

Responses to Populism in a digitally-enabled era

2019 Innovation Report Concept

Our 2019 Innovation Report will expose successful innovations to tackle populist tendencies and provide common ground for new civil society narratives

Fostering an interactive platform of sharing innovative ideas and best practices, the first annual Innovation Report from the [International Civil Society Centre](#) and [JustLabs](#) will advance the capacity and resilience of international and local civil society organisations (CSOs) to respond effectively and collaboratively to challenges posed by populism.

The Innovation Report will highlight the most promising innovations to tackle populist tendencies, build shared solidarity and promote new emerging narratives and public engagement around civic priorities, space and action. It will analyse the opportunities and challenges CSOs are encountering, as online spaces and technologies can both mobilise public support towards their globalised goals, but also facilitate false information attacks by interests opposed to these aims. It will review how both international and national CSOs and other civic actors are innovating to both capitalise on these opportunities and counter these challenges.

Leveraging the expertise of JustLabs, the report will apply an analytical framework to categorise the emerging effectiveness of these different approaches, and identify key enabling factors which have supported the design and implementation of innovation. It will highlight innovation case studies from a range of international and national CSOs and countries/contexts. It will also scan key new trends in the evolving digital and political environment which will drive further innovative responses.

The focus areas of the report include:

- 1. Reflecting the 'license to operate':** Innovative and adaptive steps to critically reflect and reshape ICSC's operational legitimacy, to advance accountability towards communities, and strengthen resilience towards challenges of perceived elitism, privilege, or disconnection from grassroots interests;
- 2. Reframing the narrative:** Building on findings from the [2019 Innovator's Forum](#), the report will present examples of powerful narratives and positive visions of civil society. This includes compelling new communication, outreach and engagement approaches which connect with new public audiences;
- 3. Countering attacks on civil society:** Building on the Centre's [Securing Civic Space](#) project, highlight robust mechanisms, mobilisation and collaboration which have been developed to counter attacks on civil rights and actors and to hold repressive actors to account.

An engaging communication & dissemination strategy for an innovative format

Keeping with the innovative and digital nature of the topic itself, engaging formats will be developed for combining both analysis and discussion on innovation. The report itself will consist of these elements:

- 1. Innovation Index** - allowing for a qualitative 'rating' methodology e.g. from 'traditional' through to 'experimental', or 'inconclusive' to 'established' effectiveness. It will also summarise the breadth of innovation initiatives, and insights into common enabling or success factors or barriers of the initiatives.



2. **Case Studies** – both from the Centre’s shareholder ICSOs and more broadly in the civil society sector. The presentation of each will include the context (why), description of what is new or different about the approach taken (what), where the idea came from and how it was incubated (who), location, means and organisational enablers (how), and emerging impact.
3. **Summary of Key Findings & Recommendations** to form major lessons and best practice guidance that can be used and adapted for future work of CSO actors in diverse contexts
4. **The evolving digital/political environment for ICSOs:** Analysis of key external developments or potential disruptors in the digital/political sphere influencing how ICSOs will have to innovate in future. This will include thinkpieces from futurists and trends analysts.
5. **Links to relevant resources and toolkits** developed by CSOs (e.g. on disinformation)

The Innovation Report will be accompanied by a communication and dissemination strategy including a variety of potential mixed media products. This will entail an innovative website utilising multimedia formats, such as podcasts and videos, presenting case studies showcased in the report, as well as a printed ca. 20 page published report. All multimedia formats will be shared via social media formats such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn that offer comment and share functions to further encourage interactive discussions and dissemination.

The final report will be launched at the Centre’s annual sector flagship conference [Global Perspectives](#), in Addis Ababa from 30 October to 1 November, which brings together up to 150 leaders from civil society, politics and business, with a focus on ‘CSO legitimacy and impact in times of scrutiny’. Case study submitters will be included in the launch session.

About the International Civil Society Centre and JustLabs

The [International Civil Society Centre](#) brings together 30 of the world's leading international civil society organisations (ICSOs). The Centre’s programmes and activities bring together these ICSOs with multipliers from broader civil society, think tanks, media, business or politics. This intermediary environment allows to leave logos and egos outside and foster effective knowledge and capacity pooling. At the same time, voices from communities and local CSOs are an integral part to the Centre’s work and thus assure truly participatory and self-reflective partnerships. No other organisation is as well positioned to deliver objective, system-wide analysis, playing a trusted think tank function from within the international civil society sector itself, beyond the remit of national CSO platforms. For the new Innovation Report format, the Centre also draws on extensive experience in research and trend analysis ([see publications](#)).

[JustLabs](#) was established to serve as a catalyst for accelerating change and deepening collective impact in human rights and other social justice fields. It deliberately takes on a systems view, one that recognizes complexity even as it deconstructs structural challenges into more tractable problems, so as to make them solvable through a step-by-step approach. For instance, in order to formulate responses to the systemic challenge of closing civil society spaces, our ongoing work has broken it down into more specific tasks, such as developing compelling human rights narratives (to counter the influence of populist authoritarian narratives) and creating platforms for online collaboration among large numbers of human rights organizations (of the type that have allowed journalistic outlets to produce systemic change through projects such as the Panama Papers).

To find out more or to get involved, please contact Vicky Tongue, Programme Manager, vtongue@icscentre.org.