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Resilient Funders: How Funders Are Adapting to the Closing Space for Civil Society

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Keywords: Grantmaking, resilience, civil society, closing space, adaptive capacity, funding, foundations

Introduction

The closing space of civil society around the world over the last decades has created a challenge for funders of social, economic, and environmental civil society organizations. Funders are working now in more restrictive political environments and are subject to new and enhanced restrictions on their activities, increased cost of operations from new red tape, and even physical and other immediate threats to their staff and networks.

While efforts to advocate for reforms of these restrictions directly are crucial, both funders and the organizations they support must adapt to this new environment. We cannot expect the conditions that prevailed during the rise of formal nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) over the last half century to continue unchanged. Most work in the area focuses on how to advocate for civil society organizations and enabling policy environments, with little consideration given to what we have learned about the key practices of resilient funders that enable them to continue to operate under shifting circumstances.

Fortunately, the emerging field of resilience studies is developing insights that can help funders prepare for and recognize ways to adapt to changing conditions and continue to support civil society organizations. The literature on social resilience is vast. Useful reviews and frameworks can be found in Westley et al., 2013; Gunderson & Holling, 2002; Bené et al., 2014; Tyler & Moench, 2012; Pendalla, Foster, & Cowella, 2010; and Plsek, Lindberg, & Zimmerman, 1997.

Key Points

- The closing space of civil society around the world over the last decades has created profound challenges for funders. Many analyses of how to respond to this reality focus on advocacy and promoting enabling policy environments. Few consider key practices of resilient funders that enable them to continue to operate under shifting political circumstances.
- Increased adaptive capacity along three dimensions – varied procedures, multiple strategies, and an adaptive environment – promotes the flexibility to weather the shocks and stresses of tightening restrictions and increasing violence. Within those dimensions, funders are finding that three characteristics of resilience are especially critical: flexibility; diversity and redundancy; and resourcefulness and ability to learn.
- Drawing on lessons from the experience of those working in countries of concern, this article proposes a conceptual framework for weathering threats from changing conditions, with the aim of providing a simple yet powerful way of assessing and improving current practices.

We use the term “resilience” to refer to the capacity of a system to continue its functions in the face of shocks and stresses. The greater the adaptive capacity of a system, the more resilient it is to changing conditions. Currently, new regulations and practices are disrupting the traditional system of funders and formal NGOs, reducing the ability of both funders and civil society organizations to function. This article

Funders that have grown in the old system must also adapt to the new realities by changing strategies and practices to effectively maintain support for civil society. Unless funders find these ways to support innovative and emerging associative forms, the ability of the associations to keep working effectively will be even further constrained.

applies a resilience lens to the funding system and suggests ways that this lens can help funders understand how to adapt so they can continue supporting civil society in old ways and new.

Even when nongovernmental or nonprofit forms of organization are threatened, people have a tremendous capacity to adapt forms of association to the changing conditions. Such adaptation is normal. Civil society is regularly shifting forms of association — the once-prevalent fraternal clubs are on the decline, for example, while virtual and networked organizations have been booming. Associations need to innovate and adapt to the changing circumstances in unforeseen ways that not only enable them to survive, but also to make them better (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards, 2015).

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associative forms, the ability of the associations to keep working effectively will be even further constrained.

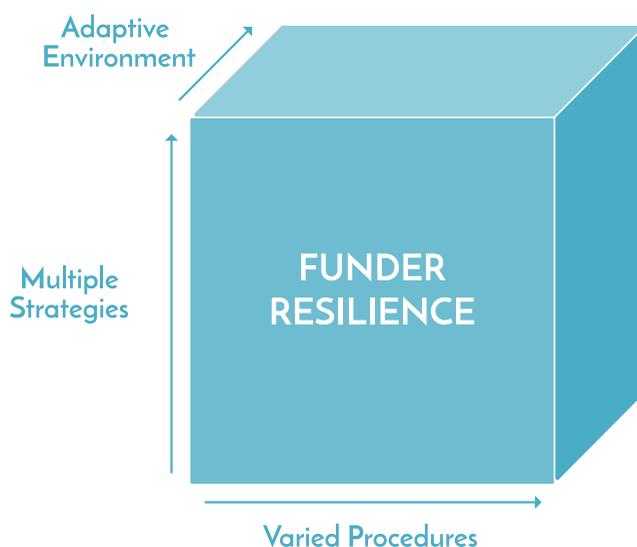
The closing space of civil society takes many forms (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Rutzen, 2015; Dobichina & Joshi, 2016; Harvey & Kozlowski, 2016; International Civil Society Centre, 2016; Civicus, 2013, 2016; Oram & Doane, 2017). None of these restrictions are new, but they are emerging on an unprecedented scale across the globe. Thomas Carothers, vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, notes:

We are currently witnessing the greatest collective effort of governments since the 1980s. These restrictive laws are part of a phenomenon that marks the end of a period of democratic opening in the [19]90s and begins a period of democratic stagnation. This is a time that is redefining the balance of power between citizens and the state (as cited in Carbajosa, 2016, para. 2).

This article proposes a conceptual framework for weathering the threats from these changing conditions. We have drawn this framework from our decades of experience as grantmakers and working in philanthropic support organizations, supplemented by discussions with dozens of funders — community foundations and thematic grantmakers in areas such as women’s rights, the environment, and human rights and supporting organizations — over the last two years. The majority are not endowed, and thus raise their funds domestically and internationally from private and public funders.¹

These reflections are not a “how to” guide. Those are available elsewhere, and are of high quality (e.g., ARIADNE et al., 2015; Oram & Doane, 2017; Funders’ Initiative for Civil Society, 2017). We present this conceptual framework to provide a simple yet powerful way of assessing and improving current practices.

¹ Given the sensitivity of the issue in many places, we maintain confidentiality of all informants. No organization cited here participated in interviews with the authors.

FIGURE 1 Three Dimensions of Funder Resilience

Funder Resilience: The larger the box, the more resilient the funder.

Resilient Funding

What increases resilience for funders? We have seen that funders who learn to adapt across three dimensions of resilience will have a greater ability to respond to the closing space of civil society. Adaptive capacity is the ability of a funder to change what it is doing, or the context in which it operates, to maintain its functions. The three main dimensions of resilience to consider are:

1. varied procedures – how to support social action;
2. multiple strategies – what to support; and
3. adaptive environment – the conditions that impact support.

Increased adaptive capacity along these three dimensions promotes the flexibility to weather the shocks and stresses of tightening restrictions and increasing violence. The more funders

address these dimensions, the more resilient they are to shocks and stresses.

This concept is illustrated by the “resilience box.” (See Figure 1.) Expanding adaptive capacity along any dimension makes the box bigger, indicating increased resilience. It is possible to increase resilience in any dimension — it is not necessary to work on all three at once.

How do we know what practices increase resilience? Within each of these three dimensions, it is helpful to keep in mind the characteristics of resilience that increase the adaptive capacity of each. There are many characteristics of resilience: Common lists include flexibility, diversity, redundancy, connections through multiple trusted relationships, safe failure, ability to learn, and transparent, accountable and responsive decision making (Simonsen et al.; Arup International Development, 2015; Allan, 2015; Castro & DuPree, 2014). To simplify the framework to make it easier to use, we propose an

abbreviated model that stresses three characteristics funders are finding critical:

1. Flexibility — The ability to change processes, procedures, and strategies to continue to support civil society in new ways.
2. Diversity and redundancy — The ability to fund through multiple channels. Funders operate in different ways with a variety of partners, and civil society organizations vary in strategies, structure, legal status, geographic focus, scale of operations, and styles of working. Different types of organizations contribute to social outcomes in various ways.
3. Ability to learn and resourcefulness — The ability to monitor changing conditions and adjust operations accordingly, experimenting with new approaches.

In this article we explore and apply these characteristics to the three principle areas of adaptive capacity to suggest ways that funders can maintain support for the civil society sector. (See Table 1.)

Varied Procedures – How to Support Social Action

Funders who have only one procedure for supporting organizations can be hamstrung by changes in rules or contexts. The more ways a funder can support its partners, the more likely it is to be able to continue that support when any particular avenue of funding is constricted.

Ensuring Flexible and Diverse Channels of Support

Funders can ensure, in a wide variety of ways, that some form of support is able to reach organizations. The prevailing form of grant support tends to be composed of a formal review of proposals and transfer of funds to legally registered NGOs. However, the actual function to be maintained is support for social action, in whatever form possible and in whatever form civil society needs it.

While transfers of funds to formal NGOs are a very important form of support, it is only in the last half century that they have become the norm. As the viability of this form of support wanes, many funders are already establishing alternate channels of support:

- “Internets of funders” are loose networks of independent funders who share learning, joint action, and, often, grantees. These networks expand reach by creating multiple paths to provide funds or influence campaigns, such as through intermediaries that can directly fund partners or introducing partners to other supporters, information, or networks that can help them to succeed.
- Nongrant, direct financial support includes prizes, fellowships, loans, contracts for services, in-kind donations, and provision of assets.
- Indirect support can be provided through publications, studies, and inclusive planning processes that benefit partner organizations or their issues.
- Projects operated by funders themselves, such as legal workshops, can accomplish similar ends or help partners to be more productive.
- Support for diversification of sources of income can be useful for funders who raise money.
- Publicity and building awareness by speaking at important conferences and gatherings can draw attention to the work of partner organizations and their issues.
- Funder influence can be tapped to promote the causes of partners in venues where funders have special access, such as funder conferences and meetings with policymakers.

These practices represent a flexible approach to key practices. The diversity of procedures increases the ability of funders to keep support going.

TABLE 1 Characteristics of Resilient Funding

	Varied Procedures <i>How to Support</i>	Multiple Strategies <i>What to Support</i>	Adaptive Environment <i>Conditions for Support</i>
Flexibility	Uses a variety of support and internal procedures <i>Example: Funds directly and through intermediaries</i>	Chooses from multiple strategies <i>Example: Funds different types of organizations as needed, from grassroots to policy NGOs, governments, social entrepreneurs</i>	Addresses changing conditions as part of ongoing program <i>Example: Creates strategic frameworks that can quickly change, rather than elaborate plans that are difficult to adapt</i>
Diversity and Redundancy	Reaches the same or similar organizations in multiple ways <i>Example: Uses networks to channel funding and get information</i>	Has a wide range of strategies for the same ends <i>Example: Funds training, advocacy, research, community organizing, organizational development</i>	Connects with others that can perform same and related functions <i>Example: Uses internets of funders to support issues directly and indirectly</i>
Ability to Learn and Resourcefulness	Experiments with new ways of supporting social action <i>Example: Uses non-grant support such as prizes, fellowships, loans, contracts for services, in-kind donations, and provision of assets</i>	Monitors changes to reach effective organizations <i>Example: Intentionally learns from partners what works</i>	Actively engages with the narratives and needs of organizations <i>Example: Supports experimentation with new narratives and media for communication</i>

This list will seem familiar to many funders. Many are active in internets of funders specifically to increase their adaptability. Women's and environmental funding networks, for example, are no strangers to hostile funding environments. They team up when needed and operate separately when appropriate, allowing them to keep resources flowing when parts of their networks are under strain. For example, when laws governing NGOs and funders changed in China in 2017, funders with domestic and international networks were able to find the means to keep funding flowing with a minimum of disruption.

Learning From Experience of Varied Procedures

Civil society organizations around the world have historically adapted in the face of restrictions on organizations or funding. In China through the first decade of the 2000s, for example, the laws around NGOs were ambiguous and confusing. Yet in that period thousands of NGOs operated across a variety of sectors — most unregistered, some registered with government departments, and many registered as for-profit businesses. To support these various forms of organization funders had to be flexible in their procedures.

[T]he bottom line is to remember the function of funders — to support social action in a shifting ecosystem of organizations of which they are a small piece. Keeping this function going requires flexible and diverse procedures and continual learning about what works and what does not.

In terms of philanthropic regulations, Pierre Omidyar (2011) of eBay discovered that registering his new foundation as an NGO would restrict its ability to invest in businesses with a social impact, whereas forgoing tax exemption would allow the foundation to achieve the impact it wanted at a cost of about 1 percent of its total. And the Islamic world has a long history of investing without requiring interest, a practice known as waqf. Civil society has taken these traditional practices and adapted them to its needs. Supporters provide endowments or income-generating assets, such as office buildings that generate rent for support of NGO activity (Tedham, 2012; Nejima, 2016).

Buying property rather than giving grants is an approach many NGOs in fast-growing economies have long urged supporters to adopt, since property ownership reduces their ongoing cash needs and can provide them with an asset that will appreciate in value. One of the important environmental organizations in Russia's Far East got its start in the 1990s by using a donated computer and printer as a local print service, supporting its activities in part with the revenue generated. Even in struggling economies, ownership of productive assets or real estate by civil society organizations ensures that people continue to have a place to meet and insulation against financial difficulties.

For funders who must raise their own resources, diversifying sources of income is another way to increase resilience. Funders have learned not to rely on a few grants from international organizations. Instead, they create a varied fundraising program where the different sources are not all subject to the same rules:

- Contributions from individuals often involve adaptations on traditional forms of mutual support — such as qoqolela and stokvels, or collective savings programs, in southern Africa — to support civil society work.
- Self-generated revenue resources include natural resources (farms, forests, waters, etc., especially for indigenous peoples in control of their territory), infrastructure (property, rent, royalties on natural resources, user fees), and entrepreneurship (casinos, consulting, triple bottom line business, etc.).
- Domestic funders may include foundations, corporations, or government programs in sympathetic departments.

Finally, creating and defending associative space is important as an enabling element for civil society. Resilient funders can support gathering places even when the outcome of this support is not clear. For example, many faith communities have a long history of building the agency of poor communities through providing a space for discussion and support to organize and plan. Schools and universities are other venues that have the infrastructure to support the emergence and growing impact of groups. These examples of diversity in procedures — funding various types of organizations, forgoing tax deductions, providing productive assets, diversifying income — all increase funder resilience to changing regulations.

Can these types of support work for everyone? Of course not. Middle Eastern activists are now being arrested for working on contract for foreign foundations, property transactions can be enormously complicated, and partner organizations need cash because there are limits to how

much time people can volunteer or work without funding. But the bottom line is to remember the function of funders — to support social action in a shifting ecosystem of organizations of which they are a small piece. Keeping this function going requires flexible and diverse procedures and continual learning about what works and what does not. In difficult environments, the point is not to struggle to return to an old normal, which had its issues of power differentials, but rather to adapt funding procedures when conditions change.

Multiple Strategies – What to Support

The purpose of funders is to advance action on social priorities that are best met through civic action, not simply to fund NGOs. With this simple reminder, the scope for social action opens up considerably. Small businesses, collectives, faith-based organizations, and community groups are among the many proven ways of organizing social action. These groups have a multitude of ways to mobilize the resources they need — and many have never even had a grant. Funders are increasingly using three broad avenues to diversify their strategies: funding the informal sector, engaging the public and for-profit sectors, and transforming mainstream activities.

Funding the Informal Sector

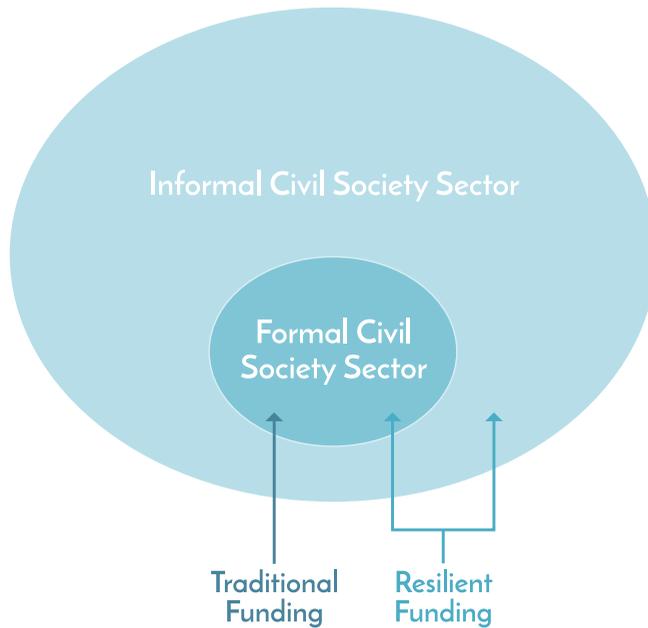
One strategy is to go beyond legally registered NGOs. The rise of the formal civil society sector since World War II has created an expectation that social problems are addressed by formal organizations acting for disadvantaged people. The costs of running formal, legally registered organizations are significant. Such organizations must pay for salaries and other operating expenses. Now that formal NGOs are under fire in many places, it is important to remember that there is a far larger informal sector of civil action. Expanding and blurring the boundaries between formal and informal society broadens the funding landscape for social action. For example, under U.S. tax law, international grantees do not need to be formally registered NGOs to receive grants from U.S.-based funders. Within many countries the same logic applies — formal registration is not required to

[F]ew social transformations take place solely based on formal NGOs. As it becomes harder to fund formally registered NGOs, funders need to find ways to support informal organizations and their alliances that represent citizens rather than NGOs.

receive funds, only for those donations to be tax deductible. Funders who forgo the need for their donations to be deductible have vast new possibilities before them.

In Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, Vaclav Havel and colleagues organized book clubs when most formal organization was highly controlled or forbidden. Coffee shops in Prague became the front lines of social struggle. Under the dictatorship in Brazil in the 1960s, the Catholic Church pastoral offices became a lynchpin of social action. Civil society in South Africa in the apartheid era adapted a kaleidoscope of organizational forms to keep a step ahead of government crackdowns. In the U.S., the civil rights movement was largely driven by communities of activists with few connections at all to formal funders. In all these environments, the scope for independent social action was very restricted. People found ways to organize, and funders found ways to support them.

From a social movements perspective, few social transformations take place solely based on formal NGOs. As it becomes harder to fund formally registered NGOs, funders need to find ways to support informal organizations and their alliances that represent citizens rather than NGOs. To reach this wider set of organizations, funders are using a more diverse set of practices, broadening the environment for social change work.

FIGURE 2 Resilient Funding in Informal Sector

Including support for informal civil society organizations as well as formal organizations enables a funder to rapidly find new ways to maintain support under increasingly restrictive conditions. (See Figure 2.) As one human rights funder said to us, “protest and mobilization are changing. In our funding, we should pay attention to the forms of human rights activism that are not necessarily institutionalized.”

Engaging the Public and For-Profit Sectors

Expanding the scope for social action to include government, academia, and private companies is another strategy that allows funders to become more flexible and diversify the avenues for addressing social issues. There are a number of ways to do that that are already well developed, while others require more experimentation and creativity.

Some critical government departments are chronically underfunded, and in many countries, it is becoming standard practice to support the transport, expenses, and even time

of government staff to get the work done. In advocacy campaigns this type of support to sympathetic policymakers can be effective. Funder support for state environmental departments in some of the Amazonian states of Brazil, for example, has stimulated government/civil society partnerships to develop environmental policies.

The private sector can be mobilized as well. Funders in the impact investing sector, for example, have found ways to remedy social problems by supporting or creating sustainable businesses that address social issues. Low-interest mortgages and finance for agriculture and small businesses are addressing issues on a scale beyond what is possible with grants, and doing so with little or no involvement of NGOs. Corporate volunteer and giving programs can be platforms for engaging large numbers of people. Funders in Mesoamerica, for example, have seen that engaging companies to invest in rural communities where they operate has drawn these companies into alliances with civil society organizations to support rural development.

Transforming Mainstream Activities

Since there are fewer restrictions on funding mainstream, noncontroversial programs and services, some funders use that opportunity to build the capacity of citizen groups. While funding mainstream charity and education programs, funders can simultaneously build skills and awareness of broader systemic issues behind “the symptoms” (poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, illness, etc.) being addressed. Enabling participation of direct-service groups in learning and action networks where issues of rights and justice are addressed, ensuring that marginalized populations are actively included in these fora, and linking groups together are all ways in which donors use their resources to meet social change objectives from within mainstream programs. The activities provide a platform and megaphone for activists. A funder with whom we spoke observed that “people using varied identities are now multiplying — comedians are environmentalists are human rights workers. Songs and tweets grow into a ball of fire.”

In apartheid South Africa, for example, the Social Change Assistant Trust could not directly support organizations to take down racist laws and structures, but it could address the lack of information, voice, and access to government services faced by African communities. By supporting legal resource centers that strengthened the capacity of these communities to relate with the government, it altered the power dynamics of the system. In the 1990s in Brazil, toymakers became aware that police and state agencies were punishing and even killing homeless children. They addressed the issue obliquely by forming the Abrinq Foundation, which mobilized thousands of dentists, doctors, and companies to provide essential services to poor children. As a result, Abrinq strengthened a constituency committed to improving recognition of the rights of street children. Even the most restrictive environment is susceptible to strategic influence. These examples show that the ability to adopt creative and multiple strategies is an adaptive capacity that enables funding to have an impact even in harsh conditions.

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Adaptive Environment – Conditions for Social Action

While procedures and strategies are largely internal matters for funders, influencing the environment in which they are working can also increase adaptive capacity. Three systemic levers for improving the environment merit action by funders: narratives on civil society, an internet of organizations, and legal frameworks.

Diverse Approaches to Narratives on Civil Society

Along with the increasing legal restrictions on civil society, there is a growing narrative in many countries that describes this work as unpatriotic, anti-development, and even terrorist. While charity activities are rarely labeled this way, an increasing amount of civil society work on social change issues is. Public policy decisions that in the past have been up for public debate are now often closed off to civil society. “There is no space for new answers,” lamented one Indian activist.

It is important for funders to dispel this shifting framing, and support efforts in the media, academia, private sector, and civil society sector to do so as well. Support for advocacy in all possible forms, improving public messaging around the sector, refraining from making claims that are not supportable, and taking a stand on the benefits of citizen action are all crucial for pushing

back. At the same time, as civil society develops new forms, funders need to support new relevant narratives as they emerge.

Many funders report that they are not effective at making the case for civil society per se, since they use language that is hard for the public to relate to. Instead, they are working to translate the issue into a more accessible framing. As one funder noted “We broadcast rather than dialogue or engage ... which is not very effective, and can be counterproductive. We use jargon and frames that don’t resonate, lack coherent arguments and evidence, and lack channels and allies to push out the counter narrative.”

It is necessary to strengthen these messages, as well as build constituencies and alliances to construct an effective counter narrative as a consistent effort. It is instructive to look at similar campaigns. One human rights funder pointed out that the organization has two programs: one for grantmaking, and a second to educate people about the importance of human rights: “People cannot support you if they don’t know what human rights are.” Similarly, it is impossible to build support for civil society if people do not know what it is.

Increased government scrutiny of their grants has also led some funders and grantees to be more innovative in finding channels to strengthen counter narratives. Some funders have increased support for initiatives that use social media, music, or art, challenging the negative narratives in ways less threatening than direct opposition. Other funders publicize data on the contribution of civil society to national income and well-being. This approach has been effective in changing views on the value of civil society in Nigeria and Kenya, where proposed legislation on foreign funding and regulation of social media were defeated.

Diversifying the ways of promoting new narratives about the value of civil society increases the resilience of the entire sector.

Internet of Organizations

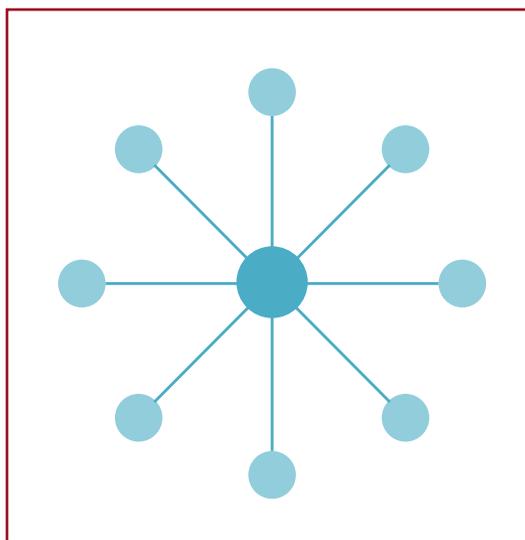
Fundamental to resilient systems are multiple connections to a variety of types of organizations. Networks among funders, among civil society organizations, and across social movements all create social infrastructure that can be mobilized to:

- organize collective advocacy;
- generate collective understanding of who is funding what and how, so there is a clearer picture of what parts of the sector are stressed and how;
- create multiple paths to funding — direct to organizations, or indirect to intermediaries domestically or internationally;
- support each other when organizations are attacked or confronted; and
- create redundancy, so the loss of one funder or key grantee does not undermine the entire sector since many organizations of multiple forms are supported.

Networks can take many forms, some of which are better structured to increase resilience than others. Hub-and-spoke networks, in which all members are connected to a single hub, are the most vulnerable. (See Figure 3). We see these networks in unions or industry groups that channel input into a central body to create a representative voice. Hub-and-spoke networks are also replicated in many formal networks where the need for resources in the center often drive the work of staff and leadership. Taking out the hub (say, by restricting funding or creating onerous legal hurdles) forces the whole network to collapse.²

Networks with multiple, diverse connections can be harder to manage, but are more likely to continue to function if some parts are blocked or even removed. (See Figure 4.) Consequently, they are better insulated from the collapse of funding

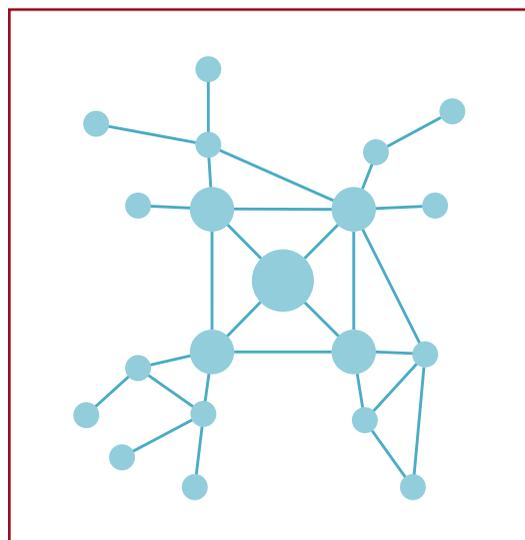
²Note that collective impact efforts often expose themselves to this type of organization with their reliance on “backbone organizations.” Any inhibition on the action of the backbone organization can stymie the entire movement.

FIGURE 3 Hub-and-Spoke Network

because parts of the network can innovate and access alternative funding more readily.

Membership matters, too. Networks made up of homogeneous organization types will all be affected by shocks and stresses in a similar way. For example, networks of private U.S. foundations will all be subject to similar restrictions when government rules on banking are tightened. In a network of public and private funders, NGOs, academics, and progressive businesses, each type of member will be affected a different way, providing more options for responding. Those organizations that are least affected can pick up the slack or provide support to their colleagues. Diverse networks are also more likely to generate new ideas, since members think differently and tap into different sources of information.

The phenomenon of closing space has prompted response from a number of networks: the Donor Working Group on Cross-Border Philanthropy, the Funders' Initiative for Civil Society, the International Civil Society Centre's International Civic Forum and Civic Charter, and the Global NPO Coalition on FATF are all examples. The rise of these collaborative networks suggests a

FIGURE 4 Multiple, Diverse Connections Network

resourcefulness to the sector that bodes well for adapting to current and future challenge.

Resilient social systems have multiple connections, allowing people within them to shift approaches and alliances when they encounter blockages. Working in diverse networks strengthens connections and creates new ones.

Enabling Legal Frameworks

The most obvious environmental factor for resilient social action is the set of laws and regulations that govern how organizations can legally operate. Advocacy by as many means as possible to maintain a supportive legal framework is clearly important. Since this is one of the main problems in the closing space, organizations know this already. Yet, despite that knowledge, our discussions with civil society funders around the world reveal a reluctance to engage publicly on resisting increasing restrictions, usually for fear of being targeted as a result. In these cases, networks can help.

Yet even in the most restrictive environments, people find ways to manage. One observer in West Africa noted that “for every bureaucrat making a rule, there are a hundred people trying to find a way around it.” When the apartheid-era

South African government banned some organizations and arrested their leaders, other leaders stepped up and created “civic associations” that organized citizens and carried on similar functions with a different form of legal organization. When dozens of African countries proposed restrictive NGO legislation in the 1990s, civil society organizations came together to oppose them, together with Northern donor governments, and in many cases successfully defeated the measures.

Funders who are flexible and support diverse approaches to maintaining enabling legal environments increase the chances that civil society work can continue to operate.

Conclusion

Through a resilience lens it becomes clearer that managing a changing system goes far beyond simply opposing legal restrictions. Adaptive capacity includes changing how funders support social action, what they support, and the conditions under which they operate. For each of these dimensions, resilience increases as they become more flexible, create redundancies and diversity, and learn about new ways to work.

Funders are very aware of the dramatic implications of the closing space for civil society taking place in many forms and ways around the world. When citizens are penalized for expressing their truths and acting for the improvement of their communities, it is not only a tragedy for the people directly affected, it is a concern for all of us. Solving the problems and challenges we face around the globe becomes more difficult and harder to sustain.

Despite this, civil society is up to the challenge. Civil society is adapting. The challenge for funders is to adapt as well to support citizen action as the rules of the game change.

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