including revenue management, anti-corruption and spending for sustainable development. NRGi staff and civil society partners are less able to point to gains from civil society in policy reform that is not related to transparency.

While the majority of survey participants felt that NRGi's work helps promote policy change, only 22 percent believed that civil society in their country was effective at promoting policy change related to resource governance. There are a few examples of NRGi's work with civil society—often in conjunction with other stakeholders—that resulted in changes in resource governance policy. These examples also illustrate some of the challenges of transforming inputs into sustainable policy change:

- In Bojonegoro, an oil-rich district in Indonesia, NRGi partnered with local civil society and local government to design and advocate for the first subnational resource revenue savings fund. With advice from NRGi, government officials drafted a local regulation and sought approval from the national government, while local civil society (funded by NRGi) tried to build support for the idea among the general public and local legislatures. At the writing of this report, the regulation is still pending approval by the local legislature.
- In Ghana, NRGi worked in parallel with local civil society that were advising on a petroleum revenue management law to safeguard the country's newly-discovered oil revenues. NRGi shared several reports on the topic with civil society and hosted annual regional and global training with Ghanaian civil society participants. The Petroleum Revenue Management Act passed with many of the recommendations from NRGi and local civil society. Unfortunately, at the same time the Ghanaian government leveraged its resource revenues to borrow excessively and mismanaged its non-resource revenues. Civil society remained intensely focused on controlling and monitoring how each oil dollar was spent while the major challenge in the economy and budget were related to debt, which wasn't directly linked to oil dollars. Since it was not a donor, NRGi's main influence on civil society was through its own focus and the way in which it presents resource governance challenges in policy analysis, technical advice and trainings.
- NRGi initiated focused work in Guinea following a major shift by the government that opened the path toward policy reform in the extractive sector. While working closely within government ministries, NRGi also tried to fund civil society groups to participate in the reform process. For the first several years, the support to civil society was supervised remotely and the local organization did little to take advantage of the openings made available by the government. Civil society recommendations for a mining law were incorporated, but they were the product of consultants' reports instead of their own research. Staff and observers noted that there had been political will for even more reforms if civil society had engaged better.

Only 18 percent of those who work directly with NRGi say that transparency or the EITI is the most important resource governance issue in their country going forward.

Each of these cases points to the importance of political will in influencing the likelihood of policy change. In Indonesia, civil society organizations worked hard to build political will for strong technical policy; in Ghana, civil society was so hyper-focused on resource governance that it missed the opportunity to influence the wider governance conversation; and in Guinea, there was political will but civil society organizations did not have the capacity to effect policy change.

The long road to accountability

Fifty-four percent of respondents close to NRGIs said that their work with NRGIs has helped them hold their governments accountable. This sentiment was strongest in Anglophone Africa (4.68, 64 percent agree/strongly agree) and weakest in Asia-Pacific (3.86, 33 percent). It is somewhat surprising that Asia-Pacific ranked highest in anticipating civil society's ability to analyze data and lowest in civil society's ability to hold the government accountable, suggesting a possible disconnect between NRGIs' outputs and the intended outcomes. Specific examples of civil society actors fostering accountability were not plentiful in the data collected for this assessment.

Data and analysis skills play vital roles in accountability and policy reform. Staff noted that making the shift from transparency to using the information that is available may involve different types of partners, a different technical focus and different skills. Many staff expressed concerns that staff were not quick enough to change partners for the different objectives at hand and thought that their ability to promote accountability had suffered as a result.

Making the shift from transparency to using the information that is available may involve different types of partners, a different technical focus and different skills.

Meaningful participation and relationships with other stakeholders are lagging

NRGI's strategy emphasizes the importance of improving civil society's ability to meaningfully participate in multi-stakeholder dialogue. Civil society report less progress in this area, with 21 percent saying that civil society is good at engaging with multiple stakeholders. Civil society's trust of other actors also rates low, with only 14 percent saying that government is receptive to input from civil society and 8 percent saying that companies are receptive. Given the emphasis on multi-stakeholder approaches and the EITI, these responses are somewhat surprising.

NRGI staff report some examples of civil society improving their credibility and advocacy with government. In Uganda, for example, after training civil society on resource governance issues, NRGIs acted as a bridge, bringing civil society representatives to meetings with government officials. Over time, the civil society groups built their own relationships with government officials and eventually the government officials would listen to their recommendations. An NRGIs staff member reported the government official saying that he previously thought civil society were just troublemakers, but now he seeks out their viewpoints. Other staff shared similar stories about building relationships with government officials, but there were not many examples for improved relationships with companies.

Anecdotes show that NRGIs can play a key role in improving multi-stakeholder dynamics. But this needs to be scaled further within current countries of engagement and be more inclusive of companies.

Bridging the dialogue to the masses and creating political will

The survey's lowest rating for outcomes were related to public understanding. Only 8 percent of survey respondents thought that the general public in their country understood issues of resource governance. When asked about the purpose of working

with civil society, many staff independently and repeatedly talked about the potential for local civil society to build mass public support for issues in a manner that NNGI cannot. A representative quote is: “We need some form of critical mass of people to support the kind of change we want to see happening in the country. We can’t do that as an external actor.” Staff also spoke about the opportunity to partner in areas that are not within NNGI’s expertise. For example, NNGI tends to be better at technical specialization and data analysis while some of its partners have strengths that speak to wider audiences. Staff emphasized that building public opinion does not require strong technical expertise, and they pointed to innovations of thought-leader partnerships (e.g., working with Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia and churches in Tanzania). The question going forward for NNGI is the extent to which it is comfortable continuing to work with organizations that are focused on mobilizing society (and may not be experts at technical or policy analysis) and how programming might look different for these partners.

Finding the right organization is key to influencing outcomes

In addition to political will and civil space, interviews revealed that the key to influencing outcomes is working with the “right” partner for a particular goal. Staff were adamant that different outcomes often require different partners. “Part of the problem,” one staff member explained, “is that we’re talking about the wrong thing with the wrong organization.” Staff cited a number of barriers to selecting the optimal organization, including: pre-existing relationships; slowness of grant-making procedures; unrealistic assessments of a partner’s capacity; limited funding; limited staff time to develop new relationships; limited monitoring or reflection; and internal resistance to long-term partnerships. One of the main factors influencing partner selection relates to sustainability, which is discussed in detail below. Going forward, NNGI must decide whether there are minimum institutional criteria for funding or partnering with civil society organizations that cut across all of its programming; and, if not, how it will compensate for partners’ institutional deficiencies when they arise.

Some additional factors NNGI staff struggled with when considering the “right” organization included:

- *Coalition versus organization.* National and international coalitions related to extractive governance are prolific, but their impacts vary. Staff noted many policy successes were only possible because of working in coalitions, especially globally. Staff also mentioned numerous instances of stalled programs because coalitions failed to meet commitments. The case study of Guinea shows the political challenges that come with trying to work with other civil society after partnering exclusively with a coalition. Staff suggested the following criteria before engaging with coalitions: good structure; evidence of a genuine coalition; alignment with a project’s objective; and diversifying risks by working with other partners.
- *Organizations versus movements.* NNGI has mostly worked with organizations, as opposed to civic movements. NNGI’s advocacy orientation is generally consultative and it tends to be less well-acquainted (and comfortable) with the tools and techniques of movements. Some staff were interested in better engaging with civic movements to capitalize on their political power and sustained civic engagement. There is an open question about whether civic movements would be a better fit to respond to the gap in public understanding and political will; and, if so, what NNGI’s role could be in supporting them.

- *Political neutrality.* Staff were very concerned that their association with certain organizations would make them perceived as in favor of the ruling or opposition party. The survey data belies this fear. Generally, survey respondents did not think NRGi is too close to the government or opposition parties.
- *Inertia in partnerships.* A few staff raised questions about patronage between staff and organizations with long-standing relationships. This form of neutrality is not checked by the survey data. NRGi's grant-making process is quite detailed and creates clear requirements for organizations to show how they have met the obligations of the grant. However, in many countries it is not clear how a competing organization would make itself known to NRGi or show that its ability might rival that of the long-term partner.

Sustaining change and scale

NRGI's work with civil society is predicated on the notion that NRGIs should not work in a particular country forever. This section considers the extent to which NRGIs' engagement with civil society is oriented to sustain change and enable scaling of programming impact beyond NRGIs' inputs.

Ownership and organization building are not valued consistently

One challenge that arises repeatedly in NRGIs programming is balancing NRGIs' desire to respond quickly and accurately against the longer-term goal of fostering response by local actors (who may need to build knowledge or skills over time to have the capacity to respond). This balance is illustrated in the mapping of relationship dynamics on page 3. Approximately one in four survey respondents near NRGIs believe that NRGIs take away opportunities from local civil society. That means they view NRGIs as doing work that could be done by local groups. There does not seem to be a consistent manner in which NRGIs makes the decision of when to respond itself or through local organizations; but internal incentives and tracking lean toward measuring short-term outputs—not growth of local ownership and capacity. In this vein, there is also no conceptualization of what constitutes a level of local ownership or capacity that would lead to NRGIs' disengagement.

On a similar note, the capacity of civil society organizations to take full responsibility for oversight and driving reform requires strong organizational capacity and internal governance. These skills are not necessarily resource-governance specific, but relate to general organizational health. NRGIs' role in fostering or partnering with others who foster this capacity is not clear; this ambiguity could hamper its long-term vision in some countries. Staff were split over whether NRGIs should help certain civil society actors develop institutional stability, or only work with more established organizations (noting that in some countries these may not exist). Some staff argued that NRGIs should not be in the business of “providing basic foundational data or quantitative skills.” Others saw ignoring institutional and basic gaps in civil society capacity as a major barrier to NRGIs' effectiveness. “I think our support will always be limited if their organization is not strengthened structurally, institutionally,” explained one staff person. “The technical issues will always change, but we need to build the capacity of civil society to identify different types of reform.”

Continuing to strategically link levels of impact

NRGIs works to propel change at the international, national and subnational level. Recent academic research on fostering change finds that impact is most effective and scalable when interventions are linked between the international, national and subnational levels. NRGIs' work on beneficial ownership, for example, began with specific cases of country-level malfeasance but quickly rose to international rulemaking and now has returned to the national level for adaptation and implementation. Though NRGIs works on these different levels, the balancing or links between them are not always articulated or clear. To be well-positioned to scale and sustain change, NRGIs must consider how best to prioritize its work so that the work on different levels of impact are reinforcing.

Learning and sharing knowledge

NRGI has had few mechanisms for learning and sharing the success of its civil society work. Building on existing internal systems, NRGI can better track its inputs and outputs related to civil society. In addition, the organization can do better to share common struggles with civil society engagement. Technical assistance—in the broad definition used by NRGI staff—is an area where staff are eager to improve and increase efficiency, making it a strong candidate for early learning exercises.

NRGI does not have a system to balance quality control against spurring dissemination. NRGI is generally reticent to disseminate its internal knowledge base externally for re-use by others, unless they have undergone rigorous quality control or have assurances about proper use of NRGI products. These internal restrictions create a bottleneck in the knowledge that is shared externally. For example, training materials are not widely shared online, but participants in trainings are usually given access to presentations and then do use them for their own future trainings. At the same time, however, NRGI sees itself as a leader in a movement of organizations working for better resource governance. Going forward, it may help NRGI to consider how much it values scaling its activities beyond direct involvement, particularly in how it contributes to a broader movement (and considering the related quality tradeoffs involved in doing so).

Conclusions

This assessment found that NRGi is successfully engaging with civil society in a number of ways. Its work with civil society has resulted in improved research and analysis, training of others and policy advocacy. NRGi has shown itself to be very versatile, and civil society from different types of organizations, capacities, civic space and regions have reported big improvements because of their interactions with NRGi. Though staff are often concerned about the time and resources required to work with some organizations—and the limited quality of outputs—the organizations themselves report improvement. Work related to data analysis, and civil society’s confidence in analyzing data, lags behind improvements in other areas and warrants additional attention.

The improved outputs of civil society have in turn led to some changes in policy, mostly related to transparency. These gains in transparency are useful but incomplete, as many civil society actors still report not having access to information they need. While the focus of NRGi’s partners seems to be shifting toward other areas of resource governance, NRGi cannot point to as many clear victories through civil society on policy change not related to transparency. In areas of resource governance, political will and civic space seem to be major influencers of civil society’s impact.

NRGi’s efforts seem to have a better chance at success when the interventions are multi-pronged and matched with the “right” organization for a particular objective. Multi-stakeholder dialogue and general political understanding are areas where NRGi needs to work most concerted to increase the correlation between outputs and impacts—that is, between improved capacity of civil society and change in policy or government and company behavior. NRGi’s work protecting civic space is powerful within the extractive sector but not well understood by those outside the movement.

NRGi has room to grow in establishing and valuing the mechanisms that will sustain and scale its changemaking efforts. It could start by improving methods for organizational learning and incorporating lessons across the organization. For example, early gains that linked national-international-local change can be captured and used to influence future work.

As NRGi management consider how the organization will engage with civil society actors and issues in the future, they could consider the following:

- *How NRGi balances civil society capacity growth versus a particular standard of output.* There is not clear guidance on how NRGi staff should balance the need for a specific output (i.e., quality report) versus growth in civil society capacity to produce that output. Clearer guidance on what factors to consider when weighing these options would be helpful for staff. It may also be valuable to outline longer-term capacity development journeys for partners – as individuals and organizations - and add offerings to sustain that growth over time.
- *Imagine disengaging.* It would be helpful for NRGi to imagine what would be necessary for civil society to be able to do for NRGi to disengage in a country and then consider whether it is building a full path for partners to sustainably fulfill that vision. It is quite likely that the character of civic space could influence the timing and scope for sustainable disengagement.

- *Finding the right partner for political influence.* Given the importance of political dynamics in impacting resource governance policy, NRGi must consider its ability to work with the “right” organizations to influence political will. Given that staff raised the importance of technically qualified partners, the question going forward is the extent to which NRGi is comfortable continuing working with organizations—or movements—that don’t have and don’t aim to have NRGi’s same depth in analysis, but may have strong political influence.
- *Optimizing role in supporting civic space.* While this assessment shows that NRGi is dynamic in adapting to civic space and has developed a strong tool in the EITI protocol, NRGi must continue to consider how it can best harness its resources to protect the space for civil society to be involved in resource governance decision-making.

Building on the reflections of the assessment, NRGi will next conduct a series of internal and external consultations to articulate guidance notes on working with civil society; provide reflections on paths for sustainable engagement; and develop a deeper understanding of responses to constraints on civic space.

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