



Civil Society Engagement and Capacity Building Strategy

Introduction

The Human Rights Commission of the Maldives (HRCM) was established as an independent commission on 10 December 2003, by a presidential decree, and later governed by the Human Rights Commission Act (6/2006). A fundamental mandate of the HRCM is to assist and support civil society actors involved in the protection of human rights. In fulfilment of this mandate, the HRCM has implemented multiple activities in cooperation with civil society actors. However, there is a need for strengthened cooperation and engagement with civil society.

This strategy builds on the understanding that the HRCM need to strengthen its efforts, functions, and infrastructure to support and engage with civil society to facilitate a symbiotic relationship to strengthen the human rights ecosystem in the Maldives and foster an enabling environment for the protection and promotion of human rights, including in defending and expanding civic space.



Strategic Ambition

The HRCM aspires to establish a consistent, collaborative, and inclusive partnership with civil society, characterised by mutual respect, open dialogue, shared responsibility, and collective impact.

THEORY OF CHANGE

WHEN the HRCM strengthens its partnership with civil society to improve effectiveness and impact of programming; AND when this partnership enables the protection of civic space, mutual capacity development, mutual support, and participatory decision making; THEN, it will lead to better promotion and protection of human rights in the Maldives.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- ◆ Priority 1: Foster a consistent and sustainable approach to civil society engagement.
- ◆ Priority 2: Strengthen HRCM's institutional capacity to support and collaborate with civil society actors.
- ◆ Priority 3: Advocate for an enabling civic space.

The strategic priorities build on HRCM's recognition that civil society is a vital force in advancing and safeguarding human rights. By amplifying the voices of the grassroots and providing invaluable insights, civil society plays a pivotal role in shaping policies that protect and promote human rights. Their extensive networks and relationships facilitate the collection as well as dissemination of relevant information, ensuring that the concerns of citizens are heard and addressed.

Furthermore, it builds on the recognition of the power of collaboration to amplify impact, share knowledge, and mitigate risks. By fostering trust, mutual respect, and shared goals, this strategy aims to create a dynamic and evolving framework for engagement. Continuous learning, adaptation, and engagement with diverse stakeholders will ensure the strategy remains a living document that is responsive to the evolving needs of civil society and the HRCM in promoting and protecting human rights for all in the Maldives.

Strategic Priorities, Goals, and Strategies

◆ **PRIORITY 1: FOSTER A CONSISTENT APPROACH TO CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT.**

This priority focuses on establishing a consistent and structured approach to civil society engagement, recognising that open communication and mutual respect are essential for effective engagement and collaboration as well as trust-building. By strengthening the existing civil society network and building on this platform for dialogue, the HRCM aims to strengthen collaboration where civil society's insights and expertise are consistently integrated into the HRCM's work. This includes actively consulting civil society in the development of strategies, and activities related to civil society, ensuring that their perspectives are considered in decision-making processes.

<p>Goal 1.1:</p> <p>Establish regular and structured mechanisms for consultation and dialogue.</p>	<p>Strategy 1.1.1: Strengthen the civil society network to further strengthen information sharing, joint planning, accessibility, and feedback, recognising that HRCM and civil society actors are equally key players in the promotion and protection of human rights in the Maldives.</p> <p>Strategy 1.1.2: Consult civil society actors as key partners in the development of HRCM's strategies.</p>
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◆ **PRIORITY 2: STRENGTHEN HRCM'S INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY TO SUPPORT AND COLLABORATE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS.**

This section outlines strategies to strengthen the HRCM's internal capabilities, ensuring the organisation is well-equipped to support and partner effectively with civil society actors. This involves enhancing the technical expertise of HRCM staff, optimising internal resources, and fostering a collaborative environment that facilitates knowledge exchange and mutual capacity development with civil society.

<p>Goal 2.1:</p> <p>Enhance HRCM's technical capacity and resources for effective engagement with and support for civil society actors.</p>	<p>Strategy 2.1.1: Conduct staff needs and capacity assessments for HRCM staff and train the staff on a regular basis in collaboration with civil society actors to ensure sensitivity and capacity to effectively engage with civil society actors.</p> <p>Strategy 2.1.2: Strengthen support mechanisms within HRCM for civil society actors for HRCM to effectively respond to the needs of civil society actors.</p> <p>Strategy 2.1.3: Reconcile and streamline all internal tools developed to facilitate engagement and participation of civil society actors to align with the "Civil Society Engagement and Capacity Building Strategy for HRCM" and global best practices.</p>
<p>Goal 2.2:</p> <p>Facilitate capacity exchange between HRCM and civil society actors.</p>	<p>Strategy 2.2.1: Facilitate peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and knowledge sharing between the HRCM staff and civil society actors, and international human rights organisations.</p> <p>Strategy 2.2.2: Support civil society actors' engagement in (international and regional) human rights mechanisms.</p>

◆ **PRIORITY 3: ADVOCATE FOR AN ENABLING CIVIC SPACE.**

This strategic priority focuses on advocating for an enabling civic space where civil society can operate freely and safely. This priority recognises that a conducive environment is essential for civil society to effectively carry out its work in promoting and protecting human rights. To achieve this, the HRCM will take a proactive role in advocating for the implementation of existing laws that protect and promote civic space, while also advocating for legal and policy reforms that protect and expand civic space. Additionally, the HRCM will actively support civil society actors facing threats or restrictions, utilising its mandate and influence to defend their rights.

Furthermore, the HRCM will facilitate constructive dialogue between civil society and state institutions, fostering a relationship based on mutual respect and understanding. This will involve engaging with state institutions to promote the important role of civil society in democratic processes and advocating for increased collaboration between the two sectors including transparency, access to information and resources.

<p>Goal 3.1</p> <p>Promote an environment where civil society actors can operate freely and safely.</p>	<p>Strategy 3.1.1: Take rights-based stands in support of civil society actors facing threats or restrictions, utilising the HRCM's mandate and influence.</p> <p>Strategy 3.1.2: Advocate for the implementation of existing laws, regulations, and policies that relate to the protection and promotion of human rights, civil society actors, and civic space.</p> <p>Strategy 3.1.3: Advocate for legal and policy reform that protect and expand civic space including freedom of association, and freedom of expression.</p> <p>Strategy 3.1.4: Collaborate with civil society to monitor, document and report on human rights violations that impact on civic space and civil society actors and hold authorities accountable.</p>
<p>Goal 3.2</p> <p>Facilitate constructive dialogue between civil society and state institutions.</p>	<p>Strategy 3.2.1: Engage in constructive dialogue with state institutions to facilitate engagement between civil society actors and state institutions.</p> <p>Strategy 3.2.2: Raise awareness about the role of civil society in promoting human rights and democratic values.</p>

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING:

To ensure the effective implementation and continuous improvement of the strategy, the HRCM will establish a robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) framework. This framework will be designed to track progress towards the achievement of the strategy's goals and objectives, assess the impact of interventions, and generate lessons learned to inform future programming.

CONCLUSION:

The development process for HRCM's Civil Society Engagement and Capacity Building Strategy in involving CSOs represents a significant step forward in fostering a collaborative and impactful approach to human rights promotion and protection in the Maldives, in addition through the effective implementation of the strategy. By recognising the vital role of civil society actors and establishing a framework for strategic and sustainable engagement, the HRCM aims to create a more inclusive, participatory, and effective human rights ecosystem.

Through the implementation of this strategy, the HRCM envisions a future where civil society is empowered, civic space is protected and further expanded, and human rights are upheld for all people in the Maldives. This strategy is not only a roadmap for the HRCM but also a call to action for all stakeholders to work together towards a more just and equitable society. The HRCM is committed to working hand in hand with civil society to achieve the shared vision of a Maldives where human rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled.