PROGRAMMES

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

OSISA
Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa

2019
Background & Context

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the biggest (2,345,000 Km²) and the most populous (80,000,000 hab.). The Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) has a wide network of partners in DRC working on issues of human rights, democracy-building, good governance and the all-important question of natural resource governance and economic justice. Programming under OSISA began in early 2007 at a very critical transition moment for the country. The country was slowly emerging from a decade-long civil war; a transition government composed of all former fighting groups was preparing the country for its first multiparty elections in forty years; the civil war and previous years of corruption and misrule during the Mobutu era had resulted in deeply weak or outright collapse of entire sectors of government such as the judiciary, the legislature and the education sector; a new Constitution had just been approved through referendum, the main features of which had been
negotiated in a South-Africa mediated inclusive peace negotiation in 2002; and an increased inflow of bilateral and multilateral aid was threatening to put economic reconstruction and stability at the center of the national agenda at the expenses of transparency and sound governance structures. This context strongly influenced OSISA’s design of its programmatic approach in the country with program interventions aimed at addressing three main challenges.

First; the urgent need to reconstruct the country after the devastating civil war. This reconstruction would take place under the backdrop of a fragile peace, a transitional government with hitherto non-existent institutions whose capacity to develop and implement institutional reforms was extremely weak.

Second, after many years of undemocratic rule in the country, it was crucial that OSISA’s interventions be aimed at developing a culture of effective political participation by building and strengthening independent civil society institutions and citizen movements to agitate for transparency in the political and economic spheres. Recognizing the significant range of international, regional and national actors in the DRC all working to address one problem or the other, OSISA set itself apart as an organization that would work primarily with citizen’s movements or civil society groups in the process of rebuilding the country in an inclusive, responsive and participatory manner. The provision of grants to civil society and citizen movements in the DRC was expected to build these grassroots movements and in some ways strengthen them to be effective claimants and credible guarantors of the principles, ideals, values and practices of open society in the modern DRC.

Third, in view of the fragility and weakness of the government and its institutions, OSISA also sought to provide direct technical and financial support to key democratic institutions.

Of particular concern was the immense natural wealth of the country which was among the reasons for the civil war. It was OSISA’s view and indeed many of its partners’ analysis, that any lasting resolution to the DRC conflict required a lasting resolution of the question of natural resources, a legitimate state and effective government, a transparent extractive industry and greater transparency in revenue generation and management.
Since 2010, the office of OSISA is fully operational in DRC. The overall objective of the OSISA’s DRC program is to promote the emergence of a democratic society, respectful of human rights and rule of law. This is being done through building a vibrant civil society movement that is professional and vocal, which is able to intervene in all spheres of life and to engage with the state to positively influence national policies and the governance of the country. In certain instances, where opportunities and circumstances have permitted, OSISA has worked directly with government institutions in order to advance open society ideals especially related to greater transparency in the management of natural resources.

OSISA has built its programming in DRC around the following objectives:

1) Promotion and consolidation of democratic mechanisms and institutions.
2) Support judicial reform and the fight against impunity.
3) Promote human rights and media freedom
4) Advocacy for and support the delivery of quality basic services, including education.
5) Promotion of citizen engagement, to promote transparency in public financial management and accountable governance in the natural resources sector.
6) Promotion of gender equality, in particular support causes that advance women’s rights.

Two underlying objectives cut across each one of these key areas of intervention and deserve special attention: (i) (re)building strong civil society institutions and (ii) building a citizen movement capable of participating in the formulation and monitoring of economic policies.
Building strong civil society institutions

The once vibrant civil society in the then Zaire is largely credited for spearheading the pro-democracy movement of the early 1990s. It was composed of a variety of grassroots associations, church based organizations, trade unions, formal NGOs, and professional syndicates such as those of lawyers (Ordre des Avocats) and medical doctors (Ordre des Médecins) that advocated for change in all areas of public policy. Two interlinked phenomena happened that contributed to the continuing weakening of the civil society movement. First, a number of civil society leaders went into politics to continue their struggle “from within”, especially after the all-inclusive peace agreement of 2002. In most cases they left behind weaker civil society organizations run by second tier and inexperienced activists. Second, international NGOs opened country offices during the first half of the 2000s to work on the same issues as national NGOs. In addition to draining financial resources previously available to national NGOs (mainly due to their better fundraising skills and familiarity with donors), these INGOs also sucked human resources off of national NGOs by hiring the most competent local activists.

OSISA has sought to reverse this trend by helping civil society hire and/or retain competent personnel; acquire capacity to attract and retain sufficient financial resources; and gain technical capacity for providing critical analysis in their areas of work, and for advocacy and fund raising techniques. We have pursued this goal by providing i) seed grants to help new/weak institutions grow; ii) institutional support to strengthen the operations of stronger organizations; and iii) resources for capacity building in various technical areas critical to the development of CSOs. This has positioned OSISA as a unique grant making institution in DRC, allowing us to engage in new perspectives that are in line with the ever changing context which characterizes the country.

The fact that OSISA is directly supporting local NGOs while other private and public donors prefer to fund international NGOs has put OSISA in a position to really contribute to the institutional development of these NGOs and provide space for their growth and visibility. OSISA is also working with new actors and stakeholders who are innovative and would never receive funding without our support.

Building a citizen movement for monitoring economic policies

While there has historically been civil society activism in most areas of public policy, there has been very little or no citizen engagement with economic policies announced and implemented by the government. OSISA’s and Southern Africa Resources Watch’s (SARW) early interventions targeted the extractive industry, given its importance in the Congolese economy and its impact on the broader governance transparency and accountability and the implications it has for peace and stability in the country. Our interventions starting as early as 2006/2007, have led to the building of a relatively successful movement in the extractive industry composed of vocal grassroots organizations, church based structures and formal civil society groups. Building on our success in the extractive industry we have sought to build a civil society movement aiming at seeking public participation in and transparency of the processes of reviewing the Congolese Mining Code and the Oil Code is evidence of that. Our interventions – between the 2006 and 2011 elections – have played a very critical role in the process of election reform, including the recent restructuring of the electoral commission CÉNI. This illustrated these new dynamics – civil society activism positively influence changes. Two cases can illustrate these new dynamics – civil society activism and procurement issues usually linked to corruption.
and procurement issues usually linked to corruption cases. Although we collaborate well with other international organizations in the country, our plan going forward is to work closely with and leverage other OSF entities to better inform our programming in this area.

**Stronger civil society engagement in institutional reforms**

OSISA can be partially credited for a growing civil society movement fighting with relative success to positively influence changes. Two cases can illustrate these new dynamics – civil society activism in the natural resources governance and in the electoral management. Congolese civil society has fought for their inclusion in the issues of natural resources management. They are now benefiting from their engagement by garnering the attention of Congolese authorities. The fact that they can for the first time play a direct and critical role in the processes of reviewing the Congolese Mining Code as well as the Oil Code is evidence of that. Their capacity to propose credible alternatives and ideas makes them real partners for the government in these issues.

The same can be said on electoral issues where civil society have been able to learn from past experiences – between the 2006 and 2011 elections – and have played a very critical role in the process of election reform, including the recent restructuring of the electoral commission CENI. This is showing that beyond the complex picture of the country there are spaces to make change and to take opportunities to achieve successful results. Many of the democracy or state-building programmes are implemented by foreign officials or organisations, these officials and organisations need to improve their understanding of the geo-political, social and economic situation in the DRC first, which make the OSISA’s approach of having people from the context working within the context with partners to which they have a better access, more effective.
In order to promote inclusive participation, OSISA’s interventions in DRC encourage participation of the most marginalized groups such as youth and women. Our activities focus on the integrity of electoral processes as well as interventions that aim to increase qualitative and quantitative participation of women and men in governance. Through various initiatives and interventions, OSISA promotes quality political participation of citizens through support for research, support for the monitoring of electoral processes, capacity building of committed actors, strategic grant making. In terms of governance, OSISA supports initiatives aiming to strengthen accountability, transparency and the fight against corruption through access to information, support to independent journalism, capacity building and partnership with national institutions of control.

Economic and Social Justice

OSISA’s interventions in this sector consist in strengthening the capacities of stakeholders in the analysis of public policies, particularly concerning the effective enjoyment and exercise of economic and social rights. Special emphasis is placed on the health sector, education, access to land and the impact of climate change and extractives on the resilience of smallholder farmers. The desire to be in line with developments in the field increasingly justifies a more sustained commitment to support youth entrepreneurship as a parade to the impressive level of unemployment in the DRC, as elsewhere in the region. We will also be interested in projects with an emphasis on the use of art and culture as vehicles for spreading ideas, amplifying voices and addressing concerns in the field of economic and social justice.

Justice, Human Rights and Rule of Law

OSISA’s interventions in this sector will focus on the promotion and defense of Human Rights. This includes working to ensure a secure environment and freedom of action for those who defend and promote their rights. It also involves working closely with the institutions responsible for implementing strategies related to the defense and promotion of Human Rights, including the National Human Rights paralegals and key ministries. We will be also particularly interested to initiatives and projects involving a business and Human Rights approach. In the justice sector, OSISA promotes access to justice through various initiatives including research, advocacy, and strategic grant making in order to contribute to reforms as well as increase access to justice for the most vulnerable.
Grant making
OSISA provide grants to local civil society organizations and state institutions. In some cases, OSISA can implement initiatives on its own through operational projects. OSISA prioritize its support to local civil society organizations. It may provide a grants to international NGOs in exceptional basis only if:

- there is no local organization capable of implementing the action;
- the International NGO justifies a partnership and a substantial participation of a local organizations in all stage of the project;
- the international organization to demonstrate the will and the means to transmit knowledge to local organizations;
- to the extent that there is a sharing of responsibility between the international and local NGOs.

In no case does OSISA give grants to political parties, or to campaign activities for the purpose of exercising a political mandate. It can only support activities with lawful aims.

Capacity building
OSISA implement directly or support via its partners several activities aiming to increase technicalities and competences of civil society organizations.

Advocacy
We have also identified a niche role in supporting and accompanying our civic partners in advocacy at the national, regional and international levels and where required amplifying their voices to enable DRC to have durable peace, promote democracy and enhance chances for economic prosperity.

Production of knowledge
The production of knowledge remains an important component of our entire work. Therefore, OSISA support or implement research initiative in the area of Democracy and Governance, Economic and Social Justice, Justice and Human Rights as well as natural resources. We believe serious programming should be based on empirical evidences to support and justify our strategic interventions.